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## Aesthetic and Educational Underpinnings of Signs among the Central Ewes of Ghana

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### **Abstract:**

*The Central Ewes have identifiable signs that are of significance to them. The youth, especially, do not adequately benefit from them. The older generations are dying with the knowledge, so a gap is created as to how to learn the accumulated knowledge and values from the signs. Central Ewe signs are also not generally known and the larger population is generally not familiar with their values. They are 'coded' and need to be unraveled for better appreciation. In order to solve the problem, the research sought to identify and discuss the signs, their aesthetic and educational values. The study sets out objectives, which help develop a structured interview guide to gather information. Geographically, the study is limited to eleven (11) towns in the Central Volta region of Ghana. Twenty-one (10) signs were identified. The signs have aesthetic and educational values from which moral lessons are learnt and it is an integral part of their everyday life. Central Ewes also have additional concepts of aesthetics which spell out the theory of excellence. Besides, they equate beauty with function or usefulness. Some of the signs are similar to that of the Akans. Their use will achieve cultural unity among the Central Ewes and other cultures, especially non-Ewes in the country.*

**Keywords:** aesthetic, signs, culture, values

### **1. Introduction**

In the absence of written literature in the past, signs were used among the Central Ewes of Ghana to understand their history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, psychology and their total way of life. Therefore the philosophy of the study is to unravel the keys to better understanding of Central Ewe culture.

According to Mamattah (1976), the Ewes migrated from Oyo in Western Nigeria in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and settled in Notsie in the Republic of Benin. They migrated again, and this time split in three parties on the way. The first party currently inhabiting Ho traditional area took the middle course. The second party, now in Kpando and Peki, went northward. The third group went to Atiavi, Keta and Anlo along with their culture. There are islands of linguistically distinct ethnic groups in Amedzofe, Logba, Tafi and Akpafu traditional areas who presumably were not part of these groups, but settled at the present dwellings from the Western Region of Ghana.

Prior to the advent of European rule, Ewes never lived under one political authority. They were organized into a number of chiefdoms, varying in size from a few villages to large and powerful kingdoms such as Anlo and Peki (Mamattah, 1976). Despite the absence of political unity, the Ewes share a common myth of origin and history of migration; a common Ewe language spoken throughout Ewe land; signs are used in their activities; and finally, the consciousness of being one people.

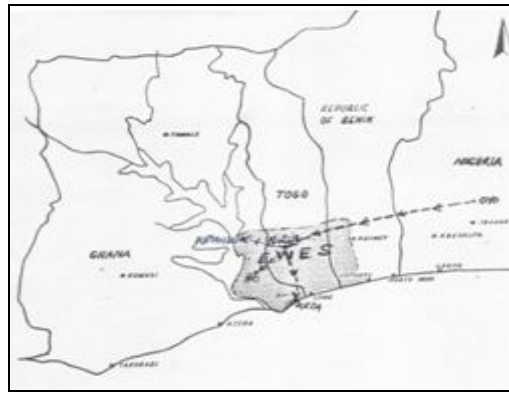


Figure 1: A map showing migration route of the Ewes  
Source: Ghana Geological Survey Dept., Ho (April, 2012)

The vegetation of the Central Volta is mixed forest. The major traditional economic activities of the Central Ewes depend predominantly on the fertile land and the long stretch of the Volta River and other rivers such as *Dayi*, *Amimli*, *Tsawe*, *Koloe*, and *Aflabo*. This has made the central Volta area agricultural communities. Farming is largely subsistent and depends on individual, family and cooperative labour drawn from the various communities. Major farming tools are rudimentary. They include hoes, machetes, axes, and cutlasses. Other farming items are baskets and containers for harvesting crops such as cassava, maize, palm, sweet potatoes, plantain, fruits and vegetables. Farming activities are carried out during the major season between March and July and during the minor season between September and December. During bumper harvests, thanksgiving offerings are made to the divinities. Inhabitants also engage in economic activities such as hunting, fishing, cropping and trading. Most of the well-known leaders during their period of migration were hunters. Hunting therefore, is identified as an old traditional occupation. It is for this reason that various hunting rituals are performed today. Several hunters' shrines are living monuments of hunters' exploits in the past. This is closely associated with folklore such as songs, proverbs, legends and myths. Religion transcends the life of the people in the Central Volta Region of Ghana. The major religious groups include Traditional religion and Christian religion and Islamic religion.

