

Clothing and Colour Symbolisms in the *Homowo* Festival: A means to Sociocultural Development.

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Abstract

This paper investigates the clothing elements associated with the *Homowo* festival of the Ga people of Ghana. This festival is the best celebrated among the society because of its significant, and has attracted extensive study by various writers. (Amoako-Attah 2001; Ammah 1980; Field 1961) However, the relevance position of costume, symbolically advocating for social development has received very minimal attention. To address this concern, the paper uses interviews, secondary data and participation observation to highlight costumes including accessories and adornment used from the beginning to the end of the festival. The paper reckons that, within the individual days of the festival, the ritual experts; traditional leaders; ordinary people; and the *kpa* dance group have specific costumes which determine their role, position, occupation, as well as the mood of the people. Moreover, colours and emblems used by the various units of the *kpa* dance group have inherent philosophies that promote nation building. The paper finally suggests that researchers should delve into festivals celebrated among the other ethnic groups, to augment the scanty work done on Ghanaian costume.

1. Introduction

Throughout the world annual celebrations are observed to commemorate some great transitions of life and passages. Through these observations (art and creativity) the deepest values of a community are aesthetically revealed and through various art forms, and costume is one of these artistic elements. Consequently, for the Ga people such criteria of revealing and expressing their unique culture is made manifest through the *Homowo* festival. The Ga people consist of six towns; Accra, Teshie, Nungua, Tema, La and Osu. Whilst some historians believe that Ga people originated from Yoruba in Nigeria, others claim they came from the sea. Their main occupation were fishing and farming, but presently the people engage in all forms of “white colour jobs.” Ga people are noted for their bravery and thus; fought and won several battles in the past. (Abbey 2010) Among the many festivals in Ga, *Homowo* is the best celebrated. It is an annual festival celebrated by all the six Ga townships, and each year Ga indigenes converge in their various towns to celebrate *Homowo*, the quintessential and symbolic Ga harvest ritual.

Through interviews and participant observation this paper specifically discusses how the people of Teshie perform the festival. It presents clothing in relation to the deferent days and occasions within the celebration and notes that due to the highly esteemed nature of the festival, and its symbolic nature, Ga people perform it with costumes that promote their tradition as well as highlighting the relevance of the occasion. Rare costumes and adornments which are not used on ordinary days usually characterize the occasion. The *kpa* dance climaxes the festival; and displays all kinds of costumes (a kind of fan fair) associated with the various units within the dance groups. Symbolically these costumes are used to foster unity among the people and also portray the socio-cultural state of affairs and the needed adjustments.

2. *Homowo*, the Quintessential and Symbolic Ga Harvest Ritual.

Various studies have been conducted on the *Homowo* festival. Among them are Abbey (2010); Amoako-Attah (2001); Ammah (1980), Opoku (1970) and Field (1956). All these writers provide the history of origin of the festival, the various towns that celebrate it as well as the days assigned to each town. They noted that *Homowo* is derived from two Ga words, *homo* meaning hunger and *wo* meaning to hoot at (Amoako-Attah 2001). According to legend when the Ga people were migrating to their present settlement they were confronted with severe hunger. Nonetheless they gathered courage, tilled the land, planted corn and asked for blessing from *Ataa-NaaNyommo* (God), the *jemawodzi*, (ancestral gods) and the ancestral spirits. Their prayers were answered by rainfall which helped yield abundant crops. With their experience in fishing they also harvested a lot of fish which included very big snappers they call *tsile* and giant tunas called *odaa*. Ga people observe this conquest of hunger with a specially prepared diet made with unfermented corn powder called *kpokpoi* (which has now been corrupted to *kpekple*) and palm nut soup prepared with fish only (preferably *tsile* and *odaa*). They hoot at “and ridiculed hunger” as they eat the meal. The day also offers an opportunity for individual families to assemble in

their *Ga* ancestral homes in seaside towns to share a ritual meal with ‘dead’ and living family members, pour libation and symbolically offer some of the meal to their gods to solicit for their protection and guidance. *Homowo* is celebrated annually between August and September. The celebration is done in succession on different days so that individuals who may belong to more than one traditional area will be able to attend any of them (Amoako-Attah 2001). Writers like Ammah (1980), Opoku (1970) and Field (1961) have mentioned that the festival is celebrated on Saturdays in GaMashie or Accra, on Tuesdays in Teshie, Nungua, Prampram, Ningo, and Kpong and on Friday at Tema

