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## Practical Considerations in Designing Costumes for Contemporary Dance Performances in Cape Coast, Ghana

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### Abstract



*The African space is characterised by performances of diverse forms, and dance remains a cornerstone in this regard. Notably, contemporary dance has become widespread in Ghana, especially in Cape Coast, where its utilitarian and aesthetic forms are greatly appreciated. Costume, a vital visual element in performances, plays a key role in contemporary dance, where its stylistic representation adds to the depth and breadth of the performance. Unlike various traditional dances in Ghana associated with the use of specific costumes identified based on inspiring philosophical postulations that shaped the dance, the same cannot be said of costumes used for contemporary dance. Drawing on the qualitative method of inquiry and using the purposive sampling technique to sample three dance groups in Cape Coast, the study employed a semi-structured interview guide as an instrument to*

*collect data to beam a search into practical considerations in designing costumes for contemporary dance performances in Cape Coast. The findings revealed that designing costumes for contemporary dance is not done in a vacuum but thrives on the colour of fabrics, the body size of performers, the dance movements involved, the motifs in the fabric used to construct costumes and finally, the cost of materials. With a treasure trove of findings, the study recommends that dance groups engage professional costumiers to costume their performances. Ultimately, the study contributes to scholarship on costume design for contemporary dance performances as it pertains to Cape Coast in particular and the Ghanaian experience.*

**Keywords:** Cape Coast, Costume, Contemporary Dance, Designing, Performance

## **1. Introduction**

The African continent is home to a wide variety of performing arts that act as platforms for the explicit display of the sociocultural beliefs passed down to its populace from one generation to the next. Undoubtedly, dance remains one such art form that has survived the test of time from antiquity to the present and has been part of various civilisations across the globe, including Ghana. Dance is highly valued in Ghana's social life, traditional and religious spaces, and academia, where it is studied as a discipline in some universities. As noted by Kwakye-Opong and Salifu (2015), in the African setting, dance is not seen as an isolated art form. It encompasses the entire living process. This indicates that dance forms part of the day-to-day activities of people in a community. During life-cycle events such as funerals, marriages and puberty rites, among others, dance forms an integral part of the celebrations. Ufford (2010) gave his view on dance:

A human behaviour composed of purposefully, rhythmically and culturally patterned sequences of non-verbal movement and gesture which elaborate the world view of the society. As such, dance is shaped by the values, attitudes and beliefs of the people who comprise its host, society; it depends on their feeling, thinking, and dynamics, in their combination and consequent form and style do not exit apart from the human behaviour process that produces them. (p.124)

From the foregoing reflections by Ufford (2010), two main issues emerge. First, dance is purposefully crafted and follows a particular rhythm built on a cultural block, which makes the dance unique to the specific group of people where it originated. Second, the stylistic representation of the dance movement is framed by influences regarding the values, attitudes and beliefs of the people who formed it. Inference from these is a testament that a particular dance may reflect the ideals or philosophy of the cultural space of its origin. Again, because dance is influenced by the feelings, thoughts and dynamics of those who create it, I contend that different dance forms tend to emerge from different lines of thought. Undergirding these thoughts is the fact that the human body serves as the medium through which dance occurs, and this is manifested in non-verbal forms, including gestures. This means that gestures, as evident in dance, may not be made for dancing's sake but embedded with meaning to affirm a society's cultural sensibilities or historical experiences, among others. Ultimately, these gestures are expressed using parts of the human body, such as the feet, legs, head, fingers, face, and arms, among others, to support their expressive, ritualistic, or aesthetic dimensions based on their representations.

In Ghana, beyond the existence of traditional dance forms such as *Agbadza* by the Anlo-Ewes, *Adowa* by the Akan, *Kpalongo* by Ga people, *Apatampa* by Fante people, *Bamaya* by the Dagbamba people, and many more, there is also contemporary dance. Unlike traditional African dances, which do not occur in isolation but often play specific roles within an event or a complex of events earmarked for a specific occasion (Ufford, 2010), contemporary dance assumes a different dimension. Although various traditional dances in Ghana are associated with the use of specific costumes identified based on inspiring philosophical postulations that shaped the dance (Younge, 2011), contemporary dance costumes cannot be said to be the same. Consequently, the need to explore practical considerations in designing costumes for contemporary dance. The overarching objective of this study was to explore practical considerations in designing costumes for contemporary dance performances in Cape Coast, Ghana. Ultimately, this study adds to the body of knowledge and appreciation of costume design and fills a very important lacuna in the literature on contemporary dance in Ghana. The study makes an important contribution to performing arts curriculum as it offers a good basis for relevant education for cultural coordinators, lecturers in the fields of costume design, contemporary dance, choreographers and students in performance studies in general to enhance their knowledge.