From time immemorial, signs have been visual representations for communication through which men have applied their philosophies, knowledge and skills to execute specific functions in the indigenous society. With oral tradition, signs are an adaptive necessity for our system of indoctrination. They are used as encoding and mnemonic instruments to make important information more easily and accurately assimilable. As a result, even in the absence of written texts, essential aspects of culture are not lost, ignored or dismissed. Instead, coded in non-literate ways, they are integrated and expressed in socially shared signs.

The nature and role of signs can be mixed up in the process of transmitting information. Both sign show that something exists or might happen. They are used for visual communication and to provide stimuli for fairly determined and appropriate responses. In astrology, a sign is really more of a symbol because it has many levels of meaning beyond the ambiguous name which indicates a particular sector of the sky. A sign is always less than the concept it represents. Signs are directly associated with concrete physical items or activities. Signs can be learnt and be applied to different sorts of activities or concrete items.

It is evident that some signs were born of religious or philosophical beliefs. All these sum up the indigenous creative view of life, which is an essential component of Africinity. As a means of communication these practices are intimately bound to the peoples' way of life, tradition and religion. This relationship is a phenomenon which makes the signs and life of the people inseparable. Signs reflect the communicative aspects of Ewe culture. Ewes in general have been famous for a long time for their exquisite culture. Ideas and values of this culture are expressed in words that are used in ordinary language, idiomatic expressions, proverbial renditions, songs, and minstrel and so on. In all these aspects of life, the aesthetic and educational values become paramount.

The Central Ewes of Ghana use signs or images to maintain concepts of reality, to enhance art and to maintain their culture as well as its organization and roles. Like other cultures, Central Ewe signs are physical representations of the values that have stood the test of time. Analysis and interpretation of these will reveal their aesthetic appeal and educational values.

Signs are cultural indices, which reflect the philosophies and beliefs, as well as giving insight into the culture of the Central Ewes and other ethnic groups. Their beliefs and values determine the signs. Through them, the society recognizes its own values, and thus, offers a means by which members of the community may express and evaluate new elements in their lives. It is evident that their philosophies, beliefs, aesthetic considerations and functionality have been the determining force underpinning the creation of signs and other images. In other words, the philosophies and beliefs are whipped up or enhanced by signs. Among Central Ewes, signs have a more diverse background than is ordinarily perceived. It spans the length of Ghana, and Ewe history by making allusions to issues related to items of culture.

The Central Ewes of Ghana build their life around the community and extended family system. Hence, whatever signs or images, that have been created is for or used by all. The signs are functional and community-oriented. It may be disagreed on because there is no proper reference to the cultural environment and the historical reality of the people. As a result, there are all sorts of misinterpretations of the signs of the people. Signs of Central Ewe society are visual, and may be for identification, direction, caution or warning. They convey varied messages which are significant and capable of educating the citizenry in their socio-cultural life for the development of

the society. Most people, especially the youth, see this as a creation and more so as a funny images without understanding their educational implications. Signs serve as instruments for education and aesthetic enjoyment.

A sign is temporary and serves the challenges of the moment. Signs that serve longer purposes also serve as symbols. A sign may warn or caution, prevent the unpleasant, and becomes a protector. If a sign does not teach, disaster may result. A sign is beautiful if it has a functional value, if it teaches morals and if it educates people. The moral teaching learnt from a sign constitutes the educational value. The Central Ewe concepts of aesthetic and educational values are used to understand the signs presented in the photograph that follow.

In terms of content, the study is limited to aesthetic and educational values of Central Ewe signs. Geographically, it is limited to an area of 6857sq km bounded in the north by Hohoe, south by Abutia, west by the Volta Lake and east by Togo.

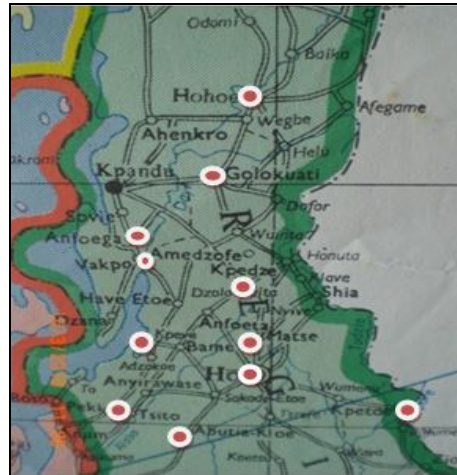


Figure 2: Map of Central Volta Region of Ghana

Key: Places visited for data collection

Source: Ghana Geological Survey Dept., Ho (April, 2012)

## 2. Review of related literature

### 2.1. Definition of sign

Fleming (1986) defines sign as something representing something else, or something that indicates or expresses the existence of something else, not immediately apparent. For example: a sign of poverty; a sign of trouble or a sign of life. It is also a gesture or action used to convey an idea, information, a wish or command.

