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# Significance of Pattern Composition on the Carnival Calabar King and Queen Costumes

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## Abstract

The term 'pattern' involves decorative designing. It is a common principle of design used in textiles to reinforce and enhance the fabrics with different visual sensations that help to stimulate interest, provide visual enrichment and enjoyment, and communicate thoughts through symbols. In patterning, surfaces are vitalized with rich variety of symbols to captivate the eyes; whether large or small, the intricate patterns contribute to the richness of a surface appearance. The focus of this paper is on the significance of the patterns and symbols used in the design of the Seagull Band Junior and Senior King and Queen Costumes for the 2013 Carnival Calabar. To achieve this, the theme 'ain't no stopping us' was interpreted to include the 'Achiever' as the junior king, 'Bliss' as the junior queen, 'Genius' as the senior king, and 'Creativity' as the senior queen. Costumes were designed and constructed by a team of experts with appropriate patterns and symbols to give credence to character. These costumes were used for the king and queen competitions in both the junior and senior categories. The competition was assessed by an international panel of judges. The judges adjudged the costumes and the interpretation of their patterns as best depictions of the theme in all categories of the competition. The paper reiterates that the conscious use of appropriate patterns and symbols in costume design can achieve a certain effect vis-à-vis that of enhancing the character during theatrical performances.

**Keywords:** Carnival Calabar; Costume Design; Patterns; Symbols; Characterization

## 1. Introduction

Patterns are made up of a basic element known as motif. This is a simplified shape of an object, which forms the unit design. When it is non-realistic, it is said to be abstract. It may be in form of a dot, shape, line or it may be complex and intricate. Some authorities in design Gilfof, 1983, Gatto et al, 1978, Parker and Smith 1974, enumerate and explain the different types thus:

**Grid:** This is composed of a network formed by intersecting lines or shapes in vertical and horizontal manner usually uniformly spaced. By so doing there is provision of equal emphasis throughout the enclosed area. A superimposition of more than one grid creates a vibrating optical effect. The grid pattern is readily seen in the checkerboard design used mainly in West African fabrics. A structural quality to pattern is achieved with grids, colour, textures and values making it a complex entity (Gilfof, 1983, p.45, Gatto et al., 1978, p.183).

**Alternating pattern:** This is the grouping of motifs along one line with alternating number either below or above. There may be variations in colour, lines or shapes but the patterning must be consistent. The idea is the manipulation of the placement of motifs. The general effect is that of an undulating look which gives a feeling of movement that increases as elements are spaced further apart (Gatto et al., 1978, p.185). In other words, the motifs may also be placed in alteration by altering their position as they relate to the central axis without changing the original direction of the pattern (Parker and Smith, 1974, p.52).

**Radial Pattern:** This kind of pattern radiates from the centre outwards and usually in a precise interval. Bedaux and Bolland (1980, pp.19-20) in their study on West African design noted that the radial design explodes and accelerates, thus making design dynamic, active and structurally strong. Examples of radial design include the 'star', 'wheel spokes', 'fireworks', 'peacock plumage' etc.

**Border and Bands:** These enrich surfaces with decorative design, which add a feeling of elegance and individuality to the fabric. Talabi (1979, p.18) sees them as a combination of repeated symbols and a repeated unit design, or lines and texture, which add a unifying force to the piece of design. Throughout history, sport teams have used this unique design pattern to identify themselves. "Borders and bands will emphasize the edge of a form or set apart a particular area, somewhat like underlining a word to make it more important" (Gatto et

al., 1978, p.186). Borders make clothing visually stronger. Depending on the role, a border may emphasize the neckline, sleeves, edge or hem of a character's costume.

Rhythmic patterns: This is a kind of pattern that pulsates and flows in simple or complex motion. Gatto et al. (1978, p.187) reckon that:

Patterns that move along curved, circular, or undulating paths will produce a visual motion that moves our eyes along prescribed directions. We sense a flowing action in rhythmical pattern because each motif seems to move easily to the next unit throughout the total flow of the design.

