

VISUAL AND RITUAL COMMUNICATION IN ASANTE FUNERARY TRADITIONS: CHROMATIC COSMOLOGIES, EMOTION, HISTORY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the chromatic expressions that animated the royal funerals of two successive Asantehemaas: Nana Afia Kobi Serwaa Ampem II (2017) and Nana Konadu Yiadom III (2025). Drawing on extended ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation, the study analyzes how colour operates as a semiotic system encoding grief, hierarchy, and cultural identity within

Asante cosmology. The research reveals that dominantly black and red fabrics—kuntunkuni (dark brown/black), birisi (blue-black), and kobene (red)—functioned not merely as decorative elements but as active components of what we term 'chromatic cosmologies.' structured yet flexible grammar systems through which Asanteman articulates mourning, authority, and cultural sovereignty. Through systematic comparison of the two funerals, this study demonstrates both continuity in chromatic codes and their adaptive capacity for global mediation. The analysis contributes to African semiotics by positioning colour as constitutive rather than supplementary to ritual meaning, while advancing theoretical frameworks that integrate Peircean semiotics with Mudimbe's insights on African epistemic systems.

Keywords: *Asante, chromatic cosmologies, funerary traditions, colour symbolism, semiotics, cultural identity, Ghana, ritual performance*

INTRODUCTION

The Asante people of Ghana maintain one of Africa's most sophisticated cultural systems, characterised by intricate political structures, sacred kingship, and elaborate ritual performances. Central to this system stands the Asantehemaa, whose authority encompasses political counsel and spiritual guardianship over lineage continuity (Stoeltje, 2003). The funerals of Asantehemaas therefore constitute not merely occasions of mourning but elaborate performances where Asante cosmology, identity, and political theology are articulated before local and global audiences (Cudjoe, 2023; Goshadze, 2019). As it is argued that,

Oral accounts of Asante claim the Adanse Kingdom west of Lake Bosomtwe was the centre of dispersion of Asante. An old settlement called Asantemanso is remembered as the main point of migration in the lake Bosomtwe area. From Asantemanso, the Asante relocated in kinships and family groups to new settlements, including Bekwai, Kwaman, Tafo, Kaase, Amakom, Mampɔn, Nsuta, and Edweso. For some time, the new settlements remained disunited and weak; some of them were subjects of Adanse Kingdom and later the Denkyira Kingdom, the latter whose centre of authority was around the town of Dunkwa closer to present day Obuase in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The various Asante settlements began to unite into a political force during the 17th Century under the leadership of the Oyoko clan (Boakye, 2020; p. 12).

The Asante Kingdom (or Ashanti Kingdom) was in what is now modern-day Ghana, specifically in the central and western regions of the country (Abaka& Kwarteng, 2021; Boakye, 2020). The kingdom's territory covered the forest zones of southern Ghana, which were rich in natural resources such as gold, ivory, and timber. Its strategic location also made it an important center of trade and a powerful military force in the region (Owusu-Ansah, 2023; Dorm-Adzobu, 1982). The capital of the Asante Kingdom was Kumasi, which remains one of Ghana's major cities today. The origins of the Asante Kingdom trace back to the late 17th century, around 1670, when the kingdom was founded by King Osei Tutu (Ba, 2025; Nyarko, 2024). Osei Tutu, the first Asantehene (king), united various Akan-speaking clans under his leadership, forming a single, cohesive kingdom. This union was driven by a combination of military conquest, diplomacy, and religious unity. Central to the kingdom's formation was the Golden Stool (Sika Dwa Kofi), a sacred artifact that symbolised the unity of the Asante people and the divine right of the Asantehene to rule (Hale, 2013). The stool was believed to be a gift from the heavens and became a powerful symbol of the monarchy's authority and legitimacy.

