

Social constructs of the coastal fante festival performance costumes and sculptural objects in Ghana: An indigenous knowledge system and practice

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Abstract: The focus of this qualitative case study was to explore the intricate relationship between Coastal Fante Festival performance costumes, sculptural objects, and the indigenous knowledge system and practices of the coastal dwellers, who reside in the central coastal regions of Ghana. To explore the social constructs of Coastal Fante Festival performance costumes and sculptural objects comprehensively, this study employed a multidisciplinary approach, combining ethnography, archival research, and artisan collaboration in the geographical context of Winneba and Cape Coast. The unstructured interview and direct observation were the instrumentations used for the data collection. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and visual data analysis tools garnered from sixteen (16) research participants using purposive (expert) and simple random sampling techniques allowed for a holistic understanding of the cultural, historical, and societal dimensions of these costumes and sculptural objects within the Central region coastal community, shedding light on their role as living embodiments of indigenous knowledge and cultural practice. The study revealed that these costumes hold profound cultural significance, symbolizing historical events, social identities, behaviour, codes and spiritual connections within the community. As a result of these social constructs, enculturation and inculturation were achieved, materialising cultural identity, defining mood (attitude), enhancing performer welfare, and addressing issues of history were addressed through performance costumes and sculptural objects. The generation should see these costumes with sculptural objects as a living embodiment of indigenous knowledge and cultural practice, enriching the understanding of Fante culture and its significance in a global context.

Keywords: Coastal festival performance costumes, Ghana, Indigenous knowledge system and practice, Sculptural objects, Social constructs, Textile tradition

1. Introduction

Coastal Fantes are conceptualised in this study to represent coastal dwellers along the coast of Ghana's Central Region. They engage in fishing activities as their major occupation and artisanal farming as a minor occupation during the lean fishing season. Coastal Fantes generate social structures to refine their way of life in order to develop a pattern of lifestyle as codes of accepted shared cultural identity (Safo-Ankama, 2014). They attach a lot of importance to the shared codes, so anyone who violates them is seen as a deviant. These codes represent accepted shared cultural norms that were practised over a long period of time and graduated into institutions that monitored their way of life. Childbirth, child naming and outdoorings, initiation for boys and girls, marriage, divorce, death, funerals, and festivals are manifested in the performance as a form of ceremonies, rites, and rituals with accompanying costumes to create the subtext for the performance, which is a demand of institutions (Wilkinson-Weber, 2010; Akwetey, 2007). Costumes are critical elements in the cultural context of the coastal Fante textile tradition. On the other hand, sculptural objects refer to artistic and three-dimensional creations made by skilled artisans within the Coastal Fante community. These objects often hold cultural, historical, and

spiritual significance and are used in various festivals, ceremonies, and rituals (K. Lawson, personal communication, April 20, 2020). Sculptural objects can take various forms, including wood sculptures (masks), metal artefacts (goldweight), ceremonial objects (staff finials, swords), textiles and beads, such as ceremonial umbrellas, banners, or other fabric-based artworks.

The coastal Fante costumes and sculptural objects serve as symbolic representations and objects of history, telling the stories of people during different epochs. Malkogeorgou (2011) supports the idea that costumes and handy sculptures are material culture and objects of history and conservation concern. Conservation is guided by a set of ethical values and a hands-on method. It provides an insight into the processes of preserving cultural materials, which include costume, and its significance in materialising the self and contextualising social activity. This viewpoint by Malkogeorgou (2011) dovetails into the concept of coastal Fante performance costume values. Performance costumes and sculptural objects present an embodiment of societal history and culture and serve as a source of an archival retrieval system. This is because most periods in the history of art had one dominant style that served as canons for the appreciation and concept of beauty and ugly. So major artists of the time followed the style by conforming to it.

