

## **Fabric symbology: Correlation between President Akufo-Addo's fabric choice and his COVID-19 addresses to Ghanaians**

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**Abstract:** Although there is no mandatory (legal) dress code for the President of Ghana, it is noteworthy that the President's choice of garment for public engagements, as the first Iconic Figure of the land, is a critical identity construction issue with an additional possibility of promoting the indigenous Ghanaian textile products for massive (inter)national patronage. This remains a pertinent concern to Ghanaian fashion devotees and scholars. This qualitative descriptive study, therefore, examines eight (8) random-purposively sampled authentic Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) adorned by President Akufo-Addo for his COVID-19 addresses to establish their nonverbal correlative communication repositories with the contents of the messages delivered to Ghanaians. The study elicited views through interviews from seasoned Ghanaian fabric manufacturing experts and fabric retailers regarding the symbology of the sampled fabrics. It was found that the Ghanaian authentic print fabrics (garments) adorned by President Akufo-Addo for his COVID-19 updates symbolically correlated with the contents of the addresses delivered to Ghanaians. Therefore, the President's continuous use of Ghanaian authentic print fabrics for his COVID-19 addresses communicates his Ghanaian nationalistic identity; promotes the beautiful and symbolically rich Ghanaian fabrics for the patronage of a larger (inter)national market. This stands to attract massive market for Ghanaian print fabrics thereby positively impacting the economic gains of the ailing Ghanaian textile industry. It would therefore be novel if further investigation is conducted on the possible economic impact of the President's adornment of authentic Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) for public occasions on the Ghanaian textile industry.

**Keywords:** Correlation, COVID-19 addresses, Fabric symbology, Garment, Ghanaian print fabric, President Akufo Addo

### **1. Introduction**

The dreadful havoc of Coronavirus disease (popularly known as COVID-19) is felt across the globe. COVID-19 emerged in the Wuhan city of China in 2019 and alarmingly blew out across nations to become a pandemic that has plagued the lives of many people worldwide (Essel & Logogye, 2021). The escalating rate at which COVID-19 spread and its associated high levels of deaths recorded within its first year of emergence made the World Health Organisation (WHO) to declare it as a global pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 (WHO, 2020a). The World Bank (2020) notes that the Coronavirus pandemic has, since its emergence, plunged many nations into recession in 2020, with the per capita income of nations shrinking hugely across the globe. Ghana is no exception to the aforementioned global mortalities and harsh economic impacts created by COVID-19.

Since the intrusion of the deadly Coronavirus disease into the sovereign confines of the Republic of Ghana, with its first two cases recorded on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (Essel & Logogye, 2021; Nonvignon, Zhang, Mao, Dixit & Yamey, 2020; Adom, 2020), many studies have been conducted to assess Government's response policies and

strategies in curbing the spread of the deadly disease. Apanga, Lettor and Akunvane (2021) examine how Senior High School students in the Bawku Municipality in northern Ghana were practising the COVID-19 precautionary measures. Adom's (2020) study took an inquiry approach to analysing the cultural and educational consequences of COVID-19 within the first quarter of its outbreak in Ghana. Also, Bonful, Addo-Lartey, Aheto, Ganle, Sarfo and Aryeetey (2020) assess the compliance audit of COVID-19 precautions such as; frequent handwashing, physical, and social distancing among others in selected transportation installations in Ghana. WHO's (2021b) strategic plan serves as a holistic public health response guide for African countries including Ghana. On another breadth, Afriyie, Asare, Amponsah and Godman (2020) examine the status of the COVID-19 pandemic in developing countries such as Ghana with a specific focus on its challenges, experiences, and opportunities. The authors established that Ghana ranked first among African nations in the administration of COVID-19 tests per million people. Ghana's effective contact tracking and tracing system, as well as lockdown and other measures, have helped limit the COVID-19-related mortality rate in the country (Afriyie, Asare, Amponsah & Godman, 2020). The contact tracing of people who, in one way or the other, might have been exposed to COVID-19 infection and transmission; lockdown in Greater Accra and Kumasi metropolis, enactment of a legal framework, and other strategic socioeconomic policies were proactively devised by the government of Ghana as mitigating response systems aimed at minimising if not controlling the spread of COVID-19. Some of the response strategies initiated by the Ghanaian President to alleviate the negative effects of COVID-19 on Ghanaians have been studied by Nonvignon, Zhang, Mao, Dixit and Yamey (2020). The authors report that the government of Ghana launched the COVID-19 alleviation fund which was used to support small-scale businesses, and provided food, free water as well as electricity to Ghanaians among others.

Amongst the various COVID-19 response approaches implemented in Ghana, a key response mechanism instituted by President Akufo-Addo was his regular Sunday public (televised) addresses (updates) to Ghanaians (Essel & Logogye (2021; Nonvignon, Zhang, Mao, Dixit & Yamey, 2020). Essel and Logogye's (2021) study took a critical discourse analysis of President Akufo-Addo's COVID-19 addresses to establish the linguistic choices (content & context) of the President regarding the development of local fashion and textile industry through localised manufacture of personal protective apparatus for stakeholders and the general Ghanaian citizenry. In that study, Essel and Logogye note that the Ghanaian President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Ghana, has regularly addressed Ghanaians via state media on strategies and decisions taken to contain the virus. Since President Akufo-Addo's intermittent COVID-19 addresses shared vital pieces of information to the Ghanaian populace on COVID-19 containment measures, it is imperative that a close examination of the President's fabric choice for such addresses is done to establish their correlative communication repositories. This has become indispensable due to the consensually held assertion that clothing, and for that matter, what a person wears serves as a channel of non-verbal communication to others (Essel, Navei & deGraft-Yankson, 2021; Goedhart, 2020; Aris, Aris & Ba'ai, 2020; Warritay, 2017; Mamiya, 2016; Tijana, Tomaž & Čuden, 2014; Howard, Sarpong & Amankwah, 2012; Amankwah, Howard & Sarpong, 2012; Hasan, Subhani, & Osman, 2011; Akwetey, 2007; Rosenfeld & Plax, 1977). "So, without saying anything, our clothes can speak. Clothing itself does have a 'language', a nonverbal one" (Goedhart, 2020: 2). The non-verbal expressive attributes of clothing, consciously or unconsciously, help in defining the mood, age, gender, social status, political affiliation, economic background, intellectual state, religious affiliation, moral standing, and cultural identity of the wearer (Essel, Navei & deGraft-Yankson, 2021; Aris, Aris & Ba'ai, 2020; Warritay, 2017; Mamiya, 2016; Tijana, Tomaž & Čuden, 2014; Howard, Sarpong & Amankwah, 2012; Amankwah, Howard & Sarpong, 2012). Goedhart (2020: 2) explains that the nonverbal communicative messages associated with clothing are often channelled "through specific symbols and rules which are determined by social groups in society". This is much more common with African (Ghanaian) authentic print fabrics. Warritay (2017: 38) affirms that "African [Ghanaian] print fashion brings semiotic elements to the fore as the dressed black body and the language of dress are 'read'

