

Northern Nigerian Garments and Caps: Uses and the Challenges for Socio-Cultural Changes.

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■ ABSTRACT ■

This paper addresses some issues on the Northern Nigerian traditional garments and caps. We observed that most of the Northern Nigerian garments and caps, particularly those of the Kanuri people, have their origin in the culture and traditions of the people. In very significant ways, the garments and the caps depict the belief systems, political metaphysics, and the general consciousness of the people including their creative impulses. But as more and more people move from rural areas to the cities, travel abroad and as more and more cultures intermingle, inevitable changes catch up with the culture and tradition of the people. We observed that it is hard to find in the Northern Nigeria scene, particularly among the Kanuri people, clothes that have assumed new nomenclature other than garments and caps. We realized that, the culture and tradition of the Kanuri people wearing longer, voluminous and roomy garments preferably with cap have witnessed changes due to the blend with foreign culture. This and many other issues are discussed in this paper. The purpose of this research is to show that inspite of the Kanuri people's strong adherence to their beliefs and culture which hardly encourage any changes, the use of their traditional garments and caps have exhibited the flexibility of their beliefs, culture and traditions. The use of the garments and caps discussed in this paper are those observed among the Kanuri people of Northern Nigeria.

Key Words

Culture, Indigo, Tradition, Garment, Kanuri

Introduction

This paper discusses the uses of traditional garments and caps in Northern Nigeria with particular reference to the originators and the changes that have occurred in their uses. The study is based on the Kanuri people and therefore Kanuri people serve as the object of our study, because they are the most conservative people in Northern Nigeria. They hardly accept any form of changes in their life, be it religious, cultural, customs or traditions and they constitute the second largest ethnic group in Northern Nigeria. As such, the discoveries are believed to be applicable to some Northern Nigerian people. The Kanuri people are predominantly found in Borno and Yobe states. Besides farming, they engage in dying, weaving and making garments and caps (cf. Sheriff, 2004:86 and Ogboli, A. P. 2004). Before the advent of manufactured textiles, Kanuri people made garments by hand and the original caps are

also knitted solely by hand up to today.

Background and significance of the study

This study of Northern Nigerian garments and caps: uses and challenges for socio-cultural changes, form part of a larger study of the culture, tradition and belief systems of the peoples of Northern Nigeria, which is being carried out by the researcher for over two years now. Among the previous works similar to the topic under study include: Negri (1976), Modu (1990), Wade and Galantha (1993), Ogboli (2004) and Sheriff (2004). Though these previous works are similar to the topic under discussion, there appears to be a gap in the description and discussion on the uses, the traditional and cultural significance attached to the garments and the changes that have occurred on their uses in our modern society. The present paper which is based on Kanuri is intended to fill this vacuum.

The viability of the use of traditional attires, the social importance for one to preserve ones culture and tradition, and the need to produce living documents of the ways of life of the Kanuri people in particular were some of the reasons that prompted this study. It was also observed that not much written material exist on this aspect. Therefore, there is need to add to the body of the scanty literature that exists in this area.

The additional literature could therefore serve as a possible catalyst that would generate renewed interest in fully understanding the origin and the historical significance and the socio-cultural import of the Northern Nigerian's or the Kanuri people's garments and caps. The interest of Government agencies like the Ministry of Culture and Tourism might be awakened to better harness a treasure which is more or less waiting to be fully tapped.

This study could also serve as a basis for comparison of the cultures on the use of garments and caps as it is practiced in the area of study and elsewhere.

Scope of the Study

The types of Kanuri traditional-garments and the changes that might have occurred on the use of the garments and caps are the focus of this study. The area under study is Maiduguri Metropolis and the adjoining villages which are specifically identified and mentioned. The study cover both the older and the younger generations and their roles contribution against the use of some of the traditional garments and the reasons for their preference for why they opt to wear modern garments and Western dresses are also found out and explained in this work.

Research Methodology

Interviews and participant observation were adopted as method of data collection. Data collection proceeded slowly. This is in order to obtain enough data and accurate information and also to cross-check information collected over a period of several months. We have participated in some Kanuri weddings in Maiduguri as friends to the grooms, during which we observed and interviewed some people on why they were not wearing traditional gowns and caps. The interview covered both men and women ranging between the ages of thirty-five and seventy-five and also between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five respectively. This is to cover all the age groups, that is, both the younger and the older generations.

