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THEORIES, CONCEPTS AND CLASSIFICATIONS OF AFRICAN COSTUMES, DRESS CULTURE, MAKE-UP AND BODY DESIGNS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract
Scholarly interrogations of African dress culture and body designs have mostly engaged non-African experiences and theories in interrogating indigenous practices. This has placed a limitation on cultural expressions of identity and inadvertently exposed the need to frame discourses around traditional African design engagements and indigenous conceptual models. The study employs the analytical, descriptive and interpretative approach of the qualitative research methodology to conceptualise, classify and describe the indigenous and contemporary practice of dressing, costuming and make-up and body designs in Africa. The emphasis is on attires/dresses/clothing, body designs, costumes and make-up practices utilised in everyday life; on special occasions; on stage; in films; carnivals; street performances and traditional communal performances. In this study, the researcher deconstructs the term 'costume' as currently used in describing African dressing. It attempts an understanding and classification of costumes from three levels of artistic and historical distinctions which are; indigenous traditional designs (indigenous trad.); modern traditional designs (modern trad.); and contemporary traditional designs (contemporary trad.). Given the identified gaps in existing scholarly presentations on traditional dress culture and body adornment, it maintains that African scholars should be encouraged to expand the scope of discourse through further constructions of identity for indigenous cultural products.

Keywords: Dress culture, Body designs, Performances, African costumes, Make-up, Indigenous adornment practices.

Introduction
The phrase, 'African dress, costumes, make-up and body designs,' presents many ideological possibilities and at the same time, throws up the critical query such as, what African dress, costumes, make-up and body designs may mean within the context of African experience of adornments; how may the African conceptualise indigenous adornment practices; and in what theoretical framework(s) or models can adornment practices be perceived? How do we transmit African adornment practices into scholarly referrals capable of transcending Eurocentric stereotypes and translating into conceptual identities? Since distinctions are decipherable in fashion trends, ethnic specificities and global practices; how do we classify the different existing practices and notions vis-à-vis the emergent trends (both local and global) in African dress,

make-up and body design practices? Joan Eicher, a scholar who has done a lot of work in the area of African dress, makes the observation that:

> Dress as an African art form demands notice, not because of the unique use of dress on the African continent, but because it has been either neglected, or misunderstood. Dress in Africa is basically similar to dress anywhere in the world- items of clothing, etc. Nevertheless, the details and total composition are distinctive. ("African Dress as an Art Form" 516)

Blumer describes fashion influence as a process of "collective selection" whereby the formation of taste derives from a group of people responding collectively to the zeitgeist or "spirit of the times" (280). Scholars such as Julie Umukoro, Olapeju Shuaib, Nkechi Okadigwe, Lilian Bakare, Anuli Okafor and a host of others have made important submissions on the nature and usage of African dress, costumes and body designs/make-up. Such studies on indigenous dress culture and body design practices have inadvertently exposed some of the challenges facing African dress, costume and make-up scholars who are attempting or grappling with the challenge of framing discourses on indigenous conceptual models. Available studies in the theory and practice of theatrical/ film costumes and make-up, tend to engage non-African experiences and Western design practices in interrogating indigenous experiences. Many scholars and practitioners have made significant claims about traditional African dress culture, make-up, body designs and the costumes used in myriad performances spread across the continental landscape; but these assertions are mostly derived from Western/Eurocentric categorisations of costumes and make-up.

This calls to question, the level of attention that African costume and make-up scholars are paying to local scholarship and the gap created by their seeming reluctance to critically, dedicatedly and academically engage local experiences, cultural specificities and the wealth of shared experiences arising from dominant communal design repertoires. Such an interrogation will, amongst other factors, initiate a robust African-based discourse on costumes, make-up, dress and body designs, which will not just shift the emphasis from the existing practice of adapting foreign models and ascribed identities; but will open up discourse on the distinctions between African dress and African costumes. This article critically examines the practice of indigenous dressing, stage costuming, body designing and make-up, as utilised in African daily life and African performances; in a bid to theorise African adornment practices and articulate a position of enquiry, which will be employed in explaining techniques and methods; describing trends and styles, and explaining design practices and preferences within the African fashion and performance space.

Is it Acceptable to Refer to African Dresses as Costumes?

Costuming is a universal practice. Costume characterises the wearer and enables him/her to play a given role in a dramatic performance. The expression, 'African costumes,' refers to attires, fabrics, and accessories used to dress a performer, to enable him/her take-on the likeness of another, and play a given role in a performance; or to enable him/her put on a spectacular or unusual appearance to play

the role of a celebrant or a participant in a festival or ceremony; or to perform in a dance; or even to take on the personality of a god, a masquerade or similar personages. Costumes are quite distinct from dresses worn for everyday use. In earlier studies, I had used the term 'African costumes,' in a broad sense, to describe the attires of African people and to qualify both performative attire and everyday dress (Utoh-Ezeajugh "Body Adornment Practices" 117; "Traditional Nigerian Dress" 22; "Communal Aesthetics" 74; "Classification of African Costumes" 1).

I must explain here that my use of the term 'costume' in such a broad manner devoid of clear distinction, is not an affirmation or endorsement of the Eurocentric description of non-Eurocentric cultural attires as 'costumes.' I had used the term, costume, to qualify both performative attire and everyday dress within African cultural experiences; for purposes of initiating a deconstruction along the lines of existing stereotypes. It is inappropriate and quite derogatory to use the word 'costumes' to describe the dress culture of indigenous people such as Africans, The reality of colonisation is that we, the colonised, have been conditioned to accept the Eurocentric depiction and description of African clothing/attires/dresses as costumes. The question is, why would the attire of African and non-Western climes be tagged as costumes? Whereas studies on Western fashion, clearly show that Western clothing may never be referred to as 'costume' unless it is worn for the specific purpose of role-play or character definition in a performative situation (Campbell 23; Gordon par.1).

The answer could be located in the assertions of the German Philosopher Hegel, who stated in the 19th century that "Africa is no historical part of the world," as "it has no movement or development to exhibit." The implication of Hegel's submission is that Africa has no history. This was echoed by an Oxford University professor of history Hugh Trevor-Roper in 1963. Thus, one discovers that until the late colonial period, it was widely believed among Western historians that Africa had no 'civilization' and thus no history (quoted in Christina Mobley par. 8). Western scholars have, therefore, continued with efforts to obliterate the existence of ancient African civilizations, or where the evidence is too glaring to be ignored, link them to influences from Western cultures. The robust civilizations of ancient Egypt, Ethiopia and great Zimbabwe are, therefore, conspiratorially denoted as developing based on influences from outside Africa. Since a people's history and culture are interconnected, the concept of a people without history ultimately also alludes to gaps in culture, politics, economy, religion, philosophy and so on.

