Mixed Fabric: Ghanaian Identity in Contemporary Ghanaian Fashion and Design

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Mixed Fabric: Ghanaian Identity in Contemporary Ghanaian Fashion and Design

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Abstract

1. Title: Mixed Fabric: Ghanaian Identity in Contemporary Ghanaian Fashion and Design
2. Author: Dakota Lancour (lancda01@luther.edu; Luther College, Decorah, IA)
3. Objectives:
   i. To discover how and why designers use Ghanaian elements (cultural symbols) in their designs.
   ii. To discover how/if designers utilize their Ghanaian identity in their designs, or why they consider their clothing Ghanaian.
   iii. To discover how the average Ghanaian views the clash/blending of western and African clothing.
   iv. To come up with some Afro-Centric designs of my own
4. Methodology: I resided in Accra for the beginning portion of the ISP time, where I interviewed shopkeepers and laypeople about their opinion on Ghanaian fashion. I then traveled to Kumasi for five days, where I interviewed Professors of Textiles and Design at KNUST. I also interviewed recent graduates of the Textile program. When I returned to Accra for the remainder of the ISP period I talked to more designers and salespeople.
5. Findings: My findings were a compilation of all the interview results that I gathered throughout the ISP period. I found that Africa Print fabric played a crucial role in Ghanaians asserting their identity, and the Ghanaian-ness of their clothing. I found that the designers tried to actively use it, and all the other lay people tried to wear it often. I found that Ghanaians are very proud of their clothing as well.
6. Conclusion: I believe that Ghanaians are trying to reclaim the Ghanaian-ness of their fashion by using Africa Print.
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Introduction

My time here in Ghana has really opened my eyes to what a culture is all about. I knew the book definition of course, but being immersed in another culture really opened my eyes to the actual nuances that make up the differences between two cultures. There are many facets of culture, from music, to dance, the food a people eat, the language they speak, and the clothes they wear. It is this last aspect of culture that I have chosen to focus on.

Upon entering Ghana it is very obvious that it is a place where there is a crossroad of cultures. This is true of many places that were once under colonial forces. The western influences that were forced upon Ghanaians by the British are still present, both legally, religiously and culturally. The realm of Ghanaian fashion is no exception. Traditional Ghanaian clothing, a length of cloth wrapped around the chest and over the shoulder, for men, and a length of cloth wrapped around the chest and another wrapped around the waist for women is still seen frequently, though mostly with the older generations. Then in the younger generations one sees this extremely unique mix of western and western influenced clothing. Yet everywhere you still see the bright colors and patterns of Batik and African-print cloth. This mix of Ghanaian tradition and Western tradition was so intriguing to me, especially coming from a part of the United States that is very not varied in terms of culture.

I was already interested in the fashion of Ghana, but one thing that really sparked the fire in me was attending the second annual Fashion Week at KNUST.
Seeing the models walk the runway clothed in designs from Ghanaian designers, both student and professional was a great reminder that there are great designers here in Africa that do not get very much attention in the West. This caused me to wonder how these Ghanaian designers are using tradition or breaking it apart and how they view themselves as Ghanaians using a Western approach that is not traditionally not Ghanaian.

From all the lectures that we have had over the course of this semester, the clash of two different cultures in Ghana was really made apparent and interesting to me. I thought a good place to take a look at this clash would be the field of fashion.

I think my majors really influenced my choice of this study. I am majoring in International Studies and Theatre/Dance with an emphasis in Design. My International Studies major has just increased my passion and curiosity for learning and studying how different cultures interact, and of course has left me with a basic knowledge of how colonialism has affected the world. Of course, studying abroad in a country that has been so strongly affected by colonialism has really helped me to experience it first hand. My Theatre/Dance Design major has obviously increased my knowledge and interest in designing things. I thought that being a designer would help me to connect with the people I was interviewing and gain some rapport.

