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Decolonising African Costume and Textiles

Naming, Symbols and Meaning in the Ghanaian Context

By Naa Densua Tordzro

(HND Fashion Technology and Manufacture, BSc in Fashion Technology)



Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirement
of the Degree of MPhil - Education

University of Glasgow

School of Education, College of Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This MPhil research is concerned with decolonising African textiles, in particular Ghanaian cloth and wax prints. It focuses on the uses, significance and meaning of designs and patterns in most of the Ghanaian indigenous textiles such as Kente, Adinkra, Tie and Dye, wax and roller prints made in Ghana. It does so in order to explore the relationship between colonisation, past and present day, the cultural and manufacturing history and naming of prints, and the changes that have occurred in designs and names.

It examines how designs in the cloth are named within prevailing social concepts, contexts and trends, and the various ways in which Ghanaian practitioners, including myself as a practitioner, visualize and articulate ideas and experiences through these cloths. It also examines how multinational cultural appropriation has affected the naming systems in Ghana.

Through a survey of existing literature and through my practice of working with oral traditions of textiles and garment making I show that Ghanaian textiles provide symbolic expressions of wealth and status, positionality in society, as well as communicating thoughts, mood, feelings, state of mind and perceptions about the social world and beliefs of the people who use them. I show how textiles are also a source of information that offer meaning and interpretation to some aspects of Ghanaian social and cultural life. The evidence of this is found in textiles such as wax and roller prints, Kente and Adinkra cloth with wide-ranging patterns and names in Ghana. I evidence this in the second half of the thesis through the cataloguing and curation of cloth patterns and names, and the use of proverbs in cloth design, emphasising the role played by market traders in the naming and design of cloth.

Finally, I offer a case study by way of an accompanying online exhibition of my ways of working through practiced based method and decolonising the methods of teaching and learning in disadvantaged communities such as Dodowa, Ghana, with western models, and with museum art works in Glasgow, Scotland. This written thesis provides the explanatory foundation for my work in the online exhibition. The exhibition, however, stands alone.

Keywords: Decolonisation; influence of colonisation; African indigenous costume; Fashion curriculum.

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List of Accompanying Materials

1. Website Exhibition: www.naadensua.com
2. Vimeo link to 'Obaa Sima Virtuous Woman' Video produced by Gameli Tordzro: <https://vimeo.com/245730264>

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Nye Yi Wala Doo !!!

Author's Declaration

“I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.”

Printed Name: Naa Densua Tordzro

Signature:

DEDICATION



To My late Grandmother Mrs Elizabeth Naa Odofoley Sabaah,
for teaching me all I know about cloth and beads. Thank you for passing on this
knowledge on to me and making it possible for me to grow into the field of cloth
and textiles. Today I continue in the field of research I hope to make you very
proud.

OYIWALA DOOO!!!

INTRODUCTION

Background of The Study

I begin in my practice. An oral tradition of dress making learned from aunties and my grandmother through song and making garments. I am a Ga textile and fashion designer and I learned my art informally, and as a 'colonised woman' growing up in postcolonial Ghana and taking my formal education in the decolonising atmosphere of 'Black Lives Matters', and the western university system of 2020. My work is based on my practice and therefore a practice-based method will be used in this research, whereby both primary and secondary sources are used to interpret my art practice. This thesis seeks to bring the informal knowledges which Ghanaian women practice in their work with cloth, wax print, and in diaspora fashion encounters, into greater visibility.

I began this study wanting to focus on community education contexts for working with African textiles. The literature review, however, and the need for a change of direction due to Covid 19, highlighted the depth of the gap in literature produced about African fashion and cloth and the importance of collecting, curating, and exhibiting the informal knowledges and their histories, before a community informed practice could be attempted.

For many years, western designers have sought inspiration from various African cultures, however, there is little recognition, acknowledgement or documentation of any teaching materials within curricula in the west focused on colonial history of African textiles, costumes and wax prints. It is also important to note that styles vary greatly across the continent, as do traditions and knowledges of textiles and wax prints. I am focusing my study here on the textiles and wax prints of Ghana as my case study. Very little or no literature has addressed the effect of colonisation on African costume, wax prints and textiles, even though the effects are highly visible. It is no secret that there are many distinctive dress styles in Ghana and African settings that support the view that colonisation had and continues to have an influence on African costume, textiles and sense of dressing. That is why it is important to include the study of colonisation, its effects and

influence on African fashion, wax prints and textiles in any higher or further education fashion curriculum. To do this, the substantial gaps and contribution of oral knowledges needs to be documented, catalogued and curated. Significantly, I contend, that decolonisation should form part of the conversations and narratives of the history of costumes, wax prints and textiles, taught in educational institutions that will eventually influence and motivate future concepts of design.

Some Africans living in the diaspora, try to retain their heritage and this can be demonstrated by a focus on Ghanaian identities performed through African textile and traditional dressing styles. The African textiles in use in the diaspora can be read as an expression of freedom from colonialism through dressing and articulating individualism in a market choked with a variety of 'Western' fashion. In this research I use the markers of 'West' or 'North' and 'South' as metaphors for the kinds of knowledge and understanding which predominate, not as exact geographical signifiers. For practical and functional purposes some will mix western styles or items as part of their own traditional heritage but continue their own customary dressing styles despite this.

Through decolonising textiles, a conversation can begin on the histories including indigenous ways of creating contemporary African fashion, guided by cultures the ideas are taken from and not dictated by solely western norms. The aim is to reclaim what was lost through colonisation, build on what we have, and enrich the Ghanaian costumes, wax prints, textile design knowledge systems through our narratives and actions with an indigenous-centred, oral-practitioner approach.



Fig. 1: Obaa Sima, 'Virtuous Woman' by Naa Densua Tordzro

CHAPTER ONE

1.0. Approaching Textiles and Sources

The primary sources I use in this study are based on my background as a Ghanaian textile designer and a trainer/facilitator in textile and garment making, who has a knowledge and understanding of the traditional and cultural values and the role textiles and cloth play in the Ghanaian society. The secondary sources are a range of literatures relating to colonisation, and decolonisation of textiles, Ghanaian fashion, cloth and clothing culture.

The written sources provide information for review on the subject and the theoretical framework. The practice-based research method is useful to this research because it offers appropriate tools for analysing and interpreting the ways in which evaluation and interpretation of artistic materials are resistant to metrics and positivism and subtle social data embedded in the design and naming of sampled wax and roller prints. This method allows me to unearth the rich meanings, concepts, definition, characteristics, metaphors and symbolism and descriptions of things associated with Ghanaian wax and roller print traditions. This practice-based method has been used extensively in the study of artefacts and cloth uses in society by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (Smith and Dean 2009), Domowitz (Domowitz 1992) and Yankah (Yankah 1995).

In addition, the curation practice, gathering together in one place a digital archive of prints and textiles with naming and meaning attached, offers the opportunity to focus on context, meaning, claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes in the form of designs and exhibitions, such as textiles and wax prints. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes. This provides meaning beyond the surface level, however, there is also the tendency of oversimplification because of this enquiry

method, which is necessary to ensure a foundation and archive are produced as a basis from which the fashion design departs, without the risk of cultural appropriation or lack of acknowledgement of source, discussed in this study.

This method has been helpful in studying phenomena, and in studying changes in social practices and what accounts for these changes. It allows for an interpretivist approach to the phenomena in question, but also a critical approach to the conditions which produce the phenomena and the way it changes in meaning and significance, according to different contexts. For example, my work has been displayed both in Ghana and in Scotland and the way in which it is received differs greatly across these areas. In this research, a practice-based research method approach will be used to acquire and share views on how decolonisation might be practiced and then perceived through the use symbols and patterns in wax and roller print to express social concepts.

In addition, the work enacts a decolonising, practice-led method. Despite my supervisor's discomfort, I proposed with this thesis that a decolonising approach would also problematise the power-relationship between supervisor and student, through requesting that my supervisor become a 'clothes model / tailor's dummy' for the decolonising practice of display, but without inclusion of her own commentary in the digital exhibition. This may be work for future collaborative research. It is important that it is my voice and not the voice of my 'white privileged' supervisor, that is the subject here if it is to be a decolonising attempt. The images problematise the tradition of western anthropologist researchers studying 'native tribal costumes' and clothing them with their interpretations and theories. It allows my practice and art and my own use of these texts and textiles to work in reverse. These then form the basis of the digital exhibition for which this written thesis is the historical background and catalogue of visual exemplars.

I acknowledge that working with systems and symbols of knowledge and oral tradition, of the sayings and practices of aunties and market traders is a stretch for those trained in western scholarship. I therefore attempt to provide explanation of traditions which may seem very distance from those in the U.K.

mainstream but to offer them in their own right, as different ways of knowing about garment making, cloth and textiles but ones which can stand alongside and as a decolonising accompaniment to the significant, though often dated or inaccurate, even culturally appropriating work of western scholarship.



Fig. 9: Naa Awula -My Lady. (Prof. Phipps) Image by Naa Densua Tordzro

1.1 The Problem

Studies on textiles and wax prints named by Spencer and Newark (Spencer and Newark 1982), suggest that wax prints were imported onto the West African market by European manufacturers who continued to export cloth to Africa up to the present. The responsibility of naming these wax prints lies with the female retailers. The textiles and wax prints are orally named by the market women (retailers) who retail the cloths to their customers, and who spread names by word of mouth. The guiding principle in the naming process is often cultural appeal associated with simplicity: long proverbs and idioms are truncated so that customers can more easily remember them, according to Kwesi Yankah (Yankah 1995). The literature on cloth, however, does not examine the changes that have occurred over a long period in designing and naming, the social and cultural contexts of the names and an artistic evaluation of the wax prints, the colonial influence and the monopoly they have on market. The discussion is centred on the names that have existed and survived over the years without contextualising the changes over a given period through cultural appropriation. This makes it appear as though the practice of naming wax and roller prints do not change, or new ones have not been introduced.

Commercial appeal is partly based on the extent to which consumers identify with the textiles and wax prints messages knowing from the outset that African buyers are discriminating when it comes to what they wear. They have designed fabrics for these markets with local tastes in mind. Regional colour preferences, for example, are well known and reckoned with.

1.2 Theoretical Framework



Nea onnim no sua a, ohu

“He who does not know can know from learning” This is from the axiom ‘Nea onnim no sua a, ohu; nea odwen se onim dodo nu, seogyae sua a, ketewa nu koraa a onim nu firi ne nsa’. G. F. Kojo Arthur (Arthur 2017).

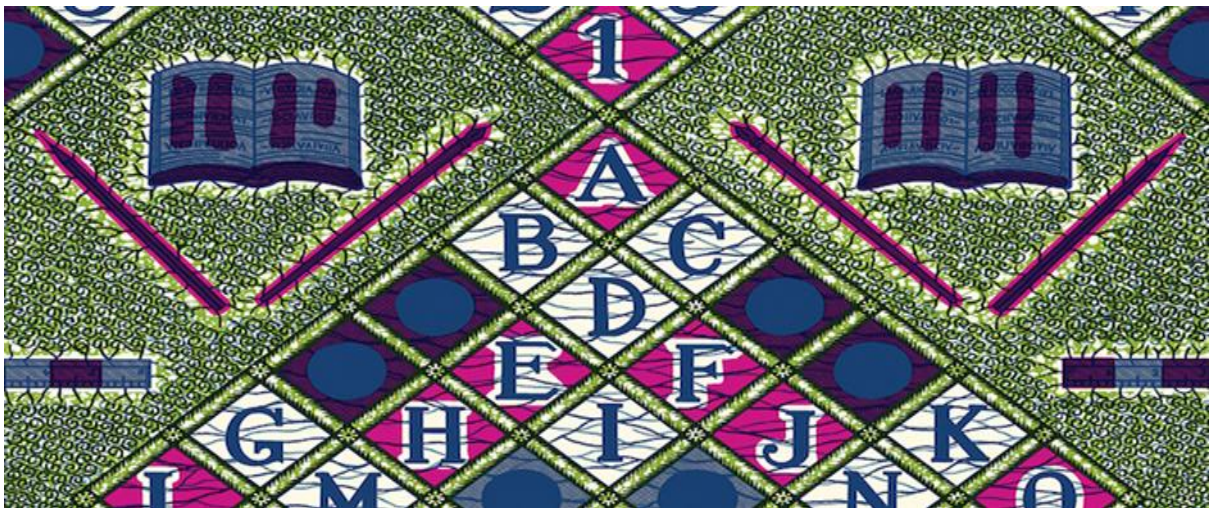


Fig. 2 ABC by Vlisco, expressing the importance of literacy: promoting education for children from an early age

1.2.1 Adinkra and the concept of Treasured Opportunities

Adinkra symbols are a system of symbols representing aphorisms, proverbs, adages and wisdom mostly used in the traditional settings and oral culture for sending messages and advice in the western African context. In recent years they have become popular design artefacts and in the diaspora. The design for ‘Divine’ chocolate, for instance, used Adinkra symbols on the fair-trade wrapper, but without acknowledging the proverbial knowledge embedded in this complex symbolic system. I will return the use of Adinkra symbols throughout this thesis.

A concept developed by G. K. Tordzro, ‘Treasured Opportunities’ (Tordzro, 2018) is also present in an Adinkra aphorism which translates as:

‘He who does not know can become knowledgeable by learning; but he who thinks he knows it all and discontinues learning will stagnate and lose the little that he knows’.

Knowledge shared, in this Adinkra philosophy from Ghana, becomes a life-long education and continued quest for knowledge enriches the mind and soul to the learner and the teacher. The more you teach, the more you learn and the more you teach, the better you get at it. This research study aims at imparting knowledge by the use of practiced-based method is concerned mainly with role of community educators, and the interaction of learners in the acquisition of skills. Sadker and Sadker (Sadker and Sadker 1997) pointed educators attention to this new direction on effective teaching and also Akande (Akande 2002) included discussion among activity based methods of teaching which involves learners. Just as spoken language is the first entry into the construction of shared meaning of events, it is important to note the interrelatedness and connections of all language process in the role of making meaning Halliday (Halliday and Webster 2006).

Textiles artists, like all artists, will look both at home and abroad for inspiration. This becomes challenging, bearing in mind the baggage of colonisation. The art of designing textiles is just like any living organism it is not static it evolves and develops, similarly, the designing of wax and roller prints is constantly expanding and changing. More often, the textiles of other cultures are primitivized, fetishized, appropriated, stolen, and stripped of their context. From our various backgrounds as humans and individuals, there are visible and delicate, ways we have asserted our baggage (history, values, cultural hierarchies) through languages and speeches onto other cultures. Recently, the deeply rooted colonialist frameworks of textiles and wax prints are beginning to crack. Equally, practices amongst textile and fashion designers can be identified which respect the cultural traditions and origins of design and seek to restore the balance through acknowledgement of their histories.

The dynamics of change experienced in the designing of prints is influenced by a few factors which include improved technology, the uses of the cloth, and marketing strategies. In wax and roller print production, designs that are associated with names have designated social uses and are certainly appropriate for a specific time and occasion. It is important to open up the cracks and continue to question, reveal, and abandon the colonialist backbone upon which the textiles

and wax print discourse is manufactured, so that a decolonised perspective can be built.

The art of designing textiles and wax print just like any living organism is not static, it evolves and develops as the literature has suggested. However, the dynamics of change experienced in the designing of prints is influenced by a number of factors which include colonial influence through the continued importation of wax prints to the West African market, improved technology, the uses of the cloth, and marketing strategies. In wax and roller print production, designs that are associated with names have designated social uses appropriate for a specific time and occasion.

As the social environment changes, the naming and designing system also changes. Because textiles and wax prints are both economic commodity and cultural item, the duration of these wax prints on the market depends on factors which include length of use, new fashion trends and economic indicators. This trend follows a model of art- historical development popularized by Giorgio Vasari (Vasari, Vere et al. 2006) (1511-74) in the sixteenth century. In Vasari's model, art works have a life cycle. He related the history of art to a biological concept of birth, maturity and decay. Over the centuries, the theory has been modified in response to dominant ideological paradigms it meets. In the Twentieth century, the modernist turn in western art history saw a gradual break away from the theory. However, it was used to explain linkages between the classical and contemporary art.

By the end of the Twentieth century, there was a great shift in the centre of focus in analysing art works. The focus shifted, in the west, from the object of art to the social context and ideology of art. A contemporary view of the theory of life processes or cycle is seen in Wolff (Perani and Wolff 1999), application to the production of wax prints as works of art. In their view, the birth of an artwork begins with the artist that creates it. The artwork matures in the hands of the consumer who assign use or give it meaning. At every stage in the life process an artwork assumes a functional value which is aesthetic, social or economic in nature. The development in stages and changes in value are facilitated by the interaction of the artwork with the creator and the consumer.

At every stage in the life process of an artwork, in this instance textile art, there is an influence of colonisation which affects the adaptation of functional values such as aesthetic, social or economic in nature. The concept of development is

in the stages and the changes in value, facilitated by the interaction of the artwork, the creator and the consumer. The artwork begins its interaction with manufacturing, and naming, by the Ghanaian textile retailers. These interactions continue through consumers who give value to the cloth both in the peak period of a fashion trend, and also out of the fashion trend.

The history, stories, values and length of life of the textiles are thus embedded in the textiles and wax prints. Just as the social environment has changed, so has the colonisation of textiles and wax prints. This has affected the naming and designing systems, an example is cultural appropriation and modern colonisation and dominance of China in the African textile industry. Samples of wax and roller print will be used in my analysis. Indicators of cultural colonisation are not isolated from one another but rather flow and layer themselves in complexities. They are mostly hard to recognise and translate, but at same time in ways clear to those who have been colonised. In this research inquiry I seek to ask questions of practice in order to start the important and long conversation towards decolonising African textiles, and specifically Ghanaian textiles.

1.3 Hypothesis

Textiles, wax and roller prints are often given names from proverbs and the environment by cloth retailers. However, current trends in the wax print industry suggest that the retailers are not only providing names but are also a source of design for the ever-growing textiles and wax print market. Decolonisation struggles have influenced the designing and naming of cloth by moving into a different form of partnership between clients (retailers) and producers (manufacturers). The persistent change in socio-political conditions compel new ideas and themes to be introduced often to meet different needs. The relationship between designs, social practices and production of textiles and prints are shaped by influences from the agents of trade and the functionality of the textile, wax prints, trends and events occurring in Ghana.

1.4 Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine how colonisation and decolonisation have influenced the changes that have occurred in the naming and designing of textiles and wax prints industry in Ghana. It will explore how patterns are used together with names to create visual images of social concepts used in Ghanaian daily lives, and how this has changed over time.

The specific objectives are to:

- Study the relationship between names and patterns.
- Examine how cultural and social concepts are represented with names and patterns and examine colonial factors that affect names and patterns.
- Examine how decolonisation is shaping the textiles and wax print industry in Ghana.

1.5 Characteristics of the Textile Samples

The purpose for this research is mainly to examine how colonisation and decolonisation has influence the naming textiles, wax and roller prints in Ghana. This is based on in-depth oral knowledge about names and patterns, experience in the cloth and the knowledge of the wax and roller prints industry in Ghana. The samples selected were based on the popularity of the wax print and social themes expressions. For the purpose of this study, this category is called 'ntomapa'. This category of 'ntomapa' has patterns that have existed on the Ghana as far back as the colonial era.

The first part of collection consists of wax and roller prints that represent the old wax and roller print patterns These patterns have famous names though they are not written in the fabric. The next collections consist of cloths that have patterns as well as names written in the cloth. This category consists of prints which are not commonly known by name but may possess recognizable symbols and environmental ideas. This group is referred to as 'fancy prints. These two main parts were further divided into sub parts of five under three categories based on three popular concepts used in the cloth discourse namely; death, motherhood

and the supernatural. The analysis is based on a comparison between the two major categories of 'ntomapa' and 'fancy prints'. The comparison was based on the names of cloth and how the relationships between concept and patterns or symbols are established.

1.7 Visual Collection Methods

The visual material collected are images from the internet, photographic images taken by myself articles and practice-led, oral and personal knowledge of textiles and wax prints.

1.8 Analysis and Interpretation

The textiles collected were analysed based on four areas; sources for patterns, origin of names, categorization of prints, and purpose of naming. The information from the three parts was compared for similarities and differences in relation to existing knowledge about the areas mentioned. The other categories were analysed under themes, the patterns were grouped into themes based on the dominant theme in the names. In order to examine how social concepts are interpreted through designs and names in textiles, wax and roller prints, the prints were categorized under three social groups; motherhood, death and the supernatural. The comparison was done using a descriptive method to assess the art of the cloth. Changes were analysed based on symbols and motifs used in designs, sources of names and processes of producing names and patterns. The life cycle model was used to examine and interpret instances of reoccurrences in design as well as influences that affect designs and name creation in the production process till it out of the fashion trend.

1.9 The Significance of the Study

This study adds to the existing knowledge on the social significance of cloth to Ghanaians. It provides information on how colonisation and struggles for decolonisation have influenced the development of textiles and wax prints

production and the adaption into the Ghanaian society and gives an idea of how Ghanaians represent social concepts in practice, with art in their daily life activity.

1.10 Problems Encountered in the Study

There were a few problems encountered in doing this research. First, there are no written information on wax print art especially from a Ghanaian perspective as many of the materials were inaccessible. Secondly, the nature and duration of my research did not allow for field interviews. Thirdly, the study occurred during the period of lockdown and the pandemic and the impossibility of access to materials, library resources, and field interviews meant that the study had to take a different turn, reflected in the digital exhibition and the curation of textiles in this written study.

1.12 Organization of the Work

This study is organized in eight chapters. The first examines at how textiles and resources are approached, Theoretical Framework, the concept of treasured opportunities, hypothesis, objectives, characteristics of the Textiles Samples, Visual Collection methods, Analysis and Interpretation, the significance of study, and problems encountered during study.

The second examines the literature review. This chapter sets out the framework for this research by examining and discussing the approach and methodology for this work. Literature from the pre-colonial to contemporary times and from varied disciplines was reviewed to establish the gap in the study of decolonising textiles and wax prints in Ghana.

Chapter three deals with an examination of the wax print industry in Ghana: Its trade, relations, cultural appropriation, dynamics and production trends. The fourth chapter describes discusses the Wax and Roller Prints industry in Ghana. three social concepts and how they have been used as old and new patterns of prints. The fifth chapter looks at the concept representation in Wax and Roller prints the symbols and names used as well as their sources of influence. The sixth

chapter examines Death and Funeral Events. The seventh chapter discusses the sources of influence in prints. Finally, the eight chapter concludes and summarizes the key findings of the work.



Fig 3: Odehe, Royal by Naa Densua Tordzro

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Literature Review

Exploration of the arts in cloths and textiles has increased the awareness of the function of cloth in the cultural and social context. It features as a tool that records events and ideas in the environment, enhances communication and facilitates various forms of social relations. The literature, however, has not looked at designs and how they relate to the names assigned to them. One of the factors being 'cultural appropriation' in this context, which appropriates by only looking at the designs and aesthetics of the cloth and textiles but not the names and meaning that is embedded in the cloth and textiles.

For the purposes of this research, the literature review is in four parts. The first part examines trends in the study of cloth. The second part is aimed at understanding the perception of what colonisation and decolonisation are in terms of social and cultural aspects of cloth and textiles. This part also discusses the literature that deals with the history of cloth and textile production and trade in West Africa and the role colonisation played. The second part of this review focuses on some themes on the social and cultural aspect and use of textiles and cloth. The purpose of this is to allow for comparison on issues that have been discussed in the literature on cloth and textiles. The third part focuses on trends of textiles and cloth literature from the 20th to the post 20th century.

Studies of the literature on cloth and textiles indicate the following trends. From 1985, writers were concerned with the cultural and social dimensions of clothing. Works by Steiner (Steiner 1985) and Schneider (Schneider 1987) attempted to explore the artistic aspects, and meanings associated with the uses of cloth. They were, however, faced with the problem of meaning and interpretation as most of them were foreigners and could not fully understand the cultures they sought to study. Works of this latter period were important as the focus of the discussion shifted from a Eurocentric point of view to focus on an African perspective. This

gave insight into uses and significance of cloth within the history and context of the cultures that use textiles and wax prints.

Writings in the 1990's saw an expansion of the social and cultural theories to themes in dress and fashion. Eicher and Roach-Higgins (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992) present dress in a wider context in which other body adornments complement and add meaning to clothing. Turner (Turner 1993) introduced the 'Social Skin' theory which explores cloth as a second skin, which hides the private and unacceptable, and presents a social view. This directed the way into exploring the ambiguities and conflicting values associated with clothing Hansen (Hansen 2004), Yankah (Yankah 1995) and Bickford (Bickford 1994), wrote precisely about West Africa, explored the dramatic dimensions in the use of clothing and textiles.

Works on textiles and cloth in the 1990's provide information on dress styles as well as messages they carry when used in both social and individual settings. The focus of writings in this period provided theoretical foundations for studying cloth and textile symbolism from a universal point of view. It, however, gave little attention to individual aesthetics found in cloth and textiles from across cultures as the focus was on the interaction of cloth with social connotations. The late 1990s to the 2000s witnessed a growing interest in the art of cloths and textiles as well as the economic dimensions that affect its production as artistic and cultural commodity. African cloths and textiles are being exhibited as artwork in many museums around the world, suggesting that there is a growing interest and it has generated curiosity in the arts world. The artwork, symbols and meaning embedded in African textiles and cloth production is influence by the market as an economic commodity (Perani and Wolff 1999), (Guyer, Denzer et al. 2002).

