

## THEORIZING COSTUME IN NIGERIAN HOME MOVIES AND ITS INFLUENCE IN DRESSING PATTERNS

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### **Abstract**

*This work critically examines how the costume in the Nigerian home movies influences the dressing pattern of its audience. It also reflects how they have become a model or pattern to the clothing style of the viewers. Film has always been efficient inordinately influencing the thinking and behavioral pattern of its audience through the visual aesthetic elements associated with it. These visual aesthetic elements include the costume, makeup, sets, light and others which communicate new ideas either consciously or unconsciously through the minds of the viewers. Despite several works on the influence of the Nigerian home movies on the dressing pattern of its audience, attention may not have been paid to theorizing these influences, by taking cognizance of how the influence takes place, resulting in a shift in dressing patterns. Through the use of the analytical approach of the qualitative methodology, Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory will be used to have an in-depth assessment and analysis of how costumes are perceived, observed, interpreted, manipulated, and recreated by the viewers into everyday clothing. The descriptive approach will also be used to describe certain costume in some select films and their recreated version. The study explores the processes through which these costumes are replicated by the viewers from the point of access to the point of recreating them into clothing styles. However, knowing that one may not be able to control what the unconscious mind takes in, but should be able to control the kind of visual content he/ she has access to. Therefore the more the stylized costumes, which reflect the ideal Nigerian culture and acceptable ethical standard, are being used, the more the dressing pattern of the Nigerian society is reshaped.*

**Keywords:** Costume, Theorizing Costume, Nollywood, Nigerian Home Movie

### **Introduction**

From time immemorial, the influence of film on its viewers has been greatly discussed by scholars. Looking at film from the aspect of its universality, it suffices to agree that it does not only entertain but plays its role in the entire social order – educate, inform and communicate ideas, perception, feelings and beauty. Film has always been efficient inordinately influencing the thinking and behavior of its audience, Nwachukwu Ukadike affirms that; “Film is a powerful visual medium with

extraordinary ability to inordinately influence, the thinking and behavior of its audience” (31). What make this film powerful enough to influencing one’s mind is the visual aesthetic elements associated with it. These visual aesthetic components include costumes, makeup, locations lighting, and others that express new concepts to viewers either consciously or unconsciously through their imaginations. Films have influenced the behavior, ideas, cultural expression and everyday activities of the viewer, via the information communicated through it. Tony Kashani affirms that “cinema becomes a tool for broadcasting state ideology to the masses, as a result, films are expected to form beliefs, influence opinions and change attitudes, including towards topical social issues”(3). Olubomehi Oladipo also supports it by saying “it was in the light of the above influence that the introduction of film in Nigeria by the Colonial Administration was to mostly emphasize the supremacy of the area of culture, civilization, economy, religion, politics...” (26).

Evidently, many scholars have been able to question the influence of the Nigerian home movies on the dressing pattern of its audience, but may not have paid attention to theorizing these influences by being aware of how the influence occurs, resulting in a paradigm shift in dressing patterns. By so doing, the film producers/designers are adequately guided in their choice of production.

Many film makers with time have begun to pay attention and details to the visual aesthetics as much as the plot. Kusturica Emir also submits that; “if you do not give the same chance to both, the spectacularity and the plot - you lose the film” (10). He adds that in his films, “every single word is followed by my strong effort to support it with visual, since the visual expression tells much more than the dialogue itself” (11).It simply connotes that a lot of ideas, styles, concept, are learnt from the visuals and should properly be portrayed to ensure a positive influence on its audience. Therefore, the costume designer plays a crucial role in creating character’s identities and thus projecting different meanings and sensations.

The movie industry from inception has produced series of real life representations and has created in the mind of the viewer an authentic medium of inspiration especially as it relates their varieties of dress codes within the African standard to the western designs and patterns. In past times, several brows had been raised towards the negative influence movie costumes have had on its audience, ranging from the use of provocative and transparent wears meant for indoor, which have in turn resulted in long term effect ranging from increase in social decadence to unethical activities being engaged in throughout the country and beyond. This is due to the issues with the act of costuming and the use of over exaggerated costumes. Gradually, the style and process of costuming in the Nigerian home movie has grown towards the stylized costuming, thereby giving a more decent and aesthetic related costumes, which are reflected in the overall everyday clothing design/pattern of its audience. In order to achieve this stylized costuming, to this end, Kevin Wilson opines that; “costumes must be consistent with the entire production, especially with the various other elements” (326).

In discussing the influence of costume on its audience and the underlying theories, the analytical approach of the qualitative methodology will be used in accessing and analyzing how costumes are seen, observed, interpreted and manipulated, by the viewers.