The issue I decided to focus on was the apparent blend of Ghanaian and Western traditions in Ghanaian Fashion. How designers use Ghanaian elements in more Western styles, and how they view using Western styles, how they reconcile their Ghanaian identity with using Western ideas, that are not considered
traditionally Ghanaian. But I also did want to get some idea of the layperson's view of this blend of fashion, since public opinion determines what designers do quite a bit, if that designer is interested in making a profit.

Since I am planning on becoming a designer I wanted to focus on the designer's side of the issue. However, I did not want to dismiss the cultural side of the issue. Which is why I interviewed people that were not designers and also did book research.

I believe that over this month I have gained valuable insight into Ghanaian fashion, culture and the effects of globalization and the West's influence in Ghana. I will put the knowledge that I have gained into the following paper.
Traveling all through Ghana really opened my eyes to all this country has to offer. However, I did need to choose a fieldwork location so I chose Accra as my main base, and Kumasi as a secondary fieldwork location. I chose these locations for very specific reasons. I choose Accra because it seemed to be the place with the most Western influence in Ghana, therefore I thought that it would be the best place in Ghana to study how the blending of Ghanaian traditions and Western traditions affects fashion. I chose to go to Kumasi in addition to Accra, because it had a very interesting vibe that was different from Accra and the textile program at KNUST has design courses. As well as KNUST Fashion Week being a considerable factor in my choice of topic, both of these reasons making me believe that it was worth my while to go to Kumasi. As well as the advice of my Advisor, Dr. Grace Adinku, who gave me contacts in Kumasi to get in contact with.

I started my ISP time with book research at Balme Library at the University of Ghana Legon. I figured this would be a great way to get some background knowledge on fashion and culture and a way to help me to develop relevant questions to ask my informants. I spent quite a bit of time looking through books about fashion, culture, and psychology. This provided me with many insights into the culture of fashion. How fashion and culture interrelate to each other, which was extremely relevant to my topic. There, unfortunately, was not much published info on the more technical aspects of traditional Ghanaian clothing, but I was able to find works that were focused on Ghanaian dress and culture. I also found books that
were more general in their discussions of fashion and culture. While these books did not focus on Ghana, I believe they provided me with helpful knowledge about fashion as an aspect of culture, and not simply a form of art.

I spent a great deal of time and thought formulating questions for my informants. For the designers I wanted to really get a grasp on the technical side of their designing, as well as what they thought about their designs culturally. For the rest of my informants, who were not designers, I wanted to grasp what they thought of different types of Ghanaian fashion, traditional and Western style, and what they themselves wore.

I started my interviews with salespeople in stores with Ghanaian designers. They wish to not be recorded, which made my task slightly more difficult. However I was able to write down their answers as best I could, and I made sure to sit down soon after the interview and elaborate my notes, since I wrote mainly notes during the actual interviews.

My second set of interviews took place over five days and was me interviewing professors of design and their teaching assistants at KNUST in Kumasi. Since this is the place where future Ghanaian designers are coming form I thought that it would be crucial to talk to them. I talked to two professors of design and the head of the textile department, which is the department that the design classes are put under. I also interviewed three teaching assistants who helped in the design and construction classes. I interviewed them because I wanted to get a younger viewpoint on the topic. These interviews I was able to get recorded, which was vital, since these informants were very informed and passionate about the topic. These
informants provided insights that led to thoughts I had never considered before. I had pre-drafted, but as the interviews went on we went into different tangents, that were relevant, but tangents nonetheless. I believe these tangents were crucial to my understanding of Ghanaian fashion.

The next type of interview that I conducted was informal interviews. I found that most people were interested in talking to a student, but were more comfortable if you did not have papers and pens and cameras. I did most of these interviews at a fashion bazaar in Accra. This allowed me to get an insight into non-designers opinions on fashion. I made sure to write down what I could remember as accurately as possible at the end of the day.

