

BORI SPIRIT WORSHIP TRADITIONAL DRESSES AMONG THE KABAWA PEOPLE OF ARGUNGU IN KEBBI STATE

Suleiman Sama'ila Nabame
Assistant Chief Ethnographer
Kanta National Museum, Argungu

Abstract

Bori cult is a traditional religion of spirit worship practised in Hausa land before the introduction of Islam in the 10th Century, even though, Hausa animism experienced a tidal wave of change with both the arrival of Islam and colonization, like many resident cultures across the African continent. With Islamic religion, Bori is now practised as part of cultural entertainment, men and women appear in different dresses as they appear in Anniya, Anne, Kirai, as spirit of rain (bafullatar ruwa), spirit of water (Babule) spirit of fire, and spirit or king of spirit of the mountain (Sulaimana). This research focuses on the dress pattern of members of Bori cult, the significance of the dresses and colours used in making the dresses, sustaining the dress code of the cult as well as the changes that the dress culture has gone through.

Introduction

The practice called Bori which involves trances, exorcism and other supernatural elements in Hausa land is being obliterated by Islam, colonialism and modernity. Since the advent of civilization, human societies emerged with the gradual evolution of their cultures and religious practices which give every human society its identity. As time went on, more advanced cultures and civilization inundated and gradually obliterated various aspects of the culture and religious practices of other societies which they dismissed as primitive or heathen. Hausa land for instance, evolved Bori as its sole religion and one of its main identifiable cultures during the ages preceding the advent of Islam and colonialism. The cult is divided into two- Bori the religion and Bori the cure.

Bori: The Religion

The religion is characterized by the worship of Jinn (*Aljannu* or *Iskoki* in Hausa) described as supernatural spirits, as the deities. Bori worshippers believe that Jinns possess all the powers possessed by God or Allah. They believe that these supernatural spirits give or withhold health, offspring, rain and bountiful harvest, peace and security and all forms of powers and fortunes. They unleash wrath in the form of epidemics on their adherents if and when they sin against them.

Bori: The Cure

The cure is principally for the cure of ailments. This practice takes place for various reasons and at various times such as during specific seasons, festivities and wedding, naming or other ceremonies with the '*Yan Bori* (those possessing the spirits) performing abnormal or supernatural feats

when they are possessed by the spirits, following provocation by specific panegyrics supernatural.

Brief History of Kabawa people of Argungu

Argungu is a city in Nigeria's Kebbi State situated on the Sokoto River and as at 2007 Argungu had an estimated population of 47,064. The city is the seat of the Argungu Emirate, a traditional state. It is the major agricultural centre of the area, with the key crops including rice, peanuts, millet, wheat and sorghum. The city also hosts an annual International Fishing and Cultural Festival.

The Kabawas are the dominant ethnic group in Argungu. Historically, they got their name from the holy mosque in Mecca (Ka'aba) because they were at one time the only people who were taking care of the Holy Mosque. As a result of that they were given the name Kabawa. Centuries later, they migrated across the Mediterranean to Sudan and eventually the northern Nigeria.

Kabawa is traditionally considered to belong to the Kebbi Kingdom which is Banza bakwai states of Hausa land locally known in Hausa legend as (seven bastards) or seven illegitimate states. The rulers of these states were supposed to trace their lineage to a concubine of the Hausa founding father, Bayajidda, hence the locally disdainful term banza (illegitimate).

The first historical references date to the time when the area came under Songhai rule during the reign of Sunni Ali (1464-1492). Kanta Kotal a Hausa immigrant from Kuyanbana in Southern Katsina became de facto military governor of the Songhai Sub-Province of Kebbi and declared it independence in 1516. During this period, Surame became the capital of the kingdom. Kebbi became a major power in the region resisting Songhai attacks, expanding into the Yauri and Nupe lands to the south and defeating attempts by the Borgu Empire to invade and occupy the Hausa states. However, after Kanta's death in 1556 the Hausa states stopped paying tribute.

Overview of Bori Cult

Bori was a religious cult practised everywhere in Hausa land before the advent of Islam. It is still practiced, but no longer has any religious affiliation and has been converted to be part of cultural entertainment among the cultists of Kabawa ethnic group. They talk with the spirit when they are possessed. Each spirit has a particular purpose and each cultist therefore dresses like the spirit he/she is attached to. The dresses are usually hand

woven, known locally as "SAKI". The colour of the dress is also important because it determines the function of the spirit; the usual colours are black, white and red.

