

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

*Yeepam efatawo* - We sew and it fits you

The social and cultural context of small-scale  
enterprise in the tailoring and dressmaking sector of  
Southern Ghana

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD

in the University of Hull

by

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

## Yeepam efatawo

*Yeepam efatawo*, we sew and it fits you, is the motto of the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association (GNTDA). It is used to call a meeting to order; the chairman will shout *Yeepam*, we sew, as many times as necessary to receive a loud and positive response in one voice by members of *Efatawo*, it fits you. The phrase also literally describes the work of individual dressmakers and tailors - a customer brings their own cloth to the dressmaker's or tailor's workshop and it is sewn and fitted to their specific measurements.

The phrase *Efatawo* is particularly significant and it has an additional meaning, usually used as an exclamation. It can be translated 'it suits you' or 'it makes you look attractive'. This is a reference to the totality of the garment as it appears on and, as it were, compliments the individual; the dress style, the cloth colour and design have all come together in such a way as to set off some previously unarticulated personal appeal or power. The seamstress who can sew to this *Efatawo* standard is said to be gifted and she will have a secure and regular customer base.

*Yeepam efatawo* having been used to call a meeting of the GNTDA to order, the silence and attention of members is now drawn to prayers and patriotic songs before the meeting begins to deal with the formal agenda. At association meetings I attended in Swedru, Cape Coast and Accra the agenda was dominated with issues of income tax, membership fees, the threat posed by second-hand clothes, discipline and management of apprentices, member's welfare letters and funds and the organisation of functions. I was surprised not to find the issue of low demand for member's products or problems of competition on the agenda as these

were frequently talked about in the workshops I studied. The reason for the absence of discussion on these subjects became clear as fieldwork progressed. I found that seamstresses and tailors don't like to think of themselves as in competition with each other and prefer to believe there is enough work to go around and each has their own customers. They like to act and consider themselves as a united occupational group bonded by possession of the gift of their skilled cutting and sewing hands and their status as master craftsmen and women. This concern underlies the first part of their motto *Yeepam*, we sew. In the articulation of this phrase members give up part of their individual autonomy for the power and security found within occupational group identity<sup>1</sup>. They are reacting within their working practice to the norms and traditional values of friendship, reciprocity and co-operation found within Ghanaian communities which sustain daily life.

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<sup>1</sup> The GNTDA differs from the general culture of associational life in Ghana in that the association is asking its members not only to voluntarily observe its rules but also to pay income tax to the state through its administration. The GNTDA is backed by the authority of the state to compel members to pay taxes and is described in Chapter Nine of the thesis as being responsible for drawing its members piecemeal out of the informal economy to make a contribution towards national state development.

Associational commercial organisations are not a recent phenomenon. A sample of 186 Ghanaian 'businessmen' researched by Kennedy between 1967 and 1970 reports that 70% of successful respondents belonged to at least one business association (Kennedy 1980); among these were manufacturers/general business associations and lodges such as the Freemasons. Earlier, in 1957, Little was struck by the "very large number and variety of voluntary associations" (Little 1957 p.581) in Ghana and other West African countries.

In 1957 Little was looking particularly at voluntary associations based in urban areas but he found that, although the associations were formed there, many existed to maintain ties with kinship in the communities the migrants had left. He called them a 'moral bridge' between 'modern' and 'traditional' life. The strength of matrilineal kinship networks was maintained through associations, with migrants able to send a proportion of wages back to their families and keep an involvement in village affairs.

*Yeepam efatawo* also literally describes the essence of the 'cloth to sew' market which forms the staple and indispensable source of demand for the garments of small-scale dressmakers and tailors. This market is seasonal, depending on observance of Christian and traditional indigenous festivals and on the vibrant Akan funeral culture. I have called the market 'cloth to sew' because it is dependent on the customers first action of sending or bringing their cloth to the dressmaker's or tailor's workshop and after discussing the style and price they leave the cloth to be cut, sewn, styled and fitted to personal measurements.

Finally, as voiced by members of the GNTDA, *Yeepam Efatawo* can be interpreted as the motto of change. Becoming a member of the GNTDA is a step towards accepting changes in working practices, paying regular income tax contributions and recognising the legitimacy of the state in working life. A useful analogy for the GNTDA would be as a bridge between state and artisan conveying messages and practical exigencies of change.

#### Dressmakers and tailors as subjects of research

This thesis is a study of small-scale dressmakers and tailors experiencing changes in their indigenous markets, products and in their relationship to the state under the policies of structural adjustment in Southern Ghana. The thesis does not look exclusively at members of the GNTDA; data was collected on non-members and on other small-scale enterprises and organisations linked to the dressmaking and tailoring sub-sector.

Many dressmakers and tailors belong to the GNTDA. This organisation has come to prominence during the 1980s and 90s and its power and influence are partly a consequence of the decentralisation process in

Ghana which has delegated certain political and economic powers to district level assemblies. In this thesis the GNTDA is analysed as a resource both to its members and the state and as an institution of growing importance acting as a buffer between the amorphous informal economy and the inaccessible state structure. The organisation is given specific attention as it is of major research interest both in the field of applied development practice and in the study of political economy.

In discussing processes of change the thesis documents, as a baseline, established norms of indigenous dress construction, the relationships between the material and symbolic aspects of wax printed cloth and the traditional demand structure for the seamstress and tailor. This places the indigenous dressmaker and tailor in academic focus and acknowledges their part in Ghanaian popular culture. Although Ghanaian dance, drama, festivals, funerals and cloth have all been the foci of academic research<sup>1</sup> the role of the indigenous dressmakers and tailors, whose trade it is to prepare the individual for participation in social and cultural life, has not been given any specific attention. Their exclusion from study has meant their role in communicating the symbolic language of cloth and their skill in its transformation into culturally accepted garments imbued with gendered forms has not been previously documented or analysed. The purpose of this thesis in documenting their role is to correct this omission and to contribute further to the general ethnography on cloth and dress. This aspect of the thesis pursues specific questions in relation to cloth and dress. How do seamstresses transform meaning from cloth into garments? What social and cultural ideas contribute to the cutting and

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<sup>1</sup> For example (Bame 199: Sarpong 1974: Picton and Mack 1979).

sewing of the Kaba and Slit<sup>1</sup> and make it into the normative female dress? The thesis also attempts an exploration into the role of cloth as a gift used to establish and maintain lineage and parental bonds within the Fante dual kinship system.

These three aspects of research - dressmakers and tailors facing the economic restructuring process; dressmakers and tailors as members of a lynch pin organisation (the GNTDA), and the dressmaker as conveyer and transformer of cultural and symbolic meanings - are the central themes of the thesis and are outlined below.

#### Four major political and economic periods leading to the promotion of the private sector and small-scale enterprises

Background to the current liberalising economic situation is to be found in the experiences of four major political and economic periods: colonialism, independence and democratic government, military rule and the present era of democratic consensus politics and structural adjustment. The colonial period brought Christianity, western education, infrastructure development and the growth of villages, towns and cities as a result of the expansion of export agriculture and trade in imported goods. Independence, in 1957, brought an expansion in agriculture, import substituting manufacturing and investments in hydro-electricity, education and social services. Nkrumah's government was overthrown by coup d'état, and this was followed by more than two decades of military rule interspersed by two civilian governments, Busia (Progress Party 1969-72) and Hill Limn (Peoples National Party 1979-81).

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<sup>1</sup> Kaba and Slit is a three piece outfit made from matching cloth and is the culturally respected female dress for public occasions



An overview of development since the overthrow of Nkrumah's government in 1966 is one of managing a growing economic crisis including unemployment, industrial stagnation and deteriorating social services. In 1983 Ghanaians experienced drought, bush fires, an inflation rate of around 122% (Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p.112), the repatriation of thousands of Ghanaians from Nigeria and a shortage of food, water and fuel. The radical political interventions of Rawlings's second military regime avoided what has been described as "total economic and political disintegration" (Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p.153). In the same year the Rawlings's government arrested economic decline by reforming the existing capitalist system, attempting to seize assets, reduce smuggling, collect taxes and rebuild the infrastructure.

In 1983 Rawlings engaged the Ghanaian economy in an Economic Recovery Programme which is still assisted by the World Bank and on occasions it has been displayed as a show-case of successful adjustment lending. The special attention given by the World Bank now makes Ghana a country of special interest for the study of structural adjustment in Africa.

Conditions imposed by the World Bank to a large degree directed government policies over the last ten years (Toye 1992). Policy changes came under three broad headings: fiscal and monetary discipline, trade and price reforms (particularly concentrated on the agricultural sector) and institutional reform, including a programme of state enterprise divestiture, new banking regulations and reviews of health and education. One of the most politically sensitive measures has been the programme of state enterprise divestiture which since 1988 has gone hand-in-hand with the policy to increase the share of the private sector in gross domestic investment (Tangri 1992).

### Structural adjustment and small-scale enterprises.

The promotion of small-scale enterprises in the 1990s is part of the emphasis on the private sector and such enterprises within the informal sector are being recognised as a developed and substantial economic base capable of absorbing and generating employment for the thousands no longer employed in the divested government departments. Press headlines on the imperative to 'give more support to small firms' (People's Daily Graphic 29-11-93) and highly publicised initiatives such as 'Workshop on informal sector opens' (People's Daily Graphic 17-11-93) are regular press features. The Ghanaian Trade and Industry minister holds the view that in Ghana

"the micro/small enterprises can take better advantage of the opportunities created by the adjustment policies than the larger enterprises.....enterprises in that sector can better fulfil the dynamic role in the transition from an industrial structure based on household manufacturing to one based on economies of scale in large industries" (People's Daily Graphic 17-11-93).<sup>1</sup>

There is evidence to show that the economy in 1994 showed signs of slowing<sup>2</sup> and this may prevent a further increase in dressmaking and

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<sup>1</sup> This workshop was organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to build upon current work in progress on the promotion of the informal sector for development in Africa.

<sup>2</sup> This slowdown has come a decade after the introduction of structural adjustment policies which prompted expectations of Ghana becoming a 'newly industrialising country'; this is now thought to be premature. A report on the economy indicates that the rate of growth of real GDP increased from 3.5 per cent in 1992 to 5.0 per cent in 1993. However, "the increased rate of growth was largely a result of increased agricultural output following good rainfall for the period. From a negative growth rate of 0.6 per cent in 1992, agriculture increased by 2.5 per cent in 1993".(Editorial [g]).

The report said the annual rate of inflation more than doubled in 1993; "end-of-year inflation increased from 13.3 per cent in 1992 to 27.7" (ibid.). The report attributed the causes to increased petroleum prices, the delayed effect of the

tailoring enterprises. The literature on structural adjustment showed there is wide agreement that medium and large scale businesses have benefited from the policies, but there is uncertainty about the effects on small-scale enterprises (SSEs). A number of studies had been commissioned to assess the impact of the Economic Recovery Programme on SSEs, particularly their growth and export potential (Jebuni and others 1992: Steel and Webster 1991: Sowa and others 1992).

Steel and Webster's general cross-industry study of SSEs in Ghana described dressmakers and tailors as "stagnant producers who have not mastered the new environment and who seem unable to change products in the face of mounting competition" (Steel and Webster 1991 P.X). They predict that small-scale enterprises in this sector are likely to continue hand-to-mouth as the opportunity for increased demand is undermined by increased competition. In another study by the Overseas Development Institute (Sowa and others 1992) these findings are contradicted by over 70 per cent of respondents in the sector saying that "they had no problem with demand" (p.35). In a further contradiction of Steel and Webster's evidence the study found that sectors such as dressmaking and tailoring "have the advantage of superior flexibility in the face of changing market conditions" (ibid.).

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substantial increase in the money supply in 1992, the depreciation of the value of the cedi and the decline in agricultural output in 1992.

The period 1992 to 1994 was to be seen as a transition from economic recovery in which growth rates averaged about 5 per cent to accelerated growth with projections varying between 7 and 8 per cent. However "virtually all macro-economic indicators of a move to accelerated growth have been disappointing" and the report gave "a gloomy picture of the country's economic performance: uncontrolled inflation, excessive bank borrowing by government, expansive money supply, decline in productivity and fast depreciation in the value of the cedi" (Editorial g- ISSER Report 1994).

The large-scale clothing industry in Ghana was once a significant share of manufacturing output but has undergone a major contraction since the commencement of the Economic Recovery Programme<sup>1</sup>. The two main factors have been the importation of new and especially second-hand clothing which is playing an increasing role in meeting clothing needs and the elimination of high levels of import protection which assisted the industry. However the textiles and garments sub-sector still "is the largest manufacturing activity in Ghana in terms of the number of enterprises"<sup>2</sup> (Lall and others 1994 p.200). Dressmakers and tailors are part of this sub-sector and exist within the informal economy where they have flourished and increased in numbers partly as a consequence of the collapse of the large scale clothing industry.

It appears that the new liberal economic environment created by the policies of structural adjustment effected the large-scale clothing industry first and created an economic space for the small-scale operator. It is mainly the number of indigenous seamstress workshops that have increased as the second-hand clothes market has supplied cheap trousers and shirts which the tailors specialised in making. Second-hand women's clothes are also imported but women mainly use these as work clothes and continue to dress in traditional wax printed cloth and Ghanaian styles for public occasions such as traditional annual festivals, funeral gatherings and travel. The continuing and increasing popularity of African wax prints and commitment to culturally specific dress styles has secured the businesses of the indigenous seamstress. More wax printed cloth is

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<sup>1</sup>Trade Policy Review - Ghana 1992 p.130

<sup>2</sup> The second largest (after woodworking) in terms of employment, and the third largest (after food processing and wood working) in terms of value added" (Lall and others 1994 p.200).

available on the market at affordable prices as a result of market liberalisation and this has also helped seamstresses maintain their businesses. More and more young women have seen the opportunities of the seamstress and have learnt sewing skills under apprenticeship and graduated to start-up their own low technology workshops. The result is a saturated market place for indigenous sewing skills and this, with the increasing market for imported second-hand and new clothing and changes in clothing tastes to reflect western styles was in 1994 threatening the livelihoods of these enterprises. If unable to raise an income from sewing many in the sector who have minimum education can only join the mass of semi-skilled and semi-employed in subsistence farming or informal trading and leave the indigenous clothing market to global market forces.

#### Dressmaking and tailoring enterprises as part of the 'informal' sector

Ambiguities described above on the prospects of enterprises such as dressmaking and tailoring under new neo-liberal economic conditions and their opportunities to evolve into larger businesses can be looked at in more general terms with reference to the sociological debates on the 'informal' economy. That the small-scale Ghanaian enterprises should in the 1990s be viewed as evolutionary and as having employment generating potential points to renewed optimism and respectability within institutions such as the World Bank for both the term 'informal sector' and its role in economic regeneration.

The debate on the informal sector can be said to have started in Ghana with the work of Keith Hart (1971 Hart, and 1973) in Accra. Hart looked at the structure of income opportunities of a group of Northern migrants

settled in Accra. It was the activities or roles individuals played within the informal sector rather than the individuals themselves that he studied as many individuals were operating both in the formal and informal economies (p.69). He asked the question "Does the informal sector have any autonomous capacity for growth?" (ibid. p87). His answer was noncommittal but saw self-employment in the 'informal' sector as 'a problem' for the economist rather than for the Ghanaian who used it as a 'buffer' between being out of the 'formal' economy and destitution.

Hart's concept entered the mainstream of policy making within development agencies and research institutions. The ILO<sup>1</sup> took up the concept in the early 1970s from a liberal perspective seeing the informal economy as having potential for employment and the production of goods and services badly needed by low income groups. The ILO terminology for those who worked in the informal economy was the 'working poor' and the institution promoted the sector using such measures as: asking governments to take a positive attitude towards the sector, to cease from demolishing informal sector housing, to review trade and commercial licensing procedures in favour of the sector, to intensify technical research and development work on products suitable for production or use in the sector (Moser 1978 p.1045).

But not all who used the concept were noncommittal or positive on the capacity of the informal economy for growth nor on the prevailing conceptualisation of developing economies as either dualistic i.e. having an

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<sup>1</sup> The International Labour Office (ILO) launched the World Employment Programme in 1969 and undertook three country studies (Colombia, Sri Lanka and Kenya) and a number of city studies in the early 1970s to ascertain the state of the perceived unemployed crisis in the developing world and to formulate policy recommendations to resolve this.

informal and formal sector or as belonging to 'modern' and 'traditional' cultural and economic spheres. In the late 1970s and early 1980s a perspective from the political left saw the informal economy to be exploitative of the 'petty commodity producers' who participated in it. The relationship between parts or sub-systems of the economy was now theorised as interacting not in a benign way but to the benefit of formal capitalist industry. The approach was based on Marx's theory of different modes of production<sup>1</sup>. One researcher of the period saw the subordinate position of the petty producer in relation to capitalist industry as a specific aspect of the generalised subordinate position of an underdeveloped country to the international capitalist system (Gerry, 1978 p.1152).

This Marxist approach has brought forward few policy proposals. It offers a more complex theoretical model focusing upon structural linkages between different production and distribution systems (Moser 1978 p.1061). The approach calls for more research but the focus of the international development policy agenda changed under the influence of first feminist and then environmental pressure groups. The publication of 'The Other Path' Hernando de Soto' (1988) brought renewed interest in the 'informal economy' and this continues into the 1990s.

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<sup>1</sup> Marxist development models entail the idea of progress and evolution in the relationship between capital and labour. For example, Frank's dependency theory would conceptualise SSEs in the informal sector in developing countries as the outcome of underdevelopment and polarisation between metropolitan centres and peripheral satellites (Frank 1971). This simplistic exploitation model is opposed by Warren's, although both draw on Marx. Warren rejects revolutionary texts in favour of finding 'true' Marxism in writings stressing evolutionary stages and modes of production towards socialism. A 'dynamic' small enterprise sector Ghana's informal economy would have been a sign of successful capitalist development, a vehicle for change (Warren 1980).

Since Hart's early work on the 'informal sector' or the 'petty producer' in Ghana researchers continue to address the contribution of the informal sector but questions are formulated often in different terms. One question now asked is that if African economies have been dominated by very small enterprises of fewer than 10 workers (Steel and Webster 1991p.1) why has evolution from small to large not occurred in other long established sectors of the informal economy? Dressmaking and tailoring would be one example of this in Ghana, where one finds well established workshops that have seen no growth over a ten year period (see Chapter Five).

One explanation emphasises the skewedness in favour of the very small as the main reason for Africa's difficulties in achieving such evolution and sustained industrial development (Kilby 1988). This postulates that there has been an absence of a medium sized enterprise sector, called by Kilby the 'missing middle', with the consequence that African industry lacks managerial skills and the opportunity to evolve.

In Ghana, Kennedy's 1980 study concluded that opportunities have been declining "over the last twenty years or so for the artisan-entrepreneur to move out of petty commodity production and establish a large firm that can compete effectively with the big companies." (Kennedy 1980 p.167). This contrast with more recent research looking at Ghana's 'informal sector' in relation to the promotion of large industries. Research by Dawson suggests that earlier economic policies of import substitution attempted to protect national interests and industries from the full commercial hegemony of the world system. When these industries began to deteriorate through lack of investment and eventually fell into crisis in the late 1970s/early 1980s an economic space was opened up to small-scale enterprises. In many fields they flourished in the accompanying



atmosphere of political uncertainty and crisis in foreign exchange (Dawson 1990). His research looked at small-scale Ghanaian industries in two of Kumasi's suburbs (Anolog and Suame) and he found that the economic vacuum created when large firms collapsed "proved sufficiently strong in itself to suck small enterprises into markets in which they had previously been either marginal or absent" (ibid. p.44).

Steel's 1977 study of small-scale employment and production in Ghana used an analytical model based on a modern-informal dichotomy of the intermediate sector. Locating a business or employment at a point in time on this continuum can help to "illustrate its hypothesised transitional role over time" (Steel 1977 p.116). On Steel's continuum, 'modern' is associated with enterprises using wage employment and the use of apprentices, and sole self-employment businesses are at the other pole of the continuum. Dressmaking businesses come at the informal pole, and are not seen as having much potential to move into the larger or 'modern' sector<sup>1</sup>. Steel found that those small-scale industries with most potential to absorb more labour and evolve towards the 'modern' sector were in vehicle and other repairs, chemicals, printing, furniture producers and cement block manufacturers. Kennedy's study was also optimistic about the role of small producers to create employment and provide services and cheap essential goods for the urban and rural poor. In addition he also saw SSEs as "essential to the survival of the multinational corporations,... as they help to keep modern-sector wage levels low" (Kennedy 1980 p.167).

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<sup>1</sup> Supply of seamstresses and their products were seen as saturating the market in the 1970s (this was still the case in 1994 but still more apprenticeships were being started and more workshops opened; see chapter 5).

Kennedy's almost 'throw-away' remark on the relationship between small-scale labour resources and large-scale industry and multinationals is also the starting point for an analysis of Ghana's informal sector by Ninsin (1991). Ninsin's work in the 1990's still draws on the Marxist tradition of analysing the informal sector. He begins his analysis by asking how Kennedy could not "grasp the character of the exchange relations between the capitalist firms and the informal sector" (ibid. p.4). Ninsin's alternative 'scientific' explanation stresses the dependent and subordinate relationship of the 'informal' sector in Ghana to the 'formal' capitalist peripheral economy. The 'informal' sector provides subsidy to the formal sector, in terms of a cheap 'reserve army' of labour, a 'dumping ground' for the unemployed, and an exploitable network for retailing and distribution of products from the 'formal' sector. He parallels 'informal/formal' relations in Ghana with the way industrialised countries have devised mechanisms for exploiting developing countries (ibid. p.5). He fiercely attacks the use of the concept of the 'informal' economy as one defaulted to by sociologists because of their inability to develop alternative modes to analyse problems of development in developing countries. He believes 'informal' and 'formal' must be analysed as interrelating systems; the two forces in the interaction are 'capital' and 'labour'.

Ninsin traces the relationships of 'capital' and 'labour' historically and finds that since the early 1890s British colonialist trade policy produced self-employed petty traders and a clerical class to service the colony's exports of primary products and imports of manufactured goods. An industrial labour force developed only with Nkrumah's industrialisation plan. This was unsuccessful despite the trade barriers introduced to protect it; industrialised countries had a competitive advantage in most of

the industries which Ghana wished to develop. Ghanaians in the informal sector have been allocated by international and national capitalists the role of hawking their products rather than producing them. Unable to afford most foreign or 'formal' products themselves, 'informal' traders produce and consume inferior products.

'Capital' and 'labour' in Ninsin's work become reified anonymous characters and through their historical relationship have produced a version of a Ghanaian informal economy inside which there is "nothing but a desperate act of survival" (ibid. 113). Ninsin is contemptuous of the idea that the 'informal' sector can be a place of dynamism and industrial regeneration.

The formal policy consensus in Ghana under structural adjustment and the formal policy for African economies within institutions like the UNECA contrasts starkly with Ninsin's analysis. They promote self employment within the informal sector as dynamic and evolutionary. A representative of the UNECA told Ghanaian delegates at a recent conference that the UNECA "has decided to target the informal sector operators in the firm belief that they should be assisted to initiate actions themselves to be able to become architects of its own future and destiny." (sic People's Daily Graphic 17-11-93). This renewed interest and optimism on the viability and developmental potential of the informal sector in Ghana can, I believe, be seen in rather a pragmatic way. That is that the failure of policies promoting large scale industrialisation and the hoped for 'trickle down' effect, starting with Nkrumah's import substitution policies, and the current policy promoting the small-scale enterprise may be explained as an acceptance of the real economic base from which Ghana's mainly agricultural economy can achieve more diversified economic growth. It is also an acceptance that promoting the small-scale is the most realistic

way of positively effecting the lives of the poorest in developing countries and also perhaps indicative of a deficit in development theory of alternatives to such macro policies.

#### Historical view of development models for small-scale enterprise in Ghana

One of the earliest policies to promote indigenous Ghanaian businesses, in particular petty retail traders and small and medium scale manufacturers, was initiated by the Political Committee of the National Liberation Council. In a Memorandum of 1967 the Committee showed their support for the 'indigenisation' of all retail and a number of manufacturing enterprises. Larger foreign-owned trading companies involved in these activities were to be phased out over a four to five year period. Large companies such as the United African Company (an affiliate of Unilever) were to be eliminated from trading in the small-scale sector in the second year. Typical small-scale enterprises such as garment manufacturing were to be declared exclusively for Ghanaians; foreign companies operating in these areas could only remain under certain conditions, one of these being that they employed one hundred per cent Ghanaians. The activities of non-indigenous enterprises were stopped or restricted. This applied mainly to the Lebanese, Syrian and Indian traders settled in Ghana for some time, who were thought to be exploiting and controlling the retail trade and gradually squeezing out Ghanaians (Hutchful 1987 p.102). It was thought the new small-scale Ghanaian traders would fill the trade vacuum they left.

These policies of enterprise promotion by exclusion were not fully implemented until the Busia Government (1969) came to power with the support of traditional authorities and religious groups. Busia's government passed the Ghana Business Promotion Act and the Aliens Compliance Act

which resulted in many non-Ghanaian African workers being expelled. These policies had some lasting effect<sup>1</sup> despite Busia's government being in power for a relatively short period and the unprofessional nature of governance. Chazan writes that "substantive norms of access to officials gave way to favouritism on the basis of kinship, ethnicity, and friendship" (Chazan 1988a p.105)<sup>2</sup>. Injustices arose from these biases in allocating power, and an era of corruption and chaotic economic management followed, concluding with the government's overthrow in Ghana's second military coup in 1972.

The next military government formed an alliance between the State bureaucracy and traditional rulers, and created a free enterprise economy of self-reliance which led to economic disorder, increased corruption and trade malpractice, the military government itself being the greatest offender (op. cit., p.107-108). When the Rawlings Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) took over power in 1979 its aim was to rid the state of corruption and return the country to democratic government through elections. The AFRC held elections and duly handed over power to the Limann government but at the end of 1981 Rawlings took back power and began another campaign of moral rectitude. The 1981 Rawlings'

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<sup>1</sup> In Ghana today a large number of small-scale enterprises are still reserved for Ghanaians only. These include the sale of anything whatsoever (retail or wholesale) in any market; the only exceptions are enterprises being carried on within or by department stores which have employed capital of not less than five hundred thousand U.S dollars. The same capital restriction applies to all commercial agents for foreign companies. Services where SSEs are very active are covered: operation of beauty salons and barber shops, bakeries, tyre retreading, and all passenger transport including taxis. The manufacturing sectors where SSEs are most prolific are also protected from foreign involvement: the manufacture of cement blocks, suitcases and all types of wallets and bags, and production of articles using foam materials. In the textiles industry the manufacture or tailoring of garments (other than for export) and textile hand printing are restricted (Department of Trade and Industry 1991).

<sup>2</sup> This can also be analysed as an extension of what Hyden called the 'economy of affection' into government (Hyden 1983).

Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) was an uneasy alliance between radical socialist groups operating from an anti-imperialist context (Ray 1986 cited in Rimmer 1992 p.181), discontented urban masses, students and disaffected ranks in the military. Rawlings himself seems to have appealed to all these groups through his popularist call for social justice and a renewed morality to improve the standard of living (Rimmer 1992 p.181).

When Rawlings went to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance and submitted to policies for economic reform this was seen as a betrayal of the revolutionary process by the socialist left of the PNDC (Yeebo<sup>1</sup> 1991 p.179) and as the only alternative to continued economic and social breakdown by other commentators (Rimmer 1992 p.180).

On the streets of major cities the more radical and harsh clean-up measures of Rawlings first and second regimes effected small-scale enterprises; the business community, entrepreneurs, and successful large farmers and professionals were seen as the enemies of the revolution by radicals (Frimpong-Ansah, 1991 p.112). Business people and wealthy farmers were excluded from government. An anti-capitalist, socialist revolutionary doctrine was propagated by many PNDC followers, even if Rawlings and his close advisers were seen to be converts to the IMF and World Bank programmes for economic regeneration by private capital.

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<sup>1</sup> Yeebo's perspective and interpretation of events stems from his involvement in the 31 December 1981 military coup, his subsequent disillusionment with the Rawlings government and eventual exile in Britain.

For Ghanaians to pursue enterprise, novel 'beating the system strategies' were developed as survival strategies. An example can be given using imported Dutch wax cloth which persists as a material of high exchange value. Traders were said to be keeping the cloth off the market stalls in order to avoid selling it at state regulated prices. But the cloth was being sold; the traders had set up in the broom section of the market, and only displayed strips of cloth tied to the ends of brooms, bringing out the lengths only when a customer had chosen the design from the strips of cloth on surreptitious display (Pillow and Chazan 1986 p.168).

The dominant economic feature of this period was the number of people gaining a livelihood from operating in both the official and informal economy (Rimmer, 1992 p.167-168). One of the main profit making activities was obtaining subsidised goods within the official economy and realising the subsidy by selling at much higher market prices in the informal economy. Many waged office workers were also participating in this practice often called *Kalabule* and many found it necessary for their economic survival - Rimmer notes the "optimal economic situation for an individual became one in which he or she was simultaneously wage-earner, trader and farmer" (ibid.). This period could be seen as one where increasing numbers of people looked to a form of self-employment in any small enterprise, legal or illegal, for economic survival. It was also a period where ambiguity and uncertainty became associated with profit making. Rawlings's regimes often branded market speculators as thieves; market prices were set by the state, and market women publicly beaten if found profiteering; a number of small businesses were seized by the state.

Uncertainty surrounding business in contemporary Ghana remains, despite the declared programme of the present NDC government to move away

from intervention in the economy and support the private sector. I am told many Ghanaians find it hard to accord this current commitment with the moralist anti-market zeal and intimidation of traders by Rawlings's previous regime. Recent evidence suggests that business life in the 1990s is still stigmatised and individuals harassed by state officials (Tangri 1992 p.99). Business owners complain that they are not consulted on economic policy which affects them, and they don't feel respected (ibid., p.107). In 1991 the PNDC did initiate consultations with the private sector and invited a representative from the business community to join a Consultative Group negotiating Ghana's continuing assistance from the World Bank and IMF. This may have been a tactical measure to assure these agencies of the government's commitment to privatisation of the economy.

#### Definitions of small-scale enterprises

Numerical definitions of small-scale enterprises abound. A recent study in Ghana by Sowa (Sowa and others 1992) defines as small-scale those employing less than 30<sup>1</sup> workers and this is broken-up into: 'micro' (less than 6), 'very small' (6 to 9) and 'small' (10 to 29). Numerical definitions are useful for counting and categorising a wide range of economic activity, but numerical terms have no substantive meaning. Delimiting economic activity by number of employees also makes unfounded assumptions (i.e., fewer employees means smaller enterprise in terms of turnover and capital base) which are not always correct. An additional array of socio-economic features is needed to supplement the above definition.

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<sup>1</sup> Employment of 30 or less people seems to be a favoured analytical cut off point in definitions of this kind in previous research on this topic, for example (Yankson 1983).



Wilson (1984 p.171) claims a widely held defining feature of SSEs to be " where ownership and management are vested essentially in the proprietor (or in a small group of partners), where there is no formal management structure and where the enterprise has little or no ability to influence the market" . This adds some useful features to a definition by making ownership and self-management distinguishing criteria.

Wilson conceptually places SSEs within a general macro market economy and as such at the behest of national and international forces; although this is a fact of life for SSEs they do have spheres of influence within their own localities and regions. Such influence is most apparent within trading groups and associations. Chazan underlines this point with her description of Ghanaian voluntary associations and extended networks as having "underwritten the parallel economy and laid the foundation for economic survival" (Chazan 1988b p.131).

Wilson's definition of SSE's may be accurate in that they do not have a corporate management philosophy, but management is frequently guided by trade association rules, formal kinship principles and loyal friendships. Kennedy's study of 126 manufacturing firms in Ghana, which included 61 'small' firms, of which 46 were 'very small', found kinship connections to be beneficial to a number of businesses. This was in terms of managerial assistance in delegating authority and decision making and employment of relatives in positions of trust. In financial terms 42% of businesses had taken gifts and loans for investment from kin; others had benefited from property inheritance. He also reported that there was a "psychological satisfaction that stemmed from the prestige earned by being a leading member of a kinship network" (Kennedy 1980 p.111).

Okelo has compiled a definition of the SSE specifically to describe the African case. She characterises SSEs as having "small size, loose informal structure, ease of entry, requiring very little capital to start up, high flexibility, little or no formal education required, tends to be labour intensive, generally a one person or family business. A large percentage of these are operated by women, they often use local raw material/inputs and cater for local/surrounding markets." (Okelo 1989 p.241). With the exception of 'high flexibility' and the 'use of local raw materials' this summary of attributes well describes the workshops I studied during fieldwork. It also incorporates the main feature of Wilson's definition which is self ownership and management.

In terms of Sowa et al's definition I could talk of my own research workshops as micro enterprises but this would conceal the large number of apprentices working and undergoing training who cannot be classed as employees. Apprentices make an enormous contribution to the workload a seamstress takes on, the possibilities for expansion and the success of her enterprise. As the number of apprentices working with one seamstress can range from one to thirty or even forty I find it impossible to use a conventional numerical definition and throughout the thesis when I have talked about the workshops as small-scale enterprises I intend by this that they are owned and managed by one master seamstress or tailor working with a number of apprentices and they conform to most of the criteria of African SSEs described by Okelo.

### The dynamics of the GNTDA

The role of local level organisations has recently become of interest in the study of decentralisation and development in Ghana. Work in progress on

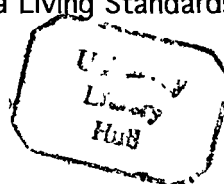
this issue (Dennis and Peprah ) indicates the importance of information on micro level activities to macro policy makers in order that an enabling environment can sustain and promote the important links which such associations forge with state structures. As an organisation of this type the GNTDA has strong links with the district assemblies<sup>1</sup> established to further the decentralisation programme in Ghana and it will be of interest to future research in this area.

District assemblies have exclusive responsibility for levying and collection of certain rates and taxes<sup>2</sup> which were formerly the responsibility of the Inland Revenue Services and district councils (1988, 1992). The collection of part of the artisan tax for dressmakers and tailors has been delegated to the GNTDA and is collected at fortnightly meetings. The Ghanaian state has an urgent need to extract revenue from the informal sector as inflows of aid which continue to finance development are not sustainable in the long term. A provisional and very cautious estimate of informal sector income and output in Ghana<sup>3</sup> suggests "it to be a sizeable percentage (at least 20 per cent in the case of non-farm enterprises" (Coulombe and others 1996 p.40)).

<sup>1</sup> Established under Local Government Law, 1988, PNDC 207.

<sup>2</sup> These include entertainment duty, casino revenue, betting tax, gambling tax, disco licence fees, wholesalers and retailers' registration fees. They also have responsibility to collect income tax from the "following economic activities: crop levy, cattle pounds, conservancy fees, slaughter houses, market dues, market stalls/stores, lorry part dues, advertisement trading kiosks, graveyard receipts, bread bakers, chop bars, corn mills, dressing stations, dog licences, hawkers, extension of hours, hotels and restaurants, beer and wine sellers, petroleum installations, palm wine sellers, akpeteshie distillers and sellers, herbalists, taxi cabs, lorry parks overseers, taxi drivers' driving licenses, self-employed artisans, fishing tolls, births and deaths, court fees/fines, district and community public tribunals fees and fines, town hall and community centre receipts, hearse hiring, slot machines, and stool land revenue. The amount realised from these sources will belong exclusively to the district assemblies". (Kwamena Ahwoi 1988 p.15).

<sup>3</sup> Provisional estimates derived from Ghana Living Standards Surveys.



The commission earned from tax collection, plus membership dues and 'special collections' finances the Association and the salary of regional organisers. Some paid officials were former members of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, (CDRs)<sup>1</sup> - as no provision was made for these committees by the National Democratic Congress some formerly active members were found places with civil associations. The GNTDA (like the CDRs) has the objective of mass organisation, education and the potential to incorporate people into the state system . Unlike the CDRs, the GNTDA has no political ideological commitment to revolution building to demolish bourgeois institutions (Ninsin 1993 p.101).

To understand the role of the GNTDA in the new democratic Ghanaian civ society is one of the tasks of the thesis. It is a new category of institution quite different from trade unions, cooperatives or survival strategy efforts - although at times it incorporates these into its activities. The GNTDA's links with the district assemblies give it status and credibility and it has further links with other trade associations under the umbrella organisation of the Council for Indigenous Business Associations (CIBA) which it was instrumental in forming. Such large associations rooted in the local and district level but having links with the state have a great deal of power to be used for members and/or for the state. They form a network of structured communication channels and will be of vital interest to macro policy makers and in the analysis of structural change and adjustment in Ghanaian society.

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<sup>1</sup> CDRs were formally named People's Defence Committees (PDCs). They have been described as agents of participatory democracy, economic democracy and popular justice - their functions were a) monitoring and co-ordination b) complaints and arbitration c) education, culture, information and religion and d) projects and mobilisation. Their role in arbitration is said to have exceeded even the powers of traditional authority and customary law (Oquaye 1993 p.155).

### The dressmaker as conveyer of culture and symbolic meaning

This thesis emphasises the role of the dressmaker and her skills in transforming cloth into the popular female three piece dress made of matching cloth known as Kaba and Slit. The emphasis is justified as dressmaker's workshops far out-number those of tailors whose businesses have suffered far more from the increasing quantities of imported second-hand clothes due to lowered tariffs initiated through the new liberal economic environment.

Observations and analysis on cloth in the thesis may be put under the heading 'anthropology of consumption' which is a development and rethinking of much that was written under the general headings of 'social anthropology' and 'economic anthropology'. 'The Social Life of Things' (Appadurai 1986) is clearly categorised as part of consumption studies (Miller 1995 p. 267) but the new branch is said to have begun in Britain with the publication of 'The World of Goods' by Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood (1978) and in France *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* by Pierre Bourdieu (1979) (Miller 1995 p.266). Douglas's work is a critique of economics in the analysis of consumption and showed the need for an alternative perspective, Bourdieu argued that the study of the structure of consumption provided an understanding of the reproduction of class relations (Miller 1995 p.267).

Earlier studies on spheres of exchange (Bohannan 1955) and cargo cults (Worsley 1957) show how goods are exchanged and consumed and have transformative effects on society. These studies could now be classified as consumption studies, also if land tenure systems are analysed as a form of consumption, the study of migrant cocoa farmers by (Hill 1963) in southern Ghana may come under this label. Hill's later work (Hill 1970)

on rural capitalism in West Africa could also be included as she analyses the way 'capital' is consumed to produce a class of rural capitalists *ibid.* (P XVII) <sup>1</sup>

The literature on cloth and clothes in small-scale societies briefly reviewed below relates to the analysis of cloth and clothes contained in my thesis, and can be classed as following the new direction of consumption studies. A number of studies explore the social and political content of cloth and clothes. For example (Weiner 1989) demonstrates that cloth in matrilineal Melanesian societies is a major source of wealth and underwrites political hierarchy. Only women produce cloth wealth<sup>2</sup> (mainly bundles, mats or skirts made from bleached and dried segments of banana leaves) which are used for distribution at mortuary rites, on the celebration of births, marriages and other public occasions where open negotiations and validation of rank and power take place. Cloth wealth operates on these occasions " as a defining agent of 'life', it also reveals the constraints and limitations within which individuals must negotiate their relations with each other" (*ibid.* p.52). On distribution occasions cloth is used as an economic base and exchanges take place according to the rank of title holders present enabling checks and repositioning in the ranking system. Thus women's wealth in cloth is underpinning the structures of authority and power.

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<sup>1</sup> "Polly Hill's major discovery is that, contrary to the usual view of an amorphous peasantry, the accumulation of capital in indigenous West African economies has been accompanied by the emergence of specialists who own and manage the capital stock - a 'class' of rural capitalists. She has therefore, concentrated on the behavioural characteristics of these capitalists; on the problems they have and their notions of the correct ways to invest money, to manage labour, and to preserve capital through time." (P XVIII). Thus Hymer believes her work should be "viewed in terms of the classical rather than neo-classical paradigm" (in Hill 1970 P XXII).

<sup>2</sup> Men can purchase bundles using their own resources such as pigs and yams to increase female resources of cloth.

A study by Michelman and Erekosima (1992) on the Nigerian Kalabari shows cloth and dress to be powerful social regulation mechanisms for women and men. The *iria* process (rites of passage system) defines a women's clothed appearance and defines her status and place in the social hierarchy.

From fieldwork in Madagascar Feeley-Harnik (1989) identifies clothing imbued with authority and political power. Cloth and clothing are examined in the context of establishing and breaking relationships among the living and dead. Clothing is seen as the key to understanding the interaction between ancestors and the living and ancestral authority over the living<sup>1</sup>.

Those who make cloth and clothes are the focus of research on the matrilineal Kuba of Zaire (Darish 1989). She focuses upon and explains the meaning of raffia cloth in relation to the dynamics of production and decoration and the context of its use. Part of the daily work of clan members is the production and decoration of cloth. On completion the cloth stays in group ownership and in its ceremonial usage comes to symbolise the security and continuity of those who made it. Indigo dyeing is described as a "cult of female secrets" surrounded by a system of taboos (Hoskins 1989 p.141). Hoskins in this study of the Kodi, isolated and unseen producers of cloth in Eastern Indonesia, reveals relationships between the normative cognitive map of cloth dyers which is informed by the substances and techniques of dyeing and social and reproductive processes in the wider society. Cloth in Kodi society is described as "a

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<sup>1</sup> A host possessed by a royal ancestor dresses in appropriate style in order to persuade the spirit to identify itself and state its intentions. The spirit will only speak when "wrapped in the bodies of commoners who are wearing the clothes that identify them" (Feeley-Harnik 1989 P.94).

master symbol for the transitions of a woman's life, wrapping her as an infant, a bride, and a corpse" (ibid. p.166).

My own analysis of cloth and the work of seamstresses is nearer to these last two studies in giving more emphasis to those who decorate and shape cloth than to cloth itself. I examine the demand which sustains dressmakers in Ghana and traditional ostentatious dress displays. In terms of economic concepts, such preoccupation with appearance has a seemingly irrational imperative; as a recent poverty profile of Ghana shows there is an inverse relationship between poverty and personal spending on clothes (Boateng and others 1990 p. 20 table 6.5 ) with the average Ghanaian using 20.7% of all non-food expenditure on the purchase of shoes and clothes. This figure rises slightly to 22% for those categorised as poor. For both groups this is the largest single non-food category of expenditure. This priority given to cloth and clothes also exists in other African countries, for example in Madagascar cloth is the largest household expense after food and shelter, and the most important gift after hospitality (Feeley-Harnik 1989 p.78).

The use of cloth and garment construction cannot be looked at as the rational economic activity of neo-classical theory as the utility value of cloth and dress is not within a market context. Some aspects of cloth and dress can be usefully analysed in terms of use value or in the social relations of its production characteristic of a political economy approach. However, this specific part of the thesis tries to avoid enmeshing cloth and dress in these macro theories and allows for analysis to be focused on the consumption and transformation of meanings by those who work with cloth, buy cloth and commission garments from it.



### Methods and scope

The overall research design was mindful of calls for qualitative studies of small-scale enterprises (SSEs) in Ghana (Farbman and Steel 1992) and the methodology used in the thesis incorporates anthropological participant observation with semi-structured interviews to selected dressmakers and tailors in three field locations - in village, town and city settings; these are Agona Abodom, Cape Coast and Accra respectively. Fieldwork was carried out over twelve months from September 1993 to September 1994.

Taking a qualitative approach to the study of SSEs in Ghana involved a departure from the recent studies which to varying degrees have been quantitative cross-section industrial studies identifying the range of economic activities and general trends in reported market situations. Such studies, where the analytical focus is on the relationship between general changes in economic environment and patterns of enterprise development, cannot address questions specific to particular types of businesses. Cross-industry studies are useful to government but not directly to businesses themselves; businesses are interested in the actions of other businesses in their sector or in their immediate business environment, rather than what unrelated businesses are doing. Schmitz (1982) made this point a decade ago, and in doing so called for studies whose purpose is to identify the growth constraints in SSEs to "delimit the field of study along the same lines as those of the real world, i.e. according to branches and not according to academic concepts such as the informal sector" (ibid. P.443). Calls for this sub-sector method of studying SSEs have been strongly reiterated recently (Boomgard and others 1992) as an essential complement to cross-industry studies.

The scope of the research ranges from the micro environment of the sewing workshop to indigenous and developing markets and the local and regional context within which dressmakers and tailors work. Analysis of the relationship of dressmakers and tailors to the state, a relationship which is mediated by the GNTDA, gives the research a macro dimension.

The scope of my research into cloth stretches from the significance of designs and their symbolic language to placing large scale domestic textile production within the context of national economic development strategies and issues of the importation of second-hand clothes.

Analysis draws on the methods and literature of social anthropology and to lesser extent political economy. Working within these two disciplines allows the researcher to combine an understanding of the social and cultural context of working practices of dressmakers and tailors with the political dynamics of the Ghanaian state and economy.

Throughout my study of dressmakers and tailors I have been confronted by political and economic statements on the potential that small-scale businesses could make to economic development or to the state in terms of them paying regular taxes, in the training of young apprentices who cannot find places in colleges of further education and to absorb redundant workers and generate employment. This has been the political and economic context influencing and delimiting the boundaries of research. Because of such considerations the research has tried to cover the breadth of micro to macro context rather than focus on the village, town or city as single case studies. My analysis is thus derived from a merger of anthropological research with that of political economy in a

form of contextual interpretative analysis of the kind being advocated by researchers such as Harriss (1994).

### Personal rationale of the thesis

The rationale for the study began to emerge during a field visit to Southern Ghana in 1990. From this visit a personal fascination with African wax printed cloth began, as did a wish to understand its central role in the social lives of the communities in which I found it being used, sold, admired, hoarded and ostentatiously displayed in dress.

Such was my fascination with cloth during that first visit to Southern Ghana that I found myself staring not just at but into the clothes worn by women trading in the streets and on local transport. A visit to market would not be satisfying without the stimulation and excitement of viewing the displays of wax prints draped over the walls and rafters of the small wooden kiosks of cloth sellers.

On my second visit to Ghana to conduct fieldwork my fascination with cloth continued. I had learnt how to value cloth and displaying this knowledge to cloth sellers added to the enjoyment of visiting them in the market. My obsession went far beyond the natural interest I would have had in cloth as part of my research into the working practices of small-scale tailors and dressmakers and during my research years I have accumulated a trunk full of sewn and unsewn pieces.

At the start of my cloth accumulation I did not understand its language and yet my fascination when looking at the colours and designs made me feel exhausted and excited as the textiles themselves focused my attention. In their intensity I knew they spoke a direct but symbolic

language which I did not then understand. Soon the cloth sellers and new friends began to tell me the cloth names and proverbs attached to them and I began to learn the construction techniques of dressmakers and tailors. I soon became fluent in the language of cloth and could tell its origin by sight. I had also learnt the same cloth associated value system as Ghanaian women; I became aware of myself silently acknowledging somebody dressed in 'Ghana made cloth' as being of a lower socio-economic group and of the high status of a woman dressed in imported Dutch wax cloth.

One aim of my fieldwork became an understanding of the process I had experienced, whereby cloth and its symbolic language was transformed into garments which in their own mode of expression spoke of the status of those who wore them. I also found second-hand clothes contrasted so vividly with traditional dress that I was interested to understand the status of these clothes in relation to those made from wax printed cloth. The further my research progressed into recording small-scale indigenous workshops and garment construction techniques for analysis the more I became aware that I might be recording these practices for historical record. I predicted the small-scale workshop serving the 'cloth to sew' market using mostly hand technology and free hand cutting techniques would become more and more an anachronism as the Ghanaian economy pursued economic reforms and opened its own markets to highly competitive imports in new and second-hand clothing

#### Arrangement of chapters

The small-scale dressmaker and tailor are analytically identified as emerging timidly from the mostly hand and foot powered technologies of their workshops and traditional 'sew to order' markets hidden for the

most part from state structures in the micro context of the informal sector and as having the potential to make a contribution to the wider macro national development process. Each chapter deals with a separate aspect of this process of change.

Firstly the descriptive chapters, four and five, detail the type of labour resources and with what equipment and for what markets dressmakers and tailors sew within village, town and city settings. Chapter six gives a historical and contemporary account of the origins of the trade and production of the wax printed cotton cloth used especially by seamstresses in indigenous garment construction. When this cloth is further analysed in chapter seven it becomes clear that what the seamstress sews and fits when her hands manipulate cloth is a material representative of gendered norms, kinship structure and the aesthetic and moral texture of Akan life and its foundation in matrilineal descent structures. Chapter eight specifically focuses on the working life of the seamstress and the garments she sews; I find that in their outward appearance her garments reproduce a prevailing normative gendered female form and from the inside they are constructed to fit and accommodate changes within the life cycle of the Ghanaian woman. Chapter nine details the way in which indigenous garment construction and working practices are being brought within the sphere of influence of the nation state. The state, under economic restructuring and pursuing a revenue imperative, is today also interested in what the seamstress and tailor sew in their workshops.

To conclude, the thesis will show that when the GNTDA call for order ,*Yeepam*, is met by the collective voice *Efatowo*, the members are articulating many facets of their collective role in the community and in the

wider society and economy. They are recognising the legitimacy of the state in their working lives in allowing tax demands to be made of them. They are proclaiming their ability to sew a perfectly fitted garment; this can be read anthropologically to mean that through the manipulation of cloth dressmakers and tailors construct garments to fit the human frame and the social, moral and aesthetic concepts within that frame of reference. The designs on the cloth raised by colour, and the design features of the garment raised by cutting and sewing, visually draw attention to idealised normative behavioural standards within the community and also reinforce them. By acquiring and wearing garments imbued with this standard individuals show their status and that of the lineage to which they belong.

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In addition to this introductory material, subsequent chapters are prefaced with short descriptive 'cameos' giving personal accounts of the fieldwork context and experience. These are also intended to acknowledge much valuable assistance given and friendships made during my fieldwork.

## Chapter Two

### Methodology

Access to the field and never leaving



### Etiquette, guests and greetings

From the beginning and throughout my research I often felt I didn't want to be the 'researcher' and instead be an established member of the communities I studied. I also struggled with the high expectations of those Ghanaians I was involved with. Some expected wealth and status to derive from association with me; a 'white' (a term which I still find difficult but accept as part of Ghanaian - English). Gradually those who became my friends and second family tapered their demands and somewhat sceptically accepted that I was useful only for renting a room at over the market prices and bolstering the collection trays at the Sunday church service. Living amongst people who had such high and ultimately unattainable expectations of me was a difficult personal challenge. The countless requests for items ranging from loaves of bread to motor cars at first made me feel uncharitable towards those who at the same time were trying their best to accommodate me as their guest.

Ghanaians are very accommodating and etiquette demands that the host should offer water, prepare food and give up their bed for a guest. To the families I came to live with in Abodom, Cape Coast and in Accra I was first welcomed in this way but after a few days I had to manage a status transition to become friend, lodger and in the case of Abodom an adopted family member and eventually honorary citizen of the village.

Through my previous association with Abodom I was aware that one of my first duties after arrival in the village was to pay a visit to the



divisional chief and offer a bottle of spirits<sup>1</sup> (preferably a good Scottish whisky). This I did, and the gift was accepted and a bottle of local spirit sent for in order to pour libation to the village gods and make my formal introduction. A *durbar*<sup>2</sup> had been organised for my more secular introduction to village life, its fellowships, churches and *asafo*<sup>3</sup> company. With these formalities over, I hoped to begin the status passage from 'guest' into household member. I had no preconceived ideas on how to manage this but the focus quite naturally became food and food preparation. I hoped Grace and her sisters (the family I was staying with) would stop preparing and serving special meals and allow me to join in the family meal which was eaten from a communal bowl in the kitchen area. I also wanted to assist with food preparation and was eager to learn how to pound cassava and plantain to make *fufu*.

At first I found it difficult to convince the family that I wanted to share their lifestyle; it seemed incomprehensible to them that I should want to eat Ghanaian food with them when I could afford to buy tins of sardines and cornbeef and eat at a table with knife and fork. They tried very hard to dissuade me from participating in pounding *fufu* saying it would spoil my hands and I was not strong enough. But I insisted and eventually was allowed to take my turn. However I admit I often felt that the energy expounded preparing *fufu* could not be replaced by eating it. But it is filling

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<sup>1</sup> This could be interpreted using Van Gennep's observation that "Exchanges have a direct constraining effect: to accept a gift is to be bound to the giver" (Van Gennep 1960 p. 29).

<sup>2</sup> Formal gathering of representatives of all sectors of community institutions and general public to grounds allocated for this purpose.

<sup>3</sup> *Asafo* companies are part of organised military systems. Of the Akan groupings, the coastal Fanti have the most elaborately organised *Asafo* system (Arhin 1985) - today companies only perform duties of ritual and symbolic importance.

and surprisingly became my favourite food when eaten with *nkatsenkwan* (peanut soup).

My training in professional catering before I entered University helped me to quickly grasp the fundamentals of Ghanaian soups and stews and within a few months I was independently shopping in local markets and preparing food for those I lived with. I became noted for my *nkatsenkwan* and as tradition demands I cooked and presented this dish as a gift to the chief on the occasion of the annual *Akwambɔ* festival<sup>1</sup>. in August 1994.

After a few weeks my presence on the village road and pathways became a normal sight and if I looked lost in the maze of passageways and paths people would direct me to the house I was looking for. As I walked down *Abodom's main street* I would be greeted with expressions such as 'fine morning', to which the reply could be 'fine fine' , ' or in Fante *wo ho ye*, are you well?. A frequently asked question is 'where are you going'? to which I would reply I'm going to Ya Ya 's workshop or I'm going to town. The reply to this would always be '*kɔ bra*' meaning go and come back. From the roadside children, I would expect to hear a single shy voice or a chorus of 'good morning sister Suzy ' or 'sister Suzy, sister Suzy' in rhythmical tones following me down the street - often they would scurry away in laughter if I turned to reply or look at them.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a traditional new year path-clearing festival where the traditional paths to all rivers and the rivers themselves are cleared and weeded. Feeding and pouring libation to the Gods of the rivers is also important, as is the *durbar* following these activities, where issues effecting the town and its development are discussed. Myth has it that the last time the festival was not celebrated all the elders of the village died.

When moving into my compound accommodation in Cape Coast I tried to avoid as much as possible becoming the 'guest'. I wanted a different kind of living agreement there, as I could not allow myself the time and often the stress of being drawn into another set of adopted kinship and community relationships and obligations. After visiting and arranging the accommodation I had given only an approximate date for my arrival in order that no elaborate preparation might be made on my behalf. This plan worked but I suffered one night of sleepless torment from biting mosquitoes as no nets had been put on the windows. The next day Baba, the seamstress whose family occupied the compound, helped me employ a local carpenter to net the windows and I began the processes of fitting into their living and eating routines.

For my Accra case studies I had hoped to stay in University accommodation at Legon where I had become an affiliate research student, but there were no rooms available in the already overcrowded student accommodation blocks. Thus I took up the offer of accommodation in the home of one of Grace's maternal cousins on the Sakomone estate just outside Nungua. Their home was very comfortable with gas cooking stove and colour television but still its modern facade was periodically lifted and a form of urban village life resumed when the piped water and electricity supply failed.

In Accra, as in Abodom and Cape Coast I paid a weekly cash rent which was always well above market prices for accommodation. Initially it was difficult for my hosts to accept these payments but I knew that even though they showed reluctance this was in accordance with etiquette. Once the money was given no further reference to it was ever made. I was often, however, under the impression that my hosts would have

preferred me not to make these payments and to defer reciprocation until they made a request of assistance from me. Occasionally I would be told about the financial difficulties facing the family and then asked if I could help. However, like the expectations and demands made of me in Abodom these were also beyond both my resources and often what I felt could reasonably be asked of me. I never felt satisfied at the end of these discussions; I was by now a close family friend and I felt requests were often being made on these grounds. I often felt confused and struggled with where the cultural boundaries of friendship and family obligations should be between this family and I who had come to rely on them so much.

In Abodom these questions and doubts were usually less preoccupying. This was despite my presence in the village contrasting much more with the style of life than it did in the town and city. There seemed to be an inverse relationship between social and economic distance and integration and acceptance, or the answer may just be that I spent more time in Abodom than in any other location and developed a genuine warmth and affection for the family I lived with and the village. I felt accepted and made many friends in the community and this was despite the fact that I turned down almost every demand made of me and would joke with people who demanded that I make arrangements for numerous villagers to accompany me back to Britain.

Eventually my reputation in the community became that of an odd, unprofitable but affectionate temporary neighbour. I was given the status of a member of the royal clan and honorary citizenship of the village by the divisional chief but this was at the end of my stay and a reward for joining in community works and observing the rites of the annual festival,

not because I was a special guest. As with many things in Ghana the sentiments of my citizenship honour were formalised in a speech and in the certificate below presented to me a few days before I returned to England.


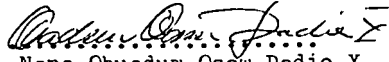
<b>NANA OBUADUM OSAM DADIE X</b>		
(L. MAXWELL SELBY) Chief of Agona Abodom and Benkumhene of Agona Nyikrom Traditional Area		
<b>BANKETS</b> G.C.B. Republic Hs. BR. Accra. Tele: hono No. _____ Our Ref No NOOD/8/01. Your Ref No _____		Abodomhene's Palace, P O Box 20, AGONA ABODOM. c/a Ghana, W/A. 14th. August, 1994.
<p>MS. SUSAN EDWARDS,</p> <p>During your 1 (one) year long stay with us, you took part in our communal works when possible and showed concern for the health and welfare of my people.</p> <p>Finally, you took part fully as any other citizen in our annual 'AKWABBO FESTIVAL' and cooked the customary Akwambo Meal for the Chief.</p> <p>You have proved to be a worthy ambassador of your country and in appreciation of all these,</p> <p>I, NANA OBUADUM OSAM DADIE X, ON MY OWN BEHALF, AND ON BEHALF OF MY ROYAL ASONA CLAN AND THOSE OF THE PEOPLE OF AGONA ABODOM, DO HEREBY HONOUR YOU WITH AN HONOURARY CITIZENSHIP OF ABODOM AND A MEMBER OF THE ROYAL CLAN.</p> <p>I HEREBY ADORN YOU WITH THIS CROWN, SIGNIFYING YOUR STATUS, AND A SASH IN WHICH IS INSCRIBED " GREETINGS FROM GHANA" TO EXTEND OUT DEEPEST FELICITATIONS TO YOUR PEOPLE.</p>		
 Nana Obuadum Osam Dadie X		Nana Efua Susan Edwards.

plate 1

## Introduction

My interest in dressmaking and tailoring stems from both a fascination with African cloth and my involvement with the EMCC 'Fellowship of Evangelical Women' (FEW) in their project to produce hand made garments for export. I made contact with EMCC members on my 1990 field visit to Ghana and later I helped them to set up this venture and through it I became a member of the fellowship. The project was initiated a year before I arrived in Ghana to begin fieldwork and my role in its establishment and participation is briefly outlined below because it was an instructive introduction to sewing techniques and Ghanaian organisational structures. It also alerted me to my own previously unacknowledged ethnocentric assumptions about enterprise culture.

While participating in the establishment of FEW's project I was not acting as an anthropologist but later when I started analysing my various fieldwork experiences in order to describe how these prepared me for the main research project, I conceptualised my participation as similar to that of an 'action researcher'. As much as I admire the principles and tenets of 'Action research' and would wish to emulate these in the field, it was not practical or appropriate methodology for the lone trainee researcher already burdened with responsibilities to a newly adopted kinship group and struggling to learn a new language. In addition I would be hopelessly unable to deliver any of the identified needs put forward to me by subjects invited to participate in an action anthropological project. I can say this with confidence as in my pilot questionnaire I included a question to seamstresses and tailors on the type of investment needed to improve their businesses. On asking this question I was immediately viewed as the person who was able to deliver or would have influence in delivering their

needs - amongst which were cars, new sewing machines and paint for decorating the workshop. The methodology which I have used is that of participant observation within the field of social anthropology and social development research and questions such as the one asked above have been researched within the intensive case studies in a more subtle way.

My involvement with the fellowship was not a documented part of the initial fieldwork synopsis which proposed a twelve month fieldwork period to follow the yearly cycle of a number of unspecified case studies in the dressmaking and tailoring industry in Southern Ghana. In addition I proposed that the cases should be chosen to reflect the variety of production, selling methods and technology in use. In following these objectives I selected the location of Abodom with which I was already familiar and predicted would exemplify the lowest technological base and distinctive production techniques. The GNTDA suggested that I research a selection of their members in Cape Coast- the organisation were keen to find any means of helping their members develop their businesses. Carrying out two case studies in the city of Accra was the obvious choice for comparative contrasts with Abodom and Cape Coast. After periods of intensive research in the workshops of case studies it was possible for me to travel relatively easily between all the locations to monitor the activities of each. This gave me an understanding of their working practices and production demand over the yearly cycle.

The methodology proposed was to be a combination of intensive participant observation and surveys of the immediate infrastructure of these case studies. I further proposed that the methodology should incorporate participatory action research as elaborated by the European Association for Development Research and Training Institutes which seeks

to offer the local level actors the opportunity to influence the direction of research to serve their own enterprise needs. I feel I have only achieved this last aim to the extent that the unplanned involvement of the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association encouraged me to carry out semi-structured questionnaires of their members in the locations where I worked. They also invited me to their meetings to report to members on my findings; this I did in both Cape Coast and Accra.

The main intensive case studies were proposed to be supported by less intensive study of businesses linked to them both through supply of raw materials and through sales, transport and distribution. I hoped this would help determine whether the commonly held view that Ghanaian enterprises have very limited specialisation is correct. Within the limitations of time and resources this was carried out by visiting textile factories making the cloth out of which dressmakers produce garments and researching the market places visited by seamstresses and tailors for supply of accessories. In Accra and Cape Coast I found the beginnings of specialisation in labour and sewing services based on the ownership and use of technology (mainly specialist sewing machine operators).

In the remainder of the following chapter I discuss the above research process and methods under the following headings:

Organisation of case studies and interviews

Gaining access to workshops

Preparing the field

Fellowship of Evangelical Women (FEW)

The name

The registration



Pace of FEW's activities

FEW's priorities

Action research

### Organisation of case studies and interviews

As the previous section details, the research was carried out in three locations - Abodom and Cape Coast in the Central Region and Accra in the Greater Accra region. In each location I conducted two main intensive case studies, one dressmaker and one tailor. In Cape Coast, in addition to the two main cases in the town centre I had access to an extra case on the outskirts of the town because my living accommodation was literally on the doorstep of a seamstress working with apprentices.

After arriving in Abodom on the 1st September and taking a month to acclimatise and improve my knowledge of Fante, I began intensive case studies there at the beginning of October. The following January I moved to Cape Coast and established case studies there and eventually moved to Accra at the end of April to add two city case studies.

The small-scale dressmaking and tailoring sector typically consists of thousands of workshops and wooden kiosks, each operated by one mastercraft dressmaker or tailor with a number of apprentices. A workshop can simply be a workspace on the seamstress's veranda or a room in her house given over to sewing. as was the case in a Cape Coast workshop I visited (plate 2) where apprentices sat shoulder to shoulder at wooden tables with their hand sewing machines following the masters instructions.



Plate 2

Other seamstresses hire one room preferably on the main road and arrange their cutting and work tables and stools for their apprentices in such a way that the master can supervise their sewing easily; an example is the Accra workshop in plate 3.



Plate 3

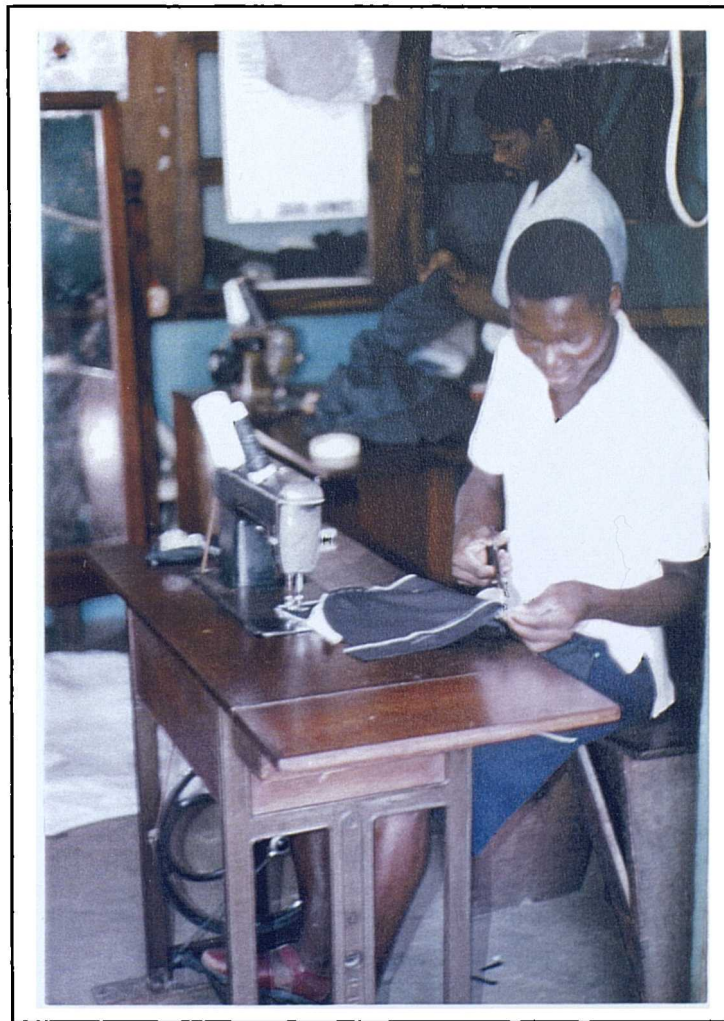


Plate 4



The long established tailoring workshop in Cape Coast (plate 4) contains the treadle sewing machines almost exclusively used by tailors and shows the master in the background and his apprentice working in the foreground.

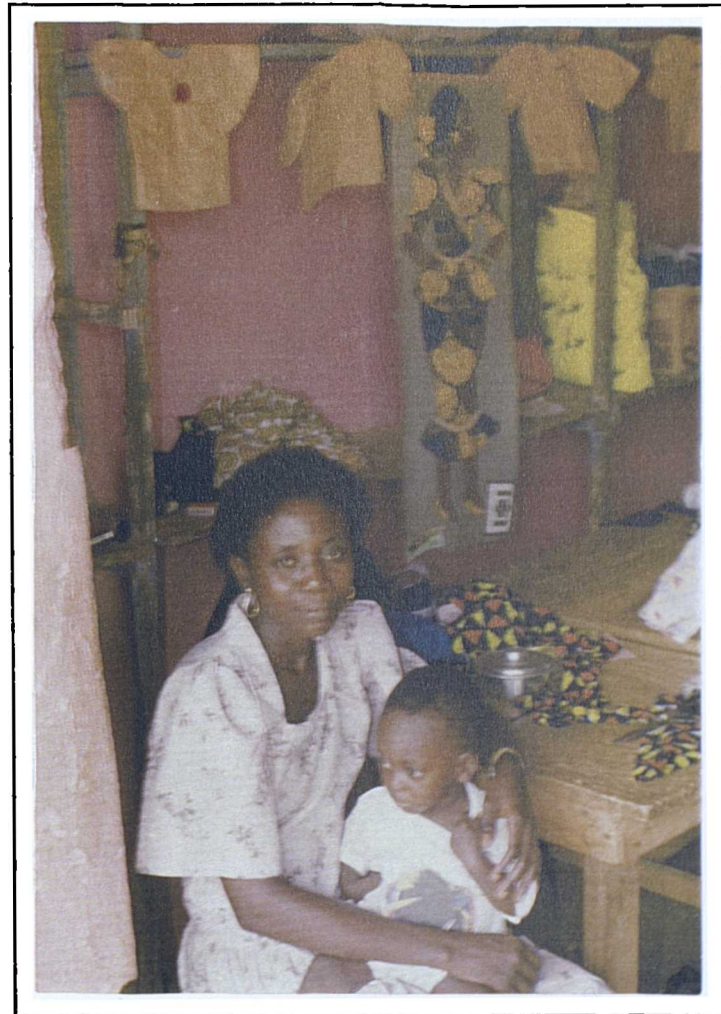


Plate 5

An Abodom seamstress (plate 5) sits in the doorway of her one roomed workshop in Abodom village taking advantage of the good light. From her seat she supervises three apprentices, looks after her small child and has an eye on the activities on the main street. Such scenes are typically found in the enterprise studies in the following chapters.

Whilst conducting the participant observation in workshops some seamstresses allowed me to help by sewing their own customers cloth or asked me to bring my own. Others preferred I sit and watch them. Tailors did not allow me to do any sewing at all and I found it much more difficult to spend the long hours I needed in their workshop to record an adequate picture of their work. Thus if I was not allowed to sew and I felt uncomfortable or made those I observed uncomfortable, I would leave the workshop to carry out interviews of other workshops (detailed below) or continue to survey sub-sectors servicing dressmaking and tailoring businesses such as Cape Coast market and in Accra the top floor of Kaneshie market. Breaks also had to be taken from intensive case study work to attend visits to textile factories, organised for me by the Department of Trade and Industry. In Abodom my case study seamstress dressed the dead as a supplementary occupation and she often invited me to attend and watch and, because of the importance of funeral cloth to the economics of dressmaking and its use in presenting the body for wake keeping, I felt I should attend. This involved staying up all night and often feeling disorientated for a couple of days afterwards.

As mentioned above, in all three locations I carried out semi-structured questionnaires which I administered in an informal interview fashion. In Abodom 11 of these interviews were carried out, which covered all workshops on the main street and side streets. In Cape Coast 32 were conducted around the main market place, the streets leading from this and on the 'Ola' estate<sup>1</sup> just outside Cape Coast, where my accommodation was. In Accra a further 9 interviews were conducted - time and resources in Accra did not allow for further interviews to be

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<sup>1</sup> This estate is locally known as 'Ola' but it takes its name from 'Our Lady of assumption/Annunciation' OLA.

carried out and I felt it was also unnecessary to continue collecting data repeating what were by now well established empirical trends. As detailed below I had access to GNTDA membership details for the whole of Accra and this furnished me with an overview of the industry in the city.

In both Abodom and Cape Coast I used a paid interpreter. In Abodom this was the wife of the tailor who was one of my main intensive case studies and in Cape Coast this was a member of the GNTDA who lived near my accommodation on the 'Ola' estate and who became a friend.

The vice president of the GNTDA happened to be a senior member of the EMCC and attended the official *durbar* held in Abodom to welcome me on the second day in Ghana (details in Chapter Four). I was fortunate to be able to discuss my work and receive a number of assurances that the association wished to help and be involved in the research. From this introduction a number of invitations were received to attend meetings of the association at both Swedru and Cape Coast and I was happy to accept. At these meetings it was clear from the way in which I was introduced that members had higher expectations of me in terms of what I could do for them than was realistic. I felt it necessary to repeat several times that my work would be of no immediate benefit to members but nevertheless I often had the impression that both members and officials seemed to insist on viewing me as a type of business consultant.

My original fieldwork synopsis did not include a survey of GNTDA members and at the time of drawing it up in England I had no knowledge of the association's existence. But as I became increasingly aware that the association viewed my work as a form of survey of their members, this presented a good opportunity to gain a wider overview of dressmaking

and tailoring to complement the intensive case studies. I designed a semi-formal questionnaire to administer to a selection of their members in all three locations.

Whilst carrying out intensive case studies in Accra the national office of the GNTDA allowed me to record and analyse membership details of Accra zones. From this I was able to obtain an overview of dressmaking and tailoring in the city which enabled me to conduct fewer questionnaires - I was grateful for this as it was much more difficult to travel around the city and for me to administer questionnaires with any practical knowledge of whether those chosen were representative of the city in general. The information gained from these membership records has been used with much caution as dressmakers and tailors may have constructed their answers on subjects like 'how many machines in the workshop' with the knowledge that the number of sewing machines in a workshop defines the tax category into which it will fall.

### Gaining access to workshops

Being invited to a meeting of the GNTDA provided an ideal introduction to dressmakers and tailors in the location studies to my work. This made my task of entering a workshop and asking for co-operation with questionnaires much easier and I was never once refused the information. The association never restricted me to interviewing only their members and a number of non-members were also included in the interviews. In Cape Coast and in Accra the regional chairman of the GNTDA invited me to use particular workshops as intensive case studies as he thought I would be most interested in a workshop with a high turnover and those attempting to expand into new markets. I was grateful for his direction,

and information gained in these workshops has informed much of Chapter Five of my thesis.

In general at the start of my fieldwork I thought gaining access to the kiosks of dressmakers would be difficult and require time for confidence building; access to the workshops of tailors, I imagined, would be even more problematic. In this assumption I was wrong as within two weeks of my arrival in Abodom village I had a visit from a tailor inviting me to his kiosk and in the following months received another similar invitation. I had to make my own semi-formal approaches to a seamstress and as I felt a little awkward I chose a woman who had for many years sewn for the women I was living with.

### Preparing the field

As mentioned in the introduction, I made a short visit to Abodom in 1990 and formed friendships which continue today. Contact is maintained by letter and as I began to prepare my fieldwork logistics I wrote to Grace asking for accommodation in her house which is also a Mission Maternity Clinic - Grace is the sole medical assistant. I had met the divisional chief of Abodom on my 1990 visit and as custom requires I also wrote to him seeking permission to carry out research in the village and also asking him to be one of my Ghanaian referees needed for my entry visa to Ghana. His answer is printed below in plate 6.



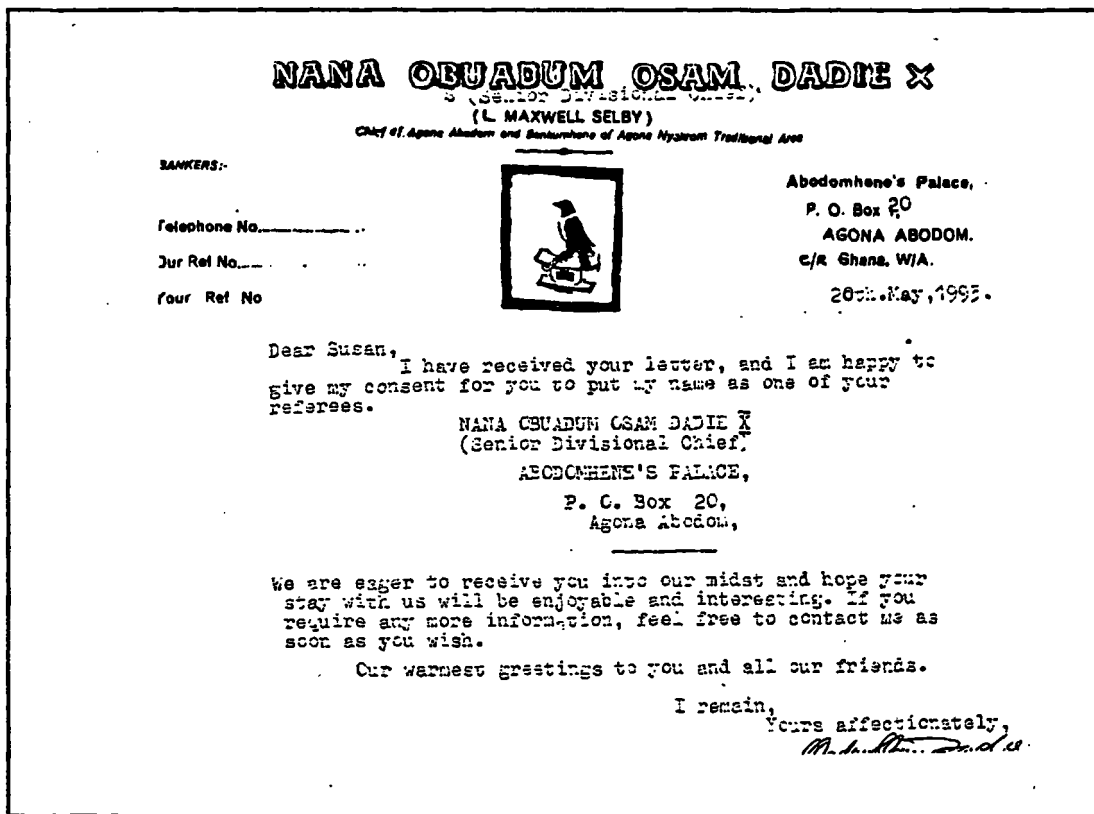


plate 6

Grace was another referee and she was happy for me to come and stay at the clinic. Grace is an influential member of her matrilineage and she also has a high ranking position within the Evangelical Methodist Church of Christ (EMCC). Throughout the whole year of research she was a friend and assisted me in many ways. She helped with language learning, she taught me how to cook Ghanaian dishes, explained numerous details of Fante culture and village life and even instructed me on delivering babies by kerosene lamp.

Grace's reply to my letter requesting accommodation was emphatic in tone, indicating the importance I should attach to the terms under which I should live at the clinic:

I am your sister and not your friend, you must understand that you are coming to stay with a sister and not a friend.  
 (letter 16.10.92)

On arrival in Ghana I was indeed drawn into Grace's matrilineal kinship group and today I continue to observe the custom of presenting Grace's mother (my adopted mother) with a piece of wax printed cloth each year just before the annual *Akwambɔ* festival.

