


Design components in the celebration of Hogbe festival of Battor traditional area in Ghana

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Abstract: Festivals are regarded as one of the most important elements in the formation of culture. This means that in order for a town to accomplish its cultural development goals, the festival should be a focal point. The Battor Traditional Area celebrates the Hogbe festival to commemorate their escape from Notsie, Togo, to their current abodes in Ghana's Volta Region. The paper seeks to identify and describe the design elements and principles that contribute to the festival's success and pageantry. The study employed qualitative research, using Hogbe festival as a case study. The qualitative research was used for the study because it allowed for detailed description of events of the festival and facilitated close interactions between the researchers and the participants in their natural settings. Thirty-five (35) participants were purposively chosen, and data were collected using a semi-structured interviews, field notes, photography, and participant and non-participant observations. According to the results, the inhabitants of the locality profited through social, cultural, economic, political and spiritual means as a result of their commitments to this cultural heritage. The art forms on display, the appearance, and understanding of the celebration's socio-cultural significance were among the observations conducted. The findings also indicated that, throughout the festival's celebration, the chiefs' procession and entourage display line, space, colour, variety, rhythm, line, dominance, and unity among others. It is recommended that the Battor Traditional Council, Hogbe planning committee, the North Tongu District Assembly, business community in the area, creative art industry, Ghana Tourism Authority, civil society organizations, and the general public should maintain the various activities that characterize the celebration in order to bring about beauty, appreciation and preservation of cultural heritage for the study area.

Keywords: Battor, Cultural heritage, Design, Elements and principles of design, Hogbe Festival, Notsie

1. Introduction

Festivals are rituals that occur at regular intervals and serve as an expression of a community's beliefs. There is also a conscious expectation that certain very specific ends will be achieved as a result of the festivals' performance, and that the performance is motivated by the desire to achieve some form of satisfaction, which is expected to be achieved (Akintan, 2013). Festivals have become part of Ghanaian culture. They are recognized as distinct institutions and are carried out in accordance with institutional philosophies. As the name 'Hobgeza' implies, the annual festival of the people of Battor Traditional Area in the North Tongu District of Volta Region, Ghana was intended not only to bring together family and friends and to remember the past, but also to raise funds to support the communities' developmental projects. The festival is held to thank God and their forefathers for their protection throughout the year.

Festivals, according to Kemevor (2004), as cited in Ayine (2009), are socio-religious in nature. To isolate them from religion is a fundamental misunderstanding of indigenous festivals. Festivals, he believes, are special times set aside by a community to commemorate important historical, cultural, or religious events. Adongo and Abanga (2014) observed in their studies that, some popular festivals in the country including the *Hogbestosto* of

the Anlo of the Volta Region, the *Aboakyer* (deer hunt) festival of the Effutu of Winneba, Edina *Burunya* celebrated in Elmina to usher in the New Year and the *Homowo* of the Ga which is celebrated to signify an end to hunger in memory the suffering of their ancestors, are notable festivals of southern Ghana. The festival's hosts and communities provide visitors with a vibrant and valuable arts and culture experience. They continued to state that, the *Samanpid* Festival of the Kusasi of Bawku, the *Kobine* Festival of the people of Lawra, the *Fiok* of Sandema (Builsa tribe) and the *Bong Ngo* Festival of Jirapa, are agriculture-related festivals in Northern Ghana. In agreement with this view, Cultural festivals, according to Adom (2016), can be important tools for the development of rural areas, especially in festival-prone countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, if they are strategically planned and well-tailored in line with developmental policies and ideologies of a society or nation at large.

These are manifested through activities such as chiefs and entourage procession, cultural troupe performances, seating arrangements, costumes, dramatizations, musical interludes, and other artefacts embedded in festival celebrations. Festivals in the community are becoming increasingly popular. Festivals are a type of event and a short-term experience that organizers, participants, and spectators create based on timing, location, theme, design, and ambiance. People are important elements of festivals, according to Pages and Connell (2012). People's interactions lead to the formation of relationships between them and the festival; as a result, meanings are attached to the experience. Festivals produce social and cultural outcomes in this way.