2.1 What is Colonisation from the Colonised Perspective?



EPA "handcuffs"

Symbol of law and order, justice, slavery and captivity servitude and control.

From the aphorism: 'Onii a ne epa da wo no, n'akoa ne wo. Or, se woko kurom na se ho odekuro mantam dedua mu a, yemmusa se kuro mu ho ye'. Literal translation: 'You are the subject of the one whose handcuffs you wear. Or, when you go to a town and see the chief of the town is in handcuffs, you do not ask whether everything is alright in that town'.

Handcuffs were introduced in Africa as a result of colonialism and slave trade, as a sign of power, control and to instil law and order among the indigenous people and slaves. "It later became popular among chiefs in cuffing offenders of the law. The symbol reminds offenders of the uncompromising nature of the law. It however discourages all forms of slavery" according to Adolph Agbo, in *Values of Adinkra Symbols*, (Adolph Agbo 2006). Colonisation is a process by which a central system of dominant foreign power takes over surrounding land and its components by setting up a colony away from its place of origin. Colonization is seen as a negative act because it tends to involve an invading culture establishing political control over an indigenous population, that is the people living there before the arrival of the settlers. There are many examples of this along the coastal belt of West Africa, especially Ghana.

Michael Sommer (Sommer 2011) in his article 'Colony, Colonisation, Colonialism: Typological Reappraisal', describes colonisation as 'invasion' or 'seizure of land'. My interpretation of colonisation is when a dominant group or system takes over, exploits and extracts from the land and its native peoples. Colonisation has taken

place all over the world, through stealing of lands; taking of people as slaves; breaking of bodies through fighting, labour, imprisonment, genocide; the stealing of children; the enforcement of religion; the destruction or attempts to destroy spiritual and cultural ways of life. All these have left a psychological, spiritual, and physical imprint on indigenous people, and in ruling systems of governance the colonisers created and left behind. This is often referred to as cultural trauma or intergenerational trauma. “The body is where our instincts reside and where we fight, flee, or freeze, and it endures the trauma inflicted by the ills that plague society.” Resmaa Menakem (2017).

A question that needs to be asked is, how do we breakdown this colonialist perspective prevalent in our discourse? An answer will be breaking down and rejecting the strategies and indicators of cultural colonisation. Sometimes when one is called out on a colonialist perspective, there is a worrying pushback with an accusation of being ‘emotional’ or ‘too sensitive.’ There are no allowances for discriminatory practices. Colonisers contextualise others’ crafts and culture with their own history, making the histories of others invisible by asserting their histories, values, and hierarchies onto others who have been marginalised and demeaned. Fetishizing the cultures, traditions and their practitioners, and making simplistic representations of people are imprints of colonisation. Our understanding of the words ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ requires revision. Traditional is often understood as old and ancient and contemporary as new and modern, there are contemporary practitioners of traditional crafts hence these two words are not binary, but they coexist. Contemporary should not serve as a synonym for Western. These distinctions are made so that ‘contemporary artists’ can appropriate from ‘traditional artisans’ without citing them or their work.

Contrary to the belief that the wax prints are an African print, they were in fact introduced onto the West and Central African market by European and Asian textiles traders during the colonial era who were traders in cotton and Indonesian textiles. When the Dutch colonized Indonesia during seventeenth century, one of the businesses that emerged from there was The Dutch East Indies. The Dutch East India Company, created in 1602, facilitated trade between Dutch colonies in Asia and European markets. Dutch textile manufacturers, recognizing the large market for batik textiles, and sought to imitate the textiles distinctive style using

industrial printing processes. Although the imitation batiks had little success in European markets, textile firms found ready consumers in another region of growing economic interest to Dutch and other European merchants: West Africa (Glover 1969).

During the Dutch Colonial-era in 1846, the Dutch had colonies along the West African coasts including Ghana, this made it easier for them to do trade with the West African textile market especially the Ghanaian textile market. Gradually, the market became saturated with wax print by the Dutch textiles manufacturing company Vlisco. Soon, factories in Holland, and later in England, began making reproductions of the early Dutch approximations of Indonesian batiks. Eventually, manufacturers sent their representatives to West Africa and some parts of Central and East Africa to conduct consumer research so that European factories could produce specific patterns and colours to suit regional tastes which they incorporated into their designs.

Finally, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, African textile factories began to produce cloth based on the Indonesian/Dutch/British prototypes. Known as wax-print, Dutch-wax, lmi wax, and by many other names depending on place of manufacture and quality, these textiles are now ubiquitous in many parts of Africa. Through these layers of influences, inspirations, and reproductions, meanings were made and remade, so that wearing the cloth may evoke a variety of national, regional, and cultural identities. Its Indonesian origins and the European mercantile impetus that propelled wax-prints onto international markets are no longer explicitly recognized in African fashion circles, for they have become African textiles, however complicated their histories (Glover 1969).

Textiles, arts and crafts in all traditions and cultures, including our own, are taught from one person to the other, it has been the same way for thousands of years, but it has transformed because of multiple factors. Factors such as technology, materials, techniques, trends, style, aesthetics, market, etc. Traditional crafts and artefacts are not encapsulated in time and era, but often transcend the age in which they originated. An example is the uses of the Adinkra Symbols. The concepts of symbolism and significance of the Adinkra symbols,

express various themes that relate to the history, beliefs and philosophy of the Asante's. The Adinkra symbols mostly consist of rich proverbial meaning, the use of proverbs is considered as a mark of wisdom. Other Adinkra symbols depict historical events, human behaviour and attitudes, animal behaviour, plant life forms and shapes of objects. In fact, the Adinkra symbols continue to change as new influences impact on Ghanaian culture as some of the symbols now record specific technological developments (Glover 1969). The context of usage has also moved from being a tool for communication to its usage as decorative art pieces such as jewellery, wax print, and as design features on homes for its artistic features to a point where it is being used for research as a research tool for decolonising language.

This is a further form of benign cultural colonisation, whereby researchers from the global north speak for a community of practitioners, asserting their own views by changing the narrative to suit their purpose, instead of creating an exchange, and making it equitable. Language has always been an instrumental tool in cultural colonisation and colonisation in general. Words such as discover, rescue, elevate, used to describe practices and cultures around the world, are words that should not be used to describe indigenous cultures. It is important to reclaim and heal, hence the need for a decolonising approach. These terms apply cross-culturally and must apply to social practices when one enters communities and society that one is not part of. Decolonisation is also a term perceived differently, depending on where one is situated in the practice.

2.2 Decolonisation from the Colonised Perspective (Sankofa)



SANKOFA

Symbol of wisdom, knowledge, and the people's heritage. From the aphorism: 'Se wo were fi na wosan kofa a, yenkyie'. Literal meaning: 'There is nothing wrong with learning from the past or hindsight'. The word SANKOFA is derived from three words SAN (return), KO (go) FA (take, bring, get). G. F. Kojo Arthur (Arthur 2017).

The symbol is based on a mythical bird that flies forward with its head turned backwards. This reflects the Akan's belief that the past serves as guide for planning the future, or the wisdom in learning from the past in building the future. The Akan believe that there must be movement with times but as the forward march proceeds, the gems must be picked from behind and carried forward on the march. In the Akan military system this symbol signified the rear-guard, the section on which the survival of the society and the defence of its heritage depended. This symbolises the Akan's quest for knowledge with the implication that the quest is based on critical examination, and intelligent and patient investigation.

Decolonisation is described by Oelofsen (Oelofsen 2015) in his article 'Decolonisation of the African mind and intellectual landscape', as the change that colonised countries go through when they become politically independent from their former colonisers. However, decolonisation is not merely a matter of political independence. Structures of government and other institutions, the way in which a country is economically organised, as well as the way in which former colonial subjects were encouraged to think, are often still determined by the former colonial powers in post-colonial countries, as a result of the economic and cultural power the former colonisers wield. This is supported with concept of Adinkra symbol of the sankofa, a bird reaching back to retrieve the past to use in the way forward, this is the sort of progress that is demanded by decolonisation Ritskes (Sium, Desai et al. 2012).

My understanding of decolonisation is simple, that is: rewriting the wrongs of our colonisers, undoing the harm, the humiliation that has been done to nations, societies, communities, people, spiritually, morally, physically and mentally. Reclaiming what was taken and honouring and strengthening through practice and

research what we still have, like our cultural identity, language, songs, rhythms, customs, clothes, artistic values, religion and most importantly ourselves.

Decolonisation is a broad subject and has many angles to it. Some intellectuals have chosen different aspect of it according to their field of work. In *Decolonising Multilingualism: Struggles to Decreate*, Phipps (2019) describes decolonisation as an activity

If we are going to decolonise multilingualism, let's do it as an attempt at a way of doing it. The only way to decolonise is to do it. It needs some forethought but ultimately it needs actions which are redolent with decolonising attempts, adding to critical learnings of previous decolonising attempts. It needs people who are able to embark on such a journey and return with tales to tell of what happens when decolonising is attempted in foreign languages learning. The tales are messy, compromised and always within what Spivak calls the 'double bind' (Spivak, 2012), a place within which there will always be dis-ease and a sense of not having reached a resolution. A place which, in critical terms, will always be found wanting, bearing traces of that which it wishes to divest. (Phipps 2019).

Even though Phipps is focusing on decolonisation through decolonising multilingualism, her point about taking decolonisation as an activity that should be implemented and needing people who are able to embark on such a journey, bearing in mind that previous attempts made by colonisers to decolonise has not worked well and critical lessons must be learnt, is very important for such a practice-led subject as fashion and design education.

This raises a further question: how do the colonised decolonise? It is in the interest of the coloniser to divide, conquer and rule, to separate people and communities from each other. Writing from a point of view and place where colonisation has happened before, it is necessary when talking about decolonisation not to make it sound like "Recolonization". It is important to note that it is only the colonised who can decolonise themselves, in other words, decolonisation can only come from the ones who have been colonised. It is as political and communal as it is personal. There is an old adage that cuts across all Ghanaian language "Obi num

eduro mma yarifuo” which translates as “no one takes medication on behalf of a sick person”. Decolonisation is a healing process and like any healing process it takes time, effort and willingness of the sick person to heal in their own time.. Ghana still has memory of unpleasant slavery in the legacies of colonisation more than 60 years after independence. We are still grappling with reconnecting with our cultures and our languages in a way that translates into sustainable development and knowledge creation.

Many ways of expressing the aspect of decolonisation include education, cultural preservations, festivals and ways of dressing Arowolo (Arowolo 2010). Decolonisation happens through the body and our values; it also happens through the senses. Scent is strongly tied to memory, as is taste and sight. Certain smells and taste can easily trigger memories of a place or an event that happened in our life these memories help us to reconnect with our past. We remember by listening to drum and song, the rattle of the gourd, the whistle of the flute, and other instruments. These reminds us of rhythms from home and we are drawn out to join the dance in the steps from home. It brings us back home, to ourselves, and to the interconnectedness of all things.

...it is important to be conscious of the value of African cultures in the framework of universal civilization, but to compare this value with other cultures, not with the view of deciding its superiority or inferiority, but in order to determine, in general a framework of struggle for progress, what contribution African culture has made and can or must receive from elsewhere. Cabral (1993, p. 62”).

One will ask, how do we create other narratives that are built on decolonized perspectives? At every stage of the process, this question must be asked: who has the power? Power is relative depending on how you look at it. Mostly it is equated to authority, social status, money, agency, and fame. To equalize power to the best of our ability, must be a break in the cycle of exploitive practices. For example, Artist should always be visible, their work should not be invisible. Their names should all be acknowledged wherever the work is exhibited, reproduced, and discussed.

This acknowledgement is not an artistic benevolence but a political necessity if there are genuine commitment to the politics of labour. Decolonisation practices from people of colour and Africans such as artists, curators, and writers in this field must be supported. One way to support this effort is by providing open spaces for inclusion in fine art spaces, galleries, museums, and publications for artists whose work is often marginalized as “mere craft” or more generously referred to as “inspirational artisans.”

African countries in particular, have embraced the concept of decolonisation with the aim of upholding an African agenda that dignifies the people of Africa as human beings and key role players in its socio-economic development. Arowolo (Arowolo 2010); Cruz (Reyes Cruz 2012); Lotte (Bailyn 2006). Both Cabral (Pina-Cabral and Lourenço 2007) and Cruz in Sium, Desai, & Ritskes (Sium, Desai et al. 2012) also suggest that there is value in moving towards the state of being ‘un’-colonised through the review and assigning true value to the indigenous cultures and their contributions, but only if done equally with contributions from the West. In this regard traditional African dressing styles and textiles should be part of any Fashion Design curriculum as they inform indigenous knowledge, which is as dynamic as the fashion world, always creating and always moving forward as observed Corntassel (Corntassel 2012); Hendrickson (Hendrickson, Farquhar et al. 1996).

The critical questioning of existing content in Fashion Design programmes to a great extent becomes a key factor towards the decolonisation of such programmes, exploring the rich history of African costume and textiles can be factored into the educational content. Many countries, including, arguably, Scotland, have experienced some form of colonialism and many lives have been shaped to some extent by incidences of imperialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths et al. 2007). During colonial times, African countries and tribes that experienced colonisation had to adopt elements of Western identities, ultimately modernising their dress and acknowledging that ‘Western fashion were elements of a system designed to sweep away the culture and traditions of the colonized Africans’. When Western clothing and textiles were introduced to Africans, it was quickly

embraced because it was flexible and practical in terms of weight due to the nature of the textiles it was made from. Modern clothing and textiles were lighter compared to traditional African textiles used during the colonial period.

Prior to the Colonial era African communities already had various forms of clothes, from raffia, skins and hides or bark-cloth and forms of dress. Part of the colonial ideology was the labelling of the entire culture of the colonised as uncivilised. So, clothes also became an ideological battlefield for superiority and inferiority. The introduction of new clothing and textiles onto the African market opened up new ways of creative possibilities for indigenous Africans to change the way they dressed. These newly acquired identities were invented and became a way to communicate back to the colonial masters and to show status in the community, this shows how much colonisation influenced and changed the way of dressing and transformed indigenous cultures with Western cultures.

For instance, the cross-cultural influence based on the curvy figure, specifically the hip and derriere of the African woman, was incorporated into the Victorian Bustle dress.



Fig. 4 Victorian dress shows the incorporation of hip and derriere enlargements worn under the traditional garments. Picture source Google Image



Fig. 5 My auntie, Nyornuga. Photo from a family album

This picture show how colonisers dress influences the dress sense of young Ghanaian ladies

Although many Africans gradually adapted to wearing Western clothes, there were those who chose tradition instead. Similarly, traditional costume and textiles have inspired many Western clothing styles, designs and designers who have sought identity and inspiration from various African cultures, often with little or no

acknowledgement, documentation or credit. For this reason there is a dearth of academic literature on African fashion and textile design.

2.3 Trends in Cloth Literature

A look at reviews on cloth literature indicates the following trends. from 1985, writers were more interested in the cultural and social dimensions of clothing. Steiner (Steiner 1985) and Schneider (Schneider 1987) attempted to explore the artistic aspects, and meanings associated with the uses of cloth. Due to their foreign background, Steiner and Schneider encountered problems of translating the meaning and interpretation of cloth and its significance because they could not fully understand the community they sought to study. The focus of the discussion shifted from a Eurocentric point of view to an African perspective. This was important as works of this latter period gave an insight into uses and significance of cloth within the history and context of the cultures that used them.

Some fashion writings in the 1990s saw an expansion of the social and cultural theories to themes in dress and fashion. Eicher and Roach-Higgins (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992) presents dress in a wider context in which other body adornments complement and add meaning to clothing. Turner (Turner 1993) introduced the 'Social Skin' theory which explores cloth as a second skin, which hides the private and unacceptable, and presents a social view. This led the way into exploring the ambiguities and 'conflicting values' associated with clothing Hansen (Hansen 2004). In Yankah's book *Speaking for the Chief: Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory* (Yankah 1995) and Bickford's *The A.B.C.'s of cloth and politics in Cote d'Ivoire*. (Bickford 1994) writing more specifically about West Africa, explored the dramatic dimensions in the use of clothing. Some of the fashion writings in the 1990's provided information on cloth, textiles, dress styles as well as messages they convey when used in both social and personal context. The writings also provided theoretical foundations for analysing cloth symbolism from a universal point of view. It gave little attention to individual aesthetics found in cloth from across cultures as the focus was on the interaction of cloth with the social.

The late 1990s to the post 2000s witnessed a rising interest in the art of cloth as well as the economic dimensions that affect its production as artist and cultural goods. Cloth has been exhibited as artwork in many museums around the world giving an indication of the interest it has generated in the world of art. As an economic commodity, the relations that influence its art and production have been examined in works by Perani and Wolff (Perani and Wolff 1999) and Denzer (Guyer, Denzer et al. 2002). Exploration of the art in cloth has broadened the insight of the function of cloth in the cultural and social context. It features as a tool that records events and ideas in the environment, enhances communication and facilitates various forms of social relations. The literature has, however, not looked at designs and how they relate to the names assigned to them. This work seeks to curate a relation between designs and names and how these two elements achieve meaning in prints.

2.4 Early History on Textiles Making in West Africa

The history of textiles, cloth and weaving dates back beyond colonial times, where yards of fabric were spun from raw materials such as cotton and raffia on traditional wooden looms. Textiles production in human societies dates back at least 35,000 years. Over the years, humans have found different materials, ways, methods to turn them into textiles and clothing. The material for textiles and clothing has moved from animal skin to tree barks to fibres like cotton and silk (Gumpert, Anyidoho et al. 2008). Weaving is one of the oldest cloth making practices in Africa. Oral history and tradition among the Akans and Gonjas of Ghana, Dogon of Mali and the Bamana collaborates this claim by placing cloth, and the art of weaving as the first human activity which precedes food cultivation. Doran Ross, one of the leading writers on West African textile, suggests that the art of weaving began in Africa from 500BC to 300CE based on evidence acquired from excavations at Meroe in present day Sudan. Ross also quoted an important sighting of another evidence of weaving dating back to the 9th century in the Igbo Ukwu region, Southern Nigeria. The textiles found however, consisted of grass, leaves and fibres but not cotton (Ross, Silverman et al. 1998).

Between the 11th and 12th century, other discoveries were made in burial caves in the cliff of the Bandiagara Escarpment among the Dogon of Mali supports the idea that, contemporary woven cloth in West Africa begun earlier. Gilfoy (Gilfoy and National Museum of African Art (U.S.) 1987), Kriger (Kriger 2005) focused their research findings on West African textiles manufacturing, trade and consumption from the historical approach, cited 15th and 16th century records as their sources. According to Colleen Kriger this was the period when cotton manufacturing and spinning in the West African region was established. Basing his findings on archaeological, linguistic and scholarly data of this period, Kriger inferred that the skills were taught by Muslim traders from Northern Africa Kingdoms.

Woven cloth discovered in the lower Niger region dating back to the 11th century also proves that it was made with the vertical loom technology. Kriger (Kriger 2005). Archaeological findings indicated that by the 13th and 14th centuries, spindle whorls could be found in trading towns such as Begro and Bono Manso in present day Ghana and other major trading towns known to this period. Kriger admits that cotton was not the only material used for clothing, but it dominated cloth and textiles production and trade in that era. In his writings he stated that, the early European traders did not only take interest in West Africa but took a careful look at the places where cotton were produced, sold and worn. They also took a keen interest in noting the difference in regional preferences for cotton products. In citing written documents of early visitors to the West African coast to support this assertion, Kriger mentions one the visitors Alvis Ca da Mosto (Cà da Mosto 1824). Ca da Mosto's description of the local cotton industry and dress styles in Senegal and Pacheco Pereira, records the production and export of cotton cloth in Sierra Leone on his voyage in 1490 (Kriger 2005).

Kriger mentioned that, by the 15th century, the Europeans had started participating in the local trade by “supplementing and stimulating” the local cloth and textiles industry through the new era of International trade. The Bight of Benin was one of the several centres where cloth and textiles was imported and where African weavers produced their own cotton cloth for export. Benin cloth is classified as cloth from the west African region. These cloths were sorted, packed

and shipped to the ready markets on the Gold Coast and Gabon as well as on international markets of the West Indies and Brazil Kriger (Kriger 2005).

The textiles and cloth industry are a dynamic enterprise which has been influenced by both local and foreign factors. Although indigenous cloth and textiles production took place in a number of centres on the West African coast, there were indications that, production could not meet demand. This paved the way for foreign participation in the cloth industry on the continent. According to Peggy S. Gilfoy, one of the leading writers on West African textiles industry, trade records between West Africa and Europe indicate that industrial production of cloth dates back to the early 15th century Gilfoy (Gilfoy and National Museum of African Art (U.S.) 1987).

The production was initiated by Portuguese traders who wanted access to gold on the West African coast. The textile industry was established in Cape Verde off the coast of Senegal. Slave labour from the Benin was the major source of labour for the industry. They also transformed the African strip loom to suit the European production needs. The products from this industry followed the Hispania-Moresque silk product of Spain. The product sold well on the Guinea Coast and was of high demand in the region. According to Gilfoy, the cloth trade was constituted 40% of the entire trade of the Portuguese in the West African region.

The Portuguese dominance in trade was felt from 1480 to 1530 due to the fact that they were the colonial power during that period and controlled most of the West African coastal trades and routes. However, there was a decline in Portuguese trade after this period due to the arrival the English which saw the exit of the Portuguese. In the mid-16th and 17th centuries, the English and other Europeans started dominating trade on the West Africa Coast. By the 18th century was an establishment of triangular markets between Europe, Asia and West Africa. The most important trade item for West Africa was printed cotton cloth from India, which sold well on the coast because of its cheap, colourful and nonfading nature Gilfoy stated. The Indian cloth was traded on the West African coast for

gold which was returned to Europe. The trading of the Indian cloth in West Africa set the state for the experimentation with wax prints in the sub region.

2.5 Kente



Fig. 6: Niata, 'Double edged sword'. Photo by Naa Densua Tordzro

Scholars have paid some attention to cloth production in Ghana. While the sources are varied in this field, this review relies on only secondary sources from the 20th and 21st centuries. Two of the well-known writers in this field are Robert Rattray and Doran Ross. Rattray is one of the pioneering writers on Akan cloth. His 1959 account touches on the different types of cloth and their methods of manufacturing. Among the cloth mentioned was Kente. According to Metz (Metz 2003), cloth weaving among the Akan dates back to the 12th century. The Akan are said to have learnt the art of weaving from the Dyula traders of ancient Mali who traded and settled in some Akan trading towns such as Begho Kriger (Kriger 2005); Sutherland-Addy and Aminata (Sutherland-Addy and Diaw 2005).

Kente weaving among the Akan is probably the most documented indigenous textile making industry in Ghana. According to Ross (Ross, Silverman et al. 1998) Kente is also woven among the Ewe in Ghana, and Togo. Although there is no concrete evidence on which region precedes the other in terms of Kente weaving, the similarities in the technology indicate that there has been considerable contact between these two Kente making areas. Rattary and Ross point to Kente weaving to the 17th century during the reign of the Asante king, Oti Akenten. It is said that it was during his reign that Kente was introduced into the kingdom. It was initially woven from locally produced cotton, and then later imported European silk which was unravelled to create new designs and colour varieties Rattray (Rattray 1959); Ross (Ross, Silverman et al. 1998). Weaving of cloth is mostly done in a narrow strip loom and joined together to form a larger piece of cloth. The history and debates regarding the origins of Kente is still ongoing as different scholars and informants present different accounts. For now, it is sufficient to provide a description of the industry in Ghana.

Apart from the shared technology, Kente production in both the Akan and Ewe areas has similarities in naming. Ross suggests that the names given to each piece of cloth is complex and ambiguous. The differences in the naming process are that, the Ewe have a more fluid system; their names do not follow any specific rules. On the contrary, the Asante have a more structured naming system. It is also evident that names of cloth were more capricious in the Ewe system where anyone could pay and own a design than in the Akan system where patterns were mostly assigned and customized to the wealthy and the royalty Ross (Ross, Silverman et al. 1998). Kente also comes in different colours, the colours are based on gender and occasion.