Through my correspondence with Abodom's chief, who is known as *Nana* (Grandfather to the whole village), my preparation for fieldwork advanced to the point of a public announcement being made of my forthcoming visit. I received notice via Grace that:

'The chief has beaten *gon - gon* informing Abodom township of your comings, I am sure you will by all means come'.  
(letter 22.2.93)

Beating the *gon - gon* is the commissioning by the chief of a drummer, usually a lower ranking court attendant, to make an announcement on the village streets on the chief's behalf<sup>1</sup>. It is the chief's prerogative to commission the drummer and in the case of the announcement of my arrival it signalled to the villagers that I should be welcomed and considered part of the community.

In anthropological terms beating the *gon - gon* clearly marked a stage in my initiation into the community. In matrilineal groups such as the Fante where everybody belongs to an extended maternal family group, the detached position of a stranger could be seen as a threat and create suspicion or friction. It is the chief's responsibility to keep the peace of the

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<sup>1</sup> The chief's announcement was broadcast to the whole of Abodom by the drummer, who first plays a drum pattern to alert people to the imminent official announcement; the message is then given and the announcer goes on to the next street to repeat the same process until all the village has been informed.

village and by commissioning the drummer he performed the rite intended to make the stranger "neutral or benevolent, to remove the special qualities attributed".(Van Gennep 1960 p. 27).

### Fellowship of Evangelical Women (FEW)

At the time of FEW's establishment I was beginning to formulate the subject of my thesis and I knew that although FEW would not be a direct part of it, I would nevertheless use knowledge gained whilst participating in its activities for an anthropological understanding of enterprise culture. I had also become aware of the concept of the 'selfish researcher' through the work of Edwards (1994) who insists that relevant development research must be linked to people's real life experiences, and involve and empower them. But for most doctoral students committed to equitable research practice, and planning their fieldwork, the possibilities of realising this ideal appear very limited. My efforts to deal with these issues of social responsibility were to make the cloth which was central to the work into something that could be sold locally in the UK and make some money for those I would be studying.

This was the rationale for my continued participation in FEW during the twelve months of fieldwork; however the motivation for starting the project was quite different and began in conversations with Grace whilst staying at her house in 1990.

I asked her what kind of assistance I could offer the clinic and she had said second-hand children's clothes were urgently needed by mothers visiting the clinic. On my return to England I sent a few parcels of such clothing, bought from local car boot sales. However, because of the cost of postage, it was not economical to continue this long term. I had also

become aware through the work of Steel and Webster (1991) of a general concern among Ghanaian dressmakers and tailors that demand for their products suffers competition from cheap imported second-hand clothing. The prospect of being party, albeit on a very small scale, to the 'good intentions' development syndrome described by Porter and others (1991) made me seriously consider the prospect of damaging indigenous dressmaking and tailoring businesses. Due to the small quantities involved and the use being made of them in the clinic I decided to carry on. However, by 1992 Customs clearance was becoming increasingly difficult; the parcels were no longer regarded as gifts to the clinic, and duty was now being charged.

I wanted to continue some form of assistance and suggested they sew some of their cloth into styles suitable for sale in the 'alternative' ethnic fashion shops in Hull, and I made a commitment to try and interest some shops. Thus the project got under way and one of the first things I felt we needed was a name. This was one of many initiatives I made which was in hindsight loaded with ethnocentric notions of western enterprise culture. Many times the fellowship women imposed their wishes over mine and through this process I gained an understanding of indigenous enterprise and garment construction. Some of the most important issues arising from the establishment of FEW for enterprise culture are summarised below:

### The name

I suggested Fanti Dress as a product name, bearing in mind the importance of brand names for marketing in Europe. Choosing Fanti which is similar to 'Fante' (the language spoken in Abodom and the name of their Akan ethnic group) and playing on it to sound like Fancy then adding

'Dress' seems both distinctive and descriptive of the project. The contribution to the name made by those in Abodom is as follows:

"It is very good to use Fanti Dress for the title but the Chief and Bishop are well convinced to add something to it, that is Fanti Dress: of Fellowship of Evangelical Women (FEW). This means the women who will sew the dresses are the women Fellowship from our church, this is the reason why the Bishop also should come in. (letter 28-9-92)

A contrast between us was immediately apparent. They had identified themselves with the work of sewing the dresses and the church, while I was associating the product with a potential market. In Abodom terms my suggestion was not descriptive or distinctive; it left out the most important element, the people who make the product. This letter is the first and only occasion that the name 'Fanti Dress' has been used by the group, in all subsequent letters the acronym FEW has been used by them in such contexts as 'the FEW have done this' or 'the FEW thank you'. This effective but polite rejection of my suggestion of 'product name' is the first example showing that the power and control over the project was firmly with FEW, in which I was only one member, although an important one.

### The registration

Next, the subject of formally constituting the project was brought up in Abodom, and in reply to a letter I asked their advice. I did, however, have a deeply held bias towards the project being separate from the church, due to my own difficulty in identifying with religious organisations and by default probably also being seen as part of their church. I felt as entitled to my own biases as they were to theirs; I felt I should be honest with them about my potential involvement in their church. My role in the group

was one of finding markets for their products in Britain; I should advise on how their products might best be presented for sale, the product name being very important in that respect. I expressed my views in a letter of September 1991 saying that I live in a society where religion and work are usually perceived to be clearly demarcated, and that at some stage, should we undertake fund raising, being constituted as an evangelical religious group may restrict who we can approach. I also mentioned that recent scandals about evangelical groups in America had given the movement a bad image in this country. This was as diplomatic as possible (at this stage the project was not the subject of academic enquiry). The reply I received was:

"The registration which I mentioned in my letter will not be necessary any more since the project is going to be within the church. The church is already registered as well as the clinic therefore any project within the church and the clinic needs not to be registered, we shall only have to pay some taxes"<sup>1</sup>.(letter 28.9.91)

In FEW's terms my Western dichotomies between church and state and religion and business were out of place. The above firmly told me that, and the following pointed out the advantages of doing things their way.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to paying less tax, choosing not to register FEW as a commercial concern with export potential avoided a great many bureaucratic procedures. These may have been faced had the project begun to export in commercial quantities. The Ghanaian export procedure requires that "Before a commercial export is approved, the exporter requires to have the sales contract between the seller and the buyer, the final export invoice and the customs entry form if the goods were originally imported. In addition he needs to have filled in an A2 form which must be approved by the Bank of Ghana or other authorised bank. The completion of the form, which is in eight parts, is time consuming since its different parts have to be sent to different institutions, for example the Bank of Ghana and the Ministry of Trade and Tourism." Jebuni, 1992 p. 26). For certain items, for example 'handicrafts', which is the label under which FEW's products would come, it is necessary to obtain special permits before the A2 form is processed; the relevant authority to consult is the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (ibid.).

"If the church's name is involved in fact it will help the project because delivering of parcels from your end will be easier, cheaper and quicker. I hope you will understand it". (letter 28.9.92)

### Pace of FEW's activities

FEW's preparations for their first order of ten pairs of trousers had a history of interruptions to deal with the exigencies of the social and economic environment of Abodom. Progress was interrupted in early February 1993 due to the death of Grace's grandmother and for most of February she and many in the fellowship were involved in preparations for the funeral which is an elaborate affair for Fantes. The major financial responsibility falls on the dead persons *abusua* (matrilineage) and the collection of a relatively large sum of money takes time and organisation. After the funeral it took until mid May to get back to planning for the first consignment which a local retail fashion shop in Hull agreed to purchase on delivery. In addition to this I was to be further reminded that FEW's sewing was a supplement to other activities in the yearly cycle. There are periods when sewing must be given lower priority than the main and more reliable sources of income. As GRace wrote at the start of our venture:

4.2.93 "One thing I must say is that, all the project women are scattered around, even though we are all at Abodom, doing their own business e.g. farming, trading, selling etc. and we all come to meet when there are materials to be sewn, since the project is not a daily affair, it is likely for us to scatter until there is need to sew".

On arrival in Ghana I found that many fellowship members were too fully occupied with subsistence farming or trading to sew cloth and many had no sewing skills at all. Another fairly substantial break in FEW activities was their preparations for the annual Convention of their church, held in

Kumasi. It was explained to me that any sewing would have to wait until after the convention as:

"all the F/Evangelical women are preparing for a convention in Kumasi on 24.4.92 as such everybody is trying to do something like labouring, selling marketing etc. to get some money for their transportation, the convention will last for 1 week"(letter 4.2.92).

Each break in the development of FEW's sewing activities is a necessary part of a diverse coping system for the self-management of economic resources including labour.

#### FEW's priorities

Again following my secular ethic and notions of 'professional' enterprise culture I attempted to try and establish some aims and objectives for the project. I proposed the income from the project go to general 'economic development' of Abodom and in particular its primary medical facilities. FEW members said they were 'very happy' with my suggestions; however, they changed them completely. The money from the sale of garments...

"will be put to the coffers of the Fellowship, that is we shall open an account at Abodom for that purpose so that it can help the church in future, the community as well ...".(letter 28.9.91)

This was a reversal of the development priorities I set out. Later FEW told me of their ultimate objective to assist the EMCC in the construction of a Church building to replace the existing open sided construction.

The modest profits made from two consignments of clothes sold to the same shop in Hull have in part been used for the church building, still in construction. When the project was wound up, just before I left the field,



the remaining money was used to commission a local carpenter to make twenty wooden benches which would be hired to villagers for use on occasions such as funerals and festivals - in Abodom there was a shortage of benches and families were in the habit of hiring them from Swedru and paying high transportation costs. This was an income generation project that the fellowship women suggested themselves and have sustained. Some of the money was also spent on renting a piece of land in order to start a cassava farm which the fellowship women would harvest and process into *gari* and sell locally to raise funds. For me this was a satisfying end to the initial sewing project which, although very instructive, was also stressful and tiring.

### 'Action research'

FEW developed by my asking "what can I do?". In so doing I committed myself to some practical action and subsequently to a form of 'action anthropology' or 'participant intervention'. Sol Tax is credited with coining the phrase 'action anthropology' which was first used publicly in 1951 (Tax 1959). Tax, a former Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, developed and applied 'action anthropology' to American Indian communities. At the centre of this anthropological approach is not only the acknowledgement of the role of the researcher in the research process, but an advocating of the involvement of the researcher as a participator rather than just an observer of the practical lives and decisions of those being studied. The epistemological premise is that indigenous values and knowledge can only become the knowledge of the anthropologist through participation in the resolution of problems where existing knowledge and values are under negotiation and new syntheses are formed. In Tax's original formulation of action anthropology entrance by the researcher into a participatory role is by invitation into an existing

activity or problem. This research approach is often reversed in contemporary formulations of participant research which are diluted into 'taking into consideration' local knowledge and objectives in the implementation of someone else's development objectives, usually national governments or international development agencies.

The Mesquakie settlement in Iowa was of particular importance to Tax in the development of the approach. This settlement was under pressure to integrate into dominant American culture. Tax became aware of their resistance and diverted from assisting in the process of 'acculturation' to developing a framework in which he could help the Mesquakie discover alternative outcomes which they might find desirable. An underlying premise is the assumption that a community's complex and competing interests and values only reveal themselves when decisions have to be made<sup>1</sup> (Tax 1974 p.510). How are anthropologists to understand decisions and the processes leading to them unless they are involved in them? This leads Tax to a criticism of participant observation; in his words "simple observation is a wholly inadequate tool" (Tax 1959 p.151). Tax claims that what is central to a theory of cultural change is the "interplay between an understanding of the situation and doing something about it and understanding it better" (ibid.).

Part of my preparation for fieldwork was informed by my involvement in the decision making processes within the FEW and after arriving in

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<sup>1</sup> The practice of 'action anthropology' with the Mesquakie Indians, now referred to as the Fox Project, was followed by similar projects with North American tribes under pressure of acculturation, and poverty stricken groups in Peru (the Cornell Vicos project) and Bangladesh (the Comilla project). Central to all of these is the practice of letting decisions be made by the people themselves. In the Comilla project villagers organised and brought shares in credit co-operatives to help meet their financial investment needs.

Abodom I continued to be influenced by their suggestions, not just as regards sewing for income but in other community matters. Through them I became an accepted 'outsider' and integrated with and acquainted with the work of other women's fellowships (FEW and the Abodom Methodist Women's Fellowship are pictured in plates 7 and 8). I remain convinced about the merits of 'action anthropology' but for reasons described above I was unable to use this methodology in the main body of my research with established dressmakers and tailors in Abodom, Cape Coast and Accra where classical participant observation was used with semi-structured questionnaires/interviews.



plate 7 Fellowship of Evangelical women (Agona Abodom 1994)



plate 8 Methodist women's fellowship (Agona Abodom1994)

As a participant observer and in gathering information by interview I was not aware of being either in the role of 'advocate', 'broker', or 'collaborator', the roles of the anthropologist discussed in a recent paper (Whisson 1985). Whisson is generous in casting the 'collaborator' as a good-hearted innocent, ignorant of the bureaucracy which he serves. Whisson draws on F. G Bailey's work 'Strangers and Spoils' to describe the 'broker', who is the fixer, middleman and the one who bridges the communications gap between local level and larger structures. The anthropologist as 'advocate' is Whisson's preferred role; the 'advocate' attempts to articulate "the aspirations of the client, into the activist role" (Whisson 1985 p.144).

The orthodoxy of these three roles can be challenged, and I believe Strathern's recommendations that anthropologists consider long term reciprocal linkages with their fieldwork population and write for them as well as the academic community does begin such a critique. Strathern's work has

much in common with the American 'action anthropology' stance, which in Britain, as Grillo says, has "few, if any, adherents" (Grillo 1985 p.26).

Strathern's fieldworker is the model I have most wanted to emulate in my own research. I feel I have succeeded in maintaining long terms ties with at least one of the communities I studied but less successful in 'writing for them'. In as much as I followed the direction of the GNTDA and gave periodic presentations to their members of my research findings, I have not as yet written a summary of my final conclusions of relevance to them in a form they would appreciate - I hope however to do this in the future.

### Conclusion

Although I continued my assistance to the fellowship while I was researching in Ghana, and the group made several small export orders to a shop in the UK, towards the end of my research period it was agreed that the project would not be self sustaining without a great deal of assistance and supervision from me which I would be unable to give in the future. Thus the sewing project evolved into a bench hiring enterprise and cassava farm (explained above). I still maintain a relationship with the family I lived with and through them the women's fellowship. I am also still bound to Abodom by being an honorary citizen; I must make a contribution to the village development fund once a year at the annual *Akwambɔ* festival - I do this by sending a small cash donation to the chief and assisting with the supply of books to the village library. I feel this is an equitable solution to the ethical dilemmas of the anthropological fieldworker. Strathern has written that the anthropologist, by maintaining a reciprocal relationship with field subjects when they leave the field and by aspiring to become a "long-standing member of the social networks



there" (Strathern 199 p.173) both avoids the paternalism and the possible exploitation of subjects who researchers become involved with.

Tax's 'action anthropology' approach has been recently described as one of the few early and remarkable efforts at applying anthropology to contemporary issues (Chaiken and Fleuret 1990 p.13). Almost two decades afterwards, anthropology has a well established place within the field of development planning and practice. Although Malinowski has been credited as the first 'practical' or 'applied anthropologist' (Mair 1972 p.287) on account of his work in instructing missionaries and government on the customs of indigenous people, and other British researchers have assisted with practical problems of social change in Africa<sup>1</sup> during colonial rule, British anthropological work into the problems of independent developing countries was, as Ralph Grillo (1985) notes, *a late developer in comparison to American research*. Most of the early British work on developing countries was done outside academic institutions, partly due to the biases within them towards pure research which left applied practitioners as poor relations within the anthropological discipline. But since the 1960s the British anthropologist has found a role in contemporary applied development research. In my own research I have tried to combine the methodology of classical anthropology with those of applied social research. The methods used have produced both pure research on the indigenous conceptual production and maintenance of identity, gender and social structures through cloth and garment construction but I have also been able to identify the problematic issues in the use of technology, labour, and the ethos of craftship within the

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<sup>1</sup> Gluckman's work on conflict and equilibrium models within Southern African Zulu Kingdoms can be interpreted as an early engagement with the issue of indigenous development problems ; the work of Clyde Mitchell (1969), Gulliver (1955) and others on the causes of labour migration are other examples.

workshops of the dressmakers and tailors and their association. These are now dealt with in the following chapters.

## Chapter Three

Development profile  
Abodom, Cape Coast and Accra





### Travelling by road to Abodom

The impact of Ghana's development history on the physical landscape can be observed within the first few days of arriving in Ghana by travelling from city through towns to villages. One can travel on weather eroded dangerous roads in the interior and out of Accra on wide motorway type highways designed in the over expansive development plans of Nkrumah's era. One sees a mixture of new but often unfinished cement block storeyed buildings and smaller single storey sandcrete or 'swish' <sup>1</sup> dwellings. Other housing found in city, town and village are huts with wooden board structures covered with corrugated-iron roofing and these contrast with the large formerly grand structures of colonial design. These colonial structures were often built in what were the newly expanded cocoa marketing towns and villages but are now often in poor repair and part of an urban/rural landscape of physical structural dilapidation, signalling only their past prosperity.

From the window seat of a bus to Abodom village travelling out of Accra on the Winneba road and changing buses in Agona Swedru (scene outside the local Swedru taxi station plate 1) one wonders if any government policy or international intervention could arrest the damaged and weather eroded roads and housing of many such urban and rural settlements.

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<sup>1</sup> Fante term meaning buildings made from sun baked red earth blocks.



plate 1 Swedru, an expanding important regional cocoa marketing town

The picture above is typical of first impressions of the urban landscape but after I had been in the country some time I became less disturbed with the physical decline of my surroundings and more impressed at the resilience and determination of Ghanaians to ingeniously overcome the constraints on their lives. The frequent journeys I made from Swedru to Abodom by local bus epitomised both this and the daily struggle to manage both financial and environmental uncertainty.

The local road transport operators, their union and passengers had devised a quasi-formal set of flexible norms to govern the economics and logistics of maintaining a viable and essential service on this route. Unlike the buses leaving the same station bound for Accra, our bus was rarely the target of roaming preachers ready to bless our journey and collect contributions for their mission, nor were Abodom passengers (except when I was recognised) the regular patrons of beggars. Headloading traders circulating in the transport station also had marginal interest in

hawking their goods or calling to our passengers. It was common knowledge that those travelling this route away from electricity and regular piped water into village life would have few resources to spare.

Thus our bus would leave the station unblessed but not until a full load of passengers and goods had been packed into every available space, often with an extra illegal passenger squeezed on, meaning the driver would be sharing his seat with a passenger straddling the gear stick.

From outward appearances the bus looked loaded in an unorganised and even dangerous fashion but every passenger knows that the route has a set number of passengers and tariff, with extra baggage fees being the only opportunity for individual negotiations. Once passengers and goods were on, the first stop, if we made it, would be for the petrol to take us the fifteen miles to Abodom. This distance often seemed much longer but I can never remember hoping the journey were shorter or that the bus would go faster - occasionally however I wished I had managed to get a window seat or that I might find a more comfortable position for my legs. But, enclosed in this bus, almost physically constrained by the closeness of my fellow passengers I felt temporarily relieved from the perpetual, intensive and exhausting experiences of doing anthropological fieldwork.

The type of journey we had depended on the season. The smoothest ride was during the dry Harmattan when the bus would speed along the dry road throwing up dust and swerving to the right and left to avoid pot holes and wide channels cut out of the road by the force of flowing rain water in the rainy season. During the rains the skill in driving this road was to remember the location of these channels and holes which would then be deeper and covered with water. The rainy season brought the additional

hazard of parts of the road near rivers becoming flooded and resembling small lakes making some journeys into precarious amphibious adventures which occasionally resulted in calling for assistance and rescue from other bus drivers, or long walks. The only road repairs I saw during these journeys were carried out by small children filling pot holes with red earth and stones, and directing the drivers' wheels over the mounds to flatten and harden the new surfaces; for this service passing drivers throw coins on to the road for the children.

The Abodom bus was always a journey away from the town and city going inland into an area overlooked by early anthropologists such as Rattray, who is thought to have found it difficult to penetrate due to the dense forest (Acquah p.7<sup>1</sup>). Although many of the large trees have been felled the dense forest on either side of the road still exists and makes for productive daydreaming and monitoring of crops on roadside farms. After some months of making this journey I became a well known regular of the route and was increasingly less nervous of the real and frequent risk of breakdown and accidents. When tired I, like many, allowed myself to doze off trusting my safe arrival to the skill of drivers.

The noise of passing buses could be heard from the clinic and around the expected time of my arrival those I lived with would begin to listen and watch for me leaving the main road and climbing down the hill towards the clinic. Usually before I could arrive a sister or child would be half way up and helping me carry my bags which would be heavy with foodstuffs or fresh fish from the coast. As I approached the clinic I would hear shouts

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<sup>1</sup>Acquah's book 'The Fantes of Ghana' was donated to Hull University by the author, a former student of Hull University, studying sociology under the supervision of Dr P M Worsley (date of publication and of donation unknown)

of greetings from neighbours and finally the greeting, *Akwaaba* welcome as I entered the clinic gates. The traditional glass of water would be offered and I would tell them about my journey and find out the local news and how many births there had been in my absence. I was back in the web of social relationships leaving behind a form of neutrality and the allowed anonymity of the mostly silent traveller. I was once again aware of myself within a Fante community as gendered, as status and age graded and if not part of a church and lineage at least perceived as representing the interests of the ones that had adopted and accommodated me - the intensity of fieldwork had again started.

## Introduction

For many seamstresses and tailors the preferred site for a workshop or kiosk is the main road near the market place. They wish to be in the hub of commercial activity which sustains them as it does all town and village businesses linked to the infrastructure of communication and trade by a road network. This chapter focuses on the importance of road and trade networks so vital to the development of the cases and the regions studied.

I was a frequent passenger on the road system that emanated from Abodom. I established my first case studies there and would, after finishing the intensive period of study in other areas, return to monitor their progress. Setting out from Abodom to return to my case studies in Cape Coast and Accra I could depart by local bus from the main road bus stop, a few minutes walk from my house. The road to the west was the geographically direct route to Cape Coast along the older established trading route which links Abodom with other market towns of Ajumaku and Mankessim. Travelling by bus in this direction to Cape Coast I had to be standing in the darkness at the bus stop by about five in the morning to ensure my arrival in Cape Coast by nine o'clock, such was the state of the road and scarcity of reliable transport on this route - a route which was once well maintained and which many villagers remember conveyed Kwame Nkrumah through the village from Accra on his triumphant tour of the country after independence.

It was in fact easier to travel to Cape Coast by going in the opposite direction, east, via Swedru (this is despite the difficulty of the first stretch of road described above). This journey was many more miles, but from

Swedru travelling on better maintained tarmac and cement roads with a more frequent bus service it took less time. The same route via Swedru would be taken when travelling to Accra.

Going west or east from the central village of Abodom to Cape Coast or Swedru and Accra respectively on local transport was a major part of my fieldwork logistics which has also determined the organisation of this chapter. My analyses of the region's development centres upon a historical account of road use policies as they have affected Abodom, Cape Coast and towns like them whose growth potential was undermined by a deliberate policy not to transport goods on the traditional trading routes and instead promote the use of the railway - a policy of colonial administration. Cape Coast and Accra are respectively sites of regional and national government, and civic centres. They both have well established universities and schools and are connected to the newer coastal trans-continental all weather road which also links them to each other and the nearby port cities of Sekondi, Takoradi, Tema and to neighbouring countries. This road is the contemporary east/west trade route which although promoting the development of coastal towns and cities has undermined the development of the interior villages such as Abodom. These issues will be discussed under the following headings:

#### Rationale for case study sites

##### Characteristics of case study sites:

Accra and the Adabraka district

Central Region - Cape Coast and Abodom

##### A history of arrested development

### Rationale for case study sites

My original proposal to study dressmakers and tailors in Abodom village and two other locations in the Central Region was revised on starting fieldwork to include at least one example in Accra city. The rationale was to obtain a better comparison between dressmakers and tailors working in locations of varied population size and industry but also who shared access to a common road transport network, historical development experiences and regional trading infrastructure. Although in a different administrative region, I found Accra city to be vital to the trading and road transport network of both Cape Coast and Abodom; it is the destination of much of the urban drift from Abodom. Both Cape Coast and Abodom tailors and dressmakers travel to Accra to buy accessories at wholesale prices. Working in Accra as a third case study site introduced me to dressmakers and tailors from many different regions of Ghana and this has enabled me to generalise further some of my findings rather than limit them solely to the regions in which the study was located.



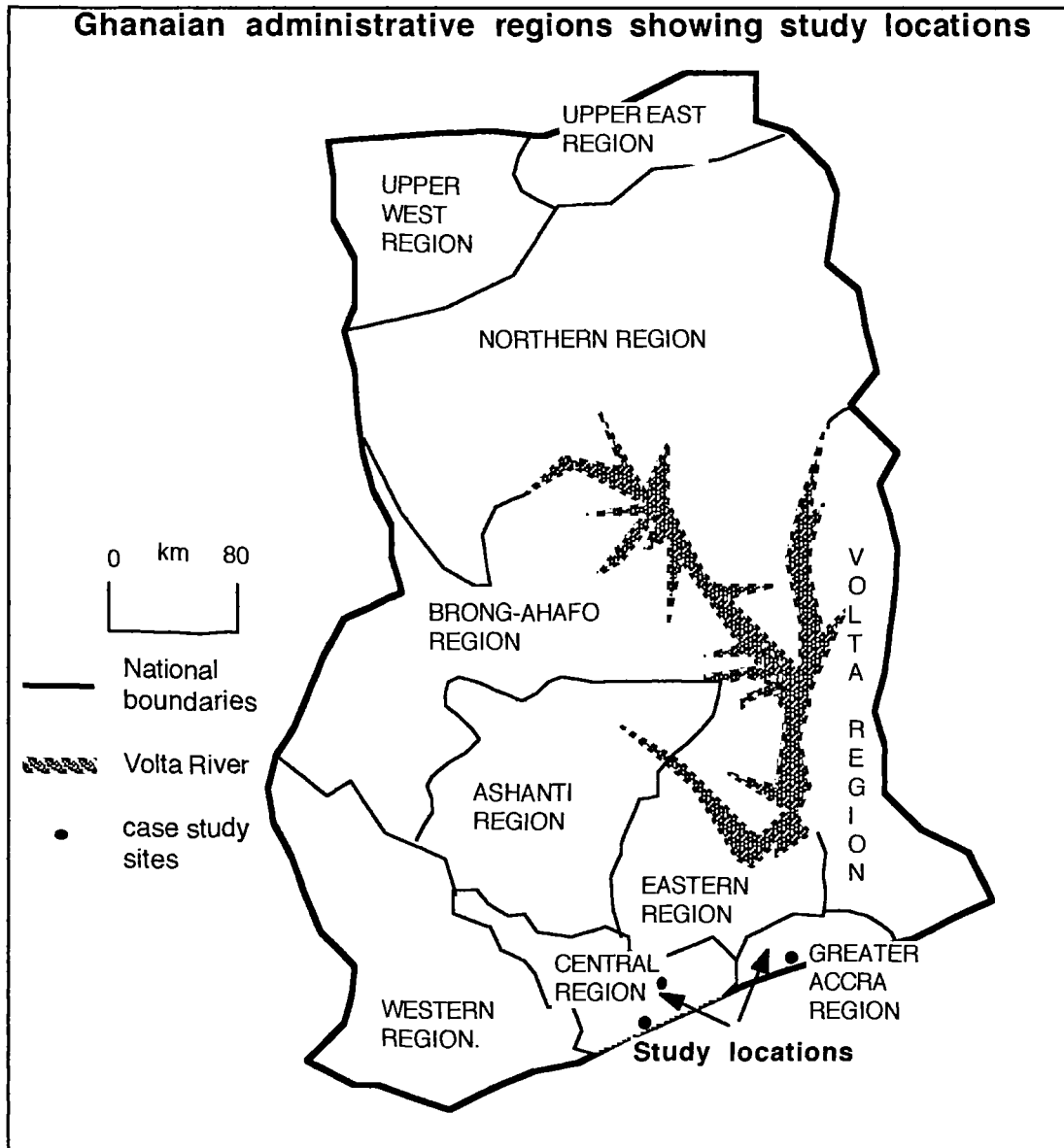


Fig. 1

### Characteristics of case study sites

#### Accra and the Adabraka district

Accra has grown quickly from a small fishing village of the original inhabitants, the *Ga*, into a heterogeneous city and seat of the national capital. It has a current estimated population of about 1.5 million living in the most densely populated urban settlements in Ghana (438 per sq km. - see table 2). It has a growth rate of 3.3 percent , second only to the

Northern Region. The population gender mix is relatively even with only a two percentage point difference (see table 1). Migration to the city by many ethnic groups means a mixed ethnic population and tremendous pressure on the cities weakening infrastructure. The city is now characterised by waste disposal problems, inadequate housing, poor networks of utilities (water, electricity, telephone) and deteriorating human habitations - three-quarters of Accra townships are slums populated by low-income earners. The city was recently described as a "conglomeration of urbanised villages" (Ocansey 1993) and many of the townships are recommended for mass demolition.

Accra has historically been well served with a road and rail infrastructure reaching north and west; the Accra survey of 1958 documents the development;

"the road from Accra to Nsawam was started in 1895. At that time a road from Accra to Aburi was in existence. This was gradually extended during the early part of this century to Akropong, Koforidua and on to Kumasi. A railway, started in 1909, reached....Kumasi in 1932. (Acquah 1958 p.26)

When the advantages of Accra were being considered in 1874, in relation to resiting the British seat of government, its potentially healthier sanitation and its location near the more moderate climate of the Akwapim hills were to its advantage. Roads and telegraph links were proposed to maintain communication with regions and assist trade and communications with other parts of the country.

The Adabraka district, where both of my city case studies were located, was described in the same survey as having large structures with the

highest rentals in Accra. The district had a medium to low population density and was the least congested. Today it is highly congested, as is all Accra, and the large structures are mainly used for the more prosperous commercial businesses, banks and national headquarters of institutions such as the Cocoa Marketing Board. The main feature of the district is the Kwame Nkrumah Avenue (where both workshops were situated in the same building as the national headquarters of the GNTDA) leading in one direction to the main junction of Kwame Nkrumah Circle and in the other to Ussher Town, one of the oldest parts of the city.

To contrast the experiences of dressmakers and tailors in the prestigious district of Adabraka I carried out questionnaires and interviews in Accra Newtown to the North of Adabraka; a district typical of the newer settlements, being a densely populated commercial and residential area.

**Table 1 Gender composition of study areas**

TOWNS	Population		Population			
	1970	1984	1984		1984	
			Male	%	Female	%
Abodom	5,195	5,009	2,349	47	2,660	53
Cape Coast*	70,729	86,620	42,938	50	43,682	50
Accra	903,447	1,420,066	693,695	49	726,371	51

Compiled from (Ghana Statistical Service 1989; Central Bureau of Statistics 1984)

Central Region - Cape Coast and Abodom

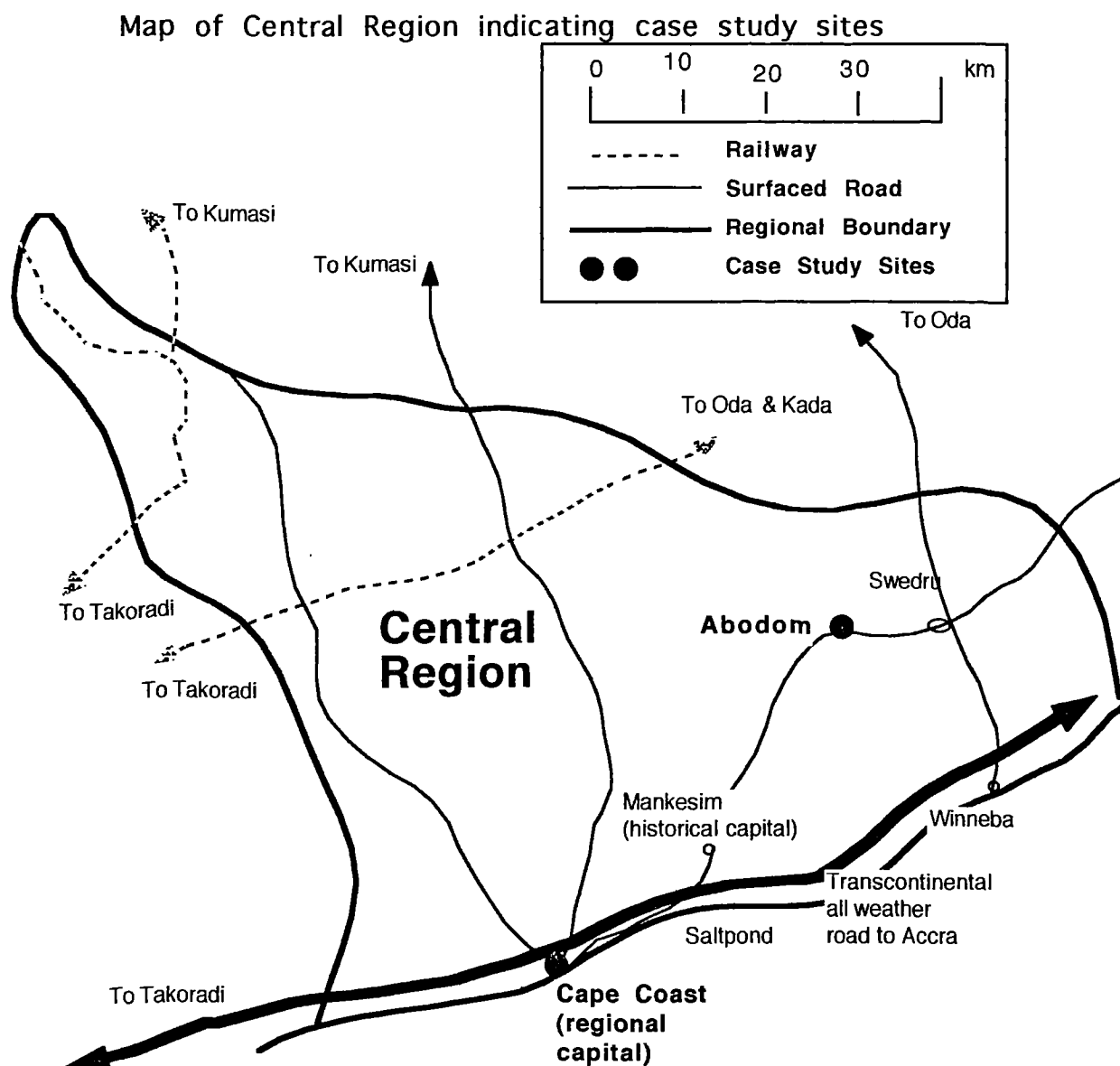


Fig. 2

The Central Region in which Cape Coast and Abodom are located covers 9,826 sq. km and according to the most recent Census of 1984 has an approximate population of 1,145,520. Apart from the Greater Accra region, the Central Region has the highest population density (117 persons per sq. km, see table 2) and the rural/urban mix is 73.5%/ 26.5% respectively.

**Table 2 Population characteristics by region**

REGION	TOTAL POPULATION	REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION	DENSITY persons per sq. km	% INCREASE since 1970	% GROWTH RATE	% RURAL	% URBAN
	12,205,574	100	51	42.6	2.6	68.7	31.3
Ashanti	2,089,683	17.1	86	41.0	2.5	67.9	32.1
Eastern	1,679,483	13.8	87	38.8	2.4	73.3	26.7
Greater Accra	1,402,066	11.6	438	57.2	3.3	16.5	83.5
Volta	1,201,095	9.8	58	26.8	1.7	79.3	20.7
Brong Ahafo	1,179,407	9.7	30	53.9	3.1	73.4	26.6
Northern	1,162,645	9.5	17	59.8	3.4	75.3	24.7
Central	1,145,520	9.4	117	28.7	1.8	73.5	26.5
Western	1,116,930	9.2	47	45.0	2.7	77.2	22.8
Upper East	771,584	6.3	87	42.1	2.5	91.5	8.5
Upper West	439,161	3.6	24	37.3	2.3	89.2	10.8

Compiled from (Ghana Statistical Service 1989; Central Bureau of Statistics 1984)

### Cape Coast

Cape Coast, the capital of the Central Region, had a population of 85,000 in the 1984 population census. The Fantes are the main population in the Central Region and in Cape Coast - they are also the second largest Akan sub-group. The original Fantes were situated in small states within a fifty kilometre radius of Mankesim<sup>1</sup> in the Southern Central coastal belt.

The town has two major features, the large market place and the Castle. For my research the market place has been a major site of interest but the castle is the destination of tourists and the reason for the historical importance of Cape Coast. The castle at Cape Coast along with those of Accra, Elmina, and Annamaboe was one of the strongest and most capable of defence and became the seat of government and trade for the British.

<sup>1</sup>Mankesim was the historical Fante capital

The population of Cape Coast were described as uncivilised by Governor White in 1814 but "peaceably disposed and well behaved towards the whites....Gold and ivory are brought from the interior in exchange for East India and Manchester goods, guns, powder, lead and iron. Cape Coast may be considered the emporium of trade" (Metcalf 1964 p.28). Historians have documented the Fantes as highly enterprising in their relationships with the Ashanti to the North and Europeans. The Fante are often cited as having been in effective control of the coastal trade during the eighteenth century, successfully playing the role of middlemen traders between Europeans and the Ashanti (Buah 1980 p.16). John Barbot of the French Royal Company of Africa described the Fantes

"those crafty turbulent people" who "secure all the passes in such manner, that not one merchant can possibly come down from the inland country to trade with the European on the coast; and not so satisfied, they obstruct the bringing of any provisions to them, till they are forced to buy a peace at a dear rate." (Wolfson 1958 p.69)

The Fante communities located near European trading companies are reported to have been greatly influenced by them and "new forms of wealth and ownership were introduced into the society" (Oppong 1981 p. 35). Examples given by Oppong are private incomes and own trading ventures; she notes that a new wealthy class of Ghanaians with high social status emerged out of success in these trading ventures (ibid.).

However, as trade with the British expanded and sea vessels became larger the port at Cape Coast (like those at Anamaboe and Accra) became inadequate. The Cape Coast port was a beach and open roadstead and the landing was difficult and dangerous due to the surf (Metcalf 1964 p.168). When the new deep water harbours were sited

they were to the West (Takoradi) and to the East (Tema - just outside Accra). The main railway lines to service these ports also bypassed Cape Coast in favour of Accra/Tema and Takoradi.

Cape Coast town itself, which was "under the very walls of the castle" (Metcalf 1964 p.313) was described by various merchants and officials living within the castle as intolerable and efforts were made to "get rid of filth and pigs and other consequences of barbarism in the town" (ibid.). In 1874 when the question of where the seat of the British government should be relocated Cape Coast Castle was said to have no special military advantages and a number of disadvantages concerned with sanitation. The soil around the castle was

"saturated through and through with sewage. There is decaying vegetable matter everywhere about, and the houses are crowded on one another... even cattle cannot exist at Cape Coast Castle. It deserves more than perhaps any other place the appellation of the white man's grave" (Metcalf 1964 p.365)

The British capital was thus resited in Accra and Cape Coast became of historical but not strategic importance and declined as a centre for international trade.

### Abodom

Those born in the village of Agona Abodom are today known as Fantes but Agona was previously a neighbouring state which was assimilated into the Fante ethnic group as a consequence of various alliances to protect its population against the Northern Ashanti moving further south to trade with Europeans (Buah 1980). I have found no historical documents on the

history of Abodom and rely on the kindness of the sitting chief, Nana Obuadum Osam Dadie X for the information in plate 2.

Despite repeated efforts to gather a history of Abodom, it was not until the final day of my fieldwork that the chief of the village handed me this hand written sheet of paper with a brief history. I had been looking forward to hearing a verbal history of the village told annually to the youth of the village on the first evening of the annual *Aqwambo* festival. But a chieftaincy dispute raging during the entire period of my fieldwork prevented the history being presented.

ABODOM HISTORY

The ancestors of the Royal Asona Clom settled at a site south of the present town in the 15th Century. During the latter part of the 18th Century a hunter by name Nana Sah broke away from his people at Nyakrom and came to settle within the boundary of the original settlers. On his hunting expeditions he scouted the settlement and went to them. They then decided to come together and build a new township which is the present site. People came to join and therefore earned the name "Abodom" came to join. In short this is the story of how Abodom ~~came~~ came to be.

Obuadum Osam Dadie X  
16/8/94.



The setting for telling the history of Abodom is an evening bonfire. The youth of the village gather wood to be set alight (formerly each family in the village contributed firewood); the firewood symbolises the troubles of each house which will be burnt and the new incoming year will be peaceful. Over the previous four years of chieftaincy dispute the bonfire had got smaller and smaller and that evening I recorded in my notes that much of the talk on the main road and on the *durbar* grounds where the bonfire was built was about the meagre amount of wood being brought and the small size of the bonfire.

As things turned out this was a sign of troubles to come and the first of these materialised when Nana Mankrado, a sub chief and prominent member of the group attempting to destool the sitting chief (whose duty it is to set light to the bonfire and tell the story to the youth) was suspended by the festival committee for fear of disruption. The document in plate 2 is based on the story that would have been told.

One of the earliest accounts of the Agona Abodom region is by Henry Meredith (a trader and Governor of Winneba). In the early 19th century he noted that the people derive their subsistence mostly from hunting and agriculture and only a few gain a livelihood from trade. Where trade does exist he found it consisted of purchasing from Europeans, in exchange for gold, cowries and a few other articles. He found the following articles to be in demand:

"East-India cotton goods, iron, lead, spirits, tobacco, tobacco-pipes, guns, gun-powder, vessels of brass and woollen and cotton goods of British manufacture. The India cotton

manufacture is most esteemed, not only here but on every part of the coast. They afterwards barter or retail these articles with their countrymen, and persons from the interior, for gold, provisions, palm-wine. palm-oil, &c., &c." (Wolfson 1958 p.97)

Today Abodom is a mainly agricultural village with a population in 1984 of just over 5000. The 1984 Census showed a decline in population from 5195 in 1970 to 5009 in 1984 (a decrease of 3.6 per cent) and there is a high incidence of female headed households; in this aspect it is typical of many towns in Southern Ghana, and Africa generally.<sup>1</sup>. Abodom is in an intermediate stage of development from a wholly agricultural to semi-urban village. It has relatively few services or industry. Its agricultural cash crops for external markets are mainly cocoa with a few people growing coffee. For local markets sugarcane, maize and cassava are grown - these are also subsistence crops along with yam, tomatoes, peppers and onions. Abodom's main non-agricultural business life is in informal trading, food preparation, baking, sewing, illegal logging and transport.

Although the rural electricity supply programme is working its way to Abodom and its imminent connection was announced at the *Akwambɔ* festival in August 1996, to date no connection has taken place. As a result of annual development levies the village has constructed its own small market (on the left hand side, plate 3) but for other services most people travel to Swedru which has the nearest electricity supply, post office, bank, chemist, functioning telephone service and regional transport station. To the east and north is agricultural land accessible through a maze of paths and Abodom is the key access point to the main road for

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd (1991) documents a 7% increase in Ghanaian female headed households over a 27 year period, resulting in 29.4 % of all household in 1987/88 (p. 7)

a number of smaller homesteads and villages nestled in the surrounding forest.

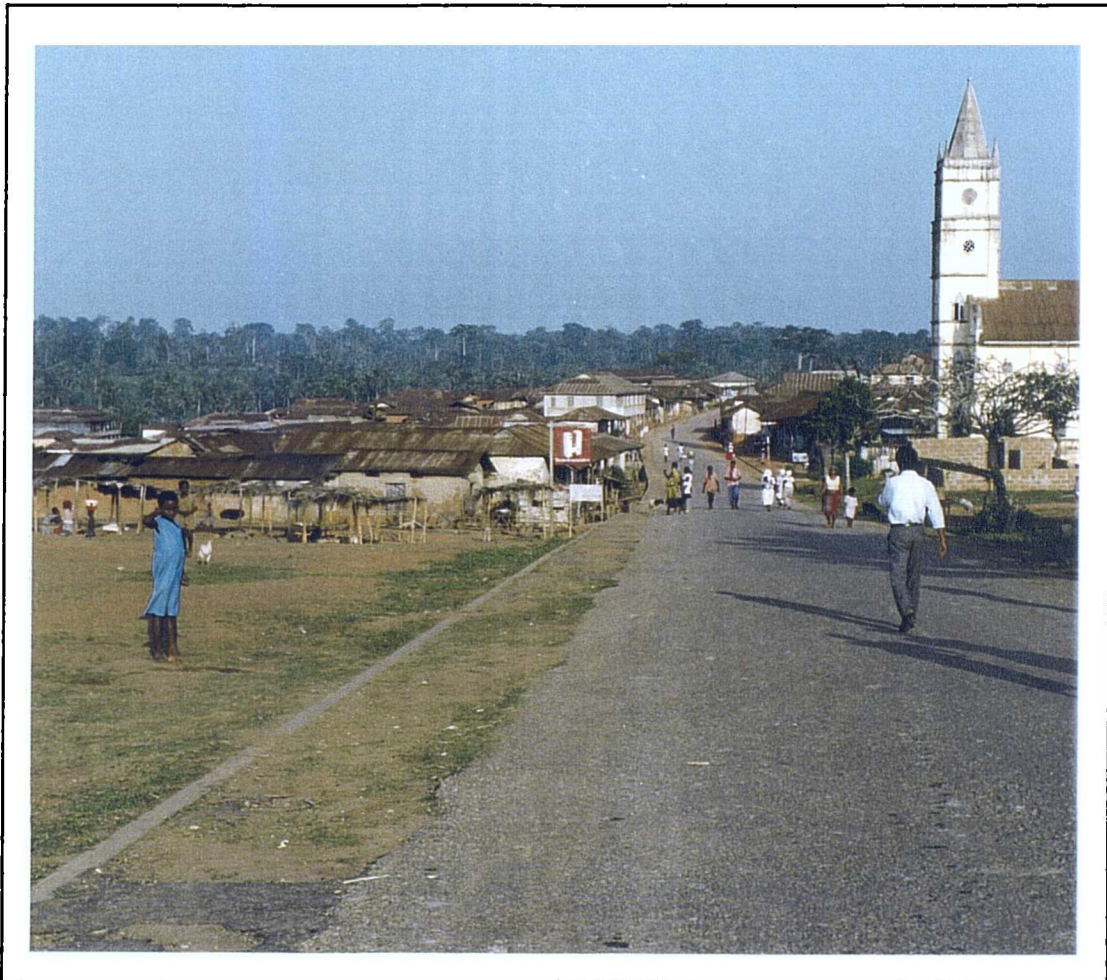


plate 3 - The main road running through Abodom is part of the old Nsawam - Cape Coast road, previously the principal central east-west route (see Fig.3).

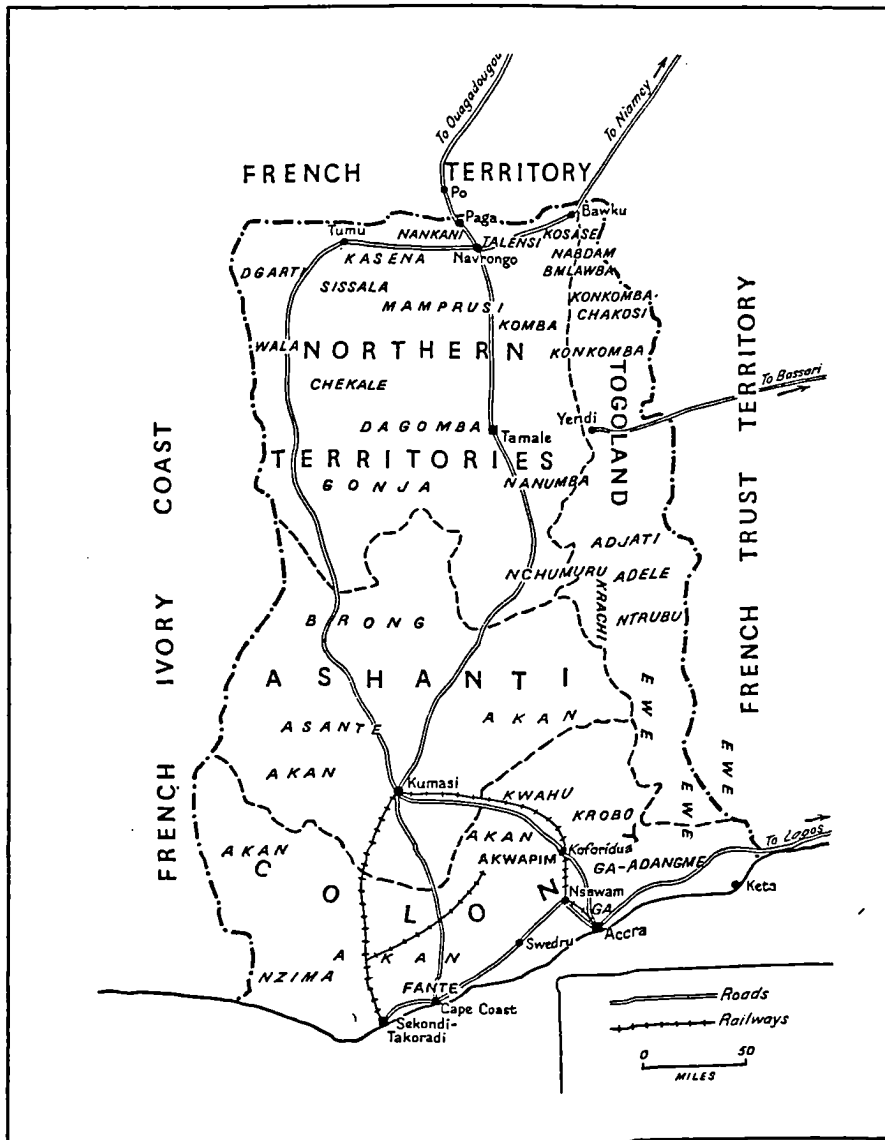


Fig.3 Copied from (Acquah 1958)

### A history of arrested development

To piece together the development of Abodom and Cape Coast in relation to Accra I have drawn on a number of sources but most importantly on published colonial records<sup>1</sup>. From these sources I believe there is evidence that Abodom and to a lesser extent Cape Coast had their development 'arrested' ; that is the natural growth potential was stunted through policies designed to promote other regions and other transport networks. Arrested development can be traced to colonial transport policies

<sup>1</sup> Kay (1972) ;Metcalf (1964) .

intended to promote British trade through cost-effective means of transport, to the detriment of established regional trade routes.

The poor development profile of the Central Region is often recognised by those who live there and described by them as the 'largest village in Ghana'. However in national statistics when poverty is looked at in terms of geographical regions the Central Region population is not classed as in a high poverty area<sup>1</sup>. The label is self-attributed to the Central Region because of the high expectations of development the people there have as a consequence of their early contact and commerce with European traders. However, despite being the regional capital Cape Coast has a failing infrastructure and poor housing stock - much of it is from the colonial era but now in a state of disrepair. Until recently the site of the old town centre under the walls of the castle has been the only part to receive major redevelopment and the population has been moved to the new 'Ola' estate on the outskirts of the town but very little further development has taken place. The electricity supply is unreliable and one consequence is frequent breaks in the water supply. Until recently the vital road links to Kumasi and the North which were important trading routes for Cape Coast's were not open to heavy commercial traffic - the main passenger services were all from the overcrowded transport stations in Accra.

Abodom is a village the size of a small town. It has some large storeyed buildings and two imposing churches (that of the Methodist church can be seen in the photo) built when the town prospered by trading with southern coastal towns. But Abodom today is a village reliant mostly on

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<sup>1</sup> High poverty regions are the Northern Savannah regions comprising Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions (Asenso-Okyere and others 1993 P.6).

subsistence agriculture and informal trading. Today it has only one well-maintained all weather road running through the centre which is viable for heavy vehicles (see map Fig.4). Many other roads are eroded away completely and others are mostly impassable for vehicles. The village does still have its own cocoa shed where local farmers deliver their sacks for weighing and receive their cheques but the importance of Abodom for producing cocoa and organising its collection has declined with the decline in cocoa production<sup>1</sup> and its importance as Ghana's single dependent export crop.

The main regional cocoa marketing board is at Swedru<sup>2</sup> and this is the main destination for most of Abodom's traders. The contemporary importance of Swedru to Abodom belies the historical importance of trading links with coastal towns such as Winneba, Saltpond and Cape Coast, which were once busy off-shore sea ports for passengers and cargo (Buah 1980). Direct road links in the region were completed by 1911 (Szereszewski 1965)<sup>3</sup> and it was the responsibility of each village to maintain their stretch of road. As the map in fig. 4 shows these roads are in poor repair and mostly not suitable for vehicles.

The rationale for the establishment of road networks was the region's established trading routes to coastal ports and this was recognised in recommendations for the colony's development in a Report on Economic Agriculture on the Gold Coast in 1889

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<sup>1</sup> In Abodom due mainly to the non replacement of diseased trees.

<sup>2</sup> A town that with the introduction of cocoa farming on a large scale in the 1920s became the most important cocoa buying centre in the Central Region (Kay 1972).

<sup>3</sup> Another source is Dickson 1961.

"The first step towards developing the resources of the country must be the establishment of good roads between the producing districts and the ports of shipment...The direction which these roads should take is pointed out by the present trade routes. There are eight principal lines of trade, having their outlets at Dixcove, Chama, Elmina, Cape Coast, Saltpond, Winnebah, Akussi and Quittah..." (Metcalf 1964 p.437 sic)

Given this relatively good infrastructure and favourable geographical position in the southern coastal area, the question of relatively poor development in Abodom and Cape Coast needs to be explained. A diversion to briefly examine British colonial road and rail development in the region in the 1920's and 30's will reveal an explanation why the Fante groups could not take full advantage of their resources.

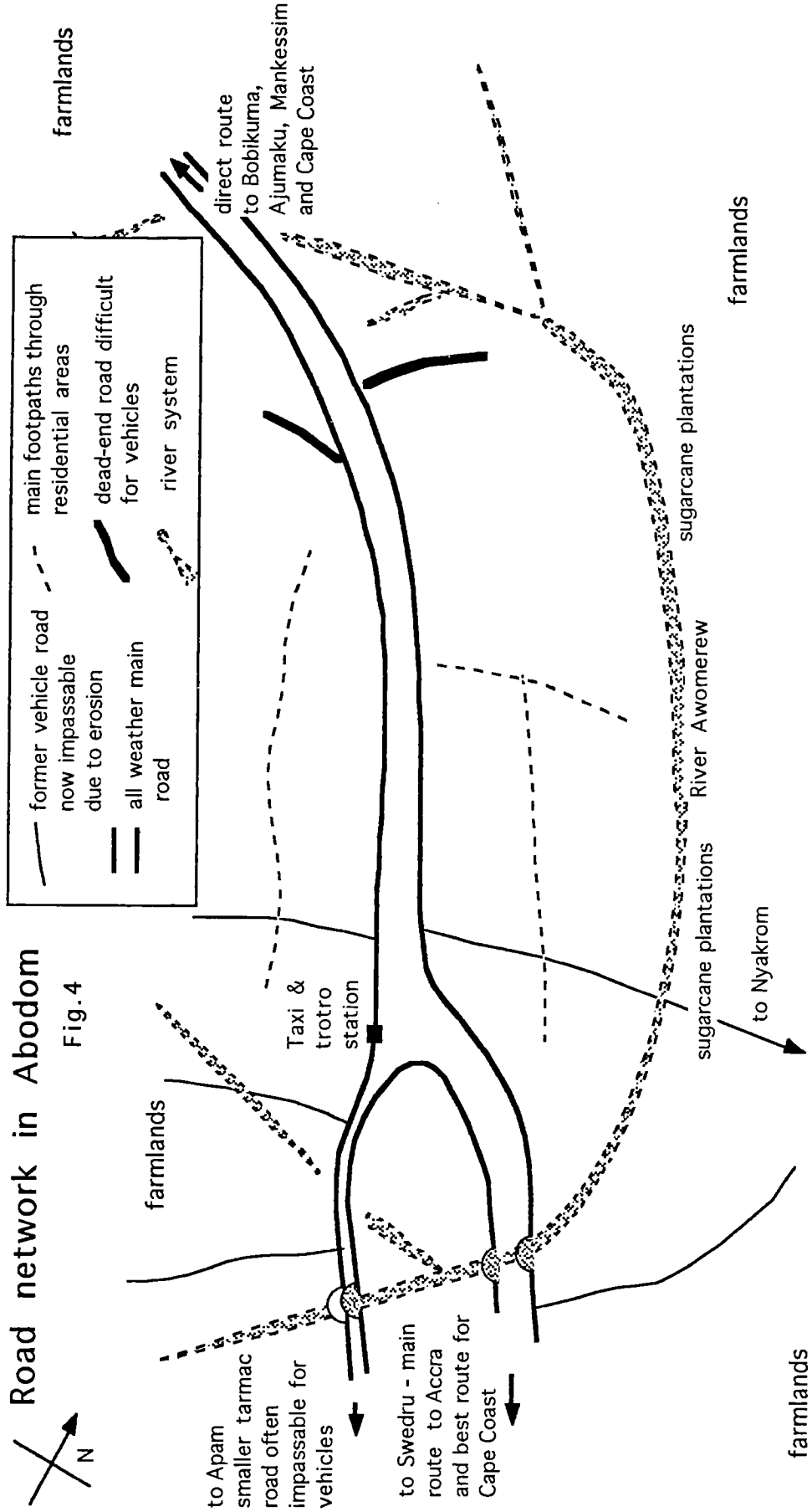
In the early 1920s British administrators discovered the need to develop the colony's seaports. Deep-water harbours were proposed but it was the coastline of Takoradi and Tema that had the most favourable features. Takoradi harbour opened in 1928 and Tema in 1962. The ports were situated near the already functioning railway stations<sup>1</sup> and thus a new rail, road and harbour transport infrastructure was developed favouring new British conceived trade routes. The railway system is shaped like a capital 'A'. Kumasi is the most northern terminus and there are two main lines - one to Tema and one to Takoradi (Senior and Quansah 1971 P.77). The railways, however, were badly situated for indigenous traders of Cape Coast and traders and peasant farmers in Abodom who did not use them. Rail transport was planned with a view to

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<sup>1</sup>The Accra-Nsawam train station opened in 1910 and the first train from Sekondi arrived at Kumasi in 1903.

# Road network in Abodom

Fig.4



farmlands



assisting the development of mining (thus the 1901 line from Tarkwa to Sekondi) and with a view to securing firmer control of the Ashanti region and promoting the development of the cocoa trade there (Rimmer 1992 p.20).

Under the development policies of Guggisberg (1919 to 1927)<sup>1</sup> expansion in rail and road transport removed communications bottlenecks to the benefit of production of cocoa and mining<sup>2</sup>. It was Guggisberg who constructed the major trunk roads in the 1920s and mobilised chiefs and farmers to construct and maintain feeder roads (Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p.64). Abodom has no mining industry but it is a producer of cocoa and a pick-up transportation point for the smaller surrounding villages and its trade would have benefited from the Guggisberg efforts to improve trade in cocoa and establish a viable road network for its transportation. The post Guggisburg development period (1929-42) however brought questioning of his investment programme especially budgetary expenditure on road transportation (Frimpong 1991). The railways were located more for the commercial development of mining than for cocoa transportation and many researchers of this period agree there was a systematic bias towards the mining sector at the expense of cocoa (Bates 1983 p.67 & Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p.65).

There was also a colonial policy in favour of carriage of goods by rail rather than road. The railways believed they faced unfair competition, as road transport had fewer overheads and was not licensed for safety or

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<sup>1</sup> Sir George Guggisburg was Governor of the Gold Coast from 1919 to 1927.

<sup>2</sup> In the mining sector for the period 1920-28 "the rate of export expansion matched almost perfectly the rate of expansion of the road and rail network" (Frimpong 1991 p.21)

capacity. Licensing of road transport was regarded as unworkable; instead consideration was given to closing down the ports at Cape Coast, Saltpond and Winneba. Only resistance by local people made this impossible. Other means had to be found because despite the advantages in handling and better prices for cocoa at Sekondi port "the people have long-established connections with Cape Coast, Saltpond and Winneba and, whatever may be the facilities for travelling afforded them on the railway, they will not abandon their visits to those towns in favour of Sekondi"(Kay 1972 p.187). So favourable were road transport economics that in 1932 the railways were forced to make redundancies. The exasperation was apparent when the Board had to report that they did not know how further economies could be made and were satisfied "that short of running its own motor transport" (Kay 1972 p.189) it had taken all possible steps to raise revenue.

The differential between rail and roads costs was "particularly pronounced for short hauls, with the result that much cocoa traffic shifted from railway to the roads along those portions of the railway that lay near the coastal ports". [Bates, 1983 #464] (p68). Finally the government resorted to prohibitions on the movement of cocoa on certain major roads until cocoa traffic was definitely assured to the railway; the rule was relaxed for imported goods (Kay 1972 p.195). This entailed the transport of cocoa by road being banned over road routes running parallel to the railway (Bates 1983) and Howard (1978) reports that there was a policy to "deliberately leave gaps in major roads to force exporters and importers to ship by rail" (p.174-176). One of the road gaps was through a large area surrounding Abodom and its routes to coastal ports and Cape Coast.

As Abodom is on the southern edge of the cocoa producing area, and the railway passed to the far north of it, the road restrictions would have been a severe blow to its role as both producer and pick-up point. The road restrictions effectively re-established a transport bottleneck which the railways were intended to remove. The failure to remove these bottlenecks for agricultural production is (according to Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p 28 - commenting on the value of the development strategy) one of the reasons why sustainable economic growth did not materialise as predicted .

Development plans after independence did not re-establish deteriorating inland road networks and only recently under economic restructuring policies have vital inland roads from the central coastal towns been repaired or reconstructed. Traders and cocoa producers in Abodom still mainly go eastwards to Swedru and to Accra to conduct business rather than risk unpredictable journeys on bad roads to Cape Coast. Abodom and the coastal towns and villages between Takoradi and Accra/Tema were to miss out on the industrialisation which occurred in areas around the harbours. Cape Coast, because of its established trade routes with Kumasi further north and its eventual access to the Coastal trans-continental east west road, has fared better than other coastal towns and villages, but nevertheless remains in a state of underdevelopment compared to Takoradi and Accra/Tema. Today the ports of Winneba, Saltpond and Cape Coast are used for beach net or canoe fishing.

The relative neglect of cocoa in the post Guggisberg period was combined with a world-wide depression which decreased export prices for cocoa. These changes would have disadvantaged the small rural producers in

towns such as Abodom in the Central Region and the relative decline of the area can be dated from here.

There have been attempts to decentralise and correct the development balance. Yankson (Yankson 1986) reports that in the 1950s there was a government strategy to create "industrial dispersion away from port cities and metropolitan areas" (p.67). However, confusion in economic policy in the late 60s and 70s lead to the abandonment of the plan. Later in the 1970s the Ghanaian government began to adopt a "growth-foci approach to regional development and state planners were developing a strategy to decentralise industry into 20 rural centres" ( ibid. p.65-66), away from Accra-Tema in the South East, Kumasi in the Ashanti Region and Sekondi-Takoradi to the South West. Yankson's work on the potential of small-business development was designed to explore some of the issues in relation to these proposed plans.

Another attempt to assist disadvantaged villages and towns and decentralise power has been the creation of District Assemblies which are a fulfilment in part of the PNDC's initial pledge to develop a representative system of government (Jeffries 1992). These have tax raising powers and in development initiatives they should work in conjunction with Town Development Committees (TDCs). Such committees operate with the involvement of youth organisations (often based in urban areas), traditional chieftaincy, NGOs and any other groups or individuals who have the potential to assist (Appendix I details the structures and interaction of the above institutions). Local members of the TDC organise communal labour and levy funds from the village population to carry on projects at the village level. Behind this physical effort a great deal of politics and conflict can arise to delay or even cause the abandonment of some

projects. Once under construction, a national announcement is often made as in plate 4 which gives further strength to the idea that Ghanaians themselves are enormously resourceful in developing their own associations to pursue their interests; in fact Chazan notes this as one of the most outstanding characteristics of Ghana (Chazan 1988a p.94). However, the public announcement (plate 4) fails to report the years the project took to complete and that the allegations of corruption and disputes between officials, sub-chiefs and the youth organisation almost caused violence to break out in the village many times. The focus of many youth organisations, TDCs, NGO assistance and indigenous chieftaincy organisations is small infrastructure projects similar to the one in plate 4 which can be opened with an elaborate ceremony and the physical frame of the building can stand for the fulfilled objective of the organisations and justify their continuation. However, the small scale nature of such projects will only go a small way to correcting the systematic underdevelopment of villages and towns in the region by colonial government.

## Day care centre for Agona Abodom

*By Graphic Reporter*

**MEMBERS of the Agona Abodom Youngsters Club are constructing a five-classroom day care centre at Agona Abodom in the Agona District of the Central Region at an estimated cost of ₵8.6 million.**

Already, ₵4.2 million has been spent on the project and a fund-raising rally held in Accra at the weekend yielded ₵2.3 million. The Japanese Association in Ghana has also donated ₵1 million towards the project.

Mrs Cecilia Johnson, Deputy Minister of Local Government and Rural Development who addressed the function, advised communities to help in the training of day care attendants to ensure that their children get the best of care.

Mrs Johnson said if the attendants are well motivated, it would ginger them to give of their best for the benefit of the children.

Mr D. A. Odoom, chairman of the club appealed to the members to donate generously both in kind and in cash because the club has earmarked a number of development projects and these demands the collective effort of all.

Plate 4 (Daily Graphic Nov. 30, 1993)

## Conclusion

Transportation bottlenecks, the neglect of cocoa production, a bias towards mining and the railways are the keys to understanding the arrested development of the Central Region and especially small rural towns such as Abodom.

Howard (1978) saw a deliberate policy of general underdevelopment by the Colonial government and cites its road and rail policy as one example it used to pursue this. In Howard's underdevelopment thesis the colonial government's main objective was an increase in government revenue, and the creation of a transport network to best facilitate the import-export trade of the colonial state. From another perspective the prohibition on some road transport networks was a consequence of the positive trade and transportation policies within the Guggisberg development programme. So successful were initiatives to promote road transport that the post Guggisberg administration felt they had to curtail its use in order to protect their investment in rail transportation which could not compete with road haulage.

Bates documents a bias in the 1930s colonial development strategy towards subsidising the mining sector at the expense of cocoa. Cocoa farmers in that period were forced to pay above market prices for transport with the result that profitability in farming declined (Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p.64-65).

Kay's 1972 collected documents reveal the human factors behind the transportation policies which arrested Cape Coast and Abodom's development but promoted that of Accra/Tema and to the west Takoradi. He records that the rail track was not well located and

underestimated both the strength of established regional trade routes and the entrepreneurship of local transport operators, who consistently beat rail prices and forced the government into the 'road gap' policy against the whole region.

Poor economic management was also a contributing factor. Initially the railways were an investment in the development of mining, the proposed Sekondi deep-water harbour and for assisting the growth of the cocoa trade. However, the cocoa industry became "the means of ensuring the future of the railways"<sup>1</sup>(Kay 1972 p.138). Without revenues from carrying cocoa it could not be profitable. Subsidising rail was not an acceptable policy for the colonial government, the philosophy being that the colonies should pay for themselves. Part of the Central Region was compromised for this objective and this turned its once favourable geographical location and its traditional and vital trading routes into a liability which resulted in the region's jocular but pertinent label as the 'largest village in Ghana'

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<sup>1</sup> His conclusion is derived from an analysis of correspondence and reports on transport development between the early 1920s and mid 1940s.

## Appendix I

### Organisational development structures

Ghana has developed regional, town and village level development organisational structures. Most improvement initiatives in small towns and villages are undertaken and funded by the co-operation and fund raising capacity of these groups.

At the village and town level, the main institutions are Churches, funeral gatherings, and the *durbars* at the end of annual festivals; from these come both funds and ideas. The latter, festivals, is a formally recognised village level organisational institution for development projects, and many urban migrants return to their home towns or villages especially for the traditional new year festival, where projects are proposed for the coming year. Those proposing, planning and costing the initiatives in advance of the festival are members of the Town Development Committee (TDCs) and Youth Organisations. These are run by sectional heads of villages (sectional divisions being differentiated by large lineage groups). The village Chief as head of the village's royal lineage will be present at such meetings and on behalf of himself and the royal lineage make suggestions and contributions - this development role perhaps replaces his former position as religious leader which colonial powers wished to be "at best relegated to the background if not abandoned altogether" (Bing 1968 p.128). The chief's presence at such meetings, like his ceremonial role at festivals, could be interpreted as giving legitimacy and authority to the development committees at this level.

Town Development Committees raise funds and pursue initiatives; acting as 'think tanks' they prepare detailed plans to be put before the population at the annual festival. Calculations for fund raising are based on resident village population numbers and the proportion living and working in the urban areas. The levy for the Abodom classroom project was 1,000 cedis per male and 600 cedis per female (approximately £1 and 60p respectively); those contributing to the fund who live and work outside the village in the urban areas make a larger contribution; an increased amount of one or two thousand cedis. Records are kept and payment by instalment is permitted. Those who can afford to pay more will gain in status by doing so. Wealthy traders are known to have been



wholly responsible for projects and thus gain enormous respect. This is perhaps one way of by-passing the rigid lineage-based authority hierarchy and gaining individual power and authority (succession to chieftaincy can be bought in this way). Migrants returning to their home villages and towns to attend the festivals are drawn into the rural development process and this pull may constitute a force working against the formation of potentially opposing classes of urbanites and rural villagers with competing interests.

Planned development is also the responsibility of the elected District Assemblies. These were introduced in 1987-88 and have been given considerable responsibility. Assemblies are headed by secretaries appointed by Central government but are made up of elected representatives from local villages and towns holding a three year term of office. Part of their function is raising revenue through a 'basic rate' tax (a head tax initially introduced by the British in 1936) and a property tax, which is mainly for substantial constructions and not paid by those living in run-down buildings. Assemblies also levy a trade tax based on turn-over of sales and a market toll tax to be paid on a daily basis by traders. Revenue raised in this way is retained by the Assemblies and together with whatever funds can be obtained from National government, officers and representatives salaries are paid and education and health care services funded. Some funds are put to specific development projects; the selection of these is based on the needs of particular villages and the ability of village representatives in the Assembly to make a good case.

The national level of Central government is the third and principal tier for revenue generation through income tax and other means, but the sums generated by TDCs can be significant and this gives a great deal of responsibility to local representatives on the District Assemblies. Initiatives by the TDC are usually infrastructure-type projects such as assistance with installing water pipes, developing bore-holes and small scale construction.

## Chapter Four

Dressmakers and tailors within the village economy



### My Mission

My first introduction to Abodom and to the tailors and seamstresses there was made during a *durbar* held in my honour on the day after my arrival in the village. I had wanted to slip into village life quietly in order to continue studying the language and acclimatising myself for a month before beginning my first case study. Therefore I was shocked to find that elaborate preparations had been made for the *durbar* and panicked when asked on that first day if I had prepared my speech which should contain an explanation of 'my mission' to the village. I was later to learn that telling one's 'mission' is a standard form of introduction and can involve telling people in a more formal way things they already knew about you and why you had come.

The church to whom the family belonged and almost monopolised was bearing the cost and organising the *durbar* and I became aware that they were surreptitiously trying to show me off as a convert. The Chief who had met me at the airport was also to be present at the *durbar* and use it to attempt to gain some advantage over a group of sub-chiefs who were trying to destool him. These hidden agendas were part of the social and political nature of the *durbar* and had I been aware of them in detail at the time I would have been even more disturbed on that first night in Abodom as I tried to sleep.

At dawn the following day activities started with food preparation, the erection of a canopy in the centre courtyard of the house and at the

*durbar* grounds. The Bishop of the Church the family belonged to arrived from Cape Coast with his entire family; the President of the church (a member of parliament and the vice chairwoman of the GNTDA) arrived with aides from the capital. Because all the women's fellowships in the village had been invited, the fellowship to which I belonged was busy practising a new song and dance movements to impress. There was some confusion over whether the fellowship would do a singing dancing march through the main streets of the village with me leading the procession and when it was decided that this was essential my previous attitude of qualified submission to their demands whilst maintaining my own western personal self identity was fully challenged.

At that moment I knew there was no time for cultural adjustment. I would have to try to overcome my shyness, struggle out of my western notion that I was a lowly student finding my research feet and become even just for a few hours the personality they wanted and expected. To maintain my reserve and show my apprehension would have been to disappoint and even shame my hosts in front of the village. To them I was a prestigious 'white' visitor who might be able to 'help' them. They didn't really understand, despite the letters I had written, why I had come so far to live with them but as I was here they would do their best to adopt me, use me and understand my 'mission'.

There were anxious hours waiting to be paraded through the main streets and to make my first big speech. I prepared the speech using as much Fante as I knew and relied on an interpreter for the rest. I practised it and tried to throw myself into the occasion but throughout the proceedings I always felt both self aware and aware that my performance was being measured. I did live up to the occasion but with

little real joy; in the photographs I recognise the strain on my face as I clumsily danced and walked in the procession through the streets and can still hear my voice making what seemed a rather pompous speech but which became the highlight of the whole event as nobody had expected me to address them in Fante.



plate 1 Women's fellowship parading me through the main streets leading to the *durbar* grounds

For me the highlight was the music and dancing of the *Asafo* company. As they took their turn in the *durbar* proceedings they addressed me with drums and dance without reserve. So intense and engaging was their drumming, I momentarily relaxed. They invited me to dance and I knew from the atmosphere that it was my duty to accept; I danced as I had seen other Ghanaian women dance with light feet shuffling and turning movements; this delighted them and encouraged them to increase the speed and intensity of the music. After a few minutes others came to join in and I was ushered back to my seat. I was later to find out that my dancing at the *durbar* had ensured my acceptance by the village and

gained me the symbolic protection of the *Asafo* company. That I had danced showed them that I was not proud - even though I was different to them I did not put myself above them



plate 2 My speech at the *durbar* grounds - seated behind are the chief and his elders and to my left members of the EMCC church

The *durbar*, though stressful, turned out to be the most thorough and 'proper' introduction to Abodom. For the most part I accepted it as an induction ritual and recorded it as methodological data but it was much more than this. It encouraged me to bear the consequences of my arrival and to submit to the culture I was to study even as this challenged my own definition of myself. I had to allow myself to be used and paraded by those who I in turn would use to help pursue my own aims. As my thesis develops it will be clear that this family whose home and church welcomed me to Abodom also helped me throughout the entire year of my stay in Ghana.

## Introduction

The micro economics of dressmakers and tailoring are well summarised in the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association motto *Yeepam efatawo*, 'we sew and it fits you'. Seamstresses and tailors wait for a customer to bring or send their cloth to them and then they sew a made to measure garment. When this is finished, if another cloth has been brought, they will make another. Relatively few seamstresses are more enterprising than this. Within this 'cloth to sew' market when there is no cloth to sew they may close shop and go to farm, carry on some trading, teach apprentices or maybe go to market.

For the majority of informal small scale dressmakers and tailors technical innovations started with hand or treadle sewing machines and little adaptation has occurred since. Every town and village has specialists in machine repairs, and seamstresses and tailors do their own makeshift repairs using material to hand such as safety pins and pieces of cloth.

The sewing machine has become an institutionalised gift within the culture of lineage obligations and an apprentice can usually expect to have a machine bought for her by her father as her education is mainly his responsibility; this is despite the fact that in the matrilineal system his children belong to their maternal lineage. Should he fail to assist his children in their education or vocation he will lose their respect and support for him and his lineage.

Colonialism also introduced an education system which is today struggling with reforms intended to produce vocationally orientated entrepreneurs instead of civil servants and masters in traditional crafts. There is an



awareness that apprentices and master craftsmen and women need their skills improving for them to find employment. To this end the Ministry of Education in 1994 developed a four-year programme to improve the skills of 5,000 apprentices and master craftsmen in electrical installation, refrigeration and air-conditioning, masonry, carpentry, joinery, and dressmaking and tailoring (Quainoo 1994).

Some factory employment in dressmaking and tailoring existed for a short period from the late 1960's until the economic crisis of the 1970s and early 1980's resulting in the closure of garment factories. To find employment today in this trade in the city is difficult, in towns more unlikely and in villages employment is never a realistic opportunity. The main supply of labour in city, town and village is still the traditional apprenticeship system. The system allows for the crucial element of flexibility needed for seamstresses and tailors to pursue supplementary occupations as a survival strategy.

Most sewing businesses start small-scale and grow only by the number and quality of sewing machines acquired by the master and in the number of apprentices he or she is able to take on; these two factors determine the type and quantity of work to be accepted. Dressmakers and tailors mostly work on one item at a time and they rarely buy the accessories they need in bulk. Master may themselves go to market or send out apprentices to buy small quantities; for example a few yards of lace, a zip, two yards of lining or a half dozen buttons. For these and other supplies Abodom seamstresses and tailors are regular customers of stall holders in Swedru market. These stall holders, who are also small scale specialist traders, are grouped together in one section of the market (as are cloth sellers, fish, rice and other trading specialists).