A sign says one thing, and says it clearly without ambiguity. For instance, if one is driving across an intersection which has a STOP sign for an on-coming vehicle, it is giving one something with a single meaning and no other. In other words, a sign conveys simple information. It directs and indicates. A sign has direct immediate connection to what it indicates. We look for a 'sign' of rain in the sky. Another example is the traffic sign. Red means stop or prohibition. Placing one's arms across the middle of the head or at the back of the head is a sign of mourning. Therefore a sign is temporary and an event of the moment. It is created to satisfy a specific purpose at a given time (Dzobo, 2004).

### 2.2. Theory of Signs

According to Wechner (2000), theories under which signs operate are that, signs rule our lives. They also communicate and educate. This theory applies to the Central Ewe community. Signs gave them moral education. In addition, signs express life and have aesthetic values. Signs make humans think, conceptualize as well as provide mental exercises in understanding and studying the meaning and messages that lie behind them.

### 2.3. Sign

A sign is something which refers to another thing other than itself. Signs can be literal "signs", such as a sale notice in a store window or directions on roads. Words and images are all signs (as they always refer to as something besides themselves.) behavior are often signs, as are mental concepts such as metaphors or equations that "stand for" some other reality. A sign is temporary and denotes future happening. A sign means any identification, description, illustration or information device, illuminated or non-illuminated, which provides information as a product, place, activity, person, institution or business and is displayed on the exterior of a building or property. The Holy Scriptures, (Exodus 12: 13), attests to sign as a mark for identification as it states that, "but the blood on your homes will be a special sign. When I see the blood, I will pass over your house." From what has been said, blood is used in this context as a sign for identification.

A sign has direct immediate connection to what it indicates. It can be taken or designed to mean so many different things and so different meanings can be read into them that are possible: for example, "stick – up" thumb in Ghana and the United States. As well,

the left hand can be a sign of filth or peace and reconciliation. Also, the protestors wave and throw their shoes at somebody as a sign of disrespect. A similar incident was viewed on Aljazeera Television Network in 2008, when an Iraqi threw his shoe at George Bush, the former president of The United States of America.

Signs can convey ambiguous information. Yet they furnish information about the environment, intentions and feelings of people so as to evoke appropriate responses. Eco (1976:16) defines a sign as, "everything that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as something standing for something else." The major limitations of signs are their ambiguity and they do not point beyond themselves to hidden meanings and information as symbols do. As a contribution to this, Scupin (2001:45) says that "symbols are arbitrary units of meaning, in contrast to signs, which are directly associated with concrete physical items or activities."

#### 2.4. Theory of Constructivism

This theory focuses on better understanding and interpreting social phenomena being studied through direct in-depth contact and relationship with the research subjects involved (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). The researcher applied this theory to get familiar with the Central Ewe Community to gather reliable and authentic information by observing and interviewing them in their natural settlement. By direct contact with the people, a bond was established giving the researcher opportunity to become intimately involved.

#### 2.5. Culture

Signs, symbols, and Art are necessary and important as a part of culture. This relationship exists and can be seen and felt. As a result, they are inseparable. In recognition of this fact, Read (1970: 38) states that:

*Art has been and still is coupled with human and spiritual values the psychologist is willing to admit; but these have nothing to do with aesthetic itself. One may speak of artistic values but they are distinct from values in ethics, sociology, religion and philosophy.*

The human capacity for culture is based on our linguistic and cognitive ability to symbolize. A consequence of human evolution that had the most profound impact on human society was the emergence of culture. As perhaps the most important defying characteristic of human, one would ask what really culture is. Banks et al (1989) present the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) description of culture as:

*one which should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional feature of a society or a social group and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyle, ways of living together; value, systems, traditions and beliefs.*

There are other definitions and many different meanings of culture, dating as far back as nineteenth century. For some, it refers to an appreciation of good literature, music, art and food. For a biologist, it is likely to be a colony of bacteria or other micro-organisms growing in a nutrient medium in a laboratory. However, to the anthropologists and other behavioural scientists, culture is the full range of learned human behaviour patterns. Culture is an integral part of every society. It is a learned pattern of behaviour and ways in which a person lives his or her life.