An offshoot of this line of reasoning is the Eurocentric description of African dress practices as costumes; which is a way of endorsing the claim that 'Africa has no history' and 'no civilization.' Interpreted along these lines, therefore, it becomes obvious that the continued labelling of African attires/dresses as costumes is a conscious and deliberate misrepresentation. It is a veiled way of saying that Africans did not have a tradition of wearing clothes until the white man came, and that each time an African adorns an attire, 'he/she is merely putting on an act, or playing a role, or attempting to put on the personality of another.' The projected idea is that dressing is alien to Africans who are more at home with nudity, and that they (Africans) wear clothes ceremoniously or occasionally. Such aesthetic composition is perceived as

being different from African existing reality. Given these demeaning deductions, it becomes obvious that whenever African scholars, succumb to, or endorse the Eurocentric description of African dress practices as costumes; we are equally endorsing Hegel and his counterparts.

I realise now, that my usage of the term costumes in earlier writings, to describe African dresses and cultural attires, is a clear contradiction to African design identity. A critical scholar, John Flaherty gives a clearer perspective in his observation when he insists; "we would never refer to western clothing worn in public as costuming unless someone was attired as such for a specific purpose" (1). He further queries "why, when we are referring to indigenous peoples or people from non-dominant cultures, do we speak and write of being dressed in costumes rather than simply the attire of one's culture, ethnic group, people, region, or origin?" (1). Flaherty's observation and query further illuminates the need to address misconceptions about African dresses/costumes and to place the different dress practices of Africa in proper perspective, and at the same time, theorise these practices in the context of usage. The term costumes, therefore, do not refer to African indigenous dresses and adornment practices; but rather, to the usage of African dresses in a performance. It is given, that traditional African society encourages artistic productions and creates settings and performances where creativity and artistry are exhibited and appreciated. In enacting these performances, the arts of costume and make-up are utilised as critical items of character definition and role interpretation. The two elements are inter-related, and are both tools of the actor.

Costume refers to the items of clothing, accessory and ornamentation worn by a performer for the purpose of role interpretation and to establish the given circumstances of the character being performed, and situate him/her in time and space. Make-up on the other hand, refers to the materials and substances used to design the face, head and other exposed parts of the body of a performer; as well as the designs achieved and effects created. The make-up designer thus utilises make-up to create a physical likeness of the character being played, by enhancing or changing the actor's features or by making special constructions on the body. Costume and make-up designers utilise design materials to create believable character portraits such that when the performers step onto the stage, the audience for which they perform believe in their acts and having shared or lived in the same illusory world created by the performer, co-endorse and corroborate the evidence that the performer or actor has become the character. For film productions, costumes and makeup are essential elements that constitute the mise en scene or the composition of shots. Other elements of mise en scene include the lighting, set design, movement of the actors and the position of the camera. In helping to compose shots, costumes and make-up play indispensable roles in projecting the mood and tone of a film. Film costumes are visual tools of communication which quickly and economically transmit a whole lot of information about the characters to film audiences. They act as agents of transformation, peeling off the distinct personalities of actors/actresses in order to change them into new and believable characters on screen.

For traditional African theatre performances, which range from drama to dance, to festivals, rite-of-passage ceremonies, masquerading, traditional street carnivals and other communal enactments; costume and make-up define those dress elements, body designs, ornaments and cosmetics used to transform dancers, singers, drummers, actors, celebrants, masquerades, and other performers involved in dramatic interpretations into the characters they are to embody in performance. This goes to buttress my earlier assertions concerning dance costumes and make-up that: in Africa, traditional dances vary in style, tempo, rhythm and mode according to the practise of different communities and the ideology of the performers. Some dances involve movements and actions calculated to break down the body into various movement parts. It therefore, becomes necessary to accentuate, highlight and enhance those parts so isolated, with costume and make-up in order to draw attention to such parts, and subsequently heighten the overall aesthetic appeal (Utoh-Ezeajugh "Body Adornment Practices" 120).

Costumes, make-up and body designs are also utilised in designing characters for epic films and feature films with African settings. Make-up, which is given expression through masks and body decorations, are commonly used in traditional performances. Masks present physical evidences of transformation by showing spectators that the actors have become 'supernatural' beings. There are wooden masks, bronze masks, copper masks, tortoise shell masks, basket work masks, animal-skin masks, textile masks and many others. But whatever their materials, masks, when used in performance, almost without exception cover the entire head of the wearer and sometimes their shoulders and trunks as well. There are different types and categories of masquerades. Some are designed and imbued with features to represent birds such as the ostrich or peacock; animals such as the horse or elephant; reptiles such as snakes and crocodiles; while some others are made to represent varied distinctions of human personages such as very beautiful maidens, agile and aggressive young men and very ugly and stooped old men or women. Some are also designed to present unusual and spectacular phenomena which could range from fairies and monsters to highly imaginative appearances and ingenious creations.

Eicher observes that masking has been developing over hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, and new mask types are being created today. Some maskers are focal dramatic characters, others clowns or police or supporting actors. Some appear alone or only at night, others are accompanied by a hundred or more 'brothers and sisters.' Many are beautiful dancers, some stomp heavily; others seem to float across the ground ("Nigerian Handcrafted Textiles" 111). Most significantly, masquerades are usually communally owned and, therefore, their costumes and props are communally determined, designed and maintained; with the result that masquerade designs are strong indications of collective representation. It is common for people to identify ownership and locality of a masquerade through its peculiar features, costumes, props and masks. Traditional African theatre thus presents a lavishly composed design repertoire reposed in great artistry, which continues to engage the designer's creative resourcefulness, and project the community's artistic repertoire as collective representation.

Many scholars and creative artists have made significant claims about traditional African dress culture, make-up, body designs and the costumes used in myriad performances spread across the continental landscape (Kwakye-Opong and Adinku 9; Rovine 1; Eicher "African Dress as an Art Form" 516). These claims have mostly been based on Eurocentric categorisations (Starck 2; Battestin 6). However, other scholars have also made different attempts to re-define the practice of indigenous dressing and performance costumes based on scholarly enquiries rooted in African lived experiences and practical experiments. These postulations invariably provide the bases for the classification and conceptualization of African body adornment practices (Utoh-Ezeajugh Classification of African Costumes" par.1; Okadigwe 139) and the deconstruction of Eurocentric perspectives.