In other words, when a pattern curves in and out especially in arcs or wave-like action a rhythm is created with overriding organization or unifying factors. Rhythm is an easy way to tie units together to form both optically and intriguing well-organized patterns. Parker and Smith (1974, p.52) sum up this observation, in the following words: "motifs in opposition tend to break the rhythm in a series of static arrangements creating a feeling of stability. Inverted motifs change the direction of the movement." Variations of motifs establish different rhythm or feeling of movement.

## 2. Culture and Patterns on Textile Materials

In Africa, textile is regarded as part of an expression of cultural values, so that, "marriages, funerals and other rituals governing the physical and spiritual worlds require proper cloth". Textiles are therefore part of cultural life whose patterns are readily linked to a particular people. Examples, the Ghanaian kente, the black-white stripes of the Tiv people of Benue State, the Yoruba aso oke, the Igbo akwete, to mention but a few. This is why Gilfoyl (1983, p.11) writes that:

Textile reflects the cultures from which they come. They are simultaneously personal, societal, religious and political, and they are valuables for the spread of ideas from one culture to another... culturally, they express the accumulated wealth and knowledge of a society and the status of their owner, and they may also have spiritual significance when used in religious ceremonies.

The accumulated wealth, status and spiritual significance mentioned above, are due to the type of patterns that are embedded on the surface of fabrics. To this end, Lamb (1984, p.26) writes that in Sierra Leone, some groups of men used raffia palm fibre cloths in their association to maintain order in daily life, propitiate the ancestors and educate the young. According to him, the Poro School, "takes place in the forest separated from the daily life of the community... Poro cloths were woven in the bush, to keep the uninitiated from seeing the secret patterns in production".

McLeod (1981, p.78) gives another example when he observes that the Ghanaian Kente carries patterns that serve to identify the rank and purpose of the wearer, and also to express ideas about political and moral relationships. Baumann (1974, p.37) also notes that in Kumasi, during ritual ceremonies, the King wears a large white cotton cloth studded all over with Arabic writings in various coloured inks, and of a most brilliant well-formed characters, said to further empower the Chiefs to perform the rituals properly.

Apart from the need for special occasion, cloths are also related to the wisdom of proverbs, which are visually realized through the use of specific motifs intricate weft-flat patterns (Gilfoyl, 1983, p.42). The wax and non-wax prints function as language or as a facilitator of the spoken or written word. One's identity, beliefs and set values are embedded in these fabrics. Some wax prints combine proverbs with visual forms to express certain Akan beliefs, values and social relations. The visual form on the cloths elicits the spoken proverbs. Therefore the surface of the cloth is used to convey messages either through written or representational imagery. The manner in which the cloth is worn can also be used for very expressive communication.

## 3. Significance of Pattern Composition

There seems to be a general agreement that well composed patterns make the performer to look more elegant, bold, sophisticated or even mysterious. Large, strong, powerful patterns command attention, while subtle, muted and closely-knit patterns produce a more reserved or refined effect (Gatto et al., 1978, p.150). As long as a pattern is planned, it will always give the same effect of enrichment and visual interest. In this case, purposeful patterns are used to camouflage, assist or enhance the character of the performer. Examples abound in nature where animals and birds are known to be attracted to one another through recognition of specific patterns. This could be observed among the different species of monkeys ranging from guenons, mangabees, drills and baboons.

If animals can be identified by their patterns, it is believed that patterns on clothing can also communicate to reveal the personality of the wearer or the reason or motive behind the adornment of such clothing.

Specifically, Gilfoy (1983, p.210) notes that the North African inspired lozenge design is to protect the Muslims against a harmful glance. Thus, wearing this image of an eye is believed to cast off evil and this belief makes most Islamic motifs to be thought of as being magical as well as protective. Special mention is made about Dogon people of Mali who perceived that rectangles gives structure to the unformed words of the spirit, thereby making the checkerboard (grid) the most important in both daily life and ritual.

Accordingly, "Dogon fields are ploughed in crisscrossed rectangles; and rectangles also appears on ritual masks, and as shadow and light motifs on buildings" (Gilfoy, 1983, p.45). The shadow and light design also symbolizes the opposition and contrast found in life as well as in the spirit realm.

