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Sincerity, Authenticity and the Artistic Imperative in contemporary Zulu indlamu dance costume

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Abstract

Historically, the Zulu indlamu costume is a traditional battle dress. Over the years, it has come to constitute a significant feature of contemporary theatre stages in South Africa. Like other traditional forms that have made the transition from original functionality into the realm of art as education and entertainment, its accompanying costumes and regalia have aided the process. Together with these iconic costumes and related regalia, the indlamu dance continues to play a prominent role in the propagation of Zulu art and cultural identity. In this paper, we focus on contemporary Zulu indlamu costume in terms of how contemporary designers have been able to strike a fine balance between sincerity and the artistic imperative within a form that has traditionally relied on authenticity for effect. Our point of departure is the supposition that whether as art or as cultural propagation, the effectiveness of indlamu is to a considerable extent reposed in the sincerity and authenticity of the regalia. Our purpose is to investigate the extent to which contemporary designers have been able to strike an effective balance between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative, especially in those instances when the dance is transported out of its original context and presented as education and/or entertainment.

Our investigation and analysis are particularly interested in finding out how a form whose basis is in war and tradition has transited into the realm of the artistic through costume design, as well as the challenges, innovations and alterations that have been effected to maintain sincerity and authenticity in attaining the artistic imperative. In arriving at a conclusion, we adopt Lionel Trilling's (1972) twin notions of sincerity and authenticity. According to Trilling, authenticity refers to the ability to 'stay true to oneself' while sincerity refers to a way of acknowledging that even if something need not be given aesthetic or intellectual admiration as the best or the original, "it was at least conceived in innocence of heart" (1972, p. 6). We rely on a qualitative methodology, which involved direct observation, as well as interviews with several Zulu cultural practitioners and other theatre design experts.

Keywords: Costume, sincerity, authenticity, artistic, transition, identity

Introduction

Like other traditional forms that have made the transition from original functionality to the realm of art as education and/or entertainment, the Zulu *indlamu* dance has been aided in this process by its accompanying costumes and regalia. Over the years, cultural productions from the Zulu nation in South Africa have achieved worldwide critical acclaim and established their artistic provenance through such shows as *Umoja* and *Ipi Ntombi* among several others. Not only have these shows toured the world, but they have also mesmerised world audiences with their colourful, exquisite and elaborate traditional Zulu costumes, also displaying the Zulu *indlamu* dance. These shows have played a significant part in helping the Zulu *indlamu* dance to find its way to theatre stages at home and abroad.

Zulu *indlamu* dance arose as a celebration of Zulu identity, traditional cultural events and rites of passage. However, over the years it has transformed into an artistic dance spectacle both at home and abroad, thereby providing a quintessential example of a phenomenon that has become prevalent across many postcolonial societies. This is the phenomenon of traditional cultural forms evolving into artistic spectacles through hybridity and adaptation through evolutionary processes. Latrell (2008, p. 42) uses the term 'heritainment' to refer to traditional shows or performances that exhibit seemingly authentic cultural forms while providing entertaining and imparting easily recognisable images and narratives. These shows can be in the form of multifaceted tourist shows that fulfil a myriad of functions including entertainment and education, as well as the construction of identities through subject matter, format and performance style. In such instances, education refers to the propagation of cultural identities through panache. The dynamism that inheres at the crossroads of these different variables inspires us to investigate notions of sincerity and authenticity in the transition from cultural functionalism to art in contemporary Zulu *indlamu* dance. We are particularly interested in interrogating how contemporary designers and traditional costume makers have been able to strike a fine balance between sincerity and the artistic imperative within a form that has traditionally relied on authenticity for effect. Our point of departure is the supposition that whether as art or as a cultural artefact, the effectiveness of *indlamu* dance costume is to a considerable extent reposed in the authenticity of the dress. Our purpose is to investigate the extent to which contemporary designers have been able to achieve the artistic imperative through sincerity and authenticity when the dance is transported out of its original context and presented as education and/or entertainment. The crossroads between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative is particularly interesting for us. It is interesting in the sense that unlike real life, art and its accessories rely on make-believe (Schechner 2004). In other words, modern audiences tend to be fascinated and impressed when imitations reach the zenith in trying to approximate lived reality, whether in presentational or representational contexts. This is what we refer to as the artistic imperative in this paper. We argue that there is a fascinating contradiction in that while the artistic imperative thrives on make-believe, Zulu *indlamu* costume seems to achieve effect and effectiveness through sincerity and authenticity. This is not least because of the costume's origin and function as a principal propagator and marker of Zulu national identity and Zulu material culture.

In its original context, the Zulu *indlamu* dance was a military drill whose purpose was to instil discipline among men of the Zulu nation. The dance also performed a function to prepare members of the military regiments for war (Asante 2000, pp. 68-69).



