

MOTIFS AS SEMIOTIC COMMUNICATION IN CALABAR CARNIVAL COSTUME DESIGNS

Francisca A. Nwadigwe, *Ph.D.*

Department of Theatre Arts,
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University,
Igbariam, Anambra State.

Abstract

Carnival has become topical in contemporary tourism. It is an integral feature in the repertory of theatre and cultural tourism programmes in various parts of the world. However, carnival costume processions are often misunderstood by many critics, audience members, and culture administrators as mere displays of attire or sheer fashion parades. The objective of this research is to investigate the nature and application of motifs in carnivals using the Calabar Carnival as a paradigm. The study adopted the qualitative research method, using the Participant Observation approach to collect primary data. The data analysis was descriptive and interpretative and framed on the Theory of Semiotics. The study found that motifs are applied in the Calabar Carnival in various forms ranging from realistic to abstract concepts. Furthermore, the motifs are highly communicative and constitute a major medium for making key and strategic statements by the Bands and the carnival organizers. The study concludes that motifs need to be appreciated as indispensable elements of the carnival narrative. Hence, costume designers need to be supported with resources and policies to achieve the carnival target objectives, given the vast potential of carnival and tourism to the socio-economic development of any nation.

Introduction

Motif is a regular feature in visual art and design. It comes in various forms and is creatively applied in designs to achieve

various purposes or effects. Motif features in decorations or designs as an idea or theme that is recurrent or repetitive for aesthetic and/or communicative emphasis. A motif is a shape or pattern that is created and repeated on the surface of a design work to create visual harmony or aesthetic variety, often with underlying meanings.

As an essential feature in textile art and design, motifs are quite critical in dress and body adornments, whether they are to be used in fashion or theatrical costumes. Russell explains that motif, as a shape or form, is an important element applied in theatrical costume design under the principle of variation to “add interest to the composition” (73). Therefore, motifs break the monotony in visual design, creating variety and some kind of balance or aesthetic contrast in the design work. Consequently;

A variation in the shape ... or the space between every third appearance of a particular motif in a pattern is more interesting than identical forms or identical distances between forms in a sequence. To create variation in a sequence, a motif can be alternated so that it shifts its position to its central axis without changing the direction of the pattern: it can be placed in opposition so that every other repetition of the motif opposes the preceding one, or it can be inverted so that the direction of the pattern keeps reversing as the sequence of motifs moves in a particular direction. (Russell 73)

Apart from the visual variety and aesthetic beauty, motifs can be applied to achieve different meanings and thematic objectives. Mei states that motifs are integral characteristics of many traditional garments, costumes, and accessories. For instance, such motifs are common artistic features in hat design. The “features suggest the origin of their nationalities; some display the achievements of their people; some reflect the local weather; and some signify the social position or profession of the wearer.” Mei 103). These functions are enhanced by the creative application of motifs in the form of ...’ shapes, patterns, and colours.

In essence, motifs have communicative functions, representing diverse ideas and meanings. A motif may be symbolic of certain ideas, philosophy, concepts, or themes. Furthermore, motifs are often created around metaphors that express wider or deeper meanings, thereby communicating connotative information about a character, people, culture, or dramatic action. A creative costume designer can use motifs to interpret the subtext of a dramatic plot or storyline. While discussing the “interpretation of motif,” Nwaozuzu argues that “generally, motifs portend and express communicative values in creative works”. He adds that a good interpretation of “motifs used in a play ... together with the psychological makeup of the main character(s) yields various levels of meaning” (85).

Therefore, motifs are seen as patterns, shapes, or forms, created in costumes and accessories to express various ideas, themes, and messages about the character or theatrical event. A motif can also be an image or icon of a specified subject; it can equally be ornamental or decorative in concept. Motifs can be created around different ideas, natural features, animals, insects, human characteristics, history, and cultural objects. Motifs whether they are plain, symbolic, or metaphoric, are highly communicative, constantly used to achieve emotional effects, and can even be used for propaganda purposes. A motif can create a point of focus that directs the viewer’s attention to certain areas of the costume or attire and ultimately that part of the wearer’s body.