In support of Gilfoy's assertion, Prussin (1986, p.75) relates the checkerboard design to Islamic belief's which ties the cosmos to an orderly arrangement of squares, with power emanating from the centre which they relate to Allah. Selorm (2011, p.3) believes that contrary to western fashion, there is often a deeper meaning hidden away in African designs. Therefore colours, patterns, and designs have an ancient root and meaning, which could be used deliberately. For example:

A pattern of a hand refers to a maxim 'it is with the hand we work', a locket denotes 'one must be wealthy to wear a gold locket' or one must have means for any 'undertaking'. Crossed lines mean 'everyman must carry his own mark' signifying a person is known for his own personality. (Clothing and Textile, 2011, p.2).

In Africa therefore, and in Nigeria in particular, unique motifs are created to express cultural values.

#### **4. Analysis of Pattern Composition in the 2013 Carnival Calabar King and Queen**

The Carnival Calabar first made its debut in 2004 and had since grown to the biggest street party in Africa. The king and queen competition is usually a parade of brilliant, massive, and spectacular costumes which arises from the imaginative interpretation of the carnival theme. This competition heralds the carnival proper and performance venue is the U.J.Esuene Stadium on the night of the 25th of December.

Five bands of the carnival namely, Bayside, Freedom, Passion 4, Seagull, and Master Blaster thrilled the audience as they showcased their king and queen in the junior and senior categories. Costumes for the Seagull band were designed by Clary Salandy and constructed by Mahogany of London. The author featured prominently in the carnival, and participated in the interpretation of the king and queen costumes for the Seagull band. The Seagull band is led by Senator Florence Ita Giwa. The 2013 theme 'ain't no stopping us' was to showcase the potentials, resources, ingenuity and endless possibility of a State struggling to wriggle out of her financial inertia. The different categories are explained as follows:

##### *4.1 Junior King - The Achiever*

The achiever is one who is always dedicated to his vision. He knows that success is not achieved alone but by the cooperation of other people. He knows how to manage his emotions and that of others around him. He is an adept at the practice of listening to learn more about the world around him. When something is not working, instead of using the same ineffective tactics, the achiever pivots and tries to tackle the problem from a different angle. His two attributes include dedication and blind persistence. His success fuels happiness and happiness in turn fuels greater success. It was in the light of the above attributes that the Seagull band presented the junior king as the achiever.

##### **4.1.1 Analysis of patterns**

The king's costume was made up of a golden trophy topped with a golden star which he wore as a mark of his achievements. The trophy represented success and the golden star a spark of inspiration. The King's costume was surrounded by eight gold and red stripes forming the letter 'V'. The costume was shaped as a half star on which sat other golden stars on the apex of the 'V' giving the illusion of energy and togetherness. The pattern of a 'V' is a symbol of victory, and the number eight, is a symbol of infinity. The golden stars on his costume depicted his hopes, dreams, and perfect quality. The stars represented new golden opportunities for him to go on in life. The golden yellow colour of his costume represented inspiration, success, wealth and his achievements. The red colour in his costume represented his passion to go on, his struggle, hard work, determination, and excitement. In line with the theme, the king was poised to bring prosperity to his people and encouragement to his peers, and 'ain't no stopping him'.

#### 4.2 *Junior Queen - Bliss*

Bliss is a state of ecstasy, characterised by peace and joy. To be blissful then requires perfect conditions both within the self and outside the self. Bliss creates conditions for rejuvenation and growth. When bliss is well managed, it becomes self-actualizing and evokes the feeling of love, awe and wistfulness.

##### 4.2.1 Analysis of patterns

The queen's costume captured the very essence of bliss and was represented by a sweet and delicate flower of pink and white which expressed the sense of joy and serenity. Every petal of the flower costume was blended from white representing purity, innocence, truth, knowledge and illumination. The blending continued to the vibrant pink colour representing the epitome of beauty, grace, happiness and treasured youth. The reflective lines which radiated from the centre of the costume symbolized an awakening indicative of the beginning of life. The petals of the costume started small at the centre but got bigger and bigger towards the fringes. This perspective represented the idea of growth and the never ending cycle of life, thus, 'ain't no stopping us.' Her elaborate cape was textured with patterns of flower buds and leaves signifying newness and continuity. The queen complimented her costume with a pink headdress, made up of filaments bearing the anthers of the flower. The anthers of a flower contain the pollen which fertilizes the ovum of the flower, leading to the production of new seeds. This strengthened the symbolism of the never-ending cycle of life.

