

Authenticity in Nollywood Costuming

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Abstract

Nollywood is often charged by its critics with being insufficiently authentic in costuming indigenous period and cultural films. This charge comes from the desire for authenticity; the desire to see indigenous Nigerian period films costumed in their pristine form and design. Costume aside authenticating the characters in space and time, establishes the class, status, gender, age and power of the actor. Authenticity in costume demands a full knowledge of the cultural and social identity of the era. This paper examines the authentic representation and presentation of costume in pristine movies. Two Nollywood Pristine movies, *Adaeze*, directed by Amayo Uzo phlips and costumed by Ogoo Okechi and the film *Osun Sengese*, directed by Adebayo tijani, *Ojopagogo* and costumed by Madam Goldspot are read. The paper identifies the place of Nollywood in creating authenticity in costume as there are tools for recording, preservation, and transmission of our cultural heritage in dress and accessories.

Keywords: Nollywood, Costume, Authenticity, Cultural heritage

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Introduction

Nollywood is often charged by their critics with being insufficiently authentic in costuming indigenous period and cultural plays. This charge comes from a desire for authenticity; a desire to see these indigenous Nigeria period and cultural films costumed in the pristine forms and design. According to Ndu-Udeji (2017) the costume designer takes into cognizance the cultural and social historical background of the film and a good understanding according Lyndersay (2010) of texture, silhouette, accent, symbolism, colour, relationship and space. Costume is the manner of dressing, the distinctive clothing worn at different era by people of different classes. It has to do with body covering including head dresses, jewelries and other accessories worn during a stage performance or films in this context.

Costume in film is an integral part of the whole production, collaborating with the whole design process and in consonance with the director's concept, style and mood of the production. Costume, aside authenticating the characters in space and period, establishes the class, status, gender, age and power of the performer.

Authenticity in costume demands a full knowledge of the cultural and social identity of the era. Motley cited in Ndu-Udeji (2016) asserts that, it “has a defining outline that lent character and personality to its costumes. To motley, for a definite authentic historical period to be achieved in film, a definite and authentic identity as regards culture with well-known personages within that period, the representation and presentation of the silhouette, texture, colour, symbols and many more becomes very important.

This paper examines the authentic representation and presentation of

costume in Nollywood films. The paper identifies the place of Nollywood in creating authenticity in costume for era and cultural films as there are tools for recording, preservation, and transmission of our cultural heritage in dress and accessories.

History of Nollywood

It is commonly believed that Charles Onu and Kenneth Nnebue's collaboration on the film *living in Bondage* was the catalyst for the development of the Nigerian home video market (Ekwuazi, 2008:138). Videos of movies made by other Nigerians existed prior to this partnership. Video films had gained enormous popularity in Nigeria by the late 1980s. Yoruba itinerant theatre performers had begun to produce videos for general viewing. *So So Meji* was created by Ade Ajiboye (Big Abass) in 1988. According to him, the audience saw the video film at the Tinuade Cinema in Oworonshoki, Lagos. Ekun, a 1989 production by Alade Aromire, was shown at the National Theatre in Iganmu, Lagos (Adenugba, 2007).

According to Ekwuazi (2008), the time between the demise of the reversing stock films and the introduction of the home video was marked by economic decline, which highlighted the home video's potential for both financial and aesthetic success. Videos produced during this time that was promoted in the nation included: Mazuri Ali's *Triple Heritage*, *A Decade of Crises*, and *Africa* by Basil Davidson (Ekwuazi, 2008:138). The potential filmmakers discovered a medium to work with thanks to its feasibility and Wole Ogundele's (2000) assessment that video cameras were fairly affordable and manageable

with little trouble.

Another organization that took advantage of video technology was N.T.A, which developed into a potent entertainment and popular culture medium. *Things Fall Apart* was adapted for N.T.A during this time. Mr. Okpuru Anyanwu, a humorous actor from the east was having trouble getting his work broadcast on TV stations in the state of Anambra. He became frustrated and began selling parts of the show's episodes on video to the Igbo speakers in the East on a weekly basis. According to Ekwuazi (2008), Okpuru Anyawu's video was the first Igbo film to be produced and distributed in Onitsha after pamphlet literature lost its appeal. It was a television drama that aired on the Anambra Broadcasting Station (ABS) for thirty-two (32) episodes between 1990 and 1991 (Ekwuazi, 2008):

The first Igbo screen play was released, unpackaged, and were the first to be sold in the crowded market of Onitsha. The brief and humorous vignettes in the movie, which covered every aspect of an orphan's existence in a village, attracted a lot of the market businessmen as viewers. the majority of the lower class liked the movie (138).