as texts by consumers and experts in the field of fashion” (Warritay, 2017: 38). On this basis, authentic African (Ghanaian) print fabrics are said to have linguistic diversity with the capacity to nonverbally communicate across dress languages (through notable design signs and symbols), pieces of messages to a cultural group (familial, ethnic, regional, and/or national) (Warritay, 2017). This study, therefore, adopts a descriptive approach in interpreting selected authentic Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) adorned by President Akufo-Addo for his famous COVID-19 addresses to establish their correlations with the verbal pieces of messages delivered to Ghanaians. By so doing, the various authentic Ghanaian fabric designs and their sociocultural symbolism embedded in the President’s fabrics (garments) for selected COVID-19 addresses were contextually subjected to symbological interpretations to reveal their correlations with the speeches delivered to Ghanaians.

## **2. Empirical review**

### **2.1. Theoretical framework**

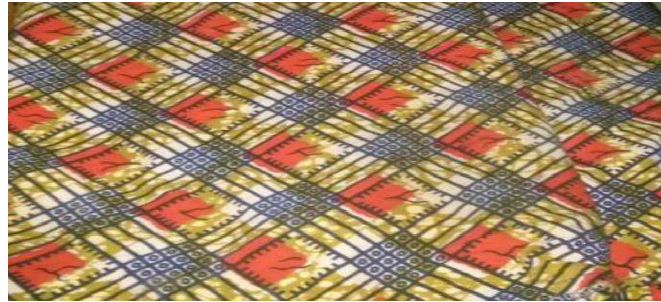
Peircean theory of semiotics situated within the concepts and sociocultural symbology of authentic Ghanaian print fabrics underpinned the study. The semiotic theory is said to have been propounded by a 19th-century American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, through his series of writings that were compiled into a single comprehensive piece of work (Yakin & Totu, 2014; Deacon, 2012). In 1931, Peirce propounded a taxonomy of diverse and interdependent categories of sign relationships (Deacon, 2012). In that taxonomy, Peirce extricates the variables that characterise a sign vehicle or a design into three categories such as; icons, indexes, and symbols (Deacon, 2012; Chapman, Ostwald & Tucker, 2004). The icon, index, and symbol offer a synchronised way of talking about how meaning is communicated through the connection between object, representamen, and interpretant (Chapman, Ostwald & Tucker, 2004). The sign becomes the representamen that represents an idea to an interpretant (Chapman, Ostwald & Tucker, 2004). Simply put, semiotics is “the study of how signs represent things in the world” (Kohn 2013; as cited in Swenson & Cipolla, 2020: 317).

In the context of this study, as Najafi and Abbas (2014) rightly put it, artefacts such as print fabrics could be created using the artist's semiotic system (designs, signs or symbols) to code the messages and feelings. Therefore, it takes a semiotic analysis of such artefacts to decode their embedded meanings. Since Peircean semiotic theory bothers on signs/symbols (designs) and their meanings, the study was accordingly guided by its theoretical framework and so contextually decoded the authentic Ghanaian print fabric designs (garments) adorned by President Akufo-Addo for his COVID-19 to establish their correlations with the pieces of messages delivered to Ghanaians.

### **2.2. Fabric symbology in Ghana**

In Ghana, fabric is often saturated with loaded philosophical meanings which go beyond the casual visual interpretation of the eye. Impraim-Swanzy, Oduro and Owusu (2018) agree that fabrics in Ghana are not only chosen for their aesthetic outlook but rather based on their symbolically customised cultural interpretations. The design makeup (symbolic motifs & images) of some Ghanaian textile products (print fabrics) has correlations with the rich Ghanaian cultural heritage. The design on someone's clothing might tell you his or her ethnicity, religion, preferred political party, profession or a specific message the person wants to churn out. Howard, Sarpong and Amankwah (2012), for instance, add that proverbs (wise sayings), totemic animals, and others are associated with Ghanaian print fabrics to convey classified meanings to the viewing public. According to Essel, Navei and deGraft-Yankson (2021), how individuals dress themselves plays a symbolic, communicative, aesthetic role and is definitive of their cultural and social identity. The communicative (non-verbal) prospects of Ghanaian print fabrics, embedded in localised fabric names, have well been corroborated by notable Ghanaian textiles and fashion scholars (Ampa-Korsah, Aboagyewaa-Ntiri Adu-Gyamfi & Yeboah, 2022; Essel, 2019; Amissah & Letcher-Teye, 2018; Daddah, Dogbey, Osei & Dedume, 2015; Relph & Irwin, 2010; Adonteng, 2009;

Wayne, 1995; Kyerematen, 1965). Kyerematen (1965) clarifies that the names given to Ghanaian fabrics are symbolic and coined out of the design properties and sociocultural uses of the fabric.



**Figure 1:** *Eni Bere a Enso Gya* (red eyes, in times of anger, do not spark fire) Print Fabric  
(Image Courtesy: Impraim-Swanzy, Oduro & Owusu, 2018).

