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## MOURNING AND MEMORY: FACTORY-PRINTED TEXTILES AND THE BAULE OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

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The panel from which this paper stems united the theme of sacred or ceremonial textiles in Africa with that of the constitution of value. Here I address these issues as they relate to some uses of factory-printed textiles by the Baule of Côte d'Ivoire. The West African nation of Côte d'Ivoire, which is approximately the size of Arizona, lies at a crossroads of cultures, bringing together people of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Though not a numerical majority, those of Baule ethnicity are in many ways central within Côte d'Ivoire, tracing their heartland to the regional center of the country and dominating Ivoirian politics since independence in 1960. The wearing of factory prints at Baule funerals, and more broadly the association of particular motifs with Baule beliefs about death and mourning, is among the topics that is consistently identified as significant by Ivoirians of all ethnic origins in discussions concerning factory-printed textiles. However, before focussing on this topic it is important to first set the stage by briefly introducing the sorts of factory-printed textiles found in Côte d'Ivoire and the place they hold in contemporary Ivoirian society.<sup>1</sup>

There are two main types of factory-printed textiles in Côte d'Ivoire: factory-produced batik textiles, called 'wax,' and roller-printed textiles, called 'fancy.' Wax prints are made using a process that was developed by the Dutch in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In it a thin resin resist is rolled by machine in a repeating pattern onto cotton yardage. The yardage is then immersed in dye, coloring the areas free of resin. Subsequent colors are either applied in an overall pattern by roller or to specific areas by hand using felt-padded wood blocks. Blocking, which results in a characteristic overlapping and misalignment of color areas, increases the price of wax because it is both time and labor intensive.

Quicker and less costly to make than wax, the production of roller-print or fancy textiles for sale in West and Central Africa burgeoned in the

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<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive discussion of factory-printed textiles in Côte d'Ivoire see Bickford (1995).

<sup>2</sup> The wax technique was invented by the Belgium firm Prévinaire and Company which amalgamated into the Dutch N.V. Haarlemsche Katoen-Maatschappij in 1857 (Kroese 1976: 16-17). See also Bickford (1995) and Picton (1995).

second half of this century.<sup>3</sup> In the roller-print process a design is incised onto a series of brass rollers, one for each color to be used. The rollers are then attached to the printing machine in close succession. As fabric passes under the rollers, dye is applied on a single side in progression from the lightest to the darkest color. This technique results in less durable prints that fade more quickly than dye-saturated wax prints; however, because it does not use resin or blocking the technique allows for greater detail, more color variety, and the inclusion of photo silk-screen images. While fancy designs often imitate wax, the unique characteristics of the roller-print process have led to a blossoming of design possibilities that go far beyond the limitations of wax.

In Côte d'Ivoire factory-printed wax and fancy textiles are known mutually as "pagne," a French word literally meaning wrapper.<sup>4</sup> Worn in cities, towns, and villages by women and men of all ages and ethnic origins, pagne is intimately entwined in the daily lives of many people. Wax prints are relatively expensive—six yards can cost as much as one hundred dollars, a great deal more than the monthly income of most Ivoirians—hence, their purchase is considered an investment. In contrast, fancy prints are relatively affordable—costing only about eighteen dollars for six yards—and their purchase may lack many of the weighty considerations of quality and durability that can accompany the purchase of wax.

Despite these differences, in Côte d'Ivoire wax and fancy prints are both highly valued in ways that are unrelated to their market value. Like the Maori and Trobriand objects so succinctly discussed by Annette Weiner, pagne often has an inalienable and affective value for Ivoirians that is closely tied to its social or personal significance (1985, 1992). In such instances pagne is valued not for its resalability, but rather for its evocativeness, which is priceless. Igor Kopytoff contends that this kind of intangible value interacts with and influences the perceived worth of commodities like pagne and creates a complex relationship between the two (1986: 80). As Kopytoff demonstrates, things can move in and out of commodity status and can be viewed as commodities and non-commodities simultaneously; thus, even a single person might give multiple meanings to a thing, seeing it as valuable in diverse and perhaps conflicting ways (76). It is in just such a multifarious realm of meaning and value that pagne exists for Ivoirians.

The affective value of pagne in Côte d'Ivoire is rooted in the historic importance of textiles of many different kinds as symbols of wealth and a means of communication. Ivoirians invoke contemporary interpretations of this history to explain the importance of pagne today. Thus, while pagne manifests a modern sense of national identity, it is also perceived in distinct ways by Ivoirians of different ethnic origins and can signal the disparities

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<sup>3</sup>For more on the history of roller prints for export to Africa see Bickford (1995), Faque and Wollenweber (1991), and Picton (1995).

<sup>4</sup>Renne discusses some origins of the word (1995: 208, n7).

among them. This is very much the case where the use of pagne at Baule funerals is concerned.