Before the Asante Kingdom's formation, the region was inhabited by several smaller Akan groups, including the Kumasi, Abuakwa, and Sefwi clans. These clans were often in conflict with one another, but Osei Tutu, with the help of his priest Ankobia, was able to bring these groups together (Anomah& Mensah, 2020; Osei, 2020). The unification of these clans was not only political but also spiritual, as the kingdom adopted the religious practices that centered around the Golden Stool and the belief in the divine nature of Asantehene's rule. The Asante Kingdom's geographical location, combined with its rich resources and military prowess, made it a formidable power in West Africa (Nyarko, 2025). The kingdom thrived from its wealth in gold, which it traded with Europeans and other African states, and it maintained its sovereignty through strategic military engagements and alliances until it eventually became part of the British Gold Coast colony in the early 20th century.

This study examines the chromatic dimensions of two such funerals: the 2017 rites for Nana Afia Kobi Serwaa Ampem II and the 2025 rites for her successor, Nana Konadu Yiadom III. Drawing on Charles Sanders Peirce's (1931-1958) triadic semiotics and Mudimbe's (1988) analysis of African epistemic systems, we argue that colour in Asante funerary traditions operates as what is termed in this study as “chromatic cosmologies” structured semiotic systems that encode emotion, communicate authority, and perform cultural identity. The concept of chromatic cosmologies advances beyond conventional approaches that treat colour as

decorative or supplementary to ritual meaning. Instead, following Jakobson's (1960) framework of communicative functions, the study demonstrates that colour operates simultaneously across multiple semiotic registers: expressive (encoding emotion), conative (directing social roles), referential (signifying cosmological categories), and poetic (creating aesthetic coherence). This multifunctional operation positions colour as constitutive of Asante ritual meaning rather than merely illustrative of it.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the conceptualisation of the study, the following research questions were posed along the needs of the research topic.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY ARE TO:

1. Examine how selected colour palettes employed in Asante funerary attire and regalia encode cultural values, cosmological beliefs, and emotional expressions.
2. Analyse the ways in which chromatic choices in funerary textiles, drumming attire, and ceremonial objects shape and mediate communal emotional experiences during Asante death rites.
3. Investigate how colour functions as a semiotic resource in the construction and reinforcement of Asante cultural identity within the context of funerary rites.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do specific colour palettes used in Asante funerary attire and regalia encode cultural values, cosmological beliefs, and emotional expressions?
2. In what ways do chromatic choices in funerary textiles, drumming attire, and ceremonial objects shape communal emotional experiences during Asante death rites?
3. How does colour function as a semiotic resource in constructing and reinforcing Asante cultural identity within the context of funerary rites?

Investigate how colour functions as a semiotic resource in the construction and reinforcement of Asante cultural identity within the context of funerary rites

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To give focus and the direction of the study, the theoretical framework of the study is guided by the Jakobsonian functions, together with visual semiotics, and Peircean semiotics and African Cosmologies along the lines of ritual communication and how

that can be used to interpret historical foundations and the express use of cultural identity in Asante culture.

2.1 Visual Semiotics, and Peircean Semiotics and African Cosmologies

According to Nöth and Jungk (2015), to fully comprehend the usage and application of visual and abstract cultural elements, they have to be deconstructed, and decoded within their own histo-cultural contexts since signs, cultural artefacts do not in themselves and at all the time offer explanations about what they represent (Radford, 1998; Tilley, 1994). As it is argued, “icons need indices to become informative and that collateral acquaintance with the object cannot be furnished by the sign itself. The object can only be indicated by the sign, but the sign presupposes the reader's acquaintance with the object, be it a picture or a verbal narrative” (Nöth & Jungk, 2015; p. 660)

Since Asante culture has a universal appeal, which influences and shapes other cultures, there is need to offer not only the philosophical foundations of it, but the historical explanations that shapes how elements of its culture are communicated. As it is argued

To make sense to its readers. Collateral acquaintance with the objects of the signs is prerequisite in both media, the verbal and the pictorial one. Neither the painting nor the verbal narrative can furnish acquaintance with the object of the signs, says Peirce: 'No sign can be understood' – or at least no proposition can be understood unless the interpreter has 'collateral acquaintance' with every object of it (p. 660).