Figure 1 reveals a Ghanaian print fabric known locally as *Eni Bere a Enso Gya* (red eyes, in times of anger, do not spark fire). The *Eni Bere a Enso Gya's* motif, as observed in Figure 1, comprises “five diagonal parallel lines intersecting and series of dots in the intersections. The portion of lines that do not intersect are left without any form of marks or impressions created in between” (Impraim-Swanzy, Oduro & Owusu, 2018: 18). The name of the fabric is drawn from the pool of Akan wise sayings (proverbs) which means no matter how aggressive or sad one may be, his/her eyes will never spark fire (Impraim-Swanzy, Oduro & Owusu, 2018). The associated sociocultural interpretation of the fabric (Figure 1) is that in times of anger or bad omen, there is the need for one to exercise extreme patience. The fabric, therefore, symbolises patience, self-control, self-discipline, and self-containment (Impraim-Swanzy, Oduro & Owusu, 2018).



**Figure 2:** *Ahwerepo* (Sugarcane) Print Fabric  
(Image Courtesy: Amissah & Letcher-Teye, 2018).

The Ghanaian *Ahwerepo* (Sugarcane in Akan) print fabric (Figure 2) is made of wavy abstracted lines with a series of nodes either horizontally or vertically registered depending on the fabric design (Ampa-Korsah, Aboagyewaa-Ntiri, Adu-Gyamfi, & Yeboah, 2022; Amissah & Letcher-Teye, 2018; Impraim-Swanzy, Oduro & Owusu, 2018). It is posited that the symbolic sugarcane design (Figure 2) is borne out of the sweetness of sugarcane juice and the difficulty involved in chewing its nodes (Amissah & Letcher-Teye, 2018). The authors further explain that a juicy stalk of sugarcane could easily be peeled and/or chewed except for its node which is hard to peel and/or chew insinuating the good times and challenges associated with life. The Ghanaian *Ahwerepo* print fabric design is, therefore, a symbol of contentment which beacons people to wholeheartedly accept life situations, whether good or bad.

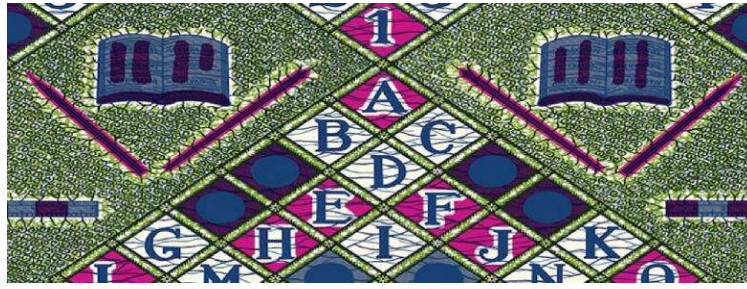


Figure 3: ABC Print Fabric

(Image Courtesy: Tordzro, Naa Densua 2021).

The Ghanaian print fabric in Figure 3 is referred to as *ABC* in the Ghanaian textile fraternity (Tordzro, 2021). The fabric contains symbols such as; letters of the alphabet, numerals, and symbols of pens, pencils, books and others. The aforementioned design elements found on the fabric (Figure 3) symbolise formal education. Tordzro (2021, p.21) affirms that the *ABC* fabric symbolises “the importance of literacy: promoting education for children from an early age”. Therefore, when the *ABC* fabric is fashioned into a garment and adorned, it indicates that the wearer is an educated literate or someone who attaches importance to formal education.

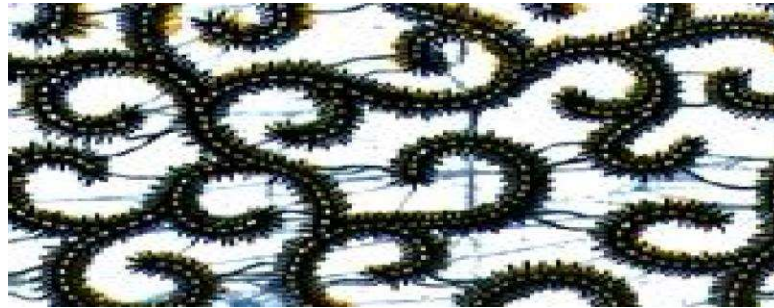


Figure 4: *Afe bi ye esan* Print Fabric

(Image Courtesy: Howard, Sarpong & Amankwah, 2012).

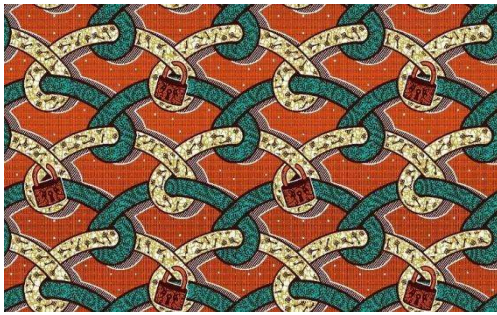
The Ghanaian print fabric in Figure 4 is referred to as *Afe bi ye esan* in Akan which means some years are bad. Howard et al. (2012) note that the *Afe bi ye esan* fabric design means that some years are generally inauspicious or unfortunate. It is a symbol of misfortune, bad luck, crisis, and/or inauspicious times. This relates to real-life situations whereby humans inevitably encounter bad or good fortunes in their engagements. The curling and/or coiling symbolic motifs on the fabric make it difficult to fathom its exact design makeup depicting the intricacies and unpredictable nature of life.



A. President Akufo-Addo in his Iconic Spectacles (Source: Getty Images).

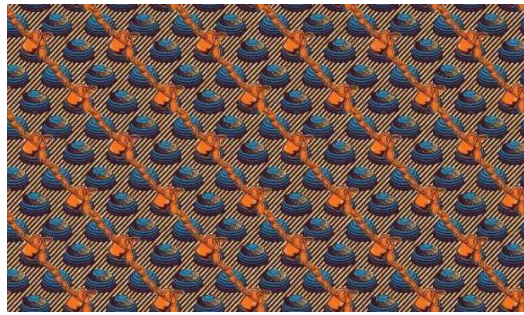


B. Fellow Ghanaians Print Fabric (Source: Ghana Textiles Printing (GTP)).



C. Lockdown Print Fabric

(Source: Ghana Textiles Printing (GTP))



D. Lockdown Print Fabric

(Source: Ghana Textiles Printing (GTP))



E. Ban on flights (source: Ghana Textiles Printing (GTP)).

Figure 5: (A, B, C, D & E): Coronavirus-inspired Ghanaian Print Fabric

(Image Courtesy: Cited in British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020).

