Asante Hightimers and the Fashionable Display of Women’s Wealth in Contemporary Ghana

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Abstract

In Ghana’s Ashanti Region, there is a certain category of woman commonly called preman (pl. premanfoa), a word that is the local version of the English play-man or playboy. Despite this word’s seemingly male cast, preman is a term applied primarily to women, particularly wealthy market traders. This article explores the relationship between the flamboyantly fashionable behavior of the preman and the long-established Asante cultural practice of poatua (“challenge”), involving both visual and verbal assertions of superior status. During the twentieth century, fashionable dress developed into a particularly female mode of
Figure 1: Cries of "QyQ preman!" ("She is a preman!") greeted the photograph of this Asante woman attending a Kumasi funeral wearing a particularly fanciful and costly kaba ensemble, 1990. Photograph: Suzanne Gott.

high-status display that provided visible proof of a woman’s success in accumulating the prestigious textiles that became an increasingly important form of female wealth. The most extreme form of such displays are the extravagant, highly visible, and sometimes scandalous fashions of the Asante preman, which may be best understood as a distinctively female mode of contemporary Asante poatua behavior.

KEYWORDS: fashion, women, textiles, wealth, status, Ghana, Africa, Asante

In southern Ghana’s Ashanti Region, there is a certain category of woman that the Asante people commonly call preman (pl. premanfo), using a word that is the local version of the English play-man or play-boy. Despite this word’s seemingly male cast, preman is a term applied primarily to women, particularly wealthy market traders. A preman, people say, is a "very expensive" type of woman, a hightimer, who always wants to be seen at every social occasion dressed “gorgeously” in the latest, most fashionable and “fanciful” styles (Figure 1).

This article explores the relationship between the flamboyantly fashionable behavior of the preman and the long-established Asante cultural
practice of *poatwa*, a term meaning “challenge” that references both visual and verbal assertions of superior status (Christaller 1933: 397). In the past, *poatwa* displays of costly textiles and golden regalia provided a major means of proclaiming the wealth and power of the Asante state’s ruling elite. In the Ashanti Region over the course of the twentieth century, fashionable dress developed into a particularly female mode of high-status display that provided visible proof of a woman’s success in accumulating the prestigious textiles that became an increasingly important form of female wealth. The most extreme form of such displays are the extravagant, highly visible, and sometimes scandalous fashions of the Asante *preman*, which I argue may be best understood as a distinctively female mode of contemporary Asante *poatwa* behavior.

This study, based on research in Ghana during 1990, 1999, 2003, and 2005, examines the intersection of cultural ideals, historical developments, and gendered socioeconomic realities that have fueled Asante women’s strong interest in cloth acquisition and fashionable display.

**Hightimers and Asante Competitive Display**

Within Ghana’s Ashanti Region, funerals are at the center of Asante social life. On Fridays and Saturdays, the days dedicated to the observance of customary funeral rites, the streets of the capital Kumasi and towns and villages throughout the Ashanti Region are filled with throngs of women and men dressed in mourning ensembles of red, black, and brown textiles. Men abandon their everyday clothing of shirts and trousers for Akan men’s customary dress, a stately eight- to ten-yard toga-like wrapped ensemble. Women, depending on their relationship to the deceased and bereaved family members, dress in either wrapped *dansinkran* or sewn *kaba* ensembles (Figure 2).

Asante funerals constitute what might be termed *totalizing events* that touch on almost every dimension of social life. Funeral observances bring together great numbers of extended family, friends, and colleagues from throughout Ghana, and sometimes from abroad, to honor and attest to the social standing of the deceased and their matrilineage. In addition to being occasions for honoring the deceased, funerals in the Ashanti Region are important, high-visibility social occasions. Kumasi funerals, especially the widely attended commemorative funeral rites (*ayie*) held on Saturday afternoons following burial, are considered to be fashion showcases where one will see prestigious textiles sewn into the latest, most fashionable *kaba* ensemble styles (Figure 3).

It is at these large Kumasi funerals where one finds the greatest concentration of Asante *hightimers*, or *premanfoo*, dressed in the latest fashions of the costliest funeral cloth (see Figures 1 and 4). Such high-visibility status-seeking behavior is, in fact, considered to be the hallmark of the Asante *preman*:
If you are a *preman*, more properly a *preman baa* (*'preman woman'*) everything you wear is 'high cost': superior dressing, superior shoes, superior *cloth*. Food, drinks, everything is costly ... [they like] to live ostentatiously, to show off. *Premansoo* have to show themselves. At any celebration—funerals, festivals—they will be there. They have to show themselves off.  

It is said that *premanfoo* will even attend grand funerals of perfect strangers in order to have the largest possible audience for assertions of wealth and social prominence by means of their costly and flamboyant styles of fashionable dress.

From the late-seventeenth-century beginnings of the Asante state until British colonial rule in the early twentieth century, public expressions of wealth and superior status were restricted according to a regulated ranking system based on political power and authority. On public occasions, members of this ruling elite dressed in ensembles of costly textiles and displayed golden regalia as a means of proclaiming the political power and wealth of the Asante state (Bowdich 1966[1819]; Garrard 1989; Kyerematen 1964; Ross 1977, 1998, 2002). The political monopoly
on such displays was maintained by strict sumptuary controls (Arhin 1990: 531–3).

“Wealth, like power,” Arhin observes, was also closely controlled (1990: 525). Asante officials maintained a rigorous system of death duties and inheritance taxes that effectively transferred most subjects' accumulated wealth to the Asante state, thus preventing the transfer of accumulated individual and familial wealth to future generations. However, those individuals who accumulated substantial wealth during their lifetime were honored for the magnificence of this monetary contribution to the state by the bestowal of the rank of gbirempon (pl., abirempon), a term derived from the pairing of the word gbarima (“valiant man”) with pɔn (“great, powerful”). An individual’s attainment of this exalted rank was publically proclaimed and celebrated by a ceremonial procession of royal proportions in which they were honored as magnanimous benefactors of the state (Wilks 1979).

Given the inextricable linkage between gold, wealth, and power in Asante, great quantities of gold ornaments figured prominently in these regal, status-asserting performances. One such gbirempon display was witnessed in 1817 by William Hutchison, Acting British Consul...
in Kumasi. The main preparation for this *obirempoon* procession, he found, consisted of fashioning "their gold into various articles of dress for show." Hutchison described the variety of gold regalia that this important court official, Gyaasewahene Opoku Frere, had commissioned for this once-in-a-lifetime ceremonial exhibition of his riches:

Apokoo ... shewed [sic] me his varieties, weighing upwards of 800 bendas [£7,200 currency] of the finest gold; among the articles, was a girdle two inches broad. Gold chains for the neck, arms, legs, &c. ornaments for the ankles of all descriptions, consisting of manacles, with keys, bells, chairs, and padlocks. For his numerous family of wives, children, and captains, were armlets and various ornaments ... New umbrellas made in fantastical shapes, gold swords and figures of animals, birds, beasts, and fishes of the same metal (Bowdich 1966[1819]: 395).