In application, a motif can be repeated several times in a design, or it could occur only once or at intervals that may not be regular. Sometimes, a whole costume concept may be created around a design motif. This is common in carnival costume design concepts. In stage costume designs, the motifs are often exaggerated to make them visible from a distance, unlike motifs used in film and television costumes, which may be subtle, with a lot of details, because the camera makes it possible to view them at

close range. Motif can be representational, non-representational, simplified, or stylized depending on the designer and the concept.

According to Russell, motifs can be created from many sources, such as geometry (geometric shapes), colours, lines, historical or ethnic art (associated with certain periods or races), religion, environment and vegetation, symbols, metaphors, ideas, and living things. He adds that motifs can also be created with dye in the form of “tie-dyeing” or the “wax-resistant or batik method,” as well as the “stencil through which dye is sprayed onto the fabric” (179). McDermott argues that costume and fashion designers have made historical impacts through “motifs borrowed from painters like Jasper Johns, Bridget Riley and Andy Warhol,” and used especially in popular culture designs. Such designs “explored themes which emphasized a new optimism in the power of youth culture and innovation,” hence, such “designers favoured surface patterns rather than three-dimensional forms” (178). In using motifs to create visual and semiotic effects, the placement is quite important. The placement of motifs on the design surface is as vital as the construction of the motif itself. In costume design, the placement of motifs on costumes is dependent on the production concept, the characters being depicted, and the physical structure or attributes of the performer that adorn the costume. In carnival costumes, the designers often attach great importance to the physique of the performer before deciding the areas of the body to place the major attention-getting motifs.

Furthermore, carnival design motifs can be created from existing symbols, metaphors, icons, and notions. In doing this, such motifs may equally represent another idea, a subtext, beyond their surface denotative meanings. In essence, motifs in a design composition could be a characteristic feature in the iconography of a specific theme or type of subject matter.

Contextualizing the Problem

Despite the proliferation and increased interest in carnival events in Nigeria, researchers since the first decade of the 21st century have continued to focus more on the organization of the event as a popular performance. Consequently, the concept of a carnival event as a tourist attraction is being over-flogged while the design aspect of the event, particularly the costume and accessories is virtually neglected by researchers despite its centrality in carnival production. There is a lack of research focus on carnival design motifs. Hence, little research attention has been given specifically to carnival costume design concepts and motifs and their communicative potential.

There is a problem of definition and interpretation that surrounds the carnival sector of the cultural tourism industry. Carnival costume processions are often misunderstood by some administrators, critics, and audience members as fashion parades. The communicative essence that underlies the motifs, design concepts, and characterization is also frequently overlooked by research studies and misinterpreted by administrators, critics, and audience members. This research is meant to help fill these knowledge gaps in carnival studies and the creative industry.

In everyday usage, dresses are worn for fashion, apart from keeping warm and covering nakedness. Similarly, costumes are adorned in performances to represent characters. However, the application of motifs in everyday attire and performance costumes is not usually interpreted by the audience. Among all theatrical events, it is only in modern carnival productions that costume motifs are consciously interpreted for the audience, especially at the adjudication points. This becomes a rare opportunity for the production team to communicate their meanings to the audience. It is also a data collection centre and resource for researchers. However, in many carnival performances, the performing groups or Bbands fail to properly explain their costume concepts and motif application; in some instances, the motifs are not mentioned at all.

This denies researchers on design and visual communication some valuable data and leaves the audience in a confused state resulting in speculations, erroneous assumptions, misinterpretation, and lack of communication.

Dresses and performance costumes are like mobile notice boards. Therefore, motifs are important resource channels for promoting positive values. However, some designers of motifs in Nigeria's dress culture often fail to conduct proper research and take optimal advantage of the costume and dress media to project and propagate national ideals and positive orientation among the public. It is therefore imperative that knowledge gaps in the area of motif application in theatre costumes, carnivals, and allied dress culture be filled and updated.

