

Peer-reviewed article**Appraising understandings of a social justice-infused pedagogy: Adinkra symbols as probes****Khaya Mchunu**Department of Fashion and Textiles,
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Abstract

This article explores understandings of a social justice-infused pedagogy whilst inspiring new approaches to design. Drawing on the work of Giroux (2004), hooks (2003) and Leibowitz and Bozalek (2016), amongst others, this paper offers a case study of a student project in a Department of Fashion at a Durban-based University of Technology (UoT), in which students partnered with community stakeholders on a collaborative handbag design project. The project involved using traditional Ghanaian Adinkra symbols as probes to explore how students and their community partners understand the concept of social justice pedagogy. Group interviews, photographs and thematic content analysis are used to collect and analyse data on understandings of social justice pedagogy. Consequently, three themes are discussed about the groups' understanding of a socially infused pedagogy. Beyond their role in understanding this pedagogy, these historical symbols are noted by the groups as providing a new approach to their design process.

Introduction

Is it necessary to enact civic participation as part of the twenty-first-century fashion curricula? If so (and I am a proponent of such an educational approach), then how do fashion educators facilitate learning that is socially engaging and socially responsive? What type of learning experience is needed in order for fashion students to respond to the uncertainties and inequalities of the twenty-first century? These questions were prompted by those posed by Brenda Leibowitz and colleagues, who ask: "What kind of pedagogy supports this learning, and in turn, what [...] should curriculum designers traverse in order to be able to shape opportunities for learning in this unsafe world?" (Leibowitz,

Bozalek, Carolissen, Nicholls, Rohleder & Swartz 2010:123). These questions are particularly important in the South African context “which carries a legacy of extreme (and on-going) social inequality, and during a time of increasing local sobriety about the limitations in the ability of a post-apartheid government to put an end to the divisions and inequities of the past” (Leibowitz *et al.* 2010:123).

In response to these questions, I explored the use of Adinkra symbols as a tool to generate new design ideas whilst engaging students to explore the capabilities of fashion education to promote democratic social change. Adinkra symbols are visual symbols emanating from Ghana that represent concepts and aphorisms (truths) that have a diverse set of meanings, touching on themes such as democracy and communalism. The symbols are historically connected to the Akan people of Ghana, specifically the Asante who are a subgroup of the Akan. Currently, the Akan make up a large number of the West African ethnic groups living in southern Ghana and the Ivory Coast (Williams 2011).

This article explores how Ghanaian Adinkra symbols are capable of providing a sign system for working with, and understanding, a social justice-infused pedagogy by offering a case study of a project involving second-year students in the Fashion programme at a Durban-based University of Technology (UoT) in South Africa. The students formed groups of between four or five members. Each group was partnered with a seamstress from a local sewing collective, providing a link between university education and community. These groups were tasked with using Adinkra symbols as a design probe, and then they reflected on the textual meanings of the Adinkra symbols and how these symbols informed their understandings of a social justice-infused pedagogy. Design probes designate a design-led approach which invites people to reflect on and express their experiences, feelings and attitudes in forms and formats that provide inspiration for those who design (Gaver, Dunne & Pacenti 1999; Sanders & Stappers 2008; Thoring, Desmet & Badke-Schaub 2018)

To facilitate this deep reflection, I compiled a booklet of Adinkra symbols, comprising the shapes and patterns, their literal meaning and, in some cases, a proverb associated with the symbols. The symbols, shapes, patterns, meaning and proverbs used to compile the booklet were accessed from two secondary sources – a website, Documents and Designs, and a visual booklet compiled by Valentina A. Tetteh (n.d), affiliated with the St. Lawrence University who, according to her reference list, used information gained from other online sources and authors such as Arthur Kojo (cited by Tetteh n.d.). Students were then tasked with interpreting the shape texturally on panels of handbags that were sewn during the project. Secondly, and at a more complex level, a design constraint was set in which the groups’ choice of a symbol was required to align with their understanding of social justice-infused pedagogy. It is this second use of the symbols by the groups on which this article focuses, providing an appraisal of students’ understandings of this form of education.

