

**Stamping History: Stories of Social Change in Ghana's *Adinkra* Cloth**

by

Allison Joan Martino

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Raymond A. Silverman, Chair  
Professor Kelly M. Askew  
Assistant Professor Nachiket Chanchani  
Professor Emeritus Elisha P. Renne

Allison Joan Martino

[allimart@umich.edu](mailto:allimart@umich.edu)

ORCID iD: [0000-0002-1252-1378](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1252-1378)

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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the summer of 2013, I was studying photography and contemporary art in Accra, Ghana's capital. A conversation during that trip with Professor Kwesi Yankah changed the course of my research. He suggested a potential research project on *adinkra*. With *adinkra* everywhere in Ghana today, research possibilities seemed endless. *Adinkra* appealed to me from my interest in studying Akan visual and verbal arts, a research area nurtured during an ethnopoetics course that Professor Yankah taught as a visiting scholar at Michigan in 2011. That conversation led to this project.

Soon after that meeting with Professor Yankah, I took an exploratory research trip to Kumasi. Professor Gilbert Amegatcher, who has a wealth of knowledge about Akan arts and culture, traveled with me. He paved the way for this dissertation, making key introductions to *adinkra* cloth makers who I continued to work with during subsequent visits, especially the Boadum and Boakye families. My sincerest thanks are due to Professors Yankah and Amegatcher for generating that initial spark and continuing to support my work.

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## GLOSSARY OF AKAN TERMS

<i>Abakosem</i>	History
<i>Abɔsɔɔ</i> or <i>slit</i>	Women’s skirt, part of <i>kaba</i> ensemble
<i>Abusua</i>	Family, matrilineal in Akan society
<i>Abusua ɔfie</i>	Family house
<i>Adae</i>	Festival held at Manhyia Palace on a recurring basis following the Akan calendar; Akans hold <i>Akwasidae</i> and <i>Anwukudae</i> festivals every six weeks on Sunday and Wednesday respectively.
<i>Adinkra aduro</i> or <i>aduru</i>	Dye made with <i>badia</i> tree bark to print <i>adinkra</i> cloth
<i>Abenemaa</i>	Hand-made leather sandals associated with Akan leaders, including chiefs and queen mothers
<i>Akatasɔɔ</i>	Women’s cloth, part of <i>kaba</i> ensemble, worn as head tie ( <i>duku</i> ) or wrap
<i>Akutia</i>	Indirect communication
<i>Anansesem</i>	Folktale or fable
<i>Asamando</i>	World of the ancestors
<i>Asantebene</i>	Asante king
<i>Asantehemaa</i>	Asante queen mother
<i>Aseda asore</i>	Thanksgiving service for funeral, held on Sunday
<i>Asempa</i>	Folktale stories
<i>Ayie</i>	Public funeral rites held after the burial, usually on Saturday afternoons in Akan communities today. These funeral rites are sometimes distinguished by size as either <i>ayie kesee</i> (small) and <i>ayie pa</i> (large).
<i>Ayitoma</i>	Funeral cloth
<i>Badia</i> or <i>badie</i>	Name of tree grown mainly in northern Ghana; bark of the <i>badia</i> tree is the main material in the printing dye to stamp <i>adinkra</i> cloth. Some cloth makers refer to <i>badia</i> dye as “medicine.”
<i>Birisi</i>	Black cloth
<i>Dansinkran</i>	Women’s two-piece ensemble for mourning cloths
<i>Di nkra</i>	To send a message; to say goodbye; to say farewell
<i>Duku</i>	Head tie

<i>Etia</i> or <i>tia</i>	Iron slag, sometimes added to <i>badia</i> dye
<i>Fura ntoma</i> or <i>ntamafura</i>	To put on cloth
<i>Honam</i>	Body
<i>Joromy</i>	A type of embroidery
<i>Kaba</i>	Women’s three-piece clothing ensemble that includes: a blouse ( <i>kaba</i> ), skirt ( <i>slit</i> or <i>abɔsɔɔ</i> ), and extra cloth ( <i>akatasɔɔ</i> ) to use as a head tie ( <i>duku</i> ) or wrap.
<i>Kente</i>	A kind of narrow strip-woven cloth
<i>Kobene</i>	Red mourning cloth
<i>Kora</i>	Calabash (gourd)
<i>Kra</i>	Soul
<i>Kurom</i>	Hometown
<i>Kuntunkuni</i>	Name of tree grown mainly in northern Ghana; bark of the <i>kuntunkuni</i> tree is the main material in the dye to create a dark-colored mourning cloth. Akans often identify the dyed cloth after the dye’s name, <i>kuntunkuni</i> .
<i>Kwasiada adinkera</i>	“Sunday” <i>adinkera</i> cloth
<i>Nkorabea</i>	Destiny
<i>Nkra</i>	Message
<i>Ntama awindee</i>	Cloth worker
<i>Ntiamu ntoma</i>	Often refers to stamped cloth
<i>Ntoma</i>	Cloth
<i>Nwomu</i>	Hand-stitching added to cloth
<i>Ɔbaapanyin</i>	Elder (woman)
<i>Ɔɔbu</i>	Respect
<i>Oboruni</i>	Foreigner
<i>Ɔfie</i>	Home
<i>Ɔkyeame</i>	Spokesperson to chiefs (plural, <i>akeyeame</i> )
<i>Ɔkyeame poma</i>	Linguist staff
<i>Ɔpanyin</i>	Elder (man)
<i>Sika dwa kofi</i>	Golden stool
<i>Sunsum</i>	Spirit
<i>Zongo</i>	Strangers’ quarters



## ABSTRACT

*Adinkera* is one of the best-known textiles of Africa. This dissertation examines how *adinkera* cloth has evolved from royal dress among Akans in Ghana during the early nineteenth century to its expanding roles today as a global icon of Africa. Akans wear *adinkera* cloth to communicate messages through the cloth's distinct graphic symbols that evoke proverbs, moral beliefs, and cultural values. These messages are not fixed. They change. Joining visual and verbal arts, Ghanaians have transformed the symbols to represent personal meanings as well as narratives about Ghanaian history and African identity. "Stamping History" traces the "biography" of *adinkera*, bringing together diverse voices that have reinterpreted the cloth across time and space. This approach places field and archival research in conversation with interdisciplinary theoretical issues of object biography, fashion, and social memory.

By reframing *adinkera* cloth as fashion rather than "traditional" – a label that evokes unchanging practices – the dissertation argues that Akans have given multiple, changing meanings to *adinkera* that revitalize the past in contemporary life. Through research in Ghana, England, and the Netherlands, the dissertation reveals the dynamics of *adinkera* cloth that have contributed to how Ghanaians have expressed identity and navigated relationships for over two hundred years. "Stamping History" contributes to fields of African social and cultural history, including Ghana and Akan society. The dissertation intervenes in critical debates on the complex relationship between history and memory to advance scholarship on how historical artistic practices have become markers of cultural and national identity.

## INTRODUCTION

“The originator of *adinkra*, a man called Duodu, hailed from this place called Asokwa. The very place where we are seated,” Kusi Boadum told me. It was July 2013 and we were at his family’s home in Asokwa, an area of Kumasi – the second largest city in Ghana and capital of the Ashanti Region. Kusi said that the origins of *adinkra* trace back to ancestors in his family. He brought out a large bag filled with *adinkra* stamps, mostly carved in the 1970s. Kusi used the stamps to tell me the cloth’s history.

“Seeing this motif *adinkrabene*, we have to bear in mind that when it was introduced in Asante, it was under the circumstances of war between the Asante and the Gyaman people. The Asante-Gyaman war [of 1818]. The chief of the other side or the enemy who was killed in that fight was wearing a cloth with this motif, which was brought as part of the war trophy to come and show to the Otumfuo [the Asante king] at the time [Nana Osei Bonsu Panyin].

He was impressed and asked his men: ‘Who can make this for me?’

The answer came from one Duodu.

‘I can make it.’

That man called Duodu hails from this very house in Asokwa.

Apart from the motif, there arose the question: ‘how do you get the dye to print?’

That information was obtained from the son of the defeated chief called Apau or Adinkra Apau”

(K. Boadum, interview, July 30, 2013, Asokwa, Ghana).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A separate *adinkra* symbol was named after Apau, *adinkra ba apau*, meaning Adinkra’s son (Mato 1994). Nana Kwasi Mensah, chief of Asokwa during the mid-1980s, told art historian Daniel Mato, “Kwaku Dwodu may have been chief of Asokwa at the time that he learned ‘*adinkra*’” (Mato 1987: 193; interview with Nana Mensah on November 17, 1983). Scholars have used different names for Duodu, including Mato who identifies him as “Dwodu.” I use the name as spelled in Asokwa during my research.

The bulls-eyed-like *adinkrabene* motif means “the king of *adinkra*.” *Adinkrabene* is one of the most popular symbols printed on *adinkra* cloth (*adinkra ntoma*) today, often celebrated as the first *adinkra* symbol (fig. I.1). Kusi’s explanation of *adinkrabene* exemplifies how *adinkra* symbols carry meanings related to historical narratives, proverbs, moral beliefs, and social values. This relationship between the visual and verbal arts is central to Akan expressive culture, one of many cultural groups in Ghana. An elder cloth maker and community leader in Asokwa, Kusi excels in Akan proverbial wisdom. Telling the history of *adinkra* cloth led Kusi to speak about several other *adinkra* symbols and their connections to Akan history and proverbs.

*Adinkra* is one of the best-known textiles of Africa. The cloth dates to at least the early nineteenth century in Akan society, and quite likely the eighteenth century, as a stamped textile printed with carved calabash stamps and a dark-colored handmade dye. Akans have also long used *adinkra* symbols in other objects as a mode of non-verbal communication, such as gold weights, regalia, and architectural designs. *Adinkra* continues to be relevant today as it resonates with an expansive audience in Ghana and beyond. In addition to the cloth’s cultural importance within Akan society, *adinkra* has circulated nationally and internationally as a marker of Ghana and Africa among Africans in the diaspora.

The global movement of *adinkra* has resulted in changes to how the cloth and its symbols signal distinct Asante, Akan, Ghanaian, and African identities.<sup>2</sup> Amidst this circulation, *adinkra* cloth remains significant within contemporary Akan society – perhaps even more so today due to the cloth’s global recognition. The cloth’s graphic symbols have made *adinkra* appealing to a diverse audience, as the motifs’ symbolic meanings satisfy desires for a pre-colonial cultural practice evoking traditional wisdom and history. Yet the ways that non-Akans reinterpret *adinkra* can mask this very

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars have formerly referred to Asante communities as “Ashantee” and “Ashanti.”

history that they reference. These audiences often place *adinkra* in alternative contexts of use and give the symbols meanings that represent their identity, history, and heritage.

Unlike most scholarship on *adinkra* that centers on the symbols removed from their use on cloth or other materials, the dissertation focuses primarily on *adinkra* cloth. Three questions guided research for the dissertation: What personal and cultural identities, histories, and meanings do Ghanaians articulate with *adinkra* cloth? How do Ghanaians wear *adinkra* cloth to navigate their place in society and relationship to the past? How have the meanings of *adinkra* changed and reflect broader shifts in Ghanaian society? Through these questions, the project examines the dynamics of *adinkra* cloth across historical and contemporary settings. This research seeks to understand how Akans and other Ghanaians have used *adinkra* in ways that are informed by, respond to, or reshape their lives and current circumstances in society (Renne 1995). *Adinkra* offers a medium to examine Akan and Ghanaian social history, as Ghanaians have often used *adinkra* cloth to reflect or enact social and cultural changes.

*Adinkra* cloth comprises a world of knowledge about the past, present, and future of Akan society and the nation of Ghana. Anthropologists Arjun Appadurai's "social life of things" and Igor Kopytoff's "cultural biography of things" inform the project's approach (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; see also Hoskins 1998). Appadurai posits, "as commodities travel greater distances (institutional, spatial, temporal), knowledge about them tends to become partial, contradictory, and differentiated" (Appadurai 1986: 56). His discussion of the changes in knowledge from the exchange and circulation of commodities pertains to the movement of *adinkra* cloth and symbols and their re-contextualization in various settings that the dissertation examines. Moreover, Appadurai distinguishes the "social history" and "cultural biography" of things in terms of class identity, social scale, and temporality. Appadurai posits that his "social history" approach considers the longstanding, wide-ranging trajectory of a certain type of object whereas "cultural biographies"

analyze more specific things (Appadurai 1986: 34).

My focus here on *adinkra* cloth, rather than a wider study of all Akan textiles, for instance, enables me to examine the “cultural biography” of *adinkra* cloth. “A culturally informed economic biography of an object,” Kopytoff explains, “would look at it as a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories” (Kopytoff 1986: 68). Kopytoff argues that a biographical method shows how the commodity status, value, and meaning of objects change as they move through spaces of exchange. A “cultural biography” of *adinkra* reveals the complex and diverse global networks of people and circumstances that have shaped interpretations of *adinkra* across time and space.

Within Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast), Akans form the largest cultural group. Historically, a large Akan subgroup called Asante was one of the most powerful kingdoms in West Africa; the Asante empire dates to the late seventeenth century. Akans reside primarily in central and southern Ghana, as well as parts of Cote d’Ivoire. Akan society is comprised of several subgroups – including the Fante, Anyi, Bono, and Akuapem – that each speak dialects of the Twi language. The making and use of *adinkra* has mainly been associated with Asante culture in in Ghana’s Ashanti Region, where I conducted most of my research; Asante communities speak Twi, an Akan language.

In much of central and southern Ghana, Akans and other Ghanaians have embraced *adinkra* and hand-woven Asante *kente* cloth to express their identity, history, and heritage. For Ewe society in southeastern Ghana’s Volta Region, Ewe *kente* cloth holds comparable value as a marker of Ewe cultural identity; Ewe *kente* cloth is a hand-woven cloth that shares the same name as Asante *kente* cloth, but has distinct visual designs and symbolic significance.<sup>3</sup> Few Akans live in northern Ghana, an area where mostly the Dagomba cultural group resides. Ghanaians in this part of the country have adopted woven smocks called *fugu*, which are associated with Dagomba culture, for similar

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<sup>3</sup> For more on Ewe *kente* cloth, see Kraamer 2005.

purposes.<sup>4</sup> As with *adinkra* cloth, the historical background of *fugu* smocks has informed its contemporary significance to express cultural identity in northern Ghana. Yet neither *fugu* nor Ewe *kente* have achieved the same level of national recognition and proliferation of designs into other materials as *adinkra* or Asante *kente* cloth.

This project analyzes how *adinkra* cloth has evolved from Akan royal dress in the early nineteenth century to become a popular funeral cloth and global icon of Africa. *Adinkra* offers an extraordinary lens into Akan, Ghanaian, and African social and cultural history from various perspectives over the last two hundred years. Ghanaians have transformed *adinkra* to represent personal meanings as well as narratives about Ghanaian history and African identities. The dissertation positions *adinkra* cloth as both an expressive form of fashion and a practice of social memory, often conceptualized as experiencing the past in the present. I argue that *adinkra* comprises a dynamic form of communication in which Ghanaians have given the cloth multiple meanings that have changed alongside other shifts in society.

## I. Debated Beginnings

### Encounters with *Adinkra* Cloth and its Histories in Kumasi

When I met Kusi, he said that we must discuss the history of *adinkra* before anything else. He stressed the importance of understanding the cloth's history. Kusi's narrative exemplifies a commonly told oral history account of how *adinkra* cloth making began. Yet he repeated that *adinkra* cloth making *first* began in Asokwa, his hometown. Curiously absent in his narrative was the name of the defeated ruler, King Kwadwo Adinkra of Gyaman, or other evidence on the cloth's background.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on *fugu* smocks from Dagomba culture in northern Ghana, see Abdul-Rahim, Abdul-Wadudu, and Nkrumah 2016; Essel and Amissah 2015; Smith 1982.

For instance, Thomas Edward Bowdich collected an *adinkera* cloth during his visit to Kumasi in 1817, confirming that the cloth's production began prior to the Asante-Gyaman war of 1818 (fig. I.2.). Following Kusi's guidance, I begin my discussion of *adinkera* with the cloth's history in Chapter One. But I present multiple stories and sources of how *adinkera* cloth production may have begun. Differences in these narratives reveal wider cultural tensions among Ghanaians and ways they use *adinkera* to create associations with a particular past. Multiple, conflicting interpretations on the introduction of *adinkera* also indicate the historical and ongoing role of *adinkera* cloth to support political positions of authority.

Akans and other Ghanaians with whom I spoke largely disregarded historical connections between *adinkera* cloth and other practices or places outside of Asante and Akan society. Among Akans living in Kumasi, emphasis on Asante society has remained paramount. Interactions with Islamic cultures north of Akan society informed the cloth's early production and meanings. For instance, the *adinkera* cloth that Bowdich collected in 1817 had connections to the predominantly Muslim Dagomba cultural group. Islamic practices in northern Ghana influenced other Akan arts besides *adinkera* cloth, such as brass *kuduo* vessels, talismans and architecture, which exemplifies the widespread practice of cultural borrowing among Akans (Garrard and Ross 1983; Prussin 1986; Silverman 1983). Yet cloth makers, including elders who are experts in the cloth's historical meanings, rarely mentioned Islam. Nearly all *adinkera* cloth makers today are Christian, the dominant religion in central and southern Ghana, which may have influenced this absence of Islam.

Islam has influenced *adinkera* cloth and symbols in important ways (Mato 1986, 1994). For instance, some *adinkera* symbols reflect graphic designs associated with Islamic cultures in northern Ghana, which Akans have ascribed with Akan proverbs. Other *adinkera* symbols carry meanings related to these Islamic cultures. Additionally, the materials to make the dye and stamps for printing *adinkera* cloth come from northern Ghana. The technique of designing cloth with dye may relate to

cloth inscribed with text that are associated with Islamic cultures located north of Akan society (Bravmann and Silverman 1987; Silverman 2007). For these textiles, cloth makers wrote text and painted other designs with dye throughout nearly the entire cloth that added protective properties. To print *adinkera* cloth, men also filled the entire cloth with designs: using dye to hand-draw lines with wooden combs that divided the cloth into a grid format and stamp *adinkera* symbols carved into stamps (fig. I.3). The grid layout of *adinkera* cloth may also relate to the grid designs of Islamic amulets and “mystical squares” known as *khatem* (Brett-Smith 2007: 75).

Scholars have taken contradictory positions on the cloth’s Islamic influences. Anthropologist Robert Sutherland Rattray, art historian Daniel Mato, and architectural historian Labelle Prussin propose that cloth inscribed with Arabic script in northern Ghana informed the technique to print *adinkera* cloth (Mato 1987; Prussin 1986; Rattray 1927). In contrast, Kojo Arthur and Joseph Boakye Danquah argue against Islamic influences (Arthur 2001; Danquah 1968). The cultural affiliation of the authors is important to note. Arthur and Danquah are both Akan. The authors who contend that Islamic cultures influenced *adinkera* cloth are American and British scholars. As with the oral histories discussed above, these disputes on the role of Islam are rooted in broader debates on Akan power and identity.

Despite this evidence on the role of Islam in *adinkera* cloth, Islam is not part of popular narratives today about *adinkera* because it disassociates the cloth from Akan and Asante culture that is now central to the cultural value of *adinkera* across Ghana. Akans and other Ghanaians have instead adopted *adinkera* as markers of Christianity, not Islam. Christianity is the dominant religion in southern and central Ghana. The historical role of Christian missionaries in Ghana, including the Basel mission that had a strong presence in Ghana starting in the early nineteenth century, had a significant impact on establishing Christian churches. Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, and



Presbyterian churches are now common in southern and central Ghana. Pentecostalism and Charismatic churches also abound in these parts of Ghana today.<sup>5</sup>

The contemporary role of *adinkera* in Christian practice has largely concealed the historical importance of Islam. Chapter Five explores how *adinkera* cloth and symbols have become common in Christian churches since at least the mid-twentieth century. Some Ghanaians have even reinterpreted the meanings of *adinkera* symbols to express Christian beliefs. Peter Achampong's *Christian Values in Adinkera Symbols* offers the most extensive analysis to date; yet he does not propose historical evidence on the connections between *adinkera* cloth and Christianity, nor discuss the cloth's Islamic connections (Achampong 2008).

Kusi's narrative recounted above associates *adinkera* cloth making with Asokwa, one of several places that made *adinkera* cloth. To the northeast of Kumasi, several small towns are known for cloth making, including Ntonso, Bonwire, and Adanwomase. While some of these towns claim to be the "home" of certain textile practices, such as Bonwire's association with woven Asante *kente* cloth, many cloth makers in these towns are skilled in multiple textile practices. Ntonso is the best-known town today for *adinkera* cloth production, as most *adinkera* cloths are now made there. Cloth makers from Ntonso have told a different story about the introduction of *adinkera* cloth than Kusi's account. Chapter Five presents how residents in Ntonso recall this oral history today, particularly the role of oral history in Ntonso's tourism industry that claims the town is the "home" of *adinkera* cloth.

Some cloth makers in Ntonso said that the nearby town Kona was an important historical site for the cloth's production. In recalling the history of *adinkera* cloth making, *ɔpanyin* Oduro Branee said that men from Ntonso traveled to Kona and observed cloth makers there who were printing *adinkera* cloth (*ɔpanyin* O. Branee, interview, May 13, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). *ɔpanyin* Branee is now retired from cloth-making in Ntonso. Specifically, he credited his ancestor Nana Kweku Nsia as a

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<sup>5</sup> Anthropologist Brigit Meyer has extensively studied Christianity and Pentecostalism in Ghana, particularly with regards to popular culture and the relationship between religion and the media (Meyer 1992, 1998, 2015).

key figure to introduce *adinkera* cloth production in his hometown. According to *ɔpanyin* Branee, Nsia visited Kona where he learned how to make *adinkera* cloth and then brought the trade to Ntonso. Other cloth makers in Ntonso also spoke about Nsia's importance. Nsia returned to Ntonso with skills for printing *adinkera* cloth, in addition to weaving and a kind of hand-stitching known as *mwomu*, which he taught to other men in Ntonso.<sup>6</sup>

Other towns in greater Kumasi were also associated with *adinkera* cloth making. For example, elders in Hemang recently recalled how their ancestors contributed to the historical production of *adinkera* cloth in both Asokwa and Ntonso. However, no scholarship has discussed this role of Hemang in *adinkera* cloth making, nor did cloth makers in Asokwa or Ntonso speak about historical connections to Hemang. The town is better known for its historical production of terracotta heads from the eighteenth to twentieth century. Brass casters in Twifo-Hemang also made gold weights and other cast objects.

In 2014, Hemang's assembly leader Kwesi Okyere and elder residents *ɔbaapanyin* Akua Afriyie and *ɔbaapanyin* Abenaa Adowaa said that Hemang was the site for intermarriages with residents of Asokwa who were likely cloth makers (*ɔbaapanyin* A. Adowaa, *ɔbaapanyin* A. Afriyie, K. Okyere, personal communication, December 2, 2014, Hemang, Ghana). They also claimed that cloth makers moved from Hemang to Ntonso in the 1920s. *Adinkera* cloth making in Hemang was not well established and short-term before then, which the elders attributed to the far distance of Hemang from the main road that made it more difficult for customers to access. Ntonso, in comparison, was a more viable site for making and selling cloth when the Mampong road that runs through Ntonso was built in the 1920s, connecting greater Kumasi to Tamale in northern Ghana.

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<sup>6</sup> *Nwomu* stitching creates narrow rows of threads stitched onto cloth, either in one color or multi-colored stripes, which adds prestige to the cloth from the added materials and laborious process to make.

## The Multiple Meanings of “*Adinkra*”

Many *adinkra* motifs evoke Akan proverbs that carry multiple meanings and interpretations. Akans value a speaker’s creativity and wit to not only be fluent in proverbial wisdom, but to also transform a known proverb into a new expression. Just as *adinkra* symbols convey multiple meanings, so too does the word *adinkra*. Today, some Ghanaians – particularly women cloth sellers in markets – identify hand-printed *adinkra* cloth in Twi as “*adinkra ntiamu*.” *Ntiamu* refers specifically to the cloth’s stamping technique, and therefore distinguishes handmade cloth from factory-printed cloth with *adinkra* motifs.

The various interpretations and translations of the cloth’s name reflect the dynamics of the Twi language and Akan expressive culture. As mentioned above, some Akans and Ghanaians associate the word “*adinkra*” with King Kwadwo Adinkra of Gyaman. This interpretation is more commonly cited among those familiar with debates on the cloth’s historical introduction, knowledge that surprisingly only a small number of Akans and Ghanaians are aware of today. Akans whom I spoke to often proposed two linguistic readings of the word *adinkra*. Some arguments for either linguistic translations of *adinkra* in Twi aim to claim *adinkra* as Akan culture amidst the expanding identity of *adinkra* as Ghanaian and African.

The most common interpretation that I encountered was based on translating the word “*adinkra*” from the Twi expression *di nkera* that means “to say goodbye” or “to say farewell.” Many argued for this translation because it supports the cloth’s primary use today as mourning dress to wear at funerals. However, this interpretation is problematic because it does not represent how the word *adinkra* connects to the cloth’s introduction: *adinkra* did not begin as a funeral cloth. Another linguistic interpretation of the word *adinkra* draws upon the Twi word *nkera* that means “message” to explain that *adinkra* articulates the expression *di nkera*, “to send a message.” This explanation was more frequently discussed among cloth makers and those interested in the cloth’s communicative

power.

Akan linguistics researcher Osepetetrekua Kwame Osei offered an unusual interpretation of *adinkra* from two Twi words: *adwen* for design and *kora* for calabash, the material used to carve *adinkra* stamps (O. Osei, personal communication, November 27, 2014, Manhyia, Ghana). Osei proposed this interpretation during a conversation I had with him and Osei Bonsu Safo-Kantanka, a *kente* cloth weaver and researcher at Manhyia Palace in Kumasi. In response to Osei's interpretation, Safo-Kantanka suggested an alternative translation: *adwen* meaning craft and *nokware* for design or marks (O. Safo-Kantanka, personal communication, November 27, 2014, Manhyia, Ghana). Both of their interpretations relate to the Twi word *adwinikena*, meaning “the art of designing on cloth” (“Making an ‘Adinkrah’ Cloth” 1970).<sup>7</sup>

Scholars have also drawn upon the Twi word *kera*, meaning soul, in which *adinkra* is “the parting or send-off message or intelligence that the soul carries to and from God” (Arthur 2001: 25; see also Boateng 2011: 23). Osei and Safo-Kantanka also suggested that the Twi word *nkra* meaning “message” may also be associated with the Akan expression for destiny *nkorabea*, which means to part with God before coming to earth and parting with earth upon death (O. Osei and O. Safo-Kantanka, personal communication, November 27, 2014, Manhyia, Ghana).

These various interpretations of the word *adinkra* in contemporary Ghana reflect some meanings of the cloth's name that circulated in Ghana during the mid to late twentieth century. A *Ghana News* article published in 1970 summarizes these beliefs:

“In support of the claim that the kings of Ashanti wore *adinkra* long before the war between Ashanti and Gyaman, there is the term ‘*adwinikena*’ namely, the art of designing on cloth, of which *adinkra* is thought to be a corruption. This claim is feasible, since the term is descriptive of *adinkra* cloth. There are others, too, who believe that *adinkra* is an inversion of ‘*nkradie*’ or ‘*dinkra*’ (meaning saying goodbye), which is an aspect of mourning the dead” (“Cultural Scene: Making an ‘Adinkrah’ Cloth” 1970).

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<sup>7</sup> Christaller's dictionary of the Akan language does not include *adwinikena*, but he does include *adwini*, which I discuss later in this section (Christaller 1881).

Since then, the press in Ghana has continued to be an outlet for publicizing narratives on the meaning of *adinkra*. This news article published in 1970 is not representative of the narratives about the history of *adinkra* cloth that circulated in the press. However, it illustrates the role of the press to disseminate narratives about the meaning of *adinkra* and related beliefs on the cloth's origins, stories that historically circulated verbally through oral history.<sup>8</sup>

Not all shared these multiple interpretations. In comparison, Kofi Antubam said a few years prior to this news article, “the Akan Ghanaian word *adinkera* simply means ‘saying good-bye to one another when parting’” (Antubam 1963: 157). Antubam led the arts program at Achimota College in Accra and was also a state artist for President Kwame Nkrumah in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Perhaps more problematic is that Antubam identifies *adinkera* as an “Akan Ghanaian” word, which directly associates Twi as a national language rather than distinguishing Twi as specific to Akan or Asante communities. Antubam’s repositioning of the Akan Twi language as “Ghanaian” reflects his broader agenda to appropriate elements of Akan society into the formation of Ghana’s national identity. Chapter Five addresses the impact of Antubam’s work to reframe *adinkera* as national culture.

In addition to debates within Akan society over the linguistic significance of *adinkera*, scholarship has also proposed multiple arguments about the cloth’s name. Some scholars interpreted the linguistic meaning of the Twi word *adinkera* to contend that the cloth’s name holds significance beyond potential references to King Kwadwo Adinkra. Other scholars offered interpretations of *adinkera* that relate the symbols’ philosophical and religious meanings. Mato’s dissertation analyzes key texts from before the late 1980s – including works by Antubam, Danquah, A.K. Quarcoo, and

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<sup>8</sup> The press in Ghana is another source on the circulation of various narratives about the historical introduction of *adinkra* cloth. This article states: “Views differ as to the origin of *adinkera*. One school of thought maintains that in ancient times, the Kings of Ashanti, Denkyira and Tekyiman wore *adinkera* which their guild of designers were the first to design. Another school is of the opinion that the first Ashanti King to wear *adinkera* was Nana Osei Bonsu Panyin who fought, defeated and slew Adinkra, King of Gyaman (now the Ivory Coast) at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (“Cultural Scene: Making an ‘Adinkrah’ Cloth” 1970).

Johann Gottlieb Christaller's dictionary of Asante Twi (Antubam 1963; Christaller 1881; Danquah 1968; Mato 1987: 104-112; Quarcoo 1972).<sup>9</sup> Mato's discussion emphasizes the work by Danquah, the first scholar to analyze the linguistics of the word *adinkra* through Twi to show the cloth's Akan origins (Mato 1987: 107-109).<sup>10</sup>

Since the 1980s, most scholarship on *adinkra* continues to present these meanings of the word *adinkra* rather than proposing new interpretations (Arthur 2001; Boateng 2011; Willis 1998). For example, communications scholar Adolph Agbo's *Values of Adinkra Symbols* – one of the most popular texts on *adinkra* in Ghana today – draws upon Antubam's translation (Agbo 2011: x). Presenting Antubam's definition of *adinkra* perpetuates nationalist perspectives on *adinkra* cloth that consequently continues the ongoing debate on *adinkra* as representing Asante, Akan, or Ghanaian identity and history.

## II. *Adinkra* Cloth and Akan Social History

### Literature Review

Most scholarship on *adinkra* cloth comes from scholars working in fields other than art history including education, philosophy, communication, sociology, and economics (Achampong 2008; Agbo 1999, 2011; Azindow 1999; Fianu 2007). However, art historian Daniel Mato's dissertation published in 1987 offers the most comprehensive study on *adinkra* cloth (Mato 1987). The range of disciplines represented demonstrates the broad relevance of *adinkra* and diverse issues pertaining to the roles of *adinkra* in multiple facets of Akan and Ghanaian society. Yet many of these

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<sup>9</sup> Mato also compares how scholars draw upon these and other sources in their discussions of the meaning of the word *adinkra*, including art historians Labelle Prussin, Herbert Cole, and Doran Ross (Mato 1987: 107-110).

<sup>10</sup> In particular, Danquah examines the meaning of the Twi words *kera* or *nkera* to mean to say farewell or send a message (Danquah 1968).

scholars have not drawn upon methods or theories from their own disciplines to research and analyze *adinkera* cloth. Consequently, literature is limited in scope and repetitive in both methodology and content. Most works follow two directions.

One area of scholarship focuses on printing techniques to make *adinkera* cloth that generally identify the practice as “traditional” culture (Menzel 1972; Polakoff 1980a; Rattray 1927). These works locate *adinkera* within wider textile and craft studies, as they do not fully consider the significance and roles of *adinkera* outside of its production. For example, German anthropologist Brigitte Menzel completed extensive research on *adinkera* cloth during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Menzel 1972). In Menzel’s three-volume set on West African textiles, she includes a detailed catalog of *adinkera* symbols she recorded during research in Kumasi and detailed discussion of printing techniques from her work with cloth makers in Asokwa and Ntonso.<sup>11</sup> Absent in nearly all recent publications is the contemporary production of *adinkera* cloth, with little discussion of screen-printed *adinkera* cloth that has dominated production since the early twenty-first century.<sup>12</sup> Ongoing emphasis on stamping – including calabash stamps and handmade dye – perpetuates misconceptions that cloth making practices are unchanging. Chapters Two and Three present alternative ways of conceptualizing the cloth’s artistic process and technological innovations that challenges how some past studies discuss *adinkera* cloth production.

The other direction in scholarship addresses the cloth’s symbolic motifs to position *adinkera* as a visual language and graphic writing system (Achampong 2008; Agbo 2011; Arthur 2001; Glover 1969, 1971, 1992; Quarcoo 1994; Willis 1998). These works often present Akan proverbs and sayings related to specific *adinkera* motifs, sometimes synthesizing the proverb’s complex meaning into a single word or phrase such as symbols of forgiveness and humility. Of these studies, Kojo

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<sup>11</sup> My research included studying Menzel’s archives of field notes and photographs documenting her work on *adinkera* cloth, now held at the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, Netherlands.

<sup>12</sup> Faculty at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana, are the only scholars I have identified that published a short article on screen-printed *adinkera* cloth (Frimpong, Asinyo, and Amankwah 2013).

Arthur presents one of the most thorough texts on *adinkera* symbolism (Arthur 2001). Surprisingly absent is how *adinkera* achieves its communicative power through both the motif's verbal and visual form. Of these works, Ablade Glover's chart of *adinkera* symbols (first printed in the 1969, with revised editions in 1971 and 1992) is one of the most popular and widely cited sources; Chapter Three examines Glover's contributions in greater detail as a well-known painter in Ghana and former arts professor in Kumasi. In Ghana today, communications scholar Adolph Agbo's *Value of Adinkera Symbols* and Glover's chart are the most often cited texts on *adinkera* (Agbo 1999, 2011).

Attention to symbolism in this body of literature also resulted in isolating individual *adinkera* motifs, removing them from the cloth worn as dress at various events as well as their use on Akan cultural objects. Unlike works that generally present each *adinkera* symbol as carrying one meaning, the dissertation shows that their meanings are plural and fluid. The following chapters present in-depth analysis of certain *adinkera* symbols and examine the visual and verbal dynamics that have shaped how people use *adinkera* symbols to convey multiple, changing meanings.

Contributions from a few scholars offer notable exceptions. Anthropologist Robert Sutherland Rattray was the first scholar to publish ethnographic research on *adinkera* cloth (Rattray 1927: 262-268). Rattray briefly describes the cloth's history and technique that cloth makers followed to make the cloth during the 1920s (including the process of preparing *badia* dye). His study documents fifty-three *adinkera* symbols, with explanations of the symbols' names and meanings that he recorded during his research. With a limited number of historical *adinkera* cloths in museum collections, this documentation is significant to understand the corpus of *adinkera* symbols in use during the early twentieth century. Rattray's work remains one of the most important texts on the subject, particularly as it offers insights into how the corpus of *adinkera* symbols and their meanings have changed over time (Rattray 1923, 1927, 1930).



Mato's dissertation, "Clothed in Symbol: The Art of *Adinkra* Among the Akan of Ghana," offers the most comprehensive study of *adinkra* cloth, especially with regards to analyzing historical evidence of the cloth's origins and Islamic influences (Mato 1987). His dissertation contextualizes *adinkra* within a wider discussion of Akan cosmology, religion, and funeral practices. Drawing upon field research in Ghana from 1982-1985 and related archival collections, Mato extensively discusses the cloth's production with analysis of stamping techniques, gender, and trade; this includes attention to the cloth's dye, stamps, combs, and types of cloth. He grounds his study within the historical background of *adinkra* to examine the continuity and changes over time, particularly with regards to issues of symbolic literacy and the popularization of *adinkra* cloth. For example, Mato distinguishes between a "core" group of historical *adinkra* motifs and "new" symbols, which he argues illustrates the "elasticity" of Akan culture as well as Akan "cultural resiliency" for certain *adinkra* symbols to remain in use over a long period of time (Mato 1987: 233-234).

In addition, Mato's dissertation includes a catalog of two hundred and eighteen *adinkra* symbols based upon his documentation of over nine hundred *adinkra* stamps. The catalog features visual variations of the stamp designs that he recorded as well as written translations of the symbols' names and meanings from those with whom he studied and other publications (Mato 1987). His catalog offers an extraordinary resource on the dynamics of *adinkra* symbols in the late twentieth century.

In comparison, communications scholar Boatema Boateng examines *adinkra* (and also *kente* cloth) in terms of intellectual property and copyright protection laws (Boateng 2007, 2008, 2011). She argues that power relations in the now global production and circulation of *adinkra* marginalize Akans internationally. Boateng proposes a "commons" approach that attributes protection of local community authorship. This dissertation draws upon historical materials provided in these works,

but departs from them through reframing *adinkra* as fashionable dress that reflects a dynamic social practice of production.

### *Social and Cultural History of Ghana and Africa*

The dissertation makes an important contribution to fields of African social and cultural history. Historical studies on Ghana have focused the most attention on the country's political history, particularly with regards to nationalism and Ivor Wilk's pioneering work on Asante political history (Fuller 2014; Hasty 2005; Konadu and Campbell 2016; Wilks 1975, 1993). The dissertation builds upon more recent scholarship since the early twenty-first century on life histories in Ghana (Clark 2010; McCaskie 2000; Miescher 2005), and especially social histories of Ghana that have studied topics ranging from popular music and politics to alcohol and transportation (Akyeampong 1996; Allman 1993; Allman and Tashjian 2000; Friedson 2010; Hart 2016; Plageman 2013).

Studies of Akan and Ghanaian culture have explored areas including theatre, dance, film, popular culture, funerals, literature, and folktales (Anyidoho and Gibbs 2000; Coe 2005a; Cole 2001; de Witte 2001; Feld 2012; Garritano 2013; Meyer 2015; Newell 2000, 2002; Schauert 2015; Shipley 2012; van der Geest 2000, 2006). Folklore scholar Kwesi Yankah's work has influenced my approach to analyze the verbal dimensions of *adinkra* symbols. Yankah's research on Akan verbal arts analyzes the dynamics of Akan proverbial speech and royal oratory, especially the role of spokespersons to Akan chiefs and kings called *akeyeame* (*ɔkyeame*, singular; Yankah 1989a, 1995). Philosophers Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye's writings on concepts of personhood, religion, and worldviews in Akan philosophy are relevant to the meanings of some *adinkra* symbols (Gyekye 1978, 1995; Wiredu 1980, 1996). Gyekye and Wiredu's work also informed the early development of this project to explore how Akan notions of personhood informed the ways that cloth makers

approach their work, in addition to the relationship between person and community that I address in Chapter Two.

Unlike scholarship on Akan visual arts that primarily centers on royal arts, the dissertation's emphasis on the uses of *adinkera* cloth among non-royals demonstrates the cloth's wide-reaching importance in Akan society. Chapter One's discussion of the political contexts for *adinkera* at Manhyia Palace and Chapter Three's analysis of a cloth maker who creates the king's *adinkera* cloths also contribute to prior studies on other cultural practices at Manhyia Palace associated with the Asantehene, the Asante king (Ampene 2014; Kyerematen 1964; McLeod 1981; Ross 2002). Other studies on Akan arts discuss gold weights, *kente* cloth, architecture, and Islamic influences; some of these practices reflect ways that *adinkera* symbols are used throughout Akan culture (Apotsos 2016; Bravmann 1974; Garrard 1980; Hess 2006; Labi 2009; McLeod 1981; Prussin 1986; Quarcoopome 1997; Silverman 1983; Swithenbank 1969).

Moreover, the dissertation's study of the multiple influences and circulation of *adinkera* cloth draws upon two notable edited volumes on Akan arts published in the 1980s that address issues related to cultural exchange and borrowing in Akan visual arts (Garrard and Ross 1983; Schildkrout 1987). These works added to art historians Herbert Cole and Doran Ross's *The Arts of Ghana*, the first major exhibition and catalogue on the topic that remains a seminal text (Cole and Ross 1977). Since then, publications on visual arts in Ghana have included studies on modern and contemporary art, arts of Fante military groups called *asafo*, and wall painting in northern Ghana (Kwami 2013b; Ross 1979; Smith 1978; Talmor 2008; Woets 2011).

## *Textiles and Fashion in Africa*

The dissertation contributes to literature on both textiles and fashion, and aims to unite these areas that are often separate in scholarship. The dissertation places *adinkra* cloth – an handmade textile more commonly associated with “traditional culture” and craft – in the sphere of fashion that generally emphasizes sewn garments and couture fashions. This reframing reveals the dynamics of *adinkra* cloth to change over time, as well as the long history of wearing *adinkra* as fashionable dress in Akan life. In doing so, this project contributes broadly to studies on fashion, dress, and textiles – including ones focused beyond the continent of Africa – to offer ways of connecting these related fields.

For example, two recent exhibitions organized in 2016-2017 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through the museum’s “Creative Africa” series illustrate this on-going separation of handmade textiles from discussions of fashion and recent emphasis on wax-prints as evoking African fashion. The exhibition *Vlisco: African Fashion on a Global Stage* presented sewn wax-prints garments (including some made by couture fashion designers) displayed on mannequins posed as if on a fashion runway. In contrast, *Threads of Tradition* centered on the designs and techniques associated with woven, dyed, and embroidered textiles in West and Central Africa. While *adinkra* was not a major contribution to either exhibition, the classification of handmade textiles as “traditional” exemplifies this separation from wax-prints and other sewn garments that are displayed as African fashion.

The dissertation conceptualizes fashion through a broad, encompassing definition not limited to couture fashion designers or runway garments. Scholars often acknowledge change and innovation as key characteristics of fashion. The project in part reframes *adinkra* as fashion for reasons similar to why some scholars first sought to position other forms of African dress as fashion: to bring attention to change and dynamic dress practices, which countered misperceptions of societies in Africa as static. In comparison, scholars previously considered dress in Europe and

other “western” countries to demonstrate fashion. In *African Fashion, Global Style: Histories, Innovations, and Ideas You Can Wear*, art historian Victoria Rovine observes, “I contend that fashion is best described as changing styles of dress and other body adornment that are motivated by the social value placed on innovation” (Rovine 2015: 15-16). With *adinkera* cloth, the following chapters discuss how change, innovation, and creativity are central to how cloth makers and consumers have made, worn, and given meaning to *adinkera* cloth.

Specifically, fashion theories that consider the role of clothing in communication practices and social interactions has informed the dissertation’s approach to examining *adinkera* cloth. Sociologists Jennifer Craik, Fred Davis, and Georg Simmel propose different understandings of fashion that share some commonalities, but also depart from one another in distinct ways (Craik 1994; Davis 1992; Simmel 1904). For this project, aspects of each of their works offer useful insights for thinking about *adinkera* cloth as an expressive form of fashion. For example, Simmel perceives a duality between distinction and imitation that shape fashion cycles and unfold in class divisions. The dissertation follows sociologist Jennifer Craik’s approach to understanding fashion systems, which counters Simmel and other scholars who propose a top-down concept of fashion cycles. Craik contends:

“A fashion system embodies the denotation of acceptable codes and conventions, sets limits to clothing behavior, prescribes acceptable – and proscribes unacceptable – modes of clothing the body, and constantly revises the rules of the fashion game. Considered in this light, ‘fashioning the body’ is a feature of all cultures although the specific technologies of fashion vary between cultures” (Craik 1994: 5).

While *adinkera* cloth is historically associated with Asante royal and political uses, *adinkera* became culturally accepted dress for men and women of varying social standing and background in Ghana to wear at funerals, festivals, political events, church, and other social events. Simmel argues that fashion is a product of social needs, as he posits, “the only motivations with which fashion is concerned are formal social ones” (Simmel 1971: 298). My interests lie in considering how such

notions of fashions can enhance our understanding about the role of *adinkra* as a mode of communication when made in dynamic social spaces and worn as everyday dress and attire for special occasions.

Davis's interest in how and what clothing communicates are relevant to discussions of *adinkra* cloth. In his proposal for a four-part "clothing code," Davis writes, "the essential distinction, however – what most distinguishes clothing as a mode of communication from speech – is that *meaningful* differences among clothing signifies are not nearly as sharply drawn and standardized as are the spoken sounds employed in a speech community" (Davis 1992: 13). Davis suggests that clothing therefore conveys ambivalent messages and social identities. While the uses of *adinkra* cloth among Ghanaians do not necessarily constitute ambivalence, the mutability of meaning at play in *adinkra* certainly relates to the complexity associated with this distinction in clothing.

Attention to the connections between *adinkra* cloth and surrounding social life is central to this project. In *African Dress: Fashion, Agency, Performance*, Karen Hansen draws upon Craik's work as she uses the terms fashioning and fashionability "to capture the performative quality of dress practice. To speak of fashionability entails shifting the focus from the garments onto the practices and situations of which they are part" (Hansen 2013: 5-6). Craik's work emphasizes links between fashion and behavior through the notion of *habitus*, a way of being in the world. Craik argues, "fashion can be considered as an elaborated body technique through which a range of personal and social statements can be articulated" (Craik 1994: 16). The dissertation considers these theories in relation to Akan concepts of proper social behavior. The Akan notion of "indirection" (*akutia*), for example, is a desired form of non-verbal communication expressed through demeanor and dress style. These fashion theories offer insights into how comportment and dress practices inform ways of wearing *adinkra* cloth as a form of communication.

Over the last ten years, a few key edited volumes began to position dress practices in Africa as fashion (Allman 2004; Gott and Loughran 2010; Hansen and Madison 2013; Rovine 2009, 2014). *Adinkra* and other comparable handmade textiles are not discussed, unless through the work of fashion designers who have adapted the designs in their garments. While not part of the dissertation's focus, *adinkra* has expanded into the world of couture fashion. For instance, designer Ben Nonterah's runway fashions made since the late twentieth century have incorporated *adinkra* motifs (Richards 2014; Rovine 2014). However, this dissertation contends that wearing *adinkra* as a wrapped cloth or sewn garment both constitute expressive forms of fashion.

In comparison to recent literature on fashion in Africa, there is a longer scholarly record of studies on African textiles. In addition to a special journal issues on West African textiles in *African Arts* (1992), several publications and exhibition catalogues have presented overviews of African textiles that focus on design and technique (Gardi, Bauer, and Bedaux 2009; Gillow 2001, 2003; LaGamma and Giuntini 2008; Picton and Mack 1979; Polakoff 1980a; Spring 2012; Spring and Hudson 1995). As such, these and other related works have often contextualized *adinkra* with other handmade textiles made with comparable techniques involving stencils or wood stamps for wax-resist cloth.

More recently, scholarship on factory-printed textiles popularly known as "African wax-prints" has expanded significantly and adds to scholarship on the historical cloth trade in Africa (Kriger 2006; Nielsen 1979; Picton 1995; Sylvanus 2016). Attention to "African wax-prints" in recent museum exhibitions in the United States and Europe (including *Vlisco: African Fashion on a Global Stage* and *Six Yards Guaranteed Dutch Design*) contribute to this conversation.<sup>13</sup> For example, the catalog accompanying the exhibition *African Print Fashion Now! A Story of Taste, Globalization, and Style*

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<sup>13</sup> *Six Yards Guaranteed Dutch Design* was held in 2012 at the Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem in the Netherlands. In addition, the Mid-America Artist Alliance and ExhibitsUSA organized a touring exhibition (2016-2021) *Wandering Spirit: African Wax Prints*. For more, see <http://eusa.org/exhibition/wandering-spirit-african-wax-prints/>

situates the historical and contemporary significance of wax-prints within global networks of exchange, identity, and fashion spanning “popular” everyday use, runway designs, and visual art (Gott, Loughran, Quick, and Rabine 2017).<sup>14</sup> Wax-prints are also a central material in the work of British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare, one of the most famous contemporary African artists. Shonibare’s use of wax-prints has certainly contributed to the scholarly attention on wax-prints today (Hynes 2001; Picton 2001). Chapter Four contributes an analysis on the historical integration of *adinkra* motifs in factory-printed cloth designs made in England.

The focus of Chapter Four on factory-printed textile designs with *adinkra* motifs also considers the role of imported Chinese textiles in hand-printed *adinkra* cloth production. Past studies on Chinese textiles in Africa, including wax-prints, address related economic factors, market dynamics of cloth trade, and issues of authenticity related to wax-print designs (Asmah 2008; Boateng 2008, 2011; Liu 2010; Prag 2013; Renne 2015; Sylvanus 2007, 2013, 2016). A dominant narrative in scholarship about these issues in Ghana centers on intellectual property and how China’s textile trade in Africa has collapsed local textile industries. In comparison, the dissertation brings attention to the relationship between economic and aesthetic factors.

Additionally, the dissertation explores approaches to re-dye and re-print old, faded *adinkra* cloth that illuminate the wider significance of re-using cloth in Akan fashion and dress practices. Anthropologist Karen Hansen led scholarship on the secondhand clothing industry in Africa (specifically Zambia) and its global connections (Hansen 2000; see also Grabski 2013). Few studies have focused on the re-use of cloth or secondhand clothing industry in Ghana despite its economic and cultural significance. Kantamanto market in Accra, Ghana’s capital, is the country’s largest

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<sup>14</sup> The Fowler Museum of Cultural History at UCLA organized this traveling exhibition, which was co-curated by Suzanne Gott, Loughran, Betsy Quick, and Leslie Rabine. In the catalog, the forward summarizes prior exhibitions held at the Fowler Museum that also focused on wax-prints (Berns as quoted in Gott, Loughran, Quick, and Rabine 2017: 9-10). For example, in 2014, the Fowler Museum of Cultural History at UCLA held an exhibition focusing on wax-prints specific to Ghana, *Yards of Style: African Print Cloths of Ghana*, curated by Suzanne Gott and Betsy Quick.



secondhand market that sells imported used garments. Akans commonly call imported used clothes “*obroni wawu*” in Twi, meaning the “white man is dead,” as Ghanaians typically only give away clothes after someone has passed away; many Ghanaians therefore refer to imported secondhand garments as the dead white person’s clothes.<sup>15</sup> Research on re-printed *adinkera* cloth presented in Chapter One demonstrate how practices to re-make clothing extends beyond transformations to imported secondhand clothes to handmade textiles.

Two important texts on other cloth practices in West Africa stand out as useful models for this project. Art historians Doran Ross’s edited volume, *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity*, and Victoria Rovine’s *Bogolan: Shaping Culture Through Cloth in Contemporary Mali*, charts the historical and contemporary transformations of *kente* and *bogolanfini* cloths in Ghana and Mali, respectively (Ross 1998; Rovine 2001; see also Adler and Barnard 1992; Brett-Smith 2014). Central to their arguments is how *kente* and *bogolanfini* have changed in form, meaning, and circulation for an expanding audience throughout the continent of Africa and African diaspora to express broader notions of African identities and heritages. The dissertation adds to this conversation on the shifting roles of cloth to articulate personal, cultural, national, and African identities.

In Ghana, art historians have studied handmade textiles such as *kente* cloth, wax-print ensembles, and couture fashion designs (Gott 1994, 2005, 2009, 2010; Kraamer 2005; Richards 2014; Ross 1998). Specific to Kumasi, Suzanne Gott’s research positions wax-print outfits within a vibrant grassroots fashion system (Gott 2010: 21). As Ross argues, Asante *kente* cloth has transformed from its Akan uses to represent Ghanaian and African identity. Historically, *kente* was a prestigious hand-woven cloth made of cotton or silk. The cloth’s access widened over time to

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<sup>15</sup> Additional names used to identify secondhand clothing in Ghana include “Folks” and “Tema Station;” the latter is named after a popular market to purchase secondhand clothes in Accra. “Bend and pick” is also used to describe secondhand clothing in Ghana, alluding to the process of selecting them at the market (K. Yankah, personal communication, November 2011, Ann Arbor, Michigan).

become accepted dress among non-royals. Yet *kente* continues to evoke status. Moreover, factory-printed textiles emulating the color, patterns, or weaving technique of *kente* cloth date to at least the late nineteenth century.

These changes to *kente* cloth reflect a similar transformation that occurred with *adinkra* cloth. But there is an important distinction in how each textile practice has become associated with African identity and heritage. As with *adinkra* cloth, *kente* cloth patterns carry individual names and meanings. But the expanding contexts for *kente* across Ghana, Africa, and the African diaspora have not retained these meanings. The *kente* cloth's visual designs alone conjure an image of African culture. In comparison, interest in the symbolic meanings of *adinkra* motifs has remained central to its now global uses. Non-Akans have reinterpreted, condensed, or simplified the meanings of *adinkra* symbols into expressions relevant to their lives.

## Methodology

Questions about the meanings, history, and changing cultural contexts of *adinkra* led me to pursue field and archival research in Ghana, England, and the Netherlands using methods from art history, anthropology, and history. My experiences during five research visits to Ghana from 2012 to 2015 guided the shape of the dissertation. Living in Ghana enhanced my understanding of contemporary Akan life, particularly the roles of cloth and influence of historical Akan culture. Archival sources offered the historical context needed to support contemporary reflections on the past.

Much of my research in Ghana concentrated in greater Kumasi, but I also traveled throughout the country. Attention to studying *adinkra* within Akan life centered on Ghana, as I did

not conduct research with Akans living in Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>16</sup> Research drew upon interviews and observation, as well as studying archival records and visual and material culture. I developed initial areas of inquiry during preliminary research visits, which identified people to speak with, events to attend, and materials to study that could offer important contributions to the project's goals. At the same time, my research approach was organic as I received recommendations and was introduced to new materials that I was previously unaware of during subsequent research trips.

My approach to interviews and observation drew upon methods from anthropology. I conducted dozens of interviews (including interviews with over twenty-five *adinkra* cloth makers) and had informal conversations with individuals of diverse backgrounds, cultural affiliations, and areas of expertise. This included cloth makers and other artists, cloth sellers, customers, elders, chiefs, faculty, and staff at museums and cultural centers. Additionally, I observed cloth makers and sellers at work. In Ntonso and Asokwa, I devoted time to learn various techniques involved to make *adinkra* cloth. Attending events where people came dressed in *adinkra* cloth spanned from small family funerals to enormous festivals and court sessions at Manhyia Palace.

My analysis of visual and material culture in Ghana focused mainly on historical and contemporary hand-printed *adinkra* cloths and the technologies used to create them (including calabash stamps, *badia* dye, silk screens, and acrylic printing pastes), as well as factory-printed cloths designed with *adinkra* motifs. Everywhere I visited, I documented current uses of *adinkra* symbols beyond cloth in other objects and images – including jewelry, logo designs, and architecture among others. For archival materials, research focused on relevant texts, photographs, and textiles held at museums, archives, and personal collections in Kumasi and Accra to better understand the historical significance and development of *adinkra*.

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<sup>16</sup> During my research in Kumasi, people with whom I spoke said that Akan cloth makers in Cote d'Ivoire historically made *adinkra* cloth, but they did not know of any active practices today. Prior research on *adinkra* by other scholars has also focused in Ghana, and I have yet to identify material evidence of *adinkra* cloth making and use among Akans living in Cote d'Ivoire.

My training in studio art prior to beginning the doctoral program also shaped my research approach. As an artist, I am particularly interested in learning the processes involved to make objects in order to write about them. Cloth makers and staff at the Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region – in Kumasi stressed the necessity of instruction in “practicals” (meaning the cloth’s production) to acquire a deeper understanding of *adinkra* cloth. Rather than pursuing extensive training from one cloth maker, I opted for learning from several cloth makers to compare how different people approach their work and personalize shared techniques and technologies. This included training in Asokwa and Ntonso from the Boakye family, David Boamah, and Kusi Boadum. First-hand experience with making *adinkra* cloth yielded a distinct insight into the artistic process than what I learned from conversations with these same people when they were not working. The outcomes of these experiences led to the argument in Chapter Two that the artistic process of making *adinkra* cloth is intimately tied to social life. This sharply counters past scholarship that presented *adinkra* cloth production as isolated from surrounding interactions and devoid of individuality.

Historical materials in Ghana concerning *adinkra* cloth at museums, archives, and personal collections were limited. Few people who I met kept old *adinkra* cloth. Consequently, I studied related historical materials now held at museums and archives in England and the Netherlands. This research centered on *adinkra* cloths and stamps, factory-printed cloth designs with *adinkra* motifs, and photographs documenting the cloth’s uses in Ghana. Examining these sources allowed the dissertation to more fully contextualize the historical background of *adinkra* cloth and analyze transformations over time.

During research visits to Ghana, England, and the Netherlands, I accumulated a vast amount of information and materials for the project. Not all of it could make its way into the dissertation. For example, detailed analysis of the critical role of *adinkra* among African Americans and Africans

in the diaspora is absent. Conducting research in London, Amsterdam, and The Hague – each with large populations of Ghanaians – offered opportunities to explore the contemporary roles of *adinkra* in the African diaspora. The Afterword addresses this subject through the circulation of one *adinkra* symbol, *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”). I plan to elaborate on this important transformation of *adinkra* and the cloth’s global dimensions in future writing.

Moreover, research in England also led to a second project in collaboration with The National Archives of the UK in Kew to investigate the roles of factory-printed textiles as historical records of cultural, political, and economic exchanges between the UK and Africa (Halls and Martino 2018). As I have pursued this research project alongside my work on *adinkra* cloth, studying the wider textile industry in Africa and its global connections has informed my thinking about the roles and significance of *adinkra* cloth.

### *Explaining Experiences, Translating Languages*

My conversations and experiences in Ghana shaped the dissertation structure and the arguments that I put forth. The people with whom I spoke and events that I participated in had a lasting impact, and shaped the narratives presented in the following chapters. After completing research, I faced tough decisions on the scope of the story to tell here. As *adinkra* has impacted so many lives, a related obstacle was whose voices to share, prioritize, or omit, and how to present their ideas and beliefs. The dissertation is a work-in-process. These challenges pose career-long undertakings that I consider daily and will revisit in future projects.

Equally challenging, I faced the task of crafting “thick descriptions” – putting these experiences into words that could convey what makes *adinkra* such a powerful mode of expression (Geertz 1973; see also Clifford 1997). Building upon philosopher Gilbert Ryle’s concept of “thick

description,” anthropologist Clifford Geertz said in his influential text on anthropological approaches to thick descriptions, “It is through the flow of behavior – or, more precisely, social action – that cultural forms find articulation” (Geertz 1973: 17). The dissertation frequently presents dialogue from my conversations and descriptions of my experiences in Ghana to share how people articulated ideas and beliefs in specific moments and places. Drawing upon methods from creative non-fiction and anthropology, this approach gives these individuals agency in their representation. The dissertation also employs these descriptive accounts as evidence to support arguments proposed in the chapters.

When I first met Kusi Boadum in 2013, he told me, “you can’t access the culture if you don’t speak the language” (K. Boadum, personal communication, July 28, 2013, Asokwa, Ghana). His remark stayed with me throughout my research, a statement that I have returned to many times as a reminder of the cultural importance of Twi to this project. I conducted interviews in both English and Twi; for the latter, my research assistants Paul Nasaa and Sampson Korsah provided translations. I am not a native speaker in Twi, but began studying the language eight years ago during my master’s program at Indiana University. Lack of fluency in Twi limited my ability to fully analyze the verbal dimensions of *adinkra* and related proverbs in ways that native speakers have offered in past publications. But my familiarity with the language and assistance from native speakers supported the project’s objective to examine the relationship between the visual and verbal aspects of *adinkra* as an expressive mode of communication.

Notably, even native speakers in Twi have written studies on *adinkra* that proved problematic. Akan scholars and Akans from outside academia debated proper translations of *adinkra* symbols and related Akan proverbs. Another significant issue that has resulted from Akans, Ewes, and other Ghanaians to publish studies on *adinkra* is how the author’s cultural identity has shaped their stance and how they present *adinkra* cloth as representing Asante, Akan, or Ghanaian culture.

Indeed, several people with whom I spoke in Ghana found merit and importance for a non-Ghanaian to offer a more objective narrative that does not cloud interpretations of *adinkra* with personal or political motives.

### *Artist, Craftsperson, Designer, or Maker?*

In Ghana, there has been a marked division between textile production, graphic arts, and fine arts, especially since the country's modern art movement developed in the mid-twentieth century. Textiles fall under wider craft production associated with "traditional culture," including woodcarving, pottery, metal, and bead working. Graphic arts during the twentieth century – best known for hand-painted signs – were often linked to other apprenticeship-based commercial trades. In contrast, modern art in Ghana (such as easel painting and sculpture) developed through university programs informed by European art that created a new field of visual arts. This division manifested in the education and social status of artists, in addition to how their works were displayed or used. Chapters Three and Five address how *adinkra* brings together these distinct areas of artistic production, as fine artists, graphic designers, and others have integrated *adinkra* symbols into their work.

Within discussions of textiles, fashion, dress, and craft, a critical issue is how to address and identify the people who make these works. Are they artists? Craftspersons? Designers? Each of these labels carries a different set of connotations regarding that person's identity, status, and education among other qualities. Such titles therefore locate these people within separate spheres of artistic production and scholarly works, and also impact their status and reception in Ghana. In Christaller's dictionary of Twi published in 1881, he defines the Twi term *owdumfo* as an "artist, artisan, workman, one doing artificial work as a carpenter, joiner, gold-, silver-, or copper-smith,

brazier, pewterer, tinman, saddler, umbrella-maker, shoe- or sandal-maker” (Christaller 1881: 109). Individuals who make textiles are excluded from this list. Christaller separately defines *onwemfo* as “1. Potter, cf. *okuku-nwemfo*. – 2. *otama-nwemfo*, weaver; *okete-nwemfo*, plaiter of mats” (Christaller 1881: 349). His inclusion of weavers is the only connection to other cloth makers; *adinkera* is again not included here. Rather, the Twi name *ntama awindee*, meaning cloth worker, was the former name for people who make *adinkera* cloth (Mato 1987: 192).<sup>17</sup>

In my research, I encountered a range of how those who make *adinkera* cloth identify themselves in relation to their work. For example, as discussed in Chapter Three, Nana Baffour Gyimah told me that he is a designer. Nana makes *adinkera* cloth, *kente* cloth, and embroidered cloths, in addition to serving as the chief of Tewobaabi, a small town near Kumasi (N. Gyimah, interview, May 2, 2015, Tewobaabi, Ghana). However, not everyone who makes *adinkera* cloth self-identifies as a designer or artist. For Nana to emphasize his identity as a designer suggests that he seeks to set himself apart from other cloth makers through his interest in innovation and creativity.

In fact, some *adinkera* cloth makers equally talented as Nana argue the opposite. During my research meetings with Kusi Boadum, he instructed me to draw each *adinkera* stamp in my notes next to the symbol’s name and meaning. When I drew the symbols, he gave specific instructions on the markings and shapes. I once offered Kusi my notebook to draw a symbol. He declined. “I’m not an artist,” Kusi responded. He instead drew the symbol with a pen on the wood bench where he was seated (K. Boadum, interview, December 8, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). Since there is not a uniform approach among those who make *adinkera* cloth today about how they identify themselves, I refer to them as “cloth makers.” This term describes their work and relates to the formerly used Twi term

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<sup>17</sup> Mato does not specify when exactly this name was in use in Ghana. Mato does not usually use the term “cloth maker,” and instead distinguishes individuals by trade and area of expertise, such as stampers and carvers (Mato 1987). In comparison, Cole and Rose identify those who print the cloth as “decorators” and those who make *adinkera* stamps as “carvers” (Cole and Ross 1977: 45). Communications scholar Boatema Boateng identifies them as “cloth producers” (Boateng 2011).



for cloth worker. Unlike titles such as artist, designer, or craftsperson, cloth maker is also more neutral in terms of debates on art and craft.

### *Adinkra as Symbol*

The dissertation primarily refers to *adinkra* as “symbols” – rather than designs, graphics, or another term – because that is how most people in Ghana with whom I worked identified them in English; this included cloth makers, cloth sellers, customers, elders, and professors. Therefore, literature on symbolism and related semiotics theories did not motivate use of the word “symbol” in the dissertation.

Christaller’s dictionary does not include a specific Twi word for symbol (Christaller 1881). His explanation of *nkeyerewe* suggests the marking of *adinkra* symbols onto stamps: “1. engraved or impressed artificial lines or figures on calabashes, pottery; *abina no ho nkeyerewe ye fe*; 2. any engraving, writing, drawing, design, delineation. 3. The lines in the palm of the hand; 4. a mark, notch, incision, groove” (Christaller 1881: 286). The term *nkeyerew* emphasizes the visual design, material, and technique without mention of the design’s symbolic meaning or significance that is central to *adinkra* symbols. Since Christaller’s work, other Akan Twi dictionaries have identified “symbol” as *senkyerenne* and *ahyensodee*, though they do not specify their application to *adinkra* motifs (Anane 2000: 419; Kotey 1998: 305).<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, Antubam referred to symbols as *dwini* in his seminal text *Ghana’s Heritage of Culture* (Antubam 1963). Yet, Antubam does not use *dwini* to describe *adinkra* motifs and only refers to

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<sup>18</sup> The following texts identify “symbol” in Twi as *senkyerenne* (Anane 2000: 419; Kotey 1998: 305) and *ahyensodee* (*Asante Twi Dictionary and Phrasebook* 2015: 105). Anane also says that “symbol” translates in Twi to *bribi se so* and *senkyerɛdze* (Anane 2000: 419), “motif” in Twi means *adwinnee a wɔde hyehye adee feɛfeɛfe* (Anane 2009: 232). In comparison, Florence Abena Dolphyne does not include the Twi word for “symbol” in the dictionary of her popular text on Asante Twi (Dolphyne 1998).

them as *adinkra*. In comparison, Christaller identifies *advini* as “artificial work; as work in gold, silver, brass, leather, wood; any trade or mechanic art reducing raw materials to a form suitable for use; plastic art; sculpture, carved work; the art of drawing; design, delineation” (Christaller 1881: 105). Christaller’s interpretation of *advini* describes several artistic practices, but does not specifically convey the meaning of a symbol. While *advini* and *nkyerewe* do not literally translate to “symbol,” they represent Akan concepts related to *adinkra* cloth.

This project argues against the common approach in scholarship on *adinkra* symbols to present only one interpretation of any given symbol. This method distorts the cloth’s actual communicative power that suggests a mutability of meaning. Presenting one meaning per symbol perpetuates a misconception of African art and life that societies follow unchanging cultural practices, the same today as in historical settings. This approach fails to acknowledge the dynamics of *adinkra* symbols to carry multiple meanings at any given time and place to different people, and that these meanings have also changed across time and space. Indeed, the ability for people to apply the meaning of *adinkra* symbols into something pertinent to their lives and the present moment is crucial to the cloth’s ongoing relevance and use today.

Throughout the dissertation, I use the translation or meaning of the symbol that the speaker presented during each example. An added glossary identifies Twi terms included in the dissertation’s discussion of *adinkra* cloth; in an appendix, I present some of the names and meanings associated with the *adinkra* symbols discussed in the following chapters. In Kumasi, those with whom I spoke most often cited Ablade Glover’s chart of *adinkra* symbols and Adolph Agbo’s *Values of Adinkra Symbols* as references for the names and meanings of *adinkra* symbols (Glover 1969, 1971, 1992; Agbo 2011). For each *adinkra* symbol in the appendix, I include Glover and Agbo’s translation of the symbol’s name and meaning as well as the name and meaning provided in Mato’s dissertation. The appendix also presents Rattray’s interpretation of the symbol, if included in his text, to offer an

historical comparison of how the meanings may have changed over time. Different cultural affiliations and fluency levels in Twi have certainly contributed to the symbols' multiple meanings. Presenting the work of Agbo, Glover, Mato, and Rattray also invites comparisons of how people of diverse backgrounds have interpreted the meanings of *adinkra* symbols.

### III. Chapter Summaries

The following five chapters are organized thematically around the historical and contemporary roles of *adinkra* cloth as a mode of communication, expressive form of fashion, and practice of remembrance. Many Ghanaians have embraced the cloth as a form of self-expression. Each chapter includes vignettes describing personal accounts from cloth makers, sellers, elders, and customers. These narratives reveal the importance of *adinkra* within several areas of Ghanaian life.

The dissertation also includes attention to the changing uses and meanings of certain *adinkra* symbols to present a detailed analysis of individual motifs – such as *adinkrabene* (“king of Adinkra”) in Chapter One, *gye Nyame* (“except God”) in Chapter Five, and *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”) in the Afterword. Surprisingly absent in scholarship are in-depth studies of individual *adinkra* motifs. The dissertation offers a more extensive analysis to evaluate how and why each motif has communicated various meanings across time and space. The approach to focus on certain *adinkra* symbols does not seek to be a comprehensive study of those particular symbols, nor present a chronological evolution of the symbols' design and meaning. To do so would be incomplete and misleading of the dynamics and complicated meanings of *adinkra* symbols. Discussion focuses on key moments that show how the meanings and contexts of use for the symbols have evolved over time in conversation with other changes in Ghana. In doing so, the cloth's immersion within Ghanaian society and layered meanings given to the motifs demonstrate how *adinkra* offers an

important perspective on Akan and Ghanaian social, cultural, and political history.

The last section of each chapter is dedicated to one individual whose work and experiences in Ghana relates to the larger issues addressed in the chapter. The five individuals highlighted in the dissertation – King Kwadwo Adinkra, Nana Baffour Gyimah, Gabriel Boakye, Nana Akua, and David Boamah – represent viewpoints from Akan men and women who live and work in greater Kumasi today, with the exception of the King of Gyaman. Perspectives from Asokwa and non-Akans who live in other parts of Ghana today are unfortunately absent in these sections, but included in other sections. The knowledge and experiences that these men and women shared with me illuminate the diverse ways that *adinkra* cloth permeates contemporary life in Kumasi, as well as distinctions in the meanings and uses of *adinkra* cloth today. By presenting individual biographies, this approach also seeks to counter historical and lingering problems in scholarship of presenting anonymous voices that strip Africans of their agency and individuality.

Choosing which individuals to highlight in this way – and consequently, who to omit – posed a challenge. The selection reflects my methodology and the kinds of people who I interacted with during my research. Voices from both men and women were essential. Scholarship on *adinkra* cloth has favored attention to men in discussions of both the cloth's making and use. Men have mostly made the cloth, but women cloth dyers have also contributed to production. Moreover, women are central to the trade of *adinkra* cloth and women seamstresses have also sewn *adinkra* cloth into fashionable garments. Kings, chiefs, and other men of high status have been primarily associated with historical uses of *adinkra* cloth, even though women have a long history of wearing the cloth.

The first chapter, “Communicating with *Adinkra* Cloth: Changing Fashions and Expressive Behaviors,” positions *adinkra* cloth as fashionable dress. It analyzes changing styles and settings to wear the cloth as a mode of non-verbal communication. This discussion examines how evolving

dress styles for *adinkera* cloth intersected with shifts in appropriate places to wear the cloth. Since first wearing *adinkera* as a wrapped cloth, Ghanaians have innovated styles to include tailored shirts, blouses, and dresses. Unlike past studies that isolated *adinkera* symbols from the cloth and contexts of use, I begin the dissertation with the roles of *adinkera* at funerals and the king's palace to demonstrate how Ghanaians wear *adinkera* as an expressive form of fashion.

The second chapter, "Collaboration and Creativity: Artistic Process and Making *Adinkera* Cloth," argues that making *adinkera* cloth is a collaborative process tied to broader social life. Social interactions have been integral to how cloth makers create *adinkera* cloth. However, prior scholarly descriptions often removed the agency of cloth makers and surrounding social settings to instead present the process and technique for *adinkera* cloth making as a uniform approach. In contrast, the chapter illustrates the dynamic workspaces and collaborations that inspired how cloth makers have approached their work.

The third chapter, "Of Stamps and Silk Screens: Innovating *Adinkera* Cloth Technology," asserts that key changes in *adinkera* printing technologies have reshaped the cloth's value and meaning. Although Kusi's account described in the opening articulates Apau's role to introduce *badia* dye, absent from this story and other literature is the introduction of calabash stamps. Chapter Three addresses this issue and presents new evidence on how *adinkera* stamps made from ephemeral materials have evolved over time. More recently, the early twenty-first century marked a pivotal moment as cloth makers discarded stamps to screen-print *adinkera* cloth – a major technological change that revolutionized *adinkera* cloth. The chapter examines how this monumental shift from using stamps to silk-screens unfolded and its implications on the cloth's production, design, use, and meaning.

The fourth chapter, "Refashioning *Adinkera*: Global Exchanges through Cloth," explores the roles of *adinkera* symbols in factory-printed textiles. The chapter traces the circulation of *adinkera*

symbols in factory-printed textiles made in the UK, Europe, and Asia to argue that these textiles offer historical evidence of *adinkera* as a global marker of Africa. The chapter begins with evidence from the late nineteenth century and then considers the wider circulation of *adinkera* since then in other factory-printed cloths exported across Africa and the African diaspora. This analysis considers how these exchanges transformed the identity of *adinkera* and reshaped the hand-printed cloth's meaning and functions within Ghana.

Lastly, the fifth chapter, “Remembering through *Adinkera*: Reflections and Re-Inventions in Cloth and Symbol,” contends that Ghanaians have used *adinkera* to remember personal, cultural, and national pasts that re-invent the cloth's pre-colonial meanings. The chapter posits that Ghanaians have used *adinkera* as a practice of social memory within and beyond the cloth's importance as a mourning dress. This analysis also considers the expanding uses of *adinkera* motifs in non-cloth designs – such as fine art, nationalism, and tourism – to reimagine Akan cultural heritage in visions for the future.

The concluding chapter reflects on how the historical and contemporary roles of *adinkera* cloth discussed throughout the dissertation have informed the cloth's changing meanings to audiences near and far. I return to the project's reframing of *adinkera* as fashion and also discuss the challenges associated with defining *adinkera* today given its expansive transformations across time and space. Following, the Afterword signals the direction of future research and writing. Specifically, the dissertation ends with a discussion of the *adinkera* symbol *sankɔfa* that expresses an Akan proverb, “*we were na wosan kɔfa a, yenkyi*,” meaning “it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten.” *Sankɔfa* is often depicted as a heart-shaped design or a bird with its head turning back over its tail. The bird's now iconic image has circulated worldwide in a range of materials, to become one of the most prevalent expressions of African and African American identity and heritage.

*Sankofa* resonates with a global audience from its message about the importance of remembering the past in the present and future.

## Introduction Images



Fig. I.1. Paul Nyaamah. Large-sized *adinkrahene* “king of *adinkra*” calabash stamp (right) and *aban kaba*, “two-storied house or castle” calabash stamp (left). November 22, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.

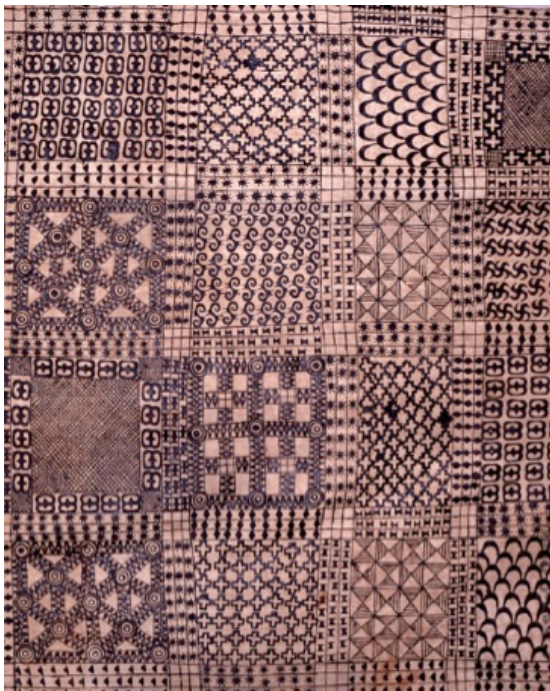


Fig. I.2. Cloth makers unrecorded. *Adinkra* cloth (partial view). Collected in 1817. Cotton cloth and *bardia* dye. Akan, Ghana. British Museum. London, England. Donated by Thomas E. Bowdich. Museum record number Af1818.1114. Photography: British Museum.





Fig. I.3. Cloth makers unrecorded. *Adinkra* cloth. 1825. Cotton cloth and *badia* dye. Akan, Ghana. Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Leiden, Netherlands. Coll.no. RV-360-1700. Photography: Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Communicating with *Adinkra* Cloth: Changing Fashions and Expressive Behaviors

#### Introduction

Starting before 8am on the morning of May 21, 2015, mourners walked through a “spot” bar – already open – to a doorway with dangling streamers to reach the family house.<sup>1</sup> The funeral for two elder women, *ɔbaapanyin* Florence Nyarko and *ɔbaapanyin* Amma Adwuwa who lived to be eighty and seventy-seven years old, began with the women lying-in-state. Chairs were arranged in a u-shape in the center of the home. In an adjoining room, the elder women laid in raised beds covered with lush, luminous cloths and pastel pillows that complemented the glittery wall decorations for the occasion.

