

**FASHIONING THE NATION: HAIRDRESSING, PROFESSIONALISM AND
THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER IN GHANA, 1900-2006**

by

Doris S. Essah

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Chair
Professor David W. Cohen
Professor Mamadou Diouf
Associate Professor Frieda Ekotto
Assistant Professor Amal Hassan Fadlalla

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To Emmanuel Victor Asihene Essah
and Doris Akosua Darkoa

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

This dissertation discusses the profession of hairdressing and the various ways in which hairdressing was a site for debates and discussions about identity, belonging and nationhood during the twentieth century. It is a study of the significance of ceremonial hairdressings of ethnic groups, the mundane discussions of hairdressing among different categories of working class persons and elites and the professionalization of hairdressing in southern Ghana that throws light on the construction of gender, the body and embodying the nation. I am driven by the belief that the practices and discussions of everyday people are critical to our understanding of social relations and social processes. Far from marginal and unknown experience, they are a key to understanding the making of mainstream history.

The dissertation addresses: (1) how people who belong to Fante, Ga and Asante ethnic groups constructed their knowledge about hairdressing and its socio-cultural and economic meanings. (2) The possible histories of various hairstyles. (3) The extent to which acquisition of the materials for hairdressing signified power and status on the one hand and on the other hand, the wearer as well as the hairdresser's sense of vogue. (4) How the co-existence of new and old forms of hairdressings provide room for people in Ghana to demand and ascribe citizenship. (5) How people in Ghana used hairdressing to draw on multiple identities and the ways in which their understanding of nation building re-formed from the turn of the twentieth century. Through the study of the relationships between hairdressing and professionalism the dissertation discusses how between 1920 and 1970, hairdressing contributed in

forming the gender and age-based identity of women and men in urban areas and identified the ranks of persons who participated in state and national ceremonies that Ghanaians appreciated as visual icons of “cultural nationalism,” “African Nationalism,” “African pride,” and pan-Africanism. Since hairdressings expressed the symbolic systems of national identity, the meanings attributed to hairdressings serve as texts to identify intellectual, socio-cultural and economic practices and discourses through which men and women in Ghana fashioned citizenship. Furthermore, the media played a central role in showcasing the works of hairdressers and criticizing hairdressings, and some hairdressers assumed roles of ombudspersons and pacesetters in providing skill training and forming professional associations.

The 1970s and 1980s were periods of economic malaise as a result of which from the mid-1980s the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund set Structural Adjustment measures for the government of Ghana. The government of Ghana downsized the staff in the civil service and sold the defunct state enterprises as private businesses that were maintained on a skeletal staff.

During the 1990s, the former workers of the public service and civil service as well as the graduates from the elementary schools, secondary schools and tertiary schools sought work in the informal economy. As the International Labor Organization studied and defined the expansive informal economy, urban workers in the informal economy formed professional associations that joined the Industrial and Commercial Unit (ICU) of Ghana’s Trades Union Congress (TUC). The hairdressers who formed the Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association gained technical assistance from the ICU to negotiate with governmental and nongovernmental bodies

for the requisite skill-training and payment for utilities of their private sector, microfinance businesses.

Contextualizing Sources and Methods

My academic interest in hairdressing began in 1999 as I conducted a focus group discussion with junior secondary school students at Akropong Akwapim for my thesis on junior secondary school adolescents' sexuality and reproductive health needs. I observed that as students from different schools assembled under a popular tree downtown for our focus group discussion, the conversation that served as an icebreaker and generated a feeling of camaraderie was about hairdressing. Two girls began a conversation about hairstyles, another girl gave an example of a hairstyle that was in vogue and yet another girl made reference to how more young people were interested in learning hairdressing as their vocation. As I studied the students' grades, economic background and the economy to understand their potential to achieve their chosen professions, the comment that the girl made about the increasing popularity of hairdressing as a vocation among young girls resounded. I noticed that in the city of Accra many beauty salons had several apprentices who were noticeable because they wore uniforms.

From July 2000 through August 2001, as a research student in the "Women's Health in the City of Accra" joint project of the Universities of Ghana and Michigan, I studied the contexts within which apprentices, employees and proprietors (popularly called madams) provided hairdressing, factors that ensured their wellbeing and

contemporary variations in hairstyles. Since the clustering of salons could result in competition, the hairdressers and other professionals who helped to facilitate the provision of hairdressing answered questions about the formal and informal avenues that hairdressers had for exhibiting competitive skills. What were the earnings of the hairdressers? How did they supplement? What knowledge on beauty culture, business and preventive care did hairdressers have? How did they acquire this knowledge? What preventive measures did they have for on-the-job hazards?