Drawing on a social justice framework, the primary objective of this study was to explore how knowledge systems from the ‘global South’ (such as Adinkra symbols) can be used to operationalise socially engaged pedagogy. To illustrate this point, I share the symbols that the groups used for the project and their understandings of social justice-infused pedagogy which I analyse thematically based on photographs I took to document the collaborative process, and content analysis of Adinkra symbol usage on handbags, ideas written about the chosen symbols by some scholars and websites dedicated to Adinkra, and group interviews conducted at the conclusion of the project. This in-depth analysis of

the Ghanaian Adinkra symbols as a knowledge system suggests such tools might serve a wider and international community interested in introducing socially engaged projects to a student body. In order to achieve these aims, this paper explores the notion of a social justice-infused pedagogy, drawing heavily on the work of Henry Giroux and bell hooks. It goes on to outline the history of Adinkra symbols and their connection with concepts of social justice. The third section focuses on the fashion students' project and their sewing partners, in which Adinkra symbols were used as inspiration for the designed handbags but to also communicate understandings of a socially infused pedagogy. In conclusion, the paper offers insights into how this approach might inform education practices to promote civic participation in fashion education through a social justice pedagogy.

A social justice-infused pedagogy

"Pedagogy's role lies not only in changing how people think about themselves and their relationship to others and the world, but also in energizing students and others to engage in those struggles that further possibilities for living in a more just society" (Giroux 2004a:63). Thus, pedagogy needs to be infused with social justice in order to "expand the public good, create a culture of questioning, and promote democratic social change" (Giroux 2004a:76). Building on the work of Amin (2001), Giroux (2004b:31) emphasises the dynamic nature of democratic change, arguing that democratisation is an unfinished process.

Hooks (2003) sees communities playing an important role in the classroom to ensure it is a place that is "life-sustaining and mind expanding". Bringing communities into the classroom can ensure that it becomes a vibrant, critical site of learning and "pedagogical and political resistance" (Giroux 2004a:77). "Stepping out of the classroom and working with others to create public spaces" makes it possible "to 'shift the way people think about the moment'" and "'to energise them to do something differently' [by linking their] critical imagination with the possibility of activism in the public sphere" (Guinier & Smith in Giroux 2004a:77).

It is apparent that pedagogy and the classroom, as explained by Giroux and hooks, is well-matched with a pedagogy of hope as conceptualised by Freire (1992). A pedagogy of hope continues to foster critical consciousness and encourages problem-posing which leads to individuals participating in social, political and economic activities. A pedagogy of hope denounces all forms of abuses and awakens in others and ourselves the need and the taste for hope (Freire 1992; hooks 2003). Furthermore, hooks (2003) places the idea of hope within the context of teaching and learning, asserting that hope emerges from those places of struggle and, within those places, educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness.

In recent years, the discourse of teaching and learning from a social justice perspective has flourished further as a result of the work of Brenda Leibowitz and Vivienne Bozalek (2016). Using the tripartite notion of participatory parity as articulated by Nancy Fraser, Leibowitz and Bozalek (2016:110) attempt to articulate a critical, transformative and social justice-orientated pedagogy. In participatory parity, the economic, cultural and political "are seen as being both analytically separate and entangled or intertwined but not reducible to the other [...] Thus, all social arrangements which are conducive to all three dimensions would have to be in place for social justice to be possible" (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2016:113).

The three pillars of participatory parity, as espoused by Fraser, inform this project's approach to a social justice-infused pedagogy. The handbag design project began as a way to make aspects of the fashion course responsive to social issues that are apparent in its immediate geographic locale, and, by implication, to explore the capabilities of fashion education to promote democratic social change. In this case the social issue was unemployment and the potential it has to marginalise certain populations in society. The project attempts to expand the fashion course by examining the capability of its pedagogy to introduce both technical practice and enable a space for critical pedagogy to emerge.

As a fashion design educator, adopting this form of pedagogy means asking students to use the content shared and assimilated in the classroom, and adapt and apply it in a way that contributes to a more just society. This requires transforming the classroom to go beyond just creating things of beauty (of which the students can be proud) to embracing issues of social justice. I argue that this approach enriches the learning experience to include both the creation of design products and promoting more democratic societal change.