The textile products observed in Figure 5 (B, C, D & E) are COVID-19-inspired Ghanaian print fabrics. In a radio discussion, Stephen Badu (Marketing Director of Ghana Textiles Printing (GTP)), briefed the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on some of the new print fabrics (Figure B, C, D & E) produced by GTP which satirically puts a positive twist on the COVID-19 pandemic. The Marketing Director of GTP reveals that some of the new GTP designs have symbolic round pairs of spectacles that are similar to the iconic spectacles (Figure 5A) always worn by Ghana's President (Akufo-Addo) for his regular public updates on COVID-19 (BBC, 2020). The fabric in Figure 5B is therefore named *Fellow Ghanaians* to reflect the popularly repeated starting phrase (*Fellow Ghanaians*) of the President's intermittent COVID-19 addresses. Some of the print fabrics also have symbols like padlocks, keys, and chains (Figure 5C&D) to symbolise the lockdown measures initiated by Government of Ghana to contain the transmission of COVID-19 in Ghana. Another COVID-19-inspired fabric design revealed by the Marketing Director of GTP contains symbolic motifs of aircraft (Figure 5E) which symbolises the ban placed by the government of Ghana on flights during the lockdown period (BBC, 2020).

In summary, the foregoing discussion on Ghanaian fabric symbology implies that the designs, (patterns, motifs, and symbols) found on Ghanaian print fabrics are generally proverbial or philosophical with deeper connotations as far as the daily lives of Ghanaians are concerned.

### 3. Research methodology

The study adopted qualitative descriptive methods to examine selected authentic Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) adorned by Ghanaian President, Nana Addo-Dankwa Akufo-Addo, for his televised COVID-19 addresses to establish their correlations with the contents of the messages delivered to Ghanaians since the emergence of COVID-19 in Ghana. Data were sourced through interviews (semi-structured) from three categories of populations: photographs of the authentic Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) adorned by President Akufo-Addo for his COVID-19 addresses; Ghanaian fabric manufacturing experts, and fabric retailers in Ghana.

While expert and homogenous types of purposive sampling techniques were respectively used to sample three (3) fabric manufacturing experts of GTP and eleven (11) fabric retailers in Ghana, the random-purposive sampling procedure was utilised to sample eight (8) of the first twenty-five (25) COVID-19 addresses delivered by President Akufo-Addo. The expert purposive sampling technique was used to sample experienced Ghanaian fabric manufacturing experts with ten (10) years of field expertise, whereas, the homogenous purposive sampling procedure was also deployed to sample seasoned Ghanaian fabric retailers (women) with at least twenty (20) years of field experience at Makola market (one of the largest fabric markets in Ghana). The study upheld that the sampled Ghanaian fabric manufacturing experts and retailers had the worth of knowledge and expertise and could corroborate in naming and/or interpreting the design makeup of the selected Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) adorned by President Akufo-Addo for his COVID-19 addresses (messages) since the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. Also, with the use of random purposive sampling (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019; Omona, 2013; Coyne, 1997; Miles & Huberman, 1994), each of the first 25 fabric choices of President Akufo-Addo for his COVID-19 addresses had an equal and independent chance of being sampled. However, the investigators first obtained a list of the first 25 fabric choices (garments) of President Akufo-Addo for his COVID-19 addresses, and then, randomly selected (Omona, 2013) the desired number (8) of the authentic Ghanaian print fabrics from the list. The selected photographs of the Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) adorned by President Akufo-Addo for his COVID-19 addresses were subjected to semiotic analysis (symbolological interpretations) while the selected addresses were also analysed using the content analytical tool to reveal their correlations. During data analysis, the study took cognisance of the anonymity and confidentiality of the research participants and adopted pseudonyms to replace their actual names.

#### 4. Results and discussion

##### 4.1. Correlations between President Akufo-Addo's Fabric choice for his COVID-19 Addresses and the messages delivered to Ghanaians

The recommendations made by Ghanaian textile scholars (Essel, Navei & deGraft-Yankson, 2021; Essel, 2019) that the legislative arm of Ghana should enact a law to regulate the President's dress code remains an urgent call. This stems from the case that the President's choice of garment for public engagements (national and/or international), as the number one Iconic Figure of the land, is a critical identity construction issue with its associated economic benefits to the Ghanaian ailing textile industry. This section of the study examines President Akufo-Addo's fabric choice for his COVID-19 Addresses to reveal their correlations with the messages delivered to Ghanaians.



**Figure 6:** President Akufo-Addo in *Anibere a Enso Gya* Print Fabric for his 3<sup>rd</sup> COVID-19 Address (Photo Credit: Citi Newsroom, 2022, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xPPuGnT3z8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xPPuGnT3z8)).

President Akufo-Addo's choice of fabric for his third COVID-19 address to the Ghanaian populace on March 21, 2020, as observed in Figure 6, was identified by fabric manufacturing experts as a GTP product with a brand name, *Adepa Premium*, and design number, 5076. One of the fabric manufacturers revealed that:

GTP *Adepa Premium* is basked with the touch of intricate colourful patterns, in its authentic design with improved fabric quality and pure elegance. Through *Adepa Premium*, GTP's most celebrated fabric offering - *Tex Styles Ghana*, is to bring African premium fashion to the world, presenting customers and fashion designers with colourful design patterns while attracting new generation of customers with discerning taste for real African prints. (GTP's Fabric Manufacturing expert 1, personal communication, February 20, 2021)

