

Evolution of Theatre Costume and Trends in the Costumiers' Training in Nigeria

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Abstract

Among specialists involved in theatre practice are designers who create the desired, aesthetics and locale that best interprets the production. The designer's art is usually referred to as technical theatre which includes; scenography, lighting, properties, costume, make-up and special effect designs, which unite to give life to a theatre performance. The problem of this research is that the design component in many Nigerian universities theatre productions in recent times, leave an impression of lack of research by theatre technicians and there appears to be no harmony between the artistic and technical units of the productions. This study therefore, considers the need to lend a voice to the propagations of the functions and practices of the costumier in Nigerian theatre and to investigate if standards are really falling or not. The design of this research is

qualitative and encompassed interviews, observation, reviews and content analysis. Two productions of same play, over thirty years' time laps are used as case studies. The study finds leverage on semiotic theory by Ferdinand de Saussure; which deals with signs, symbols and their meanings, but related theories are mentioned as found necessary. Findings include that Nigerian universities do not have the capacity to dispense practical knowledge in costume design and research, because the teachers are mostly theorists with no practice to impart and no equipment to do so. The work therefore, recommends that there is an urgent need to review funding, equipment and personnel for a practical teaching of costume and other related design.

Key words: Theatre, Costume, Design, Research, Teaching, Practice

Introduction

The theatre is unarguably an imitative art that depend majorly on the activities of man and nature (humanity and the environment) to provide the necessary information for her operations in all aspects and departments. The playwright for instance, borrows from nature and the society at large to conjure and weave the (story) scenarios he paints or documents in play. The dormant characters are subsequently animated and thus brought to live by the director who uses the actor as his primal tool in the interpretation of a play performance before a live audience. In like manner, the designers of set, light, props, sound, make-up, special effects and costume draw primarily and ultimately from man and nature for inspiration and stimulation to action when faced with theatrical design challenges. To this end, the costume designer, for instance, borrows from society to create what the actor wears in the course of his performance. According to Ommanney & Shanker, (1982, p.348)

One costume inharmonious in color or historical period,
no matter how beautiful it may be in itself or how

becoming to the actor, can ruin an atmospheric effect [to this end], a stage costume should express [totally] the personality of the character, revealing social status, taste, and idiosyncrasies. It should aid the audience understanding of the actor's relationship to the other characters and to the play itself.

Thus it becomes a global consensus and consciousness that anything worn on stage is a costume, whether, it be layers of clothing or nothing at all. (Barbara & Cletus Anderson, as cited in Gillette, (1982, p. 438). Costume therefore, is to the actor what clothing is to man off stage. Clothes originally serve as covering for the human body but beyond covering the human body, clothes serve several other purposes. It is a means of identifying a person in real life – his socio-political status, profession, association and affiliation. In like manner, costume does exactly the same thing for the character(s) in a play – making the audience identify the character once he/she appears before them.

Problems Associated with costume practice in Nigeria

This study considers the need of making known the functions and practices of the costumier in Nigerian theatre a problem that has been only recently addressed by few Nigerian scholars and the study therefore lends a voice to this propagations for the awareness and improvement of theatre costume practices in Nigerian theatre. Majority of the consumers of theatrical (performing arts) products like drama, music, dance and mime, are oblivious of the enormous potentials that abound in the performing arts industry. They often view the theatre through a very myopic and blurred lens that sees, accepts and associates only with the glamour of performance and performer(s) in either stage or screen. A position they profoundly maintain like Robin Wagner (2007) who got truly acquainted with the real essence of the theatre and later became a designer himself in the theatre and subsequently re-appraised his earlier view of the theatre saying:

I'd never really given much thought to what goes on behind the scene – as far as I was concerned, theatre was just a group of actors who showed up onstage and put up a play. In fact, I was out of high school and an art student before I was exposed to theater. And then when I took a closer look, I discovered that the accumulation of all the work that goes on behind the scenes was even more interesting to me than what was going on in performance (quoted in Wilson, 2004, p.297)

This myopic perception of the theatre by people from a distance, are expressed everyday even in our homes, amongst our families and friends and amongst colleagues even those in the ivory towers. Thus, there are many more Robin Wagners all over the globe who do not know that beyond the actor(s) or performer(s) they see on stage or screen, there exists an army of other groups of people in the theatre who actually make things work to their delight.

Usually, as global standard practice demands, a theatrical production is planned in consonance with an operational theory in mind and this is often evident in the style; naturalism, realism, surrealism, symbolism, eclecticism, and so on that informs the direction or perhaps directs the director on the way to approach a chosen production which all partakers of that given production must key into. Based on the foregoing, a formidable and dependable team is expected to be assembled in order to give the best artistic (creative) and technical interpretation to the performance for a most desired result. But the congregation or constitution of such a team that can match desirably, theory and practice is often problematic in Nigeria thereby, leaving a mark of incoherence between the guiding paradigms and the eventual presentation of the production before an audience.