**Figure 1: Zulu *indlamu* dancers in Zulu *Indlamu* dance costume
(De La Harpe 1998)*****

Sincerity and authenticity in costume, regalia and performance

In this paper, our approach to sincerity and authenticity is informed by Lionel Trilling's (1972) twin notions of sincerity and authenticity. According to Trilling, authenticity refers to the ability to 'stay true to oneself' while sincerity refers to a way of acknowledging that even if something need not be given aesthetic or intellectual admiration as the best or the original, "it was at least conceived in innocence of heart" (1972, p. 6). We seek to explore the interplay between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative against the background of how westernisation and urbanisation, with its attendant hybridity, has gradually led to certain transformations in Zulu *indlamu* attire. We believe that an understanding of the interplay between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative can play a prominent role in assisting educators and modern designers of traditional costume and regalia in coming up with more convincing artefacts, especially in those instances where original construction materials are no longer available.

'Dress', 'costume' and 'regalia' are three inter-related terms. In performance studies, the three terms are often used interchangeably (Grote 1989, p. 237). Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995, p. 7) define dress as an assemblage of modifications and supplements to the body, while costume is a form of dress in general, which includes adornments like bodily accessories, beads, tattoos and headdresses (Anderson & Anderson 1984, p. 18). Unlike dress, which is a bodily adornment in pursuit of modesty, protection from natural elements and cultural decency, costume serves a primary function to portray the wearer as a character or type that is distinct from their regular personality. Costume is usually worn at social events like weddings, graduations, rites of passage and other special occasions. However, the term is most often associated with theatre performance, where costume plays a prominent role in delineating character and events (Eubank et al. 2005). In this study, we adopt Anderson and Anderson's (1984) definition of costume as a key cornerstone in the process of attaining the fictional realm or the world of make-believe. Therefore, we differentiate costume from regalia as far as the latter belongs within the realm of dress for special or specific social occasions. At such occasions, the wearer does not necessarily adopt a fictitious identity but adorns certain items of dress (as regalia) with a purpose to accentuate the realm of make-believe. According to Schechner (2004), 'make-believe' happens when the part played becomes inseparable from

the character or role in real life. A magistrate or a supreme court judge adorn items of regalia that delineate their role as a custodian of justice and the peace without them necessarily playing the part. This is the world of 'make-believe'. The traditional respondents in this research corroborated the essential difference between costume and dress/regalia. They were quite reluctant to use the term 'costume' to refer to Zulu *indlamu* outfits, preferring to rather refer to it as regalia as they felt that the term 'costume' refers to something that is used for playful activities and/or purposes.

Costume is a central aspect of theatre and performance. It helps to tell the story. Actors in costume instantly direct the audience to the setting of the events as it also assists the transition into the realm of fiction and the world of 'make-believe' (Holt 1988, p. 7). Actors in costume hasten the process of the willful suspension of disbelief among the audience. It also helps the performance to come alive for the spectator by connecting their visual and tactile senses to the charisma and suspense of the unfolding storyline (Dogbe 2003). In Zulu traditional societies, regalia defined occasion and ceremony. Different items of regalia were worn in times of war, at funerals, during rites of passage, and at weddings and other social celebrations (Dougherty 2008). In all instances, the dress worn reflected the content, substance and the mood of the ceremony. According to Brussell (1983, p. xiv), several things ought to be taken into account when studying the history of traditional dress such as that of the Zulu nation. These factors include culture, the socio-political environment, geographical location and the function of the dress. This renders the study of traditional costume and dress as a complex phenomenon that takes into account issues of a people's psychological, socio-economic, and environmental influences and well-being. The latter is particularly the case with regard to Zulu traditional dress, which continues to place a premium on sincerity and authenticity in both original and contemporary contexts.

Several researchers, including Brussell (1983) and Zaloumis (2000) have documented the use of animal skin-based military costumes. For instance, Dougherty (2008) writes that in times of war Zulu regiments dressed in light and loosely fitting animal skins to stay cool in a generally hot African climate. The king and other members of royalty wore the skins of more valued animal species such as leopards and royal game. Military regiments wore headdresses of feathers, with strips of animal fur tied around their waists. Tufts and strips of animal skin were tied around the shins, the ankles, and the arms. Some warriors wore necklaces made out of animal teeth, horns and wood (Dougherty 2008). The practice of making garments out of the skins of domesticated animals, notably cattle and sheep is still comparatively widespread among the Zulu people (Magubane & Klopper 2001, p. 37). De La Harpe (1998, p. 21) explains that the Zulu traditional male costume consists of two strips of animal hide hanging from a central waistband to which is added the tails of cows, monkeys or genets. Strips of rolled animal hide and beads are worn across the chest and around the neck. The headdresses consist of a ring of animal hide that is sometimes embellished with feathers and quills. The use of leopard skins signifies that the wearer is a member of royalty – either a chief or a chief's councillor. Nowadays, these outfits have been hybridised with the inclusion of brightly coloured synthetic fabrics, with bicycle chevrons and reflectors also added to the skins. The notion of evolution and hybridity in traditional forms of dress in Africa leads the famous Nobel Prize-winning South African writer, Nadine Gordimer to ask 'What is a tribal dress?' as she proceeds to supply the answer "Something in a constant state of change since Africans began to wear anything" (1988, p. 194).