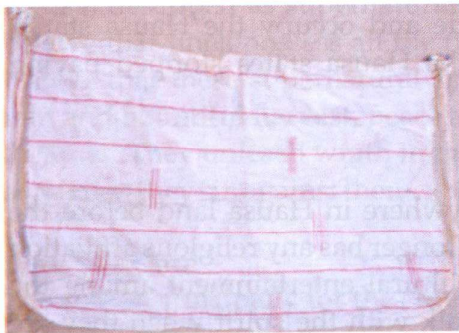
Different Categories of People and the Dresses in Bori Cult

1. Dan Tsatsunbe, or Gajere or Dandangone: He is extremely small in stature. His dressing consists of a shirt of a hand-woven material, goat's skin round his waist, a hat, a pair of leather shoes, an axe and a baton. All these signify a rearer who roams about, taking care of his animals.



A Set of Dan Tsatsunbe Dress and Costumes

2. Maryama and Umma Aisa are the wives of Dan Tsatsunbe: Maryama or Zangana as she is also known is the first wife. She uses a white woven wrapper known locally as *Dan-Shata*. Umma Aisa, the second wife uses a black one. The lengths of the wrappers are the same. The difference in colours only determines the order of seniority.



White Woven Wrapper of Maryama



Black Woven Wrapper of Umma Aisa

3. Doguwa: Doguwa is the spirit of anger. There are two sisters involved in this spirit, Hawatan the senior and Farar Doguwa known as Adama the junior. Hawatan uses black hand-woven wrapper '*Bakin Saki*', while Farar Doguwa (Adama) uses white one as the name indicates. Here, the colour is used to differentiate between the two sisters, but the lengths of the materials are the same.

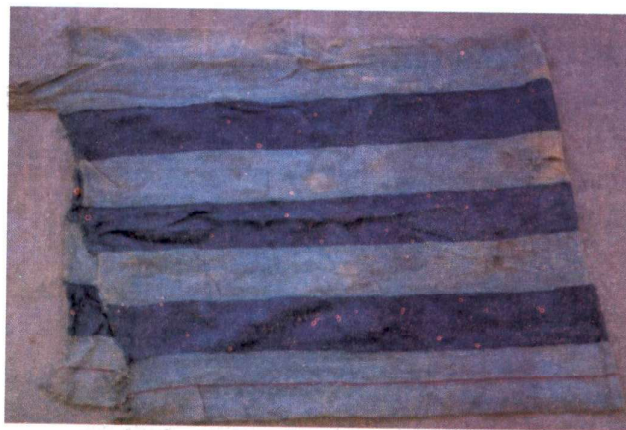


Black Hand-Woven Wrapper of Hawatan



White Hand-Woven Wrapper of Adama

4. Bazabarma: A crippled wife of one of the spirits. Due to her stubbornness, the husband had to break her legs to calm her. She therefore became crippled and a little calmed. She uses a kind of white and blue straps of material sewn together as one wrapper with a zebra-like pattern known as "*TSAWAKA*", she also speaks a different language known as "*Zabarmanci*".



Blue and White Hand-Woven Wrapper of Bazabarma

5. Balo: This is a slave to Bazabarma who always move along with her. He uses the same materials with his mistress and cowries, a horn with him, to indicate his position.



Blue and White Hand-Woven Wrapper of Balo

6. Tsoho Mai Twari: This is an old man who is always coughing due to his old age. He uses a white material that has 15 straps of white hand-woven material sewn together as one wrapper. The white colour indicates peace and gentleness associated with old age; he is also religious.



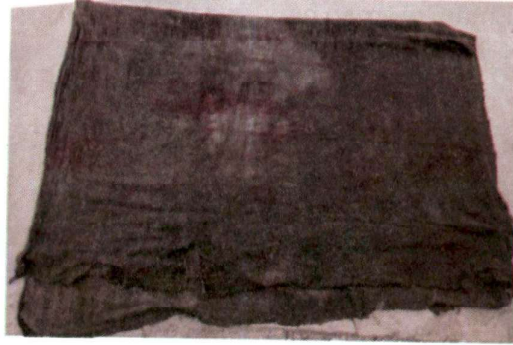
White Hand-Woven Wrapper of Tsoho Mai Twari

7. Tsoho Babai: A junior brother to Tsoho mai twari, who uses 15 straps of black materials as wrapper; this is to show obedience and loyalty to his senior brother.



Black Hand-Woven Wrapper of Tsoho Babai

8. Bugara: A junior brother to Babai who use the same material as his senior brother, but he always carries a stick along with him to show his stubbornness.



Black Hand-Woven Wrapper of Bugara

9. Rankaso: The wife of one of them, she uses a black wrapper to show wickedness.



Black Hand-Woven Wrapper of Rankaso

10. Bafillatar Ruwa: This has to do with mermaid spirit in some places. In the past, before any fishing activity was allowed, the cultists had to perform some rituals and consult with Bafillatar Ruwa. This ritual is called 'Gyaran ruwa' literally means water cleansing or water purification. She is always dressed in blue wrapper and the blue colour represents water.