According to Ommanney and Schanker: "It takes many workers behind the scenes – stagehands, property people, carpenters, costume and set designers, tailors, painters, and lighting technicians, to name a few – to

make possible the bows of a few performances at curtain call” (1982, p.204) Such workers will gain immensely from this study. One good thing about the backstage theatre workers, as those mentioned above is that their training endears them to eke a living outside the theatre while the actor is trained and operates only on stage, screen or studio. It is arguable that all workers in the theatre exist for themselves thus they often converge in the event of a production. However, actors are mere “pawns” used in the theatre to animate the characters that eventually move the theatre narrative in a given production after which they retire home until called up again for another production. To theatre designer Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966) “the actor is essentially a puppet or uber-marionette” (Billington, 1982, p.174). While the existence of others in the theatre like the director, backers, stage manager(s), choreographers and composers is well acknowledged, it is the opinion of this study that without the invisible (behind the scene) persons like the designer(s) and technicians, who provide the most needed technical support for a given theatre experience, the actor can do but so little to be plausibly theatrical or dramatic in his presentation. In agreement, Ommanney and Schanker (1982, p.281) submit that “In bringing a play to life, the scenic designer is next to the director in importance”, they say also that:

Backstage theatre experience may bring you the satisfaction and joy of knowing that you have played a part in making a successful show possible. Such experience may also help you discover talents and acquire skills that will be useful to you beyond your theater experience (p.204)

This study is therefore, significant in innumerable ways. First, it presents information to intending designers (students) as well as parents and guardians on other aspects of the theatre that is equally fulfilling and capable of being useful outside of the theatre. It also prods people’s minds to be alert and focused on the challenges posed by lack of quality education

for the theatrical designer and technician in our institutions of higher learning occasioned by the obvious absence of necessary amenities and the danger it portends for the student, society and the economy.

Theories explored in this study

Always sandwiched between the play and the director, the designer embarks on a mandatory mental journey of the play's seeming dream or abstract world with the task to make a physical visual manifestation of the story's environment and general appearance, to facilitate a believable theatre experience. But this rarely happens if the designer is ignorant of certain typical conditions or conventions operational in the theatre which we postulate here as "the codes of theatre practice" being; production style, period, play type, stage type and orientation, directorial approach and others, all of which determines and usually guides theatrical or dramatic performances intended to be properly understood for a wonderful theatre experience. Because theatrical design and production is a non-verbal means of communication used extensively in the theatre and other performance genre to express ideas with the audacity and specificity of images, the study finds it necessary to leverage on semiotic theory by Ferdinand de Saussure, which deals with signs, symbols and their meanings, supports the theoretical framework.

Research Design

This research adopts a combination of historical, sociological and artistic methodologies. The study is qualitative and comparative in that it focuses is on the challenges facing technical theatre training in academic theatre as well as the process of performance, the positions of equipment, curriculum and manpower in Nigerian universities, through the lens of the two play productions. Consequently, the study majorly relied on the primary and secondary methods of data collection. The primary method involved interviews, including recorded interviews of practitioners and trainers involved, interviews of principal crew, and some cast and active observation of theatrical designs and production processes in selected

universities. For a firm theoretical framework, this study relied on the secondary method whereby available literature, books, academic journals, encyclopedia, dictionaries, and internet materials were reviewed.

The Art of Theatre Costume Design

From the basest form of theatre – the primitive theatre when animal skin provided costume, to Grotowski the precursor of the *poor theatre*, there was no period that presented a play without the consideration of costume be it symbolic (fragmentary), realistic, representational or otherwise. Grotowski in his propagation of the *poor theatre* simply emphasized the actor over other elements of the theatre thus directing the focus of his theatre to the actor and his acts. Even so, costumes were worn to cover vital parts of the body. So like every other design area in the theatre, costume design observes the same routine of consistently relying on the society to leverage on for effectiveness, proficiency and historical accuracy where necessary.

It is imperative to note here that the ominous task of creating the required dramatic environment is done not in isolation by the designer(s) alone. It is done with the consent, agreement and in collaboration with other members of the production crew under an eagle-eyed supervision of the Director whose business is usually to orchestrate the production, animate (interpret) the story of the playwright using actors (human beings) who, in the course of the chosen play, assume or represent the characters consciously created. Greenberg, (1981, p.119) say that, “it is the director who becomes the prominent mover during rehearsals. It is the director’s vision as much as the playwright’s that shapes the production that will be seen on stage”. The director’s style or approach, whether eclecticism, symbolism, realism or naturalism, by implication becomes the major propelling paradigm for the generation of design concepts which, by extension, predicates on the overall nuances or characteristics of the production and all the partakers in that given production.

If for example the universities are well organized to handle the essence of her establishment by providing the necessary facilities and

equipment, coupled with modern amenities, students will have no choice but to learn and follow the trend of things happening in the industry with confidence. But as it stands now students are not exposed to modern facilities and trend thus their confidence is subsumed in the complex of inability and ineptitude. The above analogy of learning how to drive makes it imperative to acquaint trainees with physical forms of all stage types. It is through such training that the trainee can meet up with general design challenges and navigate his way through the different stage types and even found spaces now springing up everywhere, requesting the ingenuity of designers to configure.

The costume unit in the universities suffers the same neglect and lack in terms of work space facility and equipment. There are no dedicated spaces to train students in costume design and construction thus students are usually asked to costume themselves in the event of a production. This only develops the skill of hiring, borrowing and lending of costumes for productions. That students are not practically, taught how to design costume in the first instance is challenging enough. Also challenging is the lack of lessons on how to measure, mark, cut, and sew costumes. All these are consequent on lack work space facilities and equipment. In most cases, students borrow costumes and props. The borrowing of props or costumes comes with its own problems. Where there is no proper handling or care, damaged props and costumes are usually replaced with new ones and this, sometimes leads to litigations for breach of contract.