Mid-morning, the family separated for two church services – one was Catholic and the other was a Pentecostal Assemblies of God service; Christianity is prevalent in Ntonso and other parts of central and southern Ghana today. I attended the latter Pentecostal service held outdoors at Ntonso’s community centre. Women church members dressed in white and black outfits tailored in different styles with various cloth patterns. The women sang in unison with the choir as they danced around the coffin in a circle. The harmony of the women’s voices and attire presented an image of unity to guests. Following, hundreds of mourners formed a long procession. They walked together

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Richmond “Junior” Opoku who attended this funeral with me and provided cultural guidance.

to the nearby cemetery. After the burial, the family returned, changed clothes, and prepared for the afternoon funeral rites (*ayie*).

That afternoon, the family sat in a long receiving line to greet guests. More than one thousand chairs filled the dirt grounds of Ntonso's community centre. Two other families in Ntonso held other funerals on that same day. A different family held a funeral nearby in front of the Ntonso Visitor Centre, where the commercial and educational space for tourists and students became a religious and social space of mourning.

At the community centre, many guests sat in chairs around a large tree that provided shade from the hot afternoon sun. Mourners talked with one another after they greeted the family (fig. 1.1). The announcer recognized names of guests who made donations into a microphone with loudspeakers that blasted, yet blurred, his speech. He dressed in a white and grey tailored factory-printed shirt and black trousers (fig. 1.2). The *adinkra* motif *εse ne tekerema* ("teeth and the tongue") formed the central pattern on the man's shirt. Behind him, a band played loud, lively music. The funeral was a social activity as much as a religious ceremony.

Even more mourners came throughout the afternoon than the morning funeral rites. Men closely related to the deceased wore bright red (*kobene*) wrapped cloths, mostly undecorated. Other men came wearing black tailored shirts and trousers or black wrapped cloth, some screen-printed with *adinkra* motifs. Many women mourners opted for dresses or three-piece *kaba* outfits sewn with plain black cloth (*birisi*) or black screen-printed *adinkra* cloth.<sup>2</sup> The latter typically includes a blouse (*kaba*), skirt (*slit* or *abɔsɔ*), and extra cloth (*akatasɔ*) to wear as a head tie (*duku*) or wrap. Nearly all women wore black head ties, which some used to also hold small photographic portraits of the two

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<sup>2</sup> The Twi names that I included above come from Suzanne Gott's work (Gott 2009). Gott adds a distinction to two main kinds of *kaba* ensembles common in contemporary fashion: simple and complicated or fancy. Simple *kaba* styles stay in fashion for two to three years, whereas complicated or fancy *kaba* garments represent shorter trends (Gott 2010: 21). In comparison, Abraham Asmah includes different names in his dissertation on Akan symbolism; he refers to the top as the *kaba*, sewn skirt or wrap as *asee ntoma*, and the 'middle' piece as *finimfini* or *abosoo* (Asmah 2009: 253).

deceased women (fig. 1.3). Young grandchildren to the deceased dressed in matching black and white cloth sewn into various styles. The cloth design carried meaning about losing someone close. Wearing the same fabric projected family unity.

In the afternoon, three women spoke in front a large gathering of mourners. Each dressed in red factory-printed cloths wrapped around their waist. They wrapped black cloth above that draped over their arms and covered their left shoulders (fig. 1.3). The three women's outfits exemplify contemporary styling of two-piece wrapped *dansinkran* ensembles, named after an Asante hairstyle, which remain common attire for close relatives of the deceased at funerals and elder women (Gott 2010: 11, 13). The cloth colors of the women's dress conveyed that they were close family members to the deceased. Yet each woman selected different patterned cloths. For instance, the woman standing on the right dressed in a black cloth screen-printed with two *adinkra* motifs – *mmusuyidee* (“good fortune”) and *ketepa* (“good bed”) – that she draped over nearly all of the red cloth. Her choice, as with the other women, navigated the prescribed system of Akan mourning dress to express added messages and personal styles. The women and other mourners transformed the centre into an astonishing display of contemporary Akan culture and fashion.

The funeral was rather ordinary in that it was not a high-profile funeral for a chief or elite person. It was the kind of funeral associated with contemporary Akan families with average financial means and social standing, as most of those organizing and attending the funeral were lower and middle class. Scholarly discussion of Akan and Ghanaian funerals has focused on elite and royal funerals – especially those for chiefs and kings. Here we are dealing with the funeral of two non-elite women to underscore the central role of funerals in wider Akan life and how *adinkra* in particular has shaped these significant events.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For more on elite and royal Akan funerals, see Gott 2007; McCaskie 1989; Odotei and Hagan 2001; Rattray 1927; Sutherland-Addy 2016. For more on non-elite funerals, see de Witte 2003; Rattray 1927; van der Geest 2000.

In what follows, this chapter first addresses the cultural importance of *adinkra* as a mourning cloth. Part I also examines the gendered uses of *adinkra* cloth through the ongoing use of *adinkerabene* (“king of Adinkra”) on women’s funeral cloth. Part II analyzes how practices of re-making and re-wearing old or borrowed *adinkra* cloth have shaped how Ghanaians communicate with *adinkra* and wear the cloth as fashionable dress. Finally, Part III turns to the changing royal and political uses of *adinkra* cloth through analyzing the lasting impact of the former King of Gyaman, King Kwadwo Adinkra. An important figure in oral histories about the origins of *adinkra* cloth, this discussion of King Adinkra’s role in *adinkra* cloth examines his influence on contemporary Akan uses of *adinkra* to articulate political power. As each section moves between historical and contemporary examples, the chapter demonstrates the communicative dynamics and evolving fashion styles of *adinkra* cloth across time and space. The chapter argues that changes in how Akans have made and worn *adinkra* cloth reflect a dynamic form of fashion connected to cultural notions of indirect communication and expressive behavior.

### From Manhyia Palace to Family Funerals

Today, *adinkra* is best known as a mourning cloth. A common translation of the word *adinkra* is “to say good-bye” or “farewell.” But *adinkra* cloth was not initially made for funerals. Akan men first began wearing *adinkra* cloth at Akan political events including those that the Asantehene, the Asante king, attended. Meanings of some *adinkra* symbols from the nineteenth century or earlier related to power, authority, and leadership – such as *adinkerabene* (“king of Adinkra”), *akoben* (“war horn”), and *akofena* or *afena* (“ceremonial sword”) – and exemplify the cloth’s political settings.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In contrast, fewer historical or contemporary *adinkra* symbols carry meaning specific to mourning or death. This absence demonstrates the other uses of *adinkra* at funerals to convey other messages. Of the fifty-three symbols included in Rattray’s study from 1927, only one symbol mentions death – “*Nyame nnu na ma nu*, May Nyame [God] die before I

Beginning in the early twentieth century, non-royal Akan began dressing in *adinkera* to attend funerals, especially public funeral rites held after the burial (Mato 1987). Funerals are one of the most prominent and culturally significant events in Akan society that feature expressive practices such as music, photography, film, dance, and performance (Nketia 1955; van der Geest 1980; de Witte 2013). Cloth is central to funerals. The opening account illustrates how mourners dress according to a sophisticated system of funerary cloths (*ayitoma*) that marks family relationships.

Historically, the cloth's context of use determined which *adinkera* motifs to print on the cloth. Cloth maker David Boamah said, "the meaning of the symbol tells you when and where to put on which *adinkera* cloth" (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). For example, at funerals, the deceased's status and identity directed the appropriate use of specific *adinkera* symbols. David explained, "Was the person a royal person? When a royal person dies, people use different symbols because the meaning of the symbol interprets everything" (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). Since the introduction of *adinkera* cloth, the rigid uses of *adinkera* symbols dissipated over time. This break in protocol likely occurred in response to the cloth's shifting uses. The expansion of *adinkera* from a restricted Akan royal and political cloth to mourning and celebratory dress for virtually anyone in Ghana with the financial means to buy cloth has changed the meanings and interpretations of individual symbols and overall identity of *adinkera*.

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die" – though its meaning actually speaks about immortality (Rattray 1927: 266, number 35). A more recent *adinkera* symbol not included in Rattray's work that is today among the most popular motifs with meaning about death is *owuo atwede*, "ladder of death." Additionally, Mato identified a few newer *adinkera* designs with meanings about death during his research in the 1980-90s: "There is a modern *adinkera* stamp which has the depiction of a skull on it with the associated statement: *owuo begya hwan* – 'whom will death spare.' Another example of the stamped skull has the phrase *owuo see fie* – 'death breaks the house.' A new stamp, carved in 1992 by Joseph Nsiah in Ntonso, has death as its topic: *kotonkrowei da amansa kon mu* – 'if death holds you by the neck surely it will carry you away.' It is only now coming into use" (Mato 1994).

Funerals have also inspired new *adinkera* symbols. For instance, in 1971, *ɔpanyin* Kwabena Boakye, a stamp carver in Asokwa created a new *adinkera* symbol based on the funeral rites for Asantehene Prempeh II. *ɔpanyin* Boakye named the motif "the Asante king goes poor." Kusi Boadum, nephew of *ɔpanyin* Boakye, explained the meaning: "it will never enter the poor man. Now, here's there. Otumfuo's dead" (K. Boadum, interview, December 11, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). In Ntonso, cloth makers gave the same design a different name that shows the cloth's dynamics and fluid meanings.

*Adinkra* cloth illustrates the importance of indirect communication (*akutia*) in Akan life. Akans value indirection as an effective, desired form of non-verbal communication that reveals one's wit and wisdom to creatively use and transform visual and verbal expressions. Folklore scholar Kwesi Yankah's research on Akan royal oratory and spokespersons of Akan chiefs (*akeyeame*, sing. *ɔkyeame*) draws upon performance theory – including Kenneth Burke's "poetry of action" – to position proverbs as a performative mode of expressive behavior rather than a form of speech (Burke 1966; Yankah 1989a, 1995). In Akan verbal arts, proverbs communicate messages indirectly through the speaker's interpretation of the proverbs' meanings specific to the scenario. Akans have also used visual arts – including *kente* cloth and named wax-print cloth – to express messages non-verbally. Wearing *adinkra* cloth also silently communicates messages. The cloth's designs and proverbs associated with the symbols offer a persuasive mode of indirect communication for wearers to silently convey multiple messages as they navigate social, political, and familial relationships.<sup>5</sup>

### "To Put On Cloth:" *Adinkra* as Fashion

The Akan expression "to put on cloth" (*fura ntoma* or *ntamafura*) describes the act – and art – of wrapping cloth around the body.<sup>6</sup> Ways of wearing cloth has the power to shape the wearer's social standing, status, and identity through Akan aesthetics of display and communication.

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<sup>5</sup> Akans have often used indirect speech to navigate important conflict situations. Two prominent examples in scholarship address how indirection has manifested at the royal court and within domestic domains through co-wife jealousy (Gott 1994; Yankah 1995). Prior studies found that named cloth's communicative power is contingent on understanding the specific situation, in which the cloth's message is often directed to one or a few people rather than conveying a larger statement toward the community. For more on conflict at Akan funerals, see Adu-Amankwah 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Johannes Gottlieb Christaller included the following Twi expressions: He first said that *hye fura* conveys "to put on, to wear (of clothes fitting to the body or parts of the body)" (Christaller 1881: 202). Later, he distinguishes between types of dress. Christaller said, "*ntama, batakari, koto, kotoku, tros, kamisa; hye* at., to put on, or (contin.) to wear clothes (cf. *fura tama*)" (Christaller 1881: 468), which he identified as "to wear a negro dress" (Christaller 1881: 471). He contrasted this expression to wearing "European dress," *atadee* (Christaller 1881: 468). Christaller also included the name *atadehyefo* as "people in European dress," which shows how clothing becomes part of one's identity (Christaller 1881).

Historian Thomas McCaskie explains how Akan principles of public display – expressed through one’s clothing, accessories, gestures, and pose – draw attention to projecting personal identity through visual markers of status, wealth, and prestige (McCaskie 1986; see also Gott 2007, 2009). How one wears cloth also associates the wearer with a lineage tied to desired forms of power and status ascribed to elders and chiefs.

To “put on” cloth communicates different meanings to those fluent in these various styles. Comportment and dress practices have informed how Akans have worn *adinkera* to communicate. Theories of fashion from sociologists Georg Simmel and Jennifer Craik show clothing’s relationship to communication, comportment, and social relationships. As discussed in the Introduction, Simmel argues that fashion is a product of social needs and operates in a duality to locate an individual’s place in society (Simmel 1904). In comparison, Craik contends that fashion is a “body technique” that shapes and is shaped by social codes of conduct (Craik 1994). As with these theories of fashion, Akan concepts of “putting on” cloth and indirection reveal the communicative power of *adinkera* cloth.

Akans convey fashionable dress through the Twi phrase, “*ɔpe laif*,” an expression connected to highlife music that means he or she likes fashion (Gott 2009: 148). Although some scholars now discuss African dress as fashion, most have only discussed handmade cloths (such as *kente* cloth) as fashionable if worn as a sewn garment rather than a wrapped cloth. *Adinkera* has not been considered in the realm of fashion.

The common practice of wearing *adinkera* as a sewn garment for more than one hundred and forty years has been largely absent from scholarship. Instead, writing about *adinkera* has focused almost exclusively on the cloth’s use as a wrapped cloth. Scholars have not considered how Akans and Ghanaians actually wear *adinkera* as fashionable dress. In the early 1980s, art historians Malcolm McLeod and Claire Polakoff described different ways to wear *adinkera* cloth: Polakoff distinguishes



women's wrapped garments as "traditional" and tailored outfits as "contemporary," while McLeod only discusses women wearing wrapped *adinkra* cloth (McLeod 1981: 149-150; Polakoff 1980a: 125). More recently, Phyllis Forster's study of Akan "traditional mourning dress" likewise only addresses wrapped cloth styles, with no mention of wearing *adinkra* as a tailored garment (Forster 2012). In contrast, I argue that *adinkra* as both sewn garment and wrapped cloth are forms of fashion.

An extraordinary portrait photograph taken in Cape Coast in 1877 [ca.1910] presents the earliest historical evidence of a woman dressed in a sewn *adinkra* cloth garment (fig. 1.4).<sup>7</sup> This photograph also provides evidence countering scholarship that disregards tailored *adinkra* outfits or frames such garments as a more recent development. Captioned "group portrait of three African women," the photo taken by an unrecorded photographer depicts a woman posed standing in *adinkra* cloth. A woman seated on either side of her wear *kente* and factory-printed cloths. The black-and-white photograph makes it difficult to discern the *adinkra* cloth's color, a key marker of the occasion. Within Akan society, *adinkra* is most commonly associated with Asante communities located north of Cape Coast. This remarkable portrait reveals new insights on the historical styling of women's *adinkra* cloth and the circulation of *adinkra* between Asante and Fante communities during the late nineteenth century. The photograph's caption, however, generalizes the women's identity as "African" without recognizing their specific location or ethnic affiliation, a problem that I return to in Chapter Four.

This portrait also illustrates the historical styling among Fante women of sewn *kaba* ensembles featuring a matching blouse and wrapped cloth around the waist. European garments influenced the introduction and early styles of *kaba* blouses in Cape Coast, a city connected to Europe through trade (Dogbe 2003: 387; Gott 2010: 13). However, increased popularity of European dress in the late nineteenth century Gold Coast changed the former fashionable status of

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<sup>7</sup> This photograph is held in the Eliot Elisofon archives at the Smithsonian Institution (Record number EEPA 1995-180067). The online record does not provide any accompanying information.

*kaba* ensembles to become dress associated with uneducated women and Christian communities (Gott 2010: 13-14).

The woman's *adinkra* cloth is printed repeatedly with the motif *nkotimsefu mpua*, which references a hairstyle associated with attendants to an Akan queen mother. Thin strips of multi-colored *mwomu* embroidery add prestige. The woman also wears a necklace, bracelets, and ring that convey wealth. Exclusive use of *nkotimsefu mpua* may suggest that the symbol's meaning related to the woman's current status or aspirations to be affiliated with the royal court. But unlike the hairstyle referenced in the cloth's design, her hair is coiffed in a style associated with the Fante, another cultural group in Ghana (Sieber and Herreman 2000). The woman's appearance thus blends fashion styles associated with both Asante and Fante cultures. Other historical examples illustrating Fante uses of *adinkra* cloth are limited.

This chapter examines two sewn *adinkra* cloth garments that Captain Robert Powley Wild collected in Ghana during the early 1930s. These cloths are only one of two examples of sewn *adinkra* garments that I have identified in a museum collection worldwide – and among the earliest examples of an Akan woman's sewn garment in a museum collection. The Tropen Museum in Amsterdam holds the other sewn *adinkra* garments from 1999-2000, also made as mourning dress (Tropen Museum record numbers TM-3131-1a; TM6095-6a,b; TM6095-7a, b, c; TM6095-12a, b, c). The lack of sewn *adinkra* garments in museum collections does not represent their absence within Akan life. Rather, this gap exemplifies wider issues in collecting practices and scholarship – not specific to *adinkra* cloth, but also applicable to other African textiles – associated with how collectors and scholars in Europe and America did not consider African clothing as fashion.

## I. Messages of Mourning: Changing Funeral Fashions

“If I have a message to [send to] an ancestor, because I cannot travel to that world and return, when somebody dies, I pick an *adinkra* symbol that may be the same as the message. Then I use the symbol. I wear the symbol [on *adinkra* cloth] for the funeral. So when you bury the person, the spirit will travel with my message. When the deceased departs with the spirit, the spirit takes the message along. That is why we wear *adinkra* for funeral. It also talks about the relationship, the kind of person, and the life the person came to live in this world. And the symbols we put on the cloth, it also tells about the relationship between the living and the deceased” (Interview, D. Boamah, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

As cloth maker David Boamah explains, funeral-goers have used *adinkra* to transmit specific messages to their ancestors. Funerals illuminate the complexity of communicating through *adinkra* cloth, as mourners have expressed diverse messages to both the worlds of the living and the dead (*asamando*). For the former, some mourners have selected *adinkra* over other kinds of mourning cloths for what they can indirectly say through *adinkra* to others in attendance. In both instances, mourners have personalized *adinkra* to make the cloth meaningful and relevant in their lives.

By the early twentieth century, Akans had incorporated *adinkra* within a complex system of mourning cloths (*ayitoma*) (Mato 1987).<sup>8</sup> How exactly that change occurred is not clear. The three main mourning cloths – *kuntunkuni* (dark brown), *kobene* (red), and *birisi* (black) – are plain, undecorated textiles made in colors symbolic of mourning. Only *adinkra* cloths are elaborately patterned. When an elder passes away, some Akan families elect to wear white cloth rather than dark colored cloth to the funeral to celebrate the elder’s long life – a practice that continues today. As illustrated in the chapter’s introduction, the wearer’s relation to the deceased determines what color

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<sup>8</sup> In 1881, J.G. Christaller said, “*adinkara*, linen (*nvera*) bought of the Europeans, which the negroes wear as mourning after having variegated it with red and black stripes” (Christaller 1881: 85). Christaller’s definition is particularly significant for how he articulates the making and use of *adinkra* cloth in the late nineteenth century. Although he does not make any distinctions in the status of those who wear *adinkra* cloth, Christaller’s observation suggests the role of imported cloth and common use of *adinkra* as a mourning cloth by 1881. Yet the description of “red and black stripes” evokes the form of *mwomu* stitched embroidery more so than the stamped graphic motifs of *adinkra* symbols.

to wear at various funeral rites. Of these mourning cloths, Akans have most often added *adinkra* motifs on *kuntunkuni* and *birisi* cloth. Today, it is unusual to encounter *adinkra* printed on men's *kobene* cloth. Some women wear *kobene* cloth printed with *adinkra* as a wrapped cloth on top paired with a black wrapper skirt – a style known as *dansinkran*.

In a 2006 *Ghana Web* news article, journalist Kwame Twumasi-Fofie asks “fashion shows at funerals?” (Twumasi-Fofie 2006). He explains:

“As a sign of respect to the dead it is considered inappropriate to be mourning while in gorgeous dressing. The fashion now is that there are usually three separate uniform cloths – red, black and white – specific for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Ladies funeral clothing which used to be made in the simplest form are now designed as if they are meant for a party...in other words, exhibitionism at its best” (Twumasi-Fofie 2006).

Speaking about mourning clothes as attire “for a party,” Twumasi-Fofie’s discussion of what was in vogue in the early twenty-first century reveals how Ghanaians continue to innovate historical symbolism to be up to date with current fashion trends. Moreover, in suggesting that funeral attire is as fashionable as fashion show garments, Twumasi-Fofie conveys the dynamics of Akan funerals as social events and sites of display.

### Saturday Styles: Wrapped, Sewn, and Tailored

The funeral for the two elder women discussed in the chapter’s opening was exceptional because it was held in Ntonso where some relatives of the deceased were cloth makers. At the afternoon funeral rites, Joseph’s cloth was distinct from the rest of his family. Joseph was the grandson to one of the deceased women and nephew to the other. He dressed in a red hand-woven cotton cloth screen-printed with *gye Nyame* (“Except God”) and *osromma* (“star”) motifs that he wrapped over his left shoulder. He had changed into this cloth for the afternoon funeral rites after

wearing an all-black suit for the church service and burial earlier in the morning. Changing from black to red cloth is common for close family to the deceased. Kojo Arthur said that an Akan “funeral is an occasion during which the unity and solidarity of the lineage receive public expression...this public display of *abusua* [family] unity and solidarity is depicted by the symbol *abusua dɔ fun* (the family loves the corpse)” (Arthur 2001: 83). Joseph is an *adinkra* cloth maker. He previously worked at the Ntonso Visitor Centre where he taught students and visitors the history and symbolic meanings of *adinkra*. By wearing a red cloth (*kobene*) printed with *adinkra* motifs, Joseph distinguished his identity as an *adinkra* cloth maker from the other men in his family who dressed in undecorated cloths.

Many Akans today spend Saturdays attending funerals, sometimes visiting multiple ones in a single day. Joining religious, family, community, economic and social life, funerals consume weekend life as a major social activity. After the funeral rites on Saturdays, families usually hold thanksgiving services (*aseda asore*) on Sundays. But in Ntonso, families have retained the historical Asante practice of holding funerals on Thursdays and Fridays (with Thanksgiving services on Sundays), partially because residents often farm on Saturdays (Adjei 2010: 86). On Thursdays, the day of the funeral for the elder women described in the chapter’s opening, families hold the burial and funeral rites (*ayie*) for “foreigners” – those visiting from outside of Ntonso, including other parts of the Ashanti Region and Ghana. On Fridays, the family holds another afternoon funeral rites (*ayie*) for residents of Ntonso.

Joseph’s family held a joint funeral for both women in part because it was more economical given the high expense to hold a funeral. Funerals have become important events for Akan families to assert their social standing.<sup>9</sup> Notably, public funeral rites have become as much about what they convey about the living family as the deceased. Anthropologist Marleen De Witte said, “Early

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<sup>9</sup> Several scholars have noted the important role of Akan funerals as a prominent public stage to mark one’s status: Arhin 1983: 2; de Witte 2001, 2013; Forster 2012; Gott 2009: 147-148; van der Geest 2006.

twentieth-century observers (e.g. Rattray 1927; Shaw 1925) described how funerals for ‘ordinary’ people lasted for several days, were characterized by displays of wealth, exchanges of gifts, and ‘revelry,’ ‘drunkennes,’ ‘jollity,’ and ‘show,’ and were accompanied by high expenses” (de Witte 2011: 179). Cultural expectations have involved costly, laborious funerals – resulting in a big funeral business and commercial industry – to “properly” send off the deceased into the land of the ancestors (Arhin 1994; De Witte 2003; Gott 2007: 90; Yeboah-Afari 1997). The importance of holding a grand funeral has led some families to delay the funeral to much later after the death to raise sufficient funds. Due to high costs, joint funerals for multiple deceased from members of the same family are not unusual today.

The financial investment and time that families put into organizing funerals not only attests to their significance, but also corresponds to the time and money that mourners invest in funeral dress. Speaking broadly about contemporary life in Kumasi, Suzanne Gott said, “Both Asante and non-Asante report strong social pressure to dress well and often beyond their means, with particular scrutiny directed towards the dress behavior of women” (Gott 2009: 148). Journalist Ajoa Yeboah-Afari, former president of the Ghana Journalists Association and former Editor of the *Ghanaian Times*, said, “another ‘must’ for a classy funeral is the wearing of special funeral cloth. In some cases it is especially designed for that funeral” (Yeboah-Afari 1997: 611). Sometimes, mourners commission specific hand-print *adinkra* cloths.<sup>10</sup> In other instances, families order commemorative cloths or buy matching factory-printed cloths – as the grandchildren did in the chapter’s opening example. The specialized industry of factory-printed mourning cloths also attests to the economic and cultural significance of funeral dress.

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<sup>10</sup> The practice of families wearing matching *adinkra* cloths extends beyond funerals. For example, in 1965, photographer Francis K. Honny photographed a family in Accra wearing white *adinkra* cloths all made in the same grid style with thick dark lines dividing each section of printed symbols; the men, women, and even children dressed in *adinkra* cloth sewn into dresses, *kaba* ensembles, or wrapped cloth (Pinther 2007: 117).

As with the announcer's shirt, some women mourners also wore factory-printed cloth designed with *adinkra* motifs. For instance, this woman's cloth featured a subtle layering of matte black *nkeɔnsɔnkeɔnsɔn* ("link" or "chain") symbols on a plain black cloth (fig. 1.5). The motif *nkeɔnsɔnkeɔnsɔn* evokes an Akan proverb, "we are linked in both life and death. Those who share common blood relations never break apart" (Glover 1992). Unlike the faint designs, another woman seated next to two small children wore a *kaba* ensemble sewn with a black factory-printed cloth with glistening gold *gye Nyame* ("Except God") symbols (fig. 1.6).

A young man, likely in his 20s, dressed in plain black trousers and a black collared shirt screen-printed with black *adinkra* symbols – including many newer motifs in geometric shapes. Combining new *adinkra* symbols in a stylish shirt shows how the man used *adinkra* to present his personal style. His shirt also reveals the ongoing innovations to keep *adinkra* in line with current trends. The man's black-on-black tailored shirt also exemplifies a generational difference in how men wear *adinkra* cloth today. Sewing hand-printed funeral *adinkra* cloth into tailored shirts reflects a more recent trend in men's fashions, particularly among younger and middle-aged men. In comparison, most elder men continue to wrap funeral *adinkra* cloth in various styles.

For women, generational differences are less distinct. At the afternoon funeral rites, both older and younger women dressed in sewn *adinkra* garments, namely three-piece *kaba* outfits. Gott said, "All women, except for most elderly, are considered to take great pride in their fashionable dress and sense of style" (Gott 2010: 148). Even though fashion may be more important to younger women, both younger and elder women wear funeral *adinkra* cloth sewn into *kaba* outfits. For example, two older women at the funeral in Ntonso dressed in sewn black *kaba* ensembles made with screen-printed *adinkra* cloths (fig. 1.7). On the right, the woman's *adinkra* cloth repeats one symbol, while the other woman's cloth on the left features an array of motifs. Nearby, seated under

the large tree, two other women, younger than the elders, also wore screen-printed *adinkra* cloth sewn into *kaba* outfits.

Sewing hand-printed *adinkra* cloth into *kaba* ensembles is not new. It dates to at least the late nineteenth century, as described earlier with the portrait from Cape Coast. A blouse made before 1933 with hand-printed *adinkra* cloth offers a rare view into how some women dressed in sewn *adinkra* for funerals by the early twentieth century (fig. 1.8 and 1.9). A seamstress sewed a sleeveless blouse with pleating near the bottom and a wide, rounded scoop neckline. Historical evidence dates *kaba* ensembles made with other fabrics to at least the early nineteenth century, possibly the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries. Gott argues that *kaba* “developed through the selective incorporation and local transformation of European elements of female dress” (Boelman and Van Holthoon 1973: 237; Gott 2009: 13, 2010: 26).<sup>11</sup> The introduction of *kaba* ensembles started along coastal Ghana and did not expand inland to the Ashanti Region until the early twentieth century (Gott 2009: 155).

In 1933, Captain Robert Powley Wild (1882-1946) collected this sewn *adinkra* blouse during his visit to the Akan town Wawasi located in Obuasi in the Ashanti Region.<sup>12</sup> Captain Wild deposited the cloth at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England without any accompanying written records about the cloth’s maker, owner, or use.<sup>13</sup> Captain Wild’s work and background was

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the history of women’s *kaba* ensembles in West Africa, see Gott 2009; Wass and Broderick 1979.

<sup>12</sup> Captain Wild collected the blouses on July 3, 1933, and donated them to the Pitt Rivers Museum in August 1933. Captain Wild wrote a letter to Henry Bafour, then Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, on November 5, 1933 that mentions the “*adinkra* stamp outfit I forwarded from Obuasi” in his discussion of dye samples he was sending to him. Captain Wild’s notation for both blouses states that cloth makers created them with “wood-block printed designs” is likely incorrect because the *adinkra* stamps that Captain Wild collected and deposited to the Pitt Rivers Museum from around the same time period were carved from calabash (Wild and Pitt Rivers Museum 1933; museum record numbers 1933.44.13 and 1933.44.14).

<sup>13</sup> Captain Wild’s collection does not include any matching cloths to wear with the blouses. His collection was deposited at numerous museums, including the British Museum, Pitt Rivers Museum, Denver Art Museum, and Cheltenham Museum. Other objects that Captain Wild collected and donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum were *adinkra* stamps, various printing dye samples and tree bark used to prepare the dye. The British Museum’s collection includes small cloth samples that Captain Wild donated in 1934. Labeled “example of *adinkra* cloth,” the small fabric swatches depict different *adinkra* motifs on white cloth and *kuntunkuni*-dyed cloth. Museum records don’t specify if Captain Wild



not focused on art and cultural studies. He worked as Inspector in the Mines Department of the Gold Coast in 1920 after previously serving in the Gloucestershire Regiment; he also founded *The Gold Coast Review* publication (Hicks and Stevenson 2013). Captain Wild collected an array of objects in the Gold Coast related to gold trade and his mining work, as well as leather, basketry, and textiles, which he donated to multiple museums in England upon his return (Coote and Morton 2004: 174).

Captain Wild labeled the sewn *adinkera* blouse “European cotton-cloth bodice or shirt dyed with indigo and with wood-block printed designs” (Wild and Pitt Rivers Museum 1933). Today, the cloth appears as a dark black color, with hints of indigo blue. The ten *adinkera* motifs stamped on the blouse depict a range of symbolic meanings and themes from the lexicon of *adinkera* imagery, including some symbols still popular today. This blouse offers material evidence of *adinkera* motifs in use during the 1930s, especially symbols for mourning, women’s dress, and possibly non-royal settings.

As discussed with the funeral recently held in Ntonso, various *kaba* style outfits remain fashionable for Akan women today. Ghanaians have changed the status and meanings of *kaba* over time. From coastal Fante communities to wider Akan culture, *kaba* ensembles expanded around the time of Ghana’s political independence from Great Britain in 1957 to become a form of women’s national dress, which remains tied to the identity of *kaba* in much of Ghana today (Gott 2010: 14). During the mid-twentieth century, Fathia Nkrumah, wife of Ghana’s first president Kwame Nkrumah, is credited with introducing tailored skirts with *kaba* blouses (rather than a cloth wrapper) that became known as *slit* (Dogbe 2003: 387). These changes in how Akans perceive *kaba* ensembles intersect with shifts in the cultural identity of *adinkera* to represent all of Ghana. With this continuity of wearing *kaba* outfits over time, the specific styles to tailor *kaba* blouses and wrapped or sewn *slit* skirts has continually evolved with shifting fashion cycles.

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commissioned the small cloths or if the cloth makers had already prepared them for their own use, perhaps as display boards of potential designs to customers (see British Museum record numbers 1934.1022.24 and 1934.1022.25).

The above description of the Thursday funeral rites offers a snapshot into the dynamics of *adinkra* cloth today.<sup>14</sup> Historical examples of sewn *adinkra* cloth garments contextualize the contemporary innovations to how Akans have communicated through cloth color and style. As with Joseph’s red cloth (*kobene*) designed with *adinkra* motifs, the range of other cloths reveal personal styles as mourners sought to distinguish themselves, or alternatively, to visualize family and communal unity.

### Women Wearing the “King of *Adinkra*”

In May 2014, a woman arrived at a funeral in Techiman wearing a plain black wrapper under a red cloth with patterns that glistened in the sunlight (fig. 1.10). Techiman is an Akan city north of Kumasi in the Brong-Ahafo Region. Pairing a black wrapper with a red cloth wrapped on top over her left shoulder signaled the woman’s close family relation to the deceased. Black sandals, sunglasses, a beaded bracelet, and black head tie completed her outfit. Many other women arriving with her dressed in plain red and black wrapped cloths, free of decoration. But this woman’s red cloth was fully patterned with black concentric circles and crossed swords. Within the cloth’s scalloped edges, two repeating *adinkra* symbols – *adinkrabene* (“king of Adinkra”) and *akofena* (“sword”) – filled the entire cloth. She boldly dressed in imagery associated with the Asante king.

More than eighty years earlier, a cloth maker stamped *adinkrabene* on a blouse made with a cotton pattern-on-pattern textured fabric (fig. 1.11). The dark brown sleeveless blouse dyed with *kuntunkuni* featured a square neckline and pleated trim near the waist. Like the blouse discussed

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<sup>14</sup> In Suzanne Gott’s research on Asante dress, she found strong contrasts between how women in Kumasi position the dress of women living in urban areas, collectively called *kumasefo* (sing. *kumaseni*) with that of village residents called *annukraasefo* (sing. *akuraaseni*) through wider distinctions in how the Asante perceive them. However, her research does not include perspectives from those living in villages on these urban and rural distinctions (Gott 2007).

above that Captain Wild collected, he also acquired this cloth in 1933 during his visit to Wawasi. He gave it to the Pitt Rivers Museum later that year. Captain Wild labeled the cloths as: “European cotton-cloth bodice or shirt dyed with *kuntunkuni* (brown) dye, which is a mourning colour and with wood-block printed designs” (Wild and Pitt Rivers Museum 1933). As his notes confirm, the use of *kuntunkuni* on the machine-made fabric at that time indicates the blouse’s making for mourning dress. Captain Wild did not provide any details about other cloths that the woman may have worn with this blouse.

However, the bulls-eyed-like *adinkrabene* motif was not an *adinkra* symbol historically associated with mourning, funerals, or women. The symbol’s meaning speaks about the power and leadership of the “king of Adinkra,” referencing King Kwadwo Adinkra of Gyaman. This chapter later analyzes the oral history account that credits King Kwadwo Adinkra with introducing *adinkra* cloth and first wearing cloth printed with the *adinkrabene* motif. Historically, use of *adinkrabene* – and also *akofena* – was restricted to only the Asantehene. No one else was permitted to wear cloth designed with *adinkrabene* at Manhyia Palace (N. Frimpong, interview, April 17, 2015, Kumasi, Ghana). What messages did women seek to convey in wearing cloth printed with *adinkrabene*? Did women use *adinkrabene* to challenge male authority? Or did women seek to associate themselves with royal, political power related to the symbol’s historical meaning and the king’s use of the symbol? And how did men and women viewers interpret these designs on women’s dress? The lack of historical sources on the former meanings of *adinkrabene* makes it difficult to answer such questions. But the material evidence in cloth collections and photography archives discussed in this section confirm the historical presence of *adinkrabene* in women’s dress and the symbol’s changing uses within women’s fashion over time.

The style and material of the blouse collected in 1933 do not overtly signal distinctions in the wearer’s status or suggest why the cloth maker or customer selected *adinkrabene*. However, the

printing of *adinkra* symbols suggests that the cloth maker actually stamped the cloth *after* a seamstress had sewed it into a blouse. Most noticeably, individual symbols appear directly on top of the seams. Rather than the typical straight stamping lines, the cloth maker neatly stamped the motifs in a ring around the neckline with each symbol appearing in full. The cloth maker printed the symbols less clearly in the pleated area, as the folds made it more difficult for the *badia* dye to adhere evenly. Cloth makers who I studied with first print *adinkra* on a large cloth before sewing it into a garment. Stamping *adinkra* onto an already tailored blouse suggests a potential change in technique. Alternatively, the cloth maker may have re-stamped *adinkra* onto an old, re-dyed cloth. As I discuss later in this chapter, re-dyeing and re-printing old cloth has been common practice in Akan society.

The exclusive use of *adinkerabene* on this blouse offers historical evidence of a shift that had occurred by the 1930s in the symbol's meaning and appropriate use at funerals. Many Akans today speak about the changing uses of *adinkra* motifs as a more recent phenomenon, particularly among younger generations. Peter King Appiah, researcher at the Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region in Kumasi, discussed the contemporary use of *adinkerabene* on Akan mourning cloths.

“At funerals, you see people wearing [*adinkra* cloths]. And the designs. Now, people have disregarded the significance of the motifs. So they make it in a way that even though you can find a symbol, which has no direct correlation to the event at stake, it is being used. I am saying this because, for example, you don't expect a symbol like *adinkerabene* on a mourning cloth. But you find it today. Even though it has been somehow misused, one would say that the color that we use or that we are suppose to use on such occasions are still at play” (P. Appiah, interview, November 17, 2014, Kumasi, Ghana).

As Appiah explained, some Akans have used cloth color as a strategy to make *adinkra* symbols appropriate for certain contexts. For example, at the Thursday afternoon funeral in Ntonso, one woman dressed in a cream cloth screen-printed with the NPP political party logo in red and black ink. The color palette of her dress fit the occasion, although the printed graphics were unusual for funeral settings.

Moreover, Appiah raised a key issue about the changing contexts of *adinkrahene* and other motifs that previously held restricted access: Do these changes represent a “misuse” of Akan cultural imagery? Or alternatively, do they reveal the dynamics of historical Akan cultural practices to change in response to societal shifts and remain relevant in contemporary life? Akans have other incorporated *adinkra* symbols not historically designated for funerals onto mourning cloth. Consequently, messages that wearers communicated through those symbols no longer carry the same historical meaning that they once did. Art historian Daniel Mato refers to this transformation as the “elasticity” of Akan culture (Mato 1994). Some Akans and Ghanaians now wear *adinkra* simply for what the cloth’s identity as a whole signifies rather than the individual symbols’ meanings.

Other funeral cloths from the 1930s printed with *adinkrahene* offer further material evidence of the symbol’s expanding roles and meanings in Akan life. For instance, a cloth maker working in Ntonso during the 1930s stamped this dark colored machine-made cloth with a variation of *adinkrahene* featuring small spokes on the exterior circle. In Daniel Mato’s dissertation, he classifies this design variation as *adinkrahene*, making no distinction in name or meaning from the more common bulls-eyed-like motif (Mato 1987: fig. 9). The Textile Museum of Canada now holds this cloth in their collection, identified as a “funerary cloth.”<sup>15</sup> The cloth’s small size – 3.5 yards by 2.6 yards – indicates its making as a woman’s wrapper. In comparison to the sewn blouse, this cloth depicts an alternative layout for printing *adinkrahene*. The cloth maker created a small square grid on the entire cloth, stamping one symbol inside each square. Chapter Four addresses how cloth makers Gabriel and Michael Boakye have recently used this pattern – which they call a “short design” – for less costly printings. If economic factors motivated this particular cloth design in the 1930s, then the pattern suggests the cloth’s possible making for a non-elite Akan woman.

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<sup>15</sup> Cloth makers unrecorded. Funeral *adinkra* cloth, machine-sewn and stamped. 1930-39. Cotton, plant dye, and indigo dye. Made in Ntonso, Ghana. Gift of J. Shur. Textile Museum of Canada. Toronto, Ontario. Museum record number T85.0114.

During the mid-twentieth century, Akan women continued to dress in funeral cloths printed with *adinkrabene*. Sometimes, *adinkrabene* was the only symbol. In other instances, *adinkrabene* was one of many motifs printed on the cloth. In 1964, American photographer Paul Strand photographed a woman in Ghana's Eastern Region wearing a dark colored cloth printed with *adinkrabene* and other *adinkra* motifs (Paul Strand Archive and Aperture 1980-21-397).<sup>16</sup> Photographed in Afe Negble, a town in the Asenema area, this image demonstrates the use of *adinkra* cloth outside of the Ashanti Region. *Adinkrabene* is one of the most noticeable *adinkra* symbols, as the woman wrapped the cloth so that *adinkrabene* was prominently displayed on the front of her chest. Other photographs documented men's use of *adinkra* cloth designed with *adinkrabene* symbols. For example, in 1970, American photographer Eliot Elisofon photographed two men near Kumasi dressed in dark-colored cloth; one man wrapped a cloth printed repeatedly with *adinkrabene* in a toga-like style that covered his left shoulder (Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives 00131 and 05887).<sup>17</sup>

The role of *adinkrabene* in funeral cloth during the 1960s and 1970s extended to factory-printed textile designs, with the same patterns presumably designed for both women and men. For example, this deep red factory-printed cotton cloth was designed entirely with an *adinkrabene* variation (sometimes called *adinkra ba apau* after King Kwadwo Adinkra's son named Apau) repeated throughout the cloth (fig. 1.12).<sup>18</sup> Closely related in form and meaning to *adinkrabene*, this design has

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Strand, Afe Negble, Asenema, Ghana (Eastern region). 1964. Gelatin silver print. Paul Strand Archive and Aperture. The Paul Strand Retrospective Collection, 1915-1975, gift of the estate of Paul Strand, 1980. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Accession number 1980-21-397.

<sup>17</sup> Eliot Elisofon, "Two men, near Kumasi, Ghana." 1970 (March 17-July 17, 1970). Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives. Smithsonian Institution. Record number EEPA EENG 00131.

Eliot Elisofon, "Bas-relief sculpture adorning small building, near Kumasi, Ghana." 1970 (March 17-July 17, 1970). Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives. Smithsonian Institution. Record number EEPA EENG 05887.

Elisofon's photographs are the earliest photographic evidence that I found of *adinkra* cloth printed only with *adinkrabene*. In *The Asante*, Malcolm McLeod includes an undated photographic portrait of a man wearing an *adinkra* cloth stamped with a design variation of *adinkrabene* (McLeod 1981: 146). To date, I have not yet identified any older photographs depicting men or women – including the Asantehene – wearing cloth entirely with *adinkrabene* motif, regardless of use at funerals or other events.

<sup>18</sup> Doig Simmonds and Ruth Simmonds, who donated this cloth to the British Museum, acquired the cloth when living in Nigeria from 1960-1973. But it's not clear in museum records if they purchased the cloth in Nigeria or Ghana, as the record also includes Bolgatanga as a possible location (British Museum record number 2010.2027.1).

two concentric circles with a wheel-like graphic in the center.<sup>19</sup> Held in the British Museum, collection records identify this cloth as a man's wrapper. But the cloth's size – 3 yards by 1.25 yards – reflects that it was in fact made for a woman. The exclusive use of this symbol on factory-printed mourning cloth may reveal non-Akan influence to shape symbol use at funerals. Alternatively, this factory-printed cloth design may have followed popular trends already established with hand-printed *adinkera* cloth.

More recently, other factory-printed cloths featured *adinkrabene* as the center design. For instance, in 2011, Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL) based in Ghana printed a cloth designed with an *adinkrabene* variation and colorful stripes emulating *nvomu* stitching (fig. 1.13). Unlike the other factory-printed cloths discussed above, this cloth's white color indicates that use of *adinkrabene* was not limited to funerals. Moreover, cloth makers also printed *adinkrabene* cloth onto patterned fabrics. In a funeral cloth collected in Kumasi in 2003, *adinkrabene* was the only *adinkera* symbol printed in rows onto a fabric with an unusual thin black-line and dot graphic pattern. Now held at Stanford University's Cantor Art Museum, the cloth's size – 3 yards by 3.5 yards – indicates its making for a woman's outfit.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the cloth discussed at this section's opening, funeral cloth designed with *adinkrabene* today extends to men's dress. For instance, in 2015, a man attended a funeral in Kumasi wearing a black hand-woven cloth with *adinkrabene* printed on narrow red and black stripes (fig. 1.14). At another funeral held in Kumasi that year, I noticed a man dressed in a black cloth that repeats *adinkrabene* and *akofena* in an alternating pattern. His cloth depicted the exact pattern as the woman's cloth discussed in this section's opening (fig. 1.10). This example illustrates how women

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<sup>19</sup> Rattray calls this symbol *adinkrabene*, stating that the motif is the same as the *adinkrabene* design with three concentric circles (Rattray 1927: 266, number 34). However, Mato identifies this symbol as "*adinkra ba apau(apaa)*, 'son of Adinkrahene'" (Mato 1987: fig. 10). He cites Kwasi Doben on the symbol's meaning: "Apau/Apaa was said to be the son of Kofi Adinkra who had been killed in the Asante-Gyaman War. He was said to have taught the Asante the 'secrets' and techniques of *adinkra* making" (Doben as quoted in Mato 1987: fig. 10).

<sup>20</sup> Cloth makers unrecorded. *Adinkera* cloth. Made before 2003. Purchased in Kumasi, Ghana in 2003. Gift of Thomas K. Seligman and Rita Barela. Cantor Art Museum. Stanford University. Museum record number 2013.57.

and men have dressed in the same *adinkra* cloth pattern. Moreover, this example raises questions about whether this pattern was socially acceptable and suitable dress for both genders? Or, did the women's use of this *adinkra* cloth pattern challenge gender norms?

A notable distinction in the use of *adinkrabene* on *adinkra* cloth today is the massive increase in scale. The change to screen-printing invited cloth makers to design symbols much larger than sizes possible with calabash stamps. *Adinkrabene* is one of the most common motifs that cloth makers have screen-printed recently in the largest silkscreen size. Some cloth makers said they printed larger symbols on cloths for men, specifically chiefs or leaders. But individuals not in positions of political power have dressed in such cloths. At a funeral held in Kumasi in 2014, a singer performed wearing a red and black striped *adinkra* cloth designed with *adinkrabene* and *akofena* printed in the largest symbol-size in use at that time – around four times the size as the cloths discussed above with the same two *adinkra* symbols (fig. 1.15). In Ntonso, the Boakye family has printed red and black *adinkra* cloths with large-scale *adinkrabene* motifs paired with *gye Nyame* (“Except God”) and *akofena* that resemble the singer's cloth (fig. 1.16). The Boakye family and other cloth makers said that wearing cloth with larger symbols emphasizes messages of power and authority.

In Ghana today, *adinkrabene* is one of the most widely used *adinkra* symbols, celebrated in oral history as the first *adinkra* motif named after King Kwadwo Adinkra of Gyaman. Despite the fame of *adinkrabene*, or perhaps due in part to its recognition, the symbol has not retained its historical meaning and value among some Akans. In 2014, a cloth maker in Asokwa said, “Even the name *adinkra*, the most common name *adinkra*, *adinkrabene*, they [youth in Asokwa today] won't even know” (Interview, December 11, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).<sup>21</sup> As the contexts of use for *adinkrabene* has become more fluid, so too have the symbol's meaning. The recognizable bulls-eyed-like graphic

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<sup>21</sup> Cloth maker's name removed for privacy.



image of *adinkrabene* doesn't depict imagery specific to only Akan culture. Yet the ongoing use of *adinkrabene* since the 1930s exemplifies how the historical meaning that Akans attached to the motif remains important. With the ongoing use of *adinkrabene* in women's dress since the 1930s as just one example, less restricted uses of *adinkera* symbols have likely shaped their evolving meanings.

The shift in literacy with Akan proverbial wisdom questions the efficacy of *adinkera* as a mode of communication today. Literacy among Akan and Ghanaian viewers to "read," interpret, and understand messages that wearers convey through *adinkera* cloth have declined. Beyond popular names and phrases, knowledge of the philosophical meanings of *adinkera* is limited. A turn towards illiteracy in the historical and proverbial knowledge related to *adinkera* symbolism is perhaps more representative of the contemporary moment. At the same time, the observation that younger generations are less familiar with the history and symbolic knowledge of *adinkera* illustrates the increased power of a symbol's visual form and the motif's popular name or common association.

## II. Re-Styling *Adinkera*: Speaking through Old and Borrowed Cloth

"When you buy an *adinkera* cloth, and when you use it, you wash it, you use it, you wash it. The color gets down. You are no more going to see either light grey or deep grey. So what you do is, you send it to my mother. 'Ma, I want to change my cloth into funeral cloth.' She will dye it black. And then, after you dye it, when you come... 'I want to print it. Can you work on it?' I say, 'Yes. We can work on it.' Then we print it so that you get a new cloth. You don't throw the old one away. You use it. It's used."  
(G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

As cloth maker Gabriel Boakye explained, re-printing an *adinkera* cloth changes its appearance to make the cloth useful again. By useful, the cloth actually becomes fashionable as re-printing mainly addresses aesthetic concerns. Prior to re-printing, the cloth is still "useful" in the sense that the

owner can wear it. To undergo re-dyeing and re-printing, the fabric must be strong, meaning that the cloth's fibers are in tact and don't require repairs.<sup>22</sup> But how can an old, worn cloth become new again?

The practice of re-making old cloth is central to Akan fashion and cloth's role as a mode of communication.<sup>23</sup> Nearly all re-printed *adinkera* cloths become mourning dress – regardless of prior uses – because cloth makers dye the cloth a dark color before adding new *adinkera* motifs. Some Akans have also worn dark-colored *adinkera* cloth to attend court sessions at Manhyia Palace. Re-making old cloth has been particularly useful for non-elites unable to regularly purchase new cloth.<sup>24</sup> During Ghana's struggling economy in the 1970s and 1980s, Daniel Mato observed that customers re-printed old *adinkera* cloth because it was more affordable than buying new cloth (Mato 1987: 182). Wearing old cloth re-printed with *adinkera* presents to viewers the appearance of new cloth and impression of owning multiple cloths – a marker of wealth in Akan life.

Re-making old *adinkera* cloth is associated with Akan notions of reuse, self-fashioning, and public display. Wearing old, re-made cloth to funerals rather than new cloth does not decrease the social significance or cultural value of mourning attire. Instead, careful attention to the cloth's aesthetics and the rigorous, labor-intensive process to re-make cloth reveals the importance of funeral dress. A cultural studies teacher in Kumasi, M.H. Frempong, connected faded cloths to the Twi word *tete* (from the expression 'o ye *atetewaa*') meaning, "an old-fashioned way of dressing, of not

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<sup>22</sup> Not all old cloths can be remade. Gabriel explained what cloths cannot be re-made through distinctions in "strong" and "weak" cloths. He said: "Some cloths are of no use because they become weak. When the cloth is very, very weak, when you dye it, the cloth gets some holes inside...The more you put the cloth in the sun, it also becomes more weak" (G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

<sup>23</sup> In 1881, Johannes Gottlieb Christaller identified "old (used of things)" as *dedaw* (Christaller 1881: 70). To express "to become smoky, old-looking and dirty or dingy, of a dark, or dusky or dark-brown colour," Christaller included the Twi expressions "*ofasu or odampare no ani apun; ade bi apun or ebo apun = aye dedaw na ebo aye se koko a efi wom; ntama no bo ap.; gyata no bo ap.; ne nhwi no bo apun*" (Christaller 1881: 395). In contrast, he described "renewal" and "renovation" in Twi as *foforo-ye*, closely related to the Twi word for "new, fresh, young, another," *foforo* (Christaller 1881: 131).

<sup>24</sup> Claire Polakoff said, "Sometimes people bring old cloths to be redyed and restamped, according to Rita Warpeha, who visited Ntonso and Asokwa, two Ghanaian villages that produce *adinkera* cloth. Perhaps this is an economic measure, as it is in Nigeria where women's wrappers are retied and redyed with indigo" (Polakoff 1980a: 125). For more on re-dyeing cloth in Nigeria, see Shea 1975: 103.

putting on fine clothes” (Frempong as quoted in Gott 2010: 149). Frempong explained that this saying conveys that “the woman doesn’t like to dress well all the time. This is a terrible thing to call somebody, they will be very much angered...if you visit friends in faded cloth, they will say out of your hearing, ‘*Dye atetekwaa*’” (Frempong as quoted in Gott 2009: 149). These negative connotations and less desirable messages attached to faded cloth exemplify why Akans invest time and resources to re-make old cloth.

This section on communicating through re-made cloth focuses on two areas: first, re-printed faded cloth with new *adinkra* motifs, and second, borrowed *adinkra* cloths. Wearing borrowed cloth represents another form of indirect, non-verbal communication, distinct from wearing one’s own cloth. Both practices illuminate the dynamics of the Akan fashion system and communicative power of *adinkra* cloth.

### Making Old Cloth New

“When I finish and use [the cloth] for two months, I shall give you it back to do it again. First, I use ‘Except God’ [*gye Nyame*] to make that cloth.

I will bring it back to you, and tell you, ‘Oh, change the design for me.’

So when you see it, you will say, ‘Hey! You bought another cloth.’

But it’s an *old* one. But I changed the design.

That’s why they will ask if I bought a new one. But this [silk-screened] one, when you are printing it, you cannot change it again. It is forever. When the design spoils, it spoils. But the old one, the natural one [referring to stamping], when the design spoils, you can change the design and then you will make it again so it becomes new” (P. Nyaamah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Cloth makers, including Paul Nyaamah, have described re-printing *adinkra* cloth as a process that transforms an “old,” worn cloth into a “new” cloth. Paul is the only active *adinkra* stamp carver today. As described above, he identified a key distinction between the dyes for stamping and silk-

screening *adinkera* cloths. Paul also described an advantage of stamping *adinkera* cloth with an ephemeral dye: innovation and flexibility to create and wear multiple *adinkera* designs over time without purchasing new cloth.

Re-printing old cloth with *adinkera* dates to at least the mid to late twentieth century, possibly earlier. The timing of its historical introduction is not clear. Mato is the only other scholar that makes a cursory reference to re-printed *adinkera* cloth (Mato 1987: 187-188, 208-209). He mainly discusses re-printing *adinkera* during the late 1960s to 1980s, and does not mention any historical examples of reprinting *adinkera* cloth.

Washing a stamped *adinkera* cloth risked fading or erasing the printed designs. Cloth makers have stamped *adinkera* motifs with a water-soluble dye made with *badia* tree bark. *Badia* dye is not colorfast. In other words, the dye faded when in contact with water. *Adinkera* cloth has also faded over time from exposure to the sun and sweat of the wearer's body. To prevent fading, customers have usually placed *adinkera* cloth in the sun after each use to "air dry" rather than washing – a common practice to care for cloths in West Africa (Polakoff 1980a: 125). Scholars have debated how often customers washed *adinkera* cloth, if at all.<sup>25</sup> After the *adinkera* cloth faded and accumulated dirt and odor, some customers have asked cloth makers to re-print the old cloth with *adinkera*.

The creative process of re-printing an old cloth with *adinkera* motifs has involved interactions between men and women. Cloth makers, dyers, and their customers have collaborated on the cloth's

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<sup>25</sup> Mato said, "It was stated by a number of people that unless the cloth was to be restamped it would not be washed. If needed, cloths can be washed, cleared of their old images and restamped" (Mato 1987: 187). Roy Sieber told Mato in 1986 that he "recorded the information that the cloths could not be washed 'for one year after being stamped'" (Sieber as quoted in Mato 1987: 188). In comparison, Ablade Glover's chart of *adinkera* symbols states, "*adinkera* cloths are not meant to be washed" (Glover 1971). Polakoff also documented conflicting responses. She said, "the director of The Loom, a craft boutique in downtown Accra, maintains that the cloths are washable" (Polakoff 1980a: 125). Polakoff continued, noting examples of two Akan men living in the United States who said that "*adinkera* cloths are not washed after each wearing but used on special occasions, aired, and set aside for the next event" (Polakoff 1980a: 125).

re-making.<sup>26</sup> Some women who re-dye old cloths come from the same family or town as *adinkra* cloth makers, such as Gabriel Boakye's mother *ɔbaapanyin* Veronica Abena Tabi Boakye who dyes new and old cloths. Other women in Ntonso and Asokwa also dye cloth with *kuntunkuni*, sometimes sharing communal spaces with men printing *adinkra* cloth. For example, several members of the Boakye family contributed to re-making this three-piece ensemble for a female customer: the women re-dyed the cloth before men screen-printed the freshly dyed fabric with new *adinkra* symbols (fig. 1.17 and 1.18).

Cloth makers have usually taken two steps to prepare the cloth for re-printing: washing and re-dyeing the cloth.<sup>27</sup> Regardless of the cloth's initial color, women cloth dyers have most often re-dyed the old cloth with dye made from *kuntunkuni* tree bark. Recently, women have used imported chemical dyes more readily available in Kumasi than the tree bark that is now less often traded from northern Ghana. The women's work to re-dye cloth with *kuntunkuni* is laborious and time-intensive. The dye does not immediately turn the cloth a deep brown-black color. The women must dye the cloth multiple times over a period of several weeks to achieve a dark color (fig. 1.19 and 1.20). Once completed, the *kuntunkuni* dye conceals remaining *adinkra* motifs and designates the cloth's new function as a mourning cloth. Visual traces of the cloth's previous design may remain faintly visible underneath the newly added *adinkra* symbols; their visibility depends on the cloth's material, dyes, condition, and overall quality.

After re-dyeing the cloth, some customers have left the re-dyed *adinkra* cloth plain without any additional printing. In other instances, customers have ordered cloth makers to print either the same or different *adinkra* motifs onto the re-dyed cloth. By adding new *adinkra* symbols, customers

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<sup>26</sup> The close proximity and interactions between women cloth dyers and men *adinkra* cloth makers also impacted the approach among cloth makers to teach the stamping technique with cloths that they repeatedly re-dye and re-print (G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

<sup>27</sup> An exception to this process for stamped *adinkra* cloth: if the cloth color is still in good condition, cloth makers stamped another layer of *badia* dye onto the existing design without re-dyeing the cloth. This reinforced the faded existing design, retaining the same cloth color and design (C. Frimpong, personal communication, December 11, 2014, Kumasi, Ghana).

have conveyed an alternate message or displayed the latest fashions – all without buying new cloth. If not already sewn into a garment, customers have the option to tailor the cloth into a blouse, shirt, skirt, or dress when they re-make the old fabric.

Other kinds of textiles have become *adinkra* cloths through this practice of re-making old, faded cloths. Customers have used old hand-made and factory-made textiles in various colors to print *adinkra* – from expensive *kente* cloths to less prestigious factory-print cloths (fig. 1.21). Cloth maker Yaw Agyarko, who worked during Ghana’s economic stress in the early 1980s, said, “if there are some patterns or designs [in a European cloth] and you don’t like them, I can change the cloth. I can do it all, stamp and dye it again” (Y. Agyarko as quoted in Mato 1987: 208-209). Since then, other cloth makers in Kumasi have continued to re-make imported factory-printed cloth with *adinkra* symbols.

As with old *adinkra* cloth, women cloth makers have re-dyed other kinds of cloth with *kuntunkuni* dye. In 2014, Gabriel showed me a dark-colored tunic with an embroidered neckline drying on a rock behind his house. His mother was re-dyeing the cloth with *kuntunkuni* dye. Gabriel had owned the cloth – originally white – since 1992. But the color had faded over time and was no longer a clean white cloth. Rather than discarding the dirty cloth, Gabriel re-purposed the cloth to wear at funerals (G. Boakye, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). Additionally, cloth makers have cut older cloths into strips and then sew them back together after re-dyeing the cloth with *nvomu* stitching or hand-woven *kente* strips (Boakye family, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). Some customers have elected to leave the re-dyed cloth plain, while others have had them stamped with *adinkra* symbols. Re-making various kinds of old cloth with *adinkra* signals how adding *adinkra* symbols changes the cloth’s value, use, and meaning.

Wearing an old cloth re-dyed and re-printed with *adinkra* reflects Akan principles of display. For example, customers have sometimes re-printed an old cloth with *adinkra* motifs to rejuvenate

the worn cloth's texture. In 1969, archaeologist James Bellis suggested to a cloth maker how re-printing made cloth "more colorful" (J. Bellis as quoted in Mato 1987: 187). But the cloth maker sharply responded, "That is not the point. It will be stiff enough to stand high and crisp on his shoulder now...an old limp cloth lays flat on the shoulder and looks like you are poor!" (cloth maker as quoted in Mato 1987: 187-88). Re-making old cloth alters the fabric's material properties. As a result, indirect messages conveyed through different ways of "putting on" cloth (*ntamafura*) reflect Akan aesthetics while shaping how viewers perceive the wearer's status.

Although Paul Nyaamah found benefits in using the *badia* dye that is not colorfast, customer concerns over the challenges to care for stamped *adinkra* cloth led cloth makers to use silk-screens with a colorfast paste. A major technological change for *adinkra* cloth, screen-printing has dominated *adinkra* cloth production since the early twenty-first century.

Screen-printed *adinkra* symbols are permanent. Yet some customers have asked cloth makers to re-make old silk-screened *adinkra* cloth after the fabric faded. Women dyers have re-dyed screen-printed *adinkra* cloth with *kuntunkuni* dye to become a mourning cloth – regardless of the cloth's prior color and use. Unlike stamped *adinkra* cloth, the original screen-printed patterns remain visible on the re-dyed cloth. Consequently, re-dyeing old screen-printed *adinkra* cloth to become a dark color – and thus a mourning cloth – raises issues about appropriate symbol use and symbolic "literacy" if the cloth was not initially made for funerals. Continuity of this practice to re-make faded cloth with screen-printing affirms that not only the ephemerality of *badia* dye has prompted customers to re-print faded *adinkra* cloth. Rather, re-making screen-printed *adinkra* cloth demonstrates how the practice of re-making old, faded cloth – virtually any kind of textile – is engrained within the Akan fashion system.

Re-making old cloth is distinct from other ways of using cloth to envision and communicate identity. Re-printing *adinkra* cloth transforms the cloth's visual appearance, as well as the wearer's

projected identity. Speaking about recycling and discarding clothing in India, anthropologist Lucy Norris said, “Cloth is ephemeral, but recycling can prolong its life whilst renewing its form. Cloth mediates spatial and temporal relationships as families and individuals re-create themselves anew” (Norris 2010: 85; see also Norris 2004). The aesthetic values attached to re-printed *adinkra* cloth – and the process of how old cloth becomes new – reflect strategies for re-fashioning personal identities. The ephemerality of *adinkra* cloth lends itself as a material for individuals to remake themselves in response to and alongside other changes in their life.

Re-making old *adinkra* cloth also raises questions about the roles of cloth and ephemeral materials in an individual’s life. Erasing or concealing existing *adinkra* symbols on an old cloth removes visible traces of personal memories, stories, and meaning associated with how the wearer dressed in the *adinkra* cloth at important occasions. Keeping old *adinkra* cloth as a record or visual memory of one’s past is therefore not important. In fact, I struggled to find old *adinkra* cloths in Kumasi during my research. No one kept them. Not even cloth makers. In comparison, Akans and other Ghanaians, especially women, have more often kept *kente* cloth and factory-printed cloth associated as heirlooms and forms of female wealth (Gott 2009).

Many re-printed *adinkra* cloths have stayed with the same owner. Sometimes, a cloth owner has exchanged their used *adinkra* cloth to a cloth maker for a new cloth (G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). By exchanging the cloth, the owner paid less for the new cloth. The cloth maker then re-dyed and re-printed the old cloth before selling it to a new customer. Trading in old cloths to buy new ones at a reduced rate further illustrates the circulation of cloth between makers and customers. As I discuss next, other practices have also led *adinkra* cloths to move between owners and wearers. As such, the cloth’s material properties, designs, and meanings remain in a state of flux. The ephemerality and impermanence of *adinkra* cloth make possible these intertwined processes of re-making cloth and re-fashioning identity.



## Someone Else's Cloth

At the Mr. Six Photo Studio in Kumasi, photographer Alfred Nsia photographed a woman wearing a two-piece *dansinkran* outfit: she dressed in a white *adinkra* cloth wrapped on top and a white striped cloth on bottom (fig. 1.22). Strips of *wommu* stitching added prestige and beauty to her *adinkra* cloth. The visible *adinkra* motifs – *obi nka obi* (“bite not one another”), *adinkrahene* (“king of Adinkra”), and *aban* (“house” or “castle”) – evoke Akan power through their association with the leadership and authority of the Asantehene, the Asante king. She also adorned herself in lavish gold jewels: necklaces, bracelets, rings, and ankle bands. Her short hair was neatly coiffed. The woman faced the camera squarely, seated on a wood stool with *abenemaa* sandals on her feet – footwear historically associated with leaders and elders. Her hands rested heavy on her lap from the weight of her jewelry.

An Asante queen mother.

The woman's portrait, likely made around the 1970s, presents an image of Asante power, royalty, and womanhood. Around this time, Nsia took over a former photography business in the “Ash Town” area of Adum, Kumasi's city center, and re-named the studio “Mr. Six Photos” with the English translation of his surname, Nsia meaning “Six” (J. Nsia, interview, December 4, 2014, Kumasi, Ghana).<sup>28</sup> During that time, some photography studios in central and southern Ghana (and also other parts of West Africa) were “dream factories” for customers to visualize desired identities, lifestyles, and future aspirations (Mießgang 2001). Ghanaians of lower and middle class standing visited photography studios where they could experiment with props in front of painted

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<sup>28</sup> Nsia studied photography in the United States and Germany (J. Nsia, interview, December 4, 2014, Kumasi Ghana). In 2014, Nsia's daughter was running the photography business from the same location, which has changed its studio offerings over the years to remain up to date with contemporary trends in portrait photography (J. Nsia, Personal communication, December 4, 2014, Kumasi Ghana).

backgrounds to re-fashion their identities and communicate alternative narratives from the reality of their daily lives. Nsia assisted in shaping his customers' desired identities through pose and framing the picture, as well as selecting and styling the customer's dress. He said:

“This woman is not a queen, but I made her a queen. I dress her in a way that a queen has to dress. If the person hasn't got sufficient hair, I increase it... And women too, I have to waste time to dress them. The cloth she is wearing is mine. I have to dress them myself for them to appear as if they are queen mothers” (A. Nsia as quoted in Wendl and du Plessis 1998).

Nsia invited customers to reimagine who they could be. He speaks about his role in making these portraits, and his customers also contributed their own ideas and styles. Nsia's work illuminates an important way that Akans have re-fashioned their identities through someone else's *adinkra* cloth. No written records accompanied the photography of the women described above to confirm her identity. Was she a queen mother? Or, did she aspire to be one and adorn herself in Nsia's studio props?

Other photographs from Mr. Six's studio indicate that the woman likely borrowed the cloth and accessories. Nsia photographed two other women wearing two-piece *dansinkran* ensembles with the identical lower white striped cloth design as the woman discussed above (Wendl and du Plessis 1998).<sup>29</sup> But instead of the white *adinkra* cloth, these two women dressed in *kente* cloth. Both women displayed a similar selection of jewelry as the women wearing the *adinkra* cloth, further suggesting that Nsia's props beautified the woman dressed in *adinkra*. She was likely not the cloth's owner, nor a queen mother.

Why did the woman “dress up” in a *dansinkran* outfit with *adinkra* cloth to present herself as a queen mother? The *adinkra* symbols printed on this particular cloth – including *obi nka obi* (“bite not one another”), *adinkrabene* (“king of Adinkra”), and *aban* (“house” or “castle”) – carry immense cultural value as expressions of Asante power and royalty. Combining these symbols on the cloth

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<sup>29</sup> In the limited copies of photographs available at Mr. Six's studio when I visited in 2014, this was the only image I found depicting this particular cloth design.

may have been a strategic choice that Nsia made knowing the symbols' cultural meanings and anticipated uses for customers to pose in the cloth as queen mothers. Nsia was skilled in photographing actual queen mothers, as he made a portrait of Asantehemaa Nana Afia Kobi Serwaa Ampem II.<sup>30</sup> Nsia photographed the Asantehemaa, the Asante Queen Mother, seated on a stool in a similar pose and styling as the aspiring queen mothers.

In other photographs from Mr. Six's studio, men dressed in different *adinkera* cloths – possibly ones they borrowed from Nsia – with symbols that likewise evoked meanings about Asante power.<sup>31</sup> Art historian Tobias Wendl said, “Asante photographer Alfred Six [Nsia] declares himself to be a ‘king maker.’ He has on hand all the items necessary to dress men as chiefs and women as queen mothers. In the monarchistic Asanteman, following the death of a queen mother, women of all social classes hurry to the photographers’ studios to dress and to be shot as queen mothers themselves” (Wendl 2001: 87). For *adinkera* cloth to be included among Nsia's studio props that customers borrowed for portraits reveals how *adinkera* was a prestigious, expensive, and sought-after fashion at this time.

In Akan society, borrowing cloth has been common practice at photography studios, as well other cultural contexts. For events, some Akans have borrowed *adinkera* cloths directly from people they know – friends, family, and community members among others. Since wrapped cloth follows uniform sizes for men and women, these kinds of *adinkera* cloths offer more possibilities for others to wear them. In contrast, sewn *adinkera* garments – tailored specifically to the cloth owner's measurements – have restricted borrowing to only those of comparable size and fit. At funerals, families may borrow many cloths for dressing the deceased and the funeral bed for the lying-in-state ceremony (Arhin 1994: 310).

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<sup>30</sup> This is an undated photograph that I viewed at the Mr. Six Photo Studio on December 5, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> This included two undated photographs that I viewed at the Mr. Six Photo Studio on December 5, 2014.

Sometimes, borrowed cloth is associated with a lack of financial means to purchase new cloth. But other factors besides economic costs have also contributed to borrowing *adinkera* cloth. Some Akan men and women have borrowed an *adinkera* cloth because they seek a particular cloth design to convey a specific message relevant to an event or situation. In these instances, the cloth has a fixed life. The wearer may not need or want to convey a certain message multiple times, and would therefore not re-wear the cloth often. Osei-Bonsu Safo-Kantanka, researcher at Manhyia Palace and *kente* cloth weaver, explained how some Akans borrow *adinkera* cloths that express the particular message that they seek to communicate:

“Normally, when the message is over, someone can come and borrow it.

‘Oh, I saw you wear that piece of cloth. I also want to say the same message.

Give me the cloth to wear.’

We don’t throw the cloths away. People borrow.

If I don’t have money, and I know my friend or my brother has a cloth,

‘Oh, the other time when that man offended you, you wore that piece of cloth. Can you let me have it?’

And he will give it to me.

It speaks the same language to somebody. We don’t throw the cloths away.

We don’t wear them just once...Even if it [the message] is over, it will happen to somebody and it will continue” (O.B. Safo-Kantanka, personal communication, November 27, 2014, Manhyia, Ghana).

As Safo-Kantanka suggests, borrowing cloth is more economical than investing in a new cloth or re-printing an old cloth. Another advantage of borrowing *adinkera* cloth is that borrower has already seen someone dress in the *adinkera* cloth, in which they can observe and evaluate how the owner communicated a certain message. However, the declining “literacy” in *adinkera* symbolism over time among many Akans has lessened the effectiveness of conveying targeted messages through *adinkera* cloth.

Borrowed cloths have also included older or exclusive textiles rarely available to purchase, either in terms of the fabric type or cloth’s design. For example, *adinkera* cloth maker *ɔpanyin* Oduro

Branee loans one of his old *kente* cloths to people who wish to wear it at social events or graduations (*Ɔpanyin* O. Branee, interview, May 13, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). *Ɔpanyin* Branee said that he receives requests to wear his cloth woven with the popular “Fathia Nkrumah” pattern (named after the wife of Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah) because the weaver used a different kind of cotton than what is available in Kumasi today. This practice may begin to extend to stamped *adinkra* cloth, now less readily available to buy in favor of screen-printed *adinkra* cloth.

Borrowing *adinkra* cloth has guided how the wearer dressed in the cloth. When men have borrowed cloth the borrower must wrap the cloth so that it does not touch the ground (N. Boateng, interview, May 10, 2015, Kumasi, Ghana). By preventing the cloth from becoming dirty, this style has also silently communicated to those fluent in ways “to put on” cloth (*ntamafura*) that the wearer does not own the cloth. In contrast, another wrapped cloth style called *Mokwa* reveals that the wearer owns the cloth. C.D.A. Padova explains this style: “A proud man will not only make the cloth drag behind him, but will also carry a very big lump on his left arm. The *mokwa ntamafura* is also nicknamed ‘*Meko sree ana?*’ which implies that the owner claims ownership of the cloth himself and did not borrow it from anyone” (Padova 2003: 17). In other examples, allowing cloth to touch the ground also conveys that the man is married and his wife will wash his cloth (J. Brobbey, personal communication, November 11, 2014, Manhyia, Ghana). Such messages conveyed indirectly through “putting on” cloth add another layer of meaning to what the *adinkra* cloth’s printed designs communicate.

Wearing both borrowed and re-printed *adinkra* cloth illustrates how cloth makers, photographers, and other people have assisted with visualizing someone’s desired identity through cloth and accessories. Through re-making old cloth and borrowing cloth, *adinkra* cloth continues to change in form and meaning after its initial making and use. These practices reveals the dynamics of Akan fashion cycles.

### III. “The King of *Adinkra*” and a Ruler’s Legacy: King Kwadwo Adinkra

In the early nineteenth century, the former king of the Gyaman kingdom, Gyamanhene Kwadwo Adinkra, allegedly reproduced the Golden Stool of Asante (*sika dwa kofi*).<sup>32</sup> The Asante king, Asantehene Osei Bonsu, perceived this action as a challenge to his authority because he viewed copying the stool as an affront to the Asante empire.<sup>33</sup> The Golden Stool is emblematic of the Asante kingdom. Oral history recalls that Okomfo Anokye told Osei Tutu, founder of the Asante kingdom, that the stool contained the soul of the Asante. King Adinkra’s act of defiance led to the start of the Asante-Gyaman war in 1818. When the Asante captured the Gyaman king, oral histories recall that he was dressed in a cloth printed with a bulls-eyed-like motif that became known as *adinkrahene*, meaning “the king of Adinkra.”

*Adinkrahene* is now remembered as the first *adinkra* symbol named after the king of Gyaman. This chapter’s final section returns to a discussion earlier in the chapter about women who began wearing cloth printed with *adinkrahene*, breaking the symbol’s former restricted access to the Asante king. In what follows, this section explores the connections between the narratives told about King Kwadwo Adinkra and changing fashions for *adinkra* cloth at Manhyia Palace.

### The Power of Oral History and Origin Narratives

Kusi’s narrative presented at the opening of the Introduction represents one of the most widely cited oral history accounts of how *adinkra* cloth making began. Using the *adinkra* symbol *adinkrahene* (“king of *adinkra*”) as a starting point, he said that the symbol came about during the

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<sup>32</sup> The kingdom is also sometimes spelled “Gyaaman” and “Jaman.”

<sup>33</sup> For more on King Kwadwo Adinkra and the Asante-Gyaman war, see McCaskie 2014; Terray 1995.

Asante-Gyaman war of 1818. He continued to explain how his ancestor in Asokwa called Duodu was the first to make *adinkra* cloth in Kumasi, after learning how to develop the printing dye from King Adinkra's son, Apau. In the Ashanti Region today, this was the most frequent oral history that people told me about how *adinkra* cloth making began. Daniel Mato also said this was the most common narrative that cloth makers told him in the 1980s (Mato 1987: 193).<sup>34</sup>

Kusi's story included a few key differences, which illustrate the modifications speakers make when presenting the narrative. Notably, the name of a central figure was surprisingly absent in Kusi's account: Kusi refers to King Kwadwo Adinkra, the defeated ruler of the Gyaman kingdom, but he doesn't explicitly name him. In Kusi's telling of the history of *adinkra* cloth, he emphasizes Asokwa, his ancestor Duodu, and Apau, who taught Duodu. Other Akans and Ghanaians have instead stressed the role of King Kwadwo Adinkra and connected his influence to the cloth's name. This distinction illustrates the role of *adinkra* cloth, and stories connected to its origin, to support and advance political agendas in contemporary life.

Moreover, in comparing other accounts, there's a discrepancy in how people have identified the king of Gyaman. Published scholarly texts about the Gyaman kingdom identify the ruler as King Kwadwo Adinkra (McCaskie 2014; Terray 1995). However, in the Ashanti Region today, people who told me narratives about the king's involvement with *adinkra* cloth named him as King Kofi Adinkra, not King Kwadwo Adinkra. Likewise, in the 1980s, Mato also recorded cloth makers who recalled the king's name as King Kofi Adinkra, and is therefore how Mato identifies the ruler in his work (Mato 1987, 1994). What led to this difference in oral history is not clear, as Kofi and Kwadwo refer to different Akan day names for men (Kofi, a name for men born on Friday; Kwadwo, a name for men born on Monday).

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<sup>34</sup> Mato argues that the oral history account dating the introduction of *adinkra* cloth to the war of 1818 is "taken more as an explanation of how the techniques of making *adinkra* came to Asante rather than the use of the symbol-stamped cloth itself" (Mato 1994). Cloth maker Peter Adomako, who was from Asokwa, told Daniel Mato that Kwaku Dwodu "dipped the plantain peel into the medicine and stamped it on the cloth" (P. Adomako as quoted in Mato 1987: 123-124).