Using data from intensive case studies and questionnaires I will discuss in this chapter the distinctive structures and working practices of both dressmaking and tailoring businesses in Abodom - the apprenticeship system, technology, and supplementary occupations. These resources both equip, support and constrain the expansion of dressmaking and tailoring businesses. The discussion will be divided under the following headings:

Dressmaking & tailoring within diverse economies

The seamstress's workshop - equipment and technology

Apprenticeship and employment

Abodom tailors - status relative to seamstresses

### Dressmaking & tailoring within diverse economies

My research confirms that demand for dressmaking and tailoring in Abodom, as in many rural villages in Ghana is, as reported by (Yankson 1983 p.82), becoming increasingly seasonal, corresponding with preparations for annual festivals, when cloth is brought to the seamstress or tailor for sewing. These festivals are the traditional New Year (*Akwambɔ*), Christmas and Easter<sup>1</sup>. Two other regular community social

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional *Akwambɔ* festival is celebrated by both Christian and non-Christians although some churches (for example that of the Jehovahs Witnesses and Evangelical Methodists) refuse to allow their members to take part. The *Akwambɔ* festival in Abodom is still a vibrant colourful event demonstrating the continued importance of traditional religious beliefs.

Traditional Akan religion is based on belief in a Supreme Being, gods of the earth and rivers, a complex spirit world inhabited by benevolent and evil spirits - Rattray lists Akan beliefs as follows:

events, funeral and church attendance, mitigate this seasonal effect by providing a weak but steady demand for sewing throughout the year. This demand is too weak, however, for seamstresses or tailors to rely solely on sewing to ensure an income and food supply for the whole year and most must have one or more supplementary occupations.

Of the 11 cases studied in Abodom only three had no permanent supplementary occupation. Of those who had supplementary occupations, two seamstresses had farming as their sole supplement, for four others farming was usually integrated with another additional occupation. In the case of one tailor this was illegal logging and chain saw operating, another tailor ran the main *su su*<sup>1</sup> group for Abodom market women. One dressmaker mixed farming with dressing the dead for wakekeeping, another farmed on Thursdays and Saturdays and traded in Abodom market. Two seamstresses did no farming but one traded in fried fish and the other rice.

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- 1 *ɔnyâmê* A Supreme Being  
 2 *Abosom* 'Fetishes', i.e. spirit, power, *mana* from or of the Supreme Being  
 3 *Suman (1)* Minor deities, deriving their power from the *abosom*  
 4 *Suman(2)* Amulets or charms, a lower grade of the above (3)  
 5 *Asaman* A spirit world inhabited by *asamanfo* spirits {ghosts of various kinds}  
 6 *Bayifo* Witches and wizards, human vampires  
 7 *Bɔnsam* Monsters, half human, half devil  
 (Rattray 1916: p. 30)

Veneration of ancestors is another important aspect of Akan beliefs. This whole array of beliefs in Supreme Being, smaller gods, witches, ghost spirits and ancestors has been described by the Akan sociologist Busia as a 'world view' and Williamson (1965 p.87) describes Akan religion as having "no systematically expounded theology". So pervasive within everyday life is traditional African belief that much Christianity introduced in colonial times has been to some extent Africanised by Ghanaians. African music, including drumming, accompanies many African Christian church services and African cloth is appropriately worn. Traditional customs such as pouring libation to ancestors are still forbidden inside Christian churches but church members can pour libation to ancestors at ceremonies outside the church without reprisals.

<sup>1</sup> Informal credit and savings group.

Village seamstresses and tailors are able to diversify their economic activity and spread the risk of failure in any one occupation. This is possible because they are integrated within four distinct Abodom economies. These are agricultural subsistence and cash crop economy for the principal crops (maize, cassava, yam, sugar cane and cocoa); secondly the cash trading economy for market produce and value added goods such as bread and fried fish; thirdly seamstresses and tailors participate in informal non-cash exchange relationships for goods and services. One example is of dressmaking services being exchanged for nursing services; this was the relationship between the seamstress in my principal Abodom case study and the woman I lived with. In such relationships the offer of cash is shunned and if pursued could be an indication by one side that the relationship is breaking down. There is the expectation of loyalty on both sides and the exchange is indefinite, not based on immediate reciprocation but when need arises. The relationship is verified at least once a year with the exchange of gifts outside the scope of services rendered in the true exchange relationship. Christmas is the ideal time for gifts and these are never presented personally one to the other but through intermediaries. For the seamstress in the relationship cited above her apprentices were used to deliver a gift of Christmas fare to the nurse I lived with (plate 3).



plate 3

The fourth economy which is especially important to dressmakers is that surrounding funeral culture which Christian and indigenous religions have combined to enhance rather than curtail.<sup>1</sup> It is well documented that carrying out one's duty during periods of mourning and at the funeral is the most important activity associated with lineage membership. Fortes observed of the Ashanti that "the commonest occasion on which the unity and solidarity of the lineage receive public expression is the funeral of a member" (Fortes 1950). This is equally true for the closely related Fante.

The Fante are said to have a 'corpse culture' and the Akans in general have a saying '*abusua do fun*,' meaning 'the clan loves a corpse'. This translation is taken from a recent article by Ansh (1993) who is

<sup>1</sup> Elaborateness of funerals varies but a general model incorporates four stages:

- rural ceremony on the 3rd day.
- funeral celebration on the 8th day.
- formal customary rites after 40 days (close relations are not allowed to work or trade during these 40 days).
- 80th day and annual anniversary celebrations.

commenting on the loss of productivity due to the elaborate funeral celebrations of the Akans and asking people to "calculate the time spent on the church service and the procession for the internment, you can just imagine how much time is wasted" (ibid.). He also emphasises the social and political importance of this, which offsets his criticism somewhat. Akan philosopher K. Wiredu believes the funeral culture has become an institution of excesses due to a "rising tide of commercialism and egotistical exhibitionism" (Wiredu 1992 p.204). In some areas efforts have been made by community leaders to curtail excesses and to ban the purchase of funeral cloth - in June 1993 the Daily Graphic ran the following front page story (Editorial [f]).

"The Awutu Traditional Council has, with immediate effect, banned the purchase of 'special mourning cloth' for specific funerals that occur in the area.

Citizens who contravene the new bye-law will be severely dealt with by the council to serve as an example to others. Under the council's revised bye-laws, men who bring forth with women or girls and failed to maintain their children would similarly face severe punishment.

Members of the council attributed the increasing number of broken marriages in the area to the high cost of funerals and their accompanying purchase of special mourning cloths.

Investigations conducted by the council indicated that in most cases married men who were unable to buy new mourning cloth for their wives for every specific funeral were often divorced by their partners.

The funeral economy has been described by Arhin (1994 p.307) as an example of Mauss's concept of 'total social phenomena'. Arhin's work

shows that transformations in funeral rites have had substantial economic implications (Arhin 1994 p.308). In comparing current practice of funeral rites with those of the nineteenth century he finds the main alteration is in the scale of expenditure<sup>1</sup>; he lists cloth as one of the main items of funeral expenditure and my research confirms this.

Arhin concludes that on balance funeral rites are economically useful (ibid. p.318) but I would say that this is an understatement when applied to the work of seamstresses for whom it is an essential source of business throughout the year. Chukwukere (1982) observed that amongst the activities surrounding Fante funerals the "focus of interest is the custom of *nkaansa* and *esiedze* gift exchange" (p.64), the institutionalised exchanges between the dead person's matrilineage and patri-kin (discussed in Chapter Seven) In terms of social obligation to reciprocate, the custom is said to be analogous to the *Melanesian Kula* and *North American Indian potlatch*. The major financial responsibility falls on the dead person's *abusua* (matrilineage) and the collection of a relatively large sum takes time and organisation. Cloth is a principal gift in these exchanges and women will have as many clothes as possible sewn into new styles for wearing during the celebrations. Seamstresses are not the only trade to gain advantage from gift exchanges and large funeral expenditure; the whole village economy benefits. Funerals bring in a massive influx of visiting relations from city and town. Local people bring produce from their farms to market and almost everything is sold to those returning home. The village bars do tremendous business as do

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<sup>1</sup> Other expenses include the coffin, drinks to participants, the bands hired to drum and sing. There is also presentation of gifts to the deceased and donations usually of money to the deceased's relatives to defray funeral expenses. All presented gifts and money are announced publicly and, as Bame notes, nowadays these announcements "take on some sort of a fanfare and expert announcers are requested (and sometimes hired) to do this" (Bame 1991p.125)

local transport operators and the whole village is revitalised for two or three days around these events.

The physical layout of dressmaking and tailoring (Fig.1) can now be seen in the context of these four integrated economies. The kiosks or workshops of dressmakers and tailors are surrounded by supportive structures physical, social, cultural and ritual. Farmlands and sugar-cane plantations offer supplementary incomes. Cocoa and the cocoa marketing board shed are visual signs of the agricultural cash economy which enables village farmers the financial means to buy cloth and have it sewn. The *durbar* and funeral grounds are the social, cultural and ritual spaces where cloth in its many styles is in full competitive dress display. The *tro-tro*,<sup>1</sup> taxi station and motor roads bring in visitors and customers and give access to essential markets outside Abodom. Perhaps most importantly are the rivers and the paths to them. These are cleared and weeded during the traditional *Akwambɔ* festival. It is also along these paths and to these rivers that the many towns people and visitors participating in the festival travel on their way to give thanks to river gods for a productive year<sup>2</sup>. From the main road the river is out of sight but its influence on the life of businesses is all embracing; festival time is the period of highest demand for the seamstress and in the town generally. The development of the motor road and piped water have not made clearing the river and streams and the whole festival unnecessary. Streams are still used by many towns people for drinking water and

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<sup>1</sup> Local bus station.

<sup>2</sup> Joining the procession along paths to the rivers is a crucial part of *Akwambɔ* festivities. People then gather around the sacred groves by the main rivers to observe the priestess offering thanks and pouring libation to the gods (Opoku 1970 p.40-43).

bathing and are essential reserves for all during the frequent interruptions to the piped water supply.

The village working week has a loose structure which is tuned to local agriculture and the need to follow supplementary incomes. Workshops are usually closed on Sundays for religious services. In periods of low demand most workshops are also closed on Mondays. On Tuesdays one sees many workshops open; there is a prohibition on farming on Tuesdays<sup>1</sup> which allows people to move around on the main street and take local transport to town for marketing. Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays are opening days and those seamstresses who farmed did so usually on Saturdays.

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<sup>1</sup> Communal labour is often carried out on Tuesdays and many fellowships and organisations have their meetings on Tuesdays.



### Dressmakers and tailors and the business support sub-sector - Abodom village

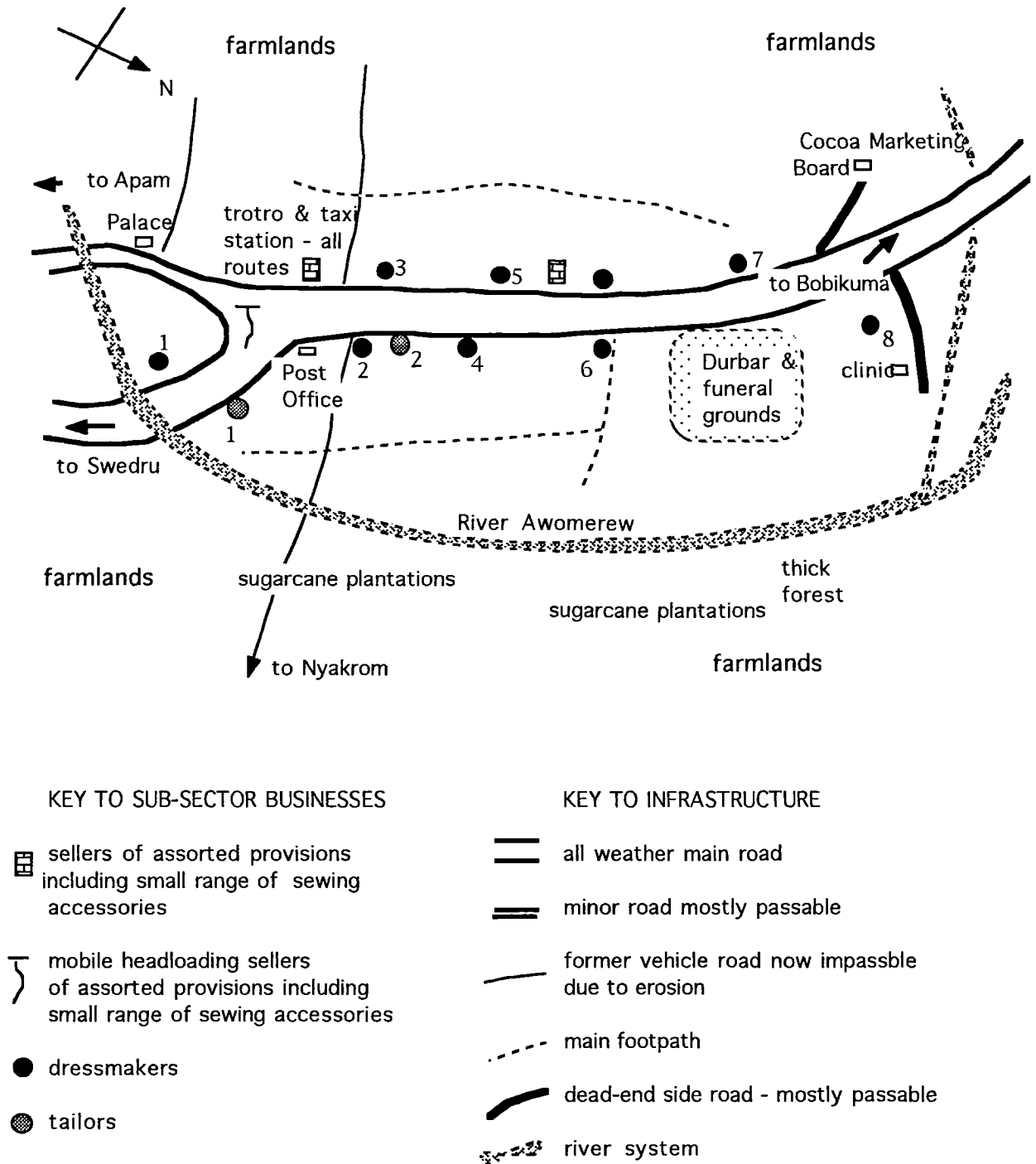


Fig 1

When a seamstress or tailor puts up a kiosk or workshop it will usually be on the main motor road and as near as possible to local transport stops. These areas have an air of excitement and expectation which is

heightened with the arrival of a taxi bus or van and the putting down of passengers from towns. The road side workshop gives passers by and passengers travelling on to the next town an opportunity to see the finished styles hanging outside and ensures the seamstress or tailor is part of the hustle and bustle of community life. It is important that they are in the public view and accessible, enabling relationships of trust to develop with customers. This is necessary not only for the supply of regular work but also because the practice of giving credit means a seamstress or tailor is often awaiting payment and collection of cloth for some time. It emerged from interviews that seamstresses and tailors attend church services regularly. These services, in addition to being the main regular village occasion for dressing up, offer another opportunity to exchange greetings and information with customers. Many dressmakers told me that church services were an opportunity to dress up in new styles in the hope of attracting customers for them.

Workshops (in map Fig.1) off the main road (numbers 1 and 8) are seamstresses or tailors working from home verandas and sew more or less full time with apprentices. Seamstress's workshops (numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) are rented workshops on the Abodom main road and workshop number 7 is a wooden kiosk erected on rented land. Of the two tailors working in Abodom, number 1 is working from his home veranda and number 2 is working on the main road from a rented workshop. Those seamstresses working from their home verandas were both saving towards either erecting a kiosk on the main road or renting a workshop there. The tailor working from home was in semi-retirement but had once had a busy workshop on the main road. There appears to an evolutionary process whereby the saving made on overheads such as rent whilst working from a home veranda allows a seamstress to move towards

opening a rented workshop or erecting a kiosk in a more public and vibrant location (further discussion of this process below). At the other end of the evolutionary process the home veranda is a place where one can work part time whilst in semi-retirement with no overheads such as rent

Theoretically the sewing kiosk and workshops, dotted along Abodom's main road and behind, resemble what Schmitz calls 'dispersed' producers (Schmitz 1992 p.64). Although many workshops are situated fairly close together on the main street, there is no division of labour or specialisation between them; each is a self-contained unit undertaking the whole process of making a garment, starting and finishing one garment and then another. They all rely on the same local demand and have to cope with being fifteen miles from Swedru, the nearest marketing town where a wide range of sewing accessories can be purchased at reasonable prices. There is virtually no business support sub-sector, only a few street traders offering a small range of accessories at relatively high prices who are used only in emergencies. There is no electricity and therefore no embroidery or overlock machine for neatening - garments must be taken to Swedru if these stitches are required by customers.

Tailors and dressmakers are thus dispersed in that they are geographically distant from sources of supply such as sewing accessories which must be purchased in Swedru, but they are closely involved in activities which influence the resources of their customers. For example, they personally experience the effects of a poor rainy season on the maize harvest and can anticipate the effects of reduced agricultural earnings on demand in their sewing businesses. The growth prospects of dispersed producers such as Abodom's dressmakers and tailors fit

Schmitz's general definition as they are dependent "on demand from local agriculture" (Schmitz 1992 p.64).

### The seamstress's workshop - technology and equipment

The standard seamstress's workshop in Abodom is one room and a veranda opening out on to the main street. It will contain three or four wooden tables for working on and wooden benches for sitting. There is usually wooden shelving and hanging from this are sewn cement paper<sup>1</sup> pattern models of the different styles the seamstress can offer to customers (plate 4).



plate 4

The following list of equipment will be found inside the village seamstresses workshop:

- hand sewing machine

<sup>1</sup> Used cement bags are cleaned and used by the seamstress and by her apprentices instead of cloth for sewing practice and for displaying styles (see miniature cement paper models hanging in the workshop in plate 4) .

- razor blades for unpicking stitches
- chalk for writing customers measurements on to the wall or pen and pad for the same purpose
- scissors
- hangers (painted wooden female busts)
- pins
- cloth measuring tape
- charcoal iron
- seamstresses keep a supply of thread and needles in their bags to be given out as required to apprentices.

There is very little paper or written culture in the village workshop, only a few income tax receipts kept in case they are required for inspection. No workshop of tailor or seamstress in Abodom had a business name - it is the personality of the individual seamstress who is identified with her sewing. Some seamstresses did say they intended to give their kiosk a name in the future and this would be a bible quotation or proverb - again something to further identify the seamstress's sewing with herself and her beliefs - as with the FEW, *labels and brand names to identify products* instead of their producers were out of place. Product names were not necessary for advertisement as seamstresses showed themselves visually on the main street by hanging finished garments outside their workshops on wooden female busts (plate 5).



plate 5

Some Abodom seamstresses keep a small book of their customers measurements and others chalk them on the wall of the kiosk. Paper was not used to keep the complex credit accounts and debts seamstresses have with their customers; these are kept mainly in their heads; no receipts are issued and no labels are attached to garments.

Village seamstresses use hand sewing machines imported from over 20 different countries (China is by far the largest exporter, see appendix I). The basic machine does only straight stitch sewing with various stitch length controls. Machines of both masters and apprentices are usually in a poor state of repair and break down often. The clutch and belt on the handle wheel often disengage and needs attention from the master who always keeps a screwdriver to hand. The basic machine has a bobbin winder but from experience I found these usually broken and the bobbin being wound on by hand making the thread uneven and causing it not to turn smoothly in the holder. This resulted in the thread continually breaking; a great deal of time would then be spent rethreading the



machine, only for the same thing to happen again within the hour. Machines either had very poor tension control dials or more likely (as it seems to me) seamstresses had not had instruction in their use. They periodically twiddled with the tension dial but still stitches often formed loops below the work due to weak tension or seams puckered because it was too tight. This is why razor blades for unpicking are an essential part of the seamstresses' equipment. My participation in actual sewing work was greatly hampered by my constant calling upon the master seamstress to carry out an adjustment or repairs to the machine I had borrowed; this was often a source of great humour to us both and also to the apprentices for whom repairing machines is one of the first tasks they learn. Plate 6 shows this, and customer's measurements chalked in white on the wall behind.



plate 6

Seamstress's scissors were another difficult piece of equipment to handle. They were very heavy and difficult to keep sharp. The ease with which the

seamstress cut into thick layers of cloth in shaping sleeves and facing is deceptive. Her scissors make the hand ache and cut into the skin - a firm and strong hand is needed to use them. Her charcoal iron is perhaps even more difficult to use and learning to stoke it, control the heat and ironing on a wooden table without causing damage or dirtying the cloth with ashes must be learnt by the junior apprentice whose job it is (plate 7). Even preparing the iron is not straightforward as smouldering charcoal needs to be sought from a nearby street trader and transported to the workshop. One final hazard is rusting pins and needles that leave holes and dirty marks in the cloth. The only piece of equipment which seemed initially unproblematic was the measuring tape, but as I soon became aware ,Ya Ya (my Abodom case study seamstress) was unable to read it. She did her best to disguise this and made a show of systematically measuring her customers, but it was clear that she makes very accurate guesses at their size. I never gave her secret away but a few of her customers in confidence told me that she can't 'read the tape'; however they were complimentary about her sewing which she was well known to have a gift for.





plate 7

The technology base for dressmaking is thus relatively low; with some savings and help from family a kiosk or workshop can be set up with ease. This explains why the "textiles and garments sub-sector is the largest manufacturing activity in Ghana in terms of the number of enterprises" (Lall and others 1994 p200). The cost of constructing a kiosk on rented land is higher than renting one room and furnishing. For the latter the estimated start up expenditure would be approximately 20,000 cedis (approx. £20) to purchase equipment<sup>1</sup> ; this excludes the cost of a sewing machine which the seamstress will already own.

From interviews it emerged that no seamstress or tailor in Abodom had taken a loan from a bank or *su su* to set up their workshop; their own savings were used or family had assisted. All those questioned started their businesses by themselves none were carrying on family businesses.

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<sup>1</sup> Estimate given in interview with seamstress.

This indicates that dressmaking is not a traditional craft attached to a lineage but a small-scale industry supplying the much sought after fashion and style in contemporary Ghana.

Case 1 established 1988

Used own savings and the sewing machine bought by her grandmother

Case 2 established 1985

After finishing her apprenticeship she worked for a short time with her master who gave her a regular allowance which she was able to save and open her own workshop with.

Case 3 established 1992

Used her own savings; her father had previously given her a sewing machine as a gift.

Case 4 (Ya Ya) established 1978

Used own savings to start workshop.

Case 5 established 1992

Used money saved from sewing in the house to start workshop. Her father made a gift of her sewing machine and helped with initial workshop equipment

Case 6 established 1993

Her father fitted out the workshop as a gift and she used savings earned from sewing in the house.

Case 7 established 1992

Erected a wooden kiosk on rented land. Her father paid for the construction, her apprenticeship and bought her first sewing machine.

Case 8 established 1992

Used her sister's room and veranda to sew from home while saving. Her father died so mother helped her with apprenticeship; she used her mother's sewing machine but has since saved to buy her own.

Case 9 established 1978

A tailor who is now working from home because the workshop closed in 1984. At first he hired a treadle machine and then with own savings brought his own.

Case 10 -

Had just finished apprenticeship and saving towards establishing himself as a tailor. He bought his own treadle machine out of

savings made from selling iced water at the Ivory Coast and Ghanaian border.

#### Case 11

Used own saving to open workshop.

The dates of establishment show there has been an expansion in dressmaking during the late 1980s and early 1990s, which corresponds to reported improvements in the Ghanaian economy. Interviews with the longer established seamstresses and tailors revealed that the ideal working model is of craft master and apprentices in a well maintained and painted workshop on the main street with plenty of cloth to sew. Most of those working from home are saving towards this or a move to the town or city. In the village, expansion beyond this model is not sought and if there is high demand a family member may be brought in. If demand continues, new apprentices will be accepted but this is usually the end of expansion and often the beginning of stagnation. At the time of my fieldwork in Abodom demand was low and the anticipated Christmas, Easter and festival trade was disappointing. The reason identified by seamstresses and tailors for the low demand was that 'Abodom people don't have money'. As farmers and traders themselves they know that the rainy season had not been good and many farmers had lost their corn crop. Also they knew that cocoa was in decline as many trees were diseased. They did not articulate any problems with competition between dressmakers or with the increased number of workshops set up on the main street; when I prompted this question Ya Ya said that there was enough work to go round and all had their customers.

#### Employment and apprenticeship training

In this section information on apprenticeship training within the setting of the small rural town or village is given; however, much of this information

also applies to town and city settings (which are covered in detail in Chapter Five). In general one could say that a seamstress known to have a gift and one also known to have plenty of customers will attract apprentices to her workshop. The master's friends, relatives and satisfied customers bring their daughters or wards to the workshop to negotiate the terms for training. It is the parents who make the final choice of seamstress as they must be satisfied that in addition to giving the best technical training available at an affordable price she will be able to give guidance in moral and social development; this is especially so when an apprentice is brought to live in the seamstress's house.

The process of inducting of a new apprentice into the workshop usually starts with a party or some form of religious ceremony. This can be undertaken when the parents or guardians make the first cash payment required for the training period (which is usually two years) and the apprentice brings to the workshop the additional items required. A seamstress will usually have two rates, one for friends and one for non-friends, typically 25,000 and 50,000 cedis respectively (approximately £25.00 and £50.00 respectively on 1993 exchange rates). Half of this sum must be paid at the beginning of the apprenticeship and the remainder at the completion. Typically an apprentice would also bring along:

- one crate of soft drinks (to cater for those present at the ceremony/party)

- one bottle of schnapps (for the pouring of libation),

- one pack of 10 reels of thread

- two tape measures (one for her, and one for the master)

- two boxes of pins (one for her, one for the master)

- two packs of machine needles (again one for her and one for the

master).

Formal initiation is by holding a private customary ceremony. This is carried out in the workshop and can either involve a mainly Christian service being conducted by the seamstress or in indigenous religious practice the calling of ancestors, speaking to them and pouring libation. A date is set for the ceremony in advance and other nearby seamstresses and tailors are invited to join the existing apprentices and parents and guardians of the new apprentice. A similar ceremony is also performed on the occasion of an apprentice completing the training period.

If the work is learnt well it is considered a 'gift' given by benevolent ancestors. To perform the indigenous ceremony, master dressmakers request at least one bottle of schnapps which is used for pouring libation. The following is a translation (from the Fante by a seamstress of one of my case studies) of the words spoken during periodic pouring of small amounts of libations.

Today is Thursday, ancestors we call you, it is not bad news, your grandchild (apprentice's name.....) we are giving her to (master's name .....)'s hand to teach her some work. We are asking them to open her eyes and open the ears so that anything that she will be taught, she will know it well, we don't want her to be rude, she should be sober to her master. If we call you, this is your water and your drink, the good ancestors should come home and the bad should go away.

The passing out ceremony is an inclusion ceremony, inclusion into the community of seamstresses and tailors.

Today she is finished learning, nothing bad happened to us, we give thanks that she is finished peacefully, she should go

and hold the job as it should be, we give you (ancestors) thanks<sup>1</sup>.

Initiation and passing out ceremonies undertaken using Christian or indigenous practices stress the responsibility of the seamstress in moral guidance as well as sewing skills. Pouring libation within the indigenous ceremony is considered outdated by the GNTDA (discussed in Chapter Nine) and Christian practices are being promoted. Because the GNTDA has more influence in towns and cities the pouring of libation is now perhaps practised more in villages. In Abodom in seven out of the nine workshops where seamstresses and tailors gave information on this practice revealed they had poured libation for the apprentices currently under training (see Table 1). Three of those answering yes (one tailor and two seamstresses) were members of the GNTDA.

Table 1 Did Abodom master pour libation for apprentices\*

Yes	NO
7	2

\*One respondent replied "yes previously, but not since conversion to Christianity"  
Data not available for one interview

Religious and moral training is a vital component of the education received within an apprenticeship. Guardians and parents choose a seamstress or tailor not only for their known skills in sewing but also for their good reputation within the community and their ability to impart appropriate values to apprentices. I found the practice of daily prayers being held and the emphasis on moral training to be equally important in rural and urban areas. Dressmaking could thus be said to be a case confirming Goody's

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<sup>1</sup> The presentation of another bottle of schnapps and crate of soft drinks should also be brought by the apprentice for the passing out ceremony.

(1982) thesis that there is a process of change in occupational craft training away from teaching within the kinship group to a more formal apprenticeship training system<sup>1</sup>. Although dressmaking as mentioned earlier has never been a lineage based occupation it is an occupation which takes young people away from the learning environment of the home. Thus the apprenticeship system for this occupation has developed a structure which substitutes kin based moral training for moral training based on a master trainee relationship of respect, obedience. The trade association for dressmakers and tailors also has a paternalistic attitude especially towards young girls and offers direct advice to them and also to their masters on moral issues.

Taking on apprentices, however, as Steel's research shows (Steel and Webster 1991p.7), is not always to meet demand for garments; it can be for income generation. Steel cites the following example of a seamstress compensating for lack of demand in this way:

"She has 37 apprentices who learn on sewing machines leased by their parents. There are no orders for garments and no fabric to be seen; they first learn to sew on paper bags. The seamstress has solved her immediate need for income but may have ensured

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<sup>1</sup> Goody, (1982 b p.177-78) notes that children are often 'fostered' out to relatives who are able to provide training in modern skills such as dressmaking. During my own work with seamstresses and their apprentices I often found a young relative of a seamstress included amongst her apprentices. In these cases I found the relative was treated no differently from other apprentices and wore the same uniform as them. In cases where a young person is sent to join a relative to receive training the concept of 'apprenticing' and that 'fostering' become ambiguous as the master gives skill training, is responsible for the moral conduct and takes advantage of labour of both non-relatives and relatives in her care. An apprentice who is not related to the master may live in the master's house and perform domestic tasks for her.

tougher times for herself in the future by training her competition."<sup>1</sup> (ibid. p.13)

This number of apprentices would be unusual in a village, thus I assume Steel's example comes from a town or city. Ya Ya, who I worked with in Abodom, had eight apprentices but rarely did all turn up together on the same day. One lived in her compound because her own village was far away and inaccessible by motor transport; she helped Ya Ya with domestic chores. All the others either lived in Abodom or travelled from nearby villages to the workshop.

As Steel reported there are many days when there is no cloth to sew and apprentices use old cement bags to practice their cutting and sewing skills. This can become boring for apprentices especially if the seamstress is away and the senior apprentice is in charge; these days are usually unproductive with time passing through a haze of drowsiness interjected by periodic enquiries and food breaks as described in Chapter Eight.

All Ya Ya's labour needs are met from her apprentices; she has never employed anyone nor intends to. She will ensure that her apprentices are able to cope with periods of low to normal demand. There is a division of labour within the ranks of junior to senior apprentices and between apprentice and master. Apprentices rarely cut cloth; this is done by the master. They start by sewing their own uniform and ironing and sweeping, then graduate on to the basic sewing stitches on customer's garments. In periods of high demand a relative with sewing skills can be called on. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Steel's 1991 research confirms his earlier fears for over supply of skilled workers in the clothing sector and he notes that apprenticeship training is still particularly prevalent in this industry.(Steel and Webster 1991 p.7)



period of my work with her she had to call on this relative once when taking on work in the neighbouring town (her father's home town) at the time of high demand for dressmaking just before their annual new year festival; her mother allowed her to sew from a wooden shed otherwise used for storing yams.

Employment in the sense of being contracted or paid an hourly or daily rate is not a realistic possibility in dressmaking and tailoring in Abodom. Self employment in one's own workshop with apprentices as income generators and meeting labour needs is the ambition of all senior apprentices I interviewed. To achieve this most will not enter for the GNTDA examination but work towards demonstrating proficiency in sewing to their master who will respond by indicating the passing out items required and organising a gathering of parents and invited seamstresses and tailors in the vicinity to witness the passing out of apprenticeship (see Chapter Nine on the GNTDA).

**Table 2** Where senior Abodom apprentices wish to open own workshops after graduation \*

Accra 4
Abodom1
Other village 2
Town not specified 2
Total 9

\*Details of these cases in Appendix II

It is generally understood among apprentices that after graduation from a village seamstress the next step towards setting up independently is to travel to a town or city (see Table 2); Accra is the favoured destination.

In towns or cities they expect to have accommodation with relatives and either take in sewing work at home until they have earned enough to open a workshop or they will further apprentice themselves to a town or city seamstress to learn more styles and finishing<sup>1</sup>. In this second apprenticeship in return for being exposed to and learning more styles, advanced techniques and how to operate electric sewing and overlocking machines the apprentice will work almost unsupervised sewing the master's customer's cloth. She may be given a daily allowance and from time to time at the master's discretion she can expect a small cash bonus.

Two equally strong rationales for not wishing to remain in the village were apparent from interviews. Firstly, that not many new styles are seen in the village and customers requests for styles are conservative. Secondly, *Abodom people do not come to collect their cloth. The cloth is left for sewing with the seamstress and no deposit is required; the full sewing fee is usually expected when the sewn cloth is collected. The seamstress may have bought lace, binding and thread to sew the cloth which is credited to the customer so her money can be tied up in a customer's cloth for some time. The reason for the delay in collecting sewn cloth is financial. Village women are usually given cloth by their husbands but the women themselves have to find the money to have it sewn. While she saves for this the cloth remains at the seamstress's workshop as security of payment. If the seamstress asked for a deposit this may discourage customers coming to her.*

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<sup>1</sup> Another reason for going to town or city was to have access to an electricity supply, making possible night work and the use of electric sewing machine and iron.

The expectation of apprentices is that once accommodated with a relative in town or city they will be able to take in sewing at home until they have saved enough money to open a workshop on a main road. These expectations of Abodom senior apprentices for self employment in urban areas would predict a future rural urban drift but if the history of apprenticeship training and eventual location workshop of their masters is analysed the prediction is not very powerful:

Table 3  
Location & type of training received by Abodom seamstresses and tailors\*

Where apprenticeship or training was undertaken	Type of training undertaken
Accra 3	Apprenticeship 9
Abodom 2	Vocational school 1
Tarkwa 1	
None taken 1	
Cape Coast (vocational school) 1	
Mankessim 1	
Swedru 2	
Total 10	Total 10

\*Details of these cases below.

Case 1 did her apprenticeship in Accra but moved back to Abodom to look after her ageing mother. She set up a workshop for six years off the main street but for the last two years she has rented the present room on the main street by the local transport station.

Case 2 did apprenticeship in Accra supported by her maternal uncle who was from Abodom and she moved to Abodom to look after her mother and has been established in a workshop on the main Abodom road for eight years.

Case 3 did apprenticeship in the town of Tarkwa; her mother and father are both from Abodom and she moved back to be near them. She established a workshop on the main road a year ago in 1992.

Case 4 did not have apprenticeship; her sewing skills are a 'gift' - her mother is from Abodom and father from the next village. She sews most of the year in a permanent workshop on the Abodom main road - for festival time she sews from a temporary shed in the neighbouring village.

Case 5 attended vocational school in Cape Coast where she learnt catering, housekeeping and dressmaking. She returned to Abodom to work at sewing from home in order to save enough money to open a workshop. She was able to do this last year and opened her present workshop on Abodom's main street.

Case 6 did apprenticeship in the marketing town of Mankessim and returned to Abodom to sew from home in order to save to open own workshop which she did in October 1993. Her father fitted out the workshop on rented not family land.

Case 7 did her apprenticeship in Abodom and has remained there. After one month sewing in the house she opened a workshop on the main road (January 1992). Her father bought the workshop construction which is on rented land.

Case 8 did her apprenticeship in Abodom and has remained there and set up a workshop on the main street in 1992 with her own savings.

Case 9 tailor did his apprenticeship in Accra for four years and on graduation returned to Abodom to start a workshop on the main road until it closed in 1984 due to seasonal nature of the work - he now sews from home.

Case 10 tailor did his apprenticeship in Swedru and is now trying to start working from home in Abodom.

These case studies suggest that dressmaking and tailoring might be called 'rural retainer occupations' because despite the ambition to work in urban areas (see Appendix II) many women return to their villages and set up workshops. Table 3 shows that seven of the ten seamstresses and tailors working in Abodom did their apprenticeship training in the town or city. Many said they found the cost of living in the city too expensive and accommodation for themselves and a workshop difficult to find; landlords often required rent paid one or two years in advance. Some women returned to the village because of their duty to look after their sick or ageing parents or relatives. On their return they join an increasing number of rural women managing their own households and resources (Lloyd and Brandon 1991). Sewing is combined with domestic work and care of

children, with children of both seamstresses and their apprentices often being brought to the workshop. In addition to giving support to their families in setting up their workshops they create work for village carpenters, they patronise local transport, pay rent to local landlords and income tax to regional authorities. Having learnt dressmaking and being able to manage other supplementary occupations they are able to support themselves and often their families; they will not be unemployed or surviving solely on subsistence farming but creating wealth in the village through adding value to cloth.

### Abodom tailors - status relative to seamstresses

Although tailors have been incorporated into the above analysis there are some very distinctive aspects to their work and apprenticeship training. The apprenticeship is for three years compared to two years for apprentice seamstresses. When I asked Kofi (an Abodom tailor on the main street) why, he said "seamstresses use cement paper to learn to cut patterns but tailors don't, they use their own mind". The implication was that tailoring work was more demanding in mental effort than dressmaking. I had come to him from a seamstress's workshop and seen the creative effort that went into free hand cutting of the elaborate Kaba design so I found this statement surprising. I continued to question its objective validity as I saw the uniform and relatively unimaginative cutting and construction methods of men's shirts, trousers and political suits. The most striking contrast was in a tailor's straight and angular cutting (for which he uses a ruler) and sewing lines as compared to the curved free hand cuts and shaping techniques of smocking, gathering and pleating to create the fullness and roundness characteristic of the seamstress's garments.

In Abodom the tailors made no charge for training but expected the apprentice to work without payment for a period after the apprenticeship was finished; during this period the apprentice will receive 'chop money' for food from the master. I was told that the absence of a training fee was to encourage apprentices to learn the trade. Unlike the abundant, even over supply of dressmaking apprentices, there were relatively few apprentice tailors.

The entire workshop, equipment and technology of tailors differs from that of the seamstress. Plate 8 shows the treadle sewing machines used in the tailoring workshop on Abodom's main road - the machine to the right has a motor ready to be fitted as soon as electricity is supplied to Abodom.



plate 8

Completed trousers and shirts are ironed (charcoal iron), folded and shelved on the back wall, awaiting collection - like seamstresses, the

tailor's customers leave garments in the workshop a long time before payment on collection and this was cited as a major problem by both.

Plate 9 below is a photograph of the right hand wall of the workshop above (plate 8); it shows two political suits. Both are 'for sale' as the paper on one states. This tailor has used his spare resources to buy cloth and make up these garments; no seamstress in Abodom had taken this initial step into an alternative 'for sale' market. Seamstresses said they sometimes used spare resources to buy accessories such as lace, ribbon and thread; none said they bought cloth and all waited until the customer brought their own cloth to them for sewing.



plate 9



Two explanations account for the tailors actions; firstly the tailor has made an investment by keeping his money in this suit as cloth is always increasing in price. Secondly, male clothes are less varied in material and styles and the political suit is a form of male uniform which is not susceptible to changes in fashion as Kaba and Slit is. Often the choice in style is on the detail of breast pockets and tucks in trousers. Customers describe the style without reference to any samples or patterns and there are no decorative male busts or models outside the workshop. Finished suits are hung on wire hangers inside.

Tailors hold most positions of authority in the GNTDA. Kofi, tailor of my case study in Abodom, is the Abodom organiser for the GNTDA; when I asked how he came to hold this position he said "because I am the only man". He is one of only four members in Abodom. This situation was repeated in both Cape Coast and Abodom where tailors dominated the entire leadership. I was told that the most appropriate senior position for a woman in this and any association was treasurer, as she can be trusted more than a man.

In Ghana men have been culturally ascribed a distinct and higher socio-economic role in society and this is clearly recognisable in the technology and structure of their sewing businesses and their participation in the GNTDA. In analysing why the seamstress's status is perceived to be lower than that of tailors one needs to understand the circumstances of women's work both inside and outside the home in Ghana. Unlike men a woman's productive work outside the home is often interrupted by reproductive and domestic activities within the home. In Ghana domestic home work in rural villages and towns involves women being responsible for the bulk of subsistence farming, cooking, child rearing and care of



elderly relations; at the same time they are expected to be at least partially financially independent. This sharing of women's time between activities prevents many women from full participation in and commitment to paid work outside the home. Many dressmakers I interviewed perceived of themselves as unreliable employees because of their family responsibilities and thought self employment was the most appropriate form of work they could undertake. Dressmaking as self-employment was considered relatively easy to set-up and could be managed, with the help of apprentices, alongside family responsibilities. It is thus clear that dressmakers and other women working in similar self-employed trades share their resources of time, energy and money between their family and their self-employment and this is a major difference between them and tailors or men working in other trades who are able to commit themselves and their resources full time to their enterprises. This difference in ability to give full commitment may explain the different levels of investment in technology, tailors investing in treadle machines and dressmakers in relatively unreliable and cheap hand machines. These differences manifest themselves also in the relative status of the two trades, with the work of dressmakers being seen by tailors as less difficult and less precise than their own. Dressmaking is thought of by tailors and by seamstresses as work which any and most women can do if they had time and training whereas the work of tailors demands more training, skill and commitment - few seamstresses make men's clothes whereas tailors are thought to be able to make women's clothes should they have the will to do so. Women's shared commitment to the home and self employment may also account for them not entering the 'for sale' market in Abodom. Entering this market involves investment in the future of their enterprises in terms of buying cloth and thread and allocating time to sewing without the security of future payment.

Within the ideal Ghanaian household the man is thought of as the 'breadwinner' and his role as income earner is not usually questioned. The notion of the 'working mother' (that is a mother in paid employment outside the home) is viewed as creating problems for family life<sup>1</sup>. Children are taught at school that a 'working mother' risks being unable to supervise and feed her children or look after the household properly - the consequences being delinquency and conflict in the family (Ghana Home Science Association 1990 p.19-20).

Women's education is premised on the culturally ascribed sexual division of labour. Young women who do not enter academic Senior Secondary Schools often attend Technical and Vocational Schools which prepare them for employment in female trades i.e. hairdressing, dressmaking and catering. Many young women who do not enter these schools take informal apprenticeships in the same crafts but also learn how to produce and sell in informal markets - they learn how to produce household commodities such as oil, soap, bread and kenkey (corn dough)<sup>2</sup>. Within

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<sup>1</sup> Amongst the Akan two family types operate - one traditional model where the wife is expected to earn her own income even though she may be looking after small children, and the 'modern' type believed to be akin to a western model where the wife is not allowed by her husband to work outside the home and is expected to look after her children and the household. This latter western notion of family life is known in both rural and urban areas but it is most influential in urban centres. In rural areas the traditional matrilineal family model persists and husbands are expected to be financially responsible for their own matrilineal kin especially supporting nieces and nephews in their education. In Oppong's research in the early 1970s one informant identified the two types of Akan marriages and households as conforming to two distinct rural and urban classes and cultures (Oppong 1981 p.137) and described the difference using the phrases 'enlightened' to refer to those living in the coastal towns within nuclear type marriages and 'illiterates' to describe those from the villages on the coast and in the interior who had traditional marriages where the husband continued to support his own matrilineal extended family.

<sup>2</sup> Those who have a higher education are channelled into formal employment predominately in teaching, nursing and secretarial work (MacEwen Scott 1986 p.178 cited in Chant 1992).

the village economy many of these trades are home based and, combined with subsistence farming, allow women to make a cash income in periods when they are unable to spend long hours outside their homes.

The source of the sexual division of labour in Ghana has been identified as the impact of colonial rule and ideologies of capitalist patriarchy and Christianity (Mikell and Okali - cited in Brydon 1989 p.86). My own fieldwork in Ghana gives further weight to this explanation. I spoke to many women and men who found justification for women's general low status relative to men in biblical texts and by referring to the behaviour of British families of colonial times (who introduced the concept of the nuclear male headed family to the coastal matrilineal Fante) as a model of family life. This colonial model continues to be regarded as ideal and many Ghanaians I spoke to held a mythical notion of the British family as consisting of a monogamous husband providing servants and all resources to his leisured wife and children within a prosperous and conflict free household; this was the ideal model they themselves aspired to but one they admitted to falling far short of. Many Ghanaians were either unaware or disbelieving of my own accounts of contemporary British family life especially the relative independence of British women with regard to their husbands or partners. They were bewildered by the fact that many British women choose not to have children or delayed having children until late in life because they wished to pursue careers, and they were genuinely unaware that many British women lived in female headed households because of marriage breakdowns.

Another factor working against women's full participation in economic opportunities is the matrilineal descent system which has been shown to

operate against women's inheritance of productive assets (Mikell cited in Brydon 1989 p.84). Mikell argues that in Ghana sons rather than daughters inherit cash crop-producing land with the daughters being left with subsistence land (ibid.). In occupations other than farming women often rely on their father's or their mother's brother or their own brothers to finance their business start-up costs and it may be at this point that ideologies which underpin women's relatively low status and marginal participation in paid work is perpetuated. This may work through the low levels of investment made on their behalf by male relatives and the nature of trades thought appropriate to be financed and participated in by women.

It appears that domestic and reproductive work restricts women's income earning opportunities and investment in the enterprises they start. The cultural norm in urban centres is reinforced by Christianity and the continuing colonial legacy, and women often become dependent on men as the 'breadwinners'. In rural towns and villages the norm is for women to manage household and subsistence activities whilst also earning a cash income. Neither of these cultural norms are universally approximated and many women rely solely on their own or their matrilineal family resources but despite the ability of women to manage the home and employment their status within Ghanaian society remains lower than that of men. The fact that women are considered appropriate to undertake the office of treasurer in organisations such as the GNTDA because they are thought of as more honest than men is a curious contradiction in their status position. I would argue that this points to the notion that it is not the character of women which accounts for their low status. It is the nature of Ghanaian gender ideologies which in material terms dictates the way women should divide their time between domestic work and work outside

the home. The imperative of family responsibilities often infringes on women's time and resources and prevents them from making long term investments in their enterprises, or taking up positions within organisations and other types of employment which have more status attached to them.

### Conclusion

Dressmaking and tailoring as rural retainer occupations maintain both young newly apprenticed and mature women in village life where they can balance family responsibilities and earning an income through sewing. Through countering the population flow out of villages to towns and cities, dressmaking and tailoring maintains some of the vitality of village life and surrounding market towns; their businesses create demand for local skills such as carpentry and their frequent journeys to and from nearby market towns for sewing accessories rely on local transport. The colourful exterior to the dressmaker's workshop and talking shop of the tailor contribute to the excitement of main street Abodom culture, the 'super information highway' of the village.

The economics of dressmaking and tailoring in Abodom is integrated into many overlapping types of trading systems: exchange spheres, cash trading, subsistence and cash crop farming and the funeral and church social economy. Within these economic spheres they are 'dispersed' producers with some specialisation of tasks within the status ranks of master and apprentices but without any specialisation between workshops - each dressmaker and tailor works as a discrete unit using apprenticeship labour and awaiting the customer to bring in cloth for sewing. When the cloth is brought depends on earnings from agriculture and on the performance of Christian and traditional festivals. In as much

as the design on the cloth the seamstress sews is an abstraction of the social and natural surrounding of village life (see Chapter Seven), the seamstress herself and the tailor are integral to every facet of the village environment.

A whole chapter has been used to describe the structure of dressmaking and tailoring businesses in Abodom because they form the comparative base from which changes observed in Cape Coast and Accra will be contrasted in the following chapter.

## Appendix I

Imports of sewing machines of the household type (Jan. June 1993)

Commodity Partner	Value in Cedis
Australia	1,893,150
Belgium	1,062,925
Canada	63,105
China	457,021,131
Taiwan, PR	35,942,119
Cyprus	7,253,136
Denmark	317,038
France	403,740
Germany, F	9,260,274
Hong Kong	43,530,769
India	36,561,430
Italy	504,945
Japan	72,120
Netherlands	6,431,513
Saudi Arabia	519,264
Singapore	16,731,239
Switzerland	2,588,746
Thailand	3,005,000
USSR	60,100
United Kingdom	13,849,593
United States	9,759,247
Total	646,830,584

Source - External Trade Statistics  
Jan - June 1993

## Appendix II

### Resources and ambition of the senior Abodom apprentices

	No of apprentices in workshop	<sup>1</sup> Usual cash training fees in cedis	Did master pour libation for apprentice ?	Source of apprentice's first sewing machine	Who pays apprentice fees ?	Apprentice's ambition
Seamstress						
case 1	?	20,000	yes	sister as a gift	mother who is a farmer and trader	will work first from home to make enough money to open a workshop in Accra
case 2	8	20,000	yes	father as a gift	father	wishes to open own workshop in own village where there is less competition
case 3	2	15,000	yes	father as a gift	father	open own workshop in Accra
case 4	8	-	yes	father as a gift	father	open own workshop
case 5	1	15,000	yes	machine belongs to maternal aunt	father	father will decide - her father asked her to come to Abodom for training and wait until he can afford to help her set up a workshop in a town
case 6	1	12,000	no	father as a gift	mother pays monthly dues and father paid lump sum	move to senior sister in Accra and establish in sewing and trading
case 7	2	15,000	no	mother and father as gift	mother and father	wishes to combine sewing with toffee making in the next village as there are few seamstresses and less competition
case 8	2	15,000	previously yes but not since conversion to Christianity	father	father	own workshop in Accra
Tailors						
case 9	0	formally 50 pesewas <sup>2</sup>	yes	-	-	-
*case 10	0	-	-	raised money himself through trading	father	set up own kiosk and have own apprentices
case 11	3	no training fee but apprentices work free for master for a set period after training	yes			

<sup>1</sup> Apprentices, in addition to paying an entry fee, also paid 10 cedis a day (approximately 1p) usually paid monthly.

<sup>2</sup> Lowest unit of Ghanaian currency.



\* The case 10 tailor (Aqua) said he is at present taking in sewing but has no fixed veranda or kiosk and no sewing machine. He was temporarily using my sewing machine outside my room while trying to make enough money through sewing and farming to pay the passing out expenses to his former master in Swedru who had confiscated his machine as security of payment. Since the initial negotiations for apprenticeship training with Aqua's parents the master was making new demands. Three years ago the training fee was 10,000 cedis plus one box of matches, one bottle of schnapps, one bottle of beer, and a bottle of local gin; his father also gave 20,000 cedis for food and accommodation which was sleeping in the workshop. In addition to sewing Aqua woke at dawn to clean the workshop and make his way to the master's house to clean, sweep and help the master's wife with cooking. He returns to the workshop to start sewing and wait for the master who is a part time teacher and will arrive later. The master's passing out demands were for 5,000 cedis, one crate of beer, six bottles of minerals, one packet of cigarettes, one box of matches, one bottle of schnapps and one bottle of local gin. Aqua, although disturbed by the demands, eventually raised a loan of 6,000 cedis and earned 9,000 cedis from his corn farm to meet them and was thankful that his master hadn't also demanded cloth and sheep in addition, as many did.

## Chapter Five

Dressmaking and tailoring in Cape Coast and Accra



## Expectations

I moved from Abodom village to Cape Coast with the help of Grace and her extended family. She was as reluctant for me to leave as I was to go. We both dealt with our feelings by seeing the move as temporary; my room would be kept at the clinic and I would try to return to Abodom every weekend with fresh fish from the coast.

In Cape Coast I had made arrangements to take a room in a compound house in 'Ola', a new settlement just outside Cape Coast and about a hundred yards from the sea. It was constructed by the government for the benefit of residents moved from their homes in the old town of Cape Coast because of demolition and redevelopment. The woman I went to live with was a seamstress called Baba; she was the girlfriend of Grace's former husband.

Baba's compound was surrounded by high walls with two gateway entrances on each side which were open in the day-time to a flow of visitors and traders; in the night they were locked up for security. The compound housed her grandmother and five other close relatives; I was using her brother's room in his absence. Baba and her apprentices were usually working outside my room on the veranda every weekday from about 8 am in the morning till 5 in the evening. I shared food expenses and ate with the women in Baba's compound and gradually became less of a curiosity to them and the surrounding inhabitants. From this compound where I felt accepted and safe I had to venture out to catch a

local bus to Cape Coast town where I was unknown and mainly viewed as a tourist and as such had to tolerate the calls of '*Oburoni Oburoni* Oh come here *Oburoni*' as I walked to my case study workshop, to market or to the office of the GNTDA. Once in the crowded market place I was surprised to hear the shout of 'sister Suzy sister Suzy' and was pleased to see a face I knew from Abodom village, which I was unable to visit as much as I wished.

My introduction to the seamstresses and tailors of Cape Coast came through my second big speech, addressing members of the Cape Coast regional GNTDA. I had asked to attend the meeting to just observe and record the current issues effecting seamstresses and tailors in the town, but as I had anticipated the meeting was to ask me to address them with my 'mission' and it was my duty to explain. In the questions that followed my address, seamstresses especially wanted to know if I was also here to help them in some way. Unfortunately I was working in Cape Coast at the same time that a number of overseas agents were believed to be circulating and visiting workshops looking for seamstresses and tailors to fulfil export orders of garments to the United States. I was often confused with these people and my arrival at some workshops to conduct questionnaires often caused unwarranted excitement and expectations. When it was realised I wanted only to ask some questions an air of resignation was often palpable.

In Accra my introduction was again through addressing Association members, this time at New Town Accra. My 'mission' statement was by now becoming fairly well polished and I was prepared and anticipating questions from the floor on the subject of 'what I could do for them', and again they came. My answer was guarded as I explained that my

research would contribute to a body of knowledge on the development and prospects of small businesses like their own. The reality was that I could do nothing for them individually which was what they really wished to know. But Ghanaians are welcoming and polite to strangers and the association as a body through the chairman wished me well in the research and allowed me to visit any and all members. The same courtesy was forthcoming in the Association's head office at Adabraka. I was allowed to share the regional secretary's desk, have access to membership details and confidential files. My research owes much to the generosity of these seamstresses, tailors and officials.

However, in many of the workshops I visited as intensive case studies I earned my information through hard work. My work in Cape Coast with Hanna is a good example. When I first visited her she insisted on treating me as a guest and sending an apprentice out to buy bottles of soft drinks such as coca cola or orange; if she was having lunch she would insist I take it with her. After a few days she allowed me to buy her lunch and drinks and our relationship developed. The development had to take direction from her and it was Hanna who broke the barriers between us; on the third day of my working at the workshop she said that she "wanted to be free with me" but she found this difficult when I had a pen and paper at hand to write down things she told me. From that time on I substituted pen and paper for a sewing machine and she soon found work for me. Because I could sew neatly Hanna began bringing me men's shirts and men's and women's caftans to sew which she would hang outside the workshop for sale. Later I helped her sew garments which were part of an export order to the United States. She checked my progress and began to make me work hard for my field data; I often went home exhausted. The main difference between me and one of her apprentices

was that I worked in the front of the workshop and they in the back. It gave me tremendous satisfaction to work hard for this seamstress who provided me with much valuable insight and information. I only regret I was of little use to the majority of seamstresses and tailors who welcomed me into their workshop and often presented me with a drink and asked about my 'mission'.

## Introduction

*Yeepam efatawo*, we sew and it fits you, also describes much dressmaking and tailoring in both Cape Coast and Accra. Many seamstresses and tailors are still waiting for customers to bring their cloth to the workshop for sewing. For those who have ventured into alternative markets their regular 'cloth to sew' customers still form their principal trade.

Alternative markets are well established in Accra and developing rapidly in Cape Coast. These new markets rely on the expanding civic capacity of towns, tourist trade, alternative male and female fashions and on production being a reasonably priced alternative to second-hand clothes. Apart from the tourist market most demand is still seasonal and similar to the classical 'cloth to sew' market for Kaba and Sii with peaks of demand occurring during preparation for staging annual traditional festivals and Christmas and Easter celebrations.

My first preliminary visit to Cape Coast meant a long and tiring journey starting out from Abodom at dawn. The first stop I made in Cape Coast was at a very small family run cafe and snack bar. I took my drink inside out of the sun and was surprised to see an electric overlock machine ready for use on the table next to me. This was not a dressmaker's or tailor's workshop and the technology looked conspicuous. I asked what use was made of it and was told that local seamstresses and tailors came to have the edges of their garments neatened for a charge. A relative had brought the machine when in Germany and it was now part of the varied occupational base of this family. From this chance meeting when I had been in Cape Coast only fifteen minutes I became aware that

supplementary occupations were also a feature of working life in the town although I was later to find out that unlike in Abodom these additional activities were more directly linked to the main sewing occupation. I also became aware that there was at least a rudimentary specialisation of labour within the tailoring and dressmaking sector which this small cafe was part of and that a reliable electricity supply was making the use of new forms of technology possible.

Later I was to learn that the electricity supply was fairly unreliable causing faults in many electric sewing, overlocking and embroidery machines. I was also to learn that apprenticeship labour was, as in Abodom, meeting most labour needs and that the employment market was poorly formed. One reason for the lack of development of the labour market in dressmaking and tailoring, I was later to find out, was related to the institutionalisation of the apprenticeship system as a rite of passage to the status position of 'master'.

In terms of material culture I found that many workshops and kiosks had names and that some seamstresses and tailors were keeping records of monthly sales and income - but on further investigation I found that very few consulted these and even fewer used them to plan their businesses.

In Cape Coast the 'super information highway' runs around and through the Kotokuraba market place and the streets leading from it. Dressmaking and tailoring businesses are dotted throughout these streets where they have easy access to small stall holders in the actual market place who sell all the accessories and offer all the services they need. These stall holders form a type of 'cluster' (Schmitz 1992) in that they are grouped close together in the market place and operate in close



proximity to both market cloth sellers and the few dressmakers who had their workshops in the market place.

In Accra, located in different areas and markets, similar types of clusters of dressmakers, tailors and small scale accessory stall holders also operate. The massive scale of this informal sector in Accra rather than distinctive patterns of trade and services sets it apart from Cape Coast; for example inside the 31st December Market<sup>1</sup> alone there are 109 dressmakers and 4 tailors. The disproportionate number reflects the institutionalised gender ordering of trade within the market place which also applies to cloth and food-related trade. In both Cape Coast and Accra an interfirm division of labour and specialisation in machine operation within the market clusters was well established. The sewing of a garment was being carried out amongst a number of individually owned enterprises with divisions formed along lines of ownership and developed specialism in the use of technology; these are the overlocking, neatening and cover button making machines which are operated as a service to dressmakers and tailors usually on a 'stand and wait' basis.

Both in Cape Coast and Accra ethnic boundaries were visually apparent with Muslim tailors (specialising in Northern dress and embroidery) concentrated in their own town and city geographically defined sectors. These were situated within clusters of firms servicing their distinct business, religious and cultural needs; for example Muslim embroiderers in Cape Coast were working very close to Muslim bead sellers and butchers.

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<sup>1</sup> Named after the date in 1981 when Rawlings overthrew the Limann Administration to form the Provisional National Defence Council

In both Cape Coast and Accra I was directed by the GNTDA to the most progressive and long established dressmakers and tailors to use as my case studies - as Chapter Two indicates, to ignore this direction would have been both difficult and bad mannered. In practice, however, the arrangement worked well as I was directed to some of the most progressive workshops where seamstresses and tailors had entered alternative markets and did much more than wait for regular customers to bring their cloth.

A preliminary visit to Cape Coast and my existing knowledge of Accra indicated a substantial comparative difference in the technological and marketing infrastructure as compared to Abodom. To obtain an overview it would be necessary to interview both a range of dressmakers and tailors at different levels of development and establish their interaction with the micro sub-sector to which they belonged. Whereas in Abodom it was sufficient to walk down the one main street to get an overview of the village environment and industry into which Abodom dressmakers and tailors fitted, Cape Coast and Accra environments were much more dispersed and I decided that a more appropriate research tool would be semi-structured questionnaires administered to a wide range of workshops. Time and resources meant that either Cape Coast or Accra could be studied with this method and I decided that a more rigorous survey in Cape Coast would cover a more representative sample of businesses than could possibly be achieved in Accra. Also Cape Coast appeared to be in an intermediary stage of development where seamstresses and tailors were just beginning to venture into alternative markets and employ specialist labour; this move was more widespread and developed in Accra. The findings from the questionnaires in Cape Coast have added substantially to the information gained through

intensive case studies in Cape Coast and Accra and both are presented in this chapter under the headings:

New technology

Alternative markets

Enterprise environment and Spatial arrangement of the dressmaking and tailoring micro sub-sector in Cape Coast

Employment and apprenticeship culture

Internal constraints to enterprise development

External constraints to expansion

### New technology

Most seamstresses workshops in Cape Coast and Accra have an electricity supply. This has not however eliminated use of the increasingly outmoded hand sewing machine technology. Master seamstresses may have electric machines but apprentices bring their own hand sewing machines; masters usually do not allow them to bring electric machines even if they had them as the apprentices would use her electricity. The electric iron has replaced the charcoal iron which only comes out when there is a prolonged power cut, and most workshops use an electric fan and electric light which enables them to work after dark in periods of high demand, something which Abodom seamstresses and tailors said would be their main and much desired use of electricity.

In the previous chapter I noted that village seamstresses use only hand sewing machines and the tailors the foot treadle, and in Cape Coast and Accra in as far as these types of machines were in use I found no instance where this rule changed. It seems that just as there is a cultural taboo

against men carrying loads on their heads a similar taboo exists for men operating sewing machines with their hands. Tailors consider their foot treadle machine a higher technology than the seamstresses hand machine and it is much more expensive. Thus in terms of hand and foot technology I found in the town and city the perpetuation of the village model. A new ungendered use of machine technology is however emerging with the use of electric machines. Electricity, it seems, is gender neutral in this context and in both Cape Coast and Accra I found both tailors and seamstresses using overlocking and industrial machines in their workshops. My Cape Coast seamstress case study had an overlocker, an embroidery and a number of multi-purpose electric machines in her workshop alongside the hand machines of the apprentices. Most workshops have mixed machine technology (see appendix II ) with the more senior apprentice often using an electric machine and overlocker while the junior apprentices must graduate first from their hand machines (plate 1 shows senior and junior apprentices in the mixed technology workshop of my Accra case study).



plate 1

A result of the varied sewing machine technology is both an intra and inter workshop division of labour. Some seamstresses and tailors are able to offer machine services to one another in the vicinity. The seamstress in whose 'Ola' compound house I lived whilst in Cape Coast was one of the few people in the area who had a cover button making machine and an overlocking machine. Unfortunately the overlocker broke down very soon after its arrival but not before Baba had started to build up a considerable trade operating it for seamstresses on the estate; her cover button machine on the other hand was very reliable and in demand almost every day. The inter workshop division of labour is based on the use of these specialised machines. Senior apprentices who are instructed in the use of these machines *find their time more and more occupied in their operation*, leaving the more basic machine stitches to junior apprentices.

I found a clear association between the acquisition of new technology in Cape Coast and Accra and the production of garments for alternative markets. A new range of garments were being produced but in similar work style to the Kaba and Slit and political suits made for the 'cloth to sew' markets; one garment was cut by the master and sewn usually by one senior apprentice. The principal garments produced for alternative markets are a man's short sleeved batik shirt and various embroidered northern style caftans both short and long for men and women. Because embroidery is an exclusively male skill the caftan is an exception in that a combination of male and female labour is needed, often within an inter workshop division of labour; the seamstress's workshop cuts and constructs the garment and it is brought to a male (usually Muslim) for

embroidery<sup>1</sup> to work on the front and back decorative stitching. Hanna, the seamstress of my Cape Coast intensive case study, was unusual in having her own functioning embroidery machine; she employed a male worker to operate it as she was not competent herself and could not give training to her apprentices on the machine.

### Alternative markets

Cape Coast and Accra both offer alternatives to the 'cloth to sew' Kaba and Slit trade for seamstresses and the 'political suit' for tailors. The main garments produced are the 'ready made' 'for sale' items described above; they are made from both imported and locally produced batik cotton printed cloth. In addition some parents purchase fabric for school uniforms and send this to their seamstresses or tailors to make up; this is also the case for many town and city workers who have fabric for uniforms issued to them (for example with nurses, hospital catering staff and bank clerks). Some private schools put their uniforms out to contract to local seamstresses and tailors as do civil servants such as immigration officers and postal workers (contracts are usually verbal agreements). There are also a whole range of associations, clubs, fellowships, church choirs and lodges who have uniforms and robes which form part of the alternative markets for both seamstresses and tailors (appendix III tables 1 and 2).

There are many tourists and commercial and official overseas visitors to both Cape Coast and Accra who buy souvenirs, especially articles of African cloth made into shirts, caftans, table cloths or anything the

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<sup>1</sup> In Cape Coast and in Accra there was a visually striking religious geographical demarcation of Muslim workshops. Similar religious demarcations existed in Abodom but as there was only one Muslim seamstress working on the main road in the Muslim area the boundaries were less visually striking.

imaginative seamstress and tailor can put together. Cloth seems as important an article to be taken away by the tourist (and researcher) as it is to Ghanaians themselves. In material terms it symbolises a lasting connection to Ghana and for the new wave of African Americans visiting Ghana in search of roots and heritage it symbolises solidarity and affection for a lost homeland. There is no doubt seamstresses will continue to exploit the visitors affection for Ghanaian cloth and articles made from it and that this alternative market will grow.

In both Cape Coast and Accra tourist articles are not always advertised and sold directly outside the seamstress's kiosk or workshops but bought wholesale on a credit basis by various store keepers whose businesses are on the main tourist routes. Hanna's workshop in Cape Coast used both these markets. I recalled the numerous visits of an old Muslim trader who was always asking Hanna for more shirts to display for sale in his store. He took the shirts on credit and paid Hanna only once they were sold. The profit she made selling through this man was very small and as she was busy she often had little time to make shirts for his shop. Her shirts sold very well outside her own workshop and I often thought she allowed this old man some stock out of affection and sympathy for him. Another outlet for the alternative market is the hotel foyer where retail space is allowed. This space for the browsing tourist is conceptually very distant from the traditional use of cloth but is now an important part of a developing network of retail outlets for the new markets.

Some seamstresses who rely solely on the 'cloth to sew' traditional market have found customers in alternative areas of the city or even regions of the country. One seamstress I interviewed goes back to her home town in the Akwapim area before the annual festival each year to

collect work to bring back to Accra. She also sews for people living in many different parts of Accra who are from her home village; even if they live a great distance away they bring or send their cloth to her - one of the complaints she had was about the state of the road outside her workshop which had been badly damaged by erosion, making it impossible for cars to get to her workshop with the consequence that she is losing her regular distance customers.

### Enterprise environment and Spatial arrangement of the dressmaking and tailoring micro sub-sector in Cape Coast

The Kaba and Slit is in high demand. A popular weekly Ghanaian tabloid newspaper 'The Mirror', in November 1993, ran the headline 'Everywhere Kaba'; the short article exclaimed that "Anywhere one goes, be it the market, work or church, there is bound to be a Kaba. And how proudly our ladies wear them!" (Manu 1993) Another article in the same newspaper in December of that year announced 'Kaba Explosion' (Adisah 1993); this was a comment on a recent fashion show of Kaba in Accra. To match the popularity of Kaba and Slit more and more small kiosks and workshops are setting up. Of the 18 dressmaking businesses visited in Cape Coast 10 had been established between 1991 and 1993, 5 had been established during the 1980s and 3 were established earlier<sup>1</sup>. In the Newtown district of Accra the GNTDA statistics show there are 98 seamstresses and 19 tailors as registered members<sup>2</sup> and 79% (98

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<sup>1</sup> The trend for relatively recent establishment was reversed for the 15 tailors visited with only one opening in 1990; 4 between 1980 and 1988; the largest proportion (10 cases) had been established earlier (between 1954 and 1980). The figures in Cape Coast are weighted by tailors in the Islamic areas being established a very long time and present owners taking over the workshop from fathers and uncles.

<sup>2</sup> The Association secretary told me that as many seamstresses and tailors are operating outside the Association so the above figure can be doubled.



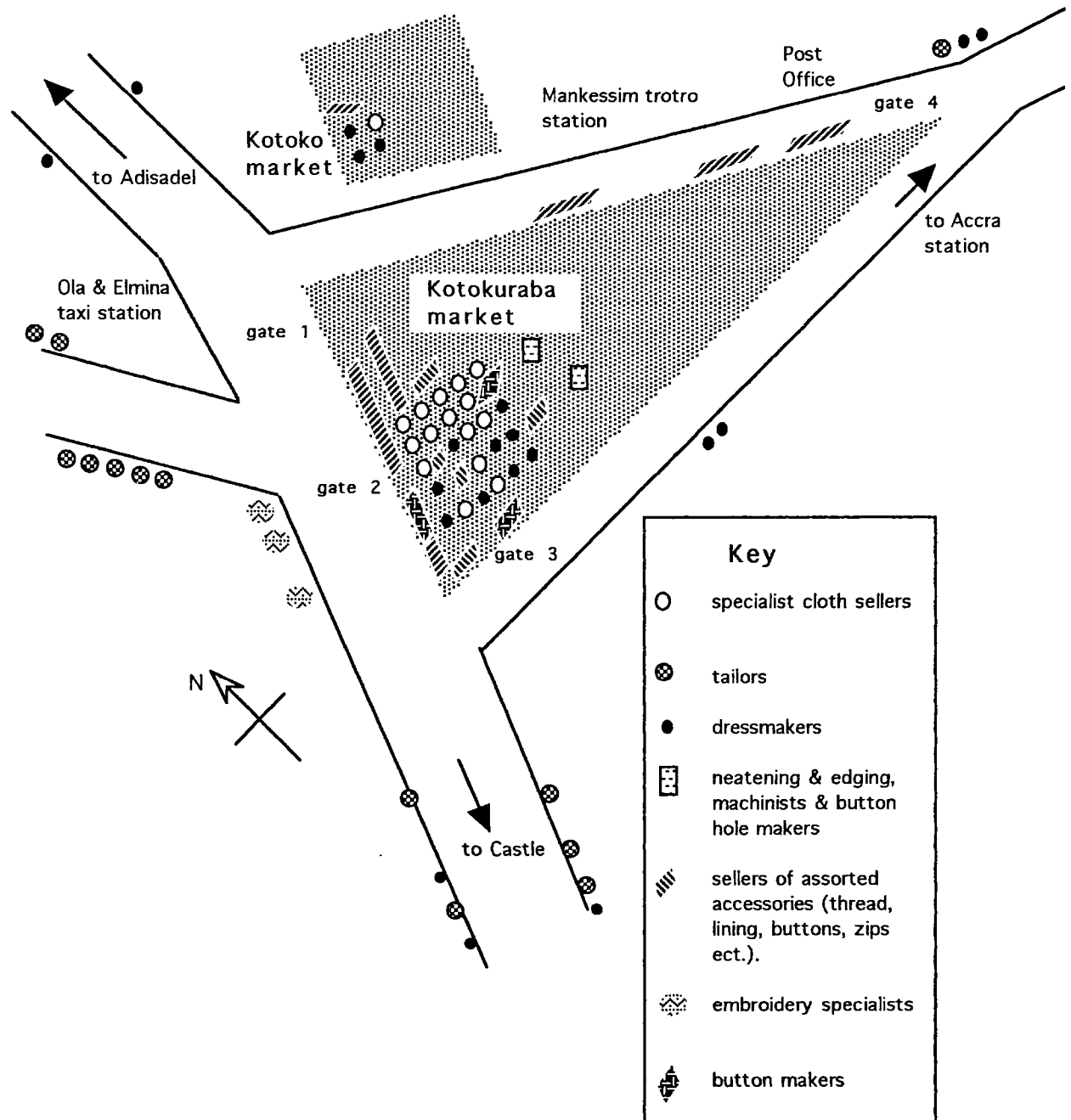
cases) had established their businesses between 1990 and 1993: the trend was not significantly different between tailors and seamstresses.<sup>1</sup>

With this booming trade in sewing Kaba and Slit and the matching slit a whole sub-sector of related trade in accessories is also growing. The Kaba is often finished with coloured binding, ribbon, lace, buttons and many types of decorative stitching. Most of these accessories are purchased from small stall holders in the market. The arrangement of these stall holders in relation to dressmakers and tailors in Cape Coast can be seen in fig. 1.

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<sup>1</sup> The Newtown figures were taken from GNTDA registration forms filled out by new members, but some caution must be used in accepting their validity. Many seamstresses and tailors may have given a more recent date of establishment in the hope of averting the imagined possibility of back dated tax demands. However I feel the data can be relied upon to show a similar strong trend of relatively recent business start up as that found in Cape Coast where my data was collected personally through questionnaires and interviews.

Fig.1 Dressmakers and tailors and the business support sub-sector - Cape Coast market place



The main customers of accessory stall holders are seamstresses or her customers. When cloth is brought to the seamstress's workshop the charge made depends on whether the customer has purchased all the

accessories in advance and brought them to the seamstress or whether they must be purchased by the seamstress herself. The majority of seamstresses I spoke to preferred the first option where they had only to sew and a lower charge was made. The average charge for just sewing in Cape Coast was 3,000 cedis (approx. £3) and when the seamstress supplies the accessories and sews the average charge is usually between 5,000 and 5,500 cedis. (£5 and £5.50) Thus accessories can make up to just under half the cost of constructing the Kaba.

The market place specialist in overlocking and decorative edge stitching (plate 2) is exemplary of a small stall holder and service provider related to the boom in demand for Kaba and Slit. His work is also evidence that the finishing of the Kaba and other garments produced locally is becoming more sophisticated in that attention is being paid to neatening the inside hem and seam edges which stops fraying and makes the garment more robust.



plate 2

As many seamstresses do not have their own overlock machines to neaten raw edges of garments or to sew decorative machine stitching they take their work to the market specialist and have it sewn mostly on a 'stand and wait' basis.

The stall operator, a man aged 24, uses two industrial machines, one for neatening and the other for decorative embroidery type stitching on the outside of the Kaba and other garments brought to him. He charges 100 cedis (approx.10p) per yard for overlocking and can earn on a average day approximately 5,000 cedis (£5) and in times of high demand such as December just before Christmas 12,000 cedis per day. His set business outgoings were 1,000 cedis (approx. £1) per month to the municipal authorities as rent for his market kiosk, 1,000 cedis per month tax to the inland revenue and 100 cedis (approx. 10p) per day market toll. He nevertheless makes a good wage when one considers the national set minimum wage at the time was 790 cedis per day.



plate 3

In addition to operating these two industrial machines he has a cover button making machine and sells a range of accessories such as thread and zips which are displayed in wooden framed glass boxes in front of his work tables (plate 3). His two sisters, who had worked for some time in Italy, helped to finance the purchase of the machines and he did a one month apprenticeship in Cape Coast to learn how to thread and control them (this cost 3,000 cedis in 1988). In 1988 he also managed to establish this workshop and has taken on one apprentice of his own for a three year period. He has not made any apprenticeship charge but he will expect the apprentice's help with the work in return for training; as the master, he will give his apprentice 200 cedis per day 'chop money' (a local expression for food money).

The two stalls in (plate 4 and 5 ) are more representative of the majority of businesses in the Kotokuraba area relating to the sub-sector of *dressmaking and tailoring*. They are situated about 25 yards from each other on the same market aisle, they both operate cover button making machines and sell a similar range of accessories: zips, thread, buttons, bindings, pins and needles etc. Their prices are also similar, for example to have one cover button made cost 100 cedis (approx.10p) at every stall I visited but rather than be in constant competition with each other they rely on servicing their own regular customers.





plate 4



plate 5

The situation is similar for cloth sellers whose stalls display a range of cloths from various countries at similar prices. The loyalty of regular customers may be a factor working against competitive pricing between stall holders; if one compares the prices around the market they are very similar, but the variations occur in negotiations between customer and stall holders for the 'last price' (the minimum price acceptable) and a regular customer will expect the best goods available at lowest prices. Goods for a regular customer may not even be on display but held back out of view. In times of economic crisis and severe shortage having one's

own regular supplies was the only way to obtain goods<sup>1</sup> but in the market now there is an abundant supply of all commodities yet the practice continues. Reliance on regular and loyal customers cannot be the only factor ensuring the existence of a large informal small stall holder market culture.

In Accra the phenomenon is increased in volume in the main markets. To the uninitiated going to market to view the best possible selection of cloth the sight of so many stall holders is overwhelming and one finds it impossible to browse without being called by anxious marketeers trying to attract your custom. On one of my visits I was accompanied by an Abodom woman who led me to a small cloth stall in the centre of Makola market. The stall holder was a relative and I was encouraged to buy any cloth I needed from her. I was given the stall number which was to me the only thing that distinguished it from the hundreds of other stalls surrounding it and I was told to always come to this stall if I needed cloth and I would be given the best prices; should I go elsewhere I may be cheated by the market women.

