

ALEX KWASI AZAGLO¹

DICKSON ADOM²

STEVE KQUOFI³

ALICE KORKOR EBEHEAKEY⁴

Department of Painting and Sculpture, African Art ¹
Culture Section, KNUST, Ghana.

Department of Educational Innovations in Science, ^{2, 3, 4}
and Technology, KNUST, Ghana.

azagloa17@gmail.com¹

adomdick2@gmail.com²

kofikquofi@gmail.com³

korkoral23@gmail.com⁴

Aesthetic elements in *Tagbayiyi* ritual performance of the *Fiasidi* tradition in the Klikor traditional area of Ghana

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Abstract

The chiefs and people of the Klikor Traditional Area in the Volta Region of Ghana celebrate the Fiasidi tradition, an annual religious and cultural festival. A yearly ritual performance known as Tagbayiyi (pilgrimage to the sacred grove) is a part of the Fiasidi tradition. Despite the abundance of research relative to the human and cultural rights aspects of the Fiasidi tradition, there is a glaring lack of research on the aesthetic elements reflected in the Tagbayiyi ritual performance. The study investigated the aesthetic aspects of the Tagbayiyi ritual by highlighting its visual and performing arts to gain a deeper understanding of the Anlo-Ewe cultural identity. The study employed a qualitative ethnographic design to interact and access the viewpoints of the participants. A total of fifteen (15) participants, comprising high priests, tradition keepers, ritual functionaries, and supplicants in the Klikor Traditional Area were sampled using a homogenous type of the purposive sampling approach. The study found that the Tagbayiyi exhibits aesthetic elements such as indigenous costume regalia, sacred stools, local beads, priestly emblems, rhythmic and graceful musical dances among others, which symbolically represent the sociocultural identity of the Klikor people. The study, therefore, recommends that

Keywords

*Fiasidi Tradition,
Tagbayiyi,
Torgbui Adzima,
Klikor Traditional Area,
Ritual Performances.*

the leadership of Klikor (high priests, council of elders & ritual functionaries) should liaise with the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, Ghana Tourism Authority, National Commission on Culture, and other cultural institutions to preserve and promote the rich aesthetic elements showcased during Tagbayiyi rite for the benefit of the current and future generations of Klikor.

1. Introduction

Man is a social being who possesses both religious and cultural beliefs. The culture of a people is a driving force that shapes their behaviour, actions, and beliefs (Kotler et al., 2020). In addition, the identity of any ethnic group is portrayed through the celebration of cultural practices and traditions (Idang, 2015). Ghana's 1992 Constitution recognises and protects cultural rights and customs. In light of that, customary law is incorporated into the country's legal system. In defining culture, Quan-Baffour (2008) asserts that practices and values that define the identity of any group of people constitute their culture. Whereas the cultural values of a people are expressed through their language, religion, social, collective, and individual lifestyles, cultural practices include the rich customs, arts, and social institutions of a people (Kuuder, Adongo & Abanga, 2012).

In Africa, cultural festivals come in different forms and are observed for different motives. Some examples include sociocultural, religious, migration origin and ancestral veneration festivals. For example, the Mashona people of Malawi express gratitude to their ancestral spirits, the Mhondoro, through an annual festival held in their honour, making the celebration spiritual (Latham, 1979; as cited in Kuuder, Adongo & Abanga, 2012). Also, festivals offer a platform for Africans to display and share their rich culture, their history, and origin which in turn provide moral education and inspiration for community development. According to Kuuder, Adongo and Abanga (2012), the *Hogbestosto* festival is celebrated by the Anlo-Ewe of Ghana to commemorate their migration from Togo to their present settlement in Ghana. In the view of Kuuder, Adongo and Abanga (2012), the rest of the known migration-related festivals include the *Aboakyer* (deer hunt) festival of the Effutu of Winneba, to mark the migration of the Effutu people from the Western Sudan Empire to their present location. They were led by two brothers and their god "*Otu*" (Kuuder, Adongo & Abanga, 2012). The *Edina Burunya*, which is celebrated in Elmina to bring in the New Year. The celebration coincides with the Dutch Festival, which falls on the 1st Thursday of January every year and is marked in Elmina to signify the bond of friendship between the Dutch and the people in Elmina (Kuuder, Adongo & Abanga, 2012). In addition, Kuuder, Adongo and Abanga (2012), observed that the *Hɔmɔwɔ* of Ga is celebrated to signify an end to hunger in remembrance of the past hunger sufferings endured by their forebears. *Hɔmɔwɔ* means hoot at hunger and it is celebrated in remembrance of the famine that faced the Ga people and their triumph over it (Nortey, 2009). According to Navei (2021), the Paari-Gbiele festival is a yearly celebration held by the Sisaala people of the Tumu Traditional Area in the Upper West Region of Ghana to commemorate the conclusion of a fruitful farming season.