Tackling such a challenge is not new nor revolutionary. The benefits of these approaches have been explored in the work of bell hooks (2003:41), who claims that in this form of education "we share knowledge gleaned in classrooms beyond those settings". Poul Rohleder and colleagues explored ways "to prepare health and social service students for the world of practice in a context of diversity, continuing segregation and marked social inequalities" (Rohleder, Swart, Carolissen, Bozalek & Leibowitz 2008:255). In these settings, "educators need to generate professionals who are able to critically reflect on and respond to such a world, and to the sorts of widespread social challenges that prevail in South Africa (for example high rates of poverty and violence, and a legacy of conflict across racial groups)" (Rohleder *et al.* 2008:255).

Critical professionals also need to understand their community. Rohleder *et al.* (2008) achieved this through community mapping and using e-learning tools to engage students in a discussion about their understanding of 'community'. This approach broadened awareness among students from different backgrounds. Following these exercises, students understood 'community' as being more than just geographical space: it continued to be imprinted with a legacy of race relations that was prominent during apartheid (Rohleder *et al.* 2008:265).

The work of Rohleder *et al.* (2008) highlights the merits of preparing students for a complex world and, arguably, university projects of a socially engaged nature play a part in preparing students to work in these environments. This article contributes to this discourse that it is imperative to prepare students for a world that continues to present challenges and complex situations.

Socially engaged projects are known for their unpredictability and complexity (see Thackara 2005; Cipolla & Bartholo 2014; and Campbell 2017). Preparing my students to partake in such projects has always been an important task. When I first started this project in 2016, I used stories as tools to engage students in social justice issues. In 2017, I used Zulu proverbs (Mchunu 2017), which helped identify fashion students' understanding of this form of education. This foundational knowledge informed the use of Adinkra symbols as a probe to engage fashion students in social issues whilst expanding their technical design capabilities. These symbols have a long history in Africa and the

varied meaning they carry make them apt for an education that considers social justice an imperative. The following section provides a discussion of this African indigenous knowledge system.

A brief overview of Adinkra symbols

Adinkra symbols which began in the 1800s have a non-written history since they were used on funeral garb (Quaynor 2018:365; Williams 2011). Although the word Adinkra means a message one gives to another when departing, the symbols are also used by the living (Williams 2011:28). In contemporary times, they are often seen on doorways, in objects such as jewellery and clothing. Adinkra symbols appear in visual form and carry a proverbial message expressed in oral forms, such as aphorisms and proverbs that accompany them. Their application as effective tools for communication in Ghana have been discussed by George Ossom-Batsa and Felicity Apaah (2018) and in the context of education by Laura Quaynor (2018).

Ossom-Batsa and Apaah (2018), as the first of the two examples, adopt a historical, contextual and theological perspective to discuss the inscription and incorporation of Adinkra symbols in different Ghanaian Methodist and Roman Catholic churches. In the article, examples of the adoption of different symbols as logos or their incorporation into architectural designs and liturgical art is shown. Symbols such as *dweninmmeen* (the sign of the lamb), *Ohene Aniwa* (the King's eyes), *adwo* (symbol of peace), *Gye Nyame* (except God), *fihankra* (safety and security) and *mate masie* or *ntesie* (symbol of confidentiality) are among those used in these places of worship to mould a form of Ghanaian Christianity. One of the findings reveal that while the newer generation lack the proficiency in reading the symbols and their meaning as compared to the older generation, they do offer insights into indigenous theology (Ossom-Batsa & Apaah 2018:277).

Adinkra symbols have also been used in teaching and learning to prompt reflection on concepts of citizenship and democracy. Using certain Adinkra symbols, Quaynor (2018:367) demonstrates that "messages in symbols and sayings are helpful in highlighting the balance of ideas about citizenship and participation existing within the same society". Quaynor (2018:367) also suggests that "researchers focusing on citizenship and democracy [...] might consider using concepts of community and individuality from Adinkra symbols as a framework for their investigations". Though the relevance of context-specific frames is undeniable, the project reported in this article deviates from this approach. Rather, it relies on K. Zauditu-Selassie's (2011:302) research on the inscription of Adinkra symbols in African diasporic literature. Like Zauditu-Selassie (2011), I suggest in this article that when Adinkra symbols are reiterated or remixed across cultural boundaries, they have a universal appeal and application in engaging students in social justice issues, as demonstrated in the section below.

