



A Costume Christology of Ghana's Most Beautiful Reality Show

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Abstract

Pageantry is an integral part of Ghana's traditional culture. Beauty pageants feature prominently in many traditional festivities. With the emergence of the digital and print media, beauty pageants have acquired an international recognition and relevance. Such contests not only entertain people but also educate audience about the culture of the contestants. Admittedly, certain aspects of these contests—for example, dressing to expose one's private parts—contradict Christian ethics and need to be condemned. However, the art forms used in the competition are embedded with rich theological ideas which can be developed and promoted to serve as a missionary tool for reaching the participants and their audience. The purpose of this paper is to offer a Christological reflection on selected costumes used in the Ghana's Most Beautiful reality show. This paper gathered data on the subject matter both by participant observation and by literature research using secondary sources such as books, articles, and dissertations. The paper contributes to the development of the emerging field of costume theology for the African context.

Keywords: *Adinkra; Batakarikesee Christology; Costume; Gye Nyame*

Introduction

Every human society has a unique culture and tradition. While culture may simply refer to the way of life of a group of people, *The Cultural policy of Ghana* (2004, 2-3) defines it as “the totality of the way of life evolved by our people through experience and reflection in the attempt to fashion a harmonious co-existence with our environment. This culture is dynamic and gives order and meaning to the social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious practices of our people. Our culture also gives us our distinct identity as a people.” The definition quoted above underscores that culture relates to the real

and meaningful existence of people. One of the key aspects of Ghana's cultural heritage is the appreciation of beauty.

History has it that traditional Ghanaian festivals involved the dramatization of certain aspects of the society's culture and traditions by beautiful maidens. Such activities were meant to promote beauty, entertain and educate people about the moral values and cultural practices of the society. The maiden adjudged the most beautiful was usually the most knowledgeable contestant, implying that the concept of "beauty" was not merely physiological but also intellectual. Today, many annual festivals in Ghana include beauty pageant in the festivities. In addition, traditional puberty rites such as *bragorɔ* among the Akan and *dipo* among the Krobos are means of demonstrating and promoting physical and intellectual beauty.

With globalization and advancement in technology in the twentieth and twenty first centuries, Ghana has experienced remarkable cultural transformation. One of such cultural changes is the transformation of the local beauty pageant at festive occasions into a national, international and global activity. At the national level beauty contests involve people from different regions of the nation displaying the diversity of cultural expression and traditional practices. The cultural display at these events projects the Ghanaian culture and boosts the local economy.

At both the national and international levels, the Ghana's Most Beautiful (GMB) reality show—a reality show produced by a privately-owned Ghanaian television channel, TV3—is one of the best-known beauty contests. The contest exhibits traditional Ghanaian culture from diverse perspectives in spite of the undeniable influences of foreign cultures, established through many years of colonization. Contemporary beauty pageants like TV3's GMB are informed, to a large extent, by Ghanaian traditional beauty pageants. The GMB reality show has been one of the main means of promoting and preserving the Ghanaian culture. It complements efforts by various stakeholders to salvage, preserve and pass on Ghanaian culture across generations.

Culturally, different attires are used for different occasions. The dress code for a funeral celebration is different from the dress code for a marriage ceremony. Similarly, the attire for farm work is different from that used for an office work. Costumes constitute a very important aspect of every beauty pageant event, more so the GMB reality show. Since one's dress relates directly to one's culture, the reality show requires contestants to display their cultural heritage through dressing and other means. The contestants display their costumes according to their culture and use their cultural traditions to educate the audience.

Beauty contests have come under serious criticisms by Christians because of some unethical practices associated with it. For example, it has been condemned on the basis of promoting external beauty at the expense of internal beauty. True beauty is also internal, not only external. Also, it has been alleged that beauty contests involve immorally sexual activities between contestants and their managers, sponsors or the judges. More so, the provocative dresses worn by contestants seduces male audience and make them have lustful thoughts. By provoking people to experience lustful feelings, the contestants not only cause their audience to commit adultery in their hearts (Matt. 5:27-28) but also sin by becoming the "objects" that makes one to stumble. In Luke 17:1, Jesus asserts that "Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come." On the ethics of dressing a key principle is: One must dress to cover all private parts and to avoid provoking others to lust after him/her. While the ethics of beauty pageants is worth investigating, it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the ethical implications of reality shows. The purpose of this paper is to consider how selected costumes used in these competitions (particularly the GMB show) may be interpreted from a Christological perspective to present the gospel to both the contestants and the audience.