When a designer plans his work, he brings together qualities like dot, line, shape, texture, space, plane, mass, and colour, according to Amenuke, Dogbe, Asare, Ayiku and Bafoe (1991) as cited in Kemevor and Duku, (2013). The viewer notices the relationship between the elements. In reality, analyzing and appreciating a work of art may require evaluating the work in the context of these elements and principles, and if the artist organized these qualities of art well or harmoniously, the work may be acclaimed as a good work of art, regardless of the cultural and social significance attached to the work. Against this backdrop, the chief's and his subjects' procession, when viewed from an artistic standpoint, has a lot to design in the realm of festivals. The chief's and his entourage's sitting posture on the ceremonial ground is also artistic. Sword bearers, flywhisk bearers, and hand fan bearers flank the chiefs on both sides. The hand fan bearers are there to keep flies away from the chief while also providing adequate ventilation. These facts support the demonstration of balance and rhythm (Kemevor & Duku, 2013).

Similarly, all of the chiefs arrive in almost the same order. This symbolic act exemplifies line, harmony, and order. Rich cloths in a variety of colours, such as blue, red, yellow, violets, and others, are worn by the chiefs. They also adorn themselves with beads, rings on their fingers, and anklet ornaments made of beautiful artefacts. The distribution of geometric shapes such as spiral lines, rectangles, or chains of horizontal and vertical lines on various parts of the chiefs' and participants' bodies, as seen in the photographs, stimulates eye movement around the body from the head to the feet, creating aesthetic sensations in the observers' and celebrants' eyes. This means that the way the markings on the bodies are organized helps to tie the various parts together as a design (Impraim-Swanzy, 2015). The graceful patterns are created by the aesthetic elaboration and organization of the round and spiral lines, as well as the vertical and horizontal lines on the participants' bodies. The colours of the paintings, such as the mix of white, blue, yellow, and green on the celebrants' bodies, add extra adornment to their complexion.

According to Cole (1975), as stated in Kemevor (2017), the regalia that surround and embellish monarchy and the institution of chieftaincy are the most visible of artworks, designed to publicly declare their authority and grandeur. Other body markings, such as scarification and incisions on the cheeks, shoulders, and arms, are permanent on the bodies of the celebrants, and while these markings may be for protective, identification, or religious purposes, they enhance the wearers' beauty during the *Hogbe* festival. The event promotes the community by raising individuals and places to a higher degree of aesthetics, spirituality, and social values.

Kemevor (2017) also highlights the aesthetic depiction of festivals when he asserts that the entirety of a festival cannot be expressed in printed words and photos. This clearly demonstrates the importance of art and design in the celebration of festivals.

2. The Historical perspective of *Hogbe* festival

One of Ghana's indigenous festivals is *Hogbe* festival. *Hogbe* festival is an event that commemorates Ewe history and recalls how the Ewe-Dogbo people were rescued from the tyranny of Torgbui Agorkorli of Notsie in Togo to a mythical exodus and great deeds of valiant warriors and their supernatural powers. The Battor people commemorate their journey from Notsie, Togo, to their current location in Ghana's Volta Region between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Historians believe that the Ewe people, of whom the Battor are a part, migrated to their current nation from Oyo in Western Nigeria. The festival provides them with the ideal opportunity to commemorate all of their great escapes as a people since leaving Notsie (Gborglah, 2010). The Dogbo people had planned a terrible escape in which the city's royal guards would be slaughtered, but Torgbui Tegli changed his mind and selected a calm and diplomatic exit instead. He proposed mapping a piece of the swish wall and instructing women to pour household water and menstrual flow-contaminated water over it. This was done to counterbalance supernatural forces that were claimed to have made the wall super-strong during construction due to the infusion of human blood and the bodies of the king's adversaries. The Dogbo women kept the secret and gradually weakened and desecrated the wall with unclean water.

The Dogbo organized an all-night drumming and dance event on the day of departure (*hohogbe*). Torgbui Tegli was whisked into the city at midnight, carrying the liberation dagger 'adekpui'. He hid himself from opponents' gazes since he held mystical powers and the spirits of the ancestors. The men brought the wall down after he pierced it with his knife, cancelling the wall's occultic abilities. The people escaped backwards through the broken wall to freedom under the guidance and leadership of Torgbui Tegli. After the long voyage, Torgbui Tegli got too weak to continue, so he vanished and moved to a remote region, where he died and joined his ancestors in the kingdom of death. (Noahnash, 2010). To avoid being discovered, they "walked backwards" to confuse their pursuers, and legend has it that "The Red Hunter" transformed himself into a rat and walked over all of their footprints to make them appear old. When they arrived in their current location, they created the *Hogbe* (Exodus Festival) to commemorate the event. The forefathers of Dogbe people arrived in Ghana after wandering and broken into different states like Anlo, Asorgli, Gbi, Akpini, Tongu, and Hokpe (Gborglah, 2010; Noahnash, 2010).