While all known accounts of *obirempoon* displays have been those of wealthy men, Akyeampong has observed that "scattered historical evidence stretching back to the seventeenth century" reveals a similar, yet
often overlooked “ethic of accumulation” among Gold Coast women. Such evidence, he argues, indicates that there “were ‘big women’ [female abirempon], just as there were ‘big men’” (2000: 223–5). In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Asante, the influential moneyed elite known as asikafuo (from sika, “gold”) included wealthy female entrepreneurs who, like their male counterparts, engaged in conspicuous displays of wealth, including generous gifts to the community and Asante state (Wilks 1975: 693–5).

Among the coastal Akan, the accumulation of wealth and sumptuary display had gradually become freed from the customary system of state regulation. Nineteenth-century accounts of life in the trading port of Elmina describe the manner in which women of this independent coastal elite orchestrated eye-catching public performances showcasing their wealth and superior status:

If a woman wore gold ornaments, so did her “maids”; thus one might see a wealthy woman going through the streets of Elmina followed by ten of her slave women, all finely dressed and wearing gold ornaments. A woman of high status might spend hours dressing her female slaves and arranging their hair (Jones 1995: 106).

Away from the more fluid social milieu of the coast, Asante authorities were able to maintain state controls of wealth and high-status display for a significantly longer period of time. However, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, state regulatory powers had become seriously eroded, first as a result of internal instability, and then, by the imposition of British colonial rule (Arhin 1990: 525–8; McCaskie 1983: 39).

The weakening of state power permitted, for the first time, the development of an independent Asante entrepreneurial elite. Yet, although this new business class was now free of the customary system of state-regulated wealth accumulation, death duties, and sumptuary display, it soon became evident that “they were still enmeshed—as their descendants are—in the received (if modified) cultural imagery of behaving like a ‘big man,’ an gbirempon” (McCaskie 1986: 8). Such behavior, Arhin observes, continues to flourish in contemporary Asante:

Much of the well-known present-day Asante competitive acquisition, poatwa, of the biggest buildings, the latest and largest car models and extremely expensive funeral rites is calculated self-assertion: it is a message that one may not be an indigenous ruler but one is in certain material respects equal to or even above such a ruler (1990: 533).8

Over the course of the twentieth century, increasing numbers of the Asante population have found ways of engaging in the once strictly regulated practice of poatwa, or competitive sumptuary display. Asante
funeral rites have served as particularly popular high-visibility display frames for such status-seeking behavior, with the staging of prestigious funerals greatly facilitated by the development of rental businesses specializing in funerary display goods and regalia (De Witte 2003; Gott 2003). The social prominence accorded such high-status displays, both genuine and spurious, demonstrates the continuing salience of the Asante *obirempon* ethos.

During the twentieth century, with the development of women’s sewn clothing styles, fashionable dress embodying Asante customary values and aesthetic sensibilities emerged as a new, ever-changing resource for women’s *poatuwa* displays. Within this dynamic Asante fashion system, the costly, flamboyantly fashionable dress of the “hightiming” *premanfоg*, who “have to show themselves” at all high-visibility social events, especially Asante funerals, may be best understood as a contemporary, and distinctively female, mode of Asante *obirempon* display.

The Importance of Dressing Well in Asante

Within contemporary Ghana, the Asante are characterized as being especially concerned with dressing well as a means of gaining social prestige. Residents of Kumasi, the Ashanti Region’s capital city, often contrast dress behavior in their city with that of Accra, the nation’s coastal capital. In Accra, they say, people are free to dress as they choose, but in Kumasi, people “gossip too much,” with that gossip frequently focusing on the quality of an individual’s dress.

Although it is Ghana’s second largest city, Kumasi is, in the words of one local woman, more “like a big village,” with an ongoing sense of social accountability maintained by regular face-to-face interaction. Kumasi residents move in interconnecting social networks of kinship, marriage, church membership, occupation, residence, and personal ties, such as those developed during school days. Both Asante and non-Asante report strong social pressure to dress well and often beyond their means, with particular scrutiny directed toward the dress behavior of women.

In Kumasi, women dress with an awareness that their clothing and appearance are subject to critical appraisal on trips to town and the market, while attending church events and funerals, and at important life transition points. All women, except for the most elderly, are considered to take great pride in their fashionable dress and sense of style.

The popular term for fashion or fashionable dressing is *life* (*laif* in Twi-English), from *highlife*, a name coined in early-twentieth-century Ghana for the cosmopolitan lifestyle and dance-orchestra music of the mission-educated urban elite. “*O pe laif*” (“she likes *life*”) is a commonly used compliment for a woman who dresses fashionably. The opposite of such a positive evaluation, explained long-time Kumasi resident and
cultural studies teacher Mr M. H. Frempong, is “O ye atetekwaa,” a pejorative assessment that most Kumasi women endeavor to avoid:

The Ashanti coined this word, tete, meaning ancient dressing all the time. In the olden days, this was an old-fashioned way of dressing, of not putting on fine clothes ... Other women look down on such a woman, saying, “O ye atetekwaa.” This means the woman doesn’t like to dress well all the time. This is a terrible thing to call somebody, they will be very much angered ... If you visit friends in faded cloth, they will say out of your hearing, “O ye atetekwaa.” The Gas [a coastal people] will never do that, but the Ashantis will do that—they want to be dressing beautifully all the time. If you don’t do what they do, they say “atetekwaa.”