In this paper, we argue that as traditional cultural and war regalia, the insistence on using organic animal hides and skins in the construction of the Zulu *indlamu* dress was part of an enduring quest for authenticity within the broader matrix of the psychology of warfare. In other words, the organic element afforded the wearer the psychological strength to face adversaries from a zoomorphic frame of mind in which he identified with the source animal

for the skins. On world stages, the Zulu *indlamu* costume has striven to display the full regimental attire of elaborate skins and shields, as well as headdresses, ceremonial belts, knobkerries and spears that continue to epitomise Zulu material culture (Hatfordhouse 2008). However, presentation on the international stage has occasioned a new set of challenges for the Zulu *indlamu* costume. The major challenge for the designer, the design educator and the design student has had to do with the tension between achieving sincerity and authenticity on the one hand and the artistic imperative on the other. According to Hill and Bucknell (1987), clothes and costumes for theatre stage performances often develop out of necessity and artistic functionalism depending on the projected visual outcome and the desired aesthetic of the play or performance. As Brussell (1983, p. xii) explains, several factors influence the development of stage costumes. Technological development is one of them. In Africa, as in other parts of the world, the idea of performance is very much about 'showing' and 'seeing'. It is about spectacle where the spectator encounters and engages with the performer as the two define and continuously redefine and aesthetically evaluate that encounter throughout the performance (Okagbue 2007, p. 2). Costume plays an important part in this process. It defines the significance of the event, be it ceremonial or military through the design and the style of the costume.

In our interrogation of the tension between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative, we used a qualitative research approach. This entailed direct observation, as well as formal and informal conversations with Zulu cultural experts, traditional Zulu costume makers, as well as professional theatre costume designers and design educators. This method enabled us to discover, to understand and to gain insights on the evolution and transition of the Zulu *indlamu* dress from traditional cultural contexts and battlefields to contemporary theatre stages.

Sincerity and authenticity in the manufacture and use of Zulu indlamu dress for cultural/traditional purposes

The history of Zulu *indlamu* costume is old as the Zulu nation. According to the four cultural experts that participated in the study, *indlamu* dress and costume adaptations are the results of urbanisation and various internal changes within Zulu society. What is presented as Zulu *indlamu* costume on South African and international theatre stages today is the result of a series of adaptations and developments that have taken place over the years. In this paper, we argue that design educators ought to realise that the process of evolution has led to strategies that are marked by the need to maintain sincerity and authenticity with the original to achieve the artistic imperative. This was corroborated by some of our respondents who, when asked to define contemporary Zulu *indlamu* dance attire, indicated that the current Zulu *indlamu* dance costume is a representation of Zulu men's traditional attire that is used for entertainment purposes. The respondents also made the significant point that although cheaper and modern synthetic materials are now used to construct costume, these are used alongside the animal skins of mainly domestic animals. According to these experts, animal skins are retained to maintain a modicum of original authenticity, without which the costume would lose sincerity altogether. According to these respondents, spectators can only get to appreciate the Zulu material culture on display through a combination of authenticity, sincerity and adaptation that is informed by a mixture of functionality and modernisation. Our research respondents described the basic authentic *indlamu* dance costume as an attire comprising the following pieces, namely a headpiece called *insinyane*; an animal hide piece that covers the chest and the upper back called *imbatha*; upper arm dressings called *amavolo*; the loin skirt, which consists of a front piece called *isinene* and a back piece called *ibeshu*. To cover the shins, they used the same dressing as the upper arm, also called *amavolo*. The Zulu people would go barefoot or wear sandals made out of animal hides called *imbadada*. Below

is an image of the full *indlamu* attire as worn by Zulu men, complete with accessories such as the shield and a fighting stick/knobkerrie.



Figure 2: Full front view of the traditional Zulu *indlamu* dance costume (Manyeneng 2013)

The respondents also stated that one way of maintaining sincerity and authenticity in contemporary Zulu *indlamu* costume and regalia was through the inclusion of traditional weaponry. The weapons that Zulu men carried when wearing the *indlamu* costume included the shield, the spear and the knobkerrie as presented in the image above. In other words, we argue that contemporary designers and design educators could do well to realise that a Zulu man dressed up in *indlamu* costume made of modern synthetic materials could still achieve artistic poise, as well as maintain authenticity and sincerity to the original by carrying traditional Zulu weapons to social gatherings and ceremonies. This is more so because the Zulu nation is often referred to as a warrior nation, with a rich history of warrior culture that is traceable to the military conquests and organisational capabilities of King Shaka. As De La Harpe (1998) rightly observes, Zulu culture still places great emphasis on courage and physical combat. Zulu *indlamu* dance, therefore, originates from the drills and exercises that were performed by the members of the Zulu regiments when preparing for war. It is for this reason that *indlamu* dance attire is often presented against the backdrop of war.