Accra markets also have an electricity supply and one finds similar overlocking specialists and a range of accessory and cover button makers as in Cape Coast. These groups of stall holders cannot be described as good examples of 'clusters' with a strong interfirm division of labour reaching collective efficiency and innovation (Schmitz 1989 cited in Ove and others 1994 p.1). Yet it is clear that the individual decisions of dressmakers and tailors and the stall holders servicing them decided to

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<sup>1</sup> This practice was also used to inflate the price of goods and is an example of the type of commercial malpractice which PNDC tried to eradicate (some of these are detailed in appendix V).



site their workshops in the same vicinity for reasons of self advantage. In doing this they have created a clearly defined sector which seen visually en masse resembles a poorly organised factory; everything necessary to produce a garment in a production line fashion is available but arranged with no discernible organisational objective of overall efficiency.

The third floor of Kaneshie market in Accra is one such site of clustered individual specialist stall holders and workshops. A massive floor space is taken up for the production of individual garments especially Kaba and Slit. In conversation with seamstresses it is clear that having their workshops situated close to a group of cloth sellers offers the possibility of picking up customers through passing trade; new customers are attracted to the display of styles hanging outside her kiosk. There is also no doubt seamstresses and tailors have gained efficiencies from their grouping together with stalls servicing them with accessories; less time is spent travelling to market to buy small quantities or to have a few buttons made; the close proximity of many accessory stalls means the seamstresses have a stock to choose from within minutes. Financial savings can also be made because instead of every individual seamstress investing in technology for her own workshop she can make use of the specialised services offered in the market place. This last point must however be qualified as the results of the questionnaires showed that most seamstresses who did not own their own overlockers and cover button machines had an ambition to purchase them, as having such machines in one's own workshop saves time. They can be used after working hours and could also be offered as services to other seamstresses and produce another source of income. The potential for over supply of these machines and services is acknowledged and in conversation many seamstresses and tailors themselves recognised that

their own economic culture has a tendency towards saturation both in the desire to own things such as machines, but also in dress styles and the acquisition of skills. Many seamstresses suggested that this was now the case with the cover button making machine and with the increase in workshops and skills of dressmakers and with a still further substantial increase expected as so many apprentices are being taken on. One seamstress said she thought that everybody must know how to sew and there is a seamstress in every family and on every street and street corner. Such saturation of the market in Ghana seems to work against collective action and efficiency and instead promotes mistrust and individualism and also the continuation and expansion of the apprenticeship system. One seamstress I interviewed in New Town Accra has attempted a form of collective efficiency through starting a co-operative with a group of seamstresses in order to share machines and business expenses but because of "petty cheating and stealing of each others customers" it gradually failed and she decided to work alone and take on apprentices to help her. The pertinent issues here are of trust and security. In the market which seamstresses and tailors work there is stability only in so far as one had a group of regular customers. If a seamstress has to move her workshop or re-establish in another town or village she has in effect to start to build up her business from new.

Possibly the form of 'clustering' that might be taking place in the markets of Cape Coast and to a greater extent in Accra may be more for the competitive advantage of individual seamstresses than for the potential collective efficiency of many. Another probability is that the effect of coming together in a form of 'cluster' is allowing these two forces of competition and collective efficiency to work together for the benefit of the most enterprising and promoting their survival and expansion. The

scope and time limits of my research have not allowed for more focused data collection and observation of these important issues and further research would be appropriate in this area.

### Employment and apprenticeship culture

Apprenticeships are the main source of labour for masters and the main source of training for an occupation in dressmaking and tailoring. Even those who had learnt sewing at National Vocational Training school had taken additional apprenticeship training with a master within a workshop. It is clear from table 1 a and b that master seamstresses take on more apprentices than do tailors and this is the case in Abodom and Cape Coast. It is also clear that individual Cape Coast master seamstresses take on many more apprentices than those in Abodom - a seamstress working with 20 apprentices was not unusual. In the case of a Cape Coast seamstress having 50 apprentices many were from surrounding villages and she also supplied them with accommodation in the town. She felt this was necessary as the girls could be better supervised in this way; she felt responsible for their safety and proper conduct whilst they were in her care<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The practice of masters undertaking responsibility for the conduct of apprentices and providing food and shelter for them is cited by Goody as an example of the 'diffuse nature of the master-apprentice relationship' whereby some kinship duties are transferred to the master (Goody, 1982 b p.201).

Table 1 a & b  
Number of apprentices in masters workshops in Abodom and Cape Coast

Table a

No. of apprentice seamstresses in Abodom workshops	No. of apprentice tailors in Abodom workshops
8	working alone
2	3
8	
1	
1	
2	
2	
working alone	
Total 27 in 8 workshops	Total 3 in 2 workshops

Table b

No. of apprentice tailors in Cape Coast workshops	No. of apprentice seamstresses in Cape Coast workshops
3	18
1	working alone
1	2
two brothers working together	50
8	3
6	3
1	25
7	5
son working with father	8
working alone	working alone
son working with father	16
missing data	3
2	2
2	5
3	20
4	3
	3
Total 38 in 16 workshops	Total 166 in 17 workshops

The difference between the numbers of apprentices taken on by seamstresses and tailors can be accounted for by the current popularity in Kaba and Slit fashion. This is providing work for masters and apprentices in dressmaking but there is a decline in tailoring due to the popularity of imported men's second hand clothing and few places for apprentice tailors and also fewer young men coming forward for training. It is also the case that the Kaba top often involves hours and sometimes days of arduous hand sewing to achieve the decorative stitches to the neckline, sleeves and yokes (see Chapter Eight) and junior apprentices are given this work. By contrast the work of junior apprentice tailors is not as time consuming and involves sewing on buttons and making button holes for the suits and shirts which are less decorative. Table 1 a and b also shows that Cape Coast seamstresses have more apprentices per

workshop than do Abodom seamstresses and this reflects the increased business in town and the all year round nature of the town workload.

Data from my own questionnaires on the reasons youths gave for entering new apprenticeships agrees with previous Nigerian and Ghanaian survey results<sup>1</sup> on this issue. In discussing these results Goody notes "a very low level of continuity of occupation from father to son among current craftsmen." (Goody 1982 b p.191). Work in Nigeria by Koll shows that apprenticeships are entered into not because of family attachment to a craft but as a "response to conditions in the labour market and to the customers' demands for new goods and services"(Koll, M 1969 cited in Goody *ibid.*). In the areas covered by my own research new apprenticeships in dressmaking are a response to the increased availability and great variety of cloth designs and the current boom in Kaba and Slit fashion. This was the case in rural Abodom and in Cape Coast and Accra. The cases where a seamstress followed her mothers' or fathers' occupation were exceptions.

Tailoring and embroidery apprenticeships amongst the Muslim population in Cape Coast differed and three out of the five workshop owners questioned had learnt their trade from their fathers and had taken over the workshop from them. The work of the seamstress in sewing Kaba and Slit can be classed as one of the new small-scale industries created from the introduction of imported sewing machine technology, sewing accessories, an expanded trade in cloth from the colonial period, an indigenous flare for dressing up and the emergence of a definition of cloth, sewn or unsewn, as a cultural measure of status (this is explained in Chapters Seven & Eight).

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The above relationship between supply and demand is complicated by factors such as apprenticeship labour being a training opportunity for unemployed school leavers, not only for those who have no wish to continue formal education but also for those who are unable to find a place or who's parents are unable to afford their formal schooling. One seamstress I worked with said it is easier for a girl's parents to enter her for an apprenticeship in sewing than pay for her to attend senior secondary school<sup>1</sup> and it is profitable, as a form of supplementary income, for a master to take on apprentices. From speaking with seamstresses it was clear that not all their apprentices enjoyed their work and some felt forced by their parents to continue. I was told that not all apprentices take their training seriously and some are just marking time, but for those who become skilled and progress from juniors to seniors the master comes to rely more and more on their labour to fulfil customers orders.

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<sup>1</sup> Callaway 1964,1973; Koll 1969 and Peil 1970,1978 cited in Goody, 1982 b p.188).

After finishing Junior Secondary School (JSS) it is cheaper to start a young girl in a dressmaking apprenticeship than send her to Senior Secondary School (SSS). One seamstress detailed the economics for me: to send a girl to SSS one can spend initially about 200,000 cedis (approx. £200) which is spent on

uniform, bedding trunk, bucket, chop box, foam mattress, pillow, bedsheet, dresses, general provisions, shito (rich fish preserve), pocket money, books, dormitory fee (50,000 cedis per term), school fee (69.000 cedis per term) Parent Teacher Association (4,000 cedis per term).

Many of these school expenses reoccur each term but with an apprenticeship the cost after negotiation should not be altered or reoccur. The apprenticeship fee will usually be 50,000 cedis plus the associated articles required by the seamstress which will cost approximately 20,000; the apprentice's machine, if bought new, will cost about 150,000 cedis therefore the whole cost of starting an apprenticeship will be an approximate 220,000 cedis one off expense which can be made by instalments.

The workshop production system for both tailors and seamstresses in Cape Coast and to a great extent in Accra is designed around the requirements of apprenticeship labour rather than the western notion of 'efficient production' of garments. In the most enterprising tailoring workshop I visited in Cape Coast (which had eight apprentices, two regularly paid workers and an export contract) I found only a very rudimentary division of labour within the production system designed to accommodate the need for apprentices to work daily on every aspect of garment construction. The master tailor did all the cutting and allocated the complete sewing of the garment to one worker or apprentice. I asked if other production methods had been tried and the answer was no, because it was necessary for an apprentice to start and complete the whole garment in order for them to learn properly. Apprentices and workers, he said, would also get bored working solely on one part of the garment. The responsibility which the master has to teach apprentices the full craft of the trade over a specified number of years rather than use their labour flexibly and under a more factory line manufacturing system will put limitations on the functioning and expansion of the workshop. This point has been made by Verdon, 1979 (cited in Goody, 1982 b p.204) who argues that due to the diffuse nature of the relationship between master and apprentices no amount of government assistance with loans, equipment and management training will enable workshops based on apprenticeship labour systems to develop into larger industrial enterprises. This argument is rather rigid and offers a view on a pure ideal type master/apprenticeship relationship. In practice in 1994 many workshops were using apprenticeship labour plus a variety of other labour arrangements and relationships; below is an example I recorded in Accra.

In Accra my intensive case study was one of the most well established<sup>1</sup> and distinguished tailoring workshops which consisted of three large rooms on the second floor of a large building on Kwame Nkrumah Avenue, a prestigious address for this specialist tailor. The sewing machines were all British made industrial PFAFF and mostly functioning well. The production system on first impression had some similarities to the western type line system. The labour base was complex with a combination of apprenticeship, paid piece workers and former apprenticeship labour now working service years with allowance. This latter category occurs when an apprentice enters training under the terms that no charge is made for the three year training period with the condition that after the training period the apprentice will work for the master for a further three years receiving a monthly allowance (at the time of research this was 25,000 - approx. £25.00 - just above the set legal minimum wage). The master and a specialist employee 'cutter' (a man of long and trusted service) did the cutting; this was on a separate floor from the eight apprentices who could only begin to learn these techniques in the final year of training.

The workshop produced men's (and very occasionally women's) suits and a clear division of labour and production space existed between trouser and jacket making with the latter being more highly regarded than the former. Trousers were made by the two male piece workers, a salaried worker and junior apprentices in a room allocated solely for this purpose. Jackets were worked on in a separate room in production line fashion by

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<sup>1</sup>This workshop was established in 1976 and had expanded and now employs 7 male workers and 4 male apprentices to make suits, shirts and trousers and service uniforms on contract.



senior apprentices and former apprentices working their service years and workers who after finishing service have become employees.

Piece workers use the workshop's industrial sewing machines and are given pre-cut pieces of material to be completed by one worker. Two and a half to three pairs of trousers per day could be made by one person and the rate was 1,100 cedis per completed pair; approximately 47,000 cedis was the average monthly wage. Apprenticeship training in completing one garment from start to finish will have prepared these workers for this type of piece work and enabled them to produce complete garments for their own customers after work and at weekends working from their own homes. One piece worker I talked to starts his own work from home at about seven in the evening and works until twelve or one in the morning. His home work is always 'cloth to sew'; customers bring their cloth and he charges 3,000 cedis for workmanship for trousers and 2,000 cedis for shirts. But he explained that work from home is not regular so he must continue piece working to ensure a regular income. His ambition, like that of every worker and apprentice in the workshop, was to set up his own workshop<sup>1</sup> and train apprentices. Information from interviews with other male piece workers in another well established Accra workshop reinforced the view that waged employment was as unappealing to tailors as it was to seamstresses.

Only those who did their apprenticeship under the workshop master were allowed to work on jackets, all others worked on trousers. This information came from a trouser maker who did his apprenticeship

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<sup>1</sup> My findings confirm those of Peil in 1978 - she also found waged labour in tailoring was undertaken for one or two years for the purpose of saving enough money to open an independent workshop; cited in (Goody 1982 b).

outside, but was expressing to me his ambition to work on jackets in order gain skill and experience; but just the mention of 'jacket' from the lips of a trouser maker was enough to prick the ears of workers on the other side of the room and receive their glance. The culture of the work rooms was premised on this division between trousers and jackets and a developed status differential and special divide was respected by all. The jacket making rooms had a more jocular atmosphere and more conversation: this contrasted to the mostly silent and speed working atmosphere of the trouser room (plates 6 and 7). Trouser makers could not see through to the jacket making rooms and the skilled hands of the senior apprentices and allowance service workers. Both categories of workers had very little information about each other. The trouser makers did not know how much the jacket workers earned and vice versa for the jacket makers who have no ambition to become waged workers themselves.



Plate 6 Trouser making room  
(case study Accra)

The skills of jacket makers seemed to be shielded by walls. If one wished to learn the skills behind them a number of years must be allocated to the process<sup>1</sup> of becoming a master in the finished article. These skills are reserved for those who have made that investment in their lives. From my interviews with apprentices in this workshop and elsewhere I learnt that learning a skill is not just for making a living but a further ambition is to have the status of being a 'master' in one's own right and one can only

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<sup>1</sup> In the jacket rooms, junior apprentices start with sewing on buttons and making button holes and progress to making pockets and tacking in marking thread. They then progress to the actual construction of the jacket, its sides, back, sleeves and collar as they become more senior and trusted.

do this by teaching. Thus 'teaching' is an institutionalised reward for working life.

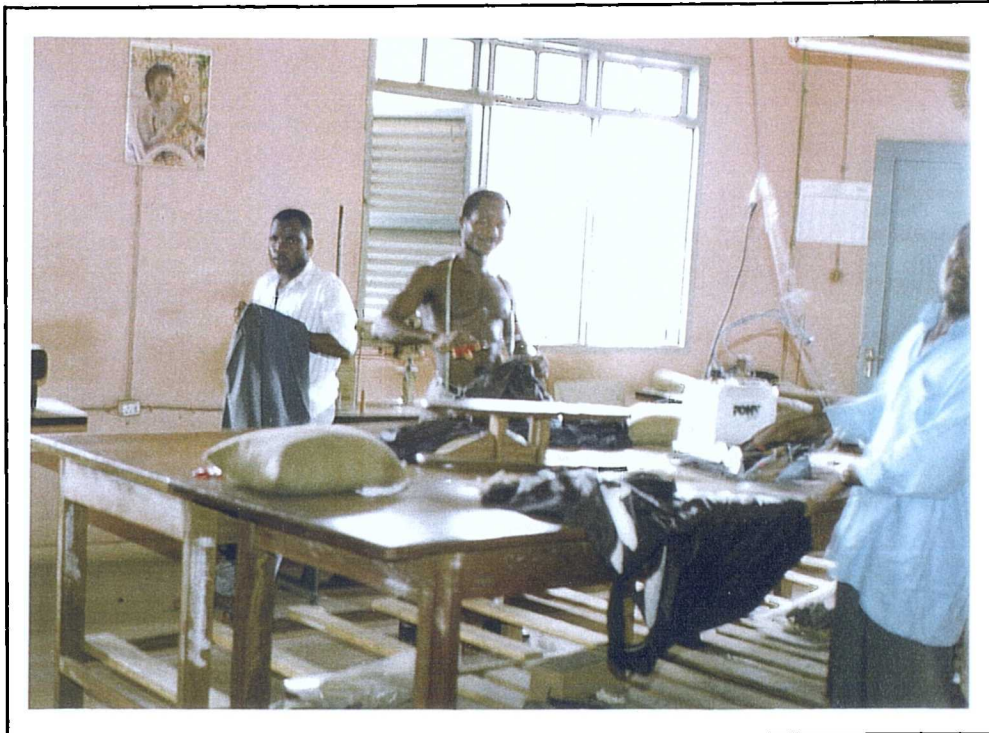


plate 7 jacket making room (case study Accra)

These production systems have been documented here to show that considerations other than western notions of 'efficiency' are embedded in the workshops visited. Workshop owners run their businesses to make money but they are also mindful of their status as masters. Masters use apprenticeship labour but in return give skills and status. Skill will enable graduate apprentices to establish themselves independently of their master and perhaps become competition but the duty of being a master and the status derived from this overrides the risk of competition.

Masters in the workshop visited in Accra and Cape Coast, as well as Abodom, are the equivalent of 'elders' to their apprentices<sup>1</sup>. A master, in the ideal model relationship, is taking an apprentice through a status

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passage from dependent minor to economic independence as master of a trade<sup>1</sup>. The employment market in this trade is unattractive to apprentices and accounts for only a fraction of the labour base because the underlying premise of 'employment' is a form of dependency on an employer. To enter 'employment' after apprenticeship is to enter a new form of dependency which conceptually reverses the rites of passage movement to 'master' status.

In the workrooms described above the sense of separation between those in the trouser room and jacket rooms was as real as the physical walls between them because trouser workers were not only working on different products to jacket makers, their rooms had different conceptual frames. For jacket makers, production was structured within a different time frame of learning and teaching and each year moving towards finishing the apprenticeship and accruing a new status position. For those workers making trousers the completion of one pair leads to the beginning of another; their time at work is not grounded in any frame but circular and repetitive, directed towards an economic objective and the hope of saving enough to open their own workshop in which their master status can be asserted.

A very notable feature of the above interviews in Accra and of those in other locations was the drive and enthusiasm which apprentices had for becoming masters themselves and for self-employment in their own workshops. This ambition seems very consistent through time. Goody

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<sup>1</sup> Apprentice Dabaoya weavers of Northern Ghana also work unpaid for their master after completing their training - their master gives them pocket money and gifts from time to time. They leave their master when they can purchase thread to weave their own cloth.(Goody 1982 b). The aim of apprentice weavers, like tailors of Southern Ghana, is to set up their own independent operation and become economically independent and masters in their own right.

(Goody 1982 b p. 201) cites research findings on craft enterprises and apprenticeship in the 1960s and 70s which also recorded this strong preferences of apprentices for self-employment. In her analysis Goody indicates parallels between the goal of economic independence (which is a prerequisite for domestic independence and political status within West African kinship systems) and the ambition and striving of apprentices for economic independence within their individual workshops (p.204). I believe there is clearly a relationship between the ambition of self-employment and standards of economic independence inculcated within West African institutions of kinship. Even though the research and analysis cited by Goody relates mainly to males, a similar relationships may also be valid for women oriented towards self-employment at certain times of their productive lives as they too achieve high status within the lineage and community through achieving economic independence.

In addition to kinship standards influencing ambition for independence through apprenticeship I understand the preference of apprentices for accruing skills and their own physical workshops above waged labour to be their rational response to the precarious economic situation of a developing country. In such circumstances skill and technology are more valuable and enduring than money, as they are not eroded away by inflation and are not susceptible to sudden devaluation in the same way as money. The crux of this argument is that skill used in self-employment brings more economic security and higher self esteem than skill sold for cash wages. The wage labourer employs his skill under economic rules which are understood to override any social responsibilities of employer towards employee and vice versa. It is not an immediate concern of the employer that inflation will effect his workers' ability to purchase more or less food than the previous week. In the temporary workroom often

hidden from public view the workers skill is valued and remunerated only when there is a regular supply of work. If waged work is terminated the status of the worker is drastically changed to that of unemployed and in negotiating for new employment his skill is subject to economics of supply and demand.

In contrast the workshop of the self-employed is a visible landmark asserting the skill and achieved status of a master. The workshop construction is often financed jointly by patrifocal or matrilineal family contributions and as such is an investment in the skill of a future generation. The workshop may be painted, named and designed to express the character and often the religion of the master. Fluctuations in trade are off-set by *daily apprentices fees and the larger cash payments* made to the master at the beginning and end of training. While the yearly trade cycle continues the skill of the master and associated status are undiminished and may be enhanced by taking up responsibilities in the community or church.

Skills of both the waged worker and the self-employed are, however, vulnerable to devaluation or redundancy through the consequences of economic restructuring. One consequence of this in Ghana is the massive importation of cheap ready made garments and second hand clothes into the country. The tailors I spoke to were aware that they, more than seamstresses, were vulnerable to these imports - unlike Kaba and Slit, suits (new and second hand), were being imported into Ghana. The market for new local ready-made suits was in a state of change and insecurity. Tailors felt both their livelihoods and the institution of the apprenticeship and investment in skill were being threatened.



The observations and experiences gained above in my Accra case study were repeated and verified to different degrees in other case studies with seamstresses in Accra and seamstresses and tailors in Cape Coast. One major difference between tailor's and seamstress's apprenticeships was that where tailors expected their training to lead to total financial independence enabling them to provide for a wife and family, seamstresses often had the expectation that their sewing skills will allow them to set up on their own and earn money to supplement the household income. In practice what constitutes a Ghanaian household is difficult to define and my intensive case study material showed that both master tailors I worked with in Abodom and Accra were married to working wives - and my impression generally was that most Ghanaian family homes were managed through the financial contributions of all who earned an income.

It was also common for the most senior apprentices, both male and female, to remain in the workshop after graduation and receive an allowance and food money in return for sewing; this is one of the ways that seamstresses and tailors saved money to open their own businesses. This happened in Hanna's workshop in Cape Coast and in Joyce's workshop in Accra. The allowance given to the senior apprentices is not always a regular and pre-defined amount but often what the seamstresses can afford and when. Hanna in Cape Coast had one other employee, a young man from Liberia who worked only on her embroidery machine, decorating caftans which were for the tourist market; he was paid a piece work rate. At the time I started work with Joyce in Accra she had taken on a young man from Togo to sew women's jackets for her; he had arrived at her husband's tailoring workshop and had been referred to her. He had brought his own machine to her workshop which



needed repair thus making a very bad start; when the machine is working she will pay him for the work he produces rather than any fixed rate. Both Joyce and Hanna would not consider taking on a seamstress to do the same work, as they believed tailors were much neater and harder workers and more reliable. They themselves knew from experience that domestic chores, dependent relatives and children don't allow women the same time and freedom to commit themselves to work outside the home. Thus women mostly become self employed in their own workshops where they can manage domestic and working life together. Often the apprentices they take on come to work and live in their master's homes to alleviate some of the seamstress's domestic commitments. The constraints of a woman's domestic life on her ability to expand her business is eased only by off-loading some of her domestic duties onto these younger women apprentices. In time the work pattern and domestic duties of the seamstress will be repeated by her apprentices and openings for employment in the dressmaking sector will continue to be mainly for men without domestic commitments<sup>1,2</sup>

### **Internal constraints to enterprise development**

Internal/external constraints models are often used to analyse the enterprise culture rather than conventional economic theory. Internal factors can be religion, family obligations including respect for elders,

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<sup>1</sup> Males make up the majority of the labour force in textiles and clothing in Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Malawi. However, females are the predominant workforce in Botswana and Lesotho "In 1990, 92 per cent of employees in all firms reported in the textiles and clothing sectors were female and in leather footwear the figure was 87 per cent (Baylies and Wright, 1993). In Botswana's textile industry 79 per cent are women (Source International Labour Office)

<sup>2</sup> A new knitting factory in Tema, just outside Accra, operating under Chinese ownership and management employs only young males who are earning the minimum national wage. On a visit to the company the reason given for the preference for male employees was that men are more reliable than women who have high absenteeism due to domestic responsibilities and pregnancy.

respect for men by their wives and inheritance conventions, dishonesty, local institutions and actions of litigation. All of these can be identified as cultural constraints to starting or developing a business. Research using two groups of respondents in two diverse rural regions of Southern Ghana<sup>1</sup> (Vyakarnam and Fiafor 1991)<sup>2</sup> used a discussion group method for participants to elaborate on drawbacks to developing their own business. A key drawback noted was their main rural institution, the extended family. Family obligations to provide welfare to relatives is said to undermine enterprise, as is the attitude of elders who are said to dislike increasing differentials in wealth and status between themselves and successful entrepreneurs. Similar tensions are reported to exist between married couples, many husbands wishing their wives to remain dependent and respectful. Women claimed to be over burdened with domestic duties which discouraged them from developing new enterprises. Finally, illiteracy and lack of numeracy are given as key factors. In particular, disparate measures used to quantify agricultural produce were said to be practised by 'dishonest' middlemen; farmers were cheated by this and thus discouraged from making greater reinvestment.

My research confirms the importance of family obligation as a constraint, especially on women. Women need to keep their businesses small in order that they can work them while caring for relatives and children. My case study seamstress, Hanna, in Cape Coast is another example; she had the opportunity to expand her business by filling an export order to the United

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<sup>1</sup> The respondents comprised one group of 35 people in the hilly rain forest area of Begoro and several smaller groups (10 to 25) in the transitional zone around Wenchi.

<sup>2</sup> Participants were asked what in their culture do they feel might inhibit them from starting a business? a direct and negative question which not surprisingly concentrated the participants minds inwards on their own institutions and immediate problems with existing trade.

States (see appendix V) but was constrained and continually missed production target dates due to a mixture of family obligations and inappropriate production techniques based on apprenticeship labour. When I asked her how she managed her domestic responsibilities she gave a sigh of exasperation. Although her children were no longer dependent, her husband expected three meals a day which must be cooked only by her as he did not trust anyone else to prepare his food. Hanna was enthusiastic about her export order but continually extending production deadlines was stretching the patience of her agents. A further constraint was her unwillingness to employ workers and she was entirely reliant on apprenticeship labour for the order and for work on the garments of her regular 'cloth to sew' customers for which she gave priority as they were her security of work in the future.

Hanna's ability to fulfil her existing export order and expand this aspect of her business in the future was constrained further by the small workshop culture and standards in garment construction which she operated under. Her export order was priced per finished garment and in an effort to secure the order Hanna had proposed what she later found was an unrealistically low price which allowed very little profit for her. The agreement was verbal and there was no written contract so she had renegotiated an increase in both the price per garment and the advance which she needed to purchase materials. One US agent, arriving at the workshop to collect finished garments, in conversation told both Hanna and myself that they were offering contracts to Ghanaian seamstresses and tailors because they had much lower labour costs compared to the United States, but that transportation costs were very high and for this reason they were not prepared to make large increases in the contract price negotiated. I only once met with the US designer and head of

operations in Ghana who seemed quite unfriendly and unwilling to talk to me after our introduction. I also met seamstresses and tailors in Accra who had dealings with these agents in their search for suitable workshops to fulfil their orders. From pieces of information I gathered in conversation with these seamstresses and tailors it appeared the US agents had encountered many difficulties but most importantly they had not understood that the reason for low labour costs in Ghanaian workshops derived from the fact that usually very little or no professional or semi-professional commercial labour was employed. In fact labour costs in Ghana's small scale workshops can be calculated in negative figures, as apprentices pay their master to come and work and train. The US agents had indeed arrived at the end of their search for lowest global labour costs!

The agents had also invested relatively small amounts of money with the seamstresses and tailors for the purchase of materials and in some cases left the materials they had brought from the United States only to be presented on their return with sewn articles well below the quality standards acceptable in the US market. They had made complaints about the cutting techniques of seamstresses and tailors which are always free hand and could not produce the standard sizes required for the export market. They complained about the 'wastage' of large seam allowances (see Chapter Eight for indigenous garment construction). In one workshop they installed a cutting machine which the owner never used. Further complaints were made about the finishing of the garments and one tailor told me he handed back the jackets he made without the buttons sewn on because he could not afford time to do this nor did the price the agents paid allow him to employ anyone to do this work.

The garments Hanna produced were more acceptable than most and one of my jobs while I was working with her was to 'quality control' them. On Friday afternoons before collection time I would sit for more than two hours finding faults such as holes in seams, buttons that would not pass through button holes, zips that caught on fabric and many more. These were all corrected by myself and her apprentices before the garments were collected. Like her apprentices I was not paid; only her senior apprentice was given an allowance offered on an irregular basis.

### External constraints to expansion

External constraints are usually those associated with the macro economic environment, policies which are biased or unintentionally detrimental to small businesses. In Ghana such external factors have been described by small-scale operators as the lack of availability of credit; 78 per cent of the 1,365 small businesses interviewed in the study by Sowa et al (1992). said this was a problem (p.40). Trade liberalisation policies also come into this category. Greatly lowering tariffs on imported goods has increased the volume of imports that sell in local markets at prices which undercut indigenous small-scale producers. This could be conceived of as an external constraint, but Sowa et al found no significant adverse effects of this policy effecting Ghanaian small firms. Only 27 of all those surveyed reported competition from imports. Foreign exchange crises is another external factor, but not necessarily detrimental to all industry. Dawson's study (1990) of small-scale Ghanaian industries in two of Kumasi's suburbs (Anolog and Suame) found that while shortages of foreign exchange crippled large import-dependent business in the 'formal' economy it benefited small-scale operators. In the economic space left as large firms collapsed, Dawson found an economic vacuum created which

"proved sufficiently strong in itself to suck small enterprises into markets in which they had previously been either marginal or absent" (ibid. p.44).

My research found a number of external factors constraining the development of the businesses I visited. Such constraints showed themselves most visibly in the workshops of those trying to expand their businesses into new markets. One seamstress in Cape Coast who produced batik cloth and had a sewing workshop operating inside and outside her parent's home was constantly faced with a shortage of operating capital, and the supply of raw materials such as grey baft cloth, chemicals, wax and dyes. She would often waste whole days travelling to Accra or Takoradi to her suppliers only to find they were out of stock.

My research showed that the problem of access to credit which small businesses face is compounded by their lack of usable business records. I included a question on record keeping in my questionnaires and found that very few seamstresses kept any records at all and of those who did not one used them to help her run the business. In all cases record keeping was started either through knowledge gained in vocational school or after participation in a seminar on record keeping organised by an NGO. One Accra seamstress said that her records did help her from getting confused when a customer came to renegotiate a debt but that she did not consult them for any other purpose.

Shortages and difficulty of access to foreign currency for importing essential materials cited by the owner of my main Accra tailoring case study as a reason for lack of expansion and difficulties in the previous years of economic crisis, but that the new policies under SAP have

alleviated the problem. He is now able to make trips to London to buy the high quality suiting material for his own workshop and enough to supply others.

One semi-retired Cape Coast tailor I often visited had kept a fairly detailed record of his business over the last ten years. He had established the workshop in 1954 and was now leaving his son to most of the work. He was the chairman of the Cape Coast Regional GNTDA and had a good knowledge of other tailoring and dressmaking businesses in Cape Coast and as such was a good source for gaining an overview of business in Cape Coast.

His workshop was elite among other tailoring businesses in Cape Coast in that it made men's suits. Although suits are still highly regarded by men in Ghana, his business had not grown over the last ten year period. Demand in suit tailoring, unlike the sew to order Kaba and Slit market of seamstresses, is not markedly seasonal. Analysis of demand in monthly orders for suits shows an increase in demand during preparation for Christmas in November and December - with highest demand during December (see figure 2). During other months increases and decreases occur in no distinctive pattern (see figs 3-13 ). The high instance of placing orders in March may be associated with preparation for the graduation ceremony at Cape Coast University. There is no increased demand for suits in the month of August which is the month of preparation for the annual traditional festival as suits are not usually worn for this occasion.

Total accumulated number of suits ordered in all  
months - 1985/93

fig. 2

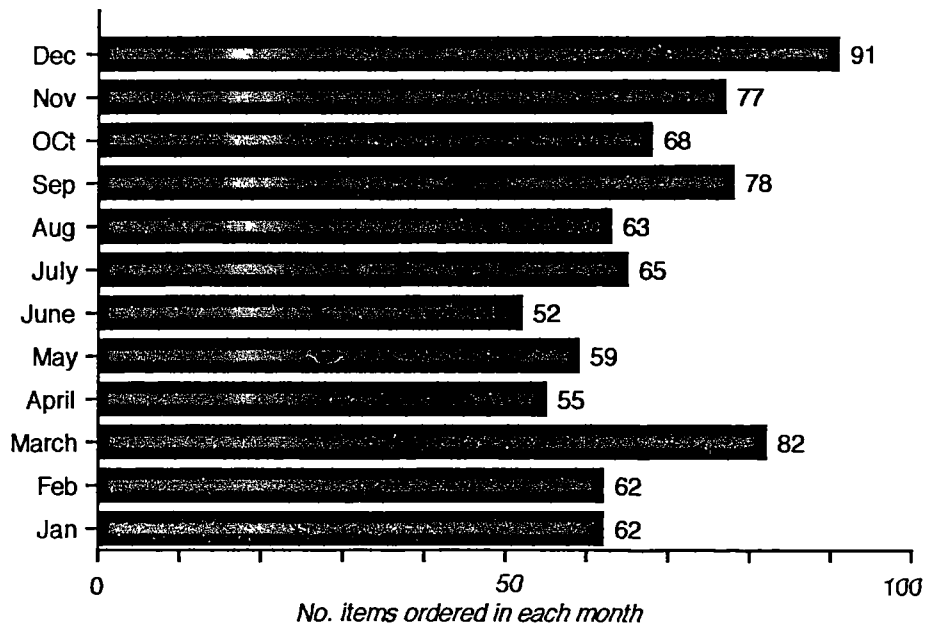


fig. 3  
No. suits  
ordered

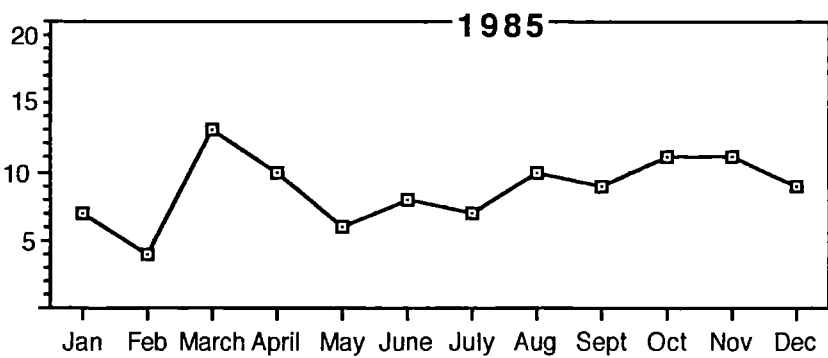
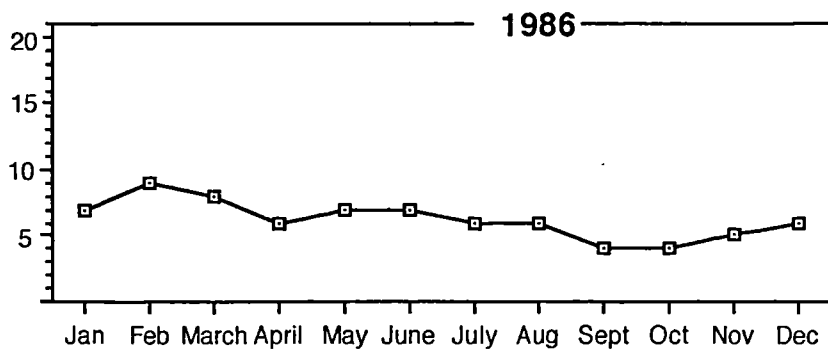


fig. 4





No. suits  
ordered  
fig.5

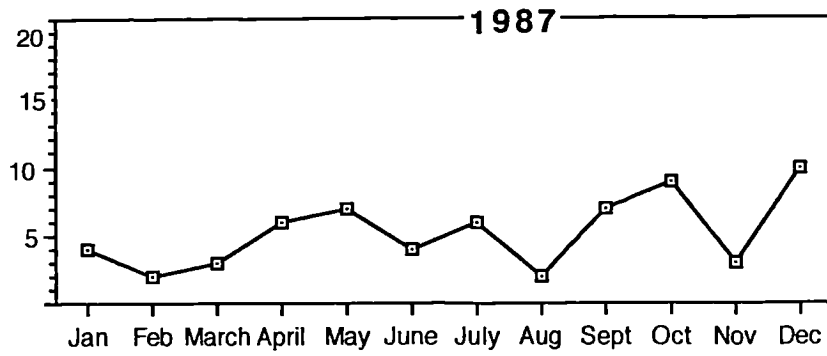


fig 6

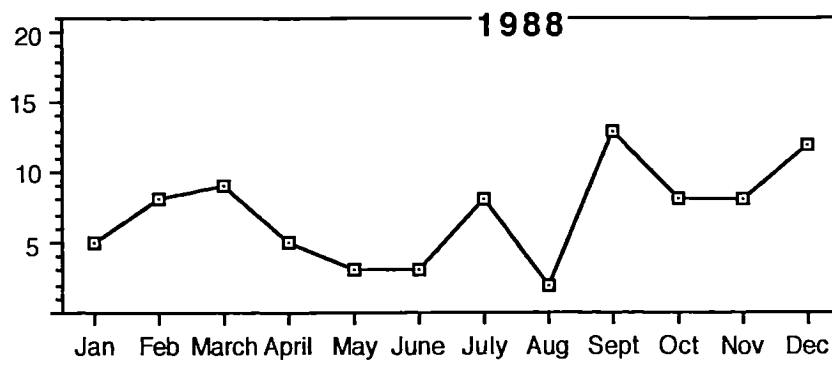


fig.7

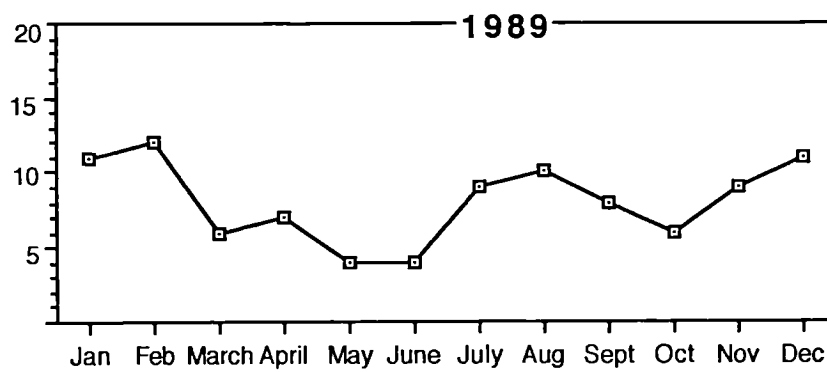


fig.8

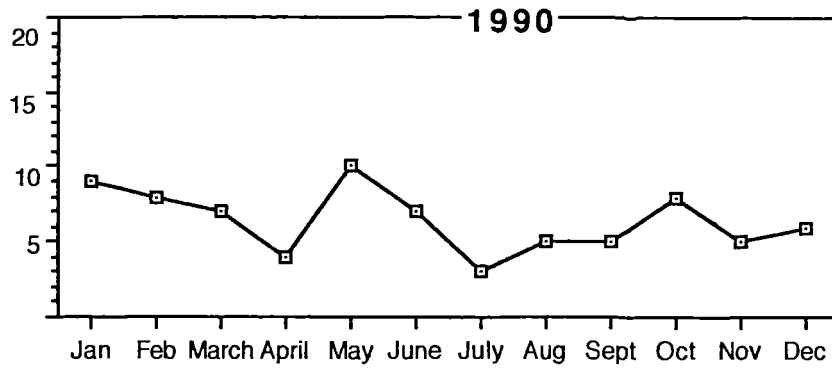
No. suits  
ordered

fig.9

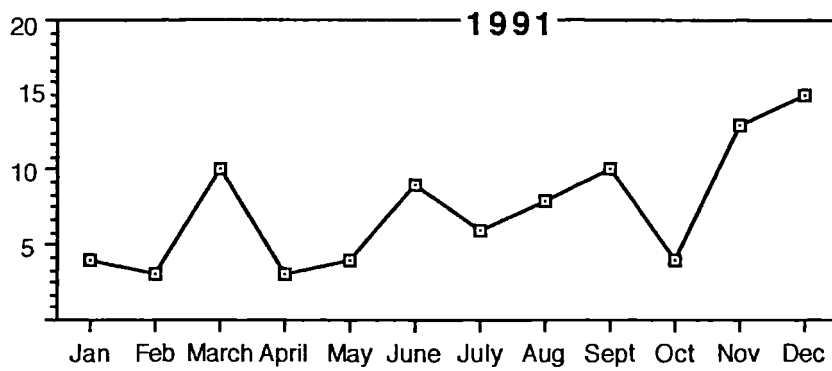


fig.10

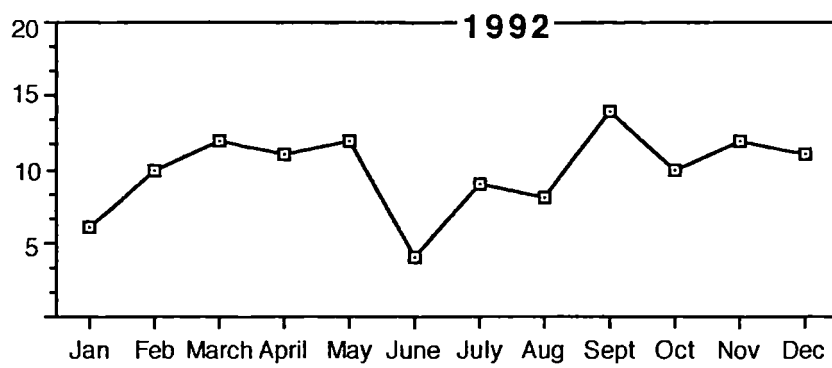
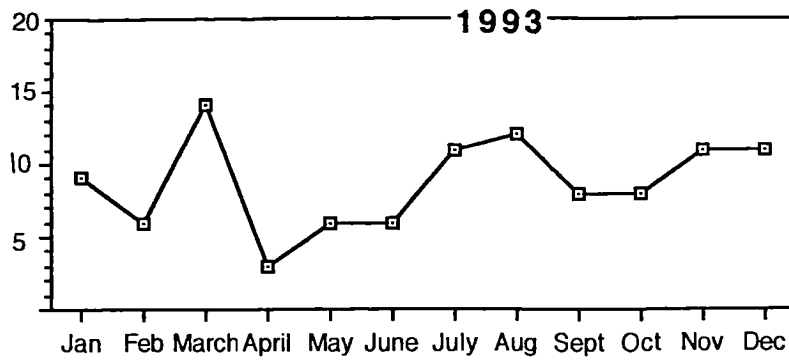
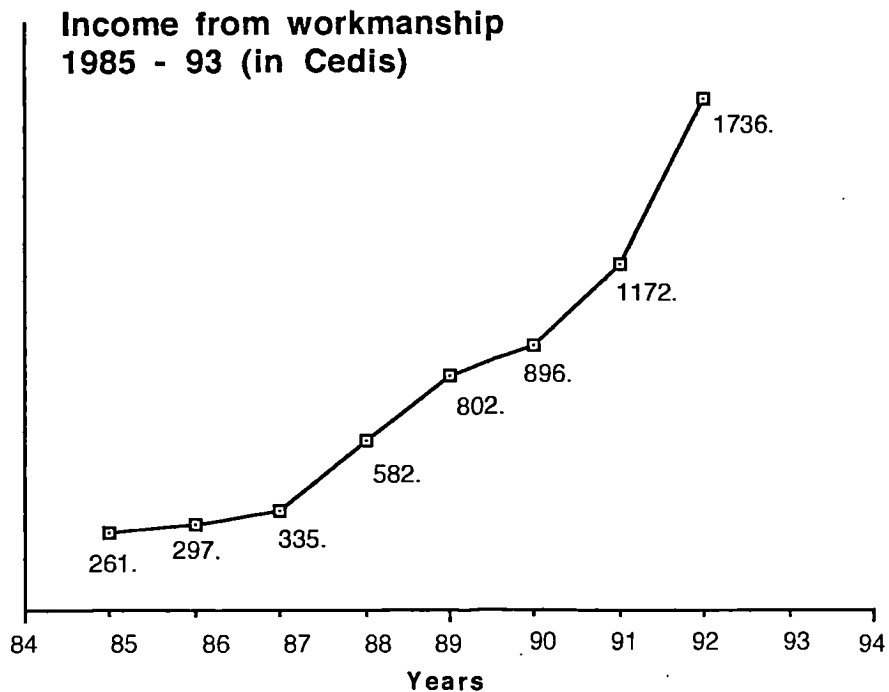


fig.11  
No. suits  
ordered



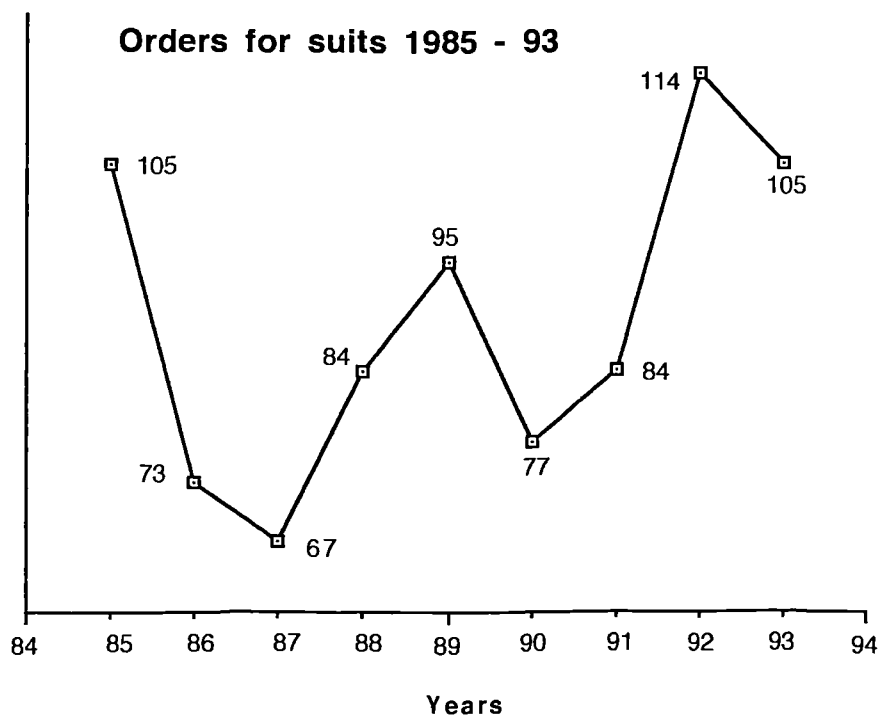
Income has steadily increased since 1984 (see fig.12) but this is accounted for by inflation and consequent price increases for sewing rather than an increase in the number of suits ordered. Growth patterns in fig.11 and fig.12. show this graphically.

fig. 12



In 1985, 105 suits had been ordered but in the following years the number declined to a low of 67 in 1987. The number increased to 95 in 1989 and declined again for a further two years before reaching a high of 114 in 1992. The last year for which records were available was 1993 and records showed that 105 suits had been commissioned, the same number as in 1985 (see fig. 13).

fig.13



The large number of suits ordered in 1992 may have been associated with a demand for formal dress during the general election campaign, which in itself can be regarded as an external factor in that it was a requirement of the international funding agencies for democratic institutions and accountability in countries receiving substantial structural assistance. In this instance an external factor has not been a constraint but an advantage to this small business. However, apart from 1992 no growth has occurred in this tailoring workshop. The popularity of the suits he makes continues but this tailor feels that in general people don't have

money to spend on making new suits. He feels that many people have begun to rely on second hand clothing. He said second hand clothing was bringing many tailoring businesses "to the point of collapse - people buy cheap suits and send them for alterations and expect to pay a small amount". There was a sense of frustration in his analysis for the lack of growth of his and other tailoring businesses. He was aware that suits are still in high demand; proof of this was that more and more were being bought second hand, but at prices below the lowest rates he could afford to charge even though he had relatively low costs as he used apprenticeship labour and his own son. All cultural factors had remained stable for the demand for his suits but what had changed were the wider economic factors. He did not refer directly to structural adjustment and the liberalised importation policies which have produced a massive second hand clothing business sector, but he was aware that some external pressure had changed the nature of his business. I asked this tailor if he always waited for customers to bring their cloth for him to sew; he said he had in the past made a few things 'for sale' but people came to leave deposits and many never returned to collect their goods even years afterwards.

The practice of not collecting sewn articles is as much a problem for seamstresses as it is for tailors. Sometimes a deposit towards the sewing and cost of accessories is left by the customer when they leave their cloth but often just the cloth is left. In both cases there is the risk that the customer will never be seen again. To minimise the risk the tailor or seamstress never realises the sewn garment before full payment is made. Only in Accra in one workshop did I find customers being issued with receipts (see plate 8) as a formalisation of their verbal contract with the seamstresses. The introduction of these written material documents

as guarantees of relationships previously based on trust are comparable to the introduction of apprenticeship indenture documents discussed in Chapter Nine.

No 9500	
<b>MAGMENS HAPPY GIRL'S HOME</b> Behind Adabraka Overhead Total Petrol Station P.O. BOX 15917 ACCRA-NORTH TEL.....	
✓	Customer's Name.....
	Address..... P.O. Box.....
	Residence of customer or Business Location.....
	Home Town of customer.....
✓	Number of Clothes brought.....
	Style of Frock.....
✓	Amount charged C.....
✓	Deposit Paid C.....
✓	Balance to be paid C.....
✓	Date materials are brought.....
✓	Date of collection.....
	Signature or Thumbprint of customer.....
<p><i>NB: 1. Customers are advised to collect their materials at the fixed date, as the company will not pay for the lost of the lost materials after one year from the date promised.</i></p> <p><i>2. Customers are expected to bring their receipts before their Clothes are given to them.</i></p>	

plate 8

The only reason that seamstresses gave for the failure of their customers to collect was that they find they have no money. When no collection is made those seamstresses and tailors in the 'cloth to sew' market lose their investment in workmanship, time and possibly in the accessories they may have purchased for the customer. In the case of those producing in the 'for sale' market like Hanna in Cape Coast, she could lose far more as she has herself bought the material which her shirts are made from. Thus she must be constantly vigilant and minimise her risk by only giving credit to regular customers and demanding cash from others. She never makes articles 'for sale' in large quantities; only five or six garments are 'on sale' at any one time and only when these are sold will she make more.

This 'failure to collect' phenomenon is a subtle restraining influence on expansion for many seamstresses and tailors as they must remain cautious not to become caught up in the economic difficulties of their customers. They can do this by staying in the 'cloth to sew' market and insist on their customers bringing both cloth and accessories. They can also ask for an initial deposit. In this way the seamstress or tailor makes no investment other than their own time and skill and their risk is minimised but so is the possibility of growth beyond the slow accumulation of savings from their own and their apprentices immediate labour capacity. For those who have entered and invested in the 'for sale' market, the garments awaiting custom have within them reserves of their own time and labour which will objectify itself in monetary reward at the time of sale. By investing in cloth which is always increasing in value the seamstress is dealing with the further risk of inflation; while her garments are hanging 'for sale' her time is spent generating income in her other markets. Confidence in alternative markets is not fully established, thus most seamstresses and tailors continue to underpin their income with regular 'cloth to sew' customers.

### Conclusion

The Cape Coast questionnaires offered a snap shot of the small scale dressmaking and tailoring industry in an intermediate stage of development. The town is developing an employment market, an alternative 'for sale' market and an inter and intra firm division of labour. These are related to and dependent on the availability of an electricity supply, investment in technology and an economic climate offering security for making measured investment risks, the principal risk being that the garments of dressmakers and tailors will be either 'sold' or collected by customers who left their cloth. Such concepts as 'sold' and 'for sale' are

part of a new language of the dressmaking and tailoring in towns and cities. The development of new markets in which they are made operational is the most distinctive feature marking out town and city economic activity from Abodom.

In Abodom dressmakers and tailors could be called subsistence household-based enterprises because of their reliance on supplementary occupations especially agriculture, but Cape Coast and Accra seamstresses and tailors are mostly pursuing sewing as a full-time occupation and earning their supplementary incomes in activities directly related to sewing. For example this is the case where a seamstress invests in a cover button making or overlocking machine and becomes a specialist charging others for her services in operating this machine.

Seamstresses and tailors in Cape Coast and Accra still wait for women to send their cloth to the workshop for sewing. However a significant number are expanding their businesses by purchasing cloth, sewing it into new fashion garments and offering these for sale outside the kiosk or to nearby shops. The customers for these articles are often tourists or other Ghanaians but the main issue is that they are anonymous buyers with whom the seamstress may have no personal contact or rapport. This constitutes a new form of relationship developing outside the confines of the social context of customer workshop relationships and it contrasts strikingly with sewing Kaba and Slit which is always a personal commission between the seamstress and her client. As I discovered in Abodom, Kaba and Slit is the dress of tradition and of lineage and this was still the case in both Cape Coast and Accra and as such is not suited to the anonymity of the alternative 'for sale' market; I found no attempts at production of



Kaba and Slit for the 'for sale' market, however I was told of a small second-hand market in Kaba and Slit in Accra.

In Ghana the dictum 'time is money' might be altered to 'skill is money'. A skill can be the guarded secret of the master to be paid for with money and to be acquired over time. Acquiring skill through the apprenticeship system is also to pass through a rite of passage into adulthood, as through their training apprentices receive moral education (see Chapter Four) and a capacity to internalise the values of independent mastercraftship status which becomes a future ambition. This culture of apprenticeship and mastercraftship is the basis for the main labour supply in the dressmaking and tailoring industry in Abodom, Cape Coast and Accra.

The abundant supply of apprenticeship labour and the practice of paying for apprenticeship training acts to keep the cost of sewing Kaba and Slit and other garments artificially low. Low production costs give the seamstress and tailor the only indigenous advantage in their competition with the increasing supply of second hand and new imported 'for sale' goods which are entering the country in the newly liberalised market. In the case of the second hand market, low labour costs are in fact competing with transportation costs which the importers of second-hand goods bear.

In the global search for the lowest labour cost the Ghanaian sewing workshops will rank high because of the apprenticeship system, but the level of skill and quality of the finished garment will not meet the expectation of the global market. There is an acknowledgement at national level of the need to improve the skills of artisans and helping small

businesses has become the focus of many NGO organisations. National newspapers frequently report on the assistance government is offering and the nature of seminars held to assist this sector. Exporting and record keeping are two of the main foci of seminars but my research shows that those who attend and gain a knowledge of record keeping have not used this skill to monitor their businesses. One of the main reasons is that their workshops are far too complex for the accounting techniques of western origin. The seamstresses and tailors customers negotiate prices on an individual level and often renegotiate at a later date when they come to order another garment without having paid for the previous one. The labour costs that are also a feature of the western accounting methods being taught will, at least for the majority of seamstresses and tailors in Abodom, Cape Coast and Accra, be redundant.

The most striking distinction between Cape Coast, Accra and Abodom working environments is the existence in the former two of large 'clusters' of interrelated businesses servicing the needs of dressmakers and tailors. But within these hubs of business activity and technological change village working practice is still to be found. Many village seamstresses and tailors have migrated to towns and cities and brought their working methods and technology with them. It is not unusual to find in the centre of the city a seamstress or tailor working from a ramshackle kiosk without making use of electricity for sewing or ironing. Often the newer machines of the seemingly more advanced workshops belie the continued reliance on traditional apprenticeship ideology which inhibits the formation of a western type employment market. The search for skill rather than the search for employment is a consequence of the ungrounded social nature of money and the risk of devaluation as compared to a traditional

skill. But the further expansion of traditional apprenticeship and the minimum semi-professional standards learnt by graduates will increase the population of artisans who can only service the needs of indigenous customers whose clothing requirements may in the future be supplied, due to economic necessity, by various imported clothing.

This chapter and the preceding one have given an overview of the position of dressmakers and tailors within the sub-sector of related businesses and within the varied village, town and city environments. I have tried to show that they are constrained from further development by both factors in their own culture and in the external environment. The question that has always been begging, and still remains, is why, in such an economically restrained market place, does such a massive sector of tailors and dressmakers and a whole sub-sector servicing them continue to exist and increase in number? The boom in the popularity of Kaba and Slit is one explanatory factor, as is the economics which makes dressmaking and tailoring a fairly reliable income earner when supplemented by other activities. The existence of new emerging markets has also been documented as a new opportunity for seamstresses and tailors. But 'economics', 'culture' and 'fashion' are surface indicators which do not answer fully the questions of 'why so many dressmakers and tailors' and 'why are they so seemingly resistant to the importation of western fashion and dress standards.' To answer these questions more fully I believe one must take the staple trade supporting dressmakers, the commission of making Kaba and Slit, and deconstruct both the cloth from which it is made and the techniques used in its construction; this is attempted in the following three chapters.

Appendix 1  
Data set used in fig 2-13

Year	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	Total
Jan	7	7	4	5	11	9	4	6	9	62
Feb	4	9	2	8	12	8	3	10	6	62
March	13	8	3	9	6	7	10	12	14	82
April	10	6	6	5	7	4	3	11	3	55
May	6	7	7	3	4	10	4	12	6	59
June	8	7	4	3	4	7	9	4	6	52
July	7	6	6	8	9	3	6	9	11	65
Aug	10	6	2	2	10	5	8	8	12	63
Sep	9	4	7	13	8	5	10	14	8	78
Oct	11	4	9	8	6	8	4	10	8	68
Nov	11	5	3	8	9	5	13	12	11	77
Dec	9	6	10	12	11	6	15	11	11	91

## Appendix II Technology in Cape Coast

## Technology in the seamstress's workshop - Cape Coast

Table 1

seamstress	establishment of workshop	workshop location	hand/treadle machine	electric sewing machine functioning	other machines functioning
case 1	First in Accra 1976/86 & returned to Cape Coast (home town) 1986	Kotokuraba area	1	1 multi purpose	1 overlock
case 2	1991	Kotokuraba area	1 (hand)	1 multi purpose	
case 3	1990	'Ola' estate - room in home	1 (hand)	1 multi purpose	1 overlock
case 4	1975	opposite Kotokuraba	2 (hand)	2 multi purpose	1 button
case 5	1993	Kotokuraba area	1 (hand)	1 multi purpose	1 overlock
case 6	1984	Kotokuraba area	1 (hand)	1 multi purpose	1 overlock 1 embroidery
case 7	1982	Kotokuraba area		3 multi purpose 1 industrial	2 overlock 1 button
case 8	1993	Kotokuraba area	1 hand		1 overlock
case 9	1991 returned to Cape Coast from Liberia because of civil war - had a well established workshop in Liberia	Kotokuraba area	1 hand	2 multi purpose (broken)	1 overlock
case 10	1993	Kotokuraba area	1 hand	1 multi purpose	1 overlock
case 11	1992	Kotokuraba area		1 multi purpose	1 overlock
case 12	1993	Kotokuraba area	1 hand	1 multi purpose	
case 13	1993	Kotokuraba area		1 multi purpose	
case 14	1991	'Ola' estate - room in home	1 hand	2 multi purpose (broken)	1 overlock (broken)
case 15	many years	Kotokuraba area		3 multi purpose (broken)	1 overlock 1 embroidery
case 16	1982	'Ola' Estate - home veranda	1 hand	1 multi purpose	1 overlock (broken)
case 17	1984	Kotokuraba area	1 hand	1 multi purpose 1 industrial	1 overlock 1 embroidery

Technology in the Tailor's workshop  
Table 2

tailors	establishment of workshop*	workshop location	hand/treadle machine	electric sewing machine functioning	other machines functioning
case 1	tailor & embroidery specialist first in Cape Coast	Kotokuraba Islamic area	2 treadle		1 embroidery
case 2	long time - first kiosk destroyed by soldiers of Acheampong military government 1975	Kotokuraba Islamic area	1 treadle		
case 3	long time established previously in Nigeria came back in 1983 expulsion	Kotokuraba Islamic area	1 treadle		
case 4	established by father 1960 son took over 1989	Kotokuraba Islamic area			specialist 3 embroidery
case 5	from 1982 in previous workshop became too small - moved here one month ago	Kotokuraba area		4 industrial	1 embroidery 1 button
case 6	1990	Kotokuraba area		motored treadle	1 overlock
case 7	1970	Kotokuraba area	2 treadle	1 motored treadle (not working- has stopped spending money on repairs and uses machine with foot pedal)	
case 8	1988	Kotokuraba area		2 industrial	1 overlock
case 9	1964	Kotokuraba area		2 motor treadle	
case 10	1984	Kotokuraba area	1 treadle	2 treadle motor	1 overlock
case 11	began in 1962 but in 1983 "all went down" worked for municipal and later reopened workshop	Kotokuraba area		1 motor treadle (but uses pedal as motor broken since 1993)	
case 12	* took over workshop from uncle in 1992	Kotokuraba area	4 treadle		
case 13	1980	Kotokuraba area		3 motor treadle (two broken and pedals in use)	
case 14	1980	Kotokuraba area	1 treadle	1 motor treadle	
case 15	1954	Kotokuraba area	2 treadle	2 motor treadle	
case 16	1981	Kotokuraba area		1 motor treadle	

Appendix III  
Employment, apprenticeship, education and  
alternative markets for seamstresses in Cape Coast

Table 1

Seamstress	No. apprentices	No. employees	Education	Production for markets other than 'cloth to sew'
case 1	18	none	form 5 secondary plus apprenticeship	sew to order - occasionally buys cloth to make baby clothes and nightdresses for sale outside workshop- contract work uniforms for commercial school
case 2	0	none	0 levels plus 2 years apprenticeship	sew to order only
case 3	2	none	vocational	sew to order - makes nightdresses to be sold in a local supermarket on sale or return
case 4	50 this seamstress rents a house to accommodate some of her apprentices who are mostly from villages	none	vocational school plus 2 year apprenticeship	sew to order only
case 5	3	none	vocational plus 2 year apprenticeship	sew to order and has purchased cloth to make women's embroidered dresses for sale outside workshop.
case 6	3	one occasionally	vocational only	sew to order - shirt, caftans for tourist market and occasionally contract uniforms
case 7	25	4 full time with fixed monthly wage	diploma in clothing production London College of Fashion	sew to order - wide range of articles for home and tourist market i.e. oven gloves, table cloths, ties, shirts and dresses.
case 8	5	none	vocational plus 3 years apprenticeship	sew to order and will soon start producing articles for sale
case	8	none	vocational plus apprenticeship	sew to order - wedding dresses
case	none	employs workers when has contract	A levels plus 2 year apprenticeship	sew to order - contracts for school uniforms
case 11	16	none	vocational plus two year apprenticeship	sew to order
case 12	3	none	form 4 secondary plus apprenticeship	sew to order
case 13	2	none	vocational plus one year apprenticeship	sew to order
case 14	2 (sewing) 3 (batik)	none	vocational plus apprenticeship	sew to order- shirts for tourist market - produces batik for sale and for own use
case 15	20	1 male operating embroidery machine	apprenticeship in Germany with private seamstress	sew to order - shirts, caftans, table cloths for sale - first export order of garments to US
case 16	3	none	secondary plus apprenticeship	sew to order
case 17	3	none	o level plus apprenticeship	sew to order - sells shirts, bags and cloth

Employment, apprenticeship, education and  
alternative markets for tailors in Cape Coast  
Table 2

Tailors	No. apprentices	No. employees	Education	Production for markets other than 'cloth to sew'
case 1	3	none	secondary plus 5 year apprenticeship	sew to order Embroidery specialist who never makes anything to sell because thread is so expensive. If he has money available he will buy thread to keep in stock.
case 2	1	none	Arabic school plus 7 year apprenticeship	sew to order
case 3	1	none	secondary, Arabic school plus 4 year apprenticeship	sew to order
case 4	works with brother	none	secondary plus apprenticeship with father	sew to order Embroidery specialist
case 5	8	2 workers paid a fixed wage per month in instalments every two weeks	secondary plus apprenticeship and was employed in Nigeria as a tailor for 3 years	sew to order - for local and export to USA & Germany (customers bring their own material in bulk for him to sew to their specifications - they take the finished garments overseas to sell). Sometimes has school uniform contracts
case 6	6	none	secondary plus 4 year apprenticeship	sew to order
case 7	1	none	elementary plus 3 year apprenticeship	sew to order and used to buy shirt material to sell
case 8	7	2 paid fixed amount once a month	secondary plus 3 year apprenticeship	sew to order - has supplementary occupation trading with another store
case 9	son working with father	none	elementary plus 3 year apprenticeship	sew to order and some work making church gown orders
case 10	0	none	elementary plus apprenticeship with father	sew to order - buys some cloth to make shirts for sale - makes school uniforms for sale
case 11	son working with father	none	secondary plus apprenticeship	sew to order
case 12	-	-	-	-
case 13	2	none	secondary plus 2 years apprenticeship	sew to order
case 14	2	none	secondary plus 5 year apprenticeship	sew to order
case 15	3	none	secondary plus apprenticeship	sew to order
case 16	4	none	secondary plus 3 year apprenticeship	sew to order



## Appendix IV

Under Nkrumah, Ghana had a mixed economy of regulation and free market. The failure of the system to deliver an adequate supply of imported commodities was blamed on the excesses of marketeers. A Commission of Enquiry into Trade Malpractice (Enquiry 1965), carried out on Nkrumah's instruction the year before the coup which removed him from power, is evidence of the aversion to speculative trade in Ghana and crises in imports, wholesaling and distribution. The report opens by refusing to accept that shortages in imports were due to shortages in foreign currency and import licenses. The fault lay with hoarders, middlemen and monopoly traders who manipulated the regulated pricing and distribution system. Punishments were severe; for 'conditional sales' (see example below) a fine not below one hundred Ghanaian pounds was imposed for the first offence and imprisonment for subsequent offences.

"the customer who cannot buy a bottle of cold beer unless he also purchases a plateful of meat, the customer who cannot obtain a piece of wax print unless she also buys a dozen pairs of children's shorts, are both victims of injustice, tyranny, and exploitation."  
(ibid. p.33)

## Appendix V

Daily Graphic February 16, 1994

**\$2.7m Export order for two firms***By Siisi Quainoo*

**TWO companies in the United States have placed orders for the supply of handicrafts and garments worth \$2.7 million, about \$2.4 billion from some local small scale industrialists in the country.**

The companies are J. C. Penny and Pier One.

The placement of the orders resulted from the successful financing of initial orders worth \$154,000 (€146 million) by the Export Finance Company in the latter part of last year.

Disclosing this to the *Graphic* in an interview in Accra, Ms Rose Margaret Nunoo, Public Relations Officer of the Export Finance Company, said the financing of the second order for the supply of garment worth \$617,000 to J. C. Penny is

underway.

She said J. C. Penny is negotiating with some local industrialists for the supply of additional garments worth \$2 million.

Ms Nunoo said since it is the first time local industrialists are dealing with these two leading companies, everything is being done by the Export Finance Company to provide funds to support the orders.

On handicrafts, Ms Nunoo said the initial order of \$38,000 financed by the Export Finance Company has brought fresh orders totalling more than \$700,000.

She hinted that after the completion of the last shipment of the handicraft, this month, officials of Pier One will arrive in the country to place more orders.

The public relations officer said since products from Ghana are now beginning to break

*Contd. on Ps. 8/9*

**\$2.7m Export order for two firms**

*Contd. from P.1*

new grounds in the US, the Export Finance Company as its policy will help them to make a headway.

She urged the local industrialists to improve

upon their production in order to have more orders from especially the Western countries whose markets are very competitive.

Some of the products are kente bags, beads, jewellery, African gar-

ments, wood carvings, straw basket, brass moulding and kente products among others.

Ms Nunoo said the orders have generated employment for about 900 people.

## Chapter Six

Textiles made in Ghana and imported to Ghana



### An official visit

I made a number of official visits to the Department of Trade and Industry and Ghanaian textile manufacturers for the purpose of analysing the wider economic context and sub-sectors in which small scale dressmakers and tailors operate. I had visited the Ghanaian High Commission in London before departing to Ghana and had received a formal letter of introduction to the Department of Trade and Industry. On arriving in Ghana I wrote to the department and received a reply and an appointment arranged for a date one week earlier than the post mark on the envelope! The meeting did eventually take place and I was offered the opportunity of accompanying an official visiting major textile companies in order to collect statistics. This was an ideal opportunity which I accepted.

Two days were planned for visits and both were rather disorganised. The first visit took place in mid-December. Because of the uncertainties of transport I travelled from Abodom on the first Accra bus setting off at five thirty in the morning to be at the Department for nine o'clock. The official I was meeting was late and arrived very frustrated to tell me apologetically that the merger of the two departments, that of Trade and of Industry into the Department of Trade and Industry had not gone well. At first I could not grasp the relevance of this problem to my visit until the resulting conflicts over ownership and user rights of transport vehicles became clear. The reason for her late arrival was that she had been arguing with former employees of the now merged Department of Industry for the use of a vehicle to take us on our visit. She had managed

to win the argument but the car was left for us with no petrol or funds to obtain any. I obliged with petrol money as this was a small price to pay for such a potentially useful visit and we were able to set off. We talked very little in the spacious air conditioned landrover driven by a rather acrimonious employee and my host showed signs of not wanting to be disturbed as she said prayers over her rosary; she found travelling dangerous and prayer reassured her.

At the first factory, one of the most successful in terms of exports, we were received coolly and with some suspicion. To the managing director the Department's official demanded to know why the company had not prepared the statistics requested some time ago. This seemed to be a challenge the director was happy to take up. He complained that the Department did nothing for the industry but ask for endless statistics to be entered on meaningless and confusing forms. In addition he said that many of the statistics asked for were impossible to compute at the time when they were demanded by the department - evidence he thought that the department knew little about business practice.

The Department's official took this criticism lightly as if she had heard it many times before and suggested the compromise that a new day be set for the collection of data. With this the atmosphere became lighter and the subject of 'Christmas boxes' was introduced in a joking fashion (this usually consisted of a number of wax printed cloths for her and members of her Department). Leaving this suggestion in the air, a diversion seemed appropriate and the Department's official chose this moment to introduce me to the company director. I hoped I would not be associated with this seemingly childish request for a Christmas box and my questions on the history and current performance of textile manufacturing would be

answered. These questions were indeed answered and just as interestingly for my research the director took every further opportunity to complain to the Department's official about the obstructive and bureaucratic practices of her Department and that of the Duty Drawback scheme. This was first hand specific evidence of the findings recently published on Ghana's export manufacturing development<sup>1</sup>. Another attack on the Department was that because imported materials for the textile manufacturing process retained high import taxes, while those for imported finished cloth had been lowered, it was now cheaper to import cloth into Ghana rather than manufacture it here. This company director did not expect a return to the times of government protection for import substituting industry but he did expect that tax incentives would not favour imports and be loaded against his products. With an expression of full comprehension the official assured him that he would not be disappointed with the forthcoming budget as his concerns would be met in full.

Similar complaints were made from those in charge of other textile companies we visited on that day. From each there was also a conservative response to the repeated enquiry of the Christmas box. Towards the end of the afternoon it was clear that the decline in manufacturing output and under capacity in Ghana's textile industries was to be confirmed in the reduced size of that year's Christmas box.

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<sup>1</sup> The report noted that to use this scheme firms had to

"submit application based on detailed, auditable evidence that duty was actually paid, inputs were actually used, and exports actually took place. The system is complicated because of the paperwork and the signatures required. Moreover, applications take several months to process, so the value of the drawback is eroded by inflation, financial charges, and administrative costs." (Jebuni and others 1996 p.16-17)

## Introduction

Cloth and many other commodities have been imported into Ghana since the 16th century. The Portuguese, Dutch, Swiss, German and British have all been involved; first from ships anchored off-shore at the coastal towns of Winneba, Saltpond, Elmina and Cape Coast and today through the deep water ports at Tema and Sekondi-Takoradi. In the case of Britain, its colonial and mercantile policies of ensuring favourable import conditions and discouraging indigenous industry (also the British approach to trade in India<sup>1</sup>), created monopoly markets for Manchester textiles<sup>2</sup>. Although British mercantilism has long since been overtaken by the philosophy of 'fair and free trade', there may be some evidence in the textiles sector to argue that mercantilism has moved from the national to the international arena. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) may be described as facilitating an emerging mercantile trade. As an organisation it has been accused of following US demands to open up markets in developing countries which could be to the detriment of domestic producers (Watkins 1992). To conform to GATT rules and adhere to Structural Adjustment policies, Ghana has had to lower its import duties

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<sup>1</sup> Bean (1989) states that the idea of *swadeshi* (the promotion of indigenous products) in India began about 1896, and within this movement "English cloth had become the most potent symbol of English political domination and economic exploitation" *ibid* p.363. Bean also cites an analysis by the Indian nationalist Naoroji Dadabhai (1887) on how British imports (under favourable import tariffs) destroyed the market for indigenous cotton products in India (*ibid*. p.362-363).

<sup>2</sup> A. Brunnschweiler is the sole remaining printer in Britain and is still interested in the Ghanaian market. They, along with their acknowledged competitors, the Dutch Vlisco Company (which belonged in 1994 to the multinational company Gamma Holdings), dominate the high quality market. Distribution in West African markets like Ghana, Ivory Coast, Benin and Nigeria is undertaken by United African Company, a subsidiary of Unilever (Company records for 1991 show Unilever having a 30% share in Gamma Holdings - the two companies work very closely).

and according to Ghana's Trade Commissioner in London<sup>1</sup> this is a source of conflict between local producers and the government. Ghana's lower import tariffs are allowing the import of greater quantities of cloth from traditional sources such as England, Holland, Nigeria, Ivory Coast but now also imitation batiks from China as well as ship loads of second-hand clothes from 46 different countries with the Netherlands being the larger exporter (see appendix I).

The small scale dressmakers and tailors operate in the shadow of this regulated international structure. The nearest material linkage in their working environment to industrial life is their acquaintance with imported and Ghanaian cloth. They work from small kiosks or workshops; all of them have sewn Ghana made cloth for their customers but few have any knowledge of the whereabouts or nature of the factories making it. For most their focus is on the customer's cloth and their own commission to create a prescribed cultural article from it. There is no tangible linkage between this massive mostly informal sector of dressmakers and tailors and the larger industrial base of Ghana's textile producers and cotton farmers in the north.

I encountered no public pride or loyalty to 'Ghana made' cloth or other products. Often when I was sitting alongside a dressmaker she would comment on the fine quality of imported cloths. When I asked about Ghana made cloth she would say she preferred Dutch; because of the cultural nature of cloth no cloth is ever disparaged. But as a recent newspaper article put it "Our women patronise some of the goods for reasons of prestige, as some of them associate certain textile products

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<sup>1</sup> Interview of 5th February 1993



with a certain class." (Editorial 1994 [b]). It adds that imported Dutch cloth "is incontestably high quality textile print, but we should pride ourselves in our own goods otherwise we would only be marketing other people's products" (ibid.).

Such advice for the production and consumption of 'Ghana made' textiles has been made since independence when Nkrumah started the first national textile factories under import substitution policies. Northern<sup>1</sup> and southern types of cloth as national costume were a very visible part of the development strategy; a reliance on imported cloth would have been tantamount to allowing neo-colonial trade a role in determining Ghana's new independent identity.

Despite such political correctness surrounding cloth, the national textiles industry in Ghana has never been able to produce a cloth which Ghanaians perceive to meet the quality of the Dutch and have continued to prefer to buy imported cloth. English cloth and Ivory Coast cloth are also perceived to be of higher quality than Ghana products. A new cloth has recently entered the market from China; it is an imitation wax print but much cheaper than any other cloth on the market. Though recognised as inferior it is being bought instead of Ghanaian made cloth for non-traditional type clothes such as simple dresses and shirts. It may allow many people the opportunity of having new clothes made up rather than purchasing second hand and this is good news for seamstresses and tailors who have been given China cloth by their customers. But it is bad

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<sup>1</sup> The dress of northern muslim women is mostly distinguished from that of the south by the way head scarves cover the head and shoulders. The northern male smock made of strips of woven cotton dyed in rich indigo shades (description in Goody 1982) has also been adopted by men in the south as high status dress.

news for Ghanaian textile manufacturers who have to reduce their prices to maintain their sales and have little or no export market to fall back on.

Arguments to understand the persistent undermining of 'Ghana made' textiles must go further than elitism in Ghanaian dress sense. Serious economic distortions in the market and poorly planned development strategies have also contributed to present problems. The new form of industrialisation the government is emphasising, described as "an outward-oriented development strategy" (Jebuni and others 1992 p.6), may reverse the stagnation in Ghanaian textile manufacturing. It is an export driven industrial plan not only for Ghana's principal traditional exports, cocoa, minerals and timber, but for 'non-traditional exports'<sup>1</sup> which include textiles and garments. But Ghana's potential for a textiles export market faces major problems, not least the fact that many other textile exporting countries with higher technological bases have targeted Ghana because of its new liberal import tariffs<sup>2</sup>. This means Ghana is pursuing an outward orientation when its own markets are opening up and flooding with cheap textiles and second hand clothes.

The development of trade in cloth from colonial trade through import substitution to the present day outward orientation economics is discussed in this chapter under the following section headings:

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<sup>1</sup> "Ghana's non-traditional exports are classified under three product areas: Agriculture, Manufactures, and Handicrafts. Under Agriculture, we have horticulturals, marine products, foodstuffs, and tree crops like rubber, cola and palm nuts. Manufactures include textile and garment goods, aluminium products, beer and alcoholics, processed food, furniture, and others. Traditional textiles, jewellery, pottery and ceramics, ratan products and basketry, etc. come under Handicrafts" (Ghana Export Promotion Council 1991 p.18).