A related term, he continued, is peppe, used to describe a person who doesn’t dress well because of extreme frugality or “miserliness,”—a quality conventionally attributed to men, rather than women:

A woman could never be peppe. Because for a woman, if she has the means, she will buy things to go out and better appear neatly [well-dressed]. She will never be peppe if she has the means, even if she is not married.9

The Special Significance of African-print Cloth

Within Ghana’s Ashanti Region, women of different economic levels, educational backgrounds, ethnic identities, and religious beliefs all participate in a unified system of value in respect to ensemble fabric and style. Women’s ensemble fabrics are grouped into two basic categories: ntoma (“cloth”)10 and material. Ntoma, as well as the English word cloth,11 serve as umbrella terms for the first category, which is comprised of three highly-valued textiles. Two of these prestigious textiles are products of local industry: hand-woven kente, a silk, rayon, or cotton strip-cloth textile historically associated with Akan rulership (Ross 1998); and adinkra, a cotton cloth stamped with symbolic designs, which is customarily associated with Asante funerals (Mato 1986). The third highly-esteemed textile is the distinctive factory-produced fabric known as African-print cloth, initially developed by late-nineteenth-century Europe manufacturers for the lucrative western and central African textile markets, with African manufacture beginning in the 1950s (Addae 1963[1956]; Bickford 1997; Littrell 1977; Nielsen 1974, 1979; Pedler 1974; Picton 1999; Rabine 2002; Spencer 1983; Steiner 1985). The borrowed English word, material, the term for the second category of ensemble fabrics, is used in referring to factory-made fabrics other than African-print cloth.
West African peoples first gained access to European textiles in the late fourteenth century, when Europe’s interest in the West African market was spurred by European economic expansion and an ever-increasing demand for West African gold. Initially, European products were brought into West Africa by means of Muslim controlled trans-Saharan caravan routes. By the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries, Muslim merchants established trading settlements on the northern border of southern Ghana’s forest zone (Posnansky 1987: 14–18; Wilks 1962). In the late fifteenth century, European merchant ships succeeded in gaining direct access to the area by establishing trading forts along the West African coast, including the region that came to be known as the Gold Coast (i.e. modern Ghana).

From their earliest contact, European merchants endeavored to discern and meet local consumer preferences, first by insinuating themselves into the established indigenous trade in highly esteemed north and West African textiles, and later by importing colorful East Indian cottons and Javanese batiks (Alpern 1995: 6–8, 10; Sundström 1974: 156–7). European manufacturers also modified their own textile products in order to appeal to African tastes and standards of quality. An early example of such efforts took place during a 1720–50 trade war between dealers in British Manchester cloth and those importing cottons from the East Indies. By the end of this thirty-year period, Manchester’s coarse, dull-colored linen cloth had been significantly modified to suit West African consumers’ preference for the lighter weight, brightly colored East Indian cottons (Nielsen 1979: 469). The eventual preeminence of European-manufactured cloth in the nineteenth-century African market was, in fact, only accomplished by the “large-scale imitation” of East Indian textiles by Europe’s expanding cotton industry (Sundström 1974: 157).

The great popularity of the Javanese batiks, which were introduced into West Africa in the mid-nineteenth century, also prompted European textile producers to use recently developed technology to manufacture wax-print imitations of Javanese batiks for the African market (Nielsen 1979: 470–6; Pedler 1974: 242). To further ensure the commercial success of this new “African-print,” European manufacturers also developed designs based on indigenous textiles, investigated the color and pattern preferences of different West African peoples, and employed a variety of marketing strategies, all aimed at furthering their efforts to meet local tastes (Addae 1963[1956]: 27; Cordwell 1979; Nielsen 1974: 25, 38; Steiner 1985: 97–106).

The designs of the African-print cloth produced for Gold Coast markets were given “names,” in a manner similar to the named designs of indigenous kente and adinkra textiles, in order to meet Akan standards of cultural and aesthetic value (Warren and Andrews 1977: 14). For the Asante, all highly valued forms of material culture must possess a name (McLeod 1976). Within Ghana, it is the endowment of African-print designs with culturally meaningful names, often by cloth traders.
of the Ashanti Region (Boelman and van Holthoon 1973: 239) that distinguishes African-print cloth from all other manufactured textiles.

The names given to African-print designs may reference important events in Asante political history, as in the cloth named Bonsu (“Whale”), named for the early-nineteenth-century Asantehene Osei Tutu Kwame, who earned the title “Bonsu” after becoming the first Asante king to successfully lead a southern military campaign all the way to the sea (Buah 1998: 95). African-print names may have religious meanings, such as the cloth called Yesu Mogya (“The Blood of Jesus”), while other African-prints are named after common elements of everyday life, as in the cloth designs Aya (“Fern”) and Kwadusa (“Bunch of Bananas”).  

New African-print designs have also been given the names of popular highlife songs (van der Geest and Asante-Darko 1982: 28-9).

The strong interrelationship between Akan verbal art and visual culture, which Cole and Ross have termed the “verbal-visual nexus” (1977: 9-12), finds expression in the particular value accorded those visual forms that are associated with “some more-or-less fixed verbal expression” (McLeod 1976: 88-9). The Akan refer to such verbal expressions as ebe—a speech genre conventionally translated as “proverb”—that includes not only proverbs but “moral-embedded extended metaphors, illustrative anecdotes, and parables” (Yankah 1989: 88-9). Ebe or ebebuo (“speaking” ebe). Yankah observes, may be expressed aurally in speech, song, or tonal drumming, and visually in sculptural form, textile design, dance gesture, or demeanor (1989: 98).

Asante ebe provide a major source of textile names, such as the popular African-print design Akwadada bô nwa (Figure 5), which is an abridged version of the saying Akwadada bô nwa na omomó akyekyede (“A child can break the shell of a snail, but cannot break that of a tortoise,” i.e. only attempt what is appropriate to your level of ability). Other ebe-derived names, such as the funerary African-print designs Nsuo afa borgde bôno (“The stream carries away plantain peels,” i.e. death carries people away) and Owuo atwedeg (“The ladder of death,” everybody climbs it) visually express philosophical commentaries on the transience of life and inevitability of death.

Marriage and motherhood are ever-popular subjects. The African-print Nsubura (“Wells”), whose concentric circular designs are likened to small natural wells, signifies the “stillness,” or stability, and depth of an ideal marital relationship. On a more cautionary note, the cloth named Barima nye sumye (“Man is not a pillow,” i.e. “you cannot rely on a man for security”), stresses the need for female self-reliance and financial autonomy, even within marriage. Asante maternal ideals of nurturance and protection find expression in African-print cloth with the well-known image, Akokobaatan ne ne maa (“Mother hen and her chicks”).

While a sophisticated knowledge of named African-print designs remains strongest among cloth traders and older women, the fact that African-print cloths are generally known to possess names continues
Figure 5
A Kumasi trader wearing the African-print design Akwaduug dawn na gnum agyakye ("A child can break the shell of a snail, but cannot break that of a tortoise"), 1990. Photograph: Suzanne Gott.

Suzanne Gott

to endow these factory-produced textiles with a cultural and economic value recognized by women of all ages and from all walks of life. As Juliana Osei, a young schoolteacher in her twenties explained: “If you put on cloth with no name, it is not good cloth. It is important to show people that you have put on good cloth.”