In between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative, the military dimension seems to be a central aspect of contemporary adaptations of *indlamu* costume. The military dimension appears to be at the centre of the modifications that have influenced the design of the modern *indlamu* dance costume on both the local and the international theatre stage. Contemporary designers and design educators ought to realise that the military dimension has worked in tandem with urbanisation as an influence. Urbanisation has come with the gradual retreat of militarism as a central tenet of Zulu culture. We, therefore, argue that the inclusion of traditional Zulu weapons of war as a central design aspect of *indlamu* dance costume on theatre stages lends the costume a significant element of sincerity and authenticity through exoticism and spectacle in ways that greatly enhance the artistic imperative. Table 1 is an illustration of the various manifestations of *indlamu* costume with the attributes of the different attires described. From this table it is clear that one of the reasons behind the provenance of war and dance attire on world stages is in the flamboyance of detail, making it easily amenable for expropriation by those that would seek to propagate Zulu cultural identity through the performing arts.

Table 1: Attire

| Costume Type | Functions | Characteristics | Practicality |
|--------------------------|---|---|--|
| Daily attire | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Hunting – Domestic activities – Farming, Courting – Protection against harsh weathers – Clan identification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Simple – Minimalistic – less intricate attire pieces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Practical – Comfortable |
| War costume | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fighting – Protection – Troop identification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Minimalistic – Protective (large shields) – Small attire pieces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Accommodates agility |
| Ceremonial dance costume | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Rituals – Traditional ceremonies (weddings) – Social status identification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Very elaborate attire pieces – Additional attire pieces for enhancement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Accommodates acrobatic moves – Accentuates the dance moves and creates a great aesthetic impression |

Earlier on, we made the point that one of the biggest influences on the development of *indlamu* dress has been the combination of urbanisation and western modernity. This combination has meant that with time and the growth of urbanisation, the dance and its accompanying material culture has been taken out of its traditional context. With this has come the challenge to maintain cultural authenticity within a context where original construction materials are no longer easily available. Hanna (1965) observes that urbanisation has also come together with hybridity and the adoption of western values and European standards, including the use of alternative fabrics and materials. For contemporary designers and design educators, this has put the use and availability of traditional organic materials under threat due to lower relative costs and easier accessibility of the latter in comparison with traditional construction materials. Consequently, few people still use the original materials as the costume has come under relentless pressure to undergo a process of transition and adaptation. As Hanna (1965) correctly observes the costumes, which proliferate on theatre stages today reflect this change although they seldom simulate or accent the

authenticity and cultural functionalism that the original costumes had. In this paper, we argue that *indlamu* dance has been able to maintain sincerity and authenticity by adopting a hybrid strategy. It has transited convincingly from its original context through the retention of certain original aspects of the regalia and props, which it uses together with westernised items of personal adornment that serve as an essential part of costume. Figure 3 is an illustration of this hybrid combination.



Figure 3: Zulu men in contemporary urban clothing doing the *indlamu* dance (Nqobo 2011)

Hanna (1965) states that hybridity in the form of the adornment of traditional Zulu dress with western garments seems to have taken root following the Zulu victory against the British at the Battle of Isandlwana in 1879. It is alleged that the Zulus took the weapons and skirts off the fallen Scottish soldiers. Nowadays, it is quite common to see Zulu *indlamu* dancers in long trousers that are hidden beneath animal skins or adorned with patches of Zulu national colours as illustrated in the image above.

Although modern costume designers and design educators still make an effort to construct costume in more or less the same way that the dress was made and presented in the past, accessing animal skins and other organic materials are no longer simple. This presents the most basic challenge in terms of the quest to maintain a fine balance between authenticity and the artistic imperative, which is the focus of our paper. Faced with the challenges of modernity, and the ready and easier access to synthetic costume construction materials that have come with it, contemporary costume designers, design educators and manufacturers have come up with a solution. Interestingly, the solution that they have come up with is also located in the on-going tension between the need to achieve sincerity and authenticity while paying homage to the artistic imperative. According to one respondent, whenever an outfit is bought or produced for cultural or traditional purposes, a special ceremony/ritual is performed to cleanse the outfit. This is meant to remove any bad energies or spirits.