Moreover, the performance of Dipo puberty rite is seen as a way to integrate Krobo indigenous arts and educate and train young initiates in their social responsibilities and educate young initiates in their social responsibilities (Adinku, 2016). The inhabitants of Takyiman, known as the Bono, have an annual Apo festival during which they air their complaints against the monarch, chiefs, and other individuals in positions of authority for their poor leadership, corruption, and mistreatment (Quan-Baffour, 2019). In support of Quan-Baffour's (2019) claim, Eghan, (2020) revealed that Apo is a festival for the purification of the Takyiman people to rid them of social evil. It's a period when insinuations are cast about the negative behaviours of some citizens including chiefs and other important personalities (Eghan, 2020; Quan-Baffour, 2019). Again, Traditional leaders also use the Apo festival to propitiate the ancestral spirits and deities to help dispel evil in society (Eghan, 2020).

To promote Ghana's tourism product offering, it is necessary to package some of the nation's well-known, long-standing, indigenous, and/ or traditional festivals as tourism hallmark events. The Kwahus' Easter Festival is one such festival in Ghana because it has added paragliding to its lineup of activities (Gyasi, 2013). *Kusakɔkɔ* initiation ceremonies are used by the chiefs and people of Avatime in the Volta Region to commemorate the passage of a girl from infancy to adulthood because they understand and cherish the role that women play in society (Dedume, 2011). According to the country's 2004 cultural policy, through traditional festivals, Ghana's cultural legacy is intended to be further streamlined, promoted, and preserved for future generations. This offers more compelling evidence in favour of Ghana's ongoing, varied celebration of festivals, of which the chiefs and people of the Klikor Traditional Area's *Fiasidi* tradition serve as a typical example. The traditional leaders and people of the Klikor Traditional Area in Ghana's Volta Region celebrate *Tagbayiyi*, an annual religious and cultural event undertaken by the male supplicants of the *Fiasidi* tradition.

Through Literature, numerous scholarly studies have been conducted relative to the contestations between cultural rights and human rights regarding the *Fiasidi* tradition (Njogu, 2021; Agyemang, 2020; Gedzi, 2019; Tudor, 2019; Jenkins, 2012; Gadri, 2010; Ababio, 2000; Ameh, 1996). The universalist perspective of human rights is an opposition to the practice of *Fiasidi* tradition on account that, it is harmful and constitutes grave violations of the human rights of women and girls such as the right to be free from slavery and forced labour, discrimination based on gender, all forms of harm and abuse as well as torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Agyemang, 2020; Tudor, 2019). On the other hand, cultural relativists argue that, the *Fiasidi* tradition is a crime control mechanism, a traditional moral training system for girls and that they have the right to maintain their forefather's culture (Gedzi, 2019; Jenkins, 2012; Gadri, 2010). The aforementioned authors protest strongly that the campaign against *Fiasidi* tradition is an attack on their freedom of religion, as guaranteed by Ghana's 1992 Constitution. However, little attention is paid to the aesthetic elements such as visual and performing arts, and their crucial role in preserving and promoting various philosophical facets of Anlo-Ewe cultural heritage. This presents a knowledge gap that requires scholarly attention. In the practice of

the *Fiasidi* tradition, a variety of cultural values and rituals are exhibited as part of the customs and traditions. Among the cultural and ritual performances of the *Fiasidi* tradition are *gatete*, *balili*, *godedegorme*, *tagbayiyi*, *kpodada*, and *blitsortsor*. In the context of this study, the *Tagbayiyi* ritual performance is examined with a focus on the aesthetic elements (visual & performing arts) exhibited during the performative actions of the high priests, ritual functionaries, and supplicants at the *tagba* (sacred forest).

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The preferred theoretical lens that guided the study's aesthetic examination of the *Tagbayiyi* ritual performance of the *Fiasidi* tradition of Ghana, in the context of African cultural performance, was Afrocentric aesthetics, as proposed by Mollete and Mole (2013). According to the Afrocentric aesthetic theory, Africans are not objects but rather persons who shape their culture and social surroundings in light of their shared historical experiences. Afrocentric aesthetics, according to Mollete and Mole (2013), maintains that beauty does not always imply the absence of moral values like good or bad and that the worth of artistic forms or works derives in part from the purposes for which they were developed. Afrocentric aesthetics also recognises the diversity of civilisations and maintains that personal beliefs and particular cultural norms and values can influence the definition of what is considered good and beautiful. Shava (2015) concurs that the theory of Afrocentricity is centred on an African viewpoint on nature, beauty, and the importance of creative manifestations, as well as the knowledge of African realities.

