

Self-Preservation Techniques and New Cultural Outlook in Pandemic Era through Costume Design

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Abstract

The tension of pandemic outbreak in the world brought about new cultural outlook and practically exposed man's helplessness in the society and ultimately in the hand of nature. Interestingly, in the various communities, the choice to survive seems to have come to conform to the circumstances and nature of the threat in situations of natural outbreak of disasters. The Covid-19 threats demonstrated that humans must always evolve a mechanism in culture and lifestyle to cope and to survive. Premised on Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed in a qualitative research design, this paper discusses the various techniques for self-preservation deployed by costume designers to curtail Covid-19 thrusts in the society. Findings show that many victims of Covid-19 refused to conform to dressing order but inversely would pay attention to their physical outlook despite the scare of death. The contemporary mankind tend to pay more attention to appearance than to survival even at the cost of extreme danger of infection as illustrated by the resistance of wearing face masks. The Paper concludes that creative masks and bodily gears induce many people to adhere to self-preservation directives than to government directives or threats. Government directives should be made to follow the popular will through creativity and costume strategies towards the preservation of lives and promotion of innovativeness in the society. The need to conform to the rhythm of bodily gears adds to engender conforming as safety net in moments of hazardous outbreaks in the society.

Keywords: Self-Preservation, Techniques, Covi-19 Pandemic, Costume-Design, Appeal.

Introduction

The outbreak of a deadly disease in a city may throw the whole city to a tumult which no one may recall what looking good may elicit anymore. In a situation like that,

everyone seeks life first; other things in life can come after, and a better option to curtail massive death is usually self-preservation in which case, conformity with the government directives is imperative but techniques to adherence towards realization of health-related goals are necessary. During Covid-19 outbreak, in Nigeria, the reverse was obtainable in virtually all the states when the desire to look good overrode the craving for life. It is in th circumstance that aesthetics kind of reset the direction for the government to renegotiate in order to tame the tide of the pandemic.

Actually, the outbreak of the pandemic brought about a great magnitude of social hysteria and anxiety (Udoinwang and Akpan 2023) tht led to a constant reiteration of its deathly verves across all media outlets affirming massive deaths across countries of the world. It was quite devastating to both man and the economy, shifting all attention towards a reliable practice to subdue the wave of death caused by the pandemic. This made individuals, groups and organizations to seek self-preservation techniques to survive the threat, especially as the government imposed a general lockdown in the midst of the reclining economy.

However, it was surprising that the self-preservation notion was intensified in the general lockdown which people were asked to keep away from crowds, disengage from groups or shun clusters of people since the pandemic was easily spread through contact. In Nigeria, it was a hash experience following the fluctuating index of Nigeria's economy; but people adhered, and it was borne in phases pending the receding response of the killer disease itself. Consequently, in Nigeria, for instance, displacement, hardship and hunger erupted and compelled people to break loose from their lockdown hermitages, asylums and even lairs which some criminals lock themselves down to cause beastly havoc. According to Andam Kwaw, Hyacinth Edeh and James Thurlow,

In late February, Nigeria recorded the subcontinent's first confirmed case, after which it began to spread throughout Lagos, Ogun State, and the Federal Capital Authority (FCT) area of Abuja. The arrival of the pandemic set off a chain of policy actions, including public health and education campaigns... restrictions on large sections of the economy... the scale of policy responses imposed significant economic costs on Nigeria's population, but the nature of the impacts on food systems and the poor remains unclear (ncbi.nih.gov).

Surprisingly, the directive from the government for people to put on face masks, yet lock themselves down in their houses was oppressive. This is because many of the citizens especially across the states resorted to feeding themselves and their families by doing menial jobs that required their meeting with others. Such jobs include street-hawking, bricks lifting, trading, farming, fishing and so on, which they go out on daily basis to do. The question of self-preservation by staying at home was borne as an act of wickedness from the government. To make matters worse, the government announced the availability of palliative; but the palliative did not go round every home. It was only a paltry worth, doled to political party loyalists. This resulted to hunger, anger and suppressed-aggression. Citizens began to realize the howling fate they may confront if

they had to lock themselves down for longer time than manageable to avoid death. The weak and poorly coordinated political system (Udoinwang and Amonyze 2022) even added to aggravate the situation that made much of the vulnerable citizens to panic about the situation and the future.