The subject of costume theology is a very important subject in theological discourses. Yet, theology's voice has been conspicuously absent in conversations about costumes. Over the years, theologians have neglected the contributions that costume theology can make to the contextualization of Christianity in Africa. Many African theologians seem to focus on the traditional areas of theology such as Theology proper, Christology, soteriology, pneumatology, ecclesiology and eschatology, among others. The authors believe that the time has come for African Christian theology to develop visual and symbolic theology in relation to costumes used at various social gatherings. This research was, therefore, conducted to offer a Christological reflection on selected costumes used during the GMB reality show in order to provide a model for African Christian costume theology.

In the next section, the paper examines some costumes used in this reality show.

Selected Costumes used in TV3's GMB

Costumes have political, socio-economic and aesthetics as well as theological significance. The term "costume" refers to the distinctive style of dress of an individual or group that is characteristic of class, gender, profession, ethnicity, nationality, activity or epoch. Simply put, costume is a cultural visual of the people. The expression "costume theology" refers to the study of what people's way of dressing or people's attire reveal about God. In other words, it is the theological discipline that deals with the dynamic relationship between theology and costumes. "Costume Christology" has to do with the ways in which Christ is revealed in the attires and how such revelation may impact people's life. As the paper will show most of the (traditional) costumes used during the GMB show are theologically pregnant.

Traditional arts reflect the social, political, cultural, religious and philosophical values of a community. Ghanaian art uses several motifs, each associated with particular meanings derived from proverbs, historical events, human attitudes, animal behaviors, plant life and objects. Ghanaian concept of "art" differs from that of Western cultures with emphasis on its importance to society (Salm and Falola, 2002). Major constituents of arts include the visual arts such as painting, drawing, architecture, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics, photography, video, filmmaking, design, crafts and architecture and performing arts such as music dance and theatre/cinema.

The GMB reality show employs both visual and performing arts. Visual arts are arts appreciated by sight to evoke an emotion through an expression of skills and imaginations (Jewel, 2002). The contestants in the GMB show educate the public about the arts and culture in their respective regions through the display of traditional dresses, jewelries, values, customs and traditions, music and dance. Generally, a person's way of dressing conveys non-verbal message about that person's culture and identity.

The reality show makes use of traditional textiles (clothing). According to Salm and Falola (2002), textiles are an important artistic expression of cultures because, in their various forms, they utilize the entire range of symbolic images and can be seen in all aspects of the life of a people. Traditional clothing also constitute a key aspect of Ghanaian art forms used outside the country. Clothing in the Ghanaian culture stands out at different places wherever one finds him/herself. Ghanaians (especially the Akan) belief in nature being full of symbols with hidden meanings (Asimeng-Boahene & Baffoe, 2014). It is also believed that sacred symbols serve to remind people of their invisible past and as well, inspire them (the people) when they (the symbols) are rendered beautifully in our traditional clothing.

With the above background, the paper proceeds to consider the *kente* and *adinkra* cloths used by the Akan, the *kente* used by the Ewes and the *fugu* (smock; Twi: *Batakari*) used by most ethnic groups in northern Ghana from a Ghanaian socio-cultural and political perspective.

Kente and Adinkra

The Akan people have two kinds of cloths—the *kente* which is usually associated with happy mood and the *adinkra* which is mostly associated with mourning (Sarpong, 1974; Mensah-Brown, 2014). The Ewes also produce *kente*, though theirs are not as brightly colored and are not woven with more geometric patterns and figural motifs as those of the Akan (Salm & Falola, 2002). Again, the Ewe *kente* has such images as birds, drums or human figure in them, unlike the Akan *kente* which does not have these designs Akan (Salm & Falola, 2002).

