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CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The exploration of near-extinct indigenous Ghanaian cultural symbols for interior decoration

Emmanuel A. Ofori¹, Benjamin Tawiah^{1*}, Benjamin K. Asinyo¹, Kwaku A. Adomako¹ and Benjamin Eghan¹

Abstract: The culture and artistic heritage of Ghana have been endorsed by the rich influence of Akan symbols like *Adinkra*, the *akuaba* doll, and others from various ethnic groups. However, the integration of ethnically unique near-extinct symbols into an art piece to highlight the cultural diversity of Ghana for wall hanging is rare. This work brings to life indigenous Ghanaian symbols on the verge of extinction from four ethnic groups, namely, the *Akan*, *Ewe*, *Ga-Adangbe*, and *Mole-Dagbani* to design a wall hanging for interior decoration, especially for public spaces by adopting Cora Marshall's aesthetico research to generate a "Quali-Aesthetico" model. The design aesthetically ingrained

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The exploration of near-extinct indigenous Ghanaian cultural symbols for interior decoration represents a significant endeavor that not only preserves the rich heritage of Ghana but also revitalizes traditional art forms and empowers local artisans. By incorporating these symbols into interior design spaces, it could tell captivating stories, celebrate diversity, and promote cultural appreciation. This initiative fosters a sense of pride and identity among Ghanaians while providing opportunities for economic growth through the production and sale of authentic, handcrafted decorative items. Additionally, showcasing Ghanaian cultural symbols in interior decoration encourages dialogue, understanding, and cross-cultural exchange, bridging the gap between different communities and fostering a global appreciation for cultural diversity. By supporting this exploration, artists, researchers, and the public will contribute to the preservation and promotion of indigenous Ghanaian culture, enriching our collective human experience and nurturing a more inclusive and culturally vibrant society.

conceptual aboriginal art and near-extinct indigenous Ghanaian symbols from the four ethnic groups as inspiration. The creative integration of these symbols yielded an interesting art piece that provides a unique ambiance for a simulated interior-decorated airport and an art gallery suitably displayed on flat interior surfaces. Besides the artistic expression of the art piece, interpretations of the uniquely combined symbols and their philosophical meanings have been provided to educate the public about the rich Ghanaian cultural heritage. The art piece also seeks to preserve near-extinct identity symbols and create a sense of belonging for the younger generation.

Subjects: Culture; Heritage Management & Conservation; Design; Visual Arts; History; Philosophy

Keywords: indigenous; heritage; cultural symbols; interior decoration; philosophical meaning

1. Introduction

Primordial-inspired symbols are forms in Ghanaian art that comprise common translations of thought, ideas, and societal idiosyncrasies, conveying and symbolizing the values and beliefs of the people. The evolution of symbols can be traced to the era of the Nomadic hunter, where drawings of everyday life were made on the walls of caves as a medium of visual communication using the semiotics approach (Agbo, 2011). Through this, essential information was communicated, which centered practically on storytelling. Art forms are the most creative and innovative means of expressing one's thoughts and emotions and communicating to achieve solidarity in society. However, in modern Ghanaian art, traditional indigenous Ghanaian symbols and their combination with aboriginal art concepts to create an artistically pleasing interior decoration product are rare, making the next generation lose touch with the rich cultural heritage of the land. Hence, the manuscript elaborates on the current trend of interior design by making use of near-extinct indigenous symbols from four (4) selected Ghanaian ethnic groups, namely, the Akan, Ewe, Ga-Adangbe, and Mole-Dagbani which employs the printing method to help preserve the culture, give a sense of belonging to Ghanaians, and bring about diversity in ambiance decoration. These tend to be both functional and aesthetically pleasing and improve people's quality of life and culture.

Semiotics, or the study of language and society's signs and symbols, as well as their interpretation and impact, varies by culture. Symbols are representations of the meanings of words, acts, emotions, behavior, and ideas among individuals in a culture. Agyekum (2006) asserts that symbols and their meanings can occasionally motivate and direct people's behavior. According to Agyekum, decoding non-verbal messages follows a pattern of "Speaker – Visual icon – Addressee." Hargie (2011) claims that these non-verbal cues frequently occur when there is a conflict between verbal and non-verbal's, and when there is emotional or relationship communication. Aristotle, 'The Great Philosopher,' working with language about 2500 years ago, said, *spoken words are the symbols of mental experience, and written words are the symbols of recorded experience* (McKeon, 1941 p.16a. 2-7).

The Ghanaian symbols are generated from proverbs, mostly with the Akans and Ewes, and have proven to be symbolic with in-depth meanings only meant for the understanding of the wise, finding application in numerous areas such as linguist staff. According to Patterson (2016), it is important to note that linguistic symbols are a sign of an ethnic-cultural and ethnic-cognitive system. Mukerjee and Dabbeeru (2012) assert that, a language's symbols serve as a supplement to national characteristics and traits. Owing to this, it is notable that among the Ghanaian symbols are some that have a direct relationship to the people of Ivory Coast, considering the history between the two nations. Prominent among these is the "Adinkra", which translates as "goodbye", and is named after Nana Kofi Adinkra, ruler of Gyaman in the 19th century of the traditional areas of Ivory Coast, who provoked the then Asantehene,

Nana Osei Bonsu Panyin, by duplicating the golden stool. This act led to war, with the Ashanti's prevailing over the Gyaman, and their captive craftsmen were compelled to teach the Ashanti the skill, which was later modified and named after the King (Agbo, 2011). According to Danzy (2009), *Adinkra* is a type of ideographic writing that uses pictorial representations to show the Asante people's rich cultural heritage. Sarpong (1974) examined Asante's fabric designs as creative symbols, especially the *adinkra*, expressing religious, aesthetic, and cultural values, as explained by Nkansah-Obrempong et al. (2002). These symbols are expressive of the Akan tradition with special meanings and have been used in various forms, including interior decoration. The Ghanaian saying *aboaonidua Nyamenaopra ne ho*, for example, literally translates to, *God drives away the flies of the animal without a tail*. This means that in the situation of the helpless, God will always supply, serving as a source of hope and encouragement to continue pressing on.