Kluckhohn and Murray (1962) say that, culture as a shared beliefs and practices of a group of people is a viable arena for examining their collective system of beliefs and therefore, contains evidence of standards which govern value. These values are often found in the norms of the society and are formally dictated by its recognized intellectuals, scholars and other interpreters of the group's historical-cultural heritage. As evident in the Central Ewe communities, communal life exists. Common needs are always met. Each person is his neighbor's keeper so they live as a family; so whatever culture exists is shared by all. Hence, the meanings and values of signs are shared by all.

Culture is said to be adaptive. It helps individuals meet needs across variable environments. It is referred to behaviours and beliefs that respond to environmental constraints and opportunities that ensure community's survivals. People must adapt to their environment, and culture is their chief mechanism of adaptation. People can modify their environments and create artificial ones to enhance survival. Culture adaptation often involves technological innovations and elaboration of material culture.

#### 2.6. Aesthetics

The creation of a sign has an aesthetic quality. Aesthetic refers to the way in which humans experience the world through their senses. It is especially concerned with the appreciation of particular objects when they strike the senses in a pleasing manner. Therefore, aesthetics most frequently focuses on works of art and other similar objects that are explicitly designed for human sensory enjoyment. So any combination of qualities that delight the senses concerned with the appreciation of beauty and anything that is good. Commenting on human experiences in aesthetics, Gilbert (2002:4) says,

*Aesthetic is the branch of philosophy concerned with the feeling aroused in us by sensory experiences experiences we have through sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. Aesthetic concerns itself with our responses to the natural world, and to the world we make, especially world of art.*

Aesthetics is also defined by Allen (2002:36) as: "the field of philosophy that studies the ways in which human beings experience the world through their senses. It is especially linked to the recognition and appreciation of particular objects when they strike the senses in a pleasing manner". This author further explains that aesthetics mostly focuses on works of art and other similar objects that are



purposefully designed for humans to enjoy. However, he indicates that aesthetic appreciation is not limited to art but it is frequently directed to the world at large.

Aesthetic is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of art and the criteria of artistic judgement. Some of the central questions of aesthetics focus on the beautiful: under what circumstances it may be said to exist. Generally speaking, there are two basic approaches to the problem of beauty- the objective, which asserts that beauty inheres in the objects and that judgement concerning it may have objective validity, and the subjective, which turns to identify the beautiful with that which pleases the observer.

The most influential discussions on aesthetics embrace the beautiful and the good. A distinction has also been drawn between what appears beautiful and what is beautiful. It is almost accepted that the beautiful is whatever is useful or powerful; but some schools of thought object that power may be used for evil, which is not beautiful, so power and beauty cannot be the same. One may make a qualification by saying and agreeing that, power when used for good is beautiful. This implies that the good and the beautiful are cause and effect and therefore different things. Yet this is ridiculous, given the long accepted identification of the beautiful and the good. It is suggested that the “beautiful” is a particular species of the agreeable or pleasurable comprising all things that give pleasure through the senses of sight and hearing, (Levinson, 2003).

African aesthetics is more open; and its concerns are much greater. “Beautiful” is given importance in terms of human life than work of art, event and scenes. It also has to do with the standards of value in appraising other facets of human life and culture, such as humanity itself and morality. The aesthetic qualities of the arts are not only determined by the Language of art. They are also determined by the ethnics of value of the people. This is so, when the arts conform to what is good in the society.

These criteria of beauty and virtue have to do with the quality of significance of the work or act as pertains to its social function and relevance to the mainstream of the Ewe value system. Stated in another way, the criteria are, “it must be fitting or appropriate”, “it must show good taste”, “it must be graceful”. Besides, it must properly and accurately reflect the standards of the Ewe value system. Ewe symbols are valued for their aesthetic appeal which is based on part of their meaning, its significance and appropriateness for a particular location or occasion. They formed multilayered Language that is universally accepted yet culturally specific.

### *2.7. Education*

The term education has been given various definitions by different scholars and philosophers. Hence, there is no univocal definition of education as the concept has been exposed to different and often contradictory interpretations. In its etymological derivation, Ducasse (1958:1) notes that it comes from the Latin word “educere” meaning to “lead out” or to “bring out”. Unfortunately, this definition is sterile, as another school of thought who denies that education comes from “educere”, but rather from “educare”, which means to “form” or “train” (schofield, 1982:32). Notably, while these views or definitions both claim that they are right in terms of etymological meaning; they of course establish very little on the idea of education, and at best, they provide clues which may be worthwhile to follow up.