The knowledge of textile history (clothing) in coastal Fante costumes is hence a key to our understanding of a multitude of human issues (Safo-Ankama & Sawyerr, 2023; Acquaye, Sawyerr & Kusi, 2018). Textiles have enormous potential in archaeological research, as they can reveal the social, chronological, and cultural aspects of past societies while also providing individuals with a unique opportunity to experience prehistoric times. For example, gender, age, family affiliation, social status, occupation, religion, and ethnicity (Acquaye et al., 2018) become more visually identifiable (Strand, Frei, Gleba, Mannering, Nosch & Skals, 2010). Cloth and clothing have long been recognised to be fundamental in relation to identities becoming materialized. Strand et al. further observed that this clothing objectifies both individual and societal power as well as prestige and fame in a variety of ways through the production, the cut and form of the clothing, articulating power in relation to the body and persona of the wearer, intimately related to group identity and the networking of social relations (Tilley, 2011). Socially, costumes and sculptural objects are a medium used for the performance of rituals in order to aid the cycle of continuity of man through different rites of passage, for example, from birth to death. Omosule (2009) affirms that Engungun masquerades are classified into two categories. The first is associated with the ritual arena. The second dimension is secular, which is patronised by the audience and well-wishers (Omosule, 2009; 2013).

Schneider (1987) endorses clothing as a tracer of rank in historical chiefdoms and kingdoms. Logically, in an African society, this concept is manifested at most societal durbars, where chiefs are paraded through streets to durbar grounds. The chief's costumes are crafted by societal ideals to show rank and hierarchy through the display of costume. The colours, iconoclasm, symbols, designs, and patterns used for costume creation are elements of class and rank. Socially, rank and hierarchy are displayed because an onlooker appreciates a sub-chief from a paramount chief. Again, sculptural items such as regalia are of political, ritual, and historical significance. Their symbolic superiority enables them to fulfil their functions. This is to imply that the sculptural objects combined with the costumes possess some power to emit the ideologies and overt political, ritual and historical inclinations of the wearer and society as a whole (Dike, 1984).

Visonà, Poynor and Cole (2008) stress that sculptural objects such as regalia worn or carried by kings, chiefs, queen mothers, and other royals and court members help to create and legitimise royal authority and show it off. The cumulative mass and effect of regalia ensembles makes statements about political authority and financial superiority, as well as spiritual protection, and verbal messages may also be projected by visual motifs. From Visonà et al.'s assertion, social identity, hierarchy, power, and allegiance can be transmitted to society. This transmission is seen in the type of costume worn by an individual or a group, from simple to sophisticated.

Bouttiaux, Sorber, Custem and Mack (2008) express that the sociological relevance of coastal Fante costumes and sculptural objects is endorsed by Acquaye et al. (2018) as cultural, religious, and ritual meanings are conveyed in colour preferences, materials, embellishments, and design, as well as reflecting priorities associated with behaviour, age-grade, and ritual practices. Textiles and sculptures also function as important barometers of change intrinsically allied to trade, intercultural contact, political and ideological change, shifting religious adherence aspects central to understanding economic and cultural links between nations and continents (Acquaye et al., 2018; Adom, 2017). Costume and sculptural items are salient markers of identity and cultural encoding. Coastal Fante costumes and wearable sculptures are more than just coverings and adornment; they are a local knowledge system and practice that has evolved over centuries of experimentation and has been passed down from generation to generation.

The costumes with wearable sculptures are also used within the community for their stylized implications; their use as modes of symbolic idioms in appropriate situational settings. The striking relationship between festival performance costumes and sculptural objects of the coastal Fante and their social values has received inadequate scholarly attention. Therefore, there is the need to take into consideration the equivocate attributes of coastal Fante costumes with sculptural objects as a medium for expressing philosophies, ideologies, and histories while still capturing the mood and sacredness of the occasion in which transformational enculturation and culture are materialised, and also not forgetting to enhance the welfare of the performer. This study brings to light the specific purpose of exploring the intricate relationship between Coastal Fante Festival performance costumes, sculptural objects and the indigenous knowledge system and practices of the Fante people, who reside in the coastal regions of Ghana. In the quest for this research, what specific social significance is embodied in the coastal Fante costume festival performance and sculptural objects? This quest brings the relationship between appearance and subjectivity into focus. This search aids in the generation of questions about the nature of identity, the body, nationality, and gender, as well as how these issues are situated in specific historical, geographical, and cultural contexts of the time in question (Evans & Breward, 2005).