In our investigation and analysis, we also sought to find out the extent to which the notion of sincerity and authenticity in Zulu *indlamu* was reposed in construction patterns, construction methods and construction skills, given the iconic place that the dress occupies as a key exponent and propagator of Zulu national identity. In this regard, it was important to

determine if the traditional costume makers and educators had received any kind of formal training relating to the making of the Zulu *indlamu* dress as regalia. All the respondents interviewed indicated that they learned the trade either through their parents or through apprenticeships with traditional experts in the trade. The majority of the respondents indicated that they had learned the craft through what Frost (2013) has referred to as 'tacit knowledge'. Frost uses the term 'tacit knowledge' to refer to knowledge, skills or expertise that is deeply rooted in the context, experience, and practice of a people's socio-cultural values. Tacit knowledge becomes a form of authenticity in as far as it is hard to communicate and because it resides in the mind of the practitioner. The respondents also indicated that they made all the items of Zulu *indlamu* pieces in their studios from inception up to the finished product. We thus discovered that the sincerity and authenticity of the dress inhered in the fact that these costumes were not simple commercial products that were put on sale on behalf of other people. This finding highlights the point we made earlier that traditional Zulu dressmakers have tacit knowledge that has been gained through close attachment with relatives and experts who have practised the trade over considerable periods. All the respondents acquired the skill through observation and understudying older craftsmen and practitioners.

However, as with most forms of skills passed through oral traditions, these traditional dressmakers seemed to have no specific written record of the processes that they apply or practise. Everything seemed to be done through memory and simple recollection. While on the surface, this may appear to be a weakness, in this paper, we argue that the use and propagation of tacit knowledge in Zulu *indlamu* dress construction lend authenticity to the final product. In other words, as the sages live and continue to impart the skill through oral traditions, the skill will not die, and the authenticity that inheres in it will continue to be enhanced.

Closely related to the above is the sourcing of materials for the construction of Zulu *indlamu* dress. In our analysis, we believe that sourcing construction material for these outfits also has a significant bearing on the intersection between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative. This is particularly the case in the context of westernisation, urbanisation, hybridity and the cheap commercialism that has come with it. We examine this in relation to the point we made earlier that Zulu *indlamu* dance has roots in war and that it is a tradition that has transited into the realm of the artistic through costume design. In addressing the matter of sourcing construction materials, we seek to find out what innovations and alterations designers and design educators put in place to maintain sincerity and authenticity in a quest to achieve the artistic imperative. Earlier on, we made the point that in original contexts, Zulu regalia was made out of the skins and furs of wild animals, some of which have become protected game because of modern conservation initiatives.

When asked about the materials used for the production of the outfits, our respondents indicated that materials were sourced from the skins of both wild and domestic animals. Animal hides play a major role in the construction of the skirt, the shield and the smaller pieces used as furs and accessories. The animal skins used included those from the springbok, goat, monkey, leopard, cow, and red duiker. Out of this, leopard skin is used strictly on costume pieces for the king and members of the royal family. The skin of the red duiker is used for the back of the loin skirt called *ibeshu* while monkey tails are used for the front part of the loin skirt called *isinene*. Although these animal skins occupy a central place in terms of meaning in Zulu culture, there is the ever-present threat that synthetic materials, because the animal rights lobby and the conservationist movement will eventually replace the animal skins.

When asked where they source the skins of protected game, all the respondents simply stated that they source them individually from the surrounding wilderness while the skins of domestic animals are obtained from livestock hand-reared by the Zulu people. Although the

traditional makers indicated an awareness that South African law forbids them from poaching activities, they insisted that hunting these animals for their hides is something that they do in the name of observing and propagating an enduring cultural tradition and practice. Our respondents also indicated that sometimes, animal skins are obtained from professional hunters, from abattoirs and from members of the community who slaughter their animals for weddings, for ritual purposes and for other traditional ceremonies. One respondent indicated that some organic accessories and construction materials were no longer readily available due to stringent conservation laws and ethics campaigns on the protection of animal species. Because of this, outfit producers were now substituting the rare blue cranes' feathers with the more readily available ostrich feathers. In this paper, we argue that the increased use of cowhides in place of protected species has the potential to go a long way to assist designers and design educators in Zulu *indlamu* costume and regalia to tread the fine line between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative as a medium for propagating Zulu material culture.

Although all our respondents indicated that rituals and traditional ceremonies of the Zulu people are the easiest sources for the skins of domestic animal hides, there is a slight challenge in that most of these events are seasonal. These events take place during spring or summer. To obviate this specific challenge, producers resort to using synthetic fabrics as a substitute for real leather.

In our argument, the use of synthetic materials severely detracts from the authenticity of the dress. However, this is ameliorated by the use of accompanying weaponry and props. According to our respondents, in the olden days, there were rules and regulations set out for hunters to control excessive hunting. These rules seem to have worked effectively to reinforce authenticity in the costume. According to these respondents, wild animals could not be hunted and slaughtered willy-nilly unless one was granted authority to do so. Royal game such as the leopard could be hunted only with the permission of the king and his council. Therefore, an individual could not go out into the forest to hunt such game. However, because of the iconic nature of Zulu *indlamu* dress and the role that it plays as a key propagator of Zulu material culture, all the respondents confided in us that sometimes outfit makers are pressured by the rich and the politically powerful to go out of their way to obtain particular animal hides. The pressure is at its greatest when it comes to the use of leopard skins, as the clients are quite ready to pay at whatever cost. The pressure and monetary temptation that comes with securing such rare and/or protected organic construction materials then force the traditional outfit makers to look beyond South Africa's borders as they try to source the skins from neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique and Swaziland.