About the same time in 1992, Ken Nnebue entered the picture. He was an Igbo businessman who dealt in video cassette sales. Nnebue made the decision to record an Igbo drama for personal consumption on video tapes in 1992. (Ayakoroma, 2008:74).The Nollywood, or Nigerian home video and movie industry, was founded as a result of the success of this endeavor. However, Ken produced the hit film that revolutionized the Nigerian film industry's economy, sparked debate,

and propelled the sector into the world scene. American Norimitsu Onishi used the term "Nollywood" to characterize the Nigerian video film business in the Financial Times of New York September 16, 2002, as a nod to more established film industries like Hollywood and Bollywood (Ayakoroma, 2008; Adamu, 2013).

According to Adamu, the Hausa home video industry in the north appears to be operating on the margins and is primarily centered around the cities of Kano, Kaduna, and Jos (Adamu: 2004, v). Adamu complains that the Hausa video films are simply ignored by the main Nigerian film industry, which is centered around the Nigerian cities of Lagos and Onitsha, as a peculiar application of media technology. The Hausa home video "officially had about 871 in 2003, were second biggest number of indigenous language home video output in Nigeria," the author writes, "and in a similar vein, the world media focusing attention on "Nollywood" rarely looks outside Lagos and Onitsha either" (Adamu, 2004).

The Hausa home video business is centered in the northern towns of Kano, Kaduna, and Jos were Nigeria's second-highest producer of home videos in indigenous languages (Adamu, 2004). According to Adamu (2013) and Ahmed (2004), Ibrahim Mandawari, the president of Tumbin Giwa, a group of TV soap opera performers, produced Turmin Danya in Kano in March 1990, marking the beginning of commercial Hausa video film production. According to Adamu (2013), a Hausa language publication called Taura ruwa (star), based on the Bollywood publication Stardust, was founded in Kano city in 1998 to cover

upcoming celebrities. Then, in 1999, the magazine's third edition added a feature titled "Kanywood" that covered developments in the Kano film industry (288). According to Adamu, the elements for the Hausa home video came from three sources, but Ahmad added a fourth. The first is the Indian film, which the Hausa people were exposed to, thanks to the Lebanese, who were the distributors and cinema owners; the second is the soap operas broadcast on radio and television by Drama Clubs in the 1970s and early 1990s; the third is the Hausa literary movement known as "Kano Market Literature" or Litattafan Soyayya; and the fourth is the traditional Hausa stories. Many producers looked to these sources for inspiration and adaptation as the home video business grew. In 2002, Kanywood, according to Adamu, was Nigeria's second-largest indigenous language video sector. In this day and age, Nollywood has advanced in terms of stories, technicalities, technologies, and distribution methods. The Nollywood industry is now divided into two categories, old and new. This essay explains the new Nollywood as an evolution of Nollywood because nothing in life is static and the industry is known as Nollywood. Nollywood expanded the sector into what some critics refer to as new Nollywood by embracing the technologies of the time and era.

Film Costume

Costume is an integral part of the film because it has the ability to support or transcend the demands of the film's narrative. Film costume expresses an identity, which is associated with geographic area or a period in history, but also indicates social, marital and / or religious status. Costumes come in two forms; for everyday wear and festival or

formal wear. Film's costumes not only relate to the characters who wear them but also to the audience who watch them. The costume helps the audience to understand the characters better. The costume of a character is very important to how the character is perceived. The costume of a character is the tool used in transforming the character into the image he is portraying. Film costumes are the clothing worn by actors in films for the purpose of defining the character and situating the film in an era and locale.