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical framework

The study adopted the theory of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) to review the gap in sociological perspective as a central element that provides insight into the role of costumes and sculptures in society. This theory was used as recognition of the wisdom, practices, and beliefs that have been passed down through generations within the two coastal Fante (Oguaa and Effutu) communities. These knowledge systems are deeply intertwined with various aspects of their culture, including costumes and sculptural objects. Within these coastal Fante communities, indigenous knowledge systems play a vital role in preserving and transmitting their cultural heritage (Adom, Kquofi & Asante, 2016; Domfeh, 2007). These systems encompass a wide range of knowledge, including traditional healing practices, agricultural techniques, storytelling, and spiritual beliefs. Those traditions are deeply rooted in Fante history, culture, and identity. Traditions such as clothing are manifestations of indigenous knowledge systems. The Fante community has a rich tradition of creating and wearing elaborate costumes for various occasions and ceremonies. These costumes often incorporate symbols and designs containing significant cultural and spiritual meaning. They serve as a visual representation of their community's history, values, and identity (Navei, 2023).

Sculptural objects also hold considerable importance within the coastal Fante community's indigenous knowledge systems. These objects are intricately crafted and often depict ancestral figures, deities, or significant events. They serve as a tangible connection to the past and serve various purposes, such as religious rituals, storytelling, and community gatherings. Sculptural objects are considered sacred and treated reverently and with respect. The intertwining of indigenous knowledge systems with costumes and sculptural objects reflects

Fante culture as a whole. It highlights the inseparable connection between their beliefs, practices, and material expressions. Recognizing and valuing these knowledge systems is crucial for understanding and appreciating the depth and richness of the coastal Fante community's cultural heritage. The study therefore acknowledged indigenous knowledge systems as a central element in understanding the Fante community's cultural framework (Information system of Masaryk University, 2011). It involved recognizing the wisdom, practices, and beliefs that have been passed down through generations. The connection between these knowledge systems and costumes and sculptural objects further emphasized the importance of these aesthetic expressions in preserving and transmitting the community's heritage.

3. Research methods

As a field investigation, the study employed qualitative inquiry using a case study as an appropriate research method (Kirner & Mills, 2019) to aid in studying all elements present in the social setting over time to understand the realities nested in the social context of the coastal Fante (Coastal dwellers along the coast of the Central region of Ghana). The investigation was aimed at an understanding of the intricate relationship between Coastal Fante Festival performance costumes, sculptural objects, and the indigenous knowledge system and practices (Huaman & Martins, 2020). These narratives required information that reflected "member" participant perspectives making available unique perspectives and experiences through the senses. The researchers understood and appreciated the gestures, actions, language, and form of the cultural indigenous knowledge systems and practices in order to determine how the coastal Fante's behaviour reflects the values, customs, taboos and other aspects of their culture.

The study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and visual data analysis tools as ideal research data collection tools that allowed the researchers to investigate and interpret the impact of the research subject-matter on the 'lived experiences' of the research participants (Alase, 2017). These data analysis tools helped to obtain easy access, and establish an immediate rapport with informants as directly related to the research interests (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016). The IPA brought the convergence and divergence of experiences, as well as its mission in examining detailed and nuanced analysis of the lived experience of a small number of participants (Tuffour, 2017; Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009). IPA created the platform for researchers to explore, describe, interpret, and identify core structures and features of coastal Fante experiences in their performance costumes through thoughtful and careful examination of experiences, trends, and social relationships to bring out socio-historical meanings (detailed analysis).

The study used purposive (expert) (Vijayamohan, 2022; Daniel, 2012) and simple random sampling techniques to sample sixteen (16) research participants allowing for a holistic understanding of the cultural, historical, and social dimensions of these costumes and sculptural objects within the Fante community, shedding light on their role as living embodiments of indigenous knowledge and cultural practice. The sampled research participants included *Ahenefo* (Chiefs) (2), *Ebuasua kyeame* (Family linguist/spokesman) (2), *Safohenefo* (Traditional militia leader) (4), *Akomfo* (Priest) (2), *Adoba/Adzewafo* (Female traditional singers) (2) and *Asafomba* (Militia members) (4) both from Winneba and Cape Coast municipalities. Unobtrusive observation and unstructured interviews were the qualitative data collection tools used in soliciting needed information from respondents, key informants and custodians of coastal Fante culture. Unobtrusive observation was a dual approach in observing sometimes a non- participant observer and sometimes a participant observer. The

observation was based on the level of emotions, attitude, behaviour and expressive qualities like joy, happiness, sadness and other contextual manifestations that served as symbolic societal aesthetics. The face-to-face interview was audio-taped for transcription as permission was sought from the respondents in order to study the direct experiences, perceptions, passion, empathy, emotions, and kinaesthetics of interviewees during interview sections. It was also used as a truth check for data during fieldwork. The validated interview guide included questions that aimed to explore various aspects of Fante performance costumes and sculptural objects, touching upon cultural significance, historical narratives, artisan perspectives, and the broader context of identity and heritage.