In *Homowo in Ghana* for instance, Abbey gives a brief but concise account of the origin of the GaDangbe people, indicating when and how the performance is organized. He presents a detailed account of the different processes the ritual meal goes through (preparatory stages), from soaking of the corn till the food is ready for the ritual, yet very minimal attention is paid to the clothing and adornment. This is the gap this paper tries to fill; to investigate and bring out some of the beautiful and colourful costumes whose meanings are culturally embedded in colour, style, silhouette, footwear, accessories and body adornments.

3. Colour Symbolism in Clothing

The vocabulary of colour can be described as the visual reaction to the wavelength of sunlight interpreted as red, blue, green and so on; possessing physical properties of hue, intensity and value as well as portraying the psychological and emotional stance of a person (Cayton 2009; Schneider Adams 2002; Greider 1996; Jackson 1980; Appiah 1979). It is the most universally appreciated element that helps to give form and meaning to a piece of art such that pleasant colour rhythms and harmonies fulfil our aesthetic desires. Colour may also be arranged or employed to interpret a person’s emotions, symbolize ideas and create mood. According to Cayton (2009) “... blue can import a state of dignity, sadness or serenity, reliability, fidelity, loyalty and honesty”. Red may suggest bravery, sin, passion, danger or violence. Globalization or shared experience among nations or countries has also helped to associate abstract qualities such as virtue, loyalty and evil with colour. Consequently phrases such as: “true blue”, “dirty yellow coward”, “red with rage”, “seeing red”, “virgin white”, “pea-green with envy”, “gray gloom” seem to be universally adopted.

However, colour meanings and symbolisms throughout the world depend on the culture and ethnicity of the people. For instance during the early Roman civilization, purple colour signified royalty. This was so because purple dye was so expensive that it was only the Roman emperor who could afford it. (Barton 1969). Apparently even when the dye became affordable the tradition and its representation were still observed. To the Chinese too red symbolize good luck, purity, power, protection and wealth; hence red is mostly used in their marriage ceremonies. Certain colours are also believed to have some psychological and varying associations in indifferent cultures. Yellow or gold for example is a sacred colour to the ancient Chinese, a symbol of power to the Egyptians and Greeks, however, the early Christians looked down on it because of its connection with wealth. (Kwakyee-Opong 2001). To reinforce the power of colour and a person’s psychological disposition Cayton (2009) has this to say:

Light, bright colours make us feel joyful and uplifted; warm colours are generally stimulating; cool colours are generally depressing. Medical facilities, trauma centers, and state correctional facilities are often painted in light blues or “institutional greens” because of the calming effect.

Inferably, these various symbolisms make colour a living reality that also define nature’s gifts such as leaves, plants, flowers, blood, insects and animals (Jones 2005). Colour application and appreciations have invariably been informed by such means, and has resulted in impressive masterpiece (Dzamedo 2009).

According to Antubam (1963) traditionally, colour symbolism among Ghanaians (including *Gas*) does not depend on scientific analysis but rather on philosophies embedded in their abstract and spiritual values. Commenting further in his book *Ghana’s Heritage of Culture* Antubam (1963) discusses the notions of colour within the Ghanaian culture. He mentions that black, grey, blue, vermilion, crimson, tomato and terracotta red, silver, gold, white and brown are colours traditionally known and used by Ghanaians. Gold for instance represent royalty, continuous life, warmth, maturity and glory. As a result the *Akans*, *Ga* and *Ewe* chiefs use gold ornaments to denote their royal position in the community. Hence at a certain time in the history of the *Bono* of Ghana queen mothers were forbidden to use gold; they used white, blue and silver. Also during state functions the *Korontenhene* or *Tufohene* of the *Akan* who is “ranked next after the paramount chief” was also restricted to silver ornaments to separate him from the chief. Moreover, when a chief of *La* selects his future wife, certain portions of the body of family members are designed with yellow preparation. And to ensure continuous life, all