The Relationship between Fabric and Ensemble

Distinctions of value between ntoma, or cloth, and material are also expressed in local conventions regarding the matching of fabric to ensemble style. Only kente, adinkra, and African-print cloth are used for women’s prestigious dansinkran and kaba ensembles, while those fabrics called material are relegated to that category of Western-style ensemble called ataadeeg ("dress" or "skirt and top"). A woman’s selection from among these three categories depends on the occasion and on her stage of life.
Ataadeeg, the umbrella term for sewn dresses, skirts, and blouses, is the usual attire of girls and younger women. However, as a woman matures, three-piece kaba ensembles of African-print cloth become an increasingly important part of her wardrobe. Women who have reached their fifties rarely wear ataadeeg ensembles in public because only dansinkran or kaba ensembles are considered appropriate to the “respectability,” or dignity, of an older woman.

Asante women’s customary two-piece dansinkran ensemble, consisting of a wrapped lower and upper cloth, is named for the distinctive Asante dansinkran hairstyle. The dansinkran hairstyle and wrapped ensemble, which is worn by queen mothers, elderly women, and chief mourners at Asante funerals, is regarded as an especially beautiful expression of time-honored Asante custom (ammamere) and cultural pride (Figure 6).
The *kaba*, a syncretic three-piece ensemble, consists of a sewn blouse (*kaba*), a wrapped or sewn skirt (*aboso* or *slit*), and an unsewn cloth (*akataso*, or *second cloth*) that can be worn as a second wrapper, or folded and tied into stylish headgear (Figure 7). The term *kaba*—a local adaptation of the English word “cover”—probably originated within the pidgin trade languages of Africa’s western coast. During the nineteenth century, *kaba* was the name given to three very different regional styles that incorporated elements of European dress: Ghana’s three-piece *kaba* ensemble; the *kaba sloht* dress of Sierra Leone (Wass and Broderick 1979); and the smocked *kaba* dress style of Cameroon.

The Ghanaian *kaba* ensemble was created by the addition of a European-inspired, sewn blouse to the one- or two-piece wrapped ensemble that was commonly worn by women in many West African societies. This syncretic ensemble first developed in coastal towns, which had trade relationships with European merchants dating to the late fifteenth century, and in those communities strongly influenced by nineteenth-century
European missionary activity. However, the kaba did not become an established style in the Asante interior until the early twentieth century, after the imposition of British colonial rule in 1896 provided access to European missionaries and immigrants from the coast (Gott 2005).

Over the course of the nineteenth century, European-style clothing increasingly became the preferred attire of Ghana’s mission-educated elite, while the kaba came to be regarded as the dress of women who had no formal schooling (Figure 8). However, during the decades preceding Ghana’s 1957 independence from Great Britain, the kaba ensemble gained new popularity among educated women as a symbol of national pride. On the eve of Ghanaian independence, Beauchamp noted the widespread use of European-produced African wax-prints in Ghana “for making up into the noble national costume” (Beaufchamp 1957: 209), and film footage of the 1957 Independence Ball, broadcast annually on government-sponsored television, shows women stylishly attired in kaba ensembles worn as evening dress, with the second cloth, or akatasog, folded and draped around their shoulders as an elegant matching stole.\(^{20}\)

Figure 8
In present-day Ghana, fashionable kaba ensembles of African-print cloth are worn either daily or for special occasions by women from all walks of life. This practice is especially apparent within the Ashanti Region, where African-print kaba ensembles have a particularly strong association with female maturity and women’s wealth.

**African-print Cloth as Women’s Wealth**

In Asante, the accumulation and wearing of prestigious African-print cloth is considered emblematic of respectable female maturity and financial well-being. The particular significance of cloth accumulation and display for the women of contemporary Asante is based in textiles’ historical value as a widely circulated commodity and currency form throughout western and central Africa (Johnson 1980; Martin 1986). In Ghana’s Ashanti Region, textiles have also been regarded as a distinctively female form of wealth since at least the mid-eighteenth century (Mikell 1989: 16).

Momentous social and economic changes followed the 1896 imposition of British colonial rule, some of which proved particularly detrimental to the financial security and well-being of Asante women. Women responded to these challenges with new strategies for financial autonomy in which textiles, with their historic status as female wealth, proved to be an important resource.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, Ghanaian agriculture, under colonial influence, made a major shift from customary food-crop production to a cocoa-based cash-crop agricultural economy largely controlled by male farmers. As a result, a wife’s work on her husband’s land ceased to produce crops that would feed their family, because labor on a husband’s cocoa farm only yielded monetary profits. Rural wives therefore became dependent on a husband’s willingness to contribute a portion of his cocoa profits to the subsistence needs of his wife, or wives, and their children (Allman 2001: 139–40; Roberts 1987: 54).

The concerted efforts of Christian missionaries and colonial institutions to replace Asante’s matrilineal kinship system with the Western nuclear model simultaneously succeeded in weakening matrilineal loyalty and “the moral imperative of blood kinship” that customarily ensured support from a woman’s brothers and other matrilineal kin. During the course of the twentieth century, Asante women became increasingly dependent on what is generally considered to be the more tenuous marital bond and on financial support contingent on a husband’s “continued loyalty and prosperity” (Clark 1999b: 71–2).

Then, in the early 1960s, a sudden drop in the value of cocoa on the international market initiated a chronic state of economic crises that has substantially reduced the real income of most Ghanaians. In subsequent decades, the substantial decline in Ghanaians’ real incomes brought about “a dramatic shift in the balance of contributions between husband and
wife” that made it even more difficult for wives to obtain the food money and children’s school fees customarily expected of husbands and fathers (Clark 1999b: 67, 73–6). The steadily deteriorating economy has led Asante women to regard financial self-reliance as a fundamental requirement for female maturity and motherhood, by providing a mother with the capacity to feed and educate her children if her husband is unable to fulfill his customary paternal obligations (Dinan 1983: 351–2; Manuh 1993: 179).

Good-quality African-print cloth, an asset that only increases in value, provides Asante women with a ready source of cash when funds are needed to pay for children’s school fees or to weather times of financial crisis. One such crisis can be the death of a husband.

Within the Asante matrilineal inheritance system, a husband’s death may result in members of his extended matrilineage not only laying claim to the husband’s property but to jointly acquired marital assets as well.21 However, on such occasions the widow’s cloth and clothing usually remain untouched because of textiles’ customary status as relatively sacrosanct forms of female wealth. Conversely, in the event of a wife’s death, strong social sanctions will usually prevent her husband from acquiring the wife’s clothing and textiles in order to sell them, or present them to another wife or girlfriend. The relatively inviolable wealth embodied in a woman’s cloth and clothing thus provides Asante wives with a valuable means of safeguarding financial assets, as well as a strategic means of securing an inheritance for their children.