<sup>2</sup> When interviewed in July 1993 Brunnschweiler had a shipment of cloth in transit to Ghana. They state explicitly that they were now targeting Ghana in order to take advantage of the new liberalised import tariffs.

Cloth of colonial import

Marks of origin and quality

The politics of 'Made in Ghana'

Linkages between Ghanaian cotton and Ghana's textiles industry

Boundaries of second-hand and new clothes

### Cloth of colonial import

Along with Kente<sup>1</sup> and Adinkra cloth, block printed wax cotton cloth (also called batik) is part of national costume and identity in Ghana (plate 1 shows Kente worn next to printed cloth). This being the case one would expect to find a clear history of indigenous batik printing techniques in Ghana but one does not. Instead it becomes apparent that the appearance and design of the cloth is based on Javanese batik.<sup>2</sup> Batik printing is not believed to be indigenous to West Africa<sup>3</sup> and there is also no clear dating of the introduction of batik prints into Ghana. It is thought that Dutch traders on the Gold coast, in the middle part of the last century, recruited West African soldiers to serve the Dutch war in South East Asia against the Javanese. On their return to the Gold Coast they

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<sup>1</sup> Authentic Kente cloth has designs and colour woven into the fabric and is produced in thin strips which are sewn together to make yardage. It is used for ceremonial occasions such as the installation or the funeral of a chief. A non-traditional kente of synthetic and cotton fibres is manufactured on wide looms by Spintex Ltd. in Tema but this is not regarded as appropriate for ceremonial purposes. It has a large American export market and the company won the African exporter of the year in 1991. (interview at Spintex, Tema Nov. 1994)

<sup>2</sup> The Gallery, Brighton Polytechnic. 'Yoruba Printed Cotton and the European Connection.' 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Another source of historical information on cloth printing in the Ashanti Region is Picton and Mack 1979. They note that today "the designs are usually found on imported cloths".

brought Dutch <sup>1</sup>batik prints which were to be become greatly sought after up to the present day<sup>2</sup>.

plate 1  
Stamp showing  
Ghanaian  
costumes-  
received in  
Hull December  
1992



With the dating of Batik printing to the 6th century Chinese Court and the spread of techniques through Asia, Java and to Europe in the 1700s via English and Dutch spice traders the introduction of batik can be linked to early trading on the West African Coast. The East Indian trading companies imported this type of cloth to Manchester, and textile works there began to copy the cloth and eventually achieve comparable quality<sup>3</sup>. Manchester textiles were already being traded in Ghana in the mid 1800s and it is suggested that the first British batik prints were there in 1840/1850 (Cassara). However even earlier accounts from the early 16th century exist.

One of the earliest accounts of local dress in imported printed cloth in the coastal regions of Ghana comes from John de Barros, a commander of the Portuguese castle, St. George, at Elmina from 1522 to 1525. He described local male dress around Elmina at that time as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> The Dutch company Vlisco is today the world-wide market leader in batik printing and continues to design for the African market which it dominates (T S Sjoerdsma . 1991).

<sup>2</sup> 'European Involvement in Batik Printing', document held in Whitworth Art Gallery (date and author unknown).

<sup>3</sup> Information from exhibition of West African textiles, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, June 1993.

"Their dress was their own flesh, anointed and very shining, which made their skins still blacker, a custom which they affected as an elegancy. Their privy parts only were covered with skins of monkeys or woven palm leaves - the chiefs' with patterned cloth, which they had from our ships." (sic)

Pieter de Marees, a Dutch trader and navigator on the Gold Coast 1600-1, described the acquired sophistication of indigenous traders in the cloth and goods of Dutch ships. He noted how the local population were often deceived by European traders who delivered rotten cloth and broken goods in exchange for the gold they traded, but that later traders

"attained such skill in our wares, that they are almost able to surpass us therein. For, first, when they buy any linnen cloth, they looke if it be not too slight and thin, and whether it be white and broad; for they are very curious to buy white and broad linnen, and respect not the strength so much as the breadth of the linnen: for they use to hang it about their bodies, specially the women, which desire to have it hang downe from underneath their breasts to their knees." (Wolfson 1958 p54 sic).

The trade wars between the Portuguese, Dutch and English on the Gold Coast are well documented, with the British finally taking control in 1850 when the Dutch left after selling their possessions to them. The Dutch left two enduring marks; the famous Christiansborg Castle (the seat of government in Ghana today) and their cloth. The British have always had to compete with this quality textile. By the mid 18th century cheaper imported cotton from the colonies allowed them to begin manufacturing cloth for the African market but their cloth has remained second best to the Dutch. After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 new products were sought for legitimate trade and increases in exports of cloth to Ghana suited this policy.

### Marks of origin and quality

Foreign made imported cloth has thus been incorporated into indigenous dress codes and authenticated<sup>1</sup> through finding associations between designs on cloth and Ghanaian natural and social contexts (see Chapter Seven) and by conferring relationships between certain cloth textures and qualities and indigenous status differentiations. To this end Ghanaians are very knowledgeable about the country of origin. Cloth is not presented for sale with packaging and labels but the origins of the cloth are known from the manufacturing company's trade mark which is a form of words printed on the edge of the cloth - the seamstress will never hem this edge. The marks indicate the authenticity of the cloth - for Dutch wax the mark reads 'Veritable Wax Hollandais' and for English wax 'Guaranteed English Wax' (plates 2 & 3 respectively). For the Ghanaian these edge printings are much more than trade marks; they are taken to be a status badge and a great pride is taken when wearing the cloth to ostentatiously display them.



plate 2

<sup>1</sup> Similar cultural authentication processes using imported textiles have been observed in Nigerian kalabari dress (Daly 1984; Erekosima 1979 cited in Michelman and Erekosima 1992).





plate 3

The majority of Ghanaians feel no animosity about the colonial legacy of the cloth trade and buy Dutch and other imported cloths because they believe they are superior quality - I encountered no national pride or feelings of loyalty in owning a 'Ghana made' cloth. A good quality cloth is expected to last a lifetime and this consideration comes before any other. Imported cloth from Holland offers the firmest guarantee of this as the colours remain bright and do not fade in the sun or with washing. Imported English and Ivory Coast wax are also highly regarded but a prejudice born from past experience of disappointment still exists against 'Ghana made' cloth.

The first cloth I brought was a 'Ghana made' cloth, a 'Guaranteed African Print'. These words were repeated along the edge of the cloth which was printed in Ghana by Tema Textiles LTD (TTL).<sup>1</sup> Despite the label's guarantee of 'super quality' (plate 4) most women simply recognise these cloths as inferior. My TTL cloth in 1994 cost 15,500 cedis (about £16) for a twelve yard piece at wholesale prices<sup>2</sup>. On showing it to those I lived

<sup>1</sup> Who merged in 1994 with the Ghana Textiles Manufacturing Company.

<sup>2</sup> I quote wholesale prices from the UAC Textile wholesaler Agona in Swedru, as prices quoted to me by market cloth sellers would usually be inflated because I was a foreigner. Wholesale cloth prices are fixed and on display, official receipts are

with they were pleased I had chosen a 'proper' cloth, one that had a name 'cowpat' but wondered that a 'white woman' would feel happy in a low cost and quality cloth such as it was to them.

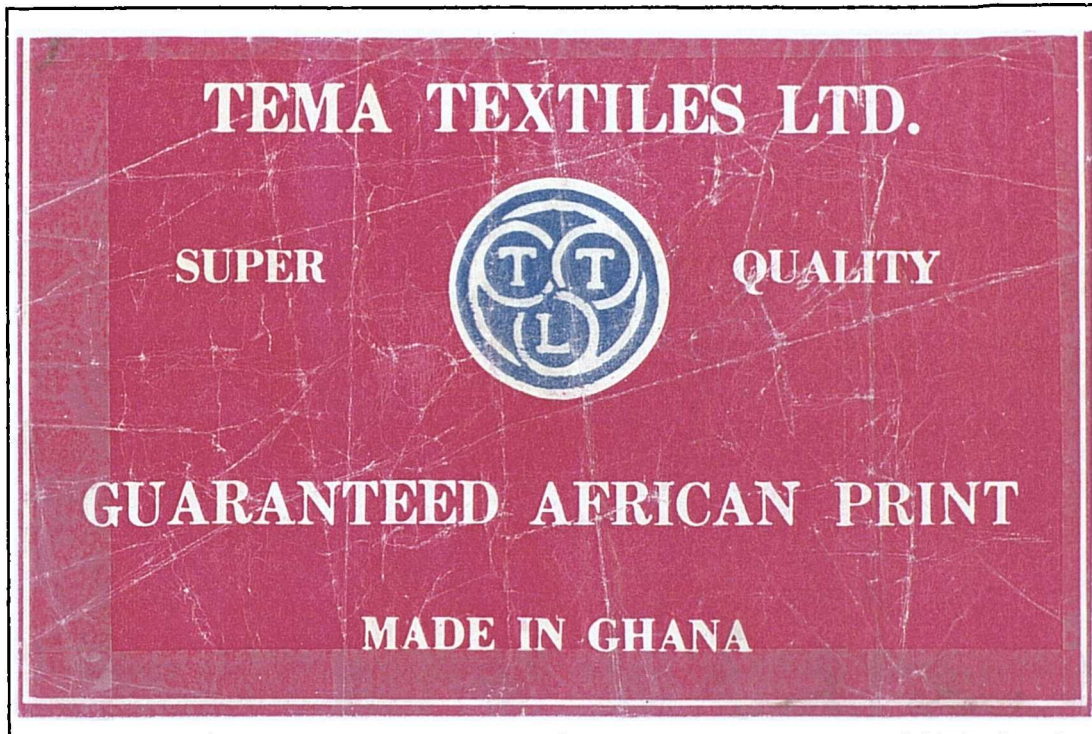


plate 4

Cloths from 'Akosombo Textiles Limited' in Ghana, commonly referred to as 'ATL', have a better reputation and a twelve yard piece in the same year was 20,000 cedis. A third 'Ghana made' cloth, commonly referred to as GTP, the abbreviation for 'Ghana Textile Printers' has a still better reputation and in 1994 this was the most prestigious 'Ghana made' cloth costing 22,000 cedis at wholesale.

Imported Dutch wax cloth is in a different category, costing at wholesale 60,000 cedis a 12 yard piece. English wax cloth was not available in

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issued for the sale. Ordinarily the public would not be allowed to purchase in such places which are for bulk sales to market women.



Swedru at the time but I found prices in the Accra retail cloth market to be between 30 and 33,000 cedis for 6 yards.

As expensive as these imported cloths are<sup>1</sup> they have been in demand since the colonial era. The Dutch and English have maintained their markets despite sustained efforts by Ghanaian governments to develop national textile manufacturing and promote 'Ghana made' cloth of Ghana produced cotton.

### The politics of 'made in Ghana'

Economic policies currently pursued by Ghana under the structural adjustment programme (SAP) are thought to be corrective. The focus of correction is the price mechanism and market distortions. In the textiles industry government advice is to place more emphasis on market analysis. A recent statement by the Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Welfare said that "Over the years, the industry has focused on product orientation instead of market analysis,... the effect of this has made some textile industries incapable of producing more than the demand and because of their uncompetitiveness cannot export their products" (Editorial 1994 [c]).

National textile companies in the past had little incentive to analyse the market commercially because successive governments protected national textile markets with high sales taxes and import tariffs, often of 100%. Despite having a captive market through these measures, national textiles factories have not flourished. During the economic decline between 1957-83 the industry suffered stagnation and lack of investment. By the 1970s

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<sup>1</sup> In 1993 the official daily minimum wage was set at 790 cedis (approximately 80p),but many earn below this.

high inflation and shortages of foreign exchange restricted the import of essential manufacturing materials and spare parts. This meant that there were often long periods of under capacity in production and under-supply of cloth to the market. At the same time shortages of foreign exchange prevented imports of cloth in sufficient quantities to meet demand. The high import tariffs applying to imported cloth discouraged western producers from exporting directly into Ghana, and smuggling through neighbouring countries such as Togo became widespread. This led to other illicit trading such as obtaining false import licences and hoarding cloth until exorbitant prices could be demanded. Imported cloth in such high demand began to be surrounded with a scarcity value. As contrasted to the highly inflated and devaluing national currency cloth became a more reliable investment.

Cloth shortages and general chaotic economic conditions continued into the early 1980s. The first 1979 Rawlings coup targeted traders, especially Lebanese, Syrian and Indian traders settled in Ghana for some time, as economic criminals and accused them of hoarding and making exorbitant profits. Cloth was a commodity at the centre of this conflict and the experiences and fear of one Cape Coast trader were still fresh in his memory as he recalled the day in 1979 when an air force jeep arrived outside his shop. In four loads the soldiers took away his entire stock of cloth, shoes and other items without any reimbursement. His Muslim brothers helped him start his business again but after the second military coup of 1981 the soldiers using similar force came again and removed all his stock. The experience not only affected his business but many others in towns and cities. In Accra the Makola Market was one of many blasted to the ground in the attempts by the military government to eradicate

corruption and alleged commercial malpractices of those traders who were believed responsible for economic breakdown.

With SAP and the improved supply of essential imports for the textile manufacturing industry<sup>1</sup> the latter half of the 1980s shows that a modest increase in production was achieved (Table 1) - Table 2 confirms an increase in output from several Ghanaian textiles factories into the early 1990s.

Table 1  
Index of manufacturing production for textile & leather goods<sup>2</sup>  
(Base year - 1977)

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Textile & leather goods	15.9	19.2	22.9	26.1	28.7

Source: Overseas Trade Board (the Department of Trade and Industry 1991 p.27)

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Textiles & leather goods	42.0	32.1	15.7	*10.6	15.9	19.2	13.9
All manufacturing	78.5	30.4	32.5	8.6	6.5	-	-

Source: Statistical Service, Accra, cited in Bank of Ghana Annual report 30th June 1996 p.22)

\*The low figures for 1983 are accounted for by political instability in Ghana; the PNDC consolidated its power in that year and Nigeria repatriated 1.2 million Ghanaians causing chaos. This coincided with a disastrous drought.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics on textiles manufacturing are difficult to interpret as they appear in official publications as an aggregate with leather goods, and unexplainable irregularities have appeared in their compilation.

<sup>2</sup> The consistency between Ghanaian and DTI figures points to them both being based on a common source but 1986 breaks this trend.

Table 2

## Textile production 1988 - 1992 (in yards)

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	Total
Akosombo Textiles	720,000	900,000	1,656,000	1,980,000	2,952,000	8,208,000
Tema Textiles Limited	414,000	450,000	756,000	846,000	1,116,000	3,582,000
Juapong Textiles Limited	989,000	1,117,000	933,800	1,265,000	1,380,000	5,684,800
Total	2,123,000	2,467,000	3,345,800	4,091,000	5,448,000	17,474,800

Table compiled from data supplied by Ghanaian Trade Commission, London (1992).

Today in the liberalising economic atmosphere under SAP there is no need to smuggle cloth (although it still goes on to avoid taxes), the markets are open and very well stocked with imported cloth and Ghanaian cloth. In fact the choice is vast in colours and prints and the high quality market is still dominated by Dutch and English imports (see Table 3). There is so much cloth on the market that a tendency towards glut and lowering of prices is apparent. Many cloth sellers I spoke to complained that now there is plenty of cloth to sell people don't have money to buy. Some said they were forced to sell at or below cost price because they needed money to repay debts and for daily expenses.

Table 3  
Imports of wax prints for 1991 (value in Ghanaian cedis)

Type of wax print	value in cedis	Countries of origin
Printed woven fabrics of cotton of less than or equal to 200 g/m <sup>2</sup>	771,727	Germany, Netherlands, UK.
Printed woven fabrics of cotton of more than 200 g/m <sup>2</sup>	22,040,900	Germany, Netherlands, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, UK., U.S.A
Printed woven cotton fabrics with less than 85% cotton & less than 200 g/m <sup>2</sup>	789,360	U.S.A
Printed woven cotton fabrics with equal to or greater than 85% cotton & less than 200 g/m <sup>2</sup>	94,322,604	Indonesia, Netherlands, Spain, UK, U.S.A.
Printed woven fabrics of cotton with equal to or greater than 85% cotton & equal to or greater than 200 g/m <sup>2</sup>	24,310,239	Australia, China, France, Gambia, Germany, Italy, Libya, Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, UK.
TOTAL	142,234,830	

Table compiled from data supplied by Ghanaian Trade Commission, London (1992).

The tendency to oversupply of cloth was confirmed at a visit to the Ghana Textile Manufacturing Company opened in 1961. The company had laid off 700 workers in September 1993 and was about to lay off an additional 200 because of falling sales and an anticipated merger with Tema Textiles LTD (TTL)<sup>1</sup> formed in 1969 which itself had 1,000 employees, reduced from 2,000.

Managers of some of Ghana's textile factories claimed it was impossible for them to lower their prices to compete with cheaper imports. The government, they complained, made Ghanaian cloth more expensive to

<sup>1</sup> The merger went ahead in 1994.

produce than imported finished cloth because of high import duties on essential raw materials such as grey baft<sup>1</sup>. In addition an import drawback scheme supposed to operate to allow repayment duty on imports for the manufacturing was, they complained, slow and bureaucratic as was the system of bonded warehousing. This analysis was confirmed by the Department of Trade and Industry and provision by amending tariffs was made in the following budget to at least give national textiles an even chance to compete with imports.

Amending the tax system to advantage or subsidise national textiles would be an anathema to SAP philosophy, but calls for protectionist type assistance to national textiles have been made through editorials in the Government controlled Daily Graphic newspaper. In February 1994 it was suggested that a way should be found of "checking the importation of large quantities of textile prints that are almost of the same quality as the locally manufactured ones, so as to sustain the local textile industries" (Editorial 1994 [b] p.9). Measures were taken to this effect in the 1994 budget and 'specific duty' was put on textiles and garments for which there are local substitutes<sup>2</sup>. By protecting textiles, the same article points out, cotton farmers who rely on them for a regular market will also benefit. Reluctance to leave the national textiles industry to compete on its own with imports is a sign of the Ghanaian government's recently reported faltering commitment to SAP policies (ODI 1996 p.4). However, textiles is not one of the eighteen key state enterprises the Ghanaian

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<sup>1</sup> Basic unprinted cotton material.

<sup>2</sup> Cigarettes, beer, Guinness, minerals and other alcoholic beverages, flour, insecticides, rubber sandals, iron rods and electrical and electronic equipment also attracted the 'specific duty'.

government is committed to retaining public control over<sup>1</sup> and it has divested its shares in Ghana Textile Printing and plans to do the same in Juapong Textiles, the company who supply GTP with cotton lint.

Divestiture of these two companies into private hands will rid government of a major coordination problem between the supply and demand for cotton to the textile sector, a problem of industrial linkage which has never been successfully developed. Cotton is well suited to agriculture in the north and could have supplied the factories in the south with cheap raw materials, lessening the import dependence of the industry. But cotton was not suitable to the politics of colonial trade and has only recently become a commodity for development under the influence of the politics of SAP.

### Linkages between Ghanaian cotton and Ghana's textiles industry

Cotton has now been identified as a priority crop by the World Bank Agricultural Services Rehabilitation Project and the price received by farmers has been increasing since 1989 (Sarris and Shams 1991). There are linkages between cotton farmers in the North and southern textile factories. This situation has taken more than two hundred years to establish; cotton growing was first undertaken as early as 1751 but was not encouraged by the British Board of Trade who instructed the Fante to stop cultivation of this and also their involvement in developing industry. This action was taken in order to protect their own trade and the following rationale was made:

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<sup>1</sup> The PNDC government in 1983 had majority holdings in 181 industries and minority interests in another 54 (Tangri 1991 p.524).

"The cultivation of agriculture and the promotion of industry among the Negroes is contrary to the established policy of this country, England; there is no saying where this might stop and that it might extend to tobacco, sugar, and every other commodity which we now take from our colonies in the New World and elsewhere, and thereby the Africans, who now support themselves by wars, would become planters and their slaves be employed in the cultivation of these articles in Africa, which they are employed to work in America.: (cited in Buah 1980 p.72-73).

Commercial cotton cultivation was introduced into the Northern Regions in about 1922 (Kay 1972 Document 25 p.207). It was successful but an absence of a northern rail link and good road transport meant difficulties in transportation to the south for export, thus hindering its expansion as both an export and domestic industrial crop.

The colonial administration developed a road transport and rail system to suit its own export trade (as documented in Chapter Three). There was over reliance on one single crop, cocoa. In 1943 the West Africa Commission, reviewing the work of the Department of Agriculture, began to realise this and talked of "the danger of the Gold Coast becoming a one-crop country" (Kay 1972 p. 231). Arthur Lewis's development plans of 1944, which were also unacceptable to the Colonial Office, argue that modernisation amounting to a revolution in agriculture must go hand in hand with industrialisation; " the agricultural revolution releases labour from the land ... the industrial revolution in turn provides the farmer with a remunerative market, and if on sufficiently large scale, with cheap commodities" (cited in Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p 27). Lewis's work is of more than historical interest; his emphasis on linkages between the promotion of agriculture and industry are being revisited by



contemporary development analysts; Frimpong-Ansah in his 1991 work concludes that his analysis supports Lewis's original ideas.

Arguments for the diversification of agriculture away from single crop dependency and towards securing national food security, and providing raw materials for industry, were on the political agenda of the National Liberation Council (NLC) in 1967 as it attempted to dismantle the unproductive state-dominated agricultural and industrial legacy of Nkrumah (Hutchful 1987 p.107). The Agricultural Committee of the NLC in 1966 reported that Nkrumah embarked on the establishment of some industries when provision had not been made for the production of raw materials to supply them. Textile mills were listed as the type of industry embarked on for political interests and "consequently, the supply of raw material was considered of secondary importance " (Hutchful 1987 p. 104).

These concerns were noted but little action followed and successive governments have continued to pursue short term policies, being unwilling to give up the "relative ease with which cocoa could be produced" (Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p.144).

In 1982 a serious dispute broke out in Ghana Textile Printing over the proposed sacking of 565 workers at the plant because of shortages of raw materials; the company relied heavily on imported cotton yarn (Yeebo 1991 p.209). In order to avoid the lay-offs the Workers Defence Committee<sup>1</sup> tried to negotiate with the company to redeploy workers into

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<sup>1</sup> Workers Defence Committees and the Peoples Defence Committees were set up by the PNDC after the 1981 coup. As grass roots democratic bodies their origins are in the June Four Movement's effort to create revolutionary committees in 1981 before Rawlings coup. (Yeebo, 1991 p.65)

the domestic production of cotton; as Yeebo argues, this would have "contributed immensely to the development of the agricultural base of the textiles industry" (Yeebo 1991 p.209). This recommendation was not acted on and the dispute resulted in a violent demonstration of force between workers and the police. The dispute was temporarily settled by a workers take-over and a period of direct worker control of the company despite its illegal status<sup>1</sup> .

With the implementation of SAP a more productive model of linkages between the cotton farmers in the North and textile mills in the South is being developed. The Ghana Cotton Company has been established as a quasi-governmental organisation to assist farmers produce cotton for processing and use in the textile industry (Sarris 1991 p34). But the model is far neater than the industrial reality. In 1993 the Ghana Cotton Company had not paid for 700 million cedis worth of cotton it bought from farmers and the textile factories were said to owe the Cotton Company 1.9 million cedis. Production of cotton had gone up (see appendix II) but demand had gone down. To the press a research officer of the Cotton Company said "demand for lint cotton in 1992 was estimated at 10,000 tonnes but 13,000 tonnes was produced. While there appeared to be over supply, 5.4 million dollars worth of cotton was imported into the country. It is therefore not clear whether the glut in cotton agriculture-business in the country is real or induced". (Editorial 1994 [a]).

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<sup>1</sup> Legislation necessary to legalise the takeover was never enacted.

The textile industry has been assured that locally produced cotton "is of better quality and cheaper"<sup>1</sup> than imports but it is reported that textile producers prefer to import cotton on a 'cash-down basis'. The implication is that buying Ghana cotton is slow, inflexible and bureaucratic and this was confirmed to me in an interview with the manager of Ghana Textile Printing (GTP). Thus a *productive and integrated agricultural and industrial* textiles programme will be left to the private sector as the government divests its interests. It will be up to the 'market' through the private sector to determine if Ghanaian cotton will produce a consistently high quality finished cloth to compete favourably with imported cloth and cheap imports of second-hand clothes known locally in Ghana as *oburoni wawu* (dead foreigners clothes).

### Boundaries of second hand and new clothes

Another means to protect national textiles and tailors and dressmakers, is a restriction on imports of second-hand clothing. A recent editorial in the People's Daily Graphic suggests "higher taxes on second-hand clothing might compel importers of such items to decrease the great quantities that are brought in" (Editorial 1994 [b] p.9). The article reports that tailors and dressmakers are not "faring very well in their business because most people can fall on second-hand trousers or shirts" (ibid.). The 1994 budget statement acknowledged the problems in this trade and proposed to prohibit a range of second-hand clothes which the minister deemed to be harmful to the health of the users rather than to national industry. Items for prohibition were undergarments, towels, socks, handkerchiefs, bed sheets and pillow cases, mattresses and sanitary ware (see appendix III). However none of these items are made by dressmakers or tailors so

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Adbulai Salifu, a cotton specialist at the Nyankpala agricultural experiment station in interview.

they gained no protection from the budget. In fact the trade association of second-hand clothes dealers successfully appealed to government for the withdrawal of the ban on many of their imports (see appendix IV).

Contrary to general opinion, when interviewing tailors and seamstresses, I found most had no worries about second-hand clothes harming their businesses. Of those tailors who complained that second-hand trousers, shirts and suits are harming their trade most were prominent members of the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmaking Association and thus had informed political views on the subject. None of the seamstresses interviewed perceived any threat from second hand clothes. They saw the main focus of their work to be sewing Kaba and slit which is not and cannot be imported because of its inherent value as a personalised and crafted garment.

The 1994 president of the *Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association* (GNTDA), a prominent Accra tailor with one of the largest businesses specialising in suit making in the country, said he was often furious to see lines of street traders selling second hand suits and trousers at lower prices than he can afford to offer for new clothes. They were ruining his business and there was nothing government would do to help. He had often used his speeches as president of the association to call for assistance not just for his sector but for informal businesses in general:

"Once again, we feel impelled to re-visit the issue of importation of second-hand goods or 'oburoni-wawu' into the country. In the past years, our association had consistently called for checks on the inflow of 'oburoni-wawu' to the country, but it appears this has been in vain. All manner of used clothing continue to be dumped in the

country, and in recent times, the situation is worsened by the unrestricted influx of old bicycles, fridges, engines, etc. from other countries. All these adversely affect the business of our informal sector, and pose serious danger to our environment due to their toxic nature. Our association will welcome any reform in government economic policy which will promote industrial growth, and we therefore fully support the recent Law passed by Parliament, banning the importation of under-wears and mattresses. We wish to submit that, while encouraging the policy of trade liberalization, the authorities should endeavour to enforce the required import restrictions that would ensure the survival of local industries."

GNTDA president annual address 1993.

Tailors and dressmakers were represented in the survey of 1,365 small enterprises carried out by the Development Institute, University of Ghana in 1990; the findings were that 70 per cent of respondents said that "they had no problem with demand". The study found that sectors such as dressmaking and tailoring "have the advantage of superior flexibility in the face of changing market conditions" (Sowa and others 1992 P 35). In the case of tailors the study found that when they do not have customers coming in for new clothes they can turn to mending second-hand ones. This may be an oversimplified assessment born of the large survey method, as in my own research I did not find evidence of this in any workshop or kiosk I visited or worked in. In interview a few tailors when prompted did say that very occasionally a customer will bring a second-hand pair of trousers for refitting. Seamstresses told me they very rarely did any work on second-hand clothes but occasionally a customer will bring a second hand western garment and ask for a copy to be made.

During interviews I became aware of a general feeling among seamstresses and tailors that new and second-hand clothes should not be mixed together and it was not respectable for a seamstress or tailor to do much work with second-hand clothes<sup>1</sup>; the occasional repair would not tarnish their reputation. Between dressmakers and tailors there is an occupational class divide and mending used clothes is the work of the *O yeadee yie* meaning 'they sew things that are torn'. The *O yeadee yie* do not belong to the same trade association as 'proper' seamstresses and tailors; they are travelling menders usually seen walking the streets with a sewing machine on their heads if they are women or on the shoulder if a man (men should not carry loads on the head). They are usually illiterates and cannot 'count the tape' (local expression for being unable to read a measuring tape).

The Cape Coast trader cited above also told me that second-hand and new clothes and cloth cannot be mixed and sold in the same shop. In the organised retail markets a clear division is also apparent between second-hand clothes sellers and other traders and there is a large market place just for second hand clothes in Accra. The division between new cloth and used second-hand clothes is made more apparent by the gender differences in their sale ; the new cloth market is dominated by women and the second-hand trade is dominated by men.

There is also a status division between new and second-hand clothes, the latter are always a poorer and second option and are mostly for domestic use. Traditional cloth is worn less for daily use by men than women; because of its length and the wraparound style it is incompatible

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that their answers to my questions on second-hand clothes will have been influenced by this attitude towards working with them.

with most types of work places. For men, western style suiting material made into the standard 'political suit' is everyday town and city attire and wearing western second-hand shirts and trousers of very similar material is not a fundamental change. Second-hand clothes thus appear more acceptable for men than women whose clothes and cloths are very often a gift and a mark of personal and family status. For younger men the 'political suit' is going out of fashion in preference for the styles, if not the status, of second-hand western clothes especially jeans. However, the choice for all would be for new clothes to be made up by one's own seamstress or tailor and as a newspaper article put it "it is all a question of money and the individual's ability to afford. If everybody could have enough money to feed and still have enough left, they would not go in for used clothes. They would prefer new ones" (Editorial 1994 [b]).

A phrase in popular use is to 'fall on' second-hand clothes and this expression is *incisive*, meaning *second-hand clothes are a last resort*. This is not surprising as it is known that the clothes have an association with people from another and mainly unknown culture, that the original owners were people from another family or ethnic group. The following contrast brings out the nature of second-hand clothes - within the lineage system in Southern Ghana it is a pride to inherit a cloth from one's grandmother but to acquire and put on the clothes of foreigners is an unfortunate necessity.

### Conclusion

To conclude, two sets of oppositional relationships must be explained. The first is that between the high value of new clothes made from new cloth compared to the low status of imported second-hand clothes; the second relationship is between the high value of imported cloth against the

relatively low value of 'Ghana made' cloth. These conflicting preferences make sense in a culture where wearing new cloth is a show of personal and lineage pride and ethnicity (this will be explained in Chapter Seven). That actual distance is needed to separate the two types of clothing points to a form of pollution taboo emanating from second-hand clothes threatening to tarnish the pristine condition and good name of new cloth and all that cloth stands for, the pride of the lineage. There is little loyalty to Ghanaian products in cloth, it is the country trusted to guarantee quality which wins customer loyalty. I would argue that this is because quality ensures long life and high status and matches the expectation of long life and productivity of the lineage.

An absence of national awareness and pride in 'Made in Ghana' cloth and other products such as soap and spirits and support for imported goods or goods made in Ghana by large-scale international corporations is leading to the scenario described by Ninsin (1991) of those in the massive self-employed informal sector in Ghana being left to hawk the products of large multinational companies around their markets<sup>1</sup>. A visual survey of

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<sup>1</sup> Many imported goods introduced into Ghana during the early colonial period remain highly valued and are preferred to similar products made by local small-scale enterprises in. By the later part of the nineteenth century the main imports into Ghana from Britain included manufactured goods such as cloth from Manchester, spirits and hardware, provisions, guns and gun-powder, earthenware, clothing, cigars and tobacco, perfumes and beads (Reynolds 1974 p.176-188 cited in Ninsin 1991 p.10). Today in Ghana's informal sector petty traders sell many of these imported goods for example cloth, perfumes, and provisions such as tinned corn beef and sardines; they remain staple trading products. After independence many large multinational companies such as Lever Brothers invested in Ghana and began monopoly production of some of these products. These large-scale companies were affected by the subsequent economic crisis but were able to take advantage of the economic reforms in the 1980s. Large corporations had superior access to finance and were able to obtain foreign exchange in the new auction market. One consequence was an increase in production of the classical petty trading products which were being produced by small-scale industries. The competition with small-scale industries resulted in a slump in local small-scale manufacturing - soap was one of the worse affected. (Ninsin 1991 p.78-79).



petty trading in the streets of cities, towns and villages show evidence of this being already the case.

In contrast to national textile manufacturers and many tailoring businesses, the performance of dressmaking enterprises is not perceived by seamstresses to be harmed by imported cloth or second-hand clothes. Ghana has had no fully competitive textiles industry for the last hundred years but this has not stunted the growth of small-scale dressmakers who have relied on imports to develop the decorative dress styles so distinctive of their craft. But the advent of the second-hand clothes market may be a serious unacknowledged threat to their livelihood.

With possible changes in dress mode will come changes in the demand for African wax printed cotton cloth. Prospective market changes have already been noted by western analysts for the export cloth market to Africa. One market report<sup>1</sup> suggested that although the market for imported cloth seems buoyant investors should be aware of changes in African dress modes, and that with the entry of China and America into the African batik market, and the increased domestic production in Africa, supply could in the future outstrip demand. <sup>2, 3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A market analysis by T S Sjoerdsma . 1991 Gamma 1989 company reports on its subsidiary Vlisco. In 1989 wax prints accounted for 32% of total turnover; 95% of its export market for this product was Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Other factors of importance were the frequent variation in import restrictions, currency depreciation, political climate and the dependence of economies like Ghana on one or two export commodities.

<sup>3</sup> A 1993 sales promotion featuring a raffle as sales incentive by Unilever Ghana Limited (major distributors of wax cotton prints) included concern that the use of African prints should be preserved for future generations (Editorial 1993[c]).

The continuing strength of traditional ethnic and lineage commitments counters these prospective changes. A major factor, however, is the general poor economic situation of Ghanaians (with unemployment and poverty widespread) that threatens through economic necessity the solidarity of family life and maintenance of lineage ties. When these institutions become fragile changes may occur at speed and the livelihood of thousands of seamstresses and many tailors could be threatened. The institution of craftship creating animated personal and lineage aesthetics through cloth will also be threatened.

## Appendix I

Imports of second-hand clothes by country  
(1992)

Country of export	value in cedis	net weight (Kg)
Australia	5,955,869	16,304
Austria	4,576,068	9,857
Belgium	723,735,381	2,088,240
Brunei	3,225,690	11,045
Bulgaria	211,326	725
Canada	374,247,972	1,008,076
China	28,379	50
Taiwan, PR	799,650	15,000
Denmark	15,319,150	18,421
Ethiopia	56,290	300
France	11,766,287	47,896
German DEM	4,884	10
Germany, F	569,191,375	2,290,911
Greece	83,131	180
Hong Kong	50,588	110
India	3,824,144	970
Israel	250,035	130
Italy	289,286,917	754,058
Ivory Coast	1,811,780	10,200
Japan	7,207,660	22,474
Jordan	11,536	120
Korea REPU	10,140	18
Lesotho	1,532,762	455
Libyan ARA	17,874	260
Malaysia	467,726	208
Malta	13,000	19
Mauritania	73,748	325
Mauritius	4,587	10
Mozambique	5,859,052	13,540
Nepal	10,206	18
Netherlands	1,003,483,708	2,591,995

Appendix I  
continued

Norway	22,530,515	85,961
Poland	24,300	10
Portugal	18,202	50
Rwanda	56,792	500
Saudi Arabia	315,892	1,582
Zimbabwe	1,383,936	30
Spain	6,310,847	9,881
Sweden	9,0087,736	22,317
Switzerland	3,861,758	5,282
Thailand	64,799	338
Togo	14,083,504	41,726
USSR	43,554	72
United Kingdom	1,107,224,608	2,821,522
United States	3,176,665,750	9,728,123

Source: Ghana External Trade Statistics Jan.-Dec. 1992  
Ghana Statistical Service

Appendix II

Output of seed cotton, 1988-1992

Year	Quantity (kg)	Annual Change (%)
1988	6126	-6.1
1989	5784	-5.6
1990	9084	57.1
1991	15741	73.3

Source: Ghana Seed Company, Accra  
(ISSER\_The State of the Ghanaian Economy in  
1992\_July 1993 p87)

## Appendix III

Extract from the budget speech of Dr Kwasi Botchway, Minister of Finance and Economic Planning

"For some time now, many importers have been bringing all kinds of goods including second-hand or used goods into this country under the trade liberalisation scheme. Some of these have proven to be harmful to the health of the users. The government can no longer look on, while these goods continue to come on to harm some of our citizens. Accordingly, it is proposed that the following used or second-hand goods be prohibited: undergarments, towels, socks, handkerchiefs, bedsheets and pillowcases, mattresses, and sanitary ware."

## Appendix IV

Second-hand clothes dealers appeal to government

# Used clothing dealers appeal to government

By Graphic Reporter

**THE Used Clothing (Oburoniwawu) Dealers Association has appealed to the government to reconsider the ban imposed on the importation of certain categories of used clothing as announced in the 1994 budget and economic policy presented to Parliament last Friday.**

The association pointed out that whilst it is reasonable to ban the importation of used underwear and handkerchiefs, the same cannot be said of used socks, towels and bedsheets.

Mr Kofi Sarpong, Ashanti Regional Chairman of the Association and Mr Evans Adusei, managing director of Evatex Company Limited, dealers in used clothing who made the appeal through the *Graphic* in Accra stressed that the socks, bedsheets and towels are used mainly by farmers and market women.

They maintained that it would be uneconomical for farmers and market women to be compelled to buy new socks which are very expensive to be used for their daily chores.

They explained that all consignments of used clothing are fumigated

before shipment so there is no need to fear that such imports could cause health hazards and tendered a certificate of fumigation issued by Holland Fumigation BU for 46 bales of secondhand clothing consigned to Tema.

Mr Adusei said since the announcement, a large number of people from different parts of the country who deal in the items have been trooping in to find out what they intend to do about the ban with some asking the association to urge Parliament to review the directive.

He said they import from mainly Europe, US and Australia and some-

times it takes about four months for delivery of orders and pleaded that since large consignments of orders are on the high seas, government should give them a moratorium for about six months to clear all the orders if the ban cannot be revoked.

Mr Adusei said many people depend on the business, particularly the sale of socks and bedsheets and the sudden ban would leave them jobless to add to the teeming number of unemployed.

He said the association has decided to send a memorandum to Parliament to seek its support for the ban to be reviewed.

Daily Graphic January 1994

## Govt to withdraw L.I. on used clothing

By Graphic Reporter

**THE government has decided to withdraw a legislative Instrument that was to give legal backing to its intention to ban the importation of certain used clothing into the country.**

This is to enable the government to confer with leadership of the Ghana Used Clothing Association (Oburoniwawu) to find a workable solution to the problems that may arise from the banning of the items.

The Instrument has already been forwarded to Parliament.

The Minister of Trade and Industries, Mrs Emma Mitchell, announced this at a meeting with members of the association in Accra on Monday.

Mrs Mitchell said the decision to withdraw the Instrument is the result of representations by the leadership of the association which she said, deserve further consideration.

The listed items are undergarments, towels, socks, handkerchiefs, bedsheets, pillow cases, mattresses and sanitary ware.

Mrs Mitchell said however, that the government will do all it could to discourage the importation of goods considered to be injurious to the health of the people.

A member of the Interim Management Committee of the association,

Mr Evans Adusei, said if the list of items are not reviewed, it will lead to the collapse of their business.

He said the items outlined for the proposed ban make up 70 per cent of the association's imports adding that "it will be almost impossible for us to convince our suppliers to ship us 30 per cent of the goods that make up a container and leave the 70 per cent."

Daily Graphic

16, February 1994

## Chapter Seven

Cloth and cloth designs within culture and kinship



### Assimilation and two yards of cloth

The first night I arrived in Ghana I shared a bed with the woman whose house I would live in whilst working in Abodom village. She had met me at the airport and we were staying the night at her relatives' house in Accra before making the journey to the village the following day. The bed we were to sleep on was made up with one flat sheet covering the mattress. It was hot so I thought I would manage to sleep in my nightdress. Grace asked if I had 'my cloth' ? I only later understood that one never travels without two yards of cloth to use as a bed sheet. She insisted I borrow a cloth for the night and on arrival at her house she gave me two yards of her own cloth on permanent loan. That I had arrived in Ghana without 'my cloth' and without the knowledge that this was considered strange epitomised on that first night the distance I had travelled and the complexities of the culture I was to learn and live in for the coming year.

After some weeks I had confidence in travelling on local transport and in local markets and I purchased a piece of cloth which was styled into Ghanaian Kaba and slit. I bought a full 12 yard piece with the intention of giving a half piece to the mother of the women I lived with. I had acquired some knowledge of the social content of cloth and knew the significance of making this gesture: the durable quality of the cloth would be a sign of long term commitment and the sincerity of my friendship to the family. What I hadn't anticipated was both the generous and formal response to the gift. The woman I gave the cloth to thanked me and from that time began to address me with *Obaa*, a term of respect for a senior woman.



Every sister in the family paid me a visit for the purpose of thanking me and shaking and holding onto my hand for some time longer than is usual, this physical gesture was showing the new bond of affection that now existed between us.



plate 1

I was happy to wear my new cloth to church services as I had been feeling conspicuous in my western styles. Those I lived with seemed pleased and relieved I had changed clothes. They also hinted that I should have my hair done properly and that the style I had was rather too youthful for my status as a senior woman. Their attitude to my appearance brought to light an inconsistency in that there were many aspects of my westernness they wished to copy by wanting to acquire

similar imported goods to those I owned, such as my watch and torch, but in respect of clothing they wanted me to be like them. I have taken this to mean they were happy to assimilate me into their culture and their family. This was taken to its ultimate statement of acceptance and friendship in the final days of fieldwork when Grace and I acquired and appeared in cloth of same colour, design and style. The picture (plate 1) of Grace, Ya Ya (the seamstress I worked with in Abodom) and myself is a source of pride to all of us.

## Introduction

My starting point in this chapter is that African printed cloth is visually evocative and represents social and cultural standards. An African dressed in traditional dress has an aesthetic presence and women especially are thought by men to be more feminine and to look more noble, responsible and as having respect for their culture (Adisah, 1993). Such statements show that cloth is imbued with social values as well as having utility value; a point made some time ago by Bohannan in describing the Tiv economy "Men value things for themselves but even more for the part the things play in social relationships" (Bohannan 1968 p.221).

The chapter is an exploratory study of the social value of cloth and the social relationships associated with its use. They are examined through two related aspects: institutionalised cloth gift giving occasions and through looking at associations between cloth designs and environmental and socio-cultural ideas. In the first an examination of gift giving occasions brings to light the role of cloth in marking out changing alliances and relationships within matrilineal descent structures and within the life cycle of domestic groups which accommodate both maternal and paternal bonds. In this aspect my study acknowledges Mary Douglas's idea that choice of clothing and other goods " afford sets of markers within the spatial and temporal frame" (Douglas 1979 p.66). Secondly, through the study of cloth designs as symbolic language an interpretative grammar emerges as a means of communicating underlying and mostly unspoken or unspeakable truths, underpinning gender relations and the proper conduct of social relationships within Akan culture.

This chapter is thus an exploration of the above issues and an attempt to show that cloth within Akan culture undergoes a transformation from an inanimate commodity into an articulate and dramatic conveyer of culture and social relationships within Akan kinship organisation. This process will be analysed under the following headings :

Cloth texture and design

Cloth names, symbols and proverbs

Variety of cloth designs - the environment, the human body, the social world and religious truths

Analysing the symbolic language of cloth - ethical and aesthetic standards

Acquiring cloth

Akan concepts of the person - descent, personality and paternity

Patrifocal cloth giving - cloth for marriage and cloth 'for the year'

Cloth for births

Cloth at death.

Cloth as a gift from child to mother

Cloth from sister to sister

### Cloth texture and design

The highest status wax printed cloth in Ghana, and the most expensive, is Dutch, English and Ivory Coast wax cotton. It has a firmer, stiffer texture and is more colour fast than cheaper varieties which come from Nigeria and imitation wax cloths that come from China. The process of waxing the cloth produces this quality (see appendix III). The texture and the bold and brightly coloured designs are essential forms of the grammar of the cloth's language. An article on West African cottons in 1945 described the

subtle search for this language in the process of purchasing a piece of cloth.

"Your West African hates his calicos 'soft'. The moment his fingers feel that harsh, authentic rustle his eyes light with pleasure. He has a word for it. 'It talks' he says" (Scope Magazine 1949 p.52).

The cloth is also talking using a grammar of colour with design.

The production process is complicated and international, as the previous chapter documented, but it is culture and imagination which turns the uniform stretch of grey cotton from the weaving loom into a cloth of textured meanings. Imported cloth does not arrive in Ghanaian markets printed with abstract anonymous designs. The process of producing a valued and aesthetically pleasing design is managed in more than supply and demand stages. There is an indigenous, informal and undocumented library of meaningful and desirable designs. For the textile printer the first transformative stage in making the cloth acceptable is to make it social and correspond to and stimulate the mental concepts of cloth buyers.

Cloth designs produced in the UK or in Holland must therefore reflect the social context of their country of destination. Today designs are often commissioned by a wholesale distributor, (plate 2 shows an employee of A. Brunnschweiler, Manchester, UK, producing a design commissioned by a Nigerian wholesaler) or an area manager takes trips to the export market to pick up new designs.



plate 2

To some extent this has been the way designs have been collected and produced for African markets since the turn of the century - A. Brunnschweiler is one of the few remaining UK. producers; many dependent on African markets closed from the 1950's onwards as the newly independent African states began their own textile printing works as part of their export substitution policy (appendix II lists Manchester companies now closed and appendix III details the techniques they used). In colonial times merchant converters, resident in the colonies, were sources of cloth designs, and worked closely with the English and Dutch printers. The converters produced designs, ordered cloths and received commission from the printers<sup>1</sup>. They were sensitive to indigenous tastes and life style on the Gold Coast and were researchers in their own right. They studied

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<sup>1</sup> 'European involvement in Batik Printing', document held in Whitworth Art Gallery (date and author unknown).



the populations' likes, dislikes and taboos and produced thousands of designs - the two scenes of the private library of designs belonging to A. Brunnschweiler (plates 3 and 4) show just a third of their collection.



plate 3; approximately 10,000 designs (interview August 17 1993)



plate 4

Particular cloth designs can become suddenly popular and others can be abruptly spurned by a particular geographic group (Magazine 1949). Merchant converters had to be constantly vigilant on the uses to which their designs were put. Typical reasons for a design becoming suddenly popular would be its association with physical events such as a good harvest or a woman having triplets; the news would quickly spread that the design brings many children. Negatively associated events such as a woman dying in childbirth after wearing a particular design were just as likely to be acted upon (ibid. p.55).

Adinkra<sup>1</sup> symbols were and continue to be the basis of many designs. Anthropology may have had a role in transferring these older designs

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<sup>1</sup> Adinkra means farewell or good-bye, and the cloth is used on special occasions such as funeral celebrations to say good-bye to the departed. Ghanaian Adinkra cloth is one of only two historical examples of printed cloth in Africa (Picton



from Ghana to the Manchester printers (see appendix 1). Rattray, an anthropologist sponsored by the British government<sup>1</sup>, while on fieldwork in the Ashanti Region of Ghana collected designs and had a detailed knowledge of printing techniques (Rattray 1927). His published monograph of 1927 illustrates 53 patterns in use in the Ashanti Region. He believed these were probably borrowed from other ethnic groups and given new names and meanings to suit local conditions. For example *Ays*, the fern; Rattray noted the word also means 'I am not afraid of you', 'I am independent of you'. The wearer, he says, may imply this by wearing it. Plates 5 and 6 are Adinkra designs in contemporary use on cloth. These samples which I collected during fieldwork have, in addition to their traditional meanings, been given other widely recognised names: plate 5 strongly resembles the *adinkra* symbol of forgiveness : *Hye wo nhye* , he who burns you be not burned (Glover<sup>2</sup>); however a seamstress translated the name written on the cloth as 'stop complaining or don't discuss much'. Plate 6 shows the Adinkra symbol of hypocrisy: *Kramo-bone amma yanhu kramo-pa*, we cannot tell a good Mohammedan from a bad one: the fake and the genuine look alike because of hypocrisy.

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1979). Designs were printed onto hand-spun cotton and locally-woven cloth. Examples in the British Museum were collected in 1817.

<sup>1</sup> In 1921 the British government set up an Anthropological Department and Rattray became its officer. Wolfson 1958 p.29).

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from Wall Chart on adinkra symbolism prepared by Ablade Glover (details in Bibliography).

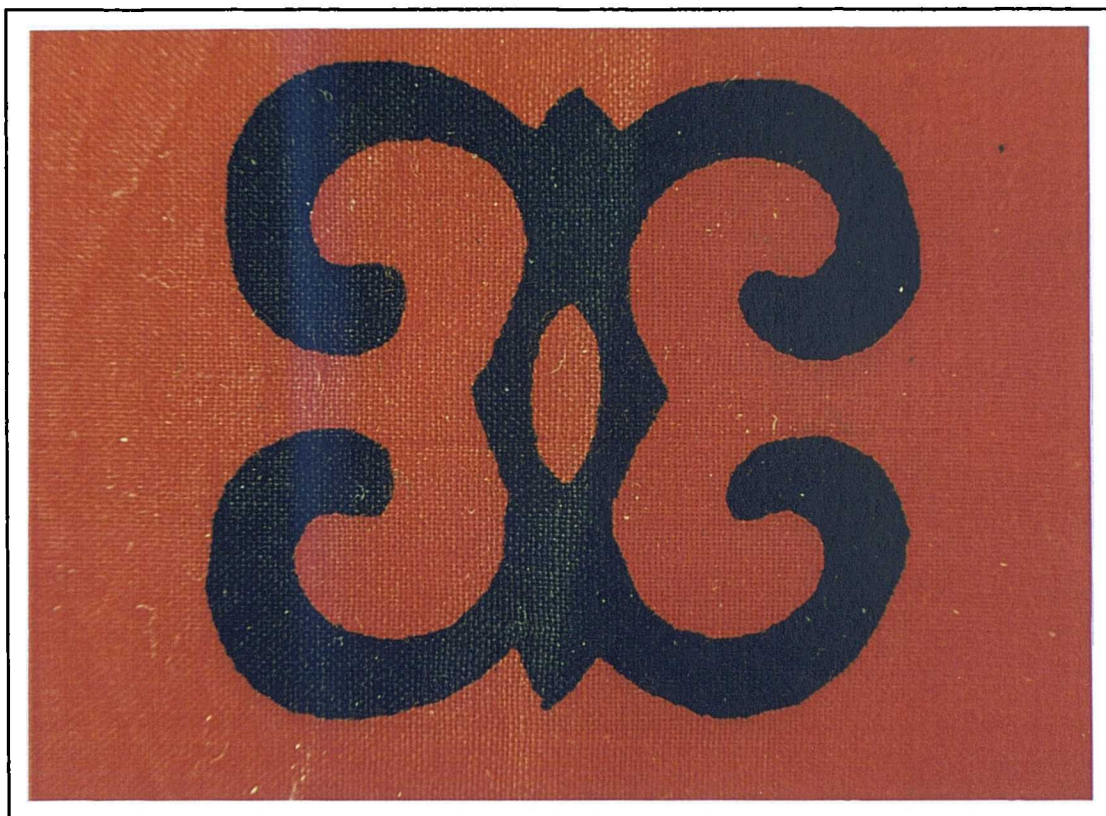


plate 5

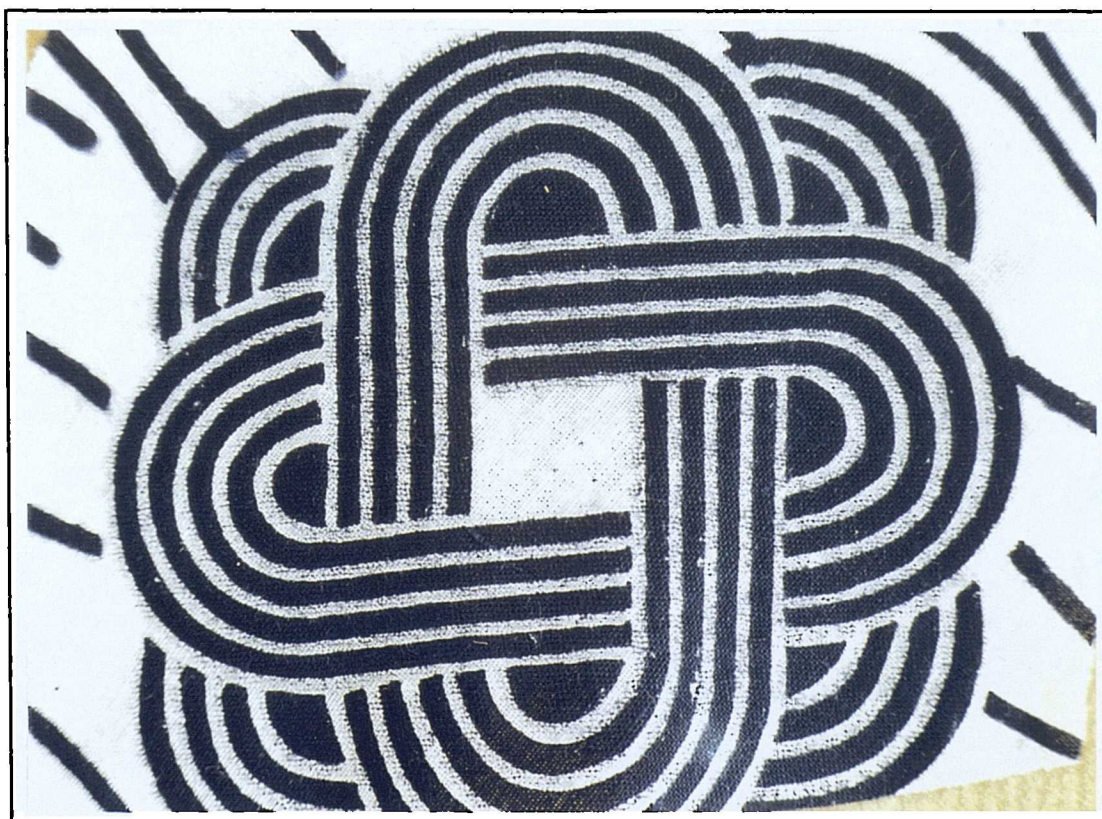


plate 6

A study of Akan designs was also made by Eva Meyerowitz (Meyerowitz 1951). In trying to decipher the symbolism in the designs and express the ideas, she found that "all knowledge appears to have been lost. It is probable that this complicated symbolism was never known in Ashanti and the Southern Akan states" (ibid. p.99). She suggests, as does Rattray, that the Adinkra designs were introduced by a nearby people called Bono and copied unaltered by the Akan. My fieldwork supports this view as nobody I questioned had any knowledge of the old proverbs attached to Adinkra symbols; they know only the local names and their contemporary meanings.

### Cloth names, symbols and proverbs

Possession of cloth is a form of personal<sup>1</sup> and lineage wealth<sup>2</sup>. It is accumulated and stored in boxes or suitcases (see below) and is styled and displayed on the body during public occasions such as funerals, church services, festivals and for travelling outside ones own area. Many other items are brought out for use, distribution, consumption and display on these occasions, for example food, bottles of soft and alcoholic drinks, sums of money, tables clothes, stools and linguist staffs and one could argue that each of these can be analysed as symbolic and ritualised displays of wealth, tradition and lineage power. However, unlike food and drink consumed on the day, cloth is a more enduring symbol and through

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<sup>1</sup> Cloth is a well recognised measure of wealth and between 1953 and 1956 researchers of the Accra survey used the number of changes of dress a woman makes and possession of a sewing machine as an indicator of wealth (Acquah 1958 p74).

<sup>2</sup> This role of cloth is not unique to southern Ghana and examples are found in other African societies (Darish 1989) and in south Pacific societies (Weiner 1989). In Western societies, parallels between the use of cloth and the use of equivalent prestige articles can be made, for example an analyst commenting on the use of high quality Dutch cloth described its role as a savings material "much like a good set of unused table linen was a sign of wealth in rural Holland at the beginning of this century" (T S Sjoerdsma 1991).

time represents associations between lineages and individuals. Unlike money, cloth cannot be exchanged for consumer goods and its value in presenting human form and social norms cannot be eroded through inflation. As contrasted with money the value of cloth is enhanced by association with social position, age and moral character of the wearer.

In symbolic content and value to society, cloth has a closer association with stools and linguist staffs. Cloth, stools<sup>1</sup> and linguist staffs<sup>2</sup> are all symbols in themselves and are used as a medium for portraying other symbols<sup>3</sup>. This also makes clothes, stools and staffs mediums for self-expression and teaching (Dzobo p.93) especially moral teaching. In contrast to the limited number of staffs in circulation and individual possessions of stools there are vast quantities of cloth in circulation either stored in boxes or in domestic use. Such quantities of cloth offer a broad and convenient medium for communications via symbol and proverb.

Many cloth designs have widely recognised names. I found that these are either single words, sometimes actual names, or more often sayings or proverbs. The fact that cloths are given names is in itself significant. The naming is a process of making associations between cloth designs and

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional Ghanaian stool is considered to contain the soul of an individual or as is the case with the Ashanti Golden Stool' a repository of the nation's soul. Dzobo states that "formerly a bride was given a stool by her husband so as to settle her soul in the husband's house. In some cases, a mother is given a new stool on the birth of a child. This is to reinforce the continued stay of her soul in her husband's house" [Dzobo, 1992 #289] (90-91). During fieldwork I was told that mothers often give stools to their daughters when they go to live with their husbands.

<sup>2</sup> The linguist (*okyaeme*) is the chief's spokesperson. His staff of office is carved in wood with a symbolic emblem on the top which often expresses proverbs or valued principles in society. (description in Dzobo, 1992 p.92-93).

<sup>3</sup>This point has been made of stools and adinkra cloth by (Dzobo, 1992 p.90)

human environments, social and physical, and thus brings cloth into the sphere of human culture and standards of truth and morality. Giving names to cloth can be thought of as a means of giving concrete form to, and recording the abstract nature of, culture and social norms.

Such an association between name or proverb and cloth design gives a cloth its symbolic language and allegorical meaning. The language often speaks of partnerships between men and women, their conflicts, feelings of fellowship, *pride and religious truths*. *In proverbial language* cloth is often analogous to the family and community within which relatives and friends can be a danger to each other : for example

'It is usually the insect in your cloth that bites you'  
 Meaning 'Sometimes it is your relatives or close friends who will ruin or betray you'. (Dzobo 1992 p.97).

Cloth is thus at the centre of domestic social life and the printed designs upon it are used as *interpretative grammar in this context*.

Similar to older Adinkra designs the more recent wax printed cloth designs have 'names' and proverbs with religious or moral meanings, others ask questions for example the design in plate 7 is called *wo dɔfo nyɛ huan ?* asking who is your lover?



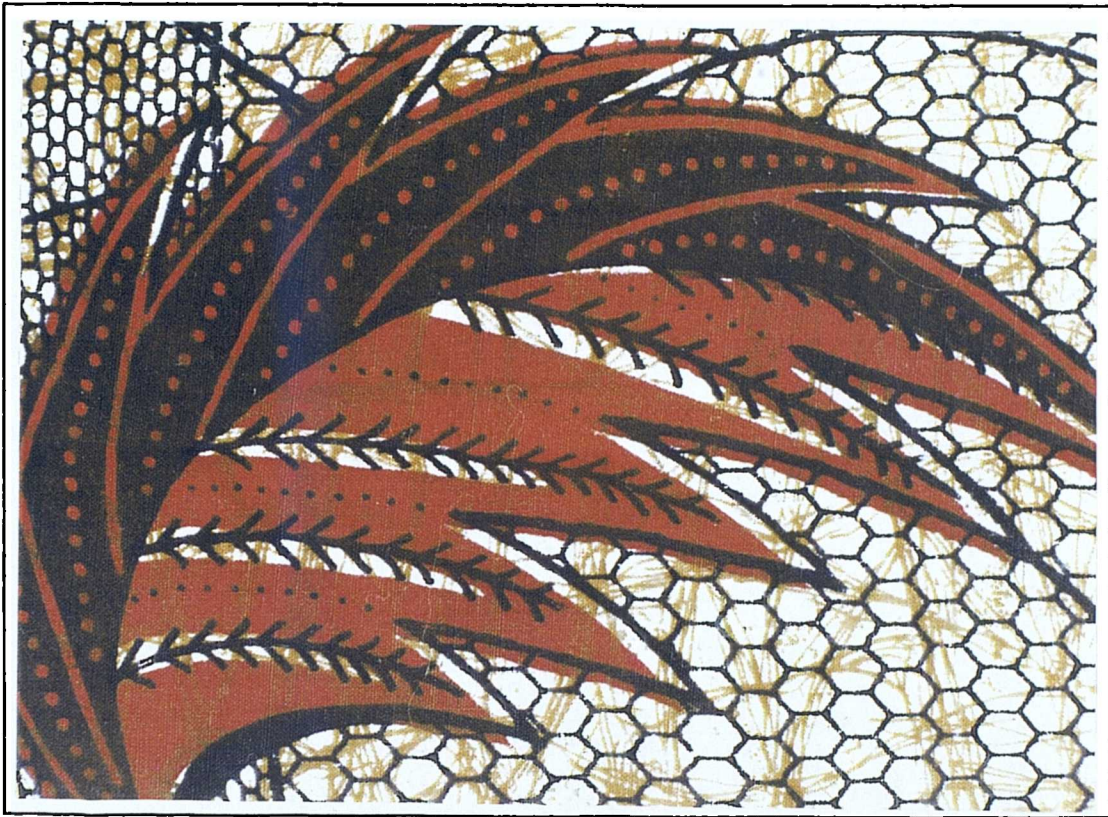


plate 7

The designs themselves are often stylised representations of objects and concepts important in everyday life and by naming cloth and developing these associations a process of authentication takes place. A cloth named with reference to Ghanaian culture is no longer an anomalous import but a part of indigenous material culture and knowledge and may like stools and linguist staffs be passed through generations.

Indigenised cloth portrays culture and is a potential medium for restoring what the Ghanaian philosopher Wiredu has called 'distorted African identity'<sup>1</sup> (Wiredu 1992 p.63). I found it used in this way by the Ghana

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<sup>1</sup> This is a distortion of the African state of mind caused by an uncritical and unconscious internalisation of European models introduced during the colonialism period. - "many Africans remain colonised in the deepest reaches of their conceptual framework" (Wiredu, 1992 p.70). The main cause of the condition according to Wiredu has been foreign substitutions of African religion, culture and politics - from this emerged a colonial mentality. He believes there is now a struggle to restore a sense of African authenticity in all its aspects. He believes this can mainly be achieved through the African taking control and

Broadcasting Corporation which had its female and male news presenters almost always dressed in traditional cloth as opposed to western styles. Newspaper and poster advertisements also used models dressed in cloth and while on fieldwork in Accra I noted a number of fashion events which promoted the use of printed cloth and the Kaba and Slit style which I cover more fully in Chapter Eight.

Despite the role of cloth in Ghanaian identity I found no evidence that the initial motive for an association between a cloth and its names was well known. Some cloths are called by actual names of people or flowers; however nobody I spoke to knew the reason for these associations. As to the origin of cloth names in general I am unsure. I often asked the question 'how did this cloth get its name?' The answer was always unsatisfactory and a variation on 'it was in the past', or 'in our history'. This is possibly because the origin of proverbs as Ackah notes usually derives from chiefs linguists or respected or wealthy men who impress an audience with phrases rich in wisdom or having metaphorical meaning. Subsequently such statements may be quoted and soon come into popular use. Ackah states that proverbs with moral significance " become current and popular, if they are acceptable to what might be called the social conscience of the tribes" (Ackah 1988 p.49). In one sense this is an acceptable explanation especially as regards proverbs attached to symbols on linguist staffs which originate from and are conveyed by male holders of lineage power. There is however a question to be asked on whether there is feminine content to proverbs attached to cloth designs. Further research needs to be undertaken to understand whether designs with proverbs attached emanate from female social interaction or from

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consciously choosing the inevitable and progressive changes that occur in a developing and changing society.

values women attached to items they are responsible for such as foodstuffs and articles within domestic surroundings. These latter two categories are clearly the subject of cloth design (examples given in this chapter) but sadly during my research I did not ask men if there were cloths they would find difficult or refuse to wear. These may possibly be cloth designs depicting articles from the female domestic sphere or the private sphere of female interaction and values.

I did ask women whether cloths were bought because of their names and the wish to say or imply something by wearing them. The reply was always that cloth was bought for them or they chose it because of its colour and design. To check this response I often asked female informants whether the name of a cloth would stop them purchasing or wearing it and I was told this was true especially of the younger generation. One seamstress told me that "some cloth names are so embarrassing... and some cause trouble". One example was a cloth named a *cun pa*, a good husband (plate 8). She said that a woman who went out wearing this cloth was showing that she had a good husband who looked after her; my informant found this display embarrassing. Another example was the cloth named *Erok0 awaraa bisa* meaning 'when going into a marriage a partner must ask properly' (plate 9); this is a reference to the approach made to the parents of the girl by the family of the potential husband and their ability to offer a suitable gifts and money as bride wealth.





plate 8

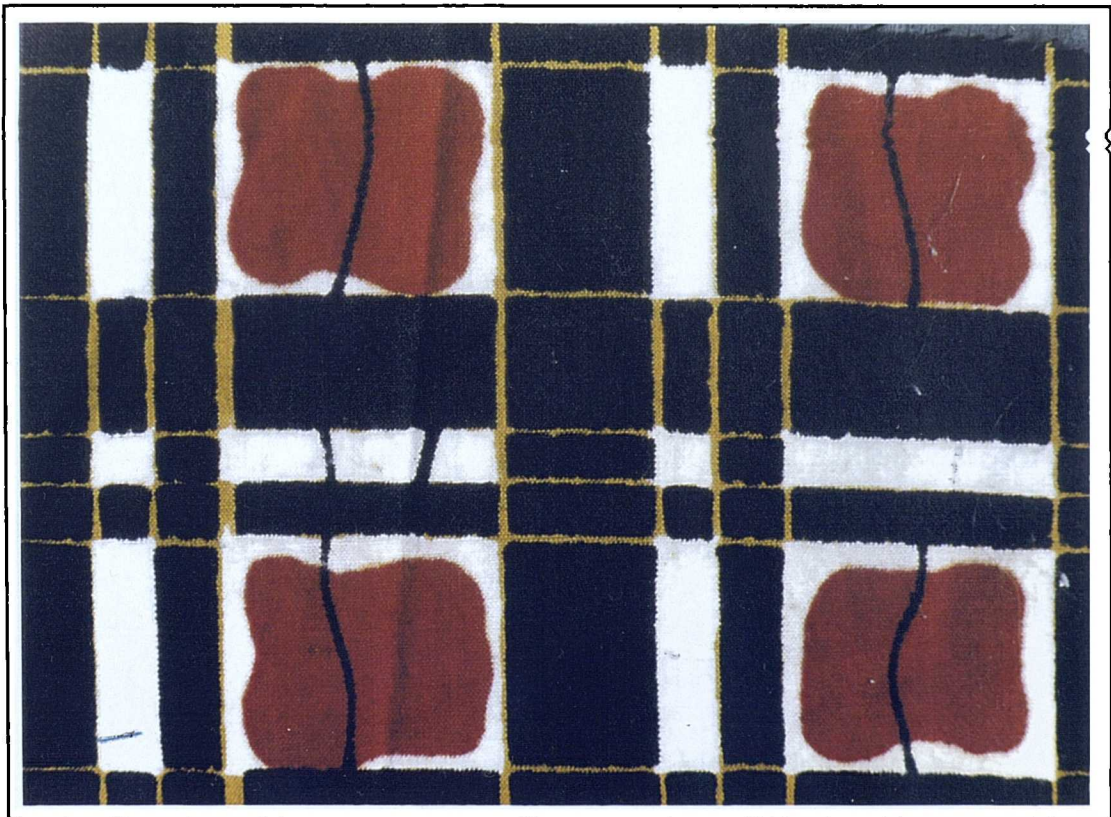


plate 9

### Variety of cloth designs - the environment, the human body, the social world and religious truths

Cloth comes between the body and the natural environment and protects the body from its hazards. Cloth design is also used to celebrate and highlight the importance of the environment to those who depend on it and many designs are derived from it. One of the most popular designs is the 'cowpat' (also known as the gramophone) see plate 10. Animals are often reproduced with some abstraction and many such designs represent abstract thought. For example see plate 11 - this design shows birds in flight and is known by the name *Sika tu de anoma* meaning 'money flies like a bird' - the fish (plate 12) symbolises wisdom, the tortoise *akyerkyer* (plate 13) and snails *nwaba* (plate 14) symbolise peace. According to Sarpong this is because they are "encased in their shells, and do not offer any resistance to those who capture them"; there is also an Akan proverb translated into English by Sarpong: "Left to the tortoise and the snail, no-one would ever hear the sound of a gunshot in the forest" (Sarpong 1974 p.111).



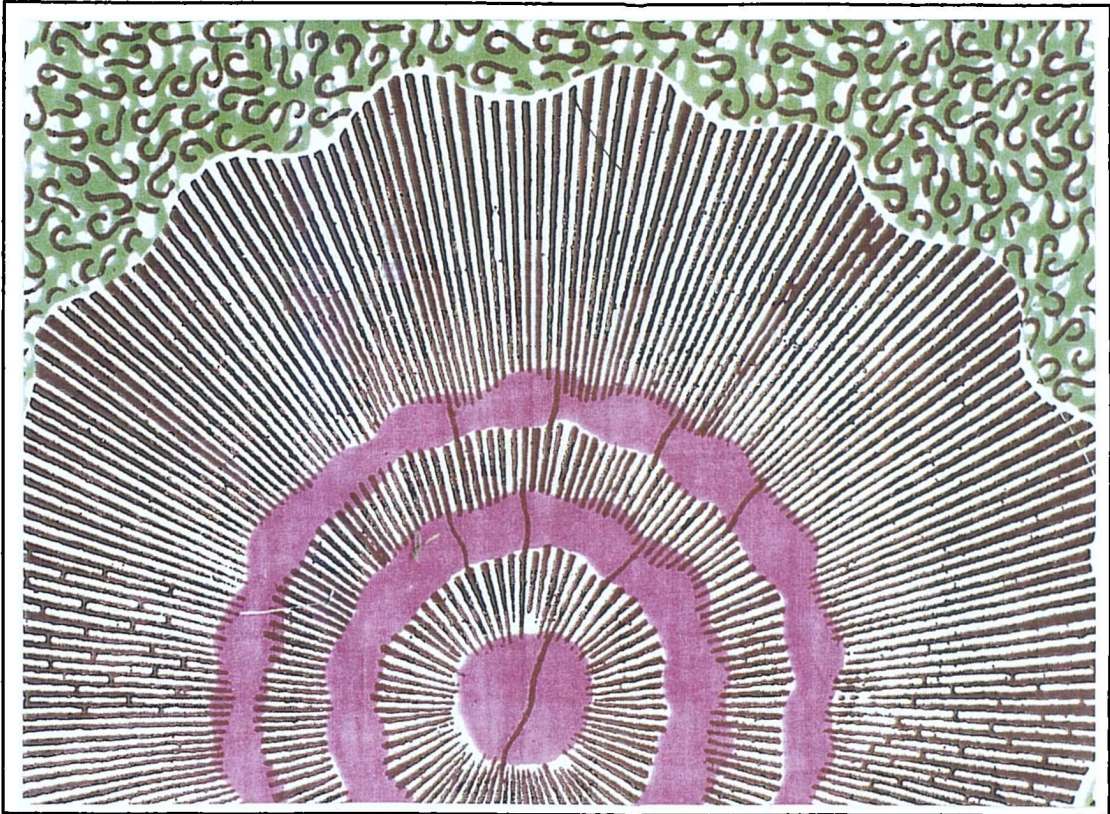


plate 10



plate 11





plate 12

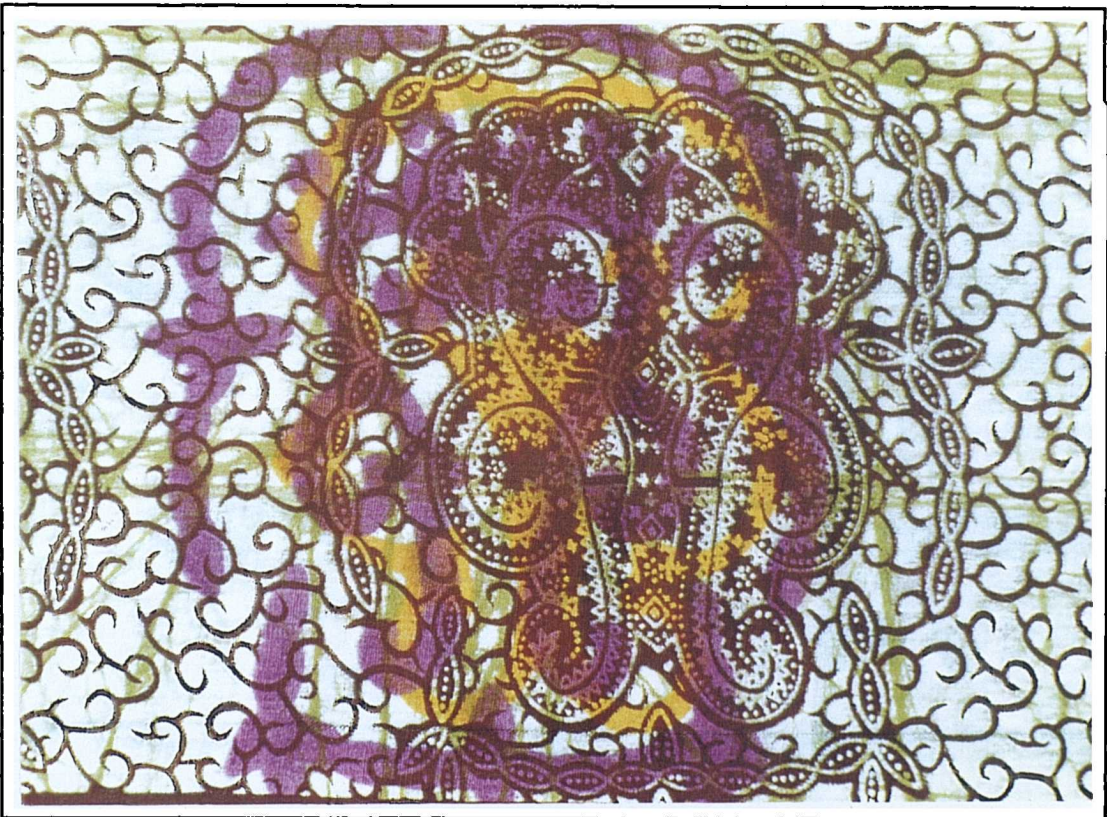


plate 13





plate 14

That highly valued animals are used as representations on cloth and to give symbolic meaning to valued societal ideas is not unique to Akan culture. Lienhardt has described the importance of cattle to the Dinka (Lienhardt 1961) and how the colour language of all their physical and material surroundings is inextricably linked to their knowledge of cattle colours. Lienhardt believed that if their cattle-colour vocabulary were taken away, the Dinka would have scarcely any way of describing visual experience in terms of colour. For the Dinka to describe the pattern or colour of newly imported cloth they would have to refer to the range of cattle colours which it most closely resembled.

The spider *ananse* is a celebrated figure in Akan folk-lore and a very popular cloth design (plate 15). Ananse tales are usually about vices, wrongdoings and punishments and each has a moral in the story line

(Ackah 1988 p.61-62). Many stories are about the spider's wisdom; Rattray collected the following which is a literal translation from his informant:

"The Spider collected all the wisdom of the world and shut it up in a gourd, and was climbing up a tree to deposit it on top. He got into difficulties, however, before he reached half-way up, as he had tied the gourd on to his belly, and it hindered him from climbing properly. His son, *Ntikûmã* who was watching him, said, 'Father, if you had really all the wisdom of the world with you, you would have had sense enough to tie the gourd to your back!' His father, seeing the truth of this, threw down the gourd in a temper. It broke, and the wisdom it contained became scattered, and men came and picked up what each could carry away." (Rattray 1916 p.73)

Rattray also notes that stories similar to the one above probably had a religious origin; he found the Ashanti supreme being often referred to in jest as the *Ananse kokrokõ*<sup>1</sup> 'Great Spider' (ibid.).

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<sup>1</sup> Orthography used by Rattray



plate 15

The human body is also abstracted on to cloth. Some of these designs are the oldest and now worn mainly by older women at funerals. I was told by a seamstress I worked with that older designs especially had names which were widely recognised and had religious and moral content- Plates 16 and 17 are examples. Plate 16 has a name meaning ' You are only greeting me but not from your heart' and plate 17 is *Onyame ahu wu* translated 'God has seen you'. A more modern design depicting the human eye is plate 18 which has at least two names; the more widely know is *enyiwa enhu a Onyetan* translated 'if you can't see something you can't hate it'.