Considered a very powerful tool or medium, visual art is an art form that is used to achieve effective communication. The study, therefore, deals with the use of near-extinct indigenous Ghanaian symbols for interior decoration, which is influenced by an article on the internet titled 'The Amazing Story of Aboriginal Art (Artlandish, 2021). The theory of Aboriginal art focuses on revealing secrets, and the indigenous symbols communicate interesting philosophical ideologies in the form of proverbs, and myths; as these ideas not only help achieve admirable demeanor but also help achieve cohesion in holistic societal development.

Over the years, myriads of traditional Ghanaian symbols have been used alone or in combination with other art forms and techniques to produce artistic works in diverse media for interior decoration in buildings, however, the use of ethnically unique, near-extinct Ghanaian symbols and their ideation with aboriginal art concepts for the artistic creation of a wall hanging is rare. This is a thoughtful necessity because, symbols in general are of great importance, and so, Ghanaian symbols in the form of wall hangings in homes and public interior decorations help understand the world from a better viewpoint, help honor the past illustrious and rich history of the people, act as a medium for the transmission of culture, and help promote social harmony and social accord. The framework supporting the project is the Quali-Aesthetico model, a triangulation of Cora-Marshall's aesthetico action research and the qualitative research method with philosophical underpinnings of symbols grouped in three, thus, personal, cultural, and universal, according to constructed structured interviews using the purposive sampling and snowball technique. Beyond the aesthetic value of the art piece, the work also seeks to preserve the near-extinct Ghanaian identity symbols and create a sense of belonging for the younger generation as a way of preserving the symbols and their philosophical meanings in the four ethnic groups.

2. Literature review

The *Adinkra* and the *akuaba* doll, which have found use in textile prints, sculpture figures, architectural miniatures, and even as wall-hanging decorations, are other Ghanaian cultural symbols that have served as a means of communicating ideas. According to Africanbeadsandfabrics.com (2020), the symbols, coupled with their collective meanings, represent chieftaincy adornments and emblems, shaping the sociocultural, spiritual, and economic lives of the people. Thus, using African artifacts in an interior or exterior setting allows for the utilization of distinctive items that reflect Africans' aesthetic and spiritual nature.

When compared to the study project, studies on existing literature in Ghanaian culture and symbols show that little has been done to preserve the country's cultural history. For instance, Antobam (1963) describes Ghana's cultural heritage and claims that throughout the millennia, the Ghanaian people's lives have been governed by the values and ideals found in their traditions. As a means of expressing and maintaining cultural identity, Antobam talks about the significance of a philosophy known among Africans and those of African origin as the "African Personality" through a continuous cultural legacy. Antobam agrees with the fact that identity serves as an important distinguishing factor for people in our modern environment. As a result, our culture may spread outside our territories through the ways we live.

Symbols, which can be both abstract, physical or spiritual, are fundamental aspect of human existence that develop from personal ideas and passions. When relating the idea of African art to Ghanaian expression, Antobam points out that like other Africans, Ghanaians express “*art for life’s sake*” by emphasizing the significance of all kinds of art as a criterion of beauty and morality. He underlines that “*art is for art’s sake*” and that people around the world are interested in a country’s art in contrast to the Western formalist aesthetic ideal;

- Its political history as well as its traditions and way of life
- Its artistic manifestations exist within the nation and the origins are deeply rooted in the nation’s philosophy of past and present life
- What traditions are developed by each individual through conscious striving and intellectual effort?

Although Antobam’s work has some drawbacks, his discussion of culture as a major factor in determining a person’s personality and sense of self offers insightful ideas that have been used as the foundation for or a guide for this investigation into the necessity of examining nearly extinct indigenous Ghanaian symbols (Linklater, 2021).

Glover’s (1971a & 1971b) study focused on a set of *Adinkra* symbols, stools, and linguist staff. In the Ghanaian culture, someone who is chosen by a clan to serve as the chief’s spokesperson due to his erudition and intelligence carries a staff with a symbol fastened to the top and is known as a linguist. The *Adinkra* are objects that represent traditional Ghanaian proverbs or emblems. Glover’s collection was investigated, and it included both the most famous and well-known symbols as well as a few that are less known to Ghanaians today, encouraging researchers to pursue the topic.

While Glover’s work included visual representations of some proverbial expressions of linguistic symbols related to aspects of cultural belief and value in the Ghanaian community, it does not attempt to interpret the proverbs, making it challenging for those unfamiliar with the linguistic facets of Ghanaian culture to comprehend. Glover’s main goal appears to catalogue them for easy access and to distinguish between the current proverbial symbols that Ghanaians use most frequently and the older ones.

In the 1978 publication “Sankofa Adinkra Poems,” Kayper-Mensah attempts to explain the meanings of several *Adinkra* symbols through a series of brief poems. The author notes that most Ghanaians frequently struggle to understand the meanings of *Adinkra* symbols when they are translated into other languages, such as English. Kayper points out that the issue is how to start such lengthy explanations, hence, the author intends to communicate the concepts in a relevant way by using poetry as a medium for an explanation. By choosing the poetic way, Kayper’s collections are considerable especially in periods when Ghana is undergoing a cultural renaissance—a period of reviving and rediscovering the lost identity. It is the idea of cultural re-awakening that the author reflects in the title of the work “*Sankofa*,” which refers to the idea of looking back at one’s past in order to move forward. The objective of Kayper-Mensah’s study is largely to provide a thorough explanation of symbolic expression, however, it seemed quite insufficient how well the author could use poetry to convey the meanings of the *Adinkra* symbols. Because the poems’ symbols were so poorly explained, only their literal interpretations were elaborated; as a result, the deeper social connotations about the cultural importance of the symbols were left unexplored.