2.6 Birisi

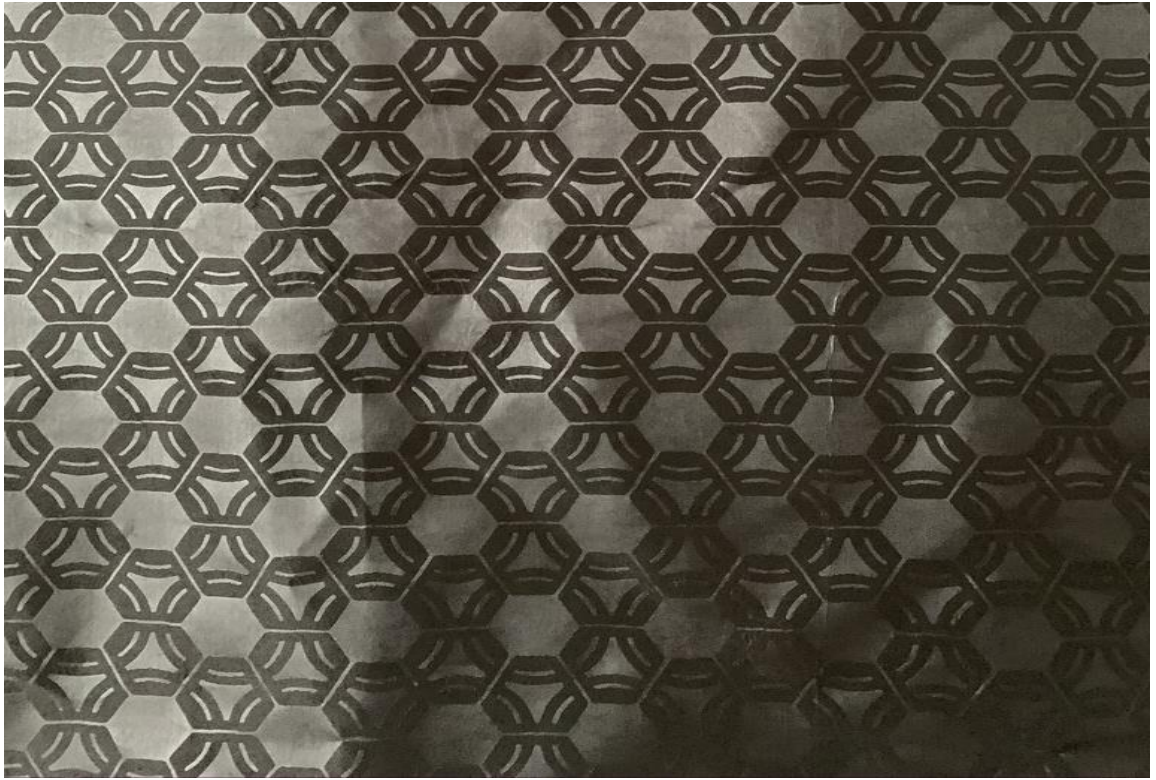


Fig. 7: Brisi, Funeral cloth. Photo by Naa Densua Tordzro

Brisi is a smooth black cloth worn during funerals to mourn a cloth member of the family. They are originally made from cotton and dyed black and became known as Birisi. Other mourning cloth includes bark cloth known as Kyenkyen and adinkra. In Rattray's account, the earliest known cloth among the Asante is the bark cloth. Although Rattray could not provide detailed information on the Kyenkyen cloth due to its unpopular nature, he mentioned that it was produced from the Kyenkyen tree, from which it acquired its name. He stated that at the time of his documentation, the cloth was being used ceremoniously during the Odwira festival by the king to signify their humble origins and also as hunting clothes by hunters Rattray (Rattray 1959). According to Rattary, Birisi was worn at funerals and other occasions such as festivals to express sorrow or the seriousness of the event.

2.7 Adinkra Cloth



Fig. 8: Adinkra Cloth. Photo by Naa Densua Tordzro

Another popular form of dyeing among the Ashanti was the stamped cloth called the adinkra cloth. In this method, Adinkra symbols are cut into stencils and dipped into dyes and then stamped onto plain cloth as patterns. Before the patterns are stamped onto the cloth, the cloth is dyed in a natural russet brown Rattray (Rattray 1959), (p:264). The dye is obtained from the Kuntutumin tree. The russet brown is a colour of mourning in Ashanti. The adinkra system has a set of symbols that have names, associated proverbs and meanings which illustrate and express the philosophy and beliefs of the Akan people. Just like kente Adinkra also comes in different colours, the occasion determines which colours will be worn. It is also a gender-based cloth. This is easily detectable by the size of the cloth and the symbols.

This type of cloth is also popular with funeral events. Cloth dyeing appears to be very popular in the West African region. Marrieta B. Joseph (Joseph 1978) (p:34) traces the practice of cloth dyeing in the region to at least the 16th century. The

method involves forming designs on cloth by the resist method. The design is achieved by preventing the dye from entering some parts of the cloth either by tying or by sewing together before dipping the textile into the dye. The deep blue dye used was originally obtained from plants which contained indicant (natural dye substance). From the evidence presented above, it presupposes that weaving preceded dying in West Africa as a method of cloth making. The subsequent use of both methods in cloth making also suggest that, dyeing may have evolved latter as a complimentary feature of adding beauty and extra value to woven cloth.

There was also the problem of over reliance on reconstructed versions of myth and history as sources of meaning for motifs that are abstract. Schneider also echoes the frustrations of researchers with informants who were either reluctant to give information on the semiotic representation or may be plainly ignorant about them. She, however, critiques this notion by making the point that users and artisans of ritual symbols do not necessarily share symbolic meanings associated with the symbols they produce and use. In view of this, it is quite obvious that the most reliable source of information on meaning will be the users and not necessarily producers which this study relies on.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 The Introduction of Wax Prints in West Africa

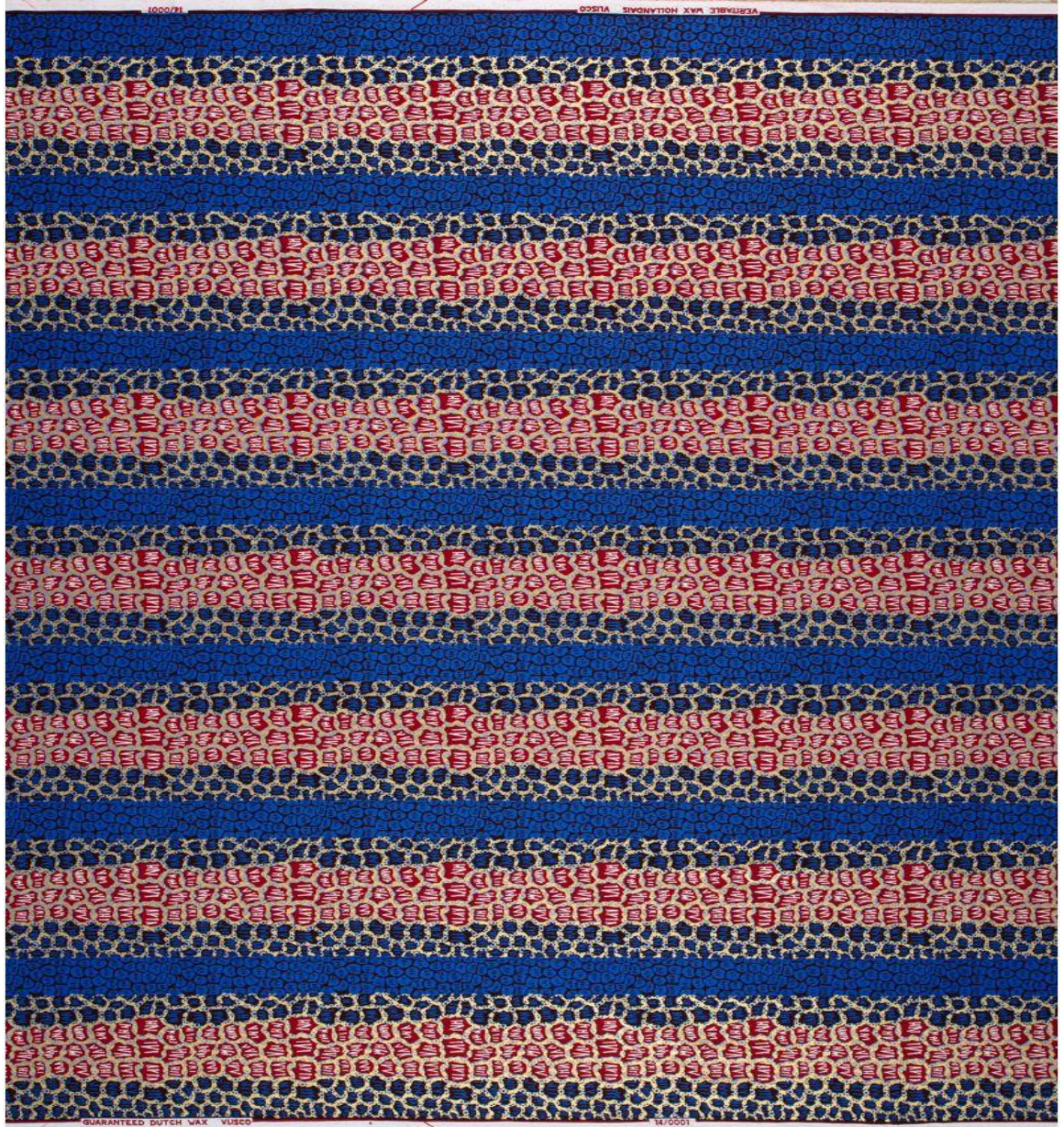


Fig. 10: Efe-Abosia, 'Household gravel', cloth and Image by Vlisco

Wax prints are cloths introduced into West Africa in the late 19th century by European traders and manufacturing companies. The production of wax prints has its origin in Holland. European textiles printing process was first practiced in Holland for the Indonesia market. The original industrially produced Dutch wax prints was copies of Indonesian designs, they also were influenced by Indian-

inspired British designs. One of such manufacturing companies is Vlisco. Early 1920s Vlisco became expert wax printers, when it obtained the rollers of another Dutch manufacturer and mastered the process. Vlisco turned their attention to the West African market and dominated with its wax print products. Even though there were wax print manufacturing companies, like Ghana Textiles Printing Company (GTP), Ghana Textiles Manufacturing Company (TTL), Akosombo Textiles Limited, Ghana (ATL) Kaduna Textile Mill (KTM) existing in the West African Region before the arrival of Vlisco.

The designs in the Vlisco wax print have been adapted to West African culture by adopting names and patterns from the cultures in the region. In Ghana for instance, the quality, values and status of the Vlisco wax print became a prestigious cloth to have among women. Aside from that, its light cotton nature is well suited for the West African market. The designs and names that contain various social themes and can be used for several social events and purposes. For example, wax prints can be used during funerals, child naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies as part of the dowry to woman, funerals, religious events such as Christian church services, and as office attire for workers.

In recent times, the cloth has drawn attention from art collectors, and museums who are intrigued by the range and richness of its aesthetic designs, symbolic messages and the variety of themes and colours. The biggest threat to Vlisco's hold on the market today has been weakened by the influx of cheap and knock off wax prints from China. Since the '90s China have been using digital photographs to produce cheap copies of European designs to sell in West Africa. Some West Africans due to low level income, often consider the Chinese imitation and inferior wax print cloth to the European standard. The Chinese wax cloth, for those who have been priced out of the Vlisco market, offer a welcome alternative.

Historical writers Bickford (Bickford 1994) and Steiner (Steiner 1985) cite the 19th century as the century imported cloth from Europe known as wax prints arrived on the shores of West Africa through the Gold Coast in the 1890s from Holland.

According to Steiner, by the end of the 19th century, the European manufacturers were aware of African regional preferences when it comes to textiles. Steiner also stated that there were two main types of textiles circulation; wax prints and fancy or roller prints. This period also saw keen competition between European and Indian producers whose products were being traded long before the arrival of the Europeans. While the Indian products appealed to the colour sensitivity of the African, the European products sort to appeal to the aesthetics of the African buyer (Steiner 1985).

The wax prints which were initially designed for the Javanese market but appeared on the West African market was brought in by Ebenezer Brown Flemings, a Scottish textiles wholesaler, after it has been rejected on the Javanese market because their inferior standards Bickford (Bickford 1994), (p:9). The acceptance of the cloth in West Africa led to the mass manufacturing of the cloth by European firms. Yankah (Yankah 1995), in citing Spencer (Spencer and Newark 1982), suggested that there is another possible reason for the wide acceptance and appeal for wax and roller prints in the West African region. He wrote that Africans may have developed a taste for the foreign textiles from returning African soldiers who fought in the Indonesia war and brought back batik cloth for their families as gift and also through trade with the Dutch East Indian Company. Kriger's observation was that, the popularity of wax prints was a response to a market that already existed prior to colonialism (Kriger 2006).

The successful capturing of the cloth and textiles market from both the indigenous cloth producers and the Indian cloth manufacturers by the European textile producer can be attributed to a number of factors which includes affordability, malleability and the non-fading properties of the wax prints. Steiner's examination of the textile trade in West Africa gives evidence which suggests that the European cloth manufacturer studied the indigenous cloth industry in Africa extensively and strategized to capture the market. In other words, wax prints for the West African coast were specifically produced to suit the taste of the local West African market.

3.1 The Making and Naming of Ghanaian Textiles

Various scholars over the years have shown keen interest in the cloth and textiles production and patronage in Ghana. Among the scholars are three of the well-known writers in this field are Metz, Robert Rattary and Doran Ross. Rattary is one of the pioneering writers on Akan cloth. His account in 1959 touches on the different types of cloth and textiles, and their methods of manufacturing.

Among the cloth and textiles mentioned in his writing are Kente Cloth, Birisi, Adinkra. In his attempt to disprove the widely believed notion about the relationship between Europeans and Africans as exploitation, Steiner one of the early writers in the Textiles industry, wrote about the European's appreciation of the African's artistic sensitivity and their reaction to style, design and quality. He failed to detail information on the response and acceptance of the textile products from an African perspective. However, if his attempt was indeed to prove that European's appreciate the artistic sensitivity and knowledge of the wax print, rather than the way they sort to improve trade revenue, it poses the question on why there was so little information on names of cloth and textiles, how they were associated with meanings by indigenes of West Africa.

The designs and communicative features found in indigenous cloth and textiles are adopted and used in wax prints. The origins of Wax prints are foreign, they are imported from Europe, manufactured in factories and named by cloth and textiles retailers. In her article 'The Anthropology of Cloth', Schneider (Schneider 1987) summarises the social and cultural values assigned to cloth in various cultures around the world, and the possibility of over generalizing the meaning of cloths. She explained that, this could give the impression that retailers and users share the same discrete culture and share in its codes of meaning. It is important to note that, most users of cloth in Ghana buy the cloth for name and meaning associated to the cloth. Even though wax prints (cloth) and textiles have been around for centuries, full of art and very common in West Africa, it was until the 1980s before the academic community took interest to study it as an academic subject.

3.2 Cloth, Textiles and Meaning

Whatever we put on our bodies carries a message or communicates something to others. In the Ghanaian context, cloth and textiles holds the ability to communicate wherever it is used, either privately or socially. The meanings embedded in cloth and textiles are significant and symbolic to both the wear and those they encounter, especially when both parties understand the language of cloth. Perani and Wolff (Perani and Wolff 1999), wrote that apart from the private, social and symbolic use of cloth, the meaning in cloth and textiles depends on other factors. One of the factors is the human body, Perani & Wolff express this view by quoting Turner (1980) who wrote that, “the body ...becomes the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted, and bodily adornment... becomes the language through which it is expressed”, ((Turner 1980) cited in (Perani and Wolff 1999)). Marietta B. Joseph, observed that the body provides a mobile exhibition of the art and a moving commentary of the message as observed in the case of West African indigo cloth, where body movements give motion to symbolic patterns in the cloth adding to the visual appreciation of the design.

In this case the cloth is sewn in a manner that flows with the movement of the body, animating the designs in it (Joseph 1978). So, the human body, becomes the surface for displaying the message, and the context for interpretation of its social meaning is expressed in the movement. In other instances where symbols of cloth are less dependent on recognisable or meaningful patterns, the colours of cloth and textiles, and etiquette of clothing serve as the space for symbolic meaning in cloth. It is important to note that colours for mourning varies from culture to culture in all parts of Ghanaian society and different parts of the world, the meanings assigned to them also depends the society that uses them.

This was further explained by Kofi Anyidoho with illustration of the use of funeral cloth. In his illustration, he points out that the wearing of funeral clothes by an individual or group of people gives an indication of mourning or loss of a loved one. However, if this action is not warranted by an actual death, it can constitute

subversion and a need for interpretation of behaviour. A subversion of the rules that govern their wearing can cause a reaction, as that constitutes a form of communication (Gumpert, Anyidoho et al. 2008). Colour is very important in the symbolic meaning of cloth. Colour is also used to indicate several abstract concepts such as death and celebration. Thus, according to Anyidoho (Gumpert, Anyidoho et al. 2008), white represents a sign of celebrations among the Ewe and Ga-Adangme people of southern Ghana, while among the Dogon of Mali it represents death and separation.

The influence of colour symbols in cloth and textiles has the capacity to override or subdue other symbol indicators within the same cloth. For instance, while adinkra cloth is known to be a funeral cloth, however, a green or yellow adinkra cloth can easily be used for non-funeral events, unlike the black adinkra cloth which has limited versatility due to its colour. In this instance, the colours and the purpose of use has changed the significance of the message the Adinkra cloth carries. Even though cloth and textiles have social and collective uses and meanings, there are some contradictions in the way it is perceived and used in cultures. One of the scholars in the field of Cloth and Textiles, Renne (Renne and Agbaje-Williams 2005) wrote that 'Cloth presents a duality in society', by referring to Turner's concept of 'social skin' whereby cloth provides the link between individual and societal interest. Another scholar Hardin (Hardin 1993)(1993:140), presents the body as "an object to be protected in addition to being controlled", this means, cloth and textiles offer control for both purposes with its ability to communicate and present more than one possible meaning in its message cited by Perani & Wolff (Perani and Wolff 1999).

3.3 The Social Significance and Uses of Cloth and Textiles

Cloth and textiles in some African societies including Ghana, attach importance to cultural and social values to the names and meanings they bare. Within the framework of the social significance of Cloth and Textiles, wax and roller prints can be analysed as a medium of communicating cultural meaning by exploring ways in which concepts are adopted from the social environment and expressed

with meaning in designs. The social significance and uses of cloth and textiles vary. Their symbolic significance, for basic and social uses, cut across many cultures and societies in Ghana and some African countries. The most basic use of cloth is for covering the body as well as several household surfaces. For instance, it can be used for upholstery, curtains and covers. Beyond its basic uses, it has social and symbolic significance for the people who use them. In recent times, cloth has also been used and appreciated as art or as a material for art. Its importance to life cannot be underestimated as it permeates all aspects of social life. In Belinda Femenias (Femenías 2010) article in the *Review in Anthropology* 'In Cloth we trust', writes:

“Cloth compels us to attend to its primacy. Rarely free of it, we are physically encased and emotionally absorbed in it from infancy, and it follows us and our descendants even beyond the grave. The touch of cloth comforts and soothes us, eases our anxieties, and allays our fears”
Belinda Femenias (2010: 259).

While one of cloth's two sides faces the body, the other faces the world, presenting an image distinct from the person beneath (Renne 1995:5) (Renne and Agbaje-Williams 2005); cloth then can also symbolize betrayal of trust (Turner 1993). Cloth never is, and never means, just one thing (Hansen 2004). The same can be said for Textiles. Femenias interpretation is based on the fact that the commonness of cloth to life is unavoidable. Cloth and textiles have become part of all aspects of human existence and beyond. In many cultures in Ghana, one is buried in their best clothes as it is believed in many cultures that, when life ends on this side, one embarks on another journey as life continues on the other side. For instance, as part of burial rituals among the Akan, the corpse is buried with fine cloth for the final journey. In other words, the primacy of cloth to our existence transcends the consciousness of our daily activity. It becomes routine to have clothes yet unconsciously, we ignore its commonness.

Some scholars who have written articles and reviews on the social significance and uses of cloth and textiles noted that, throughout the cycle of life, they represent different things for different cultures, society and individuals at different times.

It has been used for centuries to strengthen and build relations across cultures, societies and nations. When offered as gifts at marriage or given to relatives, it smoothens relationships, as portrayed in the use of raffia cloth by the Lele society in modern day DR Congo (Schneider 1987); In Mary Douglas (Douglas 1958) study undertaken on the Lele of Kasai, raffia cloth was exchanged for various social reasons. Apart from functioning as relationship building gifts, they sometimes function as money and can be used to pay off debt or dues. Despite this, raffia was not sold, neither could it be bought on the open market. Her study revealed that in the Lele society, regardless of the level at which cloth was exchanged, social relations played a leading role in governing the rules of exchange. The value of cloth and textiles in this sense is not only economic but also assumes a relational value.

Other scholars have written about other instances where clothing is used as social identifier to indicate relations to groups. According to the social identity theory, 'Social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group' (Hogg and Abrams 1988 cited in Stets & Burke, 2000:225). One of the reasons given for why groups are formed in society is that it provides co-operation in making the environment beneficial to members and also provides protection for members from the threats of the environment Winslow (Kikusui, Winslow et al. 2006). Groups provide individuals with a sense of security and belonging, and shape behaviour and relations in the society. Clothes in such cases provide an important marker that legitimizes a person's space in relation to the group they belong to. It prescribes behaviour and response from both within the group and outside the group. Labi (Labi 2002) (2001: 49-56) suggests that costumes used by different groups associated with the burial of the Asante King, Otumfuo Opoku Ware II indicated that the clothing used as costumes by the various groups and individuals during the funeral helped to maintain order and access to specific places for role performance. According to him, identification of clothing, gives individuals and groups rights to access spaces and also legitimizes role play in social spaces. Labi was commenting on how cloth can identify the different groups and create privileges and responsibilities for different groups.

3.4 Symbolism in the usage of Cloth and Textiles

Not only does clothing grant accessibility and legitimacy in social spaces but has symbolic implications as well. As it has been established that clothing is used in the various social and private spaces in all walks of life, it is imbedded with both physical and abstract symbols. Cloth and textiles represent several symbolic concepts in societies and cultures across the world. One of the leading advocates on symbolism, Rebecca Klatch, stated that, 'symbols could be actions or objects that represent a system of shared social meanings; symbols are used to represent concepts, communicate ideas, and establish meaning. The object or action that represents the symbol becomes the physical manifestation of what is represented abstractly' (Klatch 1988). Cloth and textiles in a context as social symbols do inform when symbols and messages are inscribed in them.

They are also used to show social status and wealth. Perani and Wolff suggested that cloth can indicate distinction in status by social rank, and class. In a 'durbar' where kings and queens are gathered for instance, distinguishing rank among them is through exaggerated cloth, ornaments and their seated position among other kings and queens. Cloth and textiles could magnify, reveal or diminish the body depending on its social significance' (Perani and Wolff 1999). Cloth also by economic design can indicate social class and wealth. For instance, according to a study by Elisha Renne on the social life of the Bunu of Nigeria, cloth and children were regarded as the significant expression of wealth which every member hoped to acquire (Renne 1991). Cloth and textiles, informed by the uses and significance attached to it can distinguish the rich from the poor, and rulers from commons.

2.5 Cultural Appropriation

Throughout the centuries, appropriation has happened in different parts of the world through colonisation and the African continent is not an exception. Indigenous African cultures have suffered a great deal from colonisation and appropriation of indigenous cultures, cultural artefacts and the "fetishizing" of cultures and traditions, this turns to isolate those whose cultures are being

appropriated. However, cultural appropriation has been going for centuries in the 'Western World' especially in Europe. Examples are clothes of British aristocrats during the 17th century, the three-piece suit was appropriated from the traditional dress of diverse Eastern European and Islamic countries. The Justoucoup frock coat was copied from the long Zupan worn in Poland and Ukraine, the necktie or cravat was derived from a scarf worn by Croatian mercenaries fighting for Louis XIII, and the brightly coloured silk waistcoat popularised by Charles II of England were inspired by exotic Turkish, Indian and Persian attire acquired by wealthy English travellers. During the Highland Clearance the British aristocracy appropriated traditional Scottish clothing. Tartan was given spurious association with specific Highland Clans after publications such as James Logan's romanticised work *The Scottish Gael* (1831) led the Scottish tartan industry to invent clan tartans and tartan became a desirable material for dresses, waistcoats and cravats.

Recently, there are debates and discussions concerning cultural appropriation of indigenous fashion and textiles designs, whether designers and fashion houses understand the history behind the clothing they are taking from different cultures, besides the ethical and copyright issues of using these cultures' shared intellectual property without consent, acknowledgement, or compensation. Cultural appropriation has become a catchphrase, after emerging into the broader public field from academic in the 1980s. In discussions of post-colonial expansionism, cultural appropriation at times phrased as cultural colonialism it is a concept has been explored before. Some see the adoption of elements of one's culture by members of another culture as exploitative as the original meaning of these cultural elements are lost or distorted when they are removed from their originating cultural contexts. Cultural appropriation is the use of ideas, symbols, artefacts, or other aspects of visual or non-visual cultures of communities other than one's own culture and not acknowledging its origin.

Cultural appropriation is considered harmful by various communities, including Indigenous people working to protect and preserve their cultural heritage and values through intellectual property laws and copyright laws of their country. According to critics of the practice, cultural appropriation is another form

of colonialism. Where members of a dominant culture copy, uses or take over any aspect of cultural elements of a minority and disadvantaged cultures or community's cultural property without the prior knowledge and consent of the culture or community, and these elements are used outside of their original cultural context sometimes even against the expressly stated wishes of members of the originating culture, it is also considered as disrespectful to the community and indigenous groups whose culture has been appropriated.

This also breach international intellectual property and copyright laws of World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that protects indigenous cultures and endangered cultural artefacts. However, there are groups who are in favour of collective intellectual property right of the originating, minority cultures, and for those who have lived or are living under colonial rules.

A prominent trend in post-colonial textiles and fashion designs, and the repurposing, commodification of indigenous cultural textiles and costumes, and its circulation within local and global fashion economies and design markets are on the increase. A recent example is the Fashion Designer in the UK, Stella McCartney, who used a cultural design of a well-known West African gown, which is popular and commonly worn women in any of the west African countries, on a fashion runway at a fashion show during the Paris Fashion Week in October 2017. The fashion designs and wax prints used in her 'Ready-to-wear' collections were also a commonly worn designs that cut across the west African region. However, in an interview she described her collection's aesthetic as "a joyful exploration of British style," according to Women's Wear Daily. In doing so, it may be argued that McCartney disregarded the African origin and inspiration of her designs therefore breaching the rules guarding against Cultural Appropriations.