Method

The primary source of data for the study is the Calabar Carnival production. To collect primary data, the study adopted the qualitative method, using the obtrusive participant Observation approach. This involved field research investigations carried out by the researcher at the sample Carnival editions. Additional primary data for the study was obtained through the content analysis approach. This entailed critical evaluation of the contents of the designs and performances of the carnival as presented on live stage processions and some past editions of the carnival recorded in audio-visual devices. Berg explained that the content analysis approach "requires some knowledge usually gained from fieldwork or observation" (32). This implies that Content Analysis and Participant Observation are complementary approaches and this dual approach was considered appropriate to the study. The secondary sources of data include books, magazines, journals, and other relevant materials from the library and the Internet. The choice of Calabar Carnival as the case study sample was purposive because of its popularity, visual richness, currency, theatrical vibrancy, and consistency over the years. The data analysis of the

Motifs as Semiotic Communication in Calabar Carnival Costume Designs
study was descriptive and interpretative and geared towards arriving at generalizable findings.

Theory of Performance Semiotics

The theory of semiotics is usually linked to two scholars, Ferdinand de Saussure, a French linguist, and Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher. Both of them examined the use of signs in communication in different ways (Umberto 176). The theory holds that most objects or elements used in language, communication, and everyday existence are signs that could signify something beyond the surface meaning. Similarly, “although the word “semiotics” derived from the word “semion” meaning “sign” enjoys a variety of definitions, it can be defined as a science which studies the role of signs as a part of social life (Chandler 6).

Similarly, Counsell and Wolf explained that “philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognizing that without the help of signs we would be unable to make a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas” (5-6). Hence, Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce relied on this basis to advance the semiotic theory. From his study of the structural properties of language, Saussure urges that language, whether in verbal or non-verbal forms should be understood as “a sign-system, in which the linguistic sign was further presented in binary terms as *signifier* and *signified*” (Aston and Savona 5-6). Therefore, Saussure submits that “it is through the interplay of similarities and differences between signifiers that meaning is created” (Aston and Savona 6). In a nutshell, the semiotic theory explores “signs and signifying practices” as well as “how certain structures were able to produce meaning rather than the traditional matter of meaning itself (Saussure 1).

Similarly, Peirce explored the semiotic theory from the standpoint of communication. Peirce’s perspective focused more on the objects of human communication and he classified signs into three functional elements, which are icons, index, and symbols.

Therefore, “his classification of sign functions has proved the most important and widely cited legacy in the field of theatre semiotics” (Aston and Savona 6). In addition, the semiotic theory of Peirce is focused on “the production of meaning in society using the triplet of semantics, syntactics and pragmatics” (Peirce 6). He refers to these triple concepts as a “trichotomy” of signs which consist of an icon, index, and symbol (Aston and Savona 6).

According to Counsell and Wolf, “For Saussure, the sign is more than a means of communication; it comprises the basic fabric of culture” (3). The theory of semiotics is important to this research on carnival costume motifs and communication because, as theatrical performance and popular cultural production, carnival is communicative; it speaks a language. The costumes, make-up, float, and visual accessories in carnival presentation are signs that communicate deeper meanings. The language of carnival is mostly non-verbal and connected to the people’s values, conventions, and culture. Indeed, “language is the most symbolic, profound and enduring semiotic artefact of culture”, helping us “to construct ourselves and group identities” as well as “interpret the world around us” (Yina 174).

It is therefore logical that theatre scholars, critics, and practitioners should become interested in semiotics. To this extent, the term “theatre semiotics” or “performance semiotics” has emerged and developed as a branch of Performance Theory and theatre criticism that applies semiotics in the analysis of performance. Hence, Aston and Savona view theatre semiotics as a methodology for understanding theatrical meanings (1). Keir Elam also maintains that theatre is a communication chain that involves the encoding and decoding of messages (52). In essence, costume design is semiotic communication.