In the Ashanti Region, women of widely differing financial means are united by their strong interest in acquiring and accumulating good-quality African-print cloth. This distinctive textile has been at the center of Asante women’s cloth accumulation strategies since the early twentieth century, a period marked by a substantial increase in the importation and sale of African-print cloth.22 At that time, women also began moving into the previously male-dominated market trade in such prestigious imported goods, which men were abandoning in favor of more lucrative cocoa farming and wage work. Increasing numbers of women began trading in imported cloth, liquor, and tobacco (Clark 1994: 316–18). Soon, cloth trading came to be regarded as not only a distinctly female enterprise, but a profession with the potential for achieving the status of a wealthy woman.

During the 1990s, assessments of female prosperity were, in fact, frequently expressed in terms of the number of African-print cloths a woman owned, as in Mrs Selina Aggrey’s description of her wealthy landlady:

She is rich! She has a large wardrobe filled with cloth ... She has so much that you would think she is selling it ... Any new cloth that comes, she wants to be the first person to buy it.23

This landlady’s daughter, she added, was “just like her,” with a substantial bank account that was equaled by the cash value of the daughter’s own stockpile of over 150 pieces of high-quality African-print cloth.
Women’s Cloth Wealth and the Asante Display Imperative

Given the long-established nature of Asante culture’s emphasis on high-status display, it is not surprising that women are expected to demonstrate their capacity to acquire and accumulate good-quality African-print cloth. A woman’s dress receives particular scrutiny after she reaches adulthood, marries, and bears children. It is generally said that a woman who fails to wear a sufficient number of good-quality African-print ensembles or who wears only the cheaper grades of African-print cloth will be “laughed at,” or ridiculed.

Kaba ensembles of African-print cloth are endowed with particular significance because of their capacity to communicate unequivocally their economic worth (Boelman and van Holthoon 1973: 247; Gott 1994: 59–67). When Kumasi women comment on an African-print kaba ensemble they see worn at a social event or by a woman they pass on the street, their evaluation characteristically begins with an astute appraisal of the ensemble’s monetary value. Such assessments are facilitated by two important characteristics of African-print ensembles, one being the standard six-yard unit in which African-print cloth is sold and worn. The second characteristic is the well-established ranking system, based on quality and price, for different kinds of African-print cloth.

Most women keep well informed as to the current market value of the varieties of African-print cloth. The simple statement, “gyg Holl-land” (“it is Holland,” i.e. a Dutch wax-print), is an appreciative evaluation of the highest order because imported Dutch wax-print cloth has long been regarded as the most prestigious African-print cloth in Ghana, with the required six yards costing 400,000 to 500,000 cedis (US$48 to US$60 in 2003, in an economy where the average annual income is equivalent to US$350). A woman who wears only cheaper grades of locally produced African-print cloth, costing 60,000 to 70,000 cedis (US$7 to US$8 in 2003) is subject to ridicule, and for this reason, all but the very poorest women endeavor to have at least one ensemble of Dutch wax-print cloth. Women are considered to spend a significant percentage of their income on cloth and clothing. In the words of one Kumasi woman, “after chop [food] money, the dressing is next.”

Husbands are expected to provide gifts of cloth and clothing, or the money to purchase these items, particularly upon marriage and childbirth, and as a customary gift at Christmas. Married men, who may have more than one wife in this polygynous society, report feeling considerable pressure to provide their wives with African-print cloth, citing such demands as a common source of marital stress for financially strapped husbands. Yet, as one sympathetic husband observed, Asante women, especially those living within the urban sophistication of Kumasi, feel keenly aware of social imperatives to dress well and
perhaps above their means. A good husband, he explained, must try to help his wife acquire good-quality African-print cloth.\textsuperscript{26}

However, most Asante women find men’s gifts insufficient in meeting social demands for dressing fashionably and well. Women instead rely more heavily on their own financial initiative for acquiring a respectable quantity of good-quality African-print cloth. During adolescence, girls also begin receiving assistance in this endeavor by occasional gifts of cloth from their mother or other family members.\textsuperscript{27} And, although younger, unmarried women generally wear \textit{ataadee} ("dress") ensembles of less prestigious material, they work to acquire African-print cloth to wear after marriage, and particularly after giving birth.

In the Ashanti Region, a woman’s attainment of motherhood has long been an occasion for distinctive personal display. In the past, new mothers would paint their bodies with \textit{hyet} (a local white clay) in order to express their “victory” and “joy” in successfully giving birth (Figure 9).\textsuperscript{28} In present-day Asante, new mothers wear fashionable \textit{kaba}
ensembles of white (*fufuo*) African-print cloth (i.e. white with indigo patterning) to convey their victory and success (Figure 10). A new mother is, in fact, expected to wear a substantial number of new *kaba* ensembles of good-quality wax-print *cloth*, particularly following the birth of her first child.

One friend in her mid-twenties described how she began buying and saving wax-print *cloth* during her adolescence in order to fulfill the African-print cloth display imperative that accompanies marriage and motherhood. "If you are a young woman who gives birth and are not rich enough to buy *cloth*," Julie explained, "then people will laugh at you, saying that you are not of an age to give birth." In 1990, Mrs Bea Asare, a new mother, described the social consequences of failing to meet social demands for wearing a sufficient quantity of new *kaba* ensembles of higher quality African-print cloth:

When a woman is pregnant, she will find every avenue to get *cloth* so people won’t talk against her ... Especially in Kumasi
when you give birth, they will start counting the *Holland* [Dutch wax-print cloth] you wear, because they know that *Holland* is the most expensive cloth. If you don’t wear many, they will say, “Oh, when she brought forth, she only put on two *Holland* cloths!”

**Fashion as Status-seeking Display**

Fashion, with its changeability and aesthetic appeal, has become an important component in women’s display of African-print cloth. Within Asante, the desire to appear fashionably attired in prestigious cloth is generally regarded as a distinctly female characteristic. In the words of an oft-repeated phrase, “while a man will be content to wear the same shirt and trousers for two years, a woman will always be wanting the newest cloth and the newest styles.”

Fashionable new styles develop and spread rapidly throughout Kumasi’s bustling urban environment in a grassroots fashion system that is facilitated by individuals commissioning most of their clothing from local seamstresses or tailors. Male tailors, considered to excel in sewing Western-styled garments because of training in sewing men’s tailored styles, are often sought after by younger women desiring dresses or skirt and top (attaade) ensembles. However, female seamstresses are considered to possess greater expertise in designing and sewing the kaba ensembles that become an increasingly important part of a woman’s wardrobe as she matures, marries, and bears children. As a friend, Mrs Angelina Bilson, explained:

> While a young woman may spend all her money sewing new dress styles with a tailor, no mature woman is going to spend her money sewing dresses of material. If she has the money, she will buy cloth and take it to her seamstress to sew kaba.