The study used ethical practices as an essential requirement to conduct respectful and responsible research within Indigenous communities, such as the Coastal Fante communities. Researchers prioritized the well-being, autonomy, and cultural integrity of the research communities (Resnik, 2020). The researchers approached the subject matter with an understanding that certain aspects of Fante culture may be sacred or sensitive, following cultural sensitivity and appropriation. Researchers avoided any actions that could be perceived as disrespectful, invasive, and misrepresenting the cultural elements understudied.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Categorisation of the Festival Performance Costumes and Sculptural Objects

Descriptors, narratives and thick descriptions from “member” participant perspectives coupled with convergence and divergence of experiences allowed the researchers to establish essential characteristics among major towns of coastal dwellers along the coast of the Central region of Ghana. Figures 1-6 present typical examples from the field study and are corroborated with the narratives from K. Lawson (personal communication, April 20, 2020) about the royal costume, the ritual costume (Akomfo), the Asafo costumes, the *Adzewa/Adoba* costumes, and the *Asaamfo* (generational costume) with wearable sculptural objects.

Table 1: Categorisation of the Festival Performance Costumes and Sculptural Objects

Festival performance costumes	Wearable sculptural objects
 <p data-bbox="300 1776 751 1798">Figure 1: Royal costumes (Source: Safo-Ankama, 2014)</p>	<p data-bbox="927 1541 1278 1648">Royal costumes with <i>Ahenema</i> (traditional sandals), beaded necklaces, sword, fly whisk, anklets and crowns.</p>



A.



B.

Figure 2A and B: Ritual costumes (Akomfo costumes) (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)

Ritual costumes with beaded necklaces, earrings, body paints and head gear.



Figure 3: *Safohenfo* costume (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)

Safohenfo and *Asafomba* with swords, flywhisks, ritual sticks, beaded necklaces, earrings, body paints and head gear.



Figure 4: *Asafomba* costume (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)



Figure 5: Adzewa/ Adoba costume (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)



Figure 6: Asaamfo (generational) costume (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)

Adzewa/ Adoba women with beaded necklaces, uniformed costume and gourd to make cheering and teasing music

4.2. Social Sensibilities of Festival Performance Costumes and Sculptural objects

Coastal Fante communities, as the study described, are mainly located in the Central coastal region of Ghana. These communities had essential common characteristics in belief systems, institutions and ceremonies thereby making generalization of findings possible among all coastal Fante settlements. This data positioned the researchers in making informed statements and unbiased categorizations of costumes and sculptural objects as to their form, context and meanings. The responses of the interviewees related to the social implications of the art works were categorized in a thematic representation and presented in Figure 7. Figure 7 illustrates the social sensibilities of the art works that were born out of robust traditional institutions resulting from early interaction with the early Europeans, belief systems and rituals that gave rise to several traditional utilitarian textiles and sculptures. It was noted that the significance of art works could not be overstated. They radiated critical societal ramifications that transcended different epochs (Safo-Ankama, 2014).

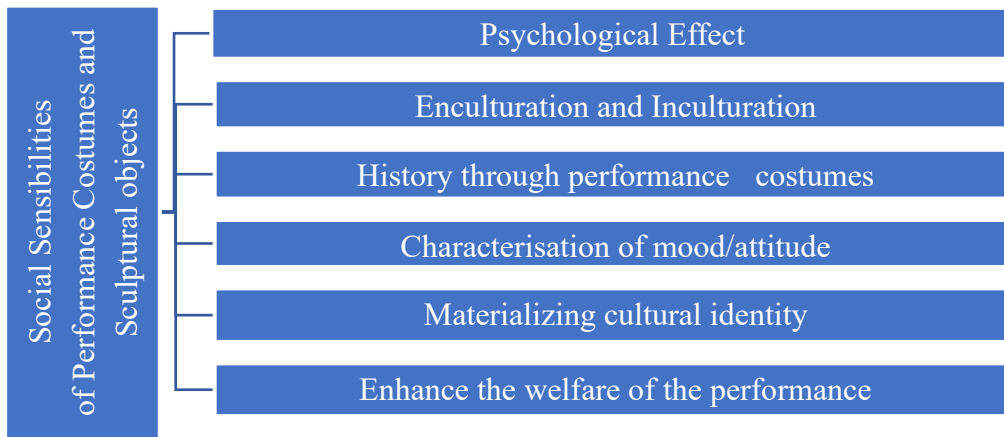


Figure 7: Thematic representation of social sensibilities of performance costumes and sculptural objects
(Source: Authors’ construct, 2023)

