



## Imageries of Covid 19 Pandemic Experiences in Ankara Designs in West African Countries

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### Abstract

Designs on Ankara fabric and the use and styles to which the fabric is put in West Africa reflect socio-historical, politico-cultural, and other contemporary issues, including the occurrence of the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) which is a very new occurrence, and which has not been studied. This study, therefore, pioneeringly examined imagery of COVID-19 pandemic in Ankara textiles and clothing in West Africa with the aim of providing detailed accounts of the pandemic experiences and the peoples' corollary artistic responses. The study was based on material and non-material field data collected in 2021. Thematic, iconographic, and iconological analysis of samples of Ankara fabrics revealed that designs and colours on Ankara of around the COVID-19 lockdown period are thematically about the lockdown experiences and that the fabric was fashioned into face masks of various styles. Moreover, and beyond designs some Ankara products were chemically treated as antivirus by the producers.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Pandemic, Ankara fabric, Antivirus, Designs, SARS-CoV

### Introduction

The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus (SARS-CoV) that happened in 2003 was first identified at the end of February and ended in July, was reported to have affected about 29 countries with a mortality of 9.6% can be likened to the corona virus disease of 2019 because of its similarities. It is a transmissible respiratory illness with high contagion, and the way to control it is by wearing face mask, maintain good infection control measure like hand washing and keeping distances from crowded areas (Hui, 2013).

Kazancioglu, *et. al.* (2020) and Hasanul, *et. al.* (2020) observed that the SARS Virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was first identified in China and thereby termed the disease as coronavirus disease 2019. The virus was compared to influenza virus because it is a respiratory disease which is transmitted through contacts and droplets (Shereen, *et.al.* 2020). As a result of this, precautionary measures must be taken to prevent it from spreading to other persons.

Liu, *et.al.* (2020) also observed this that Corona virus disease 2019 (Covid-19) is a transmissible respiratory disease caused by a new strain of corona virus that causes ill health in humans was first reported in Wuhan, China in 2019, but it spread throughout the world. The disease spreads from person to person through infected air droplets from sneezing or coughing. It can also be transmitted when humans have contact with hands or surfaces that contains the virus and touch their eyes, nose or mouth with the contaminated hands (Rana, *et.al.* 2020, Omoronyia, *et. al.* (2020) and Hasanul, *et. al.* (2020). This infection can be avoided by observing individual cleanliness practices such as regular hand washing with soap and water or alcoholic based sanitizer (Paschal, *et.al.* 2020). Therefore,



to avert the spread from air droplets from affected person or not to be infected, face mask is encouraged to be worn by individuals.

On the other hand, there are several publications on Covid-19, and there are some publications also on African wax print. For example, Kalilu and Adeoti (2022) discussed about the light-weight texture of Ankara fabric. While Adeoti (2023) buttressed it that Ankara fabric is 100% cotton which comes with vibrant colours. Hui (2013), Liu, *et.al.* (2020), and Morens, *et.al.* (2020) discussed the emergence of the virus, Lone, *et. al.* (2020) studied the Covid-19 occurrence in African perspective, while Rana, *et.al.* (2020), Hasanul, *et.al.* (2020), Omoronyia, *et.al.* (2020) and Paschal, *et.al.* (2020) studied precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the disease. Matuscheck *et.al.* (2020), Lyu, *et.al.* (2020), Shereen *et.al.* (2020) and Uzuntarla *et.al.* (2020) studies include the use of face masks as part of preventive measures to prevent the spread of the disease.

Since the inception of corona virus pandemic in 2019, there had not been any known scholastic record of its imageries in Ankara wax print design. Though, there emerged design made on Ankara fabric that depicts corona virus, and also, some people use Ankara fabric as nose cover as preventive measure against the deadly virus, but there is no written record on the study of corona virus and Ankara fabric, which needs to be studied at this time the pandemic is fresh in the memory coupled with the fact that fabric is ephemeral in nature, it needs to be studied now so as to keep its chronology before the fabric erodes away. There is also interest in the study of how covid-19 pandemic affects textile fabric design and usage of cloth during the pandemic especially concerning Ankara African wax print. In the light of this, it is therefore expedient to do a critical study of the imageries of covid-19 on Ankara and its usages during the pandemic that is very much around the globe.