Despite these variations, historical evidence confirms that the cloth's production began prior to the Asante-Gyaman war of 1818. Thomas Edward Bowdich collected an *adinkra* cloth in 1817 during his visit to Kumasi, the earliest extant example of *adinkra* cloth (fig. I.2). In 1818, Bowdich donated the cloth to the British Museum. His notes for the cloth state "made Dagwumba, painted Ashanti," which confirm the cloth's making among a cultural group in northern Ghana also called Dagomba (British Museum record Af1818,1114.23).<sup>35</sup> In 1819, Bowdich published *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee*, which documents Akan culture and describes the making of painted cloths as observing "a man paint as fast as I could write" (Bowdich 1819: 310). He later writes, "the white cloth of Dagwumba, is preferred, a piece of which, painted will be sent to the British Museum" (Bowdich 1819: 332). Scholars have suggested that his account may illustrate *adinkra* cloth making (or an inscribed cloth), even though Bowdich's description does not specifically identify the practice as *adinkra* (Bowdich 1819; see also Mato 1987: 80).

A different oral history dates *adinkra* prior to Bowdich's visit to Akan society. Specifically, this narrative recalls that Asantehene Osei Tutu I brought cloth makers from Denkyira, an Akan state, to work in Asokwa in 1701 when the Asante king defeated the Denkyira (Fortune 1997; Mato 1987; McLeod 1981: 150; Prussin 1986: 239; Quarcoo 1972: 6). Another account credits Takyimanhene Ameyaw with starting *adinkra* cloth production after Asantehene Opoku Ware (r. 1718-1750) captured the ruler of Bonomanso, another Akan state (McLeod 1981: 150).<sup>36</sup> These explanations are less often told in Ghana today, raising questions about how certain oral histories

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<sup>35</sup> Two other *adinkra* cloths from the nineteenth century are held in museum collections. The former Dutch governor residing on the Guinea Coast commissioned an *adinkra* cloth in 1826, now held at Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, Netherlands (museum record number RV-360-1700). The other *adinkra* cloth was made for the Asante king Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I in 1897, now held at Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African Art (museum record number 83-3-8).

<sup>36</sup> McLeod states, "A Kumasi court tradition written down about forty years ago [1940s] claimed the cloth was introduced by the Takyimanhene Ameyaw when he was captured and brought to Kumase by Asantehene Opoku Ware" (McLeod 1981: 150; McLeod cites Kumasi MSS, p. 151). Mato said, "Oral histories collected at Manhyia Palace in Kumasi which discuss the use of *adinkra* cloth at court during the 1700s" and cites *ɔkyeame* Bafour Osei Akoto and Abanasehene Nana Asafo Agyi II (Mato 1994).



move in and out of circulation. Why do so many Akans still support the narrative that links the cloth to King Kwadwo Adinkra and the Asante-Gyaman war of 1818 despite evidence that *adinkra* cloth making clearly started before the war?

Oral histories about the origins of certain cultural practices, towns, families, or positions have been common in Akan life. Historian Ivor Wilks analyzes the cultural role of origin narratives to claim ownership and shape Akan perceptions of history. Wilks classifies these origin stories into three categories dealing with migration, expansion, and ancestors who originated from the sky, ground, or under water (Wilks 1996).

“They [origin stories] are also ones that are regarded by those who recount them as being true stories, that is, as *abakosem*, history, rather than say *anansesem*, fable. This is rather important, since such stories are used to assert and validate claims to land, to traditional office, to family membership, and so on. They are therefore meant to be believed. This is not, of course, to say that they are always in fact true, only that they are always presented as true” (Wilks 1996: 13).

While Wilks’ discussion focuses more on origin narratives of towns or families, his analysis on the function of origin stories applies to the contested narratives on the origins of *adinkra* cloth. Cloth makers such as Kusi Boadum have told contrasting stories about how *adinkra* cloth started that present evidence and claim that their family or town represents the “home” of *adinkra* cloth making. Moreover, Claire Polakoff contends that the inaccurate account of King Kwadwo Adinkra’s role to introduce *adinkra* cloth has dominated oral history due to Akan interest in legends about political rulers and war.

“Much of Ghanaian life is dominated by legends and heroic folklore; there is, for instance, national recognition of the Golden Stool, symbolic of Ashanti royalty, the soul of the Ashanti people, and the powers of the state. It is possible that linking the [*adinkra*] cloth to a battle of the royalty over the use of the designs stolen from the Golden stool of Ashanti provides a victorious type of association well suited to present-day Ghanaian nationalism” (Polakoff 1980a: 88).

Claiming ownership of *adinkra* is especially pertinent given the transformations of *adinkra* since the mid-twentieth century to represent the entire nation of Ghana and continent of Africa.

Consequently, many Akans today seek to demonstrate that *adinkra* cloth was historically an Akan, and specifically an Asante, cultural practice. In doing so, they emphasize the roots of *adinkra* cloth within their culture and the cloth's connections to contemporary Akan life.

### *Adinkrahene* and Political Power in Ghana

In 2016, an article published in *The Daily Graphic* newspaper in Ghana said, “*adinkra* symbols were named after Nana Kwadwo Adinkra who is said to have invented the symbols” (Adu-Gyamerah 2016). The article cites an interview with Nana Odencho Affram Berempong II, Omanhene of Suma, who references the oral history about the former King of Gyaman as the only account of the cloth's origins. Notably, the Suma Traditional Area (located in Ghana's Brong Ahafo Region) is one of the core states of the historical Gyaman kingdom that today claims links to the “invention” of *adinkra* symbols by King Kwadwo Adinkra. The article therefore illuminates how individuals in positions of political authority and power, as well as the author's or interviewer's cultural affiliation, informed arguments and narratives about the history of *adinkra* that circulated in the press.

The Suma Traditional Council has even conceived of an international cultural centre named after the Gyamanhene. The website of the Suma Traditional Council states: “as a way of preserving the philosophical Adinkra Symbols of Ghana, which were invented by King Adinkra, a late Gyaman king, a cultural centre named Adinkra Village is being established at Suma Ahenkro, capital of the Suma Traditional Area” (Suma Traditional Council 2017).<sup>37</sup> As of 2017, the Suma Traditional Council had not yet built the cultural centre. Regardless of if or when the cultural centre is realized,

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<sup>37</sup> For more information on the announcement of the cultural centre, see “Adinkra village is to be established at Suma” 2016.

the idea for this centre and the Suma Traditional Council's reason for creating it is important. Other existing cultural centres in Ghana function as spaces for remembering cultural heritage and marking the area as the "home" of a particular culture or artistic practice.

While the Suma Traditional Council claims ties to the introduction of *adinkra* cloth through King Kwadwo Adinkra's rule of the Gyaman kingdom, debates persist on the Gyamanhene's identity. In K.A. Britwum's writing about King Kwadwo Adinkra, Britwum asks: "Was he a Gyaaman or an Asante?" (Britwum 1974: 230). Britwum argues that he came from Gyaman, but this is debated in scholarship. These conflicting views on the king's cultural affiliation is important to how different groups are positioning the Gyamanhene in their narratives about the cultural identity and origins of *adinkra* cloth. Britwum further explained, "there is a suggestion, which is not altogether slight, that in his youth Adinkra served at the court of Asante in Kumasi where, as Osei Tutu did in Denkyira and Akwamu before he became king of Asante, Adinkra must have had the opportunity to study Asante court politics and diplomacy" (Britwum 1974: 229-230).

A marker of power and leadership, *adinkrahene* ("king of *adinkra*") oscillates between marking Gyaman and Asante identity. The king's prominent role within the Gyaman kingdom further complicates how some Asante now tell this origin story of *adinkra* cloth to claim origins of *adinkra* as an Akan or Asante cultural practice. The Asante and Gyaman states are both Akan subgroups and illustrate the complexity of the relationships among these various groups. Britwum noted that King "Adinkra is generally represented in traditional Asante history as a powerful and proud ruler who always flouted the authority of the Asantehene" (Britwum 1974: 230). These notions of power associated with King Kwadwo Adinkra extend into the symbolic meaning of the *adinkrahene* symbol named after him. Moreover, such framing of the Gyamanhene exemplify some of the tensions and negotiations of power within Akan society.

While the Suma Traditional Area claims the origins of adinkra through the former Gyamanhene, the Asante have long employed *adinkra* cloth to mark political identity. Current and former Asantehenes have dressed in *adinkra* cloth at important political events. For instance, in the early nineteenth century, Asantehene Prempeh II dressed in an *adinkra* cloth designed exclusively with the *osrane* motif and *mwomu* stitching while in exile in the Seychelles (fig. 1.23). This cloth pattern stamped exclusively with the *osrane* motif is a common design for the Asantehene, both historically and in contemporary examples. The *osrane* (“moon”) motif evokes the Akan proverb, “*osrane mmf̄iti preko nntwareman*,” meaning “it takes the moon some time to go round the earth.” Wearing this cloth while in exile communicated the king’s patience with his political situation. Cloth is central to the king’s appearance in Akan society. At public events, cloth visually expresses the Asantehene’s power and authority. Royal cloths are the most prestigious, made by the most creative and skillful cloth makers. For *adinkra*, the king’s cloths articulate specific messages through careful symbol selection and arrangement that showcase the king’s eloquence and wisdom.

### Changing Fashions for *Adinkra* at Manhyia Palace

On May 6, 2015, Manhyia Palace held the *Amukudae*, a recurring festival held every forty days on Wednesdays. This particular *Amukudae* was exceptional. It was also Asantehene Osei Tutu II’s sixty-fifth birthday. Chiefs attended the celebrations for the current Asante king dressed in white and black or colored cloths, including *kente*, *adinkra*, woven, and embroidered cloths. For example, I met Morsohene Nana Owusu-Ansah Sikatuo, chief of the Asante town Morso, who came dressed in a white and black screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. Narrow strips of orange and green *kente* cloth added prestige to his cloth. The Morsohene told me he and other chiefs wear *adinkra* cloth because “it

speaks a lot.” He repeated “it speaks a lot” again, emphasizing the cloth’s communicative value (M. Owusu-Ansah Sikatuo, personal communication, May 6, 2015, Manhyia, Ghana).

But no one else’s dress could rival the king’s cloth that day. The Asantehene dressed in an exquisite handmade cloth. Strips of intricately hand-woven *kente* cloth alternated with strips of embroidery sewn in *kente* and *adinkra* patterns. This style of cloth that blends *kente* and embroidery reflects a recent trend in chiefly dress, popular among Asantehene Osei Tutu II and paramount chiefs for *adae* festivals. At the *Akwasiadae* festival held at Manhyia Palace in April 2015, Asantehene Osei Tutu II dressed in an elaborate cloth combining *kente* and embroidery (fig. 1.24). He wrapped the cloth in such a way so that two important *adinkra* symbols – *gye Nyame* (“except God”) and *dwennimmen* (“ram’s horn”) – were clearly visible to viewers on the front of the cloth while sitting in state.

While historical cloths continue to carry significance, this festival illustrates how new fashion styles are created at Manhyia Palace. Asantehene Osei Tutu II has also embraced screen-printed *adinkra* cloth rather than continuing to wear stamped cloth. For example, Nana Duah II, chief of Tewobaabi, has made screen-printed *adinkra* cloth for the Asantehene. The current Asantehene’s selection of *adinkra* cloths made with the latest technology demonstrates that royal Asante regalia today is not static but evolves with wider contemporary fashions.

The changing fashions of *adinkra* cloth extend beyond dress styles to the appropriate use of symbols. Nowadays, anyone can wear *adinkra* cloth with previously restricted symbols at Manhyia Palace and other places. For instance, at recently held court sessions, *Awukudae*, and *Akwasiadae* festivals, chiefs and other non-royal guests came to Manhyia Palace dressed in *adinkra* cloths with motifs *adinkrabene*, *akoben*, and *akofena*. As with the use of *adinkrabene* on women’s cloth described earlier in the chapter, these examples reveal a shift in the historical cultural value of particular symbols and the meanings they communicate.

Some *adinkra* symbols were formerly reserved exclusively for the Asantehene, including *adinkrabene* (“king of *adinkra*”), *akoben* (“war horn”), and *akofena* (“ceremonial sword”).<sup>38</sup> Historically, it was inappropriate – and viewed as a challenge to the king – if someone else came to Manhyia Palace dressed in cloth with these particular motifs. A position within the Asante court dedicated to the Asantehene’s wardrobe called the Abanasehene enforced protocol for proper use of *adinkrabene* and other *adinkra* symbols at Manhyia Palace. If the Abanasehene encountered a guest wearing cloth with *adinkra* symbols reserved for the king, he instructed them to leave and change their dress.

In the past, no other attendees could wear the same cloth as the Asantehene at Manhyia Palace. Prior to the king’s entrance at an event, when other guests are arriving, the Abanasehene observes what other guests are wearing, particularly paramount chiefs (N. Frimpong, interview, April 17, 2015, Manhyia, Ghana). The Abanasehene must ensure that the king’s cloth is distinct from other guests’ attire. If the Abanasehene notices someone else wearing the same or similar cloth that he had selected for the king, the Abanasehene changes the king’s dress to an alternate cloth before the king makes his appearance.

In addition to these duties, the Abanasehene is responsible for selecting the king’s cloth, managing the repository of all the kings’ cloths, and commissioning new cloths. The Abanasehene position falls under the Abanase section of the Asantehene’s court. Two individuals serve under the Abanasehene: the Kentehene and Akontitomahene, who provide the king’s *kente* and embroidery cloths respectively.<sup>39</sup> The Abanasehene oversees any other cloth that the king wears.<sup>40</sup> Despite the absence of an “Adinkrahene” position, *adinkra* cloth is an important dress at Manhyia Palace.

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<sup>38</sup> Nana Yaw Frimpong, who has served at Manhyia Palace for over thirty years, identified the following as *adinkra* symbols reserved only for the Asantehene’s use: *adinkrabene*, *obene tuo*, *osrane ne osramme*, *akofena*, *akoben* (N. Frimpong, interview, April 17, 2015, Manhyia, Ghana). Nana Frimpong is the family head of the royal Dichemso house and also a trumpeter at Manhyia Palace.

<sup>39</sup> As of 2015, Nana Adu Ansere Sarpong was the *Abanasehene* and also the chief of Patasi in Kumasi.

<sup>40</sup> Doran Ross identifies the *Abanasehene* as the “chief of the royal wardrobe” (Ross 2002), while Schildkrout refers to the title as the “master of the wardrobe,” following Ivor Wilks (Schildkrout 1999). Historians Ivor Wilks and Sandra Greene present two distinct narratives about how the Abanasehene position began:

The political and cultural significance of the Asantehene's cloths also reveals the responsibility of those who care for his cloths. In addition to the Abanasehene, a group of fifteen women serve within the Abanase division of the Asante king's court associated with maintaining the king's wardrobe.<sup>41</sup> The Abanase women wash the Asantehene's cloths, ensuring that the king's cloths are well cared for. Rebecca Amankwah is one of these women who now wash the Asante king's wardrobe, including his *adinkra* cloths (R. Amankwah, interview, May 5, 2015, Manhyia, Ghana). The women hold an important, though often unseen, position in the Asantehene's court to support the king's appearance and public image. It is one of the only positions dedicated to women.<sup>42</sup>

*Adinkra* allows the king to silently express specific messages through the cloth's symbols. Changing cultural norms for the use of particular *adinkra* symbols at Manhyia Palace illustrate the evolving contexts to encounter certain *adinkra* motifs and their shifting meanings. Moreover, analysis of origin stories about *adinkra* cloth demonstrate King Kwadwo Adinkra's continued importance in these narratives to mark association with Akan identity or power. "In our tradition," Rebecca told me, "if you don't wear cloth, you can't become a king or a chief" (R. Amankwah, interview, May 5, 2015, Manhyia, Ghana).

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Wilks said, "The head of the Abanase was the Debosohene, the Asantehene's barber and manicurist, whose office dated from the beginnings of the kingdom. The office of Abobotrafohene, Master of the Bedchamber, was also created by Osei Tutu, but was redesigned Abanasehene, Master of the Wardrobe, by Osei Bonsu when its incumbent became responsible for the Asantehene's clothes" (Wilks 1975: 426). In comparison, Greene said, "While she [Gyamana Nana] was at the palace, Gyamana Nana saw her own granddaughter there. Gyamana Nana was troubled. She approached the Asantehene and said that she did not mind how she herself was treated, but that she wanted her granddaughter to be cared for. So the Asantehene gave the girl to Bantamahene so that he would look after her. It was her descendants who became the Abanaschene...The Abanasehene is responsible for the Asantehene's clothes" (Greene 2013: 16-17).

<sup>41</sup> The Abanase extends beyond the king's wardrobe and is connected to the *Sanaabene*, treasurer, and other servants to the king (See: Prussin 1980: 65; Wilks 1975: 426; Arhin 1980: 25).

<sup>42</sup> The Asantehene's court includes several other important positions: Sanaahene (chief treasurer), Debosohene (chief barber, manicurist, and chief of gold weights), Gyasehene (chief treasurer for the king's household), Ahwerewamuhene (chief of the Golden Elephant tail), Nkonwasofohene (chief of the Golden Stool). For more information on these positions, see: Ampene and Nyantakyi 2014; Wilks 1975. I have not yet found published scholarship on the Abanase women's work.

## Conclusion

This chapter argued that men and women have dressed in *adinkra* cloth as fashionable dress. This framework counters a common theme in scholarship that emphasizes the wearing of *adinkra* cloth as a wrapped cloth, which is not only misleading of how Akans actually wear the cloth but also consequently creates associations with unchanging practices. My approach to re-frame *adinkra* cloth aims to move *adinkra* cloth and other handmade textiles away from conversations of craft and traditional dress and into scholarly discussions of fashion. In doing so, attention centers on change and the dynamics of dress practices. Women and men certainly wear *adinkra* cloth as a wrapped garment – both historically and in the present day – but it is one of several ways to wear *adinkra* cloth. As discussed above, historical photographs date women’s use of *adinkra* cloths as sewn garments to the late nineteenth century.

Additionally, part II introduced new scholarship on practices of re-making cloth through the Boakye family’s work in Ntonso. Re-making cloth is surprisingly absent in scholarly discussions of Akan textiles and dress practices. However, re-making old cloth has been widely practiced in Kumasi and not limited to only *adinkra* cloth, as the chapter discussed how women re-dye faded *kente* cloth as well as factory-made cloth. As with re-making cloth, borrowing *adinkra* cloth also contextualizes the roles of *adinkra* within wider discussions of Akan clothing practices and the used clothing industry. Approaches to re-dyeing and re-printing old *adinkra* cloth therefore illustrate how *adinkra* intersects with other Akan textiles and dress practices. The next chapter continues discussion of collaborative methods to cloth making and further analyzes how the Boakye family and other cloth makers in Kumasi approach their work. The following two chapters turn attention to the historical and contemporary production of *adinkra* cloth through changes to artistic process and printing technology.



## Chapter One Images



Fig. 1.1. Mourners dressed in black screen-printed funeral *adinkra* cloths. Funeral for *ɔbaapanyin* Florence Nyarko and *ɔbaapanyin* Amma Adwuwa. May 21, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 1.2. Announcer dressed in tailored collared shirt made with a white and black factory-printed cloth designed with *adinkra* symbols. Funeral for *ɔbaapanyin* Florence Nyarko and *ɔbaapanyin* Amma Adwuwa. May 21, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 1.3. Three women dressed in two-piece *dansinkran* ensembles with head ties. Woman on far right dressed in a black screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. Funeral for *ɔbaapanyin* Florence Nyarko and *ɔbaapanyin* Amma Adwuwa. May 21, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 1.4. Photographer unrecorded. “Group portrait of three African women. The two seated hold umbrellas” (title source: photo album). 1877 [ca. 1910]. Cape Coast, Gold Coast. Fante culture. Black-and-white print, 10 ½ x 14 ½. Eliot Elisofon Photo Archives. Smithsonian Institution. Record number EEPA 1995-180067. Available online [https://www.si.edu/object/siris\\_arc\\_239064](https://www.si.edu/object/siris_arc_239064)



Fig. 1.5. Mourners dressed in black funeral *adinkra* cloths. Woman on far right wears a factory-printed cloth with *adinkra* symbols, while the two women to her left wear screen-printed *adinkra* cloths. Funeral for *ɔbaapanyin* Florence Nyarko and *ɔbaapanyin* Amma Adwuwa. May 21, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 1.6. Woman dressed in three-piece *kaba* with factory-printed cloth designed with *gye Nyame* motif. Funeral for *ɔbaapanyin* Florence Nyarko and *ɔbaapanyin* Amma Adwuwa. May 21, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 1.7. Two elder woman on far right dressed in three-piece *kaba* ensembles made with screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. Funeral for *ɔbaapanyin* Florence Nyarko and *ɔbaapanyin* Amma Adwuwa. May 21, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 1.8. Cloth makers unrecorded. *Kaba* blouse made with stamped *adinkra* cloth. “Cotton bodice or shirt dyed with indigo and with wood-block printed designs.” 1933. Collected by Captain Robert Powley Wild. Pitt Rivers Museum. Oxford University. Museum record number 1933.44.13.



Fig. 1.9. Cloth makers unrecorded. *Kaba* blouse made with stamped *adinkra* cloth (view of other side). “Cotton bodice or shirt dyed with indigo and with wood-block printed designs.” 1933. Collected by Captain Robert Powley Wild. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford University. Museum record number 1933.44.13.



Fig. 1.10. First women in procession dressed in a two-piece *dansinkran* ensemble with head tie; she wears a red cloth on top with black screen-printed *adinkra* motifs. Funeral for queen mother. May 17, 2014. Techiman, Ghana.



Fig. 1.11. Cloth makers unrecorded. *Kaba* blouse made with stamped *adinkra* cloth. "Cotton bodice or shirt dyed with brown dye and with wood-block printed designs." 1933. Collected by Captain Robert Powley Wild. Pitt Rivers Museum. Oxford University. Museum record number 1933.44.14.



Fig. 1.12. Designer unrecorded. Factory-printed cloth with *adinkra* symbol. Manufacturer unrecorded. 1960-1970. Red cotton fabric, 276 x 115cm. Donors Doig Simmonds and Ruth Simmonds acquired the cloth when living in Nigeria between 1960 and 1973. British Museum. London, England. Museum record number 2010.2027.1.



Fig. 1.13. Designer unrecorded. Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL). Cloth design with an *adinkrabene* variation and stripes emulating *mwomu* stitching. 2011. Collected in Ghana. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Birmingham, England. Museum record number 2011.0046.25.



Fig. 1.14. Man seated on far right dressed in black screen-printed *adinkra* cloth with *adinkrabene* (“king of Adinkra”) symbol repeated throughout the cloth. Funeral for Dr. Samuel Francis Adjei. March 28, 2015. Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region. Kumasi, Ghana.



Fig. 1.15. Performer dressed in black and red screen-printed *adinkra* cloth with *adinkerabene* (“king of Adinkra”) and *akofena* (“sword”) symbols. Funeral for Dr. Samuel Francis Adjei, Director of the Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region. March 28, 2015. Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region. Kumasi, Ghana.



Fig. 1.16. Boakyee family. Screen-printed red and black *adinkra* cloths. November 26, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.





Fig. 1.17. Boakye family. Old three-piece *kaba* ensemble drying in the sun during the process of re-dyeing with *kuntunkuni* dye. December 6, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 1.18. Boakye family. Old three-piece *kaba* ensemble drying in the sun re-dyeing with *kuntunkuni* dye and re-printing with new silk-screened *adinkra* symbols. December 9, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 1.19. Boakye family. Old white screen-printed *adinkra* cloth in process of dyeing with *kuntunkuni* dye to wear as a mourning cloth. December 12, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 1.20. Boakye family. Old cloths drying in the sun during the process of re-dyeing with *kuntunkuni* dye. December 12, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 1.21. Boakye family. Old sewn *kaba* blouse made with *kente* cloth drying in the sun during the process of re-dyeing with *kuntunkuni* dye. December 12, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig 1.22. Alfred Nsia, Mr. Six Photo Studio. Portrait photograph of woman dressed in two-piece *dansinkran* ensemble with stamped *adinkra* cloth and *nwomu* stitching. Date unrecorded. Kumasi, Ghana. Accessed December 5, 2014.



Fig. 1.23. Photographer unrecorded. "Ex-King Prempeh of Asante in Exile in Seychelles." 1901-1917. Black and white positive, paper print. Mission 21/Basel Mission Image Archive. Basel, Switzerland. Photography: Mission 21/Basel Mission Image Archive.



Fig. 1.24. Asantehene Osei Tutu II. *Akwasidae* festival held at Manhyia Palace. April 12, 2015. Manhyia, Ghana.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Collaboration and Creativity: The Artistic Process of Making *Adinkra* Cloth

#### Introduction

It was 9am. Christopher Boakye began screen-printing a woman's three-piece *kaba* cloth. He worked at a wood table under the shade of the large mango tree at his family's house. His mother had just finished dyeing the old *kaba* cloths a brown-black color over the weekend. Meanwhile, his brother Peter leaned over the printing table to read *The Daily Graphic* newspaper.

A few men and women passing by greeted the brothers. The printing area is also a passageway to reach family homes and shops from the main road (fig. 2.1). The visitors gathered around the worktable and bench as Christopher printed. The women greeted everyone "good morning" and continued walking. The men lingered. An elderly man sat on the bench to read the paper. He ran his finger across the page to scan the latest "bonanza!" lottery results. He and the other men talked about the worsening power crisis, popularly termed *dumsor dumsor*, "lights on and off." The latest political scandal making the headlines. The football scores.

Christopher's nephew Gabi helped. Gabi moved the cloth across the table after his uncle completed each row. A few schoolboys began playing behind their workspace; the Ntonso primary school is next to their house. The kids carelessly ran and shouted. Christopher lifted his arm up from the silk-screen and waved his hand to them, scolding the boys for their behavior. Returning focus to his work, Christopher methodically ran the plastic squeegee up and down over the silk-

screen a few times to press the black paste onto the cloth. He printed the *akoma* “heart” *adinkra* symbol. Once completed, Gabi and his cousin carried the cloth over to the ground to dry in the hazy morning sun. It was Harmattan, where red dust-filled winds from the Sahara blew south over Ghana. The hot sun during dry season was best for printing *adinkra* cloth outdoors.

Christopher’s older brother Gabriel had not yet printed any *adinkra* cloths today. They share one work table with their four brothers. But Gabriel was already working. A tailor visited Gabriel to pick up an order to sew cloth strips together. Gabriel placed the individual strips of embroidered cloth with *adinkra* symbols on the dirt ground next to the printing table. He and the tailor rearranged the cloth strips to envision which order will look best. Gabriel’s mother, *ɔbaapanyin* Veronica Abena Tabi Boakye, walked by the table on her way inside. She carried wrinkled, faded cloths that she will dye a brown-black color behind the house, preparing the dye with *kuntunkumi* tree bark. Gabriel and the tailor shuffled the cloths around a few times. They soon came to an agreement. The tailor folded the cloth strips and took them to his shop nearby.

Gabriel gave Gabi some money and an empty plastic tub. Go and buy paste from the seller, he told his son. Gabriel also left with his young nephew to meet another tailor, carrying a black bag filled with strips of hand-woven *kente* cloth to be sewn for screen-printing. Gabi soon returned from the seller who lives a few houses away, the plastic container now filled with fresh black paste.

When Gabriel returned from the tailor, Christopher had finished printing his cloths. Gabriel pulled out some silk-screens, stacked on a lower shelf under the work table. His two small dogs also rested underneath the table to stay cool in the shade. Gabriel held two silk-screens in his hand, then two others, as he debated about which designs to print on a black-brown *kaba* cloth. The woman who ordered the cloth allowed Gabriel to select which *adinkra* symbols to print. Undecided, Gabriel worked on another order. He screen-printed single strips of *kente* cloth with the *obi nka obi* “bite not one another” *adinkra* symbol.

Some of the men passing by stayed all morning. Others quickly greeted the Boakye's before continuing on their journey. Gabriel kept working. He returned to the woman's *kaba* cloth. Peter came and sat on the end of the table, looking over the designs with Gabriel. Gabi and his cousin helped Gabriel with the printing, but the young boys never spoke. They only listened to their elders talk and followed any orders they received.

Throughout the morning, dark brown-black *adinkra* cloths accumulated on the red dirt ground and display racks next to the printing table. A woman hawker selling *waakye*, rice and beans, walked along the pathway by the printing area to reach the main road. She carried the prepared food in a large plastic container. Peter, the men visiting, and young boys weaving *kente* cloths at the looms around the mango tree bought *waakye* from her. The men began eating at the bench and printing table. The younger boys leaned against the frame of the weaving looms and sat on the raised gnarled roots of the mango tree, quietly eating and talking to each other. Gabriel continued to work. He screen-printed a man's red-and-black stripe woven cloth with an oversized *adinkrahene* symbol, "the king of *adinkra*."

Once Gabriel finished printing, Gabi immediately cleaned the silk-screens to prevent the paste from hardening and spoiling the silk-screens that the family shared. But he didn't discard the buckets of dirty black washing water. His grandmother will later add it to her *kuntunkuni* cloth dye because it acts like starch and makes cloth stiffer than using *kuntunkuni* dye alone.

Around noon, *ɔpanyin* Stephen Yaw Boakye gingerly walked with his cane to wooden planks resting on cement blocks. His former stamping table. *ɔpanyin* Boakye sat alone on the low-raised work table and cut a papaya to eat. He watched his sons and grandsons working on the other side of the mango tree.

This is how the Boakye family makes *adinkra* cloth.

## I. Working Together, Working Apart

### The Social Life of Artistic Process

The account above was from my visit with the Boakye family on December 9, 2014 in Ntonso. Christopher and Gabriel Boakye worked with their brothers, sons, and nephews in all stages of creating *adinkra* cloth (*ntiamu ntoma*) – preparing supplies, designing cloth patterns, and screen-printing cloth. Their activities show that interactions with family, visitors, and community members were fundamental to their work process. A social workspace created an environment that invited and supported a creative, collaborative approach to making *adinkra* cloth. The Boakye family has created *adinkra* cloths at home for several generations, working in a space filled with conversation and laughter that has sparked debates, curiosity, and innovations in their work.

Throughout this chapter, I examine how the Boakye family and other cloth makers have worked with one another to create *adinkra* cloth. Historical shifts in production responded to broader social changes, while also reshaping the cloth’s communicative efficacy and how customers dressed in *adinkra* cloth. In what follows, this chapter analyzes different social and artistic collaborations that have been important to the cloth’s production. The chapter aims to demonstrate how social interactions in the workspace have been – and continue to be – integral to the cloth’s design, production, use, and meaning.

Ways of making *adinkra* cloths has always changed. Production has been tied to the cloth maker’s life, family (*abusua*), and community (*akuraa*) – areas of Akan society that also reflect the very social beliefs and moral values that *adinkra* symbols represent. For example, the *adinkra* symbol *nkeɔnsɔnkeɔnsɔn* (“link” or “chain”) refers to multiple proverbs, including these three examples:

“*yetoatoa mu sɛ nkeɔnsɔnkeɔnsɔn*,” “we are linked together like a chain,” “*nkwa mu a, yetoa mu, owuo mu a*,



*yetoa mu*,” “we are linked in life, we are linked in death,” and “*abusua mu nnte da*,” “men who share a common blood relation never break away from one another” (Agbo 2011: 20). The meaning of *nkeononkemonon* attests to the social relationships and obligations between individuals, family, and community members in spite of conflicts or disagreements.

Collaboration and social relationships between cloth makers was central to the process of creating *adinkera* cloth, but was often sidelined in scholarship. Instead, scholars discussed production in terms of a uniform, fixed approach to technique and technology. Prior descriptions described cloth making as a linear and unchanging process, removing the agency of cloth makers and social settings in which they worked. For example, in Claire Polakoff’s frequently cited essay, she said, “contemporary *adinkera* cloth continues [in 1980] to be designed and printed in the traditional manner as recorded by [anthropology Robert Sutherland] Rattray and described in his original research published in 1927. Slight regional variations and innovations occur, according to the design of the calabash stamps and the manner in which the stamps are applied to the fabric” (Polakoff 1980b: 8). Additionally, scholar Bruce Willis said, “*adinkera* printing today [1998] is the same as it was almost 200 years ago...one can see that the only part of *adinkera* production that has changed significantly is an increase in stamp images, which have become more diverse over time” (Willis 1998: 41). But *adinkera* cloth production is not the same now as in the past. Even in the course of my research from 2013 to 2015, I noticed subtle changes to how cloth makers worked and designed *adinkera* cloth. Absent in prior studies are the nuanced ways cloth makers modified their printing methods, innovated work tools, and personalized their work approach. To understand the actual process of creating *adinkera* cloth requires consideration of how cloth makers’ use of certain technologies and techniques intersected with personal identities, social relations, workspaces, and daily experiences.

The account of the Boakye family’s work process presented in the chapter’s opening aims to move scholarly discussions of *adinkera* cloth production in a new direction – one that describes how they actually work. This gives attention to the social interactions and dynamic settings that inspired how cloth makers actually created, and continue to create, *adinkera* cloth. I argue that the process to create *adinkera* cloth engages with wider social life, as work areas have also been social spaces that shape how cloth makers collaborate, innovate production, and express their individuality. Moreover, the chapter asserts that to understand how cloth makers create *adinkera* cloth demands attention to the subtleties in how each person approaches their work.

Throughout the chapter, I present individual stories from the Boakye family and other cloth makers. My discussion of individuals does not seek to represent all cloth makers, nor showcase individuals in relation to a broader group or society. Rather, my aim is to show the breadth and multiple ways people make *adinkera* cloth within a single place and historical moment, and across space and time. As mentioned in the Introduction, I draw upon my experiences studying with cloth makers through the two primary modes to learn the trade: observation and “practicals,” hands-on training similar to an apprenticeship style of teaching.

Like the Boakye family, many other cloth makers worked with their family and community members to share ideas, techniques, and knowledge when creating *adinkera* cloth. In these instances, men learned how to print *adinkera* cloth from skilled cloth makers, oftentimes their father and uncles, passing down the trade from one generation to the next. Art historians Till Förster and Sidney Littlefield Kasfir conceptualize artisan workshops as economic and social spaces to show the human agency and interpretive acts that occur during artistic production (Förster and Kasfir 2013: 1-23). They assert that social interaction in workspaces promotes the work of imagination and creativity during production, in which artisans “learn much more *through* others, not *from* them” (Förster and Kasfir 2013: 13). For example, Gabi and his cousins learned not only how to print *adinkera* cloth

from assisting their father and uncles, but also proper social behaviors as they quietly observed their elders interact with guests.

Kasfir and Förster define workshops as “any group of artisans, large or small, who not only share a workspace, but in most cases, also draw on it as a stable framework of communication and learning governed by the acknowledged expertise of one or more senior members of the group” (Förster and Kasfir 2013: 1). Many of the spaces where *adinkera* cloth makers have worked are multifunctional spaces in either domestic or community areas that meet Förster and Kasfir’s definition of workshops. However, I do not call the production spaces for making *adinkera* cloth “workshops” because the cloth makers who I met did not refer to their workspaces as such. Instead, I call the work areas by how the cloth makers identified them.

Additionally, women and gender studies scholar Leslie Rabine argues in her research with Senegalese tailors that a cloth’s meaning is generated through social processes of creativity – the “pleasure of production” – that emerge from the social life of ateliers in Dakar (Rabine 2002: 41-45; 186-193). Rabine said, “pleasure in the social relations that accompany and enfold the work, and more importantly pleasure in the work itself are inherent parts of the process. That the pleasure of production forms part of the garment’s meaning, for both tailor and client, suggests one reason why custom tailoring has been able to compete with the immeasurably cheaper used clothing market” (Rabine 2002: 45). With *adinkera* cloth, the chapter’s opening example illustrates how the Boakye family’s work process created an inviting atmosphere for conversations with visitors and friends as they worked. Creating this social space within their home welcomed visitors to become part of the cloth making experience, as others passing by helped to move the cloth during the printing or offered suggestions of *adinkera* symbols to print. These social interactions informed Christopher and Gabriel’s behaviors, gave personal meaning to their work, and shaped the *adinkera* cloths they produced.

## Collaboration, Community, and Competition

The social interactions among cloth makers that has occurred during the process to create *adinkra* cloth demonstrates how Akans negotiate personal identities with community responsibility. Akan men and women also often dressed in *adinkra* cloth to communicate messages about unity or tensions in their relationships with family or community members. The prevalence and popularity of *adinkra* symbols related to themes of unity and social belonging – including *obi nka obi*, “bite not one another,” *funtunfunefu-denkyemfunefu*, “two crocodiles,” *kronti ne kwamu*, “one head does not constitute a council,” and *nkeɔnsɔnkeɔnsɔn*, “link or chain” – attest to the wider importance of communal harmony to Akan personhood and daily life. In Akan worldviews, philosopher Kwasi Wiredu shows how these actions intersect with desired qualities of Akan personhood:

“A person in the true sense is not just any human being, but one who has attained the status of a responsible member of society...[who] from the Akan point of view, is the individual whose conduct, by reason of a sense of human sympathy, shows a sensitivity to the need for the harmonious adaptation of her own interests to the interests of others in society, and who, through judicious thinking and hard work, is able to achieve a reasonable livelihood for himself and family while making non-trivial contributions to the well-being of appropriate members of his extended kinship circles and the wider community” (Wiredu 1996: 129).

When multiple men collaborated to make a royal *adinkra* cloth for the Asantehene, the Asante king, the artistic process involved negotiations of this very balance between self and community: the cloth maker’s identity, status, skill, and wisdom were at stake. At the same time, the cloth maker had to minimize or sacrifice their own interests and relationships for the group’s shared goals and responsibility of creating the king’s cloth. Cloth maker Kusi Boadum recalls a former approach to stamping *adinkra* cloth during the twentieth century:

“We had a way of making it that was called *Kwasiada* [“Sunday”] *adinkra*. That type, the cloth with all the stamps on it. It’s *Kwasiada adinkra*. Why they were saying, they said the name, it takes a lot of people, you see. It takes two, three, or four people to stamp. One person can’t. You see, they can’t do it in one day. It was only on Sundays

that people were free. Long ago, they would go to farm from Monday to Saturdays. Sundays, they don't go anywhere. You see, *Kwasiada adinkra*. As for Sundays, everybody, most of the people will be at home so you will get some people to help you. It was like this, but this one, the stamps were only two. But for that one, *all* the stamps were used in creating the *adinkra* cloth. All the stamps we have, you used it. These [*adinkra* stamps] will come in, this will come in, this will come in...most of them. As for this [*adinkra* stamp], I know this was always, *all* the stamps would come in" (K. Boadum, interview, December 4, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).

Kusi describes how he and other men stamped *Kwasiada adinkra* cloth in Asokwa, now a suburb of Kumasi.<sup>1</sup> Kusi added, "It took *all* the most witty craftsmen here" to create *Kwasiada adinkra* cloth for chiefs and other prestigious customers (K. Boadum, interview, December 4, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).

Kusi named some specific cloth makers who made these cloths, including *ɔpanyin* Papa Kwadwo Nsia and *ɔpanyin* Kofi Nyame; *ɔpanyin* is a title given to men in Akan society who have attained the status of an elder. Both *ɔpanyin* Nsia and *ɔpanyin* Nyame were well-respected stamp carvers known for their expertise in Akan proverbs and clever stamp creations. Cooperation and collaboration from these and other cloth makers within the community was vital to create the Asante king's *adinkra* cloths.

As illustrated in Kusi's explanation, as well as the opening description of the Boakye family's work, multiple people worked on a single *adinkra* cloth. This practice extended beyond "*Kwasiada adinkra*" cloth to less prestigious *adinkra* cloth. In addition to two or more cloth makers stamping or screen-printing the cloth together, other cloth makers dyed the cloth and made the *mwomu* stitched embroidery sometimes added to more expensive cloths. For *adinkra* cloths made with plain hand-woven *kente* cloth, cloth makers sometimes commissioned a tailor to sew together narrow cloth strips. These approaches to making *adinkra* cloth exemplify how cloth makers value an exchange of work and the development of specialized skills.

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<sup>1</sup> My research found no remaining evidence on the spatial organization of *adinkra* cloth production or actual printing process prior to the mid-twentieth century to confirm if the collaborative approach described above reflects historical practices to make *adinkra* cloth. A few photographs that Europeans took depict men stamping cloth, but it is possible that these images were staged. Oral histories do not describe the process of how their ancestors actually printed *adinkra* cloth.

Although multiple cloth makers contributed to making a single cloth, scholarship and museum descriptions do not recognize these collaborative efforts. Most often, *adinkera* cloths are unattributed in these contexts, with no identification of who made the cloth. The dissertation makes an important intervention in this regard to acknowledge this collaborative approach. Included image captions identify all contributing cloth makers if known. If the cloth makers' names were not recorded, image captions identify cloth makers in plural (stating "cloth makers" rather than "cloth maker") to convey that multiple hands contributed to the cloth's production.

Kusi and other cloth makers have defined the type of *adinkera* cloths called *Kwasiada adinkera* "Sunday *adinkera*" differently than scholars who distinguish *Kwasiada adinkera* cloth from black *adinkera* cloth worn at funerals. For example, art historians Doran Ross and Herbert Cole said, "Their bright or light backgrounds classify them as *Kwasiada* ('Sunday') *adinkera*, meaning fancy cloths unsuitable for funerary contexts but appropriate for most festive occasions or even daily wear" (Cole and Ross 1977: 45). Art historian Daniel Mato made a similar observation: "stamped cloths may be worn at parties, social gatherings, or merely for 'show,' or for going to church on Sunday. This new use of *adinkera* has been given a name: when cloths are destined for social wear, they are now called *Kwasidae* – 'Sunday cloth'" (Mato 1994). Additionally, Integrated Rural Arts and Industry professor Abraham Asmah said, "*Kwasiada adinkera* may have for the background the white color or any bright color except red. Such a cloth may be worn on any happy or joyous occasion" (Asmah 2009: 315). How and when "*Kwasiada adinkera*" became associated with this category of *adinkera* cloths is not clear. During my research visits from 2013 to 2015, I rarely encountered anyone in Ghana – a cloth maker, seller, or customer – use the term "*Kwasiada adinkera*" to identify *adinkera* cloth printed on white or colored fabrics.

In addition, the roles of stamp carvers suggest how specialized skills in proverbs and other Akan verbal arts was equally important to specialized printing techniques such as drawing comb

lines. In Akan verbal arts, speakers including spokespersons to chiefs called *akyeame* (singular, *ɔkyeame*) are praised not only for their fluency in proverbial speech, but also for their ability to transform proverbs into new contexts of use or alternative meanings (Yankah 1989a; 1995). The cultural importance of creativity and wit in Akan verbal arts translated to how cloth makers innovated the designs and meanings of *adinkra* symbols. As a result, cloth makers contributed their proverbial wisdom and artistic creativity for the stamped *adinkra* cloth to eloquently communicate desired messages.

The organization of *adinkra* cloth production in a few towns also shaped how cloth makers negotiated personal identities with community interests. A cloth maker's family, community, and hometown (*kurom*) contributed to the personal identity they projected in their work. Asokwa and Ntonso have been the two main centers for *adinkra* cloth production and hometowns to most *adinkra* cloth makers. They are located thirty kilometers apart in the Kwabre district of Kumasi. During the early nineteenth century when *adinkra* cloth production began, Asokwa was one of seventy-seven wards in Kumasi (historically spelled Kumase and Coomase). Since then, Asokwa has spread in size and population, and today occupies a much larger suburb of Kumasi. Residents in Kumasi today call the area "Asokwa Old Town" to distinguish the historical town of Asokwa. The dissertation subsequently refers to Asokwa Old Town as "Asokwa" as it was first called because discussion focuses specifically on the historical site.

On the outskirts of Kumasi, Ntonso is one of several weaving and cloth making towns along the Mampong Road, a main thoroughfare from Kumasi to other areas in the Ashanti Region and northern Ghana. There is a strong social and economic network of cloth makers between these towns due to their close proximity and shared work. Cloth makers living in nearby towns known for *kente* weaving and *joromy* embroidery – including Bonwire, Kona, Adanwomaso, and Asonomaso – have also printed *adinkra* cloth. The intersections between these towns have fueled innovations to

*adinkra* cloth design. For example, cloth makers use *adinkra* symbols in *kente* cloth patterns and *joromy* embroidery designs, just as *kente* patterns have inspired *adinkra* symbols. Some cloth makers moved away from their hometowns and worked in other Akan regions of Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. An Akan area in Koforidua, capital of Ghana's Eastern Region, was a large production site outside of Kumasi. Production of *adinkra* cloth in these areas has declined over the years and is limited today.

Despite the close proximity between Asokwa and Ntonso, *adinkra* cloth makers in each town did not often work together. Conflicting oral history accounts from Asokwa and Ntonso about the cloth's origins reflected tensions between residents that persist today. Cloth makers in Asokwa contended that people came from Ntonso and "took" their *adinkra* designs. In Ntonso, cloth makers argued the opposite. As discussed in the Introduction, the cloth's production most likely began in Asokwa. Cloth makers in both towns have followed different approaches to make *adinkra* cloth from distinctions in their customers and views on culturally appropriate uses of *adinkra* cloth and symbols. Consumers seeking high-quality *adinkra* cloths have given preference to buying cloth from the "source" – such as going to Ntonso or Asokwa rather than buying from a middleman or town lesser-known for *adinkra* cloth making. Competition for customers and claims to call their town the "home" of *adinkra* cloth making has fueled an ongoing strain between Ntonso and Asokwa.

When I talked with one cloth maker in Asokwa, he pointed out an old *adinkra* cloth drying on the ground nearby. The cloth was among others that women were in the process of re-dyeing a dark brown-black with *kuntunkuni* dye. "But it's from Ntonso," he said. "It's ugly. It's not how we carve *aya*," the fern-like *adinkra* symbol stamped on the cloth (Personal communication, April 2015, Asokwa, Ghana). But was the cloth really ugly to him? *Adinkra* cloth makers can easily identify where a cloth was made from these visual distinctions. But this cloth maker used formal differences to convey tensions in the relationship between cloth makers in Ntonso and Asokwa.



Cloth makers in Asokwa and Ntonso made design variations to *adinkra* symbols or gave the same *adinkra* symbols different names and meanings. For the latter, some cloth makers changed a symbol's name to one that "sounded sweeter," as one cloth maker told me, thus making the cloth more attractive to consumers (Personal communication, December 2015, Kumasi, Ghana).<sup>2</sup> Such manipulation of the names and meanings of *adinkra* symbols may have intersected with marketing and business strategies, which could have contributed to these tensions between production towns.

Additionally, the cloth maker's emphasis on "we" – referring to Asokwa – stressed the unity among cloth makers within his hometown. During other conversations, cloth makers sometimes identified their elders and fellow cloth makers by name and hometown. For example, in response to identifying who carved a particular *adinkra* stamp, cloth makers often replied with the carver's name, immediately followed by "Asokwa" or "Ntonso." The stamp carver's hometown became attached to their name and identity, in part because the cloth makers want their hometown name to be recognized, even if the particular carver's name is not acknowledged or remembered in the future.

Competition between Ntonso and Asokwa augmented the importance of communal unity, and how cloth makers projected personal identities and social belonging with their town. The importance of place also reflected the significance of hometown (*kurom*) to an individual's identity in Akan society.

At the same time, cloth makers within the same town or family also competed with one another for business. Navigating this balance between collaboration and competition sometimes created conflict among cloth makers and put their social relationships at stake. Creating new *adinkra* symbols became an avenue for some cloth makers, including *ɔpanyin* Papa Kwadwo Nsia, to express these tensions.

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<sup>2</sup> This example of changing the names and meanings of *adinkra* symbols to attract business echoes the wider practice of women market sellers in Ghana and other parts of West Africa naming wax-print cloth patterns that would appeal to customers.

“*Atanfo atwa mebo ahyia* [“enemies around me”]. It has been designed by one man called *ɔpanyin* Papa Kwadwo Nsia. For him, you see, when they were working, sometimes you go to somebody to give you his pattern [*adinkera* stamp] for it and they won’t give. He thought that they hated him. That is why they said that all the people around him are his enemies. So *atanfo*. When I say *atanfo*, it means enemy. Any person that doesn’t like you or doesn’t want to help you.”  
(K. Boadum, interview, November 20, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).

*ɔpanyin* Nsia worked as a stamp carver in Asokwa during the mid to late twentieth century. He previously printed *adinkera* cloths when he was younger. When Kusi explained the meaning of this symbol – he was one of *ɔpanyin* Papa Nsia’s customers – I asked him if *ɔpanyin* Nsia was also one of his family members. “He wasn’t my relative, actually,” Kusi replied. “But we are *all* from this town [Asokwa]. And *adinkera* was the main work for this place” (K. Boadum, interview, November 20, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). Although the symbol’s meaning illustrated conflict between cloth makers who did not share their printing tools, Kusi led the conversation back to the communal unity among cloth makers who worked in Asokwa. Approaches to making *adinkera* cloth have offered a space to articulate a group identity. Strategies to print the cloth have also invited self-expression for cloth makers to establish their individuality.

## II. Gender, Visibility, and Changing Landscapes of Production

### The Spaces of *Adinkera* Cloth Making

“How do you decide how the cloth will look?” I asked Gabriel.

“You have to sit down and arrange it yourself.”

“So how do *you* decide?” I asked again.

“I put all of them [silk-screens] together on the ground and I arrange it. I call one person,

‘Come and see how I arrange it. Does it look nice?’

‘Oh, it’s nice!’

I will let you go and then call another one.

If I get three people and it’s okay, then I know it is good.

Because one head does not constitute a council. We need more heads.”

(G. Boakye, interview, November 26, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Collaboration is central to Gabriel’s work process. Interactions between Gabriel, his brothers and nephews, passers-by, and the tailor described in the chapter’s introduction showed how the space where Gabriel works made it easy for him to solicit feedback and work with others. Gabriel makes *adinkera* cloth at his family’s home, where three generations lived together – from young infants to *ɔpanyin* Boakye, Gabriel’s father. Consequently, making *adinkera* cloth at home also impacted domestic life and interactions with other family members. For men, the worktable outside the house is the main gathering spot: conversations, business transactions, and even meals occur there. The women usually gather inside the home. Gabriel’s mother *ɔbaapanyin* Veronica Abena Tabi Boakye dyed cloth in a separate outdoor space behind the house, which is also across from *ɔbaapanyin* Boakye’s family house (*abusua ɔfie*).

Working in an outdoor space visible to others has shaped the cloth makers’ behavior and interactions with guests. Ntonso is a small, close-knit community. Proximity and strong social ties among community members made collaboration at different stages of cloth production possible. Within a few minutes, Gabriel can reach a tailor or stamp carver by taking a short walk or riding his bicycle. Gabriel cited the *adinkera* symbol, “*kronti ne akwamu, ti korɔ nkeɔ agyina*,” “one head does not constitute a council,” at this section’s introduction to show that working together is essential. His

response also exemplifies how the names of *adinkra* symbols and related proverbs become part of everyday speech.

Like the Boakye family, other cloth makers in Ntonso have worked together with their family members and printed *adinkra* cloth at home (*ɔfiɛ*). Such production of *adinkra* cloth thus involved navigating relationships between the cloth maker's nuclear and extended family; the family structure in Akan communities is matrilineal (*abusua*). Family houses in Akan communities symbolize a family's status, success, identity, and social relations with the community (van der Geest 1998). For example, builder *ɔpanyin* Kwabena Dadeɛ said, "when you build, you become a person" (*ɔpanyin* Dadeɛ as quoted in van der Geest 1998: 343). These associations with family houses contributed to the cloth maker's identity and projected image to fellow cloth makers in town and customers who visited. Family homes were spread apart, with ample space to print cloth outside in visible areas surrounding the compound houses (fig. 2.2).

In Ntonso, spatial organization to make and sell *adinkra* cloth has changed significantly over the years. Historically, family homes, the market, and small businesses in Ntonso were all built on the northwest side of the main Mampong road (Boakye family, interview, May 31, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Over time, the community spread to also include the other side of the main Mampong road.<sup>3</sup> Cloth makers built small shops along the main road to attract roadside business from travelers. New residents who moved to Ntonso developed the *zongo* "strangers' quarters" on the opposite side of the Mampong road.

The contrast in spaces to make and sell *adinkra* cloth in Ntonso – especially proximity to the main roadside – came in partial response to the cloth's expanding uses as popular dress for various events. Former cloth maker *ɔpanyin* Nana Kwabena Nkodwa Sowafohene described a strong

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<sup>3</sup> The population in Ntonso also grew substantially during the late nineteenth century to early twentieth centuries. In 1881, there were 90 "dwellings" and a population of 300. By 1931, the number of dwellings increased to 300 and the population grew to 786 residents (Wilks 1989: 97; see also Wilk's Table 9: Routes IV and VI: Population changes, 1881 to 1931). Comparative statistics are not available for Asokwa.

disparity between production in the mid-twentieth century and today: no roadside *adinkera* cloth shops – where some cloth makers also print *adinkera* cloths – existed when he first started working in the mid-twentieth century (N. Sowafohene, interview, May 8, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). At that time, making *adinkera* cloth was a “secret” business. He and other cloth makers kept their work hidden, away from the main roadside. Customers came directly to their homes to make orders and pick up completed cloths. As *ɔpanyin* Nana Sowafohene explained, “the funeral ones, it wasn’t for a joke,” meaning that people dressed in *adinkera* cloth for more serious occasions in the past (N. Sowafohene, interview, May 8, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). As wearing *adinkera* cloth became popular for social events, the cloth’s production also emerged in more visible social spaces.

Historical distinctions in cloth making between Ntonso and Asokwa – funeral and “popular” production in the former and royal patronage in the latter – was also reflected in how each town organized their work spaces. For cloth makers in Asokwa, Saturdays and Sundays were busy workdays to stamp *adinkera* cloth together. “When the Asantehene brought his cloth, they [cloth makers] gathered at where were sitting when we held the funeral,” Kusi Boadum explained. “Then they do it neatly and nicely, seeing to it that even a fowl or hen does not come to walk on it. After that, they send it. That involved the *Kwasiada adinkera* with all the stamps on it” (K. Boadum, interview, December 4, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).

As Kusi described, working in a shared space was fundamental to the work process. Multiple men contributed to creating an *adinkera* cloth (fig. 2.3). Each brought their own *adinkera* stamps and combs to share with one another. One man stamped. Another man drew comb lines. Sometimes, men “sprinkled” brush marks, a specialized design. In addition to creating *adinkera* cloth for the

Asantehene, the Asante king, cloth makers and other residents of Asokwa also served at Manhyia Palace in other capacities.<sup>4</sup>

Over the years, cloth makers adjusted production strategies to accommodate changing customers and fashions, as well as other transitions that occurred in their social, domestic, and communal workspaces. After production expanded beyond royal patronage to include chiefs and other men and women, cloth makers in Asokwa worked independently on their own orders. But communal workspaces remained vital. Printing *adinkera* cloth required a spacious area to spread the full cloth on the ground for printing and then dry the printed cloth. The community layout of Asokwa didn't provide sufficient space to stamp cloths at home because houses were built close to one another with only a narrow passageway between buildings. Large, public areas provided ample space for printing, while also supporting a collaborative approach to make *adinkera* cloth. The men continued to gather in shared spaces to make *adinkera* cloth rather than work separately in their homes. Kusi, for instance, always worked in the same spot each day at the open community space.

Since at least the mid twentieth century, cloth makers in Asokwa worked in three communal workspaces (fig. 2.4). These workspaces are community areas not reserved exclusively for *adinkera* cloth production. Men who made *adinkera* cloth have shared these spaces with women dyeing dark brown *kuntunkumi* mourning cloth. As men arrange newly printed *adinkera* cloths to dry on the dirt ground, women place dyed cloths nearby to dry in the hot sun. Several cloth makers with whom I interviewed agreed that hot, sunny weather is important to make the stamped or screen-printed

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<sup>4</sup> Asokwahene Kofi Poku, former chief of Asokwa (ruled 1930-1970s) said, "The Asokwa stool is *esomdwa* [service stool]. Asokwa people are servants of the Asantehene" (Wilks 1989: 457). He continued, "In the old days all the *asokwafɔ* would be *nbenkwaa* in the palace...In the old days everyone, whether sons or nephews, would be required to serve the Asantehene as *nbenkwaa*. Some would be horn blowers, some would be messengers, some would weed the royal gardens, and so forth" (Wilks 1989: 458). For example, the *ntaberafɔ* served as royal horn blowers, and were a subgroup of the *asokwafɔ* who were involved in wholesale trade between Kumase and other markets. The *akyeremadefɔ*, royal drummers, were also from Asokwa (Wilks 1993: 155; Wilks 1989: 455-458). Historian Ivor Wilks has written on the historical developments in how the Asokwahene and *asokwafɔ* became associated with these royal responsibilities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; Wilks includes a table listing all past Asokwahenes of Kumase (Wilks 1989: 455-458). Yet Wilks never mentions royal production of *adinkera* cloth in this discussion the role of Asokwa.

*adinkra* printing appear “bright.” Sharing the same workspace united the men and women of Asokwa. The gender division in these trades otherwise separated them when printing or dyeing cloth.

These community areas in Asokwa have served multiple purposes that blur artistic, social, economic, and religious spaces. Residents have held family funerals and other social gatherings in the same spaces where men and women printed and dyed cloth. For example, the communal area where Kusi stamped *adinkra* cloth was also the site for his brother’s funeral last year. To meet these multiple functions, few permanent objects remained in their workspaces. Today, large metal cylinders filled with *kuntunkumi* dye, plastic washing tubs, and fire wood are the only permanent fixtures in the open spaces (fig. 2.5). At the end of a day’s work, each cloth maker removes their cloths and belongings so others can use the space. The stained red dirt ground – turned black from preparing the dye and drying newly dyed cloths on the ground – is the only other visible trace of their work.

Despite these differences in how cloth makers organized their workspaces in Asokwa and Ntonso, both gave attention to visible areas that joined their artistic practices with social, religious, and domestic life. Some cloth makers cited their surroundings as inspiration for new designs. Several *adinkra* symbols speak specifically about home and proper behavior from their experiences in the communities where they lived and worked.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In architectural historian Labelle Prussin’s discussion of Asante architectural history, she identifies a list of fifteen *adinkra* symbols that share references to buildings and Islam (Prussin 1986: 240-241). She argues that Asante architecture reflects Islamic influences from northern Ghana, as other scholars also argue that Islam contributed to the development of *adinkra* cloth and symbols; the Introduction discusses the roles of Islamic influences. Moreover, builders frequently added *adinkra* symbols to architecture as communicative tools: historically, *adinkra* symbols were sculpted in traditional compound or shrine houses in Kumasi (Prussin 1986; Swithenbank 1969). Today, *adinkra* symbols are frequently added to entrance gates of homes in Kumasi and Accra; *gye Nyame*, “except God,” is among the most popular *adinkra* symbol displayed on entrance gates. In addition, Gabriel Boakye said of themes in the meanings of *adinkra* symbols: “When we look at the symbols, I can say it’s about three ways of talking. Some talk about Christianity, about marriage, and about home” (G. Boakye, interview, July 28, 2013, Ntonso, Ghana).

Moreover, constructing spaces to make *adinkera* cloth in Ntonso and Asokwa reflected the historical role of visibility in the spatial organization of Kumasi (McLeod 1981: 47-48).<sup>6</sup> Historian Malcolm McLeod described the role of visibility in the spatial layout of historical Kumasi with buildings of major functionaries and chiefs including open layouts visible from the street (McLeod 1981: 47-48). The open layout of buildings and homes in public space, including some spaces for chiefs and other leaders along main roads, served important functions: “office-holders transacted their formal business in these open rooms overlooking the street: to them came petitioners, clients and others. It is possible that they were used in this way in order to diminish suspicion that the office-holder was secretly plotting against others: the *adampan* [open rooms] allowed at least some public businesses to be conducted publicly” (McLeod 1981: 47-48). Open and visible architectural spaces shaped social, economic, and political life, and also informed *adinkera* cloth production.

Making *adinkera* cloth in open work areas also offered a space to spread the trade to people from families without cloth makers. For example, Sarah Boakyewaah became interested in *adinkera* cloth when she moved to Ntonso around 2012 with her mother. Sarah’s family is from Santasi, a suburb of Kumasi, and now lives in the *zongo*, “strangers’ quarters” of Ntonso.

“The first time I passed here, I saw this and I was asking, ‘What is this? What does *adinkera* mean?’ When I passed, I saw Paul [Nyaamah] and asked him about it...He told me a little history about it. I told him I would be coming here to learn more, and he welcomed me. That is how I started coming here. He too was good and friendly to teach me. He even told me, anytime I want to come here, anytime I am free and I feel like coming, I should come and he will teach me.”

(S. Boakyewaah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Paul carved calabash *adinkera* stamps at the Ntonso Visitor Centre located along the main road near the pathway to reach the *zongo* area of town. He manages the centre and sometimes worked outside next to the building when he didn’t have guests. Paul kept a wooden bench to carve *adinkera* stamps under a large tree (fig. 2.6). During the off-season for tourism, Paul also set up two weaving looms

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<sup>6</sup> See also Ivor Wilk’s article on the mapping of time and space in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Asante life (Wilk 1992).



under the tree for himself and a friend to weave *kente* cloth together.

Sarah often walked by the Ntonso Visitor Centre on her route from her home to the main road. She frequently saw Paul working outside. Similarly, I first met Sarah during one of my visits with Paul when she passed by to greet him on her way to the main road.

“Last time, I was telling Paul [Nyaamah] that if I would have been born here, by now I would know how to do everything,” Sarah said and laughed. “I’d know how to do everything. Even the women here don’t have interest in [cloth printing and weaving], and I don’t know why. What I learned was that they don’t want to do it because of the sitting down for a long time. They will not be able to give birth. That is why the women don’t have interest.”

(S. Boakyewaah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Sarah’s observations of cloth production in Ntonso suggest the importance of place, gender, and family to learn *adinkera* cloth making. Sarah seeks to break the gender norms historically associated with cloth making in Ntonso. She has enjoyed studying art and drawing since a young girl, and began to learn *kente* weaving from a weaver who lives near her. She also wants to learn stamp carving from Paul (S. Boakyewaah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). As she explained, women didn’t print *adinkera* cloth from historical beliefs of infertility attached to cloth making in Akan society. Sarah doesn’t believe these tales. “There is a [*joromy* embroidery] shop near our place. I told them I want to learn. They were saying it is not a woman’s job. It is only the men who do it. I told them I don’t care if it is men or whatever, I want to learn” (S. Boakyewaah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). These historical beliefs and limited participation of women in cloth making applies to other Akan textiles, including *kente* cloth, *nwomu* stitching, and *joromy* embroidery. However, more women weave *kente* cloth today than in the past. Women active in Ghana’s wider textile industry most often work as cloth dyers, seamstresses, or cloth sellers.

In 2013, Sarah began learning how to make *adinkera* cloth from cloth maker David Boamah after she completed secondary high school. David previously worked at the Boakye family home (*ɔpanyin* Boakye was David’s uncle) before opening his own business. Sarah, however, did not learn

through regular training as students and youth often learn within their family. Sarah's training transpired organically over time when she passed by David's shop and he was working outside. David explained the process as he worked and also arranged separate times for her to practice. Sarah is one of two women I met who is interested in making *adinkra* cloth; chapter Three describes Constance Brobbey's recent work to assist her brother Kwame Douglas Brobbey with screen-printing *adinkra* cloth in Tewobaabi. Although a strong gender division in the spaces to create *adinkra* cloth remains today, cloth makers have reshaped other dimensions of their workspaces over time.

### The Return of Stamping *Adinkra* Cloth in Asokwa

“It is now that I want to get it [stamping *adinkra* cloth] back to life,” Kusi said while heating *badia* dye on a small fire (K. Boadum, personal communication, April 22, 2015, Asokwa, Ghana). While Kusi heated the dye, his relative Kwabena arranged large pieces of cardboard on the red dirt ground. Kwabena then stretched a red and black wax-print cloth over the cardboard. Kusi set up the workspace in a large open area along the main road in Asokwa Old Town, at the exact location where he stamped *adinkra* cloth before production ended there in the early twenty-first century due to greater demand for screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. An alternative technology for making *adinkra* cloth that became popular in Ntonso, cloth makers in Asokwa chose not to make screen-printed *adinkra* cloth.

An hour prior, Kusi received an order to stamp *adinkra* symbols onto a wax-print cloth designed with floral patterns, birds, and small geometric shapes. Kusi quickly assembled a small team for the printing. Since at least the 1980s, the increased availability of factory-made cloth and broadening social contexts to wear *adinkra* cloth contributed to printing *adinkra* motifs on top of

wax-print cloth, which increased the cloth's cultural and economic value (Kent 1971: 70; Mato 1987: 214-5).<sup>7</sup>

A few weeks earlier, in March 2015, Kusi and Stephen Appiah had prepared a large batch of the *badia* dye that they used that afternoon. It was the first time they made the *badia* dye in around fifteen years. In all, they spent two days preparing the *badia* dye, or “medicine” as they call it from the *badia* tree bark's healing properties.<sup>8</sup> *Badia* tree bark has two well-known medicinal functions: first, boiling pounded *badia* tree bark in water can cure digestive ailments. Second, boiling pounded *badia* tree bark with ginger and red pepper can ease women's menstrual pains.

To make *badia* dye, Kusi Boadum, Kwabena Boadum, and Stephen Appiah summarized the general process that they follow: The men first pound the *badia* tree bark, which they then add inside a large plastic container filled with water. They soak the pounded *badia* bark in the water overnight, in which half of the liquid evaporates by morning. Following, they remove the pounded *badia* from the liquid dye and heat the dye on fire until it becomes thick and condensed (S. Appiah, K. Boadum, interview, March 30, 2015, Asokwa, Ghana).

### *Back to Life*

This red and black wax-print cloth was among the first cloths Kusi stamped in 2015. The popularity of screen-printed *adinkra* cloth today has largely eliminated the demand for stamped *adinkra* cloth. Why return to stamping *adinkra* cloth now? During one of my visits with Kusi in December 2014, he mentioned that he wanted to resume stamping after the Christmas holiday (K. Boadum, interview, December 8, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). Kusi explained that women cloth sellers at

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<sup>7</sup> Anthropologist Kate Kent said that cloth makers stamped “fancy” *adinkra* on commercial print cloth by 1970 (Kent 1971: 70).

<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the pounded and boiled *badia* tree bark used to prepare the printing dye has a secondary function to grow mushrooms: after straining the pounded *badia* bark from the boiling water, cloth makers lay the bark on the ground for seven days and water the bark each morning and evening. Following, they cover the bark with palm tree leaves and mushrooms will begin growing within one month (G. Boakye, interview, July 27, 2013, Ntonso, Ghana).

Kejetia central market who previously sold his cloths had requested stamped *adinkra* cloth to sell at their shops.

Some customers at the market's cloth shops were no longer satisfied with screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. The thick screen-printing paste made the cloth less breathable than *badia* dye. These customers complained that screen-printed *adinkra* cloth was too uncomfortable to wear in the heat and humid climate, especially when wearing *adinkra* to attend funerals and festivals held outdoors. A few customers with whom I spoke mentioned the discomfort of wearing screen-printed *adinkra* cloth, but still chose to wear it instead of stamped *adinkra* cloth. An important advantage with screen-printed *adinkra* cloth: the paste was colorfast to offer a washable *adinkra* cloth. Those who purchased stamped *adinkra* cloth sacrificed a colorfast dye. But some cloth makers and customers favored *badia* dye due to the practice of re-printing faded *adinkra* cloth.

After a few months of consideration, Kusi decided to resume his work in March 2015. He reoccupied his former leadership role and organized a small group of cloth makers in Asokwa, enlisting support from some fellow cloth maker with whom he previously worked (S. Appiah, K. Boadum, interview, March 30, 2015, Asokwa, Ghana). In 2015, Kusi was primarily stamping *adinkra* cloth for sale at Kejetia central market through the same cloth sellers he worked with before he stopped production. However, Kusi and other cloth makers in Asokwa did not mention any future plans to resume stamping for the Asantehene or other members of the royal family. Some women dyers in Asokwa also began offering *adinkra* stamping to their customers. After the women dyed cloth brown-black with *kuntunkumi* dye, Kusi and his team would sometimes stamp *adinkra* symbols onto the cloth. While renewed interest for selling stamped *adinkra* cloth at Kejetia central market brought *adinkra* cloth making back to Asokwa, business was slow in April 2015 after Kusi and his team resumed production. They received limited orders.

Yet Kusi didn't return to stamping solely for the income. He also wanted to partake again in

the experience of making *adinkera* cloth. When Kusi received orders in 2015, he was often stamping *adinkera* cloth on the weekend with Kwabena, Stephen, and other former cloth makers. Recalling a recent printing day, Kusi said, “that particular day I went to buy four pieces of cloth. I called all of them [other cloth makers] to stamp. They were all there. In fact, it was a joyous moment. We all enjoyed ourselves” (K. Boadum, interview, May 12, 2015, Asokwa, Ghana).

Stamping the wax-print cloth described above was impromptu, in part because I was visiting and Kusi was anxious to show me the stamping process. Just before receiving the cloth order, Kusi and I had met with the chief of Asokwa, Nana Fe-Baamoah Boafuor I. We walked by a small group of women dyeing cloth on our way to Kusi’s home from the chief’s palace. A woman dyer asked Kusi to stamp a cloth, and gave him a wax-print cloth without providing any details about the customer or instructions for the stamped design. The cloth’s red and black colors limited its use to mourning occasions, so Kusi knew to create a design appropriate for a funeral.

### *New Beginnings*

Once Kusi and Kwabena prepared the work area, their friend and cloth maker Yaw Mensah dipped a wooden comb into a metal pot of hot *badia* dye and began drawing lines onto the wax-print cloth. In a corner of the cloth, Yaw created a small square grid. Yaw then expanded the grid lines to a larger section. Kusi came and stamped the *dwennimen* (“ram’s horn”) *adinkera* symbol into one of the small grid squares. He stamped the cloth only once. The heated *badia* dye was now the proper consistency and ready for printing.

As Yaw completed small square grid sections throughout the cloth, Kwabena took over stamping. Former stamp carvers in Asokwa have not resumed their work, nor have cloth makers

commissioned new *adinkra* stamps from Paul Nyaamah, the only stamp carver active in Ntonso today. Kwabena dipped the calabash *adinkra* stamp into the metal pot, shook off any excess dye, and firmly pressed the *dwennimen* stamp inside each square. The men printed with Kusi's calabash *adinkra* stamps and combs that date to around the 1970s. Unlike some cloth makers who sold their *adinkra* stamps after production ended, Kusi kept his supplies in case the work returned someday (K. Boadum, interview, May 12, 2015, Asokwa, Ghana). As a result, symbol selection for this and other *adinkra* cloths that Kusi now creates reflect earlier design aesthetics rather than the range of *adinkra* symbols and variations present today.

Yaw and Kwabena continued to print, kneeling on the cardboard with only a small towel under their knees. They moved around the cloth in a counter-clockwise circle. Occasionally, Yaw and Kwabena stopped to wipe away the sweat dripping down their face. It was peak sun hours. They worked during the early afternoon in an area without any shade. During the 1960s and early 1970s, anthropologist Kate Kent observed cloth makers who similarly worked in pairs to make *adinkra* cloth, with one man drawing comb lines while another man stamped (Kent 1971: 68).

Kusi stood next to Yaw and Kwabena, and peered over their shoulders to inspect their work. Kusi is the most senior of the three men and a former group leader of cloth makers in Asokwa. "When you see the cloth, you know which [*adinkra* stamp] will make it more attractive," Kusi said. "Even Yaw said so," he added (K. Boadum, personal communication, April 22, 2015, Asokwa, Ghana). They had selected the *dwennimen* "ram's horn" *adinkra* stamp together. A few men walking along main road – including the *ɔkyeame*, spokesperson to the chief of Asokwa – stopped to talk with Kusi and watch the men work. Yaw and Kwabena continued to print while the visitors gathered around the cloth (fig. 2.3).

Shortly after, a man drove up in a shiny black SUV. Cars rarely drive through the narrow and bumpy unpaved streets. Many residents and visitors reach Asokwa Old Town by walking from the

main junction. The men greeted the man exiting the SUV, calling him “Honorable.” He’s one of the town’s leaders. He sat on a chair outside the house closest to where they were printing to stay cool in the shade. Residents from nearby homes came to greet him as he watched the men printing from afar.

Kusi resumed his lead role to oversee the printing once the visitors left. Kusi periodically refilled Yaw and Kwabena’s metal pots with more *badia* dye that remained on the fire. When the *badia* dye became thick from the heat, Kusi took an empty bowl to two women dyeing cloth behind him. He filled the bowl with *kuntunkuni* dye that the women prepared to dye cloth a dark brown-black color. He carried the *kuntunkuni* dye back to his fire and splashed it into the pot of *badia* dye. *Kuntunkuni* dye isn’t necessary for diluting *badia* dye. In fact, it is never mentioned in formal instructions to prepare or use *badia* dye. But the *kuntunkuni* dye was convenient and more suitable than water alone. The *kuntunkuni* dye softened the *badia* dye without diluting its dark color.

The *adinkra* cloth design that Kusi, Kwabena, and Yaw added to the wax-print was a square grid pattern with one *adinkra* symbol repeated throughout the cloth. Several months prior, Kusi showed me an old photograph from the late twentieth century of him standing next to a plain brown cloth: the cloth was stamped with the same layout and *dvennimen* “ram’s horn” *adinkra* symbol he printed on the wax-print cloth. Kusi, Kwabena, and Yaw returned to an older design layout rather than inventing a new cloth design for stamping *adinkra* onto the wax-print cloth (fig. 2.7).

As they finished printing, Stephen Appiah arrived to see how the *adinkra* stamping changed the wax-print cloth. Stephen had just closed from working as a security guard, his new job since *adinkra* cloth production ended in Asokwa. He noticed the men working when he returned to his home behind the printing area. Yaw and Kwabena placed the cloth on the dirt ground among the *kuntunkuni* cloths drying in the sun. Kusi said, “any time you add *adinkra* printing to a cloth, then that cloth *becomes an adinkra cloth*” (K. Boadum, personal communication, April 22, 2015, Asokwa,

Ghana). This cloth was no longer an imported wax-print cloth. In less than an hour, the men transformed the wax-print into an *adinkera* cloth (fig. 2.8).

When Kusi resumed stamping *adinkera* cloth in Asokwa in 2015, the landscape of handmade and factory-made textiles was quite different than when he last stamped *adinkera* cloth fifteen years prior. In particular, the rise of imported textiles from Asia has flooded Ghana's markets. Chapter Four examines the production, circulation, and exchange of wax-print and other factory-made textiles from Ghana, Europe, and Asia. I analyze how textiles such as imported wax-prints changed the making and use of hand-printed *adinkera* cloth, while incorporating *adinkera* symbols into factory-printed cloth reinterpreted the cultural meanings of *adinkera* symbols.

By stamping *adinkera* onto a Chinese wax-print cloth, Kusi and his team revitalized an historical cloth making practice to inscribe the imported textile with new cultural meaning as an *adinkera* cloth. This added value presumably extended to the wearer's projected identity and status when wearing the stamped *adinkera* cloth to a funeral. Kusi and his team transformed the stamping method in response to changing customer needs. In Ntonso, Gabriel and his family have also innovated the stamping method today to ascribe *adinkera* cloth with new cultural value. But unlike the cloth makers in Asokwa, the Boakye family never ceased stamping.

### **III. “We are nothing without our ancestors”: Gabriel Boakye**

“If I am going to funeral, I wear the hand [stamped] one, I don't want the silk-screened cloth. I wear the traditional one to show I am an old man,” Gabriel said.

“Sometimes, when I finish wearing,” he added, “Some people say, ‘I like it, I like it.’ Then I give it to them.”

Gabriel paused.



“Then I have to get another one [for myself],” Gabriel laughed. (G. Boakye, interview, November 26, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Gabriel Boakye wears stamped *adinkra* cloth to attend funerals today, wrapping the cloth in a toga-like style that drapes over his left shoulder (fig. 2.9). By wearing a stamped *adinkra* cloth in this way, Gabriel portrays an image that he has the wisdom, status, and respect attributed to esteemed elders. He illustrates these values not only through the *adinkra* cloths that he makes and wears, but also through his actions as a teacher, mentor, and father. In Akan philosophy on personhood, philosophers Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu define a person as someone who is responsible: they make contributions to their family and community through hard work (Gyekye 1978; Wiredu 1996). The eldest of ten siblings, 51-year-old Gabriel acts as a family spokesperson and assists his community in Ntonso. Gabriel makes and uses stamped *adinkra* cloth to express his personal identity and shape knowledge about Akan cultural history.