Over view of the history associated with costumes in theatre practices

This art of the theatre (costume design and production) as noted above is actually an old art which has been in practice since the beginning of Western drama in the fifth century B.C. "The overall visual style of a Greek theatrical production was greatly influenced by costumes and masks" (Brockett & Hildy, (2008, p. 22). During this era, "The *chiton*, or long garment reaching from neck to ankles" (Macgowan & Melnitz, (1955, p. 33) were worn by "the actor to [enable him] feel and convey the solemn mood

of the heroic characters". In addition to the popular Greek *chiton* there were other complementary costumes like the mask, headgear, "the *onkos*, and . . . a thick-soled shoe, the *cothurnus*, [for the tragic actor] while the chorus wore low shoes".

Costuming in the Greek theatre strictly observed the tragedy and comedy dichotomies by creating different costume for each genre. "In comedies, the contemporary characters had only the usual common footwear. Here we have the origin of the distinction between "sock and buskin"- the ordinary shoe or slipper of comedy and the high-soled boot of tragedy" (p.34) Again, according to Macgowan and Melnitz, "costumes for comedy, were in the current style except when gods or mythological figures appeared". The art of costuming the performer actually predates the Athenian drama of Dionysus, the Roman theatre that followed, the medieval era that succeeded the classical periods of Greek and Rome after the dark ages, the Italian Renaissance and the subsequent numerous eras that emerged afterwards.

All these periods were predated by the ritual dramas of the Paleolithic age when men (costumed) dressed in animal skin danced and performed around camp fire as they expressed (dramatize) their hunting experiences. As noted by Macgowan and Melnitz, "a primitive man, in the stone age masked in the skin and antlers of a deer, but with fingers and toes showing" (p.2) gave a performance before his audience. Though, the ritual act of the primitive man was not originally perceived to be theatre like the Greek religious festivals, it was later noted and appreciated for its theatrical content and the provision of the primal stimuli for theatre which is the power of observation and imitation limited only by the elements of the theatre. The art of imitation thus benefits the theatre in diverse ways, which is evident even in the art of costuming from the early man.

Costume in the Dionysian theatre was elaborate and considerate of the fact that the theatre at the Acropolis was a large one and that the audience must see from the distance that separates audience and actor. During the Greek, Roman, Medieval and Renaissance periods, costume design was not

designated to a professional designer as we have it today. Costumes then were either provided by wealthy citizens or by the performers themselves. Today, "The design and appearance of all . . . costume elements is the province of the [professional] costume designer" (Gillette, p. 438). While Sophocles earned credit for introducing painted scenery, Aeschylus is noted to have designed his actors' robes. The actor before now, especially the Greek actor, simply sourced his costumes or is supplied by a wealthy Athenian citizen (*choregus*) who by nature of the religious and communal theatre practice in Athens, was ". . . selected [by the state] to pay for cost of training and costumes of chorus . . ." (Reinhold, p. 322). Macgowan and Melnitz add that "The state paid the actors, but the cost of the physical production of each play [including costume] was met by a rich citizen . . . with the title of *choregus*" (p.26). Overall, the Greek theatre exhibited great prowess in the use of costume for the adornment of all character types, whether it be a comic or tragic character, and even for the choruses of the numerous plays presented during each of the festivals.

Costume in the Roman era was a stylization of the Greeks with some deliberate changes to increase the actor's size as against his true size on stage, all in a bid to exaggerate the character. Like the Greek actor, the Roman actor wore masks but "The facial features of the masks were . . . enlarged and exaggerated," an obvious departure from the Greek originals. The high headdress (*onkos*) and the thick-soled boots (*kothornoi*) of the Greek theatre, is here adopted and adapted for the convenience of the Roman theatre and actor.

Medieval costume was typical and peculiar to the period. Again, costume during this era, enjoyed better treatment as it concerned liturgical characters. "Many of the biblical characters closely associated with orthodox Christianity, though historically Jews, were dressed in Catholic clerical garb, but most other Jews normally wore clothing typical of the medieval Jew." Suffice it to observe that creativity in costume design started emerging during the medieval period as noted by Brockett and Hildy (2008, p.85),

Often, however, exotic details were added to the costumes of these historical characters to set them apart from contemporary persons. God was costumed as an emperor or pope, and angels wore church robes to which wings were attached. . . The devils were . . . made to resemble great birds of prey, monsters with animal heads, or creatures with scales, tails, horns, or claws

The medieval actor was responsible for the provision of his costume in course of a production and this was often subjected to inspection and approval before it could be used. However, in instances where special costumes were needed or in cases where an actor was unable to source his costume, an alternative means was employed by the producing body to provide the costume. It is said that "At Lucerne, the director gave performers detailed descriptions of the appropriate costumes for their roles." he assumed the role of a costume designer. Similar to the classical practice of appointing a *choragus* who bankrolled production cost in the Greek theatre, "nonparticipating wealthy citizens were required to buy costumes for actors unable to furnish their own." At other times, the clergy rented or loaned out their garments for theatrical performances. The medieval theatre also adopted costume sourcing from other production outfits.

Like the Medieval theatre, the Elizabethan theatre depended greatly on costume as "the most important visual element." Writing on categories of costumes, Brockett and Hildy explained that,

- (1) "ancient," or out-of-style clothing, used to indicate un-fashionableness, or occupationally, to suggest another period;
- (2) "antique," consisting of drapery or greaves added to contemporary garments, used for certain classical figures;
- (3) fanciful garments used for ghosts, witches, fairies, gods, and allegorical characters;
- (4) traditional costumes, associated with a few specific

characters such as Robin Hood, Henry V, Tamburlaine, Falstaff, and Richard III; and (5) national or racial costumes, used to set off Turks, Indians, Jews, and Spaniards (p.128).