Collective-Representation and Cross-Sectionalism as Theories/Concepts of African Dress Culture, Costumes, Make-Up and Body Designs

Many African scholars and practitioners have made significant claims about African dress and adornment practices based on available ethnographic documentations, surviving or re-enacted indigenous practices and available literature on costume and make-up practices across the globe. Scholars attempting to study the evolution, transition or even just the practice of African dressing, costumes, body designs and make-up have had to grapple with the task of defining or classifying indigenous dress and make-up practices based on theories and classifications drawn from other climes, which more often than not, do not reflect the reality of African cultural experiences (Utoh-Ezeajugh "Body Adornment Practices" 120; Bakare "Costumes in Igogo" 407; Bakare "Costumes in Ekiti"170). These attempts at subordinating African identity, end up creating a yawning gap in ideological framing, which has placed African scholars at a great disadvantage. In theorising African dress practices, costumes, body designs and general adornment practices, I choose the terms 'collective-representation' and 'cross-sectionalism' as concepts appropriate for analysing African dressing based on certain communally defined overlapping identities and cultural symbols or patterns in the dress styles of members of the community.

The theory of 'collective-representation' in African dress culture, body designs, costumes and make-up design derives from the collective ethos, the relatedness of communal design elements; the relationships expressed in group aesthetics, and the deep recognition which the society attaches to collective identity. In my conceptualisation, collective-representation in African dress, costumes, make-up and body designs describes the cultural idioms, icons, fashion trends, body adornment practices and stylistic composition of dress and make-up arrangements steeped in communal ethos which collectively represent what a group of people wear and adorn themselves with, in an African communal setting, or in an African/Africanised activity; and which are generally identified as representing that community's dress culture and body adornment practices. Community here, could represent kindred, an ethnic group, a social group, and members of an association, a geographic enclave, a region, a country and even a nation. Thus, it is acceptable to make reference to Kikuyu dress and costumes of Kenya; Igbo dress and costumes of

south-eastern Nigeria; Yoruba dress and costumes of south-western Nigeria; Ashante dress and costumes of Ghana; and Zulu dress and costumes of southern Africa; and present them as items of collective-representation.

Collective-representation also describes the dress styles, peculiar patterns on fabrics, body designs, make-up, costume arrangements, colour preferences and particular colour combinations; as well as acceptable fashion codes and related items, accessories and objects of dressing generally utilized by a community, associated with a community, ascribed to them and accepted by observers as bearing the identity of that particular community. Such costumes and body designs would be identified as representing particular ethnic groups or regional locations. When particular dresses, costumes and body designs which are associated with different ethnic groups are utilized with the intention of presenting a national image and asserting cultural identity, they thus translate into national dress, costume and body design cultures and become items of collective- representation for the nation. Thus, within the concept of collective-representation, Tiv dress, costumes and body designs would translate to Nigerian dress, costumes and body designs; while Akan dress, costumes and body designs would bear the identity of Ghana dress, costumes and body designs.

Collective-representation further describes those items of dressing such as skirts, blouses, gowns, shirts, trousers, caftans and so on, created or designed with certain fabrics, colours, patterns and cultural idioms associated with Africa; as well as peculiar beads, jewellery, accessories, body designs and patterns, which are generally associated with particular ethnic groups in Africa and which are collectively recognised and described globally as African dress, costumes and body designs. Certain fashion trends easily come to mind in the conceptualisation of collective-representation. 'Styletribes' as described by Polhemus possesses some similarities thus:

> 'Styletribes' is a distinct cultural segment that generates a distinctive style of dress and decoration. Such "styletribes" may create their own looks from combining existing garments, creating their own custom colors by tie-dyeing or painting, mixing and matching from previously worn and recycled clothing available in thrift shops and vintage markets. They are not as concerned with one style of dressing as with expressing themselves, though there is an element of conformity that derives from the processes used and the resulting social behaviour. (14)

Collective-representation is expressed through styles, patterns, fabric texture, colours and other artistic and aesthetic considerations. The Ashanti *kente*, Yoruba *Aso Oke* and Masai *Shuka* will thus bear the identity of African attires, while the Hausa *Laali*, Igbo *Uli* and Samburu *Naitulu* will bear the identity of African body designs. In theorising African dress culture, costumes and adornment practices therefore, the concept of collective-representation presents a theoretical context for defining, describing and ascribing meaning to the African appearance. Kenya, for instance, has forty-two ethnic groups with different dress cultures and body designs and with similarities existing in the design practices of neighbourly or related groups. The body adornment practices of the six largest ethnicities, however, exert greater influence and,

hence, higher impact on Kenyan culture. Two of these are the Masai and the Samburu. The Masai are famous and easily recognizable because of the great significance that their traditional attire, *the Shuka* (Masai blanket) has attained over the years.

The Masai dress usually consists of red *kanga*, shuka and a lot of brightly patterned necklaces, bracelets, and beaded headdresses. These attires and body design practices would be easily identified as collective-representation of the Masai people's adornment culture. Shuka is a bright-coloured cloth, predominantly red, which is wrapped around the frames of the men. Red has become synonymous with Masai culture and it is believed to have the force to scare off lions even from a great distance. Masai jewellery, created with beads and metal wire, are quite famous. Men wear wrist or ankle bracelets, and sometimes belts and necklaces too, while women wear a variety of jewellery, many bracelets and big flat bead-decorated collars in various patterns and colours, that identify the clan they belong to and their social status. In describing Shuka within the context of collective-representation, one would identify Shuka as representative of Masai culture at the ethnic and national levels because it is easily identified as the dress culture of the Masai. At the same time, it would also be identified as the collective- representation of the national dress of Kenya from a universal and global perspective.

For the Samburu, collective-representation is evident in their vibrant culture of body adornment. Red is the most significant colour for the people as it is believed to represent life, purity, youthfulness and vigour. The use of the red colour by women and young men is a form of colour coding where various colours are used to convey meaning. Colour coding is applied in the arrangement of beadwork which are used to communicate meaningfully depending on the design. For instance, Samburu beads known as *Mporo* are usually worn by married women only and the beads are traditionally given by the groom as part of the bride price. In her submission, Ngoroge corroborates this claim by stating that the traditional dress of the Samburu tribe is a striking red cloth wrapped like a skirt and a white sash. This is adorned with many colourful beaded earrings, bracelets, anklets and necklaces. Each piece of jewellery worn represents the status of the wearer (43). One would, therefore, view the concept of collective-representation from an ideological and conceptual perspective, given its relatedness to African communal existence and worldview. As I had postulated in an earlier writing.