### Keeping Stamping Alive

How Gabriel finds meaning today in stamping *adinkra* cloth partially came in response to changing printing technologies. After cloth makers integrated screen-printing in the early twenty-first century and it soon became the dominant printing technology, some cloth makers gave away their calabash stamps or sold them to tourists. Gabriel’s response was different. “It remains me alone who is doing the traditional way here,” he said in 2014, referring to his family’s ongoing use of *adinkra* stamps (G. Boakye, interview, November 26, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). Gabriel continued stamping with his family and learned screen-printing from his younger brother, Christopher. Gabriel called stamping “traditional” to signal that the printing method holds distinct personal and cultural meaning. The emergence of screen-printed *adinkra* cloth changed the values attached with stamping

to carry a stronger association to cultural history and tradition.

For Gabriel, the technology and process to create a stamped *adinkra* cloth recalled his family's history and relationship with his father and brothers (fig. 2.10). To participate today in the act of stamping cloth becomes a practice of social memory – to experience his past in the present moment (Connerton 1989; Nora 1989).

“I was nine years [old], learning how to stamp from my father after classes. Just small hours I used to print. And Saturdays, if no farm, then I assist my father to print...It's only some hours after school that you can print. But on Saturdays, the whole day for printing and helping my father. He's making the lines and I'm doing the stamping. So when he's done, I come and assist to do the stamping to finish. So we can work hard for the day.”

(G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Gabriel's father *ɔpanyin* Boakye drew the comb lines because it is a more advanced skill than stamping the *adinkra* symbols. *ɔpanyin* Boakye learned *adinkra* cloth printing in the 1930s from his uncle. The Boakye family recalled today that this uncle learned the trade when he traveled to an Akan area of present-day Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>9</sup> Gabriel's mother, *ɔbaapanyin* Veronica Abena Tabi Boakye, is a cloth dyer. She learned from elder women in her family and still works today. Of their ten children, they have four daughters who work as seamstresses, cloth dyers, and nurses; one owns a dressmaking shop behind their house. In addition to Gabriel, they have five other sons who also print *adinkra* cloth; some are weavers and tailors. Gabriel's responsibilities and relationship with his brothers changed when he grew older:

“When I became, like I can stamp my own cloth, the same thing. I taught Peter and Michael. I made the lines and they did the stamping. I taught Peter. I taught Michael. I taught Anthony. Because I am the first son in the family. And I learned first, before the others came. So by designing, I know a lot more than them. I can do some design that they cannot do. Because they stopped doing the [stamp] printing and they do the silk-screen. And I don't know much about the silk-screen because I learned from them. So exchange of work.”

(G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

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<sup>9</sup> The Boakye family recalled that this uncle later brought *adinkra* cloth making to Ntonso. However, *adinkra* cloth production there likely began much earlier, as evidence of *adinkra* cloth dates to the early nineteenth century and some oral histories suggest production in the seventeenth century.

Throughout Ntonso today, most youth only learn how to screen-print *adinkra* cloth, as demand for stamped *adinkra* cloth is minimal. But Gabriel teaches *adinkra* cloth printing to his son, also called Gabriel or Gabi, as he learned from his father. On Saturdays, “I just hold Gabi’s hand to put [the stamp] into the metal bowl of *badiu* dye. By three times, then I stop,” Gabriel said. “Then I will allow him to do it” (G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). Gabriel teaches Gabi stamping with black colored cloths, the same way that he and his father learned. Black *adinkra* cloth was common for funerals, and was also suitable for teaching. It conceals mistakes. If Gabi or another student made an error, Gabriel’s mother re-dyed the cloth a dark color with *kuntunkuni* dye and they started over. Gabriel continues stamping today to connect with his personal past and ensure that future generations will remember the historical practice and related cultural history.

### Gabriel’s Approach to Cloth Design

Although Gabriel prefers stamped *adinkra* cloth, he makes screen-printed *adinkra* cloth to satisfy customer demands for washable cloth and the latest fashions. But Gabriel’s approach to designing screen-printed cloth contrasts many other cloth makers today who print the most popular *adinkra* symbols to easily attract customers, such as *gye Nyame* (“except God”), *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”), and *adinkrabene* (“king of *adinkra*”). Gabriel blends the new technology with his preference for older *adinkra* symbols no longer popular today (fig. 2.11). As a result, Gabriel’s *adinkra* cloths for general sale reflect his personal identity as well as a broader cultural identity.

“It’s only I that have it [the *otumfuo* symbol]. I like the meaning of the symbol. That’s why I use it for printing my cloth. I don’t want to forget my ancestors. I always want to remember them. Because without them, we are nothing. Without them, then how can you get this work here? I always remember them with old, old symbols. Not common ones. That’s why I use the old symbols.”

(G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

*Adinkra* symbols carry powerful associations with time. What motivates Gabriel to select *adinkra* symbols is not their connection to a particular historical moment but rather to a broader historical past often referred to as the “olden days.” Gabriel revitalizes old, less frequently printed *adinkra* symbols in his *adinkra* cloth designs with the goal of bringing the symbols back into popularity. His strategy demonstrates how a cloth maker’s personal motives shape current trends as well as how a cloth maker negotiates personal goals with consumer desires.

The *adinkra* symbols that Gabriel includes in his cloths are lesser known today, yet his reason for selecting them resonates with Ghanaians who use *adinkra* to represent their cultural past. Gabriel explained his choice of old, uncommon symbols by discussing one of the most popular *adinkra* symbols *sankɔfa* that expresses the Akan proverb, “*ɛ wo werɛ na wosan kɔfa a, yɛnkyi*,” meaning “it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten.” *Sankɔfa* is often depicted as a heart-shaped graphic or a bird with its head turned backwards to look over its tail.

“That’s why I bring [the old symbols] back. It’s like bringing something back. *Sankɔfa*. So you don’t forget them. And that’s why, when the Asante came, they always poured libation on the stools, to remember *all* those who have passed. Old kings, old ladies. When we are pouring libation, they call all the old, old people so they will come and help us with what we are doing to become successful.”  
(G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

While Gabriel uses cloth to remember the past, his work does not suggest a resistance to change. He embraces change to facilitate new ways for others to understand the past and recall the past in the future. Gabriel selects *adinkra* symbols that will allow him to communicate a particular narrative about the forward-thinking mindset in Akan society today. His message is clear: remember your ancestors.

## Making Cross-Cultural Connections

Gabriel creates meaningful experiences for himself and others to remember the past and celebrate his ancestors. Like Gabriel's innovations to make *adinkra* cloth, he also transformed the process of creating *adinkra* cloth into a teaching tool and venue for foreigners to connect with Akan culture. When I first met Gabriel, he gave me a demonstration of how to prepare the *badia* dye and stamp *adinkra* cloth (G. Boakye, interview, July 27, 2013, Ntonso, Ghana). Gabriel returned to stamping *adinkra* cloth to teach me about Akan beliefs, history, and culture.

I am not the only student who has learned about *adinkra* cloth from Gabriel. He has opened his home and shared his knowledge to educate both Ghanaians and visitors from abroad. "If I keep all this [wisdom] in my mind and I didn't share, when I pass away, it is waste," Gabriel said. "But if I share it, and they also know how to get something from it, 'Oh, we thank Gabi for the work he has done for me'" (G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). Gabriel's family home has become known as the place to learn about *adinkra* cloth. Since 1998, the Boakye family has taught hundreds of students, tourists, and researchers from across the world.

I asked Gabriel about how he started to teach students and foreigners about *adinkra* cloth, as the extended Boakye family is the only family in Kumasi to develop a program for teaching students and tourists about *adinkra* cloth making. Gabriel credits his family's hospitality of visitors to his father's discipline and Christian upbringing (G. Boakye, interview, April 21, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Growing up, Gabriel and his siblings played at home rather than going out as their peers often did. Above the entrance door to his room, Gabriel wrote with a black marker "Except God" – the translation of the *adinkra* symbol *gye Nyame* – and taped a printed portrait of the Pope. Today, Gabriel goes to church service with his family every Sunday morning. They attend the Catholic Church located directly across the street from their house. By following their father's guidance,

Gabriel and his siblings learned strong values of respect, gratitude, and compassion (G. Boakye, interview, April 21, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

“Money flies. It doesn’t stay,” Gabriel said. “It’s like work. That’s how my ancestors learned the work and it spread to the whole village. So when you go to the roadside, you see all. Money is nothing. But ‘Oh, may God bless you. Thank you.’ It’s also a big blessing” (G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Gabriel uses *adinkra* to share his knowledge and foster connections between people from all over the world. *Adinkra* symbols are complex. The Akan proverbs and philosophy associated with the motifs’ names and meanings are tied to the esteemed knowledge of elders and linguists. Gabriel grants visitors access to this sacred historical wisdom. However, he makes *adinkra* symbols easy for visitors to understand. Stamping *adinkra* cloth cultivates cross-cultural links.

Gabriel reinterprets the meanings of *adinkra* symbols to draw out their salient points that convey common values and interests shared across cultures. He distills a proverb or historical narrative into a single word or phrase that resonates globally – such as “forgiveness” and “good fortune.”<sup>10</sup> Gabriel also refers to *adinkra* symbols by these phrases rather than their Twi name to eliminate any language barriers. His translations broaden the application of *adinkra* symbols to a wide audience. In doing so, Gabriel invites foreigners to experience and connect with Akan history in ways relevant to their own lives. *Adinkra* cloth is a vehicle for Gabriel communicates messages about his identity, history, and relationships with others. By continuing the historical stamping technique and wearing stamped *adinkra* cloth, Gabriel shows that this cultural tradition is not static and unchanging. *Adinkra* is ever evolving.

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<sup>10</sup> “Forgiveness:” *hye won hye adinkra* symbol; “Good fortune:” *mmusuyidee* (or *kra pa*) *adinkra* symbol.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the collaborative, social processes informing how cloth makers have approached their work. The various spaces where cloth makers have printed cloth – their homes, businesses, or community areas – intersects with the broader social and communal structure of Akan society. The opening account of the Boakye family’s recent work in Ntonso exemplifies this structure and collaborative method, as older and younger family members worked together. The organization of work areas have supported the social dimensions of the cloth’s production; the opening description of men visiting the Boakye family illustrate how production sometimes delineated gendered spaces, with women working and socializing in separate areas. By joining work and social life, shared experiences in the cloth’s production have cultivated links between technology, collaboration, and creativity.

Community support has also provided a framework for cloth makers to develop an exchange of work and specialized skills. The work processes and social interactions among cloth makers indicated how they balanced personal interests with shared identities and responsibilities among their family and community. At the same time, attention to individual cloth makers – including Kusi and Gabriel – reveals distinct work approaches to illustrate how creating *adinkera* cloth provides an avenue for individual expression.

While some cloth makers like Kusi and Gabriel worked to keep older cloth making practices a part of contemporary production, other cloth makers focused on introducing new printing techniques and cloth designs. In both historical and contemporary settings, cloth makers transformed the visual designs and approach to make *adinkera* cloth alongside other changes in society and customer demands. As discussed in the next chapter, social relationships and collaborations among cloth makers in Kumasi have shaped how they realize major technological changes to print the cloth.

## Chapter Two Images



Fig. 2.1. Men gathered around the bench and printing table at the Boakye family's home in between printing *adinkra* cloths. December 9, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 2.2. Woman dyeing cloths with *kuntunkuni* dye in the street next to an *adinkra* printing table. December 12, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.





Fig. 2.3. *Adinkra* cloth printing. Yaw Mensah (left) drawing grid lines with comb and Kwabena Boadum (right) stamping the cloth. Kusi Boadum stands in the middle with a visitor on either side who are observing the men work. April 22, 2015. Asokwa, Ghana.



Fig. 2.4. *Adinkra* cloth printing and *kuntunkumi* dyeing work area. April 22, 2015. Asokwa, Ghana.



Fig. 2.5. One of the communal workspaces in Asokwa for *adinkra* cloth printing and *kuntunkuni* cloth dyeing. April 22, 2015. Asokwa, Ghana.



Fig. 2.6. Outdoor area of Ntonso Visitor Centre with *badia* trees in back and covered area to prepare *badia* dye; calabash stamps on display in front next to bike. November 22, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 2.7. Detail of stamped *adinkera* cloth with *dwennimen* (“ram’s horn”) symbol printed on a red and black wax-print cloth. April 22, 2015. Asokwa, Ghana.



Fig. 2.8. Kwabena (left) and Kusi (right) Boadum displaying the completed *adinkera* cloth. April 22, 2015. Asokwa, Ghana.



Fig. 2.9. Gabriel Boakye dressed in a *joromy* embroidery cloth with *adinkra* symbols. While the colors of this cloth signals that it isn't appropriate for funeral occasions, he wears this cloth wrapped in a similar style to how he wears stamped *adinkra* cloths to attend funerals. Gabriel stands in front of a display of *joromy* cloths with *adinkra* symbols at his family's house. July 30, 2013. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 2.10. Gabriel Boakye creating comb lines on black cloth with *badia* dye. November 26, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 2.11. Gabriel Boakye. *Adinkra* cloths on display for student visitors. Otumfuo *adinkra* symbol in red and white screen-printed cloths in the center of the display (middle and top row). November 21, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Of Stamps and Silk Screens: Innovating *Adinkra* Cloth Technology

#### Introduction

“Last time when we talked,” I said to Kusi, “you told me about the history of *adinkra* and how the man who first carved *adinkra* came from this very place in Asokwa...”

Kusi quickly interrupted.

He was eager to tell me the story again.

“And how it was made was, the first *adinkra* design, when they first started making *adinkra*, they used cocoyam tuber and then made the design. It was just, you see, with time, you make improvement. With time, you improve on your designs and your work. So they changed to this one [calabash].”

(K. Boadum, interview, November 20, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).

Kusi Boadum recounted this story when I visited his home in 2014. We sat on a wood bench in the courtyard of his home, the same place where *ɔpanyin* Duodu lived, Kusi said while pointing his fingers towards the ground. As discussed in the Introduction, *ɔpanyin* Duodu was the first *adinkra* cloth maker in Asokwa. He created *adinkra* stamps from cocoyam. As we talked, Kusi pulled out dozens of his calabash stamps from a large sugar sack and wooden combs from an old wood box. Layers of dried *badia* dye covered the calabash stamps from extensive use. His stamps date to the

1970s, and remain in good condition to print *adinkra* cloth. Oral histories from Asokwa recalled how King Kwadwo Adinkra's son Apau taught *ɔpanyin* Duodu to prepare the *badia* dye. Absent in these accounts are how cloth makers developed the stamping technique and technology. Why use cocoyam? Or calabash? Why stamp at all?

## I. Printing Tools and Techniques in Flux

*Adinkra* is the only cloth printed with carved stamps dipped in *badia* dye. No other cloth makers in Ghana have used this stamping technique to create other kinds of textiles. In other parts of West Africa (including Guinea, Gambia, Mali and Sierra Leone), there are cursory mentions in scholarship of cloth makers creating batik wax-resist and starch-resist textiles with carved wood stamps. Some authors organized African textile books by technique and categorized *adinkra* cloth alongside stenciled, painted, and wax-resist stamped textiles. Yet these scholars have not discussed any possible links between these distinct textiles (Adams 1978; Gillow 2003, 2009; Picton and Mack 1979; Ottenberg 2007).

Specific to *adinkra*, scholarship has not fully examined how the development of *adinkra* stamping technology may relate to other West African textiles. Art historian Sarah Brett-Smith is the only scholar who has suggested a potential link between *adinkra* cloth and other textiles in Africa – specifically, a pattern on *bogolanfɔni* cloth called *basiaɛ* (plural *basiaɛn*); *bogolanfɔni* is a mud-dyed textile that Bamana women make in Mali (Brett-Smith 2007; see also Brett-Smith 2014; Rovine 1997, 2008). The affinity she made between the two textiles centers on the grid patterns in the cloths' visual designs, not printing technologies or techniques. Brett-Smith said, "In addition to the visual similarities, the funeral function of Asante *adinkra* as a cloth of mourning connects it thematically

with one of the *basiae*'s earliest uses as a shroud for an adult woman" (Brett-Smith 2007: 75). Trade routes could have circulated *adinkera* from Ghana to Mali, Brett-Smith suggests, as well as Islamic inscribed cloths and amulets with grid patterns and "mystical squares" that may have separately influenced both textile practices (Brett-Smith 2007: 74-76).

Within Ghana, the Introduction also suggested a possible connection between *adinkera* cloth and textiles painted in northern Ghana with Arabic script. Batik tie-and-dye is the only other textile made in Ghana with stamps. But batik tie-and-dye is practiced as a separate trade from *adinkera* cloth making. Other cloth makers who do not print *adinkera* cloth create batik tie-and-dye with different printing techniques, dyes, and tools – including wood stamps rather than calabash stamps used to make *adinkera* cloth. Today, *adinkera* symbols are common imagery for batik stamps. David Boamah is the only *adinkera* cloth maker I met who also makes batik tie-and-dye with *adinkera* symbols.

This chapter analyzes historical and contemporary changes in printing technology for *adinkera* cloth that *ɔpanyin* Duodu and other cloth makers introduced. This line of inquiry reveals how cloth makers have modified printing technology in ways that reshaped their creative process and work methods. Cloth makers have used certain printing tools and techniques that consequently impacted the cloth's designs and meanings of *adinkera* symbols. Different approaches to print cloth have also altered the cloth's materiality and ways customers have dressed in *adinkera* cloth.

In what follows, the chapter first examines how cloth makers innovated stamping methods over time. The chapter's focus then turns to a significant moment of change when cloth makers discarded stamps and began screen-printing *adinkera* cloth. Finally, the chapter concludes with cloth maker Nana Baffour Gyimah's work that illustrates his technological innovations and creativity that has separated his work from his peers. By examining various tools and methods for printing *adinkera* cloth, the chapter demonstrates how the ways cloth makers innovated production have intersected with important shifts in the cloth's cultural value and meaning. This discussion also seeks to counter



past scholarship that discuss the tools and techniques as static and fail to show the dynamics of cloth printing technology.

## Shifts in Stamping Technology

In Ntonso today, cloth makers recalled stories about their ancestors who previously made *adinkera* cloth with cassava stamps before cocoyam stamps. Many families in Ntonso also worked as farmers. They grew cassava and cocoyam, so these materials were easily accessible. The history of *adinkera* cloth told at the Ntonso Visitor Center also mentions cassava and cocoyam stamps. When cloth makers recalled these stories, they didn't offer any possible explanations as to why their ancestors first *stamped* the cloth or developed stamping technology with these particular materials.<sup>1</sup>

Oral history accounts that I collected during research from 2013 to 2015 revealed alternative histories on printing technology that contradict written scholarship: no published texts on *adinkera* cloth mention cassava or cocoyam stamps.<sup>2</sup> Only calabash. What is compelling about these new accounts is that some speak not only about recollection of stories passed down from prior generations, but also about their first-hand experiences using cocoyam stamps. For example, *panyin* Steven Yaw Boakye learned how to print *adinkera* cloth with cocoyam stamps in the 1930s (Boakye family, interview, 2013-2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Additionally, Osei-Bonsu Safo-Kantanka, a cloth

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<sup>1</sup> Akan linguistics researcher Osepetetrekue Kwame Osei said some cloth makers printed *adinkera* cloth with foam stamps as an alternative to calabashes during the late twentieth century. Osei said the man who introduced foam stamps studied ceramics at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in the 1960s, worked as a school headmaster, and is now a chief in coastal Ghana. Osei explained that foam stamps allowed cloth makers to print faster: unlike calabash stamps, the cloth maker could print the foam stamp multiple times onto cloth before applying more dye (O. Osei, interview, March 25, 2015, Manhyia, Ghana).

<sup>2</sup> This includes notable works from Robert Sutherland Rattray, Daniel Mato, Claire Polakoff, Alexander Atta Yaw Kyerematen, Bruce Willis, and Adolph Agbo that only discussed and documented calabash stamps (Agbo 1999, 2011; Kyerematen 1964; Mato 1987; Polakoff 1980a; Rattray 1927; Willis 1998). Rattray said, "the stamps, cut in the various designs, are made from fragments of old calabashes, with small sticks leading from the stamp to a point (Rattray 1927: 262). Mato's dissertation, presents oral histories he collected during the 1980s; his interviews with stamp carvers discuss carving techniques for calabash stamps, not cassava or cocoyam stamps (Mato 1987: 128-149, 195-207).

maker from Bonwire – a town located near Ntonso that is best-known for *kente* weaving – said that he learned how to make *adinkera* cloth with cocoyam stamps around the 1960s (O. Safo-Kantanka, interview, November 26, 2014, Manhyia, Ghana). Yet none of these or other accounts explained why their ancestors developed this stamping technology, nor why cocoyam or cassava stamps were absent in previously documented oral history and other scholarship.

Historical evidence for how *adinkera* cloth making began doesn't provide a clear answer as to how or why cloth makers first decided to stamp cloth. Nor does material evidence indicate what materials they initially used, in part because they were likely ephemeral and not long lasting. No cassava or cocoyam *adinkera* stamps remain today. The stamps didn't keep long. Within as little as a few days – up to one or two months at most – the cocoyam stamp developed cracks and deteriorated (K. Boadum, interview, November 20, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). The same happened to cassava stamps. Applying hot *badia* dye on cassava and cocoyam accelerated its corrosion. The British Museum's collection holds the earliest remaining *adinkera* stamps – identified as gourd stamps – from the 1930s collected by Captain Robert Powley Wild. There are no documented uses of cassava, cocoyam, or calabashes as printing tools in other Akan or Ghanaian textiles. However, as Kusi explained at this chapter's opening, oral histories recall how elders modified printing tools for *adinkera* cloth – important changes that were previously unrecorded in scholarship.

Ephemeral printing tools resulted in the frequent need for new *adinkera* stamps, which ensured more business for carvers. It also offered carvers opportunities to create new designs and variations to existing *adinkera* symbol designs. Yet cloth makers who previously stamped *adinkera* cloth spoke negatively about the short “life” of cassava and cocoyam stamps. Cloth makers wanted long-lasting stamps to avoid replacing their tools regularly. Ephemeral materials prevented cloth makers from keeping stamps as records or archives of past designs to use as a reference when carving new stamps, which may have contributed to design variations of *adinkera* symbols.

With calabashes, the *badia* dye actually extends the calabashes' life.<sup>3</sup> As Gabriel Boakye explained, "calabash is the strongest. It's not afraid of hot. It's not afraid of cold. It's not afraid of anything" (G. Boakye, interview, November 21, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). *Badia* dye prevents insects from making holes in the calabash; it creates a protective seal to keep the calabash's exposed interior flesh from deteriorating. Oral histories in Asokwa did not attribute the introduction of calabash stamps to a specific cloth maker. But in Ntonso, oral histories recalled that Nana Kwadwo Anane Koraah was the first stamp carver to use calabash; he was also a relative of *ɔbaapanyin* Veronica Abena Tabi Boakye, Gabriel's mother (G. Boakye, interview, July 28, 2013, Ntonso, Ghana).

As Kusi described above, cloth makers changed stamp materials and stopped using cocoyam stamps to improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of their work. After the introduction of calabash stamps, carvers continued to change their printing technology in response to customer demands and alongside other shifts in society. Discussion here focuses on adjustments to stamps. Changes to other tools, including combs and brushes, as well as the constructions of the fires to prepare the dye were not well documented, thus limiting analysis of historical shifts to these dimensions of cloth production.

Modifications to stamping tools reshaped how cloth makers worked together during production. For example, *ɔpanyin* Kofi Nyame and other carvers created multi-symbol *adinkra* stamps since at least the early 1970s in response to demands from cloth makers for a faster printing technique (K. Nyame, interview, December 16, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). To create a multi-symbol *adinkra* stamp, *ɔpanyin* Nyame carved an *adinkra* symbol twice within a single calabash stamp (fig. 3.1). In some instances, he carved the same *adinkra* symbol three or four times in a single stamp. No

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<sup>3</sup> Three varieties of calabash gourds are now sold in Kumasi (During the 1980s, Mato said markets in Kumasi sold two varieties of calabashes; see Mato 1987: 143-150). Stamp carvers bought the largest variety of calabashes *apekyea* (*ingenio vulgaris* or *lagenaria vulgaris*) because they have the thickest skin to carve stamps (P. Nyaamah, interview, November 22, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). This kind of calabash is not commonly grown in Kumasi. Women market traders bring them from northern Ghana filled with shea butter. Today, Paul Nyaamah buys these calabashes at Kejetia central market in Kumasi to carve *adikra* stamps; Chapters Two and Five discusses Paul's work as a stamp carver.

documented *adinkra* stamps include different symbols within a single stamp. All the multi-symbol stamps that I studied repeat the same symbol.<sup>4</sup> The absence of different *adinkra* symbols within a single stamp suggests the uniform use of grid cloth patterns filled with the same *adinkra* symbol.

*ɔpanyin* Nyame carved each individual *adinkra* symbol in multi-symbol stamps smaller than the standard size of single-symbol *adinkra* stamps (fig. 3.2). He explained that the smaller size of multi-symbol *adinkra* stamps also communicated that *adinkra* cloth printed with these stamps was appropriate for lower status men and women to wear. However, *ɔpanyin* Nyame, Kusi Boadum, and Stephen Appiah, agreed that the symbol carved on multi-symbol stamps carried the same name and meaning as a stamp carved with the symbol only once (S. Appiah, K. Boadum, K. Nyame, interview, December 16, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).<sup>5</sup>

*ɔpanyin* Nyame also formerly created larger single-symbol calabash stamps. He changed the stamp size to communicate distinct messages about the cloth wearer's status: *ɔpanyin* Nyame made larger stamps specifically for printing *adinkra* cloth for the Asantehene and chiefs (K. Nyame, interview, December 16, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). To create *adinkra* cloth for women and other men, *ɔpanyin* Nyame carved smaller calabash stamps. Kusi added, "In our tradition, things that are small small are for women and the fat or bigger ones are for men. So these [larger stamps] are for the chiefs" (K. Boadum, interview, December 16, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). Creating *adinkra* stamps of different sizes became a tactic to distinguish *adinkra* cloth of royalty and chiefs. It also marked another technological innovation after access of *adinkra* cloth widened beyond royal uses. As a result, the same *adinkra* symbol communicated different messages when printed on the cloth

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<sup>4</sup> Rattray's documented stamps do not include any repetitions of symbols within a single stamp (Rattray 1927: 265-267).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Mato recorded cloth makers who called *adinkrahene* symbol when carved two times on a single stamp "we approach *adinkra* twice," "*adinkra yeko bo mmienu*" and "*adinkra* is two-fold," "*adinkra ebo bo mmienu*" (Mato 1987: fig. 11). This suggests that cloth makers possibly gave a different name and meaning to an *adinkra* stamp with multiple symbols. *Adinkrahene* is the only multi-symbol stamp in Mato's catalog of *adinkra* symbols with a different meaning. Mato's catalog of *adinkra* symbols included the following multi-symbol *adinkra* stamps: *aban*, *aban kaba*, *abitie*, *akoko nan tiaba na enkum ba*, *bese saka*, *dwenimem*, *kodee mowerwea* or *ntwitwa woho nkyere me*, *Kvame bone*, *mmodwewa*, *mpuanum*, *obi nka obi* (Mato 1987).

depending on its size.

More recently, carver Paul Nyaamah slightly increased the calabash stamp size from the previous generation of carvers in Ntonso (P. Nyaamah, interview, December 11, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). But not for the same reason as *ɔpanyin* Nyame. Paul has been the only full-time carver in Ntonso since the early 1990s. He wanted to offer cloth makers tools for a faster printing technique. With a larger *adinkra* stamp, the cloth maker didn't have to stamp the *adinkra* symbol as many times on the cloth. Paul's change in *adinkra* stamp size signaled continued interest among cloth makers to create more efficient printing tools and work process.

Inconsistency in how the symbol sizes functioned between Paul and *ɔpanyin* Nyame attests to the complexity of how people have used *adinkra* cloth to communicate and potential for conveying ambiguous messages through the cloth. Unlike Paul's larger *adinkra* stamps, *ɔpanyin* Nyame didn't intend for cloth makers to use his larger-scale stamps to hurriedly print prestigious *adinkra* cloths for chiefs and the royal family. Rather, royal *adinkra* cloths were slowly, methodically made with utmost attention to precision and detail. The turn to screen-printing *adinkra* cloth since the early twenty-first century has further complicated the meanings associated with symbol sizes, as silk-screened designs depict a greater range of small and large symbols.

These trends in stamping technology to make larger *adinkra* stamps and multi-symbol *adinkra* stamps intersected with alternative approaches for cloth makers to collaborate during production and work more efficiently. Some cloth makers recalled to me how they historically dedicated one or two weeks to create a single stamped *adinkra* cloth, especially a cloth requiring complex patterns for a chief or elite customer. When lower-status men and women began wearing *adinkra* cloth to funerals and other events, cloth makers needed to produce *adinkra* cloth more quickly. The introduction of larger, multi-symbol *adinkra* stamps satisfied both customer requests for less costly *adinkra* cloth and the cloth maker's desire for a faster technique. For example, Kusi and Stephen said

they printed *adinkera* cloth more quickly when using *ɔpanyin* Nyame's multi-symbol *adinkera* stamps (S. Appiah, K. Boadum, interview, December 16, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). When printed on cloth, these multi-symbol stamps conveyed the appearance of single-symbol stamps and concealed the cloth maker's different tool and strategy for a more efficient work process. Rather than dedicating a week or more to create one *adinkera* cloth, cloth makers completed multiple *adinkera* cloths within a single day.

Cloth makers also developed less time-consuming cloth designs and removed special techniques to offer more affordable *adinkera* cloths for lower-status customers. Cloth makers usually retained the comb lines, but removed other advanced techniques and complex cloth patterns that were either more time consuming or required specialized skills. Unlike historical or prestigious *adinkera* cloths with symbols closely stamped next to one another to almost touch, cloth makers spaced apart *adinkera* symbols as a strategy to stamp less symbols onto the cloth. Consequently, visual distinctions between expensive and less costly *adinkera* cloths emerged. Cloth makers continued to experiment over time with alternative ways of creating *adinkera* cloth and modifying work methods to meet evolving consumer demands.

Changes to the production of *badia* dye (*adinkera aduro* or *adurni*) were not well recorded. Some cloth makers have identified the printing dye made with *badia* tree bark as "medicine," which refers to the dye's healing properties (fig. 3.3). Today, cloth makers sometimes call *badia* dye the "local dye" or the "natural dye." These two names distinguish the properties of *badia* dye from screen-printing paste, which cloth makers refer to as a "chemical," "imported," or "foreign" paste or paint. The dissertation refers to the dye as *badia*, following how most cloth makers identify *adinkera aduro* in everyday speech.

Adjustments to *badia* dye had minimal impact on the social dimensions of cloth production. Improvements to *badia* dye addressed the dye's visual appearance when printed on the cloth rather

than the process of stamping. Yet there are some contradictory accounts between cloth makers about additives to the *badia* tree bark – especially *etia* (or *tia*), iron slag. In Rattray’s explanation of preparing *badia* dye in the late 1920s, he said that cloth makers boiled the pounded tree bark with iron slag (Rattray 1927: 262). Moreover, Captain Robert Powley Wild collected samples of printing dye and tree bark in 1933 that he donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University – the only historical samples in a museum collection. In addition to *badia* tree bark and a glass tube filled with *badia* dye (now dried), Captain Wild collected a piece of iron slag that confirms its use among some cloth makers to prepare printing dye by the 1930s.<sup>6</sup>

However, not all cloth makers with whom I spoke said that they included *tia* when preparing *badia* dye. Some cloth makers cited the use of iron slag to improve their work methods. For example, Kusi and Stephen Appiah – a cloth maker who worked with Kusi – said they added *tia* metal iron clumps to create the *badia* dye. They purchased *tia* from a nearby blacksmith. The process to create *badia* dye spans multiple days. But Kusi and Stephen explained that *tia* brought the dye to a boil faster and shortened the preparation time to two hours (S. Appiah, K. Boadum, interview, May 12, 2015, Asokwa, Ghana). Other cloth makers, such as the Boakye family, did not add *tia* and said that they boiled the dye for around five hours (fig. 3.4 and 3.5; Boakye family, interview, July 27, 2013, Ntonso, Ghana).

Cloth makers sometimes added other ingredients to *badia* dye to enhance its aesthetic properties. In Asokwa, Kusi and Stephen debated on whether adding egg yolks or egg whites makes the *badia* dye “shine” when printed on the cloth. Kusi said that he added egg yolks once the *badia* dye cooled to make the cloth shiny. But Stephen said that egg whites make the cloth shine, while

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<sup>6</sup> The materials related to making *adinkera* cloth that Captain Wild collected include: “Dye sample (*adinkera aduru*) in glass display tube.” 1933. Collected by Captain Robert Powley Wild. Pitt Rivers Museum. Oxford University. Museum record number 1933.44.11. “Piece of iron slag (*etia*) used for making dye.” 1933. Collected by Captain Robert Powley Wild. Pitt Rivers Museum. Oxford University. Museum record number 1933.44.10. “Strip of bark (*badie*) used for making dye.” 1933. Collected by Captain Robert Powley Wild. Pitt Rivers Museum. Oxford University. Museum record number 1933.44.9.

also acting as a starch to make the cloth stiff; the latter marks a desired Akan aesthetic to “put on” cloth (*ntamafura*). Both men said that their ancestors sometimes added other materials – including onion or honey – to make the *badia* dye shine on the cloth (S. Appiah, K. Boadum, interview, May 12, 2015, Asokwa, Ghana). Limited historical documentation on the process to make *badia* dye makes it difficult to discern how and why cloth makers changed the supplemental ingredients to prepare the dye.

### Prelude to Alternative Printing Technologies

In the 1960s, Professor Ablade Glover was teaching textiles in the College of Art at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). Glover is a well-known painter who was instrumental in shaping modern art in Ghana. He began studying with cloth makers in Ntonso during the 1960s to develop a chart of *adinkera* symbols that became an important text on the subject. On multiple occasions, he brought some of these cloth makers to visit the textiles department at KNUST and show them faculty and student work on campus (A. Glover, personal communication, July 24, 2013 and May 15, 2015, Accra, Ghana).

Glover then traveled to the UK, where he studied at Newcastle University and the Central School of Art and Design. He learned screen-printing while he was abroad. After returning to Ghana, Glover introduced screen-printing to the textiles department at KNUST in the 1970s (A. Glover, personal communication, July 24, 2013 and May 15, 2015, Accra, Ghana).<sup>7</sup> Glover later served as head of the textiles department and Dean of the College of Art before founding the Artist

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<sup>7</sup> Scholarship on early uses of screen-printing in Ghana is limited. In Beverly Donoghue’s research on printed textiles as educational visual aids, she recommended screen-printing textiles in Ghana for its affordability and access in 1974 (Donoghue 1982).



Alliance Gallery in Accra, Ghana. Glover continued to invite *adinkera* cloth makers from Ntonso to the textiles department at KNUST after he began screen-printing. His interactions with cloth makers contributed to the changing relationship between cloth makers (often classified within the broader category of “craftsmen”), university-level arts faculty, and fine artists – a historical division that grew out of colonialism and separated these artistic practices as the British sought to “modernize” the country.

Glover recalled that one component from his screen-printing workspace sparked curiosity and excitement among the *adinkera* cloth makers who visited him: a raised work table (A. Glover, personal communication, May 15, 2015, Accra, Ghana). Cloth makers had been printing *adinkera* cloth on the ground, sometimes placing cardboard underneath the cloth before printing; in other examples, cloth makers printed on wood planks resting just above the ground (fig. 3.6). Glover was familiar with how cloth makers stamped *adinkera* cloth on the ground and showed the cloth makers the raised tables that he used at KNUST for screen-printing.

Some *adinkera* cloth makers built raised tables with long, flat sheets of wood. They added cloth sacks on top to create a soft printing surface (A. Glover, personal communication, May 15, 2015, Accra, Ghana). A raised work table was a minor modification for printers to improve their technique without altering the cloth’s appearance. The table also created a permanent fixture in their workspace, an important social space and gathering area for men (fig. 3.7). Only cloth makers in Ntonso integrated the wood table. Glover didn’t work with cloth makers in Asokwa and the concept didn’t spread among cloth makers working outside of Ntonso.<sup>8</sup>

Glover also showed the *adinkera* cloth makers his new screen-printing tools. He encouraged them to pursue alternative printing techniques for *adinkera* cloth (A. Glover, personal

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<sup>8</sup> Mariama Ross’s work discusses interactions between the Integrated Rural Arts and Industry (IRAI) department at the College of Art at KNUST and artisans working in “craft villages” – including areas making *kente* cloth, pottery, carving, and metalwork (M. Ross 2000: 239). In the late twentieth century, Ross found that IRAI was the only academic unit that worked with “craft villages” to develop technologies for craft production.

communication, May 15, 2015, Accra, Ghana). *Badia* dye was not colorfast and faded after washing. Screen-printing dyes could offer customers washable cloths. Glover's screen-printing method required special mixing and steaming to fix the imported European commercial dyes to be colorfast. Cloth makers were not interested in this process. They continued stamping.

Other arts faculty in Kumasi also encouraged cloth makers to consider alternative printing technologies. Communications scholar Boatema Boateng said, “*adinkera* cloth production has also been the target of several attempts at ‘modernization,’ mainly by faculty and students of [KNUST]...these attempts have centered around the improvement of the dye used in stenciling the designs but have largely unsuccessful” (Boateng 2008: 172). For many years, cloth makers rejected these suggestions. Yet the presence of the College of Art at KNUST and their long-term relationship with cloth makers was vital, as some changes occurred after Boateng's work in 2008.

Nana Baffour Gyimah (Kwaku Duah II) is a cloth maker not among those who visited Professor Glover. He is from Tewobaabi, a small town near Ntonso. Nana wanted a permanent dye to print *adinkera* cloth and had been seeking alternative printing dyes since the 1970s (N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2014, Tewobaabi, Ghana). He was telling his customers to bring back their *adinkera* cloth if the *badia* dye faded and he would re-print the cloth. Chapter One analyzes the common practice of re-dyeing and re-printing faded *adinkera* cloth that was less costly for customers than purchasing new cloth. For Nana, re-printing faded *adinkera* cloth free-of-charge to his customers became a high expense for him. At KNUST, Nana met with other faculty and students at the College of Art to research a colorfast *badia* dye. He gave the department his *badia* dye for testing; faculty researchers at KNUST with whom he worked also sent *badia* dye samples to the United States for additional testing. Nana later received samples from KNUST of new dyes to try and kept researching.

Meanwhile, occasions to wear *adinkra* cloth evolved during the late twentieth century, as did the kinds of textiles printed with *adinkra* symbols. More men and women dressed in white or brightly colored *adinkra* cloth to attend naming ceremonies, church, and festivals (Mato 1994). During the late 1980s, popularity grew for factory-printed cloth designed with *adinkra* motifs – washable textiles designed to resemble the hand-printed cloth (see fig. 1.19; Boateng 2008: 175). Consumption of Chinese textiles in Ghana, which began around the 1960s, also surged. Popular brands such as Hitarget offered more affordable equivalents of Ghanaian and European factory-printed textiles. Not all imported Chinese textiles were inexpensive, but those that impacted the industry of hand-printed *adinkra* cloth were less costly. Chinese and Indian textile companies imported factory-made black and red textiles (including ones designed with *adinkra* symbols) that became popular funeral fashions; chapter Four examines the circulation of *adinkra* in factory-printed cloths made in the UK, Europe, and Asia. For many middle and lower class consumers, factory-printed cloth designed with *adinkra* motifs replaced stamped *adinkra* cloth at funerals and social events. They were washable, inexpensive, and didn't fade.

By the 1990s, European manufacturers began importing chemical pigment dyes to Ghana. These dyes offered a quick and simple screen-printing method: they eliminated steps to mix and steam previously required to fix the dyes. Faculty at the College of Art at KNUST also developed and introduced new chemicals for screen-printing – notably emulsion paints, sensitizers, and even carpenter's glue – that made screen-printing a more accessible and feasible printing technology (C. Frimpong, personal communication, December 11, 2014, Kumasi, Ghana). Charles Frimpong, Professor of Industrial Arts in Textiles at KNUST, claimed that these contributions made screen-printing a popular technology in Kumasi.

As new screen-printing tools and pastes became available in Kumasi, commercial graphic art businesses incorporated screen-printing into their work. When screen-printing was first introduced

to Kumasi around the 1960–70s, sign painters did not immediately integrate it due to the slow work process (Abbey 1977: 24; Cristofano 2014: 310). But technological changes led sign painters and commercial graphic artists to transition from hand painting to screen-printing: they screen-printed posters, personalized t-shirts, and custom textile designs with organization logos and commemorative portraits for family funerals (D. Ross 2004).

Why commercial artists began screen-printing was not recorded in scholarship. Many *adinkra* cloth makers today said that they prefer screen-printing because it is faster and more time efficient. There is no precedent in West Africa for using screen-printing as an alternative technology for historical textile traditions.<sup>9</sup> Interest in screen-printing in the late twentieth century may have also developed because screen-printing represents a modern and cosmopolitan technology, as screen-printing tools were first brought to Kumasi from Europe. The start of screen-printing *adinkra* cloth during this time coincided with these broader shifts in Kumasi’s visual culture as commercial arts expanded their work to include screen-printing.

Although the main challenge with stamped *adinkra* cloth for consumers was not new – a non-colorfast printing dye – other surrounding social and visual changes made it a crucial time for cloth makers to address the problem. Amid the influx of factory-printed *adinkra* cloth and a changing visual landscape, cloth makers needed to offer washable hand-printed *adinkra* cloth to retain business.<sup>10</sup> The changing technologies available in Kumasi described above provided the means to realize an alternative mode of printing *adinkra* cloth. Soon after factory-printed cloth with *adinkra* motifs and pigment dyes became popular in Kumasi, cloth makers reconsidered Glover’s earlier suggestion and began to experiment with screen-printing *adinkra* cloth.

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<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel Bankole Ojo’s study to screen-print traditional motifs on Nigerian hand-woven *aso-oke* cloth aimed to create an alternative market for consumers, but Nigerian cloth printers did not actually use his method in practice (Ojo 2007). American Pat Morgan started the *Aladire* company in Lagos, Nigeria during the 1960s, making screen-printed versions of the indigo resist-dyed *adire* textiles and teaching screen-printing to Nigerian men (Eicher 1976: 33; Taylor 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Some *adinkra* cloth makers told Boateng that factory-printed textiles designed to resemble *adinkra* cloth were “a direct threat to their livelihood” (Boateng 2011: 29-30).

## Introducing Screen-Printed *Adinkra* Cloth

“Formerly, we were using this one, the *badia* one. And the *badia* one, when you wash it, it will fade. We sat down and we decided to change or modify it in another way. One of them sent his to Ntonso, and one, a man over there called him to...talk to him. Then he was doing closed door. You close the door, you do the work, you don’t want anyone to see how it looks. Only that you see that you have finished the cloth...We decided because when you wash it or when you are sweating, it will fade. We decided to change it to this one [silk-screen]”

(S. Attah, interview, November 17, 2014, Bantama, Ghana).

Solomon Attah, head of the textiles department at the Centre for National Culture in Kumasi, emphasized the joint effort to develop screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. My research with Solomon and other cloth makers revealed that screen-printing *adinkra* cloth emerged from a small network of individuals in the late 1990s – including cloth makers, commercial screen-printers, staff at the Centre for National Culture–Ashanti Region, and faculty at KNUST. Three people were at the forefront of this collaboration: Solomon Attah, Nana Baffour Gyimah, and Abraham Asmah, former staff at the cultural centre and current professor at the College of Art at KNUST. These men shared ties to the cultural centre and mutual interest to develop a colorfast printing dye for *adinkra* cloth.

Solomon has taught *adinkra* cloth stamping, *mwomu* cloth stitching, and *kente* weaving at the cultural centre for twenty-five years. He was inspired to experiment with screen-printing techniques for making *adinkra* cloth after observing t-shirt printers in Kumasi create textile designs (S. Attah, interview, August 5, 2014, Bantama, Ghana). Asmah also pursued options for creating washable cloth that retained the same concept as stamped *adinkra* cloth (A. Asmah, personal communication, March 27, 2015, Kumasi, Ghana). Around this time, Nana visited the cultural centre one day when Asmah was screen-printing cloth with chemical pastes. Asmah and Nana knew one another from the Craftsmen Association of Kumasi–Ashanti Region; Nana served as President and Asmah was Secretary. Like Solomon, Nana also met with printers in Kumasi who were screen-printing t-shirt

designs. They realized a major difference and benefit with t-shirt printing technology: a colorfast dye (N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2014, Tewobaabi, Ghana).

Most cloth makers today credit the quickness of screen-printing as the primary reason for its use. But speed of work was a lower priority and secondary benefit for these three cloth makers. No cloth makers who I interviewed experimented with other dyes on calabash stamps to retain the existing printing technique. Calabash stamps required a liquid dye thinner than screen-printing paste, which doesn't adhere well on the calabash's surface to print cleanly (A. Asmah, personal communication, March 27, 2015, Kumasi, Ghana). Cloth makers couldn't find a suitable handmade or chemical colorfast dye for calabash stamps. Screen-printing became a viable alternative to *badia* dye.

Solomon, Nana, and Asmah contributed to the start of screen-printing *adinkera* cloth. One person alone was not responsible for introducing the new technology. But when I asked one cloth maker about screen-printed *adinkera* cloth, he attributed its introduction in Ntonso to Nana; he didn't mention other cloth makers: “[Screen-printing] was created from an old, old man from here. We call him Gyimah. He created that silk-screen. He was the first person to use it. He was hiding it. I don't know where he learned it from...Gyimah is hiding in the house. So if somebody wants to buy it, unless you go to him, and then you buy it” (Interview, July 2013, Ntonso, Ghana).<sup>11</sup> As a result of screen-printing's popularity today, other cloth makers eager to receive recognition and credit for its success claimed they were the first person to create screen-printed *adinkera* cloth. Stories about other contributors may emerge in the future, especially since there is not yet a consistent oral history account about its beginnings.

Nana tactfully moved his work inside his home in Tewobaabi – following a “closed door” approach as Solomon called it – to conceal his new technique so other cloth makers wouldn't copy

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<sup>11</sup> Name removed for privacy.

his distinct style (N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2015, Tewobaabi, Ghana). To create the silk-screens with *adinkera* symbols, Nana consulted Saint Anthony Arts Centre, a well-known commercial screen-printing company in the Asafo area of Kumasi. Nana worked with Andrew Adjei there who used his calabash *adinkera* stamps to create silk-screen designs. Andrew said, “At first, [Nana] would bring some designs and I would add some to it” (A. Adjei, personal communication, May 5, 2015, Asafo, Ghana). Andrew’s additions were usually other graphic designs rather than *adinkera* symbols.

Collaboration with others was necessary for Nana to create screen-printed *adinkera* cloth. After acquiring the new technology, he returned focus on his personal business. By creating permanent *adinkera* cloth designs, Nana eliminated the need and expense of re-printing his customers’ stamped *adinkera* cloth. He taught screen-printing to his assistants who previously stamped *adinkera* cloth, but didn’t teach anyone outside of his family or business.

Some of Nana’s assistants left to copy what he was doing for their own work (N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2015, Tewobaabi, Ghana). Another cloth maker in Ntonso also recalled the consequences of Nana’s assistants leaving his business: “[Nana] was doing it in the house with some boys. Later...it spread out...The boys tried to open their own shop and that spread it to the whole world...now that it has spread, everyone can do it” (Interview, July 2013, Ntonso, Ghana).<sup>12</sup> This cloth maker’s account of Nana’s work and relationship with his assistants demonstrates the power relations between a cloth maker and his assistants, as well as between cloth makers within the community. When Nana’s assistants opened an outdoor shop, visibility of their workspace supported their production of *adinkera* cloth as a social practice. In turn, their social interactions with other cloth makers sparked creative approaches for other cloth makers to screen-print *adinkera* cloth within Ntonso.

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<sup>12</sup> Name removed for privacy.

Responses to Nana's work illustrate how his approach contrasted the common practice of working in visible spaces within the community. Like Nana, many cloth makers worked at home. But Nana worked inside, in an area concealed from public street view. Visibility also contributes to Akan expressions of respect (*ɔbɔbu*). Anthropologist Sjaak van der Geest elaborates on the concept from his research with Akan elders in Kwahu-Tafo, a town in Ghana's Eastern Region. van der Geest said, "Respect is a key moral concept in Akan culture. Human behavior only becomes 'good' or 'bad' in the social sense of the terms, if it is seen. Doing good without others seeing it is almost a contradiction, it does not make sense" (van der Geest 1998: 344). He adds, "two important requirements of respect (*ɔbɔbu*): visibility and sociability. Something needs to be seen in order to engender respect (or its opposite, shame, *animu*). What remains hidden also remains out of the realm of human judgment (admiration or condemnation)" (van der Geest 1998: 344). Solomon's description of "closed door" work that began this section also suggests how the distinct reception and attitude towards Nana's work coincided with wider Akan values of respect.

Despite these various settings to make *adinkera* cloth, the appeal of screen-printing as a faster method and colorfast paste attracted printers and consumers alike. For the first time, cloth makers offered customers handmade *and* washable *adinkera* cloth. Screen-printed *adinkera* cloth became popular dress for funerals, festivals, church, and family gatherings – even among chiefs and royals at Manhyia Palace.



## II. Consequences of Change

### An End to Stamping *Adinkra* Cloth

The turn to screen-printing *adinkra* cloth made the most striking technological change after almost two hundred years of production. Around the early twenty-first century, stamping *adinkra* cloth declined as screen-printing became more prevalent. Cloth makers phased out calabash stamps and *badia* dye in exchange for silk-screens and chemical pastes. My conversations with cloth makers yielded inconsistencies about when and how quickly the move from stamping to screen-printing cloth occurred in the early twenty-first century. It remains unclear if the transition from stamping to screen-printing was an abrupt switch or a slow adjustment over several years. But within ten years of first integrating screen-printing, nearly all cloth makers had completely stopped stamping and making *badia* dye. Some cloth makers offered customers stamped cloth on request, but such orders became infrequent. Screen-printing became the new dominant technology to print *adinkra* cloth.

Screen-printing *adinkra* cloth impacted the careers of stamp carvers. Few men worked as carvers in comparison to the much larger number of men who printed *adinkra* cloth. A small number of cloth makers who printed *adinkra* cloth, including Emmanuel Konadu in Ntonso, also carved their own stamps. Emmanuel and others who both printed cloth and carved stamps usually did not sell stamps or work as a full-time carver; they stopped carving stamps when screen-printing became popular (E. Konadu, interview, May 13, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

Full-time stamp carvers often first worked as *adinkra* cloth printers. Carvers sometimes began the trade at an older age, in which they also had gained more wisdom about the proverbs and historical narratives associated with the meanings of *adinkra* symbols. Not all carvers learned how to create *adinkra* stamps from their family members but other carvers in town. Kusi Boadum said, “I

was buying them [stamps] from him [*ɔpanyin* Nsia]. I was buying them from some of the elders. They learned the carving from each other. So they were carving and they were selling it to us [cloth printers]” (K. Boadum, interview, November 20, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). The transition from printing *adinkra* cloth to carving stamps as men grew older shows how the cloth’s production spanned from youth learning how to stamp cloth to elders creating the *adinkra* stamps. It also reveals how age contributed to specialized skills within the trade.

Paul Nyaamah has been the only full-time carver in Ntonso since the well-known carver “Teacher Kofi” passed away in 1995.<sup>13</sup> Paul teaches stamp carving to his son, now nine-year-old, but never taught anyone else. Few cloth makers expressed interest to learn from him due to fear of injuries with sharp carving knives, and later, screen-printing’s popularity. Screen-printing compelled Paul to redefine *adinkra* stamp carving. Paul was up for the challenge.

“At that time [during the early 1990s], I was a weaver. A weaver. I saw the man [“Teacher Kofi”] making the stamps one day.

When I saw the man, ‘Oh!’ I told my brothers. ‘Oh, I can do that.’

My brothers said, ‘Oh, you lie!’

I said, ‘Give me calabash.’

My brother found a calabash for me to start carving. When I carve and get thirty pieces now, the tourists come to my father’s place. They buy it. They come for it.

‘Oh, it is good,’ [the tourists say].

So let’s do it more.”

(fig. 3.8; P. Nyaamah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Paul’s “father’s place” references his uncle, *ɔpanyin* Steven Yaw Boakye, who Paul calls his father because *ɔpanyin* Boakye helped to raise him. Paul’s father passed away when he was six years old. His

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<sup>13</sup> People with whom I spoke in Ntonso did not know “Teacher Kofi’s” full name.

mother sent Paul to stay with *ɔpanyin* Boakye's family after his father's death. Paul continued to explain how he came to stamp carving through an unconventional path and is primarily self-taught. His determination and skill was not limited to carving *adinkra* stamps.

“So you only spent one day learning from “Teacher Kofi?”,” I asked.

“Yes, because I am clever,” Paul replied.

“Everything, I saw it too.

I said, ‘Oh, this one I can do it.’

Because when my machine stopped, when I use screw, I can start it again.

I use milo bottle. You know milo [a chocolate malt powdered drink]?

And milk bottle to make a car. You see, anything. I use that milo to do it.

You saw that raffia, I use raffia palm to make a car. You saw it? Anything.

I saw it and I will do it. That's why. Anything! I use machine to sew *any* chair.

Or I use needle to sew the bag. I have one bag in my room right now.

When I see anything I want to do, I can do it. Yes.”

(P. Nyaamah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Through Paul's creativity and resourcefulness, he innovated *adinkra* stamp carving for the work to continue after men ceased stamping cloth. Paul continues to carve calabash *adinkra* stamps (fig. 3.9). But as he mentioned, his customers are now tourists.

Paul's approach to naming new *adinkra* symbols that he creates requires collaboration with other cloth makers, especially *ɔpanyin* Boakye. Paul explained how he draws upon images from his surroundings and interactions with others to develop new designs. Then he seeks contributions from others to give the design a name and meaning. Paul said, “When I carve [the new design], I take it to my father, *ɔpanyin* Boakye and say, ‘Papa, this is the new design I am making. Name it for me’” (P. Nyaamah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). Paul's actions to include his

*ɔpanyin* Boakye in the process of naming *adinkra* symbols illustrates the association between elders and symbolic wisdom, and also suggests the continued role of elders in the process of naming *adinkra* symbols.

Declining patronage of stamped *adinkra* cloth ended *adinkra* cloth production in Asokwa during the early twenty-first century. Cloth makers there did not experiment with screen-printing *adinkra* cloth. Nor did cloth makers – including carvers – become involved with tourism. Kusi attributed the collapse of stamping to the popularity of Ntonso’s screen-printed *adinkra* cloth, factory-printed *adinkra* cloth, and factory-made funeral textiles (K. Boadum, interview, December 8, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). Cloth makers in Asokwa were not interested in screen-printing and couldn’t sustain business for stamped *adinkra* cloth. Elder cloth makers retired. Younger cloth makers found new work unrelated to their prior careers, such as security and government positions. The end of *adinkra* cloth making in Asokwa reflected different historical attitudes towards *adinkra* cloth between towns: Asokwa was known for making royal *adinkra* cloth for Manhyia Palace, whereas Ntonso was associated with making “popular” *adinkra* cloth for wider society.

When I asked Kusi Boadum about the end of stamping in Asokwa, his response was about how the end of stamping *adinkra* marked the end to a way of family and social life in Asokwa. He shared stories from his youth when his nuclear and extended family all lived in the same home. Kusi and the other boys stayed home to play marbles and football around their neighborhood. His family members also stayed in Asokwa for their work to make cloth. In the early evening, they all gathered inside the house for Kusi’s uncle to tell them *asempa* stories before going to bed (K. Boadum, interview, December 8, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).

Today, Kusi lives in the same home. But only one other room belongs to his family. Since the elders in his family have passed away, he rents the other rooms to people who are not his

relatives, nor from Asokwa. Those who now live in his house only see one another on Sundays after church. His tenants go outside of Asokwa to work and socialize. The boys also go out to smoke, Kusi said, shaking his head in disapproval (K. Boadum, interview, December 8, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).

These lifestyle changes reflect broader social and economic shifts within Asokwa. Around the mid-twentieth century, Asokwa Old Town became physically secluded from the rest of Asokwa when cocoa companies built two rows of towering warehouse buildings around the perimeter of Asokwa Old Town. Today, homes in Asokwa Old Town are tucked away from one of the main junctions in Asokwa behind these warehouse buildings and an auto mechanics area. At this junction – just outside the entrance to Asokwa Old Town – a KFC restaurant opened in 2015 and the high-end Kumasi City Mall opened in 2017. The American restaurant chain and elite shopping mall are the first in Ghana outside of Accra. Their presence signals a shift in Asokwa’s identity as part of a cosmopolitan city seeking to appeal to the rising number of ex-pats, visitors from abroad, and Ghanaian elite in Kumasi and the Ashanti Region.

Recent changes to Asokwa’s urban landscape and social life echo wider transformations across Kumasi and urban Ghana. Amidst these changes, elders have sought to retain their historical cultural practices. Although cloth makers in Ntonso ceased stamping *adinkera* cloth, honoring the old technique remained important to their contemporary work and identity.<sup>14</sup> Calabash stamps and *bardia* dye were defining features of *adinkera* cloth and what made it distinctive from other textiles. Retired cloth maker *panyin* Branee Oduro said, “When they [cloth makers] discard the stamping, it will sound like a disgrace to their elders and forefathers. So they have to still maintain it [stamping]” (B.

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<sup>14</sup> Other historical art practices continue in Kumasi, including *kente* cloth weaving in Bonwire, pottery in Pankrono and wood carving in Ahwiaa. Each of these practices have certainly changed over time and faced similar challenges of how to adapt to the present day. Unlike *adinkera* cloth production, weaving, pottery, and wood carving have not encountered such a monumental shift in what defines their work.

Oduro, interview, May 13, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). *Ɔpanyin* Oduro's family sells screen-printed *adinkra* cloth today, and cited the Ntonso Visitor Centre as an example where cloth makers continue to stamp cloth.

The end of stamping also marked a powerful shift in how Ghanaians visualized, articulated, and remembered their cultural identity and heritage through *adinkra* cloth. Although many customers prefer to wear screen-printed *adinkra* cloths today, some customers expressed sadness and disappointment that cloth makers no longer stamp *adinkra* cloth to retain their culture's historical traditions. In comparison, other Akan cultural practices in Kumasi – such as *kente* cloth, pottery, and wood carving – have not experienced a comparable change in design or handmade production that has redefined the trade.

### Exchange of Work among Cloth Makers

The impact of screen-printing on cloth makers reached far beyond changing printing tools and the visual designs of *adinkra* cloth. The new technology transformed the roles of people involved to make *adinkra* cloth and how cloth makers, cloth dyers, suppliers, and educators collaborated with one another. A new network of individuals involved in *adinkra* cloth production emerged. The assembly of this new structure reconsidered the roles of gender, technology, and education in *adinkra* cloth making.

Prior to screen-printing *adinkra* cloth, exchange of work was central to how cloth makers worked with one another. Exchange of work remained vital to the adoption of a new technology. Cloth makers specialized in certain trades and knowledge associated with the cloth's making – such as printing, carving stamps, or constructing silk-screens. Cloth maker Kwame Daniel Sarpong Duah

said of his *adinkra* stamps, “The carving is not mine, though I can do it. It’s not my work. There should be a division of labor. If I’m doing the stamping, why don’t I allow a different person to do the carving? For this [stamp], I ordered a certain man to do this carving” (K. Duah, interview, May 3, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Like Kwame, other cloth makers followed similar approaches to their work.

This exchange of work suggests the value cloth makers associated with acquiring and mastering specialized skills. Community relations are an essential component to how Akans define a person (Gyekye 1978; Wiredu 1996). An important distinction with screen-printed *adinkra* cloth is that an exchange of work broadened communal involvement beyond the immediate towns of production to other sites in Kumasi. Screen-printing *adinkra* cloth reconfigured how people worked together, along with what knowledge and training each person brought to *adinkra* cloth making.

### *Women in Cloth Making*

Men continue to dominate *adinkra* cloth printing today. Few women have stamped or screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. Chapter Two discussed Sarah Boakyewaah’s exceptional work to informally learn how to make *adinkra* cloth in Ntonso. Sarah recounted narratives of women’s roles in cloth making.

“I don’t know why the women are not doing it. I only learned there was only one woman who wanted to do it, but they used to tease her and she stopped. They also say that if you are a woman and you are doing, by the way you are doing it, because the way you are doing it with the hand and the leg, your body will build and then you will turn, you will look like a man. That’s why they don’t want to do it. That’s what I heard,” Sarah said (S. Boakyewaah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Daniel Mato said some women cloth dyers during the mid-late twentieth century made and sold

*badia* dye to cloth makers who didn't prepare the dye themselves (Mato 1987: 208).<sup>15</sup> Cloth makers with whom I met did not identify any women cloth dyers who formerly made *badia* dye.

In Ntonso, cloth makers today recalled only one elder woman who stamped *adinkra* cloth. Despite the change in printing technology from stamps to silk-screens, most women in Ntonso continued to work primarily as cloth dyers. "For the *adinkra* printing, some women do it. I have seen some women, but there are not many," Sarah said of women in Ntonso. "It is one, one. And that one, it is only the screen one that they do...But they are being accompanied by some men. It is not them alone" (S. Boakyewaah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). In nearby Hemang, elders recalled that two women stamped *adinkra* cloth there during the 1950s (A. Adowaa, A. Afriyie, K. Okyere, interview, December 2, 2014, Hemang, Ghana).

Screen-printing eliminated other prior roles for women in *adinkra* cloth production. For example, women cloth dyers collaborated with *adinkra* cloth makers to re-print and re-dye old stamped *adinkra* cloth. Although re-dyeing old cloth remains common practice today, re-printing *adinkra* cloth has declined since introducing a colorfast printing dye. In addition, women traders sold supplies at markets in Kumasi needed to create stamping tools: cassava, cocoyam, calabashes, and *badia* tree bark. Women continued to sell these goods to other customers. The trade of *badia* tree bark in Kumasi's markets has declined in recent years. Screen-printing *adinkra* cloth altered the gender norms of these roles: no women made silk-screens or sold chemical printing pastes. Only men. Cloth makers with whom I spoke did not identify any cultural "taboos" related with women in these positions. Rather, these roles are associated with commercial graphic arts in Kumasi that men

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<sup>15</sup> In Mato's brief discussion on women's roles in *adinkra* cloth production, he said, "there were no stated prohibitions; religious or social that disallowed women making *adinkra* cloth" (Mato 1987: 208). Mato did not identify any women who made *adinkra* cloth, and cited Akan weaving and carving practices – both male dominated trades – as possible reasons for why *adinkra* cloth has also become a man's trade.



dominate.<sup>16</sup> The roles of women at the markets to sell hand-printed *adinkra* cloth also changed. Chapter Four explores further how women previously sold stamped *adinkra* cloth in markets during mid-late twentieth century, and the decline of such sales due to imported factory-made textiles.

### *Technology and Wisdom*

Cloth makers often commissioned commercial graphic artists to construct silk-screens with *adinkra* symbols, especially since many didn't own the equipment needed to build them. Unlike stamp carvers that previously sold pre-made stamps, silk-screen makers only built silk-screens with *adinkra* motifs upon order. For example, Andrew Adjei and his co-workers at Saint Anthony Art Centre in the Asafo area of Kumasi have made silk-screens with *adinkra* symbols since men first began screen-printing *adinkra* cloth – including their work with Nana Gyimah discussed earlier in this chapter (fig. 3.10). Cloth makers have often provided Andrew and other silk-screen makers with a hand-drawn or digital design to transfer onto a silk-screen. “Sometimes, they [cloth makers] have the designs themselves. Sometimes, we do it here for them,” Andrew said while screen-printing cloth with school logos at Saint Anthony’s Art Centre (A. Adjei, personal communication, May 5, 2015, Asafo, Ghana). In some instances, cloth makers showed calabash *adinkra* stamps, verbally described the designs of *adinkra* symbols, or allowed the silk-screen maker to decide.

The Saint Anthony Art Centre has also acted as a supplier to sell other printing tools and pastes directly to cloth makers who print *adinkra* cloth – including water-based acrylic printing pastes. “For Kumasi, we are the sole agents,” Andrew Adjei from the Saint Anthony Art Centre

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<sup>16</sup> Scholarship on sign-painting and commercial graphic arts in Ghana has not identified any “taboos” or restrictions that prevent women from participating (Cristofano 2014; Ross 2004).

claimed. “People used to come here and buy it [printing paste] and sell it to other people. It’s not easy to find. It’s only here” (A. Adjei, personal communication, May 5, 2015, Asafo, Ghana).

To make the silk-screen, Andrew designed *adinkra* symbols on computer software to transpose onto the silk-screen with a light box. In 2015, Andrew was using Corel Draw graphic design software to create patterns for silk-screens, logos, and posters. Andrew learned how to build silk-screens from his brother who also works at Saint Anthony’s Art Centre. Andrew began working at Saint Anthony’s Art Centre part-time while he was a student at Asanteman Senior High School (SHS) in Suame, a suburb of Kumasi. He worked each afternoon after closing from school. At Asanteman SHS, Andrew studied visual arts that included screen-printing (A. Adjei, personal communication, May 5, 2015, Asafo, Ghana). Like Andrew, other silk-screen makers first learned their trade through vocational visual arts programs in public schools. Following graduation, they developed their skills at commercial graphic art businesses. Training at both school classrooms and commercial businesses focused on technical skills needed for screen-printing.

However, to make silk-screens with *adinkra* symbols, there was an absence in teaching the symbolic meanings of *adinkra* symbols at both of these settings. Training did not include the cultural and philosophical wisdom related to *adinkra* symbols, presumably because many screen-printing teachers were not experts in this knowledge. Screen-printing was not limited to the Ashanti Region and Akan communities, but practiced throughout the country, especially in urban areas. Yet even in Kumasi, Akan students learning screen-printing often lacked basic knowledge of *adinkra* symbols. Many students did not learn about the symbolic meanings, proverbs, or philosophy associated with *adinkra* from elders in their families and community. This absence reflects a societal shift in the transmission of cultural wisdom and engages with the wider lack of “*adinkra* literacy” in contemporary Ghana. Cloth makers, elders, cloth sellers, customers, and others with whom I spoke commented on how Akan youth today are less fluent in the meanings of *adinkra* symbols than prior

generations. Many silk-screen makers want “quick money,” which they could earn without learning the meanings of *adinkera* symbols.

Consequently, silk-screens makers who design *adinkera* symbols today are not experts in the symbolic and philosophical meanings as stamp carvers were before. Lack of knowledge in symbolic wisdom would have been problematic for the careers and reputations of stamp carvers. But alongside the technological shifts in *adinkera* cloth making, the appropriate use of *adinkera* within Akan society was likewise in flux. As the social uses for men and women to wear *adinkera* cloth widened, the historical attitudes towards using *adinkera* symbols also became less rigid – a key advantage for silk-screen makers.

Many silk-screen makers have not had prior training in making *adinkera* cloth. Yet many introduced new designs in the silk-screens they constructed for *adinkera* cloth makers. They rarely gave names or proverbial meanings to their graphic designs, as *adinkera* cloth makers and stamp carvers previously ascribed to *adinkera* symbols. If given a name or meaning, there are large gaps in how the silk-screen maker shares those new names for the meaning to spread and become common knowledge. Some cloth makers, sellers, and customers called the new designs “*adinkera*” from their context and placement alongside well-known *adinkera* symbols. These new designs have pushed the limit of what constitutes *adinkera* symbols. At the same time, the designs have fulfilled customer interests for new fashions and separated the maker’s visual creativity to distinguish their work from competition.

### *Education and Training*

Screen-printing broadened how cloth makers learned techniques to print *adinkera* cloth. Stamped *adinkera* cloth required training with a skilled cloth maker to learn stamp carving and

printing, as well as how to prepare *badia* dye. Cloth makers didn't often complete high levels of education at public schools or universities. Some public schools taught screen-printing, but not *adinkera* stamping or carving.<sup>17</sup> Carver Paul Nyaamah said, "When you go to [secondary school], they do that [screen] printing. No carving. They will want to carve it, but they don't have any idea. That's why I want to learn writing, so when they want a teacher, they will come here and give me that chance" (P. Nyaamah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). *Adinkera* was and remains largely absent from curriculum at public schools; if included, students learn only basic knowledge of *adinkera* symbols. Cloth makers usually studied *adinkera* stamping with their families, often learning from their father or uncle.

Screen-printing *adinkera* cloth forged new intersections with non-family members, especially instructors at public schools. When cloth makers first began screen-printing, vocational visual arts programs at public junior secondary schools, senior high schools, technical schools, and universities in Kumasi were already teaching screen-printing within graphic design and textiles coursework. Historically, public schools in Ghana followed different, often opposing, approaches to teach visual arts than family-based training. Public schools were associated with nationalist agendas to "modernize" the country and train students in European arts rather than the arts of Ghana.<sup>18</sup>

However, including screen-printing in coursework at public schools was critical during the early use of screen-printing in Ntonso. For example, cloth maker Christopher Boakye introduced screen-printing to his family's *adinkera* cloth business after learning it at his senior high school (C. Boakye, interview, July 28, 2013, Ntonso, Ghana). Christopher then taught his younger and older family members how to screen-print cloth. Like Christopher, other cloth makers who stamped *adinkera* cloth began screen-printing after learning it at school. The opportunity to learn screen-

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<sup>17</sup> For more on the roles of public education in Ntonso, see Ohene-Konadu 1994.

<sup>18</sup> See anthropologist Cati Coe's work on the relationship between Ghana's public schools and national culture (Coe 2000, 2005).

printing from public schools was particularly important since some cloth makers who first screen-printed *adinkera* cloth practiced “closed door” work that restricted access.

As screen-printing became a common way to print *adinkera* cloth, youth in Ntonso returned to learning screen-printing within their families as they previously learned stamping. The transition from printing with *badia* dye to a colorfast printing paste changed how the youth actually learned to print *adinkera* cloth. For instance, Gabriel Boakye taught his son Gabi stamping on black cloth that concealed mistakes and could also be re-dyed black to erase the *badia* dye and stamp again. Re-dyeing the same practice cloth was cost effective. It allowed the cloth maker to freely stamp multiple times without having to exercise caution when testing advanced skills or purchase additional cloths to practice. For Sarah Boakyewaah, her experiences to learn screen-printing from David Boamah involved more observation.

“For the printing with the stamps, it is easy for me,” Sarah said laughing. “I can do it. For the screens, I haven’t done it. He [David] has showed it to me, but I haven’t done it on my own. He was doing it and I was standing there. I didn’t do it on my own. For the screen, if care is not taken, you can destroy everything...The screens, if you make a mistake, you can’t shift it to the other. But the stamping, if you did it and it doesn’t appear nice, you can dip it [cloth] in the ink and stamp it again. But the screen one, you can’t do it that way. So I didn’t try my hand on it. It was only the stamps” (S. Boakyewaah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Colorfast screen-printing paste was an advantage to customers purchasing *adinkera* cloth, but the paste restricted how students practiced due to the cost of cloth.

Since other families stopped stamping *adinkera* cloth for customer orders and general sales, cloth makers no longer regularly prepared the *badia* dye necessary to teach the stamping technique. Consequently, few youth in Ntonso learn how to stamp *adinkera* cloth today. The Boakye family continues stamping *adinkera* cloth, yet some of the younger boys who screen-print *adinkera* cloth don’t know the stamping techniques. For example, Christopher’s nephew Richmond “Junior” Opoku only screen-prints *adinkera* cloth (fig. 3.11). Junior doesn’t know how to stamp *adinkera* cloth, nor does he want to learn. Junior isn’t interested in stamping because he saw firsthand how stamping is harder

work. When he was a young boy, he watched his uncles stamp cloth and carve stamps. He pointed out how his relative carver Paul Nyaamah injured himself many times from using sharp knives to carve stamps. Unlike stamp carving that put the carver at risk for injury, Junior found the screen-printing technique to be easy and free of harm (R. Opoku, personal communication, May 11, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Although Junior and other young printers are not interested in stamping, some older cloth makers hope to redesign future *adinkra* printing technologies.

### The Future of Alternative Printing Dyes

“Once you are a designer, you must always be creative. You have to create. It depends on the natural things around us. As for me, I get most of my designs from trees, leaves, and other things around us. Maybe, at the moment, look at this tree,” Kwame said from outside his cloth shop.

“Come. Have you seen the tree?”

He pointed to the tall shade tree on the opposite side of Ntonso’s main road.

“Look at the stem. Have you seen there’s a certain dot on the stem? And after that, you see there are certain lines that make the stem very beautiful. I can study the tree, especially the stem, and collect these designs – the dot ones and the horizontal lines – so I can use it to create a [new *adinkra*] design.”

(K. Duah, interview, May 3, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

Kwame Sarpong Duah is a cloth maker, farmer, and herbalist. His approach to creating *adinkra* motifs through close study of his natural surroundings also informed his research on printing dyes (fig. 3.12). Popularity of screen-printed *adinkra* cloth among consumers prompted Kwame to

research alternative natural dyes. Kwame looked to his farm – specifically plantain and banana – as potential sources for natural dyes. He noticed that the plantain and banana stems contained a liquid sap. Kwame collected the sap into a bowl and dipped a small scrap piece of white cloth into the liquid. The sap stained the cloth brown. He washed the cloth and it remained a vibrant brown color. Unlike *badia* dye, Kwame realized that the plantain and banana sap was colorfast. Multiple varieties of bananas grow in Ghana and some contain more liquid sap than others; Kwame said only those with more sap are useful as a colorfast dye. Kwame’s remaining challenge: to successfully thicken the liquid and create a paste to stamp or screen-print *adinkera* symbols onto cloth (K. Duah, interview, April 30, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

Kwame’s research on natural pigments also grows out of his personal lifestyle and work as an herbalist. His diet excludes any foreign or chemical ingredients. He eats mostly fruits, vegetables, and grains from his farm. No one in his family had fallen sick all year – he pointed out – to show how his lifestyle keeps his family healthy. If needed, Kwame heals his family members with natural herbs rather than prescription or over-the-counter medications (K. Duah, interview, May 3, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Following his approach to health and design, Kwame wants to bring natural, locally available materials back to *adinkera* cloth making and rid production of imported chemicals. Kwame screen-prints *adinkera* cloth today, but only to fulfill customer demands.

Like Kwame, other cloth makers in Ntonso today are not satisfied with available screen-printing pastes. Not all cloth makers follow Kwame’s natural lifestyle. But some share his desire for an alternative to imported printing pastes. Cloth makers cited printing pastes among their biggest challenges today. For example, cloth maker Emmanuel Konadu discussed earlier in this chapter also wants to return to printing with local materials – in part because printing pastes are more expensive and imported (E. Konadu, interview, May 13, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

Currently, three shops in Ntonso sell screen-printing paste, which are all imported from China and Nigeria; screen-printing pastes in Nigeria likely come from China. One Ghanaian trader from Kumasi supplies the imported printing pastes to these shops (K. Duah, interview, May 13, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Labels with company names, production sites, ingredients lists, and chemical components are noticeably absent from the plastic tubs filled with printing pastes. Cloth makers have not yet identified what ingredients are in the paste. They claim it's different from acrylic pastes. Cloth makers said they need this information to determine how they can improve the paste's texture, shine, and durability.

Screen-printing pastes now available in Ntonso and greater Kumasi are made with different ingredients than previously imported European acrylic pastes. Printing pastes are imported white and not ready to use in its packaged form. Most cloth makers screen-print with black paste, so the sellers must mix the paste to create the black color. Emmanuel added that proper mixing is necessary for the paste to shine on the cloth – a highly desired Akan aesthetic (E. Konadu, interview, May 13, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Mixing the paste requires skilled work, but cloth makers claimed that not all who sell and use the paste know how to mix it well.

Cloth makers rely entirely imported printing pastes. Emmanuel said cloth makers made a mistake when they began screen-printing *adinkra* cloth and hastily accepted imported pastes without seeking supplies available within Ghana or knowing the source of their materials (E. Konadu, interview, May 13, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). He advocated for using local materials. Emmanuel believes that cloth makers must improve *badia* dye to become colorfast or develop another locally made printing paste. Otherwise, Emmanuel said, cloth makers may face an abrupt threat to their industry (E. Konadu, interview, May 13, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

Cloth makers must prepare for changing circumstances, Emmanuel warned, in the event that imported screen-printing pastes change or are no longer accessible. Some translations of the *adinkra*



symbol *nhwium*, “crossings,” encourage planning. Adolph Agbo said of the symbol’s meaning: “*Nhwimu* refers to the act of always having ready at hand what is necessary for the successful performance of one’s work” (Agbo 2011: 51). Despite this symbol’s attention to planning ahead, Emmanuel’s concerns reflect a wider challenge among cloth makers who work with immediate or short-term goals rather than long-term business plans.

Cloth makers are not alone in their pursuit for alternative printing dyes. At Ghanaian universities, professors also recently researched dyes made with natural materials in Ghana that may remedy current problems with chemical printing pastes. Additionally, two different research teams developed printing dyes made from banana sap independent from Kwame’s work (Asmah, Frimpong, and Okpattah 2015; Boateng and Dzomeku 2013).<sup>19</sup> At Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Professor Asmah – whose prior work discussed earlier in this chapter contributed to the start of screen-printing *adinkera* cloth – collaborated with his colleagues at KNUST Charles Frimpong and Vincentia Okpattah to create two resist-dyes using cassava powdered starch: *kanto* for screen-printing and *asoo* for cloth dyeing (Asmah, Frimpong, and Okpattah 2015).