Again, the Elizabethan actor was responsible for the provision of his costume because "Actors were expected to own sufficient costumes to perform the basic roles assigned to them." However, "noblemen [also] gave them garments" just as servants who benefitted their master's wardrobe "sold it to the actors." Other avenues through which the Elizabethan actor got his costume was "either from the Revels office or from enterprising businessmen."

The Spanish theatre shared similar costume ideals with the English because they existed at the same period. However, unlike the English theatre, "expensive contemporary clothing served [as costume] in most cases." Deliberate efforts, at differentiating "historical and legendary figures" were evident in the "outmoded or fanciful dress." Actors in the Spanish theatre, like their Elizabethan counterparts, furnished their own costume, which sometimes were very expensive as accounted by Brockett and Hildy "In 1589 an actor paid 1100 reals and in 1619 another paid 2400 reals for a single costume, sums equivalent to about one-fifth to one-half of a typical actor's annual income." Actors usually provided their costumes and for that reason, their "contracts often specified allowances for costumes." More often than not a good wardrobe was considered one of the actor's greatest assets, for it helped secure employment . . . in the Spanish *autos* or *corrales*.

There are three outstanding theatre cultures in Asia; Japanese Noh and kabuki, the Indian Sanskrit and the Chinese theatre. All of these employed and enjoyed elaborate costumes in their performances. The Asians depended greatly on swift movements in their dramatizations thus giving room for costumes that would enable such movements that simulated climbing, running, ridding, fighting, jumping and dancing. These costumes were usually very lavish and colourful.

Like the Asians, Africans also depend largely on costumes, to present the different characters in a given performance. Africans believe so much in the semiotics of colour and because of religious attachment(s), most of their characters are stereotypical and as such tagged with certain colour(s) which the spectators see and immediately identify to be a true depiction of the character in reference. Among the Yorubas in Western Africa for instance, the colours white, red, black have some peculiar significations and are as such used for certain characters in their pantheon. White costumes/apparels and accessories for instance, are usually used to (costume) represent respected and revered characters believed to be pure and godlike in nature, like, Oba-oluwaye, Obatala, Olodumare, Olokun, Yemoja and Ifa.

Ogun and Sango, the Yoruba gods of iron and thunder as well as the fierce and furious characters are usually costumed in red to match their ferocious nature. While the character Esu “. . . the dreaded sentinel at the entrance to heaven. . .” is believed to be a trickster and a deceiver, thus he is often costumed in a deliberate blend of white and black or black and red to explain his deceitful nature, one capable of causing animosity between two friends, family or community. Similarly, among the Edo people of Benin in mid Western Nigeria, colour is used a great deal to identify and differentiate certain mythical, legendary, godlike and royal characters. The use of colour in this manner to differentiate a character’s costume and disposition is typical of pre-colonial Africa. But the post-colonial and modern African character is now costumed in modern and more contemporary costumes, such that suits his/her appearance in the context of the play

There are several other characters and situations in the African theatre context that are colour bound for a better understanding of their nature. Stereotypical characters are replete everywhere, not typical of Africa alone and they are always costumed in peculiar costumes and colour for proper identification and clean cut depiction of what they truly represent in the story/play. According to Ommanney and Schanker “. . . costume is not merely a means of characterizing a role as attractive as possible, in its color

and silhouette, it is a vital part of the total stage design” (p348). If for any reason colour is not used in differentiating the characters, the pattern of sewing will be significantly different to stand them out.

The state of Costume and makeup in Nigerian educational theatre

Costume and Make-up in Nigeria have been practiced from the traditional festival theatres, for as long as African villages have existed. Costumes alongside other theatrical designs are the key aesthetic factor in a theatre performance. There has been much claims and side talks by scholars and practitioners on the falling standards of costume research and quality of costuming on the Nigerian stage and one wonders to what extent these rumours can be substantiated. Shuaib (2005, p.59) in tracing the history of theatre practice in Nigeria from the traditional perspective to the contemporary, gives insight to historical background that has evolved to present costume practices on stage and screen. She states that,

Apart from the mentioned raw indigenous theatre modes (ritual, folktales, festivals, masquerade) there are some organized indigenous entertainment forms that are refined out of the aforementioned indigenous theatre forms in both traditional and contemporary Nigerian societies. Among these are the Yoruba Alarinjo theatres, drama of Ibibio, Bornu puppet shows as well as the Hausa comical art of Yankamanchi and Tiv kwagh-hir among others.

From these theatrical roots of traditional festival theatres, evolved the traditional professional theatre, this was what Chief Hubert Ogunde met and later transformed into the contemporary theatre form. Ododo, (1998, p.93) informs that, “Hubert Ogunde’s appearance on the Nigeria theatre scene opened up a new vista for theatre practice in Nigeria because of the formal dimension he brought into theatre presentation ... while being mindful of his audience and environment.”

The contemporary theatre emerged from the traditional festivals and later the traditional professional theatres reaching its peak with the emergence of the Nigerian movie industry known as Nollywood. This encouraged professionalism in Costume as well as make-up and introduced a set of new professionals that projected the arts of theatrical costume and make-up designs, developing it into public appreciation.