4.2.1. Psychological Effects

The coastal Fantes performance costumes and sculptural objects create a psychological transference that is triangular in nature. Because of this relationship, these art objects are mostly seen as religious objects (ritualistic) in society. This belief creates a transference relationship between the costumes, the sculptures, the performance, and the audience, as shown in Figure 8. The origin of this triangular relationship lies in myth. This concept of costume as religious and ritualistic dovetails with Rook’s (1984) statement that products (costumes) which serve as ritual sculptural artefacts may endure beyond the normal product life-cycle, becoming receptacles and media. It is believed that the sight of some of these ritual costumes can perform magic and hypnotise the audience to join in the performance or appreciate the performance better.

The study revealed that the touch of some *Asafre* or *Asafua*, patrons and clients do get pregnant, and some are favoured with marriage prospects. In some instances, the yearly purification of royal costumes (*Egua do todo*), some ritual costumes and costume elements, patrons and members of families and communities come with their problems. Prayers in the form of libations are said for their redemption. It was stressed by N. Barh IV (Personal communication, August 4, 2016) and corroborated by N. A. Kwansa X (Personal communication, September 4, 2020) that a number of patrons came back in the ensuing year to show appreciation for answering requests. The psychological effect of transference is cyclic in nature, with the effect repeated in a triangular manner. This metaphysical belief presents a platform as some ritual costumes are revered and even, in some cases, libations are made on art works to increase spirituality and performance potency.



Figure 8: Coastal costume’s psychological effect (Source: Authors construct, 2023)

4.2.2. Enculturation and Inculturation

Coastal Fante performance costumes and sculptural objects serve as agents for educating and orienting the upcoming generation. They have elements of societal and communal philosophies and ideologies that are passed on to the community and its young members from time to time. Through exhibitions, displays, and re-enactments of value-packed episodes, they serve as a source of re-orientation and an avenue for prescribing to the younger generation the values, attitudes, customs, religion, and beliefs of the older generation. This rapport creates a social and friendly learning environment for its members. This viewpoint by Wilkinson-Weber (2010) corroborates that the concept of enculturation and inculturation, commenting on the realism and authorship of costumes are viewpoints that an individual cannot just create a costume out of their own whims and caprices, rather it has to be rooted in reality. That is why costumes and sculptural objects connect a discourse about art objects to an informed audience. This concept of appreciating costumes stresses that art objects especially costumes should be in consonance with realities embedded in societal ideologies and that authorship should be deep-rooted in the customs of the people. For someone to appreciate a costume, one must first appreciate the culture and customs of the people in question.

Costumes with wearable sculptural elements like hand bands and wristbands made of beads, *Ahenema* (sandals), with their names and narrative descriptions are embedded with values which are nested in the cultural context. For example, a maxim generated from the beads of the *Adzewa* ensemble goes like this: '*Ahondzi tsiw payin ne anyim a ebi nyiw*', meaning if a treaded bead gets torn in the presence of an elderly person, none gets missing. Bead maxim imports diligence. Furthermore, '*Ahondzi pa nkasa*' literally means "Good or beautiful beads are not noisy". The implication is that empty barrels make the most noise. So, in society it is about how much one can help with community development and not how much of a noisy commentator a person can be. Another maxim for enculturation from the beads forming wristbands and finger rings found on most *Safohenfo* goes like this: "*Nyimpa obo tumi wo na DworƆ wo nkaba fa wo abatsir*", which literally means "the person who can fight you will remove your wrist band and finger rings through your arm hole. The peace an individual enjoys from observing laid-down societal norms is essential. It was noted that, traditionally, the *Adoba* costume is the approved way a woman should be dressed in coastal Fante communities. The performance reminds the young adult women about the land's culture and their efforts to preserve, protect, and promote the culture. The *Adoba* /*Adewa* costumes talk about female modesty and simplicity (*Safohene Badu & Ebusua Payin* Andrews of Cape Coast and *Nkusukum* traditional areas, respectively, Personal communication, August 4, 2015). In all these philosophical-contextual scenarios, costumes and sculptures are used to enculturate next generations, passing on the ideals and values of their society. This knowledge system consciously communicates to young adults in society the valour of societal cultural transferences and allegiance by showing re-enactment of societal history records.