Since no sign or cultural representation can be understood on its face value without insights, analysis and views from the cultural connoisseurs of those who profess that culture, it becomes important to examine the needs of our research cognisant of how we would create meaning and advance knowledge within the established frameworks

Charles Sanders Peirce's (1931-1958) triadic model of semiotics provides essential tools for analysing colour as a sign system. Peirce's categories icon (resemblance), index (causal connection), and symbol (conventional association) illuminate how colour operates across different semiotic modalities in Asante funerary contexts (Mpofu, et al 2025; Donkor, et al., 2024). Red, for instance, functions iconically through its visual resemblance to blood, indexically through its causal association with danger and intensity, and symbolically through its conventional meaning as grief within Asante cosmology (Amoateng, 2018). However, applying Western semiotic frameworks to African contexts requires careful theoretical negotiation

(Ladzepko et al, 2025; Aketema, 2017). Mudimbe's (1988) warns against uncritical imposition of European epistemic categories, arguing instead for approaches that recognise the integrity of African knowledge systems. Following Mudimbe's insights, this study treats Asante chromatic codes not as variants of universal colour psychology but as components of a distinct cosmological system with its own internal logic and cultural specificity.

2.2 Jakobsonian Functions and Ritual Communication

Roman Jakobson's model of language functions referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic originated within structural linguistics to describe how communicative acts operate across contexts, codes, and social relations rather than as mere transmission of information (Hébert & Tabler, 2019; Tribus, 2017). The framework emphasises that language is multifunctional it not only conveys propositional content but also manages interpersonal relations, expresses affect, establishes social contact, interprets codes, and aestheticises messages (Jakobson, 1987). Although Jakobson formulated these functions in linguistic theory, later communication scholars argued that his approach provides a theoretical basis for understanding ritual as a communicative genre rather than an informational one (Kakharova, 2025; Varečková, 2014; Jakobson, 1961). When it comes to indigenous cultural practices of Africans, the functions of the *phatic* resonates with ritual practices in which establishing and maintaining social bonds is paramount, while the *poetic* and *emotive* functions illuminate how rhythm, repetition, and affect structure ritual speech beyond purely referential content (Charwi, 2025; Esikumo, 2020). While explicit applications of Jakobson's model to African rituals are limited in the available literature, ethnography of communication studies demonstrate how language functions manifest in ritualised discourse (Kádár, 2024; Hymes, 1964). For example, sociolinguistic documentation of Yoruba greetings and ritual speech acts reveals patterned routines that are simultaneously *phatic* (affirming social contact) and *poetic* (drawing on metaphor and traditional forms of expression) as part of everyday ceremonial communication (Adebayo et al; 2025; Yede et al; 2025). Such studies, while not always expressly citing Jakobson, align closely with his functional categories and highlight the *multidimensionality* of ritual language in West African oral contexts. Anthropological work on ritual language and communication in general within West Africa further supports the idea that ritual acts are not reducible to information exchange but involve participation, performance, and social action. In this sense, Jakobson's emphasis on functions that manage *contact* (phatic) and foreground aesthetic form (poetic) helps frame ritual language as an integrated communicative system (Ahearn, 2021; Ameka, 2020). In Asante cultural practices for instance, communication through language and

symbolic forms such as drumming, praise poetry, and ritual chants serve to maintain cosmological order and communal identities (Asare, 2025; Buerthey et al, 2023). The famous Asante *talking drums* (fontomfrom) encode tonal and proverbs sequences to convey announcements or ceremonial messages across distances (Ampene, 2024). This illustrates how non-verbal and verbal signals operate together as complex communicative acts that blend multiple Jakobsonian functions. These drum signals serve as *phatic* functions by reaffirming social cohesion and *poetic* functions via ritually significant patterned forms.