Costume Training in Nigerian Universities

Costume practice in Nigeria has received very low documentation by the academic. Historical documentations of its development remains sparsely treated. Costume and make-up are aspect of the arts of the theatre that have not shown noticeable growth. Nwachuku, (2013, p.152) states that, "make-up achieved a celebrated peak in the academic circles, particularly at the University of Ibadan in the early 1970's and this formed the root of contemporary Nigeria make-up growth in Nigeria today". Shuaib, (2005, p.152) however observes that,

Till date in Nigeria (2005), it may be insinuated that no adequate training programme has been implemented as regards costume and make-up in Nigerian universities to produce well grounded specialists in these two areas of theatre specialization. The university theatre programmes are significantly congested with academic practice theatre courses with few slots for practical courses for the teaching and practice of costume and make-up, because there are no theatre equipment to that effect.

A survey conducted in the University of Jos, Lagos State University, University of Ilorin, Nnamdi Azikiwe University and University Port Harcourt by Nwachuku (as contained in his PhD departmental seminar of July 2013, at the University of Port Harcourt) reveals that these universities do not offer costume and make-up courses in the first year. He also observed that, in the second year they offer introductory aspects of these

courses. For the third year, he reveals that only University of Port Harcourt and Lagos State University offer these courses, but not at an advanced level. Further exposing that in the fourth year, which is the final year, areas of specialization in these two areas are stressed or spelt out for the students to specialize only in two universities since 2001: Lagos State University and Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Nwachuku goes on to inform that at the University of Ilorin, the Department of the performing Arts programme was designed as a holistic concept to give students fair knowledge of drama, dance and music, as a result such technical arts of the theatre as costume and make-up were not considered as a specialization on their own at the 400 level, but a means to the realization of the other arms of the theatre until 2007 when it was first allowed. He concludes that, the Universities of Jos and University of Port Harcourt had no specific programmes for costume and make-up specialization in their final year until 2012 when they tried to catch-up with developments.

With the survey given so far on these highlighted institutions and courses by Nwachuku, one will come to the realization that the students are not given a fair share of knowledge in costume or make-up practice, in terms of content, depth and focus, resulting in a graduating student in any of these two design areas not being conversant with practical applications of costume or make-up designs. Nwadike, (2005, p.196) states that, "...the curriculum lacks depth in the coverage of these areas and therefore does not adequately address the need of graduates and what the society expects of them..." For the theatre in Nigeria to grow along side international standards and truly present ancient costumes of our diverse cultures on stage, the theatre needs a check to ensure that such standards are maintained and by implication, there is a need to find out how the standards in costume research and presentation have fallen or been improved upon within an average period of the last thirty years.

Major setbacks the Nigerian educational theatre is experiencing have been identified by scholars like Julie Okoh, Enessi Ododo, Charles Nwadike and many others who are collectively pointing at; absence of

practice based training curriculum, unavailability of planned costume wardrobes, lack of preservation culture and facilities for costumes plus the absence of funding for proper research before costume designing in most educational and private theatres. This study is an attempt at evaluating improvements or failures as may be found, and aspires to contribute an update with a view to suggesting possible solutions or ideas that may aid the practice. It is on this premise that direct compares of costuming in two productions of a particular play, The production and re-production of *The gods are not to blame* as written by Ola Rotimi, both in the University of Port Harcourt arts theatre; known as The Crab and with a time difference of thirty years in between, has been considered a possible avenue to unveil the real situation with regards to rise or fall of standards in costume practices on Nigerian stage, particularly in epic plays, historical plays and folk story dramas with traditional Nigerian cultural settings.

Synopsys and message of the play: *The gods are not to blame*

The gods are not to blame is an adaptation of *Oedipus Rex* by the Greek playwright, Sophocles. In adapting this work, Rotimi gave it a real location in Nigeria, which is not based on fiction. The story of *The gods are not to blame*, starts with a son born to King Adetusa and queen Ojuola of Kutuje. An Ifa priest predicts that Odewale will kill his father and marry his mother as his destiny in life. To prevent this abomination, King Adetusa sends a royal guard called Gbonka to kill the boy in the evil forest. The boy is not killed, but rather given to a childless hunter Ogundele Olowe and his wife Mobike, who bring him up as their son until an uncle refers to him as a 'butterfly calling himself a bird'. Odewale's search for the meaning of that proverb led to him fleeing from the land where he grew, back to Kutuje of his birth unknown to him, killing his biological father at a farm in the land of Ipetu in transit and marriage of his real mother (again unknowingly), on arrival at Kutuje. There he freed the people from captivity of Ikolu attackers and was made king in the peoples gratitude and joy.

The land becomes cursed and as king, he promise to find the cause before night fall and prescribes punishment for the culprit if found. In conclusion he unveils himself as culprit and punishes himself as earlier prescribed. His departing lines capture the Rotimi message: "When the wood insect gathers sticks, on its head it must carry them...." (1977. P.72) He warns that people should take responsibility for their actions and not look for whom to blame. According to Nwachuku (2016, interview),

...when we staged "gods..." in 1985, Prof Rotimi took the major cast to where the three foot parts meet. The roads to Ede, Iwo and Ife. We visited Ogun shrine and Osun shrine at Osobo. We visited a place where they made ancient types of aso-oke and prints and we bought full stock of costumes for our production

Realism sticks out like sore-finger in Ola Rotimis' plays. In *The gods are not to blame*, Rotimi is dedicated to exposing African history and culture through drama. In a recorded interview at the University of Ife, on March 8, 1973 with Agbo Folarin, Rotimi points out that the gods referred to by him in the title of his play are the super power countries like America, Russia, France, Germany and Britain. He said he was looking at the Nigerian civil war and asking the Nigerian peoples to blame themselves for their suspicions of each other and hot temper as well as tribal differences which coursed that unfortunate war.