> Africans share life deeply in common. There are communal squares, farmlands, economic trees, streams and markets. There are also communal shrines, masquerades, musical instruments, ritual objects, festivals and squares for recreational activities as well as for social, economic and religious purposes. Members of the same kindred or clan could distinguish themselves by their proficiency in a particular trade, skill or profession such as basket/mat weaving, black smiting, body designing, pot moulding and so on. Some communities or lineages may be experts in rain-making, wood carving, divination and practice of traditional medicine. These and similar features characterize the communal life of traditional African societies. (Utoh-Ezeajugh "Communal Aesthetics of African" 75)

Communality is at the root of African body adornment expressions. In the construction of identity using collective-representation, emphasis is laid on the usage of certain fabrics/styles/colours/patterns/arrangements of clothing, hair styles, body decorations, make-up, beads/jewellery and accessories by a particular community, ethnic group or nationality. The Asoebi dress culture of Nigeria reflects the concept of collective-representation. As Okechukwu Nwafor observes that "Aso ebi is a form of social change, a means of individual and collective mannerism, offering an opportunity to endless design evaluation, observation, and socialization. Here, aso ebi is deployed as a social uniformed dressing in Nigeria... ("Aso Ebi Dress" 15). Thus, one sees Aso ebi as a unifying symbol of family bonding and friendship, in the same way one would view the dress culture of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria who have peculiar dress and body adornment designs which are easily identified as belonging to them.

Aso ebi accordingly becomes a national symbol of collective-representation emanating from different groups and institutions. The Igbo *Isi Agu***,** the Yoruba *Aso Oke* and the Hausa *Babanriga* constitute items of collective-representation in their cultural domains. In Benue State of Nigeria, for instance, the Idoma and the Tiv who constitute part of the ten ethnic groups in the state, have peculiar and identifiable dress cultures which make it easy for people to identify them at a glance or pick them out from the crowd. As I had observed elsewhere: among the many ethnic groups found in Nigeria, dress cultures carry peculiar identities. Each ethnic group has its own name for different types of attires made out of traditional fabrics particular to that culture. Similarities could however be found across cultures because with migration and interactions, ethnic groups have adapted and shared customs of dressing (Utoh-Ezeajugh "Traditional Nigerian Dress" 22; Nwafor "Of Mutuality" 493).

Idoma attire is usually made out of a fabric designed in two major colours of stripped black and red with gold coloured lining in the middle. The red and white woven cloth is usually crossed/draped across a man's left shoulders while the wrapper is knotted on the right side of the waist. A cap made of the same fabric would usually complete the outfit, especially during formal occasions. For the women, the cloth is tied across the chest or on the waist over a plain blouse or with a tube like top. A head-tie of similar fabric or colour would complete the outfit for formal occasions or in place of that, a coiffure arranged with beads and stones. Tiv attire on the other hand is a stripped black and white woven fabric with similar styles of draping, tying and knotting for men as that of the Idoma; while the women would design and arrange their outfits in styles also similar to the Idoma. Discussing Idoma and Tiv traditional dress, Akpa reiterates that:

> The Idoma emblem which is their dress code is a special fabric made up of two colours red and black with gold colour lining in between. This emblem or attire can be proudly worn by any Idoma person at any time especially during occasions or festivities. It is for cultural identity and speaks volumes on what the Idomas believe in. Just as Idoma emblem which is their dress code is a special fabric made up of two major colours of red and black with gold lining in between; their Tiv counterparts use a black and white fabric called "Anger" and it is of great importance to them. (3)

For the Ijaw people of Nigeria, the men have a ceremonial dress which is called 'Bayelsa'. This attire is a large shirt with long sleeves, worn with a long piece of wrapper tied from the waist to the ankle, and in most cases, hung over a shoulder. Other ethnic groups in Nigeria have identifiable cultural attires, body designs and in some instances, facial markings. These are representative of cultural bonding, communal identity and group aesthetics which are indices of collective representation. The usage of body decorations in their permanent and temporary forms by both men and women, including the use of beads, anklets, circulates and other objects and items used in body and hair adornments and dress accessories encapsulate collective-representation. In her thesis on body adornment among the Samburu of Kenya, Ngoroge observed that "body adornment was a significant cultural activity which was widely practiced by Samburu. Some of the forms of body adornment were temporary while others were permanent. Forms of body adornment emphasised power, wealth, age and social status within the community" (25). Collective-representation is also distinguishable in the designs, styles, fabric type and quality; and the colour scheme of the costumes used in traditional performances, festivals, dances and ceremonies usually enacted in the various African communities, ethnic groups and countries.

Cross-sectionalism on the other hand attempts to interpret overlapping identities expressed through the dressing, costuming, and make-up and body designs of individuals across African communities. Overlapping identities, in the sense of men and women wearing similar, yet distinct attires and body designs. I mention body designs here, because I had elsewhere explained that, "for the African, beauty, valour, honour, social status and indeed identity lies in the decorated skin rather than in the natural body" (Utoh-Ezeajugh "Traditional Nigerian Dress Culture" 20). Many people in Africa use their bodies and skins as mediums for expressing their individual and collective aspirations. Using varied mediums and styles of body decoration; traditional designers endow the skin with special significance in response to the demand for individual and collective- representation of communal aesthetics.

Cross-sectionalism locates harmony and gender-connectedness at the heart of African dressing, where men and women wear similar, yet, distinct styles which endow the wearers with very distinct culturally exclusive identities. In the construction of identity framed on cross-sectionalism, emphasis is laid on the usage of certain items of clothing in Africa, such as wrappers which are tied by both men and women; including the numerous designs which are achieved with wrappers. The usage of body decorations in their permanent and temporary forms by both men and women, where patterns and motifs vary for men and women, yet harmony exists in the collective and communal repertoire. The use of neck and wrist beads as well as anklets, circulates, nose rings, earrings and other objects, ornaments and items used in body, hair and dress adornments, present seeming overlapping identities which become more distinct and assertive when engaged as communal products that imbue wearers with ascribed communal identities.

