

# Material Composition and Sources of the Feok Festival Costume

Lucy Agaasa George Nangpaak Duut Patrick Huxley Kojo Kokonu Georgina Adongo  
Lecturer, Department of Industrial Art, Bolgatanga Polytechnic, P. O. Box 767, Bolgatanga – UER, Ghana

## Abstract

The composition of the *feok* festival costumes was studied using descriptive survey. Seventy respondents were purposively sampled for the study, and data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides. The raw data was analyzed using SPSS data analysis software, version 16.0; and the results presented using frequency counts and percentages. Findings from the study revealed that the smocks were made from hand-woven cotton fabric and studded with talismans made from skins of cats, tigers and lions, and enclosed with herbs. The study further showed that the pantaloons were also crafted using hand-woven cotton fabric. The hats were fashioned using grass, calabash, talismans and horns. The waist belts and bangles were made from skins of animals and enclosed with herbs.

**Keywords:** “Feok”, Festival, Materials, Sources, Cultural Preservation, Tradition clothing

## 1. Introduction

The study of the cultural evolution of the *feok* festival of the Builsa people is of significance for heritage preservation and protection. In many civilizations around the world, costumes have been employed in varied cultural activities undertaken by inhabitants of diverse social groupings. One of its functions is to reflect the alteration of the work days and the days of leisure. Costumes differ morphologically as far as the quality and decoration is concerned. Costume for everyday usage is very practical in its colours, design and type of material used in its composition. For instance, festive garments are traditionally rich in colours and ornamentation, and are widely used in formal dancing and at festivals (Filippou *et al.*, 2002).

Dresses codes are symbolic visual pointers to a societal culture (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992). For example, the *kente* attire and smocks are specific apparel types representing cultures from the southern and northern parts of Ghana respectfully with unique identity. The smock is made of hand loomed strips of cotton fabric (*kente*) as in figure 2 that are three to four inches in width. The strips are sewn together by hand or machine, giving it a plaid appearance. Most smocks have embroidery designs on the neckline to enhance its lustrous appeal. Also, the stock is named based on the location. For example, in the Northern region of Ghana, it is traditionally called *fugu* or *batakari*, while the *Grunsis* and *Kusasis*, both in the Upper East region, called it *dansika* and *futik* respectively. These garments are greatly used during festive occasions.

The *feok* festival is one of such festivals that use colourful costumes including the smock. During the festival, the dancers wear impressive costumes of heavy russet smocks, studded with talismans over large pantaloons (Duut, 2014 & Nii-Yartey, 2013) as shown in figure 4. In addition, each dancer wears animal skins around the waist and carries bows and arrows as props. Other costumes include the notched flutes, metal bells, waist belts, horn-mounted hats and long cylindrical drums held with ropes over the left shoulder and played with a single stick held in the right hand to provide music for the dance (Alex, 2013). The production of the above costume components are largely undertaken by aged artisans. It appears many young people are not very much interested in this artistic area due to modernity.

Considering the fact that unused knowledge always fade away, unless information concerning the relevant materials used in crafting the *feok* costume is properly documented, this important knowledge could be lost to posterity (Duut, 2014). The ultimate aim of the researchers was document the material compositions of the *feok* festival costumes and establish how these materials are sourced. The research questions that guided the study therefore were; which materials are used in crafting the various components of the *feok* festival costume, and how are these material(s) sourced? The results of this study, the researchers believe will explicitly prevent the extinction of knowledge relating the materials used in producing the costume.

## 2. The Feok - Unique Festival of the Builsa's and the study area

The study was conducted in the Builsa District, which is one of the eleven districts of the Upper East region of Ghana. It lies between longitudes 1° 05' and 1° 35' West and latitudes 10° 20' and 10° 50' North. It is bounded on the north and east by the Kassena-Nankana District; west by the Sissala District and south by West Mamprusi and part of Kassena-Nankana. It has total land area of 2,220 Km<sup>2</sup> (Kwamina & Banneh, 2004). In retrospect, the people of Builsa, in the Upper East Region of Ghana, annually hold *feok* festival to remind the youth the resilience and courage their ancestors took against the slave raiders; Babatu and Samuri and others, from southern Gold Coast who undertook the trade in humans (Der, 1998). Without sophistication, the people were able to apply just simple bow and arrows, and spears laden with crocodile bile, fought and repelled the advancing slave raiders. This historical feat is marked annually on the 23 December, and it is held with

pageantry. The Festival comes closer to the Christmas season that brings together Builsa's all over the world to meet in Sandema, the district capital of the Builsa people for the celebration.