What does this new research mean for the future of *adinkera* cloth production? Since the researchers only published their results in 2015, it is too soon to know how these specific developments may impact local production of *adinkera* cloth and other textiles. However, a disconnect remains between cloth makers and university researchers despite their shared interest in alternative printing dyes. Although faculty members often aim to support local industries through their research, cloth makers are sometimes unaware of their common goals or reluctant to

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<sup>19</sup> According to Stella Acquah and K.A. Oduro, “Over forty plant species in Ghana are reported as primary sources of natural dyes. Fourteen of these are tree species with tremendous potential in the textile industry. In addition, ten other tree species, including the two currently used by the dyers at Ntonso, have secondary uses as dyes for textiles” (Acquah and Oduro 2012: 30; see also Jansen and Cardon 2005). These extensive resources in Ghana illustrate the potential of future work to develop alternative printing dyes mad with natural, locally available materials. In Nigeria, O.O. Braide and S.A. Adetoro developed a cassava flour dye to make *adire eleko* cloth (Braide and Adetoro 2013).

collaborate with universities. One of my research assistants Paul Nasaa – who is affiliated with the Centre for Cultural and African Studies (CeCAST), a major research institute at KNUST – joined some meetings I held with cloth makers. Paul encouraged cloth makers to visit the campus. He discussed how the university can support their work and assured them of the professors’ positive intentions to support their work.

“I’m afraid of our people here,” one cloth maker said in response. “If you do your research and you go to them [university or company] and didn’t take care, they will take it. But you, the one, the person who is doing the research, you have to know something before you go to them. If they are trying to bring you second hand, you will see” (Interview, May 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).<sup>20</sup> Their fears revealed wider tensions in the relationships between “craftsmen” and university-trained researchers and faculty. Some cloth makers also cited the spread of *adinkra* symbols into European and Asian factory-printed textiles to demonstrate their lack of trust to share information. A cloth maker added, “If you have an idea, but you don’t have a certificate [degree], they don’t listen to you” (Interview, May 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).<sup>21</sup> Perspectives from cloth makers suggested how their educational background and professional status was an obstacle for them to collaborate with researchers and develop new innovations for making *adinkra* cloth. The continuation or resolve of these issues may shape the future direction of research on printing dyes and other aspects of *adinkra* cloth production.

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<sup>20</sup> Name removed for privacy.

<sup>21</sup> Name removed for privacy.

### III. “The Creative Chief”: Nana Baffour Gyimah

During the opening procession of the *Akwasiadae* celebration at Manhyia Palace in December 2014, a man entered wearing an *adinkra* cloth with oversized symbols screen-printed in yellow, blue, and white (fig. 3.13). Another man seated in the crowd was dressed in a white cloth screen-printed in a similar style with yellow and green *adinkra* symbols. As the celebration ended, a woman exited the palace dressed in a three-piece *kaba*-style cloth screen-printed with red, green, and yellow *adinkra* symbols (December 7, 2014, Manhyia, Ghana). These three outfits stood out as I immediately recognized that Nana Baffour Gyimah made the multi-colored cloths – an exceptional feat for *adinkra* cloths made with the same corpus of symbols. It was unusual for a cloth maker’s work to be recognizable in this way. But Nana’s *adinkra* cloths stood out in a crowd.

Celebratory occasions in Akan society call for white or brightly colored attire. *Akwasiadae* is a festival held at Manhyia Palace every six weeks on Sunday (*Kwasiada*) to honor the Asantehene. Dressing well in cloth (*ntoma*) communicates the status and identity of chiefs and other elite guests. At the *Akwasiadae* described above, many others came dressed in *adinkra* cloth, *kente* cloth, and *joromy* embroidery. But these three multi-colored *adinkra* cloths shared one thing in common: Nana Baffour Gyimah designed them. As examined earlier in this chapter, Nana was an instrumental figure to introduce screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. Each cloth maker innovates the *adinkra* cloths they print in their own ways, but Nana’s cloths were unparalleled in design and quality. No one else has created *adinkra* cloth comparable to Nana’s *adinkra* symbol variations, cloth design patterns, and color schemes.

## Chief and Designer

Like those in attendance at the *Akwasiidae*, Nana makes most of his *adinkra* cloths for chiefs and elite in Ghana who seek unusual, fashionable cloths. Many of Nana's customers live in the Ashanti Region, but he also receives orders from other areas of Ghana as well as from Ghanaians and foreigners abroad (N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2014, Tewobaabi, Ghana). Moreover, Nana is the chief of Tewobaabi, a small town that immediately borders Ntonso. Residents of Ntonso have not had a chief in over thirty years. Nana is the only *adinkra* cloth maker today who is also a chief. No former chiefs have been identified as *adinkra* cloth makers. Long-standing beliefs about the roles and identities of Akan chiefs have shaped Nana's reception among other cloth makers. His position as a chief ascribes him with prestige and power that separate him from other cloth makers.

Two days prior to this *Akwasiidae* held in December 2014, I visited Nana at his home. "Everyone is doing the same thing, but people like varieties," Nana said. He was dressed in a heavy blue screen-printed *adinkra* cloth in Ghana's flag colors (fig. 3.14; N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2014, Tewobaabi, Ghana). Recently, Nana introduced multi-colored screen-printed *adinkra* cloth because he noticed that bright colors attracted people. Some cloth makers used red and brown printing pastes on mourning cloths. But Nana is the only cloth maker who has layered different colors – including blue, green, yellow, and red – within a single silk-screen design, such as those that guests wore to the *Akwasiidae* described above.

Developing new *adinkra* symbols and cloth designs is central to Nana's work process. He consistently dedicates time to creating new designs, with a goal to add at least one new "style" each year – a new *adinkra* symbol, cloth design, or printing technique. "Sometimes when I get the dream," Nana said, "then I wake up, I take the paper and pen and then I draw it [design]" (N. Gyimah,

interview, December 5, 2014, Tewobaabi, Ghana).<sup>22</sup> Philosopher Kwame Gyekye states, Akans “believe that in a dream it is the person’s *sunsum* [spirit] that is the ‘actor.’ In sleep the *sunsum* is said to be released from the fetters of the body. It, as it were, fashions for itself a new world of forms with the materials of its waking experience. Thus, although the person is deeply asleep, his body (*honam*) lying in bed, yet he may ‘see’ himself standing on the top of a mountain or driving a car or fighting with someone. The actor in any of these actions is thought to be the *sunsum*, which can leave the body and return to it” (Gyekye 1978: 282). Like his dreams, Nana looked to his imagination to create new *adinkra* symbols. “I can just sit here and think about new designs I want to make,” Nana said, pointing his hand up to his head (N. Gyimah, personal communication, May 2, 2015, Tewobaabi, Ghana). He was sitting in the shade of a tree inside the entrance gate to his house, waiting for customers to come.

Nana was nicely dressed that afternoon in a hand-woven *kente* cloth and matching *abenemaa* sandals (fig. 3.15). “I don’t know who will come today...but I’m a designer,” Nana said (N. Gyimah, personal communication, May 2, 2015, Tewobaabi, Ghana). The Introduction summarized how cloth makers view their work differently, as not all cloth makers identify themselves as a designer or artist. As a chief and designer, dressing well was essential to how Nana constructed his identity and presented himself to others. For example, Nana made some *adinkra* cloth designs that he kept only for himself. Some customers requested orders for these designs, including a yellow *adinkra* cloth screen-printed with two *adinkra* symbols in a checkerboard pattern. But Nana will not make this *adinkra* cloth for anyone else. He wants the cloth design to remain associated with his personal style (N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2014, Tewobaabi, Ghana).

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<sup>22</sup> Other cloth makers in Ntonso also said that they dream about new designs. Paul Nyaamah said, “every night I saw the design in my dreams” (P. Nyaamah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). *Ɔpanyin* Nana Kwabena Nkodwa Sowafohene also said he had dreams of one of his teacher, cloth maker *ɔpanyin* Kweku Nsia, who gave him designs and philosophy about *adinkra* symbols in his dreams (N. Sowafohene, interview, May 8, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

In the 1970s, Nana gave two stamped *adinkra* cloths as a gift to Asantehene Otumfuo Opoku Ware II, who ruled from 1970 to 1999. The Asantehene dressed in one of Nana's cloths and gave the other cloth to his successor, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II. When Otumfuo Osei Tutu II received Nana's *adinkra* cloth, he asked his finance secretary to find out who made the cloth. The secretary contacted Nana and invited him to make more *adinkra* cloths for the new Asante king. When Nana began making *adinkra* cloth for the Asantehene, his status rose and his customers changed to high-ranking chiefs and elite (N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2014, Tewobaabi, Ghana). Nana has screen-printed several *adinkra* cloths for Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the current Asantehene (N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2014, Tewobaabi, Ghana). Some of these *adinkra* cloths that Nana made are now on display at the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi (fig. 3.16).

### Neatness of Work and Space

To create *adinkra* cloth for chiefs, elite, and the Asantehene, Nana has given utmost attention to detail for each cloth to be impeccable. Nana began learning these skills during his youth. When he was a young boy, his father taught him *adinkra* cloth making and *kente* cloth weaving. Nana learned how to carve *adinkra* stamps, but commissioned a carver to make his *adinkra* stamps to focus on printing.

After Nana started his own business, he opened a small outdoor shop near the main road in Tewobaabi. As the business grew, Nana hired more men to print, weave, and sew cloth. Nana became frustrated when other cloth makers started to “copy” and “imitate” his *adinkra* designs without consulting him. This prompted him to close his outdoor shop and move his business inside his gated house (N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2014, Tewobaabi, Ghana). Nana previously

printed his company's logo on his *adinkra* cloths, a rare addition as most cloth makers did not "sign" their *adinkra* cloths (Boateng 2011: 105). I have not encountered any historical or contemporary *adinkra* cloths signed with the maker's name; marking authorship is a complicated issue as multiple cloth makers often contribute to the making of a single cloth.

Today, Nana lives and works in a spacious two-storied home that towers over all of the single-storied compound-style houses and other buildings nearby. His property is surrounded by a high concrete wall and decorative metal gate – a rare privacy and security feature in Tewobaabi, Ntonso, and Asokwa. Inside, Nana's property is immaculate. Freshly painted bright white, his house is free of red dust that usually forms a thin layer on exterior surfaces. Nana's gardener keeps plants well manicured. Two small buildings are for making *adinkra* cloth: one is the printing area with a work table and the other includes a light box and equipment to construct silk-screens – expensive tools many cloth makers can't afford. Creating his own silk-screens allows Nana to keep his *adinkra* designs to himself, rather than ordering from silk-screen makers at commercial graphic art businesses. A cement patio provides a clean surface to dry *adinkra* cloths on the ground without soiling them with red dirt.

Nana's shop – which he called his "office" – displays *adinkra* cloths available for sale. In the early 1990s, Nana also sold Islamic amulets and cloths inscribed with Islamic calligraphy at his shop (Mato 1994). When I visited, Nana was not selling Islamic cloths, but sold *adinkra* cloth, *kente* cloth and *joromy* embroidered cloth. Most of these are men's cloths, with a smaller selection of women's cloths. In 2015, Nana was experimenting with creating new *kente* designs from *adinkra* symbols (N. Gyimah, interview, March 25, 2015, Tewobaabi, Ghana). Nana also displays in his "office" framed portraits, certificates, and newspaper clippings that praise his creativity and travel abroad: one certificate in recognition of his participation in the Aids to Artisans training program held in New

York; another certificate for the 2014 Ghana Tourism Authority – Ashanti Region “Tourism Retail Outlet of the Year” Award.

The appearance of Nana’s house – like Nana’s attention to his dress – also contributes to how Nana projects his identity and work to customers and visitors. Anthropologist Sjaak van der Geest argues that a house is metonym of an Akan person (van der Geest 1998). Builder *ɔpanyin* Kwabena Dadeɛ said, “a building is like a human being. If you dress it well, it will look nice” (*ɔpanyin* K. Dadeɛ as quoted in van der Geest 1998: 354). The upkeep and neatness of Nana’s house reflects not only the care towards his appearance, but also his meticulous work process and precision to create *adinkera* cloth.

Nana no longer prints *adinkera* cloth, but continues to create new *adinkera* designs on his computer. His cloth production today is a collaborative effort with others who he hires to make *adinkera* cloth, *kente* cloth, *nvomu* stitching, and *joromy* embroidery. For *adinkera* cloth, Nana taught his nephew, Kwame Douglas Brobbey. In 2015, Kwame was screen-printing most of Nana’s *adinkera* cloths with assistance from his sister Constance Brobbey. Each time I visited Nana, he instructed me to observe Kwame so I could learn how to make the cloth. As discussed earlier in this chapter, women’s roles in *adinkera* cloth production have been limited. Constance helped Kwame prepare the printing pastes and helped to move the cloth after completing each row. When I observed, she did not actually screen-print any cloths. Yet Constance was the only woman I met during my research who assisted with printing *adinkera* cloth today.

Working inside Nana’s property differentiated Kwame’s work process from most other cloth makers who work in outdoor, visible spaces where social life shaped production. At Nana’s home, the printing room was quiet. Secluded from the bustling street and neighborhood activity, conversation and social interactions were minimal. Moreover, many cloth makers hastily screen-printed the cloth – the edges of the designs sometimes printed uneven, overlapped, or blurred.



Kwame worked differently. Slowly. Taking his time, Kwame carefully lined up and measured the silk-screen over the cloth with thin wood sticks. He checked the silk-screen's alignment multiple times before each printing (fig. 3.17). Constance placed newspaper clippings – or sometimes her hands – under the silk-screen to prevent excess paste from adhering to the cloth or smudging the printed design (fig. 3.18). Nicholas, one of Nana's tailors, occasionally assisted to hand-paint with a small stick any tiny gaps not fully or evenly printed with the paste (fig. 3.19). Precision met Nana's – and his customers – expectations for neatly printed *adinkra* cloth.

### Complexities of Visual Designs and Symbolic Knowledge

Attention to detail, change, and innovation has defined Nana's work. "They call me the 'creative chief,'" Nana said (N. Gyimah, interview, March 25, 2015, Tewobaabi, Ghana). Nana named each new *adinkra* design he created and gave them meanings. For example, Nana named one design "love hooks," meaning "love can cut you like a web." Occasionally, he named an entire cloth, such as "*anomaa mmfa dua abufu*," meaning "the bird should not get angry with the tree" (N. Gyimah, interview, December 5, 2014, Tewobaabi, Ghana). Yet he only told the names to the first few customers; Nana relied on them to spread the design's name. This approach to disseminating the names of Nana's new designs raises questions about how the motifs fit within the existing corpus of *adinkra* symbols and work as a mode of communication if limited people know the motifs' name and meaning. Although Nana named his new *adinkra* symbols, his creative interests give more attention to visual components than verbal dimensions.

Nana's emphasis on visual creativity informed Kwame's design process. Nana provided Kwame with little instruction or context, not often sharing details about the customer or how they

will wear the cloth. He usually allowed Kwame to select *adinkera* symbols and colors unless the customer made specific requests. To select *adinkera* symbols, Kwame sifted through the hundreds of silk-screens loosely stacked around the printing room. He placed a few silk-screens on the work table to ensure that they matched in size, while also imagining how the shape of *adinkera* symbols and background designs would look printed together on cloth.

When I observed Kwame work, I asked why he selected certain *adinkera* symbols to print together. “It will make the cloth beautiful,” Kwame often replied. It did. But I also wondered about what messages the cloth communicated. I then asked Kwame about the names and meanings of Nana’s *adinkera* symbols on the cloth he was printing. “You’ll have to ask Nana,” Kwame replied. An exceptional visual designer, Kwame didn’t often know the names and meanings of Nana’s designs that he printed. I also realized that Kwame usually referred to *adinkera* symbols as “designs” – a subtle, but noteworthy distinction reflecting his focus on visual shapes rather than proverbial meanings.

Many of Nana’s customers are chiefs, commonly known as the “custodians of culture.” Akans expect chiefs to attend public events in attire that conveys proper use of cloth and excellence in proverbial wisdom. Nana and Kwame’s emphasis on creating *adinkera* cloth with complex visual designs – and their popularity among chiefs in the Ashanti Region today – suggests a new mode of communicating and expressing one’s identity through *adinkera* cloth.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined how *adinkera* cloth makers have innovated printing technologies over time. Change did not only happen from the switch to a different technology. Modifications that cloth makers made to their tools and techniques demonstrate that cloth making was never static or

fixed, but always evolving. Additionally, this chapter presented the first major study on the introduction of screen-printing *adinkera* cloth, the result of a collaborative effort between several cloth makers.

Screen-printing changed how cloth makers design *adinkera* cloth and give meaning to individual *adinkera* symbols, uncovering an important relationship between technology and knowledge production. Working with silk-screens rather than stamps has created a new, expanding lexicon of *adinkera* designs, and provided cloth makers with space to vary symbols in small and large scale. But unlike historical *adinkera* symbols, many of the new *adinkera* designs don't carry names or meanings; if new designs are named, the names are not yet common knowledge. A lingering issue with screen-printing is how silk-screen makers are untrained in the meanings of *adinkera* symbols, a strong contrast to stamp carvers who were experts in this knowledge.

Accounts from Nana Baffour Gyimah and other cloth makers reveal how technological changes brought cloth makers in greater dialogue with broader visual culture in Kumasi, including the arts department at KNUST, the Centre for National Culture, and commercial artists working in sign painting and t-shirt printing. The relationship between cloth makers, university-trained artists and faculty, and graphic artists was unprecedented. Chapter Five explores other interactions between *adinkera* and the cultural centre as well as other fine artists.

Moreover, this chapter suggested that screen-printed *adinkera* cloth, made with a colorfast dye, responded to the popularity of washable factory-printed textiles designed with *adinkera* motifs. The next chapter examines the global circulation of *adinkera* motifs in cloth – from the historical development of imported factory-printed textile designs with *adinkera* motifs in the late nineteenth century to the contemporary role of imported cloth on handmade *adinkera* cloth production.

## Chapter Three Images



Fig. 3.1. Carver unrecorded. *Osrane ne osom* (“star and moon”) stamp. Calabash, raffia palm, and cloth. Collection of Kusi Boadum. December 16, 2014. Asokwa, Ghana.



Fig. 3.2. Carver unrecorded. *Nkotimsefo mpua* (“hairstyle of court attendants”) stamp. Calabash. Collection of Kusi Boadum. December 16, 2014. Asokwa, Ghana.



Fig. 3.3. *Badia* tree bark. Boakye Family. November 15, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 3.4. Preparing *badia* dye on fire inside the circular center courtyard of the Boakye family home. November 15, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 3.5. Preparing *badia* dye on fire inside the circular center courtyard of the Boakye family home (detail of *badia* dye). November 15, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 3.6. Work table for stamping *adinkra* cloth at the Boakye family's home. July 29, 2013. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 3.7. Gabriel Boakye screen-printing *adinkra* cloth. December 12, 2014. Ntonso Ghana.



Fig. 3.8. Paul Nyaamah. Carving *dwennimen* (“ram’s horn”) symbol with calabash. Ntonso Visitor Centre. November 22, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 3.9. Paul Nyaamah. Cutting raffia to create small stick holder for calabash stamp. Ntonso Visitor Centre. November 22, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 3.10. Andrew Adjei screen-printing *adinkra* cloths for Nana Baffour Gyimah. May 2, 2015. Tewobaabi, Ghana.





Fig. 3.11. Richmond 'Junior' Boakye screen-printing *adinkra* cloth with help from his nephews and visitor to move the cloth across the table after printing each row. May 11, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 3.12. Kwame Sarpong Duah sitting outside his cloth shop. May 3, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 3.13. Man wearing screen-printed *adinkra* cloth made by Nana Baffour Gyimah. *Akwasiadae* festival at Manhyia Palace. December 7, 2014. Manhyia, Ghana.



Fig. 3.14. Nana Baffour Gyimah wearing a screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. Photograph taken in his cloth shop (also called his “office”) at his home. Screen-printed *adinkra* cloths on display in background, and framed portrait of him wearing *kente* cloth on the right. December 5, 2014. Tewobaabi, Ghana.



Fig. 3.15. Nana Baffour Gyimah wearing a *kente* cloth. Standing in front of screen-printed *adinkra* cloths at his home. Andrew Adjei screen-printed the *adinkra* cloths. May 2, 2015. Tewobaabi, Ghana.



Fig. 3.16. Nana Baffour Gyimah. Screen-printed *adinkra* cloth for the Asantehene. Manhyia Palace Museum. December 16, 2014. Manhyia, Ghana. Photograph by author with permission from the museum.



Fig. 3.17. Kwame Brobbey measuring screen-printing with a stick. Screen-printing the *adinkra* symbol *obi nka obi* (“bite not one another”) on a factory-print cloth. March 25, 2015. Tewobaabi, Ghana.



Fig. 3.18. Constance Brobbey assisting her brother, Kwame Brobbey, to screen-print *adinkra* cloth. April 15, 2015. Tewobaabi, Ghana.



Fig. 3.19. Nicolas painting with a small stick to fill in “gaps” after screen-printing. May 2, 2015. Tewobaabi, Ghana.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Refashioning *Adinkra*: Global Exchanges through Cloth

#### Introduction

Cream-colored satin embroideries. Thin cottons in paisleys and floral. Muted checkered designs. Stashed within this box of small folded cloths made in the UK, one design stood out. Coarsely drawn black lines on red cloth, some thick and others thin, depicted various patterns created with wooden combs on hand-printed *adinkra* cloth (fig. 4.1). The crosshatched lines of the motif *kete pa*, meaning “good bed.” Repeating diamond-shaped lines evoked a turtle’s shell in the *adinkra* motif called *anibere enso egya*. Popular *adinkra* motifs – *akoma* (“heart”), *funtunfunefu denkyemfunefu* (“two crocodiles”), and a spiral variation of the bull’s-eye shaped *adinkrahene* (“king of *adinkra*”) – appeared in varying sizes. Oddly enough, the textile resembled an *adinkra* cloth. But one addition was peculiar: portraits of four women. Was this a commemorative cloth? Or an *adinkra* cloth? Or both? And how did this cloth design relate to the other textiles stored alongside it that made no connection to Akan or other West African aesthetics?

The cloth’s red and black colors indicate the cloth’s making for Akan mourning attire. Added portraits suggest its possible commission as a commemorative cloth.<sup>1</sup> However, an Akan cloth

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<sup>1</sup> Art historian John Picton said that the earliest commemorative fancy print cloth design he identified was from the United Africa Company in 1929; the cloth pattern, titled “Mammy,” depicts a woman in a style similar to this cloth; Picton suggests she was a market trader (Picton 1995: 29). This textile design is held at Newton Bank Printworks, now

maker did not print this textile design. Nor was this cloth made in Ghana. A British designer at the Calico Printers Association (CPA), one of the largest textile firms in England, created the cloth design for export to Africa. In 1928, CPA registered this cloth design in the UK Design Registry, an extraordinary record of all patterned textiles registered for domestic and export markets since the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The Design Registry includes fabric samples and contact information about the manufacturer or merchant who registered the design for copyright. Absent were details on the cloth's design influence, production, or export markets.

This textile pattern illuminates creative ways that British designers reimagined Akan aesthetics. This circulation and transformation of *adinkra* reflects changing relationships between Akan society, the nation of Ghana, and other encounters with cultures from across the world. Akans have given imported factory-printed cloth cultural value since the trade developed in the mid to late-nineteenth century. For imported cloth to carry such cultural importance questions how manufacturers outside of Africa created textile designs that have resonated so deeply within Ghanaian life.

Ghanaians often use the word “sweet” to describe the quality of things that are good or attractive. The common Twi expression “*eye de*” loosely translates to “it is good” or “it is sweet.” An Akan proverb, “*Borɔ fere a eye de na abaa da ase,*” meaning “It’s a sweet pawpaw tree under which lies a stick for plucking,” became the name for a wax-print cloth pattern in Ghana (Yankah 1995: 83). Folklore scholar Kwesi Yankah interprets the proverb’s meaning specific to how women wear this named wax-print cloth to communicate with a co-wife, particularly in situations of jealousy over their shared spouse: “it is my sweetness that has attracted the man’s attention” (Yankah 1995: 83). Akan speaker A.J. Owusu Ansah interprets the proverb’s meaning more broadly: “you can tell when

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A. Brunnschweiler & Co. (ABC Textiles) in Hyde England. For more on historical and contemporary commemorative wax-print textiles in Africa, see Faber 2010; Spencer 1982a.

<sup>2</sup> CPA registered this cloth for copyright in the UK on October 25, 1928 (registered design number 267033). For more on this Design Registry, see Greysmith 1983; Halls 2013; Halls and Martino 2018. For more on the role of CPA in the African textile trade, see Calico Printers Association 1949; Nielsen 1979; Sykas 2001.



someone or something is good, there are signs” (A.J. Ansah, as quoted in Borenstine 1999: 22).<sup>3</sup>

This chapter explores the proverb’s meaning in relation to how textile designers in the UK, Europe, and Asia, as well as cloth sellers and makers in Ghana, have innovated *adinkera* to make factory-printed textile designs more appealing to consumers in West Africa. In short, how does *adinkera* make cloth “sweet”?

With this chapter’s focus on global exchange, attention to factory-made cloth centers on imported textiles. Limited discussion of those manufactured in Ghana is not to suggest that Ghanaian factory-printed cloth is less important or valuable in any way. The next chapter presents examples of recent textile production in Ghana. In this chapter, the first two sections focus specifically on British companies to examine relationships between textile production and colonial relations, with emphasis on the roles of *adinkera* to negotiate colonial power and authority. Both firms discussed at length in this chapter – Paterson Zochonis and Logan Muckelt – had a strong, long-term trading presence in Africa. Surprisingly, little scholarship is available on either company.<sup>4</sup> In comparison, Dutch Vlisco has received the most significant attention (Arts 2011; Gerards and Sho 2012; Hemmings 2015; Korese 1976; Woets and Delhay 2015). A secondary goal of this chapter is to introduce new research that brings attention to lesser-known textile companies active in this trade.

Cloth (*ntoma*) holds distinct value in Akan society from other types of dress. Cloth sellers, cloth makers, and consumers in Ghana with whom I spoke made key distinctions in quality cloth: a

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<sup>3</sup> The meaning of Akan proverbs, like *adinkera* symbols, is fluid, changing, and often multiple from how each speaker applies them to different contexts. Ansah offers this translation of the proverb: “the pawpaw tree with the stick under it has the sweet fruit” (Ansah as quoted in Borenstine 1999: 22).

<sup>4</sup> There are no published texts specific to Logan Muckelt; For more on Paterson Zochonis’ work in textiles, see *Paterson Zochonis Plc: A Century of Enterprise*, 1984; Maiwada and Renne 2013.

The Paterson Zochonis examples discussed in this chapter draw upon records at the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) in Manchester, England; this includes registered textile designs, primarily from the 1960s. The museum’s holdings contain small fabric samples and an attached registration form that specifies the date of registering the design for copyright. No supplemental information about the designer or market is included. Handwritten notes prepared in 2011-2012 by Anne Mason and Margaret Hickson, former textile designers at Calico Printers Association, ABC Textiles, and Laventis, identify the cloth’s name, production method, and in some instances, important design elements.

high quality cloth must be named, durable, and made of cotton or silk. Quality fabrics retain its original brightness over time. Several consumers expressed their cloth's quality to me from how the cloth appeared new after multiple washings, adding details of how many times they had already washed the cloth. These characteristics of quality cloth intersect with proper ways of styling cloth and dressing in *adinkera* cloth. Today, quality cloth in Ghana includes those made within the country and imported from the UK, Europe, and Asia. Particular brand names carry added economic and cultural value. Dutch Vlisco, for instance, is the most prestigious brand of such factory-printed textiles.

European cloth trade in West Africa dates to around the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, Dutch textile producers began exporting factory-made textiles specifically designed for West African consumers. UK, Swiss, and French textile producers soon followed. Popularly known today as “African wax-prints,” this classification masks the complexity of their global connections.<sup>6</sup> These kinds of textiles have historical origins with Indonesian batik cloth. European firms first developed wax-prints for African markets after their imitation batiks were unsuccessful in Indonesian markets. Companies in Asia, especially ones in China, India, and Japan, later began production of such cloths for African markets in the twentieth century.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, production of “African wax-prints” expanded. During the 1930s, European textile firms began making “fancy-prints,” roller-printed textiles that are less costly and less prestigious than wax-prints. As a result, imported factory-printed cloth became more accessible to consumers in Africa. Fancy-prints are distinct from wax-prints in that roller printing adds designs to one side of cloth, whereas wax-print designs are printed onto both sides.

As African nations started to gain independence in the mid-twentieth century, textile

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<sup>5</sup> For more on historical cloth trade in West Africa, see Benjamin 2016; Kriger 2006; Menzel 1990; Nielsen 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Anthropologist Christopher Steiner terms these textiles “Euro-African” cloths (Steiner 1985).

manufacturers formed in Ghana and other parts of Africa to make factory-printed cloth and other textiles. In Ghana, textile production thrived until China began importing more factory-printed textiles in the late twentieth century. Since then, textile production in Ghana declined. Only three main Ghanaian textile companies operate today – Ghana Textile Printing (GTP), Printex, and Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL).<sup>7</sup> Textiles imported from Europe to Ghana also decreased, even though Ghanaian consumers attach higher cultural value to European or Ghanaian wax-prints.

Since the 1990s, China has transformed Ghana’s textile industry. Chinese textiles have seeped into the economic, social, and cultural fabric of Ghanaian life – from the work and lives of market sellers and traders to the cultural value of cloth. Chinese manufacturers are known today for producing lower cost counterparts that visually parallel already popular and prestigious European and Ghanaian factory-printed textiles, though they also make high quality cloth. Market traders often import these cloths to Ghana illegally from China, Togo, and Benin (Prag 2013: 107; Axelsson and Sylvanus 2010). China also imports to Ghana plain factory-made textiles, including some that are less expensive than ones made in Ghana or imported from Europe. In Ghana’s weak economy, the affordability of Chinese textiles led them to lead the industry. Ghanaians generally evaluate Chinese textiles as the lowest quality (Prag 2013: 106-107). Unlike many imported European textiles labeled as one hundred percent cotton, imported Chinese textiles are often made with a combination of cotton, nylon or other fabrics.

“African wax-prints” – still ubiquitous in West African life today – have garnered global appeal to mark African identity from patterns and bright colors that evoke ideas of “African-ness.” *Adinkra* symbols, for instance, were historically incorporated within wax-print patterns as European

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<sup>7</sup> In 2005, Ghanaian textile companies had declined since the 1970s from sixteen to four companies; of those remaining active, they have limited production and decreased staff by nearly ninety percent (Quartey and Abor 2011: 54-55). Two of the three Ghanaian textile companies are now affiliated with European and Asian management: GTP partners with Vlisco in the Netherlands; ATL is associated with ABC Textiles in the UK and the Cha Group in Asia. For more on textile manufacturing in Ghana, see: Asmah 2008; Axelsson 2012; Boateng 2007, 2008, 2011; Darku 2012; Gott 2010.

designers used *adinkra* motifs in new ways. *Adinkra* has not been the lead marker of African identity in wax-print designs, nor have other historical handmade textiles made in Africa dominated wax-print imagery. Wax-prints blend African cultural imagery with other European or Indonesian designs. Integrating *adinkra* in these textiles signals a change in the cultural identity of *adinkra* to represent all of Africa. As the role of *adinkra* in factory-printed textiles changed over time, so too did the role of other Akan textiles. For instance, British and Dutch textile manufacturers created factory-printed and machine-woven textiles for consumers in Africa that resembled the color palettes and patterns of hand-woven *kente* cloth.<sup>8</sup> As with *adinkra* cloth, historical restrictions of hand-woven *kente* cloth to Akan royalty similarly lessened as Akans welcomed non-royalty to wear handmade and factory-made *kente* cloth (Ross 1998: 54).

The impact of imported textiles on *adinkra* cloth is not limited to wax-print and fancy-print cloth. Plain factory-made textiles imported to Ghana (first from Europe and later from Asia) have transformed the making and use of hand-printed *adinkra* cloth. Interactions between *adinkra* and imported plain and patterned textiles grows out of a wider pre-colonial history in Akan society of “cultural borrowing” – a process that has involved modifying and incorporating visual and material elements from other cultures into existing Akan practices (Cole and Ross 1977; Garrard and Ross 1983; Schildkrout 1987). Before European plain factory-made cloths were imported to Ghana in early twentieth century, cloth makers printed *adinkra* with bark cloth and hand-woven cloth (Mato 1987: 154-158, 181-187). Cloth makers then integrated imported plain factory-made cloth that was more affordable than hand-woven cloth. Accessibility of imported cloth – in white and various colors – likely contributed to broadening the patronage of *adinkra* cloth, and perhaps also the expanding social uses of *adinkra* cloth (Mato 1987: 230).

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<sup>8</sup> Communications scholar Boatema Boateng notes a distinction between initial reception of factory-made textiles resembling *kente* and *adinkra* cloth. She said that Ghanaians first dressed in factory-printed textiles emulating *adinkra* at funerals, similar to how they wore hand-printed *adinkra* cloth; in comparison, Ghanaians first used factory-made *kente* for different contexts than the handmade cloth (Boateng 2011: 29).

To examine interactions between *adinkra* cloth and imported factory-printed textiles, this chapter presents three case studies, moving from historical to contemporary settings. The first section examines the earliest use of *adinkra* motifs in factory-printed textiles that I identified from the 1890s. This section traces the “life” of one particular textile design by the British firm Logan Muckelt and Company for over forty years, until the 1930s. The second section analyzes the role of *adinkra* in factory-printed textiles made in the 1960s, focusing on the British firm Paterson Zochonis. The last section addresses contemporary Kumasi through the lens of a woman cloth seller at Kejetia market and her connections to *adinkra* cloth, *kente* cloth, and imported Chinese textiles.

## I. The Life of a Nineteenth Century Factory-Printed Cloth

In 1891, prominent Gold Coast photographer Neils Walwin Holm took this portrait of a child and two men at his studio in Accra (fig. 4.2).<sup>9</sup> This photograph presents something unusual. The child stands wearing a cloth designed entirely with three *adinkra* motifs: *dwennimmen* (“ram’s horn”), *aban* (“house” or “castle”), and *nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn* (“link” or “chain”). When Holm snapped this photograph, *adinkra* cloth was mainly reserved for the Asantehene (the Asante king), Akan chiefs, and spokespersons to chiefs called *akeyame*. *Adinkra* cloth was not yet culturally accepted dress in Akan society for other adults, nor children. Why, then, is a young boy pictured here wearing a cloth with *adinkra* symbols? The child’s cloth does not emulate the stamping method with to print *adinkra* cloth with dark *badia* dye. In contrast, the motifs here appear in a light tone. This difference reveals that the cloth was not handmade, but machine-printed. Holm’s photograph presents the earliest recorded evidence that I have identified of a factory-printed cloth designed with *adinkra* symbols.

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<sup>9</sup> This photo album is now held in the Commonwealth and African Studies Archives and Special Collections at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University in England. D.J. Holt, esq. donated the photo album to the library in 1982.

Holm's portrait photograph confirms the use of *adinkra* motifs in factory-printed cloth twenty years earlier than when scholars first identified the motifs appearing in the early twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> By introducing *adinkra* motifs in factory-printed textiles in the 1890s, the European producer invited a much wider audience to wear cloth with *adinkra* symbols before Akans expanded the regulated uses of hand-printed *adinkra* cloth.

By the late nineteenth century, British textile firms were developing a specialized industry that followed Dutch success in the mid-nineteenth century to market imitation Indonesian batiks in Africa (Nielsen 1979). Factory-made textiles exported to Africa from the UK and Europe included machine-woven, wax-print, and fancy-print cloths specifically designed to appeal to West African consumers. Manchester and the surrounding region – a major industrial area in England known for textile manufacturing – grew as a hub for dozens of British textile firms active in the African textile trade.

Each year, Manchester-based textile designers released hundreds of new designs created specifically for consumers in Africa. Tracking down the exact cloth design from Holm's photograph among thousands of patterns posed a challenge. But after viewing hundreds of fabric samples destined for Africa, I came across a textile design from Logan Muckelt and Company in 1904 and 1905 (fig. 4.3). I immediately recognized the design from Holm's photograph. The patterns matched.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Picton dates the earliest use of *adinkra* symbols in factory-printed cloth to Broad Oak Printworks in 1910-11 (Picton 1995: 29). Christopher Steiner's research includes the only other historical example of *adinkra* symbols in a factory-printed cloth from the 1920s (Steiner 1985).

<sup>11</sup> This chapter uses the term "pattern books" to refer to the category of books that contain fabric samples; Textile manufacturers generally created three kinds of pattern books: engraving, impression, or fabric sample books. All of the fabric samples discussed here are from Logan Muckelt and Company's pattern books now held at the Manchester Central Library in England, which includes over one hundred books filled with small fabric swatches (my research surveyed twenty pattern books). This archive includes three main types of pattern books: "impression books" with paper prints of the fabric design, "engaged pattern books" with cloth samples of designs, and other pattern books with cloth samples that were not engaged designs. "Impression books" included paper or cloth printings of textile designs that served as test runs in preparation for printing the designs onto cloth. "Engaged designs" involved purchasing an exclusive right to use the cloth design for a specified time period, in which the design could not be sold to another

This textile design raises questions about historical exchanges between England and Africa and how these interactions shaped the design, use, and meaning of both handmade and factory-printed cloths with *adinkera* symbols. How did the British begin designing textiles with *adinkera* motifs? What was the reception of factory-printed textiles with *adinkera* in the Gold Coast and how did they become integrated within existing dress practices? And in what ways did designing factory-printed textiles with *adinkera* change the cultural use and value of hand-printed *adinkera* cloth among Akans and other Ghanaians? This section traces how this one particular textile design with *adinkera* motifs evolved until the mid-twentieth century. I suggest that this cloth design contributed to broadening the use of hand-printed *adinkera* cloth, while also offering historical evidence of how *adinkera* symbols became global markers of African identity.

### Redesigning *Adinkera* in England

In Akan society, the meanings and appropriate uses of *adinkera* during the nineteenth century were mainly associated with kings and chiefs. The surrounding political landscape at this time may have influenced Britain's production of factory-printed cloth with *adinkera* motifs. The late nineteenth century marked a turning point in Britain's political relations in the Gold Coast. Britain gained political control of the Gold Coast and sent Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I into exile to the Seychelles. The three *adinkera* motifs in Logan Muckelt's cloth design evoke meanings related to the Asante king. The designer arranged the symbols in rows, closely repeating each motif next to one another in two rows. Recontextualizing these symbols in a British factory-printed cloth complicates the symbols' culturally appropriate uses and verbal dimensions of what *adinkera* communicates.

In the Logan Muckelt cloth sample, a design on the far right depicts the *adinkera* symbol

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manufacturer (Sykas 2005). In comparison, fabric samples held at The National Archives of the UK are not pattern books, but loose fabric swatches the merchant or manufacturer deposited in the UK Design Registry.

*nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn* (“link” or “chain”) that represents two oval links that connect in the middle. The motif evokes a message of unity, as it references an Akan proverb, “*Yetoatoa mu se nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn, nkwa mu a yetoa mu, onuo mu a, yetoa mu, abusua mu nnte da,*” meaning “we are linked in both life and death. Those who share common blood relations never break apart” (Asmah 2009; Glover 1992). The form of this motif also closely resembles the shape of another *adinkra* symbol, *biribi wɔ soro* (“there is something in the heavens”), with two oval shapes that connect in the middle.

In the middle of the cloth pattern, the design visually expresses the shape of a ram’s horn from the *adinkra* symbol *dwennimmen* (“ram’s horn”) that speaks about the humility, strength, and wisdom of one’s character. The motif evokes an Akan proverb, “*odwennini ye asisi a efiri ne coma emfiri ne mmen,*” meaning “When a ram is brave, its courage comes from its heart and not from its horns,” (Rattray 1916: 91). Historically, Akans have associated *dwennimmen* with desired traits of a king’s leadership.

The third motif featured on the far left of Logan Muckelt’s design depicts two small designs that repeat in alternating columns to create a diamond pattern. The round lines of the smaller motif inside the diamond pattern resemble the shape of the *adinkra* symbol *tabon* (“paddle”). But the overall arrangement of repeating motifs here corresponds to how cloth makers have stamped *aban* (“house” or “castle”) on cloth in a diamond pattern. *Aban* represents the two-storied house that Asantehene Osei Bonsu I (1802-23) built in the early nineteenth century. This motif symbolizes the king’s rule – his authority, wealth, and power. Historically, only the Asantehene dressed in cloth stamped with *aban* (Rattray 1927: 265). Akans viewed it as a challenge to the king if anyone else came to Manhyia Palace dressed in cloth with *aban* or other symbols restricted to the king.

John Muckelt founded the company Logan Muckelt that was active in Manchester’s textile



industry from 1885 to 1961.<sup>12</sup> As a “merchant converter,” Logan Muckelt bought pre-made plain textiles to print with their own designs.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the home market in Britain, Logan Muckelt’s work for both West and East African markets included three techniques common in the African trade: hand-block prints, fancy prints, and wax-prints (Sykas 2005). Logan Muckelt is rarely discussed in scholarship on British or African textiles (see Sykas 2005). Literature on “African wax-prints” has instead given primary attention to the more popular Dutch Vlisco and Manchester’s ABC Textiles.<sup>14</sup> But notes in Logan Muckelt’s pattern books reveal the firm’s importance to produce “engaged” textile designs for major exporters to Africa, including G.B. Ollivant, Compagnie Francaise de l’Afrique Occidentale, and The United Africa Company. Starting in 1887, Logan Muckelt began registering its textile designs for copyright in the UK Design Registry (Sykas 2005). Not all textile firms and merchants registered textile designs, which prevented other textile printers in the UK from using the designs.

The selection and arrangement of certain *adinkra* symbols in Logan Muckelt’s cloth design raises questions about how the designer acquired source imagery and their familiarity with Akan culture. No information about Logan Muckelt designers or their research was recorded in the pattern books. During the late nineteenth century, the general approach among British designers

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<sup>12</sup> When Logan Muckelt closed in the late 1960s, they gave their pattern book archive to Quarry Bank, a cotton mill that operated in nearby Styal, Cheshire (Greater Manchester area) from 1784 to the late 1950s. The Quarry Bank mill was not connected with the export trade to Africa, but the director of Quarry Bank in the 1960s knew staff at Logan Muckelt (Quarry Bank archivist, personal communication, April 11, 2016). In 1970, Quarry Bank opened as a museum, and sought textiles and related archives to build a strong collection about Manchester’s textile history. Quarry Bank acquired the Logan Muckelt archive because the mill’s leadership staff was interested in their collection as a museum. In 2014, Quarry Bank gave the Logan Muckelt pattern archive to the Manchester Archives and Local Studies at the Manchester Central Library (Quarry Bank archivist, personal communication, April 11, 2016). For more on the Logan Muckelt pattern book archive, see Sykas 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Soon after the business began, Logan Muckelt merged with the textile company Williams, Logan & Company (Sykas 2005: 27-31). In 1917, George B. Horridge became the company’s new director. Horridge’s family owned the Horridge and Cornell Limited textile printing company, which also ran Bolholt print works. In the 1930s, Bolholt engraved roller-printed textiles for Logan Muckelt, and Logan Muckelt shared their textile designs with the Horridge Printing Company.

<sup>14</sup> The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London, England is the only museum I have identified that holds Logan Muckelt fabrics in a permanent collection. In the late 1940s, Logan Muckelt donated a small collection of hand-block wax-print textiles made for West African markets to the V&A museum after Peter Floud, V&A Keeper of Circulation, visited Logan Muckelt’s Print Room Manager Mr. Coxon. Logan Muckelt was only one of three UK textile firms that donated factory-printed textiles designed for African markets to the V&A museum. For more about the V&A museum’s collection of British textiles for African markets, see Stylianou 2012.

creating textiles for African customers drew inspiration from photographs or handmade cloths merchants brought to England from Africa. This technique paralleled how textile designers in Manchester used European source imagery to create designs for British markets (Sykas 2005: 29).

A problem with this design method of using visual materials acquired from afar pertains to the symbolic meanings of *adinkra* motifs that guide how Akans wear *adinkra* cloth. Akan cloth makers historically became experts in the symbolic meanings of *adinkra* motifs. Logan Muckelt designers were untrained in this knowledge and probably unaware of the symbols' proverbial and philosophical significance. Research among British designers likely focused on the visual aspects of Akan and other African cultures, rather than studying both the visual and verbal dimensions. Yet the layout of Logan Muckelt's textile design suggests that their designers were familiar with *adinkra* cloth patterns. The arrangement of rows filled with closely repeating motifs references the stamping of *adinkra* symbols in rows or grid blocks.

Museums in England offered designers access to artistic and cultural practices associated with their audiences without traveling to Africa. Logan Muckelt and other British textile designers may have consulted handmade textiles from Africa accessible to view in museum collections (Sylvanus 2016: 64). The two remaining hand-printed *adinkra* cloths made before 1891 are held in British and Dutch museum collections. In 1817, Thomas E. Bowdich collected the earliest surviving *adinkra* cloth that he donated to the British Museum in 1818. In 1825, the former Dutch governor likely commissioned the other *adinkra* cloth for King William I, which was sent to the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague; the cloth is now held at the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden. This cloth features an intricate pattern with the three motifs in Logan Muckelt's design: *dwennimmen* ("ram's horn") and *aban* ("house" or "castle") appear next to *nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn* ("link" or "chain"). Unlike the complexity of these two hand-printed *adinkra* cloths made with many symbols in a grid block pattern, Logan Muckelt's design only includes three motifs repeated in rows.

Logan Muckelt designed textiles with *adinkera* symbols until at least 1935.<sup>15</sup> Following industry trends, Logan Muckelt exported indigo-colored cloth to West Africa in the early twentieth century – including patterns that featured *adinkera* motifs.<sup>16</sup> Over time, Logan Muckelt designers updated color ways and printing techniques as fashion trends evolved and they learned about color preferences of specific regions and cultural groups in Africa. My research found twenty examples of this cloth design with *adinkera* motifs in various color ways or printing techniques; future research may uncover even more examples. For instance, Logan Muckelt printed multiple versions of this cloth design with *adinkera* motifs in red, yellow, and pink. A page from a Logan Muckelt pattern book shows how they printed the cloth with *adinkera* designs to fit with the colors of other designs made concurrently for African markets (fig. 4.4). Logan Muckelt’s color choices did not follow Akan color symbolism for *adinkera* cloth. Rather, Logan Muckelt’s printing of this textile design in a diverse color palette broadened the settings to encounter *adinkera* motifs in the Gold Coast, and possibly other parts of West Africa.

Color variations also reshaped how consumers used the cloth. For instance, Logan Muckelt’s red and black textiles from the 1920 and 1930s shows the implications of printing the same textile design with *adinkera* motifs in multiple colors (fig. 4.5). Red and black cloths represent proper Akan mourning and funeral attire. In the early twentieth century, non-elite Akan men and women began wearing hand-printed *adinkera* cloth, as the culturally appropriate uses for *adinkera* expanded to funerals. Logan Muckelt released their red and black cloths designed with *adinkera* around this time, which suggests that they may have been aware of – or contributed to – the shifting settings to wear

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<sup>15</sup> When Logan Muckelt closed in 1961, they gave their textile patterns to F.W. Ashton & Co. and Salis Schwabe, prominent textile manufacturers in Manchester that exported fabrics to Africa (Sykas 2005: 27-31). It’s unclear if either continued to print Logan Muckelt’s textile designs. The relationships between these manufacturers and merchants are complicated due to their changing partnerships and ownership during the twentieth century.

<sup>16</sup> In my archival research of Logan Muckelt’s pattern books at the Manchester Central Library, I found an indigo-colored cloth design from 1907-08 with *adinkera* symbols (Designer unrecorded. Logan Muckelt and Company. Design D.5254. “Book D4981-D5476/80.” 1907-1908. Manchester Central Library, Archives and Special Collections. Manchester, England. Record number M831/88b. 60681).

*adinkera* in Akan society.

Increased exchange between England and the Gold Coast during the early twentieth century may have contributed to the changing colors and printing styles of Logan Muckelt's cloth design. For example, Logan Muckelt printed this same textile design in red and navy around 1900 for Manchester's Norman Melland and Company, also active in the West African textile trade (Sykas 2005: 30). Norman Melland CBE (1865-1933) traveled across West Africa for his company and work as African Section Chairman for the Manchester Chamber of Commerce.<sup>17</sup> Melland's account of his four-month trip in 1923 to the Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone in *Some Impressions of West Africa* does not specifically mention *adinkera*. But as described here, he wrote about meetings with traders and visits to cloth production sites.

“Many of the native hand industries are of the greatest interest and it is to be hoped that these will be well displayed at the British Empire Exhibition next year. There is much ingenuity and taste put into some of them—for instance, the beautiful hand-woven cotton cloths, the native tied-up garment cloths dyed in indigo blue...”  
(Melland 1923: 39).

As Melland discusses, the British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley in 1924 showcased handmade textiles from Africa – including *adinkera* cloth (Stephen 2009: 113; Woodham 1989: 17). Access to *adinkera* at this exhibition suggests viable avenues for Logan Muckelt designers to encounter hand-printed *adinkera* cloth in the 1920s.

In the West Africa section of the British Empire Exhibition, the Gold Coast pavilion displayed *adinkera* motifs in both cloth and architecture. The postcard photograph, “Gold Coast Africans in the Native Village at Wembley,” depicts men dressed in wrapped cloth.<sup>18</sup> A man dressed in a hand-printed *adinkera* cloth stands in front of a building adorned with *adinkera* motifs. His cloth

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<sup>17</sup> Melland was also the director of two other firms: Manchester Bonding Warehousing Company Limited and Manchester Commercial Buildings Limited. During World War I, Melland served in the War Trade Department, which earned him the title of Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) (Askey n.d.).

<sup>18</sup> Photo Union Photographers. “Gold Coast Africans in the Native Village at Wembley.” No date. Postcard published by Raphael Tuck & Sons, Ltd. London, England. Postcard now held in the Africana Historic Postcard Collection, United States Library of Congress. Available online <https://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/afs/africana-postcards.html>

repeats a single *adinkra* symbol – *mframadan* (“wind-resistant house”) – that symbolizes strength and resilience with narrow strips of *mwomu* stitching that signals prestige. The wearer may have selected this particular cloth to convey a message through *mframadan* about Akan power in the face of colonial dominance. This photograph attests to the presence of *adinkra* by the 1920s in British exhibitions, settings that negotiated British colonial agendas with the agency of Akans that participated in the event.

Anthropologist Robert Sutherland Rattray served as a section officer for the Fine and Industrial Arts section of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition (Rattray 1924). In this role, he commissioned Akan artists to make specific artworks for display at Wembley and published *A Short Manual of the Gold Coast* in conjunction with the exhibition (Rattray 1924). Drawing upon prior research on *adinkra* cloth and Akan culture during his visits to the Gold Coast in the 1920s (including the first documented study of *adinkra* cloth), Rattray proposed new initiatives for the British textile industry:

“The stamped cloths [referring to *adinkra* cloth] and the process of their manufacture which I shall presently describe were, I believe, equally unknown. I cannot but hope that, from an examination of the designs, names and colouring of Ashanti textiles, Manchester cotton and silk weavers will find that here the anthropologist and the merchant may mutually benefit. The trade would find, I believe, that it would pay to reproduce stuff which is not only artistically beautiful, but conforms to the details and accuracy sought for by these people, while anthropology would be the trader’s debtor because the latter would perpetuate and preserve all that is most beautiful and artistic in a past that is rapidly disappearing” (Rattray 1924: 267).

Some textile designers from Manchester visited the 1924 exhibition at Wembley.<sup>19</sup> Rattray’s encouragement for Manchester’s textile industry to consult handmade Akan textiles indicates potential influence from scholars and explorers on factory-printed textiles exported to Africa. Yet no archival records or scholarship document whether Rattray interacted with textile firms in

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, The National Archives of the UK in Kew, England holds a photograph captioned: “Trip to the British Empire Exhibition. Organised by the calico printers that the donor worked for – C.P.A. Printworks Lane, Levenshulme.” Photograph by G.F. Tillis, 1925. Available online <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/7976e3db-e1d0-492d-80a5-862cce78abcf>.

Manchester to initiate such interactions between anthropology and the textile trade.<sup>20</sup>

Women market traders in West Africa also took a more active role in designing imported factory-printed textiles that they sold. For example, Charles Sixsmith, former director of Bentinck Mills in Manchester said in 1934, “In Sierra Leone, one of a man’s several wives did the trading and occasionally these mummies, as they were called, also came. They usually brought a few native cloths with them for designs and suggestions for new cloths” (Sixsmith 1934). While not specific to Logan Muckelt or *adinkra* cloth, these interactions demonstrate efforts from other British textile merchants active during this time to acquire familiarity with handmade textiles in West Africa.

British textile designers began taking research trips to Africa during the early twentieth century. Firsthand cultural experiences in Africa changed design approaches. Designers no longer relied solely on source imagery – mainly photographs and textiles – brought to them from Africa. By this time, Logan Muckelt had already created the cloth design with *adinkra* motifs. Yet Logan Muckelt continued to change the cloth’s printing styles and color ways that possibly came in response to these shifts in the design process.

### Wearing Factory-Printed Cloth with *Adinkra*

Logan Muckelt’s ongoing production of this textile design for more than forty years confirms the longevity of the cloth design’s popularity. But how Logan Muckelt imagined Akan or other consumers using this cloth design and if they marketed the cloth as an *adinkra* cloth remains unclear. Additionally, where exactly this particular design was traded and if these markets changed over time was not recorded alongside the fabric sample. For some of Logan Muckelt’s other designs, pattern books noted market locations. The numerous sites – including Belgian Congo, Dahomey,

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<sup>20</sup> Some textile design studios kept small libraries of publications for designers to use as references and inspiration. It’s possible, though not confirmed, that textile designers in Manchester accessed Rattray’s 1927 published study on *adinkra* symbols (included in his text on wider Asante art and culture) as a reference for their designs.

Ivory Coast, Gold Coast, Togo, and Nigeria – indicate Logan Muckelt’s widespread presence in the African textile trade.

In lieu of trade records, a small number of historical photographs offer intriguing evidence of Gold Coast consumers wearing this textile design for at least forty-five years. The photographs discussed here are the only examples I have found to date that show the use of Logan Muckelt textiles designed with *adinkera* symbols. When Holm photographed the child wearing Logan Muckelt’s cloth design in 1891, only the elite could afford to take studio portraits and wear imported cloth (fig. 4.2). Clothing and accessories were important in portrait photography to present one’s identity and status. In the late nineteenth century, studio photographs were prestigious objects to display in the home, albums, or give as gifts. The child’s portrait was pasted in a large photo album with images from the Gold Coast and Nigeria entitled “Views, types, etc., of West Africa.” A pioneer in African photography, Holm ran one of the first African-owned photo studios in West Africa.<sup>21</sup> His customers were mainly elite families and members of the colonial administration.

Selecting Logan Muckelt’s cloth for this picture is striking. Customers came to photo studios wearing their best dress. To select Logan Muckelt’s cloth for a portrait suggests how the cloth design had acquired cultural value on the Gold Coast. The child pictured in Holm’s photograph wrapped the cloth around his chest, revealing his bare shoulders as a sign of respect to his elders. The child stands next to two adult men dressed in matching patterned cloth, wrapped to cover their left shoulder. It’s not clear if those pictured in Holm’s photographs were Akan or affiliated with a different cultural group. From a distance, the pattern on the men’s cloth does not overtly reference any Akan or other West Africa handmade cloth design or cultural imagery.

Yet Holm’s photograph reveals the distinct reception of Logan Muckelt’s cloth from hand-printed *adinkera* cloth. For a child to wear this cloth suggests that some consumers did not use Logan

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<sup>21</sup> For more on Holm’s work and career, see Gbadegesin 2010; Geary 1991, 2013; Haney 2004; and Wendl 2001.

Muckelt's design as a substitute to hand-printed *adinkra* cloth, which was restricted at that time in Akan society to royal adults.

Unlike Holm's portrait that indicates how the sitters wanted to be photographed, Swiss missionaries made pictures in the Gold Coast for mainly European audiences that reveal their interests in Logan Muckelt's cloth as representative of local culture. Each of these photographs that I found depict youth and younger adults – all female – wearing the Logan Muckelt cloth design. As with Holm's photograph, the girls' young age in these photographs also indicates that consumers in the Gold Coast didn't use Logan Muckelt's cloth in the same manner as hand-printed *adinkra* cloth. In contrast to Holm's work, missionaries employed framing devices to photograph Africans that skew representations, thereby limiting our understanding of how those pictured actually used and valued Logan Muckelt's cloth.

For instance, a photo taken between 1880 and 1895 depicts a girl wearing the Logan Muckelt fabric as she holds a clay pot above her head (fig. 4.6). She tightly tied the cloth around her chest, and also wears a beaded necklace and bracelets. The photograph, taken by an unrecorded photographer and captioned "Negro woman from the Gold Coast" (1880-1895), was included in an album "Pictures from Africa" alongside other images from Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and Gabon. In a photograph by Friedrich August Louis Ramseyer titled "Girl from the Gold Coast" (1881-1895), a young woman dressed in the same textile (fig. 4.7).<sup>22</sup> The girl wrapped her arms around her back to hold a baby, tucked under the cloth. She stands barefoot, posed sideways with her face turned towards the camera. In the absence of other accessories, props, or background to reveal the life and culture in the Gold Coast, the girl's cloth and styling shows "African" attire and cultural difference to European audiences.

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<sup>22</sup> Ramseyer helped establish the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (See Asamoah-Prah 2011). From 1876-96, he was head of the mission station in Abetifi, a town in the Kwahu area of the Eastern Region. He also visited and lived in Kumasi at various times during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Asamoah-Prah 2011).



Additionally, a portrait that an unrecorded photographer made presents a young woman wearing a dark-colored cloth with *adinkra* motifs arranged in a different pattern (fig. 4.8). The cloth design includes *dwennimmen* (“ram’s horn”) and *nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn* (“link” or “chain”). Titled “African girl” (1881-1895), the young woman wrapped the patterned cloth over a light-colored blouse, tying a small knot on the side beneath her chest. What is especially intriguing with this cloth pattern is how the graphic style of *adinkra* motifs resembles those depicted in Logan Muckelt’s textile design. During my research, I found fabric samples from the 1930s made in multiple color ways that matched this cloth pattern (fig. 4.9). Logan Muckelt created the design.

This photograph confirms that Logan Muckelt made multiple textile designs with *adinkra* motifs during the late nineteenth century. The cloth design’s layout depicts *adinkra* designs sparsely arranged around a central motif. Whether deliberate or unintended, the circle pattern relates to the *nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn* (“link” or “chain”) symbol’s message of unity as added fragments of the motif visually link the pattern together. This arrangement departs from Logan Muckelt’s other design and the standard grid or row structure of hand-printed *adinkra* cloth. This textile pattern relies on the recognizable form of individual *adinkra* motifs rather than the overall image of *adinkra* cloth patterns.

A photograph titled “traditional costume of indigenous girls” (1936-1946) shows a later example of a young woman dressed in this cloth pattern that Logan Muckelt designed (fig. 4.10). The cloth’s arrangement informed how the girl aligned the central pattern over the middle of her chest. This photograph, made by an unrecorded photographer, confirms the continuity of this cloth design or its renewed use in the Gold Coast for over forty years. Moreover, this photograph references *adinkra* two ways: the cloth design and the girl’s hairstyle. The girl’s plaited hair evokes the *adinkra* symbol called *nkontimsofoo puaa* or *mpuannum* that refers to five tufts of hair (Willis 2015: 124-

125).<sup>23</sup> Akan women were historically known for wearing this hairstyle. Both references in a single photograph show the dynamics of *adinkera* to permeate Akan expressive culture.

## Representations Beyond Textiles

Photographers from the Swiss Basel Mission illustrate how their photographers posed Africans as scientific “types” and recorded activities they associated with African life – such as mothers holding children on their back and young women carrying pots on their head. Titles such as “Girl from the Gold Coast” make sweeping generalizations that remove the specific names and places associated with these images. Records accompanying these photographs do not include the specific locations or regions where they were taken in the Gold Coast. Consequently, what remains unclear in each of their photographs is if those pictured are from Akan society or a different cultural group. The photo of the girl with the distinct hairstyle is the only indication of a possible cultural affiliation, as the images otherwise strip distinctions among the numerous cultures within the Gold Coast. Additionally, the photograph titled, “Traditional Costume of Indigenous Girls,” reflects how missionaries perceived Logan Muckelt’s cloth as part of local culture despite its design and production in England.<sup>24</sup> For Europeans to interpret Logan Muckelt’s cloth as “traditional costume” shows how the cloth’s aesthetics blended with local culture, and also, how consumers had integrated the cloth in ways that convinced foreigners the cloth was produced locally.

The circulation of these photographs reveals how other Europeans repackaged the *adinkera*

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<sup>23</sup> In Bruce Willis’s discussion of the *adinkera* symbol *mpuannum*, he includes this photograph with the caption, “five tufts of hair (notice the *adinkera* symbols on her dress)” (Willis 2015: 125). His analysis does not discuss the photograph.

<sup>24</sup> Other Europeans made similar interpretations. For example, Christopher Steiner discusses Alan Lethbridge’s *West Africa, The Elusive* (1921), which included a photograph Lethbridge captioned “Togoland Beauties” of women wearing local and imported cloth. Steiner argues that the photograph shows how Lethbridge also viewed imported cloth as “African” (Steiner 1985: 105).

motifs they encountered in Logan Muckelt's cloth to represent all of Africa. Shortly after the photographer made "Girl from the Gold Coast" (1881-1895), an artist created a print of a girl standing in the same pose (fig. 4.11). In the print, the girl faces the opposite direction – possibly a result of the artist tracing the photograph or printing the negative from the wrong side, which resulted in a reverse image.<sup>25</sup> Instead of the photograph's blank background, the artist added two tropical trees that places the girl within an "African" setting.

For the girl's dress, the artist followed the wrapped style depicted in the photograph. The artist also divided the cloth layout into rows of various widths as in Logan Muckelt's design. But the artist changed the *adinkra* motifs. *Dwennimmen* ("ram's horn") is depicted as a jumble of half circles in varying sizes. The larger section depicts a diamond shaped pattern, which generally resembles the overall shape of the motifs printed together in Logan Muckelt's design. Yet the crisscrossed lines fail to give attention to the form of individual symbols. For *nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn* ("link" or "chain") the artist fills each box with a large "X" rather than emulating the symbol's shape.

The artist's interpretation of Logan Muckelt's cloth design exemplifies the complexities that arise as *adinkra* motifs circulates further away from Akan society to audiences unfamiliar with Akan aesthetics. The artist's designs in the print no longer represent *adinkra* symbols, nor convey their philosophical meanings. For European viewers, however, the artist's design conveys an image of Africa.

The Basel Mission included the print in its "Sample Book" of around two hundred large-format images of scenes from the Gold Coast and Togo; the "Sample Book" contained late nineteenth and early twentieth century images from China, India, Ghana, and Cameroon available for printing in Basel Mission publications. The print's title, "African girl," distances the young woman even further away from her documented setting in the Gold Coast. The title fails to

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<sup>25</sup> For more on the artistic practices of creating engravings from Basel Mission photographs, see Jenkins 1993.

acknowledge important distinctions in the continent's diverse cultural groups and nations. The girl's identity and the association of a cloth specific to Akan society have come to signify the entire continent of Africa. This generalization of an "African" identity exemplifies wider historical issues in representations and stereotypes of Africa that persist today.

Mid-twentieth century exhibitions were also important sites for European audiences to encounter British and European textiles designed for Africa. In 1946, Logan Muckelt showcased their textiles made for African markets at the British Council of Industrial Design's "Britain Can Make It" exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Schoeser 1997: 68). Unlike the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley that offered artistic inspiration to textile designers, the British Council of Industrial Design's exhibition invited British textile designers to repackage the design and trade of "African wax-prints." For example, in the section "Utility and Other Furniture," Logan Muckelt displayed its wax-print cloths as wall hangings and furniture fabrics of armchairs (Schoeser 1997: 68). By presenting the fabrics as home décor and coverings for European-style furniture, Logan Muckelt's exhibition display did not offer European viewers any indication of how consumers in Africa would have actually used the textiles as clothing. As with the print from the Basel Mission archive, this presentation of "African wax-prints" in an exhibition shows how factory-printed textiles informed the narratives and understandings about Africa that circulated in the UK and Europe.

The print "African girl," in addition to the photographs and cloth samples made before it, illustrate how Logan Muckelt's textile design with *adinkra* motifs evolved over forty-five years in England, Switzerland, and the Gold Coast. The introduction of *adinkra* motifs in factory-printed cloth during the late nineteenth century may have contributed to expanding the audiences and contexts to wear hand-printed *adinkra* cloth. Textiles such as those that Logan Muckelt designed made wearing cloth with *adinkra* motifs accessible to non-royalty in the Gold Coast – and

presumably other parts of West Africa. The shifting uses of *adinkra* motifs among non-Akan designers exemplify a transformation in the meanings of *adinkra* motifs. The re-contextualization of *adinkra* within late nineteenth century British factory-printed cloth signals an historical change in the role of *adinkra* to represent more than Akan society.

## II. Reinterpreting Akan Aesthetics Abroad

Stars and moons, five-pointed stars, and flower-bursts are among the designs and geometric shapes printed on a cloth made in the 1960s (fig. 4.12). Many of the motifs evoke well-known *adinkra* symbols. The cloth's black and red colors suggest that Akan might have dressed in the cloth when in mourning to attend funerals. Arranged in a diagonal-grid pattern, the cloth resembled hand-printed *adinkra* cloth. Yet the stylized graphics were machine-printed on cloth in England.

In 1965, British firm Paterson Zochonis registered this cloth pattern for copyright. The design reveals that British textile designers were clearly familiar with the design and use of hand-printed *adinkra* cloth. In this example, the designer made noticeable departures from stylistic conventions in hand-printed cloth. Of particular interest is what remains recognizable as *adinkra* and what has changed.<sup>26</sup> Curiously, a padlock is also among the designs. A common motif in other wax-print patterns, padlock also references the meaning, but not the visual form, of the *adinkra* symbol *mmra krado* ("lock"). Incorporating the padlock graphic in this particular cloth design raises questions about if the designers selected the motif because they knew the symbolic meaning of *mmra krado* or

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Mato said, "Traditional *adinkra* stamps were taken by factory designers to copy and incorporate into their own designs" (Mato 1987: 215). However, he makes this statement in his discussion of both European and local factory designers and does not specify which designers collected *adinkra* stamps. Mato also speaks about production of "factory stamped *adinkra* cloths" in Ghana and Europe, mainly through the work of the United Africa Company (UAC) (Mato 1987: 212-213).

because a padlock graphic was common in other “African wax-prints.” Why did Paterson Zochonis’ designers make such decisions? To appeal to Akan consumer desires for new and different fashions? To exercise their creative vision? To market more widely in Africa?

### Wax-Prints and *Nsaa* Blankets

This section investigates these questions through factory-printed cloths with *adinkra* motifs that Paterson Zochonis registered for copyright between 1963 and 1965, now held at the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) in Manchester, England.<sup>27</sup> By concentrating on one company’s work in a two-year period, this focused analysis examines the circulation of *adinkra* in two ways: first, how Paterson Zochonis integrated wax-print designs into factory-printed *adinkra* cloth patterns; and second, how Paterson Zochonis incorporated *adinkra* motifs or *adinkra*-inspired designs into non-*adinkra* cloth patterns; I use the term “*adinkra*-inspired” to refer to designs that suggest influence from *adinkra* symbols, but do not follow the symbols’ common forms. In doing so, this analysis considers how Paterson Zochonis circulated Akan aesthetics across Africa, where other consumers likely gave Akan designs new meanings relevant to their lives and culture.

Factory-printed cloth that alludes to the design and layout of hand-printed *adinkra* cloth raise questions about what actually defines an *adinkra* cloth and how to identify these textiles.<sup>28</sup> Are they *adinkra* cloths? Or are such factory-made textiles “imitations” or “copies” of *adinkra* cloth? How do they compare to the hand-printed *adinkra* cloth? Some scholars, in addition to cloth makers and

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<sup>27</sup> This the only substantial public archive of Paterson Zochonis textile designs, and includes examples from the mid-twentieth century. Records do not confirm if these designs were newly created in the 1960s, or if Paterson Zochonis registered the designs as a renewal of older designs previously traded in Africa. No names or information about the textile designers at Paterson Zochonis was included in registered design samples or accompanying records.

<sup>28</sup> Textile companies have made factory-printed textiles that resemble *adinkra* cloth patterns (as well as *kente* cloth) since the early to mid twentieth century, possibly the late nineteenth century (Ross 1998: 294). By the 1970s, such textiles referencing *adinkra* motifs were manufactured in Ghana, England and Japan (Kent 1971: 70).

consumers in Ghana, view hand-printed *adinkra* cloth as more “authentic” or “traditional” than factory-printed versions. For example, Boatema Boateng refers to this kind of cloth as “imitation *adinkra* cloth” (Boateng 2011). In comparison, Daniel Mato refers to factory-printed cloth that resembles *adinkra* as “factory stamped *adinkra* cloth” (Mato 1987: 208-214). My interests lie in the inclusion or absence of the word “*adinkra*” in these labels for what values are attached to *adinkra* and become extended to the cloth. Not only does named cloth carry added value in Ghana, but referring to a cloth as “an *adinkra* cloth” also confers a set of values related to the history and significance of *adinkra* in Akan and Ghanaian life.

The *adinkra* symbol *nsaa* offers insights into how Akans think about copy and imitation specific to cloth. *Nsaa* refers to expensive, prestigious hand-woven camel hair blankets traded to Ghana from the Fulani of Mali, where the cloth is called *ferka* (Agbo 2011: 27; Menzel 1990: 83).<sup>29</sup> Asante communities have incorporated *nsaa* blankets into their regalia, such as lining palanquins and covering black stools, drums, and other important objects (Agbo 2011: 27; Menzel 1990: 83; Willis 1998:150). *Nsaa* evokes an Akan proverb, “*ne onim nsaa na oto nago*,” meaning “he who doesn’t know the real [*nsaa*] design will turn to an imitation” (Glover 1992; Willis 1998: 150). The proverb illustrates an historical precedent in Akan society for evaluating a cloth’s quality and distinguishing between cloths with similar appearances. Scholar Bruce Willis said *nsaa* “reflects excellence and is intended to discourage satisfaction with objects of lower quality or of second nature” (Willis 1998: 150-51). With *adinkra* cloth, many cloth makers and consumers with whom I spoke consider factory-

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<sup>29</sup>The integration of *nsaa* within the corpus of *adinkra* symbols also exemplifies how Akans incorporated cloths they acquired through trade within existing cultural practices, thereby giving *nsaa* new meaning as part of Akan culture. J.G. Christaller identifies *nsaa* as “a certain blanket from the interior of Africa” (Christaller 1881: 402). In addition, an Akan folk song includes reference to *nsaa*, which J.H. Kwabena Nketia translates as a “camel blanket [denotes wealth or nobility]” (Song No. 12 as quoted in Nketia 2016: 42).

Willis explains the historical significance of *nsaa*: “Because trading was an important endeavor that society depended on in open market commerce in Ghana, honesty in trading was held to a high standard. The genuineness or authenticity of an object was a necessary condition for the sale of the article. *Nsaa* was a term used in contrast with deception and untruthfulness in trading” (Willis 1998: 150-51). For more on the roles of *nsaa* cloth in West African trade, see Menzel 1990.

printed textiles that emulate *adinkera* cloth patterns to be lower quality than hand-printed *adinkera* cloth. The dissertation therefore positions hand-printed *adinkera* cloth as distinct from factory-printed cloth because Akans ascribe them with different values.

This section does not engage with scholarly debates on terms of “imitations” or “copies,” nor related issues of authenticity, appropriation, and intellectual property.<sup>30</sup> My approach continues the work of Doran Ross in his analysis of *kente* cloth, another textile with factory-printed cloth designs that reference hand-woven *kente* cloth. Ross said, “We will for the most part avoid referring to any of the latter three types [*kente* made on new types of looms or machines] by value-laden referents such as ‘fakes,’ ‘replicas,’ or ‘imitations.’ This will certainly not please everyone, but as we shall see, it more accurately reflects the complexity of an international phenomenon enmeshed in contexts and meanings that extend well beyond those originally intended” (Ross 1998: 28). For *bogolanfani* cloth, the mud-dyed cloth made by Bamana women in Mali, art historian Victoria Rovine uses different terms to distinguish handmade and factory-made versions, referring to the handmade cloth as *bogolanfani* and all other iterations as *bogolan* (Rovine 2008). In what follows, I do not position factory-printed textiles that emulate *adinkera* as imitations or copies, nor refer to them as *adinkera* cloth. I instead refer to such examples as factory-printed cloth designed with *adinkera* motifs.

### Trading Textiles: Paterson Zochonis

Paterson Zochonis was a prominent British firm, well established in West African textile trade, particularly Sierra Leone and Nigeria. In the 1870s, George Henry Paterson and George Basil

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<sup>30</sup> For scholarly discussions about issues of authenticity, imitations, and copies in African textiles, see Boateng 2011; Eicher and Erekosima 1995; Rovine 2008, 2012; Sylvanus 2007; Woets and Delhaye 2015.



Zochonis founded a trading business in Sierra Leone that became Paterson Zochonis in 1884 (*Paterson Zochonis Plc: A Century of Enterprise* 1984: 2). In the late nineteenth century, Paterson Zochonis opened offices in Liberia, Guinea, and Nigeria (Dogbe 2003: 392, footnote 8). Paterson Zochonis also imported soaps and pharmaceuticals to Africa, as well as exporting goods from Africa to Europe. In 1970, Paterson Zochonis ceased exporting textiles to Africa, consistent with the trade's wider decline. The business has continued since then, as they expanded trade of other goods with global markets. In 2002, Paterson Zochonis renamed the firm to PZ Cussons, named after the acquisition of Cussons Group Limited.

Paterson Zochonis is frequently mentioned in scholarship on nineteenth and twentieth century trade and industry in West Africa. In Allister MacMillan's *Red Book of West Africa*, a leading publication from the 1920s of important merchants and industrial activity at that time, he said, "everyone acquainted with the commerce of West Africa is familiar, of course, with the firm of Messrs. Paterson, Zochonis & Co., Ltd., whose large business affords one of the most noteworthy examples of successful achievement on the Coast" (MacMillan 1968: 254). Yet surprisingly, there is no in-depth study of Paterson Zochonis's work and impact in West Africa. MacMillan confirms the importance of Paterson Zochonis's activity and contributions; for example, he said of Paterson Zochonis's business in Old Calabar (present-day southeast Nigeria), "the number of people to be seen going to and coming from the firm's premises so far away from the centre of local shopping activity known as Duke Town is significant of the high appreciation in which this well-known firm stand for the variety and quality of their supplies, especially those most suited to native requirements" (MacMillan 1968: 122). Such observations indicate the popularity of Paterson Zochonis among Nigerians and how the firm was attuned to consumer desires.

Specific to textiles, Paterson Zochonis was a "merchant converter," the same role as Logan Muckelt and Company. As a "merchant converter," Paterson Zochonis purchased already-made

plain cloth and then hired a different company to print the patterns that their textile designers created. With offices in Manchester and Liverpool, Paterson Zochonis worked with other British textile companies to print their textile designs, including A. Brunnschweiler & Company (ABC Textiles) and R. Brotherton (Collections Department, Museum of Science and Industry Manchester; Graces Guide 2012).

Some of Paterson Zochonis's textile designs for West African markets followed wider industry trends. In the early to mid-twentieth century, the presence of *adinkera* symbols in factory-printed cloth made in England, Europe, and Asia expanded. In the mid to late twentieth century, production increased of factory-printed cloth emulating the layouts of hand-printed *adinkera* cloth. Communications scholar Boatema Boateng said that there has been a “proliferation in Ghana of mass-produced imitation *adinkera* cloth since the late 1980s” (Boateng 2008: 175). For these textiles, designers created cloth patterns designed entirely with *adinkera* motifs. As such, emphasis and value centered on the *adinkera* symbols rather than the appearance or textures of *badia* dye and hand-stamping process.

For Akan consumers, these factory-printed cloths became a washable alternative to *adinkera* cloths stamped with a non-colorfast dye (Boateng 2008: 175). While not clearly stated in written records, these cloths were possibly marketed to non-elite Akan consumers. Many of these textile designs – including ones by Paterson Zochonis – were printed in the less costly “fancy-print” method in colors consistent with appropriate dress colors for Akan funerals or celebratory events where it was common to dress in *adinkera* cloth. Although some Akans purchased them to wear at these settings, handmade *adinkera* cloth continued to convey prestige and cultural value among Akans.

