

Adaptation of Traditional Symbols into Bridal Wear

Abraham Ekow Asmah¹ Charles Frimpong² Benjamin Asinyo^{3*}

1. Department of Integrated Rural Art and Industry, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi-Ghana

2,3 Department of Industrial Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi-Ghana

* E-mail of the corresponding author: asinyoboss@yahoo.com

Abstract

Throughout history, fashion and textiles have reflected the influence of culture and conventions by the inclusion of popular motif designs. The African cultural heritage is endowed with a lot of cultural values and beliefs that are deeply intertwined with African art. In the light of this, the paper seeks to introduce Akan symbolism into contemporary bridal wears to be adapted for church weddings. It aims at reviving the lost socio-cultural educative impact in contemporary Ghanaian fashion design concepts. The introduction of this "indigenous ingenuity" to contemporary fashion design concepts is based purely on aesthetic appeal as well as Ghanaian traditional philosophy. The paper explores the awareness and use of Adinkra symbols, to promote their use for wedding gowns in Ghana and beyond. The study employed observational descriptive research approach to determine the kinds of wedding gowns on the market. The end result of the symbolic wedding gown presented reflects a contemporary design concept, fused into a traditional design concept. The paper recommends that the exchange of ideas between the two design concepts be encouraged and considered as a legitimate means of including postmodern or contemporary wedding design concepts in the Ghanaian fashion industry.

Keywords: fashion, wedding gown, bridal wear, culture, concept, symbols, philosophy and acculturation.

1. Introduction

The character, civility and the ideology of every nation and for that matter man is an important ingredient to the surge of history and the centre of customary formality of families. Studies have shown that the concept of bridal wear is a legacy of the western culture, specifically from Great Britain around the year 1442 up till date. The wedding dress or gown is the clothing worn by a bride during a wedding ceremony. The rite of a white wedding dress came from the princes' palaces and only spread slowly at the beginning of the 19th century. In the 1920's, white wedding gown symbolized the materialistic, conventional-churchly moral and the virginity of the bride which signify purity of the soul. In early Celtic cultures, red was the bridal colour of choice, worn to invoke fertility; early Christians preferred blue, which was symbolic of truth and purity (Janet, 2001). Colour, style and ceremonial importance of the wedding gown depended on the religion and culture of the wedding participants (Bartlett, 2006; Victor, 2006).

Indigenous Africans have varying traditions related to weddings and consequently to wedding dresses (Oka, 2010). Traditional bridal wears are woven in symbolic colours: white, blue, yellow (orange) and black. Just as red wedding saris are the traditional garment choice for brides in Indian culture, African brides often wear a white gown at the wedding ceremony but change into traditional wear afterwards (Jumper, *Kaba/silt, Fugu*, cotton printed dresses, among others). Over time, colour options and fabric choices and garment designs for bride gowns have expanded. Today, fabrics such as crepe, silk, lace, and satin are used which also include colours such as gold, pink, orange, maroon, brown and yellow. The garment design has also undergone an intriguing metamorphosis with a lot of variation in style and extent of the decoration. Since the wedding ceremony serves as the emotional centrepiece for the special occasion, three or more colours are used to decorate the wedding hall but the bride may choose to wear the traditional Kente, the white satin attire or a combination of the two during the actual service. To them, the white symbolizes life, freshness and purity; she is introduced to the groom and family as a fresh gem to signify her rebirth into her husband's family.

Aside baptism and burial, marriage is one of the three great public functions in a person's life. Throughout history women have tried to make their wedding gown special, to suit the festive occasion, and to make the bride beautiful and splendid to look at (Hudson, 2010). Though there are different styles in vogue, studies have shown that some societies in Ghana choose to wear their native clothing during the marriage celebration. For example, the peoples of Asante and the North of Ghana use Kente and "*Fugu*" cloths respectively for their marriage celebration. To appreciate the wearing of the white wedding gown, an incorporation of traditional symbolism appropriate to satisfy the two cultural divide, is the objective of the study. It must be understood that the

acculturation of wedding gown and marriage ceremony over the years has entrenched itself in Ghanaian culture. It is therefore apt to traditionalize the bridal gown to reflect our culture in the Ghanaian fashion industry.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Materials and Tools

The study employed observational method of descriptive research approach to determine the kinds of wedding gowns on the Ghanaian market. It observed prevailing bridal wear designs from fashion design houses, bridal designers and beneficiaries of church weddings in order to evaluate and subsequently produce ones with indigenous concepts. The study took cognisance of Adinkra symbols related to the wedding festivities. In effect, appropriate designs were then developed with selected Adinkra symbols that relate to the philosophy of bridal wear and marriage.