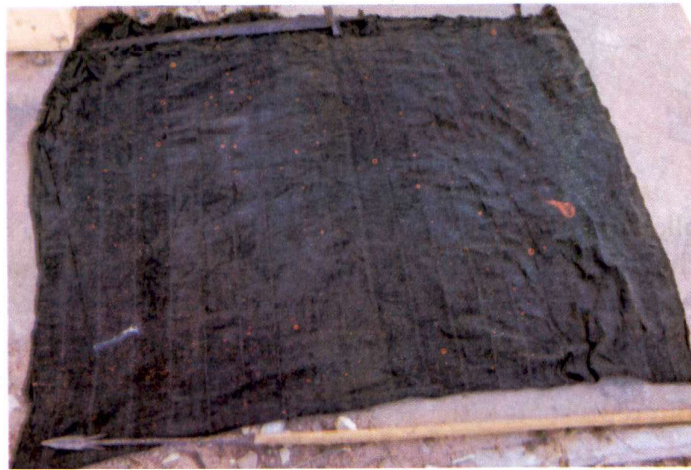
Blue Hand-Woven Wrapper of Bafillatar Ruwa

11. Badosa: A sister to Bafillatar Ruwa, but she is always on-shore. She therefore dresses in full Fulani attire, a shirt, a big wrapper and a headgear covered or decorated with cowrie shells, a necklace depicting a Fulani woman hawking milk.



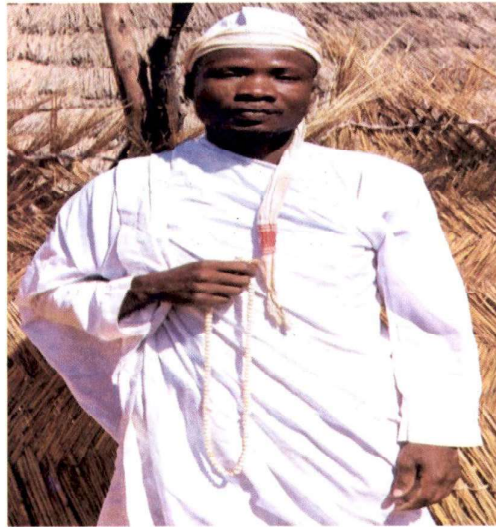
A Set of Dress of Badosa

12. Zaruma-Anniya: She dresses in black material, about 21 straps of black woven often cotton material sewn together to form a very big wrapper, she carries a spear and a sword. The black colour mostly connotes wickedness, while the spear and the sword depict bravery.



Black Hand-Woven Wrapper of Zaruma-Anniya with Spear & Sword

13. Malam Alhaji: He is a peace loving and religious spirit, as the name implies. His dressing code is mainly white all round. This includes a large wrapper, a turban, a cap and a rosary for saying prayers. The white colour means peace and Islamic faith. Malam Alhaji talks less because he is most of the times saying his prayers.



Malam-Alhaji in his Dressing Attire

14. Kirai: Kirai is directly the opposite of Malam Alhaji, mostly aggressive at the slightest provocation and always ready to protect his territory. He takes part in any battle against his territory. His dressing code is therefore a red gown of hand woven 'saki', a long red cap and carries an axe along. The red colour represents danger, while the axe shows his readiness to attack.



Kirai's Dress

15. Badakkare/Bobawa: Bobawa literally means anybody who does not understand your language. Badakkare is the only non-Hausa-speaking spirit. His attire consists of a leather shirt, a leather strap around his waist and a hairy cap. He also carries a baton that is covered with goat's skin. The dressing code indicates that he is a domestic servant of most of the spirits and he also deals with the witches, hence the baton he carries.



Badakkare/Bobawa Dressing Attire

16. Babule: The spirit of fire, when possessed, touches fire unharmed. His dressing code is therefore a red shirt, red trousers and red cap and sometimes he holds a burning torch. His red colour of dressing signifies fire.



Babule Dress

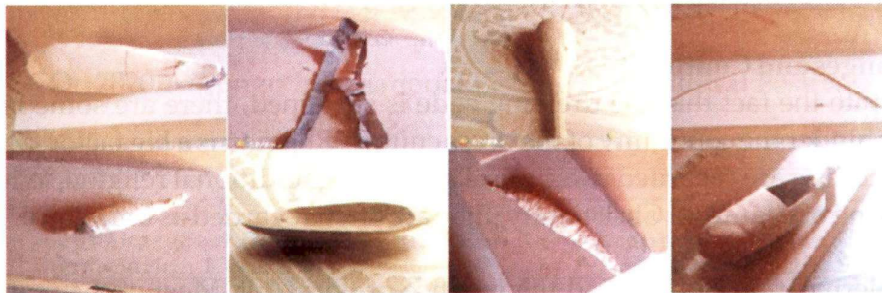
Types of Woven Materials Used in Making Bori Cult Dress

Saki: The hand-woven material locally called 'saki' is made from cotton wool which is spun into thread, the thread is taken to the local loom and woven into different types of clothing.

