

CANDID CONVERSATIONS

BY ZAHRAH HAIDER
Freelance writer



Cultures, not costumes

It's Halloween! October truly is the best month of the year to play dress-up and have fun. However, as we become more aware of social justice, it is important to know where to draw the line between simply wearing a costume, and appropriating a culture.

To put it simply, cultural appropriation is adopting certain elements of a culture by people who do not belong to that group. It is seen as disrespectful when things that are sacred or culturally significant in one culture are taken out of context and used casually by people who are from a different one. It strips minority groups of the things that make up their identities and turns those things into novelty items.

Cultural appropriation must not be confused with appreciation of the diversity of cultures or assimilation, and it is possible to incorporate parts of other cultures in a genuine way, without being

disrespectful.

With regards to costumes and dressing up, a common look for this time of year is the Mexican "sugar skull" – while it may seem like the perfect makeup idea for a fancy dress costume, the fact that the tradition itself is known as Day of the Dead, or Dia de Muertos, and focuses on gatherings of family and friends in order to pray for and remember those that have died, to support their spiritual journey, means that it should not be used as a fancy dress.

In other words, another culture's traditions shouldn't be your costume.

Therefore, to use an element of this deeply spiritual and traditional ritual and take it out of context is seen as cultural appropriation, and should not be done. This is just one common example; there are plenty other ways people reduce cultures to mere costumes: dressing up as geishas or in Native American head-

dresses, or anything that perpetuates misinformed stereotypes. It's safer to avoid culture-based outfits than to attempt one and offend someone.

We live in such a diverse and multicultural society that there's no way to avoid sharing things from other cultures, and that's fine. No one is saying you should not eat Mexican food or that you are not allowed to watch anime unless you are Japanese.

The core argument of cultural appropriation is that it commodifies and fetishises aspects of minority groups without them being able to benefit from it. We have a plethora of options for outfits that don't rely on another culture's identity. It's important to have that respect, because we certainly don't like seeing people taking elements from our own culture without any understanding of what it means.

By Zahrah Haider

LS NOTE

Boo!

All the world is stage and all the men and women are mere players...

We human beings are indeed actors; putting on a mask and becoming someone else feels so risqué yet so exciting. It speaks to the very core of one's psyche, to don a disguise, embrace a mysterious new identity and tread the universe in someone else's shoes. And that is the lure of Halloween, as we know it now at least.

Every culture around the globe has the belief of a world beyond the realms of human understanding. Folklores and ballads have nurtured these traditions for over millennia. And in today's culture we see the same standard carried in dramas, films, books, graphic novels, anime - an endless list of artistic expression.

The fine line of difference between our culture vs. their culture is disappearing fast and possibly in our own lifetime, we will see a world that is a confluence of ideas, going beyond imaginary geographical boundaries.

Maybe not in the form of a Halloween party, but how can we forget the days of our childhood on a chilly winter afternoon, cushioned by the comfort of the cotton blanket [more for protection from the ghouls than the chilly bite of winter], listening to the stories of our ancestors and their real life encounters with the creatures of the unseen?

As human civilisation has evolved, culture, traditions and norms have changed. Like a fluid taking the shape of its vessel, culture has taken the form of the human imagination. While some may see it as a matter of exchange of ideas, possibly it is more of a diffusion of human imagination than anything else.

Yet, every culture must understand where to draw the line; while we desire assimilation of human thought, we do not wish to endanger our principles. Rather than simple diffusion, could it be that we should focus more on exchange of thoughts through a porous membrane, hoping to filter, or at least, buffer the exchange? This, possibly is not a probability in any terms.

Setting aside the storm in a teacup, let's move to the matter of Star Lifestyle issue of 31 October 2017.

From the 'mecho bhoot' of Grandma's Stories, to attempting to identify the true identity of Count Dracula, this issue is our attempt to spook you by any means possible! We have snippets from what we claim our very own, to something what we consider "alien" and this has been a deliberate effort.

We certainly hope our readers will enjoy turning the pages, as much as we enjoyed putting them together.

LS Desk

FYI

The origin of Halloween

The candy laden and costume parading Halloween of popular culture owes its beginnings to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain.

The Celts, who lived 2,000 years ago in the area that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom and northern France, celebrated their new year on November 1. They believed that on the night before the new year, the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead, or the 'veil', became blurred and the ghosts of the dead returned to earth.

While these spirits made it easier for the Druids, or Celtic priests, to make predictions about the future, specially harvests, they were mischievous beings. These spirits could play tricks on the living- even going as far as to possessing unaware individuals, so it was advantageous to "hide" from them by wearing costumes. Also, the spirits could be sated with food offerings, specifically sweets.

Fast forward to the second half of the nineteenth century, European immigrants brought their varied Halloween customs with them to the United States. These customs, by then were already infused with Roman and Christian influences and included pumpkin carvings or Jack-o-lanterns to ward off spirits as well as the act of giving candy or money.

The Halloween we see now was a harvest festival at heart for people that depended on the forces of nature. Sitting in the overly connected 21st century, the appropriation is a fun way to celebrate without the supernatural elements.

By Iris Farina

Will the real Count Dracula please stand up?

In the history of horrors, very few names have manifested the terror of monsters in the human hearts than the Dracula. Even though the character was created by Bram Stoker's eponymous 1887 novel, Dracula, it is partially based upon a real life historical figure known as Vlad III, a prince of Wallachia. Born in what is now known as Transylvania, the central region of current Romania, this fifteenth century Prince was known for his similar taste for blood and his unpleasant ways of torturing his enemies, earning him the title of Vlad Tepes or Vlad the Impaler.

More than anything, he preferred the horrible ways of impalement to torture and execute his enemies. Moreover, to warn his enemies of his strict moral code, he would create a display of the decaying corpses, hanging from the stakes.

His father Vlad II who was a member of The order of the Dragon, a fraternal order of knights founded to uphold Christianity and to defend the Roman Empire from the Ottoman Turks, came to be known as Vlad Dracul. This translates as Vlad the Dragon.

In Romanian the ending "ulea" means "the son of." So, under this interpretation Dracula means "Son of the dragon" which again had a double meaning of "Devil", shedding light upon the atrocities inflicted by him.

It follows that Vlad the Impaler not only showed great cruelty towards his political and military enemies, but also relished in a sadistic amusement when it came to punishing them.

While dispensing people in his most favourite way of impalement, he used to witness the slow and painful death of the people while he dined. Rumor has it that he even drank the blood of his enemies.

Vlad's reign of terror ended after he was captured by the Turks and sent to exile in Hungary for 12 years. Even in his confinement it is said that he could not help but inflict torture upon little birds and mice, proceeding to behead and mutilate them. He was finally killed near Bucharest in 1476 and his head was chopped off and taken to Constantinople to be presented to the Sultan.

Stoker found the inspiration for his blood thirsty character from his frightening subhuman monster, on account of his violent nature and propensity to cause terror among the people.

By Mormee Mahtab