The fight against the pandemic and scare of famine smoldered to despondency. The only option to survive rested on self-isolation and costume and accessories, which was the practical thing along with incessant hand washing to rinse off the pervading virus. In the face of this oppressive atmosphere and near-death predicament, people in Nigeria, found it hard to conform to the government directive, but the desire to impress through outlook set a longing for dressing to attract. The people rather resorted to creative way and innovative approach which in the designing and creation of anti-pandemic costumes in the form of face mask “to match” aesthetic cravings to avoid seclusion. Dressing to match began to stimulate appeal. The desire to look good spurred the urge to heighten new fashion in the art of human contact, and surprisingly, adherence to the appeal persuaded the people to conform to the Covid-19 directives and protocols. The government imposed order meant to protect the state generally a, and individual compliance to the pandemic directives began to improve. This sudden swing from the fear-to-be-buried to the desire-to-be-admired brought the view of Daniel Berlyne, who acknowledges that in the time of conflict, people are unnecessarily aroused. Meaning that the need to regenerate warmth, see friends and above all, look for food and emotional solace can cause arousal to tender emotion. Such consciousness is primarily demonstrated in embellished appearance which costume is the harbinger (443-444). In the same vein, Ludwig Gumplowicz and Karl Mannheim corroborate that “when the reduction of one motivation stimulus involves an increase in another, so that a new adjustment is demanded... the conflicts that involve intense threat or fear are not solved readily but make the person feel helpless and anxious... directed more to relief of anxiety than to the solution of real problem” (britannica.com). Thus, appearance to be loved, appraised and rated beautiful rather diminished the fear for death. As situation went forth, government directives began to filter through the evolving social bend initiated by design. Techniques of costume design raised the index of self-preservation accessories.

It may be a counter discourse in presenting the urge to be admired over the desire to live in the society, but in the pandemic era, body accessories revitalized the social outlook of the society. This makes the critique of body accessories quite relevant to the communicative value in the pandemic-ravaged society. To this effect, this paper discusses how aesthetics swayed compliance to self-preservation directives through design techniques in the curtailment of Covid-19 pandemic in the society.

Theoretical Framework

In a pandemic situation death mulls over the universe gulping human beings one after another as witnessed during the peak period of the era that erupted from Wuhan City of China in 2019. Mankind witnessed a natural oppression. In Nigeria, like elsewhere, it was a prolonged lockdown curfew to dissuade people from unnecessary and movements and contacts in the bid to tune down the tempo and spread of the virus

whirling from one person to another. But in a country where majority are not employed, where many people do not have a bank account let alone having money for future use, it turned out to be that the federal government directives for safety without equitable disbursement of funds and palliative materials to citizens were another series of oppression. In the communities, the notion of going out on daily basis to find food met with the government directive that people should restrain themselves down in their house to avoid contracting and spreading the virus. Conversely, the government did not make palliative equitable to its citizen as it made the directive general to all. This appeared as an extreme case of oppression. Surprisingly, a way of dressing evolved independently from the malaise following the germaneness of costume design. For this reason, this paper is drawing its theoretical foundation from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed.