Once obtained, the process of preparing the animal hides for dress construction is just as elaborate. According to the respondents, preparing the skins is the most important part in the construction of the traditional *indlamu* outfits as the preparation process can make or break the final product in terms of sincerity and authenticity. The skins are prepared under favourable weather conditions as the skins are stretched out and sundried in a specific way and under specific conditions before they are softened and cut into the different parts. The image below illustrates the process of drying in the sun and preparation of the animal hides for cutting.



Figure 4: Stretched out animal skin (Desert Harvesters 2014)

When the skins of domestic animals are used in place of royal game, all respondents indicated that they prefer to use animal skins from calves to make *ibeshu* as it is supple and pliable, also producing the desired effect when worn by the user. To achieve authenticity the condition of the skin is also taken into account in the preparation process. The animal hides require thorough treatment and cleaning to remove all traces of animal flesh after slaughter. According to the respondents, costume makers are extremely reluctant to use lacerated hides or skins that are damaged during slaughter as this severely detracts from the authenticity and effectiveness of the final product as an item of Zulu cultural representation. The following step-by-step list of the outfit construction process that is followed in the making of effective Zulu *indlamu* dress as outlined by our informants:

- Step I – The animal skin is soaked in water for a certain period to make it soft
- Step II – The animal hide is hand washed to make it softer
- Step III – The skin is stretched out in the sun and nailed onto a wooden surface or frame to remove unnecessary creases that could make it uneven.
- Step IV – Once the skin is dry, metal scrap is used to remove dirt, fat and any pieces of flesh remaining on the skin.
- Step V – Once the inner side of the skin has been scraped and smoothed, the skin is soaked in detergent to clean it.
- Step VI – The skin is dried again.
- Step VII – The skin is oiled to soften it.
- Step VIII – Once the skin is soft, it is treated with maize meal to dry and to absorb excess oil. Only then is it ready for use in costume construction.

The animal hide is meticulously cut into the various pieces and assembled according to a specific size, style and design only when fully soft and dry.

As with every other item of dress that is made with a specific purpose to achieve force and effect through sincerity and authenticity, there are several challenges that come with the assemblage and maintenance of Zulu *indlamu* dress. When asked to outline and explain some of the challenges that come with the process of making and handling these items on a day-to-day basis, our informants indicated that one of the biggest challenges is the difficulty surrounding the acquisition of certain construction materials. The main one has to do with obtaining the skins of royal game and other protected species such as red duiker, as well as

the feathers from wild birds such as the blue crane. The respondents also indicated that in some instances, the skins remain rigid and continue to give off an unpleasant scent even after undergoing the rigorous regimen for softening, curing and treatment as previously outlined. They also reported that it was generally difficult to clean materials that are made out of leather and quite expensive to dry-clean such materials. The fact that most costume manufacturers and users neither have the requisite knowledge on how to care for materials that are made out of leather nor do they have any formal training on how to care for leather products exacerbates these challenges. We believe that matters to do with the behavioural peculiarities of construction materials, as well as aspects of proper costume maintenance as outlined above, are key issues that contemporary designers and with which design educators must be conversant. This is highly imperative because more often than not, these items are either sold to the consumer or used on stage without any advice on issues to do with care and maintenance.

Sincerity and authenticity in the manufacture and use of Zulu indlamu costume on the commercial theatre stage

In the preceding sections, our focus was on the sourcing, construction and maintenance of Zulu *indlamu* as dress or regalia in traditional contexts. In this section, we explore issues of sincerity and authenticity in the manufacture and use of Zulu *indlamu* costume that is meant for use on the commercial theatre stage. Our discussion is based on the responses from respondents with a traceable record designing and constructing Zulu *indlamu* costume for the theatre stage. These informants were selected based on their individual experience and expertise. For purposes of honing our interrogation on issues of sincerity and authenticity in Zulu *indlamu* costume that is meant for the stage, we provide a select outline of the design experience of our informants for this section of the paper.

The first professional theatre costume designer is a multi-award winning theatre designer of national and international repute. The respondent has thirty years of experience in South African theatre and has extensive skills in the field of costume design and design education. The respondent has wide experience designing for South African performance in a wide range of styles since the mid-1980s. Some of the renowned theatre directors that the informant has worked with include the late Barney Simon of the Market Theatre fame, Mbongeni Ngema, Welcome Msomi, Gcina Mhlope, John Kani and Janice Honeyman. The second respondent underwent professional training at the Camberwell School of Art at the University of Reading before lecturing at the University of Durban Westville (then University College, Durban), as well as at the Natal Technikon. Some of the respondent's most notable theatre designs include set and costume design for *Opera Africa's Faust*, *Princess Magogo*, *La Traviata* and *Rigoletto*, as well as designing for the American production of *Princess Magogo*.