3. Research methodology

This paper's framework was based on the qualitative research paradigm using *Hogbe* festival as a case study. This research approach was seen as appropriate for the study because of its exploratory, inquiry nature and its ability to thoroughly describe phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Kusi, 2012; Adom 2016). Semi-structured interview, field notes, photography and participant and non-participant observations were used to collect the required data. To ensure the validity of the data gathered, triangulation and multiple data sources were used. Interviewees' consents were sought for ethical reasons, and the agreed-upon terms of confidentiality were followed. Traditional rulers, assembly members, clan leaders, youths, students, opinion leaders, and elite indigenes in Battor Traditional Area provided data for this study through semi-structured interviews. Using participant observation method, the researcher was able to appreciate, experience, and notice essential features and elements of the festival. Thirty-five (35) participants were chosen purposively from this large population to represent the sample of the study. The sample size of 35 was selected because of manageability and accessibility. Also, the sample size enabled the phenomenon under study to be explored in detail for a better understanding

(Creswel, 2008; Denscombe, 2008; Agyedu, Donkor & Obeng, 2010 as cited in Dampson & Mensah, 2012). Creswell (2008) as cited in Kusi (2012) argues that, selecting a large number of interviewees for a qualitative research will result in superficial perspectives. The data from the instruments were qualitatively analysed through thematic lens to identify themes and patterns such as line, unity, space and rhythm among others.

4. Results and discussion

According to the respondents, *Hogbe* festival is celebrated through a variety of activities characterized by rich cultural displays. During the festival's celebrations, a variety of traditional dances are performed. The dance performances are well-organized and consistent. Drummers and singers were also seen in colourful and matching outfits, bringing rhythm, balance, unity, and harmony to the scene, as shown in figure 1. The dancers formed a circle by moving their bodies in a circle, as defined by rhythmic 'curves.' This contributes to the festival's pleasant and enjoyable atmosphere by creating space, shape line and rhythm. Various performances are put on, particularly during the drumming and dancing of the various invited cultural troupes. The majority of the festival's events are geared toward the youth. They are taught to execute dances like *Atibla*, *Kinka*, and *Atsiagbekor*, which dramatize and demonstrate a variety of movement skills. They also dress up as youthful chiefs and do recitations, blow horns, drum, and play the drum language.



Figure 1: A dance performance by a cultural troupe during *Hogbe* festival

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016

People's movements throughout the festival imply a line, shape, dot, or space, which adds design and aesthetics to the event. Balance, peace, and tranquility are ensured by the participants' movements and orderliness. Its attractiveness and originality inspire onlookers and add spice to events. This can be seen in figure 2, where Royal ladies are photographed exchanging pleasantries.



Figure 2: Royal ladies exchanging pleasantries during *Hogbe* festival

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016

Fiaga and his entourage arrive at the durbar ground in Figure 3. The linguist in front of the chiefs carries staffs with proverbial symbols that identify each clan at the top. The chiefs were dressed in kente, a brightly coloured, geometrically patterned cloth. The symbolic use, motifs and colours, as well as the messages the cloth "speaks," all have inherent aesthetics. Kente has its underlying symbolism revealing rhythm, variety, colour shape among

others as shown in the costumes of the chiefs. This is to emphasize that such design components can only be discerned by viewers with strong artistic sensibilities. In this sense, the imagery is chosen for a purpose rather than for its own sake.



Figure 3: *Fiaga* and his entourage arriving at the durbar ground

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016

The event starts with a procession, which is a form of organized design in and of itself. The procession's hierarchical structure conveys a sense of balance, order, and unity. The executioners are led by the sling drummer, staff bearers, stool carriers, costumed court attendant girls, horn blowers, the chief, drummers, female praise singers, and the crowds in that order. By progression, this may be termed a rhythm. The chief and his entourage sit in a 'U' shape formation at the durbar ground, with the chief in the center, flanked respectfully on the left and right by two divisional chiefs and drummers. This arrangement creates unity as a design principle. Figure 4 shows the design elements of unity, rhythm, line, and dominance.



Figure 4: Unity, variety, rhythm, line, colour in the costumes, jewelry and procession of the chiefs

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016

There is also much display of colour and texture in the umbrellas as well as some symbolism in the umbrella tops. For example, the umbrella of the *Kornokuxor* clan has a male statue on it that indicates the chief's willingness to defend his people at all times. It is supported with a metal pole at the centre thereby assuming symmetrical balance as shown in figure 5 below.