### 2.1 Sources of materials for producing fabric and making the regalia.

Studies have shown in Duut, (2014) that, the Builsa people obtain most of their festive costume materials through hunting of wild animals including reptiles. The other materials in herbal form, are obtained from special plants species like guinea stocks grasses, tree barks from indigenous natural forest plantations along the Fumbisi valley (Kwamina & Banneh, 2004). Fibres from the cotton plants are the key materials for making garments for cover. The most conspicuous aspect of the costume for the festival is the war regalia-smocks (as shown in plate 4). The smock is woven in the normal weaving process following the processes or steps as in figure 1.

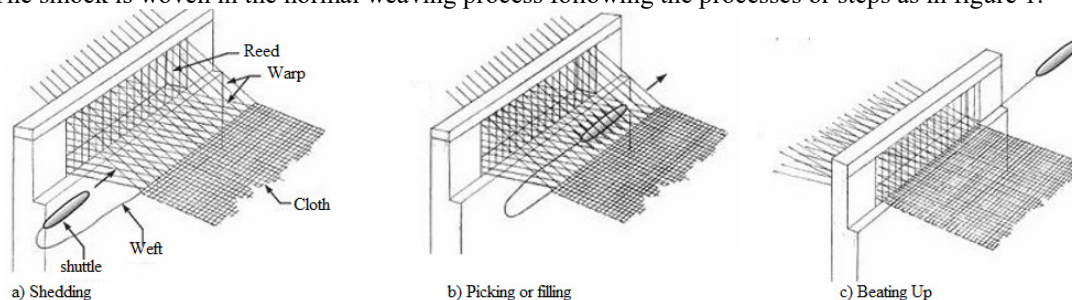


Figure 1. The weaving steps

Illustrations showing different stages of the weaving processes.

The fabric weaving process starts with the shedding stage. This consists of separating the warp yarns into two layers by lifting and lowering the shafts to form a tunnel known as the 'shed' as in (a). In the next stage, known as the picking or filling constitutes a process of passing the weft yarn across the warp threads through the shed as in (b). Following the filling process is the beating-up stage. This includes pushing the newly inserted weft yarn back into the fell using the reed as in (c). The full sequence is repeated through insertion and interlacing of the weft yarn length with the warp yarns (Luther, 2010 & Elgier, 2008).

### 2.2 Woven fabric and types of smock made

The final hand-woven fabric looks like the picture in plate 2. However, the colour or nature of the fabric chosen for design of the "smock and subsequent fortification" depends on the user (Aboagye, 2010). Fabrics that are used in making sleeveless smocks for social functions are mostly designed in coloured strips as in plate 3. On the other hand, Duut (2014) notes that fabrics that are meant for the *feok* festival smocks are strictly woven with plain colour yarns. The fabrics are then later dyed with special brown colours before the smock is sewn and taken through fortification with studded talismans as in figure 4.



Figure 2: Smock Fabrics



Figure 3: Woven Smock



Figure 4: Fortified Smock

### 3.0 Methodological approaches

Descriptive survey was used to gather data. This was aimed at examining a phenomenon occurring at specific places in particular times in relation to conditions, practices, structures, differences or relationships that exist, opinions held, processes that are going on or trends that are evident. Likewise, it generally takes raw data and summarizes it in a useable form (Malek & Massoud, 2011). Purposive sampling technique was used to sample seventy (70) respondents from the Builsa District for the study. The sampled population comprised traditional rulers, royals and scholars, producers of Feok costumes, Feok festival warriors and dancers as shown in Table: 1. According to Creswell (2003) 'purposive sampling technique' will enable a researcher to reach participants quickly and to use those participants with very rich experiences to collect meaningful information for deeper

understanding. Likewise, pictures of the feok costumes were taken and compared with the responses of the traditional people.

Table 1. People Sampled for the Study

Categories of Respondents	Frequency	%
<b>Traditional rulers</b>	20	28.57
<b>Royals</b>	10	14.29
<b>Scholars</b>	5	7.14
<b>Producers of Feok costumes</b>	15	21.43
<b>Warriors</b>	15	21.43
<b>Dancers</b>	5	7.14
<b>Total</b>	70	100

A table showing the categorization of respondents.