Ethics, data collection methods and sample population

Before the project could commence, ethical clearance was requested from the institutional research ethics committee. Permission was then requested from all the potential participants from the second-year fashion students as well as the community partners, the seamstresses from the sewing initiative. I was aware of the power dynamics between myself as fashion lecturer and the fashion students, and as a result they were all made aware of their right to withdraw at any time and that there would be

no adverse consequences should they do so. Those who chose to partake received information letters and signed consent forms.

In total, 37 fashion students and 10 seamstresses participated in the project. While the community engagement project was timetabled, participation for the fashion students was voluntarily and non-participation did not result in unfortunate consequences, since it was a non-credit-bearing project. Participation for the seamstresses was, however, mandatory. With 37 students it meant that four to five students were joined by one seamstress for the design collaboration. Therefore, 10 handbags were designed which meant that there were 10 instances of using Adinkra symbols to provide an account of what a social justice-infused pedagogy means. Notably, some groups used more than one Adinkra symbol on a handbag to send multiple messaging as the number of symbols used was not a limitation.

Because of the nature of this project, issues of authorship and misappropriation were addressed which means all participating individuals were made aware that aspects of the final products might be adapted and re-worked to generate sales for the community-based, self-supporting sewing initiative.

In an effort to avoid misreading and misunderstanding the messages embedded in Adinkra symbols, I visited the Ghanaian embassy in Pretoria, before the project began, to explore the possibility of inviting a cultural expert who might give a short talk about Adinkra symbols. I was given the contact details of an individual who worked for the embassy and an email was sent to this individual. However, to date there has been no response to the email.

As a mechanism to mitigate the difficulty of obtaining an individual to talk about Adinkra symbols, the group was shown YouTube videos to inform them about the history and meaning of some Adinkra symbols. To bring the symbols closer to design, they also watched additional videos about their application on textiles; this included preparing the dye, carving the wooden stamps and printing on the textiles. Additionally, the videos also showed the application of symbols in other design products, such as jewellery. These videos supplemented the booklet which I had compiled to support the design process and the groups were given the website addresses in instances where they needed to watch the videos again.

Introducing the videos and booklet was my attempt to activate idea generation as part of the creative design process: an activity in which designers generate and consider multiple potential solutions to a given problem (Shroyer, Lovins & Turns 2018). While this process is usually practised by the designers (Shroyer, Lovins & Turns 2018), the collaborative and grassroots nature of this project resulted in both fashion students and the seamstresses being major players in generating design ideas.

To ascertain what they had learned from using Adinkra symbols in the design project, all students and seamstresses took part in audio-recorded group interviews. I also took photographs during the design development stages and recorded observations in a personal journal. I observed significant moments of engagement and details of the design process. These observations were recorded immediately in my journal.

Outcomes of groups' understanding of social justice-infused pedagogy using Adinkra symbols

I analysed the symbols used on the handbags manufactured collaboratively between the students and their partners. The groups were also interviewed about their process and to determine what the groups wanted to express about social justice-infused pedagogy through Adinkra symbols. I used thematic content analysis to analyse this data, which entails multiple phases of reading raw data, looking at how data answers the research question, listing themes for analysis and finally explaining how themes tell a story about the data (Creswell 1994). The following three themes were identified in the analysis about how social justice-infused pedagogy is understood by the groups:

- A message of hope in social engagement
- Skilfulness and self-sufficiency as rewards
- Transparency, unity and patience in teamwork

A message of hope in social engagement

The Adinkra symbols *Gye Nyame* (Except God) (Ossom-Batsa & Apaah 2018:272; Williams 2011), *Onyakopan aniwa* (God's eye), *Onyakopon Adom Nti Biribiara Beye Yie* (By God's grace, all will be well) and *Nyame Nti* (By God's grace, I will not eat leaves to survive) (Tetteh n.d.) were some of the chosen ones used on the handbags. These symbols were expressed in different techniques like embroidery, beading and appliqué (See Figure 1). A common thread is that each symbol represents the concept of God. What can be deduced from this outcome is that, according to these groups, civic participation is understood as a practice linked to the concept of God.



Figure 1. *Gye Nyame*, an Adinkra symbolising the omnipotence and immortality of God expressed in creative forms through stencilling and embroidery. Photograph by the author.

