

Colour Symbolism of Aboakyir

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Abstract

In Ghana, traditional festivals are important cultural elements that are identified with many ethnic groups across the country. Aboakyir is one of such traditional festivals celebrated annually by an ethnic group in the Central Region called Simpa or Effutu. The Effutu people celebrate the festival at their traditional capital called Winneba every first week of May. The purpose of the study was to conduct a qualitative research into the colours used to celebrate the Simpa Aboakyir festival during the 2016 edition. To aid the researchers gather reliable data for the study, a non-probability sampling technique called purposive sampling was used to select 16 respondents. The researchers used observation, unstructured interview and still-photography to gather primary data throughout the last week of the festival. The responses from the interviews were recorded electronically; field notes and still-pictures were taken and the recorded information was transcribed, the field notes were expanded and relevant photographs were sifted and edited. The data was categorised into relevant themes and the selected photographs were analysed through aesthetic appreciation. The transcribed data were analysed through inductive reasoning and descriptive qualitative approach to respond to the objectives and research questions of the study. The findings that emanated from the analyses were discussed qualitatively according to the philosophy of interpretivism research paradigm to reflect the literature and the research questions of the study. Based on the findings that emerged from the analysis, the researchers recommended that visual art students at all levels and visual art practitioners must experiment the colours used by Effutus in the celebration of their traditional festival to develop other unconventional harmonious colour schemes that can be applied in creative arts.

Keywords: Aboakyir festival, colour schemes and aesthetic appreciation

1. Introduction

Winneba is the capital city of Effutu Municipal Assembly located along the coastal belt of Central Region of Ghana between Cape Coast and Accra. It is the traditional capital of the Effutu Traditional Area where the Effutu or Simpa ethnic group resides. The Simpa people belong to the Guan ethnic group in Ghana. However, they are sandwiched by the Gomoa people who are one of the fante groups among the Akan ethnic group in Ghana. Their language has elements of different Ghanaian local dialects so the Akans generally refer to them as 'Effutufo' which means "people of mixture." The anthropology of the Simpa people can be traced from Western Sudan in Africa. According to legend, between A. D. 1300 and A. D. 1400, a group of people left Western Sudan (around the Nile River) after the Trans-Saharan trade in A. D. 1240 and settled in present day Ghana. It is believed that the Quans might have left Western Sudan to Timbutu (in ancient Mali Empire). From Timbutu, they migrated southwards and settled in Gonjaland in the present day Ghana around A.D.1420. Unfortunately, the various ethnic groups in the Guans could not concentrate at a particular place with common leadership to build a great kingdom. They broke into segments (ethnic groups) and migrated to different parts of Ghana.

Due to tribal wars with other ethnic groups, environmental hazards and unfavourable conditions, they migrated from Gonjaland to settle at Techiman in the present day Brong Ahafo Region. At Techiman, an amicable agreement was arrived at between the Effutu ethnic group and the other groups and the Effutus left Techiman under the leadership of their powerful warrior and great farmer called Tumpa (which later corrupted as Osimpa). This oral history was further confirmed by Ghana-holiday.com (2016) which stated that the migration of the Effutu people from the ancient Western Sudan Empire to their present abode was led by a warrior.

From Techiman, they moved westwards towards the Western Region and then migrated to Effutu (a place near Cape Coast). A few section of the group settled in Effutu and majority moved along the coast. The group saw ant-hill at a place along the coast which they thought were human beings and decided to open fire at them hence, the expression-"Ana anetuamo" which literally means let us shoot at them. They settled at the place for a short period, hence the name Otuam which comes out of the expression "Ana anetuamo". From Ekumfi Otuam, they moved along the coast and entered another small town before Mumford and saw structures that looked like humans again. This time, they decided to shoot at the people to get response. Therefore they said "Ana ane da ego" which eventually gave the name of the place as Deگو.

