COSTUMING AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN NOLLYWOOD FILMS: A CASE STUDY OF SEUN OLAIYA'S *Alubarika.*

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Abstract
This study reviewed the role of costuming in character development within Nollywood, using Seun Olaiya's Alubarika as a case study. Costumes are essential in film because they convey the status, age, occupation and cultural identity of a character also improving the storytelling and realism. The research explored how costumes in Alubarika's are used to identify the characters, establish the mood and reflect the socio -economic status, thus contributing to the film's narrative and thematic depth. The study was guided by three objectives and used a descriptive research design, focusing on the analysis of film content to evaluate the effectiveness of costume in characterization . The key finding showed that costume in Alubarika are carefully designed to suit the role of the characters, such as the use of white satin and shining stone for the character Alubarika (blessing) and ragged clothes to describe the Jare's descent In Madness. The study also emphasized the cultural importance of costumes, note how traditional and modern elements are mixed to reflect Nigeria identity. In addition, the study emphasized the semiotic function of costumes, where colours, fabrics, and accessories convey symbolic meaning , such as wealth, spirituality, or moral decay . The study concludes that costumes are essential in film making, acting as a visual language to enrich the characters portrayal and audience engagement. It recommends further research into costuming practices across Nollywood to promote cultural authenticity and artistic innovation.

KEYWORDS: Nollywood Movies, Costume, Usage Costuming, Character development

Introduction

Costume sends signals similar to those used in everyday life to the audiences. These arts of the theatre relay the information in performance with regards to status, sex, age, occupation, film or ethnic identities and many more. However, costume plays a primary role for the actor to impersonate a character. Costume cannot be seen in isolation, it has to be considered with the technical aspect of the film which is light and scenery,these four art (costume, make-up, scenery and light) are combined to form a harmonious role in any film production .These must meet so as to discuss the colour motif of the production at hand in order to avoid a bizarre spectacle in film and these has to be done in relation to the concept of the director.

Characterization is the method to analyse the main character development and personality which deals with the process of creating an image (Aquino, 2023). There are two different approaches to characterization, including direct characterization and indirect characterization. Direct characterization is used when the author tells the audience what the personality of the character is and it is usually used in novel. Indirect characterization is used when the author

shows things that reveal the personality of the character while it usually is used in film. There are four different methods of indirect characterization: speech, thoughts, action, and looks (Burroway, 2020).

Costume are very crucial elements in any film production because they play an important role in film, character creation, visual aesthetic as well as practical elements in a production. Film costume can illuminate the atmosphere and characters portrayed, while the basic elements of film are nothing more than the actors and the scripts. Most film production is not complete without the addition of costume. Good costume gives the audience key information about a character at first sight. For example, if a character is a wealthy one, the costuming of that particular character may be reflected in form of expensive, neat and ironed cloth and expensive accessories coupled with a tidy hair and beards which enhance the story telling and the realism of film. Costumes also serve as a chief indicator of the time and place of a play. In most film production, costume is the most visible and often deployed arts.

A costume is made to meet the needs of the actor. Actors' costumes need to adequately suit the type of role they have to portray in any video film production. Costumes should also meet the style of a production; whether it is a contemporary story or epic. Costume also helps the viewers figure out in which historical period a video film is set as well as the locale in which it occurs. Costume helps to establish the relationship between characters. In Nigeria, many Nollywood directors use costumes for dramatic effects. It gives expressive and explanatory information of the wearers, an aid to characterization, that in performance for example, it speaks volume, even before the characters begin to speak. It then means that film transform all subjects and objects into signs which communicate to the audience. In essence, film is rooted in the communication and promotion of ideas and it serve as variable instrument of enlightenment. Besides location and setting, which should be embellished with artefacts, costume are constituents of the production infrastructure, which is a core element in film production. Therefore, the effective use of costume not only improve the visual storytelling of a movie but also deepens the audience's understanding of the character, cultural background, and narrative context. It is important to pay attention to costume design remain an important part of film making, especially in Nollywood, where visual cues often carry significant cultural and symbolic weight.

This work intended to look into the appropriate utilization of costume in the characterization of the actors using Seun Olaiya's *Alubarika,* It will critically examine the adequacy in the use of costume in the characterization of the characters in the film and highlight the adequacies where needed. Costumes are a fundamental role of visually defining characters, giving the audience immediate information about what a character is, where they are in relation to status, what culture they are from, their occupation, and even their emotional state. In a film like *Alubarika*, where characters shift between one point and another and traverse different social spheres, costumes go beyond mere clothing, it is storytelling tool that communicates without speech prior to any word spoken.