Tano fetish priest add a piece of gold (*pokowa*) to their “fetish preparations”. Antubam mentions further that white symbolizes purity, virtue, virginity, joy and victory while black reflects the idea of vice, deepened sadness and malicious spirits such as the devil and death.

Appiah(1970) holds a similar view and mentions that symbolism has an eminent role in African art as well as metaphysical qualities that express the ideologies of the people, therefore the colours used by a chief on an occasion is associated with meaning than elegance. It is deduced from all the various writers that colour concept and symbolisms are culture based; since they reflect the ideas and values of the people in focus.

In “Conscious or Arbitrary: Colour and Symbolism in Carnival Calabar”(2012), Ajibade&Obongha discuss the socio-cultural import of colours of costume and their representation in the Carnival Calabar of Nigeria. Quoting Georgina, a prominent member of the writers of Seagull band they noted that “Carnival is all about the creative use of colours. Hence their exploit was to investigate “the inherent symbolisms of the range of colours used by bands in Carnival Calabar.”

The paper mentions that the various bands choose their clothes to suit the yearly themes, and the ultimate benefits are to promote tourism and socio-economic development. The festival again promotes the Nigeria Film industry by sometimes involving film stars such as Pete Edochie, Ramsey Noah, Ini Edo and some others. They refer to the festival as a revelation of popular culture because it incorporates costumes, dance, music and properties. There are economic benefits as well; as tailors, art and craft dealers, welders, Disk Jockeys as well as fabric shops or firms are extensively patronized during the festival.

Costumes are the distinct feature of the festival; they speak. Each band therefore has a designer whose desire is to produce an outstanding desire to measure up to the intense competition. Significantly:

It is within the costume designs for the King and Queen (of the band) that the Carnival’s theme and band’s colour Symbolisms are most prodigiously expressed and experienced. And because of the centrality of the King and Queen in Carnival Calabar, their costumes are especially assessed by the teams of adjudicators. (15)

Premium is placed on costume, especially their colours because of their significance and meanings. Orange colour is chosen by a band because it ‘symbolizes a bright future’. Additional colours like white, black, maroon might be added to elevate or tone down the original colour. The writers therefore conclude that the use of colours and costume in the calabar festival is not arbitrary but there is a conscious move to bring out some philosophies needed to motivate as well as educate the community and also “provide insights into hidden social truths.”

4. Homowo Festival and associated Costume

The unique pattern of *Homowo* celebration includes opening the fishing season, participating in preparatory rituals of gift-giving and house purifying, enjoying the *Homowo* meal, performing the *Homowo* dance and observing the Day of Remembrance. During this period all economic activities cease whilst the community concentrates on participating in the custom as well as renewing relations with one another. Within the celebration, there are special days identified with specific costumes such as those described under the following themes: *Gremlilaa* (Locking the way); *Soobii* (Thursday people); *Kaemo* (Remembrance); Traditional Yam Festival; *Koyeligbi* (Day of feasting); *Noowala* (Greetings) and the *Kpa* dance.

Preparation for the festival starts with the planting of crops before the rainy season that begins in May. “Between the period of sowing and the rite of transplanting, which covers a period of thirty days a ban is placed on drumming, dancing or noise of any kind...the duration is known as *Kpofeemo* or Silence Period”(Ammah 1980). As reiterated by Terry Bright Ofose, an indigene of La, and a Lecturer at the University of Ghana, Legon, the *Ala gbImlin* and *AgbelegbInla* rites are performed to respectively put and lift the ban on noise making.