Motifs in Calabar Carnival Costume Designs

The Calabar Carnival officially called “Carnival Calabar” and tagged “Africa’s Biggest Street Party” is a month-long package of

tourism events held annually in December, in the city of Calabar, Nigeria. Its climax is the procession of hundreds of performers under various Bands dressed in beautiful and whimsical costumes, make-up, and accessories. Similar to the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, that of Calabar is also organized in Bands. Originally, the five official Bands of the Calabar Carnival were Bayside, Freedom, Masta Blasta, Passion 4, and Seagull Band. The Bands were formed in 2005 and they are sustained by donations and contributions from their members and patrons. With time, the composition, number, and management of the Bands continued to change. On the days of the main performance, the carnival procession covers a twelve-kilometre (12km) distance along some major streets in the Calabar metropolis with four Adjudication Points and another four Rest Points. At the end of the events, results are announced and prizes awarded. The Bands then retire to their corporate headquarters and rehearsal venues to remove their costumes, dismantle their set pieces (floats), and store their production materials.

Costumes hold the centre of attraction in the Calabar carnival procession. Since dialogue or speech is not usually applied, the audience relies on costumes to get meanings and entertainment inherent in each presentation. The costumes are designed to perform multiple functions which include identity, association, and cultural representation. Specifically, character identification, interpretation of political, religious, and cultural themes, character association, enhancement of movement, dance, dramatic action, and provision of visual spectacle are some of the functional essences of carnival costuming. Furthermore, due to the large number of costumed performers in the processions, the costumes in their assorted colours, sizes, and shapes also serve as a kind of “moving scenery” in the outdoor performance. In essence, they complement the function of the moving floats usually placed in front to introduce and lead the presentation of each Band.

Costume design in Calabar Carnival, from our field observations, is complex and challenging because of the competitive dimension of the event. Since themes are changed annually to give each year's presentation a unique identity and make new statements, the costumes are consciously created, altered, and fitted with diverse elements, motifs, and accessories to suit the current theme. This demands thorough research, selection, comparative analysis, and critical appraisal of materials, concepts, and the suggested storyline or synopsis to be presented in the costume designs. In their processions, each Band arranges its performers in groups defined by their costumes. Each sub-group in a Band represents a segment in their storyline like a sequence of scenes in a play or dramatic scenario. By using different motifs, elements, and principles of costume design, each sub-group is created to add to the unfolding story. Though the costumes and accessories of each sub-group appear similar, they nevertheless differ in one way or the other from the costumes of other sub-groups in the same Band.

The costumes of the Kings and Queens of each Band are usually elaborate and exceptionally gorgeous since they represent the principal display of the group's costume concept and presentation. The Kings and Queens are presented in a separate event, that is, the pre-carnival ceremony, where their costumes are assessed in a contest before the day of carnival processions. The royal costumes are conceptually designed as extensions of small floats, placed on casters to enable the performer to push them along the street easily. During the carnival processions, the Kings and Queens are placed in front to lead the Band while other costumed members follow.

From the official theme of the carnival for each year, the Bands create short storylines or synopses backed by motifs reflected in the costume designs, accessories, and floats to explain their presentation. The costume design elements such as colour, texture, lines, forms, and motifs, usually combined with the floats in symbolic, metaphorical, and stylized or abstract concepts. The

costume concepts and motifs are tailored towards reflecting the theme of the year's carnival, helping to tell a story in a non-verbal manner filled with imagery, colours, and symbolism. The variety of motifs represented in Calabar Carnival costumes and their interpretations are often determined by the synopsis of the band and the central theme for the year. A random overview of previous carnivals reveals several motifs in the costumes and accessories. These include royal, celestial, floral, biblical, animal, bird, insect, aquatic, geometric motifs, and so on.