It is no hidden truth that Africans are the finest abstract artists, although their traditional art has been more about usefulness than inventiveness, as proven by the effect on Picasso and others. Despite efforts to preserve the conventional beliefs visible in the symbols and objects incorporated in creative works, significant alterations have been made to how they are portrayed. To create a wall hanging of highly conceptualized artistic objects of rich cultural background as a new trend in interior decoration and to fill in any gaps, the study considered the following objectives:

- To give a sense of belonging and identity to Ghanaians by being within reach with historical content.
- To promote the longevity of culture and to help preserve near-extinct Ghanaian symbols.
- To keep touch with the African lineage and its lost culture.
- To serve as a body of knowledge to both locals and foreigners, especially tourists and the coming generation.
- To promote freedom of self-expression and self-awareness.
- To provide a means of contemplation and sober reflection.
- To provide meanings to the near-extinct symbols.

3. Methodology

The study focused on identifying near-extinct indigenous Ghanaian symbols from four ethnic groups, namely, *Akan*, *Ewe*, *Ga-Adangbe*, and the *Mole-Dagbani* of Ghana. The research employed a qualitative and studio-based approach, specifically, Cora Marshall's aesthetico action research (Marshall, 2010), to form a conceptual framework named, "Quali-Aesthetico Research Model (Q-ARM)". Observation and semi-structured interviews served as the main data collection instruments. Qualitative research was chosen for this study because it allows for close encounters with respondents, observation of their environments, and interpretation of findings (Borg & Gall, 1989; Marczyk et al., 2005; Osuala, 2001). Similarly, Creswell (2013), concurs that qualitative technique entails the investigator concentrating on one or more instances over time through in-depth data gathering using a variety of information sources.

Participants were recruited based on the purposive and snowball sampling technique. Respondents with detailed knowledge about the topic of study was most appropriate. The interview participants were elderly folks who are knowledgeable about the culture, proverbs, customs, and traditions of the land, and has greater insight on the near-extinct symbols. Interview dates were scheduled and participants were given the interview questions ahead of time to enable them prepare before visiting. Participants from the *Ga-Adangbe*, *Ewe*, *Akan*, and *Mole-Dagbani* communities were visited and interviewed. The session lasted for approximately three (3) hours per person over two (2) weeks period across all localities. Face-to-face questions translated from English to the various local languages were used for effective communication. In total, twenty (20) elderly folks, thus five (5) from each ethnic group were interviewed comprising three (3) aged women and two elderly men.

Documentation of the session was audio recorded and images of the symbols showed were captured with a digital camera. Sample interview questions before translation to the various languages can be found in the supplementary material. The symbols were carefully examined and analyzed for a better understanding based on the descriptions provided by the interview respondents. The merit of the philosophical meanings, significance to the people, and influence on their norms and impact on generations were carefully examined to ensure consistency.

Q-ARM (refer to Figure 1), is a triangulation of qualitative and studio-based practice using the Cora-Marshals aesthetico-action research to develop a model suitable for executing this work. The aesthetico-action is a cyclic, open-ended process that involves observing, reflecting, planning, and acting (Kuhne & Quigley, 1997; Van Manen, 1990).

Sutton and Austin (2015), indicates that qualitative research data are gathered in natural situations, and the research aims at producing philosophy rather than trying philosophy.

3.1. Qualitative research

Interviews were conducted with some elderly people from the four ethnic groups who were abreast with the cultural paradigm of their ethnic groups to gather information and explore the possibilities of using the near-extinct symbols in producing the artwork for wall hanging. A careful observation of the interview participants, their way of life, believe system and the symbols were noted.

Figure 1. Shows the Q-ARM model (Researcher's construct, 2021).



3.2. Observation

Observation is a method of data collection in which the researcher carefully takes a careful look at all the variables in a system (Patton, 2002). At this stage, the researchers did a cautious observation of the symbols going extinct as described by the elderly folks from the Akan, Ewe, Ga-Adangbe, and Mole-Dagbani communities. The symbols were shown on various traditional items as reference to the descriptions given by the study participants.

3.3. Conceptualization

The results of the interview led to design conceptualization process by which general themes were identified. Four sub-themes based on the four ethnic groups were used. The ideas/images were abstracted based on the cluster of related observations. The information obtained from the interview session was used to produce the art piece in four quadrants telling a rich African story. To keep in touch with lost cultures and symbols, the project centered on an art movement, expressionism. The work allures people with aesthetics and also provides in-depth imagery based on knowledge and findings from the elderly people interviewed in the ethnic groups under study. Inspired by the world of art, the Aboriginal idea used by Australians and Torres Strait Islanders in the form of dots to reveal obscure information was incorporated. For better clarification, selected colors such as ash, yellow, black, coffee brown, orange, and white which have same meanings across the ethnic groups according to participants, describes and connote the rich history and the daily activities of the people (focus group discussion, August, 2021) were used to communicate the message.

3.4. Reflection

Reflection-in-practice is the ability to learn and grow continuously by applying and responding to both known and novel events as they occur (Marshall, 2010, p. 81). During reflection, the selected symbols were used taking into consideration the elements of design and the overall theme of the composition. The composition was carefully thought through to fully coordinate the various symbols to help project the work in an aesthetically pleasing manner without losing its philosophical meaning. This was achieved due to help from participants (field data, 2021).

3.5. Planning

Planning refers to the activity of preparing a strategy with a set of intended outcomes, followed by a series of actions by which those outcomes are to be achieved. At this stage, the authors carefully planned by undertaking a number of rough sketches to arrive at the final work. The work was planned into four quadrants as per the ethnic groups studied and preliminary sketches were made as blueprint for the final art piece.

3.6. Creating

The creation stage began with a series of drawings in sketchbooks, and storyboards, followed by concept validation and adjustments to reflect the philosophical concepts (Marshall, 2010, p. 81). The ideas were then put in place for production by keeping in mind the suitable materials needed for execution. After careful artistic sketches and validation, the final design was produced using Adobe Photoshop software.