The fact that much of the pagne worn at Baule funerals has affective value was brought home to me one day as I was walking with a young Baule woman. Pointing to a passerby wearing a blue and white fancy print my companion said "that was my grandfather's pagne."<sup>5</sup> When I asked her what she meant by this comment, she explained that she and other members of her family had worn the same pagne as a uniform to her grandfather's funeral. The wearing of uniforms made from pagne by people who want to express solidarity is widespread in Côte d'Ivoire. However, I was struck by the highly personal tone of this woman's remark, which implied a sense of ownership of the pagne used for the uniform that seemed out of sync with its commodity standing. It was apparent that for her and others in her family this widely available and mass-produced textile was irrevocably tied to the memory of her grandfather.

This incident and others like it led me to take a closer look at pagne and Baule funerals. For the Baule an elaborate public funeral is an essential closing to a long life well-lived. Large amounts of time and money are invested in organizing and conducting the funeral of a Baule adult, and especially that of a Baule elder. Tremendous expense and effort are expended to create an event that will send the deceased into the otherworld with great fanfare. Funerals are also an opportunity for Baule people to demonstrate their own worth, whether in terms of success, influence, wealth, or respect for tradition. Describing funerals in his classic study of life among the Baule, Vincent Guerry states:

"family and close friends bring their most valuable belongings, their finest robes, gold-topped canes and fly-chasers, gold jewels and head-bands, etc. They are exhibited near the corpse to honor the deceased while, at the same time, displaying personal wealth" (1970: 62).

Guerry also points out that:

"funerals are the reimbursement of a debt. If the deceased was not generous at past funerals then he or she will receive little at his or her own funeral. Thus, people think of their own mortality at a funeral and try to lay the ground work for their own sumptuous burials..." (1970: 70).

Hence, Baule funerals become a forum for staging opulent individual and collective displays of wealth and well-being that are rewarding to all parties. The deceased and his or her family are honored by being shown to be deserving of such an outpouring, the sponsors are given the opportunity to show respect for the deceased as well as to demonstrate personal merit and increase social standing through their generosity, and those attending

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<sup>5</sup>Fieldnotes, 1991-92.

find rewards in contributing to, witnessing, and being a part of the occasion.

Valuable textiles are used in several ways at funerals to create an atmosphere of abundance and wealth. In preparation for burial the deceased's body is wrapped in woven cloth once belonging to the deceased or given by relatives for this purpose. Woven cloth may also be used to drape over the coffin or the speaker's podium and cover the walls of the room where the deceased is laid out.

Likewise, the special textiles worn at funerals add richness to the scene. Such clothing may also communicate personal messages about the wearer's sense of identity and connection to the event. Pagne uniforms are an important means of delivering these messages. Uniforms made from a specially selected blue or red pagne are worn to signify the nature of the relationships that existed between guests and the deceased.<sup>6</sup> A blue print is selected to be worn by those directly related to the deceased, such as a spouse, sibling, or child. Slightly more distant relatives, such as an aunt, uncle, or cousin, might wear the same print or they might have a blue uniform of their own. A red print is often selected to be worn by the deceased's more tangential relatives, such as distant cousins, as well as by friends. At very extravagant funerals uniforms might differentiate the deceased's relatives by generation, with the children wearing one uniform and the spouse and siblings another. Also, if the funeral is held over several days the uniforms might vary from day to day.

Uniforms help funeral guests identify those who were related to or close to the deceased; however, careful attention must be paid to which print represents each group. Others attending a funeral may also wear blue or red pagnes, as these colors are considered appropriate funeral attire in general. Indeed, many of the prints worn to funerals may have been purchased as uniforms for previous funerals, giving them added significance. The commitment of money and time required to select, coordinate, and tailor uniforms also contributes to their meaningfulness. Hence, participating in a uniform is a way to publicly demonstrate esteem for the deceased and his or her family, as well as generosity and a sense of social obligation. When a person is seen in uniform others are reminded not only of his or her connection to the deceased but also of the sacrifice of money and time that he or she has made. The paying of such a tribute is not limited to those who attend a funeral. When I asked a friend about her new outfit, which was made from a red print, she explained that she chose the pagne because it had been selected as the uniform for the funeral of a parent of one of the local teachers.<sup>7</sup> While my friend was unable to attend the funeral, which was some distance away, she purchased and wore the cloth in a show of support and respect for the school teacher.

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<sup>6</sup>Red and blue in this context refers to the predominant color in the print. "Red" cloth can range in hue from orange or brown to deep burgundy. "Blue" cloth includes a range of dark and light blues and blue-violets.

<sup>7</sup>Fieldnotes, 1991-92.

In December 1991 I attended the funeral of a Baule village chief, an important elder who had exercised influence locally and regionally. The man died in late August and his body was kept at the morgue during the five months it took for the planning of the funeral to be completed. Early in his adult life the deceased had served as a regional Secretary General for the Baule dominated Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), which was for many years the country's unique political party. Because of his PDCI affiliation the deceased's funeral was paid for by the state. These connections and his high standing regionally resulted in a funeral that was well beyond the means of most Baule, a fact attested to by the many regional dignitaries who attended, including representatives from the PDCI, the sub-prefecture, and numerous villages.