Although, the brand name of the fabric (Figure 6) is *Adepa Premium*, as revealed by the fabric manufacturing experts when contacted, the fabric was consensually identified as *Anibere a Enso Gya* by Ghanaian fabric retailers and corroborated by the fabric manufacturing experts. *Anibere a Enso Gya* is an Akan wise saying (proverbial expression) in Ghana which connotes *red eyes cannot spark flames (fire)*. The cultural symbology of the fabric design (Figure 6) as embedded in its proverbial name, *Anibere a Enso Gya*, relates to self-consolation in the wake of life-threatening circumstances which beacons the exercise of patience, endurance, perseverance, fortitude, self-discipline, self-containment, and/or self-control in dealing with such matters. The name of the fabric (*Anibere a Enso Gya*) and its proverbial interpretation as herein referred to, is well affirmed by previous research (Impraim-Swanzy, Oduro & Owusu, 2018). Therefore, President Akufo-Addo's *Anibere a Enso Gya (red eyes cannot spark flames)* print fabric as explained by the research participants (seasoned Ghanaian fabric manufacturing experts and retailers) directly foretell the sad mood of the nation (Ghana), and for that matter the President, regarding the record of COVID-19 cases in Ghana. The correlation between the sad mood of the President and the call for patience, self-control, and/or perseverance as his garment symbolises, is contained in the President's call for self-discipline amongst Ghanaians while stern measures were adopted to contain the virus. The President in the third address said that "Fellow Ghanaians...we will do anything within our power to contain the spread of the virus; firstly, all our borders that are by land, sea and air will be closed to human traffic for the next two weeks" (Akufo-Addo, 2020). Content analysis of President Akufo-Addo's third update and juxtaposing same with the symbology of his fabric choice, it is clear that the President wanted to convey a significant message to the Ghanaian people that in difficult times such as the emergence COVID-19 in Ghana, citizens need to remain resolute, self-discipline and brace themselves for tougher times ahead. The GTP fabric (Figure 6) and its visual message reaffirm studies that argue that African (Ghana) print fabrics bring semiotic elements to the fore to symbolically (consciously or unconsciously) communicate the mood of the wearer (Warritay, 2017; Howard, Sarpong & Amankwah, 2012; Amankwah, Howard & Sarpong, 2012). Therefore, it could be said that President Akufo-Addo's Ghanaian print fabric choice (Figure 6) for his third COVID-19 update was to visually corroborate the contents of his third COVID-19 address delivered to Ghanaians.



**Figure 7:** President Akufo-Addo in *Anisuo* Print Fabric for his 4<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 Address  
(Photo Credit: Citi Newsroom, 2022, 2020, <https://youtu.be/Vjl-VE3SSmk>).

Figure 7 reveals President Akufo-Addo wearing Ghanaian *Anisuo* print Fabric for his 4<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 update to the good people of Ghana. The Ghanaian fabric retailers interviewed, named the fabric (Figure 7) as *Anisuo*, an Akan word that means drops of tears. Although the fabric manufacturing experts contacted by the study

affirmed the fabric's name, as herein revealed, they variously argued that Ghanaian fabric retailers are key stakeholders in the naming of new fabric products in Ghana. One of the Ghanaian fabric manufacturing experts added that the fabric (Figure 7) is part of GTP's new collection of innovative products with design number 11132 that have been on the market for the past three years dubbed, Adepa Dumas, in honour of GTP's brand ambassador, actress Joycelyn Dumas. It was explained that:

Adepa Dumas is an outstanding new range of GTP quality fabrics targeting customers who seek to express their style uniquely and with grace. The new Adepa Dumas fabrics come with even smoother feel, new and unique designs, glossy and richer colours. The stylish range can boast of diverse patterns and colourways. (GTP's Fabric Manufacturing expert 2, personal communication, February 25, 2021)

However, delving into the *Anisuo* (drops of tears) sociocultural nomenclature as revealed by the Ghanaian fabric retailers regarding President Akufo-Addo's garment (Figure 7) which has droplets of varying degrees of red, black, and yellow prints symbolising tears, the study draws a strong correlation between the President's fabric choice and the contents of his fourth COVID-19 address delivered to Ghanaians. The fourth address was delivered at the time the nation first witnessed an alarming increase in COVID-19 cases with a record of some mortalities which culminated into the President's decision to announce lockdown of parts of Greater Accra and Ashanti regions of Ghana. The anticipated restrictions to human movement, frozen economic activities in such areas with their dire impacts on the lives of Ghanaians in a lockdown situation coupled with the mortalities so far recorded in the country, probably, might have triggered President Akufo-Addo's decision to wear the *Anisuo* (drops of tears) fabric. That notwithstanding, the President made a profound statement "I assure you that we know what to do to bring our economy back to life. What we do not know how to do is to bring people back to life" (Akufo-Addo, 2020) to install some hope in the minds of Ghanaians, which statement, gained a lot of international recognition. Parts of the President's fourth address that correlate with the symbolic meaning of his *Anisuo* print garment read:

Fellow Ghanaians,...seventy-eight (78) of the persons put under quarantine have since tested positive for the virus. It is these additional confirmations that have increased dramatically our total number of cases to one hundred and thirty-seven (137) four (4) persons, who had tested positive for the virus, but were aged and had other serious, underlying medical conditions, have lost their lives. May their souls rest in perfect peace. Thankfully, two (2) persons have made full recoveries.

...so, effective 1am on Monday, 30th March, some forty-eight hours from now, I have imposed, pursuant to the powers granted the President of the Republic, under the Imposition of Restrictions Act, 2020 (Act 1012), restrictions on movement of persons in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area ...and the Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Area... for a period of two (2) weeks, subject to review. It will give us the opportunity to try to halt the spread of the virus (Akufo-Addo, 2020).

Content analysis of parts of the President's fourth address, as espoused, and juxtaposing same with his Ghanaian print garment (Figure 7), it is clear that the announcement of lockdown of parts of Accra and Kumasi in that address and the record of COVID-19 mortalities in Ghana, unavoidably, has a significant emotional impact on the President. Hence, the President's choice of *Anisuo* (drops of tears) fabric correlatively foretells his shattered, sorrowful and teary mood during the delivery of the fourth address which introduced lockdown in parts of Accra and Kumasi to restrict movement and human contact for two weeks mindful of its attendant economic hardships to Ghanaians. The symbolical meaning of the fabric (Figure 7), as interpreted, corroborates Essel, Navei and deGraft-Yankson's (2021) assertion that how an individual dress plays a symbolic, communicative and definitive of the mood and state of the wearer.