The third respondent studied costume at Tshwane University of Technology's Department of Entertainment Technology before taking up full-time employment as a theatre designer in the local theatre industry. As accomplished designers and design educators, we believe that the three respondents whose profiles we outline above were all eminently well placed to provide insights into matters of sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative in Zulu *indlamu* costume especially in contexts that thrive on the principle of make-believe. This is particularly so because earlier in the paper, we observed that a unique feature of theatre practice is that it relies significantly on the notion of make-believe to achieve the effect (Schechner 2004). We identified this as an artistic imperative. In other words, the artistic imperative thrives on the theatre's ability to create illusions of reality by using materials and techniques that are often no more than approximations of the real thing.

Given that scenario, our purpose in this paper is to interrogate the extent to which Zulu *indlamu* costume that is made for the theatre differs from or makes an effort to mimic that which is made for real life to strike an effective balance between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative. According to the respondents, the making of Zulu *indlamu* costume for the stage equally relies on extensive pre-planning procedures that entail thorough research and direct observation. All this has to be based on an in-depth understanding and appreciation of Zulu material culture. The designers begin with a presentation of all the different characters to the theatre director. The director then indicates if they have any intention to adapt the original costume or to add some additional items to enhance the costume. Once agreed, the costume designer prepares sketch drawings and a set of guidelines on how materials work. The sketch drawings are presented in pencil, and they serve as indicator of shape, line and proportion, all of which are central to costume design.

According to our respondents, presenting the concepts in this way allows for a measure of flexibility and space to refine and develop costume detail in direct response to the frame and build of a specific user, as well as the overall design concept for the production. It also helps to incorporate the malleability of available or selected materials. Unlike costume design and construction for cultural purposes as identified in the first section of our paper, costume design and construction for the stage involves aspects of conceptualisation, text analysis, research, as well as initial sketch drawings and briefs by a small team of individuals who are specialists in executing such designs. From the data gathered, a common approach among costume designers when putting together Zulu *indlamu* costume for the theatre is the combination of design and co-ordination to amalgamate the three considerations of sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative. The artistic imperative is achieved through the presentation of costumes that are made to measure within a specific design concept, which satisfies the overarching framework of make-believe in the theatre. As Mastamet-Mason (2008, p. 27) rightly observes, design plays an important role in the aesthetics of apparel.

Costume design for the stage often incorporates the use of items such as sandals, spears and shields that the theatre costumers prefer to purchase ready-made for use on stage. These items of hand properties also enhance the notion of sincerity and authenticity for the stage in the same way as they do in cultural contexts. While its cultural or ceremonial counterpart is made with a purpose of being reasonably durable and sturdy, Zulu *indlamu* costume that is made for the stage is constructed with a purpose of being sturdy and robust, particularly for performances that involve a great deal of movement such as the *indlamu* dance itself. Because of the physicality of the dance, Zulu *indlamu* performers are constantly extending their arms and legs in all directions and in expansive ways, and this requires the designs to accommodate these often-vigorous actions. As observed by Mastemat-Mason (2008:27), effective costume design must incorporate functional ease to create a specific style and to allow for comfortable bodily movement. In light of this, the professional costume designers were asked to provide an outline on how they come up with their costume designs for the stage. According to all three respondents, Zulu *indlamu* costume that is made for the stage is largely a stage representation of the traditional Zulu costume, which it tries to replicate as much as possible through a combination of the use of original materials, synthetic garments and original hand properties. This is achieved by ensuring that the dance costume fits the stage design concept based on research. In this context, the process of conceptualisation refers to the research that is carried out on Zulu material culture before sketching and the presentation of concepts to the director and the production team. All three informants also confirmed that Zulu *indlamu* costume for the stage has to consist of the same number of pieces like the traditional costume for purposes of sincerity and authenticity as indicated in the illustration below.



Theatre Zulu *Indlamu*
costume (front view)



Theatre Zulu *Indlamu*
costume (back view)

Figure 5: Full Zulu *indlamu* costume for the stage (Manyeneng 2014)

The illustration above shows the full frontal and back view of Zulu *indlamu* costume that has been made from synthetic fabric. According to our respondents, design and construction have to be of a high standard when. The entire process has to be based on thorough research on Zulu history and material culture. The research processes used by professional costume designers for the stage aids them to understand Zulu history and material culture, including the use of artefacts and hand props. In turn, this facilitates the design and construction of convincing replicas of the traditional Zulu men's costume, but with the rigours of performance in mind in line with the need to strike a fine balance between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative. Costumes meant for the stage are designed and constructed according to specific production requirements. This must be in harmony with the theme of the show, as well as the physique of the actors presenting the performance. In other words, unlike its cultural counterpart, *indlamu* dance costume for the stage is made to fit for the specific individual. While our respondents indicated that it is often the director who determines the tone and style of the production, the translation of the whole process lies in the skill of the designer who has to use knowledge of fabrics, history and material culture to represent history and theme with accuracy. This becomes highly imperative in those instances where limitations to do with the sourcing of designated animal hides (e.g. leopard skins) are imposed on the performance.