The definition of education might have stemmed from these two Latin words put together. However, from the ancient days to this day, there have been slight changes in the concept. The old concept of education is based on the idea that education is a preparation for life (Cahn, 1997). This means that education should be used to refer to all procedures and practices by which individuals are prepared to live their lives on this earth. However, some critics believe that simply preparing an individual for life could mean transmitting the same skills and values continuously, and if there are mistakes, committing them over and over. In this case, no room is made for improving the individual and the society. In line with Cahn’s assertion, the moral education derived from signs prepares the youth in the Central Ewe community for life.

As a result of this deficiency in the old concept of education delivery, the new concept which has been developed is based on the idea that education involves procedure and practices that lead to an improvement in the quality of individuals, their living and societal conditions as a whole, Quist et al.,( 2002). Education as a social phenomenon has therefore undergone a series of metamorphosis; however, its various definitions are based on the context in which the education is delivered in a particular society within this world. According to (Agyeman, 1993:17), another definition of education was given by a well-known French scholar called Emile Durkheim. He saw education as “the influence exercised by adults on those that are not yet ready for social life”. His definition holds true today since as part of education, societies continue to pass down habits, skills, values and knowledge to their young.

After analyzing the available literature on the definition of education, one can say that, education refers to any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of the individual. In this sense education is a lifelong process in which we continue to learn from experience throughout our lives. Hence all kinds of experiences can be education, starting from the ones we learn at home, school, from the radio, television, in news papers and even the ones learnt from society through a process of taking in cultural norms. One gets educated when he or she adds any knowledge to what he or she already knows. Therefore, anyone who adds any knowledge about signs and symbols of Central Ewes to what he or she already knows gets further educated.

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1. Research Design*

The qualitative research paradigm was used to gather data for this work. Qualitative research is referred to by a variety of terms, reflecting several research approaches. Field research is often used interchangeably with qualitative research to describe systematic observations of social behavior with no preconceived hypothesis to be tested. Qualitative research is concerned with non-statistical

methods of inquiry and analysis of social phenomena. It draws on an inductive process in which themes and categories emerge through analysis of data collected, (Rubin & Babbie 1993).

Grix (2004), believes that qualitative research method generally seeks to amass information from studies on a particular event, decision, institution, geographical location, an issue, a piece of legislation, with a view to discerning patterns, trends and relationship between key variables. He further says that this type of research involves the interpretation of data, whereby the research analyses cases, usually in a few number, in their social and cultural context over a specific period of time, and may develop grounded theories that emphasize tracing the process and sequence of events in a specific setting.

### *3.2. Descriptive research*

This seeks to observe with close scrutiny the research parameters, after which a recorded version of what the researcher has observed, through photography, can be subjected to critical analysis in order to arrive at the results. In this research, Descriptive techniques for data collection are viewed as compatible with the knowledge and values of the socio-cultural basis of the core zone (Epstein, 1988).

In this study, the Descriptive technique was employed in order to have a clear and logical presentation of ideas and facts. The Descriptive analysis helped the researcher to examine the phenomenon of signs to describe vividly the aesthetic and educational values among the Central Ewes.

### *3.3. The target population*

The target population is the people who would benefit from the research. They are comprised of chiefs, queens, elders, linguists, priests and priestesses, knowledgeable individuals, the youth, and the educated elite. Some have faint ideas about signs and symbols. Some have forgotten their facts. Some have used the signs and symbols but do not understand them so about three hundred and fifty (350) people have useful information for the research and these have been classified as the accessible population in order to make the data valid and more acceptable.

### *3.4. The accessible population*

People who could be reached for information in this research were the accessible population which consisted of: ninety (90) traditionalists, one hundred and twenty (120) scholars and one hundred and forty (140) youth, totaling three hundred and fifty (350).

### *3.5. Data collection instruments*

Data-collection instruments used were observation and structured interviews. They were largely employed in order to have a clear and logical presentation of ideas and facts. Through these research instruments, aesthetic and educational contexts of signs of the Central Ewes of Ghana were assessed, and relevant information gathered.