The methodology for the study was a combination of participant observation, focus group discussions, a beauty salon to beauty salon survey along the Trans West Africa road network that passes through Abeka-Lapaz and in depth interviews about hairdressers. In other words, I visited all the beauty salons that are along the two main roads that intersect at Lapaz, interviewed in depth the madams, apprentices and employees and conducted two focus group discussions, one with apprentices in a salon that provided only braids and another with the madams who attended the meetings of the Abeka District of the Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association (GHABA).¹

After I became a doctoral student in the University of Michigan's History program in September 2002, I approached the research for this dissertation methodologically, through my study of archival documents including newspaper women's columns, feature stories, advertisements, anthropological and creative writings, audiovisuals and oral histories. One of my findings that helped me to think in a historical, national context is that many of the hairdressers at the Abeka chapter

¹ Doris Essah, "Beauty Salons at Lapaz," in Nancy Rose Hunt, Takyiwaa Manuh and Edith Tetteh (eds.) *Tales of the City: Gender, Health and Knowledge in Accra* (forthcoming).

of GHABA and its district, regional and national branches either attended the first known hairdressing schools from the 1960s or belong to families of these early hairdressers or have been instrumental in organizing the hairdressing business in Accra, Asante, Central and Western Regions. These regions are central to the history of Ghanaians' formulation of a nation. During the nineteenth century, upon Britain's formal colonization of the Gold Coast, the trade and administrative capital of European and African societies was transferred from Cape Coast (Fante) to Accra (Ga). In 1900, the British war with Asante (Twi) caused most of Ghana's geographical space to be re-conceptualized as jurisdictions, as a single polity.

Further research on hairdressing and Ghana's political economy directed the focus of this study onto the historical town of Elmina, where the study of hairdressing helps us to understand how Ghanaians conceptualized cultural heritage. According to oral history, Elmina's founder Kwaa Amankwaa, who was related to the people who formed into Asante, lived in Cape Coast before settling in Elmina. In 1471, Europeans' (Portuguese) contact with societies in Ghana was at Elmina. The intense trans-Atlantic mercantile economy that occurred from 1471 through the nineteenth century caused Europeans to associate the people of the coastal town of Elmina and the interior with a wealth in gold, distinct mannerisms and forms of dress that indicated status. After British colonization during the first half of the twentieth century, during the second half of the twentieth century when Ghanaians sought historical narratives and visual materials that represent Ghana, Elizabeth Sheppard of Elmina was nationally prominent as a hairdresser. She is the makeup artist for a public film *I Told You So* and she was enstooled as one of the queen mothers in

Elmina.²

Review of the Literature

The main premise of this dissertation is that hairdressing, like citizenship, is a signifier, an empty symbol that is malleable such that the fashioned hair and hair accessories including hats and hair bands of persons in different social contexts who during the twentieth century experienced colonialism, pan-Africanism, socialism and cold war politics, and neoliberalism serve as texts with which historians, anthropologists and art historians would interpret the ideas and practices of individuals and social groups for discussions about the body, gender, nation and transnationalism.

Many historians, anthropologists and art historians argue that it is necessary to conceptualize hairdressing as a component of dress.³ Ruth Barnes and Joan Eicher explain in their introduction to *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts* (1993) that students of dress need to discuss themes about hair, the body, beauty, fashion and clothing. The authors find that a person who aims to transform how she or he looks resorts to dress to either alter the shape of some parts of her body or add materials. Since all forms of dress could be protective, decorative and communicative of the wearer's position in society, a definition of dress must allow room for all kinds of body supplements and modifications that use a variety of

² For the history of twentieth century Ghana, see Albert Adu Boahen, *Ghana Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1975); Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana: 1946-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