### **Conceptualizing Costume**

Several concepts of costumes has sprung up overtime, which include “costumes as items or clothing that are worn by an actor in a movie or play to build up, emphasize or portray his character” (Anderson20). Barranger Milly suggests that; “costumes establish period, social class, age, economic status and time of the day, costumes include all the characters garments and accessories (purse, chain, jewelry and handkerchief)”(247). According to Barbara and Cletus Anderson, “costume is the clothes worn by actors on stage, whether it be layers of clothing or nothing at all” (20). Tracie Utoh- Ezeajugh submits also that; “costumes are apparels and accessories used for stage appearances, festivals, ceremonies and performative occasions” (5).

Costumes are basically clothing worn for a performance which is different from dress, even if they are mostly interchanged. But costumes go beyond dress. Costume functions as a non-verbal tool that communicates language which reveals a character’s age, gender, status, origin, occupation and religion. It is a unique wear distinctly designed to highlight a character in action. For the course of this study, I would lend a voice to Utoh-Ezeajugh’s submission above to say, Costumes are apparels and accessories distinctly designed to highlight a performative character.

### **Theorizing the Influence of Costume in Nigerian Home Movies**

The ideas used to account for movie costumes and its influence on its audience must be carefully studied. These ideas are known as theories. For the sake of this discourse, I would be looking at the influence of the Nigerian home movies on the dressing pattern from Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory

### **Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory**

Owing to the communicative strength of costume in film and in the minds of the viewer, it is important to understand how costumes (visuals) affect the mind. In this vein, Anthony Duruaku states that:

The objective of costume design are to set the tone and style, indicate time and place, characterize individuals and groups, underline personal relationship, create symbolic outfits when appropriate, meet the practical needs of performers and coordinate the entire production. (307)

The costumes do not only influence the performers on stage, but the subconscious mind of the viewers. Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory believes that the mind is responsible for both conscious and unconscious decision drives to explain human behavior. Freud submits that; “people are simply actors in the drama of their

own minds, pushed by desire, pulled by coincidence. Underneath the surface, our personalities represent the power struggle going on deep within us” (1). Freud believes that the conscious thoughts and motivations are achieved through the unconscious. He believes that the mind is made up of three elements- The Id, ego and super-ego, which are believed to comprise a person’s personality.

The Id according to Freud is the part of the unconscious that seeks pleasure. This is impulsive, it holds all of human’s most basic and primal instincts. The Id makes people engage in need satisfying behavior, without any recognition with what is right or wrong.

The Ego is a person’s self, composed of unconscious desires. It takes note of ethical and cultural ideals in order to balance the desires emanating from the Id. The Ego may not know the good from the bad, but is aware that not everything / desires can be met. Freud claims:

The Ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, representing the superficialities of the mental apparatus. (3)

The superego is the aspect of the mind that develops with time. This is considered to be the conscience of the mind; because it has the ability to distinguish reality as well as what is right or wrong. Freud notes that the “superego is considered to be the consciousness of a person’s personality and can override the drives from the Id” (4). This is subject to having the ability of controlling the impulses and desires that are looked down upon morally. The superego splits into two categories- The ideal self and the conscience. The conscience contains ideals and morals that exist within a society that prevent people from acting out based on their internal desires, while the ideal self contains images of how people ought to behave according to society’s ideals.

Costumes are communicative tools just as the film as a whole. Since arts are not done for art sake, emotions, ideas, creative are passed across through the medium of film & its visual aesthetics. The first process of gaining ideas starts from the mind/psychology. Man looks out for a need to satisfy their desires and as such is expectant whenever they come across an art work. When watching films, the most and easiest attractive item to its viewers are the costumes, due to the desires of wanting to satisfy their unconscious mind. Gradually the pictures stay in their unconscious mind and are waiting for an opportunity to reveal the already created pictures in the mind. People look out for themselves in a character in film, which is where the idea of having a ‘role model’ comes in. Gradually, the mind opens up to conforming to the attitude, physical appearance of the “role model” as an acceptable style of doing things. The Id begins to look out for that lapse in dressing patterns of the viewer to be satisfied, basically for pleasure. In this light, Chichi Azozie posits that:

In real life, clothes define our taste and are an expression of our personality... when a movie begins... each character is dressed in clothes that reflect their unique personality and style... the director, costume designer and actor consider the character's personality, challenges (such as anxiety, depression, money, troubles or drinking problem) and dramatic arc (the emotional and psychological changes the character undergoes through the film). (6)