Three rituals start in June. The first ritual called (1) *gbemlilaa* (locking the way) forbids drumming and music to allow the people to have enough time for their farms. This is followed by (2) *nshobulImo*; a ritual purported to calm the sea. It continues with yet another custom, (3) *okomfemaa* that bans fishing in the lagoon until the *Homowo* festival is over. Participants in these rites include only the *Wolomo*, ritual experts and elders, who dress in white to represent the ritual importance of the occasion. White clothing items are used because culturally white symbolizes purity, freedom, serenity, and so on. To express joy and liberation from hunger, white items of clothing therefore become appropriate.

When the date for the *Homowo* of a particular area is due, the people in the villages are required to return to their respective homes in the capital towns. This is done a week before the custom, beginning on Thursday: the sacred day of the earth when the community is forbidden to go to farm. The first arrivals come on Thursday and are called *Soobi* which means Thursday people. The villagers arrive with enthusiasm and jubilating songs bringing their harvested crops especially maize and palm nuts along. *Homowo* has adapted to various changes such that, indigenes coming to town to celebrate the feast in their ancestral seaside homes may come by lorries and cars as well as by foot and often wear identical clothes sewn from the same multi-colour imported fabric. In this regard Opoku (1970) mentions that:

The entry of these Lorries usually draped with flags and hunting, is a sight to see, they go to great expense to array themselves in attractive uniforms and decorations.

Similarly, it was realized that the arrivals who were mostly women dressed to portray the various quarters they originate from. Accordingly, the women dress in all kinds of colourful outfits; especially *kaba* and slit in beautiful styles, with exaggerated makeup and very elegant hairstyles. Almost all the arrivals wear identical clothing styles, used not only to denote group affiliation but also to sensitize the people on the need to have a common front in upholding the interest and norms of the Ga kingdom.

5. The Traditional Yam Festival

The traditional yam festival is observed a day after the arrival of *Soobii*. Commenting on the day, Opoku (1970) has stated that the festival is a “lustral day of all twins. Therefore, twins from each household are celebrated on this day, and the dominating colour is white. Twins are believed to be special gift from the ancestors. They are also believed to bring blessings to a family; therefore, white clothes are used first, to thank these ancestors for preserving the lives of such children, and also to ask for long life for the children and prosperity for the family. Twins, their parents and other relatives all dress in white clothes plus white powder, and make merry in their homes with feasting, and later on parade the town to show their joy. Young twins who cannot participate in the pageantry are carried on the shoulders of older family members (See figures 1&2). Again white is used in this sense to represent peace, long life and prosperity. Concluding the narration on the yam festival NnuumoAhungua stated that “the group will use the costume till sunset and then troop out to the sea to cast away the left-over’s of the feast”.



Figure 1: Two young women in white clothes carrying the concoction for the twin rites.



Figure 2: Twins adorned in white clothes and being carried by young men.

5. *Kaimo* (Remembrance Day)

The following day is dedicated to *Ga* people who died during the year. It is known as *Kaimo* or Remembrance Day and observed with black costumes in remembrance of the dead. Similar to the white, the use of black among the *Ga*s has a meaning and represents death, decay, disaster, deterioration, despair and agony, and thus associated with mourning. Consequently, dressed in black clothes *Ga* indigenes gather from dawn till evening to mourn their departed relatives, especially those who died within the year.

6. *Koyeligbi*

Koyeligbi is the day for enjoying the ritual meal. At dawn on this august day the women feverishly prepare the *Kpokpoi*, the ritual meal. There is no particular way of dressing. While some elderly women wore old *kaba* and cloths, scarves and low slippers, the young women either wore trousers with tops or dresses. (Figure 3). Their costumes were casual and depicted the urgency needed to finish preparing the ritual meal to feed the community, ancestors and deities on time.