Theatre of the oppressed has become a moral speculation in theatre studies reflecting the human motive to reinvent in the shackles of torment. In some case, frustration can make the human mind to bends to corrupt practices and violence dispositions in the society but a creative person may rather look to how innovation can spring from the torment. Creativity complements violence in the era of bondage “and the popular perspective here is the frustration-aggression thesis which attributes violence to frustration” (Osaghae 9) and frustration to innovativeness. Thus, this theory focuses on the quirk in human composure in the loss of directness of action and the frustration that pervades the mind during oppressive condition of which the single weapon to defile death and search for food is costume. Boal considers a theatre that should shake off the seeds of torment and frustration which Dipo Irele calls “the injury or harm done to the human psyche” (5), caused by a restrictive system. Boal advocates a regeneration of wakefulness even when one faces a threat of extinction like Covid-19. Going by this, such threat of death to people of Nigeria in particular and others heightened by the lockdown order without equitable relief materials to citizens except political party votaries was a bulk of oppression. According to Ashley Crossman, “this kind of oppression include the systematic mistreatment, exploitation, and abuse of a... people by another group (which) occurs whenever one group holds power over another in the society through the control of social institutions, along with society's law, customs and norms” (though.com). In which case, Nigerians as elsewhere were threatened by a pandemic; instead of a consolatory relief, they were lockdown without preparation and adequate food. They at most loosen their grip with their loved ones - all by government rule to prevent the rise of victims on the ladder of social media on pandemic in the society.

However, Theatre of the Oppressed advocates a rethink in the depth of disillusionment by re-directing the mind to something beautiful, which is beauty from oppression. This means, the oppressed can use the oppressive system as a springboard to negotiate a design in scripting, directing, costuming, making up, filming, lighting, teaching etc., as an aspect of performance. Performance in this sense focuses on using the human body to produce a change. In Boal's view,

The means of producing theatre are made up of man himself, obviously more difficult to manage. We can begin by stating that the first word of the theatrical vocabulary is the human body, the main source of sound and movement. Therefore, to control theatrical production, man must, first of all, control his body; know his body in order to be capable of making it more expressive... (to) free himself from his conditions (126).

To this effect, the costumer gropes in this darkness for light which shines in his ability to use the beam of the oppression to recreate. Oppressive system should be a vocation for the theatre artist, while oppression itself becomes a raw material for content. The pandemic brought untold agony, tears, fears and even petals of blood (Uoro and Udoette 2020) sort of situation in most countries of the world. Theatre of the oppressed recognizes the indignity in creating out of torment. It appraises dehumanization not as bestial but resurging index towards creativity in a pandemic. In the view of Paulo Freire, dehumanization is caused and reinforced by a circumstance the dehumanized may contribute even. The moment one is dipped in oppression, one should turn the situation to a vocation that can energize innovation aiming at restricting adverse conditions that may alienate people from living. It is possible to breakthrough since dehumanization is a fall out from unjust order. It is the unjust order that reinforces aggressiveness in the oppressors' psyche goading them to dehumanize others (26) Creativity radiates from nature; it does not disappear when it is blocked in the face of oppression; it should then recoil naturally to obvious whorls and eddy from every loophole of the creative theatre person.

Pandemic Outbreak and the Nigeria's situation

Pandemic refers to the outbreak of a disease that rapidly spreads and affects many people. The *BBC English Dictionary* defines it as “a disease or problem that affects everybody over a wide area”. It is usually a disease which may cause sickness even death to people. In which case, “illnesses are experiences of devalued changes in states of being and social function: diseases are abnormalities in the structure and function of body organ and system” (Eisenberge cited in Haralambos, Holborn and Healed 281). In a case like this, as Victor Assi, Grace Peters and Abanimebon Augustine put: “despite the effort by government and non-governmental organizations and church mission, it may continue to rise with its attendant consequences on the socio-economic and health implication on the nation's development in attaining sustainable health” (395). Pandemic can occur in any form.

Many eras have experienced various forms of pandemic outbreak which the major countering forces vary considerably due to the nature of the disease. In the view of Nicolas Napan, pandemics began as supernatural check. The example was the Justinian Plague (*Yersinia pestis bacteria*) which was traced to China and northeast India. It was conceived to be unleashed by the gods to punish the erring people; yet it later spread to a general malaise. In 1854, London experienced Cholera which later spread to other parts of the world via tainted water (weforum.org). Furthermore, certain dates have that Antonin plague occurred in 165 AD; 5 million people died and no one knew the cause. Plague of Justinian arose; 25 million people died, and the cause was