4.2.3. History through Performances Costumes with Wearable Sculptural objects

Coastal Fante performance costumes with wearable sculptures are classified under ancient mythologies, historical facts, exploits, materials, techniques, and styles depicting a time and era. For example, the *Dadzi kyew* (metal helmet) of the coastal Fantes exemplifies a historical account of the people and brings to mind the stories of the Europeans on the coast of Ghana during the era when the slave trade was faced by resistance by the locals

in the eighteenth century around 1807. There was constant warfare and fighting between the Asafo and the Europeans. The *Dadzi kyew* was sought after because the fighting implements used by the locals were basically stones, and it was to protect head injuries as shown in Figure 9. An interesting revelation was that after each battle encounter with the colonial masters, items retrieved from them were given to the *Safohene*, whether it was military dress or a metal cap/helmet. The seized items are worn by the *Safohene* or *Tufohene* in subsequent battles to show the opponent their might and victory in the previous battle. It preaches to the current Coastal Fante generations the historical exploits and valour of their ancestors. Their warlike attitudes bestow on them the right to follow suit and either maintain or develop upon it. Some of the *Asafohenfo batakari* and Asafo abaa have historical antecedents. Some can be traced back to the 3rd and 4th generations. It could spark dialogue about historical happenings. A case is the double *Asafo abaa* of *Safohene Badu* of Cape Coast (Personal communication, September 4, 2020), which could be traced to when there were inter-conflicts between Asafo groups in Oguaman. He narrated that his uncle, whom he inherited from, defeated an opponent and seized his *Abaa* as a sign of victory. The victory of this seized *Abaa* is commemorated and pacified every year during the pacification of their own *Abaa*. Furthermore, because of its spiritual, magical, and historical significance, the magical *Asefre* belonging to an *Okomfo* of *Kuntu* community in the Nkusukum traditional area is still preserved. A reference to *Asafohenfo batakari* and *Asafo abaa* is shown in Figure 10.



Figure 9A and B.: *Dadzi kyew* (metal cap/helmet) (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)



Figure 10A and B: *Asafohenfo batakari* and *Asafo abaa* (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)

4.2.4. Characterisation of Mood/Attitude

In the coastal Fante communities, performance costumes with wearable sculptural objects create and set the tone for effective performance. It is the agent that promotes performances and is described as the activation of traditional performances. Without costumes and wearable sculptures, spirituality cannot be enhanced. Again, invocation cannot take place, where the costumes create the enabling environment for possession, procession and display. For example, *Akom* possession and display cannot take place without costumes such as the *Asefre* or *Asafua* and other ritual costumes as shown in Figure 12. Wearable sculptures are sometimes seen as receptacles for spirits and benevolence. The *Asafohenfo* without the *Abaa* cannot perform the full invocation and take control of the group as leaders who will fight spiritual attacks from opposing groups who may set traps for them. A typical example is the *Adur soa fo* (deity carriers), who cannot be possessed without their costumes to perform the arduous duty of carrying the deity (either light or heavy weights). It changes the mood of performers with different roles in the spirit world. In this case, when the costumes or the sculptural objects are removed or taken, the carrier cannot testify to what happened. It mostly feels weary.

The mood characterisation could also be seen in the costumes of the chief, ritual costumes, *Safohenfo*, *Okomfo*, *Ahenkwaa*, and others who take on transformational appearances in the costumes they wear. The costumes serve as recognition status for the wearer. There are costumes that reflect the occupational status of the wearer, as well as social and economic status in a theatrical performance. For example, a uniformed costume of an *Adzewafo* ensemble as represented in Figure 11. *Asaamfo* could easily be identified in public by their costumes. Other costumes communicate marital status, chieftaincy status, group or ethnic membership identification, and vice versa, communicate modesty to ward off attraction. The costumes with wearable sculptures serve as a medium for conveying messages, ideas, concepts, thoughts as codes for equivocation.