Although contemporary dance is dotted across the length and breadth of Ghana, the study was delimited to Cape Coast, the former capital of Ghana. In the next section, I examine the concept of contemporary dance to situate the discussion in context.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1 Conceptualising Contemporary Dance**

Over the years, scholars have produced several debates on the definition of contemporary dance (Albright, 2010; Buday, 2006; Lepecki, 2012). These contestations, perhaps, stem from the philosophy, context and orientation that shaped their postulations. From a general perspective, Volbea (2018, p. 308) reveals that when individuals “deliberate on contemporary art... they often refer to the latest developments in these fields”. From Volbea’s illumination, a key issue emerges. The current representation of the art (dance) might have gone through various phases to reflect what is in vogue and is acceptable by the majority of people. Senturk (2011) argues that contemporary dance is a genre that surfaced in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Martha Graham as the pioneer (Adair & Burt, 2016; Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). Carlson, Schiphorst, and Shaw (2011, p. 1) have put forward that the main idea that birthed contemporary dance was the need to “break the boundaries of traditional ballet technique and strictly narrative dance forms”. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that the quest to be liberated from long-standing traditional dance forms to embrace a new dance genre that does not seek to put the dancer in a confined and specified dance movement was the nub on which contemporary dance was founded. As a result, Otoo (2021) views contemporary dance as a genre of dance that is expressive and elaborate, where individuals act out their emotions through dance. As such, it is a combination of an individual’s feelings interpreted through dance movements and includes all forms of expressivity. Consequently, Carlson et al. (2011, p. 1) are of the view that contemporary dance “is a visceral art form that is often considered to be abstract and avant-garde.” From the views of these scholars, contemporary dance relates to the expression of deep inward feelings expressed in an abstracted form, which might not necessarily connote any meaning with regard to the dance movement as compared to traditional dance. On the heels of the foregoing, I argue that contemporary dance movements thrive on startling, intriguing ideas.

A key advantage of engaging in contemporary dance for the choreographer is that he or she is free to express his or her creative prowess and emotions in any form. In this regard, Zafeiroudi (2021) has observed that contemporary dance is a genre that is made up of diverse traditional dance styles established through borrowing techniques from many traditional styles and combining them with the choreographers' ideas. As such, existing dance movements formed the bedrock on which contemporary dance was fashioned. As a result, it is not misleading to state that some dance movements in traditional dances are blended with emerging dance movements to generate contemporary dance, where movements are picked, abstracted, and reconstructed. Through this, it allows for the merging and reworking of dances such as ballet, *Adowa*, *Kpalongo*, *Apatampa*, and many more with the blending of movements in physiological activities such as walking, running, jumping, and other related movements. Sackey (2021) asserts that contemporary dance is a combination of dance movements from hip-hop, jazz, and traditional African dance movements, each clothed with visual and aesthetic elements and represented on stage. From personal experience and observation within the Ghanaian context, *Azonto* is an example of a contemporary dance that surfaced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where both the young and the old continue to engage in its movement. As observed by Azaglo et al. (2022), the *Azonto* dance, which originated from coastal towns in Ghana such as Chorkor, James Town, Teshie, Nungua and Tema and later became widespread in the entire country, has a connection to the traditional *Kpanlogo Ga* dance. The *Azonto* dance is associated with hands, shoulders, legs, knee bending and hip movements, with the dance movements mimicking everyday activities like driving, boxing, ironing clothes and washing dishes, among others. As a result, they are gestural codes that make visual statements of expression. The use of costumes as a visual element in contemporary dance cannot be overemphasised due to the myriad of importance they bring to the fore throughout the entire performance. In the next thread of discussion, I explore costume as a key visual element in dance.