We have also participated and observed people during Muslims five daily prayers sessions in mosques for couple of months and observed how people reacted to those in western dresses during the prayers. We have visited some typical Kanuri villages like Chingoa, Kalizoram and Ləgən in Magumeri local Government area to observe the situation on the use of the traditional garments and caps. The information collected was cross-checked for validity and how others feel about such information. The research period covered two years from January 2008 to December 2009.

Types of Kanuri Garments and Caps and Their Uses

There are several types of Kanuri garments and caps. Sheriff (2004) identified as many as thirty types of garments for the males and eight for the females. This paper is not concerned with female garments. The Kanuri female garment is never stable in types and usage. It keeps on changing almost after every six months. The institution of the Kanuri female garment is very complex compared to the male garments. Hence it is reserved as a separate topic for another research.

The Male Garments

This study discovered that there are four major types of traditional Kanuri male garments. These are Kulwu, Gəməje Dankiki (the Hausas have ‘yar ciki’ which is of the same type and use with that of the Kanuris) and Yange. Under each, there are several sub-types. Some of which as rightly observed in Sheriff (2004) are:

Kulwu Kajibe

Kulwu Kajibe is a type of hand made Kanuri gown made of strips of gawaa. It is very strong and heavy.



Kororopci

The Kororopci type of Kanuri gown is black in colour and shiny. It is dress that can be worn by all persons.



Kulwu Nashibe

Kulwu Nashibe is a deep blue gown. Any one that wears it would get his body, especially his arms coloured by the indigo from the gown. This determines ones position in the Kanuri society. The Kanuri people believe that it is the amount of the colour used that would make the body of the user coloured. The more the dye used the higher the cost and prestigious the gown is. Any one get his body coloured by this gown is believed to have attained certain high position in the society. He could be rich, a spiritual or a musical group leader, traditional ruler or a title holder in the society. As such, people give him due respect even if he is wearing other simple dress just because of the indigo colour on his body which is the only colour attributed to the prestigious Kanuri gown not easily obtainable by ordinary Kanuri man.



Təwuski

Təwuski is a type of gown with round neck and two pockets in front.



Kulwu indi dawu tiloa

This is a double gown with a single neck. It is mostly worn in social occasions.



Kulwu Dawungasho,

This type of gown derives its name from the style of dying. It is dyed to resemble the two-colour shape of the neck of a stork.



Several other types of Kanuri gown exist. Some derive their names from the style of dying, some from the style of sewing and some from the style of embroidery.

The Gəməje

This is a kind of dress (mufti) that covers the shin from the neck. Like the Kulwu or gown, Gəməje are also of different types in Kanuri. Some of these are: gəməje ambuka, gəməje diwadiwa, gəməje sərə etc. Both Gəməje ambuka and Diwadiwa are long sleeves covering the wrist. Their difference lies in the end of the sleeves. For the ambuka, the end of the sleeve holds tightly to the wrist with buttons or clip-buttons to keep it together, while for the Diwadiwa, the sleeve is flat. The sərə is a double garment. It has one neck. Preferably, the inner one could be plain cloth and the one on top is fabric.



Diwadiwa



Diwadiwa



Gəmajə (mufti)

The Dankiki

Dankiki is described as a sleeveless Kanuri traditional garment. It is distinguished from other Kanuri garments by its sides always being half open like a window without cover. Like the Kulwu and Gəmajə, Dankiki are also of several types. Some of which are: Dankiki kumbam, Dankiki janaaa etc. They are distinguished by their decorations and styles of sewing.



The Yange

The word 'Yange' is generally translated as trouser. A traditional Kanuri trouser is exceptionally big. It is made up of at least four to six yards of a fabric and is worn without a pant. Two types of trousers are identified. Namely: yange dərwali and yange cirtanaa and they are distinguished by the type of embroidery used on them. The cirtanaa type has beautiful embroidery made on the lower end of the leg with a thread called cirtana, while the dərwali type has no embroidery made on it. It is a plain and flat trouser.