Beyond Asante, Indigenous African rituals (e.g., funeral dirges, divination performances like Yoruba *Ifá*, and ceremonial dance-chant complexes) embed language and performance in culturally specific schemas. In this instance, Jakobson's model provides a heuristic for unpacking multiple communicative layers, referential functions anchor cosmological content, emotive functions express communal affect, phatic functions reaffirm relational bonds, and poetic function's structure ritualisedaesthetics (Asante, et al, 2013). Ritual communication studies of Nigerian festivals and ceremonial speech likewise argue that rituals act to sustain cultural identity and social cohesion, reinforcing shared values across ethnic group

2.3 African Studies and Cultural Sovereignty

Kwame Anthony Appiah's (1992) work on cultural identity provides crucial context for understanding how Asante chromatic practices asserting cultural sovereignty. Appiah's concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism" illuminates how Asante funerals simultaneously maintain local cosmological integrity while engaging global audiences through media representation. The 2025 funeral's extensive livestreaming exemplifies this dynamic, projecting chromatic codes as both intimate mourning practices and public assertions of cultural distinctiveness. Over the years, the issue of cultural sovereignty is not limited to the social practise of culture but archiving and documenting through other mediums such as scholarly works and the audio-visual forms (Deure, 2024). For instance, Tunde Kelani stands as one of Africa's most influential cultural auteurs whose cinematic practice embodies the core objectives of African Studies. The reclamation, preservation, and projection of African epistemologies (Nyarko & Aketema, 2022). Through his films, Kelani advances cultural sovereignty by centering indigenous languages, philosophies, ritual systems, and communal ethics, particularly from the Yoruba worldview. His work aligns closely with parallel cultural assertions found within Asante and Igbo traditions, all of which resist cultural erasure imposed by colonial and neocolonial frameworks (Onikoyi& Afolabi, 2021). At the heart of Kelani's artistic philosophy is the conviction that African societies must narrate themselves through their own symbolic systems. In films such as *Saworo Ide*, *Agogo Èèwò*, and *Thunderbolt*

(Magun), Kelani foregrounds Yoruba concepts of kingship, moral accountability, metaphysical justice, and communal governance (Moyo, 2024; Soetan, 2019). These themes echo African Studies' broader concern with indigenous political systems, comparable to the Asante conception of chieftaincy anchored in the Golden Stool (Sika Dwa Kofi), which symbolises spiritual legitimacy and collective identity (Lauterbach, 2017; Kwakye-Nuako, 1999). Similarly, Kelani's emphasis on communal ethics resonates with Igbo socio-political philosophy, particularly the principles of *ọha* (community) and *ụzọndụ* (the way of life) (Kingsley, et al., 2023; Okafor, 2021). In Igbo culture, authority is diffuse and negotiated, much like the moral checks imposed on Yoruba kings in Kelani's films through ritual instruments such as the Saworo Ide. This comparative framework reveals a shared African epistemological insistence that leadership derives legitimacy from service to the people and fidelity to tradition rather than coercive power. Within African socio-cultural settings where language carries the elements of culture, language is understood as a vessel of worldview (Aketema et al, 2025; wa Thiong'o, 2025) used to express how that culture is to be sustained. Therefore, the refusal of most indigenous Africans to dilute indigenous speech practises underscores the intellectual autonomy of African cultures which are manifested in several forms.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Ethical Considerations

This study employed ethnographic methods combining participant observation, visual analysis, and comparative ethnography across two funeral events spanning eight years. Research protocols received approval from the Manhyia Palace, and thus the granting of accreditation for coverage.

3.2 Data Collection and Access

Fieldwork was conducted during both funeral periods, with primary observation occurring at Manhyia Palace, Kumasi, and associated ritual sites. Access was negotiated through formal protocols with the Manhyia Palace administration and local chiefs' councils. All photographs were taken with explicit permission from palace officials and ritual participants. Interview data was collected from 47 participants across categories including traditional leaders, ritual specialists, textile vendors, and ordinary mourners.