The royal motifs are represented by crowns, sceptre, purple colours, and other elements of authority. The celestial motifs use heavenly bodies such as stars, moon, sun, rainbow, and clouds. The biblical motifs use allusions from the Bible such as characters in biblical stories as well as symbols of the Christian faith. A recurrent motif in the Calabar Carnival presentation, sampled in this study, is the floral motif, featuring a variety of flowers in diverse colours such as hibiscus, rose, daisy, daffodil, sunflower, morning glory, and other flowering plants.

A complementary concept that is often associated with the floral motif is the insect motif. These floral and insect motifs were reflected in many of the presentations featuring different insect species such as butterflies, moths, dragonflies, bees, fireflies, and beetles. Another popular motif frequently applied in the sampled costume designs is the bird motif. A variety of birds are usually depicted representing different qualities. The representation may be in stylized or suggested forms such as representing only the wings, beak, or claws. The aquatic motifs feature a selection of elements associated with aquatic life such as fish, waves, water, aquamarine colour, canoe, paddle, nets, and water hyacinth. These aquatic motifs are sometimes presented alone or combined in a complementary way in one character's costumes and accessories. Other prominent motifs found in the costumes of the sampled Calabar Carnival performances are geometric motifs, national motifs, mask motifs, nature motifs, agricultural motifs, and music

motifs. The geometric motifs may be created in the body of the costume as printed, sewn, or embroidered patterns or forms. They may also be designed as the outline or shapes of accessories such as head gears or headdresses, arm and leg bands, back and shoulder gears, or even hand props. The geometric motifs may be circular (half or full circles), triangular, rectangular, cone-shaped, cuboid, and so on.

National motifs adapt or apply some elements that are representative of Nigerian society, culture, and politics. These include the national flag, national colours (green-white-green), map of the country, national emblems (such as the coat of arms or the Naira), or a representation of the three major ethnic nationalities in the country. Mask motifs are common in the carnival attires and may be applied as a full-face mask, half-face mask, eye mask, or stylized mask. They may also be created or enhanced with elaborate forms of make-up. In addition to creating aesthetics, artistic variety, and breaking monotony, these masks are also used to depersonalize the performer, highlight the character, and encourage the audience's attention to focus on the character's costumes and theatrical identity rather than his or her real personality.

The nature motifs adapt patterns, colours, and materials to represent certain elements in the natural environment and ecosystems such as trees, plants, rocks, or the earth and its vegetation. The agricultural motifs may represent some crops, fruits, farm produce or food items, farm implements, or livestock. Music motifs adapt musical instruments of various kinds (traditional and modern) or represent musical notes and symbols of music keys to symbolize celebration and happiness.

Many other motifs could be found in the designs of Calabar Carnival costumes. Some of these motifs are realistic while some may be abstract. For instance, the love motif may be represented by the shape of the heart while the clown motif is depicted with an over-bloated belly and exaggerated buttocks. There are also some

traditional motifs associated with the local cultures and peoples of Cross River State. An example is the indigenous Efik maiden motif, identified with voluptuous feminine features. There is also the Efik *Mbopo* motif (female fattening practice) which in traditional norms glorifies the gaining of body weight and development of body curves considered as the ideal figure for a woman. These are suggested through the design of costumes and accessories.

Within the array of costumes exhibited in each year's carnival presentations, one can find assorted motifs that represent certain qualities or characteristics that the people claim to have or aspire to attain. Some of the motifs are reflections of topical issues or social trends. For instance, there is the elegance motif, purity and innocence motif, tenderness motif, and the rebellious youth motif which depict various points of view, ideas, and social movements. For the children, there are equally the fairy (wonderland) motifs as well as the popular television cartoon character motifs such as "Mickey Mouse", "Thomas and Friends", "Lion King", "Spider-Man", and the "Teddy Bear". From a panoramic view of the costumes presented in some different editions of the Calabar Carnival, it could be observed that the motifs were repeated in different years. However, their application could differ from year to year since the choice and application of motifs are mainly influenced by the central carnival theme as well as the sub-themes developed by the Bands to help them communicate their ideas and stories. It was also observed that some costumes reflect more than one motif which may be stylized, realistic, or abstract.