Fig 11: Stella McCartney image by Frances Mori/AP Photo

Several fashion designers and models have featured in imitations of Native of Indigenous African wear. Be it from the north, south, east or west of Africa, it has featured on a runway of some designers around the world. The Adinkra symbols, Kente and Adinkra cloth and textiles and no except to this trend of appropriation. Originally, the use of Kente and Adinkra Cloth was reserved for royalty and limited to special social and sacred functions. Since the creation of Kente and Adinkra centuries ago, Kente and Adinkra has remained a cloth reserved for special occasions for royals and their courts, except the parts of Northern tribes who use a different type of woven textile predominantly used in the north. However, Kente production has increased in Ghana and has become affordable and more accessible to the general public. Yet imitation of both textiles have been widely mass-produced outside Ghana, particularly in East Asia by Chinese textile manufacturers who turn to produce this textile in wax and roller print devaluing the importance and what it represents for cultures involve, without any acknowledgement, compensation to the originators of the designs.

A particular concern of cultural appropriation has been the mass production of cheap wax and roller prints made to look like Adinkra and Kente cloths, imported by Asian companies, particularly from China on to fashion scene became popular in the late 2000's. A clear distinction between the wearing of a genuine Woven Kente and Adinkra cloth and a fake made in China is determined by affordability. In spite of this criticism, many fashion and textiles experts claim that this occurrence is in fact "culture appreciation", and not cultural appropriation. Fashion homes, companies and designers claim the use of unique cultural symbols is an effort to recognize and pay homage to that specific cultures. This goes to confirm the observation made by one of the scholars in this field Paulin Hountodji, He wrote:

The indigenous is what appears to the foreign observer explorer or missionary as a purely local curiosity that has no effectiveness outside its particular context. The term always has a derogatory connotation. It refers to a specific, historical experience, precisely one of integration of autochthonous cultures into a world-wide "market" in which these perform are pushed down to inferior positions.

This quote was cited by Boatema Boateng (Boateng 2011) in her book 'The Copyright Thing Doesn't Work Here'. In her writing, Boatema touched on appropriation and protection of Adinkra and Kente and the broader implications of the use of intellectual property and laws that preserve folklore and other traditional forms of knowledge. The compatibility of indigenous practices of authorship and ownership with those established under intellectual property law, considering the ways in which both are responds to the changing social and historical conditions of decolonization and globalization have played a vital role in preserving and protecting folklore, indigenous cultures and their arts in Ghana (Boatema Boateng). The concept of cultural appropriation has also been criticized. Critics noted that the concept is often misunderstood or misused by the general public, and that charges of "cultural appropriation" are at times misused in situations such as eating food from a variety of cultures or simply learning about different cultures.

Others mention that the act of cultural appropriation as it is usually defined does not meaningfully constitute social harm, or the term lacks conceptual coherence. Still others argue that the term sets arbitrary limits on intellectual freedom, artists' self-expression, reinforces group divisions, or itself promotes a feeling of animosity or criticism rather than liberation. Those who oppose cultural appropriation view many instances as wrongful appropriation when the subject culture is a minority culture or is subordinated in social, political, economic, or military status to the dominant culture or when there are other issues involved, such as a history of ethnic or racial conflict.

Linda Martin Alcoff (Alcoff 2006) writes that this is often seen in cultural outsiders use of an oppressed culture's symbols or other cultural elements, such as music, dance, spiritual ceremonies, modes of dress, speech, and social behaviour when these elements are trivialized and used for fashion, rather than respected within their original cultural context. Opponents view the issues of colonialism, context, and the difference between appropriation and mutual exchange as central to analysing cultural appropriation. They argue that mutual exchange happens on an even playing field, whereas appropriation involves pieces of an oppressed culture being taken out of context by a people who have historically oppressed those they are taking from, and who lack the cultural context to properly understand, respect, or utilize these elements.

3.6 Cross Cultural Influence of Fashion Trends in Ghana

Often when multiple cultures come together, exchange and adaptation of cultural practices happens, this includes religion and cultural traditions, fashion, symbols, language, spiritual artefacts and music. Cultural elements which may have deep meaning to the original culture may be reduced to 'exotic' fashion or object by those from the dominant culture. On the African continent, most debates are mainly about cases where historically, colonial powers or dominant powers have symbolically or importantly recreated a situation where they appropriate or benefit economically or politically from the disadvantaged or the minorities. Before the division of the African continent through colonisation, West African

countries along the coastal belt had similar cultures, music, religion, language and traditional dress sense.

Most Ghanaian fashion trends today tend to blend traditional styles with Western influences to produce clothing that satisfies the demands of both worlds. In addition, cultural borrowing from other countries like Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Niger have also contributed in shaping Ghanaian fashion trends. For example, most Ghanaian wedding ceremonies borrow the Gele, Agbada and Ankara designs used traditionally in Yoruba and Igbo wedding ceremonies. The functions of clothing go beyond looking good or protecting the wearer from nature's elements in Ghanaian society. Various symbolic and thematic undertones are present in their textiles and the designs used, which shows social status or pay respect.

This gives an indication that the art of designing and naming prints is not static, and themes are constantly being developed and revised in Ghanaians fabrics to fit current social trends and concepts. The most widely discussed thematic adaptation of wax prints in West Africa are the proverbial and figurative names they take on, and how they have been used as marketing strategies and occasionally by sections of the community (especially women) to engage in nonverbal social communication (Domowitz, 1992; Middledon & Njogu, 2009; Yankah, 1995).

The continual use of names together with designs in prints raises issues of its functions, uses and relevance in social communication. The discoveries the relationship between patterns and names in prints, and the changes that have occurred in designs and names. It will also examine how designs in the cloth are named within prevailing social concepts, contexts and trends, and the various ways in which Ghanaians visualize and articulate ideas and experiences in these cloths. In pursuing these goals, three popular concepts; death, supernatural and motherhood, which are often used as themes in the prints discourse will be examined in selected wax and roller prints collected.

The study now moves to explore issues based on the selected social ideas, the images used to represent them, how the images used in representing these

concepts have persisted or changed, and the factors that have accounted for these changes in the designing and naming of cloths.



Fig.12: 'Tugbedze', Young Lady. Photo by Naa Densua Tordzro

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 The Wax and Roller Print Industry in Ghana

Since the establishment of wax and roller prints industry in Ghana over a century ago, the industry has provided clothing and determined fashion trends in the lives of Ghanaians. Wax and roller prints has become a platform for Ghanaians and a shared culture that cuts across ethnic boundaries and taste in fashion in an environment where there is a constant fusion of cultures. Wax and roller prints reflects on and addresses some of the communal and environmental issues that occur and affect the society. This chapter will address the manufacturing of wax print, the role cloth and textiles retailer in marketing, naming of cloth and uses of wax and roller prints in Ghana.

The chapter will be organized under four sub themes. The first theme is about the production of prints. This section will attempt address the issue on what constitutes prints, how they are produced, and who produces them. The second theme is based on the organization of cloth trade. This will focus on the organization of the wax and roller print trade and strategies for marketing the cloth. The third theme will address three uses of wax and roller prints in the Ghanaian society. It will look at dominant areas in which wax and roller prints are used and how these uses inform themes for designs. The fourth and final theme with address the role of the cloth and textiles retailers in naming the wax print and samples of wax prints and their names. This chapter will rely mainly on existing literature as well as information gathered from articles concerning traders and factory cloth manufacturers.

4.0.1 The Origin, Production and Properties of Prints

Since the inception of the cloth and textiles industry in Ghana, production of fabrics is mainly for the garment and the export market. The industry's main source of raw material for production is cotton. The reason for this is that, the

industry only manufactures cotton products such as, wax and fancy or roller prints, bed sheets, school uniforms and household fabrics for curtains. Aside the big manufacturers in the industry, are the indigenous textiles industry whose products are hand-made and hand-woven textiles such as Kente, Adinkra and Smock, the small-scale manufacturers who produces tie and dyes and batiks. The wax and roller print industry has been a major manufacturing sector since the 1960s Wax and roller prints dominate the cloth industry in Ghana. Before then, most of the wax prints sold in Ghana were manufactured and imported from Europe by trader during the colonial era, who were trading in different textiles on the Gold Coast now Ghana. Textiles became the largest export product of European traders to the West African coast. Most of the traders used it as currency for buying enslaved before the abolition of slavery.

Other Europeans like the Swiss and British had also learned how to make wax prints, making the Dutch companies not the only manufacturers who had specialized technique and rights in producing wax print fabrics. The market in Europe became saturated with wax prints and the demand for wax printed fabrics both in Indonesia and declined it dropped, European traders started introducing this fabric to the country of Ghana, which was then known as the Gold Coast. From the mid 1970's till date there has been a gradual but significant decline in the local manufacturing industry, although, the industry still provides a livelihood for many Ghanaians and an important source of revenue for government. The four major manufacturers currently operating in the country are the Ghana Textile Manufacturing Company (GTMC), Akosombo Textile Limited (ATL), Ghana Textiles Printing Company (GTP) and Printex (oral knowledge).

The production of wax print started as an attempt to copy the Javanese technique of making batik fabric by the Dutch during the occupation of Indonesia in the colonial time for mass factory line production. In the 19th century, they adjusted this technique to make the production process less labour-intensive, the result is wax print. The Javanese batik is made by using a wax resist method to print patterns. Bevan & Wengrow (2010: 202) describes the process as using a designed carved wooden block, that is deeded into a wax resist with colour, then apply onto the cloth make patterns for each colour before the cloth is dyed. A description of

the production process from two Ghanaian textile manufacturers (GTP and Printex) follows a similar technological approach in manufacturing wax prints in industrial capacity in Ghana. The raw material for wax prints production is grey baft. The grey baft is then bleached and put into the design blocks for blocking before the first colour is introduced onto the rotatory screen for first printing in wax or resin.

The cloth is then dewaxed, and a second colour is introduced. It is then washed, dried and cut into pieces of twelve yards for marketing. On the other hand, the roller print production process is described by Bickford (Bickford 1994) as, 'a design is incised onto a series of brass rollers, one for each colour to be used. The rollers are then attached to the printing machine one after the next. As the fabric passes under the rollers, dye is applied on a single side in progression from the lightest to the darkest colour'. In wax printing, the colour variation is limited, maximum number of colours that can be used is two in addition to the base colour. For instance, wax prints are generally categorized into block one or block two depending on the number of colours added to the base colour for printing. There are also categories based on the type of dye used: sepia, indigo blue, and the black and white prints.

Motifs used in wax printing are often bigger and distinct because of the tendency of colours overlapping during printing. However, the roller print process is an improvement on the wax printing technology. In contrast to wax printing it does not use resin or blocking, the technique allows for greater detail and more colour variety. The process also saves time as multiple colours of the same design could be printed simultaneously. These features as commented by Beckford's, 'have led to a blossoming of design possibilities for so-called "fancy" textiles which go far beyond the limitations of wax' (Bickford 1994), this has also led to the creation of many brands on the market. The abundance of themes, expansion in design and colour possibilities has created a limitless variety of cloth for consumers. The categories in roller prints are seen in the finishing effects on the cloth, each manufacturer has a unique finishing style that differs from the other. Examples are the seersucker (is a light cotton, linen or other fabric with a crinkled surface and with stripes) also known as pimpinis on the Ghanaian textile market, is a fancy

prints that has strips of crinkled or little folds on the surface of the cloth and this effect gives the cloth a stretchy feel but does not stretch. Another popular example is the mixed patterns cloth known as 'Asaasa' by the Ga's and Asaasaba by the Akans.

4.1 Types of Asaasa Cloths (Patchwork)

"Asaasa" originated from Africa, specifically Ghana. This style of cloth has been with us for over a century. Asaasa or Asaaba, emerged from an old practice where remnants of fabrics (wax prints) are stitched together to create a full piece of cloth. This is usually worn by poor and low-income earners in the society, who turn the fabric into work clothes or play cloths for children. After Ghana's independence from our colonial masters, came the emergence of textile factories such as the Ghana Textiles Printing Company (GTP), Ghana Textiles Manufacturing Company (GTMC) and Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL). This development gave rise to the production of quality wax prints that complemented those imported from abroad. As a result, the use of "Asaasa" declined until the manufacturers made it fashionable again. Asaasa has evolved from a low-class fashion to a high-class fashion and has become a mainstream fashion trend. There are two types of Asaasa, the Home-made and the factory made and there are two versions of factory made Asaasa design.

4.1.1 Homemade Asaasa



Fig.13: Homemade Asaasa cloth. Photo by Google

This is a homemade Asaasa cloth. It is made out of remnants of wax prints they are usually sewn in strips from pieces different designs of wax prints combined together in one pattern. This particular one is cut in squares to create quilt effect. Asaasa literally means patchwork.

4.1.2 Simple Factory Asaasa Design



Fig. 14: Factory made Asaasa. Photo by Naa Densua Tordzro

This is a version of the factory made Asaasa. In the cloth different well-known wax print designs are used in creating this cloth. The layout makes it look like it has been stitched together, but it is printed that way.

4.1.3 Complex Factory Asaasa Design



Fig. 15: Complex factory Asaasa design Photos by Naa Densua Tordzro

The designs in this wax prints are also well-known; however, its uniqueness is in the complexity of the technique used in printing the cloth. The patterns in both factory prints are basic characteristics of wax and roller prints. Designs used in wax prints are mainly acquired from the physical, social and cultural environment. The concepts picked from the environment are then transformed into patterns for prints (Akinwumi 2008), in reviewing the origin of patterns for African prints reveals that in the 19th century, manufacturers in Europe applied mostly universal themes of forage, plants and animals as patterns for cloth then latter copied African symbols as themes.

In Steiner's (Steiner 1985) review, the process of acquiring designs for prints are put into two phases; the 19th and 20th century. The 19th century saw a lot of copying of designs from afar either from records of ethnographic studies or by sending scouts to look for suitable motifs for design. Later in the 20th century, saw the movement of factories onto the African continent bringing the manufacturers closer to the consumers. Ruth Nielsen also suggested eight inspirational sources used in designing both wax and non-wax prints for the African market. These sources are Indian cottons, Javanese batiks, European prints, African indigenous cloth, traditional African objects and symbols, historical events, current events, political figures and ideas, natural forms, and geometrical designs ((Nielsen 1974), quoted by Steiner (Steiner 1985)).

The designs of 'African' prints may carry influences from other sources apart from what can be considered purely African. However, the acceptance of the cloth is dependent on the fact that the consumers can relate to it. An analysis of the acceptability of wax prints as an African product done by Nina Sylvanus concludes that, "The Africanity of the wax lies neither in the fabric, nor in its material usages, but in the signifiers which the fabric conveys and that are produced in the context of local consumption." (Sylvanus 2007), Therefore, the prints must be made to depict the social and cultural concepts of Africans or localized in terms of how the cloth is used to convey meaning to the consumer.

This can be achieved by assigning names to patterns and designs, also creating a social space where it can be used to express cultural meaning. By giving social meaning to prints, the patterns and names regardless of its origin assume symbolic status, which can be used to communicate in the society that uses it. This method of authenticating wax and roller prints has for generations made the industry dependent on the consumer preference when developing designs, styles and trends. Steiner (Steiner 1985) commenting on the relationship between consumer and manufacturer writes that:

“The textile trade between Europe and Africa in the 19th and early 20th centuries were a back and forth process in which European textile producers responded to African desires, and in which African consumers reacted to European stylistic and commercial proffers.”

Even though the manufacturers are gaining economically from the copied patterns used in producing the wax prints, it provides an artistic space for consumers to visually interpret their oral culture. The elements of design influence the meaning and names given to the cloth. This helps in the visualization of thought as well as providing variations in designing. For instance, patterns in prints sometimes give a reinterpretation and alternative representation of symbols.

An example can be seen in the wax print known as “Akofena” which has patterns of a series of swords, it literally means the “War sword” or “fighting sword. The name is an adoption of an Adinkra symbol and an Akan proverb “kunini ko a, wobo afena kye no safohene” translated as “the great warrior is given a state sword of rest even when he retires”. The Akofena is a state sword often used in ceremonial events. It is also used to bury kings and distinguished warriors. This proverb illustrates the Akan belief in authority, respect for their kings and bravery of their warriors. It is also a symbol of honour accorded a man of valour. The traditional adinkra symbol associated with this proverb is a sword. Not only does the pattern draw up a visual correspondence for the proverb but it also recycles the symbolic representation by associating it with the concept of swords.

4.2 Meaning and Representation of Colour: Ghanaian Perspective

Apart from adapting Ghanaian patterns and names, colour plays a significant role in adding meaning to cloth. The use of colours in social and ritual spaces has symbolic meaning. Antubam (Antubam 1963) described a wide range of colours used among some ethnic groups in Ghana and the meanings attached to them in his book “Notion of Colours”. He wrote: Yellow and gold represents royalty, black represents, night, sorrow and vicious spirits such as death and the devil. Green

represents fertility, newness and primness; red represents anger, the art of war, calamity and show of dissatisfaction. Blue relates to love, female tenderness, and serenity. Grey could also stand for blame and degradation, white represents spiritual entities, like God and deified spirits of the ancestors, joy, victory and purity.

Some colour combinations such as red and yellow represents life and its power over sickness. In his study of the Akan cosmology among the Kwahu's of Ghana, Bartle (1983) gave his version of meanings attached to the colours red, white and black. In his symbolic representation, white represents fertility, joy, victory and cleaning. Black represents power, energy, dynamics, time, change and destiny while red represented fecundity, provision, danger, defilement, dirt and seriousness (Bartle, 1983: 92). While there are similarities with Antobam's classification, Bartle's model merges some of the meanings assigned to other colours into his three groups. This findings in my opinion lies in the purpose and approach of the enquiries and expectation of the outcomes hoping to achieve and does not restrict the uses of colours. While Antubam draws his conclusion from the commonly understood and accepted uses of colours in social spaces, Bartle's findings and conclusion is drawn from the ideological perspectives of the community the enquiry was conducted with.

Labi writing about the use of colours in the funeral of Otumfuo Opoku Ware the II explains that the bright colours of gold and yellow Kente worn by the king laying in-state (Labi 2000) as opposed to the red and black worn by the mourners at the funeral is situated in the belief that the king is still on a journey to "the village" while the mourners show their deep loss for the departed king. Ironically, the traditional priests at the ceremony were dressed in white, which echoes their belief in life even in death.

This evidence goes to prove that while there may have been various influences on the uses of colour among Ghanaians, some colours and their symbolic meanings are still relevant to defined cultural spaces. These levels of meaning affect the interpretation assigned to a print irrespective of the earlier assigned name or

pattern. Thus, the same pattern will be appropriate for one event and not the other depending on its colour variation. The culture of imitation which underlined the creation of wax printing still persists in the industry today. Wax and roller prints have copied from a many cloth cultures in its environment. In Ghana, the Kente and adinkra cloth has influenced wax and roller print designs greatly.

4.3 Trading and Marketing of Wax and Roller Prints

The positionality of women as active participants in the global markets space, give them advantage of the economic opportunities offered by technological changes and the subsequent reordering of class relations of production. Women in Ghana play a key role not only as distributors and consumers, but also as purveyors, producers of knowledge and of a new cultural form in society. Apart from the colourful and artistic appeal of wax and roller prints, its success largely depends on the way it has been marketed. Women make up majority of wholesalers and retailers in the service sector Amu (Amu 2005) (2005: 4). For the wax and roller prints reach consumers, an effective medium of transfer has must be established between the Manufacturing companies, wholesalers and the retailers. Their role in the cloth industry is crucial to the survival of the commodity as these women interact directly with the consumer and therefore serve as an interface between manufacturers and consumers. They pass on information on colours, fashion trends and what will possibly sell for the manufacturer. On the other hand, the retailers provide services to the consumer in terms of recommendations, as to what wax print suits their social needs. Women in Ghana have dominated the cloth retailing sector since the colonial era. Their dominance in the retailing sector of trade according to Dumor (1982) can be attributed to the structure of colonial administration which created fewer avenues for the employment of women in the colonial system (Dumor; 1982 cited in Dogbe (Dogbe 2003), (2003: 385). Some schools of thought (my aunties and women market traders own oral knowledge) also argue that it a way of taking control from the colonizers and getting back some of self-worth and wealth that was lost during colonisation. One of such avenues for the women is naming and retailing of cloth.

Along the coast of West Africa for instance, a powerful class of wealthy women had started to emerge in the 1960s and 70s. The success of women in the retailing of wax and roller prints can be attributed to the skills they perfected in reaching consumers who are mostly women, by providing names for patterns that echoed experiences and emotions that are difficult to express. The naming process succeeded in incorporating daily experiences of environmental, social and cultural shared the community into wax and roller prints, then transformed these experiences into marketable commodities. These experiences are drawn from cultural images and socially ascribed roles. Cloth then presents an avenue for the creative and artistic expression of social discourse which ‘forces dialogue and opens up social negotiations’ (Sutherland-Addy and Diaw 2005).

The textiles retail market has served as a crucial point for the wholesaling and retailing of wax and roller prints since the colonial era. The market is the central business centre for the Greater Accra region and the entire country. The textiles retail market (Makola) according to Robertson (Robertson 1983) was established in 1927 and it came to replace the Salaga market in its importance. Salaga in 16th century was one of leading market centres in West Africa. Kola, beads, ostrich feathers, animal hides, textiles and gold were among the goods traded in the market. However, in the 18th century, the market became key centre in the trading of humans. People from the Upper West, Upper East and Northern Regions served as sources for slaves. Salaga Slave Market is originally located in the East Gonja District of Northern Ghana. During the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Salaga served as an important market where slaves were transported to the coast for export. The market also served as outposts for the movement of slaves along the Trans-Saharan routes. The slave traders created an annex in Accra also called Salaga Market. This was the destination where the slaves are auctioned to potential buyers and owners in a barter trade for Textiles, Kola nuts, cowries and gold before they were out the continent. The original market was demolished during the 1979 uprising in Ghana.

Makola No. 2 was built adjacent the location of the old market in 1992. Makola serves as the distribution point for most consumable goods. At the top of Robertson’s 1970 hierarchy of trading activities was cloth selling. Ga women were

said to have dominated the trade in wax prints in of access to the market and distribution links Robertson, (Robertson 1983) (1983:470). The other explanation is that, the location of the market is in the Greater Accra Region, which is predominantly a population of Ga.

4.4 Re-organization of Cloth of and Textiles Trade

After Ghana's Independence from colonisation, came a lot of restructuring, reorganising and creation of new institutions and organisations to suit the needs of the nation. One of the organisations that needed this new direction is the cloth and textiles industry, to guard against the influx of imitated wax prints from China and other issues facing the retailers. Associations were formed across the country by the Wax and Textiles print traders, these associations act as trade and welfare union for its members. The print markets are organized in clusters with strings of stalls displaying almost the same type of wares. This clustering helped in the formation of the associations, it also made it easier for referrals of customers from one stall to the other, this happens when the customers is such of a particular cloth and can find it in the stall they visited. One of the association formal role is negotiations. After series of confrontations with the Government appointed task force, who were tasked with seizures of smuggled imitated prints manufactured in China.

As the retailing of wax and roller prints trade business grew in Ghana, so did the demand. This means importing from other source to make up for the demand. Prints sold on the market mostly come from the four local companies and neighbouring West African countries especially Togo. Even though Togo also traded in Dutch wax and Roller Print, most of the prints from Togo are mainly produced in China. Togo port is a free port zone in West Africa, which makes goods including wax and roller prints cleared from their port cheaper than the locally manufactured prints. Prints produced locally are sold alongside imported Dutch prints which are both highly priced, on the other hand, prints imported from China through Togo are very cheaply priced and imitations of already existing and well know patterns on the Ghanaian market.

The difference between the quality of an imported prints and locally manufactured ones are almost unnoticeable, the imitated prints from China is obvious and noticeable in some instances due the quality of print, however, immediate differences are seen in brand name and price. Sylvanus (Sylvanus 2007) in his enquiries about the dominance of Chinese prints wrote about the role of Togolese entrepreneurs, who in the quest for new trade opportunities and new ideas ended up handing over the much-protected blueprints for West African wax to the Asian they turned to. Togo then did not only provide a gate way for the importation of cheaply imitated wax and roller prints but also lead the way for the Asian dominance in the textile trade in West Africa.

With an increase in production and the competitiveness of the print market, innovation is critical for survival, this is demonstrated in how designs changed to suit trends. the revival of old patterns and the creations of new concepts for design patterns, the range of subjects and subject matter, design in prints is limitless. When customers of the cloth and textiles market, demand for old prints designs that has gone out of print locally for some time, some cloth traders then send the patterns to China for reproduction because it is cheaper. This also confirms the participation of Ghanaian traders in legitimizing the Asian participation in the Textile trade.

4.5 Ghanaian Names: Making Meaning, Marketing Cloth and Textiles

Culturally, Ghanaian women redefined factory printed textiles from the Dutch imports and home manufacturers by assigning meaning and value through the phenomenon of naming, to reflect and conform to the beliefs culture and society. This has resulted in the acceptance of imported cloths into the Ghanaian society and has become a “visual voice” for creative expressions, a meaningful tool for non-verbal communication. To understand the meaning of wax prints in the lives of women Ghana requires acknowledgment of the cloth’s complex and complete

content, which includes not only the beautiful colours and patterns but also the names and meanings that are associated with the designs. One of the methods used by women in marketing prints is by assigning names to patterns in the prints. The names are often inspired by the environment, popular songs and proverbs and are usually accompanied with attractive colours which suit various events and purposes. In Ghana, there is a special value attached to cloth and Textiles with names, just like the Hand-stamped Adinkra cloths.