Women distinguish between two categories of kaba ensembles: simple styles and fanciful, or complicated, styles. Simple styles are said to be more modest and “ladylike.” Most women tend to have their better quality, imported wax-print cloth sewn in simple kaba styles that will remain in fashion for two or three years (Figure 11). Fanciful, or complicated, styles are more distinctive and intricate (Figure 12). Most women only use less expensive local wax-print or imitation wax-print cloth for these relatively short-lived styles. However, the Asante hightimer, or preman, is noted for wearing fanciful kaba styles of costly, imported wax-print cloth.

The fanciful styles favored by premanfoo are distinctive in several important ways. First, fanciful styles are more expensive to sew, both
Figure 11
Mrs Nora Kyei dressed in a three-piece kaba ensemble sewn into a simple style, 1990. Photograph: Suzanne Gott.

in terms of the higher labor costs of such intricate styles and because of the large quantity of expensive decorative materials that are often used, such as yards of satin ribbon, or gold braid and thread. Fanciful kaba styles are also emblematic of the wearer’s wealth not only due to the expense in sewing a particular style, but because of the extravagance of sewing valuable cloth into a distinctive, fanciful style that will remain stylish for only a short period of time, compared to the lasting stylishness of simpler fashions. Finally, the fanciful kaba styles associated with premanfoq may be described as “extraordinary” because of more provocative and revealing features, such as a low-cut neckline or short slit skirt (see Figures 1 and 4). In Ghana, excessive exposure of the female body is considered improper and is said to be the behavior of “prostitutes,” of women who want to attract the attention and patronage of men.

Yet despite such negative associations, the fanciful styles associated with the preman may, in fact, become popular fashions worn by numer-
Figure 12
A Kumasi woman attending a funeral dressed in a kaba ensemble sewn into a complicated, or fanciful style, 1990. Photograph: Suzanne Gott

ous women at important social events in Kumasi, albeit in a somewhat modified form (Figure 13; compare with Figure 1). In the 1990s, Abidjan, capital of neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, was reputed to be the source of many of the more fanciful, flamboyant styles favored by the preman. Wealthy Asante market women on business trips to Abidjan might commission new kaba styles there, and upon returning home, these new styles would be seen and reproduced, often with certain modifications, by Kumasi seamstresses.

Certain popular fashions, such as the low-cut show-your-shoulders neckline and the stiffened big sleeve of the 1990s, have served to accentuate the physical “greatness” or “majesty” (kseég) that is the Asante ideal. The term kseég, often appearing in Akan proverbs referring to all-powerful entities, such as Onyame ye kseég (“God is great,” i.e. all-powerful), or in proverbial allusions to individuals of high position, such as Aboa kseég na ne nuoma so (“A large animal’s skin is also large”), expresses Asante conceptual linkages between social and physical greatness.
In terms of the Asante preman, Madame Akua Abrafi, a Kumasi trader, describes premanfoo as women who “make everything kese ... they make everything about their appearance higher than others ... big sleeves, big earrings.” During the 1990s, when fashionable kaba blouses featured an enlarged big sleeve stiffened with interfacing, the kaba styles favored by premanfoo exhibited the most extreme versions of the big sleeve, resulting in “kese” kaba styles that served not only as a means of augmenting the physical presence of the preman, but of asserting the superior social standing of the preman, as well.

An additional, associated meaning of kese is “stoutness,” or “fatness” (as it is often spoken of in English), a term used in describing the ideal body shape for the mature Asante woman. Greeting a woman with the complimentary statement, “woaye kese paa” (“you have grown nicely fat”), is a way of telling a woman that she is “looking very attractive.” A plump, rounded appearance is considered visible evidence of a woman’s inner state, indicating wealth, a good marriage, and a contented, peaceful state of mind. Because of the importance accorded...
plumpness as a visible sign of a woman’s personal well-being and success, some Kumasi women have reportedly taken steroids in order to retain water and achieve the appearance of “fatness.” Kaba styles revealing such ideal plumpness, such as the show-your-shoulders kaba blouse style, are understandably popular (Figure 14).

**Fashionable Display and the Controversial Preman**

For those women committed to Asante custom and cultural values, who find cloth accumulation a valuable strategy for financial security, the wearing of costly, prestigious dress is regarded as emblematic of the hard work and determination of an ideal Asante woman. Such a sentiment was expressed by one prosperous market trader in 1990: “Dressing is expensive! You can’t pay 25,000 cedis for a shoe [roughly US$72 at the time] unless you work hard. So when people see you wearing this expensive shoe, they will say, ‘that woman works hard!’”

![Figure 14](image_url)

*Figure 14*

Mrs Gladys Prempeh (right) with her close friend, wearing the popular show-your-shoulders neckline, 1990. Photograph: Suzanne Gott.
However, not all women in the Ashanti Region participate whole-heartedly in this local display system with its emphasis on expensive dress, especially those Asante and non-Asante civil servants and teachers whose education, as well as limited incomes often place them at odds with Asante customary status-seeking behaviors. These women tend to regard all contemporary *poatwa* displays, especially the extravagant dress and behavior of the *preman*, as highly visible instances of the “wastefulness” and “backwardness” of Asante excess and ostentation. For such women, the display imperative associated with the Ashanti Region’s fashion system is an unnecessary burden, not a status-seeking opportunity.

In fact, pejorative comments concerning *preman* dress and behavior reflect an ongoing critical commentary within Asante society concerning the illusory nature of elite prestige displays. Thus, although the “gorgeous dress” of a *preman* may elicit an admiring appraisal that the wearer is “a very rich woman,” her costly dress may also evoke the wry observation that *premanfoo* are only able to dress so beautifully by borrowing or “hiring” [renting] the clothing of other women. Such skepticism concerning the substantiality of conspicuously displayed wealth is not new in Asante culture, being articulated by such popular proverbs as “Empty barrels make the most noise” (*Ankore a huwee niim no na ekasa dodo*), and the proverb, “You say you have become fat, but you are full of water” (*Wose waye kgs, nso woahye nsuo*).

Such criticisms of *premanfoo* have implications beyond questions of dress as an element of *poatwa* displays of wealth. Many women are also highly critical of the deviance of *preman* behaviors from the social expectations for a modest Asante woman. For one well-educated Kumasi woman, the *preman* constitutes a particularly scandalous type of person, known “by the way she dresses and the way she moves around.” She characterized *premanfoo* as being:

> ... those women who want these fanciful styles [and who] move about spending a lot of money on drinks and so forth, having fun by themselves. They like moving with men, [they] can’t stay at one place, you meet them at any funeral, any social gathering.