According to Okadigwe (2016), in semiotics, costumes do not simply record our world or provide labels for what they mean but instead, costume constitutes the world of the character wearing it. The relationship between a film costume and its meaning comes from the culture. Okadigwe also explains that the elements of film costumes worn by a character cannot be defined in isolation because they exist in chain formed by relating with the costumes worn by other characters in the film. Thus; “the meaning of a film costumes, then, is arbitrary, cultural, conventional and based on differences among textures, fabrics, lines and colours” (Okadigwe, 193). Hence all film costumes have and carry cultural meanings which are possible to identify in a given culture by examining the element of the costume design.

Film and Authenticity

The search of authenticity is the film industry's preeminent method of historical portrayal, according to Mattias Frey in his book “The Authenticity Feeling, language and Dialect in the Historical Film”. Authenticity denotes a historically accurate experience and a successful

suspension of time-space paradox. According to Frey, authenticity serves three key purposes as the driving force behind mainstream historical filmmaking: as an aesthetic approach, a reception discourse, and a marketing discourse. The question of whether the past has been accurately shown in a way that the audience can reconcile with their perspective of the historical reality comes to mind while evaluating authenticity in films. According to Frey, specific representational domains, and styles, such as clothes and music, produce the authenticity sensation. When judging old or pristine movies, authenticity is still the most crucial criterion.

The trait of authenticity means that something is real or has not been altered from the original. The truthfulness of origins, attributions, commitments, sincerity, and intentions are additional definitions of authenticity. The goal to demonstrate the adaption of a historical site as an accurate replica of the original was how Andrew Higson defined the "discourse of authenticity." The distinction between an original and a copy is made.

Authenticity in film is mostly sort in the visual aspect of the film process and production. Costumes and accessories become most prominent in this regard. This paper sees authenticity from the viewpoint of its truthfulness of origins, attributions, commitments, sincerity and intention of the costumes used in Nollywood pristine films. Pristine here refers to Nollywood film depicting the era before colonialism, pre-colonial period. Also bearing in mind that film is a tool for recording, preservation and transmission of history and culture, hence whether film bends, twists or misuses history, it still functions as a tool for recalling or retelling the past. Historical films will always compliment

documents. Through this type of films, one understands the different levels of development that had been experienced by the nation.

According to Bamidele (2008:130), the study of any nation's culture is in the film. Through film, our tastes for cultural products are enhanced, through film, we have a understanding of cultures from other nations, and even know more about our own culture, film is used also to foster a sense of cultural identity among the people, especially in the areas of dressing, fashion and styles (costume), language teaching and learning and all cultural liabilities.

The Authenticity Of Costume In *Adaeze* And *Osun Sengese*

Both films depict the pre-colonial era as seen in their settings. The film *Osun Sengese*, directed by Adebayo tijani, and costumed by Madam Goldspot tells the story of the legendary river goddess Osun. According to a document written by webmaster on the "The Osun Oshogbo festival," the festival dates as far back as six hundred centuries ago and precisely 1370. This film bears the history of an ancient Yoruba town Oshogbo and authenticity being the benchmark of historical film, this paper searches for authenticity in its costume. The film *Adaeze*, directed by Amayo Uzo phlips and costumed by Ogoo Okechi although not historical in the sense that it tells a known and identifiable event or story but it tells a story that happened in the pristine and should be able to authentically document the era in space and time and also be authentic in costume as a form of record of such an era.

Adaeze depicts the Igbo ethnic group and *Osun Sengese* portrays the Yoruba race. This is very evident in the setting, language and general out

look of the costume. The question, then, becomes how truthful are these costumes to the eras been depicted and to the narrative. The conclusion reached by Lyndersay after examining the archaeological finding of the attire and bodily adornment of early cultures in southern Nigeria is that tattooing and body scarification flourished. The reason in part, being as a result of the weather condition that favoured a show of design on the body rather than on clothes. Hair dressing was unequalled in variety and creativity and the required cosmetics to oil and colour the hair were derived from plant life in the locality. It was also discovered that weaving predates North African or European country contacts in this area by more than five hundred years. The fabrics were mainly screw pine, raffia matting and bark clothe. As regards the southwestern Lyndersay surmised thus:

Since the facial physiognomy and proportions of the Ife brasses and terracotta of the classical period are near perfect, the representations of the ornaments, hair styles, scarification and cloth, sometimes hemmed with embroidery or applique designs, are “near perfect” as well. Nevertheless, it must be assumed that while the bodily adornments were symbols of rank and prestige, the woven textiles of Yorubaland (as well as many other areas of Nigeria) are clearly of considerable antiquity and previously the possession of only great men, as seen depicted in the extant archaeological works. (2011; 78)