Cross-sectionalism defines those attires, costumes and body design practices which may appear to lack gender-distinction when placed within the purview of Western stereotypes, where one has been conditioned to recognise trousers as

belonging to men, and skirts/dresses as belonging to women. Given this Western stereotype, wrappers worn by men and women in Africa, despite their gender specific styles, may be seen as presenting overlapping identities in terms of style and fabric, but in reality, they are gender and class distinctive and they possess distinct cultural identities, aesthetic value and significance within the cultural sphere of usage. In many indigenous African cultures, both genders (men and women) across social classes use wrappers or what some scholars have referred to, as the "African cloth." To the casual observer, this appears not to present any gender or social distinctions especially when the parameter for determining gender costumes lies in Western dress forms where trousers distinguish men and skirts/dresses distinguish women. In line with scholarly classifications, the act of wearing items of clothing, hair arrangement and body adornments commonly associated with the opposite sex within a particular society such as when a man dresses like a woman or a woman dresses like a man falls under cross-gender or trans-gender dressing. This could be done to fulfil some personal desires or to perform as a character in a play or film production. However, African dressing does not fall under such classifications.

In Africa, there are no controversies about who wears what items of dressing, and how those items of dressing are to be worn. Although items of dressing may be similar, cross-sectionalism identifies clear distinctions between men's attires and women's attires; between men's beads and women's beads; between men's body designs and women's body designs; between men's style of tying wrapper and women's style, and so on. These distinctions are encased in cultural codes, symbols, placement of patterns or objects; arrangement of design elements, combination and composition of colours. It is the composition of the entire design elements – wrappers, neck/hand/ankle beads, walking stick, hand fan and many others that present a gendered distinction within cross-sectionalism. The use of wrappers, blankets, bulbous skirts, and seamless fabrics rather than trousers and dresses are common indigenous dress practices amongst many African communities. Wrappers are arranged in different styles and patterns depending on the desired effect and also based on cultural specificities. Some wrappers or fabrics or blankets are tied across the neck; some across the shoulders; some are tied across the chest; some on the waist, while some are arranged to produce a bulbous, or gathered or flared-skirt effect.

Vicentia Akwetey, in her analysis of the different styles of wearing the African cloth or wrapper, observes that some wear them with the tunic, while others do without them. It is noted that even among those cultures who do not wear the tunic in addition to the cloth, the ways of wearing the cloth differ. This is because although they are all black people, there are differences in details of culture, which have to do with the physical location and psychological environment. These elements represent minute but very distinct and vital differences in the ways of wearing the traditional cloth, which immediately establishes the cultural identity of an individual at a glance (27-28). Examples can be found in many indigenous African dress cultures. The Oba of Benin and his chiefs utilise gold, red and white wrappers and expansive fabrics to achieve aesthetically pleasing attires designed to imbue the wearers with auras of magnificence, splendour, wealth and authority. The Oba's attire would usually

constitute of an elaborately gathered bulbous skirt that reaches the ankle and a caftan-like shirt. The ceremonial costume of the Oba of Benin during certain festivals like the Igue, for instance, are an elaborate arrangement of hand woven fabrics, beads, ivory and many traditionally significant objects. Osamede Osunde gives us an elaborate description of the Oba's attire: thus:

> The costume is elaborate. From head to feet and with the exception of the Iyeruan and Akhuankhuan made of Ukponmwinanido (local Cloth), every other thing he wears is either red coral or Ivory beads. The Iyeruan, a large item of regalia, is a peculiar type of hand-woven white cloth by the Royal guild, Owina-nido. The Akhuankhuan, a white band around the waist is made of local cloth. The crown, Ede and the shirt Ikekeze are made of tiny coral beads woven into a mesh. Ikiro hand bangles, Ukugbo-Olila a band around the chest and Eguan, a ring around the ankle, are all made of coral beads, Udahae, which is tied around the fore-head is also made of coral beads. It was introduced as part of the royal regalia after the assassination of oba Ezoti about 1473. There is a set of about a dozen beaded necklaces, Odigba dropping some inches below the chest. There are also the side robes egbele and the ugogoro, a device to rest the hand. The Ada (sceptre) features in Benin armorial bearing. The sandals are made of leather. (par.2)

The Oba's entire outfit is a testament of the indigenous splendour of African dress culture. The Obi of Onitsha also wears elaborately adorned attires for official outings. The wrapper as an African cloth, is utilized in many cultures as a common dress practice. Among the Igbos of Nigeria, for instance, both men and women tie wrappers, but while women knot their wrappers on the left side of the waist or chest, the men knot their wrappers on the right side of the waist. For women, the wrapper is drawn to one side (the left side) of the waist and then knotted and allowed to fall in gentle soft folds on the side. However, for the men, the wrapper is pulled to the right and the folds are gathered up and knotted into a huge ball. The size of the knotted ball and the position could be a symbolic reinforcement of the phallic essence and a proclamation of patriarchal authority. Thus, wrapper can be considered as a cross-sectional item or style of dressing.

In Ghana, the woven or printed cloth has remained the central traditional costume for both men and women, and over the years, the traditional weaving and printing techniques in the design and manufacture of the Kente, Adinkra, Akunintam and Kuntunkuni cloths of the Ashante, have continued to be utilised. Akwetey explains that: to fully appreciate the symbolism of traditional costumes in Asante culture, it may be necessary to understand the Asante personality, and the people..."the style and drape of the cloth on the body do a lot to give information about the wearer's identity and actions. In other words, the way the cloth is moved, arranged or held around the body is a language (70).

She goes further to observe that: just as women have various ways of wearing the cloth, which communicate their status, Asante men also have various ways of putting on the cloth, which are also a "language...Apart from the Fante in the South,

most Akan men and specifically Asante men can easily be identified traditionally by the way they wear the cloth. They usually do not wear any tunic under the cloth as the Ga, Ewe or Fante do. It is not surprising to note that with the advent of modern multicultural influences, Asante men have jealously stuck to this practice (70).

Cross-sectionalism therefore, attempts to categorise and further consolidate the dress practices that have similar treads across the continent; the most popular being the wrapper. The African wrapper and indeed other items of dressing, serve the purpose of communicating the identity of the wearer and ensuring social cohesion. It also offers great comfort to Africans given the weather conditions and environmental factors. A good arrangement of wrappers, whether on a man or on a woman, enhances the personality of the wearer with grace and elegance. When the wrapper or other items of adornment are being used by either men or women, all the elements present in the wrapper and other items of clothing and body designs are replete with communal visual codes which are easily understood by others within the cycle of socialisation. Members of the community would easily identify the personality/gender being presented and would also understand the social circumstances under which such clothes are being worn and perhaps even the experiences, exploits and social engagements of the wearer.