Yange Dərwali



Yange Cirtanaa



Yange kəmo indiya



Yange diwadiwa

The Kanuri people nowadays rarely wear these garments even during important occasions as captured in the portraits below. The present generation of Kanuri youth and middle aged men only occasionally patronise the Kulwu (gown) and other traditional garments.





The Term Kulwu

Many scholars have described Kulwu as gown (cf Bulakarima 2003). Others translate the word Kulwu as robe (cf sheriff 2004:87). On the etymology of the term Kulwu, some Kanuri Islamic scholars opined that it is derived from the word Kəlawun which literary means shroud. The believe is that as death comes without notice; the Kanuri man is always prepared and ready for it and so he is in his kəlawun (Shroud) in case he dies in any circumstances where shroud could not be found or easily obtained, he could then be buried in his Kuluwu. As most of them (the Kanuri peoples) were then caravan traders, they could encounter problems during their journeys and Kulwu could solve the problem. There is a strong contention among the Kanuri people that when one is in western dress, he is as good as naked. Most western or as it is sometime called the English dresses expose part of the body. Many of them are tighter and smaller compared to the Kulwu, Gəməje and Dankiki of the Kanuri people. According to our informant, Baba Liman Amsami who is about eighty five (85) years old, if a man is not completely dressed in his Kulwu, Gəməje or Dankiki, Yange and Zawa, he is considered deviant in Kanuri society. And that: (1) He is not a trustworthy person. (2) He is not allowed to lead people during the five daily prayers or any activities for that matter. (3) Such a person is not even allowed to stand in the front row when performing the five daily prayers. If a person in T-Shirt or shirt stands in the front row, elders would quickly drag him out or order him back to the last row. One could hear the elders saying: **gəməjenəm ngurnenəmma zaksənyi**. *'Your shirt has not even covered your wrist'*. And some often says: **Kazəmunəm anyi datəbewonya ngutəbe gənyi. Abinəmma gəraata bade**. *'Your dresses are for you to just keep standing but for prostration. Your whole body is exposed'*. Our observations in a mosque situated in Mairi village near gate four, University of Maiduguri for a good nine calendar months 'Between' 28th January, 2009 to 2nd October, 2009 has proved such attitude of the Kanuri people. Infact, it is the uniqueness of the Kanuri people in this aspect that motivates us to conduct the present research and found out that nowadays the trend in the use of the traditional garments and caps have witnessed a greater change. Many factors are responsible for this. Few among which are outlined below.

Factors Responsible for the Changes in the Kanuri Mode of Dressing.

1. Science and Technology
2. Cross Cultural influence
3. Office work
4. Economy and Expenditure
5. Society, Attitudinal Change and Civilization
6. Compatibility

7. Other factors

Science and Technology

It is no longer a new phenomenon that science and technology have directly affected the weather of the whole world. Hence the over heated debate on global warming and green house emission. To this effect, the weather conditions all over the world are affected. This has affected even the ways people dress. The traditional garments and caps no longer make their users comfortable because of the terrible heat all over the place. The invention of machines now shifted the attention of the users of traditional garments and caps to the use of more readily available dresses, the western wears, from the highly competitive dress, in this case the traditional garments and caps. Similarly even our traditional barbing system that accords the use of gown is no longer compatible for the man in gown.

Cross Cultural Influence

Today, people envy other people's ways of dressing. This can be seen from our students. Nowadays many of them prefer western/English dresses. They no longer admire their traditional garments and caps. They have abandoned them in favour of the English or the western mode of dressing.

Office Works

These days office work and some professionals like doctors, lawyers, engineers, bankers, architects etc does not warrant the use of gown and garments during professional engagements. The various professions have their corporate and in-line-with-duty-dress. In fact, no profession encourages the use of traditional garments and caps. Even drivers are not quite compatible with use of gown. The gown may hook the steering wheel while negotiating bend. Gown disturbs teachers during classroom teaching and hinders demonstrations.