Statement of the Problem

Costume should be able to communicate a character appearance apart from serving aesthetic purposes, costume should also be a means of portraying the culture of the people. However, this seems not to be the case because a lot of films produced in Nigeria these days are portraying foreign culture and abandoning ours. This fact affects the authenticity of character representation in Nigeria film and reduces the cultural value of Nollywood movies. The adoption of non-indigenous representative costumes diminishes the attachment of the audience to the story. It is, therefore, imperative to examine costume usage in contemporary Nigeria film and whether they still perform their role in character representation and cultural expression.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research is to analyse the uses of costume and how it enhances Characterization in Seun Olaiya's *Alubarika* as a study. The study also focuses on costumes and its important role in film. The objective of the study are as follows:

1. To identify the costumes used in Seun Olaiya's *Alubarika*.
2. To examine the appropriateness of costumes in relation to the characters' roles in *Alubarika*
3. To assess the extent to which the costumes in *Alubarika* enhance characterization.

Research Questions

This study answered the following research questions:

1. What are the costume used in Seun Olaiya's *Alubarika?*
2. How appropriate are the costume used in Seun Olaiya's *Alubarika* to the Character's role?
3. To what extent did the costume in Seun Olaiya's *Alubarika* enhance characterization?

Theoretical Framwork

Semiotic Theory

The notion of semiotics was first introduced by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in 1916 and later expanded by French theorist Roland Barthes in 1957. Semiotics is the study of signs, symbols, and how meaning is framed and communicated within a given culture. Barthes built on Saussure's foundation by applying semiotic analysis to cultural products like literature, fashion, advertisements, and movie. In his work Mythologies (1957), Barthes argued that cultural products, including costumes in films, do not merely exist for aesthetic function but carry both denotative (literal) and connotative (implied or cultural) meanings that shape how audience understand characters, events, and location.

The theory holds that every visual element in a movie, including costume, colour, and accessories, functions as a sign that pass certain cultural or symbolic meanings. According to Berger (2011), semiotics is "the science that investigates the way meaning is produced and transmitted," suggesting that costume choices in film act as a form of visual language, silently communicating messages to the audience about a character's social status, personality, cultural background, or emotional condition.

This theory is highly important to this study because it offers a structured framework for analysing how costumes in Nollywood films function beyond aesthetics. It explains how clothing choices in Alubarika not only show the characters' roles but also communicate deeper cultural

and symbolic meanings understood by the audience. Semiotic theory helps reveal how visual elements like fabric, colour, and accessories can suggest wealth, madness, spirituality, or moral decay without relying on spoken words.

In this study, Semiotic Theory is applied to examine how costumes are used in Seun Olaiya's Alubarika to communicate character traits, socio-economic status, and cultural identity. For example, the character Alubarika is dressed in white satin with shining stones to symbolize purity and spirituality, while *Jare's* descent into madness is signified through ragged and worn clothing. These visual signs align with the denotative and connotative meanings Barthes described. By applying Semiotic Theory, the research analyses how the selected costumes function as cultural signs that enrich the film's narrative and improve characterization in Nollywood cinema.

Methodology

Research Design

Descriptive research methodology was adopted in this work focusing on investigating the costume as a tool for characterization in Seun Olaiya's *Alubarika* a case study. The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs as it exists at present. The main characteristic of this method is that the researcher has no control over the variables; he can only report what has happened or what is happening. The methods of research utilized in descriptive research are survey methods of all kinds, including comparative and correlation methods. In analytical research, on the other hand, the researcher has to use facts or information already available, and analyse these to make a critical evaluation of material.

Study Area

The researchers chooses *Alubarika,* a Nigerian film as a study because of its effective use of costume as a tool for characterization.

Method of Data Analysis

The study adopts descriptive method of analysis. The researcher did a content analysis of the film *Alubarika* to understand the effect of costumes as a tool for characterization in the movie.

Analysis

Research Questions One

1. What are the the Costumes used in Seun Olaiya's *Alubarika*

Modern costumes*:* characters such as Jare, owolabi and Owolayo appeared in Jeans, T- shirts, round neck tops, Jackets and other causual wear, showing everyday young urban Nigerians

Jare in Jeans, T shirt and Cap (Modern Costume).



***Traditional Costumes**:* Characters like Oyelade and the Herbalist wore traditional outfits including Agbada, Sokoto and Buba, Ankara fabrics and Damask showing affluence, age, or spiritual roles.

Oyelade in Agbada (Traditional Costume)



Fantastical and Symbolic Costumes: Characters like *Alubarika*, Owo and Iku appeared in mystical or symbol - laden costumes. *Alubarika* wore a white satin gown with shining stones, while Owo wore a white gown with cowries and beads, and Iku was dressed in a black costume with head drawings, all representing their supernatural roles.

Alubarika in White satin gown with shining stones



Owo in white gown with cowries, cap and accessories



Iku in Black gown with drawings of head with white paint



Occupational Costumes: Medical personnel in the movie, such as Doctors and nurses, appeared in hospital uniforms.