Handwoven Kente cloths and the Gonja woven cloth, have names and meaning associated with them. Kente, Adinkra the Gonja cloth are older cloths with an established naming system. Names are assigned by retailers and wholesalers not only for marketing the cloth but also to initiate social communication (Yankah (Yankah 1995); (Bickford 1994). The Wax prints both imported Dutch prints and local prints goes through the naming and value process. The names transformed prints from mere commodities and artistic goods to materials of social significance. The prints are incorporated as well as giving value according to cultural, social, political and environmental issues happening at the time the cloths get to the market, this most of all help with the sales of the cloths. Sometimes names given to cloth may commemorate an important person or event.

More often, names give to cloth is generated by an image in the print design which raises societal and environmental issues. Proverbial expression, in the form of the entire proverb or an abridged segment thereof are used in the naming process.

4.5.1 Nyame Bekyere

The names given to cloth may be invocations, like “Nyame Bekyere” translated as “God will make a way”.

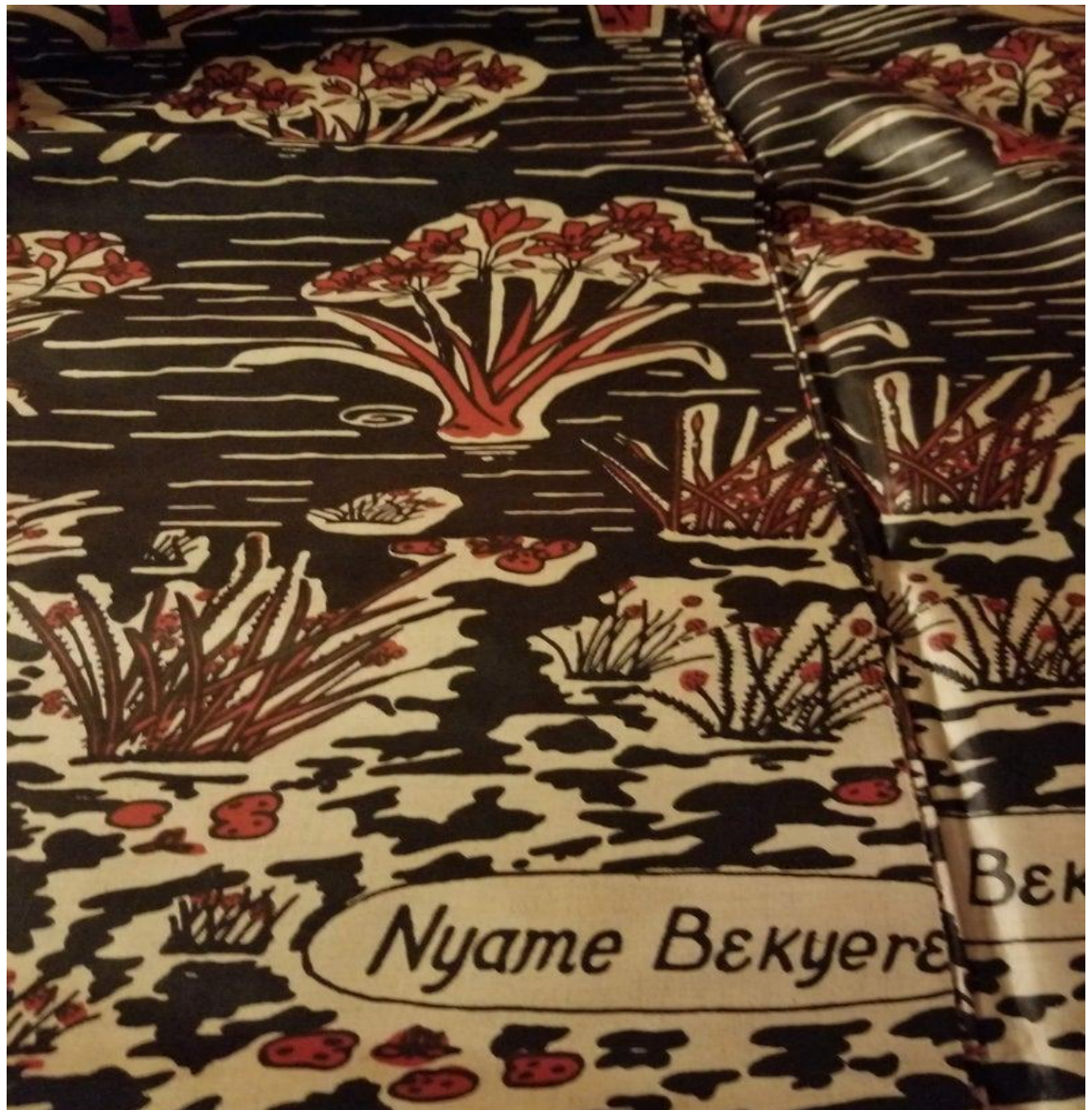


Fig. 16: “Nyame Bekyere”, God will make a way. Photo from Google

4.5.2 Wafa Me Nnwa

Another example is “Woafa me nnwa” meaning; ‘You have taken me for a snail, or you have taken me for granted’.



Fig.17: Wafa me nnwa, You have taken me for granted. Photo by Naa Densua Tordzro

4.5.3 Dua Koro Gye Mfrma Ebu

Or a profound statement on life, “Dua Koro Gye Mfrma Ebu” which translates as “When one tree faces the storm, it collapses”. This encourages communal work and cautions against isolation.



Fig.18: Dua Koro Gye Mfrma Ebu. Photo from Google

4.5.4 Otan Nnim Akrokro

Another one is and “Otan nnim akrokro” meaning, “Hate Knows no Pampering”, the explanation is that no matter what you do, you can’t change the person who this likes you



Fig.19: Otan nnim akrokro Photo from Google

As such, Printed cloths are considered as a powerful communicative tool for interacting in diverse social environments, it is also viewed as a medium used for articulating and communicating ideas. Wax and roller prints are the most artistic and visually beautiful when it comes to its surface. Its role as a personal object provides an ideal medium for displaying signs, symbols, and colours that represent the challenges of daily life. Wax and Roller Prints names, however, are not printed on the cloth itself but are transmitted orally retailers’ social networks and consumers. Cloth specialists and scholars agree that named cloths have a higher status and value for Ghanaians, for both men and women, than unnamed cloths regardless of the type of cloth (Bickford (Bickford 1994); Domowitz (Domowitz 1992); Gott (Gott 1994); Littrell (Littrell 1977)). While a gift of cloth in itself is considered thoughtful, a six- or 12-yard piece of named cloth is spectacular, named

cloth accrues economic and social value over time. People buy cloth not only because “it is beautiful”, they buy it “because it has a name” (Young: fieldnotes 2001).

4.6 The Concept of Naming in Ghana

To further understand the importance of named cloth, particularly named wax prints, it is necessary to explore the concept of naming in Ghana. The Akans are noted for naming some objects with proverbs, swords, royal stools, and cloth share this characteristic. As an established fact by all sectors of the cloth and textiles industry, that naming of cloth and textiles are done by the retailers. This goes to support Boelman and Holthoon (Boelman and Holthoon 1973) study of wax print cloth and textiles retailers as the primary name-givers. Wax prints are not only named in Akan in Ghana, the names come in other languages such as Ga, Ewe, and Krobo, to name a few. The prevalence of cloth names presented orally in the Akan language, by both native and non-native speakers in Ghana, is due to the predominance of the Akan Retailer in the cloth and textile industry throughout the country.

The idea of naming of cloth is derived from the concept and systems of naming a child. Naming is an important social marker for many communities in Ghana. Every living thing especially human are named at birth, however in Ghana it is a process. For instance, when a child is newly born, the requirement is that the child is given a name in an elaborate ceremony known as outdoorings. However, in most communities in Ghana, the newly born child will have to wait for seven days, as it is believed by the Akans, Ga's and some communities that, an ancestor has returned with the birth of every child. During the seven days period of waiting, the child is viewed as a spirit in transition. However, if the spirit decides to stay, the child is considered a person and is named on the eighth day in a celebration with family and friends to signify the transition from the Land of the Ancestors into the living.

The same terminology “outdoorings” denotes the public presentation of a new wax print design, a fact that also reflects the spiritual importance of this cloth. It is

through the given name and the formal ceremony on the eighth day of life that the infant receives his or her identity as a member of the community (Sarpong 1977: 88-90) (Sarpong 1967). The ritual act of naming authenticates the child as a social being endowed with the rights and responsibilities of a community. With colonialism came Christianity, which carries its own sets of rules and regulations. It was compulsory for member of every family to attend church service and It is also expected that members of every family get baptised in the church and given a Christian name (i.e. Peter) Since then it has become a ritual for a child to be baptised and given a Christian name in addition to the traditional name (i.e. Nii Amu) that the child has.

Apart from the traditional name and “Christian” names, the child is also named according to his/her gender (i.e. boy) and the day (i.e. Wednesday: Mensah) he/she was born. In addition to all this, the position of the child (i.e. third born child: Kwaku) in the line of birth by the parent, also adds up the number of names the he/she gets. Finally, the family name (surname: Doodu) is added to the list of names the gets. For instance, in the Ga community if the child is born a boy, on a Wednesday, a third child, has been Christened and named traditionally in addition to his father’s name, this how the child’s name will be. It will be: ‘Peter Nii Amu Kwaku Mensah Doodu’. This is how elaborate the naming process can be.

4.7 Cloth and Textiles for Rituals

When babies are about four months old, they get official photos taken with a backdrop of named cloth, because of the spiritual connotations associated to naming a child. More often the named cloth has mystical connotations and deep philosophical meanings associated with it. Some names given to cloths including Wax and Roller prints, permits the cloth to be used during rituals and at events involving the living. For example, during baby-naming outdoorings ceremonies, the parents of the new child wear white wax print in celebration, this design bear names associated with family, health, and longevity.

Traditional marriages in Ghana are considered as proper marriages as it unites families. Before colonisation, Christianity and weddings, traditional marriages were the only recognised and approved union between two people. Even though

traditional marriages are legally binding and certified by the marriage registry, people still get married in the church in addition to the traditional marriage in order to fulfil both traditions.

During the colonial era, unless one is married in church ‘the Christian way’ the marriage is not recognised, this belief is being practiced by some churches till today. In Ghana it is believed that when one marries, both families become one. Named cloth is also used during traditional marriage ceremonies. The named cloth is expected and required to win the approval and respect of the parents of the intended bride. Kente is the most desired form of dressing for the bride to be the husband in the traditional marriage, 6 to 12 pieces of 6-yard pieces of wax prints bearing names with the themes of blessings, advice and family life are frequently presented as dowry in addition to a gold engagement ring. Women accumulate named wax prints as part of their cloth treasures; female kin will inherit such cloth and its wealth upon the death of the owner.

Naming permeates all aspects of life in Ghana. Mourning a loved is expressed through cloths. Funerals in Ghana are filled with various cloth worn by mourners carry proverbial names that comment on death. The bereaved family of the deceased tie torn strips of wax prints to their left elbows or wrists to identify themselves as “chief mourners” (chief mourners are immediate family members of the deceased). As a practice, naming gives “life” or identifiable characteristics to a past mystic entity, naming creates meaning. Linguist Kwesi Yankah during an interview in 2001 with Paulette Young, elaborates on the importance of naming for Ghanaians:

“Naming is a mark of identity. It facilitates reference and for us it’s an opportunity for us to make a statement. It’s an opportunity to remember an event, for instance. So many cloths and sandals are named after major social, political events [...] It’s an opportunity to mark an event but also to make memorable the most emotional parts of your life. You may go through a very emotional experience. By naming it you are making it permanent, easy to remember. It is not something that is

fleeting; you will [not] let it pass. You name it to make it permanent and to make it a permanent monument”. (Yankah: Interview 8 May 2001).

Many personal objects in society sandals, beads, headgear, and cloth have names and thus convey messages. Art historian Nii Quarcoopome(1997: 137) (Quarcoopome 1987) emphasizes that for the Akan “art is not only for aesthetic contemplation but is also part of a complex system of thought. It can generate philosophical debate even when it is utilitarian.” To properly read message-bearing objects requires a shared knowledge among the performer that is the presenter of the message and the audience or recipients. Since an overwhelming majority of the objects in question are named with proverbs in their entirety or partial versions, knowledge of their meanings is key. Proverbial expressions become stylized in their permanent forms with repeated and continual usage so that each time a particular object appears, its message becomes a “hardened” part of the society.

A market woman with a special command of proverbs remarked that from the age of 10 she believed she always knew proverbs, since they were all around her throughout her life. Seeing a design worn by the chief, at festivals, and on important people in the woman’s life, reinforced the meanings behind the cloths so that she was able to easily recognize their messages, if only in their general form. “To know proverbs,” she remarked, “is to be a real Ghanaian.” (Young 2004).

4.8 Cloth and Textiles: Acknowledgement in Print

A number of names have also developed around political discourses and figures. Cloths like Nkrumah pencil (fig.19) and Akuffo Ahenie (fig.20) are registered in this domain.

4.8.1 Nkrumah Pencil



Fig.20: Nkrumah pencil. Image from Google

The former celebrates the signing of independence by Kwame Nkrumah in 1957. Akuffo Ahenie which literally means the reign of Nana Akuffo may refer to an earlier political dispute in the Akuapem state during the late 1880s between Nana Fredrick William Kwasi Akuffo, Okuapehene and Nana Akrofi, Lartehene over a medallion given to the latter from the British Government with the inscription “King of Larte” (Labi 2002).

4.8.2 Akuffo Ahenie



Fig.21: Akuffo Ahenie. Image from Google

Historical and monumental places like Senchi bridge which is also known as the Adomi Bridge. The bridge was originally known as Volta bridge, constructed in 1955 by Sir William Halcrow and partners to connect the Gold Coast to the then Trans Volta Togoland. The bridge was commissioned by Ghana's first president,

Kwame Nkrumah together with Sir Charles Noble Arden Clark on January 25th, 1957. It became known as Senchi Bridge because Senchi was then the nearest big town and Adomi was then a small village which was not even represented on maps (Names on Stamps, 2008). The design of the cloth is based the ripple of river that flows underneath the bridge into the ocean.

4.8.3 Senchi Bridge or Adomi Bridge



Fig.22: Senchi Bridge or Adomi Bridge. Photo by Naa Densua Tordzro

4.9 Cloth and textiles: Advice in Print

Themes, symbol and object are commonly used like advice are represented in cloth. An abject like Dice is used as a metaphor for a specific advice in cloth, the

advice is targeted to a group of people in society was start thing and backs out or live situations or things unfinished.

4.9.1 Se Wu Ni Sika

“Se wu ni sika a men’twa block” translate as Don’t start something you can’t finish. Dice symbolise the importance of making a good plan, reflected in the organisation of the stones.

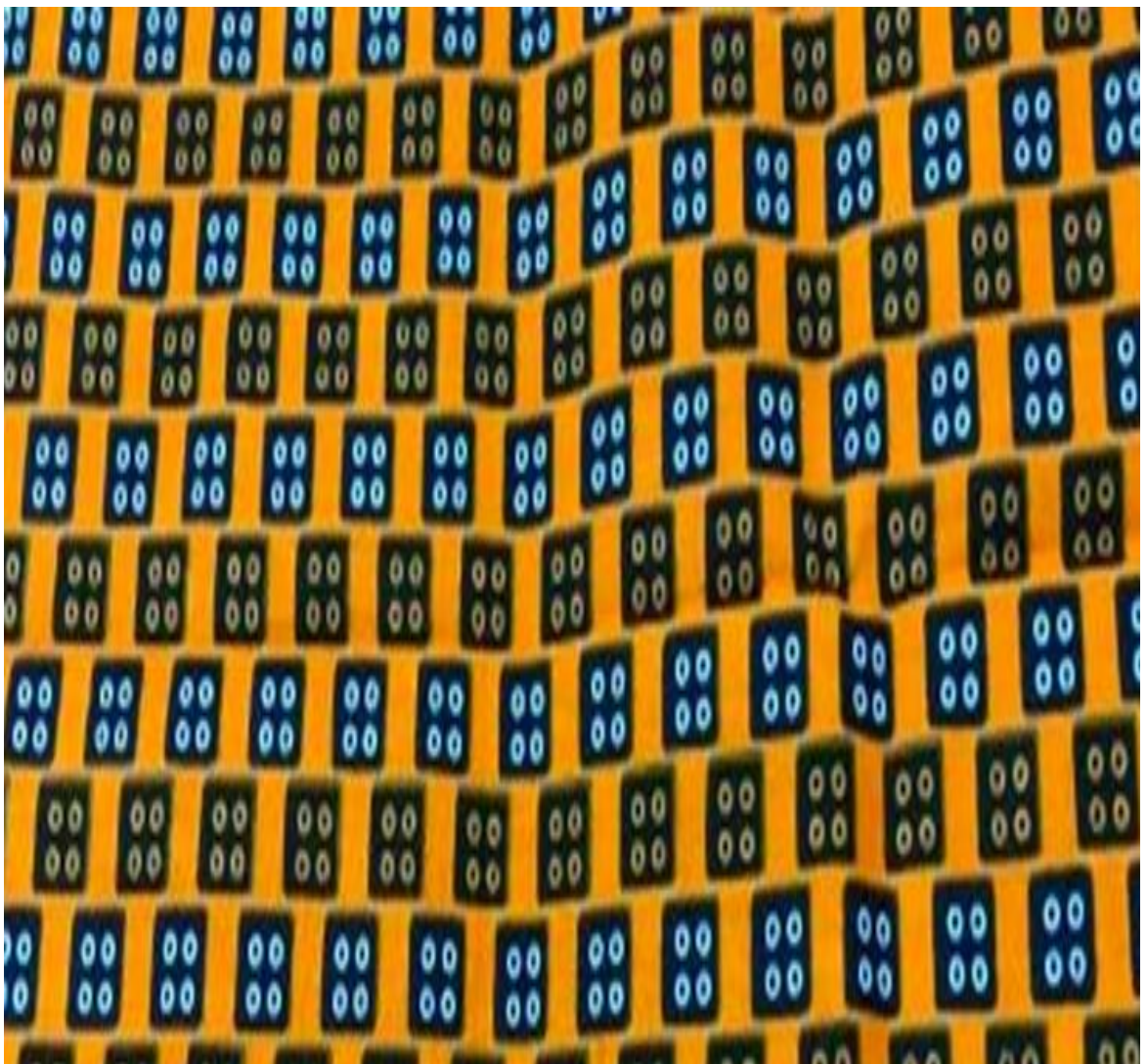


Fig. 23: Dice or “Se wu ni sika” Photo by Naa Densua Tordzro

4.9.2 Se Wo Nsa Nkyii Be Ye Wu De

“Se Wo nsa ekyii be ye wu de a entise wo nsa yem”, means, “Licking food from the back of your hand does not taste the same as good as licking it off your inner palm’. If you need something done right, do it yourself.



Fig.24: “Se Wo nsa ekyii be ye wu de” Image from Google

4.10 Cloth and Textiles: Same Cloth Multiple Names

There are some differences in names across ethnic lines and sometimes there is more than one name allocated to the same pattern within the same group. The differences reflect how various cultures perceive the patterns of the cloth.

4.10.1 Nkyenfre

A popular cloth known as Nkyenfre (fig.24) in Akan, which refers to the broken remnants of a clay pot, among the Ga consumers it known as “Didei baa”, which is a name of a type of leafy looking fish, and Koliko; which refers to fried potatoes and yam among the Ewe consumers.



Fig. 25: Nkyenfren - Broken remnants of a clay pot. Image from Google

4.10.2 Kpotoo Kadaa, Abrabo Tese Srada, Odeshie Ennsu

Another example is this popular old print known among the Akans as Odeshie ennsu; meaning, “A royal does not cry” or “Abrabo Tese Srada” meaning, “Life Can be like a carpenter’s saw”. It is known among the Ga’s as “Kpotoo Kadaa”, meaning, “The jaws of a pig”. All the names given to this cloth points to the harsh realities of life. Sometimes the carpenter’s saw or blade is sharp and other times the blade is blunt, such as in life.



Fig.26: Kpotoo Kadaa, Abrabo Tese Srada, Odeshie ennsu. Photo by Naa Densua Tordzro

The patterns of wing-like motifs are spread throughout the cloth in different sizes and shapes. Around the wing-like motifs are floral designs and in the wings are scales. Some of the motifs have thin lines and what appears like a sharp jagged edge, there are also dots spread throughout the entire cloth. This design pattern is called shrimps by Vlisco, because of the shrimplike motifs distributed throughout the textile design. The idea behind this design pattern is the concept of hardship one sometimes faces on daily bases in life, the spread of the motifs in the shows how one feels scattered, like being pulled in all direction. The important message here is imbedded in the names of the cloth rather than the designs in the print.

The new wax prints although the names are inscribed in the cloth is not as popular as the old ones mentioned above and have a relatively shorter shelf life compare to the older and well-known ones. These prints are often produced when there a big event, such as political events, funerals and anniversary celebrations. They come in mostly white backgrounds with either blue or black prints. The names are usually phrases or sentences woven around specific concepts such as God, political slogan, motherhood or death. Some example of the inscribed named cloth: “Waye bi, obaatanpa”; which means “You’ve done your best good mother”.

4.11 New Trends in Naming Prints

Sylvanus argues that: “The role of women in the retailing of cloth is still crucial to the manufacturer as they continue to play a significant role in the conception, marketing, and adaptation of products to the tastes and desires of the consumer” (Sylvanus 2007). Even though older generation of retail women still control the naming of cloth in the marketplace, the concept is changing. There is an emerging class of cloth retailers who own prints with patterns and names inscribed in the cloth. These women with the help of Textiles designers, create designs, patterns, colour pallets with the assigned names for the manufacturer to print on behalf.

There are instances where manufacturers come to an arrangement with a retailer to name an unnamed pattern, in these arrangements, the patterns are owned by the manufacturer, but the retailer who assigns the names is given full retailing privileges. In the light of the new systems of ownership emerging in the designing and naming of cloth, new names are also being created. Some of the new names are sometimes reassigned to existing design patterns that already have names, this sometimes cause confusion for the consumer who knows the original names of the renamed cloths. An example is the design pattern called Gramophone Apawa now renamed “Nantwi Bin” (fig. 26) meaning “cow dung” The new rendition is phrase used to describe jealousy, “natwi bin”- “cow dung”, in the hot sun appears fine and dry on the surface but hot, moist and stinky beneath, that is how jealousy works sometimes.

4.11.1 “Nantwi Bin”, “Cow Dung”, Gramophone

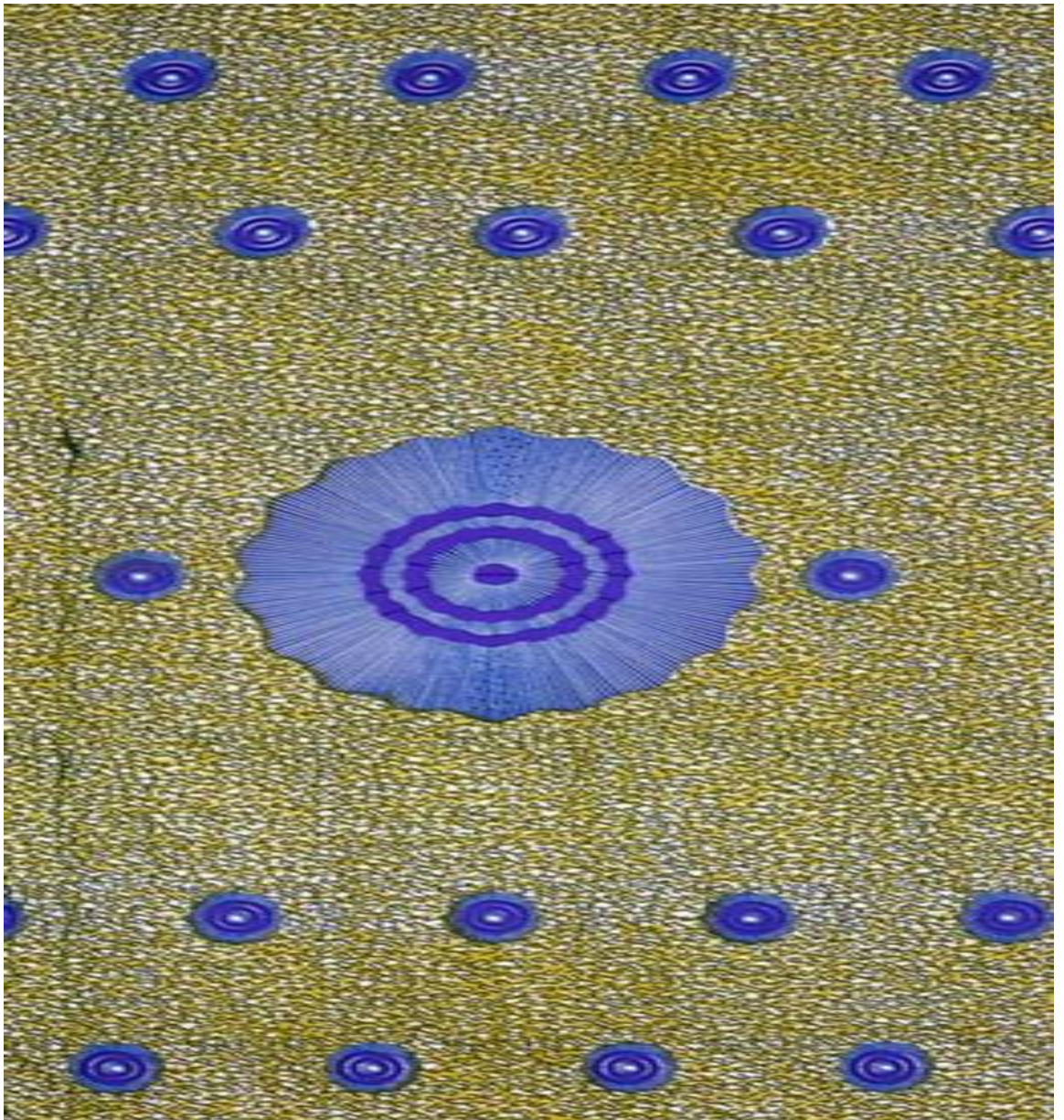


Fig.27: “Nantwi Bin” Gramophone’ Apawa. Image from Google

4.11.2 Waye bi, Obaatanpa



Fig.28: Photo: Waye bi, Obaatanpa. Image from Google

4.11.3 Obaatanpa W'ayeyi Nsa Da



Fig.29: “Obaatanpa w’ayeyi nsa da”, meaning “Good mother your praise will never end”. Image from Google

4.12 Conclusion

Wax and roller prints constitute the largest portion of textiles produced and consumed in Ghana. In an effort to break away from the colonialism, women have subconsciously been going through the process of decolonisation, by redefining the uses cloth. By naming the prints it gives control and ownership back into the hands of the of the users of the textiles. Going with the common belief that we are what we wear, it makes sense for the cloth and textiles bare their names in local Ghanaian languages. Women have always dominated the retailing of the cloth and textiles market by assigning names to patterns. Wax and roller prints are often graced with popular themes from religious, social, cultural and the environment. The way they are used in some instances affects the content of the themes used. Some of the social events that see the elaborate use of prints in

Ghana are Funerals, naming ceremonies, Islamic event such as 'Id al-fitr and Christian church services. In the next chapter three social concepts will be discussed in relation to how they are used in prints. Wax and Roller prints come in diverse colours and patterns which are sold in various markets across the country. In the next chapter three social concepts will be discussed in relation to how they are used in prints.