Economy and Expenditure

Roomy garments and caps are now considered property of those who are economically buoyant. The economy of the Nigeria is bad; people no longer have enough money to spend on garments and caps. When look for what to eat rather than wearing flamboyant garments and caps. Beside, it is cheaper to buy western dresses. In terms of expenses, the amount of money one could spend in the production or purchase of a single traditional garment and cap is higher than the amount one would spend for the purchase of modern dress. Hence people opt for the simple and modern dresses which cost lesser than the traditional garments.

Society, Attitudinal Change and Civilization

Today's society rated gowns and caps for certain classes of peoples. It is mostly for traditional rulers, politician and bourgeoisie. It is no longer for a poor man. Wearing voluminous garments even invite thieves or even armed robbers believing that the man using them is wealthy. Similarly, People's attitude has changed compared to the past. The younger generation now see one in gown as either an aged man or married man. Gowns and caps are now mostly worn only during occasions and ceremonies. Often, garments and caps are only worn by top politicians and traditional rulers. Hence, College and university students copy the white man's mode of dressing and attire. They see the use of their traditional garments and caps as uncivilized.

Compatibility

Some garments like the Kulwu kajibe is so heavy that people no longer use them. Now, it is only courtiers, title holders and slaves of the Shehu who use them and even in this case they are used in rare occasions.

Other Factors

For some garments like the Kororopci, people feel it is a gown for the Ulama or malɛmwa (traditional teachers) and so people no longer wear it as before. In those days, Ulama wore it when coming to the palace of the Shehu for moduwu. (cf shriff 2004). Moduwu is a praise singing of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) conducted for some days before the celebration of Id EL- Maulud. Today one could hardly see any one or even the Ulama in Kororopci gown. It is heavy and expensive. Modern dresses that are lighter and less expensive have taken the place of Kororopci and this is a challenge to Kanuri culture and tradition.

The materials used for making some of the gown like the Kulwu dawungasho are out fashioned that people no longer appreciate and wear it as casual dress. Today only some Kanuri dancers like the Dumas dancers use it. They used it only during the dance to depict the Kanuri culture and tradition.

The hand-woven gowns that are made of materials called gawaa are also heavy and expensive that today people buy them only as gifts to their parents. People see most traditional Kanuri garments as out fashioned and are only for the elderly people. These make them opt for the modern gowns and garments.

Ordinarily, the Gɛmje and Dankiki are worn as underneath ewars. But today one could hardly see people wearing the Dankiki form. However, one could see the people in the village particularly among the Koyam (nomad Kanuri ethnic group). The Dankiki is now a dress of the village people. Formerly, school uniforms for primary school boys were mostly made in the form of Dankiki both in the villages and the cities. But today, people could hardly use Dankiki even as school uniform talkless of using it as casual dress.

The Yange (trouser) on the other hand which is ordinarily bigger and made of up at least four

to six yards. These are today reduced to a mere tight trousers made up of only two to three yards to reduce cost and save money. These modern trousers are mostly used with pants. The use of such trouser and pant is discouraged in Kanuri culture. Kanuri culture encourages the uses of the big D̄arwali trouser to allow enough air to pass between the legs. For them this would provide a good environment for the male organs to grow healthier and stronger. Most Kanuri elders today refer to the younger generation as weaker and can't perform sexually better compared to the elders because many people today use less loose trousers and pants that keep the male organs tight and shrunken an act even medically discouraged.

The Cap (Zawa)

Cap is generally called Zawa in Kanuri Language. Cap is held in great esteem in Kanuri society. It is ordinarily used for protecting the head against the harsh sun and dust by the Kanuri peoples (cf Ogboli, 2004). However, it is unfortunate to state that the origin of how the use of Caps began among the Kanuri peoples and the etymology of the term was not tentatively known to any of our informants. Some of our informants traced the origin to Saudi Arabia, Karachi, Islamabad etc. This information agrees with other information who traced the origin to North Africa and Middle East. (cf Nachtigal 1869).