3.3 Positionality and Reflexivity

As academics and a cultural documentarian conducting research within this cultural context, this study required careful navigation of insider-outsider dynamics. Following Abu-Lughod's (1991) insights on "halfie anthropology," we maintained reflexive awareness of how cultural intimacy both enabled and potentially constrained analytical distance. Regular consultation with senior traditional leaders

and academic mentors helped ensure analytical rigor while respecting cultural sensitivities.

3.4 Visual and Textual Analysis

Photographic documentation followed established protocols for visual anthropology, with systematic attention to chromatic compositions, spatial arrangements, and participant behaviors. Textile analysis drew on established frameworks from Ghanaian material culture studies (Ross, 1998; Cole & Ross, 1977), while linguistic analysis of funeral dirges and oratory employed discourse analysis methods appropriate to Twi-language contexts.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Asante Cosmology and Colour Symbolism

R.S. Rattray's foundational work *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1927/1959) documented the cosmological significance of colour in Asante ritual life, establishing associations between red and spiritual danger, black and ancestral presence, white and divine blessing, and gold and sacred authority. While Rattray's colonial-era perspective on Asantehene cosmology requires critical rereading, his ethnographic documentation provides essential baseline data for understanding chromatic continuities (Ayamdoo, 2024; Kuusaana, 2021). Contemporary scholarship has expanded this foundation. Cole and Ross's (1977) situated colour symbolism within broader aesthetic and social systems, while Doran Ross's *Wrapped in Pride* (1998) analysed kente weaving as a "textile library" encoding social philosophy through chromatic combinations. Stoeltje's (2003) work on queen mother authority provides crucial political context for understanding funeral chromatics as performances of legitimacy and continuity. Recent scholarship in African semiotics has moved beyond earlier universalist approaches to emphasize culturally specific sign systems. Roy Willis's *Signifying Animals* (1998) demonstrated how African societies employ complex visual codes in ritual contexts, while Drewal and Drewal's (1983) work on Yoruba aesthetics revealed the sophisticated semiotic dimensions of West African performance traditions. This scholarship establishes important precedents for treating colour as a primary rather than secondary element in African ritual communication. However, systematic analysis of chromatic semiotics remains underdeveloped, particularly in Akan contexts where textile traditions provide rich material for semiotic investigation.

4.3 Colour Theory and Anthropological Analysis

Anthropological approaches to colour have traditionally divided between universalist theories emphasising cross-cultural commonalities (Berlin & Kay, 1969) and culturalist approaches emphasising local specificities (Turner, 1967). This study aligns with the culturalist tradition while incorporating insights from

sensory anthropology (Howes, 2003) that emphasises colour's embodied dimensions. Turner's (1967) analysis of Ndembu colour symbolism provides a crucial comparative framework, demonstrating how red, white, and black operate as fundamental categories in African cosmological systems. However, Turner's focus on triadic structures requires expansion to accommodate the quaternary system (red, black, white, gold) that characterises Asante chromatic cosmology.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 The 2017 Funeral: Chromatic Traditionalism

The funeral of Nana Afia Kobi Serwaa Ampem II demonstrated what we termed “chromatic traditionalism” the deliberate emphasis on established colour codes to assert continuity with precolonial practices. Observations revealed systematic deployment of chromatic elements across four primary domains:

Spatial Chromatics: Palace courtyards and ritual sites were enveloped in black drapery with strategic red accents, creating what participants described as “spaces of proper grief”. Figures 5 & 2

White appeared selectively at transitional thresholds, particularly some entrances to sacred places and spiritual custodians, marking passages between worlds of the living and ancestral realms.

Textile Performance: Mourners wore predominantly kuntunkuni (dark brown/black) and kobene (red) adinkra cloths, with stamped motifs encoding proverbial wisdom about death, continuity, and social obligation. Chiefs and royals displayed more elaborate versions incorporating gold thread, visually encoding political hierarchy through chromatic differentiation. Figures 3, 8 & 9

Regalia Display: Royal paraphernalia followed established chromatic protocols. Black umbrellas (kyinie) structured processional order, while golden afena (state swords) and ornaments marked the presence of the Asantehene, embodying what participants termed “grief tempered by sovereignty” (amane ne amanhunu). Figures 6 & 7

Linguistic Chromatics: Funeral dirges (nnwom) and oratory extensively employed colour metaphors. Mourners described themselves as “clothed in the black of deep sorrow” (birisi amane mu) while invoking the “fire of red grief” (kobene yaw). These linguistic practices demonstrated colour's discursive dimensions, showing how chromatic codes shape not only visual but also verbal expression.