**Figure 8:** President Akufo-Addo in *Yaw Donkor* Print Fabric for his 5<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 Address  
(Photo Credit: Citi Newsroom, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wjv4mqbN0q8>).

For the President's 5<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 address, he chose to wear an authentic Ghanaian print fabric (Figure 8) identified by manufacturing experts as a GTP brand (*Nustyle*) with design number 5027. The fabric manufacturing experts corroborated that the print fabric, GTP *Nustyle* (Figure 8), is made of awesome combination of colour and energy with the ability to draw attention in a stylistic manner. However, the fabric (Figure 8) was consensually named by the Ghanaian fabric retailers as *Yaw Donkor* which symbolises dedicated service and humility. The research informants explained that the name, *Yaw Donkor*, is symbolically given to humble servants in the Akan setting of Ghana. Therefore, President Akufo-Addo's choice of the *Yaw Donkor* print garment (which connotes dedicated service and humility), as observed in Figure 8, symbolises his decision to eulogise notable frontline workers (health and security services) for their dedicated services to Ghana since the emergence of COVID-19 in Ghana. Excerpts of the President's fifth address state that:

Fellow Ghanaians...let me thank, in particular, all our frontline actors who continue to put their lives on the line to help ensure that we defeat the virus. To our healthcare workers, I say a big ayekoo for the continued sacrifices you are making in caring for those infected with the virus, and in caring for the sick in general... to the men and women of our security services, who have been enforcing the directives, by patrolling our streets day and night, conducting surveillance, snap checks and mounting road blocks, we are deeply in your debt... Reports I have received so far indicate that the police, military and other members of our security services have discharged their mandate with considerable professionalism (Akuffo-Addo, 2020).

The President did not also mince words in revealing himself as a dedicated servant of the country and God. He made the following theological references in his fifth COVID-19 address to Ghanaians to illustrate his high sense of humility and service to Ghana and God:

...I am privileged to be speaking to you on a sacred day of the Christian calendar, Palm Sunday, which ushers in the Holy Week to commemorate the passion and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Let His example unites all of us, Christians, Muslims, all Ghanaians, in our care for each other, and in our resolve to overcome this challenge. This, too, shall pass! (Akuffo-Addo, 2020).

Firstly, the use of "I am privileged" as contained in the theological references made by the President in his fifth update demonstrates his humility to God and the people of Ghana for the rare opportunity given him to serve as president of Ghana and for which respected reason, he had the privilege to address the nation. The remaining theological reference of President Akufo-Addo as herein revealed further demonstrates his humble call on all Ghanaians to be true servants of God as Jesus did, care for each other, as the nation resolves to overcome the COVID-19 challenge (pandemic), believing strongly in the intervention of God that, "this, too, shall pass", (Akuffo-Addo, 2020) meaning, COVID-19 shall be contained in the near future. Therefore, President Akufo-Addo's *Yaw Donkor* print fabric which symbolises dedicated service and humility correlates with parts of his fifth address to Ghanaians as herein analysed.



**Figure 9:** President Akufo-Addo in *Obuor Fa, Dade Fa* Print Fabric for his 7<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 Address  
(Photo Credit: Citi Newsroom, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHQxUAPIHLM>).

In the delivery of the 7<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 update (address) to Ghanaians, President Akufo-Addo chose to outdoor himself in an authentic Ghanaian classic identified by fabric manufacturing experts as GTP *Safoa* with design number 5018. “GTP *Safoa* is about versatility and simplicity...just plain simple African designs. The safoa range comes printed in just one colour with different tints and shades” (GTP’s Fabric Manufacturing expert 2, personal communication, February 25, 2021) as observed in Figure 9. However, seasoned Ghanaian fabric retailers gave the sociocultural name of the GTP fabric (Figure 9) as *Obuor Fa, Dade Fa*. The informants of the study revealed that the *Obuor fa, dade fa* nomenclature of the fabric is teased out of an Akan proverbial expression which literally means *half stone, half metal*. Symbolically, the fabric connotes very difficult, though or hard situations as compared to the hardness of stone and/or metal. One of the research participants added that *Obuor fa, dade fa* print fabric could also connote empathy. Its adornment by the President for his seventh COVID-19 update to Ghanaians communicates the difficult and/or hard to crack (contain) nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the sorrow that goes with the escalating numbers of COVID-19 infections at the time in Ghana. This was evident in the President's seventh COVID-19 address to Ghanaians where he reiterated the hard decisions taken in his preceding update to control the transmission of the virus some of which included placement of restrictions in some areas of Accra and Kumasi metropolis in Ghana. The following extracts of the President's seventh update to Ghanaians which bother on hard times correlate with the symbolic meaning of his print garment (Figure 9):

Fellow Ghanaians... the decision to restrict movement has occasioned several severe difficulties for all of us across the country, especially for the poor and vulnerable.

...since the first two (2) cases of infections were recorded on our shores, we have, to date, traced some eighty-six thousand (86,000) contacts, out of which we have test results of sixty-eight thousand, five hundred and ninety-one (68,591) contacts. There is, thus, a backlog of some eighteen thousand (18,000) tests whose results are yet to be received (Akufo- Addo, 2020).

Some of the study’s informants added that the motifs on the President’s print fabric (Figure 9) are often used as patterns in Kente fabrics by the Akan people of Ghana to symbolise sorrowful mood and/or a critical situation to cope with. Adom (2016) also asserts that *Obo fa, dade fa* (partly stone, partly metal) is an Akan kente weave pattern worn for funeral ceremonies in Ghana. Adom adds that such a kente weave pattern reminds members of the bereaved family and sympathisers that death is an inevitable part of life (*obo-* stone/dust) therefore we need to endure the loss of the loved one with strong inner strength (*dade-* like metal). This assertion of Adom resonates with the accounts made by one of the research participants that “it could be possible that the President wanted to empathise with Ghanaians for the huge economic hardships and difficult moments posed by the COVID-19 induced restrictions” (Fabric Manufacturing expert 2, personal communication, February 25, 2021).