Skin: Goat's skin is sometimes used along with the cloth. The skin is tanned and dyed into different colours to suit the purpose. Cowrie shells are also used for decoration.



A Man at Work in a Woven Loom



Tools used in Woven Loom



Leather and Cowries for Making Leather Strap

Colours and their Significance in Bori Cult

Colours play a vital role in choosing or making a dress for each of the cultists. The important colours are: white, blue, red and black. Each colour determines the function, the habit and the manner of each of the spirits that a cultist is attached to.

White: White signifies peace, religion, old age and gentleness.

Black: Black wickedness, stubbornness and anger.

Blue: It simply connotes water; rivers, lakes and oceans.

Red: It signifies fire and danger.

Sustaining the Dress Code of the Cult

The Bori cult is passed down from generation to generation. In the ancient times, it was regarded as the religion of the animists. With the advent of Islam, it has now become part of the cultural heritage, practiced mostly on special occasions like fishing festival, Durbar, Sallah celebrations, etc. The dress is always kept sometimes tightly closed in a box, out of the reach of anybody except the person attached to it. The custodianship of the dress is often hereditary and is hardly renewed. The cultists are very good in keeping the track of events, with this; the dressing style is always sustained.

Changes and Continuity

Despite the fact that the dressing code is sustained, there are some factors that hinder the continuity of the dress culture. Religion is a big factor. Most of the cultists are regarded as animists, practicing traditional religion. With the coming of Islam and Christianity, they are often regarded as unfaithful.

Modernization has affected the practice of Bori Cult. Most of the materials used in making the dress are becoming difficult if not impossible to find, for example; cotton wool is becoming rare today. The traditional craftsmen are passing out and the present generation is not ready to learn the craft. Modern materials are replacing the traditional ones and they have the strong believe that anything modern is not feasible for their activities.

Conclusion

This research work has examined the Bori cult among the Kabawa ethnic group of Argungu people in Kebbi State. It showed different types of dresses of the cult with their colours and their significance. It also examined various problems that need to be addressed in this traditional practice. Firstly, the research has made us to understand that local woven industries are at the edge of collapsing or have collapsed totally. It is very hard to find these local traditional industries due to modernization. Secondly, materials that are used in making this dress like local cotton wool is very hard to get and tanned as it existed in the past. Fieldwork interview showed that some of these materials are not available in Nigeria and people have to travel to Niger Republic to purchase them. They appealed to the government to come to their aid to avoid the collapse of this very important local traditional industry.

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UNESCO: 2020 Argungu International Fishing and Cultural Festival.

Informants

S/N	NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	PLACE	DATE
1	Malam Yusuf Abubakar (Sarkin Borin Sarkin Kebbi)	67	Bori cult professional	RuggaBube, Argungu	10 th January, 2022
2	Hajiya Luba Abubakar Baraje (Magajiyar Kabi)	60	Bori cult professional	RuggaBube, Argungu	10 th January, 2022
3	Hajiya Atika Abubakar Baraje (Ta Kanana)	45	Bori cult professional	RuggaBube, Argungu.	10 th January, 2022
4	Malama Safiya Hamidu (Uwa)	75	Bori cult professional	RuggaBube, Argungu	10 th January, 2022
5	Kulu Yusuf (Mata Sarkin Bori)	60	Bori cult professional	RuggaBube, Argungu	10 th January, 2022
6	Malama Lantana Malam Alu Kitarawa	60	Professional local clothes weaver	Kitarawa Area Argungu	13 th January, 2022
7	Kulu Aya	58	Professional local clothes weaver	Kitarawa Area Argungu	13 th January, 2022
8	Malama Kulu Garba	50	Professional local clothes weaver	Tsibiri in Niger Republic	18 th January, 2022
9	Idrisu Kalle Tung Burtu	40	Professional local clothes weaver	Tsibiri in Niger Republic	18 th January, 2022
10	Sanusi Abdullahi (Babule)	30	Bori Cult Professional	Dosso in Niger Republic	20 th January, 2022
11	Malam Yakubu L. Ibrahim (Walkilar Bagaye)	57	Lecturer, A.A.C.O.E Argungu and Argungu Emirate Historian	Argungu.	22 nd January, 2022
12	Malam Bello Muhammad Musa	57	Civil Servant	Argungu	22 nd January, 2022