Bubonic plague. In 1346 to 1353, another pandemic caused still by Bubonic plague spewed and gulped 200 million people. It began from Asia but the fleas living in rats in ships spread the sickness to Europe and Africa. Being that sea ports were the major point of contact, it activated its spread from the port to the heartland. In 1852 to 1860, Third Cholera Pandemic rose from India and killed about 1 million people. John Snow discovered its cause to be from contaminated water. In 1889 to 1890, a virus called Influenza discharged flu from Asia which is recorded as the first true pandemic. The flu killed 1 million people. In 1910 to 1911, Sixth Cholera pandemic broke out and exterminated 800,000. The way to curtail it was to isolate injected people. In 1918, Flu pandemic caused by influenza erupted. The pandemic superseded the first influenza that killed only children and weak people who had trace of terminal sickness in them as it killed strong healthy people but left children and people with weaker immune system to survive. In 1956 to 1958, another pandemic called Asian flu caused by influenza broke out in China and devoured people down to United States of America; 2 million people died. In 1968, Hong Kong Flu came up and killed 1 million people. HIV/AIDS purported to have been detected in Democratic Republic of Congo earlier in 1976 simmered between 2005 and 2012. The pandemic has killed 36 million, and many people still live with the virus since it is manageable today. At Wuhan in China in December 2019, a virus named Corona virus sizzled. It is called Covid-19 (mphonline.org).

Covid-19 broke out in Wuhan in 2019 and spread to many parts of the world. In Nigeria, the first recorded case was on the 27th of February in Lagos (ncdc.gov.ng). According to Ridwan Ibrahim, Kazeen Ajide and Omokanmi Julius, “the first phase of the lockdown was announced by the president on 27th April, 2020 with effect from May 4 to 17 (ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). The most emphasized method to curtail the spread was to lockdown virtually all institutions and places that people gather. Self-preservation centered on costume such as the use of medical facemask which was only obtainable from the health centers. Alternatively, local designers began to sew facemask in varying shapes to Nigerian citizen in affordable price. The facemasks actually instilled the presence of death in the minds of the people but since its deadness appeared superficial, churches actually defiled the dress culture and many social groups in, especially, villages, downplayed the self-preservation method to the point that two people out of every three would cast the mask carelessly to the face in derogation for apt disbelief in the reality of the virus. Those who got facemasks from the government put them on and discarded them to preserve themselves since they got a steady supply from the source. Others who never had access to free medical or surgical mask lobbied for a-use-and-wash-to-use-again pieces of clothes which many people left unwashed for weeks bereft of accumulating bacteria that may breed more agents of infection that exacerbate the spread unnoticed. After all, the costume and the accessories were symbols of extermination to them. In Nigerian cultural context, no one preserves a shroud; it is thrown to the grave. To treasure a cloth death dwells, a different orientation needs to be disseminated. Costume designers bent the death-sign (accessories worn to prevent death) through techniques to fantasy signal that people craved openly for.

Costume Design

Costume has gradually widened from a set of paraphernalia a performer clothes on stage to the daily apparel people put on in life. In Milly Barranger's view, costume is practically a performance component. It includes everything a performer puts on to perform with which his age, time of the performance, the mood of the performer, his relationship with other characters, the theme under discussion, and the genre the performance is based, can be inferred (247). Costume becomes an image maker and focal index of appeal.

In another development, through costume, a collective perception can be fused and a united aim activated. For instance, footballers, baseball players, volleyball players and other sports group identify each other through costume. In sports activity, Cornelius Okoro and William Jones observe that conformity can be harnessed through sameness of dress, and the aim of a contest is intensified by the virtue of sameness in colour motivated by costume (56, 573-574). The design of human clothing compels oneness, spirit of sportsmanship, and consciousness to work and achieve an aim together. The essence in this context is "the ways dress is used to bring people together in consciousness, identities and realities for implored living, for socio-economic developmental terms... (to) unite and integrate a people" (Obafemi 12).