### *3.6. Observation*

As a qualitative research, observation is a naturalistic research or inquiry into everyday living. In seeking to explore the natural scene, the qualitative researcher aims to be as unobtrusive as possible, so that neither research presence nor methods disturb the situation. This is why observation is one of the favoured approaches. Here the researcher adopted a recognized role within the institution or group. Researchers have become, among other things, teachers, gang-members, pupils, nudists, hippies, bread salesmen, and medical students (Taylor, 1993). Direct observations were made of the signs as to how they look like. Aside this the aesthetic appeal of signs and symbols have been appreciated through direct and critical observations. Insightful and revealing answers were given accordingly when intriguing questions were asked the respondents.

### *3.7. Interview*

Interview is a face-to-face meeting between an interviewer and an interviewee or an oral presentation of a descriptive studies, action research, evaluation and sometimes correlational studies. The interview approach has several advantages that stem from personal contact, response rate and issues can be clarified. The interviewer can probe for specific meanings of responses made (Hannan, 2007). A structured interview guide was used to collect data for the research, due to its ability to obtain a higher response rate, or with respondents, especially children or those who were not literates.

## **4. Discussion of Finding**

The content of each photograph has been described and analyzed. Their interpretation is of their aesthetic and educational values. The discussions include analysis, interpretation of facts leading to conclusions and recommendations.

## 5. Identifiable signs, their aesthetic and educational values



*Trorle'*

*Plate 1: Literal translation: (Ram for a deity) – a sign of warning.*

## 6. 'Trorle': Ram for a deity (Plate 1)

- **Aesthetic Values**

Among the Central Ewes of Ghana, beauty is equated with significance, purpose or functionality of the object. They observe that beauty is not always considered in terms of physical qualities as stated in the literature review. Plate 1 is a ram with three white cowries threaded with raffia, hanging on its neck. The beauty of the cowries on the neck of the ram is for a purpose. They serve as a sign and at the same time a symbol belonging to a deity. Since the ram belongs to a deity, no other entity has anything to do with it. Beauty lies in the three cowries because they are the property of a deity. The white cowries were used for the ritual because they represent purity or faithfulness to God and the deity.

- **Educational values**

According to the respondents, the sign is a warning to people not to interfere with anything that has to do with the deity's ram. In other words, one does not interfere with a property that does not belong to one. One will invite trouble if one does otherwise. Therefore, the sight of the three white cowries on the neck of the ram is meant to prevent vices or negative attitudes to life.



*'Du, atadi kple tukpe'*

*Plate 2: Literal translation: (Gun powder, pepper and pellets) – constitutes a sign denoting quest for war.*

## 7. 'Du, atadi kple tukpe': Gun powder, pepper and pellets Constitutes a sign denoting quest for war

- **Aesthetic Values**

The physical appearance of the items in Plate 2 in totality, presents a "funerary mood". As said by most of the traditional rulers of the Central Volta Region of Ghana, the silent intension of war is averted when the neighbour chief returns the package, meaning he wants peace. The package spells war but its reverse speaks peace. The beauty is in the dichotomy. That is beauty in contradiction of life.

- **Educational Values**

This package is a visual knowledge. To them, there can never be war if there is no cause or provocation. Therefore, this is meant to prevent provocation and let tolerance and peace prevails.



*'Abladzomakpa'*

*Plate 3: Literal translation: (plantain leaf) – a sign of protection.*

#### **8. 'Abladzomakpa': plantain leaf (Plate 3) a sign of protection**

- **Aesthetic Values**

From time immemorial, Ghanaians protect themselves with broad leaves from the mercy of the weather. The types of leaves are determined by the environment or the vegetation in which they are found as shown in Plate 3.

In Central Ewe, plantain or banana leaves are used by people, especially farmers to protect themselves from the rain or the scorching sun. The plantain or banana leaf is streamlined in a way by nature to prevent the user from getting soaked by water or scotched by the sun. Its beauty is in its protective function. The size and shape provides adequate coverage.

- **Educational Values**

The sight of this is a sign of protection from the rain or the sun. It provides visual knowledge, and can be done by any one. One can quickly look for one's source of protection from the mercy of the weather, where umbrella is not readily available. Man must learn to understand the wisdom of God in providing man's basic needs of life. "Learn to explore and use the resources of your environment" is the message.