Majority of the people led by Nana Tumpa Osimpa and his blood sister Edwe moved from Deگو towards Apam. Edwe and some people in the group settled at the place and the settlement was named after Edwe as Edwe-Mba (Children of Edwe) hence, the name Dwema (Mumford). After Edwe and a section of the warriors had settled

in Dwema, Nana Tumpa decided to move further still searching for fertile land and good drinking water and the Dentsifo (a warrior group) joined him. From Dwema, they met the Manko hill, after descending the hill along the shore, a mile or so before the estuary of the Monyi Lagoon, they met a huge deep black sedimentary rock. They stopped immediately and named the place "Empi Obi" (Black stone).

Traditionally, it is believed that, the Effutu people touched the Monyi lagoon on Wednesday, tasted River Ayensu on Friday and decided to settle at Penkye (Their present abode) on Saturday the month of May. On tasting the Lagoon, it was found to be hard and after discovering River Ayensu on Friday a mother god was given some of the water to drink and the expression-"Ayansunim" was derived which means a god drinking water, which later became Ayensu. Finally, Nana Osimpa Tumpa, Dentsifo and their group settled at Penkye.

The Simpa people are known globally by their famous traditional Deer festival called Simpa Aboakyir. According to their history, the people celebrate the festival in honour of their ancestral god called Apasekum who led them during their migration from Western Sudan to their present abode. As customs demand, Apasekum would always make a request for human sacrifice every year through his fetish linguist god Otu and the human beings were drawn from children of the priest of the deity. This practice depleted the family. However, the people pleaded with Apasekum through Otu to substitute the annual human sacrifice with something else and the god heeded to their plea and substituted with a live Leopard. Ironically, this change aggravated the situation since some of the warriors were killed by the carnivorous animals every year during their hunting expedition to capture a live Leopard with their bare hands. Upon persistent plea with Apasekum, the deity selected a live Deer to replace the live Leopard because, the god believed that the blood of a live Deer was the same as the human blood and also the stripped skin of a Deer looks like that of a Leopard skin. From 1515 A. D. to date a live Deer has been hunted for the annual sacrifice during the festival. This oral history was also reported by Ghana-holiday.com (2016), which claimed that Aboakyir festival is a celebration to mark the migration of Simpa people from the ancient Western Sudan Empire, where they were led by two brothers and a god called Otu. Ghana web (2016) confirmed Ghana-holiday.com (2016), claim by adding that, Deer hunting is organised in honour of the tribal god of the people of Winneba called "PenkyeOtu". Even though the researchers support the confirmation of the oral history of the Simpa people by Ghana-holiday.com (2016), they vehemently oppose the websites claim that the Aboakyir festival is celebrated to commemorate the Linguist god Otu.

Traditionally, the actual celebration of the annual Simpa Aboakyir festival starts a month before the actual day. Before the Monday of the last week of the event, numerous customary rituals are performed to prepare the grounds for a successful event. Most of the traditional activities that are to be witnessed by visitors take place from Monday to Sunday of the last week of the event. Even though the festival is organised on behalf of every Effutu anywhere in the world, it is always organised by the brothers and sisters who live in Ghana and within the Effutu traditional area. Most of the rituals are performed by chiefs, fetish priests and priestess and the two Asafo Companies: Tufafo, No. 1 and Dentsifo, No. 2 and indigenous groups. The youths and visitors also play significant roles during the festival.

The event is always characterised by display of artifacts finished in rich flamboyant colours that create a high sense of aesthetics especially at the durbar grounds on the Saturday. Apparently, these colours dominate the entire atmosphere of the festival since they are seen in almost every object that is used during the event. Impriam, (2015) shared his views that the energetic and enthusiastic characteristics associated with the involvement of these artifacts in the festivals play functional, economic and aesthetic roles which are indispensable to the culture of the people.

Colour is explained by Stewards, (1984) as a sensation created on the retina of the eye by different wavelengths of lights. Amenuke, Dogbe, Asare, Ayiku and Baffoe,(1999) also posited that colour is the most fascinating element in the visual world. The beauty of colour highlighted by Amenuke et al, (1999) is also ascribed to by Stewards, (1984) who described colour as a visual sensation created by different wavelengths of lights. Gillete, (2000) in an attempt to explain colour, described it as a perception created in the brain as a result of stimulation of the retina by light waves of a certain length. A careful analysis of the opinions of the above authors on the nature of colour reveals that colour is a visible light in the atmosphere that can be perceived by the retina of the eye. This presupposes that without the retina and visible light, colour cannot be perceived. To unravel the misery behind this phenomenon, Getlein, (2002) traced the source of visible colours to the discovery of the spectrum colours from sunlight by Sir Isaac Newton in 1666. The British physicist claimed that the natural sun is embodiment of all visible colours in the universe and proved it with two experiments: prism and water-test methods (Amenuke et al, 1999).