This paper studied the imageries associated with Covid-19 pandemic experiences on Ankara fabric designs and its usage styles in West African countries. It covers the imageries of Ankara designs produced purposely for the pandemic experiences as well as the accessories like face masks sewn and produced with Ankara fabrics due to its light weight texture as a preventive measure against the spread of the virus.

The study aims at giving a detailed account of the imageries associated with Covid-19 pandemic experiences and the usage of Ankara African wax prints during the period with a view of collating the images and styles for scholastic record as this pandemic is still fresh in the global world. There is need to document this record to ease the dearth of literatures on this aspect of historical occurrence. The objective of the study is to bring into limelight the images associated with Covid-19 experiences in West African countries, *viz-a-viz* part of the naming system of Ankara African wax prints by both the producers and the consumers or the users.

### **Methodology**

In this study, qualitative method was adopted to gather in-depth insight into information that will help to generate data for the research, through observations of what the researcher have seen, heard and encountered in the society. The area of study covers the West African countries being part of the countries affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The data were sourced through primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the observations and interviews with those people having the designs of Covid-19 pandemic experiences on their Ankara and those using Ankara as face masks in the year 2021, collecting the data by taking their photographs, while the secondary data was sourced through the collection of existing data in texts, images and audio recordings online, the researcher was able to find out the impact of Covid 19 pandemic experience in the designs and styles on Ankara fabric prints which will eventually be a thing to remember by the generation unborn especially in West African countries and the whole world in general.

Since the photographs were taken and the images of the Ghanaian Ankara were directly from the Textile Printing Company make the instrument used to be valid and reliable. In analyzing the data, thematic analysis was adopted by identifying and interpreting the patterns. There was visitation to some Ankara markets to see new designs especially the designs reflecting Covid-19 pandemic experiences and then the people using Ankara fabrics as face masks taking their photographs and interviewing them as per their experiences while using the home-made fabric. In the light of this, designs reflecting Covid-19 pandemic experiences were successfully gathered for documentation and the reasons for using Ankara home-made fabric as face masks were carefully recorded.

### Result and Discussion

Textile Printing Companies are producing Ankara fabrics indicating the symbol of coronavirus as motifs or designs related to the experiences during the lockdown. African prints are very popular in Ghana. It was duly encouraged by the government that workers wear the native fabrics on Fridays to work. During the total lockdown in almost all the nations of the world, the Ghana Textile Printing Marketing Director reiterated that stories are being told through the designs created in the company so as to leave a mark in the history of the world. With this, generations to come will surely know that such event had occurred sometimes in the land. The designs came out of the inspiration during Covid-19 pandemic experiences. Therefore, some of the designs created for new fabrics have symbols such as Padlock (Figure 1), padlock and keys (Figure 2) and airplanes (Figure 3). This is to reflect some of the measures implemented to prevent the spread of corona virus (Covid-19).

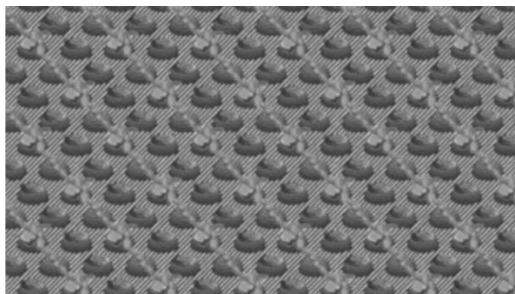


Figure 1: Ankara print with padlock design  
Source: BBC News (Africa) from Ghana Textile Printing

Ankara fabric in Figure 1 above is of padlock design. The motifs are padlock, chains and blue circular rooftops. The motifs are arranged in half drop method of creating design. The padlocks are in a row with chains holding one to the other, all, in yellow ochre colour indicating the lockdown imposed on all citizens to stay indoors. Each of the padlocks is standing on the blue rooftops forming a beautiful design. The blue rooftops are also arranged in half-drop method on a brown and white striped background.



