

## Designing Identities in Accra, Ghana

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During August 2010, I returned to Ghana to continue my research on the contemporary Ghanaian fashion industry. I spent two weeks traversing the capital city of Accra, interviewing designers, visiting their boutiques and workshops, and interviewing the designers' clientele. This trip solidified what I discovered last summer: Ghana has a vibrant, innovative, and culturally significant fashion industry, which reflects crucial aspects of Ghanaian identities.

Last summer I attended Ghana's 3rd Annual Ghana Fashion Weekend and was dazzled by the breadth of imagination and innovation exhibited by Ghanaian designers. I interviewed one of Ghana's leading designers, Kofi Ansah, as well as the CEO of the Exopa Modeling Agency and organizer of Ghana Fashion Weekend, Sima Ibrahim. This first trip demonstrated Accra was a viable location for my research and allowed me to acquaint myself with the established Ghanaian designers and their fashion labels. This summer, I utilized my preliminary research and my knowledge of European fashion to write and publish

an article addressing the visual exchanges between Western and African designers.

Building on connections from my previous trip in the summer of 2009, I returned to Accra, Ghana in August 2010 to conduct additional interviews and to elucidate the cultural significance of Ghanaian high fashion. During my brief two-week trip, I was fortunate to interview six additional designers. Their garments ranged from elegant cocktail dresses fashioned from strips of *batakari* cloth, to business casual tunics embroidered with *adinkra* symbols



and representations of Anansi the spider's web. All of the garments I photographed were a visual mélange of influences: fabrics from Europe, America, and West Africa, mixed with both local and international styles of tailoring. As I conducted interviews with both the designers and their clientele, the clothing's significance began to take shape. Ghanaian high fashion garments visually affirm what it means to be a

cosmopolitan Ghanaian, an individual expressing their global identity while attempting to maintain a connection to their cultural roots. This postulation will be strengthened with evidence as I expand my research through additional interviews of the designers' clientele.

My research thus far has been a fantastic adventure. I've learned the value of being patient and well dressed in the field! I plan to return to Ghana in the summer of 2011 to finalize my research and explore the Ghanaian fashion industry's historical antecedents. I hope my work will illustrate the importance of fashion, specifically Ghanaian high fashion, as a vehicle for understanding crucial concepts of individual's identity, and how these concepts have changed over time. Additionally, my research will attest to the importance of contemporary non-Western high fashion, indirectly asserting its creativity and viability.



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