3.7. Product

Having undergone various stages, the final product or project was executed into material tangibles by the action of hand screen printing and flexography printing techniques mounted on wall panels as support to be used for interior decoration of public places.

4. Results and discussion

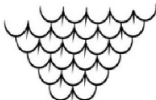
Through the interviews, a lot of indigenous symbols were identified and the history and philosophical meanings behind the symbols were fascinating. Some of the symbols were “things of everyday life”, and others connote “cultural and universal” materials, however, their usage in cultural relics and their philosophical meanings, significance, influence on their norms, and impact are unknown to the modern generations of the people of these ethnic groups. When participants were asked to explain symbol, responses such as, “*a symbol is a mark which represents something, most especially, a clan or totem*”. *Symbols have been in existence for soo long dating back to the era of troglodytes and mostly give accounts to the everyday life of the people.* Several symbols can be seen in (refer to Table 1)”. Further question on whether the youth of today may possibly be unaware of certain symbols unique to their ethnic group were asked and the responses from all the four communities were quite emphatic that several of such symbols exist and although the youth may have seen them on some traditional relics, they have no idea of their philosophical meanings and the significance to their struggle as people. The respondents indicated the reason why the youth of today has lost touch with some of symbols and their significance is due to the peculiar use of some of the symbols. Specifically, some symbols are meant for chieftains whereas others to have been associated with superstitious beliefs. More so, the taste for foreign textiles has been identified as another subliminal reason why the youth have lost touch with those symbols. For instance, the Volta kete have unique symbols but the youth does not patronise them. According to Mr. Richard Mawuko, (personal communication, August 28, 2021) “*ethnic groups use traditional textiles as a medium for promoting culture and its symbols, however, the trend has changed and so the coming generation is less conversant with these symbols but preservations have been made by keeping them in the archives of traditional books*”.

Mr. Clifford Asante Twum (personal communication, August 21, 2021) asserts that “*the lack of awareness about the symbols have affected the cultural identity of young people because some of the symbols instills patriotism and the sense of belongingness. The use of indigenous symbols in textile products will help them to be proud of their African lineage*”. It is clear from the transcribed data that the young generation of today has lost touch with these symbols and their philosophical meanings. Based on the initial findings, the near-extinct symbols, and their philosophical underpinnings were artistically conceptualized taking into consideration the importance of colors to the believe systems of the four ethnic groups. In the selected tribes, colors were of same meanings and gave a call to history according to feedbacks of participants (field data, 2021).

Table 1. Meanings of figurative images in the work

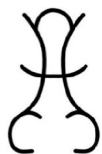
Ewe Symbols discovered	Name (Ewe)	Philosophical meaning
	<i>Ati alɔ etɔ</i> (Unity)	It's a symbol of worship. <i>Nu etɔ yae wɔ agbe</i> ; Literal meaning: three things make life. This is a Ewe symbol made of three rugged sticks put together to form a triangle. This symbolizes unity.
	<i>Fu kple dzidzɔ</i> (Suffering and happiness)	Symbol of harmony. In life there are ups and downs, so when the hard moments come to our way, we shouldn't let that overcome the happy moments instead, we should endeavor to keep the balance between both to live a harmonious life.
	<i>Atrakpui</i> (The stairs)	Depicting systematic orderliness in life. Way of fellowship, love, unity, and protecting one another is the sure way to keep or follow a common objective.
	<i>Du gbagba fe tutu</i> (Destruction and rebuilding of town)	The collapse, ruin, or breakdown of a policy, constitution, or rule is referred to as the downfall of a nation. As a result, when such a disaster occurs, others learn from their mistakes, tragedy, or calamity and make changes to their ways.
Akan Symbols discovered	Name (Twi)	Philosophical meaning
	<i>Dondo</i> (Bell drum)	A symbol of appellation. The dondo drum is used in a variety of dance and music festivals in the Akan community. The drums are also played to sing praises of notable members of the community for their good deeds.
	<i>Kokuromotie</i> (Thumb)	Cooperation, participation, teamwork, and harmony. This symbol signifies your participation and cooperation in what is happening. It means you are part of the team and that they have your support.
	<i>Owia a repue</i> (A rising sun)	This symbol is meant to inspire progress and development in people, to renew their energy to face everything the new day brings. It also brings warmth, hope, and strength to face life anew.
	Modified dondo drum. <i>Emere dani</i> (Time changes)	An instrument in energizing the people on their quest. The drum was modified from the normal to show that culture is not static but rather dynamic and undergoes gradual changes over time.

(Continued)

Akan Symbols discovered	Name (Twi)	Philosophical meaning
	<i>Akwadaa anɛ ne ni aar ɔɛ negya</i> (A child takes the reflection of the mother or father)	Depicts the traits or characteristics that one takes on from his/her background and may include bravery.
Ga-Adangbe Symbols Discovered	Name (Ga-Adangbe)	Philosophical meaning
	<i>Gongon</i> (Town crier)	A traditional instrument used to send information to people in a society. In this essence, it represents the medium of awakening.
	<i>Inshɔke kɛ kokloo nanegbɛ</i> (The wavy and circular path)	Depicts the phenomenon of lives difficulties
	<i>Kaya Yoo</i> (Hard work/dignity)	This symbol simply means to achieve success one must put in the effort.
	<i>Sabolai</i> (Symbol of individualism, coexistence, and tolerance)	The onion is round but there are spaces in between that is there must be unity in diversity. There are differences in communities, but there must be tolerance of opinions. A conscious effort to stay in peace and harmony with people with diverse cultures. Like an onion, we are different, layer by layer in that rounded way together.
Mole-Dagbani Symbols Discovered	Name (Dagbani)	Philosophical meaning
	<i>Zahim poagri</i> (The scales)	Depict a formation of an element into a pattern that symbolizes growth and development.
	<i>Niriba</i> (The humans)	Represent the different ethnic groups that come together to fight for a good course.
	<i>Lamega</i> (The wire gauze)	An element depicting protection, and is good to be united to protect one another; as the saying goes the wound of one is the wound of all.
	<i>Lag Kpahi</i> (The big cowry)	Cowry is a symbol of wealth. Because each cowry has unique characteristics that affect its worth, the price of two cowries cannot be compared to the price of one large cowry. Mankind's physical strength cannot be used to determine his or her riches; instead, the person must be assessed holistically.