5.2 The 2025 Funeral: Chromatic Amplification

The funeral of Nana Konadu Yiadom III revealed what we term “chromatic amplification” the intensification of traditional colour codes for expanded audiences through global media coverage. (refer to Figure 1) While maintaining core chromatic structures, this funeral demonstrated adaptive strategies for projecting

cultural identity beyond local contexts (Sedon, 2009; Thussu, 2006).Media-Conscious Staging: Chromatic displays were deliberately scaled for television and social media consumption. Processional routes featured expanded red and black textile installations, creating visually striking backdrops for international broadcasting. This represented not abandonment of tradition but strategic adaptation for global cultural assertion.Technological Integration: QR codes linking to online repositories of Asante cultural information were integrated into funeral programs printed in traditional colours, demonstrating synthesis of ancient chromatic codes with contemporary communication technologies.Expanded Participation: Global diaspora participation introduced new chromatic variations, with Asante communities in North America and Europe contributing specially commissioned textiles that maintained traditional colour schemes while incorporating contemporary design elements.

5.3 Chromatic Exceptions and Variations

Both funerals revealed systematic exceptions to standard chromatic codes, demonstrating the flexibility embedded within traditional structures:

Spiritual Authority: The Tepahene (Paramount Chief of Tapa) uniquely wore all white, reflecting his custodianship of Tapa Baanie deity. The same also applied to Agona and its traditional leaders. These exceptions, grounded in spiritual rather than political authority, illustrates how chromatic systems accommodate multiple forms of sacred power.



Figure 1. Giant billboard announcing the funeral at Manhyia round about in Kumasi (photo by the first author)

Alt. text: Giant billboard at the Manhyia roundabout, Kumasi, in the background with a statue of the Asantehemaa in the foreground with the red and black decoration (photo by author)



Figure 2. Panorama view of Bogyawe; the funeral grounds (photo by the first author)

Alt. text: This is a panoramic view of Bogyawe; the funeral grounds. It shows several giant umbrellas of Amanhenes in attendance. The costume is all black, with the exceptional white umbrellas in the foreground. (photo by the first author)



Figure 3. Modwafoo, the Asantehemaa's attendants, holding their peace pipes. (Photo by Manhyia Palace)

Alt. text: Modwafoo, the Asantehemaa's attendants, wearing their printed red and black cloth, the Asantehemaa, and holding their peace pipes in white handkerchiefs. (Photo by Manhyia Palace)



Figure 4: The Asantehene, Otumfuɔ Osei Tutu II, in Kuntunkuni cloth and headgear during the funeral. (Photo by Kofi Ghana)

Alternate Title: Otumfuɔ Osei Tutu II - Asantehene in black Kuntunkuni cloth with his headgear studded with the proverbial green fern and red chili pepper during the funeral, and in a very pensive mood. (Photo by Kofi Ghana)



Figure 5: The entrance to the palace of the Asantehene decorated with black and red colours depicting the mourning atmosphere. (Photo by first author)

Alt. Text: Royal Palm trees leading to the palace of the Asantehene draped in black and red cloth symbolizing the mourning atmosphere. (Photo by first author)



Figure 6: Asantehene dressed in Kuntunkuni funeral cloth, sitting in state during the funeral of the late Asatehemaa Nana Konadu Yiadom III at Manhyia. All his subjects are also in mourning cloth. (Photo - Manhyia Palace)

Alt text: Image shows the Asantehene in a black mourning cloth called Kuntunkuni, sitting in state and flanked by his state Afenas on the red carpet, with all his subjects also in mourning cloth. (Photo - Manhyia Palace)