On one level, this use of symbols by the groups appears to imply that civic participation is the duty of a citizen as a spiritual being. As one group explained: "we used the God's eye symbol, [because] it is sort of like God sees whatever that you do in your community like the good that you do for others and for other people as well ... so that's how our group decided." At this level, the use of Adinkra symbols seems to invoke a platform for the spiritual to exist in a higher education setting. This outcome raises the question about whether it is the responsibility of higher education to nourish other facets of students' beings, like their

spiritual selves. However, it would be reductionist to frame this outcome solely in terms of a God-centric and spirit-empowered discourse.

On another level, the use of these Adinkra symbols by the groups indicates civic participation as a practice that reinforces hope in society, and therefore can be linked to the pedagogy of hope discussed earlier. Since a pedagogy of hope “empowers us”, through education, “to continue our work for justice even as the forces of injustice may gain greater power for a time” (hooks 2003) – the chosen Adinkra symbols send the message of working towards achieving social justice.

The Adinkra symbol *Onyakopon Adom Nti Biribiara Beye Yie* was used by another group. The *Onyakopon Adom Nti Biribiara Beye Yie* is a heart-shaped symbol and was expressed by the group by creating a patchwork of multi-printed fabrics located in the middle of a bigger heart-shaped piece cut in order to contrast with strips of a different fabric running crosswise from the heart-shaped background fabric (Figure 2). This particular symbol has hope as one of the embedded symbolic messages, as well as two others, providence and faith (Documents and designs n.d.:12).

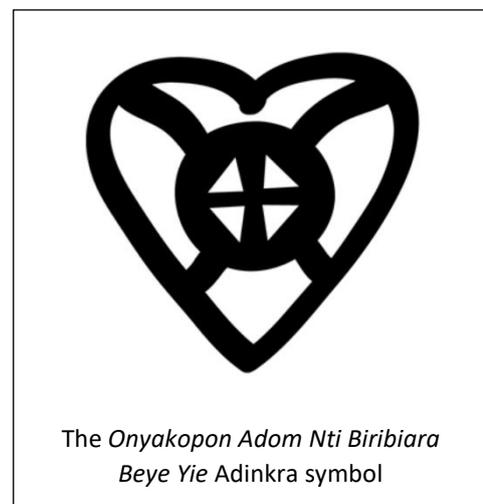
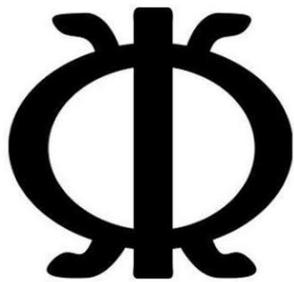


Figure 2. Group’s interpretation of the *Onyakopon Adom Nti Biribiara Beye Yie* symbol. Photograph by the author. Symbol graphic sourced from Documents and designs (n.d).

When probed to explain their choice of symbols, the group explained that it related to a story that their community partner had shared about a woman who had escaped an abusive relationship with her child. According to the seamstress’s account, the woman was left destitute and homeless so members of the sewing initiative intervened. They agreed to finish some factory rejects which they had received from donors, and the woman was given the task of selling these revamped rejects, in a jumble-sale style, to rebuild her confidence, while assisting her to generate a small income for herself and her child. After hearing this story, the group thought that it embodied principles of hope, and that civic participation through social engagement is about being responsive to a social problem such as the story of the woman. Additionally, when asked for her comment about this symbol, the seamstress stated that “Mine speaks to me, the one that we chose, it says with God’s grace all is well. With that I was thinking about this project [the sewing project]. I chose that with this project in mind and that everything is well because of God’s grace and it really does speak to me”.

Skilfulness and self-sufficiency as rewards

Skilfulness and self-sufficiency are identified here as some overarching themes drawn from the choice of symbols, as can be seen with the use of the *Wawa Aba* and *Abe Dua* symbols. The use of these symbols seems to suggest that the groups' perceptions about a social justice-infused project, such as their collaboration in this case from the fashion department, can lead to skilfulness and self-sufficiency as potential rewards for community and university partners (Figures 3 and 4).



The *Wawa aba* Adinkra symbol



The *Abe Dua* Adinkra symbol

The symbol graphics for the *Wawa aba* and *Abe Dua* Adinkras are sourced from Documents and Design (n.d).

Figures 3 and 4. *Wawa Aba* symbol as a cut-out with contrast fabric below and *Abe Dua* in embroidery stitches. Photographs by the author.