The importance of African spirituality and traditional religious rituals is highlighted by Afrocentricity. One of the outstanding assertions of the proponents of Afrocentric aesthetics is the acknowledgment of the differences in cultures while maintaining that the standards for what is good or beautiful are shaped by the principles of individuals and their specific cultural norms and values (Mollete & Mole, 2013). Consequently, within the framework of Afrocentric aesthetics, what is considered good, beautiful or valid is dictated by the values, history, and cultures of the African people. It is with this understanding, therefore, that the Afrocentric aesthetic theory of Mollete and Mole (2013) facilitated the aesthetic interpretation of *Tagbayiyi* ritual performances within the African context. This is imperative because, Adzima deities and ancestral spirits are revered in *Tagbayiyi* rites, which are in line with Afrocentric ideas that emphasise the significance of African spiritual traditions and practices (Mollete & Mole, 2013).

2.2 Meaning and Historical Origin of the *Fiasidi* Tradition

Fiasidi tradition is a traditional practice that involves the offering of a female child to a shrine to serve as atonement, for a crime committed by a family member (Jenkins, 2012; Gadri, 2010). It is practised in various West African States such as Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria (Akpabli-Honu, 2014; Dzansi & Biga, 2014; Gadri, 2010). This practice is prevalent among the Anlo-Ewe people in the Volta region of Ghana (Malacci, 2011; Ameh, 2001). The geographical centres of the *Fiasidi* practice are located in the Southern Eweland specifically

in the districts of Ketu South, Ketu North, Akatsi, and Keta (Boateng & Sottie, 2021; Malacci, 2011). Etymologically, the word *Fiasidi* is coined from three Ewe syllabic words: *fia* (a king), *si* (a wife), and *di* (marry or to marry). Therefore, *Fiasidi* denotes a woman suitable for a king to marry or 'fit to be a wife for a chief' (Njogu, 2021; Gedzi, 2019; Jenkins, 2012). The initiate is known as *Fiasidi* (singular) or *Fiasidiwo* (plural) (Dzansi & Biga, 2014; Jenkins, 2012; Gadri, 2010; Ameh, 2001). Therefore, *Fiasidiwo* are women whom the deity has chosen to be consecrated as his or her wives. The term *Fiasidi* is used as a variant of *Trokosi* in the Anlo-Ewe areas of the Volta Region of Ghana. *Trokosi* is translated as "slave to the god". In this vein, initiates of the practice are known as *woryokwe* in the Ga-Dangbe and the *Fiasidiwo* in the Anlo-Ewe of the Volta Region of Ghana (Tubor, 2019; Quayson, 2001).

The origins of the Togbui Adzima are connected to the narrative of the *Fiasidi* tradition. The Adzima has three distinct shrines at Klikor, each overseen by three *Torgbuiwo* or high priests. The three shrines are led by the high priest of Klikor *Afegame* (figure 1), the high priest of *Klikor-Ablotsivia* (figure 2), and the high priest of blessed memory of *Klikor-Ablorgame*. The first two priests are in charge of the two shrines dedicated to *Mama Vena*, a female divinity said to be Adzima's wife, even though they are referred to as Adzima's high priests (Jenkins, 2012). The researchers were told by the two high priests that Adzima is a battle god that was found by one of their ancestors, *Togbui Asifodi*, while travelling from Ile Ife, Nigeria, to their current location at Klikor with his uncle, Saba. The Adzima deity, along with the goddess, *Mama Vena* and another deity known as *Zakadza* which is currently in Nogokpo, was found. On the Sogakofe-Aflao road, Nogokpo is a short walking distance from Klikor (High Priest, personal communication, July 10, 2023).

The Klikor people are thought to have been led by Saba and his nephew Asipodi to Nogokpo, where Togbui Saba and a few of the migrants decided to settle and make *Zakadza* their object of devotion. This clarifies how *Zakadza* became the Nogokpo people's deity. The goddess *Vena* and the deity *Adzima* were handed to *Togbui Asipodi* (High Priest, personal communication, July 10, 2023).



Figure 1: The High Priest of Afegame's Shrine Depicting *Eshi* (a Necklace made of Raffia), *Hotsui* (Cowries Threaded Jewellery), and Hat on his head in a pose with one of the

Researchers (Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



Figure 2: A Section of *Fiasidiwo* at Mama Vena's Shrine, *Ablotsivia-Klikor*.
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

As a powerful deity, Adzima never stopped aiding the Klikor people throughout times of conflict, famine, drought, and flooding. When a crime was committed and it was impossible to identify the perpetrators to punish, people petitioned Adzima through hexing to carry out the judicial system. Goats and other animals of the deity's choice were first provided as compensation for crimes committed anytime Adzima caught the offender (Council of Elders, personal communication, July 16, 2023). Eventually, people began requesting Togbui Adzima to demand from the offenders that females be brought to the shrine to atone for crimes committed by their relatives, depending on the gravity of the offence (Supplicant, personal communication, July 11, 2023).