Fig.30: 'Gbeke Fofoi ', Night Flower. Garment design and image by Naa Densua Tordzro

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCEPT REPRESENTATION IN WAX AND ROLLER PRINTS

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the three social concepts namely death, motherhood and the supernatural mentioned in the previous chapter as well as patterns and names that express them will be discussed in detail. The patterns and names will be analysed and discussed in the context of the three concepts named and under categories of 'Ntomapa' (old cloth) and 'Fancy prints' (new cloth). These terms are used by cloth retailers to distinguish between quality wax prints, especially those with the old well-known designs and name, Roller or Fancy prints which have shorter life spans and are used for everyday activities. For the purpose of this study, the patterns have been divided into two main groups based on how long the patterns have been in use; this is further divided into three sub-categories based on concepts represented in the cloth. It is difficult to date these cloths; which unlike other products of art do not come with dates. This makes it difficult to assign a specific time to their birth, or origin of these works of art. The available cloths for this study are those collected from the market. With the cloths collected, the old patterns (Ntomapa) are patterns that have existed as far back as the 1950s. These have well-known names and patterns, but the names are not inscribed in the cloth. The new patterns represent designs from the 1990s. These have their names inscribed in the cloth. Cloths selected have themes that express ideas either directly or indirectly. Ntomapa means 'good or proper cloth'. Most of the information on cloth in this chapter is based on oral knowledge from my Grandmother, my Auntie and the market women (cloth retailers).

5.1 Women, Spaces and the Use of Cloth

The social defined roles for women and men are culturally determined by the societies in which they live (Ampofo-Adomako, 2001:198). The dynamics of the society also determine the avenues for expressing these roles. Expression is

important as it provides grounds consolidating roles as well as managing conflict that comes with role performance. Cloth is one method developed by women to communicate their experiences and issues that affect their daily lives (Sutherland-Addy and Diaw 2005). Cloth dialogue is used in every available space. Women therefore use both formal and informal platform to make their statement. An example of an informal space where women use cloth dialogue is illustrated as follows:

During daily interactions, “textile rhetoric along with proverb creation constitutes a tool in which women along the West African coast can resort, Akan women for instance, can use such tools when they want to make sarcastic arguments within a polygamous marriage. A proverbial textile prints such as Ahwene pa nkasa (The precious beads does not talk) can be worn by a teasing senior wife who might well feel like proclaiming loudly that “Man is not a pillow on which one rests one’s head.” (Sutherland-Addy and Diaw 2005)

Cloth dialogue provides an effective platform where issues are confronted in a non-abusive but strong statement devoid of unhealthy emotions. The message of the cloth can be as effective as its verbal form and has the capability to stir up a reaction when the target of the message is reached and successful.

Formal platforms where cloth is used actively as a communicative tool by women is during naming ceremonies and instances of childbirth. The Ga of southern Ghana are noted for their elaborate and dramatic celebration of naming ceremonies. The event popularly called ‘outdooring’ is often held on the seventh day after birth. The ceremony, which was originally done early in the morning, is to welcome and introduce a new-born officially into the society and the people among whom he or she will live (Abarry 1997). The child is on this day given a name and social identity. The ceremony brings together both the paternal and maternal families of the new-born child, friends and selected members of the community. After the solemn ritual, music and dancing could last the entire day. Naming ceremonies are also one event where cloth features extensively. Cloth is used symbolically to

express a number of things. White or bright colours are the acceptable colours designated for the celebration. Abarry, commenting on the dress code for the ceremony writes, 'Clothes coloured red or black may not be worn as those symbolize danger and death respectively. The women often wear a blouse on top of a loose skirt or wrapper made from a wax print' on such occasions (Abarry 1997). The colour white has symbolic meaning. The mother also wears white for a period of time to indicate her new status. During this period a number of prints with names can be worn to make a statement. White represents long life, and good fortune which is the request made for the child and the mother in prayers. In recent times, Christians may perform similar rituals in church in place of or in addition to the traditional ceremony. In these instances, also, white is prescribed as the colour for the ceremony.

Events such as naming ceremonies are also platforms for the celebration of womanhood. In Ghana womanhood is defined by certain roles and expectations. According to Sai (1982:236), 'In Ghanaian women's value system, marriage and motherhood, childbearing and housekeeping are considered as a given lifestyle and norm for all women, whether urban or rural.' Also, the Ghanaian woman values marriage and children and tradition expects these of her (Nsarkoh, 1982: 24). Cloth is not only used symbolically but also provides one of such avenues for expressing the roles of the Ghanaian woman in society and the family. One of such popular gender roles assigned to women is the role of a mother. The concept of mother and woman are almost synonymous and are often used interchangeably.

The concept of motherhood generally refers to the state of being a mother. A mother is a female parent. In most West African societies, the state of motherhood is highly respected, and children are highly valued. For instance, among the Ga, childbirth is celebrated with elaborate ceremonies. Children are considered a sign of increase, good fortune and productivity. The concept of motherhood is also laced with certain cultural expectations. For instance, among the Akan, the mother is considered the preserver and source of the family.

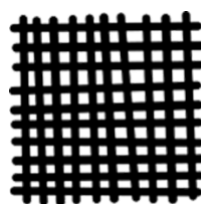
The Akan are a matrilineal group and the duty of lineage sustenance is assigned to the woman; hence, the concept of mother is central to the Akan society. The Akan have various sayings that illustrate this assumption, and this also indicates the importance of the concept to the society. A popular adage that affirms this view in the Akan society is, 'if your mother has died, your family is finished Van

Der Geest (Van der geest 2013). Another assumption linked with the concept of motherhood is the mother as a caregiver.

In the Akan system of belief, children are believed to have the blood of their mothers which makes them human and the spirit of their fathers which gives them their personality (Owoahene-Acheampong 1998). This makes the mother the provider of physical needs and the father the source of spiritual protection. The mother is expected to provide basic needs such as food and clothing and is expected to give good counsel to her children. These roles have provided themes for naming and designing prints for the Ghanaian market.

5.2 Representation of Womanhood and Marriage in Prints

This section examines some of the themes found in prints relating to the concept of womanhood and marriage. In many communities in Ghana, marriage is considered as sign of maturity in life, it is also considered as a sign of respect and honour by the woman's family when their daughter gets married. In the process of marriage dowries are presented to bride to be, cloth makes a bulk of the dowry. The parents of the bride to be also get presented with cloth as gratitude, honour and for bringing their daughter up well. The cloth presented as dowry all must have names and must all be 'Ntomapa'. This cloth names mostly carry messages of advice to bride as guide through marriage and life. There are variety of sample of this cloth the purpose of writing a selected few will be discussed. Women learn cloth names over the course of their daily lives. Most of my knowledge of cloths is what I learnt from my grandmother, she taught me through songs and proverbs.



Kete Pa

“Kete pa” means “Good sleeping mat” or “good bed ”. Also known as: “Daadze mpodua” meaning “Iron bed” by the Fanti’s, the Akan tribes of Central Region of Ghana. The design in the cloth was taken from the Adinkra concept of good marriage. From the expression that a woman who has a good marriage is said to sleep on a good bed. (Above: Adinkra symbol for Kete pa) (Arthur 2017).

5.2.1 Daadze Mpodua

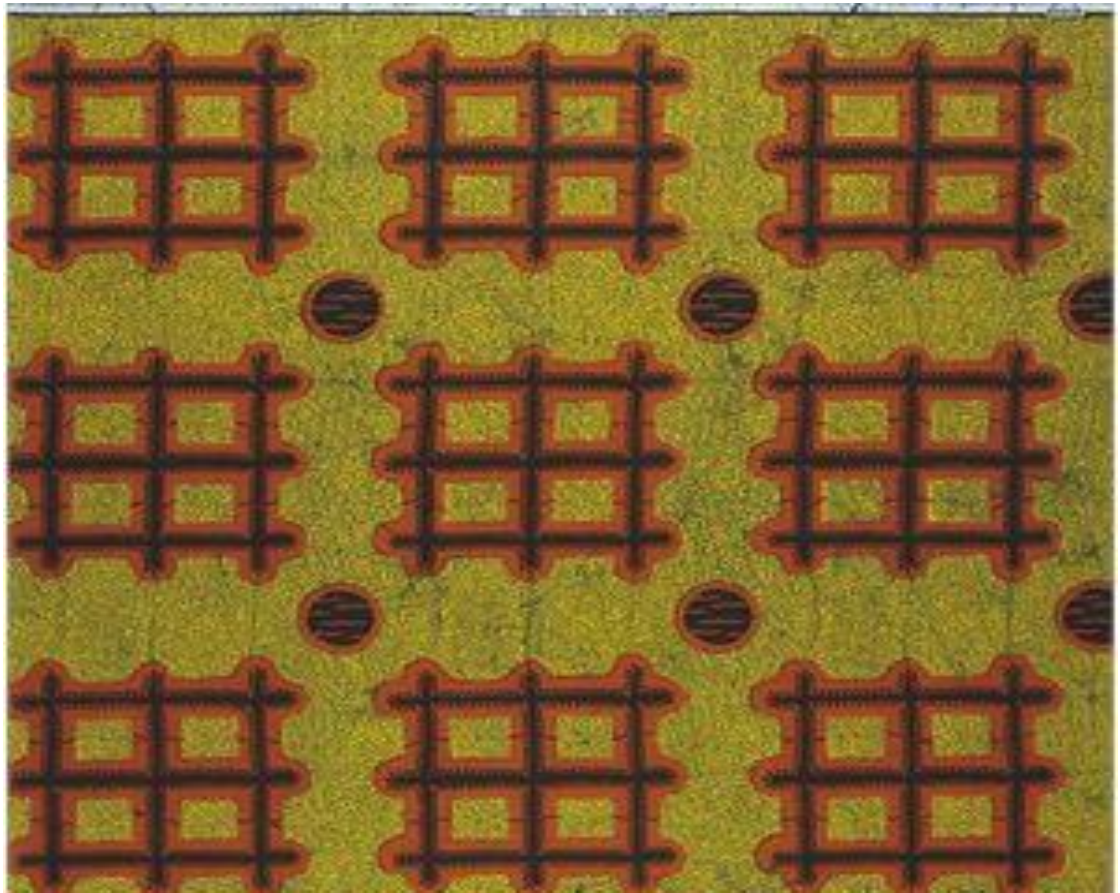


Fig.31: “Daadze mpodua” meaning “Iron bed”. Image from Google

5.2.2 Kete Pa



Fig.32: “Kete pa” means “Good sleeping mat” or “good bed”. Image from Google.

“Kete pa” is an Akan phrase that means ‘good sleeping mat or good bed’ and “Daadze mpodua” meaning “Iron bed”. The phrase is related to an adinkra symbol that refers to good marriage, love and faithfulness. It encompasses attributes such as hospitality and good care. Visually the design in (fig. 31) has striking resemblance to the locally manufactured mat.

The basic elements used for the design are shapes, specifically rectangles. The rectangles are arranged such that they form lines, textures and shapes. Horizontally, the red implied lines are relatively more appealing to the eye because of its red hue. The other colours are seen as units of triangles with two distinct sizes. The variety of colours also forms a texture from a distant view. Contrastingly, the colours, shapes and patterns formed in the design do not

project the theme of the cloth, neither does it bring any sense of love or marriage. From the above discussion, the design of the cloth will not make impact unless the viewer knows the name and the symbolic meaning without considering its attractiveness. Effective communication is achieved through the name which is common to the consumer and not the design. Though effective communication is achieved, the various individual elements used such as colour and shape are inappropriate.

5.2.3 Ese Nkiti Nkiti Ne Egyaw De'mu

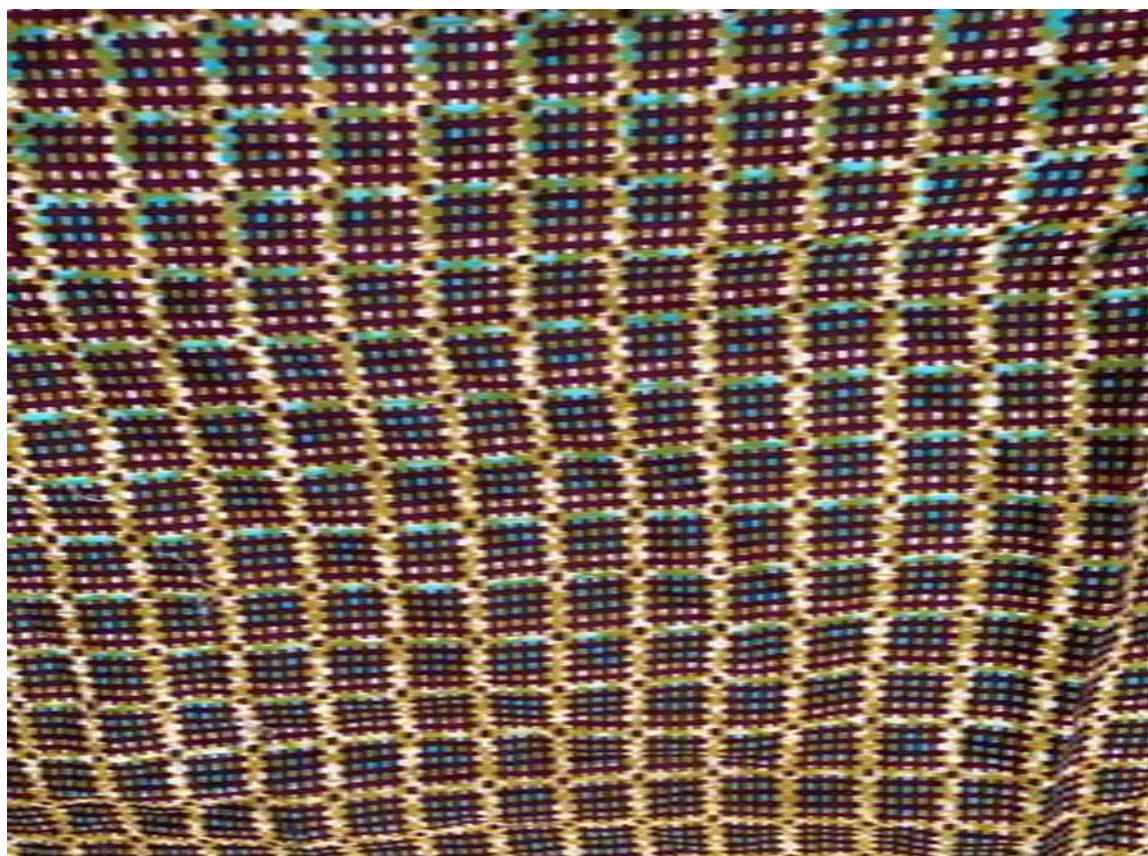


Fig.33: “Ese nkiti nkiti ne egyaw de'mu”, “Tiny teeth usually sport a beautiful gap”. Image by Naa Densua Tordzro.

“Ese nkiti nkiti ne egyaw de'mu”, the literal translation is “Tiny teeth usually sport a beautiful gap”. Implied meaning - Beautiful things come in small packages. This print is a smaller pattern design of “Daadze mpodua”. The message here is that one should be grateful for have a good marriage and a good home.

5.2.4 Obaapa

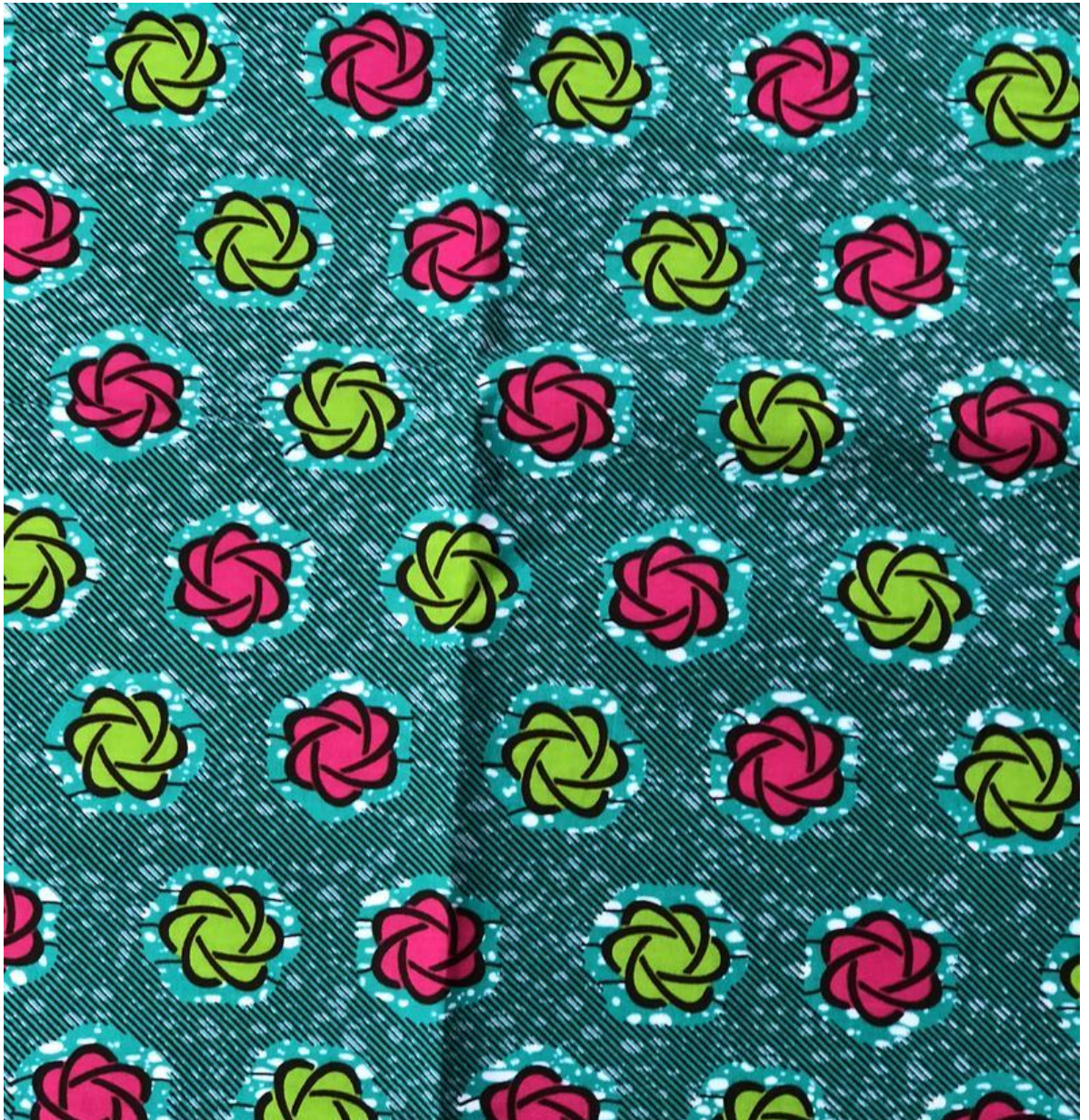


Fig.34: “Obaapa” Good woman or Virteous woman. Image from Google

The name Obaapa means ‘Good woman’ or Virteous woman but is a shortened version of a statement in a form of a question which is “Obaapa dei wan na obe nya” meaning “finding a virteous woman or good woman is a blessing or a gift. It expresses the concept of an ideal woman prescribed by the Ghanaian society. Have one of this cloth as dowry is a reminder that your married because of good character, it is also to keep the bride in check for moral and good behaviour by society and family.

5.2.5 Ahwenepa Enkasa



Fig.35: Ahwenepa enkasa. Image photographed by Naa Densua Tordzro

The name of the cloth can be translated literally as ‘Quality beads do not rattle’. Quality beads do not make noise because of the quality of the material used. It is an Akan proverb that means quality sells by itself. Hence, a woman of substance is expected to be composed and poised. Having a cloth like “Ahwene Pa Nkasa,” “Quality beads do not rattle” or “A good thing doesn’t have to talk about itself”. So, when something is good, it sells itself. There are moral reasons why such names are given to cloth aside the beauty of the cloth. Some women can be petty and quarrelsome so, these cloths are given as reminder that, it is not everything that is worth arguing about in marriage. Keep every problem at home to the confinement of the home, whatever it is should get resolve the couple.

5.2.6 Asobayre Dotoi



Fig.36: Asobayre dotoi. Image by Naa Densua Tordzro

Aso bayere, - The leaves of a sweet yam which creep all over the ground. Asobayre dotoi (fig. 35), refers to the leaves of a yam plant, is often figuratively used to express the idea of covering and preservation. Asobayre is a species of yam known for its sweet taste. The leaves of the yam plant are known for the manner in which they creep and cover its surrounding. A woman is expected to cover up any negative notion about her home from prying eyes of the community. For instance, if she hears anything negative thing about her family she must act with caution, she is also expected to be the shield that protect her husband and her home.

5.2.7 Woko Aware a Bisa



Fig.37: “Se woko aware a bisa” - Find out more about a potential partner before marriage. Image from Google.

In the past before one gets married there is a long process of investigation and negotiations that goes on behind the scene by both potential marriage couple to be. Now a days people meet on the street and in a few month time they are married. “Se woko aware a bisa” means “before you go into marriage ask questions”. Marriage is a very long journey to embark on with someone one barely knows. It important to more about the person and the family before embarking on such journey.

5.2.8 Nsu Bura



Fig.38: “Nsu Bura”, “well of wealth”. Image by Naa Densua Tordzro

Water Well, this motif is a representation of the rippling effect made on the surface of water when an object like a stone is thrown in the well. We rely on water stored for its use when the normal supply is in shortage. The same can be applied to the importance of a woman it is believe in our Ghanaian communities that, it is the good woman that makes a home, she is considered as a well of wealth. A good woman’s generosity spreads like the ripple in the well. “Nsu Bura” means “well of wealth”.

5.2.9 Kata Wu Dei So



Fig.39: “kata wu dei so” “cover your issues”. Image from Pinterest

“Kata wu dei so na bue obi die so” “cover your issues and talk about someone else’s.” Society considers gossiping as a flaw in the character of both the one who gossips and to a lesser degree, the one who responds to the negative talk. The meaning implied is that it is easy to talk about someone else’s problems and conceal your own. In fact, such a person generally exaggerates other people’s problems. This cloth has two referents, a pictorial representation of one bowl that is covered and another uncovered. It is often cited to discourage negative talk. In this way the proverb attached to the design reinforces societal norms acting as a neutralizer to conflicts.

5.2.10 Sika Wo Ntaban

"Sika Wo Ntaban" translated as "Money has Wings" or Speedy Bird. The bird has always been an important and significant symbol in many cultures in Ghana and across the world. In Ghana the symbol of the bird in this pattern refers to movement, change, prosperity, freedom, migration, taking flight, transition and the fleetingness of riches. When the wealth is made one does not have rest hence "Sika Wo Ntaban" meaning money or wealth has wings. It is a proverbial advice, a reminder that money or the wealth acquired will not be there for ever so the work must go on, because the moment the work is stopped the money or the wealth acquired will be used and if there is no income the money or the wealth will be depleted.



Fig.40: "Sika wo Ntaban". Image from google

5.2.11 Se Anomaa Entua Obua Da

“Se anomaa entua obua da” which translate as “the bird that does not fly, does not eat”. In the course of human evolution, human being has always been on the move in search of greener pastures. Whereas people migrate across continents, some migration happens within the confines of a country. This phenomenon has not changed but rather increased due to some of these common reasons, economic migration, conflicts and family reunion. The bird is seen as a symbol of progress in life.



Fig. 41: “Se anomaa entua obua da”. Image from Google.

“Se anomaa entua obua da” in the context of marriage is one must move to make progress in life when there is a family, the responsibility of their welfare relies on you, it is important that they provide for. It is true if one does move to look for work and earn income then their wealth.