She also described the fanciful styles she associated with the *preman* as being “extraordinary” (i.e. highly visible and even scandalous), with low-cut, revealing necklines and _slit_ skirts cut scandalously high. The wearing of such revealing styles causes some women and men to say that *premanfoo* behave “like prostitutes” by dressing in a provocative manner in order to attract male attention and financial favors.

The concept of the flamboyantly wealthy *preman* as being “like a prostitute” has some illuminating parallels in early-twentieth-century
Ghana. At that time, when colonialism and the new cocoa-based agricultural economy placed married women at a distinct disadvantage, Allman found that Asante women who chose to remain unmarried in order to pursue their own financial autonomy were frequently accused of being prostitutes. Their efforts to remain independent from male control and authority caused great unease among many local chiefs, who actually imprisoned women until they consented to marry (2001: 130–3). During the early colonial period, Ghanaian women who migrated into towns in order to pursue wealth and autonomy outside the confines of marriage and patriarchal village life were criticized for their acquisitiveness and promiscuity, as in the 1930s highlife song quoted by Akyeampong, “Wo pe tam wo npe ba” (“You like cloth but you don’t want children”) (2000: 228).

In contemporary Asante, the independence of premamfoo from the control of husbands, as well as male and female elders, is a major factor in premam impropriety. Although Asante is a matrilineal society, in which inheritance passes through the maternal line, senior men have customarily exercised significant control over the women of their matrilineage. The twentieth-century introduction of Christianity, with its emphasis on the Euro-American model of a nuclear family under the authority of the husband and father, has provided a new, even more restrictive ideology that inhibits female autonomy. Mrs Mary Owusu-Ansah, a retired civil servant, expressed the association of premam dress with social marginality:

When they call a woman a premam, it means she has been a hooligan before. It is not good. They are those women who do not respect themselves, married women who are free to be approached by men with their dressing ... If you are a married woman, you can’t dress like that ... Some women, as soon as you see them, you know that they are not under anyone, a husband or family member. The average woman can’t go out in such a manner. A woman who respects her husband can’t go out that way. If girls come from good homes, they don’t dress in such a manner ... Premam people are always the people who wear gorgeous things everywhere. They will go to a funeral not wearing funeral costume ... They won’t abide by what others say.

However, when questioned further, Mrs Owusu-Ansah made a marked distinction between the propriety required of married women, daughters, or nieces, and the greater latitude acceptable for an unmarried, financially independent woman. When asked if an unmarried woman could be a premam, she responded:

Yes, a woman can if she is not married, is well-to-do and controls herself. If she is a wealthy woman who can do what she likes. If
she’s the breadwinner of her family; if she is wealthy, sometimes has her own building. She is an all-around woman. You see her with necklaces, bangles, high heels, gorgeously dressed. She can talk as she likes.\(^{38}\)

**Conclusion**

Asante *premanfoog* flaunt their wealth and independence by wearing fanciful *kaba* styles of prestigious African wax-print cloth. Such fashionable, high-visibility displays of *cloth* wealth and superior status constitute a distinctly female mode of Asante *poatwa* display, which is based in the special status of African-print cloth and clothing as a major form of female wealth. Yet, the revealing styles favored by the flamboyant *preman* also represent a freedom from customary restraints on female behavior and sexuality that has provoked the notoriety associated with the Asante *preman*.

Most women do not engage in such extreme displays of financial well-being and autonomy. However, virtually all women living in Ghana’s Ashanti Region actively pursue the accumulation and fashionable display of good-quality African-print cloth. Some, such as the Asante *premanfoog*, are enthusiastic participants in this endeavor. Other women may, in fact, voice displeasure at the social pressure to acquire and wear expensive *cloth*, as in the following conversation in 1990 among three school teachers—Angelina, Bea, and Nora.\(^{39}\) Bea, an Asante woman who had recently returned from teaching near the coastal capital of Accra, complained that:

In Accra, people don’t care what you put on, but when you come to Kumasi, people are very particular about dressing ... Illiteracy is the reason. For people in the Ashanti Region, education came late. In Accra, people don’t care, but in Kumasi there is a special *cloth* and everyone would want it, and even styles, everyone would want to sew that style with even one in that particular *cloth*.

Yet, even within the context of this sometimes heated discussion about the burdensome pressures for women to dress fashionably and well, Bea concluded by drawing attention to the particularly fashionable character of her friend and fellow schoolteacher Angelina, exclaiming “Angie *pe laif paat*!” (“Angie likes *life*, i.e. dressing fashionably, very much!”); and Bea commented on the special interest in fashionable dress that she observed in her own four-year-old daughter, Amma Seiwa, who regularly expressed special admiration for Angelina’s stylishness:
Amma Seiwaa is always talking about money and dressing ... Angie is her idol. Amma Seiwaa used to come to school and when we came back home, all she would talk about is Angie and her dressing, saying “Angie pg laif!” ... When we are going out, every person Amma Seiwaa sees, she will comment on their dressing—their hairdo, shoes, dresses.

“She’s like Abigail [Nora’s six-year-old daughter]!” Angelina interjected, as Bea continued:

I tell Amma Seiwaa, “You like dressing too much,” but my husband says, “She’s just like you. Q pg laif na nso wo pg laif” (“She likes fashionable dress because you also like fashion”) ... When going to church on Sunday, Amma Seiwaa will select her own dress on Saturday ... I’m embarrassed, she’s too young. But my mother says I was like that, too.

Thus, in a discussion critical of the dress display imperatives for women in the Ashanti Region and of the extravagant, flamboyant fashions of the Asante premiif, these three schoolteachers also admitted their own special interests in dressing well, as well as their daughters’ precocious preoccupation with life—the fashionable stylishness considered to be a fundamental feature of contemporary Asante womanhood.

**Epilogue**

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, women invested significant percentages of their income in costly Dutch wax-print textiles and more affordable West African factory prints. By the late 1990s, Ghana’s worsening economy began limiting women’s acquisition of African-print cloth; although money or cloth sent by family members living abroad provided one means of continuing to dress well. By 2007, new, cheaper versions of African-print cloth manufactured in China had become increasingly popular, enabling women to continue wearing fashionable African-print kaba ensembles. At the same time, world fashions, especially imported second-hand clothing, have become increasingly popular not only with Ghanaian men and youth, but with a growing percentage of middle-aged women who now largely reserve their African-print ensembles for church, funerals, and special occasions.

**Notes**

1. Use of the term, *higbtimer*, for those engaged in an extravagant, elite lifestyle, is conceptually linked to *highlife*, the name given to
the elite cosmopolitan lifestyle and syncretic Ghanaian-European dance-orchestra music that developed among Ghana’s early-twentieth-century educated urban elite (Collins 1976: 62–3).