2.3 Aesthetic Elements in African Traditional Festivals

Festivals are rituals that occur at regular intervals and serve as an expression of a community's beliefs. There is also a conscious expectation that certain ends such as social cohesion, and communal identity are often achieved during the performance of festivals (Akintan, 2013). Ayesu, Osei, Chichi and Acquaye (2020) see festivals as intrinsic aspects of the culture of a group of people that allow the displaying of interesting crafts such as fabrics, symbols, folktales, and paraphernalia. Consistent with this viewpoint, Nyarko and Yorke (2024) observe that festivals play a vital role in the cultural heritage of a group of people and are a means of showcasing rich traditional Arts. Similarly, Falade, Akinola and Adejube (2009) posit that festivals showcase various moral and societal values meant to regulate interpersonal relationships, standards, and norms of a community. In consonance with Falade et. al. (2009), Olupona (2008) opines that in festival celebrations, there are a set of values such as hospitality, truth, respect for old age, covenant-keeping, hard work, and good character that guide the behaviour of every member of the community. In the realm

of aesthetic values, Cole (1977), as cited in Azaglo (2017), stated that festivals are full of art. The author was of the view that the arts serve as a vehicle that carries the celebration to achieve its main objective. This implies that, without the arts, festivals could not have been a success. Wright (1999) investigated the symbolism represented through art in the *Yewe* and *Tro Mami* religious festivals in Klikor and revealed that artefacts such as *Fiagble*, *Gong Gong*, *Asie*, and *Abla* were employed in the worship of these religious entities. Building on Wright's (1999) work, Kemevor (2017) also highlights the aesthetic values of festivals when it was asserted that the entirety of a festival cannot be expressed in printed words and photos. This demonstrates the importance of arts in the celebration of festivals. In the same vein, Adjei (2019) conducted an ethnographic study of the Kli- Adzima Mama Vena festival and revealed that aspects of visual art forms in Anlo-Ewe Vodun religion including wall paintings, installation art, pottery, textiles, sculpture, jewellery, and body art were utilised in the celebration. It is evidenced in Impraim-Swanzy's (2015) findings that the Aboakyir festival is always characterised by the display of hairstyles, costumes, and masks finished in rich flamboyant colours that create a high sense of aesthetics, especially at the durbar grounds. In addition, the Gologo festival of the people of Togo also employs artefacts including bows and arrows, horns, "*Nansa*" (a metallic dangle worn around the ankle and is used in the dance as a musical instrument), and "*Gbared*" (a leather belt worn by the war dancers) among others (Ayesu, Osei, Chichi, & Acquaye, 2020).

Furthermore, Adjepong and Obeng (2018) are of the view that performing arts comprise music, dance, and drama which normally go on during festival celebrations, funeral rites, durbars, marriage, and naming ceremonies to entertain people. They added that these performing arts promote physical fitness and teach societal norms and values. Apart from the emotions that performing arts elicit, Amenuke, Dogbe, Asare, Ayiku and Baffoe (1991) as cited in Armah, Darkoa, Ampomah and Osei-Sarfo (2020), also assert that the dances and poetry recitals that go on during festivals celebrations educate and teach people how to behave in the societies in which they live. In agreement with this perspective, Appiah (2004) is of the view that performing art comprises drumming, dancing, jubilating, and chanting to promote religious and cultural activities such as festivals, funerals, naming ceremonies, and other rites in the African traditional society. In support of the views of Appiah, Lopes (2007) added that performing arts comprise dance, music, opera, oratory, mime, and other art forms that are used in cultural performances such as festivals. The discussion shows that diverse artistic elements of aesthetic value often characterise the celebration of traditional African festivals.

3. Research Methodology

The research was qualitative and situated within ethnographic design. Qualitative research involves direct contact between the researcher and the researched since it occurs in the socio-cultural environment of the participants (Cleland, 2017). In the case of the current study, the lived experiences of the respondents regarding the *Tagbayiyi* cultural performance of the *Fiasidi* tradition of the Klikor Traditional Area in Ghana were of interest. Since the ethnographic design is said to be one of the finest main designs in qualitative

research that deals with the study of the culture of a people (Mohajan, 2018; Creswell, 2013; Kusi, 2012), its adoption for the current study is justified. In their various Adzima shrines in Klikor, the study participants were monitored and interacted with by the researchers which led to the gathering of empirical data on *Tagbayiyi* cultural rites, particularly its aesthetic elements. This study was conducted from an insider's perspective because two of the researchers are from the study area and have witnessed and participated in the *Tagbayiyi* rites performed over the years and did comprehend the Adzima shrines' adherents' culture and belief system. However, the researchers did not impose their ideals and ideas on the findings of the study as required of ethnographers (Fetterman, 2010; Padgett, 2008). The target population of the study includes the chiefs and people of the Klikor Traditional Area of Ghana.