According to Sir Isaac Newton, both experiments revealed various shades of coloured lights from the sun but he noticed that seven of them dominated, he selected them and named them spectrum or rainbow colours. These pure light colours are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Upon examination, he identified commonalities in the spectrum colours and further selected three of them which could possibly be mixed to obtain the other colours and named them primary colours of light. These colours are red, blue and green. Hurst, (1980) in supporting the report of Getlein, (2002) claimed that, the spectrum colours are the bases of all visible tangible

and intangible colours in the solar system. Stewards, (1984) claimed that it is the visible light colours that make it possible for human beings to identify various shades of colours in tangible objects in the solar system and these tangible coloured objects are called pigment colours (Fulcher, Tickle, Rholes, & Steward, 1998). Apparently, the colours are found in plants, animals, earth, and others.

For easy mixing of pigment colours, three basic colours have also been selected from coloured pigments and named pigment primary colours. They are red, blue and yellow. The mixture of two primary colours produces a secondary colour while a primary colour and its adjacent secondary colours produce tertiary colours. To facilitate easy application of pigment colours in visual and applied arts, various individuals and organisations have developed colour systems. Notable among them are Munsell colour system and twelve-colour wheel system. The Twelve-colour wheel system for instance, consists of twelve pigment colours arranged chronologically in a circular format. The twelve colours have been listed as follows: Yellow, Yellow-green, Green, Blue-green, Blue, Blue-violet, Violet, Red-violet, Red, Red-orange, Orange and Orange-yellow (Getlein, 2002 & Fulcher et al, 1998)

The researchers opine that, because there are principles governing the selection and application of colours in visual arts, it is imperative that creative artists understand the theories and psychology of colour since knowledge and skills in colour psychology and application facilitates one's ability to achieve good colour harmony in creative arts. The researchers would therefore suggest that visual artists must acquaint themselves effectively with the following colour terms and schemes: Hue, value, intensity, tint, shade, contrast, harmony, cool colours, warm colours, advancing colours, retiring colours and colour schemes such as analogous colours, complementary colours, triadic colours, monochromatic colours and polychromatic colours (Fulcher et al, 1998).

Hue is the basic identity of colour. For example, all the spectrum colours and the colours in the twelve colour wheel are hues. Value refers to the lightness and darkness of a colour. Intensity refers to the purity of a colour. These three terminologies are used to describe the characteristics of colour (Agyarkoh, 2016). Tint is used to describe a hue in which white has been added, while shade describes a hue in which black has been added. Contrast refers to the dominant feature of a colour. Thus the ability of a colour to obliterate or conceal the one it has been imposed. Harmony refers to the coherence and unity achieved in using different colours in a scheme, cool colours are calm and retiring colours that are dominated by blues, greens, violets and others, while warm colours are hot, aggressive and advancing colours dominated by reds, yellows, orange etc. and black and white are known as neutral colours (Goodier, 1990).

Colour schemes are pair of colours that are combined to produce work of art. Some examples of conventional colour schemes are analogous, complementary, triad, monochrome, achromatic, dichrome, trichrome, tetrachrome and others. Analogous are two or more colours adjacent on the colour wheel and which contain a common factor of colours. Complementary are colours that lie directly opposite or near opposite on the colour wheel. Triad is three colours equidistance on the colour wheel. Achromatic is a mixture of black and white to produce tones of grey. Monochrome is the tints and shades of one hue. Dichrome is the tints and shades of two hues. Trichrome is the tints and shades of three hues whilst tetrachrome is the tints and shades of four hues (Amenuke et al, 1999).