I started to draw my own designs, using some of the principles that were brought about in my interviews, as the participatory part of my project. These will be attached in the appendix.
Findings

Chapter 1: Fashion and Culture

Fashion. This word has many connotations, both positive and negative. I believe that fashion is neither a positive or negative thing, but is a good indicator of the culture that a certain strain of fashion resides in. I believe that this thought is illuminated by this quote from Phyllis G Tortor and Keith Eubank’s book, Survey of Historic Costume. They say, "The word fashion is often used interchangeably with the words costume, dress, and clothing. Fashion is more precisely defined as a taste shared by many for a short period of time..." (Eubank and Tortor, pg. 8). The emphasis on the "taste of many" in this quote, I think really shows how fashion is an aspect of culture, being that culture is a concept that is shared by a group of people.

Of course, when designers are designing clothes they need to take into consideration what the people they are marketing their clothes to want. This is further explained by the concept of the "zeitgeist" or "spirit of the times" as defined by Eubank and Tortor. A quote from their book that really fleshes out the relationship between designers and the zeitgeist of their culture is the following, they say "The modern apparel industry assigns the role of creating new design ideas to fashion designers. Some designers are exceptionally innovative, generating exciting new ideas that the public finds to be in keeping with the current zeitgeist." (Eubank and Tortor, pg. 7) Of course, the zeitgeist is going to be different depending on what culture you are in. For example, the spirit of the times in the United States is going to be very different than the spirit of the times in Ghana. Even if there are
many Western influences in Ghana, the zeitgeist would still be controlled by social
and cultural norms. In my research I came across a quote that explained how
exactly how cultural standards, which I believe to be the same thing as cultural
norms, affect dress, which is a part of fashion, and why they affect dress. Mary Ellen
Roach and Joanne B. Eicher explain in their book, *The Visible Self: Perspectives on
Dress*, that, "Cultural Standards for dress limit the number of forms from which
selections can be made and thereby limit a person’s practice of the art of dress.
Underlying adherence to cultural standards for dress is desire for social
acceptance..." (Eicher and Roach, pg. 122) This need for social acceptance ties back
into the concept that fashion is a taste that is shared by many people for a short
amount of time. People are not going to be accepted if they do not follow cultural
norms, and people are going to buy clothes if they won’t be accepted when wearing
them. Designers know this and will design with this in mind. Making fashion a
barometer of the culture that it is from.

Even though fashion stays within cultural guidelines, it is still a form of art.
This means that it will push those boundaries. As Roach and Eicher say about it,
"But cultural standards do not mean absence of change; instead change is
inevitable..." (Eicher and Roach, pg. 122). This is a very obvious fact, given that
cultures generally have not stayed the same throughout the entirety of history. A
quote that I believe that illustrates this concept of art and culture changing is the
following quote by Fred Davis, from his book, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*. Davis
says, "The designer-artists who initiate fashion intuit somehow the currents of
identity instability pervading a people and seek through the artful manipulation of
the conventional visual and tactile symbols of clothing presentation to lend expression to them, or alternatively to contain, deflect, or sublimate them." (Davis, pg. 17) This emphasizes the way that fashion draws from the visual symbols of a culture, which makes fashion a reflection of a culture. But it shows that fashion will not just throw those symbols onto a garment and let them sit there, it will try to make those symbols accomplish something. This something may be to either challenge or reaffirm a cultural standard, but the point is that it can be used to make sure a culture does not stay stagnant, but rather that it serves as an agent of change. It also raises the concept of identity, and how that relates to fashion and also to culture.