Nurses and Doctor in occupational costume



Research Question Two

2. How appropriate are the costumes used in Seun Olaiya's *Alubarika* to the characters' roles?

Alubarika's costume, consisting of a white satin gown with shinning stones, appropriately signified purity, blessing and her spiritual importance.

Alubarika's costume showing purity and spirituality



Jare's progression from wearing jeans and T-shirts to ragged clothes effectively portrayed his descent into madness, visually marking his emotional and mental state.

Jare's casual wear



Jare in ragged clothes (madness depiction)



Oyalade's Agbada depict wealth,status and political authority

Oyalade in Agbada



Owo's white gown with cowries visibly marked the character's control over wealth and mystical powers.

Owo's costume signifying wealth and mysticism



Iku's black gown successfully communicated death and fear, aligning with the ominous role in the movie.

Iku's deathly costume



Doctors and Nurses uniforms appropriately show their professions within the hospital scenes.

Occupational costume for hospital staff



Research Question Three

3. To what extent did the costumes in Seun Olaiya's *Alubarika* enhance characterization?

Alubarika's consistent white satin attire visually establish the spiritual, mystical figure associated with purity and blessings, even before dialogue confirmed the character's role.

Alubarika's mystical costume



Jare's shift from modern clothing to ragged wear visually communicated his gradual descent into madness.

Jare's costume transformation





Oyelade's Agbada immediately identify the character as a rich politician, allowing the audience to understand the social position of the character.

Oyelade's Agbada showing affluence



Iku's dark costume and painted face symbolised death and invoked fear, perfectly matching his ominous presence in the movie.

Iku's representation of death



Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study have shown that costume plays a central role in character building in Nollywood films, using *Alubarika* as a case study. The analysis revealed that varied costumes were used in the film, from modern, traditional, religious, fantasy, and occupational attire, each of which was carefully chosen to suit character roles, signify social class, and validate the narrative's cultural setting.

The study concluded that the character interactions of these costumes were highly successful. *Alubarika*, dressed in white satin with shiny stones glued on it, was immediately associated with blessings, purity, and spirituality. Oyelade's Agbada also testified to wealth and political power, while Jare's transformation from casual wear to ripped-up clothing successfully illustrated his descent into madness. These findings support Semiotic Theory, which emphasizes

that meaning is constructed by shared cultural signs and symbols, with costume being an implicit yet potent communicative tool in film.

Besides, the study observed that despite the growing alarm at the loss of native costume use in Nollywood, *Alubarika* managed to maintain cultural authenticity by embracing traditional and culturally vibrant costumes for their characters. This enhanced the film's realism as well as strengthened Nigerian cultural values, which countered the trend towards adoption of foreign costume designs in contemporary Nollywood films.

Effectively, the study confirms that used consciously and effectively, costume is a visual language in cinema, and that is employed to add depth to characterization, substantiate narrative, and pass silent meanings to the audience. The study therefore establishes the relevance of Semiotic Theory to film studies and the importance of costume design in the act of visual storytelling in Nollywood.

Conclusion

In conclusion, costumes have been an inevitable visual element in the movie from time immemorial, as it stands out distinctive among other visual elements such as light, sound, props, scenic design,thus creating a strong visual aid that carries an in depth story which creates lasting pictures in the mind of the audience. Therefore, it is pertinent to pay adequate attention to these strong visual aids.

In the movie *Alubarika*, the costumier used appropriate costume to enhance characterization in the film.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following are recommended for a better practice and research in costuming in Nollywood films:

1**. Increased Documentation and Study of Costume in Nigerian film:**

It is rare to find research materials on costuming characters such as Iwa and *Alubarika* in contrast with characters such as Owo, whose white dress and cowries costuming effectively represented prosperity. Students, researchers, and practitioners can be encouraged to carry out more research and documentation of costuming applications in Nigerian films so as to have a stronger body of research in this area.

2. **Incorporation of Costume Design as a Core Course in Theatre and Film Studies Curriculum:**

A mandatory, core course of costume design for theatre arts and performing arts courses should be incorporated. This will deepen the students' knowledge of the aesthetic and performing role of costume and initiate practical training in costume construction, rather than gravitating towards renting or buying costumes *for* performances.

3. **Professional Training and Industry Partnership**:

Professional costumiers and designers would be engaged to teach students through workshops, conferences, and seminars. Post-performance forums would also be held on a regular basis to address the role and functionality of costumes within production analysis.

4. **Interdepartmental Cooperation in Production Design**

Costumiers have to work together with other technical departments in the production of films to create a cohesive visual representation of the narrative. This collaboration enriches storytelling by ensuring that the costume designs are aligned with lighting, set design, and aesthetic direction as a whole.

Adherence to these recommendations will not only improve the quality of costume design in Nollywood movies but also ensure the cultural authenticity of Nigerian storytelling through properly thought-out, culture-grounded costume practices.

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