Colour plays very important role in all traditional festivals across the world which Simpa Aboakyir is not an exception. Having stayed at Winneba for several years, the researchers have had the privilege of witnessing the Simpa Aboakyir festival on many occasions and have identified the flamboyant display of colours during the festival. These aesthetically appealing colours dominate in all categories of people who participate and witness the occasion every year. The question is, have creative art professionals and students who witness the festival annually reflected on these colours to identify the colour schemes that dominate the occasion? It is on the bases of this that the researchers who have visual art backgrounds found it necessary to adopt a field study approach to conduct a qualitative research into the colours used during the Simpa Aboakyir so that various dimensions of the colours can be explored. To enable the researchers to gather relevant qualitative data for the study, the following research questions were developed to guide the study: What are the dominant colours used during the festival? What colour schemes can be identified in the colours and how do the colours impact on the festival?

2. Methodology

Based on the ontological and epistemological positions of the researchers towards the study, the researchers aligned the study to the interpretivism research paradigm which led to the adaptation of descriptive qualitative research approach. These research paradigm and approach allow researchers to base on their personal observations and respondents opinions and views to construct meanings through inductive analysis (Blaikie, 2010, Malhotra, and Birks, 2007, and Fraenkel, and Wallen, 2009). Also, descriptive research was used to systematically describe the colours of aboakyir.

Due to the nature of the objectives and research questions of the study, the researchers employed a longitudinal research design and field study and descriptive research method to conduct the study. Kumar, (1999) and Creswell, (2003), asserted that longitudinal research designs provide opportunity for a researcher to collect information from a respondent many times whiles field study allows a researcher to personally visit the setting of the study to observe event or phenomenon. These assertions are buttressed by McGivern, (2006), Guy et al. (1987)

and Churchill, and Iacobucci, (2009).

The target population of the study consisted of all natives of Winneba who took part in the festival and visitors who witnessed the festival. Due to the large size of the target population, it was reduced to an accessible population constituting of the members of the royal entourage, the two main Asafo companies in the traditional area, participating indigenous groups and visitors. In order to facilitate data collection, the researchers used purposive sampling technique to select sample population for the study. The purposive sampling technique was used because, it permits researchers to base on their personal experiences, familiarity with the study area and advice from professionals and experts to select respondents that can provide relevant information which can answer the research questions of the study (Malhotra and Birks, 2007). The sample population was selected from the two main Asafo companies (Twafo and Dentsifo), the royal entourage, indigenous participating groups and visitors. Table 1 below shows the distribution of respondents for the study.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents

Category of respondents	Number selected
Leaders of Asafo companies	2
Spokes persons of the royal entourage	2
Indigenous participating groups	2
Visitors	10
Total sample population	16

3. Discussion of Findings

Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. In line with the principles of interpretivism paradigm and qualitative research approach, the researchers used unstructured interview guide, observation and art appreciation to gather data for the study because, these instruments are aligned with the philosophies of subjective and constructive epistemology which formed the bases of the study (Kusi, 2012, and Rubin, & Rubin, 1995).

The researchers stayed during the week of the festival period and observed most of the activities that took place. They personally conducted series of unstructured verbal interviews with the respondents, recorded the responses electronically and made field notes where necessary. They also used professional cameras to take photographs of relevant activities and scenes throughout the period.

The responses of all the interviews were transcribed and the field notes expanded. The appropriate photographs were also selected and edited with Adobe Photoshop to enhance their quality. The processed data was codified into relevant themes that would respond appropriately to the research questions of the study and the colours of the images were aesthetically appreciated using classical aesthetic theories of formalism and expressionism. The following criteria were used to appreciate the pictures: the types of colour evident in the pictures, how the colours were applied in the pictures and the colour schemes identified in the photographs.

The researchers also read through the transcriptions and expanded field notes thoroughly and grouped them according to the research questions of the study. The data were presented and analysed using qualitative descriptive approaches such as interpretation and inductive reasoning to reflect the research questions and objectives of the study. Below are the major findings that emerged from the appreciation of photographs, analysis of transcriptions and field notes:

3.1 Colours of Royal Costume

Assessment of the pictures of the royal entourage revealed that different types and shades of hues were used in the costumes of the chiefs, queen mothers and their entourage. These colours consisted of different shades of yellow, orange, blue, green, red, black and white. The yellows were dominant in their jewelry and clothes, headgear, sandals and Lindquist staffs. Almost all the chiefs and the queen mothers were dressed in rich colourful kente clothes of varying shades of cool and warm hues creatively blended to achieve good contrast and harmony. It was also observed that different colours had been paired into schemes in the royal costumes. Figures 1 and 2 below are some photographs of the royal entourage.