When I first started this topic, I was very interested in Ghanaian identity in relation to fashion. This was brought to the forefront of my mind because there are so many Western influences in the clothing here in Ghana, I wanted to see how Ghanaians retained their identity as Ghanaians when they were operating with styles that were more influenced by Western cuts and styles than traditional Ghanaian clothing. So to start my forays into the concept of fashion and identity I turned to Fred Davis' book yet again to see what he had to say on the topic. The first quote I want to bring up really helped to clarify in my mind how identity and culture are related. Davis says,

"I would begin by noting that although we ourselves are actively (and a good deal of the time, self-consciously) engaged in the construction and articulation of our social identities- we are not passive recipients of identities ascribed to us by some remote abstract entity terms 'society'- there are nevertheless strong collective currents that impinge on our sense of self at different times during our lives and at different historical moments. That is to say, because we are subject to many of the same conditions of life, a great many of us experience in our persons similar yearnings, tensions, concerns,
and discontents, which, regardless of how we apprehend them, seek some form of expression. It is in this sense that our identities can be spoken of as sharing a strong collective component. (Davis, pg. 16-17)

This quote demonstrates how our identity can be tied to the people around us and our culture. However human beings still want to stand out, just not too much. this idea is described by Davis in the following quotes. Davis says, "Indeed, the very subject of this book, fashion, is analyzed by Simmel (1904) as the social by-product of the opposition of processes of conformity and individualism, of unity and differentiation in society." (Davis, pg. 23) Davis goes on to describe this opposition as "ambivalence". I brought this word up, mainly because it is mentioned in the next quote, which says, "As for fashion specifically, while it must of necessity work within the broad parameters of a relatively well established and familiar clothing code, it turns for fresh inspiration to the tensions generated by identity ambivalences, particularly to those that, by virtue of cultural scripting and historical experience, are collective in character." (Davis, pg. 26-27) This shows that fashion designers do truly take aspects of culture into their designs. Also it demonstrates that where fashion really gets a lot of inspiration fuel is the uncertainty of identity and the ambivalence that takes place in wanting to fit into a culture yet also stand out. I thought that the clash between Western influences and Ghanaian traditions would serve as a great springboard for innovative designs. From all my observations from over the course of the semester, at the fashion week fashion show at KNUST, to simply observing various advertisements and storefronts over the country, it truly seemed like Ghana had an amazing and unique fashion scene. What made it truly unique was the blend of Western influences and Ghanaian traditions in these
designs. The designs I saw were very obviously not super traditional, which just made me want to discover how designers and Ghanaians viewed the Western influences in their fashion. And how they maintained their Ghanaian identities. To really understand this mix, I thought it would be beneficial to study the history of Ghana and the West in terms of fashion.
Chapter 2: Ghanaian Fashion and the West

In order to get a sense of how Ghanaian traditions and Western traditions act in today's fashion world I thought it would be important and helpful to research the historical influence that the West has had over Ghanaian clothing.

The British colonizing Ghana obviously had a large influence on the culture of Ghana and its dress. Ghana was now exposed to different types of clothing and fabric. As well as the British sense of what was considered to be decent dress. This was shown to me by an article by Jean Allman, who said, "Indeed, throughout the colonial period the binary of the 'naked' and the 'clothed' invigorated colonial discourse, while clothing, in it's most literal sense as the donning of woven cloth, served as the barometer of the success, or failure, of the British 'civilizing mission'." (Allman, pg. 146) So it is shown that the British did not think very highly of the Ghanaian way of dressing. It makes sense that the aftershocks of colonization would still resonate in Ghana even after Ghana claimed its independence and the British officially left. This is evidenced in the campaign that Ghanaian Hannah Kudjoe organized during the early days of the new country. She mostly campaigned in the North of the country where the style of dress was very different from the South of Ghana. She wanted the Northerners to adopt a "Ghanaian Costume" now Allman explains this, "The 'Ghanaian costume' in which Kudjoe sought to dress the north was very much based on southern Ghanaian notions of what it meant to be 'clothed' (though the actual clothes distributed were seldom 'in line' with 'Ghanaian fashion' and were made up primarily of second-hand European and North American items brought in by various non-governmental agencies." (Allman, pg. 157) This shows
the desire for a costume that is culturally acceptable and the same throughout the country. Which shows that even back in the late 50s and early 60s there was an acknowledged viewpoint that the clothes that Ghanaians wore reflected the culture of the country. It also shows that even though they were trying to instill a codified "Ghanaian costume" the West still snuck in it's influence with the donation of secondhand clothing.