At first certain *kente* designs were associated with royalty, but in contemporary times it is used by the general public. The *adwinasa* design—literally “all craft ideas are exhausted”—for example, was worn only by kings of high status. The designer of this cloth is said to have combined all the then known to weaving motifs in weaving it and at the end remarked that “all craft ideas are exhausted.” The *adwinasa* cloth is, therefore, considered as top quality, and the most prestigious of *kente* cloths. It symbolizes royalty, elegance, creative ingenuity, excellence, wealth, perfection and superior craftsmanship. The *adwinasa* design is shown in Fig. 1 and a contestant is the GMB contest, clad in another *kente* design is also shown in Fig. 2 below.



Fig. 1. Adwinasa kente



Fig. 2 GMB contestant adorned in the Akan kente (Source: Courtesy of TV3, 2016)

The *adinkra* patterns are stamped but the *kente* figures are woven (Sarpong, 1974). *Adinkra* symbols are creative and innovative ways of expressing the worldview of the people associated with it. One of the *Adinkra* symbols usually used in the beauty contest is the *Gye Nyame* (except God) symbol which signifies the supremacy of God over all beings. It is usually found in the *kente* cloth worn by contestants; it may also be used for stage decoration. *Gye Nyame* derives from the Bono-Twi aphorism “*Abɔdeɛ santann yi firi tete; bi nte ase a onim n’ahyɛaseɛ, na bi ntena ase nkosi n’awieɛɛ, Gye (sɛ) Nyame*” (“This great panorama of creation dates back to time immemorial; no one lives who saw its beginning and no one will live to see its end, except God). This symbol (shown in Fig. 3 below) highlights God’s omnipotence, omniscience and superiority.



Fig. 3. *Gye Nyame* symbol

Another *adinkra* symbol commonly used in costumes used at traditional celebrations is the *Sankɔfa* symbol. *Sankɔfa* (lit. “Go back and get it”) is the short form of the Bono-Twi proverb, “*Sɛ wo were firi ne wosane kɔfa a benkyiri*” (“It is not taboo to go back and get/take something after you have forgotten it”). *Sankɔfa* suggests that established Ghanaian conventions and traditions of dealing with socio-economic challenges which have been ignored by the present generation should be revisited to enhance the nation’s efforts at fixing its problems. The *Sankɔfa* symbol not only teaches the wisdom in learning from the past to help improve the future of humanity but also teaches people to cherish and value their cultural heritage and avoid its negative adulteration. The *Sankɔfa* symbol is shown in Fig. 4 below.



Fig. 4 *Sankɔfa* symbol

Color is also taken into consideration as a rich symbolism in the GMB contest. These colors represent several things among the various ethnic groups. For example, in most Ghanaian communities (including the Akan, Ewe and Ga ethnic groups), gold or yellow represents royalty, prosperity, maturity, prime of life and also signifies the presence of God; white symbolizes virginity, virtue, purity, joy and victory and green represents newness, fertility, vitality and primness of growth (Sarpong, 1974). The Fante and Ga also use the green color during puberty rites. Black generally symbolizes death, deep feelings of sorrow, the devil, while blue is associated with love and female tenderness (Sarpong, 1974). Thus, the color of a costume communicates the mood the contestant wants to portray and the emotions she wants to evoke.

Aside the *kente* and *adinkra* cloths, the GMB also makes use of the *fugu/batakari*, which is popular among the people of the northern part of the country. The following section examines the *fugu/batakari* from a socio-cultural and political perspective.