## **2.2 Costume: A Silent Visual Element that Propels Dance Performances**

Costume remains one of the most powerful visual elements in the performing arts cycle and has been defined from varying perspectives by different scholars. Anderson and Anderson (1999) have argued that costumes include all items a performer wears, including nothing at all. Anderson and Anderson's views on costumes are embedded with two important concerns: First, costume encompasses the apparel and accessories donned by a performer. As a result,

costumes include items worn by the performer that are primarily made of fabrics, leather, beads, foam, paper, and other materials. Again, the application of grease, makeup and related items are all costumes worn by the dancer in ways that can accentuate and enhance dance aesthetics in general. Second, the performer, who wears nothing at all to perform, is also in costume. This means that the appearance of the performer, who is not wrapped or covered with any material or accessories, is also a costumed body. Similarly, Campbell (2004, p. 4) states that “any kind of clothing, or anything at all worn by a performer, including masks and jewelry”, is a costume.

Observing generally, it is noticed that the costumed body enveloped in materials is characterised by two elements: the colour of the fabric and the style of the costume. Colours have an impact on humans, and their representations differ from one person to the next based on varied understandings. As noted by Kwakye Opong (2014, p. 113), “colour meanings and symbolisms throughout the world depend on the culture and ethnicity of the people.” Therefore, the people who live in a particular geographic area shape the meaning and symbolism of colours. Consequently, Qiang (2011) highlights that in Chinese culture, the colour red represents happiness. However, Antubam (1963), Hagan (1964) and Sarpong (1974) have divulged that the colour red within the Ghanaian context connotes sadness, death, sorrow, and grief. While the costumier may use red fabric to construct costumes for performers to express sadness within the Ghanaian context, he will again use the red colour of the costume to express happiness within the Chinese cultural space. This observation suggests that in order to choose particular fabric colours for costumes for particular occasions, it is necessary to place the symbolism of colours within a particular cultural context. This, therefore, thrives on the appreciation of colours in the cultural setting that shaped them.

The style of costume also makes a statement about the performer. However, as noted by Strand-Evans (2014), a key factor that informs the style of a costume is the cost of fabric. He explains that “even when it is (fabric) available, the perfect fabric may cost more than a limited costume budget will allow” (p.129). This, therefore, has implications for the style of costume to be designed. Beyond the cost of fabric, Sidberry (2011) has also noted that body sizes or shapes of performers or actors have effects on the designing of costumes and for that reason, costumiers must be aware of the various body sizes to inform their designing decisions. To improve the body sizes of performers psychologically, Gbetodeme et al. (2016) have indicated that line as an element of design can

create a visual illusion if used skillfully. Curved lines tend to add softness and femininity to a design, while vertical lines have a tendency to lengthen the body and make it appear slimmer. Horizontal lines also add width to the wearer.

For dance performances to thrive, whether traditional, African, or contemporary, costume remains one of the silent and salient visual tools used to release the soul of the choreographer onto the stage. This is because costumes worn for dance performances affect representations of the dance movements involved and an appreciation of this further adds breadth to the performance. As noted by Dennis and Bello (2015, p. 37), “the performer does not perform solely to portray his emotion, but his emotions are catalysed by the costumes he wears based on his character or role analysis.” For many years, dance performances have been among the several performing arts sectors that have made extensive use of costumes to shape their essence and being. As such, traditional African dances that originated in Ghana have all made use of costumes. Beyond the use of costumes to cover dancers’ bodies, a semiotic interpretation of dance costumes also serves as an avenue that distinguishes a dance from others in non-verbal terms (Kwakyee-Oppong & Salifu, 2015). This is because imagery or motifs in costumes serve as a means of cultural expression, which is evident in the designs in flags and fabrics and their interpretation within a cultural space helps to appreciate them (Kwakyee-Oppong, 2011). The use of costumes in contemporary dance is even more profound, as it brings intriguing perspective to the entire dance performance. Since contemporary dance thrives on creativity, costumiers have the liberty to break boundaries and permeate non-conventional fields to achieve their goals. From this exposition, the overall aesthetic representation of costume in the dance performance serves as a driver of the entire performance.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Profile of the Study Area**