Figure 5: *Kornokuxor's* umbrella at the durbar ground

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016



Figure 6: Space created as a result of the arrangement of canopies at the durbar ground

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016

The contrast and harmony in the beat or rhythm of the drum language is so melodious (figure 7). This was supported by verbal art to invite the special guest, Hon. Alex Segbefia of the occasion and the minister of Health to deliver his speech. In today's world, festivals play an important role in a country's political arena. These are forums where the ruler and the ruled, or the elected and the electorate, can communicate and discuss concerns. These festivals are used by traditional authorities to reassert their power over their subjects and to meticulously prepare activities for their communities. The drums at the *Hogbe* festival produce music with a rhythm and harmony that is expressed through drumming and dancing. Drums and drummers are placed opposite dancers to create a vast arena which is considered as a design element for showcasing talents and stylish bodily movements, which adds to the aesthetic appeal of drumming and dancing.



Figure 7: Drum language played to welcome Hon. Alex Segbefia

Source: Fieldwork data, 2016

In terms of the political implications of festivals, Kuuder, Adongo and Abanga (2012) express his opinion about the Congolese people's farming ritual festival, in which the chief and his wife play key roles in ritual activities. They go on to say that the indigenous people renew their loyalty to their leaders and pay homage to them. According to them, in today's rising African states, the traditional political role has taken on a national perspective, with governments seizing the chance for goodwill dialogue between chiefs whose people are enjoying the festival and the government of the day. They aid in bringing people together by allowing them to exhibit their confidence in themselves as well as their allegiance to their leaders. Also, from the responses, the celebration was historically significant since it was tied to our forefathers' journey from Notsie to their current sites, making it part of the Anlo-Ewe people's historic legacy. The festival is a cultural regulator of inhabitants' moral behavior in that it emphasizes the values, norms, beliefs, and code of ethics that are expected of every *Tongus* to ensure society development growth. In terms of social change, the event helps to improve the state of communities by having a good impact on the environment and architecture of the communities, as well as promoting togetherness, oneness, and social cohesion and integration. Individuals, small businesses, and companies benefit economically from the *Hogbe* cultural festival, which also helps traditional councils in host villages generate cash for societal development.

5. Conclusion

The goal of this paper is to pinpoint the characteristics that constitute design components in the *Hogbe* festival celebration. The study discovered that design components in the *Hogbe* festival celebration include elements and principles of art such as dot, space, line, shape, texture, variety, colour, rhythm, and balance, among others which are manifested in various activities. The arts (both visual and performing) are an important part of the *Hogbe* festival. Festivals are lavish affairs, featuring choreographed performances of dances, costumes, music, drama, and poetry. The findings revealed that, participants in this celebration wear *batakari* (smocks) in a range of colours. It's because wearing smocks makes it much easier for them to dance and dramatize whatever the drummer is saying, and when they do a whirling dance, the smocks beautifully revolve around them as if they're about to fly. All of the various costumes and dresses on display during the festival's celebrations bring to mind stupendous artistic creations of colours, shapes, lines, and textures, among other things. The wearing of different costumes by different groups transforms the entire ceremonial grounds into a kaleidoscope of colour, creating visual illusions, balance, and rhythm, enhancing the celebration's artistic qualities.

The art forms are created with the intention of eliciting different emotional responses. They give opportunities for the transmission of traditional customs and values from one generation to the next since it includes re-creation of the past. Festivals, on the other hand, serve as a way for people to recall significant events in history while also uniting them in expressing their respect for and confidence in their leaders. Another aesthetic feature worth noticing is the chief's and his entourage's hierarchical distribution of power and authority throughout the procession and seating arrangements at the ceremonial venue. In addition, the dignitaries' seats, the drummers' and singers' positions, and the spectators' circular configuration produce favourable perceptions and demonstrate that the organizers have thoughts about what is beautiful. This results in a design that has the potential to bring order, balance, and harmony to the spiritual sphere. Indeed, design is at the heart of the *Hogbe* festival's celebration. It is recommended that the Battor Traditional Council, *Hogbe* planning committee, the North Tongu District Assembly, business community in the area, creative art industry, Ghana Tourism Authority, civil society organizations, and the general public should maintain the various activities that characterize the celebration in order to bring about beauty, appreciation and preservation of cultural heritage of the study area.

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