Fig.41: Nsoro mma, Stars. Image by Naa Densua Tordzro

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 Death and Funeral Events

The decline in the local manufacturing sector has however not stifled the popularity of the fabric on the market. Imports from Nigeria, La Côte d'Ivoire and China have complimented prints produced locally. With a wide range of preferences and varieties, prints are accessible to people of different economic and social levels as well as for a wide variety of purposes and events. Prints are available in various degrees of quality and a large variety of designs. They are used as part of everyday life and are deeply rooted in the culture of Ghanaians and cut across all ethnic groups. Some of the popular uses are for funerals, naming ceremonies, and Christian church services. Wax and roller prints are usually made into kaba and slit, which is worn by women and has become associated with a national cultural dress, used both during formal and informal occasions. The dress consists of a tailored blouse (kaba), long ankle length skirt (slit) and a two yards rectangular piece of cloth used as a shawl or head tie). Prints are also made into shirts or used as body wrappers for men and are used at various events and occasions. They are inscribed with messages, and when used in the various cultural spaces have communicative competence.

Funerals are one such social event where cloth is used deliberately for encoding messages and expressing feelings. Beliefs about death influence what messages are inscribed in cloth. Mbiti, in his renowned book, *African Religions and Philosophy*, explains that, in the African Philosophy of life 'there is no end to the rhythm of life'. Life is a cycle of stages, and death is considered a stage but not the end of it (Mbiti 1969). This idea can be seen in the concept of death in the Akan belief system where death is not considered the end of life but rather a continuation of the journey of life in eternity. This belief is embedded in the Akan conception of the human makeup. They believe that the human being is made up of three components; the sunsum, which is the spirit of a person; the mogya; the blood and the Okra which is the soul. The mogya is inherited from one's mother,

and the sunsum from a person's father (Opoku 1978). The okra is given by God. When one dies, the sunsum dies with the person and the okra of the person which is the 'indestructible part' of God in every person lives on into the spiritual world. The okra also controls the destiny of every person and it is considered the most important part of the human being (Owoahene-Acheampong 1998). A person is considered to be picking back up spirit ties with the world of spirits at the point of death. Puberty rites are therefore performed not only to usher people into adulthood but also to sever ties with the spirit world Baumgarten Assmann, & Stroumsa, 1998:21 (Baumgarten, Assmann et al. 1998).

Death is therefore seen as a necessary part as well as a transitional point in the cycle of life therefore, every human being will experience it. The beliefs that surround the notion of death influence the manner in which funerals are performed. Funerals are celebrated elaborately in the southern parts of Ghana. According to Marleen De Witte (de Witte 2003) 'Celebrating a funeral is a long process that starts from the moment of death, and ends with the last celebration after one year, and incorporates several ceremonies and events' (2003:532). Weekends are popular times for funerals, and it is common to see people dressed up in funeral cloths and traveling distances far and near to register their presence at funerals. The celebration involves drama, feasting and giving of donations to the bereaved family. The moods at a funeral are mixed. At a point there is a deep expression of loss and the atmosphere is sober whilst at another point the mood changes to excitement.

Sarpong explains that, "The ambivalent attitude of the Ghanaian towards death can be summed up in the conception of death as a journey for a better life but with its implication of inevitable physical separation between people who do not want to be separate" (Sarpong 1974). Death in this sense is thought of as a separation from the secular world but not necessarily the end of the life journey. Funerals are occasions used to show respect for the dead and also to guide their spirit into the next world. This is expressed through rituals, symbolic behaviours as well as verbal and non-verbal acts. One of the non-verbal avenues for

communicating or expressing loss of a loved one and respect for the dead is through the use of cloth.

The colours often worn for funerals are black, brown, red, and black and white cloths. The colours express the mood of the event. Adinkra cloth, plain Red (kobini), and plain black (birisi) cloth are popular in the Akan areas while the brown, black, and black and white prints are popular among the Ga of Greater Accra. The white and black prints are used for the funerals of people considered as having lived a full life and died old among the Ga. In almost all cases Christian thanksgiving services after the burial has ended, black and white seem to be the preferred colour. Apart from the use of colour as a medium of expression, messages and symbols are also used in the cloth (especially in adinkra and prints) to encode a message.

The cloth and the message in it are deliberately chosen by the family of the deceased person. These messages are inspired by beliefs about life and death in Ghanaian societies as well as feelings about the deceased and cloths serve as a medium of exhibiting these expressions. Usually these imported prints come with patent designs of local manufacturers and are sold at cheaper prices.

6.1 The Representation of Death in Print



Owuo Atwedee- Death's Ladder

‘Owuo atwedee, obaakufuo mfroro,’ or ‘Obiara befuro owuo atwedee’. Literal translation: ‘Death is inevitable for everyone,’ Or ‘Death ladder, it’s not climbed by just one person. It is there for everyone, because we will all die. Death is the ultimate equalizer, it is universal. (Above, Adinkra symbol for Owuo Atwedee) (Arthur 2017)



Fig.42: 'Owuo Atwede'. Image from Google

The name of this pattern is Owuo Atwede, which means, “The ladder of death”. The origin of the name can be traced to an adinkra symbol which is a ladder and associated with the notion that death is like a ladder that all humans shall climb someday. The idea expressed in this print is the idea that everyone will die. “The ladder of death” symbol of mortality, a reminder of the transitory nature of existence in this world and of the imperative to live a good life is to be a worthy soul in the afterlife. “Owuo atwedee eda ho ma oibara - Death’s ladder is there for everyone to climb”. Death is no respecter of life; it does not matter who you are society it will come knocking on your door when it is your turn to go. The Akan’s belief is that the physical part of the human being is mortal. The soul (sunsum or okera), however, never dies.

In the print the concept is represented with staircases rather than the bright primary colours. The design incorporates dots, lines and triangular and rectangular

shapes. The above description of (fig. 41) shows that the concept has been effectively communicated through the design elements used.

6.1.1 Owuo Sei Fie



Fig.43: Owuo Se Fie. Image from Google

The name of the print is 'Owuo sei fie' which can be translated as 'Death destroys the homes and families'. The design is plain and dull. It contains human figures, tree branches and skulls. It has only two colours; black and red of which black is the dominant. The design is made of a portrait of a family. Beneath the portrait are two branches that bear resemblance to an adinkra symbol called Nyame nti, me nnwe nwura which literally means, By God's grace I will not chew leaves to survive". This adds a note of hopefulness. The portrait projects the idea of mournful home even though they seem to be happy. The combination of the skull and the human figures draws the contrast which projects the concept of

destruction. Circles and space are the major elements of design used. The use of space conveys the idea of nothingness, however the space in this work is not void but it is defined by the shapes and colours in the print.

The larger circle encloses the picture of a family and the other, the skull represents the presence of death. The circles are in two rolls; one roll is a repetition of skulls in a line and the other is a repetition of the family portrait. The two colours symbolically represent the destructive nature of death. The main concept of this print is the destructiveness of death. This is represented with the portrait of the mourning family. The red and black which carries the sense of death, danger, and sorrow helps communicate the concept effectively. The use of the mourning family and the skull is also appropriate for the concept of death. Even though the black space dominates the prints, the red image of the family attracts most of the attention because of its brightness. The empty space in unity with the red images creates an effective harmony.

Owuo sei ade (figure 42) means 'Death destroys. In this cloth there is only one motif evenly spread against a plain background. The motif is a feather-like shape in which are found different textures made by lines. The concept is that of destruction caused by death. The main elements found in the cloth are shapes, lines, dots and texture. The open feathers could represent life while the texture at the edges could be said to express the ruins caused to life. The dots and lines lacing the floral edges from afar form a texture.

6.1.2 Akofena - Sword of War



Symbol of State Authority and Power, Legitimacy, Gallantry, Courage, Valour and Heroism from the aphorism: ‘Konim ko di nim a, wobo afena hye no safohene’, the literal translation is ‘The war hero is given a royal sword and promoted to the rank of a general’. (Above: Adinkra symbol for Akofena) G. F. Kojo Arthur (Arthur 2017).



Fig.44: Afokena, Image from Google

Akofena is also known as Nsuaefena, it is used to swear the oath of office and swear allegiance to a higher authority. The crossed swords were a popular motif in the heraldic shields of many former Akan states. State swords are carried by state traders, royal messengers and ambassadors, and are used in the rituals for purifying the chief’s soul and various ancestral stools. In addition to recognizing courage and valour, the swords are representation of legitimate state authority

and power. There are various state swords that are used for specific functions. Chiefs maintain a group of sword-bearers, each of whom carries one of the various state swords on public occasions. While these swords were important military weapons in the past, their use these days are mostly ceremonial, for that reason the blades are unsharpened so don't cause any harm.

The idea expressed in this print is bravery, valour and gallantry. The elements of design are texture, lines, dots and shapes. The concept translated into a popular print called Akofena is a sword-like motif with a curvy tail. The print has sticks and horns joined together and seem to be in an irregular rectangular form. In the middle of the form is found the Akofena, which has a curvy handle. On top and at the bottom of the shape are found two horns facing each other. The horns can be related to another adinkra symbol which is referred to as Akoben, meaning war horn. It symbolizes the call to battle and preparedness for battle. The design also has dots. The dots can be found in the shape described above. Another group of dots can be found outside the shapes forming a line between them. There are zigzag lines formed at the edges of the grouped dots and the background colour.

In the print can also be found short curved lines found in the horns. The print is made of one colour which is a shade of purple. It symbolizes royalty which conveys the concept appropriately. The colour of the background and the shape draws attention to the sword. A careful look at the shape gives an impression of a coffin with a sword resting in it. Hierarchically, the sword should be the first point of attention because it is central to the meaning of the concept. It is rather reduced in size and confined in the irregular rectangular shape. The purple colour dominates the design since it is the only colour used for background and motives as well. There is enough space around the motifs which allows the eye enough space to rest when appreciating it. The above discussion shows that unity of design is achieved through the use of various elements.

6.1.3 Efunu Adaka



Fig.45: Efunu Adaka. Image from Google

‘Blood’ was the original name for this cloth by Vlisco. The colour for this mourning cloth is red and black, the traditional mourning cloth in Ghana, black signifies sadness, grief and gloom. The red signifies the blood shed this print is often worn at funerals

Efunu adaka; which means ‘Coffin’ is the name of the cloth in figure (44). The design consists of a large oval shaped pattern with red fiery looking design in the middle of the shape. There are very few motifs in the cloth due to the large size of the motif. Perhaps this is so because the motif speaks for itself. The pattern expresses a popular saying in Akan that is ‘Adaka mu ye hye’, meaning, ‘inside the coffin hot’. The elements of design used in this print are space, colour and line. The space is the empty area around the motif which forms the background of the motif. The oval shape defined by the shades of red is the only motive found in the cloth. The darker shade forms the oval shape and it encloses the brighter irregular

shade of red. The thin strips of the irregular shape form the lines of different thickness and length in the design. The red colour gives a sense of the uncomfortable nature of death described above which helps to project the idea of the concept. The concept laments the shortness of life and the need to live well because death is an uncomfortable state. This attempt to speak or feel for the dead at the same time casts a reflective look at life. Because the red colour which forms the motif is the only colour in the pattern, it is naturally seen first because of the contrast in colour. The visual hierarchy in terms of design is achieved. The space and the black background are dominant in the design and these enhance the concept of the design as black projects a dull, sorrowful feeling. The space also provides a void feeling associated with death. The arrangement of the elements of design in this print helps achieve unity in terms of design.

6.1.4 Afi Bi Ye Esan



Fig.46: Afi bi ye esan. Image from Google

The texture at the edges has traces in an early design called Afi bi ye esan (fig.45) which means, “Some years are full of misfortunes”. The motif of the concept in fig. 45 is ambiguous; it looks like macaroni from afar and can also be seen as a curled-up worm at a closer glance. It poorly communicates the concept in terms of design.

6.2 Fancy prints: Representation of Motherhood after death in Prints

6.2.1 Obaatan Pa Ye Dawa Se Ni Nhwe So Pa

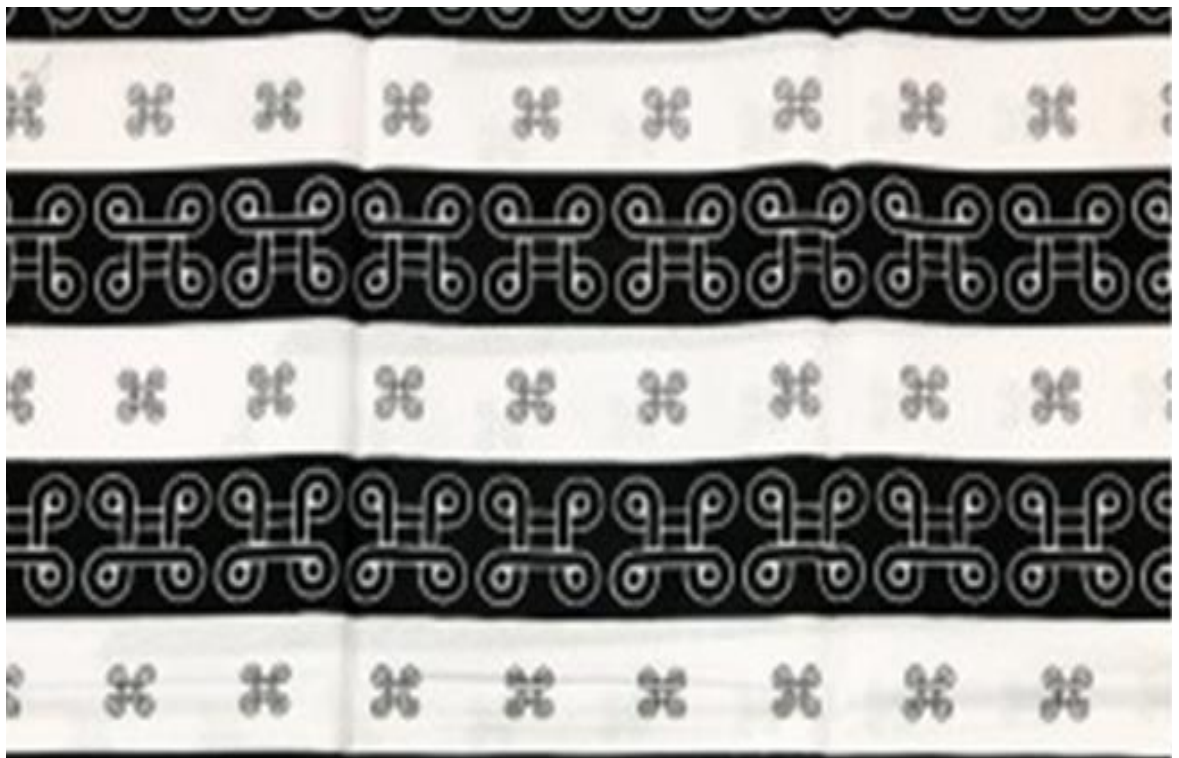


Fig.47: Obaatan pa ye dawa se ni nhwe so pa. Image from Google

The Adinkra symbol used in this cloth is called MPATAPO "knot of pacification/reconciliation". It is a symbol of reconciliation, peacemaking and pacification. Mpatapo represents the bond or knot that binds parties in a dispute to a peaceful, harmonious reconciliation. It is a symbol of peacemaking after strife. The use of this symbol could also mean that when the person was a peacemaker when alive. The name of this cloth in the Twi Ghanaian language

“Obaatanpa ye dawa se ni nhwe so pa”, which means “Dear mother thank you for your good care”. The concept of this design is the unpredictability of death. Uses of Adinkra for funeral cloth have become the trademark for the producers of fancy cloth.

6.2.2 Osure Ni Me Fie



Fig.48: Osure ni me fie. Image from Google

‘Osure ni me fie’ in (fig. 47) can be translated as ‘Heaven is my home’. The concept refers to the Christian belief in the rising of the soul to heaven after death, and also based on the sayings of Jesus Christ that He was going to prepare a place for Christians in Heaven (Bible- John 14: 2).

6.2.3 Obaatanpa Na Enim Nea Ni Mma Be Di



Fig.49: Obaatanpa akoda egya ne nnma, also known as Obaatanpa na enim nea ni mma be di. Google image

The name of the design in (Figure 48) can be translated as “It is the mother who knows what her children will eat”. This connotes the notion of a caregiver which is associated with motherhood. The pattern is that of a bird’s nest with opened beaked little birds and two bigger birds, one flying away with food in its beak and

the other standing at the edge of the nest about to feed the little birds. The space draws attention to the picture and makes it very visible. The picture communicates the concept of motherliness effectively by contrasting the idea of the feeding with the idea of the bird departing from the nest.

6.2.4 Obaatanpa, Womma Bekai Wo Daa



Fig.50: Obaatanpa, womma bekai wo daa. Google image

Obaatanpa, womma bekai wo daa which can be translated as ‘Good mother, your children will forever remember you’. The cloth celebrates and remembers a good mother’s deeds. This cloth has a pattern of the Adinkra symbol Dwannimmen; ram’s horn in a white background alternating with a textured pattern. The Adinkra symbol Dwannimmen is a derivative of the Akan proverb, Dwannini ye asisie a, ode n’akoma na enye ne mmen which means it is the heart and not the horns that leads the ram to bully. Dwannimmen is a symbol of concealment of humility and strength Wisdom and learning.

The symbol is the most dominant feature of the cloth. It, however, does not project the theme of the cloth since the symbol used does not have a direct correlation with the name of the cloth. The only visible elements in this design are shapes and textures. The squares are defined by the areas filled by the textures and they are arranged in such a way that it alternates with the adinkra symbol in the negative areas. The images in correlation with the visual elements do not correspond to the name and the concept.

6.2.5 Oboafo Pa, Awurade Mfa Wo Kra Nsie

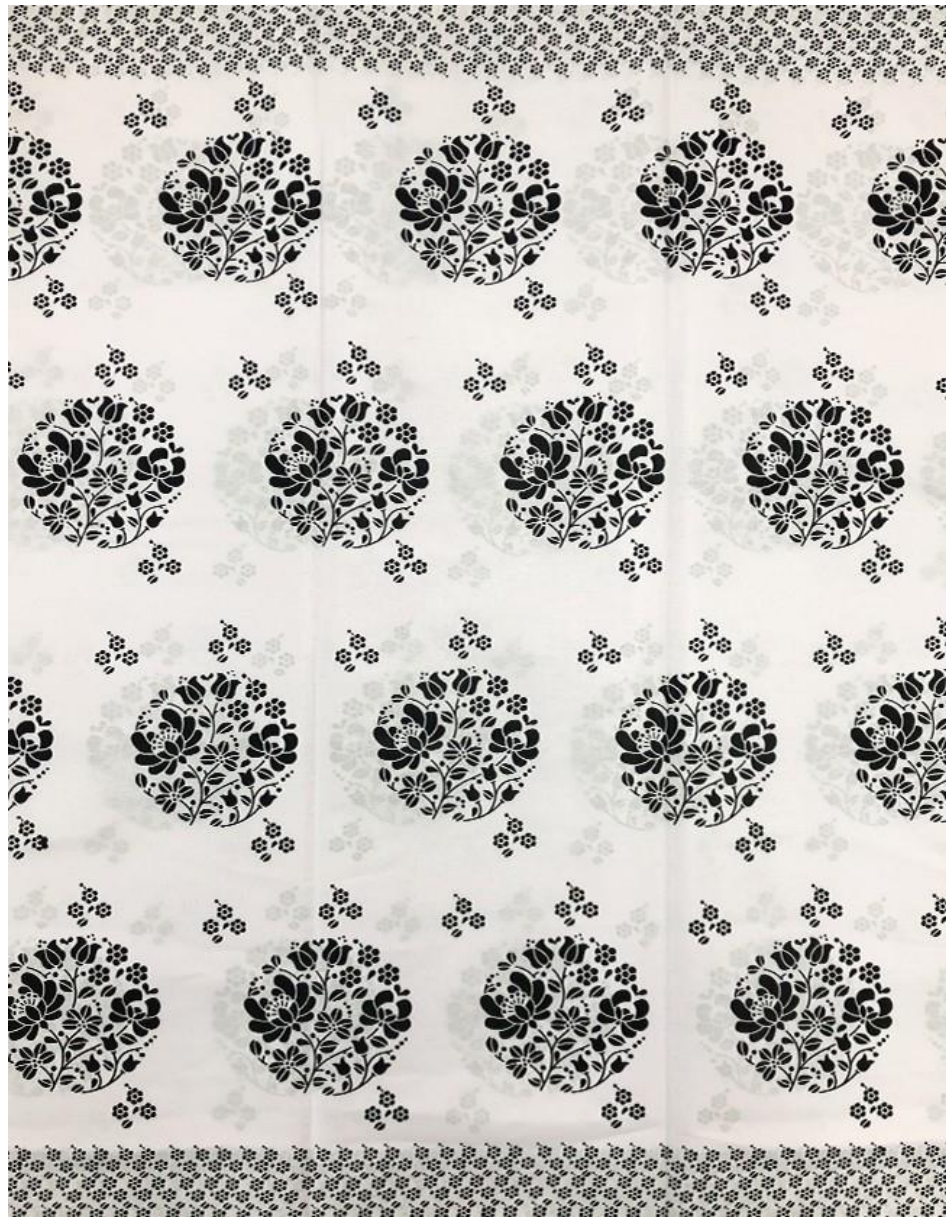


Fig.51: Oboafo pa, awurade mfa wo kra nsie. Image from Google

“Oboafo pa, awurade mfa wo kra nsie” is translated as, “Good helper, may God keep your soul”. The concept expressed in the design (fig.50) is endless protection. The elements of design are plants, in horizontal lines and textures. The shapes in the design are leaves and flowers. All the circular shapes of plants in this design implied in the concept and defined, the circular shapes and texture of the plants depict the protection expressed in the name given to the cloth. The textures form three distinct patches they are flower beds both at the top edge and the bottom edge, a short, horizontal lines of petals against the main circular horizontal lines of plants. The name of cloth and design seems to have a connection and communicates well with its consumers.

6.2.6 Asumdwe Ne Nhyira Na Medegya Mma Ne Abusua

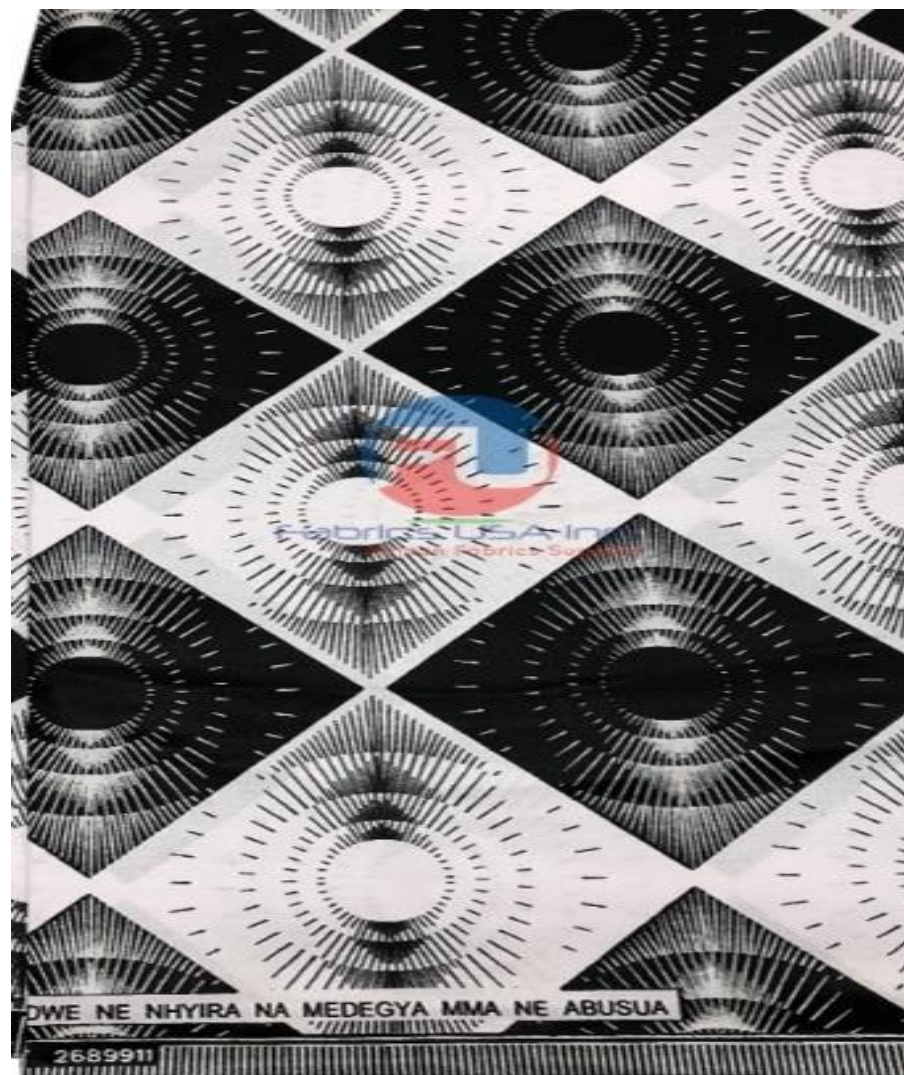


Fig.52: Asumdwe Ne Nhyira Na Medegya Mma Ne Abusua

Asumdwe Ne Nhyira Na Medegya Mma Ne Abusua; which means, “I leave my children and descendants with God’s protection and blessings”. The design as seen in (figure 52) basically employs sparks and lines. The sparks are grouped to form dark circular patches which alternate with taped lines that form circles and triangles that looks like a halo and a perpetual gateway. The pattern also gives a Kente impression when viewed from a distance. There seems to be no relation between the design and the name.