Cape Coast is the former capital of Ghana and is among several historic towns as well. Originally known as *Cabo Corso* by the Portuguese, which meant “short cape”, Cape Coast remains the corrupted version of *Cabo Corso* (Hyland, 1995; Sarpong & Botchway, 2017). However, indigenes of Cape Coast refer to the town as *Oguaa*, which was coined from *gua*, a Fante word that means market. This was as a result of several marketing activities that took place at Cape Coast, largely because colonialists used the community as a place to sell their goods. Subsequently, Cape Coast served as a transit point for transporting slaves from

Ghana to the diaspora during the slave trade period (Hyland, 1995; Oppong et al., 2017). Crabs were in abundance in the town when the early settlers arrived. As such, these settlers fed on the crabs. Members who were engaged in catching the crabs called the area characterized by crabs as *koto-wuraba* meaning crab rivulets. The area was later called *Koto-Kuraba*, which is a corrupted version of *koto-wuraba* (Hyland, 1995). In terms of language, the indigenous people speak Fante. However, due to the settlement of other ethnic groups in the community and other foreigners, several languages are spoken in the town. Traditionally, the people of Cape Coast engage in fishing, while others also engage in crop farming (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). Due to the many tourist sites dotted around Cape Coast, the town is considered the tourist hub of Ghana. These tourist centres include the Cape Coast Castle, the London Bridge, Fort William and many more. Subsequently, both locals and foreigners travel to see the town. Beyond these, the town is also the home of the beginning of Methodism in Ghana, with the first Methodist church, the Wesley Cathedral, established in 1835 at Chapel Square, a sub-burb of Cape Coast (Richmond & Cornelius, 2021; Yalley, 2018). The people of Cape Coast celebrate the annual *Fetu Afahye*, their traditional festival, during the first week of September every year. In terms of formal education in Ghana, Cape Coast is revered as the citadel of education due to the many second cycle institutions whose students mostly perform very well in standardized examinations. A number of performing arts groups, including Fancy Dress masquerade clubs, dance ensembles, theatre and choral groups, and many more, abound in the town and their performances are patronised by both locals and foreigners.

### **3.2 Methods and Process**

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. On the part of Hammarberg et al. (2016, p. 499), a “qualitative research approach is used to answer questions about the experience, meaning, and perspectives, most often from the standpoint of the participant.” As a result, for the current study, the views of participants were used to construct the narrative of costume designing in contemporary dance due to their rich experiences. The study employed the case study design of qualitative research. As noted by Creswell (2009), case studies are used to study one or more cases within a bounded setting. For the current study, the bounded context was Cape Coast, where I purposefully sampled three dance groups for studying. These were the Odikro Royals Dance Group (ORDG), African Footprint International (AFPI) and African Foundation Dance Theatre (AFODAT). These three dance groups were selected due to the



precision, dexterity, aesthetics and display of mastery associated with the manner in which they carry out their dance performances. These efforts have resulted in the dance groups becoming well-known throughout Cape Coast and beyond. With the intention of interviewing artistic directors and costumiers of these dance groups, it turned out that the artistic directors also doubled as individuals who designed costumes for their respective dance groups. As a result, the three artistic directors formed the sample size for the study. The sample size of three is justified because qualitative research often requires a few participants who bring on board their rich experiences to craft the narrative of a phenomenon (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Chrisweel, 2014; Given, 2008). The semi-structured interview was the main instrument used to collect data. Specifically, the semi-structured interview guide was employed because of its unique quality, which allows the researcher to probe for further clarification from participants (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Wilson, 2013). With the permission of the participants, the interview was recorded using an android phone with an in-built recorder. The data collection was done in March 2022, and a session lasted for about 35 minutes. The data collected through interviews were transcribed and coded, and a thematic analysis based on an inductive approach was employed to analyse the data manually.

### **3.3 Profile of Selected Dance Groups**

The three dance groups that were purposefully selected for the study were Odikro Royals Dance Company (ORDC), African Footprint International (AFPI), and African Foundation Dance Theatre (AFODAT). To put into practice and expand the frontiers of what he learned during his undergraduate and postgraduate studies at the University of Cape Coast as a dance scholar, ORDC was formed in 2016 by the artistic director. The ORDC is made up of fifteen (15) members, comprising three (3) females and twelve (12) males. The founder, who also serves as the artistic director, has choreographed a number of contemporary dances for different occasions. Over the years, since 2016, the ORDC has partnered with the Department of Music and Dance, University of Cape Coast (UCC), to execute some performances. These include council procession and performance interludes at the University of Cape Coast congregation, traditional marriage rites, funerals, weddings, and the teaching and learning of dance. In terms of the designing of the dance company's costumes, the founder-artistic director of the dance company conceptualises and sketches the various designs of costumes and constructs them with the help of two female dancers who have mastery in sewing (ORDC participant, personal communication, March 24, 2022).