³ See Roy Sieber and Frank Herreman (eds.), *Hair in African Art and Culture* (New York: Museum for African Art; Munich: Prestel, 2000); Ruth Barnes and Joan Eicher, *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts* (Oxford: Berg, 1993); Joanne Eicher, *Dress and Ethnicity: Change across Space and Time* (Oxford: Washington DC.: Berg, 1995); Jean Allman (ed.), *Fashioning Africa, Power and the Politics of Dress* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

materials and actions to create an appearance.⁴

The authors explain that how people define dress helps to contextualize the geographical and historical background, economic status and gender of the wearer. First, groups of people use dress to define themselves within a cultural context that distinguishes between the relationships that they have with each other as well as the relationships that they have with nonmembers. Dress features prominently in the stories of origin of many ethnic groups and nations. Since members of society acquire different cultural dresses based on their ages, political powers or spiritual powers, “[a] cultural identity is thus expressed, and visual communication is established before verbal interaction even transmits.”⁵ Barnes and Eicher’s discussion of how people use the cultural symbolisms of hair works well with Jane Guyer’s discussions of “wealth in people” and, more recently, “money matters” (1995 and 2004 respectively), which use historical as well as anthropological approaches to urge scholars to focus on how wealth and social status are perceived and linked to production and reproduction of systems of power and knowledge.⁶ Her edited works together with visual impressions and social discussions of hairdressings are important for conceptualizing different members of societies’ agency, subjectivity and identity.

Second, Barnes and Eicher’s discussions about dress encourage a study about how groups of people used dress to define themselves as students, members of social clubs or professionals. For this dissertation, an important historical context during the

⁴ Barnes and Eicher, *Dress and Gender* (1993), 1.

⁵ Barnes and Eicher, *Dress and Gender* (1992), 2.

⁶ Jane Guyer, *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); *Money Matters, Instability, Values and Social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995); and “Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 36 No.1 (1995), 91-120.

first half of the twentieth century is that of British colonization. During the period of colonization, school-education was one of the new cultural practices that Africans sought and they used the visual characteristics of school-education including changing tastes in dress to explore multiple new roles which distinguished between and within African families and societies.⁷ It is important then to examine the significance of hairdressing in the education and professions of Africans during the pre-colonial and colonial eras. During the second half of the century, the period of the Cold War, Ghanaians experienced a crisis of nationalism. Employment in the public sector and the formal private sector contracted in response to economic constraints, even as many young people either graduated or left school. As an increased number of unemployed persons sought work in the informal economy, the charismatic workers organized into professional associations at the same time that labor organizations, development organizations and scholars examined the informal economy.⁸

Third, Barnes and Eicher argue that dress distinguishes the gender of the wearer. Usually, gender specific dress closely linked to sexuality allows for the development of specific dress codes that helps scholars to understand the qualities that societies regard as feminine or masculine. Dress was important in how men took on gender specific roles by acting as women in plays during the colonial era when

⁷ See Carol Summers, *Colonial Lessons: Africans Education in Southern Rhodesia* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002); see also, Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Seattle, Washington: Seal Press, 1988); Laura Fair *Past Times and Politics: Culture, Community and Identity in Post Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001).

⁸ See Takyiwaa Manuh, "Ghana: Women in the Public and Informal Sectors under the Economic Recovery Programme," in Pamela Sparr (ed.), *Mortgaging Women's lives: Feminist Critiques of Structural Adjustment* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1994), 61-72.

there were restrictions in the jobs that were available to African men, and women were discouraged from pursuing career opportunities.

Fourth, Barnes and Eicher argue that “dress is more encompassing than costume that could result in discrepancies between the ethnographic report and the tangible, visible evidence.”⁹ Yet, hairdressing in everyday life is an important component of performance and performativity. As persons use their hairdressings to perform their everyday life, they may or may not be conscious that other people serve as audience. In Erving Goffman’s book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), he argues that a person’s experience is related to that of an actor on a stage. A person is conscious of how he or she presents him or herself to others and has some control over the impressions that others receive. Other peoples’ reactions toward a person’s presentation of self are important for a person’s sense of worth. Sumaila Villanuela (2002) is in consonance with Goffman in her study of African Americans and Latinos. She finds that while many researches provide a comparison of African American women’s and Latino women’s lack of interest in body weight when they are compared to white women, African American women and Latino women focus on hair to attain their body ideal and present themselves to the public.¹⁰ African American women and Latino women get involved in beauty practices such as the choice of clothing and the use of makeup that flatter their body shapes. Their daily performances are attempts at achieving gender that is public consensus that they are feminine and beautiful. This process of presenting themselves is performed backstage because members of their societies presume that gender is a natural state

⁹ Barnes and Eicher, *Dress and Gender* (1992), 4.

¹⁰ Sumaya Villanueva, “Beyond the Barbie Doll Image: Beauty Ideals and Practices among African American and Puerto Rican Women” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2002).

and women attain their beauty and femininity with ease.