Classification of African Dress Culture, Body Designs, Costumes and Make-Up

African dress culture, body designs, costumes and make-up practices, are so uniquely distinct and at the same time aesthetically interwoven with the cultural ethos of their communities of engagement; that in line with Kendra Cherry's concept of "Collectivist cultures", they "emphasize the needs and goals of the group as a whole over the needs and desires of each individual. In such cultures, relationships with other members of the group and the interconnectedness between people play a central role in each person's identity" (1). Given the uniqueness and cultural significance of African dress practices, it has become necessary to describe and then classify the practice of dressing, and body designs in Africa; as distinct from other world cultures while acknowledging possible intersections.

I had elsewhere noted that "the dress and body design culture of the many ethnic groups found in Africa, evolved through circumstances of geographic location, weather conditions, inter-ethnic interactions, colonial activities, foreign interests, religious orientations and the impact of local and international migrations" (Utoh-Ezeajugh "Beyond Eurocentrism" 16). From existing ethnographic and archaeological evidences, Africans across the continent have sustained varied unique and elaborate body adornment cultures (King par.1; Utoh-Ezeajugh "Classification of African Costumes" 1-5; Holl par.4). This involves the use of permanent and temporary body decorations to enhance beauty or compose identity. Varied woven and matted fabrics for dressing the body and various objects for accessorising the attires, aided personal and collective identity. For the traditional society, distinctiveness in dressing did not necessarily require distinct gender classifications in terms of items of clothing or even items of body adornment; but rather, the emphasis sometimes lay on the positioning and selection of the beads, motifs, symbols and patterns utilised on attires or body decorations. Usually, items of clothing and body designs are embodied with visual

signs which communicate the socio-cultural context in which they are being paraded. This communicative essence is very significant because members of the community usually possess the ability to read the language of the cultural attires such that African aesthetics of beauty are artistically expressed in the dress and body designs of the traditional society as well as in the evolving contemporary styles (Utoh-Ezeajugh "Beyond Eurocentrism" 16).

The dress practices, utilised by the many ethnic groups found in different countries in Africa such as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Senegal, Morocco and South Africa have, overtime, and in response to fashion trends, environmental/social changes and technological advancements that have incorporated changes into the dress styles, fabric types/designs, patterns and colour codes. However, distinct identities exist in the different and sometimes similar or parallel design practices of Africa's ethnic groups. Considering Africa's contributions to global fashion and the influx of African clothing, headgears/wraps and accessories on the runway; it has become necessary to give classifications to the different dress or adornment practices utilised in various festivals, carnivals and ceremonies exhibited or performed in diverse communities.

The term, "traditional African dress, costumes, make-up and body designs", is a broad categorisation that requires further classification for a more concise description of African adornment practices. From highly traditional African adornment practices, through modern to contemporary design creations, the African continent have remained consistent as conveyors of artistic heritage of its people despite shifting paradigms in terms of production and usage. Broadly speaking, traditional African adornment practices refer to all forms of traditional attires, costumes, make-up and body designs utilised by Africans and non-Africans; and identified as belonging to African design repertoire; and embodying African stylistic idioms, and cultural heritage. In my attempt to classify the adornment practices of the African people, I find three distinctions appropriate. In making these distinctions, I have chosen functional/functionality as sensorial issues/criteria for classification. The distinctions are based on created identities, autochthonous authenticity, trends and content, and style of the designs rather than on chronological periods and regions. The three categories are identified as follows; indigenous traditional designs (indigenous trad.); modern traditional designs (modern trad.); and contemporary traditional designs (contemporary trad.) (Utoh-Ezeajugh "Beyond Eurocentrism" 15-22).

Indigenous Traditional Designs (Indigenous Trad.)

Africa is a nation with diverse ethnic groups and a robust artistic cultural heritage (Kerchache, et al. 1). Indigenous traditional African costumes, make-up and body designs were initially made with materials derived from plants, animals and mineral deposits, as well as feathers, quills, fronds and the teeth and skin of animals. Indigenous attire consisted of bark cloth, grass or raffia skirts, animal skins, furs and hides. The body and hair were accessorised with beads made from ivory, corals, seeds and cowry shells; as well as seashells, bones, wood, grass, bells, pressed metal, ostrich eggshells and feathers. Others were circlets and anklets derived from tusks and animal

horns. Leg rattles made from animal shells or seeds were used for aesthetic appeal and to enhance sound effects during dance performances. Make-up and body decorations were made with liquid extracted from leaves, seeds, pods, insects and animal fat; as well as solutions made out of mineral deposits, plant extracts and wood ash.

The predominant colours of make-up in use are red, black, yellow, brown and white. However, factors arising from the colonial experience led to a drastic decline in indigenous body adornment practices. The circular- shaped hats which are made with grass and local cotton and cow-hide skirt worn by married Zulu women; the skirt made of grass or beaded cotton strings worn by unmarried Zulu girls; skirts of animal skin and head feathers worn by Zulu men and Leopard skin skirts worn by men from the Zulu royal family; are some examples of indigenous traditional costumes. The Yoruba tribal marks and the facial scarification of the karamojong- Jie of Uganda are examples of permanent traditional body designs. The Igbo *Uli* and the Hausa *Laali* present good examples of temporary traditional body designs; while the red and white ochre decorations usually applied on the bodies of Masai Moran warriors and brides represent indigenous traditional make-up.

Following the introduction of weaving machines, the discovery of dyeing pits and the availability of cotton; woven fabrics, dyed fabrics and prints, and imported make-up materials became available. In Nigeria for instance, the inception of cloth weaving has been traced through archaeological discoveries in Eastern Nigeria to more than one thousand years ago. The earliest recorded evidence is in the accounts of Africanus Leo who reported cotton growing in "abundance near Kano" in the 1500s. In the 1590s, Kano cloth was reported to be used as 'currency' and Barth observed in 1851 that dyed and woven cloth was the main product of Kano. As many as twenty five different kinds of cloth were noted to have been locally made in Kano and nearby towns. And in about 1900, French officers estimated that "nearly everyone living in the central and East Sahara and two thirds of the population in the Sudan zone wore Kano cotton". An Englishman visiting Western Nigerian in the 1850s also talked about the cotton produced in that part of the country. His account as rendered by Eicher says:

> With regard to the present quality of the cotton which is grown in such vast quantities in Yoruba … it is declared by those who are most capable of judging that although the supply is intermittent and the sample not over clean, it is very well thought of in the Liverpool market and commands a paying price, equal to that of Louisiana and superior to that of India. ("Nigerian Handcrafted Textiles" 13)

Apart from local cotton, silk was also available in some parts of the country and weavers made silk cloth out of them. Records from the 1800 show that Yoruba people had started wearing *Sanyan*, a prestigious local silk cloth made from the Anaphe Larvae. In the Eastern part of Nigeria, Basden, in his book, *Niger Ibos* (1917) observed that the woven cloths from the town of Akwete which were initially called Akwa Mmiri and later Akwete, were testimonies of "the unique artistic skills of the weavers" (Basden 159). In Benin, the weaving tradition was highly regarded by both

explorers and indigenes by explorers (Eicher 33). According to Eicher, "Benin cloths were praised for their fine quality and were sought by explorers and trading vessels for trade with other African nations" (33). In the 19th century, Barth reported that the Nupe people "were also skilled weavers" (cited in Candotti 90). Igbirra and Okene broad loom cloth were also highly admired. In Bida, Ilorin, Zaria and Benin, tufted cloths were woven for use by women who used them to tie their babies to their backs.