Figure 2: Padlock and Keys  
Source: BBC News (Africa) from Ghana Textile Printing

Figure 2 above is the padlock and keys design. This is another design from Ghana Textile Printing. The motifs are two coloured strong ropes, padlocks at intervals and many floating

keys in one of the two coloured ropes. This is to indicate that there was lockdown at intervals and ease of lockdown at intervals. The background of this design is golden brown with ropes of both yellow and green locking to one another. The ropes cast shadow of grey colour as they twine to each other. The yellow rope is having tiny swimming keys in the middle of the rope, the red padlocks are also arranged in half-drop repeat method at intervals.

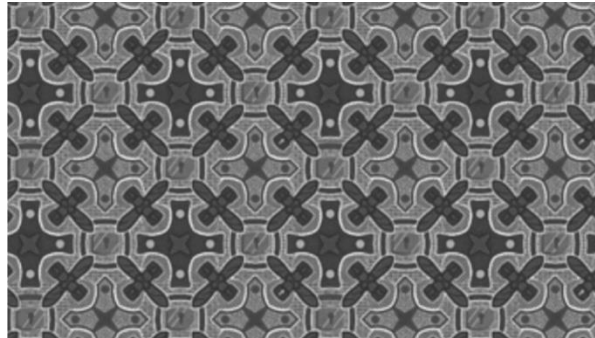


Figure 3: Airplane

Source: BBC News (Africa) from Ghana Textile Printing

Figure 3 design above shows the airplane motifs in anti-clockwise repeat pattern. This indicates that during the lockdown, Ghana closed all borders disallowing flight into or out of Ghana as a measure to prevent the spread of Covid 19 (BBC News, 2020) as it was in almost all the countries throughout the whole world. The background is golden brown with the airplane in royal blue with the touch of black colour which is arranged on a dotted light green. The spaces one inch between the airplanes formed another design painted in burnt sienna colour. This makes the whole fabric to have combinations of cool colours in royal blue, light green, burnt sienna and touch of black, all on a golden-brown background.

Hunt (2020) stated that the Covid-19 pandemic has made many people and textile printing companies come out with fabrics that incorporate the symbols of the current times. Below is an Ankara fabric with the symbol of coronavirus as its motif. The name of the company producing the fabric is the Rossberry Platinum. The fabric is in royal blue colour on a white background. The fabric now comes in various colours to attract the consumers in their choices. The coronavirus symbols are arranged in half-drop method of creating pattern. The fabric has been treated with antivirus chemicals and named 'World's Finest Antivirus African Fashion Fabric'. The fabric is said to have rendered the virus ineffective. The chemicals used for the antivirus treatment on the fabric were eco-friendly and skin-friendly, which are all boldly written on the label of the Ankara fabric (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Ankara fabric with coronavirus symbol and also treated with antivirus chemical  
Photograph by Kalilu, R.O.Rom (2021)

Fashion designers and tailors are also using fabrics of different types and textures especially Ankara fabrics as part of accessories used on everyday dresses. Many countries have adopted and made face masks to be worn as a matter of compulsion for an effective strategy to guide against SARS Covid-19. It is worldwide known that the infection is viral, and so therefore, the use of mouth, nose covering is an adequate protection when there is close contact, thereby limiting the liquid droplets dissemination from infected person. The masses are now advised to make use of masks that could cover both the nose and the mouth.

Therefore, face masks have now become part of everyday wears to the offices, social gatherings, religious places, and so on. Different types of materials in various shapes, forms and styles are being used and advertised to the extent that the business of producing and selling face masks became lucrative especially since year 2020 till date. (Matuschek *et.al.* 2020 and Lyu, *et.al.* (2020).

Matuschek *et.al.* (2020) highlighted four different shapes and styles of face masks, these are, Filtering Face Piece (FFP) which is a mask without valve. The second type is also called Filtering Face Piece but with valve inclusive. The third type is surgical or clinical mask known as Mouth, Nose Piece (MNP) and the fourth one is homemade face masks for everyday use. The homemade face masks are of various shapes and styles made of fabrics. It has at least a little risk reduction for transmission of droplets and can guide against the spread of the virus to some extent. Ankara fabric is one of the materials widely used for the production because the material is durable, reusable, and breathable.