**Figure 10:** President Akufo-Addo in *dea emboa edzi ne dze hon ndzi nko* Print Fabric for his 10<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 Update (Photo Credit: Citi Newsroom, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1kyY-c3PRw>).

On the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 address to Ghanaians, President Akufo-Addo chose to wear an authentic GTP fabric (Figure 10) with *Safon* as its brand name, just like Figure 9, but with unique design number 16976. The research participants, particularly the seasoned Ghanaian fabric retailers, identified and named the President's outfit in Akan as *Nea mmoa adi no, ma nni nko, na nea aka akyere no na ye bo hoban*, which literally translates as what is lost is lost, the rest must be safeguarded, protected and preserved. A cursory view of the fabric design reveals a plant with its flowers assembled at the central point of the fabric's front view (Figure 10) indicative of the surviving populace of Ghana. The President's choice of fabric (garment) for the tenth COVID-19 address communicates the exegesis of the period where the pandemic was severely wrecking its cold hands on the lives of Ghanaians and the lockdown of selected parts of Ghana was eventually having a hefty toll on the economic progress of businesses. The President had to strategically impose restrictions and consciously ease same in some areas to safeguard the remaining fortunes of the country as signaled by his garment (Figure 10). In the tenth update, President Akufo-Addo declared the withdrawal of the restrictions previously placed on religious activities and mass gatherings as proactive initiatives to resuscitate the socioeconomic lives of Ghanaians who have been negatively affected by COVID-19. The President in his address stated that:

Fellow Ghanaians... In view of the obvious economic difficulties that the tough measures brought. ...a consensus has emerged from these consultations that we should embark on a strategic, controlled, progressive, safe easing of restrictions to get our lives and economy back to normal. As I stated in my May Day address, a month ago, I am now in a position to outline the roadmap for easing safely the restrictions. ...So, fellow Ghanaians, with effect from Friday, 5th June, we will begin Stage One of the process of easing restrictions (Akuffo-Addo, 2020).

A critical view of the President's print garment (figure 10) which symbolises protection and preservation resonates with parts of his speech, particularly where the President in releasing the restrictions appears to build a consensus to promote togetherness as well as rally Ghanaians to understand the situation at hand and strategically and safely cope with government's roadmap for easing the COVID-19 related restrictions.



**Figure 11:** President Akufo-Addo in *ABC* Print Fabric for his 11<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 Update (Photo Credit: Citi Newsroom, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2YldNF08dY>).

The Ghanaian print fabric (Figure 11) adorned by President Akufo-Addo for his eleventh COVID-19 Address to Ghanaians was unanimously identified and named by the research participants as *ABC*. The study found that the *ABC* is a GTP product, one of the most common and patronised print fabrics in Ghana as consensually recounted by all the research participants. Adepa Premium as its brand name and design number 5019, as revealed by the fabric manufacturing experts, shares the same brand name and similar stylistic qualities as ascertained in Figure 7. According to the research participants (both fabric retailers and manufacturing experts), the *ABC* print fabric symbolises formal education as affirmed by Tordzro (2021). One of the Ghanaian fabric retailers added that the fabric (Figure 10) is also known in Akan as *Akrachefo Ntoma* (literate's fabric) or *Eteacher Fo Ntoma* (teachers' cloth) adding that the *ABC* print fabric generally has symbolic elements such as; alphabetic, numerical, books and other motifs which are accoutrements either used by literates or used in the formal education setup, hence, its symbolism was coined from that perspective. It was also found that people wear the *ABC* print fabric to communicate to the viewing public that they are literates or formally educated. A research participant typified that in a marital rivalry situation where a man has two wives with one being literate and the other non-literate, the literate wife will routinely wear *ABC* print garment to show off her academic status and an edge over the non-literate rival. From the foregoing, it is clear that the *ABC* print fabric symbolises formal education. President Akufo-Addo's choice of *ABC* print garment as observed in Figure 10 (which symbolises education) correlates with his eleventh address which heavily bothered on the reopening of schools in Ghana after a long-time closure due to COVID-19. Excerpts of the address read:

Fellow Ghanaians...from tomorrow, Monday, 15th June [2020], the last batch of institutions in this phased approach, our educational institutions, will begin to re-open, with final year students in our tertiary colleges and universities returning to school to prepare for and take their exit examinations. As has been stated, final year senior high school (SHS 3) students, together with SHS 2 Gold Track students, will resume on 22nd June; and final year junior high school (JHS 3) students, the week after, on 29th June.

...It must be put on record that some final year University students will not be returning to school, as some of them, through virtual means, have already sat their exit examinations. (Akufo-Addo, 2020)

From a contextual view of the President's *ABC* print garment (Figure 10), which symbolises formal education, and the case that the eleventh address centred on education (reopening of schools), the President's fabric choice (Figure 10) symbolically correlates with the his eleventh COVID-19 address.



**Figure 12:** Akufo-Addo Wearing *Ahwedepo* Print Fabric for the 15<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 Address  
(Photo Credit: Citi Newsroom, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZZydCVVeeU>).

Figure 12 presents President Akufo-Addo in an authentic Ghanaian *Ahwedepo* (sugarcane) designed outfit. The research participants consensually identified and named the President's outfit as *Ahwedepo*, a brand of GTP's collection (*Nustyle*) with design number 5101. The *Ahwedepo* fabric (Figure 12) as noted by previous studies (Ampa-Korsah, Aboagyewaa-Ntiri, Adu-Gyamfi, & Yeboah, 2022; Amissah & Letcher-Teye, 2018; Impraim-

Swanzy, Oduro & Owusu, 2018), is made of wavy abstracted vertical lines of sugarcane with its series of nodes patterned together to constitute the main fabric design which philosophically relates to the case that life is not all rosy as imbedded in the sweetness of sugarcane juice and the difficulty involved in chewing its nodes. The symbology of President Akufo-Addo's outfit (Figure 12) and its correlation with his 15<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 address is eminently found in the brouhaha that surrounded the decision of the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana to compile a new electoral register for the 2020 general elections in Ghana amid COVID-19 escalating crisis. In view of that Ghanaians expressed discerning concerns and fears about conducting such a multifaceted exercise that involved millions of Ghanaians amid the fast spread of the virus which unavoidably undermined the social distancing and other preventive protocols canvassed by President Akufo-Addo in his previous COVID-19 addresses. However, in delivering the fifteenth address to Ghanaians after a successful compilation of the new electoral register by the Electoral Commission of Ghana, President Akufo-Addo recounted in his address that:

Fellow Ghanaians...and, there were those who claimed that, in the midst of a pandemic, the registration exercise should not be conducted, with some warning of an explosion in our case count and very high numbers of deaths, should the exercise go ahead...we have been through several phases of the fight against the pandemic, we have put in place restrictions to our everyday lives, indeed, of which some remain, and we have gradually moved to restoring normalcy in some aspects of our lives (Akufo-Addo, 2020).