African Footprint International (AFPI) was established some twenty-two (22) years ago in Cape Coast at Green Hill, Addison Street. Membership in the AFPI comprises both individuals who have a hearing impairment and those without a hearing impairment. By dint of hard work, fortitude and the need to expand their boundaries beyond the borders of Ghana, the AFPI has birthed a branch in Denmark called African Footprint Legend (AFPL). As a result, some AFPI members have joined AFPL, and whenever the AFPI embarks on an exchange programme to perform in Denmark, they travel with a few Ghanaian members and rely on colleagues in the legend group. Being a non-governmental organisation, the AFPI performs at every event to raise money to support the business's ongoing operations. As part of their annual activities, the AFPI organises the "Green Festival," which is a dance festival that brings on board different dance groups in Ghana and Denmark to showcase their prowess. In terms of costume design, the artistic director of the AFPI leads the discussion with members of the dance company and the final construction is done by members who have mastery in sewing (AFPI participant, personal communication, March 30, 2022).

The third dance group, African Foundation Dance Theatre (AFODAT), was established in 2006 at Kakumdo, a suburb in Cape Coast. This was after the participant, who doubles as the artistic director and founder, had performed well in the drama debate and writers club at the Cape Coast Technical Institute when he was a student. The AFODAT has a total membership of eighty (80) dancers. This is made up of fifteen (15) adults and sixty-five (65) young adults. The adult membership of fifteen comprises four (4) females and eleven (11) males, while the sixty-five membership of children is made up of forty (40) males and twenty-five (25) females. The AFODAT performs at the Pan-African Historical Theatre Festival (PANAFEST), receiving diplomats at the Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana, commissioning state projects such as the Cape Coast stadium and train station in Kojokrom in Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana. Beyond these, they have also performed at rites such as naming ceremonies, funerals and marriages. Brainstorming on costume choice for these performances is led by the founder-artistic director of the group with the four female adult dancers because they have some knowledge in sewing (AFODAT participant, personal communication, March 30, 2022).

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

In conducting this study, participants were duly informed about the nature and hub of the study. Again, participants' confidentiality and anonymity were taken into consideration, as these are critical ethos in research. On the basis of

confidentiality, the names of participants were not assigned to specific voices; however, an abbreviated form of the dance group's name was used to represent the voices of participants. For example, the participant of the Odikro Royals Dance Company was represented as "ORDC participant" while the participants of African Footprint International and African Foundation Dance Theatre were represented as "AFPI participant" and "AFODAT participant" respectively. The consent of participants was also sought, with participants signing a consent form.

## **5. Results and Discussion**

### **5.1 General Biographical Data**

Participants involved in the study comprised artistic directors of three dance groups in Cape Coast who engage in contemporary dance performances. All three participants were male, with an age range of 25 to 55 years. From the data, it emerged that participants were actively involved in contemporary dance performances prior to the formation or joining of their respective dance groups. As a result, participants brought a wealth of experience to their various groups. Two of the participants have a postgraduate degree in dance studies, while the other one possesses a secondary technical level of education. From the data, five themes emerged as factors considered for designing costumes for contemporary dance. These were the colour of fabrics; the body size of dancers; the dance movements involved; the motifs in the fabric; and finally, the cost of materials. These themes are discussed in detail in the next segment.