Nigeria refers to the area of Land from Sokoto state, with capital at Sokoto in the north-east, down to Lagos state, with Lagos as capital in the south-west, Rivers state, with Port Harcourt as capital in the south-south, Adamawa State, with Yola as capital in the north-east and Cross River state, with Calabar as capital in the south-east, it is divided into three by the river Niger, from West of the middle belt and the river Benue from east of the Middle Belt, coming together at Lokoja to flow down to the Atlantic ocean at the South, also known as the Niger-Delta. According to Lasode,(1994, p.2),

The political entity known as Nigeria (named after the River Niger by the wife of the first Governor-general) came into formal existence on 1st January 1914 with the Amalgamation of the separate administrations of the Northern and Southern British protectorates presided over by the first governor general, Lord Lugard.

Ola Rotimi in that interview on 8th March, 1973, warns that, “we should not blame others for our own faults over the Nigeria/Biafra civil war” and that this was the hidden message of his play: *The gods are not to blame*.

Costuming in Ola Rotimi’s production of *The gods are not to blame*

Costuming in *The gods are not to blame*, 1985 to 1988 Productions directed by Ola Rotimi, appears to have been well researched and funded. According to Nwachuku (2016, interview),

The costuming was done by the late Amatu Braide. Ola Rotimi and Amatu set out to acquire the actual texture of the old aso-oke that was of the tick, heavy, coarse and non- shiny variety of the aso-oke that the Yoruba race used for over one hundred years, up to the late 1960s, when lighter and flashy textures came under production. Even the print and adire used for those productions were of ancient variety and sufficient quantities of all were made for the University of Port Harcourt theatre.



Plate 1. Aderopo attempts to swear. (1986)

The production is said to have utilized the actual costumes of the time in which the play is set as seen in the pictures presented here. With a costumier that had studied at the University of Ibadan and a director of Modakeke origin in Oyo state of Nigeria, it was not surprising that historical knowledge on the plays' background and Knowledge of sources for the needed items were available in aid of the production. The level of poverty and under- development of African people in that era of the plays setting could easily be felt when the towns' people are on stage as pictured in the costumes texture and colours in plate 1 (above).



Plate 2. Aderopo returns from the shrine at Ile Ife
Nwachuku (2016, interview) gives revealing insights to the production of 1985-1988 and supports his information with pictures of varied outings of the production for over a period of four consecutive years, presented in this study. He informs that,

In the production or shall I say repertory production of Emmanuel Olawale Gladstone Rotimi, which stretched from January 1985 to October 1988. Rotimi was both playwright and director. I played a palace guard in the first production of January 1985. By July of that year, hoping I am accurately remembering the dates, I became a double cast for king Odewale. By November of that year, my best friend, the late Peter Feuser who had been the lead cast for king Odewale, became my double cast, as I got an unfair majority of the performances on an endless tour of schools, arts centers, etc. Most cast kept changing as student sets of the certificate programme of which I was a pioneer set changed yearly...



Plates 3&4.Odewale laughs at Adetusa, and then kills him. (1985)



Plate 5.Odewale: "wife, who gave me birth?" **Plate 6.** Odewale plucks his eyes. (1985)

Costuming in Ovunda Ihunwo's production of *The gods are not to Blame*.

Costuming in the production of *The gods are not Blame*, as directed by Ovunda Ihunwo in 2016 at a glance appears to be similar to that done by Ola Rotimi. It is however noticeable at closer study that the production looks more glamorous as lots of shiny and modern costumes come into play. The costumier, Nkechi Barture-Uzor (2016, interview), inform us that,

There was limitation Because there was no budget for costumes per say, we had to rely on getting those things from people and the person we finally got most of those things from eventually, happened to have a friend that is taller than Dr. Ovunda Ihunwo and fatter than Dr. Imo Edwards. But at the end of the day we were able to manage. Then for the town's people, the students were asked to bring something and because most of them were not interested they ended up bringing things that cannot be used for that kind of production. You know all these sequences and laces that are presently in vogue and you see somebody bringing it because it is sewn in buba style, mind you the way fashion goes you can actually use a material that we can see in the market today to simulate something older in time. But at the same time, if you do not handle it properly, it is going to mare the production. The crowd scenes was where we hard this problem of interjecting costumes that were not right.

This admission by the costumier must not be taken as a proof of fallen standards but rather an exposition of effects of a falling economy on the theatre and education in Nigeria, as shall be further elaborated upon in this study.



Plate 7. Adetusa and Ojuola at the birth of Aderopo (2016)

There were a lot of costumes of the post independent Nigeria production quality utilized in this production. Although they looked flashy and colourful, they could not possible give the audience the time setting of the play, because the technology of the people had not reached that level of advancement during the playwrights' intended timing of the play. The picture (Plate 7) above is revealing and supportive of this observation.