The *Wawa Aba* refers to the seed of the wawa tree whilst the *Abe Dua* refers to the palm tree. The wawa tree (*Triplochiton scleroxylon*) is found in the tropical areas of Western Africa and hosts the African silk moth whose cocoons are used to make silk. Each symbol refers to themes about skilfulness (*Wawa Aba*) as well as wealth, self-sufficiency and vitality (*Abe Dua*) (Tetteh n.d.; Documents and design n.d). Specifically, the reading of these symbols indicates that civic participation, according to the groups, has the potential to upskill and revitalise communities by harnessing opportunities for self-sufficiency.

Indeed, the idea of upskilling as expressed by the *Wawa Aba* is evident in the comments made by some community partners during an interview such as “I learnt how to stamp and cut it through a stencil [...] doing it manually was kind of cool because we had to cut the whole thing out and put the ink by hand, I enjoyed it. And we finished it off with embroidery, but I am used to embroidery that was easy for me, but I was curious about how we will put the real picture on the fabric with ink”. Another community partner shared during the same interview that she had also learnt new skills: “I enjoyed mine and I had to use different types of material and it came out nice and I learnt a lot”. She added that through the process she “learnt how to mix the beads and the sequins things I learnt something new from the group”.

Furthermore, some of the fashion students’ comments speak to ideas of revitalising communities represented by the *Abe Dua* and *Wawa Aba* symbols. For instance, one student commented that “as we did the sample, it was important that we have to reflect on where we came from, look back [...] it is important to go back and give back to our community”. Revitalising a community, in this student’s perception, is about looking back as one goes forward. Another student commented that “community engagement is helping someone transform their life in a way by helping them gain a skill or knowledge or sharing our experiences with them to better their lives and transform their situation for the better” which speaks directly to the *Wawa Aba* and *Abe Dua* symbolism of wealth, self-sufficiency and vitality.

Indeed, skilfulness and self-sufficiency as rewards for community partners manifested themselves, and moved from rhetoric to reality and action, when some seamstress partners who participated in



Figure 5. The handbag adapted by the seamstress in different fabrics. The three-panel shape has been straightened in her version contrary to the angled lines of the ones made during the project. Photo courtesy of the seamstress.

the project were interviewed a year after the project concluded. For example, one significant outcome of the project is the progress of a seamstress who joined the training after a local refugee centre recommended that she do so. After graduating from the training, the woman received a sewing machine and now works from home completing orders for private clients as a way to make extra income for herself. Another significant outcome is a seamstress who adapted the handbag design for commercial sale. She combined the panel design that she made during the project with new fabrics and sells these handbags in addition to other products in Durban and Johannesburg. This seamstress shared the images with the researcher on *WhatsApp* as shown in Figure 5.

Thinking about skilfulness and self-sufficiency as outcomes of civic participation through social engagement is not a particularly fresh perspective; I do, however, find the manner in which they were gleaned, through indigenous knowledges like Adinkra symbols, as a fresh approach for the participants. My claim is supported by comments

made by students and community partners from the sewing initiative: “for me, it’s just that you see such bags in the streets and never necessarily know and understand the meaning behind them. And I just always thought it was just shapes and just people just playing around. So, like to find like a meaning behind it was really awesome” and “What I found really great was just a simple single symbol can tell a sentence and that meant a lot to many of us.”

Transparency, unity and patience in teamwork

Some groups used Adinkra symbols to make commentary about the nature of partnership and collaboration required between community and university stakeholders. Adinkra symbols that encompass symbolic meanings of patience, calmness, interdependence and cooperation, unity and transparency were used, indicating that these ideas should be embedded in these partnerships according to the groups.

For example, after deliberation, a group chose the Adinkra symbol “*boa me na me boa wo*” which literally means ‘help me to help you’ (Zauditu-Selassie 2011:310; Tetteh n.d.:10). The symbol communicates themes of interdependence and cooperation. This group defied the convention and expressed the symbol through symbolic use of materials which eventually altered the sewing sequence of the handbag. The group further chose not to imprint the shape of the original symbol on fabric. Their interpretation included the use of camouflage fabric and clear PVC material (See Figure 6).