Figure 1: Chiefs and Queen Mothers (Source: Fieldwork, 2016)



Figure 2: Linguists Leading their Paramount Chiefs (Source: Fieldwork, 2016)

A careful study of the colours identified in the costumes of the four groups of people that took part in the festival revealed to the researchers that, the costumes of the royal entourage were dominated by different tones of yellow being complemented with different tones of analogous colours such as orange, red, greens, leaf-green. However, few blues, black and white were found in the schemes. It can be induced from the colours that the dominance of yellow in the scheme symbolically portrays their royalty which distinguishes them from their subjects. It can therefore be suggested that in the Effutu culture, selection of colours for royal wardrobe is made to reflect the status of the chiefs in the society especially during public events. Again, the use of yellow with analogous colours such as orange, red and green in the colour schemes of the royal costume portray that the designers of the costumes did not consider only traditional colour symbolism but were aesthetically conscious to create colour harmony in the costumes.

The researchers can therefore conclude that the designers had knowledge and skills in colour symbolism and application. This view of the researchers is supported by Amenuke et al, (1999) who stated various types of harmonious colour schemes that can be used in visual arts. The researchers can also induce from the analysis that, dominance of varying shades of yellow, in the colour schemes of the royal costume suggests that the designers knew how to create tints, shades and grays of colours. Also the direct and split complementary colour schemes used in the costumes further confirm the knowledge of the designers in aesthetics. The use of such colour schemes in visual art is also suggested by (Fulcher et al, 1998).

3.2 Colours of Asafo Companies

The analysis of the costumes of No. 2 (Dentsifo) Asafo Company revealed that the group used different colours

such as red, yellow, shaded green, blue, white, black, and others. It was noted from the appreciation that the dominant and symbolic colour of the group was red which was complemented with yellow. However, their Supi (Chief) also wore white and blue costume. It was also observed that some of the leaders of the group wore multi-coloured costumes consisting of strong yellow, shaded green, pink, tinted blue and red. It also emerged from the appreciation that the wooden horse their chief (Supi) sat on the Saturday afternoon was rendered black and some of their sub-chiefs held black sticks and wore multi-colour costumes that were not easily identified with the group. It was also noticed that the group did not limit the use of the red colour to their clothes but smeared it on their skin as well. Figures 3 to 6 below are photographs of Dentsifo Asafo Company.



Figure 3: Dentsifo Asafo Group (Source: Fieldwork, 2016)



Figure 4: Staunch Members of No. 2 Group (Source: Fieldwork, 2016)



Figure 5: No. 2 Asafo sub-chiefs (Source: Fieldwork, 2016)



Figure 6: No. 2 Asafo Supi on a Wooden Horse (Source: Fieldwork, 2016)

White and blue were the only colours seen in the costume of the Tuafo, No. 1 Asafo Company. The group also did not limit the use of the white to their costumes but smeared it on their skin as well. Figure 7 below is a photograph of the Tuafo Asafo Group.



Figure 7: Tuafo Asafo Group (Source: Fieldwork, 2016)

The findings also revealed that the ordinary members of the Tuafo Asafo Company used fewer colours in their costumes than the ordinary members of the Dentsifo Asafo Company. This suggests to the researchers that the use of colours by the Tuafo Asafo Company is much focused on traditional symbolism than aesthetics. On the other hand, the analysis revealed that the Dentsifo Asafo Company did focus much on traditional colour symbolism but were much conscious of achieving aesthetics in their costumes. This was evident in the multi colour schemes

that were used in the costumes of the leaders and chiefs of the Asafo Company.