Costume communicates an era and serves as an intensifier to an occurrence that may have happened during that period. Such situation can be drawn from the depiction of Rome with its military gears, Medieval with a somber draped tunic and elaborate embroidered cassock, and the modern period with a lab-coat. Besides, in such era like the Dark Ages (medieval) where much symbolic portrayal of abstract concepts was the culture, accessories like masks were used to emphasize an idea, may be, Grace, Calmness, Horror, Good, Bad, Somberness or so. Oscar Brockett submits thus:

Costumes were used to distinguish among the inhabitant of the earth, heaven, and hell. Secular, earthly characters (no matter the period or place of the action) wore contemporary medieval garments appropriate to their rank, profession, or gender, since no attempt was made to achieve historical accuracy. God, the angels, the saint, and certain biblical characters wore church garment... the greatest design imagination went into the costume of devils who were fancifully conceived with wings, claws, beaks, horns, or tails. The devil also often masked to emphasize their deformities... In its time, it made efficient use of convention that provoked the human condition as the medieval mind understood (95-96).

The main theme, challenges, mindset and general perception of a time can be captured in a costume. The Covid-19 bodily gears also set as a new phase to costume history. Costume can be used for body preservation. Over the years, the major essence of putting on clothes has always been to cover the body. In covering one's body, one has protected oneself from the freeze of cold, the bite of poisonous insects and from unexpected fly-objects that may come towards one's direction. Within this range, costume beautifies, creates warmth, embellishes people's outlook and protects the

body. This makes costume to feature for every era in a multipurpose way. In the aspect of protection, “it is about fussing diffuse issues... and remaking of clothes to cover and uncover our bodies-to give shape, aesthetic pleasure value, sense, for, and meaning of clothes that we put on to protect ourselves” (Obafemi 12). Therefore, costume design may boost self-preservation in a pandemic era.

Self-Preservation Techniques through Costume

A typical Nigerian person explores dressing to emphasize the natural grace of something else away from mere covering of the body. For instance, a man who views the welt of his biceps to be attractive usually chooses a peculiar clothe to register his ego in the swells of the biceps; a lady who possesses a tuber of heavy breasts intensifies the grace in the choice of clothing; the one with medium size does same with costume; and the one who has small breast uses costume to create effect. Through clothing, all sizes become a grace to behold. Among the fat, the slim and the chubby, it is in the use of clothe that each is made to appeal consistently. In this manner, costume filtered through this notion of grace to self-preservation technique in Nigerian society during the Covid-19 pandemic era.

A notable factor is that in virtually every opportunity, the designer explored to clone the desirable (dress to appeal) on the obligatory (covid-19 gears enforced by the government) as the era enforced. This is viewed this way because the people of Nigeria emphasize arts; they pay more attention to their outlook; and they take time to embellish their appearance even in the face of sorrow (Ntia 177-178; Udoh 144-145). Other nations of the world as showcased in the media had a similar problem. In terms of design, the opportunity was explored as techniques by designers to make a vital impact that shifted people from conceiving facemasks, gloves and other accessories deployed to counteract Covid-19 as instrument of death to objects of appeal. The techniques are discussed in distinct subheads with details and example in pictures:

Face Mask on Festive Attire

In Nigeria, for instance, there is usually a high rate of responses to occasions such as marriages, weddings, funerals, political special sit-outs, and religious gathering. In the Covid-19 era, certain cultures which engender gathering in crowds and groups were prohibited but people still defied the order to converge and practice their culture. During church activities which few people were ordered to converge in church buildings, Nigerians designed their facemasks from the cloth of their clothes. The use of the material engaged in making trousers, shirts, skirts, dress and cap to design facemask tickled the urge to own some and showcase same during festive period. Thus, a way of doing it neat and beautiful without the augury shadow of death was defied. This aesthetic combination became a self-preservation technique.