To fully grasp what traditional Ghanaian clothing and cloth is I interviewed several professors from KNUST. The response that I received from Dr. Charles Frimpong and Professor Akosua Amanka were particularly enlightening on this topic. When I asked Professor Akosua what she considered to be traditional Ghanaian clothing, and she replied, "The traditional Ghanaian clothing...its the...the one wrapped around the chest and the one on the shoulder. Traditionally that is what our old women wear, which is supposed to be our traditional way of dressing. But the wrapping is turning to what we call slit and kaba. So i would say that should be our traditional way of dressing. But it started with the wrap around the chest and the shoulder the waist area. (Amanka 23 APR 2014). My advisor Dr. Grace Adinku in foreshadowed this sentiment in an informal interview when she brought up that what was really traditional was the wrap around, and even the Kaba and Slit, which is considered traditional, is descended from Western styles. (Adinku 15 APR 2014).
Dr. Charles Frimpong really helped me to understand what are the traditional Ghanaian textiles.

Illustration 1
Me trying my hand at weaving traditional Ewe Kente.

really put emphasis in that "there is traditional Ghanaian woven cloth, which encompasses the kente, which is woven in the south, as well as the cloth that is woven in the north for smocks. There is also African prints and the tie and die batik. There is also a die up north. You have dyed fabrics but there are different categories, you have tie dying, you have Batik and you have traditional dying."

(Frimpong, 24 APR 2014) Dr. Frimpong also went on to say, another thing that makes Africa print so African is the colors that are used in it. He said that African colors are the truest form, "if it is indigo it is strong indigo" and they don't use pastels such as the westerners do. He mentioned that some companies, such as Woodin and Vlisco, have started using a little bit of pastel in their fabric. Those companies, however, are not based in Ghana. He did admit that exposure to different color schemes has increased the colors used in Ghanaian textiles.

(Frimpong, 24 APR 2014) Dr. Frimpong vouched for the Ghanaian identity of Africa print by telling me that it was only recently that the manufacturing of Africa print
has been outsourced, and that in past years it was made exclusively in Ghana.

(Frimpong, 24 APR 2014) One way that the West has influenced Ghanaian fabrics is that the designs and patterns of the print fabric have become smaller. This is in order for them to be more easily made into shirts and other Western styles of clothing. (Frimpong, 24 APR 2014) Fabric started to be manufactured in Ghana as a way to stem the tide of imported fabrics from the Dutch and British. (Frimpong, 24 APR 2014) Dr. Frimpong said that one way that fabric was tied into the culture was in the naming of the fabric. The market women would often name the fabric after popular music that was trending, or proverbs, after the fashion that traditional textiles were named and marketed. (Frimpong, 24 APR 2014) Through this interview I was able to grasp some of the history of Ghanaian fabric and why it was so important to the culture of Ghana.
Chapter 3: Ghanaian Voices on Fashion

Of course since I wanted to discover how Ghanaians themselves view Ghanaian identity in fashion I had to interview actual Ghanaians and not just read books on fashion, and culture, and identity, and Ghana. My first task was deciding whom I wanted to talk to. I decided a mix of professors, students, designers, salespeople and laypeople would give me the best picture of Ghanaian identity in Ghanaian fashion.

Section 1: Non-Designers

I talked to some various people in the fashion field, holding informal interviews with them. I found them in various places, from stores to fashion bazaars where I was able to talk to informants about Ghanaian fashion.

I talked to a model named Roland at a fashion event. I chose to go up and talk to him because he was wearing Africa print trousers. And as I discovered from all my informants the fabric that is used in clothing plays an important part of what makes Ghanaian clothing Ghanaian.
When I asked him why he chose to wear African print trousers he reported that he "just felt like it this morning" (Roland, 13 MAY 2014). I asked him who he modeled for, if they were designers that used Africa print in their designs and he said, "I am a Ghanaian model, so I model for Ghanaian designers. I don't choose who I model for, but most of them use Africa Print." (Roland, 13 MAY 2014) So most Ghanaian designers are using Africa print, and people will wear it for sure, Roland mentioned during our conversation that he had many articles of clothing that utilized Africa print. Also when you walk down the street you see Africa Print everywhere.