To investigate *Tagbayiyi* ritual performances of the *Fiasidi* tradition, the study used participant and non-participant observations, semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and photography to gather the needed data. To provide a deeper explanation of the phenomenon under research, a semi-structured interview guide was utilised for the interviews, allowing for the freedom of supplementary probes when necessary (Schuh & Upcraft, 2006). A sample size of fifteen (15) participants, comprising high priests (4), the council of elders (2), ritual functionaries (4), and key supplicants (5) of the *Fiasidi* tradition in the Klikor Traditional Area, were selected using a homogeneous purposive sampling approach because of their common repertoire of knowledge and experience in *Tagbayiyi* rites... These approaches allowed the researchers to capture a diverse and rich dataset that provided in-depth insights into the phenomenon being studied.

Inductive thematic analysis of the qualitative research was used to organise, transcribe, analyse, and interpret the data set (Creswell, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined the benefits of applying inductive thematic analysis in qualitative research arguing that this approach boosts the validity of the analysis since it is transparent, easy to use, and flexible. Ethically, the researchers informed the participants of the purpose of the study and sought their written consent before starting the data collection. Research by Bowling (2004) intimates that participants in a research project should not be harmed and must give their informed consent to participate. As a measure to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants' faces were disguised and coded pseudonyms were employed.

The study area is located at the Adzima and Mama Vena shrines of Klikor in the Ketu South Municipality of the Volta Region of Ghana as mapped in Figure 3. Klikor is situated about thirteen (13) miles from Lome, Togo, and one hundred and six (106) miles from Accra, it is situated on the Accra-Lome Road. The Klikor people are members of the Ewe ethnic group, which is found in Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, and Benin. In the fifteenth century, they moved to Ghana from Notsie in modern-day Togo, where they settled on the Volta Region's Atlantic coast (Lawrence, 2005; Amenumey, 1997; Nukunya, 1997).



Figure 3: A Map Showing Klikor Along Accra to Aflao Road
(Source: [Blakhud, 2022](#)).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Tagbayiyi of the Fiasidi Tradition

The study found that *Tagbayiyi* is a compound construct consisting of two Ewe words *Tagba* and *Yiyi*. According to the respondents, *tagba* denotes a forest, while *yiyi* denotes the act of pilgrimage. Therefore, *Tagbayiyi* literally means a pilgrimage to the forest (Ritual Functionary, personal communication, March 19, 2022). Within the Klikor community, a well-defined area known as the *tagba* (Figure 4) is utilised for ritual activities. about the Adzima cluster of shrines, frequently during the annual Kli-Adzima/Mama Vena festival. Male supplicants from all walks of life who practice the African Traditional Religion in the study area participated in this traditional performance as corroborated by the respondents.



Figure 4: The Scores of Male Supplicants at the Entrance of the Sacred Forest
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

The sacred forest's bounded area (Figure 4) is well-maintained and surrounded by symbolic trees. It is often cleaned and kept tidy to provide a clean space for ritual activities. One of the high priests interviewed stated that:

Torgbui [chief] oversees the affairs and the responsibilities of the *trɔkporme* [shrine], the high priests and locations of the shrine are normally attached to the *trɔkporme* [shrine]. This title reflects their relationship to members of the shrine's community and in Klikor generally. Technically, the priests are *fiaviwo*, as members of the shrine-owning lineage. Therefore, the *Torgbui-kporme* in Afegame, *Mama Vena-kporme* in Ablotsivia, and *Mama Vena kporme* in Ablogame, all in Klikor (High Priest, personal communication, May 2, 2023).

Once a year, as part of the *tagbayiyi* rites, the male supplicants of the *Fiasidi* tradition come to the sacred forest to offer prayers and supplications. Despite being called the *forest shrine*, the area is strictly supervised by the shrine leaders. The shrine is a consecrated location, devoted to traditional religious believers of the study area. Devotees who come to worship the deities, make sacrifices, and carry out rites related to the deities of the shrine (Adzei, 2020). The three shrines and deities also share the *tagba*, a term locally referring to a shared shrine located in an uninhabited section of Klikor. Female initiates, who do ceremonial sweeping, and members of the three shrines alternately clean the area once a week as observed in Figure 5. The cultural symbolism of ceremonial sweeping of the sacred forest includes purification and cleansing of the land, community, and individuals of spiritual impurities, evil spirits, and negative energies. Adom (2016) affirms that sacred groves are uniquely tied to the traditional festival celebration. For instance, the Opemso festival of the Asantes of Anyinam Kokofu is tied to the Kwantakese sacred grove, the Papa Nantwi Festival of the Kumawu people is associated with the Bomfobiri Wildlife Sanctuary and the Nkyiridwo festival of the people of Essumeja is linked to the Asantemanso sacred grove (Adom, 2016).