Figure 7: Otumfuo Osei Tutu II- Asantehene wearing a specially made funeral cloth stud with cowries and being carried in a palanquin covered in funeral colours of red and black. (Photo - Manhyia Palace)

Alt text: Image showing Otumfuo Osei Tutu II- Asantehene wearing a specially made funeral cloth stud with cowries with a headgear to match and being carried in a palanquin covered in funeral colours of red and black. (Photo - Manhyia Palace)



Figure 8: The Mamponghemaa clad in her funeral cloth and headgear processing to Bogawe (Photo - Manhyia Palace)

Alt. text: Image show the Mamponghemaa clad in her black Kobene cloth funeral cloth and headgear processing to Bogawe, with her hands supported by an attendant. (Photo - Manhyia Palace)



Figure 9: Uncontrollable crowd in mourning cloth at Manhyia Palace to witness the 'dotiyie' of the late Asantehemaa Nana Konadu Yiadom III (photo by the first author)

Alt text: Image of an uncontrollable crowd, all in black mourning cloth at Manhyia Palace to witness the 'dotiyie' of the late Asantehemaa Nana Konadu Yiadom III (photo by the first author)

Religious Pluralism: Christian clergy introduced liturgical colours (white robes, purple stoles) that coexisted with rather than challenged traditional codes. This chromatic coexistence reflects broader patterns of religious synthesis in contemporary Asante society.

Ritual Specialists: Traditional priests (akomfo) displayed deity-specific colours reflecting their roles as divine intermediaries rather than community mourners. Their chromatic autonomy demonstrated the system's capacity to accommodate multiple spiritual registers.

5.4 Semiotic Analysis: Peircean Functions in Practice

Applying Peircean categories reveals the multidimensional operation of Asante chromatic codes:

Iconic Functions: Red's visual resemblance to blood creates immediate associations with life force, danger, and intensity. Black's absorption of light iconically represents the void left by death and the mystery of ancestral realms.

Indexical Functions: Colour choices causally connect wearers to social categories and emotional states. Wearing kuntunkuni indexes deep mourning, while gold ornaments index royal authority and divine sanction.

Symbolic Functions: Chromatic meanings operate through cultural convention rather than natural resemblance. The association between red and grief in Asante contexts contrasts with red's associations with celebration in other cultural systems, demonstrating the conventional nature of chromatic symbolism.

DISCUSSION: CHROMATIC COSMOLOGIES AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

6.1 Beyond Decorative Symbolism

The concept of chromatic cosmologies advances beyond approaches that treat colour as decorative addition to more fundamental ritual elements. Instead, this framework positions colour as constitutive of cosmological meaning, arguing that Asante worldviews are literally unthinkable without their chromatic dimensions. This constitutive relationship operates through what we termed as “chromatic embodiment” the process by which wearing, seeing, and speaking about ritual colours materially shapes participants' cosmological experience. Mourners reported that donning black funeral cloth physically intensified their grief, while chiefs described gold regalia as conferring spiritual authority. These accounts suggest that chromatic cosmologies operate not only semiotically but also phenomenologically, shaping embodied experience of ritual participation.

6.2 Cultural Sovereignty and Global Representation

The comparative analysis reveals chromatic cosmologies' capacity for what Appiah (1992) terms “rooted cosmopolitanism”, maintaining cultural specificity while engaging global audiences. The 2025 funeral's extensive media coverage projected

Asante chromatic codes as assertions of cultural sovereignty, demonstrating resilience in the face of globalization rather than capitulation to it. This dynamic challenges narratives of cultural erosion under globalization, showing instead how traditional systems adapt while maintaining core structures. Chromatic amplification for global audiences represented not dilution but strategic deployment of cultural resources for identity assertion on international stages.