6.2.7 Religious Events and the Use of Prints

Traditional religion, Christianity and Islam are the three major religions recognized as official religions and are given credence during national ceremonies in Ghana. Central to all the three religions is the concept of a Supreme Spirit being who created and controls the universe and the existence of other spirits. When it comes to cloth and textiles it does not matter what religious sect one belongs to. Come the day of worship half of members of this religious sect will be seen in wax prints. Gyekye (Gyekye 1996) defined Religion as “the awareness of the existence of some ultimate Supreme Being who is the origin and sustainer of the universe and the establishment of constant ties with this Being”. Gyekye’s definition is centred on the idea of God and also the conscious act of establishing communication. Thus, religion goes beyond the awareness of a Supreme Being to actual expression of this awareness.

Melford Spiro (SPIRO 1966) also defined religion as ‘an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings. For Spiro institutions referred to ‘socially shared patterns of behaviour and belief’. To him ‘all institutions are made up of patterns of action and value systems and beliefs which refer to the supernatural beings. Spiro’s definition lays emphasis on the cultural component of religion, and how it defines the concept of supernatural beings and organizes knowledge and practices of interaction between the people and the supernatural. In my view, people’s ideas about religion are defined by their culture. the cultural diversity that exist account for the numerous religious

systems found in Africa and across the world. Despite these differences, there are commonalities that could justify the assumption of an African world view which is fairly representative.

T.N.O. Quarcoopome's (Quarcoopome 1987) elaboration of the five level structures in the West African traditional Religion has the belief in God at the top of the hierarchy, followed by belief in spirit beings, belief in ancestors, and at the bottom belief in magic. The various levels are believed to be interrelated and the universe is controlled by the Supreme God. In the Akan belief system, the Supreme Being is called "Onyame" or "Onyankopon" (Literally, means 'If you get Him you are satisfied'. Literally means 'One great God'. In the Ga belief system, the Supreme Being is known as Ataa Naa nyomo ('Ataa' means father and 'Naa' is a title for females) and perceived as having both male and female attributes. The concept of the Supreme Being in the Christian religion is a God with three components intertwined; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The three elements that make up His nature can operate independently. However, Christians worship God through Jesus Christ who is believed to be the saviour of the world and the component of God which became human.

Manufacturers and have over the years capitalised on religious beliefs of Ghanaians by incorporating designs and symbols that represent God into prints. Retailers have named cloth with catchy phrase from the Bible, this phrases mostly are statement that cuts across all the religion and society. This intend makes the cloth attractive to users from all religion. Christians have been involved in several activities including the textile industry. Christians make up the majority of the three recognized religious groups in Ghana. Christianity in Ghana goes beyond preaching the Gospel. It has served as "agents of civilization" during the era of colonisation they have been involved in education, politics as well as trade. Churches have since the 19th century been actively involved with the promotion of wax and roller prints. Akinwumi (Akinwumi 2008), reveals that before wax prints were sent to West Africa in large quantities for sale, small quantities had been introduced by missionaries who needed them for their converts. Also, during the era of trade missionary, trading companies were the main distributors of wax and roller prints. Sylvanus (Sylvanus 2007), writes that:

The Gold Coast, present-day Ghana, appeared as the first market for the wax-print at the end of the 19th century. European traders, missionaries, and, in particular, the evangelical mission of Basel contributed significantly to the popularization of these newly adapted fabrics. They were, in fact, distributed through the mission's trade company, the Basler Handelsgesellschaft, which was charged to meet the needs of its expatriates and to provide the local population with 'civilized' commodities. It is in this context that missionaries ordered wax-prints in specific colours and patterns according to the area in question and the targeted ethnic group' (2007:208).

This could perhaps explain the association of wax and roller prints with church activities. Sunday church services are common places for the display of prints. They are sewn into various styles accompanied with various themes and colours. Themes in wax and roller print cover numerous subjects that deal with everyday experiences that relates to the belief in God. Ghanaians, regardless of which religion they profess, or ethnic group they belong to, do not strictly separate the religious from the non- religious. The awareness of God is in their consciousness. The concept of God is perceived as an everyday reality. God is seen as a personal being that can be communicated with (Gyekye 1996). This is manifested in their speech, art and behaviour. Mbiti explains that, religion is so central and basic to the African's way of life such that it is embedded in their language. Therefore, to understand the African's religious life, one must also understand the language and perhaps how it is used in whichever form it appears.

6.3 Supernatural Ideas in Prints

Oral and written history thought us to believe that there is a Supreme being called God who created the universe and made us in his own image. Even though we don't see him, most individuals in Ghanaians believe that, interact with humans though means like the sun, the moon, the stars, the wind, rain and the rainbow

to let us know that he is with us at all times. The Supernatural ideas in prints re-enforces and portray that belief in cloth.

6.3.1 Nyame Eniwa



Fig.53: Nyame Eniwa. Image from Google

The name and idea used in the cloth (fig. 52) bears resemblance to an adinkra symbol that is known as “Onyankopon eniwa (God’s eyes) and its correspondent proverb which says, Onyankopon eniwa hu esumu asem biara”; meaning “God’s eyes see every hidden thing.” It expresses the omnipresence of God. The main motif, which is the eye, is effectively used to convey the theme of the cloth as it is visible and draws attention. This is effective because, to make impact in a design, the main elements bearing the concept should be dominant and more attractive therefore the design achieves impact by the use of the bright orange colour and the eyes in its concept development. The meandering pattern of the lines also affirms that the eyes that the eyes of God see beyond the ‘usual’.

6.3.2 Bonsam Abodwe



Fig. 54: Bonsam abodwe. Image from Google

“Bonsam abodwe” which means, “The beard of the devil”. In the Akan belief system, the term “Bonsam” refers to the devil. There is also a mythical creature called ‘Sasabonsam’ which is said to be a forest monster. It is said to be a large monster that lives in the remotest part of the forest and it is covered with long hair (Appiah, et al, 2003:9). The phrase also refers to a certain type of weed that is known for its toughness. The basic element in the design is texture. The design has a green and yellow textured background with blue floral patterns as well as blue and yellow wing-like motifs. The motif projects the idea associated with the concept partially, the dark colours of the cloth reflect the abode of the mythical character. The motif, however, does not visually capture the ideological description of the creature. This implies that the motif used for the concept is not appropriate and communication is not effective in terms of design. This motif is originally an Indonesian batik design that has been incorporated into the Ghanaian cloth culture.

6.3.3 Me Kra Wo Abrokyre



Fig. 55: Me kra wo abrokyre, “My soul is living abroad”. Image from Google

“Me kra wo abrokyre”; which means, “My soul is living abroad”, consists of a repetitive pattern of a bird in flight with an animal and plant below. This concept is based on the “out of body experience that one gets when overwhelm with emotions or fines oneself in a situation. The bird in flight could represent the idea of the soul connecting with loved one abroad. Considering the design elements and motifs used, it can be said that the design has achieved its effectiveness in communication. “Me kra wo abrokyre”; is another Indonesian design.

6.3.4 Papa Ye Asa



Fig. 56: Papa ye asa or Yesu wo mafa. Image from Google

This pattern has motifs of leaves and brunches extending over and superimposed on the moon in the sky. In Ghana the name is “Papa ye Asa” meaning “there are no more good deeds”. “Yesu wo mafa” (fig.55) means, “Jesus is on my side”. The pattern is a repeated motif of a branch with a halo around the apex of the leaves. The concept of the cloth is the idea of assurance and dependence on God. The basic design elements are the dots. The dots form the halo, as well as the texture for the leaves and the borders of the cloth. It has a lot of space which gives the pattern a sense of peace and serenity. Halos have been used for many centuries in art to express the sacred, powerful or the magical. It became popular in the

4th century AD in portraying the image of Jesus, and it represented holiness in art (Ledwith, 2006). Jesus is symbolically referred to as the vine and Christians are the branches (John 15:5). The use of the halo and the branch is effective in portraying the idea of the print.

6.3.5 Conclusion

The environment in general provides the bedrock of ideas for generating themes. For instance, wax and roller print designs consist of everyday things in the environment such as plants and animals, and names assigned to prints are found in everyday language. However, some specific sources such as popular sayings, music, traditional symbols and religious belief provide inspiration for names and designs in wax and roller prints. For instance, traditional symbols like adinkra and Kente patterns and modern concepts like the usage of curves and lines features prominently in the design trend of current producers. Proverbs and popular sayings also dominated cloth naming in the earlier generation of wax prints although they did not use a lot of local ideas for motifs. The opposite happens with the new print categories where there is an extensive use of local concepts for motifs but not the use proverbial names. There is also the blending of new and old ideas in projecting various aspects of the concepts examined in the new prints. For instance, the use of adinkra symbols together with names that have no direct relation to the meaning of the symbols but express Christian concepts. Meaning is therefore fluid as the scope of symbols is expanded and the various agents that influence the production and uses of prints interpret and use symbols differently.



Fig. 57: 'Lebi Hunu', 'Morning Sun. garment design and image by Naa Densua Tordzro

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.1 Sources of Influence in Print Production

For centuries, wax and roller print have been used to project social concepts. Four of such popular concepts are womanhood, birth, death and the supernatural. These four concepts feature predominantly in the lives of Ghanaians as they form part of the reality of daily life. Events and rituals are organized around these concepts on a regular basis. Cloth becomes crucial as it features on both a personal and social level to add or express meaning of the events. This is because cloth provides a visual representation of the social perception of the concepts. It uses symbols and patterns to restate social beliefs and values. Its themes therefore may give an idea of what constitutes the existing popular view of the people who use it as well as indicate change.

This chapter examines the relationship between patterns and names, the sources of influence in designing and naming prints, changes that have been observed in the designing and naming of prints, and how these names and designs reflect social discourse. This chapter analyses the characteristics found in the prints. The patterns will be analysed based on what they represent and the sources and influences of names and patterns. The categories will also be compared on the basis of how concepts are represented, as well as name and pattern correspondence. The aim is to analyse the differences that are found in the prints in relation to how it reflects change in aspects of the culture or representation.

7.2 Characteristics of Designs

It is known that earlier patterns with popular names were made outside the African continent but named in the various local market centres on the continent where they were sold. On the other hand, fancy prints of the latter generation are created and sold here in Africa. These two generations of prints exhibit some differences and similarities in their design and naming trends. Designs are basic

characteristic of prints, the patterns examined employ traditional symbols, Kente patterns, human and animal figures, plants and shapes as motifs or ideas for design. The designs are two dimensional and flat, with little details. The colours used are simple and a design may employ a maximum of two colours in addition to the base colour. An examination of the older generation of patterns and names (ntomapa) shows that, most of the designs were implied as they had no exact correspondence to the names they were assigned to in the environment.

This implied that when the pattern of the print bore some level of ideological resemblance to the known adinkra symbol, the name was adopted for the print. An example is “owuo atwede” and “kete pa” discussed in the previous chapter. The current trend of designing and naming uses more local concepts like adinkra and Kente. Similar to the “ntomapa” category, adinkra and other traditional symbols provide inspiration for prints. Ironically, while the symbols are used for design, their names are not but rather ideas and phrases are coined around the concepts they represent. This means that, while local designers used indigenous symbols very often, they did use the names that accompanied the symbols they used. Other cultural items that represent perceptions, or evoke social symbols are also used in creating names and designs. An example is the “Asesegua” or “The chief’s stool” and Kente, which are used to represent royalty or the cowries which evoke an image of divination.

Names on the other hand play a complementary role to designs in prints. The function of names to design is that; it provides a mechanism by which people can relate experience to design by transforming prints from mere art into functional art. Bickford (Bickford 1994), observes that names may refer to designs implicitly or explicitly. The major difference observed however, is found in the sources of names and designs used for the different era. Whiles the “ntomapa” category uses mainly proverbs and popular saying, phrases from contemporary gospel songs form the main source of names for prints in the fancy category. The “ntomapa” category also has names which are shorter and easy to remember whiles in the fancy print category the names are long and difficult to remember.

Most of the proverbs used as names in the “ntomapa” category already have assigned adinkra symbols. The adinkra has for generations, (which precedes the wax print generation) been used in the local cloth industry. Adinkra patterns are printed into dyed cloth for funerals and other festive occasions. The print patterns in the old cloths not necessarily resemble the adinkra symbol they are named after, but they convey the idea in a similar way. In other words, the proverbial names assigned to wax and roller prints were inspired by the adinkra representation of the proverb. The other names that reflect popular sayings or social ideas employed a popular environmental concept which lends itself easily to the understanding or explanation of the idea. An example is the popular “wa fa me nwa”, which means “you have taken me for granted” which depicts meekness in character, is represented with a cracked design motif (see chapter 3, fig.16). Proverbs constitute the largest component in the names for “ntomapa”. According to Yankah, proverbs are aesthetic performances that seek to persuade people or attract attention. Proverbs are mainly in verbal form although there are instances where symbols or actions can be used to represent the verbal form. The artistic value of proverbs is realized the manner in which they are presented. The presentation of proverbs comes in specific forms that should not be altered. One of the styles in presentation is to delegate the proverb to a third person of higher authority.

This gives the proverb authenticity and also defers the consequence of the statement made Yankah (Yankah 1995). Proverbs have similar functions when assigned to prints, the prints become the expression of the wearer, and at the same time suppress open confrontation as it is logically not his or her own voice. Songs as sources of names are more common in the fancy print category. The phrases used for names in fancy print are longer and can be found in a number of songs that belong to the local gospel music genre. The names may also not necessarily be phrases from songs but inspired by life situations and experiences. The current naming system shows a shift in the oral expressive culture of the Ghanaian. While print consumers are more aware of what constitutes Ghanaian symbols, they are unaware of what these symbols originally represent. The symbols have now been assigned new meanings from the gospel music genre.

7.3 Representing Ideas with Art

Concepts used in patterning cloth designs are numerous and fluid. This is because patterns and symbols used in production are not static to one idea. For example, floral patterns in prints are used in expressing ideas about all the four concepts discussed; birth, death, motherhood and supernatural (God). However, there may seem to be a certain amount of systemization in pattern and naming. For instance, floral patterns are used mostly for themes on womanhood. This is peculiar especially for the “ntomapa” category. Similar floral patterns with thorny impressions are used to express “bad times”. In the fancy print category, floral patterns are used in expressing ideas about God. Birds often represent the idea of spirits in both categories. The representation of death in the old category, however, is more diverse than the other concepts discussed. Their representation ranges from human to geometric figures.

Kente, cloth or patterns connote prestige, royalty, wealth and nobility. Fancy prints use kente to express these ideas in their cloth. It is therefore common to see kente associated with all three concepts that have such elements as themes. In fancy prints, death is represented by the Akofena or state swords and royalty is represented by the stool. Adinkra symbols as patterns are mostly used in the fancy category while it is almost non-existent in the “ntomapa” category. There are also instances where old motifs are given new interpretations. For example, Akofena (fig.43) is an old pattern redesigned and renamed. The fancy print category exhibits this characteristic more often.

This makes designs and names very fluid and unstable. The reuse of already known patterns without their original names also aids in recycling the meaning and expanding the meaning base of some symbols. The success in rebranding symbols is also because different people relate and interpret cloth meanings differently. This is due to the different people who interact with cloth at different levels. The meaning in cloth is therefore not found in the entire cloth but in different aspects. Thus, while the designer relates to patterns, the consumer may find interest in

name and may not necessarily understand the meaning of the symbols used beyond the name assigned to the cloth.

7.4 Wax Prints and Social Discourse.

Names and patterns in a print are such that their meaning depends on the context in which they are used. Each component of prints can be independent in terms of meaning, its interaction with the society determines the message being put across. The meaning of the ideas being expressed therefore depends on the event in which the print is being used as well as the design and name in the print. Each of these elements highlights aspects of the concept being expressed and provides multiplicity of meaning. This also allows prints to be used for multiple events.

The sampled prints devoid of context may not be enough to suggest a trend in how messages are transmitted through wax and roller prints. However, since patterns are fundamental to the characteristics of prints and they present messages irrespective of the intelligibility of the pattern used, they can provide some level of meaning from the perspective of design. This is because, apart from names, other elements such as colour and usage may add meaning to prints. Colour provides the avenue for patterns to be used in multiple ways. Thus, the same pattern can be used for different events due to the difference in colour. Colours can also change the context or the level of intensity that a print's message carries.

In this study, social uses of prints were not primarily observed, however the reasons for which people purchase wax and roller prints with names were discussed in four main situations. The first and most popular are funerals which are always elaborate in the south. The event brings together diverse people who are related to the deceased in different ways. It is a time for paying last respects to the dead. Expressions and messages are therefore very necessary at funerals. The wax and roller print industries have taken advantage of this need and importance for expression.

There are designs and names for every kind of death. The second popular situation in which people prefer prints with names is to show appreciation and pay their respect, this is expressed in many situations. After funeral events, thanksgiving church services are used to climax the funeral celebrations and this opens up another opportunity for people to show off their wears in appreciation. Motherhood is also celebrated with various messages in printed cloth that expresses ideas of good nurturing, care, love and protection. In most cases, the subject of appreciation may be deduced from the intention or context of the user.

This is because the concepts used to represent God are sometimes derived from attributes of the mother. The third situation which calls for prints with names are the traditional non-verbal “rhetoric” exchange among women. Old patterns thrive in this industry as its non-verbal rhetoric value is still being appreciated and used at both personal and group levels. The old patterns also appeal to traditional ceremonies such as traditional marriage and nobility rites. The old patterns are also preferred in instances of gift giving where cloth is offered to show appreciation. Most prints, irrespective of the message they carry can be used for multiple events provided its colour is appropriate, reason being that, the event be attended may be a “colour coded” event.

In the case of the “ntomapa” category; where there is a fair level of mutual intelligibility regardless of the existence of names in the print, cloths have a wider communicative scope which goes beyond the individual or the group that uses it. The fancy print category on the other hand serves a group identification purpose as the meaning is not widely known beyond the group or person that uses it. There is a slight difference in the use of prints from these two categories. The purposes are different because the responses to print messages are also different. While people will react almost instantly to prints in the “ntomapa” category, the response to fancy prints are not immediate, as it may take some time to know what constitutes the message of the cloth.

7.5 Conclusion

Although cloth may appear to be a great source of art and innovation, it is first and foremost designed to be used as an everyday product and serves a basic necessity. It is therefore not made with the intention to preserve or exhibit as in the case of other art forms. Wax and roller prints can however be translated into materials with artistic value in terms of how it is used to initiate nonverbal communication. It therefore presents an art that is part of the everyday Ghanaian's life. The art in wax and roller prints is subtle and it expresses the rapid changes in the sense of art in the everyday life of the Ghanaian. Despite these limitations of prints as works of art, the designs and names in prints serve various communicative purposes.



Fig. 58: Nsu bura, 'Water Well'. Garment design and image by Naa Densua Tordzro

CHAPTER EIGHT

8.1 Summary and Conclusion

this study has analysed the impact of colonisation, and its influence in cloth and textiles industry in Ghana. The study also looked at the relationship between patterns in wax and roller print and names used in wax and roller print, as well as the influences of decolonisation in the creation of names and designs. The study analysed designs and names of some selected wax and roller prints, the sources of names and patterns, their meanings and adaptation in the prints. The findings are from articles, reviews and scholarly readings, explanation and interpretation of symbols, patterns and names used in the wax and roller prints that were selected are based on article, reviews, scholarly reading and researcher's knowledge in Adinkra Symbols and Wax Prints. This chapter contains a summary of the findings from this study and a short conclusion on the study.

8.2 Summary of Findings

This study shows that even though Ghanaians patronised the wax print in precolonial and colonial times, they did not consider it as their national heritage or tradition, the reason being that wax prints were foreign and not widely accessible by the local population. It was after colonisation, that female retailers of wax cloth and textiles took control of the market. Through local and foreign trade policies that favoured the industry, the women began an extensive campaign in naming the wax print and incorporating them into the Ghanaian society. The attempt to name the cloths proved to be successful, decolonisation happened non-verbally through the naming. Today, Ghanaians think of wax prints as “African print or Ghanaian print”.

8.3 The Relation between Patterns and Names

This study showed that, names and patterns in prints may or may not have direct correspondence. However, names and patterns complement each other in projecting ideas. The patterning and naming systems also rely heavily on the patronage of the consumer. The aim of names and patterns are crafted to suit what appeals to the consumer or what they can relate to. Patterns and names are therefore drawn from the perceivable environment to create meaning for the various needs of the consumer. Analysis of the four concepts examined in selected patterns indicates that motifs and symbols used for patterns in prints are not limited to specific concepts. Symbols and motif use are fluid; they are used in multiple ways to make meaning in many instances. An example is the use of the Akofena sword used to express both funeral and praise themes. However, there are some symbols and motifs that may be gaining specific symbolic expressions. An example is the use of thorny looking plants to express unfavourable situations.

The study also discovered that the sources of names for prints are drawn from popular oral sources in the culture which the people can easily associate with such as proverbs, songs and places. This also accounts for the shift in the use of proverbs to the use of local gospel songs as sources of names for cloth. This trend also indicates that changes in the naming and patterning of prints are dependent on changes in the oral expression of the people who use it the most. The ability of the names to stand the test of time therefore depends on how long the names or the sources they are derived from remain in use or are remembered by the people who use it.

8.4 Cloth Uses Affect Designs and Names

The uses of wax prints affect what is used for in terms of designs and names. Names in the print industry operate effectively on occasions and events that call for expression of thought. Popular themes in the cloth naming business revolve around funerals and Christian church events. The naming of prints has therefore shifted from everyday prints named after proverbs to specialized occasions such as funerals, as well as praise names for mothers and God. The old names still persist as they are used for more traditional events such as marriage ceremonies

and gift giving. Design trends are also influenced by users; an example is the “asaasaba” design that fuses different patterns into a single cloth. This design emerged from the patched prints used for everyday work. The patched cloths were further popularized by its appeal to tourists who purchased and used them as bags and shirts.

While prints are still brought in from foreign manufacturers like Vlisco (Holland), they are not being named. The naming of prints only occurs in locally manufactured patterns produced by local entrepreneurs and factories. The names as indicated by representatives of print producers are solely done by the market women or in consultation with them. Various factors influence the production of prints. These factors affect the design and appreciation of the finished product. From the level of production to consumption there are additions to the product as different people relate to cloth differently. These affect designs and names that are marketed.

8.5 Implications for Further Studies

The values attributed to prints by the various actors in its production also determine the interpretation associated with the prints at various levels. The relevance or continuous promotion of a particular pattern is determined by how long the actors attach value to it. This is shown by how old print patterns are revived or reinterpreted into new designs. The findings of this study have a theoretical implication for the life cycle theory which views an artwork as having either an economic or cultural value, depending on its stage of production. While the theory examines relationships associated with an artwork, it may ignore the interpretations that are associated with the art. Therefore, the theory can be further expanded as a tool for understanding changes in meanings as art interacts with the elements that influence it in its environment. It also begins the work of decolonising formal education in fashion and design studies in the global north by insisting on critical consideration of cultural appropriation, oral traditional knowledge and the fluid and complex cycles developed from adoption and resistance under colonialism and its traumatic, intergenerational history.

8.6 Creating Meaning with Wax and Roller Prints

Meaning creation in wax and roller prints occurs from the production to the consumption level. Meaning is created by design, name, branding or usage. People relate to prints in different ways depending on the meaning and value assigned to prints. The manufacturer may be concerned with elements of design while the retailer may be concerned with issues of branding. The cloth user may be concerned with the cultural interpretation that these elements afford them. The meaning in prints is also affected by elements like colour and event. For instance, a black and white patterned wax print can be used as funeral cloth or as an outdoor cloth regardless of the name assigned to it. However, the same pattern in a black wax print limits the possibility of the print being used in other events not associated with funerals. Meaning may therefore not be universally shared but may depend on context as well as the individual's personal interaction with it. There are different levels of naming. Meaning is created and interpretations are situational with local nuances.

8.7 Conclusion

Decolonisation as I have come to understand it in this study, is a journey and living process. It is a 'doing process' as Phipps (Phipps 2019) wrote. The women's effort in naming cloth and society claiming it as their own is one example of how decolonisation can be achieved. For instance, the significant changes of designs and names in production of the wax and roller print industry shows that, the design system is incorporating more local pattern systems like kente and adinkra as well as other local concepts to express meaning. The naming system has also been dominated by popular genres like local gospel music. The changes that are being experienced in the wax and roller print industry are as a result of an expansion in the design resource base in the industry. Thus, market women entrepreneurs are now sources of designs and names as they not only liaise with producers to name prints but also produce their own designs. Patterns and names are used to express a host of themes. Patterns and symbol used in prints however cut across themes. This makes meaning fluid and multiple. The full meaning of designs then becomes

dependent on other factors such as, colour, names, or the particular event in which the print is being used. The importance of names and patterns to the print industry beyond marketing and providing a social communicative tool is that it provides avenues for partnership between the formal manufacturing industry, and the informal retail sector.

It also provides ownership of creative and innovative work for women in the informal retail sector. It is important to acknowledge that witnessing and experiencing cultural colonialism is damaging and traumatic for people, and especially so for people of colour. There is an old adage that cuts across all Ghanaian language “Obi num eduro mma yarifuo” which translates as “no one take medication on behalf of a sick person”. Decolonisation is a healing process and like any healing process it takes time, effort and willingness of the sick person to heal in their own.



Fig. 59: Obla Yoo - Young Lady

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