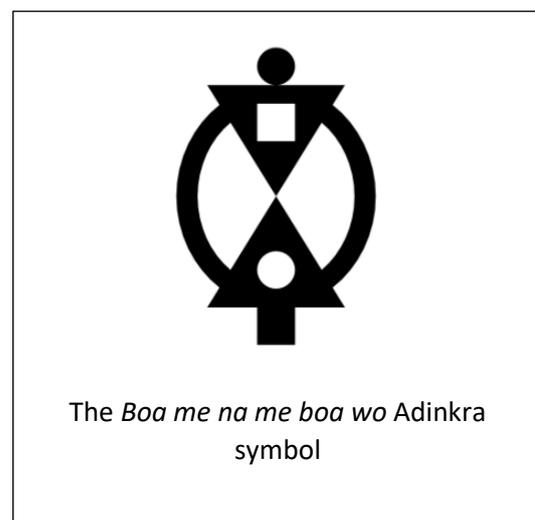


Figure 6: The handbag inspired by the *Boa me na me boa wo* symbol. Photograph by the author. Symbol graphic sourced from Documents and designs (n.d).

A group member explained their approach:

We had PVC for the outer when we discussed it, it was like when we are working together as a team we need to be honest about something so you need to see through a person. So, we thought of how we gonna [...] make it transparent and make a transparent bag and [...] we chose this camouflage because more of a team work, you know soldiers work together [...] if the soldier is not strong, [...] if they don’t have unity, which was our symbol [...] then the whole thing will collapse if it is a house with no pillar then the whole thing will collapse.

Unity was communicated by another group with the *Mmomudwan*, an Adinkra symbol that speaks about unity and togetherness. A group member commented that “our symbol was unity and upliftment, we chose the upliftment of the community and I guess it makes sense because at the end in the community there needs to be like that union in order to make sure that the whole community benefits”.

The theme, and material quality, of transparency was also explored by a group that used the *Fafanto/esono namtam*, a butterfly-like symbol that communicates a message of tenderness and gentleness (Tetteh n.d.:11) that was the centrepiece in the handbag (Figure 7). This is an instance of using more than one symbol to provide multiple messaging since the *Nyame nti* symbol was used on the side panels of the handbag. The *Fafanto/esono namta* symbol was interpreted texturally through the use of diamanté, sequins and glass beads which signified the body of the butterfly and some diamanté were used to hold down tulle fabric which was used to represent the wings of the butterfly. Material use in this case was also applied symbolically to some extent. A student group member, for example, explained that an aspect of their design was a statement about working in a team: “the idea of our wings was about transparency and showing your true feelings that you have on the inside not being something on the outside but something different on the inside.”

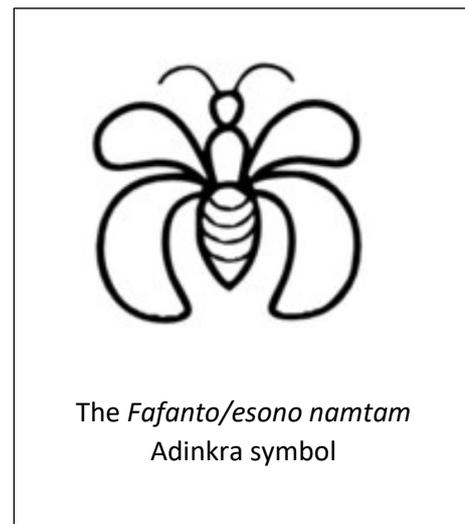


Figure 7: The handbag inspired by *Fafanto/esono namtam* and *Nyame nti* symbols. Photograph by the author. Symbol graphic sourced from Documents and designs (n.d).

The *Nya abotere* Adinkra symbol, which conveys the theme of patience (Documents and designs n.d.:10), was chosen by another group. It was expressed texturally by stitching a heart shape through random machine stitches. The centre piece comprised two blocks of fabric on a cross-like shape was embroidered (Figure 8). The use of this Adinkra symbol about patience is revealing in this case given that the community partner entered the collaboration weeks after groups had been formed. Her late entry into the project resulted in groups being reshuffled to form a new one with a new partner. The partner had less sewing time compared to those members who began when the project started so the process entailed a lot of patience and extra time working with her. While the group did not communicate the word patience verbally, their process and chosen symbol is indicative of this theme.



Figure 8: The handbag inspired by the *Nya abotere* symbol. Photograph by the author. Symbol graphic sourced from Documents and designs (n.d).