Weavers from the many ethnic groups of Nigeria produced locally hand woven cloths for use in their localities and surrounding communities. Apart from the use of local materials for weaving, some indigenous weavers especially those living along the coast had access to imported yarns, fabrics and dyes as far back as the 18th century. In addition, it is of note that India had exported cloth to Africa for a long time. With this development, local weavers and dyers began to use the imported materials alongside the local ones. Even as imported printed cotton cloth later became available, the locally woven cloth continues to occupy pride of place as it is regarded more highly than the imported ones. Weaving and dyeing traditions began to produce fabrics which gradually edged indigenous traditional attires out of usage, thereby given rise to the emergence of modern traditional designs in Africa.

Modern Traditional Designs (Modern Trad.)

Modern traditional dresses, body designs, costumes and make-up, refer to fabrics and their styles; make-up materials and application procedures; and body design patterns and styles which are produced by Africans using weaving/sewing machines and modern make-up equipment and materials. It also refers to the use of dyes, processed wool and tattoo technology. Modern traditional designs describe certain styles achieved with fabrics manufactured locally or imported into the continent, which are intrinsically African in style, design concept and cultural aesthetics. Modern traditional make-up and body designs took off from the point where factors arising from the colonial experience encouraged a decline in the use and practice of local dress items, make-up and body designs; and an increase in the use of "colours and patterns, created in printed and dyed cloth; woven fabric strips; and beaded attires..." (Ashworth and Varshney 1). This marked a shift in the African ideology of beauty and style, where the adorned and decorated body spoke volumes concerning the bearer's personality.

The 'natural' and 'bland' body began to gain significance over the decorated body, and make-up simply defined or enhanced beauty, and nothing else. Make-up materials such as eye pencil, rouge, lipstick, powder and eye shadow began to dominate the scene, although local make-up and body designs are still utilized sparingly. Modern traditional dress, costumes, make-up and body designs are achieved using either local or imported materials or a mixture of both; as well as a fusion of foreign design processes with local artistic expressions. Weaving technology enabled the use of cotton, silk and wool in the processing and production of attires. Weaves, tie and dyes, batiks and Industrial prints represent the four types of cloth that emerged. Examples of modern traditional fabrics include the machine or hand woven Yoruba *Aso Oke* and *Adire*; the Igbo *Akwete* and the Ghana *Kente* and the numerous Wax and

Ankara (patterned cotton fabrics) and printed materials; including the different styles achieved with the fabrics. Unique hairstyles enhanced with attachments and 'weavons'; body designs/motifs/patterns made with machines; walking sticks and jewelleries of beads, shells, glass, bronze and gold, represent modern traditional designs and body adornment.

Gradually, a distinct traditional African identity began to emerge, embodying certain unifying elements foregrounded in African tastes and design repertoire. Discernible in the emerging styles, are certain symbolic indexes and cultural idioms such as representations of African heroic exploits; the quest for identity and the merging of identities; cultural specificities; African communal experiences, and the primordial strive for artistic excellence, elaborate artistry and sophisticated creativity. The Isi Agu of the Igbo, the Njiri of the Ijaw and the Iyeruan of the Benin of Nigeria; as well as the *Kente* of the Ashanti of Ghana and the *Shuka* of the Masai of Kenya, are some examples of modern traditional attires/designs.

Contemporary Traditional Designs (Contemporary Trad.)

Given the diversification of fabrics and styles and the penchant for imported make-up and body tattoos, African dress culture and body designs are becoming more dynamic and more malleable. African cultural idioms are identifiable in those dress and body design practices that have evolved in the past fifty years; which are distinctively associated with various African nations/ethnic groups. The term "contemporary traditional designs", defines those styles/fabrics and body designs/make-up procedures, items and patterns which are representative of contemporary African identity both locally and globally. It represents the styles and designs sewn or handcrafted with African cloth/fabrics, prints and materials that are African in outlook. It also refers to designs that have come to be identified and accepted as African style; which are achieved using fabrics and clothing from Western or other cultures.

Given these descriptions, one realises that the style may be African, and the fabric African; or the style may be African but the fabric Western or other cultures; or the style may be Western or other cultures, but the fabric African. Contemporary traditional designs thrive on the total look of the individual or performer, and on the effects achieved. The distinction lies in the Africanness of the styles – boldness of designs, peculiar body design motifs/patterns, spectacular and distinctive colours, as well as conformity with environmental and socio-cultural realities.

Contemporary traditional African attires, costumes and body designs reflect the cultural, social, political and technological changes that are taking place both in the continent and across the world. That is why the Igbo of Nigeria can use George material made in India and create their own unique style to such an extent that George wrappers have become synonymous with Igbo dress culture. The various styles that are being created with African print materials, which range from different cuts of skirts and blouses and dresses; to trousers and shirts and different wraps and tops; all bear the identity of contemporary traditional African dresses. Designers are also re-creating myriad multi-ethnic and continental styles using African Ankara and wax prints for

purposes of establishing an African identity. Such designs have gained global import as African fashion. As observed in *African Fashion: History and Future*: in the 21st century, African fashion is in the global spotlight, from runways to its use by celebrities in music videos and film... Certainly, seeing in real time, how Africans dress and the variety of styles available makes people want to connect with African culture and style (13). The numerous attires, make-up applications, body design practices, and the costumes of performers in different festivals, which have come to be identified as traditional African designs, would be more easily understood within the context of these three classifications.