When faced with such limitations, designers and costume constructors always resort to modifications to strike the necessary balance between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative. These modifications simultaneously involve making the costume applicable to the

theatre performance even as the costume captures the significant symbols, conventions and aesthetic impressions that are embedded in the original traditional costume. Applications such as the substitution of organic animal hide with synthetic leather and furs among other things are all aspects of the mediations and translations that occur during the process of adapting the traditional costume for it to be applicable for theatre purposes in fulfilment of the artistic imperative. This facilitates the fulfilment of other demands of the theatre, such as the washability of the costume alongside the total cost of maintaining the costume for repeated use. Unlike traditional costume makers, professional theatre costume designers are relatively more informed on issues to do with fabric characteristics and maintenance. They are also better able to adapt different fabrics for theatrical performance in ways that strike an effective balance between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative. Our informants indicated that professional costume designers for the stage source their materials from fabric stores, art galleries, curio stalls and cultural markets, and sometimes import materials that are not locally available. They also indicated that cheaper animal hides (such as that from springbok) are then used alongside synthetic materials and artificial furs in ways that are meant to reinforce a sense of authenticity while achieving the artistic imperative. As we found earlier in the section on traditional costume construction, similar challenges also exist in the usage, maintenance and storage of Zulu *indlamu* costume that is meant for the stage.

One of the main challenges for non-Zulu indigenes who are involved in professional costume design and construction is the lack of an ethnographic cultural frame of reference that often comes with being part of a specific national identity. This positions the non-Zulu theatre designer as an outsider who can only rely on secondary research. It also creates a certain cultural distance between the costume designer, the staged narrative text and the specific identities, which the costume designer is required to engage with, and bridges with the people of a different race and culture. The discrepancy in sourcing organic cultural references and the use of acceptable synthetic alternatives often poses serious challenges in the designer's perennial quest to strike a convincing balance between sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative. Whereas the use of costumes constructed from original organic materials would appear to be the more obviously desirable option for the average professional user or designer, the irony of it is that it comes with considerable challenges in terms of long-term use and maintenance. According to our respondents, costumes made out of pure animal hides or skins require thorough cleaning after a series of runs. Unfortunately, however, all three respondents were agreed that it is a challenge to wash, clean and maintain Zulu *indlamu* costume that is constructed out of organic materials such as animal hides and feathers. The problem is exacerbated by the financial challenge and difficulty that comes with dry-cleaning and maintaining materials that are made of real leather. Therefore, costume designers and design educators for the stage must always make an effort to identify ideal fabrics that can substitute the real thing without compromising on sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative. As one respondent indicated, "I learned the hard way when it came to selecting the ideal fabrics, fabrics that are functional in all respects".

Compared to the use of Zulu *indlamu* costume, as ceremonial dress where the user is at leisure to adorn and adjust the costume as deemed fit, one of the challenges inherent in costuming for the stage is the limited time available to change or adjust costume during scene changes. Members of the ensemble often make very quick costume changes, all of which involves properly adorning many pieces of costume with small components that the costume comprises. Ensuring that all the bits and pieces that make up the costume are put on properly, quickly and firmly without the risk of coming off because of the physicality of the performance often presents a huge challenge in terms of maintaining and balancing issues of sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative. This has meant some rethinking and adaptation on the security of these items with the use of elastic bands in place of simply tying these different items to the actor's body.

Conclusion

According to Emery (1981, p. 3), stage costume is a vital aspect of bodily adornment in performance. As a key component in achieving the artistic imperative, costume helps to enhance the qualities and aesthetics of the performance as it helps to delineate character. The Zulu *indlamu* costume plays a central role in giving productions within the genre a distinctive Zulu identity. It also helps to position performances within a Zulu cultural backdrop in which Zulu material culture is a central aspect through iconic items of costume. Therefore, it is in that context that matters of sincerity, authenticity and the artistic imperative become of central importance. According to Hanna (1965), historical wear has gained ascendancy in the propagation of African cultural identities within the theatre and in other social domains. The success of a number of historical costume dramas on the world stage, such as *Umoja*, *Ipi Ntombi*, and *Touring the World*, including some that featured Zulu *indlamu* dance, such as *Princess Magogo* and *Shaka Zulu: The Musical*, have no doubt allowed African theatre to stake a niche in the annals of western theatre spaces (Hatford House 2008). With these shows, *indlamu* dance brought the magnificence Zulu men's costume to western theatre stages. What was once a cultural dance used by the Zulu nation to celebrate weddings, the inauguration of royalty, military conquest, and rites of passage, has become a staged dance aesthetic that has come to enthral crowds the world over. Over the years, Zulu *indlamu* dance and its accompanying costume have evolved into a stage phenomenon in ways that provide interesting insights into the intersection between sincerity, cultural authenticity and the artistic imperative for the contemporary designer and design educator.

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