Besides using Adinkra symbols to provide their understanding of social justice-infused pedagogy, certain statements by group members in the interviews explained how the incorporation of Adinkra symbols introduced them to a different source of inspiration that could inform their design praxis. These statements included, “I also had no idea about this so it is a good learning experience. It is a new way in terms of thinking and designing”; “I think I would use this, how we did this, because I feel like they are conceptual. You take a conceptual approach and what the symbol means and represents. It was a very good approach like in terms of one day designing a range that’s based on symbols” and “I think it was a nice way of putting a modern twist to history and to bring it back to life in a modern way not just boring old like museum kind of looking back what used to be it is bringing it back in a new contemporary useful method”.

Conclusion

To sum up, the discussion in this article was theoretically undergirded by a social justice-infused pedagogy, which drew from concepts of a pedagogy of hope, pedagogy of democratisation and pedagogy as a critical practice. To complement these forms of education, a recent explication of participatory parity as it may apply to teaching and learning, was combined as part of relevant literature underpinning this study. Although this form of pedagogy has been written about locally and globally, the contribution that this article attempted to make was the incorporation of historical knowledges from Africa to this form of teaching and learning. The attempt to include African knowledge was explored previously through using Zulu proverbs in my teaching practice. Here, I introduced Adinkra symbols in the classroom, from a knowledge systems that has its origin in a different part of the African continent. The assumption that I made with their inclusion in this process of teaching and design is that Adinkra symbols can be used by fashion students both as design inspiration and for learning. Another rationale for their integration in this project was curiosity about the outcomes of these founts of African knowledge in teaching and learning as well as an exposition of their universality.

Teaching and learning in a social justice-infused pedagogy means stepping out of the classroom context and applying those lessons learnt in a public sphere (hooks 2003 and Giroux 2004a). However, this form of teaching and learning, I argue, is a newly emergent form in fashion education, prompting the question: how can understandings of a social justice-infused pedagogy be determined? This is the understanding of all stakeholders who participated in this project which includes myself as the lecturer and facilitator of the project, students from the UoT and the seamstresses from the sewing project. Three outcomes were yielded from posing this question.

Firstly, evidence showed that the use of Adinkra symbols *Gye Nyame*, *Nyame Nti* and *Onyakopan aniwa*, amongst others within the frame of social engagement, enabled the process to enact a message of hope for some participating members. Hope was situated in pedagogy and by so doing an attempt was made to show instances where education is used as a vehicle towards achieving social justice. Secondly, skilfulness and self-sufficiency as potential rewards of civic participation for community partners were communicated through Adinkra symbols that spoke to upskilling as well as revitalising communities. Two examples were provided that indicated how the expression of these themes manifested themselves in the lives of two community members who participated in the project. Thirdly, some outcomes suggested notions of transparency, unity and patience in teamwork. This notion was communicated through the selection of Adinkra symbols that held symbolic meanings of patience, interdependence, cooperation, unity and transparency.

Hooks (2003) propounds a pedagogy of hope, arguing that “hopefulness empowers us to continue our work for justice” even though injustice may prevail at times, and that “hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them”. This project demonstrated what may be achieved within a pedagogy of hope, and using Adinkra symbols to uncover this was a fresh and innovative approach in fashion education. On the one hand, Adinkra symbols were shown to be design probes through their interpretation in various textural forms such as stencilling, beading and sewing. As design probes, Adinkra symbols invited the groups to express subjectivities in different and rich forms. Some groups chose to depict the Adinkra design on the handbags while others attempted to capture the message of a symbol through the use of materials.

Adinkra symbols, as historical resources, were also shown to be relevant to contemporary practices of teaching and learning in the context of the global South, yet the themes they represent may also have universal relevance in social justice frameworks. Thus, this study builds on Quaynor’s (2018) research about finding value in the inclusion of Adinkra symbols as ways in which active citizenry may be understood in the context of education. An unexpected outcome of this study is seeing messages embedded within some symbols manifesting themselves in the lives of some community participants. It is for this reason that I encourage other educators interested in social justice-infused pedagogy to build on their knowledge of these Ghanaian resources, or similar knowledge systems from other parts of the continent and explore them in their teaching practices in order to build a better understanding of the role this symbolic system could play in educative and social justice efforts.

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