2. The Asante constitute the largest subgroup of the linguistically and culturally related Akan peoples of southern Ghana. Their language is Asante Twi, the most widely spoken dialect of the Akan language.

3. See the following selected works on Asante leadership regalia: Cole and Ross (1977), Garrard (1989), Kyeremateng (1964), and Ross (1977, 1998, 2002).


5. Interview with Mr M. H. Frempong, Kumasi, June 1990.

6. This practice had historical precedents among the Akan peoples living on the coast. A 1602 account by Dutch merchant Pieter de Marees describes and illustrates a “triumphal ceremony” held to celebrate a man’s rise to the status of “Brenipono,” or “Nobleman” (1602: 167). French prefect Fr Godefroy Loyer’s 1714 account of his visit to a different coastal region records one male trader’s prayer for “Brembi,” or obirempon status (1714: 213), indicating that similar ennoblement ceremonies may have taken place among various coastal peoples.

7. In present-day Asante, the honorific title of obirempon (“valiant, powerful man”) has a female corollary in the term, obaa barima (“valiant, manly woman”), that is used for market women who achieve “the level of financial success and economic independence considered essential for men” (Clark 1999a: 722).

8. In Asante, the assumption of “royal” prerogatives by members of the moneyed, rather than royal, elite remains a point of contention that continues to the present day, as in the restrictions concerning the wearing of abenemma mpabua (“royal children’s sandals”) by non-royals at ceremonial and ritual gatherings.

9. Interview with Mr M. H. Frempong, Kumasi, May 1990.

10. For the Fante, a coastal Akan people, the term for cloth is ntama.

11. In this article, the word cloth will be italicized when referring to African-print cloth, in keeping with the Asante linguistic convention of using the term ntama, or the English cloth, to distinguish African-print cloth from other factory-produced textiles.

12. The Akan practice of assigning names to textile designs has been well documented in respect to the three most valued forms of cloth: locally produced hand-woven kente and hand-stamped adinkra, as well as imported and, more recently, local factory produced African-print cloth (Boelman and van Holthoon 1973; Bowdich 1819; Domowitz 1992; Gott 1994; Mato 1986; Rattray 1927; Ross 1998; Warren and Andrews 1977).

13. The deeper levels of meaning that may be associated with seemingly mundane names is exemplified by the cloth Aya (“Fern”), an
African-print whose fern-like designs and name are reminiscent of an earlier adinkra pattern. In Rattray’s discussion of the adinkra design Aya, he observed that in addition to “fern,” the Asante word aya “also means ‘I am not afraid of you,’ ‘I am independent of you,’ and the wearer may imply this” by wearing this design (1927: 265). Certain women also find deeper meaning in the cloth name Kweadusa, as a metaphorical allusion to matrilineal unity and support.


15. Interview with Juliana Osei, Kumasi, January 1990.


17. Asante women’s dansinkran hairstyle consists of closely cropped and darkened hair, with a shaved, recessed hairline outlined with a mixture of soot and shea butter in order to create a high, clearly delineated forehead.

18. Personal communication, Dr Kofi Agyekum, Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana, Legon, July 1999.


20. Personal communication, Mrs Angelina Bilson, Kumasi, March 1990. See Wass (1979), and LeBlanc (2000), for investigations into the impact of historical change and political identity on dress in Lagos, Nigeria, and in Bouaké, Côte d’Ivoire.

21. In 1985, the national government passed the Intestate Succession Law to ensure that the widow and a man’s children receive a portion of his estate. In actual practice, however, the law has had limited effect on customary inheritance practices (De Witte 2001: 173-9).

22. See Boelman and van Holthoon (1973) for more information.

23. Interview with Mrs Selina Aggrey, Kumasi, June 1990.

24. African-print cloth is an umbrella term for three closely related fabrics—African wax-prints, Java prints, and fancy prints—all with designs created to suit consumers’ tastes in different regions of western and central Africa: African wax-prints are machine-made batiks manufactured in a process that imitates the Javanese handmade batik method. Designs are applied in hot wax or resin to both sides of plain cotton cloth using mechanized rollers. This printing process has been carefully developed to create the imperfections that are distinctive to handmade batiks, such as crackling of the wax or drip spots of wax. The fabric is then dyed indigo, leaving a blue pattern on a white background after the wax or resin is removed. Additional colors may then be added by hand blocking or by a special printing run. Java prints are high-grade imitations of wax-prints produced by direct roller printing, preceded and/or followed by special dyeing or chemical processing. Fancy prints are lower quality wax-print imitations produced.
by direct roller printing with no additional dyeing or chemical procedures (Bickford 1997; Nielsen 1974, 1979; Picton 1999).

25. Interview with Mrs Bea Asare, Kumasi, July 1990.
26. Interview with Mr Maxwell Gyamfi, Kumasi, March 1990.
27. See Manuh concerning the increasingly important role of Ghanaian emigrants’ financial contributions and gifts of European-manufactured African-print cloth in keeping “close family members well clothed and able to maintain a semblance of well-being” (1998: 14).
29. Women often compare childbirth with “going off to battle,” and describe labor as a perilous event in which the woman or baby may not survive—a fear borne out by the continuing threat of maternal and infant mortality in West Africa. A new mother therefore wears white to signify her victory over death, as well as her joy and success in giving birth.
30. Interview with Juliana Osei, Kumasi, June 1990.
31. Interview with Mrs Bea Asare, Kumasi, July 1990.
32. Interview with Mrs Angelina Bilson, Kumasi, September 1990.
33. Interview with Madame Akua Abrafi, Kumasi, September 1990.
34. Personal communication, Dr John Bilson, Kumasi, July 1990.
35. Interview with Mrs Gladys Prempeh, Kumasi, November 1990. At that time, 300 to 350 cedis (US$0.85 to US$1) was considered to be the average worker’s daily income.
37. Certain cultural factors, however, complicate assigning the label of prostitute to all women seeking financial favors from men: As Dinan observes, there is a long-established sense of reciprocity associated with customary courtship and marriage, in which men are expected to provide gifts and maintenance in exchange for sexual access (1983: 353). Akyeampong also notes that, given “the traditional context of gender relations among the peoples of southern Ghana, it is not surprising that sexuality became a key resource in women’s endeavor to acquire wealth in towns” (2000: 228).
38. Interview with Mrs Mary Owusu-Ansah, Kumasi, September 1990.
39. Interview with Mrs Angelina Bilson, Mrs Bea Asare, and Mrs Nora Boakye, Kumasi, July 1990.

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