Interview guides and observation were the two instruments used in collecting the data for the study. The administration of the interview guide was in two sections. Five (5) literate respondents representing 7.14% were given prior information about the interview, and were made to peruse the interview questions a day before the interview. This idea was in accordance with Tashakkori & Teddies, (2003) concept to help obtain their views from academic perspective. Same percentage (7.14%) of respondents, made of the war-dancers on the other hand, were considered and interviewed when they thronged the chief's palace on the festival day, to announce their presence at the festival and pay homage to the paramount chief. This was also on the basis of their limited status in determining which or what costume to be used during a particular period (Duut, 2014).

The producers of feok costume and their warrior counterparts put together were 30 respondents representing a percentage of 42.68% on reason of soliciting views pertaining to indigenous Afro-centric Fashion Design (Sarpong, 2004). It is of similar position that Nukunya, (2003) advises that, traditional set ups of a society is the repository of in-depth knowledge and must be consulted at all times. In view of that, as many as 20 chiefs representing 28.57% and ten (10) subjects, representing 14.29% amongst the royal families were interviewed.

### 3.1 Results and Discussion

The responses of the interviewees relating to the material composition of the *feok* costume were categorised in frequencies and percentages, and presented below in Table: 2.

Table 2. Composition of the Male *Feok* Costume

Costume Types	Material Composition of Male <i>Feok</i> Costume	Frequency of Respondents	Percentages (%)
<b>Smock</b>	Cotton smock studded with talismans made of cat, lions, tiger skins	68	97.1
<b>The hat</b>	Calabash mounted with horns from bush cow/buffalo and talismans	67	95.7
	Grass Stalk hat made from <i>benbem</i> plant and mounted with horns from buffalo /bush cow and talismans	66	94.3
<b>Pantaloon</b>	Cotton trousers studded with talismans made with skins of bush animals and herbs	64	91.4
<b>Notch flute</b>	Horns from a bush animals called <i>kima</i> , metal/carved wood	63	90.0
<b>Shoes</b>	Skins/leather from bush animals	60	85.7
<b>Bangles</b>	Skins of wild animals and herbs	61	87.1
<b>Waist Belt</b>	Skins/leather enclosed with herbs or talismans	62	88.6

A table showing the responses of the interviewees relating to the material composition of the *feok* costume were categorised in frequencies and percentages, and presented. *Source: field work (2014)*

As shown in Table 2, the male *feok* festival costume includes the smock worn over a long pantaloons, the hat, pair of shoes, bangles and a notch flute. In terms of composition of raw materials for design of the costume, 68 respondents representing 97.1% stated that the smock was produced from cotton fabric and studded with talismans. The cotton plant is shown in figure 8. These talismans were produced from cats, lions and tiger skins. The hat, a unique feature; is made of either a calabash (figure 5) mounted with horns from a bush cow or buffalo (figure 7) as stated by 67 respondents representing 94.3%. Again as captured in Table 2, 66 respondents representing 94.3% indicated that the hat could also be crafted from grass stalks of a local plant called *benbem* as shown in figure 6.



Figure 5: A calabash gourd from which the hat can be made



Figure 6: grass plant (Bembem) from which the hat can be woven



Figure 7: Horns of a buffalo  
(Use to mount on the hat)



Figure 8: The Cotton plant. (Raw material for the smock fabric)

The pantaloons are fashioned out of cotton fabric and affixed with talismans made of bush animal skins and herbs, as agreed by 64 of the respondents representing 91.4%. Furthermore, the notch flute which provides melodious music for the dancers is said to be made of the horns of wild animals locally called *kima* and *Sebik* respectively, as stated by 63 respondents representing 90%. Seven (7) of the respondents representing 10% pointed out that metal or wood could also be specially crafted into a notch flute. The shoes were made of skins/leather from bush animals as opined by 60 respondents representing 85.7%. The bangles worn on the upper part of the arms, as agreed by 61 of the respondents constituting 87.1% was said to be made of skins of various wild animals and enclosed with herbs. The waist belt on the other hand was said to be composed of animal skins and enclosed with herbs or studded with other types of talismans.



Figure 9: A typical war costume



Figure 10: A dancer wearing a Talisman- studded smock

Table 3: Material Composition of Female *Feok* Costumes

Type of Costume	Raw Material Composition	Frequency of Respondents	Percentages (%)
<b>Cloth</b>	Cotton fabric	68	97.1
<b>The hat</b>	straw or calabash with mounted horns	67	95.7
<b>Pots</b>	Baked clay containing herbs	64	91.4

A table showing the material composition of feok festival costume.