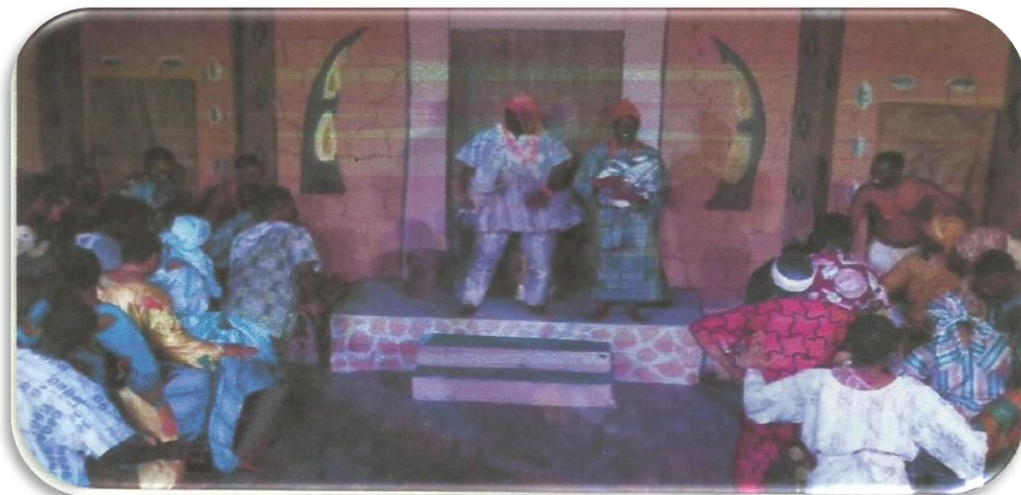


Plate 8. Celebrating the birth of Aderopo (2016)

Comparative Analysis of the two productions

With a careful study of pictures and information made possible by Dike Nwachuku it is obvious that the costumes used in these 1985 to 1988 repertory productions for the characters of the three chiefs did not conform to the realism of the rest of the characters in the play, as they were dressed in colours of china materials. Baba Ogunshomo is dressed in red, Otun in green and Balogun in Blue. For an explanation, Nwachuku (2016, Interview) tells us that,

Ola Rotimi, "the director informed us then, that he did this dressing of chiefs in colours intentionally to represent their offices in colour symbols. Red for spiritual office, green for agriculture and administrative chief while blue is for the war lord. The Yoruba war colour of old was blue" ...

The white top used by Odewale in the ending scene of, Rotimi's production is in keeping with the underwear of Yoruba kings, but is actually favoured by the director and costumier to aid the blood effect at the end of the play. The top which happen to be achieved with two identical tops; one clean and the other blood stained as Nwachuku informs, was necessary in view of the repertory nature of that production. The costume also embodies the level of development and technology available to the people in that age of its setting and the simplicity common to pre-colonial African costumes.

The production of *The gods are not to blame* by Ovunda Ihunwo on its part, was full of spectacle and costume contributed a fair share of this spectacle, as many of the costume used took on a glitter effect under the intensity of the stage lights. The costuming is confirmed to have been based on borrowing of people's personal clothes and therefore a huge improvisation of costumes as there was no building of costumes or adherence to the research we are informed was conducted by Bature-Uzor, the costumier. The costuming was able to communicate the location of the

production, justify the actions of the play, but the timing of the play depended only on the plays spoken lines to be identified. The costumer, Nkechi Bature-Uzor (Interview) however, goes on to give her production a pass mark in historical and cultural accuracy. According to her,

...the costumes used were able to portray the play as African. Historically we were able to archive, apart from the limitations of the crowd. But in over-all we achieved that historical piece. We equally achieved the three unities of time, place and action; because the director was able to segment it and even with the costumes we were able to play it out.

It is also evident that a larger percentage of the costumes utilized were of the texture that came into production more than a decade after the Nigerian independence. This implies that costumes in a play set in time before European discovery of Africa, presented costumes of post independent Nigerian nation. This can be seen from the perspective of poor research to the costuming. It may also be seen as a case of forced improvisations as informed by the costumer at an interview. Boyle (2016, Interview) who designed the set and lights for the production and the make-up effect of King Odewales' plucking of his eyes, contributes a suggestive view in the following words,

I have been involved in *The gods are not to blame*, not once, not twice and those ones I would say. The designers were faithful to the location of the production, why? *The gods are not to blame* is set in the west, amongst the Yoruba's who had the costumes within their area, because they were done in Ibadan and Lagos and so the designers at that time had the space to work, within terms of getting materials and the costumes for those productions, so their own interpretations met it at the time they did it. This one like I said has been

contemporized by the designers as agreed with the director. So, all productions have their qualities, from different people at different times.

Nwachuku (Interview) supports this view, but provides an explanation. According to him, "In just a few words; it was a fair effort at resourcefulness through improvisations in this time of institutions and society with financial limitations and misplaced values. They archived the unities of place and action, but the unity of time was not archived".

Insufficient researches towards design conceptualization and development are bi-product of laziness or poor training of practitioners of costume. The need for research before implementation of any design art is most important to professionalism in the arts; however, from the interviews done in this research and those obtained from available literature it may be safe to conclude that majority of hands on the field in Costume practice are self thought, and some may have no knowledge of the processes of research and may not also see the relevance of research as those trained in the University do. Those who are trained are at times prevented from doing research for economic reasons, because well paying jobs often come to them at short notice that would not allow for proper research others strangle research through absence of funds and this is most common in the educational theatre in Nigeria.