Fugu/batakari

Even though the *fugu/batakari* is used nationwide, it is used predominantly by the Gonja, Dagomba, Talensi and Mamprusi. Bolgatanga, Daboya, Tamale, Gushegu, Kpatinga, Yendi, Bawku, and Navrongo people (Acquaah, Amissah & Yankson, 2017). It is composed from narrow strips in the same fashion as *kente*, either plain or with warp-stripping. The *batakari* is fashioned after the Dagombas' "dondon" drum, having two ends that are wider and a trimmer midsection, which when sewn together creates a lovely garment. In Dagbon culture, it is customary to wear a headpiece or hat when wearing a smock or pantaloon to facilitate communication (Acquaah, Amissah & Yankson, 2017). The headgear or hats (referred to as "zugprigu") are used for non-verbal communication (Acquaah, Amissah & Yankson, 2017). No one is allowed to wear a smock without a hat, except when grieving; if they do, it is thought to be improper dressing.

Batakari is sewed with or without sleeves and the lower part is able to form a full circle. Ceremonially, these are worn with trousers, a cap and leather boots. According to Condra (2013), the existence of *batakari* dates from the 17th century and was bought at the Benin coast. *Batakari* is found throughout West Africa, most especially in the Sahel zone (Condra, 2013). Hats also have a long tradition as component parts of northern dress forms. A red fez, turban, or Islamic cap and decorated leather boots form part of ceremonial outfits. A black cap made with twined bast fibers was the most important hat in the northeastern Ghana until 20th century and around this time a variety of basketry hats and cloth caps became widespread as part of daily dress (Condra, 2013). A sleeveless *batakari* is shown in Fig. 5 and a GMB contestant wearing *batakari* is shown in Fig. 6 below.



Fig. 5. Smock/fugu/batakari



Fig. 6. GMB contestant dressed in a smock (Source: Courtesy of TV3, 2016)

Apart from *kente*, *adinkra* and smocks, textile fabrics or cloth are printed for other important occasions and everyday activities based on their level of quality. They are printed by the Ghana Textiles Print (GTP), Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL), Ghana National Textile Printers (GNTP) and others. Private organizations also deal in another type of cloth in Ghana called Tie and Dye and wooden printers have also introduced wooden or Printex (*maaso mehye bi*, lit. “Me too I will wear some”) (Mensa-Brown, 2014). These cloths are used in sewing *kaba* and slit and a heard gear for women across the country. Usually six yards are used to make the *kaba* (blouse), slit (skirt) and a cover cloth including head gear. They come in different styles, accompanied with various accessories depending on the occasion and in accordance with preference of the wearer. In Ghana a cloth is used to wrap a child on the back as well by their mothers.



Fig. 7. GMB contestant dressed in a printed fabric (Source: Courtesy of TV3, 2016)

Christological Reflections

Traditionally, Ghanaians commonly use the design of their cloths to express their worldview and (traditional) theology. Thus, symbols in Ghanaian cloths are not only for aesthetic appreciation but also for expressing visual theology (that is, theology expressed in visual form). Having examined some costumes used in the GMB show, the paper now proceeds to explore some Christological themes embedded in the designs of these costumes.

1. The Unlimited Wisdom of Christ

Earlier, the point was made that the designer of the *adwinasa* cloth used all available ideas for craft and concluded that all ideas are exhausted. This fact points to human finitude; human beings can exhaust their ideas. Normally two or more people would have to come together to have the possible best of results. The Bono-Twi maxims, *Nyansa nni baakofoɔ tim* (“wisdom is not the exclusive possession of one person”) or *ti korɔ nkɔ agyina* (“one head does not go into council”) underlines the Akan belief that no individual can have unlimited wisdom. This is the reason why a chief will normally tell his people “We are going to consult the old woman” before giving a final judgment for a case in his court. While no human being is a repository of all knowledge, God has all knowledge at his disposal and so he is referred to as *Nyansaboakwa Nyame* (“God of all wisdom”).