6.3 Theoretical Contributions to African Studies

This study contributes to African studies by demonstrating how indigenous knowledge systems operate through sensory modalities often overlooked in text-focused scholarship. Following Mudimbe's (1988) call for analytical frameworks that respect African epistemic integrity, chromatic cosmologies provide a lens for understanding how Asante people generate and transmit knowledge through visual, tactile, and embodied practices. The framework also extends beyond Asante contexts, offering analytical tools for examining chromatic practices across African societies where colour plays significant cosmological roles. From Yoruba aso-oke weaving to Maasai beadwork, African societies employ sophisticated chromatic systems deserving of serious theoretical attention.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

7.1 Methodological Implications

This study demonstrates the necessity of multisensory ethnographic methods for studying African cultural practices. Traditional anthropological emphasis on linguistic and behavioral data must expand to include systematic attention to visual, tactile, and aesthetic dimensions of cultural experience.

Visual anthropology methods proved particularly valuable for documenting chromatic practices that resist purely textual representation. Future research should further develop these approaches, particularly for studying cultural practices where sensory dimensions play central roles.

7.2 Theoretical Development

The concept of chromatic cosmologies requires further theoretical elaboration, particularly regarding its applicability across different African contexts. Comparative studies examining chromatic practices in other West African societies would help refine the theoretical framework and establish its broader analytical utility.

Additionally, the framework's relationship to other sensory anthropology approaches deserves further exploration. How do chromatic cosmologies intersect with sonic, tactile, and olfactory dimensions of ritual experience? Such investigations could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of multisensory cultural systems.

7.3 Applied Implications

Understanding chromatic cosmologies has practical implications for cultural preservation, heritage tourism, and diaspora cultural maintenance. Museums and cultural institutions could better serve African communities by recognizing colour's constitutive role in cultural practices rather than treating it as a decorative enhancement.

Similarly, diaspora communities seeking to maintain cultural connections might benefit from frameworks that emphasize colour's capacity to embody and transmit cosmological knowledge across geographical distances.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that colour in Asante funerary traditions operates as a sophisticated semiotic system encoding grief, authority, and cultural identity. Through systematic comparison of two major funerals, the analysis revealed both continuity in chromatic codes and their adaptive capacity for global mediation.

The theoretical framework of chromatic cosmologies advances anthropological understanding of African knowledge systems by positioning colour as constitutive rather than decorative in ritual meaning. Drawing on Peircean semiotics while respecting Mudimbe's insights on African epistemic integrity, this approach provides analytical tools for understanding how indigenous communities generate and transmit knowledge through visual and embodied practices.

The funerals of Nana Afia Kobi Serwaa Ampem II and Nana Konadu Yiadom III illustrate the resilience of Asante cultural heritage in an era of rapid globalization. Rather than erosion under external pressures, these events demonstrated strategic adaptation that maintains cosmological integrity while asserting cultural sovereignty on international stages.

Ultimately, this research affirms that understanding Asante cultural practices requires recognition of their multisensory dimensions. Colour is not merely decoration but cosmology made visible, emotion made tangible, and identity made manifest. Through chromatic cosmologies, Asanteman continues to speak its heritage, ensuring that traditional knowledge remains vital and relevant for contemporary and future generations.

The concept of chromatic cosmologies offers a framework for understanding how African societies employ sophisticated visual knowledge systems that deserve serious theoretical attention. As anthropology increasingly recognizes the limitations of text-centric approaches, studies of chromatic practices provide essential insights into the full range of human meaning-making possibilities.

In the specific context of Asante funeral traditions, this study reveals how colour operates simultaneously as emotional expression, social communication, and cultural performance. The black of deep mourning, the red of intense grief, the white

of spiritual transition, and the gold of divine authority constitute not merely a palette but a cosmology a complete system for understanding life, death, and continuity within Asante worldviews.

Future research should continue exploring these multisensory dimensions of African cultural practices, recognising that full understanding requires attention to the visual, tactile, and embodied aspects of meaning-making that complement but cannot be reduced to linguistic and behavioral analysis. Through such approaches, anthropology can better fulfill its mission of documenting and understanding the full range of human cultural creativity and knowledge systems.

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