Figure 11: Adzewa/Adoba costume (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)



Figure 12: Akomfo Asefre/Asafua (raffia skirt) (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)

4.2.5. Materialising Cultural Identity

Coastal Fante performance costumes go a long way to bringing to the fore the religion and culture of the people. This statement affirms Tilly's (2011) view on costumes as cloth and clothing have long been recognized to be fundamental in relation to identities becoming materialized. This concept is typical of coastal Fante costume ideologies. Tilly's observation gives more insight that these clothing objectifies both individual and social power as well as prestige and fame in a variety of ways: through the production, the cut and form of the clothing, articulating power in relation to the body and persona of the wearer, intimately related to group identity and the networking of social relations. A large component of traditional sculptural objects has cultural values and norms through their names and narrative descriptions. For example, beads, cowries, and swords are some philosophical symbols used for the performance. These sculptural objects create the needed identity and materialise culture such as Cape Coast (Oguaaman) societal flags and umbrellas. These umbrella tops have *Kɔɔ* (Crab) symbol as a totem and cultural identity.

Furthermore, it was found that the coastal Fante performance costumes possess sociological relevance that is endorsed as cultural, religious, and ritual meanings. These costumes are conveyed in colour preferences, materials, embellishments, and design, as well as reflecting priorities associated with behaviour, age-grade, and ritual practices (Acquaye et al., 2018; Bouttiaux et al., 2008). Again, religion is also displayed in reference to the performance costumes employed. For example, a great number of the coastal Fante communities have *Akomfo* costumes (Traditional priests and priestesses) reflecting on the society in which the religion is practiced, which is obviously a traditional religion. This is because these *Akomfo* (priests and priestesses) are custodians of the numerous *Abosom* (deity) scattered along the length and breadth of the coastal towns. The costume shows resemblance and loyalty to their deities or symbols of fear and beneficent agents to depict clear allegiance and reverence. Religion or meta-physical beliefs of the coastal Fante people inform their choices and give their direction on visual appearance which is portrayed by the costumes they wear. These various cultures express their own unique identity in their indigenous costumes which in turn becomes their cultural identity. This means that with their traditional costumes, it is easy to identify one culture from another. It is plausible to note that there are further details in the symbolism of colour, the drape of the cloth, the manner of wearing it and the type of accessories used that further differentiate one culture from another (Akwetey, 2007; Safo-Ankama, 2014).



Figure 13: The *Akomfo* costumes (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)

4.2.6. Enhance Welfare of the Performer

It was revealed that in the coastal Fante traditional setup, performance costumes serve as a tool to enhance the performer's welfare. These costumes cover the performer's nakedness. This is because, in many cases, when performers are possessed, they go into a trance. The possession state causes the performers to lose consciousness and make certain gestures according to the dictates of the spirit in possession. The sacred and private parts of the performer are covered in costumes. For example, the possessed *Akomfo* and *Adur soa fo*, most of the time, lose consciousness when fully possessed. Their *Abrefo* (assistance) is always ready to stand by to help adjust costumes or use costumes to cover nakedness to enhance welfare. For instance, when a chief is descending from a palanquin, because his nakedness is forbidden, a camp is created with a number of clothes to barricade the chief to redress and adjust his costume before walking into the state. Again, the women's costume for *Adur soa* is *kaba*/t-shirt and slit. It is held at the waist by a knotted cloth rope for control and direction. A loop-like effect is created with fabric and loosely wound around the *abaawa's* waist. Loose enough for the *abawaa* (maiden) to turn around in a 360° movement as she is possessed by the spirit (*sumsun si no do*). Figure 14, presents the *Adur soa fo* costume in performance. A suggestive loop is created for the person guarding the *abaawa* carrying the *tsitsi egua* (ancestral stool). The loop in the costuming process is essential because when the *abaawa* is possessed during performance she is prone to nudity or nakedness. The loop also helps in controlling and guarding the spirit possessed *abaawa* (maiden) carrying the *tsitsi egua* from straying and possibly destroying the generational property of the *abusua*.

Moreover, costumes elevate the performer's life to a reputable level. For example, a chief after costuming due to regalia and ornamentation, is seen as the overall commander and leader of Sculptural objects such as the crown are a symbol of authority. The *Safohene*, in a moment when he is coronated and picks his *Asafo abaa*, is transformed from a commoner in the *Asafo* system to a leader with control over leadership. The *Asafo abaa* used in performance is illustrated in Figure 15.



