



The Copyright Thing Doesn't Work Here: Adinkra and Kente Cloth and Intellectual Property in Ghana (First Peoples: New Directions Indigenous)

Boatema Boateng

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In Ghana, adinkra and kente textiles derive their significance from their association with both Asante and Ghanaian cultural nationalism. Adinkra, made by stenciling patterns with black dye, and kente, a type of strip weaving, each convey, through color, style, and adornment, the bearer's identity, social status, and even emotional state. Yet both textiles have been widely mass-produced outside Ghana, particularly in East Asia, without any compensation to the originators of the designs.

In The Copyright Thing Doesn't Work Here, Boatema Boateng focuses on the appropriation and protection of adinkra and kente cloth in order to examine the broader implications of the use of intellectual property law to preserve folklore and other traditional forms of knowledge. Boateng investigates the compatibility of indigenous practices of authorship and ownership with those established under intellectual property law, considering the ways in which both are responses to the changing social and historical conditions of decolonization and globalization. Comparing textiles to the more secure copyright protection that Ghanaian musicians enjoy under Ghanaian copyright law, she demonstrates that different forms of social, cultural, and legal capital are treated differently under intellectual property law.

Boateng then moves beyond Africa, expanding her analysis to the influence of cultural nationalism among the diaspora, particularly in the United States, on the appropriation of Ghanaian and other African cultures for global markets. Boateng's rich ethnography brings to the surface difficult challenges to the international regulation of both contemporary and traditional concepts of intellectual property, and questions whether it can even be done.

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