Figure 5: *Xanuplor* (Ritual Sweeper) sweeping the Sacred *Tagba* (Forest).
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

Tagbayiyi is a major activity that forms part of the annual Kli-Adzima/Mama Vena festival of the chiefs and people of the Klikor Traditional Area as affirmed by all the respondents. The respondents indicated that, as part of the rites, all male supplicants of the *Fiasidi* tradition foot to the sacred grove bare-chested and bare-footed, as observed in Figure 7A. According

to one of the high priests interviewed, the prescription to all worshippers to appear in the sacred grove bare-chested and bare-footed symbolises the ever-protective power of the Adzima deities. It means that the worshipper should not fear cold or thorns in the presence of the Adzima deities. This symbolically implies that the supplicants are fortified and protected from any malevolent energies as argued by the high priests of Klikor Traditional Area. The male supplicants of the *Fiasidi* tradition visit the sacred grove once a year for prayers and supplications during the Kli-Adzima/Mama Vena festival.

In a related manner of embarking on pilgrim to offer prayers and supplications to deities, Nyamuame (2013) observed that during the celebration of the *Amesikpe* festival by the chiefs and people of Ave-Dakpa of the Volta Region in Ghana, members of the community foot to *Amesikpe* (the name of a spiritual rock) where they make various resolutions as well as request diverse blessings of the deity. At the sacred forest, the participants in the *Tagbayiyi* are often obligated to engage in various religious rituals and ceremonies. These rituals are seen as a form of worship and appeasement to the deities. Dedicated participants are involved in ceremonies such as libations, sacrifices, and dances, which are believed to maintain spiritual harmony and address the perceived wrongs committed by their families. The belief in spirits according to Dosu, (2017) plays a key role in the concept of reality and destiny in the African traditional setting. This assertion suggests that when one considers the actions and inactions of all that takes place in the spiritual world, it does have a bearing or governs most of the social and spiritual phenomena of the believers.

4.2 Aesthetic Elements in *Tagbayiyi* Ritual Performance

In Ghanaian society, traditional festivals and other practices are held in high esteem, and the authentic Ghanaian identity is portrayed through them (Dennis, 2018; Essel & Amissah, 2015; Nortey, 2009). In such traditional Ghanaian cultural practices and festivals, art is dominantly used (Kemevor & Duku, 2013). The *Tagbayiyi* ritual performance of the *Fiasidi* tradition is aesthetically characterised by diverse artistic expressions. Similarly, Nortey (2008) concluded that art among the various aspects of Ga culture is the most significant phenomenon that fuels the success of the twins' yam festival. In this study, performing and visual arts are two examples of recognised artistic values displayed in *Tagbayiyi* rites. During the festival, various indigenous visual arts and performances were exhibited such as libation art, indigenous costumes, calabashes, pots, jewellery, melodious music and insightful dance steps (Figures 6, 7, 8) thereby showcasing the cultural heritage of the people of Klikor Traditional Area. Cole (1975), as cited in Kemevor and Duku (2013) considers festivals as a platform for the display of total artworks of the people. The aesthetic appeals of the aforementioned Indigenous artistic expressions are best consumed during their manifestations at each of the phases of the *Tagbayiyi* rites.



Figure 6: The High Priests of Kli-Adzima Shrines Performing *Tsifodi* (Libation).
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

A key aesthetic element that featured in the *Tagbayiyi* rite is the performance of libation. The performance of libation has been a common practice for the people of Ghana from the pre-colonial days till date (Brako, 2016). Before the procession ceremony began, the Adzima deities and spirits were summoned to conduct the ritual performance at the shrine grounds through *tsifodi* (libation) as observed in Figure 6, a humble prayer for protection from God through the intercession of ancestors. According to the respondents, libation prayers represent spiritual communion. The act of performing libations and poetically reciting spiritual verses, calls for the altruistic deities to take up their roles in the protection of the festival participants leading to a successful end as explained by the respondents. The proverbs, appellations, and poems that go along with the libation performance (Figure 6) constitute the verbal arts of the celebration of the *tagbayiyi* rites. The performance of libation ensures continuity with the past, honouring the traditional practices and cultural heritage of the Klikor people. This is supported by Kemevor and Duku (2013) that whenever libation is performed, our deities, spirits, and descendants are exalted. The study's respondents shared their views on the composition of the mixture used for the *tsifodi* (libation) performance (Figure 6). The items used for *tsifodi* ritual performance vary depending on each situation. Four items constitute the *tsifodi* ritual performance. These are *tsi* (water), *bliwor* (corn flour), *tre* (calabash), and *akpeteshi* (distilled local liquor). According to the respondents, the use of water is significant in *tsifodi* rites as it calms the hearts of ancestors and deities.

The officiating priest stirs the water in a clockwise motion with his right hand to represent the continuity of life and the sincere bond between the living and the deities and ancestral spirits. The *bliwor* (corn flour) is used to make *dzatsi* (a mixture of water and corn flour). *Dzatsi* represents the food that deities and ancestors are believed to consume. Illustrating this point, Sarpong (1996) emphasises that the purpose of *tsifodi* is to feed the spirits so that they would be pleased with the living. Water is occasionally poured on top of or next to the *dzatsi* (a mixture of water and corn flour) on the ground in the hopes that it will aid in

digestion and relieve the ancestor's thirst. *Akpeteshi* (distilled local liquor) in its ritual context is considered a stimulant and a driving force that activates and arouses the interest of human thought for the deities and ancestors to accomplish the obligations bestowed on them for a successful festival celebration, as explained by the high priests.