Figure 3: Women in casual clothes preparing *kpokpoi*



Figure 4: Young women (left) and a man (right) in rich clothes on the *Noowala* day

The food was ready by mid-morning. To perform the ceremony is the chief priest who is dressed in full ceremonial clothes; a long gown worn over a pair of big trousers, the *kotofai* and the *nyanyara* necklace. He is barefoot. The gown, *Gan*, (probably a corrupted version of the word gown) is a special dress used for all religious ceremonies. The *kotofai*, is a symbolic hat cut into three hundred and sixty-five edges, with each representing each day in the calendar year meant to intercede for the *Ga* people. The edges are cut into seven layers with each overlapping the other, and representing the seven waves of the sea. The chief priest is accompanied by the elders of the town who help to sprinkle some of the *kpokpoi* "around all doorsteps of the house and sometimes around the immediate precincts of the house", as shown in figure 5 (Opoku 1970).



Figure 5: A wulomo wearing Kotofaiand Gan, sprinkling kpokpoi

Later, each chief sprinkles *kpokpoi* on the lanes and streets, (from one principal household to the other) to purify the community and also invite their ancestors and deities to dine with them. Among the procession are the chiefs, their wives, elders and heads of families. The men mostly wear jumper and *adasaa* with sandals while the women use *kaba* and two loin cloths / slits, with white or black slippers. It is worthy to note that the chief priest, the chiefs and their wives, the elders and heads of families all wear white. However, other *Ga* indigenes outside this domain wear various clothes. The children use smaller version of the adult clothes. After the purification ritual all the members within a family finally gather round a bowl of the *kpokpoi* and enjoy its contents. Clothes worn remain the same as before, since no special costume or costume changes are required.

Noowala (The Day for Greetings)

The day after the feasting, *Noowala*, is spent in visiting friends, relatives and in laws to exchange greetings. It is also a period of settling disputes (Amoako-Attah 2001). The people put on their best clothes because the day opens an avenue for people to form acquaintances. The community is at its best with clothes and jewellery, thus, both males and females dress in bright multi-colours and the dominant colour is gold or yellow. These colours are chosen because they have cultural affiliation with riches, excitement, affluence and joy, therefore, these colours are apt to explain the psychological state of mind of the people (See figure 4). In such outfits they visit their paternal homes to greet the elders and to also contribute money into the family coffers. This yearly contribution is reserved to refurbish or maintain the family house. In *Ga* Mashie *Noowala* falls on Sunday while the other towns celebrate it on Wednesday (Opoku 1970).

Festivities after the *Kpokpoi* feast vary from town to town, and all the respondents mentioned that at Teshie for instance the *Homowo* feast is followed by the *Kwashimo* dance and parade. The people of Nungua also celebrate the *obene* dance in the night and *Kple* dance during the day. However, the most popular and most patronized dance is the *Kwashimo* of Teshie. It begins on Sunday with *Tsesefaa* (the carrying of wooden dish containing water and sacred leaves). According to *Ga* tradition the bearer of this concoction is selected only from the *Paana* family. The clothes of the *Tsesefaa* bearer includes: a piece of white loin cloth about 3.7 meters long worn around the waist; a long *afili* worn as necklace; bare chest and bare foot; *Afili* worn on both wrists, in addition to three bundles of beads. He also wears beads on his ankle and instead of wearing the *Nyanyara* as necklace; it is made into a head pad for carrying the *Tsesefaa*. And as indicated earlier on, the *nyanyara* leaf is medicinal, and using it as head pan interprets how the community is spiritually supported.

The ceremony also involves *Asafo* groups drawn from the various quarters. These were war lords who in the past protected the community during war. Even though the Ga people do not presently go to war, they maintain this group who works with the chiefs to rule on judicial matters. Each group is identified with a jumper and trousers made with the same material and a cap probably made with a calabash, and embedded with talisman, worn for protection. The leader, *Asafoatsemei*, is a male or female, and usually holds the *kplebi* leather rod which is used to control the crowd and spiritually clear the way for the *Tsesefaa* carrier.