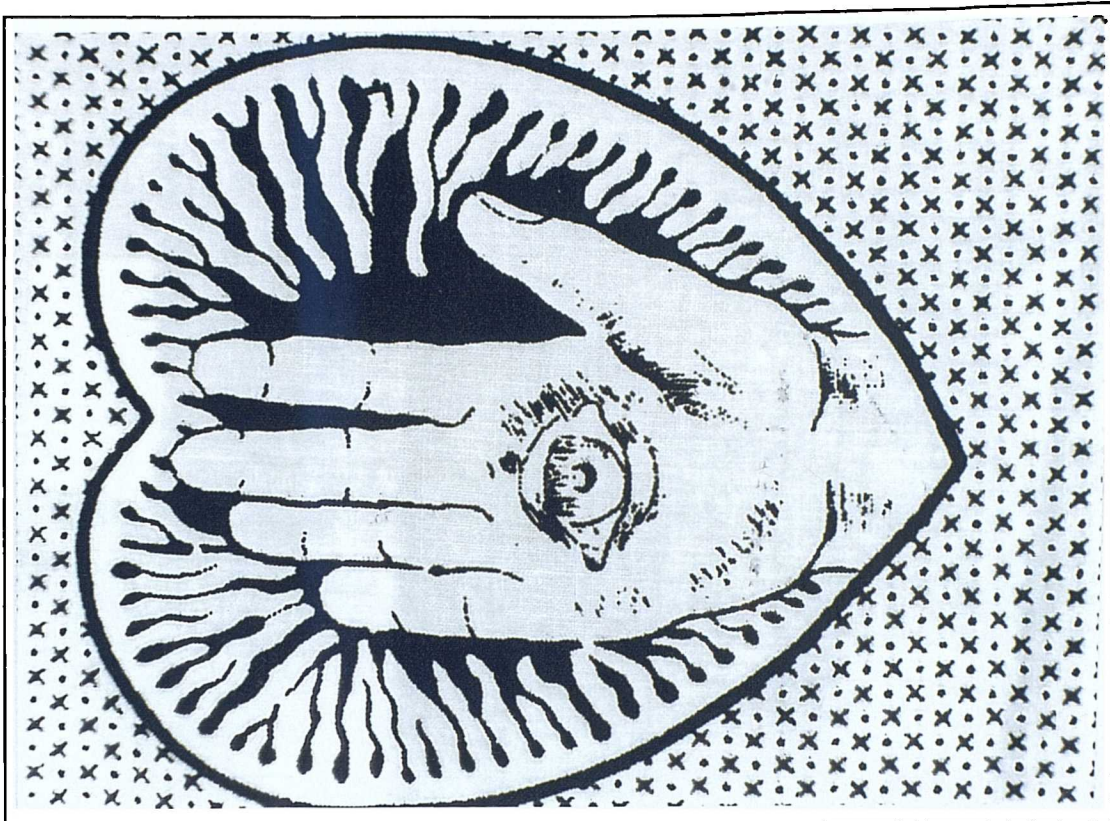


plate 16

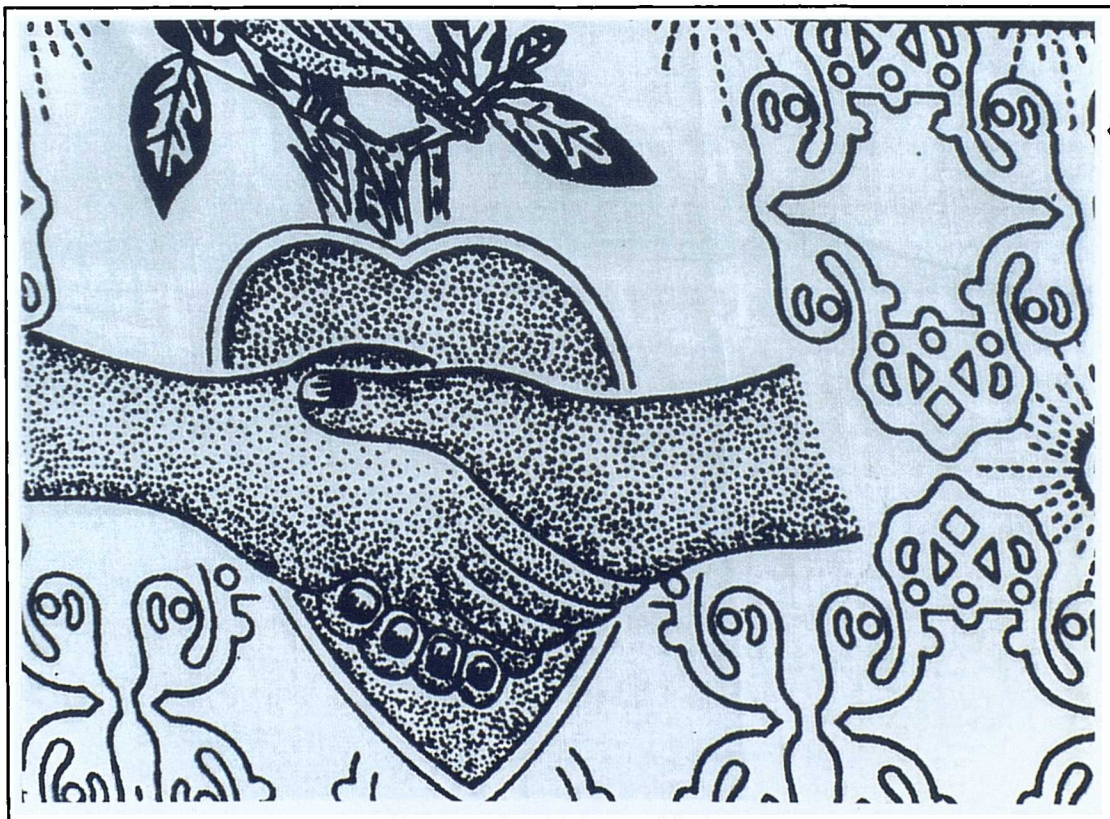


plate 17





plate 18

Cloth designs are produced for important national figures and occasions - designs were produced to celebrate independence in 1957 and there is a cloth named 'Kwame Nkrumah pencil' (plate 29). More recently, a cloth was produced for Rawlings' political campaign in the 1992 presidential elections: plate 19 (woman on the left) shows a cloth which has Rawlings' face as the main design feature; on the other woman is an example of western style dress trimmed in the colours of the NDC (National Democratic Congress) political party. Cloth is used in this way as uniform dress, a feature of great importance in the establishment of group identity in Southern Ghana.



plate 19

Domestic surroundings, tools, building materials and personal items are all the subject of cloth design : drums, the iron bedstead, lamps, beads, air conditioning fans, brooms, umbrellas and stools are very popular. Such designs may also have names giving commentary to human behaviour and relationships- plates 20 & 21 illustrate this. One design depicting building blocks (plate 22) has the poignant saying attached to it *sika a wo ntwá blocks* meaning if you don't have money you can't cut cement blocks - a reference to the importance attached to an individual's ability to purchase building blocks and put up their own home (also a reference through cloth design of the importance of lineage wealth in housing stock). A cloth called *fie mboziabo* translated 'home gravels' (plate 23) also emphasises the



importance of building materials, the gravel referred to on the cloth is the type which was laid inside a house before floors were cemented.



plate 20

*Se minya wo a anka me war wo* 'If I get you I will marry you'

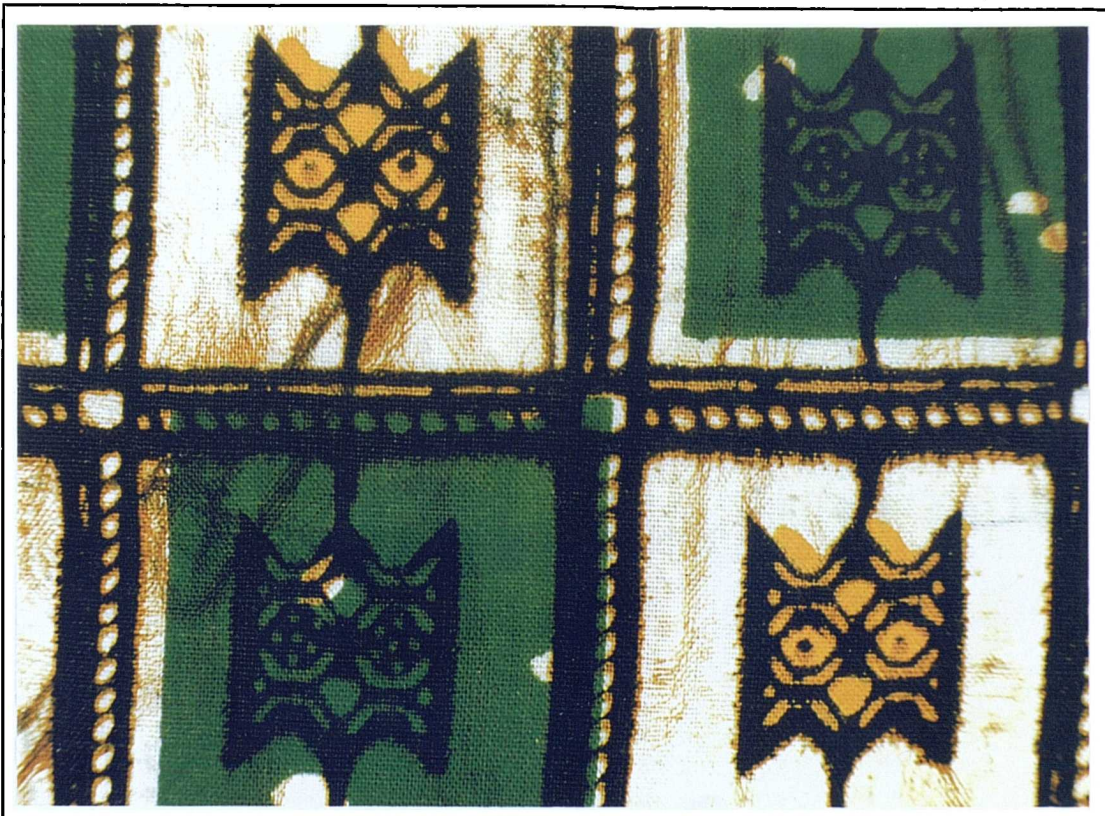




plate 21      *Se ebeka meho asem a pe akondwa tena so 'If you want to talk about me get a chair'*



plate 22



plate 23



As essential material objects and concepts for maintaining a healthy physical, social and spiritual life appear as designs on cloth, I was therefore not surprised to see food stuffs as amongst the most popular. These designs include water and the well and fingers of banana (see plates 24 & 25), yam branches and leaves, pineapples, shrimps, corn, crackers, guinea fowl, chickens, groundnuts, fruits and sugar-cane.

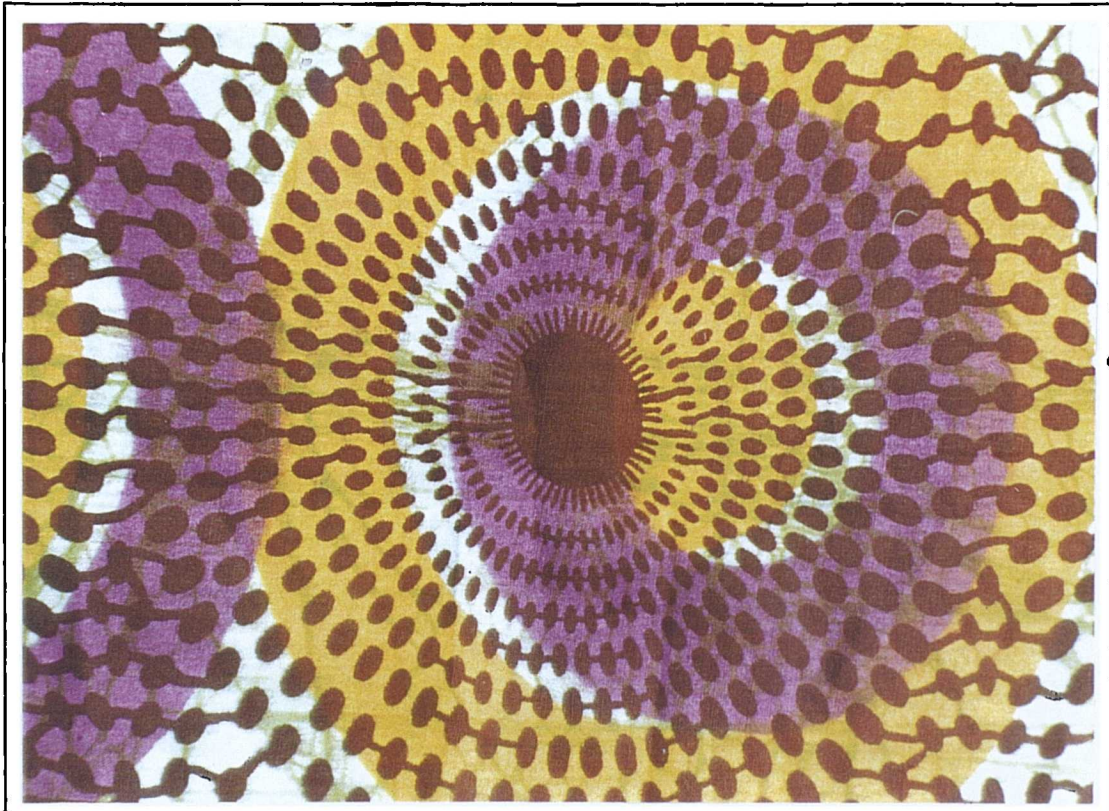


plate 24 *nsu bura* well

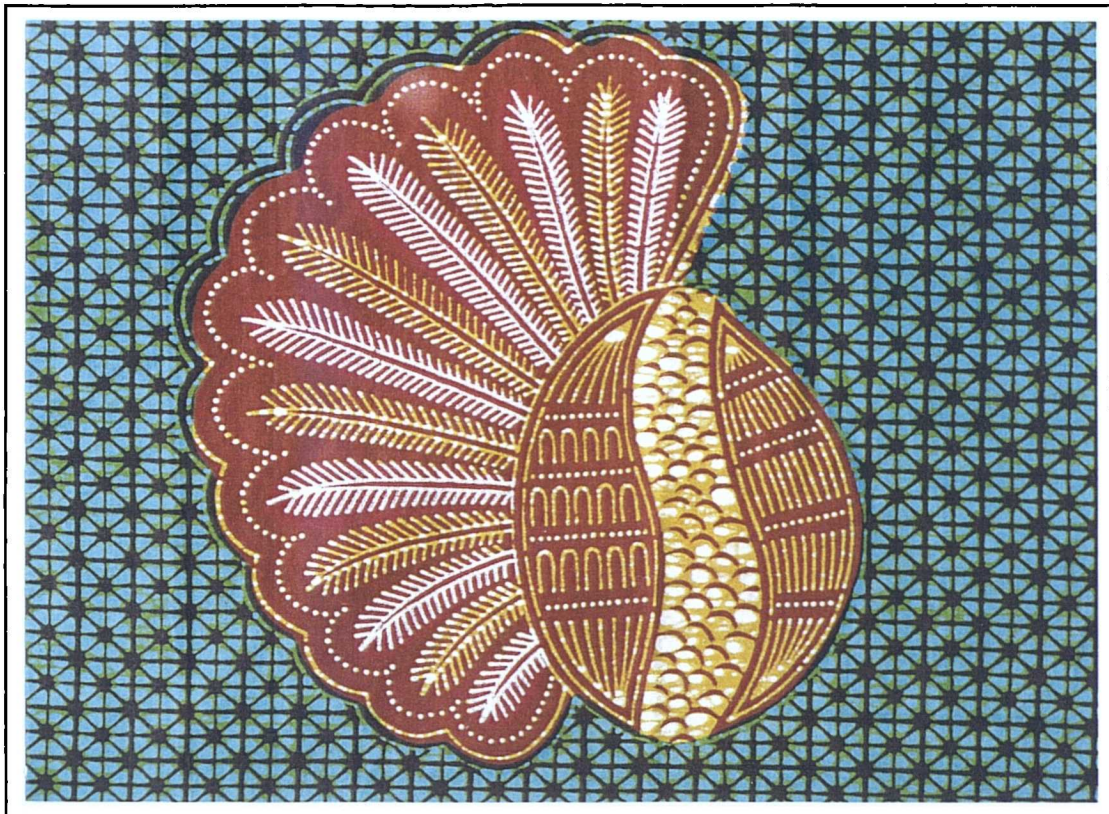


plate 25 fingers of banana

Some cloth designs are immediately recognisable representations but many are abstract and only understandable with commentary from knowledgeable women. Plate 26 and 27 for example must be translated. Plate 26 has a compound name *Wo bε hwε a hwε Wo nnhwεa yi wanni* translated 'if you will see, see - if you don't want to see look away'. Plate 27 is *Onyame menyiwεs wo medo* meaning 'God is looking after me'.



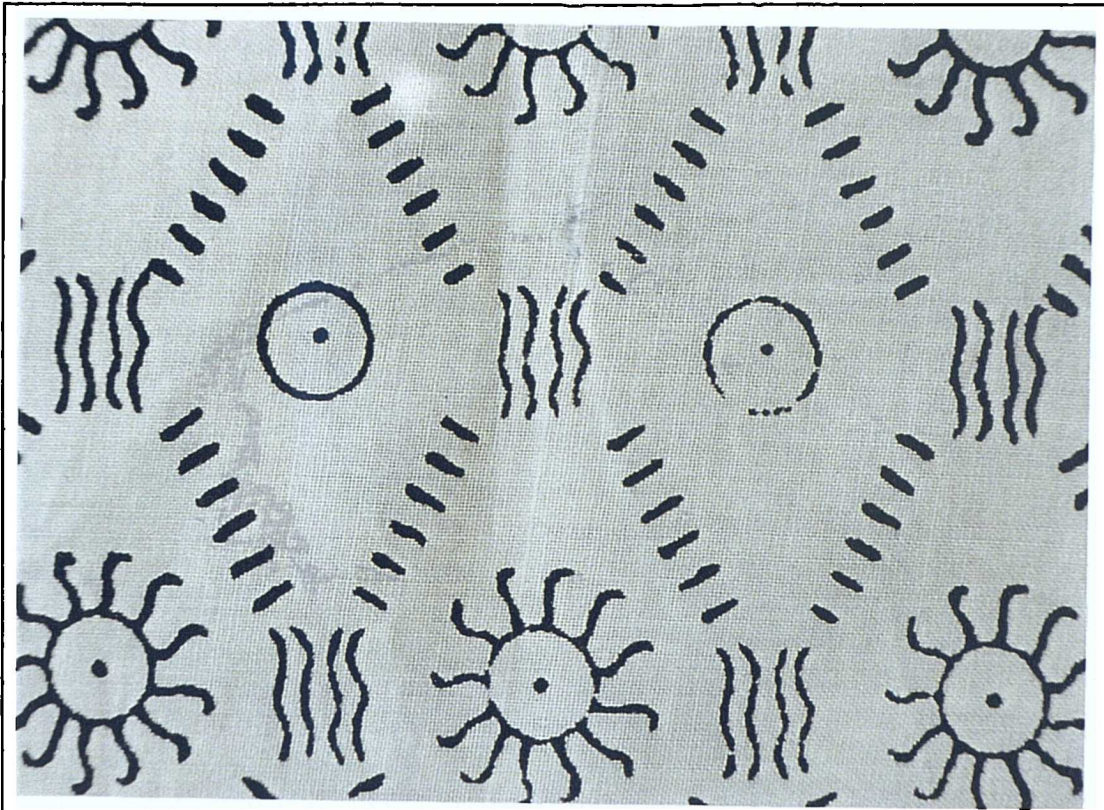


plate 26 *Wo be hwe a hwe Wo nnhwea yi wanni* 'if you will see, see' - if you don't want to see look away'

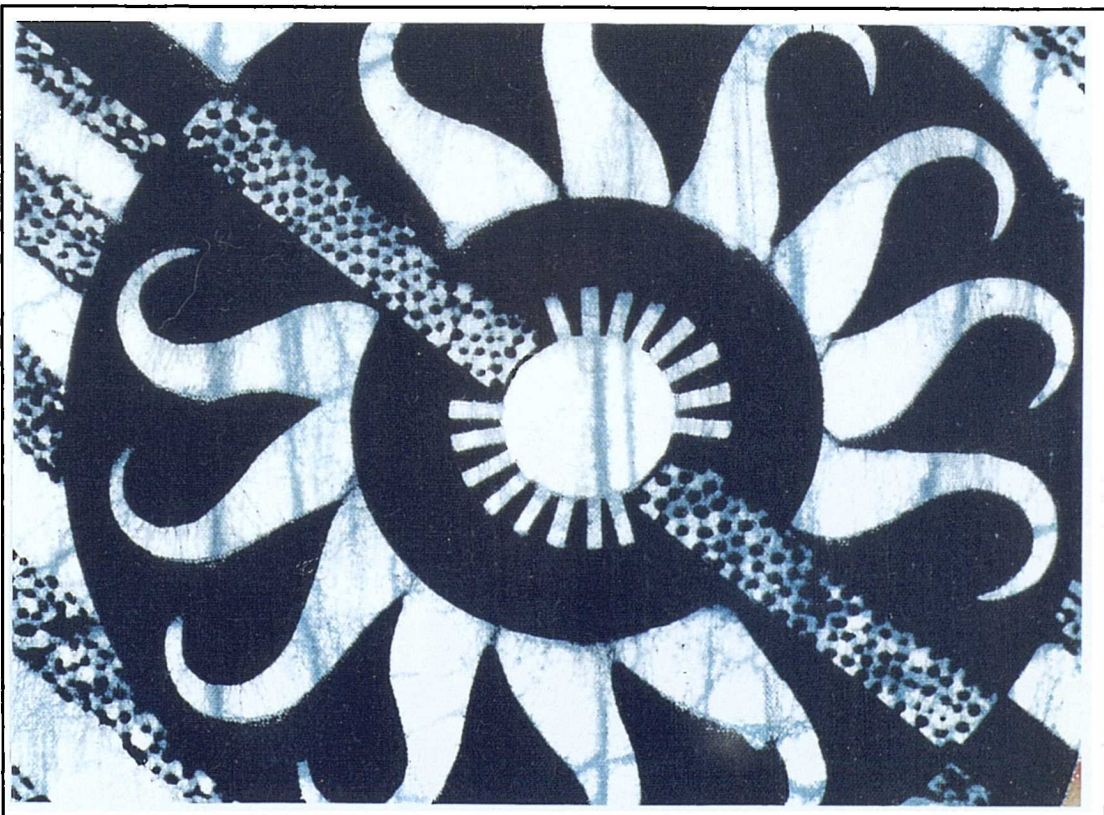


plate 27 *Onyame menyiwawo medo* meaning 'God is looking after me'

### Analysing the symbolic language of cloth - ethical and aesthetic standards

Occasions such as funerals, Sunday church services or annual festivals are opportunities for Ghanaians to present themselves at their very best. Great care is taken with appearance and many changes of clothes are necessary - only the newest and best clothes should be worn. Such preoccupation with appearance is much more than personal vanity or narcissism. In the Akan world view ethical and moral standards are contained within aesthetic standards. Beauty represents goodness and ugliness is indicative of wrong doing. This applies also to tastes or smells; "sweet as the characteristic of what should be approved of, and the offensive taste or smell as analogous to an evil deed" (Ackah 1988 p.123). Other writers have noted that wearing of best mourning dress during the celebration of funeral rites is an exhibition of the artistic and aesthetic standards of the community (Arhin 1994 p.312). Drumming, dancing and singing are also performed to the highest standards on such occasions.

The qualities of cloth and its designs are an unspoken symbolic language and an effective conveyer of Akan ethical ideas. Ethical standards are complex statements and in formal spoken or written language such communications are contained in complex sentence forms. Cloth and its designs may be short hand means of this difficult expression. Wittgenstein's work provides an argument for this notion. Wittgenstein found that formal language is severely limited and that attempts at the expression of non-factual information such as ethics will be senseless. For formal spoken language to be logically perfect and convey perfect meaning it should "have single symbols which always have a definite and unique meaning" (Russell 1961 p.x). The symbols necessary to express a



statement of ethics within a single sentence will be varied and complex. The communication of an ethical idea is not the expression of a single symbol but of a whole complex meaning, the parts of which contain many symbols. Thus it may be expected that the non-formal symbolic language of cloth and dress, an aesthetic language, may have a communicative and expressive force more appropriate for ethical statements. Wittgenstein tells us in his proposition 6.422 that:

It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words  
Ethics is transcendental.  
(Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.)  
(Wittgenstein 1961 proposition 6.421 p.71)

This statement towards the end of his early work contributed to the final conclusion that the essential things in life are unsayable. One commentary on the Tractatus states that Wittgenstein " thought that ethics, religion and aesthetics ..... were all in the realm of the unsayable " (Searle and Magee 1987 p.325). If formal spoken language has such limitations it is not surprising that the symbolic language of aesthetics in the colour, design, and shaping of cloth has been used to convey ethics and social values in the organisation of Akan culture.

The art historian Gombrich makes an analogy between language and pictorial form when he says that "the words of a language, like pictorial formulas, pick out from the flux of events a few signposts which allow us to give direction to our fellow speakers..." (Gombrich 1960 p.89). Cloth designs can be thought of in a similar sense to give direction to those initiated into their representational language.

My analysis of the aesthetic content of cloth design is informed by Coote's anthropological usage of the term 'aesthetics' defined as an "active and

cognitive process that is informed by culture" (Coote 1992 p.247). Coote himself draws on Gombrich's work as I have done to understand the theoretical base for the representational language I have found on cloth. Gombrich's entire study of art and decorative forms is premised on Popperian empiricism. Gombrich is following Popper and Kant in postulating the importance of our innate ability to search and scan our environment and perceive and order our experiences of it. Information received is plotted against an "elementary expectation of regularity" (Gombrich 1979 p.3). Gombrich notes that when one experiences regularity in nature which is usually random and chaotic this is often celebrated in design. He gives the example of the mushrooms arranged in a perfect circle becoming known in folklore as fairy rings because it seems impossible to imagine that such regularity has come about by accident (ibid. p.5).

Cloth designs and their symbolic language take much of their reference from configurations of edible vegetation, roots and fruits in the natural world and domestic animals and objects derived from natural materials. Whether it is significant that such articles are produced by nature in the course of its regular cycle of production is not easy to say and further focused fieldwork would need to be undertaken to substantiate this notion. It is clear, however, that most designs are at a level of abstraction. Some are visibly highly stylised reproductions of natural objects, some geometric forms, others are combinations of the two. Some designs often appear with almost hypnotic regularity against a background of a random veining effect or cracking<sup>1</sup> (plate 15 is a good

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<sup>1</sup> This is caused by the cracking of the wax when setting on the basic pattern (see appendix III). It is regarded as a fault to the Javanese, but to Africans it is an essential part a genuine batik print. 'European Involvement in Batik Printing', document held in Whitworth Art Gallery (Manchester, UK)(date and author unknown).

example) which is due to the waxing and dying production process. The designs do not reproduce the natural world in any accurate form and I believe it is not their purpose to do so. Their function possibly is to express in visual language a relational model between essential physical surroundings and essential social values and shape and colour.

In this relational model, the regularity of designs that are printed on cloth can never be found in the natural world. A cloth which displays six yards of identical snails in regular lines is not celebrating the abundance of snails themselves but the general ideal of abundant food supply. The same is true of the social world which informs cloth design and name. The representations on cloth are ideal moral standards not often achieved in the intricate web of kinship obligations and responsibilities which weigh down heavily upon the individual. Perhaps the attraction of the random cracking which is the essential background to most designs is an acknowledgement of the disordered and unpredictable state of nature and social organisation.

The process putting the social and physical world into focus upon cloth highlights these important objects, concepts and relationships. In the lives of those who are part of the process of naming cloth and understanding cloth symbolism the social or physical phenomena of design has become in Durkheimian terms part of their collective representations. These designs as they appear on cloth during religious ceremonies, traditional festivals and occasions marking out kinship solidarity can be viewed as 'sacred'. Sacred, again in a Durkheimian sense, means here that the collective imagination has metamorphosed designs in nature and domestic life into representations of respect and imbued them with a power which when in context is capable of raising the individual and the community above itself

to celebrate its very existence, renew its bonds and reinforce membership of the community. Cloth designs thus can on the proper occasion become sacred<sup>1</sup> symbols and represent and heighten emotions in similar ways to drumming and dance.

### Acquiring cloth

The first question I deal with in this section is how individual men and women acquire cloth and the answer reveals some basic structural features in Akan matrilineage structures, the nature of affiliations between matrilineages, and the ideal gender roles in Akan society.

One fundamental difference between men's and women's cloth acquisition practice is that in principle men acquire cloth themselves and women acquire cloth through a variety of associations especially through conjugal relationships with men. *Women may acquire cloth as a result of marriage and childbirth but also through members of their own maternal lineage (for example a daughter's gift of cloth to her mother) and by their own efforts.*

For special occasions a young man may borrow his father's cloth but as he matures he should buy cloth for himself. Only rarely do fathers receive cloth from sons or daughters and this is determined by the fathers' financial situation. My correspondence on this subject with Ghanaians shows a clear principle

"Men, and not only Akans, acquire their cloths, in principle, by themselves. In fact, when sons go home on festive occasions they wore one of their father's cloths. Sons, and

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<sup>1</sup> I am drawing on Durkheim's use of the concepts of the sacred and profane and his view that society is constantly creating sacred things out of ordinary ones. I am not implying that the representations on cloth are things set apart and forbidden as are some sacred objects which are used as collective representations in religious ceremonies.

for that matter daughters may give cloth to their fathers but only rarely. The economic situation of fathers may determine whether a son may buy his or her father a piece of cloth. Usually the son will, if he has to buy the cloth, give the money to the father to do the purchasing. "<sup>1</sup> (sic)

Another correspondent wrote that

"Akan males (known very much for their social roles as the bread winners) buy their own cloth without any assistance from women. Any male, who solicited financial help from females (even if they were his sisters) to purchase gifts for his wife, was known as an "okotoo" -(an imbecile!).<sup>2</sup>

The cloth acquisition principle is quite different for women who show pride or even flaunt cloth bought for them by their husbands. One example of this is wearing the cloth known by the name *a cun pa*, a good husband (plate 11). Women who have their own businesses or income *very often* buy themselves cloth; however many rural women such as those in Abodom are dependent on their husbands or matrilineal family resources for cloth. To gain an overview of the way both types of women (financially independent and dependent women in Abodom) acquire new cloths, I asked two women who I came to know well, to open up their boxes and discuss the contents - many women in Ghana use boxes and suitcases to store both sewn and unsewn cloth; they are usually piled one on top of the other in a corner of the bedroom. <sup>3</sup> (plates 28 & 29).

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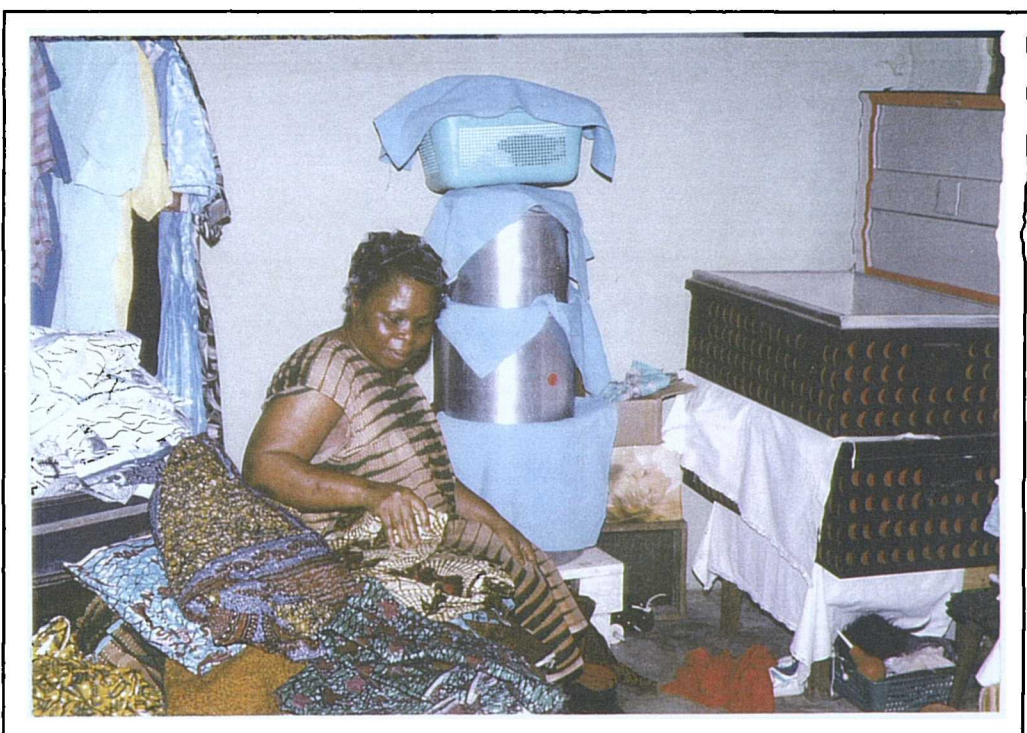
<sup>1</sup> E.mail correspondence - Date: Wed, 18 Jun. 1997 15:55:31 -0500 (CDT)  
From: "E. Akyea" <eakyea@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu>

<sup>2</sup> E. Mail correspondence - Date: Thu, 19 Jun 97 20:39:03 GMT  
From: M.AMOAH@lse.ac.uk

<sup>3</sup> The suitcase is now becoming more prestigious than the trunk (see plates 2 & 3) and is an essential part of a bride wealth which should ideally in 1993 also include the following standard items "the Bible, a dozen or more alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, the rings, cash, pieces of wax prints with matching scarves, jewellery (optional)". (Nkansa, 1993). A daughter who was sent away to boarding school will have received her first box from her mother at the time of leaving home.



plate 28

plate 29 woman wearing a house dress of the cloth name  
'Kwame Nkrumah pencil'

The number and quality of boxes is in itself a visible sign of wealth as is the number and quality of cloths inside. Originally the cloth will be acquired

as a 'piece'<sup>1</sup> or 'half piece'<sup>2</sup> and will then be partly sewn into style - a process which will be detailed in Chapter Eight.

The two women who opened their boxes to me were Grace's mother (female A) and Grace herself (female B). The former, an eighty year old woman, had lived most of her life in Abodom and worked as a baker and trader. She had brought up her family of four daughters mostly within her own matrilineage as her husband had abandoned the family. She now lived in a household with her daughters, and their children. This woman's two boxes contained fifteen sewn cloths, one lace outfit, one Kente cloth outfit, four best head scarves plus six for daily use and four house dresses. She explained that many of her clothes had worn out but explained the origins of those she had in her box. I asked her who had given her the first cloth, she replied it had been her father (the significance of this will be outlined below).

I asked when was the last time she had worn each cloth and she appeared to remember this in approximate terms of about so many months or weeks. For some cloths she remembered the precise year it

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<sup>1</sup> In Ghana, cloth is bought by the 'piece' or 'half piece'. These are culturally specific measures, of 6 and 12 yards respectively. This has been the practice for many years; a comment on the Gold Coast cotton market in 1949 said "The native buyer chooses the length which suits his mode of dressing, and according to style and habit, lengths vary throughout West Africa. The Gold Coast lengths are 12 yards always, in widths of 48 ins" (West African Cottons 1949 p.50).

<sup>2</sup> Cloth leaving the factory is usually cut into 12 yard lengths and folded into squares for stacking one on top of another on market stalls (much as the cloth is stacked in plate 3 and 4). This is also the case with imported cloth. The Manchester based company A. Brunnschweiler export cloth to Ghana pre-cut and folded into 12 yard pieces - these are then taped at both ends and ticketed with the name of the design. If a customer requires six yards the market cloth seller will cut the 12 yard piece into 6 yards using the original 12 yards as a marker - the 12 yard cloth is folded at each 2 yard measurement until all the 12 yards are neatly folded in this manner then scissors are used to cut at the third (6 yard) fold to make 2 'half pieces' from a 'full piece'.

was bought because of its association with an event such as the birth of a child or the funeral of a close relative (see table 1a). For others she would say the number of years ago and by this she meant the approximate number.

- 1 35 years ago bought by her husband for the year
- 2 30 years ago bought by her husband for the year
- 3 1965 (Kente cloth) bought by a daughter (on credit basis over a six months period)
- 4 25 years ago bought by herself from trading in sugar cane and fruit
- 5 25 years ago bought by herself from trading
- 6 10 years ago bought by a daughter for Christmas
- 7 15 years ago bought by herself
- 8 8 years ago bought by a daughter for Christmas
- 9 8 years ago bought by a daughter
- 10 1976 bought by a daughter
- 11 1980 bought by a daughter
- 12 1983 for wearing to church.
- 13 1984 (lace outfit) bought by a daughter to celebrate her wedding
- 14 1992 bought by a daughter to celebrate her mother's funeral
- 15 1992 bought by a daughter for Christmas
- 16 1993 bought by myself for Christmas

Table 1a Source of cloth acquisition for female A

Bought by herself	Bought by husband	Bought by daughter
3	2	11

Total clothes 16

Table 1b Occasions for which cloth was bought for female A

Funerals and church services	Husband on birth of a child	Husband for the year	Important lineage occasions*
12	0	2	2

Total clothes 16

\*Daughter's Wedding 1

\*Mother's funeral 1



Of these 16 cloths only three were bought by herself in her trading days. Some women inherit cloth from their mothers, but this woman's mother was sick for many years before she died and in these years she used most of her cloths and the remaining few were buried with her in the coffin. Should there have been cloth to share on her mother's death, it would have been for the most senior sister to take them and divide them between the other sisters as she saw fit. This woman once belonged to the Methodist Church and is now a leading member the Evangelical Methodist Church; both of these discourage observance and participation by its members in traditional festival celebrations, hence the occasion for buying cloth for this woman has been Christian celebrations of Christmas and Easter.

The boxes looked at below belong to Grace (female B), the daughter of the above woman who is a leading member of the Evangelical Methodist Church. Grace received an education in nursing and had travelled to England once in the mid 1960's. She has been married twice and has two children (one from each marriage). She is now separated and financially independent of her second husband. She helps sustain her immediate matrilineal family (especially her mother) in Abodom through her work as medical assistant in a private clinic. Her financial position allows her to take responsibility, on behalf of her sisters, for presenting their mother with new cloth once a year. She has a very extensive wardrobe of two trunks, three suitcases and a vanity box. One box is for coloured cloth, another is for funeral cloths <sup>1</sup> of dark colours.

- 1 1992 bought by herself for grandmother's memorial church service, worn only once

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<sup>1</sup> All funerals taking place in Abodom village should be attended by at least one member of each lineage. It is important to be seen at the funeral gathering to show respect for the dead and their families.

- 2 1992 bought by herself for her grandmother's wake keeping and worn only once
- 3 1992 bought by her husband and worn at her grandmother's funeral and at church
- 4 1989 bought by her husband when she delivered a son
- 5 1984 bought herself for Sunday church service (this was a white and blue cloth; colours should be worn at Church on every first Sunday of the month).
- 6 15 years ago bought herself
- 7 10 years ago bought as a funeral dress
- 8 10 years ago bought herself for church service
- 9 1990 bought herself for church service
- 10 1993 bought herself for church service
- 11 7 years ago for church and funerals
- 12 12 years ago bought herself because she liked the colours and design
- 13 20 years ago bought herself for occasional use
- 14 15 years ago because she liked the colour and design
- 15 1986 bought herself for church
- 16 12 years ago bought herself for church and best dress
- 17 5 years ago bought herself for church
- 18 3 years ago bought herself for funerals
- 19 7 years ago
- 20 1993 bought herself for church
- 21 1994 bought herself for church
- 22 1992 bought herself for church
- 23 6 years ago bought herself for church
- 24 4 years ago bought herself for best dress
- 25 10 years ago bought herself for funerals
- 26 8 years ago bought herself. This is a red funeral cloth used specifically to mourn at the funeral of a Queen Mother or Chief. She had worn it once to a chief's funeral but had lent it often
- 27 22 years ago bought herself for a funeral
- 28 date missing bought herself for church
- 29 10 years ago bought herself for church, now converted to a house dress
- 30 1993 bought herself for church

Her last box contained her best church cloth (31), two hats, six yards of white lace (32) bought by herself for her wedding<sup>1</sup> in 1984 and worn once. - she gave a further six yards to her mother as a wedding gift. There were also two half pieces of Kente cloth (33 & 34) bought in 1965

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<sup>1</sup> She financed most of her wedding herself because of what she called "the difficult situation of her husband."

and 1984. In a separate place she had ten pairs of shoes, fifteen western dresses and a handbag.

Table 2a Source of cloth acquisition for female B

Bought by herself	Bought by husband
32	2

Total 34 clothes

Table 2b Occasions for which cloth was bought for female B

Funerals and church services	Husband on the birth of a child	Husband for the year	Bought for important lineage occasions*
29	1	0	4

Total 34

\*

Own Wedding 1  
 Grandmother's  
 - funeral church service 1  
 - wake keeping 1  
 - memorial service 1

Grace said she has many cloths and she felt it was necessary to accumulate them while she was still earning an income. Some, she said, will wear out and others she will keep for her old age when she may have nobody to help her and no pension. While I lived in her house I was often surprised to find she had bought yet another new cloth while often complaining of a shortage of money. The cloth she preferred to buy was imported Dutch wax which is the most expensive. A quick and conservative estimate of her wardrobe put the current value at approximately a thousand pounds sterling. This at first seemed to me an extraordinary and extravagant expenditure. Grace explained that the price of cloth was always increasing and there were times in the 1980's

when cloth was hardly available or affordable. To buy cloth now was an investment and a means of beating inflation. She did not have a bank account but was sure that her money would be wasted should she open one. In fact when I investigated the interest on savings accounts in the Standard Charter Bank in Swedru I found the interest rate to be less than the official rate of inflation. Grace, without consulting any figures, had a good knowledge of inflation from her daily expenses and was keen to change her money into material goods such as cloth which would maintain their value.

The cloths in the boxes of the older woman were mostly presented to her by her own daughters. She also had two cloths from her conjugal relationship with her estranged husband - these were bought 'for the year' - this gift being an affirmation of the continuing viability of the marriage.

Grace's cloths had been bought mostly by herself and she was a key figure in maintaining her mother's boxes. In presenting her mother with cloth she was assisting her sisters who had smaller and less reliable sources of income from farming and trading. It was a source of pride to the family that they and their elderly mother could be seen going to church each Sunday in the good quality cloth and appear at the annual celebrations in new or hardly worn cloths. The appearance of the family group dressed as such and in correct style with the correct cloth yardage is a highly conscious and visible display of the integrity of the matrilineage objectified through cloth.

The cloth contents of the boxes described above are typical of women living in Akan female headed households. The structural composition of this

household is based on matrilineal descent. Typically, the most senior woman, constitutes the household head<sup>1</sup> and she lives with her own children, sisters, grandchildren and great grandchildren - under Akan principles of matrilineal descent all these household members belong to the maternal lineage (*abusua*) (Fortes 1950 p.254). The maternal domestic group are all pulled together by descent ties - this is despite a weaker counter pull of conjugal ties (Fortes 1946 p.30). Cloth acquisition of both women cited above clearly follows the matrilineal principle but the few clothes given to women by their husbands on the occasion of childbirth and 'for the year' show the bonds and ties of conjugal relationships and paternal responsibility towards women and their children. Such ties are rooted in the traditional Akan perception of a person and the notion of double descent.

### Akan concepts of the person - descent, personality and paternity

In analysing what underlies matrilineal descent and paternal bonds Sarpong's simple but essentially accurate account of what constitutes the Akan human personality is instructive. He says that a person "derives something from his mother, something from his father and something from God, the Creator" [Sarpong, 1974 #263] (p37). These various maternal and paternal contributions have been described by anthropologists as aspects of Akan double descent or what Fortes has called bonds of patrification and matrification (Fortes 1963). At a general level there is agreement over the properties which God and mother and father give to a child : the mother gives her child blood, (*bogya*), the

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<sup>1</sup> This conforms to Fortes conclusions on the age and gender composition of Ashanti head of household (Fortes 1946 p.12-16).

father spirit (*sunsum or ntoro*)<sup>1</sup> and God gives the soul (*Okra*), and the breath of life (*honhom*) (Sarpong 1974 p.37). The nature of the latter element are under continuing philosophical debate; this centres on the material, physical and immaterial, spiritual nature of the elements (Gyekye 1987). However, for the purposes of my discussion, the important factor is that an underlying conceptual basis for patrification within the dominant principle of matrilineal descent exists in the formative stages of life and these are affirmed on occasions during the life cycle when cloth is gifted from husband to wife, father to child and children to parents.

During the child's life the concepts of *bogya* and *sunsum/ntoro* become operationalised into family allegiances; the mother's *bogya* then stands for the authority and pull of matrilineal descent ties and the fathers *sunsum/ntoro* the pull of partifacial ties. Strength of matrilineal ties are established through birth rights, the most important of these being inheritance, including rights to farm land and citizenship in the mother's natal home (Fortes 1950 p.254). The strength of a child's allegiance to his father is established through the father performing subsistence duties<sup>2</sup> towards his sons and daughters. Fathers also take responsibility for the moral upbringing and conduct of their sons and a mother does this for her daughters. The father's subsistence duties include his responsibility in feeding, clothing and educating both sons and daughters and setting them up in life (Fortes 1950 p.268). Much of Fortes findings on the focus of

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<sup>1</sup> Rattray and Busai often use the *Ntoro* and *Sunsum* synonymously. Opoku (1978) describes *sunsum* as separate from *ntoro* - *ntoro* is inherited from the father but *sunsum* is "an intangible element which accounts for the character (*suban*), disposition and intelligence of a person" (Opoku 1978 p.96-97).

<sup>2</sup> The duty of a father to provide for the future of his own children is not a condition of the matrilineal kinship structure; there are many examples of fathers performing this role in societies having patrilineal or cognatic descent (Goody 1982 p.195).

paternal duties continue to be valid today. At least this is the case in the small rural town of Abodom where, as table 3 shows, fathers continue to be mainly responsible for setting up their sons and daughters in dressmaking and tailoring apprenticeships.

Table 3

Start up finances for Abodom<sup>1</sup> apprentices, seamstresses and tailors (8 seamstresses, 2 tailors)

Source of apprentice's first sewing machine				Who pays apprenticeship fees			
Father	Mother	Father Mother	*Other	Father	Mother	Father Mother	*Other
6	0	1	3	7	1	2	0

\*

1 sister
1 maternal aunt
1 raised money himself through trading

It is through performing the above duties that father/child paternal ties are formed amongst children who are born into the jural authority of the mother's matrilineage and who have the potential to perpetuate only the maternal lineage. Fortes cites an Ashanti saying that - "a man has no hold over his children except through their love for him and their conscience. A father wins his children's affection by caring for them" (Fortes 1950 p.268). A father's must look to his sister's children to perpetuate his own matrilineage but another Ashanti dictum quoted by Fortes which is still relevant today says "that no man loves his sister's children as much as his own children" (Fortes 1950 p.269).

<sup>1</sup> All apprentices interviewed in Abodom were from Akan matrilineal families. Apprentices in Cape Coast and Accra were from a range of ethnic backgrounds and lineage systems thus similar comparative tables for them have not been compiled.

Clearly the potential for conflict exists between parents and between the children and members of both parents lineages. The Akan are renowned for promoting values of peace and unity and many life cycle events are occasions for ceremonies which include moral training where such values are taught. When one looks at the various institutionalised cloth gift giving occasions they are found to occur along side or within such life cycles events and ceremonies - for example at births, marriages and funerals. When cloth is gifted as part of these events the exchange can be analysed as representing standards or peace and unity between individuals and amongst and between lineages.

If one examines life cycle events within the domestic group, principally marriage, childbirth and death one finds cloth giving obligations which enforce kinship responsibilities. The example in (fig. 1) shows a man's cloth giving obligations towards his wife and children and these reveal both the responsibilities of paternity and one of the obligations between marriage partners which sustains the relationship - that is a duty of a husband to cloth his wife - these are elaborated upon in the following sections.

Cloth giving patrifocal obligations				
1	2	3	4	5
CLOTH FOR MARRIAGE	CLOTH FOR THE YEAR	CLOTH FOR BIRTHS	1ST CLOTH TO SON OR DAUGHTER	CLOTH AT DEATH
Cloth from husband to wife as part of bridewealth	Each year the gift of cloth from husband to wife sustains the marriage	Cloth from husband to wife for the delivery of a child	Sons and daughters often received their first cloth from their fathers	Cloth from a man's children and their mother to fathers relatives at the funeral

Fig 1



### Patrifocal cloth giving - cloth for marriage and cloth 'for the year'

An ideal type conjugal relationship will begin with the gift of cloth or clothes within the institution of bride wealth<sup>1</sup>. The number of clothes and amount of cash, trunks or suitcases also given depends on the social status of the bride and can either be negotiated between the families or a current norm<sup>2</sup> is followed. My fieldwork in Ghana, however, taught me that most things can be substituted by money and token cash can be given as a substitute for cloth in bride wealth. (Nkansa 1993). Invariably, though, a woman will use much of this money to purchase cloth for herself and have it made up into styles by her dressmaker.

After marriage there is the future expectation that a husband will give his wife a new cloth at least once a year<sup>3</sup>. The appropriate occasion for this

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<sup>1</sup> Amongst the Akan this is an exchange from the man to the woman's group. The exchange is not always a single payment but can be a series. Some Ghanaian parents ask prospective sons-in law to make payments of money as a condition for their consenting to the marriage and would not accept the main bride wealth payment unless this initial amount is paid or promised to be paid - the money is refundable in the event of divorce (Sarpong 1974 p.83). Buah (1980) describes bride wealth payments as a series beginning with the 'knocking fee' which takes the form of drinks given to the bride's father; the next stage is the engagement ceremony at which members of the two extended families "prescribe 'fees' in the form of money, drinks, a trunk filled with cloths, and other valuables including, in some places, live animals such as cows or sheep, are presented to the bride's parents by the boy's father". The third stage involves a meeting of representatives of the two extended families on an appointed day to finalise the marriage.

<sup>2</sup> Because bride wealth payments have been known to become exorbitant there is a standard minimum cash payment and procedure laid down in writing in most traditional areas but it is usually good manners to exceed this requirement.

<sup>3</sup> Information on cloth gifting from husbands to wife was gained through informal conversations with those I lived with in Abodom, Cape Coast and Accra. Information from correspondence with Ghanaians studying in England confirm my field observations. I cite below part of a personal E.mail correspondence with M.AMOAH@lse.ac.uk who replied to a request for information I made on cloth gifting amongst the Akan through the *Okyeame* electronic news group:

"I know that sometime ago my mum (she is not from Abodom, but not too far from the Abodom area, and a Fanti), used to complain that my dad hadn't bought her some cloth this year. I thought that this was just because women were more fashionably-oriented and

gift is on one of the annual festivals such as Christmas, Easter or the traditional New Year Festival.

Without the annual gift of cloth or the equivalent in money the marriage may not be maintained. Many women I met in Ghana told me that the severe economic problems in the 1980's when there was a scarcity of affordable cloth meant men could not present their wives with cloth and this caused many marriage difficulties.

I was told that women who don't receive cloth from their husbands 'for the year' often begin to suspect that another woman is secretly draining her husband's resources. Should a woman find this to be true she may only tolerate her husband's behaviour if she is compensated and this is often with cloth or the equivalent in cash. Women are often tolerant of a husband's co-wife or wives as long as material provision is made equally amongst the women. However, a husband's illicit relationship with a girlfriend is a cause of conflict when it is carried on very publicly and no compensation is made to the wife. Men are expected try to keep affairs with girlfriends discrete and a man's wife is expected to tolerate such relationships if compensated. A conversation with Grace on this subject revealed women's attitudes and men's practice.

Extract from field notes

Grace was wondering whether the poor moral behaviour of men was in fact partly the fault of women. Women often allowed their husband to take girlfriends and accepted in return for keeping quiet money, cloth or both. Sometimes men brought their girlfriends home with them. They are even invited to sleep in the same bed as the man and his wife.

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liked to change appearances. I didn't know that there could be some anthropological and historical significance in those complaints."  
(19/6/97)

The 1st wife will be angry but can do nothing except perhaps pinch the husband in the back when she sees him making love to the girlfriend in the middle of the night. Grace said a friend of hers did this to her husband who didn't even notice until he found the mark in the morning."

Giving of cloth within a marriage can thus help to diffuse the conflicts inherent within marital relationships. Ghanaian women told me that should the marriage break down, as marriages frequently do, a women may keep the bride wealth gifts including cloth which her husband had given her. Danquah, however, described cloth as a moveable asset and claims that in the event of a marriage ending the cloth may have to be returned even if worn out long ago (cited in Oppong 1981 p.49).

A marriage usually begins an association between two separate matrilineages<sup>1</sup> and the gift of cloth symbolises this association in a lasting material form. The sums of money and drinks which are also distributed as part of the marriage ceremony are no less important but they are a less visible and lasting material symbol of relationships and a currency used to negotiate within them.

### Cloth for births

In discussing the relationship between father and child Fortes notes the importance of a man acknowledging paternity by accepting responsibility for maintaining a woman during pregnancy and by giving her and the child a number of customary gifts after the birth (Fortes 1950 p.266)<sup>2</sup>. Today

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of cross-cousin marriages (which are allowed amongst Akan ethnic groups) this would not be so; however Fortes suggested that such marriages account for a small proportion of relationships and that the number was in decline. (Fortes 1950 p.282).

<sup>2</sup> Fortes draws on Rattray (1927) who lists other such customary gifts as "imported toilet articles, clothes, soap, trinkets, &c." (Fortes 1950 p.266 footnote 1)

the most expensive and most essential of these gifts is a half piece of appropriately coloured wax printed cloth - this must be given after the delivery of each child.

The gift of cloth can be associated with the concept of *sunsum/ntoro* and the responsibilities of fatherhood and there is an association with the concept of *bogya* as it represents the attainment of motherhood and the perpetuation of the maternal matrilineage. Although the idea of motherhood and fatherhood are implicit within the gift due to the occasion for its presentation, I believe the gift's main purpose is to represent the whole family's shared responsibilities towards the child and the future responsibilities the child will undertake towards father's and mother's kin within the Fante dual kinship system. This latter function of the gift of cloth is most clearly seen in the context of the naming ceremony<sup>1</sup> often organised for the child<sup>2</sup>.

Plate 30 is a photograph taken at a naming ceremony I attended in Abodom; the cloth worn by this woman was a gift from her husband on the occasion of the birth of child she is holding (her second child). The cloth of blue printed design upon the white background has a specific symbolic reference. White in Akan colour symbolism represents purity, virtue, virginity, joy and victory and blue stands for love and female tenderness (Sarpong, 1974 p.103). During fieldwork when I asked about the significance of this type of blue and white cloth I was told that it

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<sup>1</sup> The child's name is formally given at a naming ceremony but the gathering is also an opportunity for moral training (Ackah 1988; Sarpong 1974 ).

<sup>2</sup> The resources of the family will determine whether this is held.

represents feelings of joy and happiness<sup>1</sup> and it is worn on occasions when one wishes to express these feelings.



plate 30 The wife of the Abodom tailor I studied at the 'naming' of their newly born son.

When a naming ceremony is organised and both parents are living together the event is usually carried out in the courtyard of the father's

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<sup>1</sup> The classical anthropological example of this is Turner's analysis of the milky white sap of the *mudyi* tree in Ndembu rituals as a symbolic substance of conceptually related meanings including breasts, breast milk, womanhood and childbearing and matrilineal descent (Turner 1966); the white colour of cloth can be interpreted in a similar way to stand for maternal attributes and relationships emanating from human reproduction.

home - if they live separately it takes place in the mother's compound (where the mother is usually living with her matrilineal kin). The father chooses the day of the ceremony and the proper name of the child. However, the father's duty of choosing a family name<sup>1</sup> and formally giving this to the child seems of secondary importance on this occasion compared to underlying function of the occasion which is to consolidate relations between members of the mother's and the father's matrilineage.

Cloth and dress play a major part in status recognition at the ceremony. On the appointed day guests will arrive dressed in best cloth, the baby will be dressed in white - this is often a European style baby dress and shawl. The mother will wear the newly gifted cloth from her husband for the first time. Mother, father and child are the focus for the occasion and the family group can be sociologically interpreted as standing in an ambivalent position between their own two sets of matrilineal kin. Both sets of kin cooperate during the ceremony with members of the mother's matrilineage submitting to the authority of the father's kin group. It is the head of the father's rather than the mother's family group that presides over the proceedings, thus being a sign to the mother's kin that both mother and child who are under their jural authority are also under patrilineal authority. The gifted cloth the mother is wearing also symbolises her husband's rights over her and the child and with this gift her husband has made an acknowledgement of paternity and signalled his attachment and support for both mother and child.

The gifted cloth is the first symbol in the child's life and it is likely to determine the child's relationship towards the father thereafter. One could

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<sup>1</sup> This is in addition to the day name given to the child - day names correspond to the day of the week on which a child was born.

also say that the gift of cloth conspicuously on display at the naming ceremony highlights the mother and child as 'liminal'<sup>1</sup> figures in the sense that they are between the authority of mother's and father's kin groups. There may be little conflict in this liminality as the Fante kinship structure has clearly defined roles for both mother's and father's kin groups in fulfilling their responsibilities towards the child. The gift of cloth signals that these roles will be fulfilled by kin from both groups.

Those invited to witness the ceremony are required to make personal contributions, in cash or as gifts, to various collections for the child. The amount each guest gives will be announced publicly at intervals during the occasion. A spirit of giving is cultivated by these periodic announcements and they also persuade guests to give as much as they can. I attended three naming ceremonies whilst on fieldwork and at all I discerned an air of competitiveness amongst the guests for giving gifts and money. More than once I felt under considerable social pressure to contribute more than I had intended. I wondered how much more pressure the actual relatives of both lineages would be under as the very public nature of announcing contributions was clearly designed to show the amount a person was prepared to contribute towards the future welfare of the child and to give a opportunity to guests to enhance their own standing and that of their respective lineages. The contributions can be analysed as the child's matrifocal and patrifocal ties being asserted publicly. That none-family members are invited and expected to contribute to the child's fund reflects the importance within the community for the care of children. Amongst all the activity of the occasion including the distribution of food

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<sup>1</sup> I use this term with reference to Turner (1967) as mother and father appear to be between status positions within kinship organisation and between the authority of both matrilineages.

and drinks, collections and announcements which are all in themselves social statements on the value and shared responsibility for the new-born child, the mother's cloth remains the most public and eloquent symbol of the joint responsibilities of lineage and community care.

### Cloth at death.

The children's gift (esiedze) of a coffin for their father's funeral is described by Chukwukere as "the fulfilment of the children's chief obligation to their dead father" (Chukwukere 1981 P.63). Chukwukere hypothesises that the coffin is a fundamental symbol of the father/child relationship and expresses the dualistic classificatory principle of Akan social structure (ibid.).

Chukwukere cites Fortes (1950) and Manoukian (1950) as confirmation on the importance of the coffin but he also cites Ffoulkes (a colonial administrator) who wrote that failure of a father to fulfil his duties and obligations to his children carried the latter's sanction to "refuse to provide his coffin and burial cloths at his death" op cit. p.64. Throughout Chukwukere's discussion he gives no analytical importance to cloth as a symbol of the child/father relationship; his whole argument emphasises the coffin and the funeral. Although I would not dispute the importance of the coffin I feel Chukwukere has neglected to show that the practice of giving cloth is an important part of the process whereby the father/child relationship develops and ultimately culminates in the gift of the coffin. The processes of forming the father/child bond should start at birth with the gift of a cloth to the child's mother (as discussed above) and continue as the father performs his duty of feeding and clothing the child through to adulthood. A father will give his own cloth or loan it to his own son when he comes of age and a son may buy cloth for his father in his old age. A



father may also give cloth to his daughter and she may provide cloth for her father in his old age. This depends on the financial situation of both father and child. Children are expected to give cloth to their father's matrilineal relatives on his death. Cloth has been throughout a father's life a visual statement of his personal and lineage status and the relationship he had with his children. On death the funeral can be an acknowledgement of a life of fulfilled obligations which can be represented through presenting and wearing cloth and other material symbols. The gift of a coffin must be deconstructed to take account of the many symbols it contains and the many cloths it represents throughout a man's life.

Chukwekere does not give enough significance in his article to the fact that burying the dead in cemeteries and the use of the coffin are relatively new practices. Many Ghanaians within living memory did not use a coffin and "buried the dead in the house. According to K. B. Asante<sup>1</sup> the colonial government outlawed the practice but a way was found to defeat the law. A coffin stuffed with cloth was carried to the cemetery while the dead was buried in the house. The government got wind of this and suspected coffins were opened by sanitary and other authorised officials - the unpleasant consequences put a stop to the practice. Today burial in a cemetery is the norm and the coffin is an important symbol of the deceased's status and a demonstration of the father /child bond within the dual kinship structure, but the coffin should be seen as a new symbol of a much older structural classificatory principle. A similar point can be made of wax printed cloth as this is a relatively new product of colonial import trading. But an older trade in cloth, both Kente and Adinkra cloth (a specific funeral cloth), has a longer tradition in Ghana.

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<sup>1</sup> Daily Graphic (Feature) July 1997

Chukwukere also understates the importance of mourning cloth. This can be another substantial expense which the deceased's wife and children bear in preparation for the funeral. I observed the distress that can be caused by funeral expenses during fieldwork. I awoke one morning in Abodom to find a regular visitor to my compound home, an elderly woman who was a fellowship member, sitting crying quietly to herself in a doorway. I was told her husband had died. I knew that this woman had been divorced from her husband for many years and I wondered why she was so publicly overcome with grief. The explanation was that she expected the funeral costs to financially ruin her. That morning she had been going about the village visiting friends and relatives trying to raise a loan that she could ill afford in order to purchase funeral cloth and to cover travelling expenses to the husband's home town.<sup>1</sup> I was told it is the duty for the deceased's wife (her children can help her) to buy cloth for the husband's close relatives - failure to do this can lead to disgrace. The matrilineal family of the deceased may also provide their own cloth; if the family is wealthy many pieces of the same cloth may be purchased

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<sup>1</sup> In contemporary Ghanaian funerals great importance is placed on where one should be laid in state and where one should be buried. Ideally the body should be taken back to the town or village of birth and laid in state in the deceased's own room in the family home. This is a relatively recent preoccupation which came with the introduction of mortuary refrigerators and air-conditioners which can keep the body for some time (but with much expense) in a decent condition for laying in state. Before these were available people had to be buried quickly where they died. The nails and some hair were then cut and sent home for burial.

Formerly most people died at home and the family assembled there to mourn and to arrange for the burial which normally took place early in the morning. Messages were quickly sent to all the family, relations, and friends, but before telephones and vehicles those afar received the messages late. The practice of formal mourning 40 days later became useful. The many who could not attend the burial ceremonies arranged to be present at the real funeral on the fortieth day.

and worn in unison symbolising the unity, pride and prestige of the lineage<sup>1</sup>.

On this occasion no mention was made by the mourning woman of the coffin as this had already been provided. I was told that in most villages a funeral committee operated to which most citizens belonged. With the regular dues of its members the committee provides a coffin and decent funeral for all paid up members. This committee also co-ordinates funerals to occur on one day of the week (usually Saturdays<sup>2</sup>) which often means three, four or more funerals taking place at the *durbur* grounds simultaneously<sup>3</sup>. These joint Saturday funerals are the formal mourning events and take place some time after burial<sup>4</sup> at which all family and friends attend (see note above). Many families with the resources buy their own coffins and conduct their own funeral proceedings and parties apart from the communal celebrations in the *durbar* ground. This is a show of status and it is perhaps in these more lavish funerals that the importance of the coffin is most clearly seen.

In addition to formal mourning days there are also memorial church services, burial services and more recently Ghanaians have created another mourning celebration, that of the unveiling of a tombstone and the laying of wreaths on the first anniversary. At all these events no coffin

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<sup>1</sup> Brokensha notes this in his description of a funeral in Larteh (Brokensha, 1966)

<sup>2</sup>Traditionally Mondays and Thursdays were funeral days because they are said to be propitious. Saturdays were introduced in order that town and city workers could attend funerals.

<sup>3</sup> This initiative was introduced to stop absenteeism from work for the purpose of attending funerals.

<sup>4</sup> There may be any length of time between burial and the formal funeral, Sarpong, (1974 p.30).

is on display but the relatives of the deceased matrilineage and his wife and children are expected to take part wearing best cloth. It appears to me that the procession following the coffin to the cemetery is only the first status display on behalf of the deceased and the matrilineages involved; the events which follow on the formal mourning days, and on the anniversaries are equally important. When these subsequent events are celebrated the preparation and distribution of food and drink is necessary and adherence to cultural aesthetic standards in dance and oratory and most importantly in dress are all called for and seem to be crucially important symbols demonstrating the deceased's achieved status within his own matrilineage and that he has fulfilled his obligations towards his wife and children.

The colour of mourning cloth has its own grammar. When you are not a close relative to the deceased, red or black should never be worn; instead any cloth of dark colour is appropriate. New cloth in black, reds and/or browns is expected to be worn by the principal mourners at funerals. These funeral colours are the colour of the earth according to Warren (1986 p.22). Sarpong describes the colour red in Akan symbolism as associated with "melancholy, the death of a relative, wars, national anger or crisis, violence or sudden calamity" (Sarpong 1974 P.103). Red or orange worn by a mourner indicates a very close relationship with the deceased. Also according to Sarpong, black stands for "vice, deep feelings of melancholy, the devil, death and their power over life, and old age." *ibid.*, Black is worn by those not as closely related to the deceased. Only for the church memorial service of an old woman may white and blue be worn as these colours are a sign of joy at the long and productive life of the deceased.

New cloth is not only important for those attending funerals, the body of the deceased will also be dressed in good quality cloth and jewellery. The room where the body is laid in state will be decorated with cloth and ornaments, especially clocks<sup>1</sup> (see plate 31). As with other West African ethnic groups the Fante believe the dead will become ancestral spirits (Fortes 1949) and clothing them appropriately is the correct preparation for this new status. Placing cloth in the coffin (that of the deceased and that gifted to the deceased at the funeral) is necessary as this will be of use in the after-life as the deceased will become an ancestor and the nature of the cloth will signify the status of ancestor. If the deceased's own cloth was not of a 'presentable' standard the matrilineal relatives will supply cloth which may be buried with the deceased. Darish (1989) documents similar uses of raffia cloth at Kuba funerals. Like the raffia textiles she describes as an "aesthetic and unifying resource" to the clan (p.137), both the wax prints and kente cloth used in Ghanaian funerals symbolise the grief and unity of the matrilineage and the status of the deceased.

Cloth is the main accessory used by those employed to dress the dead.<sup>2</sup> Plate 31 is a scene of an elderly woman laying in state in Abodom village. She has been dressed with skill in two yards of white and dark blue wax

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<sup>1</sup> One 'laying in state' occasion I attended had two clocks on the wall, each telling a different time. On asking the significance of the time on each I was told there was none. The dresser who supplied the clocks and hung them upon the wall I knew to be illiterate and therefore could not herself tell the time - this was the case I suspect for many attending the 'laying in state'.

<sup>2</sup> According to Warren (1986 p.20) traditionally the dead body is bathed three times, the maternal kin washing the right side and the paternal family kin washing the left side - the body is then laid on a bed on its left side facing east. He makes no mention of professional dressers. I have found no reference to professional dressers in other sources and I assume that hiring a dresser and the decorations and jewellery often provided is a relatively new practice. A person hired to dress the dead does not have to have a kin relationship to the deceased although this would not prevent them from carrying out the dressing.

cotton cloth which has been folded to look like a full six yards by the seamstress of my main case study in Abodom. Dressing the dead was one of her supplementary occupation (the other was farming). She also sewed the white burial gowns which are either hired or sold for the occasion (plate 32)



Plate 31



plate 32

Over the years that she had practiced this occupation she has collected two very large bags of essential accessories for both dressing the dead person and decorating the wake-keeping room. All her accessories are removed from the body before it is put into the coffin. Her accessories were jewellery (artificial gold chains and rings and strings of beads), lengths of lace and a lace pillow case, white nets, wall clocks, fans, kente cloth, facial cosmetics (face powder and lipsticks), gold braiding, artificial flowers and a set flashing fairy lights (the type used to decorate Christmas trees in Britain). The fairy lights are laid around the head and shoulders of the deceased, forming part of highly decorative front bedstead (plate 33). These fairy lights were a recent acquisition given to her by her brother and added greatly to



her popularity as a dresser<sup>1</sup>. The attention given to the deceased in order to make them look presentable to the mourners contradicts Chukwukere's observation that for the Fante "Death is recognised and accepted in all its ugliness, .....No serious attempt is made to recreate at death, especially through face-lifting of the corpse, a nostalgic impression of the buoyant life the deceased once lived" p.65. On the contrary I observed the dresser inserting cotton wool into the nose and mouth and going to great lengths to adjust this to make the face more acceptable. She also used face powder and on women she used lipstick.



plate 33

Wax cotton printed cloth seems to be of less importance to the aesthetics of laying a body in state and the white burial gown is considered of higher status. The body in plate 33 is that of a chief

<sup>1</sup> She greatly desired an iron bedstead for use in this work and assured me that she would be in great demand and could charge more for her services if she could supply this feature for the wake keeping room.



wearing the dresser's white gown. The woman's body in plate 31 is covered with only two yards of cloth made to look like six. The dresser was complimented by the relatives of the former for the skill she had shown in making this cloth look more voluminous than it was. The dresser was also complimented on the youthful appearance of the deceased she had recreated by skilful use of cosmetics.

Cloth also becomes an article for litigation on the death of a man. I was given many examples which are similar to the following situation described to me by Grace.

Extract from field notes

Should a woman be living in her husband's house and he died suddenly, his lineage members could act quickly to drive her and her children out of the marital home and all their possessions including cooking pots and cloth could be taken by the dead husband's in-laws as their property<sup>1</sup>.

Even the introduction of new civil inheritance laws<sup>2</sup> have not protected women from the loss of their possessions in this type of legitimate plunder.

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<sup>1</sup> Oppong states that a wife "is considered to have her own separate rights .....Moreover, married people customarily have no joint property, each retaining his or her own goods, and they may not inherit each other's property at the death of one intestate (Oppong, 1981 p31). Oppong cites both Bosman 1967 and Rattray 1927 who reiterate this point. She quotes Danquah 1928 on the issues of returning cloth if a marriage breaks down " everything the husband has given to the wife since the marriage payment of *aseda* must be returned by her. This may even include cloth which wore out long ago" (p.153).

<sup>2</sup> Ghanaian law now recognises the passing of substantial wealth from a father to members of his nuclear family. Fortes reported that Ashanti fathers, with the permission of their matrilineage, could in their lifetime pass gifts of land or money to their children or bequeath them on their death-bed (Fortes, 1950 p.268). However, a man's child or wife could not inherit his property. The changes in Ghanaian law now allow up to a third of a man's acquired property to pass to his children and up to a third can be passed to his wife (Kronenfeld 1991 p.26). However, the popularity of this change is uncertain; Kronenfeld found no instances of paternal inheritance in the fishing village of Egyaa No1 in the Central Region during his fieldwork there in the late 1970s. From my conversations on this subject I found that women are keen on the recent change in the law but that the instances of it being observed to the benefit of women were few. In support of

Cloth in this context is in the same category as land, houses and gold in being classified as stool property, family property and private property (Oppong 1981 p.29).

### Cloth as a gift from child to mother

The classic work on Ashanti kinship (Fortes 1950) documents the importance of mother and child bonds and described this as an "absolutely binding moral relationship" (p.263). Fortes also cites the Ashanti as saying that "throughout her life a woman's foremost attachment is to her mother who will always protect and help her" ( ibid.). In old age a mother will expect her children to support her and part of this responsibility is to provide her with cloth to meet her needs. Daughters especially are expected to keep their mothers well dressed in cloth - the gift of at least one cloth per year, with three being a more acceptable number. Since leaving the field, correspondence with Ghanaians on this issue *has confirmed the practice of daughters and often sons giving cloth each year to their mothers*<sup>1</sup>. As a relatively wealthy member

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this many cited cases of women who had, on the death of their husbands, been thrown out of their homes by their husband's in-laws and all their property including their cloth taken by the in-laws.

<sup>1</sup> Re. your query on the above subject I do not think the practise of daughters giving half a piece of cloth to their mothers is widespread in Ghana. What happens is that daughters and also sons who may be working in Accra or Kumasi or Koforidua or some "big" town may give the cloth to their mother when they come home for Easter or Christmas or an annual traditional festival like ODWIRA or YAM FESTIVAL.

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University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

E,Mail correspondence -  
Date: Tue, 17 Jun 1997 15:09:23 -0500 (CDT)  
From: "E. Akyea" <eakyea@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu>  
Subject: Re: Wax printed cloth

of my host lineage in Abodom I have given a gift of cloth annually to my Abodom mother since 1994.

### Cloth from sister to sister

Fortes' description of sibling relationships amongst the Ashanti is still a fairly accurate account and can be extended to those I lived with in Abodom. Fortes wrote that siblings treat one another's possessions as joint property and borrow one another's personal goods without asking permission - where borrowing and lending of money do take place these exchanges are in a class of their own, meaning that borrowing between siblings cannot create debts (Fortes 1950 p.274). Complaints and acrimony, he claims, are seldom felt between siblings over irrecoverable loans which if requested between siblings cannot not be refused (ibid.). If this is the case possessions including money and cloth may be classed as in the realm of shared matrilineal wealth.<sup>1</sup> This, however, may be the ideal but in practice I witnessed many sibling arguments over money and cloth and I found no institution of giving gifts of cloth between siblings.

#### From field notes

Grace had an argument with one of her sister Hanna (the eldest) over a piece of Ghana made wax cotton cloth that Hanna brought back from Swedru market. Grace had a credit with a cloth seller in the market which Hanna was settling on her behalf. Instead of cash the market woman persuaded Hanna to take the balance in cloth. When Hanna brought the cloth to the house Grace didn't like the design and even more the quality of cloth. It was also too expensive, being 9,000 cedis when it should have been brought for around 7,000 or 8,000. Grace believed Hanna had been cheated and had been foolish. The argument was

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<sup>1</sup> This notion of communal ownership of cloth is found in other African cultures. For example Darish (1989) documents female heads of clans directing other female members of her clan section in the work of embroidering and producing raffia cloth skirts which will not become the property of one individual but will belong to the group (ibid. p.125-126).

settled with Hanna agreeing to buy the cloth from Grace giving her a 5,000 cedis down payment - Grace has the idea that she may never see the balance of the money from her sister.

### Conclusion

For the initial period of my fieldwork many designs were beautiful and fascinating abstractions and the women and men wearing them classical figures in a colourful African environment. As my work with seamstresses became established I became aware that Ghanaians were not just choosing their cloth designs from a selection offered on the market stalls by foreign and local manufacturers. They had made an essential contribution in defining the available stock. The market cloth trader made her selection from the wholesaler and the final customer will add their choice. That choice is a form of selective interpretation of colour and design and appropriateness to fit the occasion. Through making a choice in design Ghanaians are amplifying their physical world and social ideas via the medium of their cloth. When Ghanaians interpret a design and associate it with the social or physical environment what is important in their lives is being pulled out of context, often abstracted, and increased in importance. Such designs are often named and perpetuated through generations.

Some clothes of older women are fifty years old and are still admired and worn. Many will be handed down to younger relatives. The style of dress construction may be altered but the printed design and colour will still be admired. That such old designs continue to be popular today is not surprising when one understands the imagery and its associations. That the branches and leaves of yam and fingers of banana are celebrated as much today as in the past is a reflection on the absence of, or slow

progress of, change especially in rural villages such as Abodom where people are still utterly dependent on the natural environment for their existence.

One often sees cloths printed with air conditioning fans, clocks and other representations of imported goods; valued possessions or aspirations. The subjects of cloth design may change but the medium of cloth for expressing old values and new orientations has remained unchanged - western fabrics have not replaced traditional printed cloth. The reason may be that in the choice of a western cloth the Ghanaian can make little contribution to design. The cloth cannot be given as a highly respected gift within a marriage or to relatives; it cannot then maintain lineages and social structures. The uniform colours and abstractions of such cloths are truly abstractions reflecting no recognisable values or essential physical surrounding. The combinations of colour and shapes in western fabrics cannot elicit the same kind of response as wax printed cloths.

It is possibly the continued dependence on and reverence for the natural physical environment, established social structures and respect for ideal social and aesthetic standards illuminated through printed cloth that ensures the continuity of its classical designs and names.