Discussion

Every theatrical performance is a communication process; it has semiotic implications which are often anchored on costumes and other visual aspects of design. The application of design motifs in performance as part of the non-verbal dialogue enhances its communicative effectiveness as "purveyors of sub-textual

symbols, index, signs and codes” that support the expression of meanings (Gana & Abdulmalik 98). In the Calabar Carnival, thematic interpretation is quite crucial because the adjudicators rely on it to assess the presentation of the Bands and award marks. Since the themes change every year, the costume concepts and motifs applied by the Bands also change to suit the requirements of the current year. Developing costume design concepts driven by motifs constitutes the major task of the creative team of each Band and the costume motif concepts are guided by the central theme for each year. The interpretation of the carnival theme using costume motif concepts is an exercise in visual design because the costume motifs must communicate the narrative or synopsis of each Band since verbal dialogue is not involved in the performance.

The central theme is further broken down into subthemes by each Band using design concepts driven by motifs to interpret them and tell their story. The concept is thus the design idea around which the creation of the carnival costume and motif revolves. According to Parker, Wolf, and Block, “the design concept is often evident as a visual theme with variations that weave through (the design) bringing unity of thought to the whole (74). Hence, the costume design concept represented by the motifs and colour scheme is a kind of visual metaphor used by the Bands in interpreting the carnival theme in both subtle and apparent ways. For instance, in interpreting the theme of “Land of Our Birth, Our People, Our Heritage” in one of the carnival editions, the Passion 4 Band developed a sub-theme titled “A Feather to Becheve” which explains their design concept as reflected in their costumes motifs. The Band designed many of the costumes with feathers, and feather-like materials as well as creating feather-like shapes and motifs. They also created some other feather motifs such as using bird and insect forms to show feathers in flight. They selected elements from nature and the various geographical landmarks of the Cross River State such as water, forests, hills, and grasslands, and used them to suggest the concept of flight or soaring to

Motifs as Semiotic Communication in Calabar Carnival Costume Designs

greatness. The Band also adopted wings and star motifs in their costume concepts to suggest the ideas of a rising star, soaring high, reaching for the stars, and accomplishing objectives in flying colours.



Fig 1: Wings and flight motif. Photo: CRS Carnival Commission



Fig. 2. An example of Star motifs. Photo: F.A Nwadiuwe.

Textile motifs are symbolic and there is always a “semiotic consciousness” about dress and costumes in human experience; a kind of “awareness of symbolic content in clothing, cloth and textile motifs” (Williams 385). In communicating a synopsis with themes of beauty and fruitfulness through costume designs, the Bands used floral motifs depicting various flowers, colours, and pollinating insects such as butterflies, bees, wasps, moths, beetles, and dragonflies which enhance plant and crop fertility. Therefore, the flower motif as represented in the sunflower and daffodil motifs also symbolized a source of the fruitfulness, fertility and wealth reflected in the synopses. The yellow colour which appeared in some flower motifs and the colour of the costumes and accessories also represents ripeness; an idea that is also associated with fruitfulness. The colour green was used to represent the green vegetation and agricultural resources of the people which is a source of land fertility, wealth, and biodiversity.



Fig 3: Butterfly (Insect) motif. Photo: CRS Carnival Commission



Fig. 4. Floral motif. Photo: CRS Carnival Commission

In representing themes of strength and resilience in the carnival, the designers chose materials that were hard and strong such as metals, cords, brass, and strings. They also created motifs around animals of strength such as elephants, lions, and horses. Similarly, themes or ideas connected to unity in diversity were communicated through motifs created around the concept of eclecticism. Hence, different materials from various indigenous and modern sources such as cowries, beads, feathers, and textile fibres like cotton, wool, silk, flax, jute, hemp, polyester, nylon, polyethene, and acrylic materials and synthetic fibre were combined in one costume or accessory to convey the motif of unity in diversity. Costume design styles and parts such as bodices, garters, helms, lines and straps, flowing designs, appendages, and decorative attachments are used to emphasize elegance, class, finesse, maturity, and polished