Hand screen printing on satin materials was explored with printing paste to ascertain its efficacy. Materials used for the project are as follows: bridal satin, sewing thread, printing paste, mesh, stiffening fabric and a cotton lining fabric. Tools and equipment included ironing board, pressing iron, sewing machine, wooden frame, needles, masking tape, tailors chalk, pins, tracing wheel, a pair of scissors, a tape measure and squeegee.

2.1.1 Design

To traditionalize the bridal gown to reflect Ghanaian cultures (see Figure 1&2), the concept of “*akataso*” and “*abosoɔ*” (a storage pouch worn at the waistline) was used. “*Abosoɔ*” is a long narrow tube-like stripe of cloth normally worn by mothers or elderly women as a supportive belt for the purpose of keeping valuable or precious things such as jewels, concealed around their waist as a waist cloth and again covered with a cover cloth as seen in Figure 1a. The tube-like stripe is sewn exactly in the middle and the two ends left open to receive the precious objects after which the two ends are tied together at the waistline. Fig. 1b is its graphical representation.

This lifestyle within the society culminated the need to adapt this concept to symbolize preservation as a corrective measure to avoid unwarranted human intrusion to marriage or possible disruption of the marriage. This calls for bridal foresight, precaution, and preparedness prior to embarking on such marital journey. Though the concept encourages careful planning, it also warns against procrastination. The concept of “*akataso*” deals with the use of cloth to cover the body from the armpit of a lady to her feet (see Figure 2a). Figure 2b is its graphical interpretation. This denotes preservation of the ladies ‘valuables’ only to be exposed to the husband on the day of their honeymoon.

Before the construction of the gown, a lot of preliminary sketches were made until the desired effect on paper was realized. This was imported into CorelDraw X3, manipulated and then developed into a stencil. Figure 3 are some examples of the sketches.

The suitable size used for the measurement was size 14 of the female body with the measurements arranged as follows:

- Bust..... 36 inches
- Waist..... 32 inches
- Hip.....42 inches
- Across back..... .5 inches
- Nipple to nipple.....6 inches
- Bust to the waist line.....15 inches
- Blouse length..... 24 inches
- Waist to knee..... 44 inches
- Bridal trail.....62 inches

To prevent mistakes during cutting out, the designed patterns were developed on a brown paper and later transferred onto the fabric before they were sewn. Three different types of fabric were used for the sewing of the bridal wear. These were as follows:

- Stiffening fabric - to help the dress attain firmness on the bride.
- The cotton lining fabric - used to line up the main fabric to help absorb sweat and to prevent the under garment from showing

- The bridal satin - used for the main body and the bridal trail.

Most parts of the dress went through the normal stitching and bone fixing. The fixing of the bone was done with a hand needle; this was because the sleeveless dress had to be firm to support itself when worn. The bodice was pinned together after the sewing of the bridal satin fabric to ensure a good seam allowance. Again after notching, the various part of the bodice was sown together. With much care, all the four cut out parts of the bodice were gradually sewn together. Since the dress had no sleeves, the measurement taken was transferred from the shoulder to the waist to get an accurate off sleeve. For easy joining of the fabric during sewing, the cut out areas were indicated with notches. Indications were made with pencil to identify the front side that needs to be up, the sides, the middle and the down to avoid confusion during sewing. The traditional symbols used for the work were *Akoma*, *Akofena*, *Kronti Ne Akwamu*, and *Osrane Ne Nsoroma and Nhimu*. These traditional symbols were used for their philosophical relationship with marriage and the wedding ceremony.

Akoma means symbol of patience. In marriage, both parties have to get enough patience to be able to tolerate one another since both are raised from different family backgrounds. It is believed that the place of the heart is the source and centre of emotional life, where the deepest and sincerest feelings are located and where a person is most vulnerable to pain. The heart is believed to be responsible for a person's emotions, for example anger, hatred, love, joy, grief, among others. A person is said to have a heart in his stomach when that person is very tolerant. Patience in marriage is said to be the best medicine given to us by the creator and society demands that everyone must have the capacity for waiting: the ability to endure waiting, delay, or provocation without becoming annoyed or upset or to persevere calmly when faced with difficulties. This design on the dress is to let the couples know that they should exercise patience when they are confronted with any problem starting even from their wedding day.

Nhwimu means planning. Planning is the most important thing in the marriage institution and that it should be respected as such. The couples should plan everything they do so that their future will be secured.

Osrane Ne Nsoroma is a symbol of faithfulness. The most important thing in marriage is faithfulness and that each partner should be faithful to the other so as to engender trust.