Abiola (2020), Bethany (2020) and Alo (2020) are all on the opinion of using Ankara fabrics as a form of measure to cover face, nose and mouth for the prevention of Covid-19 pandemic. In Nigeria, the National Council for Arts and Culture suggested and distributed both the medical and conventional face masks made from local *Adire* and Ankara fabrics with NCAC logo prints on it. This is to showcase the home-grown solutions to demand for the equipment. Director General of NCAC then opined that it is an intervention that will ensure no one finds excuse to disobey Covid 19 code of behaviors (Figure 5).



Figure 5: A man wearing Ankara face mask.  
Photograph by Adeoti, A.A. (2020)

Covid 19 pandemic has provided Nigeria a great opening to look inwards for the making of relevant equipment and accessories that are made in Nigeria which will meet up with export standard and health set of rules. Nigerian fashion designers then looked inwards and thereby creatively discover certain advantage in our cultural endowment, then produced face masks according to the laid down rules and instructions of masks that will be fashioned with our conventional fabrics.

Though, the Disease Controlled Agency maintained that cloth face masks alone cannot guarantee absolute safety against the virus, it is supposed to be used as an added layer of physical distancing. They also maintained that frequent hand washing is mandatory to avoid having contact with the virus (Abiola, 2020)

Ankara fabric used for face masks is washable and lightweight (Adeoti 2023). It is meant to cover both the nose and the mouth. It has elastic bands on the two sides to be hung by the two ears. The interior is layered with breathable fabric to make it comfortable for the wearer. It is advisable to hand wash it frequently in warm water if it is going to be reused. While the masks are designed for durability and effectiveness in preventing users from touching their faces, it is also meant for fashion (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Another man using Ankara face mask.  
Photograph by Adeoti, A.A. (2020)

The Ankara-made face masks have highly elevated the cost of using disposable medical masks. Apart from its unique and beautiful feels, it is very durable, reusable and breathable. With the Covid 19 pandemic ravaging the world and subsequent introduction of protective measure to curb its spread which includes the face masks, the Nigerian fashion designers turned the spread of coronavirus to showcase fashion style.

In Liberia, the youths make masks from Ankara African prints for sales everywhere in the country for protection against corona virus. The Liberia Initiative for Empowerment encouraged the youths (Kuwonu, 2020) and a young lady named Humphretta Reid reiterated that:

*"...after seeing the various masks around the world, I was inspired and I decided to take it to our local culture by creating an African version of it,... we too can make use of what we have in order to put an end to this whole coronavirus".*

The International Trade Centre in Guinea in collaboration with the government also trained their youths to produce masks for those in need. Kuwonu (2020) further reported that roughly 85,000 cloth face masks are produced and given out as urgent protective measures against Covid 19. This is part of their safety measure to train up young tailors to proffer new products to curb coronavirus disease.

Ankara fabric is 100% cotton and so this gave the fabric the opportunity to be used as face masks. The texture is soft, durable, washable, and reusable for face masks better than the

imported medical facemasks that will be used only once. Ankara mask is so unique as to match with cloth making it fascinating to switch up wears. Nowadays, many people both men and women have taken up wearing 'to-match' face masks to look trendy when stepping out. This is another way of promoting cultural heritage. Ankara fabric has carved its way into the fashion world because its uses and styles are unlimited. As face masks to-match with the cloth, it is a very overwhelming approach and classic (www.360afric.com) Figures 7 and 8.



Figure 7: A woman wearing Face mask to-match with her dress.  
Photograph by Adeoti, A.A. (2020)



Figure 8: Another woman using Face to-match with her dress.  
Photograph by Adeoti, A.A. (2020)

### Conclusion

Ankara fabric raised social connotation and awareness. The fabric serves as a honor to modernization, the designers are creative and meeting the needs of the consumers when they share their thought and given them joy to celebrate life through their clothing. As much as many businesses were affected during the Coronavirus pandemic because of the lockdown all over the world, it has boosted the economy of Ankara fabrics through the styles and designs created out of it. Findings revealed that the lockdown experience during Covid-19 has created opportunities for producers, designers, and the consumers to think on what to remember after the occurrence of the pandemic.

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