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Mole-Dagbani Symbols Discovered	Name (Dagbani)	Philosophical meaning
	Nyeighh (Exposure)	When the wind blows the towel's butt is exposed.
	Aboriginal art Concept	The design concept of the aboriginal art people is the dot. The dots were used to obscure their secret symbols.

5. Naming and identification of symbols

It has been emphasized in several scholarly writings that symbols generate names from spoken words and life happenings (H, 2022, June 21). However, according to an elderly person of the Akan tribe, Mr. Clifford Asante Twum (personal communication, August 21, 2021), *“traditional symbols are named by perceptive observation in human life, proverbs, and even from spoken words which constitute a popular way of life’s philosophy and thus creates awareness.”* Proverbs are short, popular sayings that express a truth or piece of wisdom about life or human behavior (Mieder, 2004). They are more prevalent than aphorisms, and they frequently use metaphor, alliteration, or rhyme to represent common experiences. Popular among these are *“Adinkra”*, translated as *“goodbye”*, and *“obatan na nim niar nin mma bedi”*, literally translated as *“a mother knows what to feed her children”*. Because most proverbs have their beginnings in oral tradition, they are generally phrased for simple memorization, and their meanings vary slightly from generation to generation, although they all have similar connotations. The session however led to the below symbol discoveries across the ethnic groups.

6. Philosophical underpinnings of symbols

Imageries and oral symbolisms are used in conveying information as a means of imparting knowledge. As opined by Dzobo (1975), a symbol has a deeper representation than its literal meaning. Mr. Clifford Asante Twum (personal communication, August 22, 2021) and Dzobo both accept the notion that symbols are linked together and categorized into three (3) as

6.1. Personal

These are associated with things be they living or non-living. An example may be one having a love for animals whereas another may not.

According to Mr. Clifford (personal communication, August 22, 2021), *“the choice of a human figure (head) as the template of an organization demonstrates the supremacy of man over all creations and his ability to act and bring the change required for the peaceful co-existence of all creatures both living and non-living, as depicted in the final work.”* Mr. Clifford is quoted as saying, *“man is considered superior based on characteristics in his mode of existence, thus, having divine spirit, angels prostrate before them, he is God’s vicegerent on earth, he is the goal or purpose of creation and has great intellect and that after God’s creation, said to the angels so when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall making obeisance to him.”*

6.2. Cultural

Different symbols could have relatively diverse connotations in diverse beliefs and cultures. In Christian culture, a lion might represent Christ, while the sun represents Marduk in Sumerian civilization. From Biblical viewpoints, God used the tree of life as a symbol of the covenant between Him and man in the garden of Eden and declared it sacred. God again used the rainbow as a sign to represent the end of the flood. According to Mr. Clifford Asante Twum (personal communication, August 22, 2021), cultural diversity in Ghana cannot be over-emphasized and it is not surprising that Ghana has become the pinnacle of the African continent in many aspects due to its monumental cultural heritage. The respondent is quoted, saying, *“in the Akan cultural symbol, a dog with fire in the mouth represents the Aduana, the akroma (hawk) represents the people of Oyoko and the leopard (osebo) represents the Bretuo which gives a belief system to these people.”*

Mr. Raymond Appiah (personal communication, August 22, 2021) of the Akan ethnic group is quoted as saying that *“the cultural symbols originate from people’s histories and will remain relevant as long as culture exists. He compares Ghanaian culture to Asian culture by noting that a dog in Chinese symbolizes loyalty and prosperity, explaining their love for dogs, likewise the Ghanaian beliefs in regaining consciousness of its history.”*

6.3. Universal

According to Mrs. Hilda Intsiful (personal communication, August 25, 2021), *“symbols can be a general representation of all in the world.”* Particular examples cited to back participants’ statement includes, Jungian psychology, along with other philosophies asserts that some symbols have universal meaning. In a variety of civilizations, lions, for example, represent different deities. Symbols are a common way for people to perceive the world, according to Cassirer (2012). However, recognizing and expressing the common meaning of signs is difficult (Dalfovo, 1996). A symbol, according to Agbo (2006), is a mark, sign, or object that is used to signify something. It is a graphical representation of some abstraction to which a name or motto is attached. Symbols are primarily employed to represent events in our daily life in documents. Firth (2011) defined symbols as the idea of a hidden meaning in an aesthetic image.

7. Colour symbolism and significance to the people

According to Clake (2002), as cited in Howard et al., (2012), symbolism forms a very integral part of the African culture and this reflects in Ghanaian fashion. For better expressionism, selected colors with the same symbolic meanings across the ethnic groups as per (field data, 2021) which describe and connote the rich history, culture, events, and day-to-day activities of the people were used to communicate the message, since colour is deemed an important necessity in Ghanaian culture. According to an accustomed participant of the culture (Mr. Ebenezer Neequaye, personal communication, August 26, 2021), colors in the Ga- Adangbe language are yellow (*wuɔɔ*), coffee brown (*asrasu*), black (*edin*), ash (*lamululamulu*), orange (*akutu*), white (*ey3n*) translates to English owing to the record of history.

In the Dagbani community, according to one of the participants (Mr. Samuel Ojakawudo, personal communication, August 27, 2021) the colors yellow (*doziem*), coffee brown (*zag tank tankpagu*), black (*zag sabinli*), ash (*tampilim*), orange (*lein kom*) and white (*zag pieli*).

Interview conducted at the Akan community, according to participants (Mr. Clifford Asante Twum and Mr. Raymond Appiah, personal communication, August 22, 2021) the colors yellow (*akokɔsrade3*), coffee brown (*dodoe3*), black (*tuntum*), ash (*nsonso*), orange (*ankaahono*) and white (*fitaa*).

