

Re-Fashioning Africa: Ghana's 3rd Annual Fashion Weekend

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This summer I traveled to Ghana for three weeks to begin investigating my research topic, contemporary African fashion, and to gain insight into the development of a fashion industry in Accra. I attended Ghana's third annual Fashion Weekend, which featured over 30 contemporary African fashion designers. The designers ranged from recent graduates to internationally known designers like Alphadi from Niger. Textile companies, such as Vlisco and Da Viva sponsored several runway shows with the intent of showcasing their latest fabrics. Not only did Ghana Fashion Weekend indicate a burgeoning fashion industry in Ghana, but it illustrated interesting continuities between "classical" African textiles and contemporary fashion garments.

Several designers, including Ghana's top designer, Kofi Ansah, relied heavily on bogolan and kente cloth, remixed into European influenced designs. Nigeria's Modela borrowed the silhouette of Yoruba ades (beaded crowns worn traditionally by Yoruba kings) to produce hats and purses. As these current designers suggest, "classical" forms of African textiles still play an important role in African dress, but in new and transformed styles.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Ghanaian designer Kofi Ansah, as well as the organizer of Ghana Fashion Weekend, Sima Ibrahim. Both individuals provided me with an interesting perspective on African fashion and its relationship to the European fashion market. Both expressed their desires of making African fashion global, while maintaining localized production and building a fashion industry within Ghana.

Beyond the influences of classical textiles and forms of dress on contemporary African fashion, questions regarding beauty and gender emerged from my experiences during Ghana Fashion Weekend. Several women expressed to me during the show their frustration with the runway models, as they were too thin and did not accurately represent the "average" female body. What constitutes beauty in Ghana is something to explore further, particularly the conflict between Ghanaian and European standards of beauty.



The four-day fashion event was a whirlwind of vibrant fabrics and innovative garments, suggesting this is an area in need of further examination. After this initial visit, I plan to return to Ghana in summer 2010 to begin working directly with Ghanaian designers and exploring the role of fashion within contemporary

Ghanaian society. This will include how classical African forms and textiles are reinterpreted into contemporary clothing, the viability of a fashion industry in Ghana, and a further exploration of issues pertaining to conceptions of ideal beauty and gender.

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