3.3 Colours of Native Participating Groups

Apart from the two main Asafo Companies, there were many indigenous groups that participated in the event. During the 2016 edition, the researchers were able to witness two of such groups and appreciated the colours of their costumes. The costume of one of the groups consisted of yellow, brown and red while the other was a monochrome of brown. (See figure 8)



Figure 8: Pictures of some native participating groups (Source: Fieldwork, 2016)

Also, a thorough examination of the findings that emerged from the data pointed out that the colour of the indigenous groups that participated in the festival were selected for identification and aesthetic purposes but did not base on any symbolic traditional significance. This observation was so with the multi-colours found in the dresses of the visitors.

3.4 Colours of Non-participants Native and Visitors

Examination of the colours of the non-participants native and visitors costumes in figure 9 revealed multi-colour schemes. Figure 9 below is a photograph of native non-participants and visitors.



Figure 9: Pictures of visitors and non-participating natives (Source: Fieldwork, 2016)

The tables 2 to 4 below show the summary of dominant colours and colour schemes used in the celebration of the 2016 edition of the Simpa Aboakyir festival.

Table 2. Dominant colours and schemes in royal costume

Pair of colours	Identified colour schemes
Blue, green and orange.	Direct and split complementary and analogous
Green, orange and cream	Analogous and split complementary
Green and cream	Analogous tint.
Purple-red and pink	Analogous tint
White and cream	Hue tint
Blue, cream and orange	Analogous and direct complementary
Yellow, orange, green and blue	Analogous and direct complementary
White, orange, blue and shaded leaf-green	Analogous shade, direct complementary

Source: Fieldwork, May, 2016

Table 3. Dominant colours and schemes in Dentsifo Asafo Company's costume

Pair of colours	Identified colour schemes
Red	Pure red colour
Strong yellow, shaded green, pink, tinted blue and red.	Monochrome and analogous
Blue, white and black	Contrasting and neutral colours
Yellow and red	Analogous
Multiple colours	Polychrome

Source: Fieldwork, May, 2016

Table 4. Dominant colours and schemes in No. 1 Asafo Company and visitor's costume

Group Category	Dominant colours	Identified colour scheme
Tuafo, No. 1 Asafo Company	White and Blue	Contrasting colours
Visitors and non-participating natives	Multi-coloured	Polychrome

Source: Fieldwork, May, 2016

3.5 Impacts of the Colours on the Festival

To enable the researchers gather relevant data that could answer this research question appropriately, the researchers conducted series of unstructured interviews with 16 respondents consisting of leaders of the royal entourage, leaders of the two Asafo companies, leaders of indigenous participating groups and visitors that witnessed the occasion to seek their views and opinion about the impacts the colours used during the festival had on the event. It emerged from the transcriptions that all the respondents agreed that the colours had socio-cultural and educational significance. The informants for royal entourage and the Asafo groups for instance, said that, "the colours help visitors to distinguish the chiefs from their people, the two main Asafo companies and the various indigenous groups from each other". They also said "the colours contribute to the general beauty of the occasion." Again, the analysis of the colour schemes that emerged from the findings revealed to the researchers that different conventional and non-conventional colour combinations (scheme) were used for the festival which showed good contrast and harmony. Most of these colour schemes have been suggested by Getlein, (2002) and Holdsworth (2005). It could also be observed that, most of the colour schemes used were based on the twelve colour wheel provided by Getlein, (2002).

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the major findings that emerged from the data analysis and discussions of results, the researchers could infer that, aesthetic application of colour is an integral part of the culture and traditions of the Simpa people since their traditional Aboakyir festival is characterised by variety of flamboyant colour schemes. It can also be concluded that these aesthetically appealing colour schemes were not just used to beautify the occasion but had symbolic significance on their culture. It can also be highlighted that these colours have socio-cultural and educational impacts on the people of Effutu and the visitors who witnessed the festival.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn, the researchers would finally recommend that visual art students at all levels of education must be encouraged to explore further into the colour schemes used by the Effutu traditional area during the Simpa Aboakyir festival and experiment them in their designs. Also, History, African Arts and Culture, Arts and Culture, African Studies, Anthropology, Theatre Arts, Tourism, Visual arts, and Art education students, tutors, lecturers and researchers must be encouraged by relevant state and private stake holder organisations to research into various aspects of the culture in general and in particular festival of the Ghanaian people and document them for posterity.

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