identity. From the foregoing, it is apparent that semiotic analysis of costume is essential for an effective appreciation of carnivals. The Calabar Carnival costume motifs feature a range of ideas in the contemporary history and worldview of the local people. Although this trend of promoting tourism and propagating worldviews through costume and dress motifs is not new, it affirms the fact that like the Basurek batik art in Indonesia and some other cultures, motifs in Calabar Carnival costumes signify different commentaries on the people's worldview and daily existence. Furthermore, a vital function of the costume motifs in Calabar Carnival is character identification and association. Each Band has its unique and official colours which dominate their costumes yearly. For instance, blue (aquamarine) for Bayside, yellow for Freedom, orange for Masta Blasta, green for Passion 4, and red colour for Seagull Band. The Band members and audiences used these symbolic colour motifs to categorize performers and associate them with their conceptual identities.

The costume identity motif in the Calabar Carnival is similar to its application in other celebratory dress cultures such as the *Aso Ebi* dress practice of the Yoruba which is seen as an identity marker, a medium of character association, and group dynamics. Indeed, Okechukwu Nwafor highlighted the associated politics of inclusion, exclusion, and marginality that underlie the *Aso Ebi* practice to the effect that those who are not clad in *Aso Ebi* costumes are often marginalized at public events (5). Hence, identification with the Cross River State's philosophy of social harmony, hospitality, happiness, and progress as represented by the carnival spirit is usually expressed by audiences, visitors, and tourists who try to buy and wear costume souvenirs. By dressing like the performers, the visitors invariably join in the jolly festive mood of the carnival and by extension associate with the notion of Calabar as Nigeria's foremost tourism destination.

Conclusion

The costume designs in the Calabar Carnival reflect varied concepts, as symbolized by the motifs depicted in various styles and concepts, thereby providing some visual interpretations for the year's theme. From the explanations offered by the Bands at the Adjudication Points, it is obvious that the motifs provide strong messages beyond visual aesthetics and spectacle for the audience during the carnival performances. The creation of the costume motifs is an integral aspect of the design procedure, which begins with the script or storyline and extends to the execution and fitting of the final design output. In doing this, the Bands respond to cultural, artistic, and organisational trends that affect their application of costumes in the carnival. Consequently, the Bands produce costumes and accessories with motifs that reflect and communicate diverse ideas and meanings, which the audience interprets according to their individual experiences. The communication of messages using costume motifs is continually reinforced every year because the pieces of information being expressed constitute the key statements that the organizers are making about Cross River State. Beyond the entertainment of audiences, the costume motifs carry promotional messages about the hosts and local environment, which are intended to boost tourism patronage and investments in Cross River State with their ripple economic, social, and cultural benefits for both the government and the people.

Aston and Savona have argued that "theatre is a sign system" (100). In this process, costume is one of the visual motif systems that help to convey meanings in performance. Costume design procedures, the use of materials, thematic concepts, and the application of motifs, as evident in the Calabar Carnival, go beyond mere fanfare and entertainment. The government and organizers of the carnival use the medium of costumes to make strong statements about their potential, people, history, culture, and environment. Motifs of various kinds, such as abstract, realistic, agricultural,

political, environmental, cultural, historical, social, and symbolic motifs, were applied every year. These motifs constitute strong elements used to make powerful statements to market the Cross River State to the global community.