All the changes reflected through the costumes are pictured in the Id of the audience, since they can relate with these changes, irrespective of it being right or wrong. The Id do not have an awareness that costumes are different from fashion design, that is why it accepts the picture of costume, it sees and stores for an opportunity to express it out through the Ego. The Ego begins to relate self with the Id (internal picture). The viewers create the balance between themselves and the character represented on screen, then the need to satisfy 'self' through the costume replication; as a dress. Many audience threads on this aspect of the mind. According to Azozie, "it is impossible for all desires of the Id to be met and the Ego realizes this, but continues to seek pleasure and satisfaction" (3). Azozie also affirms that; "the audience must believe that every person in a story has a life before the movie begins" (4). The above assertions reveal that though the characters in films have a life different from what is portrayed in the film, and as such should not determine how the viewer perceives them, but the Ego fails to realize this and will rather seek pleasure and a way to satisfy its needs of recreating what has been seen. In times past, many persons ended up working with ideas from the Ego - that is bodily sensation and as such began to duplicate costumes seen in films into everyday dress, to satisfy the ideas stored in the Id. Most of these dressings include provocative and transparent wears. It does not consider either being ethical or not, but just to satisfy its pleasure. Corroborating this, Utoh-Ezeajugh submits that;

Nigerian film stars have also become adopted role models for the teeming youths across cultural boundaries. A pervasive costume culture ranging from skimpy dresses, see through blouses, breast-exposing, pubic hair-exposing, bum-exposing trousers, skirts and blouses have become the hallmark of Nigerian video film costuming... in a bid to emulate these film stars, costume is turned into dress and the mass of Nigerian youths parade the streets and university campuses clad in replicas of these provocative outfits. (1)

Some of such costumes and its duplicate dresses includes:



Fig i. Shalewa in Demeji Ajibola's *Shanty Town*

Costumed in a tiny striped crop top, a skimpy Skirt and a knee length leather boot



Fig ii. A replication of the previous costume



Fig. iii. Inem in Demeji Ajibola's *Shanty Town*,

Costumed in a pink and yellow fur jacket, a slight difference of opening in the cleavage



Fig. iv. A replica of Fig iii costume, with a slight difference of opening in the cleavage Inner singlet and a macro skirt

The super-ego precedes the ego, where the mind produces conscience since it flows from knowing what is right or wrong. Gradually, viewers of these films have begun to function based on the ideas released by the super-ego. They tend to begin to understand the right and wrong in whatever is revealed in films as costumes and not accepting it hook line and sinker. This has brought about a whole lot of moderation both in the style of costumes being used in films and also in the way the viewers

replicate these costumes to dresses. On this note, Yolanda Okereke in a YouTube interview with Channels Television posits that:

As a Nollywood costume designer, whose passion is to expand the Nigerian cultural heritage and beauty through clothing and accessories, not engaging and working in isolation of the imagination, but on critical reasoning and conscience to produce what the audience of the Nollywood films will appreciate and learn from. Not merely to entertain their ego, but to bring satisfaction to their beauty and ethical values. (Channel 0:22-1:24)

Gradually the turnout of film costumes influencing its audience in a negative form is on gradually taking a low turn. People have begun to distinguish the right from the wrong, the reality from the imaginative, and the ego from the super-ego. Okereke further states that:

Recently the Nigerian movies are leading us to a new style of dressing pattern that considers the ethical value of our culture, moral values and yet increasing in its aesthetic values. And today, people look out for the trends in the latest boubou styles displayed in films, abaya and agbada designs as designed and worn by their 'stars' in films. (Channel 1:27-1:35)

In the same vein, Azozie also affirms that:

It is impossible to ignore the superb costumes in the most talked about movie in Nigeria...speaking of originality, elegance, rich and representation, the costumes were everything and more... the movie is in fact a fashion fiesta because almost all the major moments were a statement to be readily recreated by those who are out for the rich aunty vibes. (4)

The Nigerian viewers see the home movie as a source of clothing ideas that are communicated through the mind and expressed in their everyday outfit.

Examples of clothing produced after certain costumes in this realm includes



Fig. v. Eniola Salami in Kemi Adetiba's



Fig. vi. A recreation of the costume in Fig. v *King of Boys*. Costumed in a long white in a different

fabric and colour. Abaya designed gown.

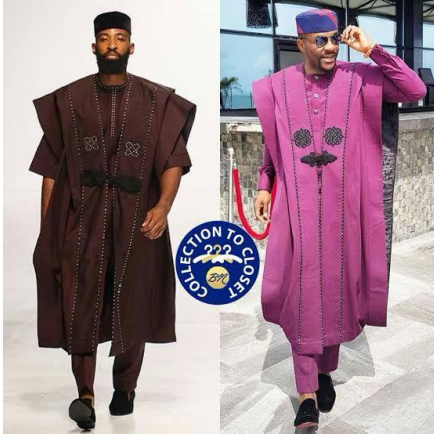


Fig. vii. Ebuka Obi Uchendu in Big Brother Nija show. Costumed on a lilac coloured Agbada and an “Aso oke” designed cap. To the left is a replica of same design but in a different colour and sleeve, showcasing elegance.