In the Ewe tribe, according to (Mr. Richard Mawuko, personal communication, August 28, 2021) the colors yellow (*anutsiqidi*), coffee brown (*avumi*), black (*yibo*), ash (*dzowɔ*), orange (*akutsu*) and white (*ɔre*).

It was evident from the study and interview sessions that the above described colors of equal meaning are translated as, ash represents balance and wisdom of visionaries, yellow is a symbol of happiness and joy after freedom from shackles, black represents power since there is no autocratic rule, coffee brown symbolizes history in remembrance of the sacrifice made by our forefathers, orange as a symbol of

energy and protection and white representing the presence of peace and love among members in a community for coexistence when translated to English from the respective dialects.

8. Influence on norms and impact on generations

A focus group discussion on 30 September 2021, revealed that for decades, it's been argued that symbols are created not just for their aesthetic value, but also to help individuals in a community come together. As observed from the selected samples shown in Table 1, these very symbols could mean different things in the four ethnic groups with different psychological meanings. Above all, the symbols in general influence the behavior and norms of current generations and generations to follow. Below are some of the influences;

- Helps bind a nation together by reminding its people of the nation's history and most important principles.
- It helps set societal dos and don'ts in a valued manner.
- It helps create a sense of self-expression and self-awareness.
- It leads to a healthy and thoughtful cultural discussion.

9. Production and execution stage of the project

Like a storyboard, the central theme “unity in diversity for nation-building” was portrayed by the design of the work in four quadrants. Each quadrant dealt with a specific sub-theme of the bigger theme as shown (see Figure 2). Symbols from the various ethnic groups were aesthetically ingrained into each quadrant to tell a story. The entire story is illustrated in four stages as presented in Figure 2(a), showing the initial concept development after which the idea of quadrant development of the work came up after reflection. The planning regarding where to position a specific symbol and the creation of the work continued to form the puzzle, which was subsequently put together as a single image to form Figure 2(b-h).

Sub-theme 1: Solidarity (for growth and development of society)

As shown in Figure 3, different elements of design were intricately combined with the traditional indigenous symbols to communicate the sub-theme of solidarity. The symbols are the onion (*sabolai*), *fu kple dzidzo*, and a design inspired by aboriginal art. The human (*niriba*) represent the different ethnic groups, and the onion attests to the fact that despite their differences, they come together in solidarity to fight for a good common course.

Figure 2. (a) Idea development, (b-e) quadrants, (f) combined image, (g) vector image, (h) image with color (Designed in August, 2021).

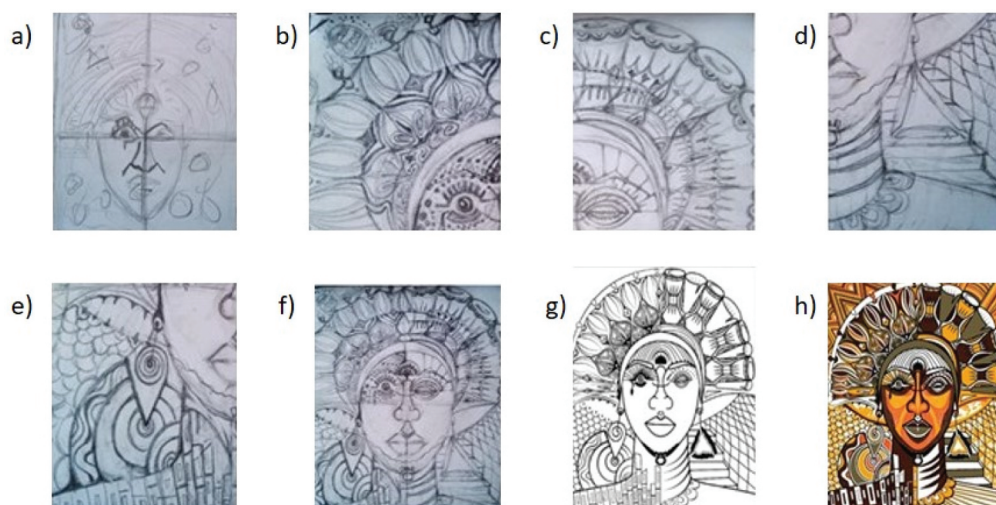
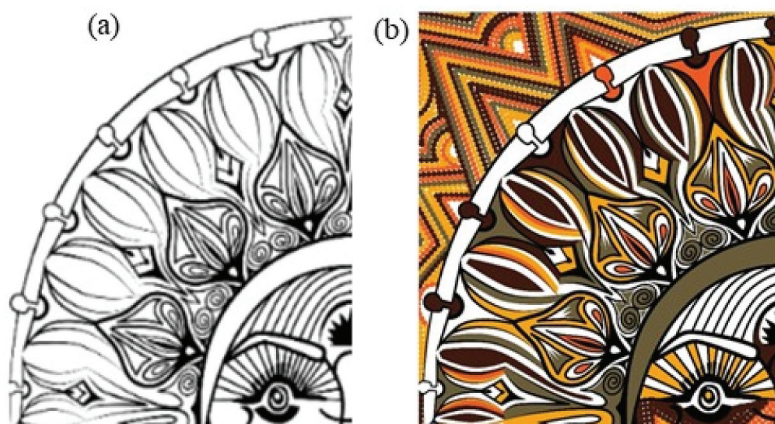


Figure 3. (a) Quadrant 1 vector image, (b) Solidarity design with concepts from Aboriginal art (Designed in August, 2021).



It is important to state that some of the symbols used may have some resemblances in other cultures. For instance, “*The Egyptian Eye of Horus*”, which symbolizes protection, health and restoration. This is however, different from the Ghanaian Ewe symbol, “*Fu kple dzidzo*”, which symbolizes harmony, thus, a representation of life’s ups and downs. The two are different in areas of presentation and symbolism. *Fu kple dzidzo*, clearly outlined that despite their oppressions and pain, there is the hope of overcoming their challenge one day. This indicate that when communities are determined to achieve a worthy course, there will always be setbacks and struggles, however amid the setback, there is a high possibility for the achievement of that common goal if they persevere. The message (quadrant of solidarity) has been expressly portrayed with colors that communicate the struggles, hence the choice of dull colors.