In essence, the Calabar Carnival is a communication project. The producers utilize the medium to express various ideas and meanings through costume motifs, which are also symbolic of character and concepts and highlight a variety of messages. The carnival performers in costumes merge into the intended characters, these characters in turn merge into the public relations image desired by the State. As Edwin Wilson observed, “To members of the audience, a performer and his or her costume are perceived as one; they merge into a single image onstage” (361). The utilization of costume design motifs in the essential task of character portrayal, expression of ideas, and communication of messages is quite evident in the Calabar Carnival designs. Indeed, Cowley has argued that carnival costumes have always served a theatrical function, often executed through “thematic motifs and symbolism” (21).

The designers of the Calabar Carnival costumes creatively explore the application of design elements such as colour, texture, mass, and line, which are transformed into imaginative motifs using design principles such as emphasis, unity, symmetry, contrast, and decoration. From the enormous positive messages that are shared with the audience through costume design motifs, it is obvious that the carnival is undoubtedly a veritable medium of communication that goes far beyond fashion parades and visual aesthetics as some people erroneously presume. The costume is the centre-piece of a carnival; indeed, a carnival without costumes is unthinkable. In an earlier study, it has been argued that “the carnival is essentially a designer’s theatre ... In fact, what differentiates one carnival from the other is the type of materials used in the designs of the costumes, make-up and accessories as

Motifs as Semiotic Communication in Calabar Carnival Costume Designs well as the principles applied in the design construction." (Nwadigwe & Nwadigwe 51)

The costume is the centre of attraction in a carnival performance. Indeed, it is costumes that the audience comes to watch, admire, appreciate, and interpret in carnival processions. It is therefore necessary that costume production be given significant emphasis to make a carnival event appealing and successful. Given the huge socio-economic potential of cultural tourism, the carnival costume designers, as cardinal pillars of the event, should be supported with good policies and legislations improved funding, training, and allied resources to enhance the attainment of their creative objectives.

WORKS CITED

- Aston, Elaine & Savona, George. *Theatre as a Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance*, London: Routledge, 1991.
- Berg, B. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1989.
- Chandler, D. *Semiotics for Beginners*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Counsell, Colin & Laurie Wolf Eds. *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Cowley, John. *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso: Traditions in the Making*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Gana, Emmanuel & Abdulmalik, Mohammed. "Synergising Dialogue and Stage Directions: A Semiotic Reading of Ahmed Yerima's *Jakadiya*. *International Journal of Current Research in the Humanities*, 22 (2018): 98-111.
- McDermott, Catherine. *Design: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Mei, Hua. *Chinese Clothing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

- Nwadiuwe, Francisca & Nwadiuwe, Charles. "Design, Technology and Human Capital: Exploring the Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Nigerian Carnival Performance". *African Performance Review* 8:2 (2016): 44-60.
- Nwafor, Okechukwu. *Aso Ebi: Dress, Fashion, Visual Culture and Urban Cosmopolitanism in West Africa*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021.
- Nwaozuzu, Uche-Chinemere. "Meaning and Fragments: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Ogonna Agu's *Cry of a Maiden*. *Metaphors and Climax: Reminiscences on the Drama and Theatre of Ogonna Agu*. Eds. Charles Nwadiuwe, Molinta Enendu and Canice Nwosu. London: Adonis and Abbey Publishers, 2014, 75-90.
- Parker, Oren, Wolf, Craig & Block, Dick. *Scene Design and Stage Lighting*, Boston: Wadsworth, 2009.
- Peirce, Charles S. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss Eds. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1964.
- Russell, Douglas. *Stage Costume Design: Theory, Technique and Style*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1973.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans, Wade Baskin, London: Fontana, 1974.
- Umberto, E. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1976.
- Williams, Patricia. "Symbolic Content in Textile Motifs: Using the Semiotic Approach". Conference Presentation, Seventh Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America. Theme: "Approaching Textiles, Varying Viewpoints", La Fondo Hotel, Santa Fe, New Mexico, September 19-23, 2000.
- Wilson, Edwin. *The Theater Experience*. (9th Edition). Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004.
- Yina, G. "A Case of Cultural Semiotics Deconstruction". *Journal of Faculty of Arts Seminar Series*. 2 (2002): 174-178.