Findings

From the information gathered in the course of this study and experiences in production processes, findings include that;

- Most students of theatre arts find it difficult to specialize in the areas of costume or make-up, because there is a lack of practice contents and shortage of practical materials and equipment The methods, techniques and styles of costuming a short film as experienced on the production location was beyond the expectations of this researcher despite the class room teachings of what to expect. This was so, because there had not been

sufficient opportunities and space for practice in school to adequately accommodate the number of students specializing in costume and make-up.

- Material for practice have also been in short supply or absent, for example; students of costume design of the University of Port Harcourt Theatre from the 2012/2013 to the 2017/2018 academic sessions, did not see a functional sewing machine in the department, which is necessary for practice.

- This brings us to the issue of production funding, which appears to be the major differentiating factor between the two productions by Rotimi and Ihunwo. The Naira which was equal only to the British pound in the 1980s was as at the time of Ihunwo's production in 2016 counting three hundred and twenty two naira to a US dollar. The scarcity of funds in the country is a major factor that may have hindered costume practice in the Nigerian theatre, rather than the quality of costume designers. In Ola Rotimis' production; funding was adequate, permitting research, building and purchase of ideal costumes. But Ihunwo's production on the other hand was only able to beg and borrow manageable costumes, due to the non availability of funds.

- In most Nigerian universities there are no courses designed purely for costume or make-up, rather the study of costume and make-up are paired with other major areas of theatre practice, as sampled in the University of Port- Harcourt where the curriculum for theatre arts provides training in the following courses in the third and fourth years of study: & THA 403.1 titled, 'Acting, speech, costume and make-up: THA313.2 Acting, speech, costume & make-up II and THA 303.1, Acting, speech, costume and make-up. Under this kind of scenario specialization becomes a fundamental problem. While the University of Port Harcourt in its new Theatre and film studies curriculum, which came into effect with the 2017/2018 academic year set of student, appear to have solved the problem by separating technical courses from artistic and management, for both film

and stage areas, this appear to be an isolated response and equipment to drive the new programme are slow in appearing.

Conclusions

From the study so far, it is rational to conclude that costume is an integral part of every theatrical production. It is an essential element of every movie, television and drama production and is aimed at enhancing the visual aesthetics and information of the performance. When properly applied costume becomes a tool which the actor uses to help characterization and use of ill conceived costumes on the actor might make the actor loss focus in characterization and place the actor off balance in performance. Without proper training in costume design for theatre and film; which should include skills acquisition through exposure to practical involvement and provision of related equipment for practice, To avoid this, the provision of standard costume and make-up equipment, employment of trained teaching staff with tested practical skills have been found as urgent needs towards improving training of the costumier in Nigeria and shall aid the growth of the industry.

It is the place of universities in Nigeria to educate and inform the practitioners on new methods and technique that might arise from their production and research. The second university of Port Harcourt Nollywood film workshop that has granted this experience should be encouraged in other Nigerian Universities. The climax of my experience in this experience has been receiving the award of the production with the best costume, out of over ten short films produced this year at the Uniport-Nollywood film workshop 2018.

Undoubtedly, the insufficiency of competent manpower or practitioners in the costume arts of the theatre is a very crucial impediment to the growth rate. In many universities where Theatre Arts and Film departments exist, there is a gross dearth of lecturers specifically trained for costume or make-up and so, few costume and make-up courses are integrated into other technical theatre programmes and taught simultaneously with other

technical areas like scenic design, lighting, sound production, properties, etc, without special attention on the content and practice skill acquisition needs of costume design. It is also noteworthy that most professional costume design practitioners in Nollywood admit to have developed themselves through personal experimentation on the field of practice, without formal training in an institution or from an apprentice master.

The universities in Nigeria rarely teach sewing and a shocking majority as observed through interaction with friends studying in other Nigerian universities, do not even own a functional sewing machine, as is the plight of the University of Port Harcourt, which is rated amongst the top three in the teaching of this art in the country by the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC). As a result, graduate students of costume design should not be expected to be very conversant with cutting and sewing or building of costumes, because in reality the curriculum lacks depth in the coverage of this area and necessary equipment, space and trainers needed for training are not in sufficient supply, meaning that costume training in a Nigerian university presently does not adequately address the need of students and what the society expects of them at graduation.

Recommendations

This study recommends as follows;

[1] Universities should recognize the need of costume specialists on their staff. This was the case of the University of Ibadan from the 1970's to late 1980's and again since 1990, in the person of Dr. Chucks Okoye. Practical staff like Okoye, who are still active in the field while teaching, do help in both transfer of skills and exposure of their students to the field of practice before graduation.

[2] Given that costume cannot be separated in practice from make-up, both of them need to be developed together. The importation of international materials for make-up by institutions, companies, guilds and individuals are recommended. This research finds that the importation of

make-up equipment into Nigeria shall help the development of indigenous materials, because it shall help to increase our knowledge of these products and their usage and then the nation's industries may be more likely to see a need to develop local varieties.

[3] It has been observed in this study, that in most universities theatre, dramatic or Performing Arts departments in Nigerian Universities there are a dearth of costume training equipment and the Department of Theatre and Film Studies in the University of Port Harcourt is no exception to this problem. This researcher suggests that the universities should recognize costume as a professional area of study and expand the curricular, while assisting in providing materials as teaching aids for a more practically oriented training.

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- Bature-Uzor, Nkechi. Interview granted Egejuru Onyinye, At the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre. On 5th of October, 2016. By 3:15pm.

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