What is at stake in Paterson Zochonis's textile designs with *adinkera* motifs is the reshaping of Akan culture during a time of shifting political relationships between the England and West Africa.

Paterson Zochonis registered the cloth designs with *adinkra* motifs discussed here in the mid-1960s, which marked an important political moment in Ghana and a change in Paterson Zochonis's work in Ghana. In 1957, Ghana gained independence from Britain and then elected Kwame Nkrumah in 1960 as Ghana's first president. The following chapter examines the impact of Nkrumah's work to appropriate *adinkra* and other Akan arts as markers of national identity. Broadening *adinkra* beyond Akan society may have contributed to using factory-printed cloth designed with *adinkra* motifs, and may have informed Paterson Zochonis's production of such cloths at that time. Paterson Zochonis also began manufacturing in Ghana during the 1960s. In Accra, Paterson Zochonis also managed the Tema Thread Company in Ghana, which Paterson Zochonis said in the 1980s was "the sole producer of sewing thread and yarn in the Ghanaian market today" (*Paterson Zochonis Plc: A Century of Enterprise* 1984: 11). Paterson Zochonis's new presence in Ghana may have increased firsthand exposure and access to Akan cultural practices to also inspire their production of textile designs with *adinkra* motifs.

### Between Akan and Africa

In 1963, Paterson Zochonis registered for copyright in the UK a red and black textile design with *adinkra*-inspired motifs arranged in a square grid format, typical of hand-printed *adinkra* cloth (fig. 4.13). Unlike *adinkra* cloth stamped with dark-colored *badia* dye, the motifs and grid lines appear printed in bright red onto a black cloth. This cloth design is exceptional in how the graphics and overall layout both follow and depart from conventions in hand-printed *adinkra* cloth. The design uses six motifs, each one repeated inside a square in scale comparable to a carved *adinkra* stamp. All but one motif – a set of two keys – illustrates or demonstrates influence from *adinkra* symbols,

including: *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”), *duafe* (“comb”), *dono ntoaso* (“double drum”), *nsaa* (name of a trade cloth), and *akokɔnan* (“hen’s feet”). Some of these *adinkera* motifs appear in other Paterson Zochonis textile designs from the 1960s that do not emulate *adinkera* cloth layouts, revealing the wider circulation of *adinkera* motifs in factory-printed cloth.

For example, four “tooth” grid lines set the cloth’s layout that evokes the style of hand-drawn comb lines on stamped *adinkera* cloth. But even the steadiest hand-drawn comb lines with *badia* dye can’t rival the perfectly straight, even red lines on the machine-printed design. Paterson Zochonis used this grid layout with multi-“tooth” lines in a different textile pattern registered in 1963 (fig. 4.14). Similarly, narrow black and white square grid lines divide a cerulean blue background in the other cloth design. Inside each square, a pattern of short double lines divides each square into another grid for arranging small musical notes. This pattern inside each square resembles the form of the *adinkera* motif *nea onnim no sua a obu* (“He who does not know can know from learning”). Layered on top of this grid pattern, small circles contain guitars and drums, and larger circles depict a couple dancing with inscriptions “Twist Twist” and “Rock Rock Rock.”

Returning to the red and black cloth, symbol selection is of paramount importance. Included motifs reference *adinkera* symbols still highly popular today. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the meaning of *nsaa*, one of the referenced *adinkera* symbols, speaks about value in high quality cloth. Yet the symbol is included here on a cloth considered among Akans to be of lower quality than hand-printed *adinkera* cloth. Two *adinkera* stamps carved with *nsaa* that the British Museum acquired before 1950 may have informed their use in the Paterson Zochonis design (British Museum record numbers BM1934.1022.10 and BM1946.18.237a). While not a confirmed resource for textile designers at Paterson Zochonis, the museum’s collection was a possible source of inspiration for designers in England creating wax-print designs for consumers in Africa.

Some *adinkera* motifs referenced in this red and black textile design also appeared in other

cloth designs that Paterson Zochonis made at the same time that do not follow *adinkra* cloth layouts. For instance, the black and red Paterson Zochonis textile pattern features *duafe* (“comb”) rendered with a distinct handle design (fig. 4.13). Another Paterson Zochonis cloth design labeled “*femme et bebe*” includes a different visual variation of the *duafe* comb in a pattern with a woman holding a baby on her back (fig. 4.15). Variations to the handle’s design were also common in *adinkra* stamp carving. The design of *dono ntoaso* (“double drum”) in the black and red textile pattern deviates from its typical carving in *adinkra* stamps (fig. 4.13). Here, the drum’s form is elongated in the center with two dots added in between two drum designs. This variation of *dono ntoaso* also evokes the form of a less popular *adinkra* symbol called *tie* or *tae* (“flying tie”) (Mato 1987: fig. 200). In a different Paterson Zochonis textile design from 1965, a graphic comparable to the shape of a single *dono* drum is depicted in a larger scale with a volleyball motif.<sup>31</sup>

Not all designs in Paterson Zochonis’ red and black textile design follow the *adinkra* symbol’s common stamp carving. For example, this Paterson Zochonis textile pattern depicts one of the most unusual interpretations of the *sankɔfa* bird (fig. 4.13). Often the *sankɔfa* bird looks back over its tail to express the symbol’s meaning of returning to the past to look forward.<sup>32</sup> But in this cloth design, the bird has two tails curved in opposite directions. As such, the bird’s lower half resembles the shape of the crossed swords in the *adinkra* motif *akofena* (“sword”). This representation confuses the idea of “looking back,” as the bird’s two tails point upward towards either side of its head. Another Paterson Zochonis textile design features the heart variation of *sankɔfa* with the *adinkra* symbol *bese saka* (“kola nuts”) (fig. 4.16). Changing the bird’s pose in the *sankɔfa* motif suggests that the textile designer was likely unfamiliar with the symbol’s cultural

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<sup>31</sup> The Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester also holds this Paterson Zochonis cloth design (Designer unrecorded. Paterson Zochonis. Factory-printed “wax-print” cloth. 1965. Registered design number 496562. Museum of Science and Industry. Manchester, England. Acquisition 1995. Museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/19).

<sup>32</sup> Regarding potential design inspiration, the British Museum holds an Akan gold weight of the *sankɔfa* bird that the museum acquired before 1960 (record number BM1955.05.75).

meaning.

Lastly, the design of two keys does not reference any *adinkra* symbols in use by the 1960s. However, the designer may have included it due to another connection to Akan culture. As some textile designers consulted museum collections for inspiration, it is noteworthy that the British Museum's collection holds an Akan gold weight designed with two keys (British Museum record number BM 1922.1027.202). Paterson Zochonis registered two other textile designs that featured keys, common imagery in wax-print designs.<sup>33</sup> By including the set of keys in the cloth design emulating hand-printed *adinkra* cloth, a non-Akan specific motif became visually associated with the corpus of *adinkra* symbols.

This cloth design that evokes the layout of hand-printed *adinkra* cloth demonstrates how British textile designers at Paterson Zochonis interpreted *adinkra* and Akan aesthetics for consumers in Africa. Moreover, the textile design reveals the circulation of imagery associated with *adinkra* in other Paterson Zochonis textile designs from the mid-1960s and how *adinkra* symbols inspired other cloth patterns that presumably traveled far beyond Akan society. In both instances, these artistic interventions show the complexity of what *adinkra* had become by the 1960s and difficulty of defining what constitutes an *adinkra* symbol and cloth.

A blue and white Paterson Zochonis cloth design, registered for copyright in the UK in 1963, reveals other interpretations and uses of *adinkra* motifs in factory-printed cloth (fig. 4.17).<sup>34</sup> Designed in two alternating diagonal rows filled with stripes and graphics departs from the common layouts of hand-printed *adinkra* cloth. Here, a connection to *adinkra* is made only through symbols, not cloth pattern. For example, representations of the paddle-shaped *tabon* motif and flower-like *fofo*

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<sup>33</sup> The Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester holds these Paterson Zochonis cloth designs (Designer unrecorded. Paterson Zochonis. Factory-printed "wax-print" cloth.. Museum of Science and Industry. Manchester, England. Acquisition 1995. Museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/28; museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/23).

<sup>34</sup> The name "Asanti symbols" comes from Mason and Hickson's handwritten notes about individual Paterson Zochonis textile samples and may not be the official design name (Hickson and Mason 2011-2012). "Asanti" is the spelling that Mason and Hickson used in their notes.

design closely follow their counterpart in carved *adinkra* stamp designs.<sup>35</sup> The row of freely arranged graphic designs represent “Asanti symbols,” according to Manchester-based textile designers Anne Mason and Margaret Hickson who worked specifically on “African wax-print” designs for Calico Printers Association, ABC Textiles and Laventis (Hickson and Mason 2011-2012). Two motifs depict the *adinkra* symbols *tabon* (“paddle”) and *fofoɔ* (named after a plant).

Two additional motifs in this blue and white cloth design do not illustrate conventional representations of *adinkra* motifs, but may have taken inspiration from *adinkra*. The designer’s approach to recontextualize *adinkra* motifs with other graphics reveals a negotiation of designs that convey cultural specific and universal imagery. For example, one graphic depicts a stylized eye that resembles a typical motif in “African wax-print” patterns. This graphic relates to the meaning, but not the visual shape, of the *adinkra* motif *ɔbene anɔwa* (“the king’s eyes”). The other graphic depicts a cowrie shell. The *adinkra* symbol *nsirewa* (“cowries”) usually featured a grid of small cowrie shells carved into a single calabash stamp. Paterson Zochonis also featured cowries in other textile designs.<sup>36</sup> Beyond *adinkra* cloth, cowries are common graphics in “African wax-print” designs that signify wealth and currency.

The row of thin stripes also reflects a balance of graphic elements with both cultural resonance to Akans and appeal to a broader audience. The stylized form of precise, even lines in the Paterson Zochonis cloth conveys a universal graphic. The stripes may also reference the *adinkra* symbol *owuo atwedee* (“ladder of death”) or *nvomu* stitching added to prestigious hand-printed *adinkra* cloth, both of which carry distinct cultural meaning in Akan society. In a different Paterson Zochonis cloth registered in 1965, thin stripes form the cloth pattern’s grid lines. Textile designers

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<sup>35</sup> Regarding possible design influence, the British Museum acquired an *adinkra* stamp carved in the *fofoɔ* motif before this factory-printed cloth design was registered in the 1960s (British Museum record number 1934.1022.15).

<sup>36</sup> For example, the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester holds a cloth design from Paterson Zochonis designed with cowrie shells (Designer unrecorded. Paterson Zochonis. Factory-printed “wax-print” cloth. 1963. Registered design number 491364. Museum of Science and Industry. Manchester, England. Acquisition 1995. Museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/9).

Margaret Hickson and Anne Mason identified this as “ladder edging,” a reference to the *adinkra* motif *onwo atwedee* (“ladder of death”) (Hickson and Mason 2011-2012). Unlike the black and red cloth that limited use among Akan consumers to mourning dress, blue and white colors were appropriate for multiple occasions during the 1960s.

In sum, numerous cloth designs that Paterson Zochonis registered during the mid-twentieth century included *adinkra* motifs or *adinkra*-inspired imagery. I have not yet found any photographs depicting consumers wearing these particular cloth designs. No information about the intended markets or actual places where Paterson Zochonis traded these specific textiles in Africa, was included with the fabric samples, nor their sales to identify popular cloth designs. Nevertheless, the cloth patterns offer compelling historical evidence of how British designers understood and re-interpreted *adinkra*, and Akan aesthetics more generally, for consumers in West Africa. Mass production of such textiles suggests the popularity among Akans during the 1960s of funeral *adinkra* cloth and factory-printed textiles evoking *adinkra* cloth. Registering the red and black cloth designs for copyright indicates that some Akan consumers had accepted these cloths as a substitute for hand-printed *adinkra* cloth at funerals.

Paterson Zochonis did not limit use of *adinkra* motifs to only textile patterns that resembled hand-printed *adinkra* cloth. *Adinkra* was likely a reference for other graphics that designers made for non-*adinkra* cloth patterns. Close analysis of the motifs in just two cloth patterns reveals how *adinkra* motifs circulated in British-designed textiles. The above examples offer compelling evidence of how *adinkra* motifs were part of the wider visual language for Paterson Zochonis’s wax-print designs during the mid-1960s. In doing so, Paterson Zochonis spread *adinkra* motifs and Akan aesthetics to non-Akan audiences and contexts of use, as these textile designs were likely traded beyond Ghana.

Designer preferences for including certain *adinkra* motifs – and absence of other *adinkra* symbols – are equally important. In the Paterson Zochonis textile designs analyzed here, the



designer's selection and interpretation of several *adinkra* motifs reflects strategic choices of *adinkra* symbols with graphic elements and geometric shapes that carry wide appeal, or the potential for broader relevance, to audiences beyond Akans. In contrast, the visual form of other *adinkra* motifs not included – such as *akoben* (“war horn”), *obene tuo* (“king’s gun), and *akofena* (“sword”) – reflect imagery specific to Akan culture.

Historically, the meanings of individual *adinkra* symbols guided the cloth's use for certain individuals to wear at specific settings. For example, some motifs were fitting or unsuitable for funeral use, whereas other symbols were restricted to the Asantehene. Factory-printed cloth broke these guidelines. Factory-printed cloth was presumably widely distributed in vast quantities in Ghana or other parts of West Africa, in which included graphics had the potential to reflect or reshape popular *adinkra* motifs and overall cloth layouts. As circulating *adinkra* motifs in this way adjusted how Akans encountered *adinkra* symbols, such cloth designs may have influenced the declining fluency in the symbolic meanings of *adinkra* motifs.

For example, in 1963, Paterson Zochonis designed a factory-printed cloth entirely with *gye Nyame* (“except God”) (fig. 4.18). Printed in black on a red cloth, the textile design was likely marketed to Akan consumers as a mourning cloth; Mason and Hickson identify this cloth design as a “tar print” (Hickson and Mason 2011-2012). Some hand-printed *adinkra* cloths were printed with only one symbol in a grid pattern, but the designer's choice of checkerboard pattern with black squares alternating with *gye Nyame* does not reflect common *adinkra* cloth patterns. Sole attention to *gye Nyame* in this cloth pattern suggests the popularity and importance of *gye Nyame* during the 1960s.<sup>37</sup> The next chapter explores in greater detail the shifting role and meaning of *gye Nyame*, one

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<sup>37</sup> Stamp carvers in Ghana have created multiple visual design variations of *gye Nyame*. Regarding the potential influence of the symbol's design in the Paterson Zochonis cloth design, the British Museum does not hold any *gye Nyame* stamps made before 1965. The only Akan object with *gye Nyame* acquired before 1963 in the British Museum is a nineteenth century royal bracelet with amulets (*suman*), one of which was a good lost wax casting of a disc bead in the shape of *gye Nyame* (British Museum record number Af1900.0427.13).

of the most common *adinkera* motifs today.

The distinct visual representations of *adinkera* motifs in machine-made cloth designs contributed to a remarkable shift in Akan aesthetics, from the nuances of symbolic forms to the dynamic interactions between the visual and verbal arts. For example, since Paterson Zochonis' textile designs from the 1960s, mechanical designs of *adinkera* motifs in factory-printed cloth have come to also correspond to the graphic qualities of screen-printed *adinkera* cloth. To consider the importance of other voices who determined popular *adinkera* motifs and related ideas of fashionable dress, the chapter's final section turns to the roles of women cloth sellers and market dynamics in Kumasi.

### III. The “Sweetness” of Cloth: Nana Akua

Inside the bustling Kejetia market in Kumasi – the largest market in all of West Africa – Nana Akua's shop was brimming with colorful hand-woven *kente* cloths on floor-to-ceiling shelves, neatly folded and tightly wrapped in plastic.<sup>38</sup> Sewing machines buzzed as tailors nearby sewed together narrow strips of hand-woven *kente* to create large cloths. Nana Akua's shop is located in the “*kente* line,” the area of the market dedicated to the prestigious handmade cloths emblematic of Akan culture and power. Her shop is tucked deep inside the market, away from the outer streets where hawkers call out to passers-by the cheap prices of imported goods.

Nestled in Nana Akua's shop, she loosely stacked on the lower shelves some hand-printed *adinkera* cloths. Women cloth sellers at Kejetia market introduce new trends, while also reflecting current desires from their customers. Yet the *adinkera* cloths that Nana Akua sold are not the popular

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<sup>38</sup> This description is from my visit to Nana Akua's shop at Kejetia market on April 22, 2015. I only briefly met Nana Akua on this one occasion and did not record her surname at that time. The other information I discuss about Nana Akua comes from my conversation with the Boakye family.

screen-printed cloths on heavy fabrics. Instead, she sold stamped cloths made with thin, inexpensive Chinese fabrics. How did these Chinese textiles end up here, transformed into *adinkra* cloth and sold at Nana Akua's shop in Kejetia market's "*kente* line"?

### Cloth Sellers as Designers

In Ntonso, Gabriel Boakye gathered three kinds of imported fabrics to show me distinctions in high and low quality cloths for printing *adinkra* cloth:

Calico, the preferred cotton cloth for stamping *adinkra* today.<sup>39</sup>

A mid-range cotton cloth imported from Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.

And a low quality cloth from China, which Gabriel called "shudder" cloth.

I recently saw *adinkra* cloth for sale at the "*kente* line" printed on that same Chinese fabric, I told Gabriel. Sure enough, Gabriel responded that he printed some of the *adinkra* cloths sold at Nana Akua's shop. The network of cloth sellers and cloth makers was much smaller than I had realized (G. Boakye, interview, May 11, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

Three weeks prior to this conversation, Nana Akua made an order to the Boakye family. She provided Gabriel and his brother Michael with plain cloth for stamping. Gabriel and Michael are from one of the only families that continue the stamping technique today. Her fabric selection was unusual. The purple color and glossy finish of the Chinese fabric contrasted most new *adinkra* cloths made for general sale today that follow current trends to ensure broad appeal. This includes screen-printed red and black cloths to market as funeral attire or white cloths to wear at social events. Nana

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<sup>39</sup> Calico is the preferred cloth for stamping because it absorbs *badia* dye well. Economics and business scholars Peter Quartey and Joshua Abor said traders import calico to Ghana from Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, China, India, and Pakistan (Quartey and Abor 2011: 56). Cloth makers in Ntonso told me they use some calico cloths from China.

Akua's cloths were neither.

Admittedly, when I first saw the *adinkra* cloths on the shelves at Nana Akua's shop, I thought they were older cloths. They didn't reflect common fabric types, printing techniques, or cloth designs. The use of stamping, cloth color, and overall design (a square grid pattern with one symbol stamped inside each square) recalled the style of some late twentieth century stamped *adinkra* cloths common before screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. The only connection to popular *adinkra* cloths today was the symbol choices: *adinkrahene* ("king of Adinkra"), *gye Nyame* ("except God"), and *sankɔfa* ("to go back and fetch").

Nana Akua asked the cloth makers to insert rows of multi-colored fabric strips to the stamped *adinkra* cloth. The narrow cloth strips sought to resemble expensive *kente* cloth strips and *nwomu* stitching added to increase a cloth's prestige (fig. 4.19). Yet the cloth strips added to Nana Akua's cloths were neither *kente*, nor *nwomu* stitching. Gabriel and Michael commissioned a tailor to make yellow and red strips with a thin yarn, half the price of the *kente* cloth version (G. Boakye, interview, May 11, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Anthony Boakye, one of Gabriel and Michael's brothers, sewed the strips onto the cloth. Incorporating cloth strips creates an association to the costly handmade *adinkra* cloth at an affordable rate.

This example demonstrates Nana Akua's important contributions to innovate *adinkra* cloth and transform imported textiles in ways relevant to her local customers. While Nana Akua selected the fabric and multi-colored strip design, she did not instruct the cloth makers on specific *adinkra* motifs or overall layout. Similarly, another cloth seller at the "Ntomabema line" in Kejetia market who sells *adinkra* cloth, Nana Afia Rebecca Oppong, also allows the cloth maker to decide on the cloth's *adinkra* symbols. The cloth maker who Nana Afia works with charges an added fee if she requests particular *adinkra* motifs or cloth designs (A. Oppong, interview, May 7, 2015, Kumasi, Ghana). To avoid added costs, Nana Afia tells the *adinkra* cloth maker to use any design that will look beautiful.

This approach to cloth making reveals negotiations between men cloth makers and women cloth sellers to design hand-printed *adinkera* cloth. In addition to commissioning local cloth makers to make hand-printed *adinkera* cloth, women cloth sellers have also commissioned textile companies in Ghana to produce factory-printed cloth with *adinkera* symbols, in which the seller is actively involved in the cloth's design (Boateng 2007: 343, footnote 13).

To create an *adinkera* cloth with Nana Akua's fabrics, Gabriel and Michael selected common *adinkera* symbols today already popular and familiar to attract customers (G. Boakye, interview, May 11, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). The brothers stamped one symbol per cloth, creating a simple square grid pattern that they called a "short design" – the same cloth pattern illustrated in Chapter Two that cloth makers in Asokwa used in 2015 to add *adinkera* onto a wax-print cloth. Complex, intricate cloth patterns made with multiple *adinkera* stamps required more time to create, and therefore make the cloth more expensive. For Nana Akua's cloths, time was of the essence to avoid high costs. Michael and Gabriel worked on a single cloth together. Gabriel drew comb lines and Michael stamped. The brothers printed around twenty *adinkera* cloths in three hours.

The process to print this "short" design reveals how the fabric's low quality and cheap costs determined the cloth design and symbol selection. Gabriel and Michael developed an efficient printing method that maintained association to more expensive *adinkera* cloth. The Boakye brothers are skilled artists who have mastered their craft since learning the trade as a child. Gabriel and Michael know how to make complicated designs, but chose not to print them because it would make the cloth more costly to consumers. They also believed that "short" designs would satisfy customer desires for affordable handmade *adinkera* cloth (G. Boakye, interview, May 11, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

This example reveals a significant relationship between the economic cost of cloth and the choices made by those involved in the *adinkera* cloth's design and production. Cloth makers would not have selected the same cloth design if using higher quality fabrics. It is for the very reason that

imported cloth (especially cloth imported from China) are the cheapest fabrics available in Ghana that the cloth makers designed *adinkera* cloth noticeably different from the designs printed on more expensive fabrics. By revitalizing the historical stamping technique for imported Chinese textiles, cloth makers and market sellers continue to adapt and transform *adinkera* in contemporary life.

### Women's Roles in *Adinkera*

By participating in the process to design an *adinkera* cloth, women cloth sellers at the markets in Ghana, including Nana Akua, have made important contributions to contemporary Akan culture. Handmade *adinkera* cloth sold at Kejetia market reflects key relationships between aesthetic and economic choices, as well as negotiations between the seller and maker. Nana Akua's selection of plain cloth for printing reveals her considerations of what kinds of cloths are available, affordable, suitable for printing *adinkera*, and desirable by consumers. The *adinkera* cloths that she sell indicates how women cloth sellers shaped the cloth's aesthetic qualities, as cloth sellers are closely attuned to changing fashion styles.

Many customers who purchase *adinkera* cloth directly from market sellers are women. This gender distinction aligns with the role of the market to make *adinkera* cloth more accessible and widely used beyond chiefs and other elite who historically dressed in *adinkera* cloth. For instance, Nana Agata Mensah, a cloth seller who has worked at Kejetia market for twenty-five years, said that mostly women buy *adinkera* cloth at her shop (fig. 4.20; A. Mensah, interview, May 7, 2015, Kumasi, Ghana). Yet she emphasized the importance of chiefs who wear *adinkera* cloth; Nana Mensah said that chiefs buy such cloths from shops in Manhyia or cloth makers in Ntonso rather than from her or other market sellers. Sometimes, customers at the markets ask the seller to help them select which *adinkera* cloth to purchase. Nana Afia said that when asked to choose for her customers, she picks the

*adinkera* cloth most beautiful to her. For Nana Afia, the cloth's visual design makes it beautiful, rather than its symbolic meanings (fig. 4.21; A. Oppong, interview, May 7, 2015, Kumasi, Ghana). Other women cloth sellers in Ntonso made similar remarks that customers seek the seller's guidance to choose an *adinkera* cloth.

Women cloth sellers have thus shaped contemporary beliefs about Akan cultural wisdom when selling *adinkera* cloth. To appeal to buyers, cloth sellers sometimes changed the names of *adinkera* symbols, in much the same way as how cloth sellers created names for wax-print designs (Mato 1994). Named cloth has carried significant cultural value in Akan society, and other parts of West Africa, from the cloth's use as a form of non-verbal communication. Sometimes, the name of a wax-print cloth design has attracted consumers to buy the cloth more so than the cloth's visual design.

Yet, women cloth sellers at Kejetia market do not have the same training or expertise in Akan proverbial wisdom and the historical meanings of *adinkera* symbols as cloth makers and elders. Some sellers are not even Akan. For instance, a cloth seller at Kejetia market said that she does not know all the names of the *adinkera* symbols printed on the cloths that she sells (Interview, May 7, 2015, Kumasi, Ghana).<sup>40</sup> Some cloth sellers do not engage in conversations about the cloth's symbolism. For example, one cloth seller told me that she does not explain the meanings of *adinkera* symbols to women buy *adinkera* cloth from her (Interview, May 7, 2015, Kumasi, Ghana). Whether customers seek *adinkera* cloth for their aesthetic design or symbolic meaning, this seller assumes that the women already know the symbols' names and meanings because they are from the Ashanti Region. However, some women consumers only know the common names of *adinkera* symbols currently popular. Buying *adinkera* cloth at Kejetia market therefore signals an important transfer of Akan cultural wisdom – or lack thereof – through the names and meanings of *adinkera* symbols.

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<sup>40</sup> Name removed for privacy.

## Market Dynamics

At Kejetia market today, handmade *adinkera* cloth occupies a small portion of cloths for sale.<sup>41</sup> In addition to Nana Akua, the few other women I met who sold hand-printed *adinkera* cloths also sold other handmade cloth (namely Asante *kente* cloth and *joromy* embroidery cloth) or factory-printed cloth.<sup>42</sup> The “*kente* line,” “*ntomabema* line,” and other nearby lanes selling cloth are the main market areas to find hand-printed *adinkera* cloth. Nana Akua’s cloth selection was also exceptional in that most other hand-printed *adinkera* cloth for sale at Kejetia market were screen-printed and made with black and white or black and red cloth – appropriate colors for the most common settings to wear *adinkera* cloth in Ghana today. However, Kusi Boadum began stamping *adinkera* cloth again in 2015 for a different cloth seller at Kejetia market. Discussed further in Chapter Twi, Kusi explained that he decided to resume stamping *adinkera* cloth after more than ten years hiatus because the women cloth seller at Kejetia market (whom he formerly worked with) began requesting stamped *adinkera* cloth from him.

Changing patterns to sell hand-printed and factory-printed *adinkera* cloth at Kejetia market (and other markets in Ghana) are closely connected to shifts in *adinkera* fashions. The recent surge of China’s commanding presence in Ghana’s textile industry has also contributed. Women cloth sellers have negotiated shifts in the global circulation of cloth at the markets and refashioned *adinkera* as a result of this changing landscape. At Kejetia market and the neighboring market area of Adum (Kumasi’s city centre), several cloth sellers who now only sell factory-printed cloth previously sold handmade *adinkera* cloths. The women cloth sellers – including some who have worked at the market for more than twenty years – stopped selling handmade *adinkera* cloth because they became less popular due to greater demand for factory-printed cloth.

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<sup>41</sup> This decline appears to be more widespread at markets in other cities with large Akan populations from my visits to cloth shops at Makola market in Accra, Kejetia and Adum markets in Kumasi and Manhyia area of Kumasi.

<sup>42</sup> Most factory-printed cloth sold at the market are manufactured in Ghana or imported from China and other parts of West Africa (including Benin, Nigeria, and Togo).



Consequently, cloth sellers who I spoke to in Kumasi expressed difficulty in finding handmade *adinkera* cloth at the market outside of the “*kente* line.” Sellers often referred me to Ntonso or the Center for National Culture in Kumasi (commonly called the “arts center”) to purchase handmade *adinkera* cloth. Despite these recommendations, I did not find any full-size *adinkera* cloth sold the arts centre in Kumasi during my visits from 2013 to 2015. At Makola market in Accra, I had noticed a few women cloth sellers with a limited selection of screen-printed *adinkera* cloth – no stamped cloth – in 2013 and 2014. Cloth sellers there similarly suggested to me that I visit the nearby Centre for National Culture in Accra for hand-printed *adinkera* cloth, which had available at that time a limited number of stamped *adinkera* cloths.

As a result of fewer women selling hand-printed *adinkera* cloth in markets today, more consumers buy *adinkera* cloth directly from cloth makers rather than market sellers. Outside of Kejetia market and Ntonso, I only identified a few shops in Kumasi that now sell hand-printed *adinkera* cloth; most of these shops are located near Manhyia Palace and sold handmade cloth and regalia for chiefs and other elite customers. Among the women customers in Accra and Kumasi who I talked to that do not buy *adinkera* cloth at markets, most said they prefer to buy directly from cloth makers in Ntonso because *adinkera* cloth sold at the markets are premade and lower quality.

These transitions show how the role of hand-printed *adinkera* cloth at markets in Ghana has changed over time. Currently, factory-printed cloth with *adinkera* motifs is the most accessible and affordable option at markets in Kumasi and Accra. But markets were once central places to make *adinkera* accessible to Ghanaians across economic and social classes. In the mid to late twentieth century, Kejetia market was an important site to buy hand-printed *adinkera* cloth. During that time, women cloth sellers at Kejetia market formed an *adinkera* cloth association (D. Mato, personal communication, February 26, 2015). However, this association dissolved due to the decline of selling handmade *adinkera* cloth at Kejetia market.

Today, there are two cloth associations active at Kejetia market: one specific to *kente* cloth sellers and another for all kinds of textiles. In 2015, a man led the *kente* cloth association and a woman supervised the association for all textiles with the title of queen mother; the associations have additional positions for vice president and secretary. In each cloth lane, one cloth seller serves as the queen mother of that lane. Both offer cloth sellers more social support (such as bereavement) than business support. None of the women cloth sellers who I interviewed at Kejetia market in 2015 were members of either association, nor did they know former members of the *adinkra* cloth association.

As the presence of factory-made textiles and handmade *adinkra* cloths at Kejetia market has shifted over time, so too has the role of women cloth sellers changed. Although men have most often been associated with *adinkra* cloth, this section has demonstrated how women have played a significant role in the design and use of *adinkra* cloth. Women outside of Kejetia market – including the wives, mothers, and sisters of cloth makers who help with the dyeing, sewing, and selling of handmade *adinkra* cloth– have also shaped historical and contemporary meanings of *adinkra*.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrated the implications of depicting *adinkra* and *adinkra*-inspired motifs in factory-printed cloth on changing the cultural meaning of *adinkra* within and beyond Ghana. Specifically, the role of *adinkra* symbols in late nineteenth century British factory-printed cloth offers historical evidence of how *adinkra* symbols later became global icons of African identity in the twentieth century.

As discussed above, most factory-printed cloth designs seeking to resemble handmade *adinkra* cloth reflect emphasis on designing *adinkra* motifs in grid and row layouts. Factory-printed

cloth designs emulating *adinkra* cloth layouts appear uniform with sleek, even lines. As such, *adinkra* symbols and the overall cloth arrangements carry more value than the hand-stamping technique. Absent is attention to the visual qualities of stamping tools and printing process, such as the rough edges of carved calabash stamps and hand-drawn lines with wooden combs.

However, some textile designers incorporated the hand-stamping technique in factory-printed cloth designs with *adinkra* motifs. For example, a Japanese company based in Ghana made a factory-printed “fancy print” cloth in the 1960s that depicts two *adinkra* symbols – *aban* (“house” or “castle”) and *nkotimsefuo puaa* or *mpuannum* (named after a women’s hairstyle) closely printed next to one another in alternating rows with an Akan stool design (fig. 4.22).<sup>43</sup> Small groups of two or three dots are added between the *adinkra* motifs. The dots reappear in exactly the same places, and in exactly the same shapes and sizes. The small black dots reflect the designer’s interest in representing the act of stamping *adinkra* cloth.

Including drip marks on the factory-printed cloth design – the only reference of irregularities from hand-printing – also indicates that the designer may have studied the stamping process or viewed hand-printed *adinkra* cloth in person. When viewing hand-printed *adinkra* cloth at a distance or in photographs, small dye drips are not visible. On hand-printed *adinkra* cloth, drip marks are evidence of the handmade process. On the factory-printed cloth design, added dots evoke the cloth maker’s act of carrying stamps and combs covered in *badia* dye across the cloth, resulting in drips of dye. To make such references may suggest a strategy to market the factory-printed cloth design as “authentic” from attention to the stamping process.

Not only did European textile designers look to Akan aesthetics, but *adinkra* cloth makers also incorporated European culture in their work to create *adinkra* symbols. Speaking broadly about

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<sup>43</sup> This cloth is currently held in the British Museum’s collection, which they acquired in 2015 from Anna Craven who lived in Ghana during the 1960s to 1970s. The name of the Japanese company or designer was not included in accompanying documentation.

cultural exchange and circulation within West Africa, anthropologist Brigitte Menzel observed, “it is impossible to overlook the fact that most of the textiles in use [in West Africa] could not have been produced locally. This applies not only to the colorful printed cottons but as well to handmade textiles” (Menzel 1990: 83). In addition to the contributions of imported materials and tools, several *adinkera* symbols reflect inspiration from European textiles and design. Anthropologist Robert Sutherland Rattray documented the earliest example of an *adinkera* motif reflecting European influence. In 1927, Rattray described an unnamed diamond-shaped *adinkera* motif as “this, I was informed, was a new design copied from Europeans” (Rattray 1927: 267, *adinkera* stamp pattern 50). Mato’s research in the 1980s included seven *adinkera* designs reflecting influence from Europe.<sup>44</sup> These examples reveal that the impact of cultural borrowing in *adinkera* cloth, and wider Akan society, was not limited to Islamic cultures north of Akan communities but also extended beyond the continent of Africa.

Other examples discussed in this chapter demonstrate how cloth makers and sellers have used imported textiles to create *adinkera* cloth. *Adinkera* cloths for sale at Nana Akua’s market stall represent some changes, including the current roles of affordable Chinese textiles that satisfy

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<sup>44</sup> The *adinkera* symbols that Mato recorded include (listed in alphabetical order): *ABCD*. “Cloths made by the United Africa Company (U.A.C.) in the 1940’s had this pattern stamped upon them” (Mato 1987: fig. 3). *Foreign devil*. “Donkor. This motif was taken from the book *A Foreign Devil in China*, written by J.C. Pollack (1971). It was selected by Donkor who ‘liked its shape’ and made into a stamp in 1980” (Mato 1987: fig. 95). *Nnavuro*. “The beating of the gogon (fetish bells). Doben: ‘This cloth we called the Gogon. I carved the stamp after seeing this cloth.’ This pattern was based upon Doben’s seeing a ‘European’ cloth and making a stamp named after the pattern upon the cloth. ‘European’ cloth patterns were often given names for identification and often to increase their marketability. The gogon is a traditional bell-like instrument used in West Africa” (Mato 1987: fig. 139). *Obohema*. “See *Tabon*. ‘Diamond.’ Note: the Obohema stamp was often found on early cloths seen in nineteenth century photographs. It is less used today, and if used is more often identified as *tabon*” (Mato 1987: fig. 155). *Senchi Bridge/Senkye Bridge*. “Ofosu: ‘We went to see how the bridge was built. It was like this, like that, like this (Discussion the form of the stamp). Therefore the stamp was designed upon the same pattern. Even Europeans have made the same pattern on their cloths and headkerchiefs. That is why it is called *Senchi Bridge*” (Mato 1987: fig. 198). *U.S. Flag*. “Oppong. He created this form in 1981” (Mato 1987: fig. 205). *V/W*. “Created by Nsiah who choose the logo of the Volkswagen car for its design. Collected in Asokwa” (Mato 1987: fig. 206). Additionally, cloth maker Kwadwo Nsiah said in the 1980s, “Even the patterns found in European cloths were cut [made into a stamp] by us and named. Sometimes the Europeans come to us and take photographs of the [*adinkera*] patterns and send them back to work with” (Nsiah as quoted in Mato 1987: 215). Mato explained, “It is unclear whether the photographs were sent to home factories to design cloths or merely for their personal use” (Mato 1987: 215). Nsiah’s experiences suggest potential interactions and mutual influences between *adinkera* cloth makers and Europeans to adapt foreign textile patterns for new markets.

consumer desires for the latest fashions in today's struggling economy. Changing approaches to cloth making reflect shifts in popular cloth trends and production strategies as well as responses to different plain and patterned machine-made cloths available in Ghana.

Akans continue to wear contemporary factory-printed cloth designed with *adinkra* motifs. But in a culture where always dressing in the latest fashion is highly desired, the following example suggests preference among some Akan consumers for hand-printed *adinkra* rather than machine-made *adinkra* cloth:

“There is one man here, he says, a poor person will buy the silkscreen...with the little money that he has, he buys it and he keeps the cloth for so long. Traditionally, tradition is tradition. You cannot change the tradition. No way! How can you change Saturday to Sunday? Can you do that? No. Because Sunday is Sunday” (G. Boakye, interview, November 26, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Amidst the influx and popularity of factory-printed cloth designs emulating *adinkra* cloth, the cultural significance of buying and wearing hand-printed *adinkra* cloth in Akan society persists – even if one cloth is all you can afford.<sup>45</sup> European textile designers, in addition to market sellers and cloth makers in Ghana, re-fashion *adinkra* in ways that will be “sweet” and appealing to those who will wear them.

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<sup>45</sup> In September 1982, Kwame Ofosu told Mato: “We Akans prefer traditional cloths because of funerals. However we do like the types made from machine also” (Ofosu as quoted in Mato 1987: 213).

## Chapter Four Images



Fig. 4.1. Designer unrecorded. Calico Printers Association (CPA). Factory-printed “fancy print” cloth sample (detail). 1928. Registered design number 267033. Design registered on October 25, 1928. The National Archives of the UK. Kew, England.

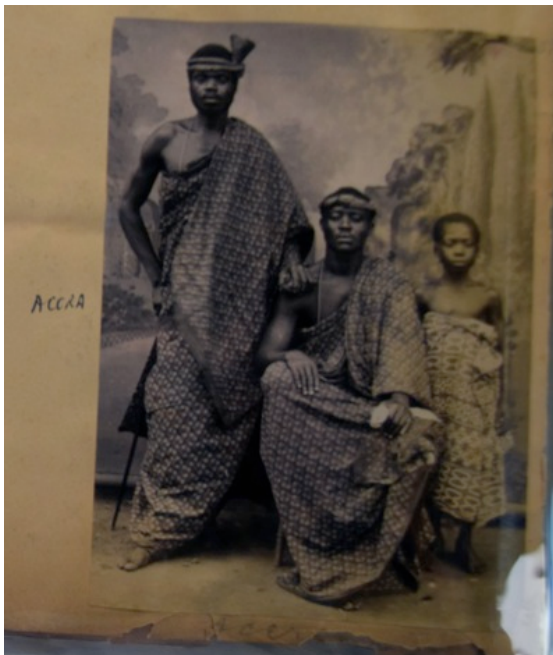


Fig. 4.2. N. Walwin Holm. Untitled photograph. Accra, Gold Coast. In “Views, Types, etc., of West Africa: Album of captioned photographs of the Gold Coast and Nigeria, 1891.” Donated by D.J. Holt, Esq. The Bodleian Library at Oxford University. Commonwealth and African Studies Archives and Special Collections. Oxford, England. Record number MSS.Afr.s.1789.



Fig. 4.3. Designer unrecorded. Logan Muckelt and Company. "Impressions Book 160-260." 1905. Manchester Central Library, Archives and Special Collections. Manchester, England. Record number M831/48. 60180.



Fig. 4.4. Designer unrecorded. Logan Muckelt and Company. "Pattern Book HT1-77, EB1-8." 1931. Manchester Central Library, Archives and Special Collections. Manchester, England. Record number M831/13. 60695.



Fig. 4.5. Designer unrecorded. Logan Muckelt and Company. "Pattern Books L6691-L7185." 1934-1936. Manchester Central Library, Archives and Special Collections. Manchester, England. Record number M831/100. 60680.



Fig. 4.6. Photographer unrecorded. "Negerinnen v. d. Goldküste," "Negro women from the Gold Coast." 1880-1985. Black-and-white albumen print, 10.9cm x 8.3cm. Album, "Bilder aus Afrika," "Pictures from Africa," owned by Ms. Christin Aepli. Mission 21/Basel Mission Image Archive. Basel, Switzerland. University of Southern California Special Collections Library. Record number impa-m55698. Available online <http://bmpix.usc.edu>





Fig. 4.7. Friedrich August Louis Ramseyer. “Mädchen von der Goldküste,” “Girl from the Gold Coast.” 1881-1895. Ghana. Black-and-white albumen print, 8.7cm x 5.8cm. In late nineteenth century photo album; an added notation states that this photograph was placed in album owned by “someone with special relations with Kyebi and Begoro,” towns located in the Eastern region southwest of Lake Volta. Mission 21/Basel Mission Image Archive. Basel, Switzerland. University of Southern California Special Collections Library. Record numbers QD-30.024.0092, impa-m37777, and impa-m26106. Available online <http://bmpix.usc.edu>



Fig. 4.8. Photographer unrecorded. “Negermädchen,” “African girl.” 1881-1895. Ghana. Black and white positive and paper print and albumen, 8.8 x 5.8 cm. Untitled photo album. Mission 21/Basel Mission Image Archive. Basel, Switzerland. Record number QD-30.024.0107; album record number QD-30.024.



Fig. 4.9. Designer unrecorded. Logan Muckelt and Company. "Pattern book L6691 to L7185." 1934-1936. Manchester Central Library, Archives and Special Collections. Manchester, England. Record number M831/100. 60680.



Fig. 4.10. Photographer unrecorded. "Tracht der eingeborenen Mädchen," "Traditional costume of indigenous girls." Black-and-white albumen print, 9.7cm x 7.2cm. Album of photos from Ghana during 1936-46, possibly belonging to missionary Mr. Ernst Peyer. Mission 21/Basel Mission Image Archive. Basel, Switzerland. University of Southern California Special Collections Library. Record number impa-m55895. Available online <http://bmpix.usc.edu>



Fig. 4.11. Artist unrecorded. “Negermädchen,” “African girl.” Before 1905. Ghana. Half-tone print, wood engraving or line block print, 10.2 x 5.5 cm. Mission 21/Basel Mission Image Archive. Basel, Switzerland. University of Southern California Special Collections Library. Record numbers QD-30.001.0085; impa-m36760. Available online <http://bmpix.usc.edu>



Fig. 4.12. Designer unrecorded. Paterson Zochonis. Factory-printed “fancy print” cloth sample (detail). 1965. Registered design number 496465. Design registered on February 23, 1965. Museum of Science and Industry. Manchester, England. Acquisition 1995. Museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/19.



Fig. 4.13. Designer unrecorded. Paterson Zochonis. Factory-printed “fancy print” cloth sample (detail). 1963. Registered design number 491363. Design registered on July 11, 1963. Museum of Science and Industry. Manchester, England. Acquisition 1995. Museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/9.



Fig. 4.14. Designer unrecorded. Paterson Zochonis. Factory-printed “fancy print” cloth sample (detail). 1963. Registered design number 492399. Design registered on November 15, 1963. Museum of Science and Industry. Manchester, England. Acquisition 1995. Museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/9.



Fig. 4.15. Designer unrecorded. Paterson Zochonis. Factory-printed “wax-print” cloth sample (detail). “Femme et bebe.” Design number 5/2182, A14889. Museum of Science and Industry. Manchester, England. Acquisition 1995. Museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/30.



Fig. 4.16. Designer unrecorded. Paterson Zochonis. Factory-printed “wax-print” cloth sample (detail). Museum of Science and Industry. Manchester, England. Acquisition 1995. Museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/28.



Fig. 4.17. Designer unrecorded. Paterson Zochonis. Factory-printed “fancy print” cloth sample (detail). 1963. Registered design number 492022. Design registered on September 25, 1963. Museum of Science and Industry. Manchester, England. Acquisition 1995. Museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/9.



Fig. 4.18. Designer unrecorded. Paterson Zochonis. Factory-printed “fancy print” cloth sample with *gye Nyame* (“except God”) motif (detail). 1963. Registered design number 508045. Design registered on March 6, 1969. Museum of Science and Industry. Manchester, England. Acquisition 1995. Museum record number YA1995.2, box MS0424/23.



Fig. 4.19. Gabriel and Michael Boakye. *Adinkra* cloth commissioned by market seller Nana Akua (detail) with strips of cloth strips made to resemble expensive *kente* cloth strip (shown next to cloth). May 11, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 4.20. Nana Agata Mensah. Cloth seller standing in front of her market stall with black screen-printed *adinkra* cloths. May 7, 2015. Kejetia Market. Kumasi, Ghana.



Fig. 4.21. Nana Afia Rebecca Opong. Cloth seller seated at her market stall with factory-made funeral cloths and screen-printed *adinkra* cloths. May 7, 2015. Kejetia Market. Kumasi, Ghana.



Fig. 4.22. Designer unrecorded. Factory-printed “fancy print” cloth (detail). Cloth design includes Akan stool and the *adinkra* motifs *aban* (“house” or “castle”) and *nkotimsefuo puaa* or *mpuannum* (named after a women’s hairstyle). Printed by a Japanese company based in Ghana. 1964. British Museum. London, England. Donated by Anna Craven, who lived and worked in Ghana during the late 1960s-early 1970s. Museum record number 2015.2010.4.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Remembering through *Adinkra*: Reflections and Re-Inventions in Cloth and Symbol

#### Introduction

Samuel Adjei pulled out a set of keys from the pocket of his trousers. The keychain holder was a small piece of carved wood. The design means *gye Nyame*, “only God,” he explained to me. He added that it is one of the “chief” symbols hand-printed on *adinkra* cloth. Samuel said, you “can feel God’s presence in the symbol.” He was seated in an armchair behind his desk, where factory-printed curtains designed with *gye Nyame* and another *adinkra* symbol draped over his office windows. On the wall, Samuel displayed an *adinkra* cloth that a former student had made. At that time, Samuel was director of the Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region in Kumasi, the heart of Akan culture. Samuel grasped the keychain in the palm of his hand, and tightly wrapped his fingers around the wooden *gye Nyame*. The symbol’s form, he told me, represents how Akans visualize God (S. Adjei, interview, August 4, 2014, Kumasi, Ghana).

Samuel’s account about *gye Nyame* reveals the symbol’s personal meaning and importance in his life. He kept representations of the symbol physically close to him and within his office surroundings. A little over six months after this conversation, Samuel suddenly passed away. In the days leading up to the funeral, held one month after his passing in March 2015, funerary announcement posters with Samuel’s portrait were displayed around the cultural centre (fig. 5.1). At

the entrance gate, a commemorative banner was posted beneath a *gye Nyame* design. A smaller poster was taped in between two *gye Nyame* decals pasted on the front of a bus parked at the centre (fig. 5.2).

After the morning church service and burial, an enormous commemorative celebration was held at the cultural centre. Black and red striped tents around the lawn set the stage for hundreds of mourners who came dressed in exquisite cloths. The cultural centre's dance troupe performed to honor their director's memory, dancing to the beat of tall *fontomfrom* drums carved with *gye Nyame* symbols (fig. 5.3). One man danced wearing a stylish tailored shirt and trousers, sewn with a factory-printed cloth designed with a large *gye Nyame* symbol strategically placed on the center of his back (fig. 5.4). Samuel's funeral was an extraordinary commemoration of song and dance to honor his passion and life's work in theatre and performance. *Gye Nyame* surrounded Samuel's journey to the world of the ancestors in cloth and other materials.

*Adinkra* cloth has become best known as mourning dress at Akan funerals, and one of the popular translations of the word *adinkra* is "to say goodbye" or "farewell." Yet the role of *adinkra* in practices of remembrance extends far beyond funerals. This chapter turns attention to these other contexts. From tourism to sites of national display, Ghanaians have used *adinkra* to mark relationships to the past and reconstruct historical narratives. The chapter is organized into three sections that explore the role of *adinkra* to remember cultural, national, and personal pasts.

This chapter examines how Ghanaians have used *adinkra* across historical and contemporary contexts as a practice of remembrance – to recall the past in the present, to re-invent historical traditions, and to envision future aspirations. These connections between the past, present, and future call to mind the *adinkra* symbol *sankɔfa* that evokes an Akan proverb "*ɛ wo werɛ na wosan kɔfa a, yɛnkyi*," meaning "it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten." Often shortened to the phrase "to go back and fetch," *sankɔfa* is visually represented as a heart-shaped design or a bird with its head looking back over

its tail. The Afterword that follows this chapter explores how *sankɔfa* has circulated beyond Ghana – such as in Haile Gerima’s film entitled *Sankofa* – to become a marker of African and African American identity.

This chapter’s attention to the relationships between history and memory considers this expression of *sankɔfa* in conversation with ideas related to social memory, often theorized as experiencing the past in the present (Burke 1989; Connerton 1989; Halbwach 1992; Nora 1989). But in following the meaning of *sankɔfa*, this chapter argues against social memory theories that stress memory’s link to the past. In contrast, the chapter asserts that acts of remembering are very much engaged with the future (Munn 1992; Shaw 2013). I later discuss in this chapter how David Boamah’s forward-thinking attitude and vision for the future have shaped his efforts to remember the past and history of his trade. More broadly, Ghana’s “culture of remembrance” emphasizes how the way people want to be remembered in the future shapes what they recall from the past – as Tobias Wendl and Nancy du Plessis’ film on photography in Ghana is aptly titled “Future Remembrances” (Wendl and du Plessis 1998).

Social memory revitalizes the past through the ways people live in the present and envision the future. The chapter considers social memory theories that explore how memories materialize in objects and images. Historian Pierre Nora posits that memories materialize in “*lieux de memoire*” (meaning “sites of memory”), unlike histories that are embedded within the relationships between objects (Nora 1989). Ghana’s “culture of remembrance” includes a process of self-fashioning identity related to how Ghanaian wish others to remember them in the future; for many Ghanaians, this involves marking select connections to a desired lineage and wisdom from the past (de Witte 2001; Wendl 2001).

Discussion of how *adinkra* motifs have become a national symbol of Ghana draws upon historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s notion of “invented” traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Hobsbawm said, “insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity

of ‘invented’ traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition” (Hobsbawm 1983: 2). The chapter analyzes the historical use of *gye Nyame* in stamped *adinkra* cloth and politics, as well as its expanding roles as one of the most widely used motifs in Ghana today.

President Kwame Nkrumah’s nationalist iconography in the mid-twentieth century appropriated *adinkra* and other Akan cultural practices to mark national identity, unity, and pride (Antubam 1963; Hess 2006a, 2006b). Today, *adinkra* symbols are one of the most prevalent design elements in Ghana. *Adinkra* is celebrated in Ghana from the cloth’s graphic symbols that evoke traditional wisdom and history as a pre-colonial practice re-invented as national culture. The visual imagery from the nationalist program was extended into the tourism industry, presenting Ghana to the world as a unified nation.<sup>1</sup> Since the late twentieth century, Ghana has become a popular tourist destination: slave castles have become pilgrimage sites associated with heritage tourism, and tourists worldwide are drawn to first-hand experiences with village craft production and wildlife at national parks. At Ghana’s largest crafts and souvenir venue, the Centre for National Culture, *adinkra* symbols carry value as an icon of Ghana.<sup>2</sup> Well-known *adinkra* motifs such as *gye Nyame* and *sankɔfa* adorn wall hangings, jewelry, woodcarvings, stools, and drums – typical of tourist crafts made and sold across the country.

In what follows, the chapter’s first section on remembering Asante cultural pasts centers on how cloth makers in Ntonso have recreated *adinkra* cloth making for tourists that ascribe meanings

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<sup>1</sup> In 1960, the government of Ghana first gave attention to tourism within the Ministry for Parks and Gardens. Recognizing the industry’s potential contributions to Ghana’s economy, tourism became central to the government’s economic strategy in the 1970s (Teye 1988). The government created various boards to oversee the tourism industry, including the 1962 State Hotel and Tourist Corporation, 1968 Ghana Tourist Corporation and State Hotels Corporation, Ghana Tourist Control Board, and 1991 National Tourism Task Force (Asiedu 1997). The government has repositioned tourism within the ministries over time. In 1992, a separate Ministry of Tourism was established. In 2013, the government restructured their ministries. For the first time, tourism became joined with the arts as “The Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts;” their current policy objectives include: to “promote sustainable tourism to preserve historical, cultural and national heritage; develop a competitive creative arts industry; harness culture for national development” (Ghana Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts. n.d.)

<sup>2</sup> On the role of national culture in Ghana’s education system and art world, see Coe 2005a; Hess 2001; Woets 2011.

to *adinkra* about Asante cultural history. The chapter's second section analyzes how Ghanaians have used *adinkra* to remember national pasts. This line of inquiry focuses on one *adinkra* symbol that has become a central marker of national identity in Ghana: *gye Nyame*. Often translated as "except God," the transformation of *gye Nyame* from Asante culture to a national symbol of Ghana engages with a process of re-inventing historical cultural traditions. The last section on remembering personal pasts focuses on David Boamah, a cloth maker with several other important roles in Ntonso. David's dream for the future of his trade and community has inspired him to preserve *adinkra*'s past. As Nora said, "memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual" (Nora1989: 9). David's attitudes towards his work and community service emphasize the importance of recalling the past in his everyday actions for him to envision what lies ahead.

## I. Remembering and Reconstructing Cultural Pasts

### Experiencing *Adinkra*'s Past and Present

Large displays of bright colored *adinkra* cloths welcomed me to the Boakye family's home in Ntonso, a small town near Kumasi commonly known as the "home" of *adinkra*. Gabriel showed me how to create an *adinkra* cloth. He started with the dye handmade from *badia* tree bark. Meanwhile, Gabriel's brother Daniel assisted a couple also visiting on how to properly wrap a large *adinkra* cloth around the body in a toga-like style. Once dressed, he snapped their photograph. A nearby table displayed neatly organized rows of carved calabash stamps. Gabriel told me that the symbol called *hye won hye*, "he who burns be not burned," means "forgiveness" (fig. 5.5; G. Boakye, July 27, 2013, Ntonso, Ghana). Gabriel instructed me to select five *adinkra* stamps with designs and meanings that I liked, as he re-interpreted the symbols' complex historical and philosophical meanings into a single

word or short phrase with global resonance. Following Gabriel's instructions, I dipped each stamp in a hot metal pot filled with a dark colored dye and pressed it onto a narrow strip of hand-woven cloth. I stamped a row of repeating *adinkera* symbols onto the cloth to take home.<sup>3</sup>

I returned two days later. It was a Monday afternoon in late July of 2013. Gabriel's brothers and nephews were screen-printing a red and black *adinkera* cloth with industrial printing paste (fig. 5.6). A mourning cloth. Silk-screens were loosely stacked on the table that previously displayed stamps (fig. 5.7). That day, I was the only *oboruni*, or foreigner. No tourists came. By returning to the historical stamping technique on the weekend, the Boakye family's tour exemplifies how Ghana's wider tourism industry emphasizes "traditional" culture rooted in a pre-colonial past. At stake in the role of *adinkera* in tourism is the re-interpretation and representation of cultural history to a global audience.

Most tourists who come to Ntonso are foreigners visiting Ghana from North America, the UK, and Europe. International tourism declined throughout Ghana during my research in 2014 and 2015 due to the Ebola outbreak in other West African countries – even though Ghana never recorded any cases of the disease. Cloth makers active in the tourism industry commented on how Ebola impacted their business, as they received less international visitors and students enrolled in study abroad programs.

Occasionally, Ghanaians or visitors from other African countries come as a tourist to Ntonso. In my conversations with Ghanaians living in Kumasi and Accra, many said that they would visit Ntonso to buy *adinkera* cloth – preferring to buy directly from the "source" (rather than a middle man at a shop or market elsewhere in Ghana) because they believe they would receive higher quality cloth. Yet none described past or potential future visits to Ntonso as a tourist, nor conveyed interest to learn the cloth's production or history.

Domestic tourists primarily include students. University-level students living in greater

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<sup>3</sup> In subsequent visits to the Boakye family's home in 2014 and 2015, Gabriel's nephews also sometimes gave tourists weaving demonstrations to show how they make the narrow-strip cloth.

Kumasi, especially those enrolled at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), have visited Ntonso as part of a class or practicum to learn cloth printing techniques. Additionally, groups of youth have visited for cloth-making demonstrations organized through their primary or secondary school. For domestic tourists, the Boakye family creates a similar experience as those for international tourists, with two notable differences: first, conversations are usually in Twi rather than English. Additionally, contextual information shared during the tour, such as how they explain symbol meanings and ways to wear the cloth, varies by the visitor's age and what the Boakye family assumes that the Ghanaian visitor already knows.

By teaching the cloth's stamping technique, the Boakye family's tour meets visitor interests for first-hand experiences with indigenous, "traditional" culture. Such strategies exemplify the kinds of techniques that traders in West Africa have similarly used to construct appealing narratives and experiences for tourists (Steiner 1994). What tourists don't see during their visit is how cloth makers actually create *adinkra* cloth today. The tour intentionally excludes screen-printing, the technology that cloth makers in Ntonso have used since the early twenty-first century. The Boakye family even hides silk-screens from view. Instead, they display carved stamps made as souvenirs. As Christopher Steiner addresses in his research on the art market in Cote d'Ivoire, other artisans and traders likewise emphasize historical cultural practices because age is central to constructions of "authentic" African art (Steiner 1994).

However, most cloths made in various sizes for tourists to purchase are not stamped. They're screen-printed. Stamped cloths are less popular among tourists, surprising given their desires for "traditional" handicrafts and interest to learn the historical technique. Unlike stamped cloths' uniform symbol size and dark dye, screen-printed cloths show *adinkra* motifs in various sizes and colored pigments (fig. 5.8; see also fig. 1.16). Additionally, displayed *adinkra* cloths expose tourists to

a larger corpus of *adinkra* symbols than the handful of best-known motifs repeated in other tourism designs.

Screen-printed *adinkra* cloth that the Boakye family sells to tourists reveal the dynamics of the cloth's production today. The Boakye family also has an extensive business making *adinkra* for Asante customers, in which they create *adinkra* cloth designs that express the customer's desired identity, relationships with others, or the latest fashion trends. The Boakye family usually makes tourist cloths with the same silk-screens as those for local orders. For example, Gabriel designed a tourist cloth with four repeating *adinkra* symbols that matches the same design that his brother used for a red and black funeral cloth (fig. 5.8 – 5.11). By using the same silk-screen designs, imagery communicating contemporary Asante identities for local orders extends into tourist cloth. Through these *adinkra* cloths, tourists encounter the cloth's current production while discovering shared values in their quest for “authentic” crafts.

As the Boakye family sells their *adinkra* cloths directly to tourists who visit, the cloth makers can control the narrative and experience tourists attach to the souvenirs they take home (Stewart 1993). A relative of the Boakye family, David Boamah, has also been instrumental in cultivating Ntonso's tourism industry. For David, design also creates conversations:

“When you are in the field of tourism, it is a matter of exchange. It is an exchange program...When you come to me, I can tell you what I know. You also do something. You know, when I learn from people, I learn from your questions. I learn from the patterns that you create because we believe that everybody is creative in this world” (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

When David, Gabriel, and other members of the extended Boakye family speak with tourists, they use *adinkra* to cultivate cross-cultural understanding. They reinterpret the complex meanings of *adinkra* symbols, simplifying Asante philosophy to make Asante values relatable to tourists. Gabriel, David, and other members of the Boakye family distill the meanings associated with a symbol into a single English phrase familiar to tourists, such as the “forgiveness” symbol that Gabriel told me. In



doing so, the Boakye family encourages tourists to find commonalities to Asante beliefs amidst their experience of cultural difference. Unlike Asante *kente* cloth and Bamana *bogolanfini* cloth that are primarily marketed to international tourists as images of difference and an “exotic” Africa, representations of *adinkera* in tourism conveys messages about shared human values.

The extended Boakye family (including David Boamah and Paul Nyaamah who now work away from the Boakye family’s home) has developed the most well known program of teaching students and tourists about *adinkera* cloth in Ntonso today.<sup>4</sup> The family has cultivated a reputation for Ntonso as a welcoming “craft village” for tourists – a role that has created conflict among cloth makers about what narrative to tell tourists and how to deliver that experience. Cloth makers expressed the importance of those who lead Ntonso’s tourism industry to be knowledgeable about the history and symbolic meanings of *adinkera* cloth. This comes in partial response to the growing popularity of *adinkera* symbols, in which younger generations in Ghana often only know the symbols’ common names, not their historical background, philosophical meanings, or related proverbs.

In Ntonso, the Boakye family and other cloth makers have embraced the tourism industry for the future of their trade and community. But in Asokwa, a nearby town where *adinkera* cloth production likely first began, tourism is not up for debate. Asokwa is best known for making royal *adinkera* cloth for Asante kings, which followed a regulated system of appropriate symbol use. Beyond experts in historical Akan culture, few know about Asoka’s former importance to *adinkera* cloth production. Cloth makers in Asokwa haven’t participated in tourism, as those with whom I spoke were uninterested in tourism and generally view the expanding roles of *adinkera* beyond Asante dress and culture as unfitting.

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<sup>4</sup> In the early 1980s, another cloth maker in Ntonso, Joseph Oppong, participated in the tourism industry. Daniel Mato said, “He [Oppong] was known to tourists who came to buy cloths and he would also make cloths under contract for the Asante Cultural Center in Kumasi to be sold in their shop” (Mato 1987: 219). In Ntonso today, cloth maker Joseph Owusu who formerly managed the Ntonso Visitor Centre also receives some students and tourists at his cloth shop in Ntonso.

## Alternative Roles for Printing Stamps

“Teacher Kofi carved them,” Paul told me.

A crusty accumulation of dried *badia* dye covered the four stamps (fig. 5.12).<sup>5</sup> The dye’s heavy buildup had produced deep cracks in its thick coating from the absence of recent use. Cloth ties on the stamps’ handles were stiff, no longer soft. The stamps rested on a low-raised wood table covered with a thin layer of foam, speckled black from wet dye rubbed off from other stamps. Paul displayed these stamps scattered amongst other stamps, freshly carved with the calabash’s flesh exposed or covered in a thin layer of smooth dye (fig. 5.13).<sup>6</sup> Here, at the Ntonso Visitor Centre, Teacher Kofi’s *adinkra* stamps were for sale to tourists. I was stunned.

The man known as “Teacher Kofi” was an important stamp carver in Ntonso during the mid to late twentieth century. Carver Paul Nyaamah mixed in Teacher Kofi’s stamps with his own newly made stamps as souvenirs, no separation or acknowledgement of their differences. Questions raced through my mind as I tried to make sense of what I had stumbled upon. Why was Paul selling Teacher Kofi’s old stamps? How did Paul not find value in keeping these stamps for himself or his community? And just how many of Teacher Kofi’s stamps had Paul already sold to tourists?

Paul’s display of Teacher Kofi’s *adinkra* stamps featured the same *adinkra* symbols as those in Paul’s newly carved stamps. So what was really different about them? And why was I so surprised to find Paul selling them to tourists? Till that moment, I only knew about Teacher Kofi’s work from the memories and stories that Paul and other people in Ghana shared with me. I had never seen Teacher Kofi’s work before. Teacher Kofi’s stamps not only offer material evidence of *adinkra*

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<sup>5</sup> These four *adinkra* stamps included: *obi nka obi*, *osrane*, and two variations of *nsromoa*.

<sup>6</sup> This account is from my visit with Paul Nyaamah at the Ntonso Visitor Centre on November 22, 2014.

symbols in use during the twentieth century, but also how he approached his work. The stamps reveal Teacher Kofi's technical skills in carving and personal artistry through his designs and variations to the form of each *adinkra* symbol.

My reaction clearly differed from tourists who may have interpreted his stamps as more “authentic” than others from their older appearance. In Steiner's work on the art market in Cote d'Ivoire, he considers how notions of authenticity in Europe and America – including associations with the past, an object's age, and prior use in cultural practices – have shaped tourists and collectors' aesthetic preferences and how traders in Cote d'Ivoire market artworks to foreigners that fit these ideas (Steiner 1994: 100-129). Although Paul did not distinguish Teacher Kofi's stamps from his own, the visible differences of the older stamps may have appealed to tourists as evidence of such qualities of “authentic” objects.

To me, Teacher Kofi's stamps were important historical objects. Stamps embody Nora's concept of “*lieux de memoire*” (meaning “sites of memory”), which he said are “*lieux* in three senses of the word—material, symbolic, and functional” (Nora 1989: 18-19). Nora adds, “the most fundamental purpose of the *lieux de memoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial...*lieux de memoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, and endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications” (Nora 1989: 19). As *lieux de memoire*, stamps are material sites of memories that invite recollection of their many meanings and former uses. *Adinkra* stamps were common during my research interviews with cloth makers. In Asokwa, Kusi Boadum used his collection of *adinkra* stamps to tell me the cloth's history. Elsewhere, other cloth makers I met similarly used *adinkra* stamps as mnemonic devices to recall symbolic meanings and point out how visual details in the stamp's design related to its meaning.

Paul's display of Teacher Kofi's *adinkra* stamps were among a limited number of remaining *adinkra* stamps made by former carvers, especially with a known attribution. I have not yet identified any museum collections of *adinkra* stamps with the carver's attribution to understand an individual carver's body of work or to compare distinctions between carvers or production towns. But was it my place to question Paul's decision to sell Teacher Kofi's stamps and suggest an alternative home for them? For Paul, the old stamps were no longer useful to make *adinkra* cloth, as he had switched to screen-printing and could easily carve a new stamp in his own style if needed for printing a cloth. Teacher Kofi's stamps instead offered Paul a potential source of income. Paul needed the extra money. Though at that time, in 2014, Paul sold *adinkra* stamps that he and Teacher Kofi carved for a mere five Ghana cedis each – the equivalent of just a little over one US dollar.

Paul wasn't the first person in Ntonso to sell old stamps to tourists. Teacher Kofi's main business was carving stamps for cloth makers in Ntonso. Later in his career, Teacher Kofi began carving stamps for another market: tourists. For example, Artist Alliance Gallery in Accra previously sold Teacher Kofi's *adinkra* stamps at the gallery's gift shop (A. Glover, personal communication, May 15, 2015, Accra, Ghana). Teacher Kofi's stamps that Paul sold were likely not made for tourists as they showed material evidence of extensive use. In addition to selling *adinkra* stamps to tourists, cloth makers sold substantial amounts of *adinkra* stamps to scholars and collectors visiting Ghana during the 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

After screen-printing became the main printing technology, some cloth makers in Ntonso began selling their stamps to foreigners. For example, Emmanuel Konadu discarded his stamps after he began screen-printing because he no longer needed them to make *adinkra* cloth (E. Konadu, interview, May 13, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Emmanuel had carved his own *adinkra* stamps, and sold

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<sup>7</sup> This included art historians Daniel Mato and Doran Ross, archaeologist Timothy Garrard, and collector Karl Heinz Krieg; the *adinkra* stamps that they collected in Ghana during this time are now in private and public collections in the United States and Europe.

the stamps to foreigners who visited his shop. Emmanuel did not have a tourism business, nor did he promote his stamps as souvenirs. But his cloth shop was highly visible on the main road that connects Ntonso to Kumasi and other nearby towns. His shop's location attracted visitors who came to Ntonso. Foreigners, he recalled, showed much interest in his old stamps from their age and prior use. In the hands of foreigners, the stamps gain renewed use – not as a printing tool, but as a souvenir that fulfilled tourist desires for “authentic” crafts.

Paul noticed this interest in old stamps from tourists visiting Ntonso. When stamping declined due to screen-printing in the early twenty-first century, Paul shifted the market for his work towards tourists. In 2011, Paul Nyaamah became manager of the Ntonso Visitor Centre. Adapting Paul's work for international tourists has posed a challenge: Paul doesn't know how to read and write English. This language barrier limits his ability to communicate with tourists and develop his business (P. Nyaamah, interview, November 27, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

At the Ntonso Visitor Centre, Paul gives demonstrations in *adinkra* cloth making, which includes the processes to make the *badia* dye, stamp the cloth, and carve the stamps. Only Paul offers tourists the opportunity to learn how to carve an *adinkra* stamp from a calabash, which they can then take home as a souvenir. The two other main tourist sites in Ntonso – the Boakye family's home and David Boamah's business – don't offer stamp carving demonstrations because cloth makers leading tours there are not carvers. Occasionally, Paul goes to the Boakye family's home when they have large groups of visitors to speak with guests about stamping. Paul's new customers direct which *adinkra* symbols he carves on the stamps. For example, his stamp display illustrates how his symbol selections follow motifs popular today – including *adinkrahene* (“king of Adinkra”), *gye Nyame* (“except God”), and *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”). Upon request, Paul carves stamps on the spot if a tourist is seeking a design not already carved. In some instances, tourists request a

stamp with a design that is not an *adinkra* symbol, complicating the limits of what's included in the corpus of *adinkra* symbols and what defines an *adinkra* stamp.

Paul's *adinkra* stamps for tourists appear slightly different from those carved for cloth makers. Since most tourists won't actually use the stamps to print cloth, Paul modifies the design, scale, and type of calabash. Most of these changes are economic decisions to minimize his costs and time. Carvers and cloth makers will recognize these differences, but these small changes go unnoticed to tourists and others unfamiliar with *adinkra* cloth stamping. For example, Paul carves tourist stamps slightly smaller in size to create more stamps from a single calabash. He also sometimes carves tourist stamps from different varieties of calabashes with thinner flesh if more accessible or affordable (P. Nyaamah, interview, November 22, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). Stamps made this way are also fine for printing *adinkra* cloth, as he uses some of them during stamping demonstrations. But these stamps are more fragile and break more quickly than those made from calabashes with thicker flesh, which are more durable for extensive printing.

As of 2015, Ntonso's tourism industry was sustaining Paul's carving work. Without tourist interests in his *adinkra* stamps, he would probably cease stamp carving. In 2014 and 2015, Paul was deliberating to stop carving completely in favor of other work that would provide a steadier income to support his family. Business from tourists buying his stamps wasn't sufficient. Tourism peaks in Ghana during the summer months, especially June through August. Paul works year-round at the Ntonso Visitor Centre, and weaves plain *kente* cloth during the off-season for supplemental income. Unlike his stamps, Paul's weaving orders mostly come from customers in greater Kumasi. Despite these changes and challenges, Paul's stamp carving today exemplifies a broader consequence of how tourism keeps alive cultural traditions that would otherwise end (Day 2004).

## A Museum's History of *Adinkra* Cloth

A small group of women and men talked, gathering in a half circle of plastic chairs to face the roadside. They sat outside an *adinkra* cloth shop along the main road in Ntonso. My research assistant Paul Nasaa and I greeted them. We stated the mission of our visit, customary in Akan society, briefly summarizing our research and interest to speak with them.

One of the women quickly responded.

“Go to the Tourist Centre,” she instructed in Twi, pointing down the street with her hand.

One of the men agreed.

Paul thanked her for the suggestion and politely explained that we already visited Ntonso's Tourist Centre. We wanted to talk with them. Paul emphasized the importance of their knowledge and value of their perspectives as cloth sellers and residents of Ntonso. The woman told us that she couldn't teach us – or even talk to us about *adinkra* – because she doesn't make the cloth.

“I only sell *adinkra* cloth,” the woman said.

Precisely.

The woman's work as a cloth seller was exactly why Paul and I asked to speak with her.<sup>8</sup> We wanted to hear the woman's story. Her experiences, knowledge, and views of *adinkra* as a seller differed from cloth makers. But she and the others seated with her didn't believe they could contribute anything useful or help us learn more about *adinkra* cloth. Several other women cloth sellers that I approached during my research in Ntonso and greater Kumasi responded similarly. The group in Ntonso perceived the town's tourist centre as the authoritative voice on *adinkra*, more qualified and equipped to share information about *adinkra* cloth.

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<sup>8</sup> This is from my visit with cloth sellers and residents in Ntonso on April 30, 2015. Names removed for privacy.

During my first visit to the tourist centre in 2014 – officially named the Ntonso Visitor Centre – Paul Nyaamah welcomed me. “Do you want to see the museum?” he asked me after our greetings. “There is a fee to pay to see it and for a tour,” he explained. “I will show you the dye and how to make it, and then to stamp the cloth. You can go inside to read about the history of *adinkera* and take pictures.” Then we will go on the tour, he added. Paul also warned me that it was “lights out” that day. The power had gone out earlier in the morning. Paul offered to bring the display boards outside so I could read about the cloth’s history. The museum’s exhibition room was dark, as there were no windows to provide natural light. I proceeded to go on a self-guided tour of the museum, while Paul prepared for the demonstration (P. Nyaamah, personal communication, November 22, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

The Ntonso Visitor Centre is centrally located at the taxi rank on the town’s main road, a short walk from the cloth shop Paul and I visited. Inside the brown brick building, a one-room “exhibition hall” displaying a selection of *adinkera* cloths was the only indoor space open to the public. A covered porch wraps around the building, overlooking a large grassy area with weaving looms, clay fire, carving bench, and stamping table. A management committee in Ntonso oversees the centre with the local Kwabre District Assembly; the committee appoints one individual to serve as the centre’s manager, usually an *adinkera* cloth maker who lives in Ntonso.<sup>9</sup>

National government agencies in Ghana’s tourism industry constructed the building and other visitor centres across the country. This initiative supported the marketing and development of Ghana’s well known “craft villages” as tourist attractions. For instance, Bonwire, a town nearby to Ntonso that is best-known as the “home” of Asante *kente* cloth, also has a Visitor Centre. Current Kentehene and retired professor Nana Opebuor Addae Yeboah Santamire manages the Bonwire

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<sup>9</sup> Residents in Ntonso sometimes referred to Ntonso’s Management Committee as the “unit committee” or the “development committee,” which includes a Chairman and three officer positions: finance, organizer, and secretary (J. Owusu, interview, May 2, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).



Visitor Centre (N. Santamire, personal communication, May 1, 2015, Ejisu and Bonwire, Ghana).

The Kentehene is responsible for the Asante king's *kente* cloths and reports to the Abanasehene who oversees all of the Asantehene's cloths.

Several years prior to my first visit to Ntonso, after the centre had first opened, David Boamah recalled how the centre didn't function well. "I can tell you, when I first went to the visitor's centre, they were not receiving people. For like a month, we could see that we only received one visitor. And they were not doing any practical work there. So when I went, I introduced this practical work. So it keeps increasing, increasing, increasing" (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). By "practical work," David is referring to *adinkera* cloth making demonstrations. David first volunteered at the centre before becoming the manager. When Paul became the manager in 2011, David remained active in Ntonso's tourism industry and strategically opened his business aimed at students and international visitors next to the centre.

While David was involved with the centre, he collaborated on a major renovation project with Gordon Frimpong, Collections Manager at the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi. Gordon said of his visit to Ntonso in 2011:

"I realized that the village museum was in a poor state. The displays were old and dirty and the place was very dark. I felt challenged to do what I could to help bring it to a professional museum standard. I work full time at the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi, but on my days off I decided to do what I could to help at Ntonso village museum. I began by meeting the museum management committee and gave them a brief introduction on the importance of the site and its cultural value for future generations. The committee agreed that I could help them to improve their museum and to train their staff" (Frimpong 2013: 6).

Gordon and David's observations on the declining state of the Ntonso Visitor Centre exemplify a wider cultural problem of maintenance in Ghana today, resulting from an absence of long-term plans or resources for a building's upkeep after construction.

The transition to local management in Ntonso after the national initiative and construction augmented this problem. It's unclear if residents in Ntonso even wanted the centre, or if the national

government constructed the building without local requests or support. Residents have also used the Ntonso Visitor Centre for local uses that differed significantly from its intended purpose. Residents transform the grassy area in front of the building to host various events, from religious crusades to family funerals. A few hundred yards away from the visitor centre is Ntonso's community centre for local residents. The community centre can easily go unnoticed to non-residents as the building is unmarked, with no added signs outside or along the roadside identifying the space.

Both David and Gordon wanted to reinvigorate Ntonso's Visitor Centre after its period of neglect and lack of use. For instance, Gordon organized a collections care workshop that focused on museum conservation and storage strategies.<sup>10</sup> Gordon holds training in museum conservation and display from the British Museum's Africa Programme, active in Ghana since 2007. He has also worked with local management staff at the Visitor Centre in Asanamaso (a town near Ntonso known for *kente* cloth weaving) to offer similar training in museum display and conservation.

Since the redesign project, the content and design of the Ntonso Visitor Centre has changed minimally. Gordon and David reinstalled the interior exhibition room – a space labeled as an “exhibition hall” that they now refer to as a museum; for consistency with how they identify the space, I also refer to the space as the museum. Each contributed a distinct set of skills and expertise from their backgrounds to redesign and complete the renovations.