As shown in table: 3 above, 68 (97.1%) of the interviewees agreed that the female (cloth) costume, which is slightly different from the males, was fashioned out of cotton fabric. Additionally, 67 of the respondents constituting 95.7% concurred that the hats worn together with the smock were made of grass stalk or calabash as the base, mounted with horns of buffalo or bush cow. Occasionally, some of the women were said to carry pots containing herbal preparing to provide support to the men as stated by 64 respondents representing 91.4%.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

The study on the material composition of Feok festival costumes unveiled the rich cultural heritage of the Builsa people. This common cultural practice is consistent with the opinion of Elgier, (2008) which indicates that strands of fibres are twisted and interlaced to make fabrics. The study found that, for maximum comfort and convenience, the smocks and the pantaloons were produced locally with cotton fabric studded with talismans.

For the purpose of protection, the fortification mediums (talismans) whose contents were found to compose of herbal potions were made with skins of tigers, cats and lions. The sources of materials and types of herbs which formed an integral part of the objective was found to be obtained from swampy places along the Fumbisi valley as opined by Kwamina & Banneh, 2004, Duut, 2014 and confirmed by the respondents.

The second objective that was achieved was the components of the head mask, which is the most conspicuous aspect of the costume. This hat is worn by men and women of special stature, and made of stalks from a local plant known as *benbem*. It is then mounted with horns of buffalo or bush cow. The arm bangles and the waist belts were usually affixed with talismans crafted from skins of wild animals and herbs intended to provide various spiritual protections. However, the myths relating to the ingredients that spiritually energize the costumes were not revealed by the respondents.

#### 5.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are made:

Farmers should be supported by the Government (Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), District Assemblies and non-Governmental Organisations (NGOS) to increase cotton and jute cultivation since smocks and pantaloons are woven from cotton and jute fabrics

Preservation of wild animals and herbal plants should be sustainably promoted by Wild Life and Forestry Division to prevent extinction, since large portion of the costumes are treated and fortified using these materials.

### 5.1 Authors' Contribution

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time research is conducted to unravel the materials and their respective sources for the purpose of preserving them for posterity in the Builsa Traditional area.

### References

- Aboagye, B. F. (2010), "Indigenous African Warfare: A Concept and Art in the Gold Coast, Asante and the Northern Territories up to early 1900". Ulinzi Africa Publishing (AUP) Solutions: South Africa.
- Agaasa, L. and Ampa - Korsah, H. (2016), Feok Festival Costumes: Evolution & Socio-Cultural Importance, *Journal of Culture, Society and Development* www, Vol.24, 2016
- Bordens, K.S and Abbott B.B (2002) *Research Design and Methodology*. Houston: L.C.C Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2 ed.). London: Sage Publications Inc. Retrieved from: <http://www.rmc.edu/academics/sociology/ghana%20website/Gonja/gonja-smock.aspx>. (Retrieved January 23, 2014).
- Der, B.G. (1998). "The Slave Trade in Northern Ghana". Woeli Publishing Services: Accra.
- Duut, G. N. (2014), "Feok War Dance Festival: Addressing Security concerns in Upper East Region, Ghana". PhD Thesis, University of Education Winneba, Ghana.
- Elgier, T (2008). Types of Fabric Weaves. Retrieved November 18, 2016, from <http://www.teonline.com/articles/>. Eng. edition, London: Frank Cass and Co Ltd.
- Filippou, F., Harahoussou I., Kabitsis C., and Koleta M. (2002). Dance and Costume from Tradition to Performance. Retrieved from: <https://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol23/costume.pdf>
- Kwamina, B. D. & Benneh, G (2004), "A New Geography of Ghana".(Revised edition). Longman
- Luther, S. (2010). All about Fabric Weaves. Retrieved 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2018. <http://www.xzcution.com/>.
- Malek, E. and Massoud, D. (2011). Classification of Researches and Evolving a Consolidating Typology of Management Studies, *Annual Conference on Innovations in Business & Management London, UK, page 3*.
- Nii-Yartey, F. (2013). Dance in Ghana, The national commission on culture. Retrieved from: <http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index1.php?linkid=263&page=4&sectioned=589>. (Accessed September 5, 2013).
- Nukunya, G. K. (2003). Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology, 2nd Edn. Ghana Universities Press: Accra
- Roach-Higgins, M. E., & Eicher, J. B. (1992). Dress and identity. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*; 10 (4), 1–8.
- Rouse, E. (1993). *Understanding Fashion*, Great Britain: Publishers Black Well Scientific Publications.
- Sarpong, N. J. (2004). *Infusion of Afro Centric Approach to Fashion Design in the Polytechnics*; Unpublished thesis, KNUST.