The clothing, including several uniforms, worn at this funeral interested me for the many different stories it told. Those in the deceased's immediate family wore clothes tailored from a specially selected blue-violet fancy print. These family members also sat together during the service, their proximity to each other further emphasizing the solidarity implied by their matching dress. More distant relatives and close friends of the deceased wore outfits made from a blue and white fancy print, also specially selected for the funeral.

Various other blue and white fancy prints were worn at the funeral, as were a variety of red prints. While not selected specifically for this funeral, the multiple number of guests wearing some of these pagnes had the effect, like uniforms, of drawing people together through visual repetition. Prominent among such improvised uniforms was a blue and white fancy print that had been worn as a uniform for the recent funeral of a former mayor of the region's main town. A green fancy print produced for the PDCI during the presidential election of December 1990 was also worn by several guests. Because the deceased had been an active and faithful member of the PDCI, those wearing the print declared their affiliation with and support of the party while simultaneously demonstrating an ideological link between themselves and the dead man.

Like pagne uniforms, other types of clothing that served to group and differentiate people were also worn to the funeral, reinforcing the valuable communicative role textiles can play in such an arena. Commemorative t-shirts featuring a photo silk-screened portrait of the deceased were made for the funeral and purchased to be worn by men and women alike.<sup>8</sup> Many of the male chiefs and dignitaries from neighboring villages attended wearing large wrappers. In Côte d'Ivoire men are rarely seen wearing wrappers outside of their home or village. When worn at a special event, such dress is associated with the conservatism of the village. In the context of this funeral, wrappers identified important men within the regional village hierarchy. While, unlike other uniforms, these wrappers did not match, their distinctive voluminousness drew the men together into a cohesive group.

In contrast, the men and women who came to the funeral as representatives of the Ivoirian government wore contemporary urban

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<sup>8</sup>These were printed in blue on white t-shirts.

fashions such as suits and ties for men and stylishly tailored outfits for women. Such dress distinguished these people, whose official roles are associated with the urban milieu, from the villagers.

Pagne selected as a funeral uniform is purchased in conjunction with a specific event; however, the outfits usually continue to be worn long after the funeral is over. As I have discussed, uniforms made for one funeral are often worn to other funerals, where they may inspire memories of the person in whose honor they were made and the event where they were worn. Funeral uniforms are worn at other times as well, and it is in such instances that the affective value of pagne associated with a particular funeral is perhaps most evocative. In 1992 I attended a performance in a Baule town where a large funeral had recently been staged for the town's deceased chief. Though this performance was unrelated to celebrations held in the chief's honor, I saw several women wearing commemorative fancy prints that were produced as uniforms for the funeral. Dancing side-by-side the women demonstrated their continued respect for the deceased chief and once again honored him and the things he represented through a repetitive display of the print. Their dress also displayed solidarity and a sense of group identity that may have extended beyond an obvious association with the deceased chief to include their relationships to each other, to the town, and so on. Similarly when Côte d'Ivoire's long-time president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who was Baule, died in 1993, numerous textiles were printed in his honor. During a recent trip to Côte d'Ivoire I still found these textiles available in the market and worn on a daily basis, once again helping to keep him and all that he represented alive in people's memories.

The use of pagne at Baule funerals has led to the production and sale of pagne with this market in mind. Blue and red textiles with the potential for serving as funeral uniforms are printed in quantity by both wax and roller-print factories. Many of these prints feature popular designs that have no direct association with death, funerals, or mourning, and derive any significance related to them from context and personal association. Thus, when worn in other situations, for instance as the uniform of a church choir, they can have very different meanings. However, pagne that features funereal motifs is also produced. One such print, known as "Death Knows no Hour," is produced in both blue and red and includes a sickle, an hourglass, and a clock in its imagery. Another pagne, with a decidedly Christian slant, shows three crosses standing on a hill and flanked by slogans such as "Death is hard," "Death knows no pity," and the rhetorical question "What have I done?" Prints such as these, which illustrate popular sentiments about death, have broad resonance and are not considered to be uniquely for use at funerals. Indeed, one elderly Baule man I met in 1992 wore the cloth called "Death has Finished the Family" on a regular basis. Feeling little connection to the much younger, distant relations with which he lived, this man believed himself to be the last surviving member of his family. For him the pagne "Death has Finished the Family" seemed to be an apt representation of his own situation.

Like all objects, pagne has the potential to be valued in diverse ways. In Côte d'Ivoire the importance of pagne at Baule funerals and during

mourning can stem both from its market value, for instance when the wearing of pagne is perceived as a demonstration of esteem or generosity through financial sacrifice, as well as its affective value, for instance when pagne worn at a funeral continues to have emotional associations and to inspire memories. As Igor Kopytoff points out, the division between market and affective value is not easily defined (1986). Baule funeral and mourning practices allow us to see how the value of mass-produced textiles may be constituted in complex ways.

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