Jesus Christ, being God is also referred to as *Nyansaboakwa*. Kuma (2011) attributes *Nyansaboakwa* to Jesus because of the wise way in which he dealt with death. She says Jesus “blockades the road of death with wisdom and power” (Kuma, 2011, 20). Death is the inevitable end of every human

being. It is one of the tools that the devil uses to put fear in Christians. Akan oral tradition has it that Komfo Anokye, one of the celebrated traditional priests in Ghana, failed to obtain the antidote to death despite his great wisdom. Komfo Anokye travelled to the spiritual realm to find a medicine that could deal with death; unfortunately, he was captured by death and never returned. Laryea (2000, 88) notes, “[i]f all the heroes in Akan mythology have wrestled with death and have failed, we have in Jesus one who confronted death and came back alive. The Akan then can appreciate the superiority of Jesus over this powerful priest and all other traditional priests.” Having resurrected, Jesus proves himself as the “Wisest of soothsayers, the resurrected body, who raised himself from three days in the grave” (Kuma, 2011, 33). Given the foregoing discussion, the concept of *adwinasa* only applies to human but not to Jesus Christ. Human wisdom is exhaustible but the wisdom of Christ is inexhaustible. Jesus’ *Nyansaboakwa-ness* elevates him above the attribute of *adwinasa*.

2. The Gye-Nyameness of Christ

As noted earlier, the costumes used by the contestants in the GMB includes *adinkra* symbols two of which were presented and examined. The *Gye Nyame* symbol is an epitome of divine attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, eternal nature, and others. It underscores that no one has power like God and so people should not fear anything except for God. Since God is sovereign and supreme, he is feared and revered by all. According to Quarcoo (1968, 57) the *Gye Nyame* symbol “has a lot more to say than is usually assigned to it. It is the greatest single ‘little sign’ which epitomizes the attributes of the God of all creation. He is eternal, hence the spirit of man is eternal. Although, He died, He lives and the Atonement makes man alive. As long as God exists man lives, and it is He alone who has final jurisdiction over the spiritual self of man.” Quarcoo’s assertion draws from the Akan belief in *Nyame* who is both the Creator and Redeemer of the world. From the Christian perspective, *Nyame* has revealed himself in Jesus Christ through whom he reconciled the world unto himself on the basis of the atoning sacrifice on the cross. God’s *Gye-Nyameness* is highlighted in the Tetragrammaton YHWH. The symbol is also reminiscent of the text of Sirach 1:8: “There is but one who is wise, greatly to be feared, seated upon his throne: the Lord” (NRSV) (Ossom-Batsa & Apaah, 2018). Again, the *Gye-Nyameness* of Christ is highlighted in Revelation 1:8: “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (NRSV). Christ, being the beginning and the end, is the one who knows what was, is and is to come.

In the African worldview, there is belief in spirits, lower divinities and other entities which affect the lives of the living. The African always looks for a stronger power to associate with in order to overcome attacks that may come from malevolent forces. In this context, the African can find refuge in Christ who alone possess all powers. Africans also believe that whatever happens in the physical world has spiritual antecedent. There are there fond of consulting people to find the spiritual cause and solution to their existential issues. The people who offer consultation seek assistance from the supernatural world. The omniscience of Christ (evident in his *Nyansaboakwa-ness*), underlined by the *Gye Nyame* symbols, assures the African believer that Christ is the source of all true knowledge and so he is the only one who can know the true cause and solution to one’s challenges. The African Christian, by looking at the *Gye Nyame* symbol, is encouraged to maintain good relationship with Christ and trust him for solutions to life’s problems.

The *Gye Nyame* symbol therefore underlines the providence of Christ. In Africa, poverty manifests itself in many ways including lack of access to health facilities, malnutrition, poor roads, lack of portable water, and other. The Christian gospel is expected to address these existential issues. The symbol carries the theology that only God can provide for the needs of humanity (Quarcoo, 1968). This thought agrees with Jesus’s teaching about God’s providential care in Matthew 6:26, 31-33.

The *Gye-Nyameness* of God/Christ calls for an uncompromising monotheism that is the belief that there is only one true God, who alone deserves worship. God does not share his glory with any deity and so African Christians must therefore desist from affiliating themselves to gods. Christ is God and so had glory with the Father long before creation (John 17:5). No deity is worthy to be worshipped except God who is superior to all powers. Therefore, in African societies where people acknowledge and worship other gods than Yahweh, the *Gye Nyame* symbol is a reminder to stop.