Fig. viii. Dame Dabola in Demeji Ajibola’s tume in Fig. *Shanty Town*. Costumed in a long embroiled colour. Robe on a long sleeve gown



Fig. ix. A recreation of the costume in a different fabric and

The creator of these costumes used in films sends a feeling that is grabbed by the intuition of the viewer in a form of signs which are later expressed through form in the real life’s dressing. The mood of the character and film as a whole is communicated through costumes, which automatically transmits to the audience same mood or a different mood from that of the character, which depends greatly on



the intuition, and the meaning drawn out of the item. This gives us the reason why the Nigerian home movie viewers tend to easily relate with the pattern/styles of clothing/costumes used, and are able to read certain meanings from these wears, which connote where and how these clothes function in their everyday life and are ready to replicate the costumes and the effect received.

Another illustration is a young man who is preparing for his traditional wedding, but is not sure of what to put on, and runs into a movie having several male characters costumed in a beautifully embroidered agbada that radiates elegance and confidence. The young man decides to recreate this agbada style for his wedding irrespective of his tribe and cultural wears. The idea is every groom should put on an agbada, even if that is the clothing of the Yoruba culture. But because the agbada communicates glam, elegance and uniqueness, every to-be groom – despite the culture, will want to have such design of dress for his wedding.

If the society continues to applaud (almost) nudity on screen, then there is a risk of having a high almost-nude persons on the street. For instance, some of these costumes seen in movies are recreated by fashion designers for their clients on daily basis, the ‘stars’ sometimes wear these style of costumes out for social functions, where some of the viewers would have an opportunity to meet with them physically. Haven noticed these dressing styles which also had been seen in the movie on them, releases to the viewer a satisfaction of having a social acceptance of this style of dresses. And the urge to recreate theirs is birthed.

In the course of the observational phase, which is played out through the intuition of the mind, adequate attention is paid towards the costume, where by internal questions are raised, looking for satisfaction for the inner self created by these costumes. Afterwards retention of the pictures already created in the mind plays out, keeping the details of the colours, size, body fittings and nitty-gritty of the clothes. The viewer is motivated to bring these ideas that have been observed to light, this begins with looking out for the satisfaction (pride, uniqueness, respect) expected after putting up those clothing either to be seen like the model (the characters) or to receive the desired compliments for putting up those clothing or even the social or psychological satisfaction. In the quest for modeling what has been observed, the thought of moderating what has been seen may or may not play out, as seen in the images above.

### **Conclusion**

Arts in any form must be able to perform its task. This is ensuring that it must not only entertain but influence the social order. Film as an art is a form of communication, verbally and non-verbally. The aesthetic visual elements of film communicate through its appearance and usage. Therefore, there is a level of influence it will have on its viewer. The Nigerian movie actors are seen as models to the viewers, who carefully or unknowingly process (almost) everything they display in the films. The viewers are observant of the costumes worn in the films as it relates to their taste.

“So many sit beside the television to get updated with the latest clothes, pattern/styles and accessories” (Oladipo 24). In this study, costume has become an aspect of film that communicates to its audience who are largely influenced by it.

Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory has been reviewed to reveal the processes through which these costumes in the movies influence the dressing pattern of its viewers. It is observed that the influence basically starts from the unconscious mind, which accepts the information that has been seen on the screen, due to the continuous projection of that dressing pattern by their favourite characters (role models), which may have been used severally without due consequences. The mind retains these information and begins to process the information to suit the mental/social satisfaction by means of symbolism, and finally moves to a replication of these ideas into everyday clothing/dress, either putting into consideration the ethical values, morals and cultural values or just an exact replication of what has been observed, this is dependent on the applause or sanctions laid on the model of that idea (home movie character). The conscious exposure of the viewer to certain costumes will certainly influence their dressing pattern either positively or negatively.

It is on this note that the Nigerian home movie creator and designer should pay conscious attention to the aesthetic elements projected on the screen for viewers, noting the level of influence these elements especially the costumes have on the dressing pattern of its viewers. One may not be able to control what the unconscious mind takes in, but should be able to control the kind of visual content he/she has access to. If they pay keen interest to these feedbacks, they will know what is good to go on the screen henceforth; there will be a measure of moderation in the costuming of characters. Howbeit, the more the stylized costumes, which reflect the ideal Nigerian culture and ethical standard, are being used, the more the dressing pattern of the Nigerian society is reshaped. The creator and designer of the Nigerian home movie should frown at reducing the cultural glory and ethical standard of the nation through what they project on screen. If these are looked into, then the level of replication of such costumes will be low, leading us into a world of decency in the dressing pattern of the home movie viewer. Also the home movie creators can create events in their stories where characters are faced with certain consequences for the use of certain costumes revealed on the screen, it will eventually scare the viewers away from such dressing, bringing to recognition that they are strictly meant for the screen and not the street.

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