### **5.2 The Colour of Fabrics**

The colour of fabrics used to construct costumes for contemporary dance emerged from participants from different perspectives. The AFPI participant revealed:

*When a dancer mounts any stage, viewers' attention is directed at the dancer. Hence, there is a need to use colourful fabric to construct the costume to add to the aesthetics of the dance. I normally use a bright hue of fabric to add to the aesthetics of the dance. Although I consider bright colours of fabrics to construct my costumes, I also consider the use of the same costumes for other occasions. As such, there are instances when I also prefer colours that are not too bright.*

From the data, three key issues emerge. First, the colour of the fabric occupies centre stage in the designing of costumes for contemporary dance performances. This is because as dancers mount the stage, the attention of spectators is focused on them (the dancers), and for that reason, it is imperative to use bright colours of fabrics to construct the costume to make the dancers stand out. The AFODAT participant corroborated: “the colours of the fabric must arouse the attention of the audience”. Second, the use of bright colours of fabrics further adds to the aesthetics of contemporary dance. This arises when tints and shades of varying or the same colours of fabrics are used to construct costumes for a particular performance. Third, although bright colours of fabrics are preferred, some occasions where contemporary dances are performed do not warrant the use of bright colours of fabrics. To that end, the use of bright colours of fabrics has a limitation, given that the same costume will be worn for different occasions. Beyond the use of bright or dull colours of fabrics, as noted by the participant of the AFPI, the participant of the ORDC also brings to the fore intriguing varying viewpoints on this theme. Although the participant affirms the use of bright colours of fabrics to construct dance costumes, he holds the view that:

*...both the symbolic and aesthetic purposes of colours are explored. The symbolic meanings of colours within the Ghanaian context play a key role in the choice of the hue of fabrics. Although colour aesthetics are crucial, they play a minimal role.*

The ORDC participant’s view evokes concern about the use of colour as a symbol. While the fabric’s colour is an important factor, its symbolic interpretations are even more profound. This provides a means of utilising colours of costumes to elicit meaning and feelings, among others, where the costume serves as a vital visual narrative cue for the audience. On the heels of the forgoing, I argue that such approaches serve as conduits to a deeper understanding of the variety in colour usage and the connotations that accompany them across cultural boundaries and even within the same culture over time. This view is systematic with literature, as noted by Kwakye-Oppong (2014), who avers that the symbolic interpretations of colours differ from one civilization to the next largely based on the philosophy of the people who shaped them.

### **5.3 The Body Size of Dancers**

The body size of dancers is yet another factor that emerged when designing costumes for contemporary dance. As noted by the participant of the AFPI:

*We design our contemporary dance costumes to be used for several performances, not just a single or specific performance. As a result, costumes are designed to meet the body sizes of other performers as well. Because of this, we do not construct our costumes using the exact body measurements of a particular dancer. We consider the average body measurement of performers so that the costumes can be worn by a number of dancers with different body sizes over the years. We do this because we do not have enough resources to meet the needs of every dancer.*

Inference from the participant is an indication that although body measurement is needed to aid in the construction of costumes in general, the need to have a costume that can fit a number of performers becomes the pillar around which body measurement revolves to aid in the costume construction. On the heels of the foregoing, average body measurements of dancers are employed. While acknowledging that this approach provides a window for the dance company to make use of their limited financial resources, I argue that it may be associated with some challenges. First, there may be instances where the costume will have to be altered to fit other dancers, and when this persists, the costumier will be faced with the challenge of altering costumes every now and then. Second, granted that the alteration of costumes becomes routine, there will be a strain on the fabric used to construct the costume, and this may affect the durability of the fabric and the strength of the seams as well. This finding is consistent with literature by Sidberry (2011), who argues that body sizes or shapes have an impact on costume design, and as a result, costumiers must be aware of the various body sizes to inform their design decisions.

The participant of the ORDC noted that the body sizes of dancers are an important consideration in determining a contemporary dancer's costumes from another perspective:

*The actor must wear his body as a costume. It is good to show the skin of the dancer, and in such cases, when the dancer's body is very slim and too soft, it does not in any way add to the aesthetics of the dance. I tell some of my male dancers, who are slim, to hit the gym to amplify their bodies to appeal to the audience. Wear your skin so the costume reveals such body shapes, but not to reveal the private parts of dancers. In some cases, I apply body oil to the skin of dancers to enhance it.*

The ORDC participant's standpoint demonstrates that costume extends beyond the garments and accessories worn by performers. The focus is on the body structure and how it is presented to audiences. I argue that this is instructive and beyond that, it also brings intriguing dimensions to the fore. The need to consider the body as a form of costume is confirmed by Anderson and Anderson (1999), who have suggested that a costume encompasses everything the performer wears, including nothing at all. However, within this context, as evident in the data, the private parts of dancers are covered. From another dimension that hinges on showcasing vital parts of the performer's body, the AFODAT participant added:

*The display of vital human body parts in contemporary dance performances varies based on the kind of audience. With elderly consumers, we do not show more of the vital parts of the body, while youth audiences require displaying more vital parts that are enveloped in leotards.*

It is a fact that to be a performer in the contemporary dance space, dancers have to work on the appearance of their bodies to the extent that visiting the gym to enhance their muscles to appeal to spectators is necessary. This, therefore, compels the dancer to be mindful when he is gaining extra weight that puts his or her body out of the "box". The need to create a psychological effect in the minds of spectators on plus-size dancers and those who are short in height is another dimension to the body size of dancers that the ORDC participant brings on board. This arises because there is a need for the dancer to look smart, and being too big or too short detracts from achieving such goals. To avert this challenge, the use of lines, an element of design, helped in this context. Specifically, lines in fabrics offer some psychological effects. Hence, constructing costumes with fabrics with vertical lines compels the spectator to view the dancer from an up-to-down perspective to conform to the representation of the vertical line, which may psychologically add some height to the short as well as plus-size dancer. This outcome lends support and justification to the acknowledgement of Gbetodeme et al. (2016) that line as an element of design can create a visual illusion if used skillfully to improve the body sizes of performers psychologically.

#### **5.4 The Dance Movements Involved**

One of the themes that emerged from the participants on practical considerations in designing costumes for contemporary dance performances in Cape Coast was the dance movements involved. The thoughts and ideas of the participant

of the ORDC were:

*The dance movements to be projected and areas to be accentuated to give the dance its exaggerated form are highly considered. For pelvic movements, for example, I examine the rhythmic nature of the movement of the pelvis and design costumes to complement such movements rather than cover them up. In some cases, I design flare skirts with extra fullness incorporated at the waist line so that when the pelvis of the dancer swings up and down, the fullness in the skirt also swings in conformity to the movement of the pelvis. Similarly, where there are upper torso and stamping movements using the leg, I design costumes to amplify the body movements and help appreciate the aesthetics of the movement rather than to conceal them. When the costume fails to aid in projecting the body's movement, the dancer will exert more energy or power in his dance. However, the dance may not be appreciated because the costumes do not complement it.*

The foregoing serves as a testament to the fact that the dance movements involved in a specific contemporary dance are among the pillars that inform the design of its costumes. Because of this, costumes for contemporary dances are designed to accommodate, project, and amplify the dance movements. As a result, the rhythmic nature of the dance, based on its movement, is complemented by designing costumes that conform to it. These are done with the view of making the costume project the dance movements. It will, therefore, be out of place to design costumes that will not allow the aesthetics of the dance movement to be showcased and appreciated by spectators. When this happens, it will detract from the beauty of the dance and force the dancer to exert more energy with the goal of showcasing the dance movements involved to spectators. This means that the need to design costumes to project dance movements rather than obstruct them is key. The implication is that if the aesthetics embedded in the dance can be seen in the intricate leg movements, then the costumier must not design, for example, a long skirt that will conceal all the elaborate leg movements. Rather, a costume that seeks to project the dance movements will be appropriate.

The participant of the AFPI also revealed that dance movements serve as key determinants in designing costumes for contemporary dance. He narrated:

*... because the movements in contemporary dance are mostly very fast and sometimes characterized by kicking and summersault movements, among others, it is important to construct costumes that are not close fitting on the dancer. This is because, as the dancer engages in such vigorous movements wearing close-fitting costumes, especially tight pairs of trousers, the crotch of the trousers may get torn and expose the private part of the wearer. This does not also mean that we have to design loose-fitting costumes. The concern here is that the costume must not be too tight or too loose on the dancer.*

While the ORDC is concerned about designing costumes that can accentuate the dance movements to project their aesthetics, the concern of the AFPI is about the fit of the costume on the dancer in relation to the vigorous dance movements. The concern here is that although the fabric used to construct the costume may be durable and the seams very strong, the likelihood of the close-fitting costume getting torn when used for the dance performance is very high due to the vigorous movements involved. As a result, there is a need for costumiers to find a balance to achieve a good fit for dancers. Additionally, wearing a close-fitting costume to engage in such vigorous dance movements has the tendency to limit the dancer's ability to express his dance movements due to the seeming discomfort associated with the wearing of such a costume. The ensuing discussions are a testament to the fact that, although the two dance groups consider the dance movements involved, their ideas spring from different sources. Literature is silent on dance movements as a factor in designing contemporary dance costumes.