Therefore, the contestant who uses costumes with the *Gye Nyame* symbol in it is not just displaying a cultural piece but is telling the audience that Christ is the supreme judge of the contest and so, if she is ordained to win, she will definitely win because no human being can reverse Christ's decision. That is, the final outcome of the contest is with God, (and not human). At the same time, it reminds the audience that they can achieve all their plan provided Christ is with them. Christ, having superior powers, will see everyone through this journey of life once the person continues to be under his canopy of protection and guidance (Quarcoo, 1968). The fact that Christ is the ultimate judge should encourage the judges to desist from corruptive decisions. They must be fair and firm. Similarly, the contestants must not influence the decision of the panel of judges through unchristian acts. The judgment process must be a replica of God's fair and firm judgment.

3. Batakarikɛɛ Christology

All the costumes outlined above are associated with royalty. The *kente* is a royal cloth. As noted earlier, in the olden days there were certain *kente* designs that "ordinary" people were not allowed to wear. The discussions above reveal that the *adwinasa* cloth alludes to the kingship. It epitomizes wisdom because it was designed by the combination of all available wisdom about weaving. It is a high quality cloth that is reserved for the king and a privileged few. Among the people of northern Ghana, kings often wear the *batakari*. People coming before the king remove the footwear, remove their hat and then bow in reverence to the king.

The royalty associated with the *batakari* was evident in the enskinment of His Royal Majesty Yaa-Naa Abubakari Mahama II in 2019. The occasion was characterized by the display of culture, especially in terms of different kinds of *batakari* worn by different people. The Dagbon overlord and his sub-chiefs were clad in high quality *batakari* that speaks volumes about their status in the society. The Yaa-Naa, in addition to the royal *batakari*, also wore a royal headgear. Fig. 8 below shows the Yaa-Naa and President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo.

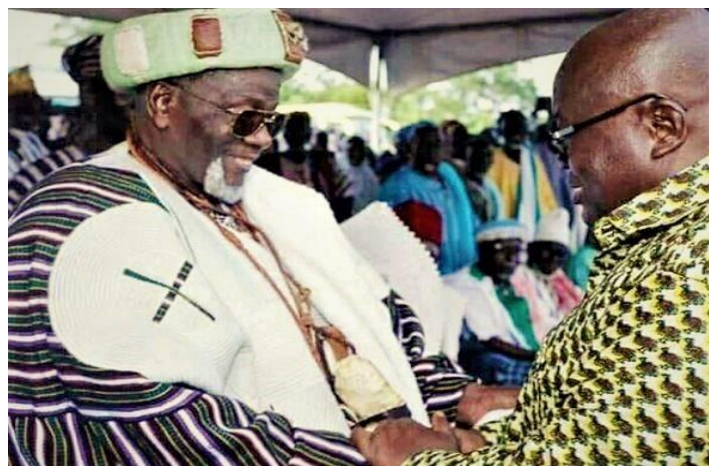


Fig. 8. The Yaa-Naa and President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo

The *batakari* is also a military costume, even among the people of southern Ghana where *kente* dominates at social gatherings. The war/religious *batakari*, referred to as the *gbagno*, is believed to be “bulletproof.” To shield the wearer, the *gbagno* has been spiritually strengthened and charmed (Acquaah, Amissah & Yankson, 2017). It may contain talismans and Arabic writing on it, and occasionally amulets are sewed onto it (Acquaah, Amissah & Yankson, 2017). It is not a fashionable outfit; it is primarily worn for protection during occasions like funerals and wars. It is often intended for a specific wearer, and even a son or grandson who inherits one should be made aware of its dos and don'ts because failing to comply with them could put one's life in danger (Acquaah, Amissah & Yankson, 2017). Before the new owner is permitted to wear it, the person must conduct specific rites. Fig. 9 shows a war/religious *batakari*.