Figure 7A: The High Priests of Adzima Shrines in Priestly Amulets (Hats, Shields, Brooms), leading the procession to the Sacred Forest(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



Figure 7B: The High Priest adorned in a Ritual Costume Regalia with a Priestly Amulet (Shield, Hat and Broom) (Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

After the performance of libation, the high priest of the host shrine, the male *fiaviwo* (lineage members), the *zikpuitsorlawo* (those who carry the priests' stools), the high priest of the Mama Vena shrine, and the supplicants embark on a procession to the *tagba* (sacred forest) as observed in Figure 7(A). A cursory view of the procession reveals diverse aesthetic elements ranging from the high priest's costume regalia and that of the other participants (Figure 7A & B). The respondents regarded the Klikor-Afegame Adzima high priest's costume regalia, known locally as *bishi* (Figure 7A & 6B), as spiritual protective elements. The broom

and shield held by the high priest are priestly amulets with robust spirituality whereas the priest's ritual outfit is only adorned during *Tagbayiyi* rites as revealed by the respondents. A respondent further added that the high priest is only permitted to wear a shirt during this particular festival season of the year, which is known as a *dagbawo* (spiritual protection). From the respondents' perspective, the costume regalia of the Adzima high priest (Figure 7) and his leading of the procession of Klikor men to the sacred grove and back to the courtyard of the shrine reflect how Klikor men go into war against the enemy.

In stressing the spirituality of the priest's costume regalia, one of the respondents revealed that the costume was symbolically referred to as "the god's shirt. If you were wearing that shirt (Figure 7A) and they fired a gun, the bullets would not touch you. The bullets would pass another way. This illustrates the strength and powerful nature of the ritual shirt" (Ritual Functionary, personal communication, July 17, 2023). The wearing of spiritually fortified costume regalia during festivals is similarly observed during the celebration of traditional festivals in Ghana (Navei, 2021; Fusheini, 2020; Acquah et al., 2017). Also, one of the most important objects of the *Tagbayiyi* rites is the *zikpui* (traditional stool), which the ritual functionaries carry (Figure 7A) to the *tagba* (grove) and around which the high priests sit on to perform their rites. It is one of the ancestral authorities of Klikor on which the priests gain the spiritual direction to conduct the climax of the *Tagbayiyi* rituals as customs required. It bears similar colours to the priests' shields and hats indicating their uniqueness and spirituality.



Figure 8: A Section of Supplicants with Calabashes and Pots on Display at the *Tagba* (Sacred Forest) (Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



Figure 9: Supplicants been served drinking *Liha* (Wine made from Maize) with Calabash to Drink at the Sacred Grove (Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

On arrival to *tagba* (sacred forest), the supplicants are made to sit down for the necessary rituals before they are served a spiritual drink (Figure 8). Conspicuously displayed in Figure 8 are indigenous pots and calabashes among other artefacts. The study observed that the pots were used to boil and store the *liha* (maize wine) while the differently sized local calabashes were used in serving and drinking the *liha* (maize wine). The high priests explained that the use of calabashes in serving the local wine facilitates in connecting the supplicants to the spiritual protection and fortification of their ancestors (Figure 9). Also, pots on the other hand are said to be vessels for spiritual growth, holding the supplicants' prayers, hopes, requests, and dreams and facilitating the communication with the spiritual realm. The study observed that the high priests and male petitioners exchanged *liha* (maize wine) and *edza* (ground millet and sugar), which were served in local calabashes of varied sizes, with the deity while at the *tagba*. In this case, *edza* (ground millet and sugar), is ingested to receive spiritual protection. By appealing to the deity near the *tagba*, where it is most powerful, the men are presumably getting ready for war, while they also understand that this is a perilous area where the Adzima deity's protection is required (Ritual Functionary, personal communication, May 4, 2023). The researchers found that at the Adzima shrine, *edza* (ground millet and sugar), is typically connected to offering supplicants spiritual protection, which guarantees one's health and fertility.