The partnership between David and Gordon also cultivated a relationship between the Manhyia Palace Museum and cloth makers in Ntonso. In comparison, *adinkra* cloth makers living in Asokwa have historically been involved with Manhyia Palace through royal cloth production and additional roles at ceremonies. Some *adinkra* cloth makers from Asokwa remain active with Manhyia Palace today. For example, Kusi Boadum, whose work has been discussed throughout the dissertation, is second in command of the horn blowers for the Asantehemaa, the Queen Mother.

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on the British Museum's Africa Programme, see [http://www.britishmuseum.org/about\\_us/skills-sharing/africa\\_programme.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/skills-sharing/africa_programme.aspx).

In Ntonso, the centre's exhibition space offered residents the potential to claim the origins of *adinkra* cloth – for both themselves and others who visit. David and Gordon's work also reflects Nora's description of how “the passage from memory to history has required every social group to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history” (Nora 1989: 15). At the Ntonso Visitor Centre, three new display cases for the reinstall showcase a selection of *adinkra* cloths, flanked by two tall display boards mounted in wood frames carved with *adinkra* symbols (Frimpong 2013). The display board “Adinkra Symbols and their Meanings” features a chart of sixty symbols with the motif's Twi name and English translation; the approach of presenting *adinkra* symbols in a chart format mirrors Ablade Glover's popular chart of *adinkra* symbols (Glover 1992). The written text on the other board titled “History of *Adinkra* Cloth” centers on the cloth's debated origins. It presents multiple viewpoints from Akan oral history, scholarship, and material evidence of the earliest remaining *adinkra* cloth. The narrative gives attention to Ntonso's first *adinkra* cloth makers, names of cloth makers who are rarely discussed in popular oral histories or published scholarship. Notably absent is mention of Asokwa, the town known for historical production of royal *adinkra* cloth and where some cloth makers have claimed that *adinkra* cloth making originated.

The surrounding cloth displays turns attention to the cloth's dynamics. Viewers encounter a mix of stamped, screen-printed, batik, and embroidered *adinkra* cloths made on various sizes of hand-woven and factory-printed fabrics. Narrow single strips of strip-woven cloth made specifically for tourists are even included, their intended audience clearly evident from the addition of Barack Obama's portrait screen-printed alongside *adinkra* symbols. Life-size wood figure cutouts depict a man, woman, and even a small child wrapped in stamped *adinkra* cloth with *mwomu* stitching (fig. 5.14). An additional display rack near the entrance features single strips of brightly colored Asante *kente* cloths. No labels or text accompany the cloth displays to identify them or offer any context on their making, use, or significance. The combination of old and new, as well as local use and tourism,

may come across as a haphazard arrangement. But in some ways, the display actually reflects the dynamics of the cloth's production in Ntonso and important changes over time.

When preparing the reinstall, David and Gordon asked residents in Ntonso to donate their old cloths (D. Boamah, interview, December 13, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). One display class features these old red and black funeral cloths, including some plain unprinted cloths. A few unusual carved *adinkera* symbols – carved in wood, not calabash – rest on the bottom of the display case. The center of the room displays calabash *adinkera* stamps, linking the former printing technology with the older cloths. As with Paul's cloth making demonstration, the museum does not include any silk-screens, even though many screen-printed cloths are on display.

In addition, Gordon and David renovated the outdoor space to recreate an historical setting for demonstrating the cloth making techniques. They added a clay fire for visitors to experience how cloth makers prepared the *badia* dye (fig. 5.15 and 5.16). The covered roof above the fire was constructed in an historical style from woven raffia leaves because “it looks more indigenous,” David said (D. Boamah, interview, November 28, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). Paul later changed the roof to metal sheeting, no longer reflecting the “traditional” style of the former raffia leaves. David and Gordon built the fire next to a *badia* tree, the type of tree bark cloth makers used to prepare the printing dye. *Badia* trees are not common in Ntonso, as they grow in northern Ghana. But the *badia* tree was planted to show visitors an example of the tree and bark, even though most *adinkera* cloth makers didn't have access to their own *badia* trees and instead bought the tree bark at local markets brought from northern Ghana. By reconstructing the outdoor space, David and Gordon offered visitors an immersive experience in the materials, techniques, and tools involved to stamp *adinkera* cloth.

As tourism brought global attention to Ntonso, the influx of international visitors also raised awareness to other cloth makers and residents about how foreigners view *adinkera* cloth's cultural

value and significance. Anthropologist Edward Bruner said, “the tourist interest in Ghanaian culture has led to an increase in Ghanaians’ own interest in their culture” (Bruner 1996: 300). Bruner added, “There is a revival due to the attention tourists pay to these longstanding ‘traditional’ practices” (Bruner 1996: 300). Reflecting on the Ntonso Visitor Centre renovations, Gordon said, “I’m proud of our work at Ntonso...it gives the whole community pride in their culture and in their village” (Frimpong 2013: 6). In other contexts beyond tourism, Ghanaians, including non-Akans, have adopted *adinkra* cloth and symbols to visually express pride in their national identity.

## II. Re-inventing *Gye Nyame* as a National Symbol

“*Meehwe de Nyame beye*. I'm looking up to what God has for me,” Kusi said while holding a calabash *adinkra* stamp in his hand (fig. 5.17).

Puzzled, I questioned Kusi on his translation of the *adinkra* symbol.

“You see, if you turn here, it will point to God,” Kusi explained.

He pointed to the line on one side of the central motif that faced upward.

“But if you turn here too, it will point to God,” he added.

Kusi turned the stamp to face the opposite direction. One of the lines again pointed upward.

“So any or every time, I am looking up to God. That is why. Our ancestors were very witty.”

(K. Boadum, interview, November 20, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).

A few months after my conversation with Samuel Adjei in 2014, presented in the chapter opening, I met with Kusi Boadum in Asokwa. Kusi traced the origins of *adinkra* cloth to ancestors in his family. He used this stamp design to defend the *adinkra* symbol’s historical name. The symbol’s design was

unusual, but familiar. It is everywhere in Ghana today. The symbol adorns plastic chairs, decals pasted on *tro-tro* buses, churches, corporate logos, jewelry, entrance gates, tourist souvenirs, cement blocks, and even plastic bread bag designs. But I had come to know that particular stamp design by another name. Before this conversation, everyone else who I spoke to in Ghana about this *adinkra* symbol called it *gye Nyame*, which most translated as “Except God;” *Nyame* is the Twi word for God. *Gye Nyame* expresses an Akan saying, “the great creation originated from the unknown past. No one lives who saw its beginning. No one lives who will see its end, Except God” (Agbo 2011: 21; Kyekye 1995: 72). Why was it only in Asokwa – the town where *adinkra* cloth production first began – that Kusi didn’t call this symbol *gye Nyame*?

The popularity of *gye Nyame* in Ghana today reveals how the symbol resonates not only with Akans, but also other Ghanaians. The symbol’s relevance and power as *gye Nyame* oscillates between spaces of politics and religion, commercial and domestic life, personal self-fashioning and national identity. These various transformations of *gye Nyame* reveal how Ghanaians use the motif to signify national identity. What is it about *gye Nyame* that has made it one of the most prevalent images in Ghana today? And what is it about the past and present state of Ghana that has made *gye Nyame* so appropriate for marking national identity? How have the meanings of *gye Nyame* changed as a result of the symbol’s now widespread use?

### The Politics of *Gye Nyame*

Kusi explained that Ghana’s former leader Jerry John Rawlings used his authority to influence the symbol’s name as *gye Nyame*. Kusi recalled a shift that occurred in 1979.

“He [Rawlings] didn’t understand, and called it *gye Nyame* because he doesn’t understand Twi very well. So this is *meehwe dea Nyame beye*. As for it, it was carved here. It was first carved here. And when I have named my child, you from somewhere come and rename. So Rawlings came to make *gye Nyame*. But *meehwe dea*

*Nyame beye*. I'm looking up to what God has for me and will do for me in life" (K. Boadum, interview, November 20, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana).

As Kusi points out, Rawlings is not an Akan. His father was Scottish, and his mother came from Ewe culture in Ghana. Kusi's claim that Rawlings shifted the name and popularity of this *adinkra* symbol revealed tensions arising when non-Akans have appropriated Akan culture. A few weeks later, I held a group meeting with Kusi and two of his fellow cloth makers, Stephen Appiah and Kofi Nyame (S. Appiah, K. Boadum, K. Nyame, interview, December 16, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). The elder men sifted through their stamps, discussing and debating various symbol names and meanings. When they reached the stamp Kusi previously identified as *meehwe de Nyame beye*, there were no disputes. The men agreed. Rawlings made the symbol widely popular as *gye Nyame*.

Outside of Asokwa, other evidence demonstrated how Rawlings used *gye Nyame* in ways that may have contributed to the re-invention of *gye Nyame* as a national symbol of Ghana.<sup>11</sup> Starting in 1983, Rawlings adopted *gye Nyame* as political propaganda to design Ghana's currency notes (Fuller 2014a, 2014b; Mensah 2009: 80). Historian Harcourt Fuller said, "'Gye Nyame' epitomizes the centrality of the belief in divine assistance and justice in human affairs, notions which were important in the long struggle in the Gold Coast for independence from Great Britain, as well as the belief held by many of Rawlings's supporters that his leadership was ordained by God" (Fuller 2014b: 68).<sup>12</sup> A series of Ghana cedi bank notes issued in 1984 and 1986 included "*gye Nyame*" as written text below a star surrounding a clenched fist – a symbol of solidarity and unity in Ghana.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> During the early 1990s when Rawlings was president of Ghana, *Gye Nyame* also became the motto for the Democratic Alliance of Ghana (DAG) based in London, England (Africa Analysis 1991: 27). The DAG also published a newspaper titled *Gye Nyame* (Yen 2014).

<sup>12</sup> In comparison to Fuller's statement on the association of *gye Nyame* with Rawlings, marketing scholar Kobby Mensah said, "The 'gye nyami' (except God) symbol adopted by Jerry Rawlings and embossed on the country's legal tender after seizing power in Ghana was enough statement to scare off any prospective attempt on his life" (Mensah 2009: 80).

<sup>13</sup> Ghana cedi bank note with "*gye Nyame*" and "For the Nation" written text. Bank of Ghana. 1986. Available online <https://www.bog.gov.gh/banking/currency/banknotes-of-ghana>

Ethnomathematics scholars, including Ron Eglash who has analyzed the mathematical dimensions of *adinkra* symbols, suggest a visual similarity between the shape of the *gye Nyame* symbol and the knuckles of a hand when clasped in a fist (Babbitt, Lachney, Bulley, and Eglash 2015: 118).

One of six phrases is written inside the star: justice and equality; freedom or death; for the nation; get involved; honour and truth; work and industry.<sup>14</sup> Notably, *gye Nyame* is the only text in the bank note written in Twi rather than English. The design reveals that the role of *gye Nyame* in constructions of national identity wasn't limited to its visual form. By the 1980s, the power of *gye Nyame* spanned image and text. Unlike *gye Nyame*'s design that invites multiple interpretations of its meaning, *gye Nyame* as text only presents the motif's common name.

*Gye Nyame* continued to be printed in bank notes for over twenty years, until 2007. In March 2017, the Bank of Ghana issued new five cedi bank notes featuring *gye Nyame* (Ghana Web 2017c).<sup>15</sup> Again, "*gye Nyame*" appears as written text rather than depicting the symbol's visual representation, written beneath a clenched fist surrounded by the outline of a star. Below, text reads "Celebrating 60 years of central banking in Ghana 1957-2017." This image is shown next to a portrait of Dr. James Kwegyir Aggrey, a notable figure known for his contributions to shape education during the early twentieth century.

Rawlings may have amplified the popularity of *gye Nyame* in the late twentieth century. But the symbol's use as *gye Nyame* within national contexts began earlier, before Rawlings' time. In 1959, two years after Ghana gained political independence from Britain, postage stamps were issued featuring *gye Nyame* as text and image. A second variation of the same design features the inscription "God's Omnipotence" (Gibbons 2012: 111).<sup>16</sup> As the stamps presumably circulated internationally, these designs raise issues related to visual literacy in Akan symbolism and the role of text to

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<sup>14</sup> Other *adinkra* symbols began to appear as background designs in Ghana cedi banknotes in the late 1960s.

<sup>15</sup> Ghana Web. 2017c. "What to Know about the New GHC5 Note." March 3, 2017

<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/What-to-know-about-the-new-GHC5-note-515645>

<sup>16</sup> This is the earliest example of a postage stamp to feature an *adinkra* symbol in the Stanley Gibbons comprehensive collection of postage stamps from Ghana (Gibbons 2012). That same year, in 1959, another design featured three *adinkra* symbols, *duafe*, *dwennimmen*, and *foforo* with inscriptions "traditional symbols," "independence," and "second anniversary," respectively (Gibbons 2012: 111). Historian Kenneth Wilburn said, "Asante Minister of Communication, Krobo Edusei, must have encouraged Nkrumah to wear Asante Kente cloth and promote Adinkra symbols transformed by Ghanaian philately to incorporate all Ghanaians" (Wilburn 2012: 28). Since the 1960s, Ghana's postage stamps continued to feature *adinkra* symbols.



understand the symbol's meaning. Joining the motif's form with its written name suggests an early strategy to establish the symbol as *gye Nyame* to audiences near and far.

The re-invention of *gye Nyame* as a national symbol in Ghana occurred through the broader integration of Akan culture into national politics when Ghana gained political independence in 1957. This process of transforming the meaning and context for *gye Nyame* engages with Hobsbawm and Ranger's discussion of invented traditions. Distinguishing this process from the adaptability of historical traditions over time, Hobsbawm said that invented traditions are "highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the 'nation,' with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest. All these rest on exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative, if only because historical novelty implies innovation" (Hobsbawm 1983: 13). In Ghana, the first African nation to gain independence, President Kwame Nkrumah led the pioneering movement to visually construct a national identity through *adinkra* symbols and other Akan imagery including *kente* cloth.<sup>17</sup> Although *adinkra* symbols became widely integrated in national contexts, Nkrumah and other succeeding presidents have rarely dressed in *adinkra* cloth to attend public events. Instead, Asante *kente* cloth has been the "traditional" dress of choice that Ghana's former presidents have worn to express national identity and unity (Ross 1998); occasionally, former presidents have also selected to wear woven smocks common in northern Ghana at public events.

Kofi Antubam was an influential state artist to President Nkrumah. In this role, Antubam's works supported Nkrumah's nationalist iconography and pan-African vision. Art education scholar Osuanyi Quaicoo Essel said Antubam was "the foremost artist to integrate *adinkra* motif design in Ghanaian sculptural art" (Essel 2014: 45). Antubam included *gye Nyame* in the parliamentary mace that he made in 1960, which overall resembles an Akan linguist staff (*ɔkyeame poma*). Moreover, the

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Mato discussed the appropriation of *adinkra* symbols into Ghana's political party logos during this time (Mato 1994).

logo of Parliament includes a design of the mace with *gye Nyame* highlighted directly above the mace in the center of the surrounding circular border that features other *adinkera* motifs.

Antubam was also the head of the art department at Achimota College, which had a leading arts education program in Accra. Some art students who trained at Achimota College joined a new wave of artists during the 1960s that visualized their heritage through historical Akan culture. The meaning of *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”) resonated with this renewed focus in the arts to envision the nation’s future through reflecting on the past. They made works that re-contextualized *adinkera* symbols from use in cloth – viewed as “traditional craft” – to “fine arts” such as painting and sculpture. As a result, such artworks re-invented *adinkera* symbols as markers associated with the nation. Attention to *gye Nyame* and other *adinkera* symbols in Ghana’s visual arts around this time transpired in conversation with political rhetoric on nationalism and pan-Africanism.

El Anatsui was an art student in Kumasi during the 1960s, and now one of the most famous artists from Africa known for monumental wall hangings made with recycled bottle caps. As a student at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi during the 1960s, Anatsui visited the nearby cultural centre in Kumasi to observe local artists at work, including men who were making *adinkera* cloth. Anatsui said of his visits, “That was where I got influence from, or an attraction to, the arts and crafts” (Anatsui as quoted in Vogel 2012: 26). Anatsui collected *adinkera* stamps and observed cloth makers working at the cultural centre where Samuel Adjei later served as director (Oguibe 2010: 25). After graduating from KNUST in 1968, Anatsui created a “Market Tray” series. In one work for the series, he engraved *gye Nyame* into the center of a wood tray typical of those at markets that displayed goods for sale. Anatsui said, “When I saw *adinkera* symbols, signs with names and meanings, I thought that without presenting a human figure one could convey meaning” (Anatsui as quoted in Vogel 2012: 26). Anatsui is not an Akan, but *adinkera* motifs appealed to him for their graphic qualities and connection to language and

philosophy.

Antubam was also interested in the language of *adinkera* and the motifs' symbolic meanings. In his seminal text *Ghana's Heritage of Culture*, Antubam writes of *gye Nyame* as a “symbol of the omnipotence and immortality of God” (Antubam 1963: 160). Antubam's best-known work as Nkrumah's state artist incorporated *adinkera* symbols in his designs of the seat of state and chair of state. More recently, in 2014, the Parliament House replaced other chairs formerly designed with *adinkera* symbols with new chairs imported from China. Parliament member Ursula Owusu Ekufu responded, “It is sad that we have lost our ‘*Adinkera* and *Gye Nyame*’ symbols which make our Parliament Ghanaian” (Ghana Web 2014). She singles out *gye Nyame* from other common *adinkera* motifs, and also equates *gye Nyame* with the entire corpus of *adinkera* symbols. Moreover, her comment on the symbol's absence tells us how Ghanaians have ascribed *gye Nyame* with meaning to define a place or group as part of the nation.

In addition to chairs at the Parliament House, plastic chairs designed with *gye Nyame* are ubiquitous in Ghana – by far the most common way to encounter *gye Nyame* in Ghana today (fig. 5.18). Some companies that produce these chairs have registered their use of *gye Nyame* with Ghana's National Folklore Board – an organization established in 2003 through Ghana's copyright office (H. Lemaire, personal communication, May 18, 2015, Accra, Ghana). The related copyright office claims *adinkera* is part of “the cultural heritage of Ghana” (Ghana National Commission on Culture n.d.). As such, the board requires registration and fees for any commercial uses of *adinkera*. These actions sparked heated debates that continue today on who – if anyone – “owns” *adinkera* symbols.

These issues aside, the name of the symbol as *gye Nyame* within Akan society dates prior to its role in nationalism. In 1927, anthropologist Robert Sutherland Rattray identified the symbol as “Except God (I fear none)” (Rattray 1927: 267). Since then, anthropologist Brigitte Menzel documented three variations of the symbol – which she identifies as *gye Nyame* – during her research

in the 1960s. She documented one *gye Nyame* stamp design in Asokwa in 1966, which she noted an extensively used *adinkera* symbol at that time (Menzel 1972: 359).<sup>18</sup> Abraham Asmah documented an oral history of *gye Nyame* in Ntonso, not recorded in other published scholarship, which dates the symbol to the eighteenth century and also suggests possible Islamic influences on the symbol's visual design (Asmah 2009: 213).<sup>19</sup>

Notably, the two earliest remaining *adinkera* cloths, collected in 1817 and 1825, do not include this *adinkera* symbol. I documented the earliest use of *gye Nyame* stamped on a white *adinkera* cloth with *mwomu* stitching in the 1920s; this cloth is currently held at the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam in the Netherlands (fig. 5.19).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, I documented *gye Nyame* in factory-printed *adinkera* cloth exported to Africa since at least the early 1960s. For example, the British firm Paterson Zochonis released a red and black cloth in 1963 designed exclusively with *gye Nyame* in a checkerboard pattern, likely made as a funeral cloth for Ghanaian consumers.

In Daniel Mato's research on *adinkera* cloth during the 1980s, he recorded twenty-three different designs named *gye Nyame*. There are few *adinkera* symbols with so many variations. Yet despite the variety of designs, verbal explanations of the symbol were largely consistent with *gye Nyame*. A notable exception was cloth maker S.K. Osei's explanation in 1982. Osei told Mato that the symbol was previously known as "God and Earth" (Mato 1987: fig. 100). Similarly, Abraham Asmah, professor of Integrated Rural Arts and Industry at KNUST, also recorded this alternative

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<sup>18</sup> The other *gye Nyame* stamps that Menzel recorded were from Mampong in 1969, and an undated example from Kumasi (Menzel 1972: 360-361).

<sup>19</sup> Asmah cites Nana Agya Bedu in 2007, who he identifies as a "master artisan at Ntonso." Asmah said, "Opanin Kofi Maanu an indigene of Asante-Ntonso is believed to have adopted the symbol from a Muslim merchant...it is believed to [originated] during the reign of Nana Opoku Ware 1 (1719-1750)" (Asmah 2009: 213). This account also suggests the historical influence of Islamic practices, which Akan cloth makers tailored with meanings that fit to their lives. Asmah added, "It is said that this symbol was created because of Opanin's problems with some of his brothers who were threatening him with death at that time. He therefore stated that only God could kill him and affirmed it visually with this symbol" (Asmah 2009: 213).

<sup>20</sup> Regarding the cloth's acquisition: the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam purchased the *adinkera* cloth in 1954 from M.L.J. Lemaire in Amsterdam. Lemaire was an arts dealer in Amsterdam (especially "tribal arts"), and founded Galerie Lemaire in Amsterdam in 1925. Future research may reveal earlier material evidence of the *gye Nyame* design in stamped and factory-printed *adinkera* cloth.

name and meaning during his more recent research on *adinkra* symbols in the early twenty-first century (Asmah 2009: 213).

In comparison, education scholar Kojo Arthur identifies the *adinkra* motif “heaven and earth” as a separate symbol from *gye Nyame*, rather than an alternative meaning, despite its visual resemblance to *gye Nyame* (Arthur 2011: 128).<sup>21</sup> Arthur names this symbol “*soro ne asase* – heaven and earth” as a symbol of indivisibility, connected and unity” (Arthur 2001: 128). He states that this symbol expresses an Akan saying: “*Asase trɛ, na ɔnyame ne panin*. Also, *Nnipa nyinaa yɛ ɔnyame mma, obi nyɛ asase ba*,” which he translates as “of all the earth, God the Creator is the elder. Also, all people are the children of the Supreme Being, God and no one is a child of the earth” (Arthur 2001: 128). For some *adinkra* motifs, their representational form corresponds to the symbols’ name – such as *dwennimmen* that depicts a ram’s horns. In comparison, the abstract design of *gye Nyame* invites a wider range of meanings from how viewers have interpreted the symbol’s form. These examples reveal the dynamics of *gye Nyame* to carry multiple meanings, within a particular historical moment and across time and space, and the complexity of using *adinkra* as a form of communication.

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<sup>21</sup> Arthur also designates a separate *adinkra* symbol for *Nyame yɛ ɔhene*, which includes the *gye Nyame* design depicted inside a stylized circle (Arthur 2001: 128). Arthur states that this is a “Symbol of the majesty of God, Supremacy and preeminence,” which comes from the expression “*Nyame yɛ ɔhene*” and translates to “God is King” (Arthur 2001: 128). Arthur states that *gye Nyame* – including eight design variations – is a “symbol of the omnipotence and the omnipresence of God,” which comes from the Akan saying “*Abɔde santann yi firi tete; obi nte ase a ɔnim n’ahyɛase, na obi ntena ase nkɔsi n’awieɛ, gye Nyame*,” translated as “this great panorama of creation dates back to time immemorial; no one lives who saw its beginning and no one will live to see its end, except God. The symbol reflects the Akan belief of a supreme being, the creator who they refer to by various names – e.g. *ɔhwadeɛ, nyame, onyankɔpɔn twereampɔn*” (Arthur 2001: 128).

## Commemoration and Controversy

Two national commemorative events in Ghana featured *gye Nyame* in different ways. Held ten years apart, both events fueled conflict over the role of *gye Nyame* – and *adinkra* more broadly – to represent the entire nation. On March 6, 2007, Ghana celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of political independence. Yearlong events commemorated the milestone occasion in Ghana and in many Ghanaian communities across the world. Termed “Ghana@50,” the anniversary logo depicted the number “50” in gold script with the *gye Nyame* motif inside the number zero. A striped ribbon in Ghana’s flag colors – red, gold, and green – spanned behind the “50,” with a small black star carefully placed inside a small opening of the *gye Nyame* symbol. Below, text in smaller size read “GHANA” and “Championing African Excellence.” Ghana’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary planning committee held a competition for the logo design, but did not reveal who designed the logo, nor the reasoning to select *gye Nyame* for the logo (Ghana Web 2007a). As the only design paired with the country’s flag colors and black star, *gye Nyame* appears as a marker of Ghana’s national identity. To select *gye Nyame* out of the wide corpus of imagery associated with the many cultures in Ghana attests to the symbol’s continued fame and status in the twenty-first century.

Ghana’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo circulated widely in Ghana and the diaspora through various media. The logo adorned banners and billboards, cloth designs, architectural décor at major landmarks, and other commemorative paraphernalia.<sup>22</sup> For example, the official Ghana@50 cloth design, one of many commemorative textile designs produced for the occasion, featured a pattern emulating Akan *kente* cloth and the *adinkra* symbol *biribi wo soro* (“there is something in the heavens”) with the anniversary logo (fig. 5.20).<sup>23</sup> Factory-printed commemorative cloths have been popularly worn at special occasions in Ghana. The communicative power of *gye Nyame* resonated widely with

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<sup>22</sup> Markets in Ghana experienced a rise in sales leading to Independence Day celebrations as Ghanaians purchased products branded “Ghana@50” (Ghana Web 2007c).

<sup>23</sup> For more on commemorative textiles in Africa, see Bickford 1994; Faber 2010; Spencer 1982a.

Ghanaians to represent a nation's history, identity, unity, pride, and hope. Including *gye Nyame* in the logo and *kente* in the cloth design exemplifies the ongoing preference of Akan, and specifically Asante, visual culture in nationalism since independence.<sup>24</sup>

The “Ghana@50” commemorative cloth sparked controversy in Ghana, not for its design but its production in China. General Secretary of the Ghana Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers Union Abraham Coomson said, “If we are celebrating 50 years, we must be able to print our anniversary clothes, otherwise what are we celebrating?” (Coomson as quoted in Ghana Web 2007e). Ghanaian textile companies claimed that they only received the anniversary design with three weeks notice, while the “Ghana@50” planning committee said cloths were made in China because Ghanaian firms could not print the needed quantities. Responses to these debates grow out of wider issues in the textile industry about China's growing influence and declining production within Ghana.

The role of *gye Nyame* in the logo to represent an entire nation to audiences worldwide fueled controversy in the news. In a press conference held in Kumasi after the “Ghana@50” logo release, communications designer Yaw Boafo said, “In the interest of a successful and all embracing Ghana's 50th Independence anniversary, I suggest that the current logo is withdrawn and replaced with a more appropriate one crafted out of either an outline map of Ghana, the Coat of Arms, Independence Arch, Big Six, Black Star, Eagle, or National Flag” (Boafo as quoted in Ghana Web 2007a). Boafo's response is striking. His criticism reflects on-going conflicts in Ghana from the unequal attention to Akan culture in national settings and cultural predominance of Asante in Ghana. As an Akan, Boafo advocated for using national landmarks rather than Akan specific imagery. Other Akans have similarly pushed against using Akan culture in nationalism because it

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<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Ghana's Ministry of Trade, Tourism, and Diaspora Relations, Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture, and Aids to Artisans Ghana (ATAG) organized an exhibition on *adinkera* and *kente* cloths for the “Ghana@50” anniversary celebrations at Accra's International Trade Fair. The exhibition presented *adinkera* and *kente* cloths around the theme, “A March from the Cultural Past into the Cultural Future with ICT” (Ghana Web 2007b).

disassociates the Akan origins of these cultural practices. At the same time, non-Akans have argued against emphasis on Akan culture in favor of representing greater cultural diversity.

Ten years later, in March 2017, Ghana celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of political independence. When current President Nana Akufo-Addo held an unveiling ceremony for the anniversary logo and theme, he said, “It is appropriate that the theme of this program should be one of reflection, celebration, challenge, and togetherness” (Joy News 2017; see also Sackey 2017). The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo follows a similar design structure as “Ghana@50.” In a modern sans-serif font, a large number “60” is surrounded with text stating “GH” (for Ghana) at the top and “Years On” beneath the number sixty. The anniversary theme, “Mobilising for Ghana’s Future,” is written in italics below. An unusual design of three curved lines and circles representing three people joining arms are depicted inside the number zero. Designed in Ghana’s flag colors, cultural imagery was strangely absent. President Akufo-Addo said during the announcement, “the logo symbolizes of the diversity and unity of our country, and the aspirations of the Ghanaian people for a dignified and prosperous future” (Joy News 2017; see also Sackey 2017).

The “Ghana@60” logo sparked debates. The day after the logo release, news media claimed that the graphic design inside the number “0” copied the International Festival of Cultural Diversity’s logo. These plagiarism claims came on the heels of other plagiarism charges against President Akufo-Addo, newly elected in December 2016, for not acknowledging the sources of quotes in his speeches. The “Ghana@60” committee quickly issued a response (*The Daily Graphic* 2017a). They declared that *adinkra* symbols inspired the logo, positioning the design as “Ghanaian” and offering evidence of the logo’s originality (Citi FM Online. 2017). Here, the use of *adinkra* as design inspiration argued that the logo did not infringe on copyright, while the wider appropriation of *adinkra* symbols has raised issues on intellectual property (Boateng 2011).



The committee released a “Logo Insight” document on the “Ghana@60” Facebook page that illustrated how two *adinkra* symbols inspired the logo. The text states, “the logo is inspired by the *adinkra* symbols *Mati Masie and Tikorno nko agyina*. The people holding hands in a circle with heads coming together symbolises a diverse Ghana at work together” (“Ghana 60 Years On” 2017). The document provides sketches and computer graphics that show how designer Emmanuel Addo, a current post-graduate student studying Communications Design at KNUST, molded the two symbols into a new visual expression.<sup>25</sup> *Gye Nyame* was not cited as a reference. Yet the curved lines and dots in the logo curiously suggest a reshaping of the graphic elements that make up the form of *gye Nyame*. The logo’s affinity to *gye Nyame* shows how the motif seeps into Ghana’s visual culture, whether deliberate or in unplanned ways.

Emmanuel’s design process also exemplifies current teachings at the Faculty of Arts department at KNUST that encourages art students to study *adinkra* symbols as design inspiration. As a result, the referenced *adinkra* motif may be unrecognizable in the new design. At KNUST today, the Faculty of Arts department continues to recommend that art students study *adinkra* motifs. Faculty including Charles Frimpong in Textiles and Industrial Arts encourages his art students to creatively re-invent *adinkra* symbols (C. Frimpong, personal communication, December 15, 2014, Kumasi, Ghana). For example, Frimpong organized a student fashion show held in April 2013, titled “The New Phase of *Adinkra*,” which illustrated this approach of incorporating *adinkra* symbols in new designs. With this present approach, keeping the historical forms of *adinkra* symbols is no longer desired. This strategy reflects a shift away from using *adinkra* symbols as cultural heritage during the mid-twentieth century.

However, the symbol’s recognizable form remains essential in the commercialization of *adinkra* to convey a familiar image. In the commemorative textiles for Ghana’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary,

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<sup>25</sup> Emmanuel Addo and other designers unrecorded. Published in Ghana: 60 Years On. “Official ‘Ghana: 60 Years On’ Logo Insight.” Facebook, February 13, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/Ghana60YearsOn/posts/233614307047754>

Ghanaian textile firms Printex and Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL) incorporated *gye Nyame* and other *adinkra* symbols into the textile patterns. For example, ATL launched a commemorative cloth pattern with the “Ghana@60” logo and a variation of the *adinkra* symbol called *nkotimsefuo pua* or *mpuannum* (named after a hairstyle) designed in Ghana’s flag colors; ATL released a cloth pattern in four colors: white, blue, yellow, and green (Kwawukume 2017).<sup>26</sup> An array of *adinkra* symbols – including *gye Nyame* – is depicted in black inside the center of the *nkotimsefuo pua* symbols.

In comparison, Printex created their own 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary emblem, separate from the official logo, with the black star and colors of Ghana’s flag.<sup>27</sup> Designed on a white background, rows of two *adinkra* symbols – *gye Nyame* and *sankɔfa* – repeat in square patterns with thin stripes of red, gold, green, and black. Printex publicist Chester Anie said that this particular cloth design with *adinkra* symbols aims to “create the right meaning of the celebrations by highlighting what makes us proud as Ghanaians. What a set of people wear plays a major role in their culture and as such, we need to depict the Ghanaian culture during this August celebration while promoting made-in-Ghana goods” (Chester as quoted in *The Daily Graphic* 2017b). In positioning *adinkra* symbols as Ghana’s culture and pride, the “Ghana@60” commemorative cloth designs attest to the longevity of the relevance and leading role of *adinkra* as symbolic of national identity. Yet the conflicts spurred from adopting *gye Nyame* to remember Ghana’s past and envision the future during both anniversary celebrations exemplify the unresolved issues around the boundaries between Akan and Ghanaian identity.

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<sup>26</sup> Designer unrecorded. Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL). Factory-printed cloth for 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary (detail). Published in Akosombo Textiles Limited. “Ghana Anniversary Cloth for Sale.” Facebook. February 24, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/214991278559173/photos/a.1049476438443982.1073741826.214991278559173/1346949892029967/?type=3&theater>

<sup>27</sup> Designer unrecorded. Printex. Factory-printed cloths for 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary (partial view). Published in Printex. “New Designs from Printex.” Facebook. February 16, 2017. [https://www.facebook.com/pg/printexghana/photos/?tab=album&album\\_id=1228389653896636](https://www.facebook.com/pg/printexghana/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1228389653896636)

## Churches and Cultural Centres

Historical evidence on the development of *adinkra* cloth has suggested influences from Islamic cultural practices in northern Ghana. Several *adinkra* motifs share connections to Islamic visual forms, but *gye Nyame* has not been specifically associated with an Islamic symbol. However, Asmah said that a cloth maker in Ntonso Nana Agya Bedu recalled that *ɔpanyin* Kofi Maanu, also from Ntonso, adopted *gye Nyame* from a Muslim merchant during the rule of Nana Opoku Ware I in the eighteenth century (Asmah 2009: 213). *Adinkra* is not common in Ghana's northern regions, an area with little Akan or Twi-speaking populations. But surprisingly, *gye Nyame* even emerges there today. *Gye Nyame* is one of a few Akan motifs that made its way north, where there is usually a stark absence of Akan cultural imagery in comparison to other parts of the country.

However, *gye Nyame* is not used in northern Ghana today in relation to the cloth's historical links to Islam, nor local dress practices. *Gye Nyame* instead appears in spaces of tourism seeking to project a national identity. Northeastern Ghana, especially the area around Bolgatanga is renowned for wall painting designs that feature a large corpus of graphic motifs with symbolic meanings associated with Gurensi culture. Sirigu, the best-known town for wall painting, has developed a tourism industry around wall painting traditions. Artists at the Sirigu Women Organization of Arts and Pottery (SWOPA) incorporate *adinkra* symbols with the Gurensi symbols historically associated with wall painting (Woets 2014).<sup>28</sup> The Centre for National Culture in Tamale and a cultural centre in Bolgatanga give attention to artistic traditions most prevalent in the north, such as leather work, basketry, and indigo dyeing. Yet *gye Nyame* remains a frequent symbol. For instance, *gye Nyame* adorns handmade leather bags as applique (fig. 5.21). By incorporating *gye Nyame*, the leather bag blends Gurensi artistic practices with Asante imagery. As references to northern Ghanaian cultural

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<sup>28</sup> In anthropologist Rhoda Woets' discussion of her research with SWOPA in 2008, she said that women at SWOPA made tourist paintings with *gye Nyame* and also used *adinkra* symbols on the painted walls (Woets 2014). When I visited SWOPA in June 2014, I did find *gye Nyame* motifs in wall paintings or tourist paintings.

practices are often minimal in national culture, the addition of *gye Nyame* in these contexts visually marks northern Ghana as part of the nation.

Despite the possible historical connections of *adinkera* to Islamic practices north of the Ashanti Region, Ghanaians have reinterpreted *gye Nyame* over time as a symbol of Christianity.<sup>29</sup> It's unclear when this began and how exactly this transformation intersected with *gye Nyame* becoming a national symbol. Evidence dates the use of *gye Nyame* as a symbol of Christianity in Accra to at least the 1960s; future research may uncover earlier examples. In the Labadi area of Accra, the Emmanuel Methodist Church reveals the innovative ways Ghanaians use *gye Nyame* in religious spaces. Built in 1967, the church's founder Andrew C. Denteh considered *adinkera* symbols as tools for writing. Inside the church, Denteh designed the altar in the form of an Akan stool – with *gye Nyame* largely carved in the center – that A.K. Quarcoo suggests conveys “the idea of God as a King” (Quarcoo 1968: 64). Denteh also created a wall display of *adinkera* symbols – *gye Nyame*, *nsoromma*, *mmusuyide*, *dwennimmen*, and *fibankera* – arranged in a particular order.<sup>30</sup> Denteh intended for viewers to “read” the meaning of each *adinkera* symbol sequentially (O.K. Osei, interview, November 27, 2014,

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<sup>29</sup> In the introduction to *Christian Values in Adinkera Symbols*, Peter Achampong states, “the symbol which opens the chapter ‘Gye Nyame’ (except the Lord), clearly symbolizes that they knew and worshipped God; their behavior, word and deed were in discipline to Holiness. *Adinkera* has been the cultural heritage of the Akans in Ghana” (Achampong 2008: ii). Achampong continues to write that *gye Nyame* symbolizes “The omnipotence of God, Omniscience of God” and represents “the omniscience of God is that attribute by which He knows all things past, present and future. What is hidden from human sight is still known to God” (Achampong 2008). To further support this, Achampong cites passages from Matthew 6:26, 31-33 and 1 John 4:8 that expresses “the providence and care of God” (Achampong 2008).

Reverend Peter K. Sarpong, Archbishop Emeritus of Kumasi, said, “the well-known Gye Nyame symbols. It deals with the unsurpassable power of God. Since there is one God, Creator of all human beings, this Nyame of the Akan must be the same as Yahweh and Jesus Christ in the Old and New Testaments respectively” (Sarpong as quoted in Achampong 2008: v). Additionally, in the book's Preamble, Michael H.O.S. Monak said, “the ‘Gye Nyame’ symbol is the stalwart item of faith since without God nothing can be possible. Hence it may be said that Psalm 127:1 mentions the symbol directly: ‘Gye Nyame’ means ‘Except the Lord’ (Monak 2008: viii). Achampong presents his interpretation of the Christian meanings associated with *adinkera* motifs, but does not discuss any historical context of *adinkera* in Christianity.

<sup>30</sup> Denteh also formerly served as the Vice President of the Methodist Church of Ghana and was the secretary of the Centre for National Culture in Kumasi. For more on the role of *adinkera* at the Emmanuel Methodist Church in Labadi (including photographs), see Quarcoo 1968. Quarcoo said that *gye Nyame* “is the greatest single ‘little sign’ which epitomizes the attributes of the God of all creation,” including the Akan saying, “‘*Gye Nyame wu na mawu*,’ ‘my death comes only when God dies’” (Quarcoo 1968: 57).

Kumasi, Ghana).<sup>31</sup>

In contemporary Ghana, *gye Nyame* has become one of the most widely used Akan symbols in Christian religious spaces.<sup>32</sup> For example, at the Methodist church in Kumasi, located on the highly visible Accra-Kumasi road, *gye Nyame* is centrally placed on either side of the church name on the building's façade (fig. 5.22). Christianity, including Pentecostalism, is the dominant religion in much of southern and central Ghana today and plays a major role in contemporary life. Including *gye Nyame* in Christian spaces has certainly contributed to the overall popularity and fame of *gye Nyame*. Other *adinkra* symbols expressing religious meanings, especially *Nyame dua* "tree of God," have also become common visual imagery in Christian churches. Yet no other *adinkra* symbol is as prolific within and beyond religious settings in Ghana as *gye Nyame*.

Some interpretations of *gye Nyame* in non-religious settings directly opposed or challenged the re-invention of *gye Nyame* as a symbol of state power. For example, when I spoke with Justice Brobbey, current director of the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi, he associated *gye Nyame* with Asante political power. Not national power. At Manhyia Palace (located next to the museum), the entrance gate depicts the *gye Nyame* symbol in gold alongside other markers of Asante identity – including a large stool and *akofena* crossed swords – on the adjacent welcome sign. The current Asante king, Asantehene Osei Tutu II, attended a festival at the palace in 2015 dressed in an exquisite hand-woven cloth wrapped to show a large embroidered *gye Nyame* design on the lower left area and *dvennimmen* ("ram's horn") on the lower right.

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<sup>31</sup> A. K. Quarcoo interprets this sequence of *adinkra* symbols to convey the message, "God's son became a sacrificial lamb for the household" (Quarcoo 1968: 56). Similarly, O.K. Osei told me that Denteh's message sought "to establish the reason for Christianity in Ghana, that the son of God, that is Jesus, was used as a sacrifice for our salvation" (O.K. Osei, interview, November 27, 2014, Kumasi, Ghana).

<sup>32</sup> Anthropologist and religious studies scholar Birgit Meyer discusses how Professor Dzobo, Moderator of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church reinterprets and recontextualizes the *gye Nyame* design in religious contexts. Dzobo has been involved with this church since 1981, one of the five main mission churches in Ghana. Meyer said, "One expression of this synthesis is Dzobo's symbol of the cross in the *Gye Nyame* sign...By combining the *Gye Nyame*, which refers to an African (in Dzobo's view *not* just Akan) conception of confidence in God, with the cross, which stands for the forgiveness of sin, Dzobo tries to join the life-affirming forces of both religions" (Meyer 1992: 102). Meyer adds, "Dzobo's interpretation of this sign is: 'Except if God dies I am not going to die'" (Meyer 1992: 124, footnote 11).

In my conversation with Brobbey, he translated *gye Nyame* to mean “except God.” The name and meaning of *Gye Nyame* as a Twi word, Brobbey said, also claims the Asante origins of *adinkra* cloth (J. Brobbey, personal communication, November 11, 2014, Manhyia, Ghana). In his explanation of the symbol’s meaning, Brobbey located *gye Nyame* within Asante political rule, history, and identity. Anthropologist Jennifer Hasty’s interpretation of *gye Nyame* echoes how Brobbey related the *adinkra* symbol’s meaning with Asante power. Hasty writes, “in the postcolonial period, the consolidation of wealth in the south has combined with these nationalist allusions to Asante nobility, resulting in a virtual equation between Akan symbols of power and Ghanaian national culture (gold, kente, *adinkra*, Twi). The ubiquitous *adinkra* symbol, “*Gye Nyame*,” is, after all, a bold declaration of Asante power: “Except God, I fear no one” (Hasty 2002: 65). Similarly, Brobbey explained that except for God, there is no power greater than Asante political strength, giving evidence of how the Asante kingdom conquered other empires (J. Brobbey, personal communication, November 11, 2014, Manhyia, Ghana).

In comparison, the Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region, where Samuel Adjei served as director from 2003-2015, was also a space for articulating Asante identity. In 1951, the venue opened as an Asante cultural centre. Kwame Nkrumah later transformed the centre into a regional branch of the national cultural centre after Independence. This shift supported Nkrumah’s wider agenda to reduce Asante political and cultural presence. Today, *gye Nyame* is prominent at the centre. The main entrance gate displays a large *gye Nyame* symbol in gold above the sign “Amammwere Fie” sign, meaning “House of Culture” in Twi. As visitors enter, a large cement sculpture of *gye Nyame* stands at the curbside. Outside the Administration block, a series of cement sculptures depict *adinkra* symbols with their most common names carved below. Nearby, a figural sculpture added in 1987 of Dr. Alexander Attah Yaw Kyerematen, founder of the Asante Cultural Centre, holds a plaque in his hand with the *gye Nyame* symbol (fig. 5.23). Shops at the centre now sell

crafts and tourist souvenirs adorned with *gye Nyame* – including small wooden key chains like Samuel Adjei’s key chain. The commercialization of *gye Nyame* in tourism illustrates the mutability of the symbol’s design and meaning. As the venue remains today a regional branch of the national cultural centre, the centre’s use of *gye Nyame* and other *adinkera* motifs emphasizes Asante culture while promoting a broader Ghanaian identity.

The dynamics surrounding the ongoing negotiation of the nation’s identity through *gye Nyame* reveals the continued significance of *adinkera* in contemporary Ghana. Moreover, claims that *gye Nyame* represents cultural or national identity illuminate deeper political tensions between Akans and the wider nation. The expanding contexts to encounter *gye Nyame* show how Ghanaians continue to re-interpret the symbol’s historical meanings. This craze of *gye Nyame* has resulted in an image overload. The symbol’s fame is now largely embedded within popular use rather than limited to government initiatives such as those that first re-invented the symbol to portray national identity.

Questions remain about what messages *gye Nyame* conveys today. Many Ghanaians assume others know the meaning of *gye Nyame* simply because its visual design has become so recognizable. Yet my research found that sometimes there’s a disparity between familiarity with the motif’s visual form and its symbolic meanings. The examples I’ve discussed show the complexity of using *gye Nyame* to communicate as the motif expresses multiple messages. Many Ghanaians like Samuel Adjei continue to give *gye Nyame* personal meaning. His small wooden key chain also tells us how he embraced the commodification of *adinkera* and use of the symbols beyond their historically appropriate contexts

Amidst this proliferation of *gye Nyame* from Akan life to across Ghana, the symbol has retained its cultural value on hand-printed *adinkera* cloth. It’s quite likely that the expansion of *gye Nyame* beyond Akan society has made the symbol even more popular today on cloth than ever before. In 2015, I met elder *adinkera* cloth maker Nana Nkodwa Sowafohene in Ntonso. Nana

included *gye Nyame* in a small selection of his old calabash stamps that he told me are the most important *adinkra* symbols (N. Sowafohene, interview, May 8, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). The on-going importance and popularity of *gye Nyame* in *adinkra* cloth making spans from elders now retired to younger *adinkra* cloth makers active in the business. On Ntonso's main road, cloth maker Michael Gemfi owns the shop "Sankofa Kente Enterprise" that sells his screen-printed *adinkra* cloths. I asked Michael which *adinkra* motif is most popular now among his customers. He said, "the particular design that sells more is the *gye Nyame* design." Why? Michael replied, "Because of the name. *Gye Nyame*. It's moving fast" (M. Gemfi, interview, April 30, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

### III. "Forward Ever, Backward Never": David Boamah

"When you are a child, and your mom always prepares you peanut soup, then you always eat peanut soup. If you don't make any attempts to learn some different soups, then you also grow up preparing peanut soup because that is what your mother did. But if you go out to learn from different backgrounds, next time, 'Oh! So I can also make light soup.' So you can make this, you can make that. Otherwise, it will only be the peanut soup. Why am I saying this? The education too has done a lot for me."

(D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

David Boamah is always thinking about what's ahead. His work promotes Asante heritage and understanding of the historical background of *adinkra* cloth, while also introducing new innovations to his trade. The vision of Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah resonated with David, who adopted Nkrumah's slogan for the Conventions People Party, "Forward Ever, Backward Never," as his own motto and the name of an *adinkra* symbol he created.<sup>33</sup> As David explained, "There is something ahead that you want to achieve that comes with perseverance. So you push forward.

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<sup>33</sup> David did not credit his use of "Forward Ever, Backward Never" to Kwame Nkrumah when mentioning the saying to me.



Because the challenge comes at the middle of your decision, of whatever you want to do. If I go back, I lose. If I push, then I will make something out of it. I would rather push forward. So forward ever, backward never” (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). David’s decision to make and use *adinkra* draws upon how he wants to remember his past for the present and future – from his personal upbringing to the historical background of *adinkra* and wider Asante cultural history.

This chapter began by exploring how cloth makers in Ntonso have reimagined the history of *adinkra* cloth to create an immersive cultural experience for tourists. The chapter’s final section focuses on the impact of Ntonso’s recent growth in tourism on one cloth maker. David’s interactions with people from Ntonso and across the world have shaped his identity, work, and attitudes towards remembering the history of *adinkra* cloth.

### Innovations in Fabric and Design

“The main motive behind [*adinkra* cloth] is that it’s a means of sending a message, a means of communication. By what media or medium can I use to send my message?... It’s not necessary that I have to go get a big piece of *adinkra* cloth. How often can I wear that? It’s heavy. What I’ll rather prefer to do, maybe I’ll use it in form of design. My shirt, my clothes, or maybe have the *adinkra* symbol on a t-shirt that I put on. If I do this, I still wear *adinkra* cloth.”

(D. Boamah, interview, December 5, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

In 2010, David first adapted the screen-printing technology that he uses to make *adinkra* cloth to design t-shirts with *adinkra* motifs for a group visiting Ntonso from abroad. On the front of the shirt, he created a design with “*Adinkra* 2010” and added a grid of small *adinkra* symbols on the back (D. Boamah, interview, December 13, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). He wanted to create something more wearable for visitors than large *adinkra* cloth that is impractical for those unaccustomed to wearing

wrapped cloth and living in areas where it is not common dress.

Since then, David began screen-printing t-shirts with *adinkra* symbols (using imported t-shirts) for other visitors and tourists. His t-shirt designs have often featured one large *adinkra* motif on the front with a grid of small *adinkra* motifs on the back, sometimes with written text. For example, one t-shirt design reads “Adinkra Village Ntonso” around the *sankofa* symbol. “Preserve Our Culture” is inscribed on the back of the shirt (fig. 5.24). Here, David uses design to communicate the identity and importance of *adinkra* to Asante history and culture. Incorporating text that marks the cloth’s production place frames *adinkra* as a main marker of Ntonso’s identity. Beyond Ntonso, t-shirts with *adinkra* motifs are commonly sold at souvenir shops. For example, a shop on Oxford Street in Accra’s trendy Osu neighborhood displays t-shirts designed with *adinkra* motifs, Ghana’s flag colors, and “Ghana” inscriptions (fig. 5.25). Unlike David’s designs, the colors, text, and imagery surrounding the *adinkra* motifs associate *adinkra* with the nation. Moreover, David’s status as a skilled *adinkra* cloth maker adds value to the t-shirt designs he creates – the only ones made and sold in Ntonso.

David also stamps and screen-prints *adinkra* cloth in narrow strips or small wrapper sizes for tourists and other customers seeking handmade *adinkra* cloth. He prints *adinkra* on brightly colored cloth, but does not incorporate Ghana’s flag colors or black star, nor any written text with “Ghana” as is included in some *kente* cloths marketed to foreigners. One of the only non-*adinkra* symbols David includes is Barack Obama’s portrait, which he often paired with historical *adinkra* symbols (often the popular motifs *adinkrabene*, *akofena*, and *gye Nyame*). These cloths with Obama’s portrait share David’s admiration for the president, while also attracting tourists from America – especially African Americans participating in heritage tourism to trace their “roots” in Ghana. David is the only cloth maker who has transformed hand-printed *adinkra* cloth into other kinds of souvenirs for tourists. For instance, he works with a seamstress to sew his screen-printed *adinkra* made with hand-

woven cotton cloths into small zippered bags, accent pillowcases, and tablecloths (fig. 5.26 and 5.27).

Unlike *adinkra* cloth often made today for local use on factory-printed cloth, David uses hand-woven cotton cloth for tourists. David said, “why not use these *adinkra* symbols with the traditional hand-woven cloth and batik, so when you get a hand-woven cloth it becomes more traditional” (D. Boamah, interview, December 5, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). Yet the cloth colors selected for tourists do not often reflect “traditional” dress. David (and also the Boakye family) use yellow, blue, pink, and other brightly colored hand-woven cloth rather than the most common dark-colored cloths (especially black, brown, or red) today that Akan customers wear when in mourning.

In 2014, David experimented with layering batik *adinkra* and screen-printed *adinkra* onto hand-woven cloth – a combination I have not encountered before (fig. 5.28). Batik cloths with *adinkra* motifs – made through a resist wax process using wood stamps and dyes – are commonly sold today at markets in Kumasi and Accra. But batik making is not practiced in Ntonso. David is one of the only *adinkra* cloth makers who has made batik *adinkra* cloth. David combined screen-printed and batik *adinkra* to attract tourists because he thinks that it makes new cloth look old. “An antique,” he said (D. Boamah, interview, April 18, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). His approach represents a common strategy elsewhere in West Africa to make tourist crafts and souvenirs that suggest an aged appearance, but are in fact brand new (Steiner 1994).

David’s use of batik and hand-woven cloth illustrates his attention to techniques and materials that can allude to “authentic,” “traditional,” and historical practices – despite the fact that the batik combinations does not actually reflect Asante *adinkra* cloth. At the same time, David has also selected other techniques and materials to present *adinkra* motifs in objects more reflective of contemporary trends. For instance, David screen-printed single *adinkra* symbols in the corner of machine-made handkerchiefs that he packages with a typed description of the symbol’s name and

meaning. In 2016, David introduced tote bags screen-printed with *adinkra* symbols on one side and batik *adinkra* on the reverse side (fig. 5.29). Both examples demonstrate how David innovates cloth making technologies to expand the contexts and audiences for *adinkra*.

Although these souvenirs are not used locally, David's work reflects contemporary trends to transform hand-printed *adinkra* cloth for Asante wear, including applique on funeral shirts and *abenemaa* sandals. "When I am sewing a shirt," David said, "then I use part of this *adinkra* to design in the form of applique. Like my shirt, it is all designed with *adinkra*. And I wear it everywhere" (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). David has collaborated with a local tailor to make black shirts with *adinkra* as applique to wear at funerals; for these, he screen-prints *adinkra* symbols in a black paste on a hand-woven black cloth.

David doesn't like to wear wrapped cloth to funerals, whether printed with *adinkra* symbols or as a plain dark-colored *kuntunkuni* dyed cloth. David prefers tailored shirts. In this portrait, David dressed in one such shirt: narrow bands of screen-printed designs adorn the neckline and sleeves, with an added square sewn diagonally in the center (fig. 5.30). The screen-printed design is not an *adinkra* symbol. It's a *kente* cloth pattern. When I asked David about the shirt, he pointed out this difference. But interestingly, David still called the shirt *adinkra* because of the screen-printing technique. David's naming of this shirt raises questions about the role of printing technology to define an *adinkra* cloth, especially given his use of the new printing technology rather than stamps. This tailored shirt reveals how David has innovated *adinkra* cloth, his personal dress preferences, and the complexities of what defines *adinkra* today.

## A Student and a Teacher

On a Saturday afternoon, David and I were sitting outside his shop on Ntonso's main road when a girl passed by. She emptied dirty water from a large metal bin into the street and side area at the edge of his property. Pausing our conversation, David responded immediately. He called the girl's attention from afar in a stern voice, scolding her inappropriate behavior. Stunned, she walked away slowly and quietly, her head turned down. David turned to me, and smiled. A little while later, a group of four girls passed by David's shop, talking with one another. He called their attention after they walked away from him. It is an important custom in Asante society to greet people who you pass by, even if you don't know them. The girls didn't greet David. He politely asked each girl her name. David then instructed the girls to come greet him individually, as he shook their hands.

A proper Asante greeting.

(D. Boamah, personal communication, April 18, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

These kinds of actions reveal David's informal gestures and actions to teach youth in Ntonso about proper behavior in Asante society. When David was eleven years old, he began learning how to make *adinkera* cloth from elders in Ntonso. He had already learned how to weave *kente* cloth when he was even younger (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). After closing from school, David spent his afternoons helping men who were printing *adinkera* cloth nearby. Working in outdoor spaces facilitated these interactions. David sometimes helped men he would greet or visit as he walked by after school and found them printing *adinkera* cloth. At the age of fifteen, David was making his own *adinkera* cloth. He used the income to fund his secondary high school education.

David also studied closely with his uncle, *panyin* Stephen Yaw Boakye, who is also Gabriel

Boakye's father. David worked at the Boakye family's home until he began his own business. On July 20, 2013, David opened his shop on Ntonso's main road next to the Ntonso Visitor Centre (fig. 31). Now forty-one years old, David is teaching young men – and also women – in Ntonso about *adinkra* after they close from school. But his teaching style is distinct from his elders, as is his inclusion of women. *Adinkra* cloth production has been primarily a trade for men in Ntonso, as cloth dyeing is more associated with women's work in the town. David follows a different approach than the common practice of young men learning from their father, uncles, and grandfathers. As of 2017, David did not have any children of his own to teach. But he teaches other youth in Ntonso, students living in Kumasi, and international students who come to Ghana on a study-abroad program. For the latter two groups of students, he has organized internships, practicums, and short workshop programs. Depending on the students' interests, he teaches various cloth making techniques: stamping, screen-printing, *mwomu* stitching, and batik. With each, David also teaches students the historical background and symbolic meanings of *adinkra* motifs.

David is a life-long student, passionate about learning. As he discusses above through the example of different kinds of soup, David seeks to learn from people of different backgrounds and areas of expertise to expand his knowledge and skills. "I am also dreaming of going back to school and pursue [a degree] when the time arises," David told me (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). He has spoken with faculty at KNUST with whom he hopes to study with about his interests. David wants to receive a bachelor's degree in textiles or related field of study to enhance his knowledge and continue to improve his own work. David's educational aspirations are unusual for *adinkra* cloth makers. Most cloth makers do not have or seek advanced education beyond secondary high school; David could become one of the first *adinkra* cloth makers with a bachelor's degree.

In the meantime, David initiated workshops for cloth makers in Ntonso to encourage his

peers to advance their training and grow the town's economy. Workshop topics have spanned from batik making to business management. David considers current challenges facing the trade in Ntonso, sets long-term goals, and identifies what steps he can take to achieve those objectives. Few other cloth makers in Ntonso share David's forward-thinking mindset. In contrast, many other cloth makers active in Ntonso today are more interested in "quick money" than long-term business planning or maintaining the history of their trade.

Some cloth makers innovated their work due to competition among cloth makers. By doing so, cloth makers offered customers distinct *adinkra* cloths. David's work is exceptional. He doesn't innovate his work to navigate competition. Instead, he is more concerned with the overall success of work in Ntonso as a whole. "All that we need is to sell the good name of the village," David said. "Then other people will also benefit because they will get something for themselves and their family. That is how we build a community" (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). David has encouraged other cloth makers active in Ntonso's tourism industry to follow his lead. Economic reasons was part of why David began creating some small souvenirs, as he wanted to generate additional income from visitors who would otherwise not buy more costly full-sized *adinkra* cloth. David said that he suggested to other cloth makers in Ntonso that they also make similar souvenirs that could also increase their profits. But as of 2015, cloth makers had not yet taken David up on his offer.

### David's Dream

"Day in and day out, things are changing. I am also telling the children, that you are also going to do wonderful things that I will never come to do."

(D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

A youth organization founder. An HIV prevention activist. A sponsor to orphans. These roles are all central to David's life and identity. David's contributions to Ntonso extend far beyond his work to make *adinkra* cloth and grow the town's tourism industry. Inside David Boamah's cloth shop on Ntonso's main road, large plastic bins filled with donated books from America are stacked against the wall under folded *adinkra* cloths. Architectural plans for a future cultural centre, the Thread Centre for Traditional Arts and Education, are tacked above onto a bulletin board next to posters promoting "World AIDS Day" and "Lets Unite Against HIV Stigma." On the opposite wall, dozens of narrow hand-woven cloth strips in an array of colors are neatly stacked on the shelves. A guest book rests on the back table next to a basket full of white handkerchiefs screen-printed with small *adinkra* symbols. No other *adinkra* cloth shop looks quite like this.

David is founder of the Thread Foundation, an organization aimed at improving the lives, education, and arts opportunities for youth in Ntonso. The foundation includes the Thread Happy Child Club that offers afterschool academic and cultural activities for youth in Ntonso, from cloth making to drumming and dancing. David also uses the Thread Happy Child Club to encourage children to take interest in *adinkra* cloth and teach them about the cloth's production and symbolic meanings. For instance, David designs activities for kids to create *adinkra* cloths or drawings; following, he asks them to give a presentation or write an essay about how they designed their *adinkra* cloth, their understanding of a symbol's meaning, and why they selected the particular symbol. He explained that he teaches children about *adinkra* so that it will continue in future generations. "Because we don't want to lose our culture," he added. "If we lose our culture, then we always get lost" (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

David's dream is to open the Thread Centre for Traditional Arts and Education in Ntonso, a cultural centre for his community and visitors. The concept for the cultural centre embodies David's forward-thinking vision to support his community. His motivation for constructing a cultural centre



is to offer a space for people (especially youth) to come together and learn from one another. Although David already organizes various youth programs in Ntonso, he doesn't have a dedicated meeting space, especially during the rainy season or evenings when they cannot hold activities outdoors (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

“I started to dream that I have to build a library. I have to build a cultural center, like a theater hall with a museum, to preserve our beautiful culture so what we have from the beginning, what our ancestors came to do, at least we can have something to exhibit for people to also go and have a look at it. Because if you don't exhibit something from the past, how do you defend your culture?” (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

Part of David's motivation to defend *adinkra* as an Asante practice hailing from Ntonso stems from the ongoing debates on the origins of *adinkra* cloth, as well as how *adinkra* has acquired new identities as markers of Ghanaian and African identity from its global fame and circulation. As David describes, some of his goals overlap with the museum space he reinstalled at the Ntonso Visitor Centre. David's intent to build a separate cultural centre suggests how the national government's initiated centre in Ntonso does not fully support or accommodate the community's own interests.

David has already taken action to realize the cultural centre. The plan is ambitious. The cultural centre will include a library and an open-roof gallery space to display cloths in natural sunlight. He has purchased a piece of land, planted trees on the property, and begun construction.

“At first, I wanted to use this land to build something for myself. But then I realized, no, what about my village? What about my community? The children in my community are the future leaders. One day, I will disappear and the problem might still be there. What am I going to do to leave my name behind? I have to leave my name behind so that my ancestors can also see what the generation has done and become, and what I was able to do to sustain” (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

David plans to build the centre in four phases, starting with the library, which he designed in collaboration with an architect. For the library, David has already solicited donations of books and educational materials from individuals and organizations in the United States that he met through

his tourism business. His remaining challenge: complete fund raising to finish building.

David's interests in the centre also reveal intersections between the past, present, and future. Celebrating the history of *adinkra* cloth making in Ntonso, the cultural centre also aims to support the work of future generations in Ntonso. On a personal level, the centre represents the legacy David wants to leave behind and how he hopes that people will remember him in the future. David's approach reflects the meaning of the *adinkra* symbol *sankɔfa* ("to go back and fetch"). "I do like the *sankɔfa* a lot," David said, "because *adinkra* goes back generations. And from generation upon generation, we all learn from history. It is not like now, I was talking of sustainability, and how I can preserve." He later added, "Without the past, the future is unknown. If we are able to go back to take what is left behind, then we have the hope that we can reach whatever we want to reach. We can never ignore our past" (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the roles of *adinkra* as both cloth and symbol to contend that Akans and other Ghanaians have used *adinkra* to remember personal, cultural, and national pasts. Such functions demonstrate how Ghanaians use *adinkra* as a strategic tool to navigate political settings and advance personal agendas. In Ntonso, cloth makers reconstructed the history of their trade and gave their former stamping tools new functions as souvenirs – teaching visitors about Akan cultural history while also honoring the work of their elders. David Boamah's work shows how his innovations in *adinkra* cloth making keep the practice up-to-date with current trends as he remembers his cultural past. David's forward-thinking mindset that drives much of his work also suggests the importance of considering the role of the future to concepts of social memory.

The chapter further argues that Ghanaians have re-invented *adinkera* to mark national identity in Ghana, tracing some key moments in the use of *gye Nyame* (“except God”) that recontextualized the symbol’s identity to mark the entire nation. While not comprehensive in scope, the examples included demonstrate how such re-invention of *adinkera* (and wider Akan culture) unfolded during the mid-twentieth century as Ghana gained political independence. The preceding chapters focused on *adinkera* cloth, yet the symbols have long been used in other cultural objects within Akan society – including gold weights, linguist staffs, stools, architecture, umbrella tops, and regalia. Attention in this chapter to the use of *gye Nyame* within national contexts illustrated how depictions of *adinkera* symbols in other materials (such as logos, currency notes, and postage stamps) depart from common Akan uses of the motifs.

The opening example that described Samuel Adjei’s key chain carved in the shape of *gye Nyame* illustrates the personal meaning he gave to the symbol. The funeral held after his passing also showed the widespread use of *gye Nyame* from plastic decals to drums that exemplify the use of *adinkera* symbols beyond cloth. At Samuel Adjei’s funeral, many mourners came dressed in black or red *adinkera* cloth as well as factory-printed cloth with *adinkera* motifs, such as the man who danced wearing a wax-print designed with *gye Nyame*.

Analysis of *gye Nyame* shows how people have ascribed *adinkera* symbols with different meanings and values specific to each context of use. Attention here and in other chapters to unpacking how people have interpreted individual *adinkera* symbols reveals how each symbol conveys multiple meanings across time and space and within an historical moment. The outcome of this work challenges a trend in scholarship on *adinkera* to present one interpretation of a symbol’s meaning. The Afterword continues this discussion of the shift in *adinkera* symbols to represent Akan, Ghanaian, and African identities through the role of *sankɔfa* to communicate African and African American identity and heritage

## Chapter Five Images



Fig. 5.1. Entrance to the Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region. March 2015. Kumasi, Ghana.



Fig. 5.2. Bus with *gye Nyame* plastic decals and funerary poster for Dr. Samuel Francis Adjei. Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region. March 28, 2015. Kumasi, Ghana.



Fig. 5.3. Funeral for Dr. Samuel Francis Adjei. Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region. March 28, 2015. Kumasi, Ghana.



Fig. 5.4. Funeral for Dr. Samuel Francis Adjei. Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region. March 28, 2015. Kumasi, Ghana.



Fig. 5.5. Paul Nyaamah and Boakye family. Display of calabash stamps at the Boakye family's home, with display of *adinkra* cloths in the background. July 27, 2013. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.6. Boakye family. Screen-printing a red and black *adinkra* cloth. July 29, 2013. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.7. Boakye family. Silk-screens for printing *adinkra* cloth. July 29, 2013. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.8. Boakye family. Red and black screen-printed *adinkra* cloth for Asante customers to wear at funerals; *adinkra* cloths for tourists displayed in the background. November 21, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.9. Boakye family. Red and black screen-printed *adinkra* cloth for Asante customers to wear at funerals (detail). November 21, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.





Fig. 5.10. Boakye family. Display of screen-printed *adinkra* cloths for tourists and visitors. November 21, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.11. Boakye family. Display of screen-printed *adinkra* cloths for tourists and visitors (detail). November 21, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.12. Paul Nyaamah and “Teacher Kofi.” Display table with *adinkra* stamps for sale (detail); “Teacher Kofi” carved *obi nka obi* (“bite not one another”) stamp on lower right. Calabash, *badia* dye, raffia palm, and cloth. Ntonso Visitor Centre. November 22, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.13. Paul Nyaamah and “Teacher Kofi.” Display table with *adinkra* stamps for sale. Ntonso Visitor Centre. November 22, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.14. Cloth makers unrecorded. Display of stamped *adinkra* cloths with *mwomu* stitching. Ntonso Visitor Centre. November 22, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.15. Covered roof above fire to prepare *badia* dye. Ntonso Visitor Centre. November 22, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.16. Fire heating *badia* dye for printing cloth. Ntonso Visitor Centre. November 22, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.17. Carver unrecorded. *Adinkra* stamp. *Meehwe de Nyame beye* (“I’m looking up to what God has for me”). Calabash, *badia* dye, raffia palm, and cloth. Collection of Kusi Boadum. November 20, 2014. Asokwa, Ghana.



Fig. 5.18. Designer unrecorded. Plastic chairs designed with *gye Nyame* (“except God”) motif. 2013. Accra, Ghana.

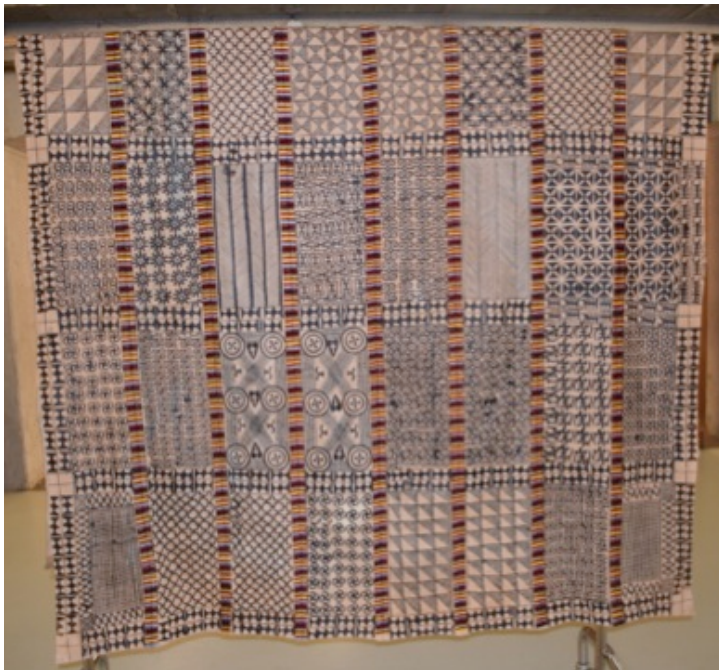


Fig. 5.19. Cloth makers unrecorded. *Adinkra* cloth with *mwomu* stitching (partial view). Ca. 1920. White imported cloth, silk and *badia* dye. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam. Rotterdam, Netherlands. Acquisition: M.L.J. Lemaire, Amsterdam, Netherlands. Museum purchased in 1954. Museum record number 33870.



Fig. 5.20. Designer unrecorded. Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL). Ghana@50 Anniversary cloth design (with the Ghana@50 logo). British Museum. London, England. Acquired in Ghana in 2007. Museum record number 2007, 2014.10.



Fig. 5.21. Artists unrecorded. Display of leather bags with applique of *gye Nyame* (“except God”) and *sankofa* (“to go back and fetch”) symbols. Centre for National Culture – Northern Region. June 2, 2014. Tamale, Ghana.



Fig. 5.22. African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church with *gye Nyame* (“except God”) symbols. November 11, 2014. Kumasi, Ghana.



Fig. 5.23. Artist unrecorded. Sculpture of Dr. Alexander Attah Yaw Kyerematen, founder and first Director of the Ghana National Cultural Centre – Ashanti Region, holding a plaque with *gye Nyame* (“except God”). Statue unveiled on October 17, 1987 by Col. E.M. Osei-Wusu, on behalf of the head of state on October 17, 1987. Centre for National Culture – Ashanti Region. August 5, 2014. Kumasi, Ghana.



Fig. 5.24. David Boamah. David wearing a screen-printed shirt with *sankofa* (“to go back and fetch”) symbol and text “Adinkra Village Ntonso” while drawing comb lines on a stamped *adinkra* cloth. November 18, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.25. Designers unrecorded. Shop display of t-shirts with *gye Nyame* (“except God”) and other *adinkra* symbols. August 3, 2013. Oxford Street, Osu, Accra, Ghana.





Fig. 5.26. David Boamah. Thread Foundation. Display of zippered bags made of screen-printed *adinkra* cloth. November 15, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.27. David Boamah. Thread Foundation. Display of zippered bags made of screen-printed *adinkra* cloth (detail). November 15, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.28. David Boamah. Thread Foundation. Hand-woven cloth with batik *adinkra* and screen-printed *adinkra* symbols. April 18, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.29. David Boamah. Thread Foundation. Tote bags with batik and screen-printed *adinkra* (children pictured are involved with the Thread Foundation). 2016. Ntonso, Ghana. Photography: David Boamah.



Fig. 5.30. David Boamah. Thread Foundation. David wearing a tailored shirt with his screen-printed *adinkra* cloth; he stands in front of a yellow screen-printed *adinkra* cloth that he also designed. May 30, 2015. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. 5.31. David Boamah. Thread Foundation and cloth shop. November 15, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.

## CONCLUSION

“When you talk of *adinkra*, it is something to me that is broad,” David Boamah told me.

We spoke that day about his work to make *adinkra* cloth and lead community initiatives in Ntonso, as well as his beliefs on the cloth’s historical and contemporary cultural significance.

“So maybe I can put a question on you. Let me quickly give a pre-test,” David proposed. It was our first meeting, and he was eager to test my current knowledge and thinking about *adinkra*.

“So I ask you, if I talk of *adinkra*, what comes to your mind?

What do you know about *adinkra*?

One might ask, what is *adinkra*?”

(D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana).

It has been more than three years. I’m still grappling with that last question. What is *adinkra*? How have different people defined *adinkra* cloth and symbols, historically and in the present-day? David and I didn’t come to a clear definition that day as to what constitutes an *adinkra* cloth or symbol. Instead, we spoke about the complexity of *adinkra* and the dynamics of using *adinkra* as a mode of communication. David and I discussed the changes over time, from the cloth’s debated origins to its commercialization today as a signifier of Ghanaian and African identity. Such transformations have made it even more difficult to delineate what is – or is not – *adinkra*.

This dissertation argues that Akans and other Ghanaians have used *adinkra* cloth as a dynamic form of fashion to communicate multiple, changing messages. Tracing how Akans and other Ghanaians have used *adinkra* over time to express personal and national identities has offered important perspectives on the social history of Ghana. The ways that people have refashioned *adinkra* shows the significance of the symbols' designs, meanings, and uses to be in flux: it has not only kept *adinkra* cloth relevant, but also vital to constructing and communicating identities in contemporary Ghanaian life. The broadening contexts and audiences for *adinkra* within and beyond Akan society demonstrate some of the ways in which the functions and meanings associated with *adinkra* have changed.

For example, Chapter One analyzed a shift within Akan society for *adinkra* symbols to no longer carry restricted access to certain wearers. A case study on *adinkerahene* (“king of *adinkra*”) explored how the first *adinkra* symbol printed on the Gyaman king's cloths evolved from its limited use on the Asante king's *adinkra* cloths to become culturally acceptable for men and women to wear at various events. Discussions of *adinkra* cloth production in Chapters Two and Three revealed the social aspects of cloth making and collaborative approaches to technological innovations that have contributed to the symbolic meanings and multiple design variations of *adinkra* symbols. Chapter Four contended that the circulation of *adinkra* motifs in late nineteenth century factory-printed cloth – textiles that possibly circulated beyond Akan society – offers historical evidence in the shift of *adinkra* from representing Akan society to Africa more broadly. In the mid-twentieth century, Ghanaians re-invented *adinkra* symbols as national identity, as Chapter Five argued through the transformation of the motif *gye Nyame* (“except God”).

The movement of *adinkra* away from a distinct Akan cultural practice and into national politics has contributed to the wider re-contextualization of *adinkra* to signify African identity – the subject of the Afterword that follows this concluding chapter. Africans in the diaspora have

employed *adinkra* in various forms to convey African and African American identity for audiences worldwide. Drawing upon approaches to object biography, the previous chapters examined how some Ghanaians have used *adinkra* to represent distinct personal and cultural identities – such as the Boakye family’s efforts to cultivate a tourism industry in Ntonso that positioned *adinkra* as representing Asante cultural identity and history. Consequently, these transformations have complicated the cultural identity of *adinkra* as something that is Asante, Akan, Ghanaian, or African. *Adinkra* therefore oscillates between representing multiple identities depending on the context and audience, each carrying different meanings and histories. These evolving uses of *adinkra* reflect the wide-reaching importance of the cloth and its symbols across time and space.

### What is *Adinkra*?

The shifting role of *adinkra* in constructions of identity in Ghana and beyond contributes to the difficulty in demarcating the limits of what constitutes an *adinkra* symbol or an *adinkra* cloth. What does it mean to call something *adinkra*? What do Ghanaians consider an *adinkra* cloth and *adinkra* symbol, and what informs this classification? And what does the absence of *adinkra* in such labels imply? How Akans and other Ghanaians define *adinkra* has been changing with shifts in the ways that people make and use *adinkra* cloth and symbols.

Scholarship has proposed different definitions of *adinkra*, including key texts published during the mid to late twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> For example, Daniel Mato noted during his research in

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<sup>1</sup> Other scholars made distinctions between *adinkra* cloth and other kinds of textiles given the popular use of *adinkra* at funerals. For example, Herbert Cole and Doran Ross said, “a cloth can be called *adinkra* only if it has these patterns, regardless of color and context of use. Many *adinkra* cannot properly be called mourning cloths. Their bright or light backgrounds classify them as *Kwasiada* (‘Sunday’) *adinkra*, meaning fancy cloths unsuitable for funerary contexts but appropriate for most festive occasions or even daily wear” (Cole and Ross 1977: 44-45). In their discussion of *Kwasiada adinkra*, Cole and Ross cite unpublished field notes from Gregory Bishopp’s research in Ntonso and Kona in 1975.

Kumasi in the 1980s, “the term *adinkera* refers not only to the finished cloth but is often used to describe the process of printing as well as the stamps used” (Mato 1987: vi). During my research, most cloth makers with whom I spoke used “stamping” or “screen-printing” to specify the printing technique. In comparison, Alexander Atta Yaw Kyerematen said, “a cloth thus stamped [with *adinkera* stamps or prints] may be called an *adinkera* or *ntiamu*” (Kyerematen 1964: 68). With the change in technology from stamping to screen-printing (that came many years after Kyerematen’s text was published), cloth makers have extended *adinkera* to mean screen-printed cloth.