#### 4.3 *Senior King - Genius*

A genius is a person who displays exceptional intellectual ability, creativity or originality associated with the achievement of unprecedented insight. Genius sees targets that others cannot see and has the courage to move against the tide of opinion when he is convinced to do so. He is endowed with a strong intuition, insights and tremendous energy. His attributes include brilliance, capacity, and excellence, which are some of the ingredients of ingenuity.

##### 4.3.1 Analysis of patterns

The King's costume consisted of three panels in front and two at the back. The front panels carried two large eyes and a small eye at the centre of the forehead representing the 'third eye.' The two back panels cradled the brain where grey matter is found and this was established with silver colour. The genius was symbolically represented by the three eyes because the eyes are the windows of the soul. They scan the world and lead to the creation of ingenious answers to questions that arise. The king's costume was designed with several shapes scattered all over the costume. Circles represented continuity, stars represented the universe, the eternal and the apex, open eyes represented awakening of consciousness and ingenuity, having the power to see forever. Other geometric patterns like squares, rectangles and polygons represented esoteric power, inner consciousness and continuity. Wavy patterns represented energy. Question marks represented awareness and curiosity. The third eye represented inner consciousness and the ability to see potentials. The brain represented the intellect, positive energy and consciousness. The different patterns on the king's costume graduated from small to large representing growth, continuity, synergy interaction and breaking of new grounds. The King was costumed in warm colours of red and orange to signify strength, power, leadership, passion, control, confidence, and creativity. The king was designed by the Seagull band to inspire people to discover that special thing in them, because that is where their personal genius lies, and to use this positively for the benefit of their State and the Nation.

#### 4.4 *Senior Queen - Creativity*

Creativity and innovations are critical skills in the 21st century work place. Creativity is the ability to produce new, diverse and unique ideas that are not restricted by rules, customs or norms. Creativity is central to our growth and learning. We gain from creativity because we have the ability to produce new ideas; also, we have the ability to approach different situations from different perspectives. The creative ability to turn fantasies into reality prompted the Seagull band to create and present the queen as 'creativity.'

##### 4.4.1 Analysis of pattern

The queen's costume was designed with a spectrum of musical keys, symbolizing her melodic creative energy. Arising from her spiral costume were golden musical horns which were highlighted with pink, the colour of youth and grace. Together, the spiral, the horns and the brilliant colours on her costume, formed a medley, a spectacle of creativity. The spiral nature of her costume represented the evolving journey into life, connoting continuity, and carried the power of flow and change. The relationship between the musical keys and the spirals

showed that music appealed to all, carried the power of change and can go on and on to infinity. Thus creativity and development be it personal or for the State could grow and advance to any height of one's choice. The queen's creativity was represented by the different colours on her costume which showed the bright future of the people and was rich in symbolic meanings. There were nine different colours which carried the following symbolisms:

Golden yellow, for the bright, rich economy and endless joy this will bring. Red represented the passion of the people, pioneering spirit, leadership qualities, ambition and determination. Pink, represented youth, grace, and mother's unconditional love Orange, represented warmth, happiness, cheerfulness and hospitality of the people. Purple represented imagination, spirituality, togetherness and the union of the body and soul. Green was for balance, harmony, growth and rebirth. Blue represented trust, honesty and loyalty of the people. Turquoise gave a calming perspective and inspiration. Black represented power, mystery, sophistication, control and the dignity of the people. White represented innocence, wholeness, balance and purity.

The Queen was truly the spirit of creativity embodying a spiral symphony of colours, a spectrum in the key of life. Colours were used in the patterning to add more meaning and enhance to the character.