I talked with a woman named Akua, who worked with a designer of shoes and handbags. All the items that she had were made from Africa Print. Accessories are an important
part of fashion that I feel sometimes is overlooked when fashion is wrote and/or
talked about. I figured it was a good niche market to talk about. I asked Akua if she
often wore African print clothing, and she replied that she did. I figured so, since
many of the fashion people that I spoke to did, but I wanted to ask to be sure, since
she was wearing Western clothing at the time when I interviewed her. I asked her
why she was wearing western clothing and she said that since there are so many
western influences in Ghanaian media, and everywhere else that it is very difficult to
not wear any western clothing at all. I asked why the designers chose to work with
Africa Print and why she thought that it was important and she replied, "We use
Africa print because it is time to develop our own materials and styles. The white
man has brought things into Ghana, like leather, that is theirs and they use it for
their products. But we need to use what is ours, to make our own things, and also to
spread it throughout the world." (Akua, 13 MAY 2014) She went on to ask me if
there was much Africa print in the United States. I replied that there was not much
in any sense where I came from in the States, but I said the area that I am from is not
culturally diverse in any way, but that in the larger cities there was some presence
of it in the African communities. I feel that this disconnect proves a couple of things.
One, it only emphasizes how much of an aspect of Ghanaian culture that Africa print
is; Two, it shows how, unfortunately, that the West puts so much into the culture of
Ghana, but doesn’t take anything out that would benefit Ghana, but only takes things
that have a negative effect on Ghana.

I talked as well to a woman named Renata, who was the creative director of
her own store in Osu. Her shop specializes in vintage leather. This seems like a very
obviously non-Ghanaian store, but I thought it would be good to talk with her to see why she chose to open a business that dealt in Western products. She said that she started by just selling leather bags to friends and family, and then she thought that she should think about opening a store. As for why she chose Western styles, "I just am really drawn to the vintage styles," Renata reported. (Renata, 10 MAY 2014) Renata did design some of her own clothing items that she sold in her store, and many of them used Africa print, but she said that she tried to use older Africa print, to keep the vintage theme of her store alive. I think that the thing to be gained from my conversation with Renata is that even in stores that are more Western, there will be a bit of Ghanaian fashion in them as well.

I spoke with a woman who works in a clothing shop in East Legon. Her name was Ellie. I asked her what her opinion of Ghanaian clothing was. She really emphasized that she thought the main aspect of importance of Ghanaian clothing is that it provided an economic advantage for Ghanaian girls. Ghanaian textiles and clothing presents an opportunity for an income for Ghanaians. She also explained that she thought that it was important that clothing was made in Ghana, so that it could be made to be appropriate for Ghanaian weather. She pointed out that Western clothing is sold all around Ghana, and she said that people wear Western clothing that is too hot and does not let you breathe. But she said that the clothing made in their store is made to let you breathe and keep you cool. (Ellie, 28 APR 2014)

I interviewed a salesperson named Eli at a store called Nallem at the Accra Mall. I wanted to take a look at this store, since the clothing was very obviously at
least Ghana-inspired if not Ghanaian completely. When I asked he said that all the designers for that store were Ghanaian. So the designers for the store are Ghanaian, but when I asked if more Westerners or Ghanaians shop at Nallem he said, "More Westerners and Francophones shop here. Not necessarily Westerners, but not a lot of Ghanaians." (Eli, 20 APR 2014) The pricing of the clothing was definitely geared towards wealthier patrons, the prices ranging from 50 cedis to 200 cedis. Eli said that the gender of people that shop at his store varies, but that it tends to be more women since, "women shop more." (Eli, 20 APR 2014) I asked him what type of clothing he wore, Western or Ghanaian, and he said, "I wear a mix, but since I am promoting Africa I always wear some Africa wear. Since I am wearing this shirt [pointing to a polo shirt he was wearing], I am wearing African trousers." (Eli, 20 APR 2014) So I got from this interview that Eli thought that by wearing Africa print pants, he was promoting an aspect of Ghanaian culture, showing that he thought his pants were Ghanaian.