The Challenge of Historical Accuracy in Designing Period Costumes and Make-Up for African Plays and Films

The demand for historical accuracy/authenticity in costumes and make-up designs, especially when this is weighed against the backdrop of historical antecedents, can be a tasking one. The non-availability of historical records, documents and visuals of dress cultures of African people and ethnic groups across the ages, has remained an impediment to designers attempting to reconstruct African exploits and civilization using costumes. African costume and make-up designers, have the option of recreating historical costumes and body decoration motifs and patterns, based on information contained in writings, documentations, archaeological finds/objects, natural/historical sites/landmarks and oral accounts/narratives. Examples are documentations and writings presented by ethnographers, historians and creative writers; or information obtained from field research (where elderly people and those who are vast in oral history and the people's folkloric traditions are available to be interviewed); or archaeological excavations/discoveries; or inherited clothing/ornamentation/ heirlooms. Although in some cases, the information contained in these sources may be inadequate, because such documents, items and oral knowledge systems were not specifically dedicated to the documentation of costume and make-up information, but still, vital information would be gleaned from the available sources.

A major challenge however, is that the 21st century is so far removed from the 19th, 18th and other centuries before them in terms of historical activities and their influences on socio-cultural developments; that the authenticity of oral accounts may not be easily determined. Oral accounts as we know, tend to gradually (and sometimes even drastically) lose original materials in the course of transmission from one story teller to another. Also, the influence or infusion of contemporary knowledge indices which are based on historical stereotypes that have emerged over the years cannot be overlooked. The historical information derived from these sources may therefore not be regarded as authentic or accurate because they may provide pieces of information that will only constitute part of the design repertoire, leaving a yawning gap of unrecovered knowledge. The challenge before African costume and make-up designers lies in the ability to sift through the available gamut of historical information and create designs based on conscientious research, combined with creativity hinged on acquired knowledge, rather than creating designs based on historical stereotypes. What then do

I mean by historical stereotypes in discussing African costume and make-up design practices?

Historical Stereotypes in African Costumes

When I use the term 'historical stereotypes', I am referring to costume and make-up designs or design cultures that have emerged over the years which are not representative of any particular historical period; but which emerged through the combination of dress practices and arrangement of pieces of items of clothing from different ethnic groups and historical periods. These combinations are given presence, style and design by designers, using the instrumentality of imagination, and ingenuity. Over the years, an assortment of designs and styles generally conceived as authentic depictions of traditional dressing representative of certain ethnic groups or cultures or royalty, have dominated theatre stages and films. Nigeria's Nollywood has an array of such costumes being utilized in epic films by royalty, their subjects, domestic staff and guards. These designs have emerged over the years and are being utilised and displayed on theatre stages and films as authentic historical costumes and body design practices. However, these designs, when subjected to research-oriented enquiries, do no bear actual resemblance to the dress culture of the historical period being represented and the ethnic affiliations of the characters being paraded on the stage or screen.

These designs are products of assumptions and presumptions, combined with genuine efforts on the part of costume and make-up designers, to present characters whose appearances are reflective of African cultural heritage. For these designers, Africanness is found in the arrangement of colourful clothing, resplendent with peculiar styles and iconic patterns, as well as intricately patterned bodies adorned with body paintings, varieties of beads and other objects of body adornment. Of course, these depictions have received wide acceptance from audiences and designers as authentic representations of the dress culture of certain historical periods and certain ethnic groups, irrespective of any seeming contradiction with available historical accounts/records. Historical stereotypes are creative productions of designer's intent on enhancing narratives and building distinguishable character portraits. While such designs may aid the audience's pleasurable experience, especially as most audiences possess little or no historical knowledge about indigenous costume and make-up design practices; the designs may not serve the purpose of improving the audience' knowledge and aesthetic orientation. In the designing of historical plays and Epic films, some designers have had to resort to historical stereotypes. This is because, while some designers make impressive efforts to research into traditional dress cultures using available sources, some other designers do not bother to tap into the indigenous knowledge systems and other available sources when they are faced with the task of designing historical/period films or stage plays.

There is no doubt that the designer's job is strewn with challenges. Lack of pictorial and artistic documentations of African indigenous dress practices and body designs has made the job of the designer who is faced with the task of designing characters for historical plays, a challenging one. There is need for in-depth research to confirm or challenge existing historical stereotypes and create designs that will

reflect trends in the dress culture and body design practices of specific periods in history. Despite incidents of colonialism and the periodisation of African experiences into pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods; it is important to be true to Africa's historical experiences and work with the reality that fashion trends were not block movements that followed these stereotypical classifications. African dress culture and body design practices were influenced by many factors; some of which are - realities of the environment; inter-tribal migrations, exchanges and interactions; influences from cultures outside Africa and the exceptional skills and ingenuity of traditional craftsmen, body decoration experts and cloth weavers. Many distinguishable trends of dress and body design practices could therefore be identified in Africa's design history. It only requires the commitment, dedication and ingenuity of costume and make-up designers to restore, recreate and reconstruct the design history of periods and localities in the African performance space; and then translate these into authentic period designs. This also exposes the need for the documentation and hosting of historical African costumes and make-up in digital format and in internet domains, in the same way as, for instance, Pin Interest is documenting spectacular African fashion in the internet.

Conclusion

The study interrogates the practice of dressing, make-up and body designing, alongside the concept of costuming in Africa, and makes distinctions between dresses worn in everyday life and costumes used for performances. The study navigates the uncharted terrains of African dress and body design practices, and their evolving models, which serve as identity markers; and seeks to consolidate, and at the same time, create new ways of stamping the presence and identity of the clothed body. African costumes and make-up define those attires, fabrics, and accessories used to dress actors/ performers, to enable them play given roles on stage, film and street performances. They dress elements, body designs, ornaments and cosmetics are used to transform dancers, singers, drummers, actors, celebrants, masquerades, and other performers involved in dramatic interpretations into the characters they are to embody in performance African dress and costume practices, are aesthetically interwoven with the cultural ethos of the communities of engagement.

The practice of African indigenous dressing, stage costuming, body designing and make-up as utilised in African daily life and African performances have been critically examined in a bid to articulate a position of enquiry, which will be employed in explaining techniques and methods; describing trends and styles, and explaining design practices and preferences within the African fashion and performance space. The concepts of collective-representation, cross-sectionalism and historical stereotypes, are engaged in theorising African adornment practices based on certain communally defined overlapping identities and cultural symbols/ patterns of dressing. Classifications are approached from three levels of artistic and historical distinctions, giving rise to clearly defined activities, practices and styles. Based on these classifications and categorizations of African dress and costume practices, the study has attempted to translate African adornment practices into scholarly referrals capable

of transcending Eurocentric stereotypes to translate into conceptual identities. Scholars attempting to study the practice and development of African dressing, costumes, body designs and make-up; are, therefore, encouraged to disengage from Western ideological conceptualisations and engage African cultural experiences in creating scholarly models.

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