The rest of the ritual activities include incantations, the adoration of deities, music, and dance, performing libation all of which are regarded as art forms deserving of evaluation and admiration. These ritualised performances are intended to maintain the shrine and preserve the protection of the deities for the well-being of the supplicants. With specific reference to local music, the study observed that it was an important medium through which religious codes and other instructions were expressed in almost all the ritual performances of the *Tagbayiyi* of the *Fiasidi* tradition. This resonated with the views of Amenuke, et al. (1991) that indigenous music is played at religious and social ceremonies to enhance the overall festive experience for both participants and spectators. While at the

tagba (sacred forest), the supplicants were led to sing a ritual song. A few lines of the song are reproduced below:

Lyrics of the song in Ewe

//Miwua gbo mayi

Dahume

Kaleawoe miwua gbo mayi

Dahume

Miwua gbo mayi

Dahume//

Translation of the song in English Language

//Open the door to enter

Dahume

Warriors open the door for me to enter

Dahume

Open the door to enter

Dahume//

The song demonstrates the supplicants' willingness to put their spiritual abilities to the test. The song metaphorically explains the supplicant's entry into Dahume, a significant Benin town known for its spiritual potency. Fortified with the spirit of Adzima, they urged the warriors to open the door for them. One participant mentioned that the song speaks to the devotees of Adzima deities while elucidating the significance, wisdom, and teachings included in it. This is because Adzima deities have the spiritual power to defeat all other extremely strong spiritual beings; thus, there is no reason to be afraid as argued by the respondents. This explains the essence of the *Tagbayiyi* yearly rites where the supplicants seeking safety and a spiritual reunion variously gather at Klikor in Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Ghana.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper looks at specific aesthetic elements used in the *tagbayiyi* rites to emphasise how deeply ingrained they are in the *Fiasidi* tradition and how important they are to its celebrants. The *Tagbayiyi* rite is an important event in the lives of its adherents because they view it as a chance to improve relationships and social cohesion among the practising communities. Every year, all male petitioners gather for *Tagbayiyi*, an occasion to worship and request the Kli-Adzima deities for protection from spiritual harm and general well-being. The power of Adzima spirits and goddesses is a traditional belief at the heart of the *Fiasidi* heritage. This tradition is maintained by high priests and ritual functionaries who consider it a means of appeasing as well as seeking the blessings of the Adzima deities.

The *Tagbayiyi* ritual of the *Fiasidi* tradition contributes to a sense of belonging and identity, as it is often passed down through generations and is considered an integral part of the Klikor cultural heritage. The *Tagbayiyi* rites are an embodiment of various artefacts of rich aesthetic values including indigenous costume regalia, stools, pots, calabash, beads, hats, priestly amulets, libation performances, and rhythmic and graceful musical dance performances. The annual commemoration of the *Tagbayiyi* rites of the *Fiasidi* tradition demonstrates the Anlo-Ewe people's reverence for their spiritual beliefs and ancestral connection. The study recommends that the leadership of Klikor (high priests, council of elders, and ritual functionaries) should collaborate with cultural institutions including Ghana

Museums and Monuments Board, Ghana Tourism Authority, National Commission on Culture, and Centre for National Culture, to preserve and promote the aesthetic elements (visual & performing arts) showcased during *Tagbayiyi* ritual performance for the benefit of the current and future generations of Klikor. This includes the creation of digital platforms to showcase the aesthetic elements of the *Tagbayiyi* rites for both local and global accessibility.

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About Authors

Alex Kwasi Azaglo is a PhD candidate in African Art and Culture, Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. His research interests include Contemporary Art History, Indigenous Cultural Practices, Visual Communication, and Popular Culture. He has worked as an assistant and itinerant examiner for the West African Examinations Council since 2018. With over a decade of teaching experience in Graphic Design and General Knowledge in Art at Battor Senior High School, he possesses a deep understanding of the subject matter and a proven track record of inspiring learners to unlock their creative potentials.

Dr Dickson Adom is a researcher in the multidisciplinary fields of Place Identity, History, African Art, Art Installations, and Cultural Anthropology for Biodiversity Conservation and Environmental Sustainability. He is a lecturer in the Department of Educational Innovations in Science and Technology, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi,

Ghana. In 2018, he received a 1% Global Top Reviewer Award from Publons, New Zealand, for his rigorous peer review activities for top-ranked publishers and journals. Dr Adom is a certified Publons Academy mentor and Diamond Level Author at Ezines, with over 60 journal publications, ten book chapters, and 200 e-articles.

Prof. Steve Kquofi is an Associate Professor of African Art and Culture. He is currently the Head of the Department of Educational Innovations in Science and Technology (DEIST), Faculty of Educational Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, Kumasi (KNUST), Ghana. His expertise includes Cultural Anthropology; African Art, Global Art History; Art Education; TVET; Museums and Monuments Studies; Socio-Cultural Practices and Environmental Aesthetics; Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Biodiversity Conservation; as well as Aesthetics and Criticism. Currently, he is exploring the use of art and aesthetics in environmental protection in sub-Saharan Africa and its implications for Art Education.

Dr Alice Korkor Ebeheakey is an African Artist, Art Critic, Researcher and Senior Member of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). In her work and research, she looks out for possible answers to the problems that contemporary societies face, in the ancient epistemological thoughts, arts and theories of Africa. Her research interests include Contemporary African Art, Africa Diaspora Art and Culture, Ethnographic and Indigenous Cultural Studies, and African Ethnic Studies. She is currently exploring ways of bridging the gap between indigenous peoples and art practices and contemporary anthropological ideologies through research.

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