Akofena is a symbol of authority. Authority is legitimate power to enforce obedience. Authority goes with submission and submission brings respect so the man being the head must exercise authority with love over his household helping each other in times of trial and being there for each other.

Kronti Ne Akwamu is a symbol of collaboration. There should be better collaboration between the man and the woman. This good collaboration should make their marriage last forever. After designing, it was printed out on a transparent A3 tracing paper and photographically developed accordingly. The parts of the garment needed to be printed with the traditional symbols, where the trail and the waist band fabric. These were carefully laid flat on the printing table for printing. The band and the flap or trail fabrics were printed separately with their corresponding design screens. They were then dried in a shady area before ironing. The finished pieces were later fitted or stitched to their respective parts on the body of the wedding dress. The band was fixed onto the fabric with glue and a glue gun and the flap were fixed with machine stitches and knitted at the edges to achieve a neat work. Though other parts of the dress were joined together at the waistline, the joints appeared hidden from view.

The outcome of the design print reveals a new method of transferring the symbols onto the fabric in that the area to be printed was first sprayed with opaque ink as a foundation to restrain the paste from spreading to unwanted areas during the printing process. In searching for a way to secure the breast area of the bridal wear firmly to the bride, a dress bone was inserted in the dart area to help hold the sleeveless dress. Again to minimize heat and sweat, cotton lining was used for the inner fabric since it easily absorbs sweat to reduce or avoid any discomfort. The choice of material was bridal satin and the choice of colour of the print was golden yellow. The symbols run vertically on the flap and horizontally on the band (see Figure 4 & 5)

3. Results and Discussion

This project sought to explore the possibility of adapting Akan traditional symbols into bridal wear using a foreign fashionable material. The research revealed the appropriateness of the use of some traditional symbols in this regard and its method of execution was restricted to hand screen printing. The designed traditional symbolic bridal wear brings an awareness of the possibility of blending traditional symbolism with a contemporary design concept. Such an alliance creates a new and the innovative artistic appearance that offers numerous philosophical interpretations.

Using Akan traditional symbolism, contemporary wedding dresses, can project the philosophy of a locality and yet maintain a harmonious balance between ethnic grace and western elegance to exclusively produce a bridal wear to fit an acceptable Ghanaian wedding design concept. The need to promote the vast and diverse traditional metaphor through fashion has necessitated the need to incorporate traditional metaphor with foreign wedding materials in a contemporary design fashion to bring aesthetic and philosophical bridal wears to today's consumers.

The style of the bridal wear was designed with the traditional concept of "*akatasoo*" and "*abosoo*" in mind. Traditional way of using "*akatasoo*" (cover cloth) and the way it flows over the body were taken into consideration to give the garment a traditional appeal. The symbols were arranged linearly along the edges of the "*akatasoo*" and positioned at the trail of the bride wear to give it a royal finality. A similar band in the form of "*abosoo*" was cut out and designs placed over the waist band at an inch interval. The designs chosen were carefully selected to reflect the queenly reality of the bride. The other parts of the bridal wear still maintained their normal foreign touch to ascertain the integrative-ness of traditional forms with that of foreign dress forms.

This traditional custom concept created, is a functional and a fascinating aesthetic bridal piece. The frontal waistline curves depicted as a result of the "*abosoo*" concept compliment and contrast the free flowing linear designs on the trail of the gown. The bridal piece is designed to put emphasis on the traditional symbols used to project the peaceful co-existence between the traditional and the contemporary complexity of its artistry. An important essence of the bridal piece is its extremely good dimensional gracefulness.

From the style, texture of materials and embellishment on the bridal wear to the techniques used in its execution, the influence of the traditional concept is evident; from the waistline design resembling the "*abosoo*" form thus revealing the facets of traditional dress codes. Though the design of individual symbolic elements is fairly free, the compositions as a complete bridal wear marked unity and coherence revealed by the relationship between the white satin spaces and the printed or decorated areas. Assumed with aesthetic zip, the symmetrical, simple but chic design of the entire bridal wear suggests the vigour and excitement of drapery evident in the linear arrangement of motifs and subtle inference of association peculiar to Afro-centric designs (West, 2010). The flowing curls of the dress and the cherished agreements formed by the traditional and the contemporary concepts make this bridal graceful dress worth remembering.

4. Conclusion

The study is a proof that traditional symbols can be used in designing a bridal wear. It also ascertains that foreign materials such as satin and many other materials coupled with traditional metaphor could be a wealth of additional resources to enhance contemporary bridal wears. The bridal wear, though they may look foreign, reflects a facet of Ghanaian philosophy specifically by the exclusive rendition of style, motifs, colour and usage that communicates an allegory only the possessor of the bridal wear can unravel.