In this chapter I have made an initial exploration of the role of giving cloth as an institutionalised gift within matrilineal descent relationships, between husband and wife within conjugal relationships and between fathers and mother and their children. I have found evidence that the gifting of cloth is carried on between members of the same matrilineage and amongst members of matrilineages associated by marriage and the nurturing of children. Cloth gifting within the former can be explained as an expression

of building and maintaining matrilineal status and solidarity. Within the latter, gifting can be explained as a visual and material expression of the ties of paternity and adherence by men to institutionalised norms of marriage and family maintenance. The gift of cloth made by a man to the mother of his child is the first marker or symbol of the father/child bond which will finally express itself in the contribution the child will make to the father's funeral. It is the responsibility of the child, with the help of the mother or mother's brother, to provide not just a coffin for the funeral but to be able to meet all the aesthetic standards of the occasion of burial and the following memorial celebrations. Gifting cloth and wearing cloth on all occasions associated with the funeral is fundamental and all a person's resources may be used in order to present cloth to the deceased's kin and present themselves and other lineage members in appropriate attire. The most appropriate presentation of the self is made by wearing a good quality cloth and one prepares oneself and one's cloth for such occasions in advance with the knowledge that what covers the body also expresses the social self beneath. That social being is part of many complex relationships but crucially part of a matrilineage whose status is marked visually by the aesthetic presentation of its members.

## Appendix I Rattray and Ashanti cloth designs

Rattray hoped that by detailing Ashanti knowledge and skills in cloth printing and other arts and crafts "that a certain commercial advantage to Ashanti may possibly result" (Preface VI). Perhaps in addition to documenting these techniques and designs had Rattray secured patented rights Ghanaian domestic textiles manufacturers may have had a competitive advantage and a stronger market position today. At the time, the Gold Coast had no domestic textile industry and it was not British policy to start such ventures when the market for cloth could be exploited from Manchester. Rattray's willingness to publish these designs is in stark contrast to the strict industrial and intellectual property rights practised in Europe at the time and today. The merchant converters registered their designs in Britain or Holland depending on the printers they were using. Merchant converters did not always give their work to Manchester printers; they also used the printing works in Holland. The surviving printers in Holland, Vlisco,<sup>1</sup> are a good example of current trade secrecy in the batik industry. Vlisco has developed all its modern printing equipment and does not allow any outsiders into its factories. It was only in October 1994 that the Ghanaian National Co-operative Kente and Adinkra weavers Association appealed to the Ministry of Trade and Industries to take action on its petition for patent rights and compensation from foreign textiles manufacturers who imitate kente and adinkra designs (Editorial 1995 [d]).

To what extent, if at all, Rattray's disclosures helped in the export of the designs he discovered to other countries is very difficult to know. His work was directed at the academic anthropologist and thus circulated to a very narrow readership. Speculation is not completely quelled however; he was obviously in contact with textile companies in Britain. Evidence for this comes from his reference, in the form of recording his gratitude, to Joseph Bridge & Co., Ltd, of Manchester who prepared the textiles plans which appear in his 1927 publication. Joseph Bridge were merchant converters, who continued trading in batiks until 1977 (Cassara). That

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<sup>1</sup> Holland has been a specialist centre for cloth finishing since the seventeenth century. It developed despite having no indigenous flax cultivation or yarn production. All but the bleaching and printing is reported to have been done outside Holland (Weiner, 1989 p.183).

British companies were not interested in taking over Ghanaian indigenous dye making processes is clear from documents cited by (Howard 1978). These give reasons why the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce showed no interest in 'such dyes', that "could be produced here in greater quantities from superior materials and at less cost than in Africa".<sup>1</sup> Much more interest was shown in the Ashanti designs. These without doubt were used in the textile printing factories in Manchester and evidence for this comes from a cloth (plate 34) recently produced by the Manchester based A. Brunnschweiler who have been trading since 1816 and now combine the roles of merchant converter with printer.

Rattray ended his preface with very gracious thanks to his informants and expressed the hope that in their "separate individualities and diversities lies {their} ultimate value to the Empire and the world". Although British anthropologists of the colonial era have to some degree been cleared, by more recent members of their own profession, of being overly helpful to colonial authorities in Africa (Kuper 1983), little has been said specifically on their role in compromising the economies of these countries.

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<sup>1</sup>Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, 41st Annual Report, P.91 (cited in Howard 1978).



## Plate 34

Originally the pattern stamps for Adinkira cloth were made from fragments of old calabashes. The dye was made from tree bark and iron slag, boiled and strained until the consistency of tar.



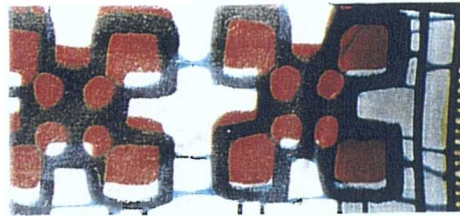
*Dwenini aben* - the ram's horns



*Gye Nyame* - 'Except God (I fear none)



Cloth is 'Veritable wax Anglais', purchased at Nasser Fabrics, Brixton, Sept 1991 supplied by A Brunnschweiler - Manchester U.K



*Mmrafo ani ase*, the *Keloids* on a Hausa man



*Musuyidie*, lit. something to remove evil; a cloth with this design stamped upon it lay beside the sleeping couch of the King of Ashanti, and every morning when he rose he placed his left foot upon it three times



*Nsirewa*, cowries

Rattray 1927, source for historical data.

Appendix II

Companies based around Manchester involved in the textiles trade to West Africa

**Merchant Converters**

H.J Barrett	(closed 1985)
Joseph Bridge	(closed 1977)
Edwards Cunliffe	(closed 1950s)
Elson & Neill	(closed 1970)
Grafton African (now part of A. Brunnschweiler)	
J.F. Hutton	(closed 1960s, started before 1800)
Richard Brotherton	(closed 1990)
Logan Muckelt	(closed 1990 started 1885)
Norman Melland	(closed 1960s)
J.A. Duke	(closed 1960)
E. Goodwin/ A.H. Emery	(closed 1960s)
Simpson & Godless	(closed 1960s)
Brown Fleming (1895 taken over by the Calico Printers Association {CAP}1939)	
Aitken Campbell	(closed 1960s)
J. Taylor	(closed 1960s)
M. Hurst	(closed 1960s)

Manchester wax printers

United Turkey Red (closed 1960)  
 Marple Printing Company (closed 1952)  
 Horridge & Cornall (1857 to 1959)  
 B.F. Crompton (closed 1966)  
 Astbury & Pickford (closed 1966)  
 Broad Oka (CAP closed 1959)  
 S. Schwabe & Co (CAP closed 1966) incorporating James Black  
 F.W. Ashton (now Brunnschweiler) started 1816 ceased 1989 but still printing batik prints)

Source: Letter from Miss Cassara, held in the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, (date unknown).

### Appendix III

The original technique used by the Manchester companies for waxing the basic design and block printing is summarised below:

"grey cloth, that is, cotton cloth as received from the weaving loom, is treated in several ways so as to bring it to the wax printing machine in as pure a state as possible. The cloth is then printed in hot, liquid wax which sets hard almost on contact. This printed cloth is dyed in indigo and the cotton absorbs the colour everywhere except where the wax lies on the surface and resists the indigo. This indigo-dyed cloth has acted as a photo negative. The fabric is now washed to remove the bulk of the wax and we see an indigo design on a white background with little globules of wax clinging to the cloth here and there. ...now is another colour applied to brighten the design. Wooden blocks inset with copper strip showing the design in relief, are used to apply bright-hued oranges, yellows or golds to the cloth, ...and the cloth, stretched across long tables, is slowly printed by hand. ....Once more the cloth is washed to remove the remaining beads of wax which have resisted this second colour blocking, and one sees a very pleasant irregular specked effect. The cloth is once again blocked with a contrasting colour such as green, bright red, or yellow, to add further highlights, before finally entering the last washing and finishing processes."<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The sale of British cotton goods in West Africa (The Times August 13, 1958 p.12)

## Chapter Eight

The seamstress' work on female form



## Time

Some of the most frequently seen posters and logos in Ghanaian homes, work places and local transport refer to time; 'take time' and ' God's time' are typical. Until I started working with seamstresses I did not understand the significance of these sayings. As a fieldworker I considered all time to be working time but as I contemplated spending my days working in sewing kiosks alongside seamstresses I was grateful for the potential time structure this would put on my days and began mentally organising the time I might take off for a lunch break and the amount of time I would have to write up the morning's field notes before returning for the afternoon session. I naively expected to find seamstresses and their apprentices imposing a time structure on themselves in order to complete work. This I imagined would entail a certain number of working days in the week and a regular starting and finishing time.

Soon the conceptual scheme broke down. It became increasingly difficult for me to order my days with my own time imposed categories. Instead of turning up at the kiosk of my case study seamstress, she insisted that one of her apprentices should come to my house to collect me. They almost always arrived at different times and when I least expected them or not at all. This was because the seamstress, their 'master', arrived for work at different times and on different days.

One day I made an unexpected visit to the sewing kiosk and was told by the apprentices that the master was expected. I asked if I could wait and

there was no objection. This I thought would be a good chance to see how the apprentices coped without supervision by the master. I took a seat, but left my note book in my bag so as not to appear the company spy. There seemed nothing going on needing detailed description. In fact the apprentices were doing nothing, not sewing, not tidying and hardly exchanging a word. Some were sitting on wooden stools in front of wooden tables on which their arms were folded, their heads leaning forwards and resting on their arms. Time passed and they were soon silently drifting in and out of daydreams and dozing. I also became drowsy as I wondered about the day dreams of these girls. I wondered if they were using time to some effect, perhaps calculating budgets or planning household chores, but their faces were too empty for their minds to be active. The day was passing and nothing was happening apart from being in a place of work. I dozed with them until I gave up hope of the master coming to work.

I found out later she had 'travelled'; a local term meaning she had left Abodom by local transport - this could be for the day or longer. It would be unproductive to ask when she would be back. Even if people know, the difficulties with local transport meant that no precise time could be estimated. This seamstress was the second wife of a man who lived in Accra and she would periodically visit him there leaving the kiosk closed for periods. She also suffered more than most with debilitating bouts of malaria and she, like most people in Abodom, had to supplement her income. She did this, like most, by working her farm but she also specialised in dressing the dead for wake keeping - a job which takes about two days to complete and recover from. It appeared to me impossible for her to plan even the following day with any certainty.

This was my initiation into the working life of the village seamstress. I found more formally time structured work places in Cape Coast and in Accra which re-engaged a sense of western time structure, but everywhere people had to battle against tiredness in the heat of the day, hunger pangs, transport problems and illness. All these were also my problem to cope with.

## Introduction

In the previous chapter I detailed how, by reference to the natural and social world, cloth had acquired meaningful and descriptive designs and become part of indigenous culture; in this chapter the processes of authenticating cloth is taken a step further by examining the role of the seamstress in cutting and sewing the cloth and recreating from it an outfit which celebrates the female form within a carefully outlined and constantly reproduced model of female statue and body image.

The previous chapter also showed that African printed cloth is visually evocative and in this chapter I will be detailing how the same is also true of the garments produced from it. The essence of a seamstress's garment is likened to dance and drumming in popular culture. She is seen as an artist in her own right in that her garments invoke in those who wear and view them an emotional response. Her art is not art for art's sake in that it is an object to be viewed or studied for enjoyment but a functional art as much African art is (Abraham 1991 p.48-52). The dressmaker's art comes from her head; she has a cognitive map of female form and essence and this is expressed through her cutting hand. Each cutting stroke lucidly frames an effort of concentrated and creative mental and physical co-ordination.

The seamstress is usually much respected and trusted in her community and is thought of as gifted. She is trusted by her customers who hand over their cloth to her knowing she will not 'spoil' it (a Ghanaian English term meaning waste or fritter away resources). She is trusted by the apprentices she takes into her care and helps them 'open their eyes and ears' to the work. As they learn and eventually become independent they



will speak highly of her skills and enhance her reputation in the community. This is the ideal model of the seamstress at work in the community which is most closely approximated in village practice.

There are many variations on this model and changed practices are especially visible as one travels from Abodom village to Cape Coast and Accra; these are detailed in the following chapter. In this chapter it is the dressmakers' knowledge of the changing structured aesthetic of legitimate female form which is explored through historical records and fieldwork experience. The discussion will be divided in the following way:

Historical view on dress sense

Demand for the dressmaker

Dressing up the female form

Wearing cloth and the life cycle

Cutting and sewing - Kaba, Slit and Wrapper

Creasing. folding and recycling

### Historical view on dress sense

Unlike many West African people, Southern Ghanaian Akan groups including the Fante do not have a long established tradition in tailoring and dressmaking<sup>1</sup>. Skills in sewing, cutting and dress construction became widespread with the introduction of hand sewing machines in the early part of this century and with colonial trade in imported textiles. Early women's styles were influenced by British colonial dresses probably worn by missionaries or the wives of colonial officers. The term Kaba which will

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<sup>1</sup> Northern Islamic populations such as the Hausa have long established tailoring traditions which they have not abandoned (Pokrant 1982).

be discussed below is said by many of my informants to be a corruption of the English phrase 'cover shoulder'<sup>1</sup>, a possible reference to the influence which British colonialists had on persuading the indigenous female population to cover the top half of their bodies.

Akan groups do, however, have traditions in cloth production and historical records show that Ghanaians have always taken great care over their appearance. William Bosman<sup>2</sup> (1967) noted that women take greater care in their appearance than men. He recorded that women pleat and place coral and ivory in their hair and wear gold chains and strings of coral around their necks ( op, cit. p.120). He described women's typical dress of the time as a piece of cloth wrapped about their waist secured with another piece of cloth making a close fit to the body (p.121) - this has been interpreted as an early description of the waist and cover or wrapper cloth<sup>3</sup>.

Cruickshank, who arrived on the Gold Coast in 1834<sup>4</sup> described the natives as particularly fond of dress. Of men he wrote that their

"robes are made of all kinds of Manchester goods of silks, of velvets, and of their own rich country cloths. The patterns and colours are selected according to the taste of the wearer, some preferring a neat modest print, while

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<sup>1</sup> Many other seamstresses did not know the origin of the word.

<sup>2</sup> Bosman reached the West African Coast about 1688. He was appointed to the chief factorship at the fort of Elmina and became the second most important Dutch official (Boman 1967, p.vii).

<sup>3</sup> Note to Bosman's records by Fage and Bradbury (Bosmam 1967 p.528).

<sup>4</sup> Cruickshank, Brodie ('Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast' 2 vol London 1853) was a merchant and also held office as a magistrate for many years and as Lieutenant-Governor.

others delight in gaudy contrasts of colour. Wealthy people indulge in frequent changes of apparel, and have an immense variety of these robes. Even the poorer classes have several changes, and always a good handsome cloth to wear on gala days".

For women he noted that behind they attach

"a large bustle of a conical shape extending about a foot from the person. A robe is passed round the body from the waist to the ankle, and tightly secured immediately about the bustle by a broad outer girdle. The breasts, shoulders, arms, and neck are left perfectly uncovered. Older females wear an additional cloth, which is passed round under the arms, and meets the lower robe or petticoat, leaving only the shoulders, arms and neck exposed. They are equally anxious with the men to set off their persons to advantage and occupy no little portion of their time about their toilet, of which the proper adjustment of the bustle is their chief study. The size of this extraordinary appendage varies according to the consequence of the wearer, always increasing in proportion to her dignity."(Wolfson 1958 p.139-140).

Although the hips are still given emphasis in dress design, the bustle is no longer a feature and can only be seen in the exaggerated form of humorous festival costumes. Other details of this record remain little changed. People still have huge wardrobes, and make frequent changes. Those living in towns and cities returning to their villages to celebrate funerals or festivals usually make a great show of their success through dressing-up. Women in groups or with their men ostentatiously stroll the main streets wearing new cloths sewn in the latest styles. Men continue to wear cloth in the fashion recorded by Rattray; however the western two or three piece suit is a highly prestigious outfit:

"The Ashanti dress is a cloth wound round the body up to the breasts and the end thrown over the left shoulder (if a left-handed man, the right). When coming into the presence of, or addressing, a chief or superior, the shoulder is bared as a mark of respect, the right hand placed on the hip, the right foot advanced, the sandal slipped off and the foot set on it, but not in it." (Rattray 1916 p.144)

In addition to dress Ghanaian women spend heavily on hair dressing products and cosmetics "to maintain a fashionable and youthful appearance" (Oppong 1981p.120). This is true for all socio-economic groups but especially the lower bands. Busia, commenting on a social survey in the 1950s, believed that competitive dress displays meant people spent more than they could afford on clothing and as a consequence lived in abject poverty (Wolfson 1958 p.240). Also the poverty profile of Ghana cited in Chapter One (p.31) shows an inverse relationship between poverty and personal spending on clothes

### Demand for the dressmaker

Ghanaian independence and Nkrumah's promotion of the concept of Pan-Africanism promoted Ghanaian and African identity through traditional dress and textiles and gave a new legitimacy to ostentatious and often competitive dress displays. Previous high tariff barriers on new and second-hand clothing acted to make bought ready-made clothes expensive relative to locally made clothes. The collapse of large scale garment industries in Ghana itself in the economic crisis of past decades also opened up economic space to small-scale dressmakers and in 1994 there were approximately 25,000<sup>1</sup> recorded dressmaking and tailoring enterprises in Ghana. However, this figure is a fraction of the true number

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<sup>1</sup> Recorded as members of the GNTDA.

earning an income from sewing. Many seamstresses and tailors are working in their homes and on their verandas. They do not appear in the recorded figures because they have not registered with a trade association or for payment of income tax. The large number of seamstresses exists to match the huge demand for new clothes and styles always in demand.

Demand is from the seamstress's local 'sew to order market' a personal commission, or from the local alternative markets outlined in Chapter Five. There is no substantial export trade and there is no history of an export trade in textiles between Ghana and Europe as there has been with other former British colonies such as India. Although in theory government and trade associations have laid down guidelines and regulations for workshops and apprenticeship training, in practice there is little government involvement. *The GNTDA, as discussed in the next chapter, is just beginning to have an influence in terms of regulation and modernisation.* It is possibly because of the absence of an export trade and interest by government that dressmakers continue to work from independently managed workshops rather than sweat shops. Demand for the indigenous seamstress is influenced directly by local conditions and indirectly by external factors such as imports and exports. This contrasts with Southern Indian sweat shop garment outworkers described as controlled by the precarious export market and dependent on export traders (Swallow 1982 p.163). Swallow's main argument in relation to these workers is that centralised systems of production were changed to decentralised systems because the former failed in that part of India (and in others). This was due to the particular conditions in India including an aptitude for textile and garments production, plentiful and cheap labour supply, a tradition of small-scale production and low production costs of

the out worker system which was a more accepted cultural form of production. Most of these conditions also apply in Ghana and, as Chapter Five noted, interest is being shown in establishing out workers and decentralised forms of production.

As in India, the centralised factory system has not in the past suited the Ghanaian craft worker. How easily and with what degree of satisfaction would those working within the mastercraft workshop culture in Ghana undertake the subcontracting of fragmented parts of garment construction working in a more production line mode can be judged from some of the responses of unskilled workers in garment factories in Takoradi, Tema and Accra questioned in a survey by Peil in 1966. She found that job satisfaction "decreased as the size of the firm increases. The most obvious reason for this is that large firms are more bureaucratic than smaller ones and workers do not like impersonality" (Peil 1972 p.95). The response of one former master tailor (employed as an unskilled worker at the factory because of financial difficulties) was to ask "that concessions be made to imagine rather than follow pattern designs" (ibid. p.89); others said they resented the constraints of working for someone else when they were used to making their own decisions. She found punctuality to be both a conceptual and practical problem and that many workers "simply do not understand the rationale of continuous labour.." (ibid. p.91). She found the 'economy of affection' (this term is discussed further in Chapter Nine) operating within relationships of workers and supervisors, the latter being expected to look after the worker's interests in terms of being a patient teacher, and having the ability to handle requests for loans, exception to rules and assist in finding jobs for relatives and friends (ibid. p.96).

The above gives a view on the attitude of former master tailors working in factories in the 1960s. Most of the factories Peil visited have been closed for some time and although there are other garments factories, like the Hong-Kong owned knitting factory in Tema which employs exclusively male workers (cited in Chapter Five), a return to industrialisation exclusively in the form of male factory floor production systems is now unlikely.

The essence of decentralised production for larger corporate organisations means scanning global production opportunities for investment incentives, extending networks of subcontractors and lowest labour costs; the Italian 'Benetton model' and the Japanese 'Just-in-Time' strategy are exemplary. Such models are now being adopted in parts of the developing world, for example large companies in the garment and textile industry of Aguascalientes in Mexico farm out the processes of garment construction to smaller subcontractors and outworkers while maintaining control over design, packaging, labelling, brand name and the market (Mitter 1994 p.18).

For the seamstresses and tailors I worked with in southern Ghana only two of the above concepts are of importance, that of 'design' and the 'market'. For them 'brand names' and 'packaging' consist of their personal relationships with their customers, and 'labelling' is their distinctive sewing and cutting hand. These are evident from observing the seamstress at work as she constructs garments to dress up the female form.

### Dressing up the female form

When the seamstress cuts the cloth she is following gendered cultural codes of garment construction - she is cutting, folding and sewing in the traditional Ghanaian ideal type feminine standard. That standard is most effectively captured in the term 'Kaba'. This is the female dress for public occasions and since the 1960's<sup>1</sup> is the garment most women choose to have their cloth made into. Kaba is a three piece outfit made from matching cloth. Kaba is also the name of the bodice part of the outfit that is usually elaborately styled around the neck line and sleeves. The 'Slit' is usually a straight skirt worn different lengths according to age and taste.

The shape of the garment the seamstress creates for her customer is an over statement of the female form; it emphasises fullness and roundness of hips and bust line. Large wide sleeves is a current fashion in Kaba, these are sometimes gathered into puffs or frills and often stiffened to extend their form. The neckline is also decorative to emphasise the neck and frame the head.

The most popular neckline is the crescent. In Ghanaian sculpture the shape of the crescent moon strongly represents the ideal female form<sup>2</sup>. The moon stands for beauty, tender kindness, gracefulness, serenity, and

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<sup>1</sup> Before the 1960's 'Kaba' type dress used to be a two piece outfit rather than the three pieces it is today. Formerly the skirt piece was a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist with a Kaba top to match.

<sup>2</sup> The carver exaggerates the characteristic of the most praised parts of female form. The neck is always exaggerated; it should be long and have rings around emphasising its length, showing its beauty and hard work. Beads around the neck, arms, hips and legs also stress beauty. The female's buttocks should ideally be large, her legs should be plump and feet flat as a sign of strength (Sarpong 1974 p.100).



the broken circle and oval are symbols of fertility and cleaning power (Sarpong 1974 p.102).

Like the finished works of the carver or the sculptor the dressmaker's finished Kaba is much more than the sum of its material parts. The finished garment idealises female form and by so doing reinforces the values in society that form stands for i.e. female strength, fertility and nurturing. As it is very unusual for male tailors to sew Kaba and slit one can also say that the seamstress is feeding back into society the images of women created for them, by them and sanctioned by them. The seamstress can be described as conforming to, rather than challenging dress and gender stereotypes. She innovates in style but not in form. She copies styles out of western magazines and alters them to be more elaborate and more modest, as Kaba is a Sunday Church dress. The seamstress produces an outer body coverage which marks and maintains so vividly women's and men's social worlds.

The seamstress often follows her customers' instructions and other times she advises and makes small changes to styles on her own initiative; this is often as much through accident as through design. Often a customer through trust will just ask the seamstress to sew a style that 'fits her' - *Efatawo*. Ya Ya, who I worked with, often dreamt new styles and immediately on awakening would cut them on to paper so as not to lose them. In this way the interaction between customer and seamstress produces an aesthetic of style. The garments produced by this union conform to a definition of African art by Abraham that African art objects are "calculated to induce a state of mind and set of emotions" (Abraham 1991 p.51). They also fit Coote's term, the 'visual aesthetic' of a society i.e. "the way in which people in that society see" (Coote 1992

p.248). This is so even though Coote maintains his study of the 'visual aesthetic' is distinguishable from the study of 'art'. The Akan 'visual aesthetic' in dress construction and displays is analysable in terms of form, content and meaning and the aesthetic is associated with widely understood and maintained concepts of the true and the good.

Reverence to God of either Christian, Muslim or traditional religious practice is part of the daily working lives of seamstresses. For Christians the practice of starting the working day in the kiosk or workshop with morning prayers may be associated with the current fashion for evangelical Christianity. The prayers are usually lead by the seamstress herself or the senior apprentice. I observed and participated in these in all the places I worked and my questionnaire/interviews showed this practice was widespread. If a name is given to the sewing kiosk this reverence is often extended. The Fante name '*Nyama Adom* Fashion Home' translated 'God's Grace Fashion Home' is very popular in various forms. Many ,especially in Cape Coast and Accra, choose to quote lines from the Fante Bible, for example '*Tumi wura* Jesus Mary's Fashion' translated 'Jesus died for me Mary's Fashion'. Many others used English and some of the more notable names I observed were:

'Everything By God Latest Fashion Home' 'God's Time Is The Best' 'Rejoice In The Lord Fashions' 'Christ The King Sewing Centre' 'Grace Of God Sewing Centre' 'In God We Trust Fashions' 'Jehovah Nation Sewing Centre' 'Have Faith in God Fashion' 'Great God of Wonders' 'God Gift' 'It's The Lord Dressmaking Home' 'God First Sewing Centre'

To be reverent in Christian religious practice can be achieved through citation of and adherence to biblical instruction, but reverence in

traditional religion requires the pouring of libation to the ancestors and the seamstress must perform this for the good of herself and her apprentices. In the service of mastercraftship she can assist her apprentices to 'know' the work. To give such knowledge is different from teaching. She allows the apprentices to watch her work but she does not formally teach them. They learn through their 'eyes and ears' and come to understand the process of dress construction and the myriad of unspoken sociological phenomena that constitute the constructed world of female gender evolving through the life cycle.

### Wearing cloth and the life cycle

Within women's social world wearing cloth in various styles and lengths marks stages in the life cycle<sup>1</sup>. Six yards of cloth is a culturally defined and correct measure for a mature women to wear. A young girl will be given four yards of cloth by her mother or relation to be worn as 'up and down' (a local English/ Fante term for a simple styled straight dress). Until she is about eighteen she will not wear the full six yards. When she reaches maturity she will receive cloth from her family and can wear it in the Kaba and Slit style. The slit may be short should she choose and the Kaba tapered to the waist with decorative yoke or gathers. The wrapper may be folded or rolled and carried in her hand or folded into a strip and worn over the shoulder. As an alternative it may be worn as a head-dress or as in plate 3 it can be sewn decoratively into the Kaba neck cape.

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<sup>1</sup> Cloth and various kinds of personal adornment are features in the life cycle stages in many African societies; (Michelman and others 1992) document this use of cloth for the Nigerian Kalabari. Participation in cloth production can also be a way of marking stages in the female life cycle - Kodi indigo dyers (Hoskins, 1989) is an example.

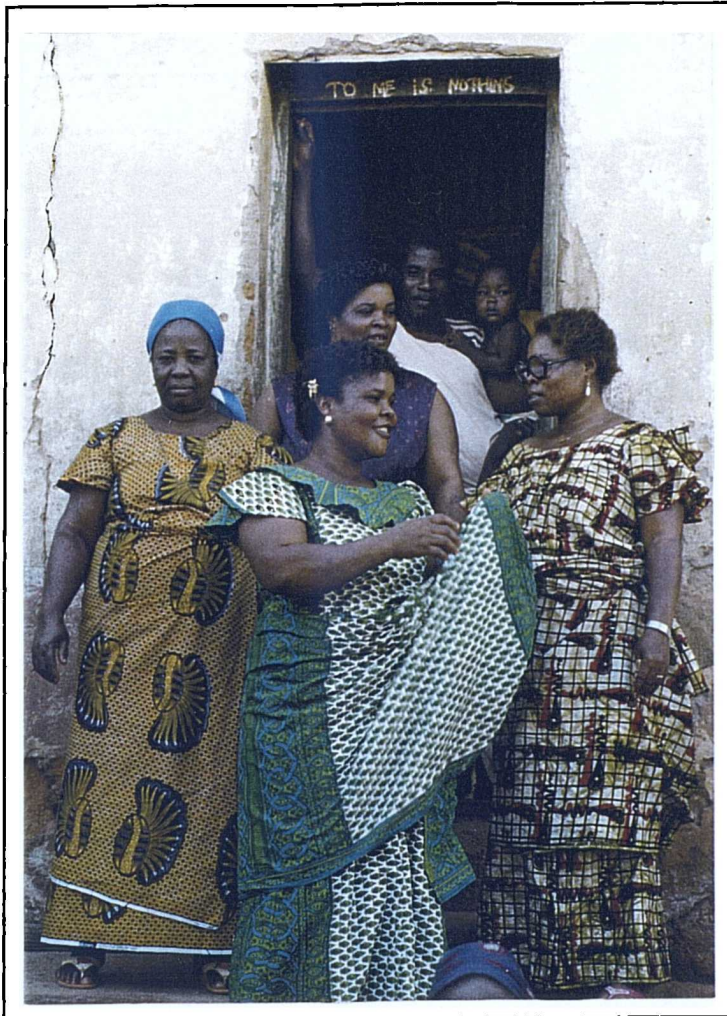


plate 1 mature women wearing Kaba with long skirt and wrapper tied to the left.

A fully mature woman with her own children must wear the full six yards of cloth. She will style it in Kaba with a short or long slit with a fitted or loose Kaba. Ideally the slit will be longer than that of the younger women. The wrapper is usually tied around the waist on the left hand side (plate 1 above). As a woman finishes with child bearing and enters old age she should not be seen in public without the wrapper. Her skirts will become longer and she will possibly use a two yard piece of cloth wrapped into a skirt with a home made cloth belt.

These principles of cloth measurement and style also apply to men who should wear 12 yards in the style described above by Rattray (p.324) A

young man may wear seven or eight yards or he may borrow his first cloth from his father or maternal uncle. When he wears it he may appear awkward with the seemingly huge amount of cloth. He must be careful not to let it trail on the ground in case he damages it. By contrast a senior man is properly dressed when wearing the full twelve yards of cloth with confidence; it should be trailing slightly along the ground showing that the cloth is his and he can be a little careless with it if he chooses.

The subtleties surrounding cloth do not only apply to it being worn; they are evident even before the cloth reaches the dressmakers' kiosk. The cloth should not be visibly carried to the seamstress; it should be wrapped in paper and kept concealed in a container of some sort. Alternatively a woman might send her cloth to a seamstress's house or kiosk by messenger, wrapped and concealed. She may have previously spoken to the seamstress about the style to be made up and negotiated the price. The finished outfit is also usually collected by messenger, often a young relative. So much that I learnt about cloth has been from awkward and embarrassing experiences and the need to conceal cloth was no different. In Abodom the master seamstress asked me to bring a cloth to the kiosk to sew. I had bought the cloth and that morning I was walking to the sewing kiosk accompanied by her. I was admittedly feeling excited to have a cloth to sew and decided to tell her while we were on the road. As I did I pulled it partly out of my bag and the paper it was wrapped in. I was surprised to see her reaction. She appeared impatient and pushed the cloth back into my bag and indicated we should wait until we reached the kiosk. After this I noted that I never saw a woman openly bringing her cloth to the kiosk and Ya Ya told me she often receives cloth at her home and brings it to work with her. There is then, a transformation taking place: cloth is on display in the markets but after purchase it remains in a



form of purdah wrapped in paper, packed in a woman's box or surreptitiously passed to the seamstress before its reappearance in a new and celebratory state, within the Kaba and Slit style. The concealed cloth is for display in a specific social context, coordinated with other accessories, and should it appear outside these frames of reference it might lose its value and dramatic effect. Once transformed and in its intended context no reservation in displaying it to full effect is necessary.

### Cutting and sewing - Kaba, slit and Wrapper

After the seamstress has received the cloth it becomes a pride to her that she has cloth to work on. After cutting she will hang the cloth pieces over a line at the back of the kiosk where they can be seen by passers by (plate 2).



Plate 2

The first cuts the seamstress makes into the cloth are straight and bold. She separates the six yard piece into three two yard pieces. Each two

yard piece is culturally defined: two yards for the Kaba, two yards for the Slit and two yards for the wrapper. Each section of the outfit is given separate attention, with the Kaba being worked on first. It often takes days of exhaustive hand and machine sewing to complete the decorative finish of the Kaba. One of the most time consuming Kaba designs is the 'air conditioning' style (plate 3) named after the neck cape feature which it resembles - part of the wrapper cloth is used to make this design.

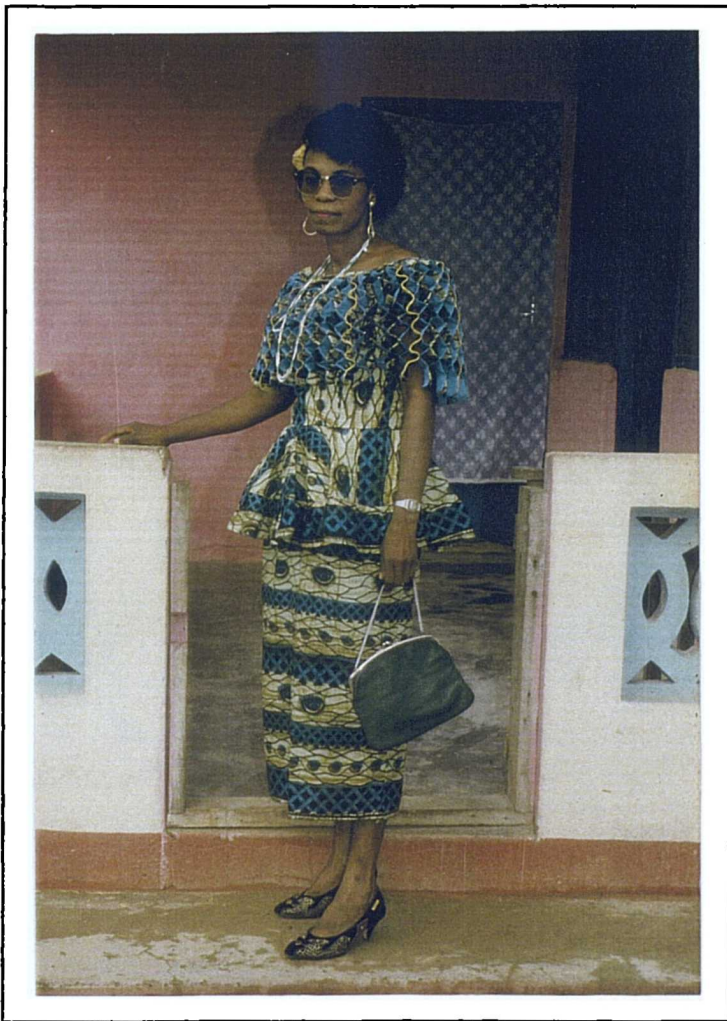


Plate 3 showing the classical tapered waist, flared hip yoke and neck cape style know as 'air conditioning'

The cutting hand is the essential tool of the seamstress. As her apprentices look on she folds, creases and strokes the cloth to prepare it for cutting. Using large heavy scissors she cuts free hand into layers of cloth. Sometimes she makes bold positive cuts and at times she shapes

and trims the cloth. All look on in silence as she performs and concentrates. She invites no comment from her apprentices and they ask no questions; they will learn from watching and later listening to the masters' instructions on sewing. Some seamstresses are not so generous as to allow their apprentices to watch while she is cutting. So personal and valuable are cutting and styling skills that they do this work in secret, away from the kiosk and the keen eyes of enterprising apprentices who may copy her designs when they leave her. The seamstress is working to the *Efatawo* standard - her garment must fit her customer not only in terms of body dimension but also set off her social and gendered persona. The cloth which she sews may have been received by her customer as part of a marriage dowry and as such is both a symbol of the female reproductive power and an objectification of the joining of two lineages. The garment produced from it must carry over these meanings and in its attractiveness will contain an erotic appeal<sup>1</sup> and a visual statement on the conjugal status of the woman. Making the first cut into the cloth is thus a heavy responsibility for the seamstress as she starts with the Kaba.

### Kaba

She cuts the bodice section of the Kaba as a block, then makes angled openings for the armholes and curved lines for the neck opening and facings. Shape, accentuating female roundness<sup>2</sup> is given to the bodice by sewing in darts front and back and sewing in curved side seams. The

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<sup>1</sup> Hoskins discusses the erotic appeal of cloth and its objectification of women in relation to the role of indigo dyed cloth and its exchange for women. By wearing cloths with certain motifs a woman is "made into an exchange valuable, representing the wealth that must be given to her patrilineage by her husband's ancestral village" (Hoskins 1989 p.158).

<sup>2</sup> Roundness is also accentuated in Nigerian Kalabari female *bite sara*. (Michelman 1992 p.177-178).



sleeves and neck are the focus for styling. Sleeves may sometimes be incorporated into the neck yoke; they can be frilled, gathered or puffed and they are very often lined with 'stiff' (the local term for interfacing) to give them a substantial form standing out from the arms. The decorative neckline is just as important - plates 4, 5 and 6 show some of the many neckline styles in vogue at the time of my fieldwork. Some are with cape, others with smocking or gathers. The large neck opening and reinforced sleeves together appear to widen the upper body frame and show off the neck and head to full effect. The kaba is constructed to be a show case for the head and neck. To conform to traditional ideas of female beauty the neck should be long with a number of rings around it emphasising its length and strength (Sarpong 1974 p.100). It supports the head which in the Akan concept of a person contains the soul *okra*. The soul is conceived to be a mental or spiritual substance and to be lodged in the head (Gyekye p.208-209). It is the immortal essence of a person and conceived to be a spark of God (ibid.). Stylised images of the female head and neck with rings are painted on the wooden models in plates 4, 5, and 6. The seamstress commissions these and uses them for hanging and displaying her finished Kabas outside the kiosk while they are awaiting collection or delivery to their owners. This is also an opportunity to advertise the seamstress's styles and skills for passing women to admire.



plate 4



plate 5

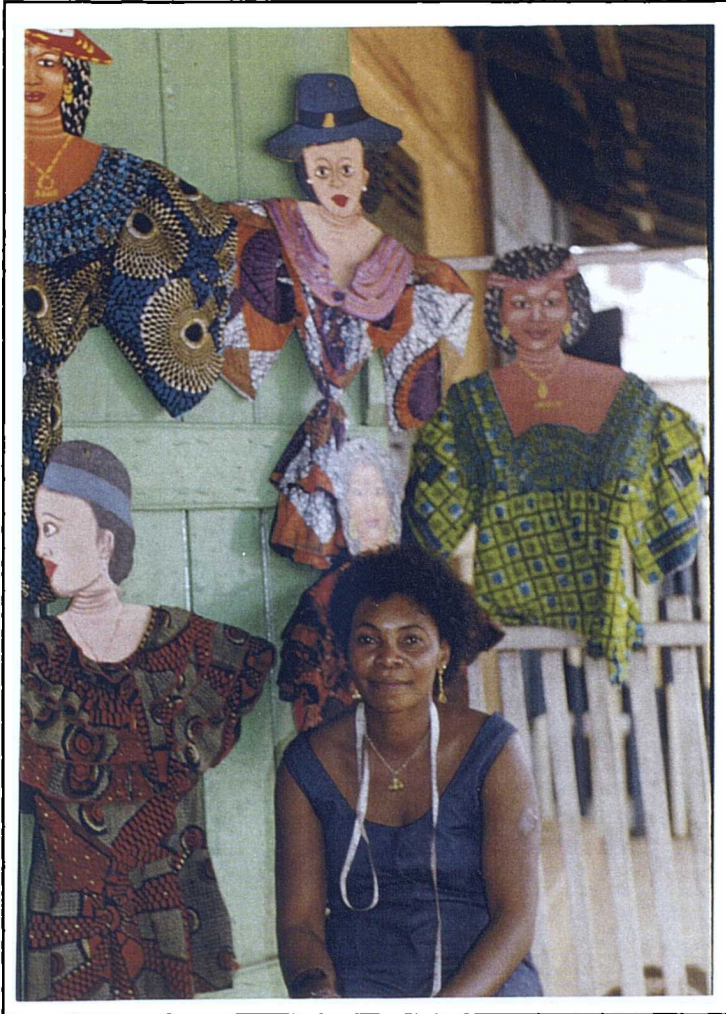


plate 6

The importance of the head in the Akan concept of the person is thus fully reflected in the neckline of the Kaba; however the Akans maintain a two-way interaction exists between the soul and the body - what affects the head reflects on the condition of the body and vice versa<sup>1</sup> (Gyekye 1978 p.209) This philosophy is unarticulated by dressmakers but in conceptual terms it justifies the importance of dressing the body to give good appearance and infer good physical and mental condition, and explains why the upper half of the body, especially the neck is emphasised - an analogy might be made between the neck, and the entrance to the soul.

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<sup>1</sup> These beliefs are the basis of spiritual healing and witchcraft.

## Slit

The two yard piece separated for the skirt or slit receives no further cutting. Sometimes the piece is simply wrapped around and tied about a woman's waist, using a narrow strip taken from one side of the cloth. The more fashion conscious and younger women prefer a shorter fitted and sometimes partly pleated skirt, and this can also be made without cutting the cloth. I learnt the technique of styling without cutting again in a haphazard way. Sometime after starting work in my first case study kiosk in Abodom and bringing my own cloth I was encouraged to sew. This was always under the instruction of Ya Ya, the seamstress; she selected lines for me to sew and then I gave the cloth back to her for the next instruction. She soon realised that I had experience in sewing and I could sew in a straight line (something that eluded many of her apprentices) and I was given additional work to do, something which seemed to delight her apprentices. However, the skirt is considered the least difficult to sew and they reasoned it was below my status to spend time on this - it was taken for granted that an apprentice would do the work when I was absent.

The slit was then sewn without my knowing, and in a style I found difficult to wear. In my own time at the clinic I began to un-pick the skirt stitches in the hope of reconstructing a more useful style. From my experience of dressmaking I expected to find the slit made of a minimum of three separate pieces: a front, back and waist band. Therefore I was surprised to find the un-picked skirt, to be a complete and perfect two yards of unfolded cloth. It had been fitted and shaped by folding and sewing alone. I was delighted and later I was able to wear the two yards as a long skirt although I could not allow Ya Ya to see or know I had altered her style as she might take offence.



## Wrapper

An essential element of the Ghanaian feminine standard is motherhood and the two yards of cloth separated for the wrapper symbolises this most graphically when being used to carry a child on the back. As mostly older cloths are used for this the wrapper matching the Kaba and Slit is more often seen tied or tucked around the waist to the left.

It requires little attention by the seamstress who leaves the machine hemming of the raw edges to the apprentices. The seamstress's main concern is to cut the Kaba and Slit section correctly first time and have as little wastage as possible. For facings, pieces of cloth are sewn together as she tries very hard not to use any of the two yard section of the wrapper. Some women are so concerned that the wrapper cloth will be cut into or 'spoilt' that they separate it before handing over the cloth to the seamstress.

If a woman is seen not wearing a wrapper cloth it could indicate she cannot afford the full six yards of cloth. It may be further assumed she is without a husband and is childless and consequently she has nobody to buy her cloth. Alternatively it might be thought she had the six yards but had to give two yards to a poor relative for a dress, leaving her to manage with only four yards. Wearing the wrapper is not a form of conspicuous consumption, because it is not optional but necessary if one is to appear properly dressed. When tied around the waist it has little utilitarian function apart from using the roll on the waist as a money holder and as a contingency cloth for such tasks as sun canopy, cushion for headloading or a makeshift basket. It can make one uncomfortable in heat and needs adjusting and tightening from time to time.

I discovered the significance of the wrapper cloth very early in my fieldwork. At the first Sunday Service I attended I observed cloth being worn and I was struck by the way women tied the two yards of wrapper cloth around their waist covering up the bottom half of their Kabas. These were often styled with yokes, gathers or pleats which requires detailed and painstaking work of the seamstress. For me this part of the Kaba was one of its most attractive features. I had to ask those I lived with why the wrapper was used to hide the Kaba and was so unceremoniously tied by a couple of knots. It was also in constant need of adjustment, being tied and retied and often becoming loose as women danced in the church and needing complete refashioning. The answer was straightforward and revealed one of the principal rules of grammar for wearing cloth. The wrapper tied in this way to the left is a sign of seniority and respectfulness; a status mark.

### Creasing, folding and recycling

Fashion in Kaba and Slit may come and go but cloth must always be reclaimed from style and recycled. In the process of sewing in female style, the seamstress contributes to the cloth's loss of commodity value. Once cut and sewn a cloth can no longer be exchanged for cash and becomes valued as an item of personal and lineage status. Its value now resides in its expressive character and will remain so until, through age and hard wear it may be only fit to become a house dress or of use for household purposes such as bed sheet, bath robe, money belt, duster, bandage, sanitary wear, mat making or as a head-loading cushion.

The seams of the Kaba and Slit need to be expanded to fit the changing shape of a woman or the garment may need to be unpicked and re sewn if it is to be given to a young relative. It is the seamstress's responsibility to

her customers to ensure the cloth will be serviceable in this way. She must follow strict cultural rules of dress construction, cutting and seam allowance.

Thus, after the initial cutting and separation of three two yard pieces, further cutting of the cloth is kept to a minimum - the two yards for the Kaba is the only piece to receive additional cutting. Rather than cut the slit yardage the seamstress folds and sews the cloth to fit her customer. Should the whole cloth be cut into pieces it would be considered 'spoilt'.

The side seams must have at least two inches (preferably more) allowance (see plate 7) in order for the garments to be let out in later years. Should a seamstress hand back a sewn cloth without the standard seam allowance the client would again consider the cloth 'spoilt' and demand compensation.



plate 7  
Top in Nigerian *sheda* showing wide seam allowances

To me the discovery of recycling cloth and garments through sewing and folding in shape contrasted so vividly with European practice of cutting out shape. It made me reflect on the different expectations Western culture has of cloth and garments. In Europe, patterns are used to cut out shape and size for the ready made garment industry. The Ghanaian seamstress receives her customers' cloth and sews the shape of her client into it. From inception the Ghanaian garment has an anticipated longer service life. It is intended not just for the life of one individual but of service to her family. In the form of an uncut piece or as Kaba and slit it is part of family inheritance and could not conceivably be thrown/given away or wasted.



## Conclusion

Working practices in the seamstress's workshop in village, town and city locations are mostly uncontrolled by merchant capitalists, nor is the workshop a sweat shop of outworkers dependent on the precarious nature of an export trade. The aspects underpinning the seamstress's 'cloth to sew market' are known and often personally experienced by the seamstress herself. This does not make trade any more secure but knowledge of the processes controlling demand will give the seamstress more control and freedom in her sewing work and supplementary occupations. Economic necessity or the prospect of increased earnings may make experimentation with an out worker sub-contracting system attractive to more seamstresses, but the reality of workshop practice in 1994 was still that of indigenous production for local 'cloth to sew' demand.

In the field I was often told that the seamstress's trade mark is her sewing; it is like her hand writing. Perhaps more than any other item of material culture her hand crafted garments are animate. When worn they animate the spirit and gendered social presence of women.

On completing the sewing of a Kaba in Ya Ya's workshop she held it up and said "see what your hands have made". She was expressing her satisfaction that I had created a Kaba that was now more than the sum of its parts. Though the parts are conservatively separated from the whole by cutting, they must be able to come together again at least in part to serve a woman's long term household needs. She will trust her seamstress not to 'spoil' her cloth and through this trust a long term relationship may develop. The bond of trust must be in place before a

woman will send her cloth to the kiosk, as styles in dress may come and go but cloth must always be reclaimed from fashion and is more enduring.

A seamstress establishes her position of trust by her good behaviour and reverence. But she must also have a gift expressed through her imagination for 'new' styles. She sometimes is the vehicle for change by advising her customers of new styles she saw in the city or new styles she dreamt, but her work in practice is conservative and the contribution she makes to developing style is always within and conforming to ideal gendered aesthetic visual standards.

The garment made by the seamstress and worn in the context of the indigenous festival atmosphere combines with and is an integral part of the dance and drumming of the occasion. Dance, the drum and cloth can be seen as a combined art form of popular culture which together induce the excitement of the occasion. The cloth is manipulated by the seamstress who evokes and animates it into idealised female form reflecting philosophical concepts of the person. In this sense she is an artist reflecting and projecting images and ideas of her culture not onto cloth but constructing them from it.

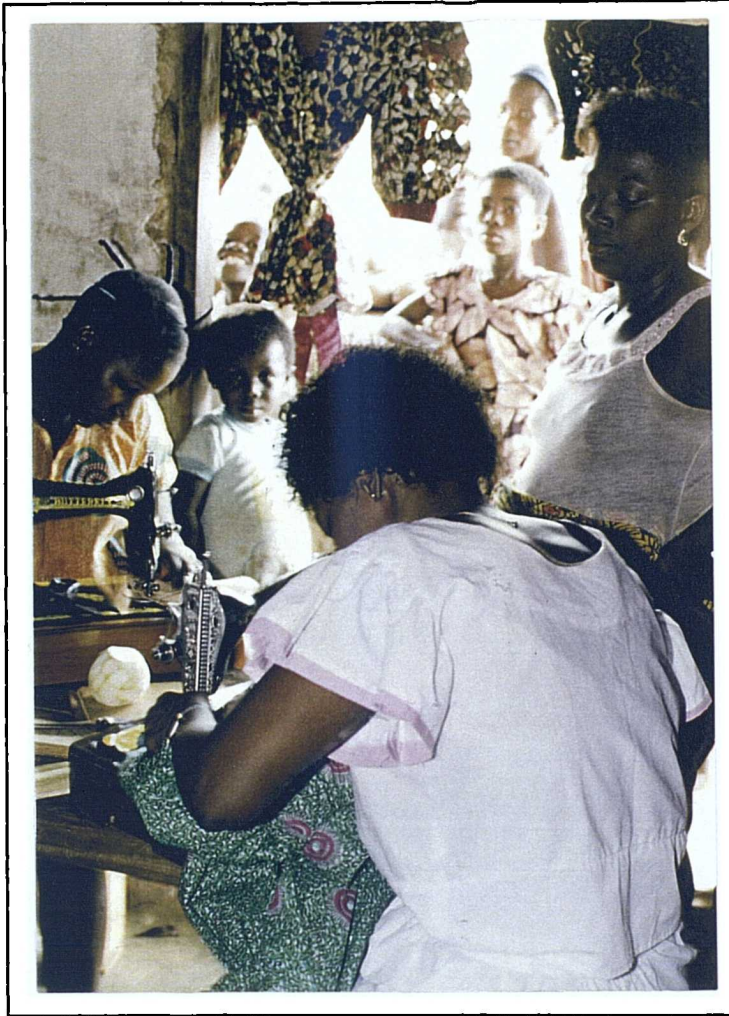


plate 8

During fieldwork I found seamstresses to be highly respected and at the centre of community and church life. Their kiosks were places women would often stop to talk and admire the finished Kabas hanging outside (plate 8). The seamstress creates this presence around her because not only does she dress the female form but frames its soul.

## Chapter Nine

Incorporation of tailors and dressmakers into the  
Neo-Liberal State



### Waiting for change

I met the vice president of the GNTDA at the *durbar* which welcomed me to Abodom village and two weeks later, when returning home to Abodom after a trip to Swedru market, I found two association representatives waiting to talk to me. Those I lived with were anxious that one of the visitors had made at least a two hour journey by local transport from Cape Coast and was by now becoming irritated at waiting so long to speak to me. They had arrived at the clinic at one o'clock and I had not arrived home until four. As I received this news I was thrown into a minor panic and tried to recall any prior arrangements I had made with these two visitors. I could find none but decided to face them with an apology just the same. I was glad to find my apology was unnecessary and the visitors had just assumed I would be at home that day and were prepared to wait until my return. At the time I was overwhelmed by the precarious nature of their arrangements and their expectation to find me at home. I later found this to be much less unusual and there were other occasions during my stay at the clinic when I arrived home to find visitors waiting or that some had waited and left leaving a message often tinged with a note of annoyance at 'meeting my absence'.

The visitors from the GNTDA had arrived at my house so the onus was on them to explain their mission to me. They had heard of my arrival and interest in sewing enterprises and wanted to know my programme of work and schedule - where I intended to carry out my research and how many seamstresses and tailors I wished to talk to. They wanted this

information in written form addressed to the GNTDA regional organiser for the Central Region and there was a further request that I should make my findings available to their members. Their tone was friendly but official and I was beginning to wonder whether in a polite way they were asking me to seek permission from the association to carry out fieldwork.

As representatives of their trade association my visitors were displaying a form of ownership and paternalism over their member seamstresses and tailors and potentially myself. It seemed as if they had a task to carry out with their members and in pursuing their objective they could threaten to stand between me and the subjects of my research should I not agree to work through the association. For the first time I realised that the raw data of fieldwork was not as freely available for observation as I had previously assumed and that I would have to manage a relationship with the GNTDA in order to proceed. It was at that moment I realised that this organisation, previously unknown to me, was to become an important aspect of my research.

I later sent a typed letter to Cape Coast outlining my research and I attended the next meeting of the GNTDA in Swedru to tell local members and officials the nature of my mission. This meeting was to begin at 11 o'clock but when I arrived at five minutes to there was only one seamstress present and she soon left. The meeting eventually started around 1 pm with approximately 46 members - it seemed that the start time was more dependent on the number of members present and a set time was only a reference point. Some time between 12 o'clock and 1 I almost left the hall to return to Abodom as I thought the meeting had been cancelled or I had been given the wrong day to attend. But the few people drifting in and out of the hall assured me a GNTDA meeting would

take place that day so I waited with the same expectation that my own visitors at the clinic in Abodom had waited for me.

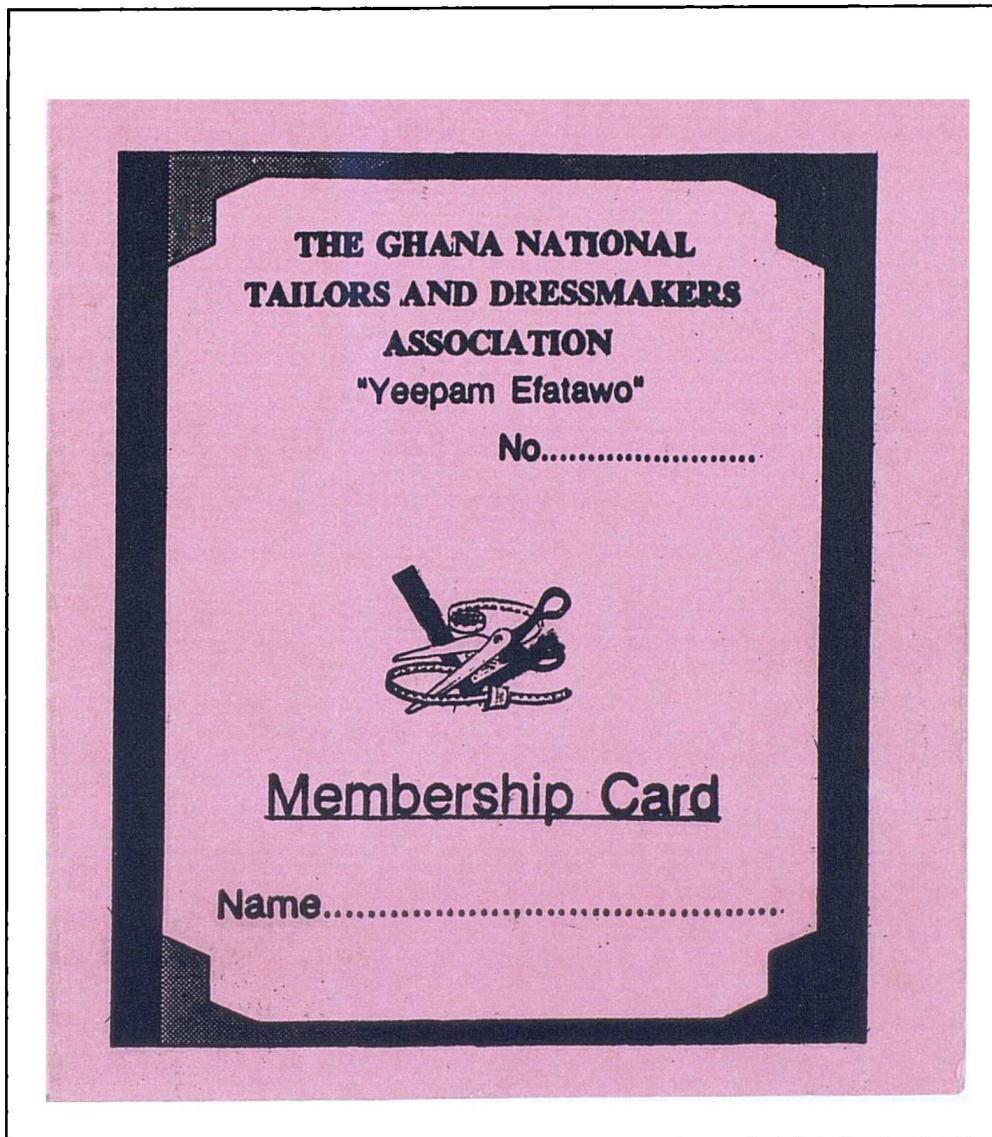


plate 1

My long wait was rewarded by the enormous interest which the meeting held for my research. The agenda covered issues such as income tax payments, apprenticeship discipline and formalising of their training and examination. Each point was argued out with contributions from members. The agenda was one of change and the members present seemed prepared to make changes, believing them to be in their best interests.

From this first meeting it was clear that the forum for debate which the GNTDA presented was a front line between state and the informal sector and that possession of a GNTDA membership card (plate 1) represented a formal agreement of co-operation between seamstress and tailor and the state. The GNTDA officials issuing the membership cards hold a position of responsibility and trust and mediate between the two previously irreconcilable sides. They carry out this responsibility with an air of authority and determination which struck me so forcibly on that first meeting at the clinic in Abodom. With hindsight I am grateful to those officials for taking the time to make themselves and the nature of the GNTDA known to me.



## Introduction

The Ghanaian government recognises that reliance on economic aid is not a viable long term strategy and development of internal resources such as the small-scale business sector, mostly existing on the verge of the formal economy, is the only means of sustaining recovery. This chapter deals with how small-scale dressmakers and tailors are being initiated into formal economic citizenship of the neo-liberal State through the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association<sup>1</sup>. The GNTDA's organisation combines indigenous models with evolving, characteristically Ghanaian, legal bureaucratic procedures which together are capable of influencing state policies and addressing members' individual needs. The chapter argues that the GNTDA functions as a buffer zone between the formal economy with its inflexible obligations (taxes, licences, etc.) and the insecurities of small-scale economic activity.

Although the GNTDA operates as a fellowship, using dues for social welfare and self promotion, its position between the State and its fee paying membership puts it in an ambiguous position. The benefits to the State often conflict with the interests of its membership. The Association often coerces reluctant operators into membership and its authority is ultimately backed by the state sanctioned ability to form 'task forces' with a mandate to confiscate equipment and close workshops. This chapter suggests that members accept and manage this ambiguous position with the state because they accept their inevitable incorporation

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<sup>1</sup> Commercial Associations are not a recent phenomenon; a sample of 186 Ghanaian 'businessmen' researched by Kennedy between 1967 and 1970 showed that 70% of successful respondents belonged to at least one business association (Kennedy 1980).

into the formal economy and believe that a buffer organisation lessens the impact as compared with meeting the neo-liberal State head-on.

The membership of the GNTDA often indicates an acceptance by dressmakers and tailors of a process of transition into a more formal economic operating environment. On joining they may find that some of their beliefs and working practices based on ancestor guidance and the pouring of libation are challenged. The challenge is to take up 'Christian' and 'bureaucratic' standards considered to be 'progressive'. At the three fieldwork locations I found the transition in working practices developed to different stages. For example, in Abodom many seamstresses and tailors continue to hold traditional initiation and passing out ceremonies for new apprentices that focus on pouring libation to ancestors. This practice is being abandoned in Cape Coast and Accra and the GNTDA discourages such rites in favour of formal examinations and presentation of qualification certificates. A more general change is that from a moral and religiously bonded working environment to one guaranteed by official receipts, indenture documents and set tariffs.

These changes might be theorised using a number of classical 'now' and 'then' sociological theories - Redfield's folk-urban continuum, Tonnies's evolutionary concepts of transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, Durkheim's from mechanical to organic solidarity or Parsonian structural differentiation theory. These models of change are examined in the first part of this discussion and a case is made for making use of Hyden's 1983 work on economy of affection. This will be followed by analysis of case study and interview material on the structure and role of the GNTDA. The material is divided in the following way:

Theories of transition

Development of the GNTDA - 'chopping'<sup>1</sup> and credibility

GNTDA - Service to members

GNTDA - Service to apprentices

GNTDA - service to the State

Taxes and making a contribution to development

GNTDA as a buffer organisation between state and artisan

The future of the GNTDA

### Theories of transition

To use classical sociological theories developed by Redfield, Tonnies, Durkheim and Parsons involves making parallels between the rapid social and economic changes associated with urbanisation and industrialisation taking place in Europe during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the histories and current changes effecting Ghana and other African countries. Clearly these evolutionary models cannot be applied to the strikingly different pace, degree and character of change that has taken place in each continent. Development in the dressmaking industry is a clear comparative example. The contrast is in mass factory garment production in the west and mass small scale kiosk production in Ghana. Both Ghana and England were exposed to the same basic materials and technology. Chapter four has shown the colonial association in the supply of cotton cloth to Ghana from Manchester and it is also the case that Ghanaian seamstresses adopted British colonialist sewing techniques and hand sewing machine technology. From these machines the Ghanaian

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<sup>1</sup> 'Chopping money' is a reference to corruption and the misuse of funds.

industrialist made no new inventions or adaptations to more reliable and productive technology. It was the Ghanaian seamstresses who adopted the technology and culturally internalised it making the use of wax cotton cloth and hand sewing practices into an enormous small scale industrial base. In conceptual terms these seamstresses are economic actors actively constructing, within the limitations of technology left by the colonial years, their own style of economic livelihood.

To use an rural urban continuum or to analyse fully the above pattern of development would involve firstly stretching the line in length and adding notches to indicate practices based on traditional<sup>1</sup> religion and indigenous perceptions of gender and aesthetics. Secondly a feedback curve should shoot out from the line to indicate retrograde development associated with military rule and failed development strategies. The diagram begins to look much less simplistic than the nature of the theory.

More controversial than the above theories, Hyden's 1983 work *No Shortcuts to Progress* has been of more relevance in understanding the development stage of the dressmakers and tailors under study. He defines the economy of affection as

"a network of support, communications and interaction among structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin, community or other affinities " p.8

In its most pristine form Hyden believes the economy of affection makes no contribution to macro-economic flows. Income generated from this economy is not recorded although it makes an enormous significance to

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<sup>1</sup> Here I continue to define 'traditional' practices as those governed by ancestral guidance and pouring of libation.

the basic survival of its members. The idea is that survival is not the same as development and what promotes survival may act against development. Hyden feels a transition to a more formal and disciplined economy is necessary to achieve the kind of developmental objectives sought by countries such as Ghana. Hyden's work is based on an evolutionary model of progress towards a more formally disciplined economy which will involve a shift in the attitudes and orientation of people in Africa. In Hyden's terms the economy of affection is more than deeply ingrained in Ghanaian society; it is the basis of traditional life and social structures. Within the family, expectations of assistance and reciprocation are not optional; families rely on their own members to help each other. This is as true in the rural as in the urban context<sup>1</sup>. Affective ties cover entry into employment and apprenticeship positions and they operate within state bureaucracies to help ensure service. Reciprocity within affective networks may not need complete equivalence or necessarily be immediate. In terms of Sahlins' spectrum<sup>2</sup> of reciprocities, it comes between 'generalised' and 'balanced'. Thus the shift in attitudes which Hyden sees as a prerequisite to a transformation of the economy is also a shift in the fundamental human values and social base of society.

In Hyden's terminology the transition required in African society is one from pre-capitalist to capitalist and his recommendations can be compared to those made by Weber in his theory of economic progress.

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<sup>1</sup> Other forms of associations also existed; in 1957 Little found voluntary associations in urban areas which maintained extended networks ties with kinship in the communities the migrants had left. He called them a 'moral bridge' between 'modern' and 'traditional' life. These organisations continue to exist today.

<sup>2</sup> In describing 'generalised reciprocity' Sahlins suggests that a counter obligation is not stipulated by time; "the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite. It usually works out that the time and worth of reciprocation are not alone conditional on what was given by the donor, but also upon what he will need and when, and likewise what the recipient can afford and when" (Sahlins 1972 p194).

For Weber the development of a rational legal state framework was the prerequisite for the emergence of capitalism. The process leading to the establishment of capitalism was one of increasing formality in economic organisation and the superseding of the type of 'affective' organisation taken as the norm in countries such as Ghana.

It is by using principles of affective organisation, however, that Ghanaians have managed to survive in their country under the difficult political and economic conditions of the last few decades<sup>1</sup>. Slowly small businesses can be seen to be crossing the divide between the affective economy and the developing formal capitalist economy. Crossing it, however, means allowing a formal relationship to develop between themselves and the state, a relationship which recognises the legitimate role of the State to extract taxes and intervene in their business.

One of the main challenges for the state in pursuing its macro economic objectives has been how to capture some of the economic resources and development potential of the mass of small-scale operators. Military governments have ordered soldiers on to the streets to attempt organisation of this sector and obtain tax payments. Other governments have enlarged the size and powers of the revenue services. Both have had little success and many of the official agents themselves became

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<sup>1</sup> Participation in community welfare organisations has also been a survival tactic and helped maintain a link between the urban centres and rural villages and been a device for channelling funds for development and assistance to relatives. Affective bonds are part of the more generalised culture of association and fellowship which was more widely practised in the pre-colonial traditional era. They derive from clan based community organisations and structures. I found them still to have commonly known geographical borders in Abodom village. Members of clans are held to be related to one another and bound together because all are believed to have descended from a common ancestor (Sarpong 1974 p.36). These village structures have few political functions today but the general principle of community and group action is being revitalised currently in the decentralised local administrations.

incorporated into affective networks. One strategy the state has used to capture some of their resources is giving recognition to trade associations which can operate both in the formal economy and the economy of affection. Being able to straddle both cultures, but having more loyalty to the formal economy, the GNTDA can hope to draw small-scale operators into the discipline of the formal economy.

### Development of the GNTDA - 'chopping' and credibility

The first attempts at formation of the GNTDA were made in 1979 but its most rapid development has been in the late 1980's as it took on responsibilities of income tax collection from District Assemblies. The GNTDA can be seen at local and regional level to be a small but vital part of the government's local administrative decentralisation process which began around 1986.

Before the formation of the Association, revenue collection from wayside dressmakers and tailors was often carried out by soldiers or officers of the Internal Revenue Service. The founding President of the GNTDA recalled that in the political environment of 1979 and 1981 the military government's drive for the collection of taxes meant that demands could be made by harassment at irregular and unexpected times. The operators who suffered most were those visible on the main streets of Accra, as his own business was. To avoid this forceful practice of direct intervention by State agents, individual tailors from well established workshops came together to discuss ways of negotiating with the State. The founding members wished to negotiate and co-operate with the State because they could not move beyond its reach, but a second rationale given by the President was that of wanting to establish unity and co-operation between small-scale dressmakers and tailors. He said the

motivation was to "bring the tailors and dressmakers together, to fight for their own interest"<sup>1</sup>. The government, he said, only takes an interest in civil servants; they get assistance with health care, pensions and housing, but the private sector gets nothing so it is necessary for them to organise themselves. This second rationale for the formation of the GNTDA is a clear example of the divide between formal state structures and the economy of affection in which the community of small-scale dressmakers and tailors have operated in beyond the reach of the state.

One consequence forming the GNTDA and of trying to establish unity of all dressmakers and tailors was to bring the majority, hidden in crowded streets or working from home verandas, to the attention of the State and for them to face the obligations of formal economics which founding members (by virtue of their visibility) were already confronting, the main obligation being that of income tax payment. However, the underlying initiative for founding the Association came from a wish for self help and fellowship.

It was not until 1987 that the Association started to take on tax collection duties therefore tax collection was the second rationale for the Association's formation. From the minutes of the first general meeting held to organise tailors and dressmakers in the Central Region on 6th October 1982 the following statement of 'Aims and Objectives' was drawn up which in the first two statements stresses the need for fellowship:

"To love ourselves by helping each other in all aspects.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview June 1994



To assist ourselves in financial difficulties by paying monthly dues, funeral contributions and special contributions to the Association.

To write letters to Government Departments.

To secure the supply of raw material inputs at reasonable prices

To promote the large scale export of Ghana - made garments and other textile products by organising periodic fairs and exhibitions both at home and abroad".

In the GNTDA's development there was a balance to be struck between the Association's identity as a fellowship and its development as a trade organisation. This balance has not always been easy to maintain and can be seen as reflecting the intermediate nature of the artisan population in relation to the state. Their incorporation and engagement within the national state has not fully taken place despite Nkrumah's efforts and more recently those by Rawlings. Thus within the GNTDA culture, the conflicting commitments are on the one hand to a bureaucratic model, and on the other to community, lineage and friendship networks<sup>1</sup>.

Over time the GNTDA has had to direct itself away from internal membership welfare assistance, and resulting problems of nepotism and corruption, and focus on its role in training and marketing. The balance is as important to relations with the State as it is to the membership. I quote the chairman of one of the Association's more active branches in Accra.

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<sup>1</sup> Chazan notes the persistence of these types of affiliations in most of Africa where there are weak economic, political and cultural links between state and society (Chazan 1988b p.131).

"The Association started in 1979 at the time of Rawlings first coming but it finished twice because of chopping money - the secretary or someone would run off with all the Associations funds. The last time it restarted we said it would not be as a party - that is it would not be for collecting money for outdoorings, funerals and sending members to attend these things. It would be more of a business organisation. The 200 cedis dues which we collect from the masters will be used to buy stiff<sup>1</sup> in bulk and zips and thread so we can sell them at good prices to our members"

In the office files of the Accra Association I found some regional branches whose activities were at times dominated by confusion over the funding of funeral expenses and attendance, organisation of public celebrations (*durbas*) and the sale of Association promotional articles such as T-shirts. With the stress on fellowship within the organisation, friendship, and mutual assistance can result in relaxation of rules. The organisation can become seen by those outside as a self-promotional and self-financing club for its committee members; the following extracts show the recent history of the La zonal branch of GNTDA in the Greater Accra region that has developed these problems.

"Attendance at that 1st meeting was as high as 80 but this figure continued to drop at subsequent meetings. {As this number at meeting continued to dwindle}, others outside continued to paint a bad picture of the Association saying we are in to extort monies and will also embezzle these monies. Others thought we were by so doing dragging them into the tax net forgetting that every good citizen should pay tax on his business".

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<sup>1</sup>The local name for interfacing used to stiffen garments .

Government has always treated private enterprises, small or large, with suspicion and when internal wrangling and accusations of corruption come to light this provides justification. These concerns were recognised at the National level when the President of the GNTDA addressed members at the 7th Annual General Meeting (May 1994) with an appeal:

"I will appeal to my fellow members of the GNTDA as well as members of the other associations, that we should look inward into our various set-ups to identify the negative activities in which most of us have frequently engaged, which give credence to the mistrust of our sector by government."

To counter such suspicion and to promote national and local credibility zonal and regional GNTDA branches are encouraged to organise promotional events and participate in or initiate community projects, for example the La zonal branch made the following effort:

"During the Inauguration Week, all members undertook a clean up exercise in and around the La Market and also white washed the walls fencing the market and desilted drains {the organisers also announced} We call on the Town Development Committees not to hesitate to call on us when our assistance is needed".



## *Tailors, dressmakers clean Oda Hospital*

• About 120 members of the Akyem Oda branch of Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association last Thursday organised a two-hour clean-up exercise at the Oda Government Hospital to help improve sanitation at the hospital.

The volunteers cleared weedy surroundings, swept the compound and desilted choked

gutters.

The volunteers were later addressed by Mr Yaw Boamah, Senior Hospital Administrator, Mr N. K. Boateng, and Mr Antwi Berko, chairman and secretary, respectively of the association.

Picture by **Samuel Kyei-Boateng**

Plate 2 (Kyei-Boateng 1993)

A further example is the voluntary action taken by dressmakers and tailors in Oda (plate 2). Both these examples were publicised in National newspapers which would have to send a photographer or reporter to the site. Given the problems of logistics the events must have been planned and designed for maximum publicity, the objective possibly being to cleanse the associations reputation whilst cleaning up the environment. The examples also show the highly politicised nature of the GNTDA.

Another highly public display of the association's fellowship identity is uniform. This has reached its highest form in apprenticeship dress. The first garment a seamstress's apprentice produces is her own uniform; the style and colour are chosen to uniquely identify an apprentice group with a particular master. Less success has been had in persuading masters to wear the association T-shirt when attending meetings. Depending on the

function and size of meeting the masters find them ideal opportunities to gather information on new styles and show off their own creations.

### GNTDA - service to its members

The spirit of fellowship and service to the community is also expressed in mutual assistance to the GNTDA's own membership. Mutual assistance is usually financial, helping to meet funeral expenses and family welfare. Minutes and letters from the Association's files show that in some regions members have used its subscription funds to take on the ritual role within funeral functions of celebrating the occupational identity of the deceased. One of the more recent 'Funeral Reports' in the files is from August 1993:

"...apprentices gathered to the scene where the deceased was laid in state. In fact it was sorrowful. The Chairman, Organiser and Miss Buaful came to help on the nick of time. They were also welcomed with a bottle of gin by the clan. After this the sewing pursued its course as custom demanded performing the trade of the deceased for about five minutes and after that, the Catholic Church performed the necessary requiem mass for the departed member....."

The following presentation was made  
 Cedis 10,000,00 - to the father  
 Cedis 5,000,00 - to the nursing mother  
 Cedis 1,000,00 - to the clan

After the above presentation, they held discussions with the husband. They observed that items brought for presentation to the deceased were plenty. Their thanks were also reciprocated. They cautioned the nursing mother to take absolute care of the nursing child. Her failure to comply with their directive will compel the Associational body to sue her at all sewing centres in the region and perhaps national....."

The GNDTA belongs to its members, it is not sponsored by government or an NGO. It was not designed by external NGO blueprints and as a consequence the culture of its organisation is modelled on 'indigenous structures' which provide status positions for active members. The 'indigenous structure' is not a pure form; the influence of Ghana's British colonial history is clearly retained. This is seen in the formality of even the smallest organisations with positions of President, Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer almost always allocated and meetings follow the standard of minutes, agenda items, other matters etc. The imposition and retention of the British colonial bureaucratic system may be the cause of much inefficiency in Ghanaian society and the GNTDA. However, formalities in themselves are recognised professionalism and mark out legitimate organisations. With such formalities one organisation can communicate with another and with the State using the common bureaucratic language.

The composition of its membership is predominantly of seamstresses yet the governing officials, except for the position of treasurer which is very often occupied by a woman (women have a reputation in Ghana of being more trustworthy than men with money) are predominantly tailors or male workers. This composition is not challenged by seamstresses and the dominance of men appears to be accepted as the natural order. Women also feel that despite being represented by men within the GNTDA they have gained some security, control over their working lives and the benefit of contact with other seamstresses by becoming members.

With status and sexual differentiation accepted, the officials of the GNTDA use the Association membership motto '*Yeepam efatawa*', to announce the start of meetings. All meetings of the GNDTA follow formal lines but with characteristically Ghanaian additions. An opening prayer is followed by a patriotic song. An attitude of sympathetic paternalism and fellowship

spirit pervades and shows itself in coming to the aid of members at times of personal hardship. Subscription to charitable causes and assistance to members, their widows and children is written into the formal objectives of the Association. The assurance of attention to unique personal circumstances is an incentive for joining and gives seamstresses and tailors some security and control over the precariousness of their working lives, and eliminates the worry of their kiosks being visited by corrupt or unsympathetic State tax officials. A letter below from the GNTDA files shows personal domestic circumstances mediation by the Association:

Accra, dated February 1991

"I wish to inform you that, I am a member of the Tailors and Dressmakers Association since 1986 and have accordingly tried to fulfil my tax obligations. But very unfortunately my mother had her hand broken and I was therefore charged to take care of her since I am the only daughter.

This brought my operation as a seamstress to a halt in February 1991 until March 1992.

I therefore hope my humble request will meet your kind consideration.

Yours Faithfully"

Many small scale operators have developed tactics to escape the state by working from home where they are difficult to contact by authorities but also by potential new customers. Some who venture on to the streets often do so by constructing kiosks which can be shifted quickly with as little trouble as possible. Those with businesses on the streets experience many insecurities, often the enforcement at short notice of orders of Metropolitan authorities who periodically attempt to remove unauthorised structures from towns and cities because of environmental and planning

concerns or in attempt to embellish the urban landscape. The GNTDA tries to act for its members when they receive notices such as the one below:

"Unauthorised Temporary Structure

Metropolitan Works Department  
Temporary Building Control  
James Town  
Accra 23/11/92

1- It has been noticed that you erected a Temporary kiosk.....measuring 12'\7' without a permit at Kokomelemele.

2- This is in contravention with the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (Kiosk Keepers) Bye Laws of 1976 and Accra Building Regulations No. 114 of 1944.

3- You are accordingly requested to pay an amount of Cedis 11,000,00 as laid down in the Fee Fixing Resolution of 1992, this being the permit fee before you are considered for Temporary Building Permit.

4- You are accordingly requested to obtain a permit at the Metropolitan Works Department (City Engineers Department), James Town within three days from the date of this notice.