*'Xe, ala kple aklala'*

*Plate 4: Literal translation: (Kaolin, raffia and calico) – constitutes a sign denoting quest for peace*

#### **9. 'Xe, ala kple aklala': Kaolin, raffia and calico (Plate 4) a sign that denotes peace.**

- **Aesthetic Values**

Most of the respondents identified each item in Plate 4 as symbolic. The kaolin and calico represent the colour white, which the Ewes refer to as 'Xe'. It symbolizes joy, success, victory and happiness. Raffia which is used long ago by the ancestors and then passed on to the new generation, symbolizes the totality of life. They further said that, putting 'Xe ala', and 'aklala' together symbolizes peace. If a community sends these items to its neighbour, it simply means they should co-exist in peace. The symbolism in Plate 4 is opposite of what is in Plate 2. Anything peaceful is positive, healthy, and beautiful. The physical appearance of the items portrays a pleasant mood.

- **Educational Values**

To the people of Central Volta Region of Ghana, the items in Plate 4 give one a usual knowledge. When there is peace in the communities, development thrives. So, communities coming together in peace can learn from each other. It should also not be forgotten that it takes two to quarrel and so if one wants to avoid quarrel, one should not be a party to it.





*'Kuze' (Dehakpafe)*

*Plate 5: literal translations: (Entrance to a palm-wine tapping area indicated by 'Kuze') Sign of direction*

#### 10. 'Kuze' (Dehakpafe) Entrance to a palm wine tapping area indicated by 'Kuze' (Plate 5) Sign of direction

- **Aesthetic Values**

In Plate 5 there are two calabashes containing palm-wine opposite each other at the entrance to a path. In front of the calabashes, across the path is a green, immature and dry palm frond. The respondents confirmed that it is a sign indicating that palm-wine is tapped in the area. If one walks along the path, one will get there. The green, immature palm frond represents freshness or newness while the dried one represents old age. This indicates that tapping started long ago and is getting finished but at the same time, fresh palm trees are being tapped. This follows a beautiful order. As one is diminishing or finishing, the other (green frond) simultaneously, is coming up. There is beauty in pairs of things. Two of everything can be seen as a connotation of balance. Therefore the two calabashes opposite each other is a sign of beauty. Balance creates harmony, peace and pleasantness.

- **Educational Values**

The respondents said the sign gives one a direction and informs about palm-wine tapping. One cannot get lost in pursuance of the palm-wine. Visual knowledge is acquired because one gets to know that palm frond is used in making the torch which is used to smoke the palm tree in palm-wine tapping. One also learns that palm-wine is served in calabashes.



*'Abayafe'*

*Plate 6: Literal translation: (immature palm leaves) - a sign of warning.*

#### 11. 'Abayfe/ Blekpo: immature palm leaves (Plate 6) sign of warning

- **Aesthetic Values**

Plate 6, 'Abayafe'/ Blekpo is said to be mostly used by militants (Asafo group) for their rituals. Knotted young palm frond as shown in Plate 6 has a strong connotation. If a piece of land is being cleared and one happens to see this sign on it, clearing must stop immediately. This is used to stop one from working on a disputed land. Knotting of the leaves gives it that attention. Its compliance not to temper with the land prevents chaos, which is peace creation and therefore beautiful. 'Enya kpor' (It looks good, beautiful) is an expression to indicate that the fresh palm frond is pleasant to look at.

- **Educational Values**

The respondents posit that it is also good to obey warning signs in order to prevent trouble. The end result (peace and harmony) are the tenets of education. One learns that the particular community has a peculiar way of alerting its citizens of danger or trouble. It is a secret or silent way of showing a signal which only community members understand.



*'Morxexe'*

*Plate 7: Literal translation: (blocking of way) - Sign of direction*

## 12. 'Morxexe': blocking of way (Plate 7) Sign of direction

This is a non-verbal sign of direction. It is very common among the indigenous people of the Central Ewe Community.

- **Aesthetic Values**

Plate 7 depicts fresh greeny leaves on the ground. The green leaves have been used to block one of the paths leaving the one which was used. To the Central Ewe community, this is done normally by those who used the path earlier to assist those who would follow later. It gives an indication that when one passes the blocked path one would get lost and would not be able to get those who passed earlier. That common sense of giving direction with leaves that can easily be fetched and used is a beauty among the communities. This sign is used to direct people and prevent them from being lost.

- **Educational Values**

They indicated that, this sign provides a visual knowledge, and can be replicated everywhere. This is another way of giving meaningful direction to both literates and illiterates. The sign that indicates 'go straight' and 'don't turn right' is a direction given to any member of the community in absence of written directional sign-posts. The secret non-verbal sign is a protective communication tool known among natives of an area, not foreigners.