Irrefutably, such products integrated with traditional symbols could be an effective means to provide alternate and unlimited opportunities for bridal wear designers to explore for maximum economic benefits. The outcome of this study provides hope for Ghanaian traditional symbols and the work of contemporary fashion designers in exploring other techniques to finish their products. The outcome is that, Akan traditional symbols can add value and improve the marketability of bridal wears. In this regard, enhancing bridal wears with traditional symbols can help foster universal acceptance of Ghanaian metaphors.

References

- Hudson, (2010). The History of Wedding Traditions, Retrieved May 6, 2013, from <http://sandieHUDSON.blogspot.com/2010/10/history-of-wedding-ceremony.html>
- Janet, L. (2001). The Origins of the Wedding Costume Renaissance, Magazine 80 USA: Hathaway Drive, Stratford, CT 06615.
- Bartlett, L. (2006). Bridal Gowns - How to Find the Perfect Wedding Dress, Retrieved July 21, 2006, from <http://ezinearticles.com/?Bridal-Gowns---How-to-Find-the-Perfect-Wedding-Dress&id=248620>
- Oka, H. (2010). African Cultures and Traditions, Retrieved July 26, 2010, from <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/african-cultures-and-traditions.html>
- Victor, (2006). Wedding Gowns, Colour and Style Depends on Religion and Culture, Publishers: Article Alley, Retrieved February 26, 2006, from <http://victor.articlealley.com/wedding-gowns-color-and-style-depends-on->

religion-and-culture-112003.html

West, & Thembile, C. (2010). "Afro-Centricity: Moving outside of the Comfort Zone". The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance. Academic journal article from JOPERD-- Vol. 65, No. 5



Fig. 1a: The “aboso” a tube-like waistband

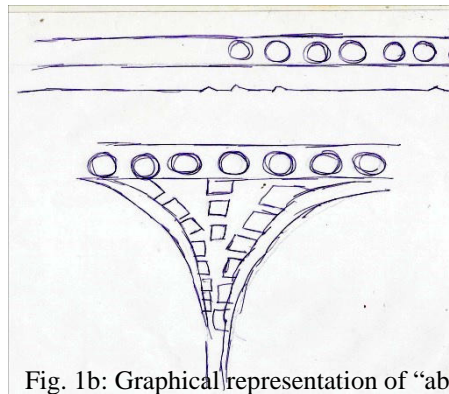


Fig. 1b: Graphical representation of “aboso”



Fig. 2: The “akataso” cover the body from the armpit.

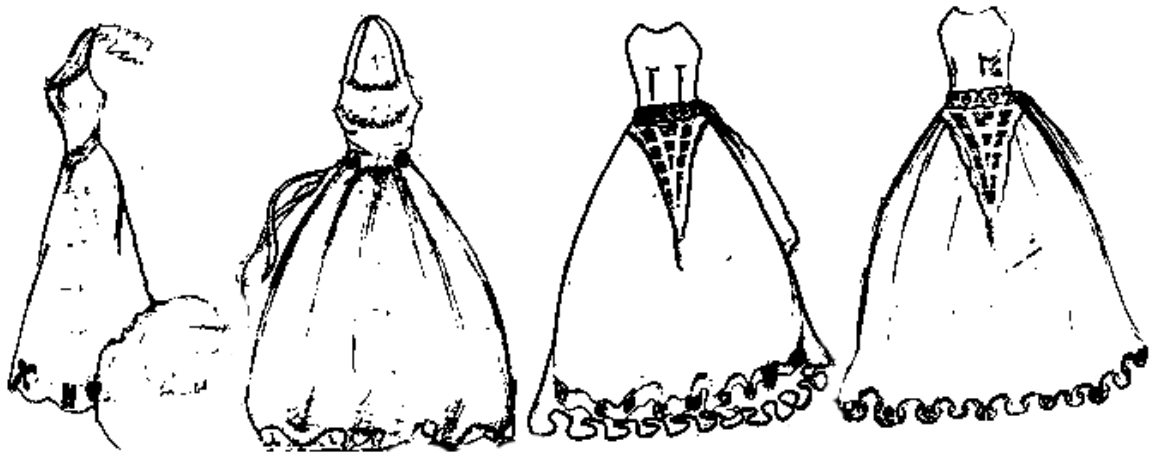


Fig. 3: Idea development process.



Fig. 4: Shows the finished work

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:
<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Recent conferences: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