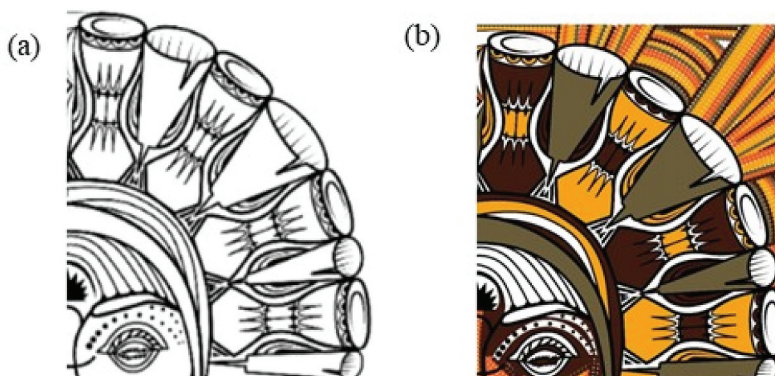
Sub-theme 2: Awakening (*It can be done if we rise*)

Now, the course of coming together is achieved. The call of awakening is needed and motivation to strengthen the course is illustrated in (see Figure 4). The symbols used are drum (*dondo*), gongon (town crier), and cowry (*lag kpahi*). The *gongon* is a traditional instrument used to send information to people in a society. In this essence, it represents the medium of awakening.

The *dondo* is a musical instrument that reveals the role of music in strengthening a charter by uplifting the spirit of the people to fight till victory is won. Cowry (*lag kpahi*) symbolizes wealth or status in achieving a common objective, it will require all classes of people to work cooperatively because all hands are unique and designed for their purposes.

Sub-theme 3: The Pathway (*follow the laid down path bearing in mind your identity*)

Figure 4. (a) Quadrant 2 vector image, (b) Awakening design with design from Aboriginal art (Designed in August, 2021).



It is essential to have a plan (pathway) for every course worth fighting for. The symbols are *ati alɔ etɔ*, a stair (*atrakpui*) and wire gauze (*lamɛga*). *Ati alɔ etɔ* meaning unity in one spirit, is critical if something of value is worth fighting for. The wire gauze (*lamɛga*) is an element depicting protection, and is good to be united to protect one another; as the saying goes “the wound of one is the wound of all”. The stair (*atrakpui*) depicts the path to follow. In a nutshell, it reveals certain virtues that are indispensable in a battle for liberation (see Figure 5).

Sub-theme 4: Nation-building (all hands on deck for a worthy cause)

The symbols and elements involved are *du gbagba fe tutu*, *kokuromotie* (thumb), *inshɔke kɛ kokloo nanegbe* (wavy and circular path), and scales (*zahim poagri*). Putting good policies together for rebuilding a nation will surely come with some difficulties as depicted by the wavy and circular paths. However, to overcome this conformation of challenges, there is the need for absolute cooperation as depicted by the *kokuromotie*. The scales depict a formation of an element into a pattern that symbolizes growth and development as presented in (see Figure 6). As the saying goes, “it takes single bricks to form a house which also implies that in nation building, every little action amounts to something big”.

And to finally conclude, as the design is assembled, it forms a woman. The woman stands for mother nation (Ghana) and the symbol in the middle (*owia*) depicts goodwill, blessings, progress, and development. The nose which is *nyeighh* means exposure, for us to prepare for a course. The symbol used for the jaw called *Kaya Yoo* is hard work and dignity. Together, the entire work is presented in (see Figure 7).

9.1. Simulation

Simulation is the imitation of the operation of a real-world process or system over time, Zeidman (2020). The essence of simulation is to mimic the operation of an existing or proposed system, providing evidence

Figure 5. (a) Quadrant 3 vector image, (b) Pathway design (Designed in August, 2021).

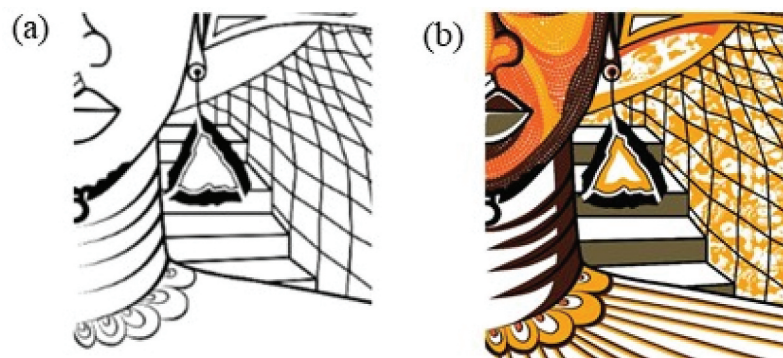


Figure 6. (a) Quadrant 4 vector image, (b) Nation-building design (Designed in August, 2021).

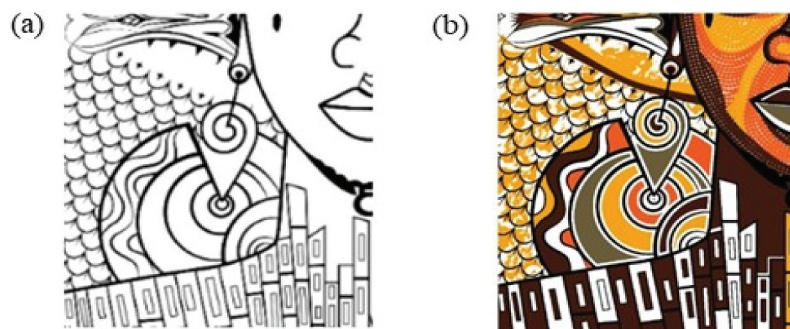


Figure 7. Combination of sub-theme (a-d) quadrants on a canvas (Designed in August, 2021).



for decision-making. Design simulations are carried out to ensure that the output and iteration of the design are both functional. By simulating the product correctly and thoroughly, one can determine its efficacy. According to Nasar and Augustin (2007), the perceived visual quality of a place has a significant impact on humans, contributing to productivity and overall well-being. For an essential functionality, as shown in (see Figure 8), the produced art piece has been mounted and simulated at a public place, specifically, a local airport where natives are made to remember their history and for foreigners to also see and embrace the rich and illustrious culture of the Ghanaian people. For interior decoration, the use of space was factored into account during the mounting phase.