A juxtaposition of the symbolic interpretation of President Akufo-Addo's *ahwedepo* print garment (Figure 12) with parts of his fifteenth address, both strategically correlate to communicate directly to the Ghanaian citizenry that the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic are gradually paving way for life to regain its rosy normalcy. For instance, the President uniquely presented an asymptomatic message in line with his choice of fabric which could be likened to the peeling of sugarcane which is easy to peel and/or chew from the start but difficult when peeling and/or chewing the node. In the fifteenth address, the President admits that Ghanaians have since gone through several phases of hardship in their collective fight against COVID-19 (Akufo-Addo, 2020) which could be related to sugarcane, regardless of its sweetness when chewed, it is problematic peeling/chewing the node, a reflection of the ups and downs of life. Both the President's print garment (Figure 12) and parts of his address, as revealed, content that life is faced with good times, hiccups, and uncertainties. It, therefore, behooves humankind, in this case, Ghanaians, to accept whatever conditions they find themselves in as the nation collectively fights against the COVID-19 pandemic, believing that there are good times ahead.



**Figure 13:** President Akufo-Addo in *Afe bi ye esan* Print Fabric for his 23<sup>rd</sup> COVID-19 Address  
(Photo Credit: Citi Newsroom, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8i5igB97SXg>).

In the Ghanaian Akan ethnicity, the GTP *Nustyle* brand with design number 5161 (Figure 13) adorned by President Akufo-Addo for the 23<sup>rd</sup> COVID-19 update on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021 was aptly described by all the research participants as, *Afe bi ye esan*, which means some years are characterised by bad luck, crisis, tragic events or inauspicious times. Howard et. al (2012) affirm that the *Afe bi ye asiane* fabric design means some years are generally inauspicious or characterised by bad luck. The 23<sup>rd</sup> address was not the first time the President wore

the *Afe bi ye esan* print fabric for his COVID-19 updates. It was previously worn for the 8<sup>th</sup> address which focused on the enhanced measures taken by the government to combat the Coronavirus pandemic due to the crisis it posed to Ghanaians at the time. The case that President Akufo-Addo chose to outdoor himself in *Afe bi ye esan* fabric (Figure 13) for his 23<sup>rd</sup> update meant that he was visually communicating the discomfort and misfortunes COVID-19 has subjected Ghanaians through, the first of its kind of a global pandemic experienced in Ghana, thereby, making 2020 a year of crisis. In this context, the President seeks to communicate through his *Afe bi ye esan* GTP print fabric that the year 2020 was a bad luck year due to the escalating records of COVID-19 infections and deaths as well as the stress it poses to health facilities in Ghana. This was correlated in the President's 23<sup>rd</sup> COVID-19 address to Ghanaians as it reported that the COVID-19 deaths and cases of infections in Ghana, as of the time, had skyrocketed with an average daily infection rate of seven hundred (700) people.

Fellow Ghanaian...as at Friday, 29th January, sixty-four (64) more people have, sadly, died, over the last two weeks, bringing the total number of confirmed deaths to four hundred and sixteen (416). Our hospitalisation rates are increasing, with the number of critically and severely ill persons now at one hundred and seventy-two (172). Our hospitals have become full, and we have had to reactivate our isolation centres...the total number of active cases has more than doubled, from a little over one thousand, nine hundred (1,900), two weeks ago, to five thousand, three hundred and fifty-eight (5,358) currently....In effect, fellow Ghanaians, we have a lot of work to do in coming to grips with the disease (Akufo-Addo, 2021).

The excerpts of the President's address, herein referred, correlatively reflect in his non-verbal communicative Ghanaian fabric print (*Afe bi ye esan*) both of which centered on the record of escalating cases of COVID-19 deaths and infections in Ghana seen as a misfortune that soiled the year 2020.

## **5. Conclusion and recommendation**

The President's choice of garment for public engagements (national and/or international), as the first Iconic Figure of the land, is a critical identity construction issue with an additional possibility of marketing the indigenous Ghanaian textile products for national and/or international patronage. This remains a pertinent concern to Ghanaian fashion devotees and scholars. It is in this perspective that the study examined selected authentic Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) adorned by Ghanaian President, Nana Addo-Dankwa Akufo-Addo, for his televised COVID-19 addresses to establish their correlations with the contents of the messages delivered to Ghanaians since the outbreak of the pandemic in Ghana. It was found that all the eight (8) random-purposively sampled authentic Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) adorned by the President for his COVID-19 addresses symbolically correlated with the contents of the addresses delivered to Ghanaians. President Akufo-Addo's choice of authentic Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) for his national COVID-19 addresses of global interest demonstrates his obsession with indigenous Ghanaian fabric culture and his commitment to the use of made-in-Ghana fabrics, a right step in decolonising the dress culture of Ghanaians. Also, the President's continuous use of Ghanaian authentic print fabrics for his COVID-19 addresses, communicates his Ghanaian nationalistic identity; promotes the beautiful and symbolically rich Ghanaian authentic print fabrics for the patronage of a larger national and/or international market. This stands to attract massive market for the Ghanaian print fabrics thereby positively impacting the economic gains of the Ghanaian textile industry. Therefore, it would be novel if further investigation is conducted on the possible economic impact of the President's public adornment of authentic Ghanaian print fabrics (garments) for public occasions (national & international) on the Ghanaian textile industry.

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