Adaeze and *Osun Sengese* are considered epic movies by Nollywood's

ranking system and by the website Epics - Historical movies are movies that depict historical events. Epic movies frequently feature a real or imagined event, a mythical, legendary, or hero, along with an opulent setting, pricey clothing, grandeur and spectacle, and a sweeping musical accompaniment. Due to the complex and expansive locations, historical period attire, and other requirements, they are costly and extravagant to construct. Epic movies have been found to frequently alter history, and they also frequently suffer from inauthenticity, fake recreations, excessive religion, difficult-to-follow details and characters, among other problems. Most crucially, under the pretense of poetic license, historical forces are occasionally personalized at the expense of accuracy. This is the case of the two films under review.

In the film *Osun Sengese* a supposedly classical Yoruba film was costumed in the modern Yoruba attires. There was nothing legendary or mythical about the costume of Osun, the woman turned goddess. Although some of her costumes were hand-woven but most are printed adire materials or printed material dyed like we have them these days. Costumes of the men were more of woven aso oke but some wore Damask materials which were not authentic to the age being depicted in the film. The myth of Osun is the era that the gods walked the land. In the film, Osun wore foot wear, although an effort was made to make it look epic but still, footwearers if at all, were not like those. In earlier archaeological finds in Nigeria, women are shown bare breasted or else with beads concealing the upper torso. In most cases, a breast-band, as well as a waist wrapper used. The wrapper

is worn folded down at the waist and held to the body by a sash or girdle with fringed ends, tied and knotted at the front. Examples are “an owo terracotta entitle” woman holding a cock” and the ife female terracotta seated figure, which show a rare element of female dress a woman wearing a full waist wrapper and/or a band of cloth over her breast” (Lyndersay 2011, 79). Also according to Lyndersay, cloths were locally woven either of cotton or another fiber like screw pine or raffia.

In *Osun Sengese*, the costumes were not worn in this manner or made in this form. The authenticity feeling of the costume and accessories are just absent. Describing the female Yoruba attire in the 1830s, the lander brothers observed as seen in Lyndersay, that the “unmarried women generally use two wrappers, the under-wrapper being fixed above the breast. This is made of fine cloth and is heavier. To these, married women add a third, used as a shawl, or a covering for the head and back” (2011; 322). Delana also in the 1930s confirmed this same attire by the females. *Osun Sengese* is not of this age of 1830s and 1930s but still the costume did not even portray this era. The women were costumed in simple Iro and buba worn the way it is being worn now.

The film *Adaeze* tells a pristine story of a princess in an Igbo community or village. The setting, set and props suggest the era before colonialism as seen in the thatch homes and the kings palace. There were no evidence of the white man except in their costume. The costume does not speak for the era being depicted in the film. The film suffers from inauthenticity in costume and accessories. All the characters are costumed in the george wrapper whether rich or poor, maidens and

guards alike.

James Welsh in 1389 as seen in Lyndersay (2011) noted that the Igbo people wore clothes made from the bark of palm trees and helmets of cocoyam leaves and feathers. They also wore breast and back coverings of pieces of woven cocoyam leaves suspended by means of shoulder straps. Another documentation of the attire of the Igbo people in the late 1790s by Hawkins also quoted in Lyndersay (405).

both sexes... go almost entirely naked, the loins and waist only being covered; the women wear a sight garment, or bandage of cotton cloth, round the waist, or a small apron of cotton stuff, fancifully decorated with featured, or strips of different coloured cloths, this is about six inches long, and eight broad, hanging in front, and tied on by two strings of cotton, which knot behind, from which hangs a little tassel. The men from the age of puberty only wear a narrow bandage of cotton round the waist with a strip of the same kind, but five or six inches in breath, tucked in before, and passing thro' the crutch, so contrived that the knot behind also affords a long bunch of tassel like the women... the men of respect... wear a large and broader piece of cotton that hangs nearly down to the knees... the old chief was dressed with a profession of these bauble (trincets of copper, brass, glass, and tinsel)...