In contemporary Ghana, those with whom I spoke typically used the word “*adinkera*” to refer to *adinkera* symbols, *adinkera* stamps, and cloth printed with *adinkera* symbols using either stamps or silk-screens. To identify a cloth as an “*adinkera* cloth” often meant that the cloth was hand-printed – regardless of whether it was made with hand-woven or machine-made cloth. Cloth makers and sellers generally distinguished hand-printed *adinkera* cloth from factory-printed cloth designed with *adinkera* symbols (including factory-printed cloth designs made to resemble the hand-printed cloth). For instance, many cloth makers used the cloth’s technique – either stamping or screen-printing – to identify a cloth as *adinkera* and to distinguish it from other textiles featuring *adinkera* motifs. For example, Kusi Boadum said of his work to stamp *adinkera* onto a wax-print cloth: “any time you add *adinkera* printing to a cloth, then that cloth *becomes* an *adinkera* cloth” (K. Boadum, personal communication, April 22, 2015, Asokwa, Ghana). Kusi’s comment echoes Kyerematen’s observation on how stamping turns a cloth into an *adinkera* cloth.

Moreover, some cloth sellers at markets in Kumasi identified screen-printed *adinkera* cloth as *adinkera ntiamu* (a term formerly used for stamped *adinkera* cloth), which separated it from factory-printed textiles designed to emulate the handmade cloth. This difference between hand-printed and factory-printed textiles also extends to their display at cloth shops in Ghana today. Oftentimes, cloth sellers display factory-printed textiles designed to emulate *adinkera* cloth patterns alongside other

factory-printed textiles. In comparison, cloth sellers often displayed hand-printed *adinkra* cloth – whether stamped or screen-printed – with other handmade cloths such as *kente* cloth. This visual separation suggests the importance of technique, and the wider differences between handmade and factory-printed cloth, to inform what Ghanaians call an *adinkra* cloth.

Distinctions between hand-printed and factory-printed cloth suggest how techniques and related material properties inform the ways that Ghanaians ascribe cloth with cultural value. Among Akan consumers, specific terms and expressions in Twi distinguish cloth (“*ntoma*”) and how “to put on” cloth (*fura ntoma*) from other types of dress, the latter sometimes defined with the English word “material” or “*ataadee*” in Twi. In comparison, I did not notice consistent language in the terms or phrases that Ghanaians used for factory-printed textiles that resemble hand-printed *adinkra* cloth; generally, those textiles became more associated with other factory-printed textiles – sometimes through terms such as wax-prints or “the machine one.” For these reasons, I chose not to call factory-printed textiles that resemble *adinkra* cloth “imitation” or “copy,” nor “*adinkra*-inspired.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time, I do not refer to these textiles as “*adinkra* cloth” because those with whom I worked distinguished their material properties, cultural significance, and economic value from hand-printed *adinkra* cloth.

In addition to printing technique, the cultural significance of *adinkra* as a form of communication has further complicated how Ghanaians define “*adinkra*.” Changes to how and what messages people convey through *adinkra* cloth question the efficacy of using *adinkra* to communicate and the importance of this communicative function to defining *adinkra*. Historically, cloth makers gave *adinkra* symbols names and meanings that evolved as the motifs circulated among various audiences and contexts. The communicative role of *adinkra* was central to its uses among Akans, as links between the visual and verbal arts abound in Akan expressive culture. The corpus of *adinkra*

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<sup>2</sup> In other examples, I use “*adinkra*-inspired” to describe factory-printed textile patterns that suggest influence from *adinkra* symbols, but also clearly depart from the common form of *adinkra* symbols and cloth layouts.



symbols has long been in flux, as certain motifs move in and out of use in Akan society. More recently, two related changes have impacted the evolving corpus of *adinkra* motifs: the declining literacy in the historical and proverbial symbolism associated with *adinkra* motifs among Akans, and also, the technological innovation of screen-printing *adinkra* cloth. As a result of these changes, not all *adinkra* symbols carry names and meanings, and consequently call into question the contemporary role of *adinkra* as a form of non-verbal communication.

Screen-printing revealed a critical relationship between technology and symbolic knowledge, as the new technique for creating *adinkra* changed who made the cloth and how they went about their work. Consequently, graphic artists and other cloth makers have generated new designs through screen-printing *adinkra* cloth that have become incorporated within the corpus of *adinkra* symbols. These new designs tend to fit with the visual aesthetics and graphic quality of *adinkra* symbols. Few of the new motifs, however, carry a name or meaning. Yet the designs become *adinkra* symbols by association with established *adinkra* symbols and printing technique. Contemporary production and use of *adinkra* cloth therefore suggest that the definition of what constitutes an *adinkra* symbol no longer requires motifs to carry proverbial or symbolic meaning. Attention has shifted to emphasize the cloth's visual qualities more so than its verbal dimensions.

### *Adinkra* as Fashion

“For people now, *adinkra* has become part of fashion,” David told me (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). His discussion of *adinkra* as fashion considered the trendy uses of *adinkra* outside of cloth, and sometimes, outside of Ghana. David continued to explain how people are now “using *adinkra* as part of home decors. Some people love [certain

symbols]. ‘Oh I really, I appreciate this symbol.’ I love maybe the *gye Nyame* symbol. The *sankɔfa* symbol. So I need to make something out of this *adinkera sankɔfa* symbol. For myself, I use *adinkera* for decoration” (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2014, Ntonso, Ghana). David gave an example of how he used *adinkera* as applique on tailored shirts or screen-printing on t-shirts. He considers these types of clothes to be *adinkera*. For David to call his tailored shirt with screen-printed applique *adinkera* (even though the added design represents a *kente* cloth pattern) shows the importance of printing technology and technique to how he defines *adinkera*.

Unlike scholarship that positions fashion designers as creators of “fashion,” this dissertation demonstrates how cloth makers such as David create fashion, often in collaboration with seamstresses, tailors, graphic artists, and their customers. The recent shift in scholarship on fashion in Africa to encompass seamstresses and tailors who make everyday fashions informed the dissertation’s approach to rethink the makers of fashion. To place cloth makers within the realm of fashion illustrates how the dissertation supports a broad definition of fashion and gives agency to these cloth makers.

To consider *adinkera* as fashion, the dissertation drew upon theories of fashion from sociologists Jennifer Craik, Fred Davis, and Georg Simmel. These works share an emphasis on how fashion connects to social interactions and communication, both of which are central to *adinkera* cloth production and use. Simmel, in his theory of fashion, notes, “fashion, to be sure, is concerned only with change, yet like all phenomena it tends to conserve energy; it endeavors to attain its objects as completely as possible, but nevertheless with the relatively most economical means. For this very reason, fashion repeatedly returns to old forms...and the course of fashion has been likened to a circle” (Simmel 1971: 320). With *adinkera* cloth, the return of stamping in Asokwa after a hiatus of around fifteen years illustrates Simmel’s articulation of the ways fashion revisits prior styles, as does the cyclical nature of *adinkera* symbols to move in and out of popularity. Moreover, changing

uses of the cloth as fashionable dress intersects with shifts in the symbolic meanings of *adinkera*.

In comparison, current discussions of fashion in Africa often highlight couture designers and runway garments. For example, *Fashion Cities Africa*, held at the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery in England in 2016-2017, was the first exhibition on contemporary African fashion held in the UK (Pool 2016).<sup>3</sup> The exhibition largely conceptualized fashion through fashion designers, as opposed to this dissertation's approach of a more inclusive understanding of fashion. Specifically, the exhibition focused on four cities: Lagos, Johannesburg, Casablanca, and Nairobi. With emphasis on the work of current fashion designers (that included but was not limited to wax-prints) in these urban areas, attention to the historical background informing these works or the manifestation of fashion in other settings within these cities was largely absent. With minimal consideration of handmade textiles in Africa as fashion in this exhibition and other contexts, the dissertation contributes an alternative perspective on how fashion theories can enhance our understanding of handmade cloth.

Positioning *adinkera* as fashion also aims to underscore significant changes in how Akans and other Ghanaians have actually made and worn *adinkera* cloth. Scholarship has often framed *adinkera* cloth as a traditional, unchanging form of dress, particularly from its use as a wrapped cloth. However, I suggest that wearing *adinkera* cloth as a wrapped cloth also reflects fashionable dress. While wearing wrapped *adinkera* cloth reflects an historical dress practice, Akans continue to innovate ways of making and designing *adinkera* cloth to wear wrapped around the body. Moreover, the dissertation demonstrates historical and contemporary ways men and women have dressed in *adinkera* cloth as stylish sewn garments. In contrast to scholarly works on textiles framed through traditional culture and craft studies, the dissertation's analysis of *adinkera* through fashion theories reveals the

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<sup>3</sup> *Fashion Cities Africa* is part of a larger initiative *Fashioning Africa* to research and build a collection on African fashion from 1960-2000. The accompanying catalog makes an important contribution with regards to *who* writes about fashion and dress in Africa. The Introduction states, "For too long books on African fashion have been writing by anthropologists and ethnographers, rather than those who live, breathe, and above all, wear it" (Pool 2016: 15). Curated by journalists Hannah Azieb Pool and Helen Jennings, the catalog includes short autobiographies written by African fashion designers.

cloth's dynamics and continued innovations to design and production.

### *Adinkra* in the Diaspora

Returning to my conversation with David that began this Conclusion, I follow David's thinking of *adinkra* as a broadly defined term. *Adinkra* can mean several things to different people, at different places and times and within a particular moment. *Adinkra* spans from cloth to symbol, and from image to text. The dissertation also reframes *adinkra* through a broad definition of fashion, applicable beyond *adinkra* cloth to other dynamic dress practices across the continent as well as handmade textiles made in other parts of the world.

While the dissertation positions wearing *adinkra* cloth as fashionable dress, the idea of *adinkra* as a "traditional" cultural practice is important to how and why people have re-invented *adinkra* symbols to mark Ghanaian and African identity. How David located *adinkra* within fashion was connected to trendy and popular styles, not limited to cloth as clothing, as he also mentioned uses of *adinkra* symbols today in home décor. Such transformations of *adinkra* suggest that fashion need not be set in opposition to tradition. For these alternative contexts that do not involve cloth or Akan culture, it has become fashionable to use *adinkra* because the motifs evoke ideas of "Africa" and notions of "traditional" culture connected to a pre-colonial past.

Moving forward, the project will give more attention to the global dimensions of *adinkra*. An important area of my dissertation research explored the roles of *adinkra* since the mid-twentieth century among African Americans and Africans in the diaspora, particularly in London, Amsterdam, and The Hague, and to places where I have lived and visited in America. This research involved

documenting *adinkra* in public spaces, visiting Ghanaian-owned cloth shops, and attending cultural events that Ghanaians organized abroad.

In what follows, the Afterword examines the historical and contemporary meanings of the *adinkra* symbol *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”). Historically depicted on *adinkra* cloth and other Akan cultural objects (such as gold weights and linguist staffs), *sankɔfa* has become one of the most widely used motifs to mark identity and heritage among Africans in the diaspora. The symbol’s circulation further complicates issues around defining the limits of *adinkra*, as *sankɔfa* has reshaped what *adinkra* represents and communicates about Akan, Ghanaian, and African identity and history. Focus on the role of *sankɔfa* among African Americans and Africans in the diaspora at the end of the dissertation is not intended to lessen its significance. Rather, its inclusion in the Afterword marks the next steps in my project that will consider the historical and contemporary movement of *adinkra* within and outside the continent of Africa.

## AFTERWORD

### I. Looking Back, Looking Forward

Across the globe, organizations and businesses are called “sankɔfa.” To name just a few in America: Sankofa Financial Group in Maryland, Sankofa Beer Company in Washington, D.C., Sankofa Safe Child Initiative in Chicago, Sankofa Freedom Academy charter school in Philadelphia, and a Jamaican restaurant named Sankofa Café and Bar in Kansas City. In the Netherlands: Sankofa Bed and Breakfast and Sankofa Television network. In Brazil: the museum Museu Sankofa Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro and Sankofa African Bar in Salvador de Bahia. In Nigeria and Liberia: fashion shows featured Liberian born designer Korto Momolu’s collection named “Sankofa.” In South Africa: Sankofa Creations interior design business in Pretoria. Commercial appropriations of *sankɔfa* extend beyond text to the motif as logo. Personal uses of *sankɔfa* symbols worldwide span from home décor to jewelry design and tattoos.

Today, the *adinkra* symbol *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”) resonates with a global audience. *Sankɔfa* is one of the most widely used images to express African identity and heritage. The Twi word *sankɔfa* is most often translated as “to go back and fetch/pick” (from *san*, “to return,” *ɔ*, “to go,” and *fa*, “to pick, take, or fetch”). *Sankɔfa* evokes an Akan proverb, “*se wo were na wosan kɔfa a, yenkyi*,” meaning “it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten.” The proverbial

meaning of *sankɔfa* has enchanted audiences worldwide. The examples above illustrate the circulation and use of *sankɔfa* among non-Akans beyond the continent of Africa, including those of African descent and non-Africans.

One of the best-known uses of *sankɔfa* in the African diaspora is director Haile Gerima's acclaimed film entitled "Sankofa." Historian Sylvie Kandé observed, "Gerima privileges a single translation [of *sankɔfa*]: one must return to the past in order to move forward" (Kandé 1998: 129). The narrative told in "Sankofa" reinforces this interpretation of the symbol's meaning. In the film's opening at Cape Coast castle in Ghana, a tour guide identifies a man dressed in white cloth as "Sankofa" and says he is a self-appointed guardian of the castle. The man called "Sankofa" holds an Akan linguist staff (*ɔkyeame pɔma*) carved with the *sankɔfa* bird. He approaches Mona, a black woman model on a photo shoot at the castle. He tells Mona: go "back to your past" and "return to your source." The man demands that Mona face the harsh reality of a past she was only cursorily familiar with. The film traces Mona's experiences as she is transported from present-day Ghana into slavery to understand the history that shaped her identity as an "African" woman. Telling this story in "Sankofa" calls attention to the importance for people of African descent to learn about their cultural past and heritage as Africans.

Ghanaians and others across the world have used *adinkra* to project their identity as well as their relationships with other people, places, and the past. How has *sankɔfa* become such a prevalent and an important marker of African identity worldwide? Of all the images in Ghana – and across the continent of Africa – why *sankɔfa*? Despite the symbol's prevalence and importance to many different populations, little scholarship has explored the trajectory of *sankɔfa* or other *adinkra* symbols from Akan society to other parts of the globe (Temple 2010). The Afterword considers

how Ghanaians, Africans living in the diaspora, and non-Africans have embraced the meaning of *sankɔfa* about returning to one's past to signify Ghanaian and African identity and heritage.

The dissertation centered primarily on the roles of *adinkra* cloth within Ghana over the last two hundred years. This focus consequently limited discussion of *adinkra* symbols beyond cloth and outside of Ghana, two areas of study that form part of my long-term research project on *adinkra* cloth. The movement of *adinkra* within Ghana and the spread of *adinkra* to other African countries and beyond the continent have contributed to transforming *adinkra* – and especially *sankɔfa* – into a symbol of Africa. Here in the Afterword, I explore these two areas through the *adinkra* symbol *sankɔfa*. This discussion unpacks the multiple meanings and uses of *sankɔfa* within and beyond *adinkra* cloth – first in Ghana, and then the symbol's circulation beyond the continent of Africa.

In what follows, I examine the use of *sankɔfa* as both text and image, in which the core message of *sankɔfa* connects to anyone interested in the role of the past to the present and future. The following examples are a small sampling of the widespread uses of *sankɔfa* within and outside of Ghana, with attention on African-American contexts. But the opening examples suggest comparable uses of the symbol in other places, from South Africa to Brazil and the Netherlands. This study reveals three aspects of *sankɔfa* appealing in global contexts when combined together: the motif's name, visual form, and expressions of its symbolic meaning. Analysis of *sankɔfa* across historical and contemporary examples in Ghana and the African diaspora yields insights on the power and fame of *sankɔfa* as a global icon of Africa.



## II. “To Go Back and Fetch”: Transforming *Sankɔfa* in Ghana

### *Sankɔfa* in Akan Culture

The *adinkra* symbol *sankɔfa* includes three kinds of visual designs, each with multiple variations. One *sankɔfa* design is heart-shaped, with curled lines turned inward inside the top of the heart (fig. A.1). Another variation of *sankɔfa* includes a similar heart-shaped design, with curled lines repeated at the bottom on the outside of the heart (fig. A.2). Although these two graphics resemble a heart-form, another *adinkra* motif called *akoma* means “heart” in Twi. A third version of *sankɔfa* depicts a bird with its head looking back over its tail; sometimes the bird holds an egg (fig. A.2; A.3).

When Akan communities introduced *sankɔfa* into the lexicon of *adinkra* symbols is not clear. *Sankɔfa* was not among *adinkra* motifs printed in the earliest remaining *adinkra* cloths from 1817 and 1825, nor an *adinkra* cloth made before 1897 for Asantehene Agyeman I. Robert Sutherland Rattray’s published study on *adinkra* cloth in 1927 includes three visual variations of the heart-shaped *sankɔfa* motif; he does not make any distinctions in their identification, referring to all three graphics with the same name and meaning (Rattray 1927: 265-267). An *adinkra* cloth from 1905 that Swiss missionaries collected in the Gold Coast may offer the earliest extant example of *sankɔfa* printed on an *adinkra* cloth (fig. A.4).<sup>1</sup> This cloth includes a symbol that resembles the heart-shaped version of *sankɔfa* with a rounded bottom edge rather the pointed tip (pictured on the lower right corner). No published studies on *adinkra* symbols have included this particular motif as a variation of *sankɔfa* or a different symbol, yet it shares affinity to one of the *sankɔfa* motifs that Rattray recorded in the 1920s (Rattray 1927: 265, number 14).

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<sup>1</sup> This *adinkra* cloth is now held at the Museum der Kulteren Basel in Basel, Switzerland. Basel Mission records identify this white cloth as mourning dress. The cloth’s small size – two yards by one yard – does not correspond to standard cloth sizes for men and women’s dress, which suggests its possibly making as a sample rather than dress.

My research did not uncover any examples of the *sankɔfa* bird variation in *adinkra* cloths from the nineteenth or early twentieth century. However, within Akan society, *sankɔfa* is not limited to use on printed *adinkra* cloth. As with other *adinkra* symbols, *sankɔfa* appears in objects including gold weights, stools, linguist staffs and architectural designs. For example, T.E. Bowdich documented an Akan pipe that depicts the *sankɔfa* bird in 1817 – the same year that he collected the earliest remaining *adinkra* cloth (McLeod 1977: 100; see also Kandé 1998: 129). Additionally, in the early twentieth century (possibly the late nineteenth century), an Akan artist made a gold leaf umbrella top with five *sankɔfa* birds – each with their head looking back over their tail; this umbrella top is held in the British Museum collection (record number Af1934,1).<sup>2</sup> These examples confirm the historical role of *sankɔfa* in Akan visual culture.

More recently, Daniel Mato’s dissertation records ten symbols named *sankɔfa* in the 1980s (Mato 1987: fig. 184). There are many more visual variations of *sankɔfa* today in *adinkra* stamps, silk-screens, and other materials that reflect the symbol’s wide-reaching audience. Yet despite the array of visual representations and appropriation of the word “*sankɔfa*,” the symbol’s interpretations have been relatively consistent with no distinctions in meaning, significance, or use noted between the three types of designs.

Cloth makers in Kumasi today told me slightly different interpretations of the symbolic meaning of *sankɔfa*. Chapter Five’s discussion of David Boamah’s work ends with his interpretation of *sankɔfa* in relation to his initiatives in Ntonso. David explains the meaning of *sankɔfa* as: “you are going back to pick what has been left behind. When you look at the symbol, it matches with the

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<sup>2</sup> The register entry for this work in the British Museum collection states “state umbrella of the chief (of?) Ejisu, Ashanti, taken during the 1896 expedition.” Other records state that the umbrella top belonged to “Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I and that Sir Cecil Hamilton Armitage collected the object during the Asante war in 1900” (see British Museum record number Af1934,1). The British Museum collection also holds over twenty gold weights that depict the *sankɔfa* bird in different design variations.

meaning” (D. Boamah, interview, November 15, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana). Michael Gemfi, another cloth maker in Ntonso, named his cloth business “Sankɔfa Kente Enterprise” because he likes the saying related to *sankɔfa* about going back and remembering historical practices (M. Gemfi, interview, April 30, 2015, Ntonso, Ghana).

Two cloth makers from Ntonso and Asokwa central to discussions in the previous chapters, Gabriel Boakye and Kusi Boadum, offered similar interpretations of *sankɔfa*. Gabriel explained *sankɔfa* as: “It is not taboo to go and fetch it back when you forget it. You can always undo your mistake. That is the meaning. That is why to go back, go back. The main reason is, whatever you forget, [you can] go back and bring it” (G. Boakye, interview, July 28, 2013, Ntonso, Ghana). In comparison, Kusi offered this interpretation: “When you make a mistake, you can go back and make a correction” (K. Boadum, interview, November 20, 2014, Asokwa, Ghana). These translations of *sankɔfa* echo some former explanations recorded in Ghana. For instance, in 1976, Adansehene Nana Kwantwi Barima II, explained the meaning of *sankɔfa* as “pick it up if it falls behind” (Nana Kwantwi Barima II as quoted in Ross 2003: 94, footnote 10).

Such interpretations of *sankɔfa* stress the temporal dimension of the symbol’s meaning that is connected to the past. But as Chapter Five proposed, the future is equally important to the concept of *sankɔfa*. Historian Ivor Wilks said, “A people without a history is, in a real sense, a people without a future, for the past lives on in the present, within which the future is nurtured. *Tete ara ne nne*, the past is verily today. History is powerful” (Wilks 1996: 63). Archaeologist James Anquandah translated the proverb that Wilks mentions, “*tete ara ne nne*,” as “the present is part and parcel of, and coterminous with, the past” (Anquandah 2014: 12).<sup>3</sup> This proverb suggests continuity between the

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<sup>3</sup> Rattray translates “*tete ara ne nne*,” as “history repeats itself. Lit. the very same ancient (things) are today” (Rattray 1916: 189).

past and present, whereas *sankɔfa* urges a more active reflection and incorporation of the past into the present.

Other writings on *sankɔfa* illuminate links between the past, present, and future. For example, Alexander Attah Yaw Kyerematen, founder of the Asante Cultural Centre in Kumasi, said that this symbol means: “*ɔakyirɛfa* (one should not ignore one’s past: or, past experience must be a guide for one’s future)” (Kyerematen 1964: 71). Similarly, A.K. Quarcoo explained the meaning of *sankɔfa*: to “learn from or build on the past. Pick up the gems of the past. Constant reminder that the past is not all shameful and that the future may profitably be built on aspects of the past. Indeed, there must be movement with the times but as the forward march proceeds, the gems must be picked up from behind and carried forward on the march” (Quarcoo 1972: 17). In their interpretations of *sankɔfa*, Quarcoo and Kyerematen both underscore connections between the past, present, and future. Without making specific cultural references to Akan or Ghanaian history, *sankɔfa* appeals to anyone seeking connection to their past.

Furthermore, anthropologists Birgit Meyer and Marleen De Witte point out how the *sankɔfa* bird’s visual depiction corresponds to the forward-thinking aspect of the symbol’s meaning. Meyer and De Witte said, “The fact that the bird’s feet are pointed forward is often emphasized to show that not a complete return to the past is aimed at, but a selective picking from long-standing traditions and past experience and wisdom while taking new steps of cultural self-definition to build the future” (De Witte and Meyer 2012: 46). While attention often centers on the bird’s head looking backward as capturing the meaning of *sankɔfa*, Meyer and De Witte show how the bird’s overall pose expresses the symbol’s temporal arc from past to future.

## *Sankofa* in Post-Colonial Ghana

The meaning of *sankofa* about returning to the past to move forward inspired attention to cultural heritage in Ghana's national development. Chapter Five presented the role of President Kwame Nkrumah and state artist Kofi Antubam to re-invent *adinkra* and other Akan arts as "national culture." The cultural and political importance of *sankofa* in Ghana following independence resonated with President Nkrumah's pan-African vision and concept of African personality. The political ideology in Ghana after independence during the 1960s to 1980s was referred to as "sankofaism," which came in response to colonialism and aimed to shape a new African modernity based on the pre-colonial past. Meyer and De Witte said, "Within the framework of sankofaism, the valuable aspects of the diverse cultures of Ghana were to be identified, recovered, and re-presented in the frame of a national heritage style" (De Witte and Meyer 2012: 47). This influence of *sankofa* has had a lasting impact on government initiatives in Ghana, including ones that continue today.

For instance, in the "Cultural Policy of Ghana," the National Commission on Culture (a government organization) writes about the ongoing significance of *sankofa* in Ghana. Specifically, an essay titled "Culture as Dynamic Force" discusses cultural changes over time.

"Culture is a growing phenomenon. In our concept of Sankofa we establish linkages with the positive aspects of our past and present. The concept does not imply a blind return to customs and traditions of the past. It affirms the co-existence of the past and the future in the present and embodies, therefore, the attitude of our people to the interaction between traditional values and the demands of modern science and technology. This is an essential factor of development and progress" (National Commission on Culture 1991, updated 2004).

The National Commission on Culture adopts *sankofa* and Akan arts to associate specific cultural pasts with a nation's history. Key words such as progress, development, and technology reflect desired criteria to construct national modernity. At the same time, progress and development is

related to how Akan philosophers conceptualize time and the future (Adjaye 1994: 73; Gyekye 1995: 170-171). The National Commission on Culture's interpretation of *sankɔfa* suggests the temporal dimensions of *sankɔfa* to link the past with the present and future, as well as the selectivity of what people remember from the past.

Other organizations and companies in Ghana have followed this approach to curate the image of Ghana presented to local and global audiences. *Sankɔfa* is a popular motif in imagery associated with Ghanaian identity presented to foreigners visiting Ghana. For example, in 2011, the upscale Movenpick hotel opened at the site of the former Ambassador hotel in Accra, Ghana's capital. Built in 1957, the Ambassador hotel design showcased Nkrumah's iconography and Antubam's painted murals (Hess 2000). The Movenpick restaurant "Sankofa" is likely named in homage to the symbol's importance to Ghana's post-independence identity. When I visited the Movenpick during my research in Accra, the menu's logo design features a whimsical variation of the *sankɔfa* bird motif. Accompanying text read: "Sankofa is a mythical bird of Ghana which represents the importance of reflecting on past experiences in order to use lessons from the previous experiences to inform future actions." Framing *sankɔfa* as a "mythical bird" generalized to all of Ghana exemplifies how re-inventions of *adinkra* deviate from and distill the symbols' historical Akan meanings.

Today, *sankɔfa* is common in Ghana's tourism design, promoting its message that resonates globally. *Sankɔfa* is especially pertinent to the heritage tourism industry, as many visitors of African descent come to trace their "roots" through Ghana's slave castles in Cape Coast and Elmina. Chapter Five's discussion on remembrance examined the role of *adinkra* in current tourism practices in Ntonso, as cloth makers reconstruct the history of *adinkra* cloth for foreigners. In David Boamah and Gordon Frimpong's work to reinvigorate Ntonso's Visitor Centre, they added a large black *sankɔfa* bird on the building's exterior above the entrance sign "Akwaaba" (meaning "welcome") and next to the text "Adinkra Village" (fig. A.5).

The dissertation also analyzed how fine artists working in Ghana during the 1960s turned to *adinkra* symbols to visualize their cultural heritage.<sup>4</sup> *Sankɔfa* became a cornerstone of this artistic movement. Akan philosopher Kwame Gyekye said, “Sankofa, meaning to return for it, to go back for it (in the Akan language of Ghana), is thus a philosophy of cultural revivalism or cultural renaissance” (Gyekye 1997: 233). Prominent artists from Ghana, including Kofi Setordji, Wiz Kudowor, Kwabena Ampofo-Anti, and El Anatsui, have incorporated *adinkra* motifs into their artworks.

In 1968, The Arts Council of Ghana, in partnership with Mobil Oil Ghana Limited, opened a landmark exhibition in Accra titled “Sankɔfa.” The exhibition, which was a national arts contest, showcased artworks around the theme of *sankɔfa* and “cultural heritage.” In the exhibition catalogue, modern artist Oku Ampofo said, the exhibition “was a worthwhile exhortation to get Africans to return to their great traditional heritage of sculpture and other forms of indigenous art expression” (Ampofo 1968: 24). Ampofo was interested in *adinkra* symbols to express ideas about Ghana’s cultural heritage. He added *adinkra* motifs to the bodies of abstract figural sculptures whose forms recalled historic cultural practices from other parts of Africa (Fosu 2009). Ampofo added, “through such competitions like ‘Sankofa’ the rest of this century may well see a definite renaissance” (Ampofo 1968: 25). The meaning of *sankɔfa* supported Ampofo’s interest for Ghana’s modern artists to study and revitalize historical African artistic practices rather than European art.

Chapter Five discussed some of El Anatsui’s work from the late twentieth century that references *adinkra* symbols. Now one of the best-known contemporary artists of Africa, Anatsui

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<sup>4</sup> For more, see art historian Rhoda Woets’s dissertation on modern and contemporary Ghanaian art; the chapter on visual art during the 1950-1960s includes a section titled “Sankofa and the Making of a Ghanaian Heritage” (Woets 2011: 134-138). In addition to state artists and modern artists, cloth makers may have also contributed to the role of *adinkra* as part of Ghana’s national identity. Art historian and curator Nii Quarcoopome raises an important question relating to the potential involvement of cloth makers in constructing national identity through their trade. Quarcoopome asks, “What role did indigenous, non-college-trained artists play in this process of national identity formation? ...the numerous gifts of carved Asante stools and so on presented to foreign dignitaries were not the handiwork of state artists. Many had been commissioned from the nation’s finest craftsmen” (Quarcoopome 2006: 25). Future research is needed to understand how *adinkra* cloth makers may have contributed through gift-giving or other practices.

studied fine art in Kumasi during the 1960s. Anatsui said that *sankofa* “gained popularity almost as an ideological rallying point at the time of independence, at a time we felt we had to take stock of what happened before and during colonization in order to chart a mode of moving on. It is a way of drawing on the past, historicity, what lessons this offers. The idea of ‘going back to retrieve’ has many meanings for each person. To me it implied even the need to search immediately around” (Anatsui as quoted in Anatsui and James 2008: 43). Anatsui explained the meaning of *sankofa* as a quest for self-rediscovery. Yet the central role of *sankofa* in artistic practices was short-lived. In the 1970s and 1980s, modern artists in Ghana began to explore other directions and influences; they no longer prioritized visualizing the nation’s cultural heritage through historic traditions (Woets 2011: 138).

Contemporary art in Ghana today is dynamic and prolific. Accra’s artistic scene has changed significantly over the last five years since I began research there in 2012. Contemporary art in the capital city is thriving with new art galleries and festivals (such as Gallery 1957 and the annual Chale Wote street art festival organized by Accra [dot] ALT) highlighting innovative works of emerging young artists that have gained recognized both nationally and internationally. Some artists continue to look back at cultural traditions in Ghana for inspiration and content in their work. Yet artistic production has largely moved beyond the cultural heritage and *sankofa*-inspired movement of the mid-twentieth century. In broader visual culture, *sankofa* birds and heart-shaped motifs abound in objects ranging from ceramic pottery to architectural cement blocks.

Moreover, the meaning of *sankofa* and related notions of cultural heritage has informed the work of African American artists and artists from Ghana now living in the diaspora. For instance, at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, the visual art galleries includes James Phillip’s painting entitled “Sankofa II” (1997-1998) that depicts a heart-shaped variation of *sankofa*; Phillips was a member of the AfriCOBRA collective of African American artists



in the 1960s. The accompanying label displayed next to the painting includes a quote from Phillips: “For me, painting is an endless search for discovery, reflective thinking and invention based upon my ancestral heritage” (Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture).<sup>5</sup> Phillips discussion of painting suggests the importance of *sankɔfa*’s meaning to his artistic practice.

For Owusu Ankomah, *adinkra* motifs are central to his acrylic paintings. Ankomah began his career in Ghana in the 1970s, and has lived and worked in Germany since the 1980s. Ankomah’s black graphic designs visually refer to the color and grid layout of historical *adinkra* cloths. But in his paintings, the symbols become a cloth-like skin superimposed on unclothed male figures. In more recent paintings, Ankomah depicts *adinkra* motifs alongside his own designs and symbols from other societies worldwide. This combination reflects Ankomah’s interest in the commonalities across cultures. Ankomah’s use of *adinkra* marks a departure from past attention to *adinkra* in modern art as cultural heritage to reconsider *adinkra* as part of a larger, more global visual language. As such, Ankomah doesn’t use *adinkra* to signal his identity or nationality as a Ghanaian artist. Instead, Ankomah said in his artist statement, “I’m an artist who paints for humankind and who just happens to come from Africa” (October Gallery and Ankomah n.d.). Other artists, including Anatsui and Yinka Shonibare, share Ankomah’s views on reframing “African artists” as artists without geographic constraints.

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<sup>5</sup> The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture displayed Phillips’ work and this label text when the museum opened in 2016.

### III. Global Connections

Outside of Ghana, *sankɔfa* is common among Africans in the diaspora and African-Americans to express African heritage, culture, and identity.<sup>6</sup> Yet not all uses of *sankɔfa* are limited to people from Africa or of African descent. *Sankɔfa* has universal appeal. Those who are not from Africa or of African descent have re-interpreted *sankɔfa* to explore their personal, cultural, or national heritage from other parts of the globe. Consequently, *sankɔfa* is incorporated into things and places far removed from *adinkra* cloth, Akan society, Ghana, and Africa.

People worldwide connect to the meaning of *sankɔfa* that encourages reflection on the past to live in the present and future. For example, Dutch owner Miriam Lochte runs the Sankofa Bed and Breakfast in the Netherlands mentioned in the Afterword's opening. Lochte says on her website, "for me personally, sankɔfa is occasionally coming to yourself to be able to continue fresh and charged. I offer you that: a place of peace and attention. A place that you would like to return to again" (Lochte n.d.). Lochte's interpretation of *sankɔfa* and application to her business demonstrate how people recast the historical meaning of *sankɔfa* in different directions that mark personal connections.

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<sup>6</sup> Further research is needed to understand the historical background informing the expansion of *sankɔfa* and other *adinkra* symbols into the African diaspora before the mid-twentieth century – a line of inquiry that I plan to pursue in the future with this ongoing project. Historian Barry Higman's research on slave sites in Montpelier, Jamaica offers insights into some potential future lines of inquiry; Higman contends that designs on excavated ceramics reflect *adinkra* symbols" (Higman 1998: 246; see also Morgan 2006: 58).

## Text and Image

The power of *sankɔfa* extends from the symbol's visual form to its use as text.<sup>7</sup> In Ghana, companies and organizations are named after *sankɔfa* and other *adinkra* symbols, such as Michael Gemfi's "Sankofa" cloth shop in Ntonso discussed in Chapter Five. Even gas fields in western Ghana were recently named "Sankofa" as part of the "Sankofa Oil and Gas Project." Logos and marketing slogans recontextualize the name and design of *sankɔfa* into corporate branding.

Examples included in the Afterword's opening exemplify the vast application of *sankɔfa* in Africa, the Americas, and Europe that question what meaning *sankɔfa* carries to such audiences. Sometimes, the proverb associated with *sankɔfa* relates to the mission of the business or organization – such as Museu Sankofa Rocinha that is dedicated to the history and memory of the Rocinha neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro and the Sankofa Financial Group that extends the symbol's meaning to their approach towards long-term financial planning. Yet not all such uses of *sankɔfa* as a name include the bird's image alongside the text. For example, Harry Belafonte started a New York-based social justice organization called "Sankofa" that uses the image of a clenched fist as its logo.

Public spaces in America – including parks, community spaces, and memorials – have engraved "*sankɔfa*" as image and text onto signs and monuments. For instance, in Atlanta, a city with a large African American population, visitors to Woodruff Park encounter a gold heart-shaped *sankɔfa* motif and the word "SANKOFA" inscribed below (fig. A.6 and A.7). The Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta commissioned the plaque in conjunction with Atlanta hosting the Olympics in 1996. Placed at the Gateway to Historic Auburn Avenue, the commemorative plaque

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<sup>7</sup> Doran Ross identified the use of *sankɔfa* as image and text in two Ghanaian periodicals. He said, "the masthead of *Sankofa Arts and Culture Magazine* explained that its name 'refers to the wise bird who picks for the present what is best in ancient eyes to meet the demands of the future, undeterred' (Bedu-Addo 1981: 3). In the editorial introduction to *Sankofa: The Legon Journal of Archeological and Historical Studies*, the motif was interpreted as 'Every wise man knows where he is going but only the fool does not know where he is coming from' (Anquandah 1975: 5)" (Ross 2003: 51).

with *sankɔfa* includes added text beneath the symbol that reads: “know your past so that you can understand the present and direct the future.”<sup>8</sup> Auburn Avenue, an African American district that dates to the early twentieth century, became a National Historic Landmark in the 1970s. The plaque’s combined text and images proclaims *sankɔfa*’s message as a guide for learning and honoring history, while associating *adinkra* with African American identity.

Other parks in America have also incorporated *sankɔfa* as text and image for similar purposes. In Fort Lauderdale, Florida, artist George Gadson designed the “Sankofa Historical Monument” in 2016 for Sistrunk Park to celebrate the city’s African-American community (Gadson 2016).<sup>9</sup> Below the sculpture of the *sankɔfa* bird, inscribed text reads: “Remembering the Past, Embracing the Present, Preparing for the Future.” In both Florida and Georgia, *sankɔfa* marks Africa. Such commemorative uses of *sankɔfa* are significant because they draw upon something specific to Akan culture in remembering African American history.

Added text suggests that the visual image of *sankɔfa* alone – as either bird or heart-shaped design – does not convey its symbolic meaning to African Americans and other visitors. To both identify the symbol’s name and explain its meaning also reveals that such uses of *sankɔfa* become important sites to disseminate knowledge of *adinkra* symbols. These uses of *sankɔfa* in highly visible public spaces contribute to popular beliefs of *adinkra* and their association to African identity and African-American history. Incorporating *adinkra* motifs in these contexts may also contribute to the status of *adinkra* symbols to signify Africa, and therefore encourage or reinforce the appropriation of *adinkra* symbols in other African American settings.

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<sup>8</sup> For more on Woodruff Park, see Central Atlanta Progress and Atlanta Downtown Improvement District. “Woodruff Park – History.” Available online <https://www.atlantadowntown.com/initiatives/woodruff-park/history>

<sup>9</sup> George Gadson. 2016. “Sankofa Monument.” Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Available online <http://www.georgegadsonstudios.com/artwork/22826-2760469/Art-In-Public-Places/Sculpture/Bronze/Abstract/sankofa-monument.html>

The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture is also important to this conversation. Recently opened in 2016, the museum’s Slavery and Freedom exhibition uses *adinkra* symbols as wall graphics to accompany text in “The Middle Passage” section on the transatlantic slave trade. *Sankɔfa* is one of five included *adinkra* symbols selected for how the symbols’ meanings relate to the exhibition narrative. The museum’s use of *adinkra* symbols advances an association between *adinkra* and African American identity and history.<sup>10</sup>

### New York’s African Burial Ground

One of the more controversial uses of *sankɔfa* outside of Ghana is the motif’s presence at the African Burial Ground in New York City, the oldest site in the United States of free and enslaved Africans buried in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Excavations at the burial grounds in 1992 revealed that a coffin maker added a heart-shaped version of *sankɔfa* with brass tacks onto a coffin lid. The man buried in the coffin (burial 101) – now known as “Sankofa Man” – died in the 1760-70s (Frohne 2015: 143).<sup>11</sup> Art historian Kwaku Ofori-Ansa said, “it could be safely concluded that the image was meant to be [*sankofa*]” (Ofori-Ansa 1995: 3; see also Seeman 2010: 109). Other scholars also contended that the design represented *sankɔfa* (Harrington 1993; La Roche and Blakey 1997).

Historian Erik Seeman disagreed. Seeman claimed that the heart-shaped *sankɔfa* is not an *adinkra* symbol – nor of any African origins – because there is no remaining material evidence of

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<sup>10</sup> This description is from my visit to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture on December 2, 2016. Objects displayed in the museum also depict *sankɔfa* and other *adinkra* symbols. Also on view in 2016 in the Cultural Expressions exhibition is Johnnetta B. Cole’s academic robe from Bennett College in 2003 where she was President; a gold heart-shaped variation of *sankɔfa* is prominently displayed on the center of the neckline. This work exemplifies common uses of *adinkra* motifs and other Akan arts in African American contexts, particularly *kente* cloth patterns that are ubiquitous in contemporary African American graduation stoles.

<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth analysis of burial 101 at the African Burial Grounds, see Frohne 2015: 143-147; Seeman 2010.

*adinkra* in Akan society during the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Seeman said, “On closer inspection, however, the African origins of this symbol appear doubtful. Indeed it is more likely an example of Anglo-American mortuary culture. People of African descent seem to have adopted this aspect of Anglo-American burial practices” (Seeman 2010: 103). In support of this view, Seeman presents evidence of Anglo-American coffin lids with heart-shaped designs (Seeman 2010: 116). Moreover, archaeologist James Denbow suggests other African cultures as alternatives to *sankɔfa* that may have inspired the coffin design at the New York burial site (Denbow 1999: 413-420). Denbow cites Loango tombstones that also depict heart-shaped designs rich with cosmological meaning in Kongo society. In Cuba, Denbow found heart-shaped designs also used in connection with Kongo and West African spirituality.

Yet popular recognition of the coffin lid’s design as *sankɔfa* spurred the *adinkra* symbol’s use in commemorative practices associated with the African Burial Ground. In 2006, the site became a national monument. Architect Rodney Leon designed a black granite memorial titled “Ancestral Libation Chamber” that opened in 2007. *Adinkra* symbols were central to his design theme. A large heart-shaped *sankɔfa* design is a focal point, the only graphic on one side of the memorial. Text next to the *sankɔfa* design reads:

“For all those who were lost  
For all those who were stolen  
For all those who were left behind  
For all those who were forgotten” (African Burial Ground National Monument).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Seeman said, “scholars cannot place *adinkra* cloth definitively in the eighteenth century, and other evidence suggests that the *sankɔfa* symbol in particular may have emerged as late as the early twentieth century” (Seeman 2010: 112). Seeman contends that the earliest recorded evidence of *sankɔfa* is Rattray’s study in 1927; he only discusses the use of *sankɔfa* in *adinkra* cloth and does not mention the symbol’s use in other dimensions of Akan visual culture. However, Bowdich’s documentation of the pipe bowl with *sankɔfa* described above provides historical evidence from the early nineteenth century.

<sup>13</sup> For more, see National Park Service. n.d. “African Burial Ground NM Memorial.” <https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery.htm?id=19CBA11C-155D-451F-67AA7B78DDDCB3A4>

The nearby circular wall at the memorial – titled “Circle of Diaspora” – features several other popular *adinkera* motifs alongside symbols from other African cultures. Art historian Andrea Frohne contends that the African Burial Ground tell a story of pan-African identity. Frohne said, “The Asante *sankofa* becomes pan-African because it refers simultaneously to Africa in a generalized way (rather than to Ghana specifically), to the African Burial Ground, and finally to slavery as explicated by the text alongside it” (Frohne 2013: 122). References to *adinkera* spans from commemoration to the commodification of culture. For instance, magnets, earrings, and coffee mugs sold as souvenirs are printed with *sankofa* graphics and “African Burial Ground National Monument” text.

In response to Seeman’s article, published after Leon’s work, the National Park Service changed the symbol’s identification at the visitor center. When the memorial opened, the interpretive display associated *sankofa* with “cultures found in Ghana and the Ivory Coast.” Journalist Sewell Chan reported, “The interpretative sign...will say only that the design ‘could be a sankofa symbol’ and that ‘no one knows for sure’” (Chan 2010). The new interpretative display, Chan adds, “offers the easier-to-grasp phrase ‘look to the past to understand the present’” (Chan 2010). This condensed expression corresponds to Chapter Two’s discussion of Gabriel Boakye’s work that similarly distills complex meanings of *adinkera* symbols into simple, relatable phrases for tourists visiting Ntonso. The National Park Service’s website for the African Burial Ground presents the following explanation of *sankofa*: “It literally translates as to ‘look to the past to inform the future.’ This sheds light on the struggles of enslaved African people; though long gone, slavery is still a large chunk of African American history, and should be acknowledged rather than forgotten in order to move forward productively” (National Park Service 2015). These interpretations of *sankofa* show the changes made for certain audiences to understand and relate, as well as how non-Akans have appropriation the symbol to represent African American experience and history.

## Placing *Sankɔfa* within the Corpus of *Adinkra* Symbols

The popularity of *sankɔfa* shares similarity to the transformation of other *adinkra* symbols, particularly *gye Nyame* (“except God”) that Ghanaians re-invented into a marker of national culture and identity. In the summer of 2017, I encountered *gye Nyame* in Michigan while I was writing the dissertation – carved into wood earrings at the Ann Arbor Art Fair and added to leather bags at the Africa World Festival in Detroit. Also in Detroit, the National Business League hosted the “Sankofa Black Business Awards Ghana” in 2017 with a *sankɔfa* bird design featured on promotional materials. Here, *gye Nyame* and *sankɔfa* have transformed from representing Akan society to all of Africa.

While *gye Nyame* is arguably the most popular *adinkra* symbol of national identity in Ghana, *sankɔfa* is the most widely used *adinkra* symbol to express African identity outside of Ghana. A key difference divides the paths of these two *adinkra* symbols: the symbol’s appeal in both form and meaning to an international audience. The image and meaning of *sankɔfa* is more relevant to a broader international audience in comparison to the abstract design and common translation of *gye Nyame*, “Except God.” For example, Chapter Five discussed the prevalence of Christianity in southern and central Ghana today that has contributed to the ongoing use of *gye Nyame* to mark national identity in Ghana.

The common use of *sankɔfa* today as both image and text extends to the naming of other businesses and organizations after *adinkra*. For example, there’s Adinkra Radio station 91.3 in Ghana, Adinkra Lodge in Accra, and Adinkra Plaza Hotel in Sekondi-Takoradi. Moreover, women hawkers walk along the bustling city streets in Kumasi and Accra, calling out “aaa-adinkra pie! aaa-adinkra pie!” to the passengers in cars and *tro-tro* buses waiting in traffic. The marketing and design



scheme for the company Adinkra Pastries also features *adinkra* symbols printed in Asante colors of green, yellow, and black. Such uses of *adinkra* within Ghana correspond to the naming of businesses after *adinkra* and other symbols in the diaspora. For instance, there's Adinkra Magazine based in England for online distribution, Adinkra NOLA educational organization in Louisiana, and Adinkra Cultural Arts Organization in Mt. Rainier, Maryland. A notable difference with this practice in Ghana is the association of *adinkra* as Ghanaian rather than African. As with *sankɔfa*, the use of *adinkra* as name reflects a marketing strategy to cultivate associations with an historical practice that remains culturally significant and relevant today.

*Sankɔfa*'s message rings far and wide. The examples presented above reveal the contemporary significance of *sankɔfa* to visualize African and African American history, culture, and identity. The expanding platform for *sankɔfa*, and *adinkra* more broadly, demonstrates a shift in *adinkra* becoming a global marker of Africa. *Adinkra* has always been – and continues to be – a dynamic cultural practice. No longer an image of only Akan culture, *adinkra* marks Ghana and Africa.

## Afterword Images



Fig. A.1 Paul Nyaamah. *Adinkra* stamps carved in the form of *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”). Ca. 2000-2013. Collection of the Boakye family. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. A.2. Carvers unrecorded. *Adinkra* stamps carved in the form of *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”). Mid to late twentieth century. Collection of Kusi Boadum. Asokwa, Ghana.



Fig. A.3. Paul Nyaamah. *Adinkra* stamp carved in the form of *sankɔfa* (“to go back and fetch”). Ca. 2000-2014. Ntonso, Ghana.

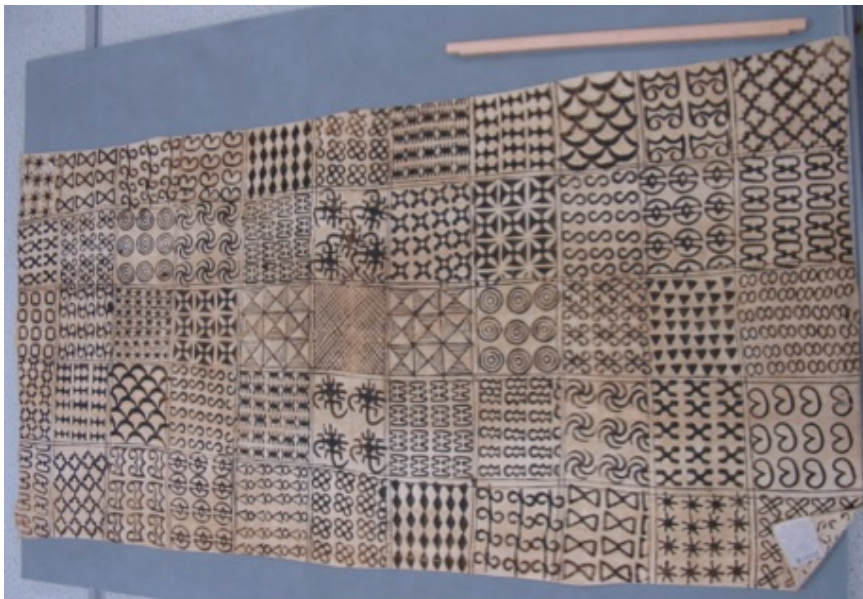


Fig. A.4. Cloth makers unrecorded. *Adinkra* cloth, stamped on white imported European cotton cloth. 1905. Collected by Merkel Missionary. Museum der Kulteren Basel. Basel, Switzerland. Museum record number 23299. Photography: Isabella Bozsa.



Fig. A.5. Ntonso Visitor Centre. November 22, 2014. Ntonso, Ghana.



Fig. A.6. Designers unrecorded. Gateway to Historic Auburn Avenue. *Sankofa* inscription with heart-shaped motif on plaque displayed to right of sidewalk. Presented by the Corporation for Olympic Development. Photograph: August 10, 2015. Woodruff Park. Atlanta, Georgia.



Fig. A.7. Designers unrecorded. Detail Gateway to Historic Auburn Avenue. *Sankofa* inscription with heart-shaped motif. Inscription reads: “Know your past so that you can understand the present and direct the future.” Presented by the Corporation for Olympic Development. Photograph: August 10, 2015. Woodruff Park. Atlanta, Georgia.

## APPENDIX I.

### ADINKRA SYMBOLISM

This appendix only includes the *adinkra* symbols cited in the dissertation (listed here in alphabetical order) and is therefore not a comprehensive list of *adinkra* symbols. For each *adinkra* symbol, the most common Twi and English names is included along with four perspectives on the symbol's meaning, listed in alphabetical order: communications scholar Adolph Agbo, artist Ablade Glover, art historian Daniel Mato, and anthropologist Robert Sutherland Rattray.<sup>1</sup> Each entry also states if the text cited multiple visual variations of the symbol design. Those who I spoke with in Kumasi most often cited Ablade Glover's chart of *adinkra* symbols and Adolph Agbo's *Values of Adinkra Symbols* as references for the names and meanings of *adinkra* symbols. Both are included here, along with Rattray's work that provides the first published explanations of *adinkra* symbols.<sup>2</sup>

Each entry also states the page number(s) in the dissertation for easy reference to discussion of the *adinkra* symbol.

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<sup>1</sup> This appendix does not include the full interpretations that Agbo and Mato provide in their works given the long lengths of their discussions per symbol. For instance, Agbo's text of fifty-four *adinkra* symbols presents the following for each symbol: Twi and English name, related proverb (if any), meaning, background, and moral value (Agbo 2011); Here, the appendix includes Agbo's Twi and English name, related proverb (if any), and meaning; please consult Agbo's text for his discussion of the symbols' background and moral value. In comparison, Mato's catalog of two hundred and eighteen *adinkra* symbols (included in his dissertation) features written translations and visual variations of the symbols that he recorded in the 1980s (Mato 1987). In his catalog, Mato identifies the motif's name in English and Twi, followed by interpretations of the symbol's names and meanings derived from his interviews with cloth makers and multiple publications. Here, the appendix only include the symbol's name and meaning stated at the beginning of each entry in Mato's catalog that synthesized the most common interpretations of the symbol.

Ablade Glover's chart of sixty *adinkra* symbols has been published in three editions, printed in 1969, 1971, and 1992. This appendix includes information from the second and third edition; I was unable to compare the first edition to the later editions because I was unable to access the earliest version of the chart.

<sup>2</sup> For additional interpretations of the meanings of these and other *adinkra* symbols, see Achampong 2008; Antubam 1968; Arthur 2001; Menzel 1972; Willis 1998, 2015.

### ***Aban, House or castle***

Agbo: “*Aban*. Symbol of security and protection. ‘Fence.’” Meaning: *Aban* therefore means a secured and well protected community is a prerequisite of peaceful and success in life” (Agbo 2011: 55).

Glover: “*Aban* (fence). Representing fenced homes. A protector. Double security. Safe and sound; fool-proof” (Glover 1971).

Mato: “*Aban* or *eban*. A two storied house or castle or the symbol of government and authority. (Note: *Aban* was the stone house built in Kumasi during the rule of Asantehene Osei Kwame (1802-23))” (Mato 1987: fig. 1). Two stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “A two-storied house, a castle; this design was formerly worn by the King of Ashanti alone” (Rattray 1927: 265, number 11).

### ***Adinkrabene, King of Adinkra***

Agbo: “*Adinkrabene*. Symbol of greatness. ‘The King of Adinkra.’” Meaning: “*Adinkra* means ‘bidding farewell or good-bye.’ It means saying good-bye to one another when parting” (Agbo 2011: 42).

Glover: “*Adinkra bene* (Adinkra king). Chief of all the *adinkra* designs, forms the basis of *adinkra* printing” (Glover 1971).

Mato: “*Adinkrabene* or *Adinkar’bene*. Chief of stamps; first *adinkra* stamp; stamp of *adinkrabene*” (Mato 1987: fig. 9). Thirty-two stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Adinkira bene*, the Adinkra king, and ‘chief’ of these Adinkira designs” (Rattray 1927: 266, number 21; see also number 34). Two stamp designs recorded.

### ***Akofena or Afena, Ceremonial sword***

Agbo: “*Akofena*. Symbol of authority.” Proverb: “‘*Akofena kunini ko a, wobo afena kye no safobene.*’ ‘The retiring great warrior always has a royal sword of rest, and is always created a warrior-chief.’” Meaning: “*Ako* means ‘war,’ *afena* also means ‘sword’ (war sword or ceremonial sword). This symbol signifies the power and authority vested in chieftaincy. It symbolizes the gallantry and loyalty of warriors who protect a particular chieftain. It is also used for swearing the oath of allegiance” (Agbo 2011: 32).

Glover: “*Afena* (a state ceremonial sword). *Akofena kunim ko a, wobo afena kye no safobene.*’ ‘The retiring great warrior always has a royal sword of rest. Recognition of gallantry” (Glover 1971).

Mato: “*Afena* with stars and moon. ‘A state ceremonial sword’” (Mato 1987: fig. 17). Four stamp designs recorded.

“*Afena*. ‘A state ceremonial sword’” (Mato 1987: fig. 18). One stamp design recorded.

“*Afena/Akofena* with stars, moon and heart. ‘A state ceremonial sword’” (Mato 1987: fig. 19). One stamp design recorded.

“*Akofena*. (See also *Afena*). ‘State or ceremonial swords’” (Mato 1987: fig. 28). Two stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: symbol not included.

### ***Aya*, Fern**

Agbo: “*Aya*. Symbol of defiance.” Meaning: “*Aya* refers to the ‘fern.’ It is a hardy plant with thin evergreen leaves, which has the ability to withstand almost all weather conditions and soil types” (Agbo 2011: 8).

Glover: “*Aya* (the fern). This word also means ‘I am not afraid of you.’ A symbol of defiance” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: “*Aya*. ‘The fern’” (Mato 1987: fig. 55). Thirteen stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Aya*, the fern; the word also means ‘I am not afraid of you,’ ‘I am independent of you,’ and the wearer may imply this by wearing it” (Rattray 1927: 265, number 10).

### ***Biribi wo soro*, “there is something in the heavens”**

Agbo: “*Nyame biribi wo soro*. Symbol of hope.” Proverb: “‘*Nyame, biribi wo soro, ma embeka me nsa*,’ ‘God, something is in heaven, let it touch my hands.’” Meaning: “*Nyame* refers to ‘God,’ *biribi* means ‘something,’ *wo soro* means, ‘is in heaven,’ *ma embeka* means ‘let it touch,’ *me nsa* means ‘my hands.’ *Biribi* in the proverb signifies God’s benevolence, mercy, blessings and all the good things which promotes the well being of a person. *Soro* also signifies a source of opportunities and prospects which abound for advancement in every aspect of life” (Agbo 2011: 25).

Glover: “*Nyame biribi wo soro na ma embeka mensa* (God there is something in the heavens, let me reach it. A symbol of hope” (Glover 1971).

Mato: “*Biribi wo soro* (see *Nyame biribi wo soro ma no me nsa*). ‘There is something in the sky’” (Mato 1987: fig. 60). One stamp design recorded.

“*Nyame, biribi wo soro, ma no me ka me nsa* or *Biribi woso ma no ka me nsa*. ‘God there is something in heaven, pray let me reach it’” (Mato 1987: fig. 149). Two stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Nyame, biribi wo soro, ma no me ka me nsa*. ‘O God, everything which is above, permit my hand to touch it. This pattern was stamped on paper and hung above the lintel of a door in the palace. The King of Ashanti used to touch this lintel, then his forehead, then his breast, repeating these words three times’” (Rattray 1927: 266, number 26).



### ***Dwennimen*, Ram's horn**

Agbo: “*Dwennimmen*. Symbol of strength.” Proverb: “*Dwenini aboɔden ne namen; wopan n’amen a na woayi no, a wie no,*’ ‘The strength of the ram lies in its horns, once they are plucked off, then it is caught in a trap.’ Meaning: “*Dwennini* refers to a ‘Ram’ and it signifies ‘humility.’ *Nmen* also refers to ‘Horns’ it also signifies ‘strength.’ Therefore ‘Ram’s horn’ means ‘humility and strength’” (Agbo 2011: 6).

Glover: “*Dwennimen* (Ram’s horn). ‘*Dwennin ye asise a ode n’akorana na ennya namban.*’ It is the heart and not the horns that leads a ram to bully. (Concealment)” (Glover 1971).

Mato: “*Dwanimen*. See also *Dwannimen notaso*, *Dweninmmen*, or *Dwanin aben*. ‘Ram’s horn’” (Mato 1987: fig. 73). Fourteen stamp designs recorded.

“*Afe bi ye asiane*. Also known more commonly as *Oweninmen Ntoaso/Dweninmen Ntoaso* (Mato 1987: fig. 16). Nine stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Dwenini aben*, the ram’s horns” (Rattray 1927: 266, number 31).

### ***Ese ne tekereɛma*, Teeth and the tongue**

Agbo: “*Ese ne tekereɛma*. Symbol of friendship.” Proverb “*ese ka tekereɛma mmpo ko,*” ‘the teeth and the tongue even fight.’” Meaning: “*Ese* symbolizes the masculinity and toughness of man and *tekereɛma* the tenderness of a female. The proverb means that, the essence of marriage is for couples to co-exist and compliment each other despite occasional squabbles. This is also likened to other human relationships” (Agbo 2011: 14).

Glover: “*Ese ne tekereɛma* (the teeth and the tongue). ‘*Wonmwo be na se,*’ no child is born with its teeth. We improve and advance” (Glover 1971).

Mato: “*Ese ne tekereɛma* or *tekyrerema ne ese*, teeth and tongue” (Mato 1987: fig. 86). Five stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: symbol not included.

### ***Fofoɔ*, The name of a kind of plant**

Agbo: “*Fofoɔ*. Symbol of jealousy.” Proverb: “*se nea fofo fofoɔ pe ne se gyinantwi aba bidie,*’ ‘what the *fofoɔ* plant wishes is that the *gyinantwi* seeds turns black.’” Meaning: “*Fofoɔ* a yellowish plant refers to a jealous covetous and a malevolent person with evil intentions. *Gyantwi aba* also refer to those who are wished by others, various form of evil misfortunes” (Agbo 2011: 5).

Glover: “*Fofoo. Se die fofoo pe, na se gyinantwi abo bedie.* ‘What the *fofoo* plant wants is that the *gyinantwi* seeds should turn black.’ Symbol of jealousy” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: “*Fofoo*” (Mato 1987: fig. 94). Four stamp designs recorded.

“*Se die fofoo pe, ne se gyinantwi abo bedie*” (Mato 1987: fig. 186). Three stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Se die fofoo pe, ne se gyinantwi abo bedie.* ‘What the yellow-colored fofoo plant wants is that the gyinantwi seeds should turn black.’ This is a well-known Ashanti saying. One of the cotton cloth designs bears the same name. The *fofoo*, the botanical name of which is *Bidens pilosa*, has a small yellow flower, which, when it drops its petals, turns into a black spiky seed. Said of a jealous person” (Rattray 1927: 266, number 29).

### ***Gye Nyame, Except God***

Agbo: “*Gye Nyame.* Symbol of supremacy.” Proverb: “‘*Abɔdeɛ yi firi tete; obi nnte ase a, onim n’ahyease, obi nntena ase nnkosi nawie ye gye Nyame,*’ ‘The great creation originated from the unknown past; no one lives who saw its beginning. No one lives who will see its end except God.’”  
Meaning: “*Gye* means ‘except,’ *Nyame* means, ‘God.’ God is regarded as the creator and ruler of the world and humanity, therefore he must be revered and worshiped” (Agbo 2011: 21).

Glover: “*Gye Nyame* (except God). Symbol of the Omnipotence and immortality of God” (Glover 1971).

Mato: “*Gye Nyame.* Also *Agye Nyame.* ‘Except God (I fear none) or I fear only God’” (Mato 1987: fig. 100). Twenty-three stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Gye Nyame, ‘Except God (I fear none) or I fear only God’*” (Rattray 1927: 267, number 37).

### ***Hye won hye, He who burns be not burned***

Agbo: “*Hye-Wonhye.* Symbol of endurance. Burn, you do not burn.” Meaning: “*Hye* means to ‘burn.’ *Wonhye* means, ‘you do not burn.’ (That which can not be burnt or fireproof” (Agbo 2011: 36).

Glover: “*Hye wo nhye* (he who burns you be not burned). Symbol of forgiveness – turn the other cheek” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: “*Hye wo nhye.* ‘He who would burn you be not burned’” (Mato 1987: fig. 103). Three stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Hye wo nhye.* ‘He who would burn you, be not burned.’ This pattern was on the King of Ashanti’s pillow” (Rattray 1927: 267, number 49).

### ***Kronti ne akwamu*, Elders of state**

Agbo: “*Kronti ne akwamu*. Symbol of collaboration.” Proverb: “*Kronti ne Akwamu; Odomankoma Nyansabooa see; ti korɔ nkɔ agyina*,’ ‘Kronti and Akwamu, the God of wisdom says; one head alone cannot go into consultation.’ Meaning: “*Odomankoma* is an attribute of God which means the ‘all-grace-giver.’ *Nyansaa* also means ‘the ability to use ones experience and knowledge to make sensible decision and judgment.’ *Kronti(bene)* refers to a commander of the army, in the absence of the *ɔbene*. *Akwamu(bene)* also refers to the second in command to the later. These two important sub-chiefs are noted for their regular consultations” (Agbo 2011: 54).

Glover: “*Kontire ne Akwam* (elders of the state). *Tikoro mmpam* (one head does not constitute a council)” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: “*Kontwire ne akwam*. ‘Heads or elders of the kingdom”” (Mato 1987: fig. 107). One stamp design recorded.

Rattray: symbol not included.

### ***Mframadan*, Wind resistant house**

Agbo: “*Mframadan*. Symbol of resilience. ‘Wind building or wind house.’” Meaning: *Mframa* refers to the ‘wind,’ *dan* also refers to a ‘building.’ *Mframadan* therefore means a ‘building that can withstand stormy winds.’ It also means the quality that someone or something has of being strong and not damaged easily” (Agbo 2011: 52).

Glover: “*Mframa dan* (wind house). House built to stand windy or treacherous conditions” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: “*Mframadan*. ‘Wind house or winds”” (Mato 1987: fig. 125). Four stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: symbol not included.

### ***Mmra krado*, Lock**

Agbo: “*Mmara krado*. Symbol of justice. ‘The padlock of the law.’ Meaning: “*Mmara* refers to the ‘law,’ that is, the rule or set of rules for good behavior, be it moral, religious or emotional. *Krado* refer to ‘padlock.’ It symbolizes ‘authority.’ This means the supreme authority vested in someone to fasten or hold in check other people’s behavior, for the good of society” (Agbo 2011: 22).

Glover: “*Krado – mmra krado* (seal of law and order). Symbolising the authority of the court” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: “*Krado* or *mmra krado*. “Lock, or symbol of authority and justice” (Mato 1987: fig. 112). Eight stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Mmra Krado*. “The Hausa man’s lock” (Rattray 1927: 266, number 30).<sup>3</sup>

### ***Mmusuyidee* or *Kra pa*, Good fortune**

Agbo: “*Mmusuyidee*. Symbol of sanctity.” Proverb: “*Kra pa te se okra; okyiri fi*, The good soul is like a cat, it abhors filth.” Meaning: “*Mmusu* means ‘ill luck’ or ‘curse,’ *yi* means to ‘remove,’ *adee* means a ‘thing’ or an ‘agent.’ *Mmusuyidee* therefore means, the agent which is used to remove ill luck or curses” (Agbo 2011: 33).

Glover: “*Kerapa (musuyide)*. Good fortune sanctity. ‘*Kerapa te se okra, okyiri fi*.’ ‘sanctity is like a cat, it abhors filth.’ Symbol of sanctity and good fortune” (Glover 1971).

“That which removes bad luck;” ‘*kra pa te se okra, okyiri fi*.’ ‘sanctity is like a cat, it abhors filth.’ Symbol of sanctity and good fortune” (Glover 1992).

Mato: “*Musuyide*. ‘Something to remove or trap evil’” (Mato 1987: fig. 131). Six stamp designs recorded.

“*Nhomaa Tire*. Also *Anomaa Tire*. (See also: *Kerapa* or *Musuyide*)” (Mato 1987: fig. 132). Five stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Musuyidie*, lit. something to remove evil; a cloth with this design stamped upon it lay beside the sleeping couch of the King of Ashanti, and every morning when he rose he placed his left foot upon it three times” (Rattray 1927: 266, number 25).

### ***Nea onnim no sua a obu*, He who does not know can know from learning**

Agbo: symbol not included.

Glover: symbol not included.

Mato: “Untitled stamp. Made by Doben in 1976. Collected in Asokwa. This stamp was closely patterned upon the U.A.C. design” (Mato 1987: fig. 217). One stamp design recorded.

Rattray: symbol not included.

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<sup>3</sup> In *Ashanti Proverbs*, Rattray includes the proverb, “*Onu no okyekyefo adaka ano safe*,” meaning “Death has the key to open the miser’s heart” (Rattray 1916: 51, number 67).

### ***Nhwimu, Crossings***

Agbo: “*Nhwimu*. Symbol of planning. ‘Criss-crossing’” Meaning: “*Nhwimu* refers to the act of always having read at hand what is necessary for the successful performance of one’s work” (Agbo 2011: 51).

Glover: “*Nhwimu* (crossing). The division done onto the plain cloth before the stamping is done” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: symbol not included.

Rattray: symbol not included.

### ***Nkotimse fuo pua or Mpuannum, Hairstyle of the Queen Mother’s attendants, or Kodee mowerewa, Talons of the eagle***

Agbo: “*Kodee mmowerewa*. Symbol of dexterity and prowess. ‘The talons of the eagle.’” Meaning: “*Kodee* refers to the ‘eagle’ and this signifies the sense of power of the mind, *mmowerewa* also refers to ‘talons’ and this depicts the skills of using the hands in doing something very well” (Agbo 2011: 48).

Glover: “*Kodee mowerewa* (the talons of the eagle). This is also said to be shaved on the heads of some court attendants” (Glover 1971); “Five tufts of hair. A traditionally fashionable hair style” (Glover 1992).

Mato: “*Nkotimsefuopua*. See *Kodee mowerewa* (eagle’s claws)” (Mato 1987: fig. 136). Two stamp designs recorded.

“*Kodee mowerewa* or *Mmadwowa*. See also *Ntwitwa wo bo nykere me*. ‘The eagle’s talons’” (Mato 1987: fig. 106). Seven stamp designs recorded.

*Ntwitwa wo bo nykere me*. See also *Kodee mowerewa*. ‘You shouldn’t show off.’ Perhaps a more traditional meaning would be: ‘Don’t display or reveal your pride to me. Or perhaps the idea of excessive pride’” (Mato 1987: fig. 148). Two stamp designs recorded.

“*Mpuannum*. Also: *Nkontimsofoo puaa*. ‘Five tufts of hair. A traditional hair style’” (Mato 1987: Fig. 130). Twelve stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Nkotimsefuopua*, Certain attendants on the Queen Mother who dressed their hair in this fashion. It is really a variation of the Swastika” (Rattray 1927: 265; number 12).

### ***Nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn*, Link or Chain**

Agbo: “*Nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn*. “symbol of unity and relationship.” Proverb: “*Yetoatoa mu ɛ nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn, nkwa mu a yetoa mu, owuo mu a, yetoa mu, abusua mu nnte da*, We are linked together like a chain; we are linked in life, we are linked in death; men who share a common blood relation never break away from one another.” Meaning: “*Nkɔnsɔnkɔnsɔn* refers to a chain, and it signifies the strong bond between people of common lineage which is difficult to break. The unity of a community can be realized if citizens see themselves as responsible to each other. This realization binds communities together. The symbol portrays unity, responsibility, and interdependence” (Agbo 2011: 20).

Glover: “*Nkonsonkonso* (link or chain). We are linked in both life and death. Those who share common blood relations never break apart. Symbol of human relations” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: “*Konsonkonson*. ‘Chain’” (Mato 1987: fig. 109). Seven stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Nkonsonkonson*, lit. links of a chain” (Rattray 1927: 266, number 17; see also number 44). Two stamp designs recorded.

### ***Nsaa*, The name of a kind of cloth**

Agbo: “*Nsaa*. Symbol of quality.” Proverb: ““*nea onim nsaa na ɔtɔ nea ago*, ‘he who knows *nsaa* is the person who even buys the old and weak one.”” Meaning: “*Nea onim* means ‘he who knows,’ *nsa* refers to a ‘cloth,’ *na ɔtɔ* means ‘who buys,’ *nea ago* means that which is ‘weak.’ This proverb draws the significance of aiming at good quality and durability rather than quantity” (Agbo 2011: 27).

Glover: “*Nsaa* (a kind of blanket). ‘*Nea onim nsaa na ɔtɔ nago*.’ (Glover 1971).

“*Nsaa*. A kind of blanket. ‘*Nea onim nsaa na ɔtɔ nago*.’ Literally ‘he who does not know the real *nsaa* buys the fake of it.’ This refers to knowing the difference between the real and imitation” (Glover 1992).

Mato: “*Nsaa/Nsa* or *Nsaa nea onnimnsaa na oto n’ago*. ‘A cloth from the north’ or ‘he who does not know the real *nsaa* buys the fake of it.’ (*Nsaa* was a traditional component of various funeral rituals as gifts, burial garb and wrappings for the deceased)” (Mato 1987: fig. 141). Nine stamp designs recorded.

“*Mmrafo ani ase*. See also *Nsaa*. ‘Keloids of the Hausa man’” (Mato 1987: fig. 127). One stamp design recorded.

“*Wunin nsaa na eto madwenen*” (Mato 1987: fig. 209). Two stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Nsa*, from a design of this name found on *nsa* cloths” (Rattray 1927: 265, number 6).

Rattray calls a motif that resembles the form of the *nsaa* symbol as ““*mmrafo ani ase*, ‘the *keloids* on a Hausa man’” (Rattray 1927: 266, number 24).

### ***Nyame dua, Tree of God***

Agbo: “*Nyame dua*. Symbol of worship. God’s tree.” Meaning: “*Nyame* refers to ‘God,’ who is he Almighty and the Supreme Being. *Dua* also refers to ‘tree’ and this signifies the altar or the place of worship of God. This also represents the shrine, church, mosque and other sacred places of worship” (Agbo 2011: 26).

Glover: “*Nyame dua* (an altar to the sky God). Altar – place of worship” (Glover 1971).

Mato: “*Nyame dua*. ‘God’s tree’ or ‘Altar of God’” (Mato 1987: fig. 150). Eleven stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Nyame dua*, an altar to the Sky God” (Rattray 1927: 266, number 18).

### ***Obene aniwa, The king’s eyes***

Agbo: “*Obene aniwa*. Symbol of vigilance.” Proverb: “‘*obene aniwa ye mienu pe, nso obunnu beε biara*, ‘the king’s eyes are only two, but he sees everywhere.’” Meaning: “*Obene* refers to the ‘king’ or ‘chief,’ *aniwa* also refers to the ‘eyes,’ *ye meanu pe* means ‘are two only,’ *nso obwo bebiara* means ‘but he sees everywhere’ (The king’s eyes). *Obene* signifies a person in leadership of a group of people or people representing them. ‘*Aniwa*’ also signifies the various people who are loyalists and sympathisers of persons in authority. This proverb means that people in authority have quick and easy access to information” (Agbo 2011: 29).

Glover: “*Obene niwa* (in the King’s eye). The king has lots of eyes and nothing is hidden from him” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: “*Obene niwa*, “‘In the eyes of the king’ or ‘The eyes of the King’ or ‘The King’s favor’” (Mato 1987: fig. 162). One stamp design recorded.

Rattray: “*Obene niwa*, ‘(in) the king’s little eyes,’ i.e. in his favour” (Rattray 1927: 267, number 39).

### ***Owuo atwedee, Ladder of death***

Agbo: “*Owuo atwedie*. Symbol of mortality.” Proverb: “‘*owuo atwedie, obaako mforo*, ‘death’s ladder is not climbed by one person alone.’” Meaning: *owuo* refers to ‘death,’ *atwedie* refers to ‘ladder,’ *obaako* means ‘one person,’ *mforo* also means ‘does not climb.’ ‘Death ladder, one person does not climb.’ Death is portrayed as a necessary end or journey which every person will undertake” (Agbo 2011: 12).

Glover: “*Owuo atwedie baako nio (obiara banu)*. All men shall climb the ladder of death” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: “*Owuo atwedie baako nfo (obiara bennu)*, ‘ladder of death’ or ‘the ladder of death is not climbed by one person alone’” (Mato 1987: fig. 177). Two stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: symbol not included.

### ***Sankɔfa*, To go back and fetch**

Agbo: “*Sankɔfa*. Symbol of positive reversion.” Proverb: “‘*se wo were fi na wosan kɔfa a yennkeyi*,’ ‘it is not a taboo to return to take back what you forgot.’” Meaning: “*San kɔ fa* is the short form of this proverb. *San* means ‘return,’ *kɔ* means ‘go’ and *fa* means ‘take.’ *Sankɔfa* therefore means, ‘return and take.’ The proverb seeks to dwell on the wisdom in acquiring knowledge from the past and improving on them” (Agbo 2011: 2).

Glover: “*Sankɔfa* (return and fetch it). *Se wo were fi a wosankɔfa a yenkeyi*” it is no taboo to return and fetch it. You can always undo your mistakes” (Glover 1971). Two stamp designs recorded.

“Another *sankɔfa* design (it could be a broken piece from the original design)” (Glover 1971).

Mato: “*Sankɔfa*. ‘Turn back and fetch it’ (Mato 1987: fig. 184). Ten stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: “*Sankɔfa*, lit. turn back and fetch it” (Rattray 1927: 265, numbers 13 and 14; see also number 27). Three stamp designs recorded.

### ***Tabon*, Paddle**

Agbo: symbol not included.

Glover: “*Tabon* (paddle). Paddles are more common with the coastal tribe” (Glover 1971, 1992).

Mato: “*Tabon*. Paddle” (Mato 1987: fig. 197). One stamp design recorded.

Rattray: “*Akam*, an edible plant (yam?)” (Rattray 1927: 266, number 28). [Note: the visual form of this design resembles the shape of the *tabon* symbol]

### ***Tie*, Flying tie**

Agbo: symbol not included.

Glover: symbol not included.

Mato: “*Tie*. (‘Flying tie’) Note: A small, flat bow-tie shaped pestle with a seriated edge is used to mash food in bowls with roughened inner surfaces. This was also called a ‘*tie*’ (Mato 1987: fig. 200). Four stamp designs recorded.

Rattray: symbol not included.



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