### **5.5 The Motifs in the Fabric**

Motifs printed on or found in fabrics are also another factor considered when designing costumes for contemporary dance. The ORDC participant informed:

*There are a number of fabrics on the market with different motifs. Motifs have meanings. As a result, I am open to the meanings of motifs in the fabric and their relationship to the occasion for which the contemporary dance is going to be performed. For instance, if I am putting a piece together for a marriage ceremony, then there is a need to get fabrics with motifs that either speak to marriage or have something to*



*do with progression or success to affirm the occasion. Hence, understanding the motifs in the fabric is vital.*

This arises because the meaning inherent in the motifs in fabrics varies from one civilization to the next. In Ghana, for example, printed textile cloth made by some textile manufacturers are associated with unique motifs that may reference an important event or proverbs that communicate nonverbally to individuals in a community. To this end, if one does not engage in a careful analysis of a motif, one may buy fabric with a motif that speaks to issues related to funerals for a marriage rite. As a result, understanding the meaning(s) of motifs in fabrics is essential in this endeavor. This outcome is confirmed by literature by Kwakye-Oppong (2011), who argues that imagery or motifs in costumes serve as a means of cultural expression, as seen in the designs on flags and fabrics, and their interpretation within a cultural space aid in their appreciation.

## **5.6 The Cost of Fabrics**

The designing of costumes largely requires the use of fabrics and other related materials. The cost of fabrics to design costumes for contemporary dance also surfaced as another factor worth considering for designing costumes for contemporary dance in Cape Coast. The submissions of the participant of the AFPI were:

*...while acknowledging that some of the fabrics used to construct costumes for contemporary dance are colourful, they are also very expensive. In our contemporary dance, we sometimes add drama to embellish it, and in some cases, it requires the use of unique costumes to help situate the performer in context. Because we are unable to afford the cost of fabrics, we sometimes forgo the drama or settle for other costumes that may fulfil a similar role.*

From the ensuring data, it is evident that the cost of fabric plays an important role in the design of contemporary dance costumes. This is because, although a particular fabric may be more suitable for a specific contemporary dance costume, the high cost of the fabric may deter the dance company from buying it, thereby serving as a setback. Unarguably, contemporary dance thrives on creativity, and, as such, designing costumes for such pieces must also be guided by some degree of creativity. There is no doubt that achieving creativity in dance costumes may be impaired due to the cost of materials that may not be in

line with the financial resources of the dance company. This is a reflection that, although dance groups may have intentions to design costumes characterized by preferred aesthetic nuances, such expectations are controlled by the cost of materials used to construct costumes. This is because the cost of materials will determine the kind of materials to be used to construct the dance costumes. This position is affirmed by literature by Strand-Evans (2014, p. 129), who points out that the “cost of fabric is a critical consideration in determining the style of a costume and that even when fabric is available, the perfect fabric may cost more than a limited costume budget will allow.”

## 6. Conclusion

Over the years, contemporary dance has become part of Ghana’s popular culture, and a number of dance groups continue to create more insightful dances to add to the existing repertoire within the Ghanaian space. The use of costumes, a non-verbal visual element in contemporary dance performances, contributes a great deal to the overall performance in diverse ways. While acknowledging that these pieces thrive on the creativity of the choreographer, designing costumes for contemporary dances does not follow the use of specific costumes, as evident in a number of traditional Ghanaian dance pieces. Hence, the need to explore practical considerations in designing costumes for contemporary dance in Cape Coast. The findings revealed that designing costumes for contemporary dance thrives on five (5) main blocks. These are the dance movements involved; the colour of fabrics; the body size of performers; the motifs in the fabric; and the cost of materials.

Although the artistic directors of the three dance groups double as costumiers, I recommend that these directors engage the services of professional costumiers for their performances. When this is achieved, such trained costumiers may expand approaches to costuming contemporary dance as they bring to the fore a treasure trove of wealth of experience in costuming these pieces.

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