I also spoke with a salesperson named Gertrude at a store in Accra mall called Kiki. This store was also in the same price range as Nallem, with items ranging from 50 cedi to 250 cedi. When I asked Gertrude who shopped at her store more, Ghanaians or Westerners, she replied that Westerners shopped there more. I also asked Gertrude what type of clothing that she wore more, and she said, "I wear both, for example if I am wearing a Ghanaian shirt I must find Western bottoms to match." (Gertrude, 21 APR 2014) When I asked her what type of clothing she would classify the items in her store as, Western or Ghanaian, she said, "Both. We have tank tops, and those are Western, but we make these [pointing to dress] out of
our [Ghanaian] fabric." (Gertrude, 21 APR 2014) This shows that she definitely thought the clothing made out of Africa print to be Ghanaian.

Section 2: The Designers

"Africa is fashion's new frontier. Having been sidelined by mainstream fashion for over half a century as little more than a source of aesthetic inspiration. The continent's home-grown industry is now showing the world how African fashion is really done." (Jennings, pg. 8) This quote is a great example of the reason that I first wanted to talk to designers. I felt that they were a source of new things that were happening in Ghana, results of changes in the culture. But also, an African did not write this quote. Which made me want to figure out why Ghanaian designers considered their clothing to be Ghanaian.

I wanted to talk to professors and students at KNUST, because I felt that that was a place where a lot of new talent would be coming out of Ghana, so I wanted to get their thoughts on what made their designs Ghanaian.

The first person that I talked to was Professor Akosua Amanka. She teaches the design classes at KNUST. I wanted to at first if she used any western elements in her designs, she said,

"Yes because most of the youth in Ghana don't want to be wearing the traditional clothing, they want more western look. So we try to, mostly i have been trying to use local print and adapting western styles. Even the concept of the slit and kaba has been adapted from the western fashion. So we adjust the modification to what we have here. Then you can also create your own from your own inspiration. But then it ends up looking like the western fashion. So there is a shift towards western fashion from our own traditional clothing." (Amanka, 23 APR 2014)

This made me realize that there are indeed Western influences in Ghanaian designs, so I asked Professor Amanka what Ghanaian cultural symbols and influences she
used in her designs. She replied, "Mostly you have the African print on the market, either you are buying the imported prints or African fabrics, they have the motifs and symbols already." (Amanka, 23 APR 2014) She mentioned that applique is quite popular to apply traditional symbols onto clothing. Professor Amanka says there is no identifiable Ghanaian fashion that identifies that clothing is from Ghana. This is why Ghanaian designers are influenced by Western styles, because the super traditional clothing of Ghana is rather restricting. Professor Amanka said that what really ties the designs to their Ghanaian-ness. (Amanka, 23 APR 2014)

The next professor that I talked to was Professor Cynthia Chichi. Professor Chichi teaches the construction classes in the Design department. When asked her thoughts on Ghanaians using Western styles in design Professor Chichi said that, "Because fashion here is still developing, what we have been taught is a Western style, that is what you do when you are learning. Because they have advanced, practiced all the theories, there is something you can use...when you are taught you are taught the basics of the Western world. But then we have our own kind of dressing, which is related to our culture." (Chichi, 23 APR 2014) She goes on to say that now they are trying to bridge the gap that is created. And the way that they are doing this is by using Ghanaian fabrics. She says, "So we are trying now to use our fabrics, African fabrics. And still come out with some of the old ideas, as are related to our culture, and bring them together so that we can also market [our designs]. (Chichi, 23 APR 2014) I wanted to see how Professor Chichi felt about these Western styles being worn by Ghanaians today and she replied that she thought they were fine and interesting. But that she only had a problem with the designs
that went against decency. Which I felt showed how traditional Ghanaian culture
still does influence current Ghanaian designs.