Fig. 9: War/religious *batakari* (Source: Acquaah, Amissah & Yankson, 2017, 72)

In the Ghanaian political landscape, Mr. Johnson Asiedu Nketiah (the immediate past General Secretary and the current Chairman of the National Democratic Congress [NDC]) is noted for his consistent use of *batakari* at political functions. The military connotation associated with his constant wearing of *batakari* has brought him under serious criticisms. His wearing of the *batakari* is interpreted as having spiritual fortification. Again, some people see him as not being a peace-loving person whenever he wears his characteristic *batakari*.

In an interview with Wa-based WFM (in September 2016), Asiedu Nketiah disclosed that the dress signifies the political authority that he has as the Chief Executive Officer of his party and an assurance to his party's foot soldiers that he is in control of the work that has been assigned him. He said the *batakari* also showed the party's readiness for the political battle that was ahead of them in December 2016 (Modernghana.com, 2016). Drawing on the African traditional political context, Asiedu Nketiah asserted, “If you are a paramount chief there are certain dresses you will wear on certain occasions, either at festivals or pouring libation. It demonstrates to [the] community [that] you are a full control and every chief has one to boost the confidence of his subjects” (Modernghana.com, 2016). In his assertion, Asiedu Nketiah uses a military imagery to describe the parliamentary and presidential elections of his country (Ghana). He further stated that his *batakari* does not signify violence, indicating that political contests are not about physical battles but about the battle of the mind through the display of ideas (Modernghana.com, 2016).

The metaphorization of elections as a battle should, however, not be interpreted literally as physical war. Paul used a similar device when he said that Christians do not “wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12 NIV). Just as one is not expected to read Paul literally, so is one not to give a literal interpretation to Asiedu Nketiah's military imagery in the context of political activities. However, the Ghanaian perception that *batakarikeseɛ* makes one powerful is also evident in the following response by Asiedu Nketiah: “The NDC is in full control and ready to battle in

the 2016. I need to dress like the General who commands the foot soldiers. Those who claim I have spiritual powers because I wear the smock have created their own problem. I will not go out on radio defending that I do not have spiritual powers. If they see me as powerful, then so be it” (Modernghana.com, 2016). Here, the experienced politician does not admit that he has spiritual fortification; yet, it is evident that people see him as fortified whenever he wears this special dress.

Interestingly, during the contest for the national chairmanship of the NDC in December 2022, Asiedu Nketiah wore his characteristic/symbolic *batakari*. His customized *batakari* is a black one with party colors, which also contains emblems. He was seen in picture symbolically indicating the cutting off of his opponents’ head (as shown in Fig. 10 below). In an interview with Joy News, after his victory as the national chairman of the NDC has stated: “I wear this type of costume occasionally, when the occasion demands. It is our traditional war battle dress, so when you are going into battle, you wear it and you know I’m referred to as the General of NDC for a good reason because people think that whenever there is crisis, I am the one who is called upon to take the lead. Traditionally this is the regalia of a war general and so on occasions like this is the dress.” (Adomonline.com, (2022). In this interview, Asiedu Nketiah adds a reconciliatory significance to his *batakari* outfit. He indicates that he is the “General” of the NDC and one who is called upon whenever there is crisis (disunity). He, therefore, wears the *batakari* to symbolize his readiness for political battle and to unite estranged parties in his party.



Fig. 10. Mr. Johnson Asiedu Nketia in his symbolic *batakari* costume

From the forgoing discourse, *Batakarikese* Christology—the Christology of the war *batakari*—may be defined as the reflection on Christ’s kingship, military nature, mediatory nature and priesthood. The royal connotation of the *batakari* connects well with the kingship of Christ, “the King of kings”, the king par excellence. The Akan refer to Christ as “the *ahene mu Hene*.” Therefore, earthly kingship foreshadows the kingship of Christ. The superiority of Jesus’s kingship is taught in Revelation 19:16, which reads, “On his robe and his thigh he has this name written: ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’” (NIV). The phrase “King of kings” appears 6 times in the Bible. In Ezra 7:12, Ezekiel 26:7 and Daniel 2:37, this expression is used either in reference to Artaxerxes or Nebuchadnezzar in reference to their absolute sovereignty over their respective realms, which is Persia and Babylon respectively. It is used to describe God the Father in 1 Timothy 6:15 and it is used twice in reference to the Lord Jesus in Revelation 14:17 and 19:16. A similar phrase is “Lord of lords”, which is used by itself in Scripture twice and refers to God the Father in Deuteronomy 10:17 and Psalms 136:3. The phrase “King of kings” portrays Christ as the Yaa-Naa par excellence, the head of all the heads and the one to who none can be compared. The phrase draws on the hierarchical nature African kingship where a number of rulers rule under an overlord.