Though it is said that males exclusively make and embroider caps, investigation shows that many young girls and women also involved in cap embroider. It has been also reported that it is a taboo for a woman to embroider the crown of a cap. This is not unconnected with the belief that it is belittling for a woman to design the crown or dome of an object that will sit on the head of a male in Kanuri tradition. But today no one bothers to know who embroiders the crown. Here an important aspect of Kanuri culture has faded out. Though influences of modernization have little effect on the use of caps, we have observed increasing number of people going about bareheaded. Their reason is not unconnected with personal health problems. For some youth, it is for fashion. They copied the Senegalese and Gambian style where one can see people in complete garments or Kaftan but bareheaded. One could admit that these people are culturally redressing to the 18th century style where the Kanuri, the Kanumbu and the Makari for the most part went about bareheaded(cfNachtigal1869). According to Kanuri culture and tradition, these people are also exposing their head to health hazards. This is captured in the following Kanuri popular saying which states that:

If one knows the amount of hazardous effect the sun ray pours on human head, one could not go bareheaded in the daylight and likewise, if one knows the amount of hazardous effect of the sun ray the human head releases in the night one could not wear cap in the night.

The above saying teaches that one should wear cap at least for protection in the day and remove it to get relief in the night. This is extended also to the use of kulwu, ḡamaje and yange. Long ago people dressed in complete set (kulwu, ḡamaje, yange and zawa) throughout the day. Then remove all but Kulwu once the sun sets to get relief. Today people have no respect to these culture and tradition and ehen one wears only a gown in the night, he becomes an object of mocking. His image would be painted and addressed with all sorts of ill habits and characters. What a challenge and ill attack

on Kanuri culture and tradition.

From the information we gathered, slaves of the Shehu of Borno were not allowed to wear cap long time ago. This attitude also has now faded because most of the slaves have now gained economic, political and social freedom nearly competing with the Shehu himself. These slaves remove their caps as mark of respect only when coming closer to the Shehu in the same manner ulama remove caps as mark of respect to their superiors.

However, in the course of this study, it was discovered that some Kanuri people are known for their unique and strict adherence to the use of complete garments and cap. For the past forty years, Alhaji Muhammad Mustafa II Al Amin El-Kanemi now the shehu of Dikwa is known for his outstanding adherence. No one has ever seen him in incomplete dress to date. Even in the midnight when you knock at his door, he will appear in his complete garments and cap on his head. Females of equal calibre have remained largely anonymous. As such, female participation in maintaining culture and tradition is fertile for further research.

Although no serious sanction has been placed for not wearing a complete dress in the society, it was established that atimes women embrace men during some occasions, particularly in wedding ceremony. They will refuse to attend to those men who are not in complete dress. We have observed such case in Fezzan ward, Maiduguri during a wedding ceremony of a friend in which we served as participant observers in November 2009. The bride's sister, Ya Falmata Amsami aged about 42 years old and her friends refused to attend to the groom's friends. Her reason was that no one among the groom's friends appeared in complete dress (gown and cap). Some were in Kaftan and not even wearing caps. The women suggested that the groom's friends should please go back and wear gowns and caps or at least one or two in gowns and caps should lead them. This experience revealed women's belief in complete dressing in Kanuri society. They felt that any one in incomplete dress is irresponsible and not trustworthy.

Conclusion

The above discussion on the Kanuri garments and caps has provided an opportunity to exposes the flexibility and dynamisms of the Kanuri culture, traditions and belief on the use of garments and caps. What this discussion reveals is a movement from the use of traditional garments and caps to modern attires. This movement hindered continuity of the Kanuri tradition on one hand and signals the endangerment of the Kanuri people's cultural traditions on the other. The traditional gowns or garments and the caps depict the Islamic pre-occupation of the people. They provide clarifying data that portray the belief and the culture of the people. The study shows how the Kanuri people respond to change that typify their pastime. From the study, the uses of the garments and cap can be discerned. Their use gives insight into the richness of the people's culture, tradition and values. Though the slight changes bring into unity several issues of intercultural interest among peoples of different linguistic background, culture and geographical settlements, the situation is a challenge to the culture of the Kanuri people. Garments and caps serve as undeniable artistic, social, cultural historical and religious medium of preservation and transmission of the people's culture and consciousness. It is very clear that the Kanuri peoples easily respond to change with resorts to the use of traditional garments and cap. What remain is for

all peoples to acknowledge and respect culture and traditions of one another for unity and developments.

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