5- Please note that if the above directive is not complied with within THREE DAYS from the date of this notice, steps will be taken to remove the said structure and that the Accra Metropolitan Assembly will not be liable to any damage done to it or any material/equipment therein.

6- Please note that if this is not done within the time limit steps will be taken to take action against you!!""

Another form of harassment can be private landlords seeking to maximise the value of their land. Here is an example of a GNTDA member seeking a



respite from the worry and stress of fulfilling tax obligations because of adverse personal circumstances:

Accra, dated 10th July 1991

"The fact is, since April, 1991, I am unable to pay my Income Tax and my dues. I am in a mess. I have lost almost everything.

On the 6th of April, 1991, the owner of the land on which my kiosk was, informed us that he has sold the land and those who bought it are ready to put up buildings so he has given us just five days to pack off. We were there when they brought sand, stones and blocks.

I tried my best but could not get any place around so I had to take the kiosk from Mataheko Police Quarters to Dansoman and by so doing, lost all my customers, almost all my twenty-one apprentices and had my kiosk also broken. To repair it may need almost 50,000,00 cedis.

Due to this my husband has applied for a loan from his employers which shall be approved any time from now, to repair the kiosk.

Thus I am appealing to you for a breathing chance to put this together before I fulfil all my obligations as a patriotic citizen of the Nation and a member of this Association"

Hoping to hear from you soon."

By taking up such cases on behalf of members and being involved with their social welfare the Association performs a self-help function at a micro level. The Association also communicates directly with the State to influence its members tax contributions and has conducted a vigorous lobby to try to restrict the importation of second-hand clothing, perceived to be damaging the market for indigenous sewing skills and garments - a

campaign that has been largely hampered by the strength, numerically and politically, of the Association for second-hand clothes dealers.

### GNTDA - Service to apprentices

In interview, the association's president said he and the members had a moral concern that the youth must be given some skill to enable them to look after themselves - 'to do something' as Ghanaians say. To address this the GNTDA has set up a separate branch of the association for apprentices and has begun to impose obligations and standards on seamstresses and tailors to ensure proper training of apprentices who are often exploited. The traditional model of the master apprenticeship relationship incorporates a three way affective bond between the family of an apprentice and the apprentice and master. During the apprenticeship period the bonds are retained and reinforced with parents or guardians often visiting the workshop for reports. These relationships operate to different degrees from village to town to city, with bonds being most intense in the village where an apprentice is often in total service to a master. The apprentice will often live in the same compound house and do tasks such as sweeping, laundry, fetching water, cooking and farming.

Apprentices are used less for these tasks in Cape Coast and in Accra and there seems to be a growing disapproval of excessive use of apprentice labour for the seamstress's domestic chores. A form of regulation has been introduced by the Association in the model apprenticeship contract document for use by its members (plate 3). Regulation G instructs the apprentice to come to work "early for sweeping, cleaning, fetching of water etc."

The contract makes provision for the continued three way relationship and this is not solely for purposes of paying fees; parent or guardian is expected to visit regularly and receive reports on the apprentice (also regulation G plate 3). In regulation F the apprentice is told to be obedient, punctual, respectful and take instructions. In these requirements the contract is maintaining an emphasis on moral as well as technical education.

# Ghana National Tailors & Dressmakers Assoc.

## FORM FOR APPRENTICE & REGULATIONS – MADINA BRANCH

Apprentice Name and Address .....

Home Town ..... Age..... Married or Single.....

Parent's Name & Address .....

Tuition .....

**REGULATIONS**

- A) No Chop money during his/her period of time
- B) Half Payment at a stretch and balance after 6 months.
- C) That I would be dismissed for Stealing.
- D) The money paid is not refundable if I stop work
- E) If there is balance to be paid and the apprentice runs away, the guarantor will pay without hesitation
- F) The closing time depends on the condition and the demands of the Customers and must be obedient punctual, take instructions, respect the Master/Headmistress and the Seniors.
- G) Apprentice will be on probation for 2 months.

Apprentice will be suspended after two days absent without good reasons, After two weeks absent without taneible reason the apprentice should consider him/her self sacked If appren- tice comes again, he/she considered as a new commer.

Disrespect of apprentice, may cause the apprentice dismissal, apprentice should come early for sweeping, cleaning, fetching of water etc. Apprentice should work under instructions to avoid damages and inconveniencs.

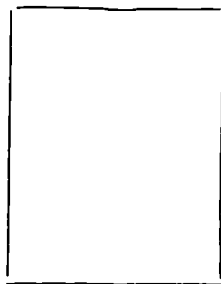
The parent/guardian should visit the apprentice regulaly to receive the report of the appren- tice.

**MONITORING:** Any master/Headmistress have authority to check apprentice whose master/headmistress is a member of G. N. T. D. A.

The apprentice will learn the work for the period of 3years from .....19..... to .. ..... 19..... Depending on the ability of the apprentice.

After completion the apprentice should provide—

.....



Apprentice Signature .....

Guarantors Signature.....

Manager's Signature .....

Witnessed by.....

plate 3

Masters are very keen that their apprentices stay the full term. As training advances the apprentices become very useful; with their advanced knowledge they can work unsupervised on customers' dresses

and are a source of income for their masters. As the master always has a number of senior apprentices at one time there is almost never a need to employ additional labour. Some masters have as many as thirty apprentices and their fees make a substantial contribution to income. It was my impression in the field that apprentice training in itself was a supplementary income for masters (these practices have impeded the development of a labour market, discussed in Chapter Five). There is so much concern amongst masters that apprentices complete their training that this is written into contracts with clauses such as 'if an apprentice does not complete her training and conceives or stops she will pay double the amount charged' (plate 4 - bylaw 3). There is also a concern that an apprentice might do private work for a fee and possibly steal the master's customers therefore regulation forbidding this is written into contracts (plate 5 condition 1).

Moovie Fashion Center  
c/o P. O. Box K95,  
Accra-North

A D M I S S I O N   F O R M

NAME..... DATE OF BIRTH.....  
ADDRESS..... FAMILY STATUS: MARRIED/SINGLE  
DATE OF ADMISSION..... DURATION OF WORK .....

A D M I S S I O N   R E Q U I R E M E N T

- 1) Cash (An Amount of )  $\emptyset$ .....
- 2) 1 Bottle of Shnapps
- 3) 1 Crate of Minerals

W O R K I N G   R E Q U I R E M E N T

- |                     |                        |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1) 1 Sewing Machine | 4) 2 Packets of Pins   |
| 2) 1 Measuring Tape | 5) 2 Packets of Thread |
| 3) Scissors         |                        |

Working hours      Monday ---- Friday  
Morning 8a.m. - 12 noon  
Afternoon 1 p.m. --- 6p.m.

NOTE:      Closing time may depend on nature of work in the shop.

R E G U L A T I O N S / B Y E L A W S

- 1) Apprentice should respect and take instructions from her mistress.
- 2) Apprentice should be regular at work.  
Absent without permission merits severe punishment.
- 3) If an apprentice does not complete her ..... Tuition and conceives or stop she will pay double the amount charged.
- 4) Apprentice should respect themselves.
- 5) Apprentice should not cut anything (even their own dress) without directives from their Mistress.

SIGNATURE OF APPRENTICE..... DATE.....

NAME/ADDRESS OF WITNESS..... DATE.....

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS.....

.....  
MARGARET OWUSUA  
(MISTRESS)

DATE.....

AGREEMENT FORM

MAGMENS HAPPY GIRLS HOME — P. O. BOX 15917, ACCRA-NORTH  
(NEAR OVERHEAD BRIDGE—TOTAL FILLING STATION—ASYLUM DOWN, ACCRA).

Miss.....has on this.....day of.....19...  
agreed to undergo a TWO YEARS COURSE OF APPRENTICESHIP at the above Home. From.....  
.....19.....to.....19..... at a total Tuition Fee of  
₵.....under the following conditions/terms.

1. That the undermentioned items are to be provided by the Guardian/Guarantor before admission.
  - (a) One Bottle Schnapps
  - (b) One Carton of Beer
  - (c) One Crate Minerals
  - (d) Admission Fee of ₵.....50,000.....
  - (e) Late Coming Fee of ₵.....200.....
2. Deposit of ₵.....20,000.....
3. After paying the deposit you are given 6 months to pay the 2 years amount of ₵.....  
after you have completed the two years Course, the following items will be provided by the Guar-  
dian/Guarantor before their ward will be customarily discharged or released.
  - (i) One Bottle Schnapps
  - (ii) One Carton of Beer
  - (iii) One Crate Minerals
  - (iv) One Crate of Eggs
  - (v) Two (presentable) live fowls

CONDITION OF TRAINING

1. An apprentice has no right to accept or do any Private work for a fee without the consent of the Master/Mistress.
2. Likewise, an Apprentice has no right to take anything whatsoever out of the workshop to any place.
3. Is compulsory for each apprentice to bring cement paper for every Saturday. There will be an inspection on every Saturday. After the inspection all apprentices will use it for patterns (styles).
4. Absenteeism: An apprentice should attend work daily except that she is sick and permission obtained and approved.
5. Leave of Absence: Should an apprentice wish to leave for her home town or attend to a very important call, she should first and foremost obtain permission and approval from her master/ mistress before doing so.
6. Failure to comply with the foregoing condition the master/mistress reserves the right to sack or punish her.
7. An apprentice should get permission before she gets out.
8. The days of work are from Mondays to Saturday, but an apprentice must be present on every Saturday. In defiance of this the apprentice would be penalised.
9. An apprentice has no right to travel during any occasion because of the nature of the work.
10. The apprentice should be punctual, and respectful to her seniors.
11. Stealing: This is strictly prohibited in this organization, and stringent measures will be taken against any apprentice who commits this grievous offence/crime.
12. Note: The guardian/guarantor could bring the requested items whether complete or incomplete.
13. An apprentice you are to appear in the Workshop in Skirt (Blue) or black and Blouse (Yellow).
14. An apprentice is not to receive visitors during working hours.
15. Wednesdays are days for teachings and suggestions about the work.
16. An apprentice has the opportunity of learning overlocking after her two years course for three months, as part of the training.

plate 5

These concerns about competition in the city show a new perception of the market which dressmakers and tailors operate in. There is evidence of a shift away from the notion of a community of craftship bonded by trust

and fellowship. In Abodom where apprentice agreement forms have not come into practice I asked seamstresses if they had any fears that their apprentices might become their future competition. The answer was often received with a smile and a shaking of the head to indicate no. They expect to be respected by their apprentices after they leave their workshop and are confident they will receive their own customers and that there would always be plenty of work to share.

The traditional model allows negotiations between the master and the family of the apprentice over the training fees but the association recommends a set tariff of 50,000 cedis (approx. £50). However, the fluctuating rate of real inflation means regulation on fees is difficult and most are set by individual workshops using an informal 'going rate'. The usual practice is for a cash payment and a list of items to be brought by the apprentices on starting training and a number of items to be brought on leaving. The terms are mostly made easier by allowing a cash deposit to be followed in about six months by the amount in full. The full cash fee at 'Magmens Happy Girls Home' (plate 5) was 50,000 cedis in July 1994; a 25,000 cedis deposit was required. This was the average fee in the capital, and in Cape Coast and Abodom the fee reduced respectively.

The items to accompany the cash varied much more. At Magmens Happy Girls Home one bottle of schnapps, one crate of beer and one crate of soft drinks were required on the start of training and the same items plus one crate of eggs and two presentable live fowls on completion (plate 5). In the Golden Tailoring Shop in North Accra the cash fee was the same but the amount of schnapps had increased to two bottles and in addition



two bottles of local gin were required<sup>1</sup> - this despite giving up pouring libation to the ancestors.

To replace the traditional passing out rites and the pouring of libation<sup>2</sup> some seamstresses and tailors said they hold 'parties' where the apprentice brings soft drinks for all invited and Christian prayers are said. The Association has also intervened here. Its justification is that with so many small workshops and kiosks holding separate parties, resources of the apprentices are used up and much time is wasted. The Association's solution has been to hold mass annual passing out formalities. They are usually meetings in public halls with the most distinguished invited guests possible. The event incorporates a fashion show, Christian prayers, soft drinks and patriotic songs. These are interspersed with periodic cash collections to pay for the event. The main event is the presentation of certificates verifying formal examination passes (*appendix J details the content of the examination*).

The traditional model of the passing-out ceremony acknowledged competent craftship and the passage of an apprentice into a small morally bonded community of gifted masters. It is clear that the Association examinations and ceremonies are much less a personal acknowledgement than they are a celebration of status transition into

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<sup>1</sup> Agreement form too badly printed for inclusion.

<sup>2</sup> Analysis of my questionnaires confirms the information received from my intensive case studies, that the main reason for giving up pouring libation was on religious grounds; conversion from traditional beliefs to Christianity or Islam. Comments like "it's not good, we say prayers instead" are common. One tailor in Cape Coast said he hadn't poured libation for six years, saying "its not necessary, our grandparents did it, we don't know why, it was our custom". Request by masters for at least one bottle of schnapps has not however been given up; the tailor who made the above comments requests one bottle of schnapps and a packet of cigarettes in addition to buttons and thread.

national socio-economic culture. This is the culture of economic hardship and bureaucratic standards and the reaches of the State through the Association into this previously hidden occupational group.

The Associational body see these changes from 'traditional' to 'modern' as necessary but no rationale is clearly articulated. Comments like 'we don't do those things any more, they are not good' or 'now I know the right way (the Christian way)' are common. Being a Christian and a member of the GNTDA is associated with being part of 'modern' Ghana. The GNTDA membership are still bonded by occupational identity and fellowship but they see their products, techniques and equipment as changing. During fieldwork I recorded members personal ambitions as buying an electric sewing machine, overlock machine, iron and learning new styles and techniques. Joining the Association may make these ambitions more realistic as they feel they can call on the State for help. The membership reciprocate by paying dues and taxes. The process of joining and becoming part of a large group with shared occupational identity would seem to bring the abstract nature of participation in State structures into a more practical and realistic opportunity for self advancement; this is just one of the services the Association performs for the State.

### GNTDA - service to the State

Rawlings' second military government (the Provisional National Defence Council) took over the country on December 31 1981 and soon began to address short and medium term economic factors. The first policy document issued by the new regime in May 1982 was a revision of the budget of Hilla Limann's government. The only form of radicalism contained in it referred to reorganising the tax system. The intention was

to raise the share of direct taxes as against indirect taxes by widening the tax base to include the self-employed and professionals who had previously evaded the tax net - one means of doing this would be to impose tax payments without issuing assessments (Folson 1993 p.84). This was carried out and became an incentive for the organisation of trade associations like the GNTDA.

The Association's National President is adamant that the GNTDA does not belong to the state through any political party. One can, however, find evidence that it is influenced by the ideology of the government's national development philosophy and does, through awareness raising of its membership, assist in propagating these ideas to develop notions of formal economic citizenship. Central to this is developing and inculcating the notion of tax obligations as a moral duty to the nation. There are, however, no alternative national development programmes to choose from as all Ghanaian political opposition parties support continued co-operation with the World Bank and structural adjustment measures. The extract of the GNTDA National President's speech below clearly shows the Association's commitment and belief in the current economic development strategy. The extract is taken from an address to members at the 7th Annual General Meeting (May 1994).

"It is important for us to cultivate the habit of willingly giving to government what is due to the nation in the form of taxes, licences and other levies, because all these directly affect funding for development projects like schools, hospitals, roads etc."

He goes on to announce the Association collected 35 million cedis on behalf of the revenue services, but stresses that there are still sectors that the tax net has not yet covered (see appendix II).

There is an incentive for the GNTDA to collect taxes on behalf of the State as the Association has negotiated a two per cent commission<sup>1</sup> on the total amount collected; this is kept at the national office to pay staff. The Association is supplied with official Inland Revenue receipt books for each Region and can organise part-time 'task forces' to help collect taxes from those who don't pay or have stopped attending meetings where tax and other dues are usually paid. In Accra a new tax collection system is being developed by the Association that involves the appointment of an area leader to monitor collection. Within each administrative zone sub-groups are to be set up, preferably in walking distance coverage. For a small daily allowance Association members are expected to become member collectors and a roster of collector duties should be drawn up. To counter the underlying suspicion of corruption "members collectors should account every pesewa<sup>2</sup> to the Area Leader at the end of the week for onward remittance to the Zone Executive"<sup>3</sup> .

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<sup>1</sup> A number of other trade associations representing informal sector occupations have similar agreements with government and the Inland Revenue Services; these include hairdressers, bakers, drinking bars, garage operators. The Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) regulates haulage of goods and passengers, assists the police and collects taxes on behalf of the Internal Revenue. The GPRTU was regarded as an ally of the former PNDC government and an 'organ of the revolution'. (Gyimah-Boadi and Essuman-Johnson 1993 p. 204) In June 1994, in recognition of the Union's achievements, Rawlings unveiled a three million cedis bronze statue of the former Ashanti regional Chairman . In Rawlings' address he praised the Chairman's "enormous sense of responsibility and positive attitude to national life." (Nyinah 1994). In more general terms he said that "the future of the country depends on how Ghanaians perceive things and their attitude towards societal events.....every Ghanaian has a duty and responsibility to serve the country" (ibid)

<sup>2</sup> The lowest unit of Ghanaian currency.

<sup>3</sup> Notes from official correspondence consulted at the national office of the GNTDA, Accra.

Dressmakers and tailors themselves are policing those that remain outside the tax base. Members are encouraged to see non-members as failing to fulfil their moral duty to the nation. This is an important psychological strategy to use against dressmakers and tailors whose reputations and businesses are built on relationships of trust and respectability in their communities, but an unarticulated concern may be that those outside the Association are enjoying a cost advantage over GNTDA members. Forcing non-members to join may be as much in the interest of existing members as it is the State's, a case of 'if we by virtue of our visibility on the streets have to pay up, you're not getting away with it'. With sector members having a financial and moral motivation for policing their own territory, momentum is given to the process of harassing the rest of the wayside disparate population into conformity.

Association collection methods are an alternative to tax collection by officials of the District Assemblies. If the Association can collect taxes at its meetings this would prove cost effective and could relieve District Assemblies of this task. Recently the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development considered either abolishing the collection of basic rate tax or reviewing it upwards because the current rate of cedis 200 (approx. 25p) per adult per week is uneconomic to collect by District Assemblies (Okyere 1994).

I attended a meeting of the GNTDA in Cape Coast in February 1994 and found that seamstresses and tailors were paying cedis 1,000 (approx. £1.20) per month in basic rate tax; this rate had been held since 1988 but was in the process of being adjusted upwards. The meeting was

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addressed by an official of the Inland Revenue Service on the proposed new rate. He explained that the existing rate was set on the assumption that seamstresses and tailors only had one sewing machine in their workshops. This, he proposed, was an obvious falsehood and that the new rate would take into account the number of sewing machines. The new rates would be banded, with the first band being cedis 3,000 for a workshop with between one and three machines. The official reported that a survey to find out how many machines members have had been proposed and rejected as it was believed that 70 per cent of masters would hide their machines revealing only one. This rate was later revised to cedis 1,000 per machine per month.

Complaints from members on the need for an increase were met with some impatience; the official reminded them that the current cedis 1,000 per month was in theory only a deposit and full written accounts including legitimate expenses should be submitted to the Inland Revenue for assessment. He admitted the instances of this practice being followed were very rare as 90 per cent of seamstresses and tailors don't keep records due to illiteracy or lack of training. The results of my questionnaires in Cape Coast suggest that the figure is accurate. I found one long established tailor who kept a secret book of records more out of a commitment to the practice and not for business or tax purposes. This was the case with three seamstresses who as a result of attending a seminar on book keeping had made a start at record keeping but had not kept up to date or used them for analysis of their business or for tax assessment. The tax official's complaints on members' tax arrears and their lack of co-operation in record keeping found no sympathy with members who have become hardened to such protestations and who have similar grievances with the Cape Coast Municipal Assembly and other

bodies. Seamstresses and tailors (like all small-scale operators) have to pay, in addition to income tax, workshop licences, Municipal registration fees, kiosk rents and daily market tolls, all of which are constantly increasing. To these protestations the official's only comment was that he would probably be dismissed from his job by the end of the year! At this the meeting was perceptibly disturbed. In this instance the GNTDA is providing a concrete and sympathetic face to face forum for the Revenue Service and tailors and dressmakers to negotiate and communicate the requirements of economic participation in the state.

### Taxes and making a contribution to development

There is no incentive for seamstresses to keep up to date with tax payments and many will not pay long outstanding arrears until final exasperated demands are made by tax officials. At another GNTDA meeting I attended in Cape Coast in December, just before Christmas, an official from the Inland Revenue addressed the meeting in a firm tone, determined to dismiss protestations by seamstresses and tailors that because of poor business they could not pay taxes. He spoke from informed experience, telling them that their delaying tactics would no longer be tolerated and that they should pay off all their arrears with the large sums of money he knew they would earn from the seasonal trade. I noticed a few people turned to face each other and smile and a hum of voices became audible in the room - none could deny that Christmas trade held the potential for large sums of money to be made but it was also the case that this money was used to off set the drop in trade expected in the off peak months (see figs. 1 and 2 and appendix III) and this point was put to the official as a bid to help their case in further delaying the payment of arrears.

The good natured banter mixed with subtle determination both from the state agent in the uniform of the inland revenue and seamstresses and tailors as members of the 'quasi formal economy' (see following sector for definition) belies the real underlying imperative of the state to find methods of ensuring small-scale artisans make their contribution to development through tax revenue. In this pursuit one of the first considerations must be to assess whether the protestations of some of the seamstresses and tailors about their inability to pay is genuine or not and this can in part be judged by looking into the earnings of these small businesses. This, however, has its own problems as very few small businesses keep detailed records and my attempts to deal with this question rely on answers from seamstresses to part of my interview questionnaire which asked them firstly the charges they made for workmanship and secondly to estimate the number of garments produced in a busy month such as December and in a low demand month such as November or February.



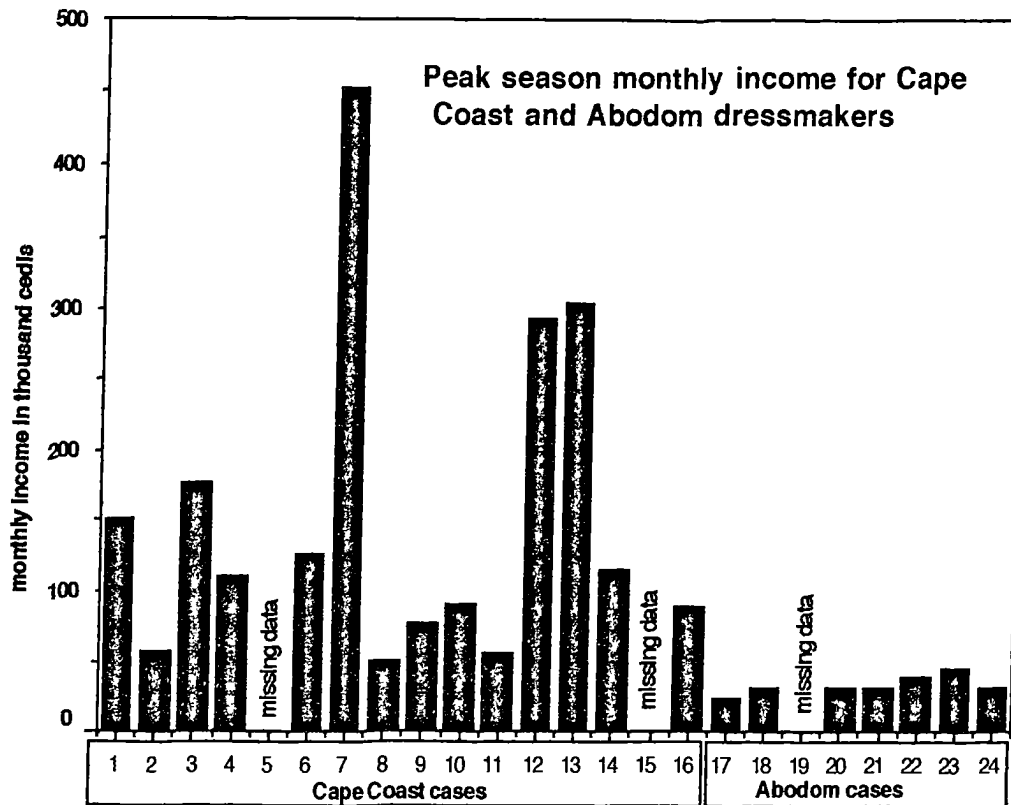


Fig 1

From this data I found that the average mean income in peak season for the 14 seamstresses in Cape Coast for whom data was available was 144,000 per month (approx. £144) and in low demand months this fell to 55,000 (approx. £55). Figure 1 shows there are exceptional seamstresses who earn considerably more than the mean average and those who earn much less - all however keep no records and all pay the standard 1,000 cedis per month tax demand. Clearly those seamstresses on higher incomes in peak season have the potential to make larger tax contributions without hardship and efforts are being made to instruct them on record keeping which will indirectly assist the Inland Revenue in their assessment task. But this is hampered by the fact that even the most successful seamstresses may be illiterate and unable and unwilling to keep accurate records.

I have not recorded in my income assessment the money which seamstresses earn from apprenticeship fees. This is another source of unrecorded and untaxed income from which the Inland Revenue has not as yet attempted to extract a percentage. For those seamstresses with large numbers of apprentices their fees amount to a substantial source of capital and in her apprentices a seamstress has a large mainly unpaid labour force which enables her to take on large quantities of work. Rather than the Inland Revenue proposing that the number of sewing machines in a workshop be taxed, it may be more informative for tax purposes if the number of apprentices under a master and her income from apprenticeship fees be part of the income assessment where no formal records are kept.

From the graphs presented here there seems a clear need for banding of tax categories as the village seamstress could be taxed at a lower rate than the town worker to reflect both lower income and the more seasonal nature of her work. Village seamstresses will typically accept a lower workmanship charge than those working in towns and markedly lower income even in peak season - mean average income in Abodom for the peak working season is 32,000 cedis a month (approx. £32) and for out of peak season, when the seamstresses will only be sewing several days a week, it is 9.000 cedis per month (approx. £9).

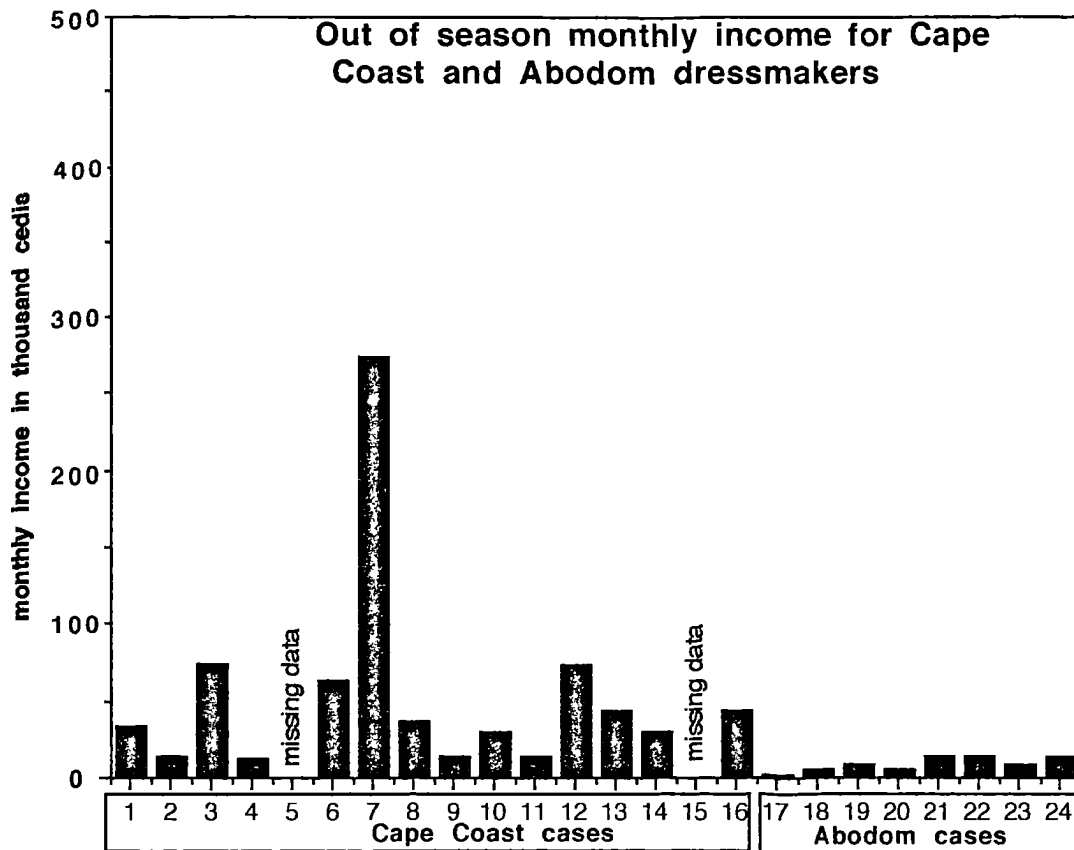


Fig. 2

It is notable that in Abodom there is less variation in the amount of income earned by individual seamstresses than in Cape Coast and this stems from the similar agricultural dependent situation of most of the regular customers of the village seamstress. This contrasts with the urban situation where greater variations in wealth and sources of income are found. The village seamstress also has a greater reduction in non-peak income compared to peak season' non-peak income being approximately a quarter of peak income. In Cape Coast the difference, although marked, is not so great - seamstresses earn approximately two thirds less in non-peak months and their income in these slow months is considerably higher than that of the village seamstress who is very likely to pursue supplementary occupations unrelated to sewing when demand is not high.

Even though workshop rents are much higher in towns than in villages and living expenses, especially food prices, are much higher the seamstress working in town has considerably more income at her disposal than the village seamstress. This differential explains the ambition of seamstresses and apprentices to leave their village and move to the town or city to set up a workshop and establish themselves as masters by taking on apprentices and using this labour source to gather a regular clientele to themselves. Whether or not a move to the town is achieved or the seamstress or tailor sets up a workshop in the village the culture of mastercraftship within the small-scale enterprise is perpetuated. It is a culture which tries to insulate itself from the reality of wider state structures and national development responsibility. The culture of small-scale workshops attempts to keep its own resources within the confines of the community and families which it serves. For the town seamstress this is clearly a culture on the brink of change. Their workshops, working practices and their large tax arrears cannot now be ignored by tax officials, who have found a legitimate forum and a platform within the GNTDA to address them and persuade them that their role in national development is vital.

### GNTDA as a buffer organisation between state and artisan

Since the first attempts at formation in 1979 the GNTDA has established itself as a form of buffer organisation between on the one hand state economic activity and forces of structural adjustment and on the other the economic culture of small-scale artisans in the informal, quasi-formal and formal sectors. As a buffer organisation it encourages and initiates small-scale dressmakers and tailors into formal economic citizenship, lessens the effect of economic reforms, makes realistic the opportunities

of such reforms and gives some power to small-scale operators in their negotiations with the State.

On joining the Association members directly enter obligations towards the Associational body involving the payment of monthly dues and income tax. Indirectly they are however entering a relationship with the formal economy as Association officials deliver all tax payments to the Inland Revenue Service on behalf of its members.

Many operators refuse to join claiming they pay taxes directly to the Revenue Service or they believe they can continue evading the authorities; in Figure 2 those continuing to evade are classed as 'informals' - many are suspicious of the intention of the Association and feel the officials are possibly corrupt.

New members often cite harassment by corrupt tax officials who come to their kiosk to demand money as a reason for joining the Association. Competition in the informal economy for the resources of operators is becoming fierce<sup>1</sup> and the minimum income tax payment of cedis 1,000 per month accepted by the Association is considered initially fair. New members are issued with an official membership book in which records of all payments against the Secretary's signature are made. Members may occasionally get into arrears and lapse membership thus becoming part of the limbo of the 'quasi-formal' sphere in Fig 3. This second stage en route to formal economic citizenship is possibly the largest category. One

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<sup>1</sup> The decentralisation programme has given District Assemblies the right to raise funds from every sphere of economic life - entertainment duty, tax on the registration of trade or business, betting tax, gambling machine tax, casino revenue tax, advertisement tax, daily transport tax, personal income tax, market tolls, crop levies, property rates. Much corruption and misuse of funds has been reported (Andoh 1993 p.102-103)

of the major factors is the insecure and seasonal nature of tailoring and dressmaking which makes regular payments difficult to maintain. As the Association has details of former members on record, 'task forces' are often mobilised to persuade them to re-establish membership obligations - the threat of confiscation of sewing machines or closure of kiosks is used. The ambition of the Association is to have all dressmakers and tailors as members and it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid the recruitment efforts of the task forces.

Those who maintain membership and tax payments, whether attending meetings or not, become the 'formal' sphere in fig.3. They may become active administrators of the Association and drive the recruitment momentum forward. They willingly dress in the Association's uniform and enter their apprentices for the Association's proficiency examinations thus initiating a new generation into a formal mode of operating.

### Route to economic citizenship

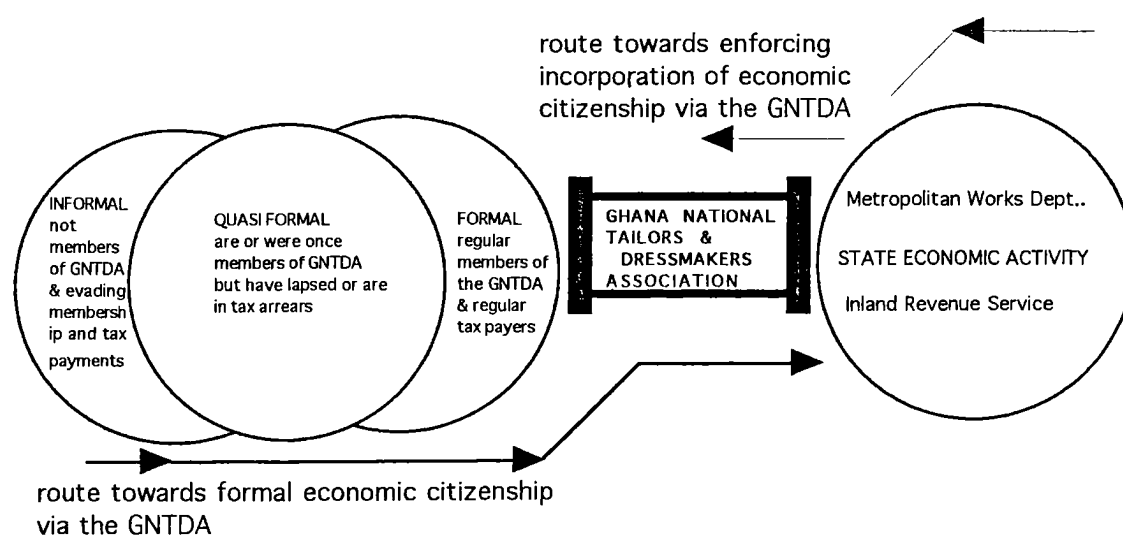


Fig. 3

There are two critical interchange points which allow the triad between State, Association and the small-scale sector to function. One is the point

of contact between the seamstresses and tailors in their workshops and activists of the Association. The second is the meeting of State officials and Association members representatives. This triad forms the Association's network from village level to national profile and political force. Through membership of the Association individual tailors and dressmakers become constituents of local groups and give abstract numerical force to regional and national aggregates. It is the highest aggregate, the national body operating in Accra, that encounters the political and economic agents of the State. Without an intermediary or buffer organisation such as the GNTDA with a network of active members there is little possibility that the alienation between the small-scale operators and the State bodies such as Inland Revenue could be bridged and the State's urgent 'revenue imperative' (Bates 1981) addressed.

### The future of the GNTDA

The GNTDA is more than a coping strategy; it has a vision of a better future for its members. In this respect it is unlike self-help organisations in Tanzania recently described by Michael Schulz that have no ideological "hope for a better future to-morrow" or no ambitions to be "spiritual sources of self empowerment" (Schulz 1995 p.14). The leadership of the GNTDA has analysed the future of the evolving neo-liberal state and its relinquishment of responsibility for the citizen's social welfare through the reduction or total withdrawal of funds and subsidies from already run down public services. Like the majority of Ghanaians the GNTDA has given up the illusion and hope of a paternalistic Welfare State.

To fill the gap in social provision being left by the State, the GNTDA has initiated a project to bring most of the major trade Associations together under one new umbrella organisation, the Council for Indigenous

Business Associations (CIBA). The various Associations are giving big incentives to get their members to subscribe to CIBA. The GNTDA for example are offering members "goods on hire-purchase terms such as fridges, deep freezers, electric cookers, washing machines, colour television sets, video decks, sounds systems, etc.." (National President, GNTDA, May 1994). In the future CIBA would like to model its development on the pension scheme of the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) which finances housing for rent and outright sale to its members<sup>1</sup>. CIBA wishes to offer these opportunities to its own members and perhaps take over, like SSNIT, other former State responsibilities. Small-scale businesses operating in the informal, quasi-formal and formal sectors active in indigenous trade Associations, once vilified as impeding the progress of development, may now be the catalysts of future institutional social welfare provision in the private sector and a possible alternative to the western economic development model.

### Conclusion

Rawlings' military government came to power to conduct a 'clean up' operation. The regime had a dislike of exploitative unchecked markets; businesses were not seen as making a contribution to development, but rather impeding its progress. Most small-scale operators had disappeared from the tax base and formed a massive informal economy beyond the reach of existing State intervention techniques. In the thirteen intervening years the same leaders, although now democratically elected in 1992, have a commitment through the Structural Adjustment programme

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<sup>1</sup> 4,250 flats have been constructed under its housing programme begun in 1974. In the future SSNIT intends to "move into tourism, public transport, shops and offices and the building material industry as a way of complementing government efforts" (Welsing-Jones 1993).



to accept the role of the private sector and of 'small-scale' operators<sup>1</sup> who are now 'enterprises', a relatively recent term with positive semantic meaning referring to the sector's role in promoting development. Recent research continues to question this commitment to the private sector; it claims there is little trust between them (ODI 1996 p4). Where there is mistrust of government by the small-scale enterprise community tax evasion will continue and working practices will continue to operate within informal and affective practices. The State's ability to communicate and intervene in the small-scale sector and tap its vitally important revenue resources will be limited to time consuming and threatening methods of collecting small amounts of arrears payments.

The establishment of trade associations such as the GNTDA have been an appropriate method used by the formal state in trying to tap the resources of the small-scale sector. Another more general method the state has used is to work through the political decentralisation process - stressing within the associated participation philosophy the moral imperative on citizens to make their tax contributions. But the political nature of the district government is itself often conceived to be within the economy of affection and often there is little trust in officials.

It has been the initiative of small-scale operators in many trades who created unifying Associations to negotiate with rather than confront, the State. The service which the GNTDA performs for the State of harnessing through membership the disparate population of small-scale dressmakers and tailors is not complete. Many geographical areas are still not covered,

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<sup>1</sup> "Dr Kwesi Botchwey, Minister of Finance, said on Tuesday that the government will find ways and means of harnessing the potential of the small and medium scale entrepreneurs because of the roles they could play in the country's economic growth....." (GNA 1993)

yet the goal of full national membership and resulting economic citizenship is pursued because internal taxation is seen as the only sustainable path to national development. For the founders of the Association the motivation was the inevitability of state intervention and the wish to control it and retain some of the 'affective' welfare features of their community organisations. They wished to influence the amount of tax paid and design a more appropriate collection system; by doing this the GNTDA has become a quasi-state institution. For the ordinary Association member the motivation for joining is also a way of avoiding the penalties of staying outside i.e. the confiscation of their machines by task forces. It also serves to elevate status in the community by gaining responsibility within the Association's administration and an opportunity for 'chopping' for those seeking illicit financial gain. The movement towards entry into the formal economy is probably for many an unintended consequence of membership of the GNTDA and for many only a partial step because they persist in underpayment, tax arrears and non-disclosure of income. However, the partnership between the Association, its members and formal state structures is shaping a process of transition from an industry based on local mastercraftship and ancestor guidance to the acceptance of participation in a developing state capitalist system.

In previous decades the generation of internal revenue for urban industrial development called on the resources of rural farmers. (Bates 1981 p.122). The 'revenue imperative' which Bates analysed in relation to the African State's political interventions in agricultural markets is now, in Ghana, broadened to include the artisan sector. In Ghana the State's intervention in the cocoa industry has been described as destructive while not achieving its development objectives. The question which we might

now ask is whether the burden of taxes, licences, memberships dues, kiosk rents and market tolls will restrict the growth of the small-scale sector.

Intervention for revenue collection in the artisan sector is made difficult by the independent, disorganised and often secretive nature of businesses. The creation of new associations or institutions with revenue collection responsibilities has thus been a new means of state intervention. Such associations were not created through acts of parliament, by military decree or by worker militancy. Nor were they the result of World Bank or NGO policy or funding but were created by small business operators themselves. The Association which this chapter focuses on is self governing, having its own constitution and serves the interests of its members as well as the state. Within a theoretical model consisting of three overlapping economic spheres, the informal, quasi-formal and formal State economy, the activities of the GNTDA is that of a buffer organisation functioning for all spheres but primarily introducing new opportunities and lessening the effect of economic reforms of structural adjustment on the lives of small-scale operators. The future of CIBA sponsored social welfare programmes for members (providing pensions and meeting housing needs) is a brighter, more secure prospect than that on offer by the shrinking responsibilities of the neo-liberal state. Tailors and Dressmakers volunteered themselves for this role, and they have successfully brought 25,000 fellow small-scale dressmakers and tailors some way towards inclusion in the state and formal economic citizenship.



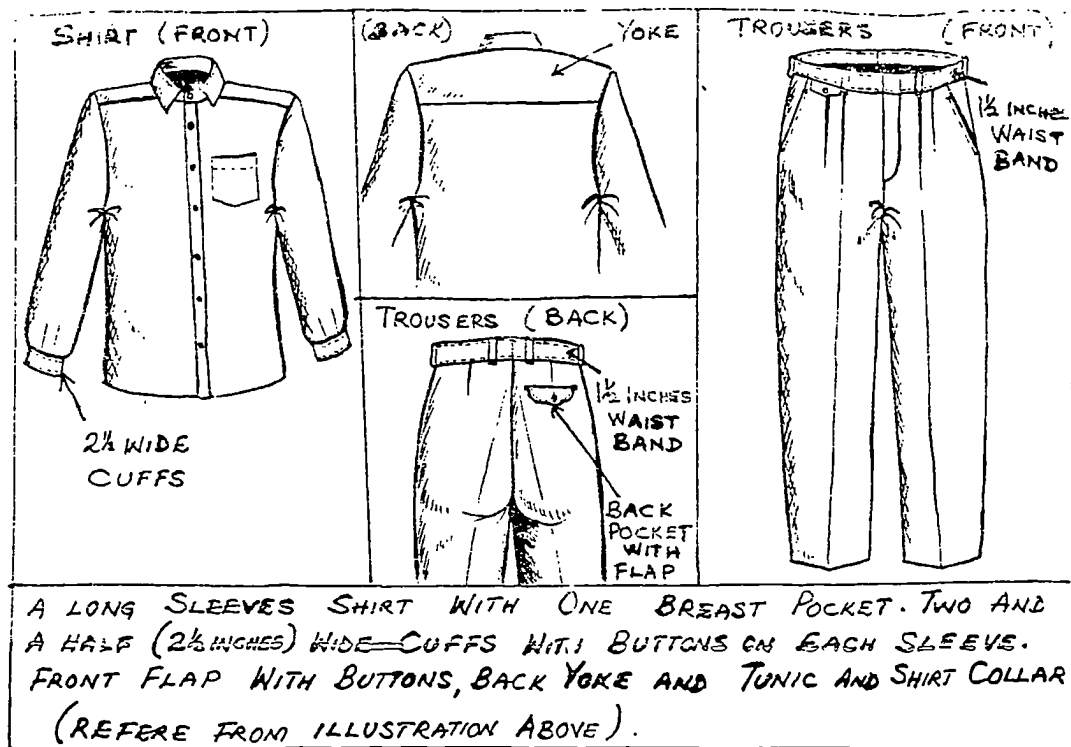


Plate 7

Plate 6 & 7 Graphics produced by the National Tailors and Dressmakers Association as the 1994 apprenticeship practical examinations papers.

A written examination is planned for the future but the Association anticipates the widespread lack of literacy amongst apprentices and masters<sup>1</sup> may prevent it coming into widespread use.

<sup>1</sup> There is a general impression that those who take up dressmaking have either failed or not participated fully in the formal education system. As a gendered occupation for uneducated girls dressmaking is the equivalent status occupation to carpentry and masonry apprenticeship for young boys. For example a recent newspaper article reported a sum of money had been received for a project which included the setting up of dressmaking, carpentry and masonry training centres in the Atwima District of Ashanti. The centres are specially to "train teenage mothers and school dropouts in the area" (Mensah 1994 ).

At present there are training initiatives supported by the 'National Council on Women and Development' (a Ghanaian government advisory committee set up in 1975) to direct girls education away from traditionally feminine occupations into more technical subjects. However, the majority of girls trained in private vocational institutes and those in government-owned technical institutes are made to concentrate on "three main traditional subjects - catering, hairdressing and dressmaking" (Dolphyne 1987 p.214). For those unable to pursue formal education, apprenticeship training is the third route into the clothing industry.



Plate 8 GNTDA apprenticeship examinations in progress

## Appendix II

GNTDA Income Tax Collection Data<sup>1</sup>

Regional Branch	Taxes Collected from Members (million Cedis)				
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Greater Accra	3.068	2.584	4.733	3.807	5.129
Ashanti	2.766	5.491	5.369	12.137	*
Eastern	2.652	3.476	2.679	1.674	*
Western	1.961	2.023	2.431	3.197	2.104
Central	0.500	0.894	1.213	1.278	*
Volta	0.151	0.125	0.449	0.480	*
Brong Ahafo	1.543	2.093	0.480	-	*
Upper East	0.023	0.099	0.186	0.130	*
Tema District	0.377	0.721	1.052	0.633	*
Northern	-	-	-	-	-
Upper West	-	-	-	-	-
Total	13.044	17.510	18.288	23.339	

\*Figures not yet received.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From original table produced by the National Secretariat.

<sup>2</sup> The association is not well organised in the Northern regions; organisers were put in post in 1994 and serious work will begin next year (Interview with the National Secretary - Accra July 1994). In the case of the Ashanti Region, the office has been established for 10 years; this was the reason given by the National Secretary for the larger amount of tax collected.

## Appendix III

Estimated seasonal demand for seamstress's garments  
and estimated monthly income

Table 1.a Cape Coast dressmakers

Dress-makers	<sup>1</sup> Kaba/Slit & dresses peak demand (Dec.)	Kaba/Slit & dresses low demand (Nov. or Feb.)	<sup>2</sup> Average sewing charges when a customer brings their own accessories	Average peak demand monthly income from Kaba/Slit and dresses	Average low demand monthly income from Kaba/Slit and dresses
case 1	60	13	2,500	150,000	32,500
case 2	23	6	2,500	57,500	15,000
case 3	70	30	2,500	175,000	75,000
case 4	55	13	2,000	110,000	12,000
case 5	3	-	2,500	0	0
case 6	36	18	3,500	126,000	63,000
case 7 <sup>4</sup>	180	110	2,500	450,000	275,000
case 8	20	15	2,500	50,000	37,500
case 9	50	10	1,500	75,000	15,000
case 10	36	12	2,500	90,000	30,000
case 11	28	7	2,000	56,000	14,000
case 12	115	30	2,500	287,500	75,000
case 13	100	15	3,000	300,000	45,000
case 14	45	12	2,500	112,500	30,000
case 15	-	-	3,000	0	0
case 16	35	18	2,500	87,500	45,000
Totals	711	237		2,017,110.000	764,000

## 1.b Abodom dressmakers

case 1	15	1	1,500	22,500	1,500
case 2	20	4	1,500	30,000	6,000
case 3	0 (had just had a baby)	6	1,500	0	9,000
case 4	20	3	1,500	30,000	4,500
case 5	20	10	1,500	30,000	15,000
case 6	25	10	1,500	37,500	15,000
case 7	30	5	1,500	45,000	7,500
case 8	20	10	1,500	30,000	15,000
Totals				225,000	73,500

<sup>1</sup> This refers to a simple styled Kaba; for more complicated and time consuming styles charges for workmanship are increased.

<sup>2</sup> The average charge of sewing Kaba and Slit or a dress have been reached by adding the two standard charges together and dividing by two.

<sup>3</sup> Missing data

<sup>4</sup> This seamstress was working with 25 apprentices.



## Chapter 10

### Conclusion

The sewing kiosk facing the state and global  
economic change

## Introduction

I hope this thesis has shown through both sociological and micro-level anthropological observations and analyses that the findings of a survey on small-scale businesses in Ghana describing dressmakers and tailors as representative of "stagnant producers who have not mastered the new environment and who seem unable to change products in the face of mounting competition" (Steel and Webster 1991 P.X) is a sweeping statement taking no account of the relationship of the dressmaker and the tailor to the social structures and aesthetic standards of their own communities. Although Steel and Webster objectively describe the position of many dressmakers within a Western type definition of the 'economy', they have little appreciation that dressmakers in southern Ghana make garments not for a reified notion of the market but for those who bring their cloth to be made into garments for occasions when it is proper to display and celebrate *ethnically and socially defined gender roles* which in themselves are symbols of lineage wealth, strength and pride.

My findings also contrast with Ninsin's description of informal economy activity. The Kaba and Slit made by any class of seamstress in village, town or city variant of the informal economy is by no means an 'inferior product' nor can it be compared in quality to any imported garment. It is not hawked about the street for sale but is a personal commission constructed with the ideal status and dignity of the Ghanaian personality in mind. But Ninsin's highly charged and theoretical analysis does contain a realistic description of much working practice within the informal economy. The life of market hawker is substantially more insecure and difficult than that of the seamstress or tailor who all theoretically belong to the same category, the informal economy.

Ghana is not only being introduced to international production systems; the government itself has declared policy options for the 1990's and beyond which draw on the experience of the newly industrialised countries of East Asia which have used such methods as flexible specialisation to advantage. In emulating these countries Ghana hopes to move its economy's growth rate from 5% per annum to about 8% by the year 2000 (Asante and Addo 1993 p.113) - as part of the accelerated growth strategy. Investment from the private sector, both local and foreign, is being sought and government is to play the "role of facilitator through the creation of an enabling environment<sup>1</sup>" (Asante and Addo 1993 p.113).

The conditions of economic decline of the previous decades have been the enabling environment for the massive growth in the informal sector of enterprises such as dressmaking and tailoring. Although the economic environment is changing, informal apprenticeship (especially in dressmaking) is still seen by young female junior school leavers as having potential to provide them with status and a livelihood. But the continued creation of craftmasters with the ambition for independent small-scale self-employed production orientated mainly to servicing a 'cloth to sew' market, cannot be compatible with economic liberalisation and the flood into national markets of new factory-made and second-hand clothes. At government policy level, Ghana is responding by choosing the East Asian development model of export promotion to counter the influx of imports, but for the many small-scale dressmakers and tailors working from their one room workshop or wooden board kiosk, they can only hold up their

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<sup>1</sup> Amongst the essential features are: good governance of economic and social development, positive attitude towards the role of the private sector, a well functioning financial market and determination of prices by market forces.

Chinese butterfly hand-sewing machines in wonder at how they will make the transition to compete in the global market place.

Many have taken the first steps in the transition by producing for new local markets in Cape Coast and Accra. Sewing for these markets is not a personal commission when a piece of cloth is given in trust to a dressmaker and bonds of friendship often remain for life. The new markets are made of anonymous customers and the products have become a commodity bereft of the personal qualities of the dressmaker. As such these new local markets are important training grounds for a transition to global export trade. This was the case for my case study in Cape Coast who was working on her first export contract, and it was the case for tailors and seamstresses I visited in Accra who had also fulfilled part of the same export order.

Entering the global export market is essential for the survival of a garments sector in Ghana and this will probably come under the production system of large firm flexible specialisation. The most creative and skilled small-scale workshops will continue to be targeted by transnational companies and the hoped for technology transfers and increased incomes will result. Opportunities for employed labour may also result as seamstresses and tailors will not be able to continue to rely on apprenticeship labour, if export orders become a major part of their work. The dangers here are that the unique atmosphere of the Ghanaian workshop, where masters hold a daily religious ceremony with apprentices and transfer knowledge of sewing with education on life and craftship will be threatened. This may be replaced by deskilled production-line working practice and less personal working relationships orientated to reproducing set designs for bulk orders using cloth imported solely for this purpose

which is not grounded in the local social and physical environment of those who sew it.

The organisation which is mediating these changes is the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association. The Association has the role of both introducing and engaging its members in the increasingly imposing neo-liberal economy. As the GNTDA develops there is evidence that its programme of change for its members has a dynamic of inclusion and engagement. There is an attitude that traditional ways based on indigenous beliefs are bad for development and that more transparent, objective and formal procedures within a Christian tradition will bring greater rewards. Thus the Association has three roles in developing the garments industry - as mediator for participation in the neo-liberal economy, as provider of welfare for members, and as a 'modernising' organisation.

The development of the dressmaking sector specifically cannot be understood in isolation from the main product which has sustained demand for dressmakers and been mainly responsible for expansion of the industry since the 1960's. That product is Kaba and Slit which has developed into a high fashion garment and as such has carried social and political statements about the women who wear it. It can also be seen as a form of 'power dressing' (the western term for independent female assertive dress style). This concept could be re-formed into 'Kaba power dressing' and applied to the Ghanaian woman dressed for occasions. But unlike her western counterparts the, power communicated through her dress presence is more likely not to be her own but that which she shares with her own and her husband's lineage.

My concluding remarks concerning the importance of Kaba and Slit and the dressmaking and tailoring sector as it becomes engaged in the neo-liberal economy and ultimately the global economy are discussed under the following headings

Power dressing - gender, kinship and new styles

Textiles, dressmakers and tailors and future scenarios

GNTDA and the revenue imperative

The decentralised mode of production and evolution of small-scale dressmaking and tailoring businesses

### Power dressing - gender, kinship and new styles

Evidence of the continuing relevance of patrification and matrification as a principle of social organisation amongst the Fante of southern Ghana can be found in the continuing institutionalised gifting of cloth especially wax cotton cloth. The giving of cloth on life cycle occasions such as births, marriages and death is not dependent on class or status or on rural or urban locations. Cloth is mostly only given as a gift to persons linked through marriage, affection or descent - to wives, girlfriends, mothers, fathers, children or close friends. It is given by men and women according to norms within Akan social structure which ensures the undertaking of responsibility and support for young children, older relatives and women caring for young and old and ensures these groups are clothed and respected members of the lineage.

A Fante woman and her children belong to her matrilineal descent group<sup>1</sup> and have association with her husband's descent group. On public occasions her skilfully prepared outward appearance will objectify her own matrilineage or that of her husband depending on which family is involved in the occasion. However, her main affiliation is to her own matrilineage where her rights to assistance, subsistence and shelter in the extended family are more secure. She may receive cloth from a member of her matrilineage, usually her children, and this will become both her property and ultimately that of the members of her matrilineage, but the cloth which she received from her husband, as part of the marriage dowry or as a gift 'for the year', represents the strength of their relationship and his lineage.

In chapters seven and eight I suggested cloth, its presentation in dress and the designs upon it represent important widely held environmental and social values. In the form of 'Kaba power dressing' this is a heavy sociological load for women to wear, and it is understandable that Kaba and Slit is mostly the dress for occasions such as church attendance, *durbars* and funerals and for travelling to town or city. On such occasions one is representing more than one's social and physical self but also the matrilineal descent group one belongs to.

A woman's wealth and power is closely associated with her matrilineage. While she is in formal association, through marriage, with her husband's lineage she may gain in prestige and potential security through having children but may not increase her own wealth in possessions such as

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<sup>1</sup> The Fante lineage (*abusua*) has been described as both matrilineal and having 'double descent'. 'Double descent' means where male and female "complementarities underlie many areas of Fante and Akan social behaviour" (Chukwukere 1982). This description draws on an analysis of dual symbolic classification found to be inherent in Fante life cycle rituals.

cloth. If she is able to continue her own productive life outside the home the wealth she accumulates will be her own and part of the wealth of her lineage. If a marriage is dissolved and a woman becomes successful in her own trade she will increase her personal wealth and possessions and become a force in the matrilineage, helping to finance the education of family members, or assisting in loans for start up capital. As an independent successful woman she will also be responsible for purchasing cloth for herself and members of her family, especially her mother. Under these circumstances her self confident presentation in the best quality Dutch cloth sewn in elaborate Kaba and Slit style encapsulates her personal success and pride at being a source of the continued strength and importance of her matrilineage.

Some of the most memorable visual scenes from my fieldwork experience were sitting with seamstresses and watching them leaf through western sewing pattern catalogues noting details of various styles. Sometimes a particular dress would be cut out and hung on the workshop wall and the blonde haired western woman modelling would look very conspicuous in these surroundings. The catalogues are in much demand as are any magazines showing dress styles and more than once I was asked to send these to various seamstresses on my return to England.

Although most seamstresses had the skill to cut the catalogue styles free-hand and sew them into approximate finished garments, few do this, preferring to copy some of the features of sleeve or neckline into her own range of styles. Sometimes customers bring a picture to suggest a new style or the seamstress offers her customers her own catalogues to look at, but only in one seamstress's workshop in Accra did I see wholly western style clothing being made and this was a jacket being sewn by a



tailor employed specifically for that purpose. I was, however, told by some seamstresses that customers often brought second-hand dresses to them to have copies made using the African wax prints.

Through incorporating new style features into her repertoire of styles the seamstress is also dealing with the new cultural images and lifestyles inherent in the models and clothes in the catalogue. It was often my impression that the portrayal of western female body images clad in new life-style clothing and objectifying a different set of behavioural standards provoked from Ghanaian women a wish to emulate and incorporate these traits into their own appearance and identity. Hence the well documented heights women have gone to in *straightening their hair and lightening their skin*. But I was also aware that few Ghanaian women wished to change their cloth and Kaba and Slit for western type clothes on occasions which demand their presence as representatives of their household or lineage. I also encountered a general bias towards Ghanaian dress standards and on a number of occasions I received comments from both men and women who suggested I wear Kaba and Slit as it would suit me and be more appropriate than the clothes I wore. The resistance of many seamstresses and women to western design can in part be understood as an unarticulated and implicit resistance to the use of cloth as a commodity in the way in which clothes are used - to be worn, worn out or disregarded without reference to societal values of those who make and wear them. I found the relationship of western fashion garments to the traditional Kaba style was one of synthesis which worked to continually reproduce Kaba styles of ever more variety and this has been one reason why Kaba and Slit fashion has lasted in popularity.

### Textiles, dressmakers and tailors and future scenarios

Many of Ghana 's textiles factories were set up when Ghana became independent and at a time when industrialisation was influenced by Fordist models of large-scale factory production. Management and investment decisions were determined by the national balance of payments problems and political development objectives, such as import substitution as a means of avoiding neo-colonial dependence through the uncontrolled imports of western goods. The factories were the polar opposite to the current newer flexible models; they were reliant on large-scale public sector investment, top down administrative controls, price fixing rather than market mechanisms and biases towards the use of national resources.

The above strategies failed both to produce a strong national textiles industry and curb imports; smuggling of foreign cloth could not be stopped. The industrial strategy of establishing sector linkage with northern cotton producers continues to be unsuccessful despite renewed efforts under the economic recovery programmes. Textile factories are still dependent on imports of grey baft which is expensive due to high import tariffs. In March 1994 the managing director of the Ghana Textile Printing was reported in the Daily Graphic appealing to the government to reduce tariffs to enable the company to produce at competitive prices. He also suggested that local grey baft producers improve their production techniques to cut down on costs (Ashirifie 1994).

These failed strategies have left the textiles sector in a state of continual under capacity which is not expected to be resolved in the near future. Two reasons for under capacity are given by Ghanaian economists - firstly, "imported input requirements of full capacity production exceeds

the amount of foreign exchange that is likely to be available for this purpose" (Asante and Addo 1993 p.97). Secondly, the domestic market for textiles is restricted by the "decline in real per capita income and the availability of competing imports (especially used clothes) due to trade liberalisation measures)" *ibid.*

It could be argued that second-hand clothes will contribute to damping down demand still further for the products of textile manufacturers, both domestic and foreign, and have a consequent effect on seamstresses and tailors who receive this cloth to sew in their workshops. The strength of the second-hand clothes market will make the future possibility of sector linkages between domestic cotton growing, textiles production and a domestic garments industry less likely.

If the textiles industry continues to decline and the importation of cheap second-hand clothes continues to expand, traditional dressmakers and especially tailors will be challenged to lower their sewing charges to compete. However, one cannot foresee their charges being any lower than they currently are but instead rising, with all market prices, in line with inflation to enable the seamstress to subsist. A second and related scenario would be that the seamstress maintain charges and her hand sewn garments become, as in many Western countries, the dress norm for the elite and for select ceremonial occasions. Dressmaking would then provide work for a smaller and increasingly specialised occupational group, rather like the suit makers in my Accra case study on Kwame Nkrumah Avenue. This might be called the boom and bust scenario, and the outcome would mean the end of the expansion in the dressmaking industry and for the many thousands of existing masters and their newly

apprenticed recruits the start of the search for alternative training and occupations.

Even if the scenarios above are unnecessarily pessimistic, and the decline in the number of dressmakers is not imminent, the continued expansion of the sector is viewed by those working within it as impossible to sustain. But despite this and perhaps in the desperate search for skills and training for young girls leaving Junior Secondary School (JSS), anxious parents and guardians continue to look for suitable workshop apprenticeships. Many parents cannot afford the recurring costs of sending their children to Senior Secondary School (SSS) and many young people simply cannot be absorbed by the over burdened and inadequate size of the SSS educational infrastructure. Recent statistics<sup>1</sup> showed that the existing SSS infrastructure could only absorb 30 per cent of Junior Secondary School leavers and that in 1991 as many as 98,000 school leavers could not find training places.

The government's reaction to inadequate school places was to invite all private technical and vocational training institutions to absorb the JSS students. Also for the first time the government gave specific instructions (Rawlings, then Chairman of the PNDC, was cited as giving the instruction) to include the informal sector and their apprenticeship schemes in the absorption of the floating students. The GNTDA was approached to assist the government in this respect as in others and agreed to participate but not without trying to extract some form of commitment in return that import of second-hand goods should be limited. This is a good example of the way in which the GNTDA communicates and liaises between

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<sup>1</sup> From the National Co-ordinating Committee for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACVET), established in 1990.

the formal state structures and its own members in the many spheres of the informal sector - a sector which is increasingly being seen by government to have the potential to assist the development process.

### GNTDA and the revenue imperative

As well as offering training opportunities, the dressmaking and tailoring sector and their informal artisan trades possess internal resources which the economy now badly needs to access in the form of revenue collection. It is widely acknowledged that for economic recovery and government spending to continue funds must be mobilised internally - a 1992 report on the state of the economy puts this unequivocally: "there is no viable or sustainable alternative to taxation as a means of financing government expenditures". It has also been acknowledged that economic aid is not viable long term and is always tied to unfavourable preconditions which limit the independence of the indigenous state. In a recent speech, Vice President Arkaah observed "that with the dwindling volume of the world's aid flows and the increasing competition for them, taxes easily lend themselves as the most reliable source of internal resource mobilisation open to developing and survival." (Editorial 1994e).

The Ghanaian government has a history of high budgetary expenditures and poor revenue collection (see appendix I). While savings in the private sector have improved in recent years, government savings have become negative due to the poor fiscal position (ISSER 1996). Budget deficits have persisted over the years, and projections expect them to continue for some time to come. Deficits have been financed with foreign loans, by printing money and raising import duties and taxes.

One reason for ineffective and low revenue collection is a "massive withdrawal of the tax-paying community into occupations beyond the tax range" (Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p.156<sup>1</sup>). In past decades this resulted in most of the resources of the informal sector being consumed within the communities of its operators but today the Ghanaian government is claiming a larger portion of informal sector resources in the name of national development. Widening the tax base to include the small-scale self employed entailed finding a new means of revenue collection. For tailors and dressmakers this has been the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association which is the focus of Chapter Nine. The GNTDA has used a combination of indigenous and western imported organisational methods to begin the process of bringing small scale dressmakers and tailors within the structures of the emerging neo-liberal economy.

One of the most successful proposals of the Association was to become agents of the state's Inland Revenue Service and begin to collect taxes from its membership on easier and more personal terms. The state's constant need for tax revenue previously tapped mainly the agricultural sector. Now, instead of agriculture subsidising industry and political organisation (Bates, 1981 p.119) resources generated by small scale industries hitherto mostly hidden and consumed within the sector are being used to help carry forward industrial development.

Trade associations like the GNTDA which are integrated within the spheres of the formal and informal economies<sup>2</sup> can provide a positive social and

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<sup>1</sup> The failure of production and low volumes of import and excise duties as a result of the shrinking import tax base are also cited (Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p.156).

<sup>2</sup>Research (Prasad and Prasad, *Homeworking in India*, p.103 cited in (Mitter 1994 ) points to the pre-existence of workers organisations such as trade unions

cultural base to overcome the anti-enterprise rhetoric expounded since the early 1980's by the PNDC and still often by the NDC. The self managed networks of the local and regional branches of the GNTDA make the organisation self-sustaining and accessible to its members and may deliver the kind of development most appropriate to both members and the exigencies of the revenue imperative of the developing economy.

### The decentralised mode of production and evolution of small-scale dressmaking and tailoring businesses

Two forms of flexible socialisation were distinguished by Schmitz - that resulting from the division of labour within clusters of small firms in developing countries and secondly the neo-fordist decentralised production system described in Chapter Eight. Decentralised systems, which have been introduced for some time in countries like India where there is a tradition in small-scale textile production, are now entering Ghana's small-scale production sector. Increasingly Ghana's industrial base will incorporate inward investment of large transnational companies targeting small-scale businesses as flexible subcontracting units. This type of industrial expansion may enable more women to participate and at the same time maintain the autonomy of their workshops and manage family commitments which often centre around workshop production, but only if the small workshop can maintain a base of 'cloth to sew' costumes which may counter the tendency towards dependency relationships inherent in subcontracting arrangements. But as is well documented (Mitter 1994), competitive price bidding between potential subcontractors might mean the successful contractor being forced to either pay very low piece-rate workers to fulfil the contract while master and apprentices work on 'cloth

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being a pre-condition for the establishment of self-help organisations. The formation of the GNTDA supports this thesis as Ghana has a history of strong trade union organisation, a culture of voluntary associations which include women's fellowship, male lodges and ethnic associations.

to sew' customers, or the security of income from this market be given up. From my research I found many dressmakers and tailors to be very happy to take on new contract work as a form of supplementary occupation but would need a great deal more confidence in the global and new local markets before they would consider abandoning their 'cloth to sew' customers.

The possible success of increased income and increased employment opportunities from the above projected developments for small-scale enterprises are premised on entrepreneurial and organisational abilities of small dressmakers and tailors to take advantage of them. The American agents placing export orders for garments with Ghanaian dressmakers and tailors and testing their ability to fulfil contracts are the practical carriers of the large firm flexibility model. The press optimism (Chapter Five, appendix V) with which such orders are treated by the state press must be balanced by reservations on the ability of the small-scale industry both to satisfy such demands and gain any real benefits. Unless there is long term commitment on behalf of transnational companies to form secure trading partnerships and invest in new skills training and technology in the workshops, dressmakers and tailors will not be able to meet the supply deadlines and quality standards or have enough confidence in their relationship to the international market to regularly transfer their effort from their 'cloth to sew' customers to this new market. As Dawson (1990) reports, Ghana's small businesses tend to invest more resources when they have confidence in wider economic structures and see proven sale opportunities; in the absence of these their 'rational' response is conservatism, even when offered new technical skills and incentives by support agencies (p.44). The small-scale mastercraft artisan may then fail to make a transition away from servicing the



traditional 'cloth to sew' market and the cycle of reproducing through the apprenticeship system yet more proud but poverty stricken independent master dressmakers and tailors.

My research did find the small-scale garments sector in 1994 enthusiastic for the wealth that potential overseas customers would bring, but poorly equipped to cope with any orders. The majority of small-scale dressmakers and tailors mostly rely on the traditional apprenticeship labour system. This labour system makes it difficult for them to enter markets other than the 'cloth to sew', local tourist trade or negotiating civic uniform contracts. Their main production methods and orientations are designed to put in relief particular Ghanaian aesthetic standards and social cultural precepts which are highly gendered and status conscious. The agents of the global export market may have found in Ghanaian workshops the lowest labour costs imaginable but it is also difficult to imagine and disturbing to contemplate master dressmakers and tailors turning their apprentices into labourers and their workshops into 'sweat shops' to produce the quantities of uniformly made garments for the anonymous global markets.

My research also showed that the optimism of the evolutionary policy for small-scale enterprise may be just that. I found a widespread lack of technical innovation since the introduction of the hand operated household sewing machine in the colonial era. Because of the absence of electricity this is usually the only viable machine for the village dressmakers - the foot powered treadle machine for tailors. There is a gradual increase in the use of electric machines in towns and cities; however the machines are mostly also domestic rather than industrial models and because of interruptions to the electricity supply hand powered machines are always

on standby. This is hardly the basis to begin competing in the global market and despite a great deal of hard work many seamstresses and tailors barely generate enough income to survive and most must undertake supplementary occupations. The poverty and hardships of the informal economy have been recognised by many researchers, notably Hart's 1973 study on informal income opportunities in Ghana. It has also been recognised for some time that intervention in the 'informal' sector might hinder rather than assist development. A World Bank paper of 1979 (Page 1979) proposed that policies for the promotion of small-scale enterprises as employment generators might have the reverse effects. For example, providing SSEs with increased access to subsidised loans for capital equipment could result in the purchase of labour saving technology to substitute labour intensive techniques, and consequently jeopardise the supposed employment generative function of SSEs (Page 1979 p. 36).

It has been clear throughout my research that the informal sector of small-scale dressmakers and tailors is suited to servicing their indigenous 'cloth to sew' market rather than compete in the global market. The potential and dynamism in the chorus of *Yepam efatawo* is one mainly for lateral expansion of similar dressmaking and tailoring small-scale enterprises that produce specific garments that enhance the standing and culture which they are part of.

### Final thoughts

The long decline of the Ghanaian economy in the 1970's and 80's and the collapse of large garment manufacturers created for dressmakers and tailors the environment for the expansion of their part of the informal sector. African style wax printed cloth never declined in popularity during the same period although it was in short supply - national production

declined but cloth was either imported under high tariff barriers or smuggled into the county. The years of cloth shortage are over and under the policies of structural adjustment the increase in the supply of affordable cloth and accessories has created another environment, enabling a further increase in the number of dressmaking and tailoring workshops and in new apprenticeships. But the open liberal economy is also flooding the markets with imported goods, especially cheap second-hand clothes. Many dressmakers and tailors hardly acknowledge this as a threat to their businesses because they are confident of the continuing inherent social and aesthetic value of new cloth and the hand crafted garments they produce. However, over the heads of many who do not see the threat, the question of the continuing impact of cheap imported clothes must be addressed as the scale of the informal sector of second-hand clothes sellers increases as does dependence on such clothes.

As threats to the structure of indigenous garment construction and the culture of small-scale workshops become apparent one can speculate a number of directions the sector might take; the work of seamstresses and tailors may become a service only affordable by the elite, the spontaneous attempts at small-scale flexible specialisation within the market places of Cape Coast and Accra may be consolidated into organised profitable production centres or the transnational companies may offer their contracts to competitive tender and supply a source of unskilled but low paid insecure work for the skilled but desperate craftmaster. Unless the dressmakers and tailors and their trade organisation respond to the threats and opportunities of economic liberalisation and negotiate their own development path, the independent dressmaker with her apprentices and her one roomed workshop displaying with pride the finished Kabas on the busts outside will come to

look more and more anachronistic within a global and uniform market place.

The GNTDA's response thus far has been to attempt a restructuring of the traditional working practices of the dressmaker and tailor and communicating to government agents both the problems of the industry and making the policies of government known and acted upon by its members. The organisation encourages expansion of the sector and at the same time is attempting to formalise relationships between seamstresses, customers and apprentices. Apprenticeship indenture documents have come into use and customer receipts are beginning to be issued. These new paper documents, as articles of material economic culture, specify standards and guarantees which all parties can only approximate to.

Cloth is still the most enduring article of material culture in Southern Ghana and does not seem to be losing its relevance today; it has maintained an essential value despite the dominance of the cash economy. Much of a person's income is spent on cloth and women spend additional money having elaborate styles made-up. Cloth, like money, still demands respect but unlike money it cannot be exchanged for western goods. The essential medium of exchange for cloth is human social relationships - those of kinship and lineage affinity and friendship. Cloth is respected; above all other goods, it separates the physical human form from nature and puts it above nature. Cloth enables an unspoken but very direct form of expression by the wearer, whether it is the exuberant feminine elegance of Kaba and slit or the twelve richly coloured yards of the Opanyin's cloth opulently wrapped about him and trailing slightly along the ground. Cloth

communicates status far louder and more dramatically than any other form of wealth.

Cloth enhances the drama of the occasion and is worn with pride and dignity by Ghanaians. One such occasion is the spectacular sight of a funeral *durbar* which engages the viewer. More than the music and dance the evincing power of the colour and design of different cloths strikes the senses. By European aesthetic standards Ghanaian cloths are often loud, garish and ostentatious. However in their cultural context they are subtle and complimentary.

Through being first cut and then reconstructed by the seamstress, cloth becomes a living garment with appearance and movement and the most animating article to be made from cloth is Kaba and slit. Kaba and slit is made to emphasis the female form and abstract cultural meaning. Cloth fitted around the female body in this way articulates complex ideas of female gender, lineage structures and the commonly held standards within these institutions.

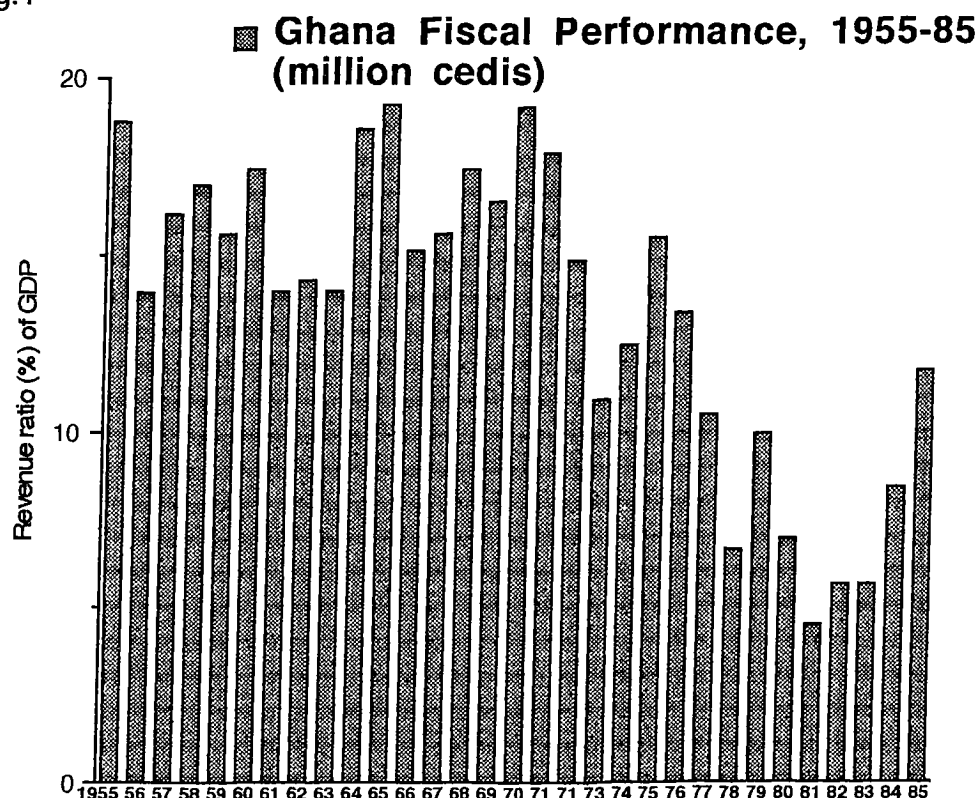
Seamstresses believe their work to be creative and skilled because the garments they produce are much more than the sum of their material parts. The piece of uncut cloth has a presence in itself. To touch it the owner can be filled with pride - a feeling that it contains some power of its own. Worked by the seamstresses it becomes a living garment and the power is transferred and articulated in the social presence and status of the wearer.

The cloth is folded, creased and stroked to prepare it for cutting. When the pieces are separated the process of sewing and bringing them

together begins. Something new emerges, this synthesis is the ideal female shape which has a presence and power and objectifies the social values and structures which underpin the communities in which Ghanaian women live.

## Appendix I

fig.1



Source : extracted from Frimpong-Ansah (1991 annex 1 p.160)

Figure 1 shows how income from internal revenue sources has been in long term decline in the Ghanaian economy. Since the 1950s there was a failure of fiscal policy due to the diminishing tax base (Frimpong-Ansah 1991 p.156) and revenue reached its lowest level at 4.5 % of GDP in 1981. This was the final year of Hilla Limann's civilian government that saw inflation reach 122%.

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