To get a bit younger opinion on the topic I wanted to talk with some students. When I asked Professor Chichi if there were students that I could talk to she led me to a room where there were three teaching assistants who were happy to talk to me. These teaching assistants were recent graduates of the KNUST Textile program, and were chosen because of their skills in designing, construction and instruction. Their names were, Portia, Belinda, and Kwame. These young designers not only design garments, but design fabrics as well. I asked them what they used for inspiration when they were designing fabrics, Portia replied that it was always different, that they had to take into account what the fabric was going to be used for. The occasion makes all the difference. This made me see how deeply the culture goes into the making of the designs of fabric. Belinda said that when they design clothes they have to take into account tradition as well. That certain fabrics would go for certain occasions, such as red and black fabrics for a funeral. I asked them how they would design something of their own, and Portia said, "When you are trying to make a design that is truly your own you would look for inspiration in things that are around you and in nature." (Portia, 25 APR 2014) I asked if the West influenced their designs at all, Kwame said that they were a little bit, but it really depended on who or what you were designing for. For example, if you were designing an outfit for a local festival, you would adhere to local traditions and use local fabrics. This made me realize how much emphasis was put on the fabrics by these designers as well.
I wanted to get an opinion on fashion from a designer who was not affiliated with KNUST. So to do so I talked to a designer based in Accra named Sheila. She has a boutique called Ms. Blaze's Emporium in Dansoman. I asked her what makes her clothing Ghanaian. She said that the main reason that her clothing is Ghanaian is, "the inspiration behind the designs, and I use Ghanaian fabric. As well as the fact that it is made in Ghana by Ghanaians, I guess." (Sheila, 13 MAY 2014) This shows how much some Ghanaians consider clothing that is made with Africa print to be Ghanaian. Sheila was very busy so I unfortunately did not get a chance to have a full formal interview with her, but if she had had time, I feel it would have been a very profitable conversation to have.
Conclusion

Over the course of this month I have talked to many Ghanaians about Ghanaian fashion. I have really had a chance to see Ghanaian fashion in use on the streets, and talk to people who made it, sold it, and wore it.

I believe that many of my interviews pointed to the fact that although there are definitely Western influences in Ghanaian fashion, that there are a lot of Ghanaian influences as well. And the Ghanaian-ness of the clothing mainly comes from the cloth that it is made from, as well as cultural values that determine what is appropriate to be worn.

The talks that I had with the professors at KNUST were very enlightening and inspiring. These talks combined with the rest of my informants showed me that while there are some Western influences in Ghanaian fashion, Ghanaians and Ghanaian designers are really trying to reclaim their Ghanaian identity through their fashion. The main way that they are trying to claim their clothing as Ghanaian is through the use of Ghanaian fabric.

I really enjoyed doing this research project but there are some things that I would change if I continued further research. I would try to get in contact with some of the bigger names in Ghanaian fashion design, such as the label Christie Brown, or the designer Kofi Ansah, or Joyce Ababio. All of these are designers that the rest of the world has classified as Ghanaian designers, and I think their opinions and thoughts would have given me unmatchable insights to the world of Ghanaian
high fashion. Also I would schedule in time to sit in a few design classes, since I did not get a chance to do that when I was visiting KNUST.
Appendix

Designs 1 & 2

**Design 1:** Based of the Kaba, but replaced the Slit with trousers.
**Design 2:** Top based loosely of some Kaba tops that I have seen. Bottom based off of the aesthetic of wrapped skirts.
Design 3: Based off of the wrapped cloth that Chiefs and Queen Mothers wear.
Design 4: An extended Kaba basically. I always found the black on brown fabric to be very aesthetically pleasing.

Design 5: Based off of the slit, but trying to make it more appealing to the younger generation.
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