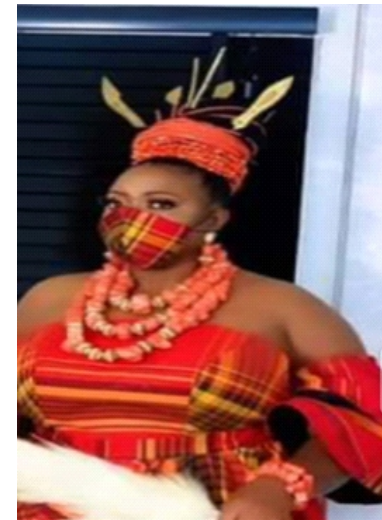
Courtesy of Peace Lionel, 2021



Courtesy of Peace Lionel, 2021



Courtesy of Facebook.com, 2021



Courtesy of Facebook.com, 2021



Margaret Akpan's Collection, 2021



Courtesy of Google, 2021



Courtesy of Abeegy
7Clothing Fashion, 2021

Hand Gloves in Colours of Face Mask and Body Accessories

The use of hand gloves was not actually trending but the deployment of colours to match the handbag, shoes and even bangles drawn from the reflection of the face mask became exceptionally appealing. This design encouraged mostly ladies to comfortably go to their business with death signals every wherein confidence and assurance of security guaranteed.



Courtesy of Studio and Talia in Rabimov, 2021



Courtesy of Akese Style lines in Rabimov, 2021



Courtesy of Forbes, 2021



Courtesy of Lydia Eshiet: Facebook, 2021

Medical Costume

Nigerian hospitals quite like other countries of the world which most Covid-19 cases were erected, preservation technique was observed in the elaborated use of thick layered coat, hand glove, and facemask. The use of lab-coat was declined for coveralls. A special brand of foot wear was introduced, and medical workers appeared romantic instead of horrible which the period portended.



Courtesy of Google, 2021



Courtesy of Google, 2021

Plastic Mask Synchronizing Trimmed Coveralls:

The emergence of plastic mask was somewhat elitist in Nigeria. Gradually, it became a common man mask but due to its broadness, few sets like Keke-riders, motor cyclists, drivers and select-men like welders and traders use it. When it began to draw

attention, it was used with the tendency to match with other bodily gears. A blue pigmented one would be used with blue painted nails in ladies while men would choose their clothes also to reflect the blue. So did it go across to encourage more design within the society.



Courtesy of Google, 2021



Courtesy of Esther Anietie, 2021

Actually, medical costumes are not usually designed to command appeal. They never really attract costume designers' attention to build on their usual green and white (in the case of Nigeria) accessories. It was a sense of curiosity that drew designers to opt for designing face masks that actually looked much like the government accessories. The notion seemed to evolve from the hyped price of hygienic mask sold in the health centres. It was like oppression to the people; which means, only those who work in the hospital or health institution; that is, those who can either get hygienic accessories or procure in affordable price could live. The difference was colour and, maybe, some speculative claims in the hospital to their life-giving accessories, but designers began to create the medical costume which also helped in the self-preservation crusade. Thus, the tradition of putting on a facemask was the highest form of moral duty (Charles 117). Maintaining the medical hygiene ambience was heightened to draw more patronages to costume designs that attracted many people. People conformed because of appeal than any other fact of preventing the pandemic.

Conclusion

Creativity is a decision sharpened in consciousness. The creative person is wakeful to virtually every situation of concern around him at all times. In the Covid-19 period, the government directive to prevent the spread of the virus was a total lockdown, or alternatively, putting on of facemask, glove or a shield. These two options were sure safe self-preservative options but they were viewed as oppressive since majority of people live by daily engagement and bodily contact with, which they go out every day to get their needs. Conformity to the costume alternative was the easiest but it was more as a mark of fear for death and surrender to the oppression of social malaise. Costume designers began to design costume for aesthetics through Covid-19 model. This persuaded everyone to bend practically to self-preservation order. Facemasks, gloves, lap coats, coveralls, plastic mask, and other pandemic prevention accessories were practically worn as aspects of aesthetic than a costume to dissuade death. Self-preservation techniques can build from self-beatification. Consciousness to bodily order can engender consciousness for social order.

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