## 5. Conclusion

From the analysis of the patterns and symbols on the costumes as discussed above, it is clear that those patterns suited the characters of the 'achiever,' 'bliss,' 'genius,' and 'creativity.' The stars, the victory symbol, the trophy combined with the massive costume to give character to the performer. 'Bliss' used the radial pattern projected by the flower and harmoniously designed with a mixture of two colours to enhanced characterization. Alternating patterns were used on the costumes of the 'genius.' These comprised of different shapes and symbols. Borders and bands were also used to emphasize the edges of the costume. The costume for 'creativity' made use of rhythmic patterns with curves and spirals giving a feeling of flow, movement and infinity. According to Noubikko (2010, p2) "the brain attempts to discern and understand patterns as they occur and give expression to unique and creative patterns of its own. It will resist having meaninglessness imposed on it." By meaninglessness, he meant pieces of information unrelated to what makes sense to observers or learners.

Patterns on materials used for theatre costumes should also be meaningful to the audience. In China, patterns are used meaningfully, and are always embroidered on robes of ceremony worn by the actors. Buss(1922, p.94) writes that "scroll and animal and flower knots and leaves, claws, scaly tails, fangs, and squinting eyes depict fury, malice, cunning, goodness or wisdom..." The pattern of a dragon means protection and that of a fox means betrayal. The list is unending. In Nigeria a typical Igbo Chief could easily be identified with his chieftaincy dress top with patterns of the lion's head, known as Isi Agu. The Tiv people of Benue State are identified with their black and white striped patterns. Picton and Mark (1979, p.9) record that the 'tribal association of a Moroccan Berber woman can be read in the pattern of the stripes on her cloak.' The Zulu beadwork design is not merely a decorative art of weaving small glass beads into aesthetically pleasing patterns but, "research has shown that these designs were surprisingly articulated vehicles of communication that helped to regulate behaviour between individuals of opposite gender" (Stan, 1983, p.114). Further explanations reveal that men could see whether a woman is uncommitted, engaged, married, unmarried, has children or unmarried sisters. The above ability of the Zulu beadwork to communicate is said to be rapidly subsiding under the pressure of urbanization and culture change. The theatre is a good place to revive this unique use of pattern to communicate.

Again, socially high ranked people are identified through special item of clothing in place of patterning. Example, only the Roman Emperors wore garments dyed with Tyrian purple. Bassey (2001, p.65) writes that among the Efik, only Ekpe adepts wear the okpomkpom Ekpe (a long strip of decorative cloth tied around the neck). In other traditions, images are painted on clothing as decorative motifs to represent objects, place or events. Thus, patterns do not only enhance the person's appearance but also define his place in the community. Spencer (2003, p.4) writes that in Japan, patterns have been used to exploit loopholes in the law by recreating cloths which ordinarily was banned by law but designed for use in the theatre. Creating costumes which is full of subtlety, illusion and hidden meaning helps emphasize the character's role. Most textile materials especially the wax prints carry a number of identifiable and meaningful patterns which could be used for personal, political, social and religious expressions.

The size and shape of patterns in costume design have considerable effect in the development of character. The designer has the responsibility to understand the working principles of, and how to use the various elements of design in the manipulation of meaningful patterning. Decorative embellishment or shapes of garments may have prestigious value so that the wearer of such things is immediately marked out as having great wealth or status.

Design elements and principles enable the creation of any pattern for visual sensitivity and creative order because in the theatre, good designs combine with the actor's experience to promote the action in the world of the play. Good patterning creates harmony which in itself is a pleasing arrangement of parts that engage the viewer, creating an inner sense of balance and order. A chaotic thing indicates disharmony, and as Morton (2002, p.2) puts it, the brain has the capacity to reject something that is not stimulating or something that it cannot organize or understand.

Patterning is not a new idea but, costume designers should make bold to employ patterns in costume design to reflect the nature of the performance. There are patterns that specifically correspond to people's temperaments, and these should be purposefully employed. This is because the knowledge and application of the psychological meaning of patterns can further aid characterization better. The design of costume has to take this growing need into consideration in order to meet the demand of play/film productions.

The patterns, colours, and textures that a costume designer chooses make an immediate and powerful visual statement to the audience. Most members of the audience can read meaning and understand patterns and symbols on costumes, though a publication of the analysis of patterns on costumes will be of great help. It should be understood that costume is a very powerful visual element in the theatre and when they fail to be meaningful they create a barrier to the understanding of the production in question.

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