7. The *Kpa* Dance Group and related costumes of the various units or bands

There are two types of *Kpashimo*: *Amlakui-Akpa* and *Kpa*. *Amlakui-Akpa* refers to the dance of the nobility which is a form of traditional songs and dancing done in a more gentle way. The *kpa* is very democratic and focuses on exposing the wrong behaviour of both the nobles and the community at large. The *kpa* is a dance group made up of people (mostly youths) from the seven quarters of Teshie. They usually perform during the *Tsesefaa*, and each quarter is identified with a specific colour of costume. For instance the Pot band is identified with multi-colours, which signifies unity in diversity (Figure 6). *Gbematele* (literary meaning kill and let me carry) group has the spider (*Ananse*) as their emblem and black as their colour. The use of *Ananse* in the Ghanaian concept is a metaphorical character which can be used contextually to mean greed, wisdom, knowledge, cunning, egotism, etc. In this regard the band sees *Ananse* as the African political leader who through greed and egotism has 'darkened' the lives of the citizenry. Consequently, the use of *Ananse* as an emblem, together with the black colour fittingly creates awareness on how the African, in this regard, the Ga has been disappointed by their leaders (Figure 7).



Figure 6: The pot group in multi-colour costumes.



Figure 7: Youths wearing the black costumes of the *Gbematele* or *Ananse* group

Next is the *Koolewon Koo* group which is known by their red clothing items and a red cock as their emblem. Red has attributes such as danger, love, pride, beware, and according to their leader the group adopted it to deter their enemies. It also portray bravery, aggression and determination and accurately represent the enduring way the Ga people fought through thick and thin to migrate to their present, site and the numerous conquests that were won to achieve their freedom, as well as to overcome hunger which could have totally annihilated the entire *Ga* race. The red cock as an emblem also creates an awareness to the society that, it should be time conscious,

and must not behave like the lazy person who sleeps at the dawn cock crow, whilst others are up and working to improve their lot. This simply means that; to build a strong nation a society needs to be alert and does not sleep at the detriment of its development (Figure 8). Yellow is associated with the *Tafoyefew* (Tafo is beautiful) band.(Figure 9). As indicated earlier on, yellow or gold additionally represent the rich gold mineral the country is blessed with. Consequently, the Ghanaian and for that matter Ga people are naturally rich, and so must be content with their lot and strive to national advancement. This is because Gold is rich, hence it has economic empowerment to make a nation beautiful.



Figure 8: The Koole Won Koo group in their red clothes, and the red cock as emblem.



Figure 9: The yellow costume associated with the Tafoyefew group.

The other three groups are America, Mind-You (corrupted as Maa-U) and *Tsese*. The American group uses the American colours of their national flag; red, white and black, which tries to help the youth to accept their lot in life and work hard to achieve the ultimate, because America was not created out of the vacuum. It also tries to discourage the ‘no America no life’ slogan which has financially crippled some youths, because this ideology has made them victims of some ‘connection men’ who take exorbitant money from them all in the name of helping them get visa and travel to America(Figure 10).

One significant symbol, the *sankofa* as well as white colour is used by the Man-U (corrupted as Maa-U). *Sankofa* means locate your roots or go back to your roots and simply advocates that Ghanaians should re-visit the good old days and learn from its virtues. Hence the group sensitizes the society to be wary of foreign domination, and avoid cultural infiltrations that are detrimental to national development. As explained already, white denotes purity and victory, and to the group, with hard work and good virtues the Ga will overcome all hurdles on his way (Figure 11).

The *Tsese* group is recognized by white clothes as well as the *nyanyara* necklace. This group carries the soul of the community. The leaf is believed to have powers to physically, spiritually and psychologically heal the people. As a result the band or unit is the pivot of the entire group and therefore formalizes the end of the *Homowo* ceremony. The white clothes and the *nyanyara* leaf used by the group depict victory over unseen forces that might try to harm the people (Figure 12). The last but obviously not the least group; Ghana, presumed to have been among those recently formed, uses red, yellow and green colours that constitute the Ghanaian flag. Red

stands for the blood their ancestors shed to establish the country; Green represents the vast vegetation that is the bedrock of their sustenance, and gold connotes the abundant riches that is the sure hope of their survival and prosperity (Figure 13).