Figure 8. The finished work (wall panels) simulated at a public place i.e. an airport (Simulated in August 2021).



Figure 9. The finished work (wall panels) simulated at a museum (Simulated in August 2021).

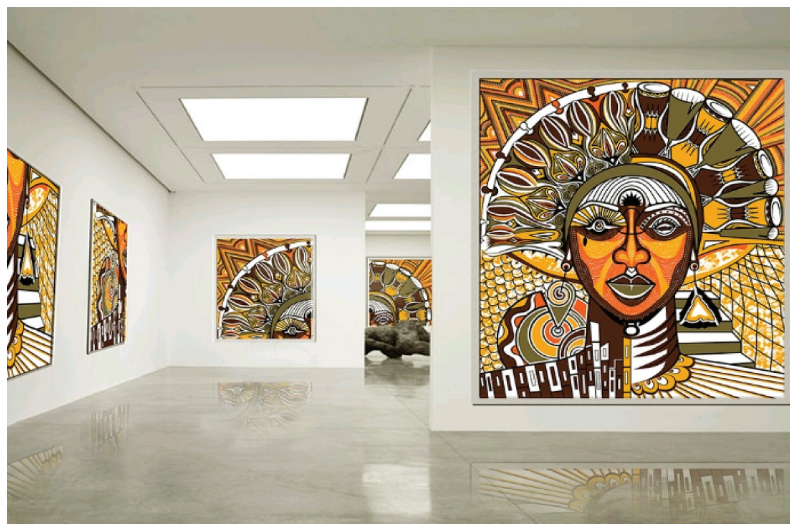
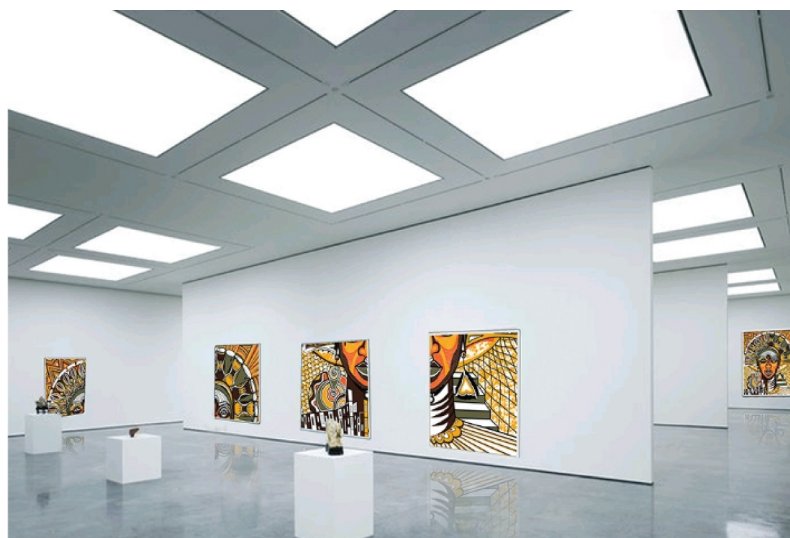


Figure 10. The finished work (wall panels) simulated in a gallery (Simulated in August 2021).



Another area of application of the masterpiece is the museum and as shown in (see Figure 9), the produced masterpiece has been mounted and simulated for public viewing and education about the rich culture of the people.

Lastly, serving the purpose of interior decoration, education, and increase in revenue, it helps the younger generation to keep in touch with the rich history of the country, the masterpiece again

finds application at the gallery (see Figure 10), where they are mounted on wall panels to serve the above-intended purposes.

10. Limitations

In executing the work, the limited number of the near-extinct symbols relating to the ethnic groups in Ghana was a result of insufficient funds to stay out that long, and the positioning of some symbols since they had to blend in well in communicating the message to the general public.

11. Conclusion and future implications

The ethnic diversity and the multi-cultural uniqueness of the Ghanaian populace remain a rich source of ideas for artistic creations. Most Ghanaian ethnic groups are replete with indigenous symbols that are near-extinction due to foreign influences and the lack of documentation. The study uncovered a plethora of traditional symbols which are characteristically missing in our national artistic discussions from the four ethnic groups, namely Akan, Ewe, Ga-Adangbe, and the Mole-Dagbani. The supposedly extinct symbols were artistically combined in a beautiful art piece under four sub-themes to form a design that has been simulated as a wall hanging in an airport, art gallery and museum to show the rich cultural heritage.

The philosophical, dialectical, and conceptual meanings of the symbols, significance and influence on the people have been explained in the art piece for the preservation of the cultural symbols that have lost their luster or cultural value, and thereby serve as a reminder for the ancestral past.

Manipulation, organization, blending, and composition of the symbols were interesting, especially on the part of selecting a position for a symbol to be placed to achieve the end goal. The process, however, yielded artistic results and from the findings, it was apparent that some of these symbols have been neglected in social activities.

12. Recommendations

The study serves as a platform to inspire and motivate other researchers to also embark on projects related to this study to unearth such concepts for the growth and sustainability of the creative art industry. More importantly, there is a need for further inquiry into near-extinct symbols from the other major ethnic groups not captured in this artistic expression to promote and preserve the rich Ghanaian cultural symbols on the verge of extinction.

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Supplementary material

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