Figure 14A and B: The *Adur soa fo* costume in performance (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)



Figure 15A, B and C: The *Asafo abaa* in performance (Source: Fieldwork, 2014)

5. Implications for Further Research

Further research into coastal Fante festivals in the Central region of Ghana contributes to a more ample understanding of the dynamic interplay between culture, identity, and material artefacts within the Fante community. This implication promotes both academic knowledge and practical strategies for cultural sustainability. Therefore, the study suggests some areas for further research:

- i) An in-depth analysis of symbolism:
Future research could delve deeper into the specific symbolism embedded in Fante's performance costumes and sculptural objects. In addition to providing a deeper understanding of the cultural narratives and spiritual connections represented by each design element and symbol, understanding their nuanced meanings can provide a deeper insight into them.
- ii) Analysis and change over generations:
An examination of how the designs and symbolism of these artefacts have evolved over time and across generations would contribute to a dynamic understanding of cultural change and adaptation within the Fante community.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study emphasised on the rich cultural tapestry and significance of performance costumes and sculptural objects within the coastal Fante community. Through a multidisciplinary approach that combines ethnography, archival research, artisan collaboration, and qualitative analysis, this research has provided valuable insights into the multifaceted roles of these costumes and sculptural objects. The study indicated that these artefacts serve as tangible expressions of coastal Fante identity, heritage and spirituality that connect wearers and viewers with their history, ancestors, and deities. The intricate designs, symbolism, and craftsmanship behind these objects reveal the depth of Fante cultural traditions and the resilience of their indigenous knowledge system. In essence, the traditional festival and its philosophies remain unchanged as these festival performance costumes and sculptural objects are symbols of ethnic identity in Ghana. The significance and resilience of indigenous knowledge system on Fante festival performance costumes and sculptural objects must be ensured by traditional leaders, elders or local authorities by preserving as powerful symbols of Fante ethnic identity and cultural heritage in Ghana, while also promoting their sustainability and responsible sharing with the wider world.

The history of textiles with wearable sculptures as a tradition of the coastal Fante cannot be understated. It was evident from the study that performance costumes and sculptural objects, as material culture and identities, do not just mirror pre-existing sets of ideas or symbolic systems but facilitate narrative values as they form part

of a holistic historical repository of indigenous knowledge systems and practices from generation to generation. These costumes hold profound cultural significance, symbolising historical events, social identities, behaviour, codes and spiritual connections within the Fante community. As a result of these social constructs, enculturation and inculturation were achieved, materialising cultural identity, defining mood (attitude), enhancing performer welfare, and addressing issues of history were addressed through performance costumes and sculptural objects. The creation and wearing of these costumes with sculptural objects should not be merely seen as garments and objects but intricate expressions of Fante identity and heritage, connecting wearers with their past, ancestors, and deities. It is also recommended that more interdisciplinary research and collaboration must be encourage involving cultural anthropologists, historians, artists, and community members as such collabrations could yield a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural significance of these artefacts.

Contextually, these artefacts create the appropriate environments for ceremonies, rites, and rituals for the coastal Fante communities to pay allegiances to their objects of benevolence to afford them continual existence. These artefacts articulate ideas, probe moral precepts, and prescribe societal sensibilities. What one wears becomes a vehicle to transmit and share knowledge. Traditional dresses are symbolic and collective from societal perspectives. The enactment of the coastal Fante festival costumes expresses a unique identity in their indigenous costumes, which in turn becomes their cultural identity. This means that, through their traditional costumes, it is possible to identify one culture from another. It is best understood through the symbolism of colour, the drape of the cloth, the manner of wearing it, and the type of accessories differentiate performance costumes from one another. This connects a discourse about clothes to an informed and non-informed audience. In a broader context, this study serves as a reminder of the importance of safeguarding cultural diversity and indigenous knowledge systems that enrich our global heritage. It underscores the need for responsible research practices that respect and empower Indigenous communities while promoting cross-cultural understanding. In essence, the exploration of Coastal Fante Festival performance costumes and sculptural objects transcends the realm of aesthetics; it unravels the intricate social constructs of symbolic significance embedded within these artefacts, deepening our appreciation for the enduring legacy of the Fante people. Therefore, it is recommended that the concept of appreciating coastal Fante festival performance costumes and sculptural objects should be in consonance with realities embedded in societal ideologies. The idea of authorship should be deep-rooted in people's customs. The generation should see these costumes with sculptural objects as a living embodiment of indigenous knowledge and cultural practice, enriching the understanding of Fante culture and its significance in a global context.

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