Figure 12: The Tsese group including the tsefefaa bearer (center) in their traditional clothes.



Figure 13: The red, yellow and green colours of the group called Ghana

For the other indigenes who do not belong to any of these groups, the predominant colours used are red and white. The reason is that the white symbolizes victory over hunger and blessing for a new year. With the red colour, it was revealed that due to the several disputes between the various *Ga* towns, wearing red on this occasion proves to the other towns that the celebrants “eyes are red”, and thus, ready to fight anyone who dares them.

Clothes are sewn into skirt and blouse and worn by both sexes. Similar style of costumes worn by both sexes portrays the idea of gender neutrality; and encourages the women to rub shoulders with the men in developing the nation. Most of the youths also dress to portray the different professions such as nursing and the security services like the police, navy and so on; and the purpose is to portray and encourage the society to take formal education very seriously so that all the other professionals like nurses, soldiers, teachers and so on will be people found among the community, and who will obviously have its indigenes and the community at heart. (Figure 14) Others also dress in school uniforms to promote education, while some are clothed in fanciful dresses with men mimicking pregnancy. Dressed like a depressed and a wretched pregnant woman, young girls are advised from engaging in pre-marital affairs that might result in pregnancy and endanger their future. (Figure 15).



Figure 14: Male in female school uniform, advocating the need for girl child education.



Figure 15: A wretched and depressed pregnant teenager

The excited dancers do not spare makeup at all. They use exaggerated make-up such as a lot of white and blue powder worn on the face or on the whole body, wide eye-liners, and blood-red lip-wear (Figure 16-left). Most of the groups use flags corresponding their colour/colours and emblems (See figures 10,11&13)

Children are not left out in the celebration and the investigation shows that the children wear a smaller version of the adult clothes (Figure 14).



Figure 16: Some youths in fancy dresses and elaborate make-up



Figure 17: A group of children in costume at the Homowo festival

Source : All pictures taken by the researcher

The occasion can be described as a carnival where all kinds of clothes, both formal and informal are exhibited. The festival ends with *Tsesebumo*; the overturning of the wooden dish and its contents which is intended to cleanse, bless and grant the wishes of the people. Dressed in the same make-up and clothes, the *Tsesese* group goes to the *Mantse* (chief) and *asafoatsemei* for blessing, and together with the other groups and the visiting spectators, they throng the principal streets amid singing and jubilation. The procession ends at *Sangonaa* (the shores of the Sango lagoon in Teshie) where the carrier of the *Tsesese* pours out its contents. This ritual performed to overturn the *Tsesese*, signifies the end of the *Homowo* festival of the *Ga* people of Teshie.

8. Economic Importance

Apart from its socio-cultural relevance, the *Homowo* festival promotes trade among the people. With the influx of modernity among most cultures today, new clothes are mostly patronized by participants of the festival. Though the festival does not aim at promoting competition, it has silently crept into the tradition. People try to look their best; consciously or unconsciously trying to outshine the other. This seeming competition generates income for tailors, seamstresses, fashion designers, cloth sellers, jewellers, beauticians, as well as food vendors, who provide cattery services for the people. Ultimately the festival generates income for the nation by way of the numerous, foreigners (from within and abroad) who come to Ghana every year to witness or participate in the celebration.

9. Conclusion

The paper has described the *Homowo* festival and how the use of costume and colour play a dominant part not only for aesthetic but also for economic advancement promotion and preservation of culture and for creating awareness. Significantly the costume symbolisms used among the ritual experts and especially the various units within the *Kpa* dance fosters unity, development and growth. The units' or bands' deliberate use of colour brings tranquility and a sense of belonging among the people. The use of icons such as the *Sankofa* (go back to our roots) helps the people to be resonate of the past and be circumspect of acculturation that might endanger the much toiled for traditions and customs; virtues fought by the elders who have lived before them.

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