*'Aforkpa'*

*Plate 8: Literal translation: (footwear) – a sign of humility and obedience.*

## 13. 'Aforkpa': footwear (Plate 8) Sign of humility and obedience

- **Aesthetic Values**

This is a wall of one of the shrines in the Central Volta area. A local sandal is shown with an inscription. 'Aforkpa' is a general name for all kinds of footwear. From the occupants of the shrine, the sign on the wall prohibits anyone entering the shrine with footwear on. The type on the wall is very common among the people in the community. Prohibition of footwear to the shrine is to show respect and humility to the deity. Even in the homes, one removes one's footwear before entering an adult's room. This is to show humility. In another sense, it prevents dirt and other particles from entering their rooms. There should be that cleanliness and respect in the presence of God and gods. Therefore the footwear as a sign of humility is appropriate. Humility is one of the beautiful virtues of mankind. An example could be read from the scriptures, when Moses was asked by God to remove his footwear before drawing near the fire (God). Humility is the idea of beauty attached to the symbol.

- **Educational Values**

Portraying the educational value of the sandals on the shrine wall, the occupants said it is a moral issue to serve God with respect. One will learn this and apply it at sacred places. The sign on the wall also provides a visual knowledge. One learns about humility and obedience from the symbol.



*'Atadi-le-ga-dzi'*

*Plate 9: Literal translation: (Pepper on money) – Protective sign.*

#### 14. 'Atadi-le-ga-dzi': Pepper on money (Plate 9) Protective sign.

- **Aesthetic Values**

Plate 9 depicts pepper placed on money. This is a common sign especially used by market women. To the Central Ewe community, it has a common belief that evil spirits steal money from them. To avert this, anywhere money is put, pepper is placed on it. Pepper is a very hot spice. 'Exordzo' (It is hot). By its nature, it is not pleasant when pepper is in contact with one's body. It is a beautiful occurrence to find a means of repelling evil forces. Life is pleasant when there are no evil forces disturbing it. Money is a force and essential in life. In the same way, pepper has also got its strength. The two coming together makes a potent symbol.

- **Educational Values**

This gives a visual knowledge. To the Central Ewe community, every possibility must be explored to protect one's valuables.



*'Hagla'*

*Plate 10: Literal translation: (Jaw bone of a wild pig) – a sign of bravery.*

#### 15. 'Hagla': Jaw bone of a wild pig (Plate 10) Sign of bravery

- **Aesthetic Values**

In the Central Ewe community, warriors are commended and recognized when they return from the battlefield with their booties. In relation to the phenomenon, Plate 10 depicts the jawbone of a wild pig hanging at an entrance of a home. Among the Central Ewes, every entrance of a home that one finds a skull or the jawbone of any wild animal means the chief hunter resides there. He is regarded as 'kaletor' which means a brave man. Anybody with hunting expertise can also hang a skull or a jawbone at his entrance for people to recognize his bravery.

- **Educational Values**

To the youth, it will edge them to emulate bravery in all spheres of life. Responsibility, bravery and leadership roles are learnt from this sign.

#### 16. Conclusion

The educational values of signs and their role in everyday life are not generally familiar to the larger population and they have not been fully documented. Central Ewes have identifiable signs which served very valuable purposes in the past. They were effective means of communication, education and expression of culture. However, while the older generation still recognizes and upholds the significance of signs, the youth know nothing or very little about them. The meaning of signs is the preview of a few citizens indicating that, the non-verbal means of communicating the beliefs, and sense of purpose, as well as philosophical attitudes of Central

Ewe life have been significantly blocked. Besides, the secret “language” of signs which need to be understood by the larger percentage of the population in order to properly manage their lives have been missing over the years due to modernity and globalization. It is observed that:

- Signs describe the way Central Ewes live.
- The Central Ewes have a system in which signs are used to manage their daily lives through has remain in oral traditions for years.
- Central Ewes relate beauty to everyday life in which useful things are considered beautiful.
- Signs of the Central Ewes are avenues for non-school education.
- Central Ewe signs direct, mould and influence social behaviour.

### 17. Recommendations

- Central Ewes signs express both theoretic and artistic culture. So their use must be kept alive.
- Sign are impotent features of the Central Ewe culture. Therefore, they must be upheld and documented in a written, video and electronic form.
- Central Ewe concept of beauty linked to function is unique. Therefore, that knowledge should be made available to other cultures.
- If moral education could be learnt through signs, then it will be useful to the community to organize public education or moral lessons learnt from signs.
- Signs should be used as tool to check anti-social behaviour.

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