Chinua Achebe in his novel *Things fall apart* also describing the Igbo

clothing in the 19th century stated that men wore loin clothes in place of wrapper following the description of Hawkins. The women did not have to cover the breast area, the waist areas were covered, by thick locally made textile fabrics (ekwerike) or dressed in strung beads known as jigida. Later in the century, unmarried girls usually wore a one-piece wrapper tied from the bust, reaching to the knees or upper calves. A short skirt (mbe n ukwu), like apron with waist ties as underwear. There is a confusion here concerning the era being depicted in the film *Adaeze*. *Adaeze's* maids were dressed in George wrapper tied around the waist and around the breast and *Adaeze* wears hers different from theirs in that her George wrapper around her waist got to her ankle which is not to be. An unmarried maiden whether princess or not wears her wrapper very short to the knees. The wrapper around *Adaeze's* breast is tied cross her neck to back, this too, is not the dressing for maidens, her beads are supposed to be on her neck as described by Lander brothers of the daughter of the Obie, king of the Igbo that held them for ransom in the 1830; "...her dress and personal charms... consisting simply of a piece of figured silk, encircling the waist, and extending as far as the knees..." (2011). Married women or older women wore two pieces; the wrapper closest to the skin reaching to the ankles, and the second wrapper reaching to the knees, or sometimes an "up and down". The Queen is dressed in this way but her beads are not worn the way Igbo women wear their beads. Igbo women wear their beads around their necks not on the shoulder like clothes. The Queen wore her beads on her shoulders which is wrong of the Igbo women.

Film costume is to tell about the characters' status, occupation and

economic standing. All characters were dressed in the Gorge wrapper and wore the Gorge on every occasion. Azunna's mother in the farm and Azunna who is referred as tattered and poor in the film wore Gorge wrapper from beginning to the end of the film; he and his friend even on the hunting escapades. A Gorge wrapper tied around the waist and another covering his back and his friend the bright coloured Gorge around his waist and another on his neck as if there were attending a marriage ceremony. Abada, the cotton (waxed) Dutch English print materials and also the Gorge wrapper Indian madras, waxed cotton with its multi-coloured plaid print were commonly imported materials used for wrappers. If this film *Adaeze* is of this era, then the poor does not use the Gorge, not for every occasion like farm and hunting as depicted film. Young men do not cover their body even for ceremonious occasions. The king of the neighbouring village ties a band on his head, Igbo chiefs do not tie bands on the head, they wear locally woven cap with large ostrich plume in it crown. Young men don't wear head bands always as seen in the film. Igbo chiefs do not wear clothes in those eras they tie their wrapper one down to the ankle from the waist and the other tied on one should flowing down to the knee a red woven cap with feathers on it. *Adaeze's* father, the king, wore sewn clothes of Gorge, which Igbo men do not, if at all, they tie it on their waist down the ankle with beads of coral on their necks.

Conclusion

The audiences watching these films now are highly misinformed costume and accessories wise. This film actually has rewritten the history and is suffering from inauthenticity and most importantly,

accuracy has been sacrificed on the altar of aesthetic. In making any film, especially historical or heritage film, research becomes very important and essential in holding the film together. Research into the era, into what kind of clothes and accessories and how there were worn becomes very important. Granted that film is a representation or a copy of the original or an imitation, the truthfulness to the original should be seen and that authenticity feeling be felt especially in the costume and accessories. This telling of our history in moving pictures or images becomes the only history book most Nigerians read not forgetting this saying that if you want to hide anything from a Nigeria, put it in a book.

In order to give a positive orientation to locally produced films, the Film Policy for Nigeria under the Focus of Implementation states in its article 4.4 that the state shall, through appropriate legislation: Encourage the exploitation of our heroic past and cultural heritage in the production of films intended for both local and international consumption; Encourage the development of indigenous heroes and heroines who can serve as role models for our people, in all areas of life.

Therefore, it beholds on Nollywood, to tell our history and propagate our heritage truthfully as it is the instrument of recording, preservation and transmission of this history and heritage for generations to come.

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FILMOLOGY

Adaeze

Director :Amayo Uzo Philips

Costumier:Ogoo Okechi

Osun Sengese

Director: Adebayo tijani, Ojopagogo

Costumier: Madam Goldspot