Jesus's First Advent was characterized by weakness and lowliness. The King of kings was born in a manger and his parents had to seek refuge in Egypt to prevent Herod from killing him (Matt. 2:13ff). On the cross, he appeared like a weak person who could not do anything to save himself. His Second Advent will be quite different. He will come in power, glory and splendor as stated in Mark 13:26: "At that time people will see the son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory, he will come and sit in his judgement seat and judge everyone who has lived on the earth" (NIV). Therefore, the totality of Jesus' Kingship will only be realized in the *Parousia*.

The reconciliatory significance of the *Batakarikese* (as indicated by Asiedu Nketiah) finds expression in the priesthood of Christ. Because of his spotless character, his dual existence as God and human, and the celestial tabernacle in which his priestly sacrifice takes place, Christ's priesthood is distinct from the ancient priesthood. Even more so, Christ's priesthood differs in both scope and method from that of African traditional priests. On the cross, Christ reconciled God with humanity through his atoning sacrifice (Col. 1:20). God's will and his pardoning of the sins of everyone who believe in Christ lead to reconciliation. Christ continues to serve as a high priest forever (interceding on behalf of humanity; see Rom. 8:34). Therefore, if Asiedu Nketiah is the General who reconciles estranged members of the NDC, Christ is the "General Extraordinaire" who reconciles God with humanity.

Batakarikese Christology finds its expression in Kuma's (2011:6) reference to Jesus as wearing a *batakari* studded with the sun and the moon that "sparkle like the morning star." As seen in the Fig. 10, the *batakari* used for religious and military purposes are usually studded with talismans as a means of fortifying the wearer against spells, incantations, bullets, arrows and other weapons. Jesus, being a warrior-king, wears *batakarikese* (great *batakari*) not studded with talismans but with the sun and the moon. Studded with the sun and the moon, Jesus's *batakari* provides the greatest and most effective protection for his people. Given this fact, believers can be assured that with Jesus around them no enemy (physical or spiritual) can come near them. With Jesus, the "Sergeant- Major of the Soldiers" and the "Victorious Chief of soldiers" (Kuma, 2011, 17) on every side of the believer, no power will attempt to come near. The Great Warrior leads his people into battle wearing his *batakarikese* and ensuring that there are no casualties. As the wearer of *batakarikese*, Jesus is *Okatakyie* (the Brave one or the Hero), a war hero "who make a clean sweep of their enemies and return from battle victorious. It is only a brave person and man of valor who fights and covers his back while facing the enemy or does not turn his back to the enemy in battle" (Laryea, 2000, 80). Anyone who is in Christ, therefore, has complete security against evil forces.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how cultural costumes used in the GMB contest can be interpreted from a Christological perspective. The key areas considered are the unlimited wisdom of Christ, the *Gye-Nyameness* of Christ and *Batakarikese* Christology. By reflecting Christologically on costumes used in the GMB show, this paper has provided means by which the activities in the show can be used as means of reaching people with the gospel. The issue of the position of Christ as the ultimate judge was highlighted; this is a reminder of the final judgment that will happen when Christ returns. It was also stressed that it is unethical to influence anyone or to be influenced by anyone in the decision making process during the contest. Implied in the paper is the fact that Christian outfit must cover all private parts and not cause others to have lustful feelings for the wearer of the outfit. It is hoped that the African scholars will build on the foundations laid by this paper to develop costume theology to facilitate Christian discipleship in the African context.

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