It is important to examine how Ghanaians provided and interpreted hairstyles on stage and in real life. Since hair is a part of the body, how people are socialized through debates about hairdressing is important for examining how men and women are associated with locality and nationality. During the 1920s, James Kwegyir Aggrey, one of the founders of the first coeducational school Achimota College that taught hair-cutting as an extra-curricular activity, made a presentation on race and explained to Americans that long-haired women from his Akan ethnic group were feminine.¹¹ From the 1950s, Kwame Nkrumah's government portended to "African Nationalism" as the Gold Coast was renamed Ghana, and Ghanaians performed "African pride" through dress and the promotion of oral narratives, theatre, film and television that utilized visual and aural senses to provide entertainment, information and education for social and political transformations. Nkrumah promoted African personality and appointed women as ministers. The Minister of Social Work was beautiful Susan Alhassan who originated from the Northern Territories, where she worked as an educationist after she graduated from Achimota College.

The media played a central role in shaping readers minds about dress, beauty and the roles of school-educated women in their communities, and featured the workplace of hairdressers as a space of desire based on gendered ideas about family, nationhood and international skill training. Mabel Dove, the first woman journalist and first West African woman elected to the legislature examined hairdressing in her columns about femininity and women's roles.

¹¹ Edwin W. Smith, *Aggrey of Africa: A Study in Black and White* (9th ed) (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1932), 47.

Fifth, the works of Barnes and Eicher and other scholars of dress guide us to understand how Africans including Ghanaians wore hairdressings as cultural statements. The findings of art historian Babatunde Lawal (2000) raise issues about the semiotics of art and culture; that in reality, neither art nor culture is easily decipherable. In order to decipher the meaning of any piece of artwork or aesthetic attribute of a group of people, we need to go through a learning process of the culture of every society. Lawal argues that across West Africa, hair, as part of the head is linked with interpretations about the cosmology. Among the Yoruba in Nigeria, a person's "physical [outer] head is highly valued" as a site of "perception, communication and identity, [yet] it is regarded as no more than an outer shell for the inner head." Men and women must keep their hair like a "grove," "well maintained to hallow the sanctuary that the physical head constitutes." In their myths, physicality embodies a "will to adorn" and to be creative by manifesting the visual, performance and applied arts that has transformed "wildernesses to civilization." Well groomed people pay attention to their "behavior, clothes and hair" and the multiplicity of Yoruba hairstyles "communicate taste, status, occupation and power, both temporal and spiritual."

Hair provides sanctions for the most vulnerable members in the Yoruba human society through to the highest in the hierarchy of spirits, the Supreme Being. For example, babies' hair must be shaved on the eighth day, at which time, kin name them. The naming ceremony begins the series of rites of passage for becoming full members of the Yoruba human society. Adult men more often keep their hair short

and grow their graying beards; gray hair symbolizes their experience and wisdom.¹²

In Ghana, most ethnic groups had initiation rites marking the movement of persons from one stage in life to another. Among Akan societies, babies' hair was cut to welcome them into their families before the eighth day, when their naming ceremonies were performed. During childhood and adolescence, girls together with their female relations and friends spend time together, dexterously plaiting each other's hair. They create aesthetic hairstyles practical for mundane activities and foster a relationship for sharing their knowledge about life.¹³ Hairdressing was a means by which adult women educated younger girls about gender roles.

During the twentieth century, since there were variations in the contexts in which girls and women provided and received hairdressings, it is important to study the history of education vis-à-vis that of hairdressing. Peter Sarpong (1977) argues that historically, among Asante people, because girls unlike boys did not have access to school-education, soon after puberty, well respected older women in the community educated girls about adult life. Girls' education was a part of their nubility rites which culminated in their community's participation in a public "hair-cutting ceremony." The ceremony demonstrated the society's appreciation of feminine grooming. Socially and economically, it acknowledged the girls as adults.

In Ghana, in addition to these general hairdressings that provided a visual commentary on people in different occupations' presentation of themselves, from the 1950s, wigs were fashionable and women wore them to a variety of events and as

¹² Babatunde Lawal, "Orilonse. The Hermeneutics of the Head and Hairstyles among the Yoruba" in Sieber and Herreman (eds.), *Hair in African Art and Culture* (2000), 94.

¹³ See Esi Sagay, *African Hairstyles, Styles of Yesterday and Today* (London: Heinemann, 1983); Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps, *Hair Story, Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2001).

office wear. Some Ghanaians who disliked wigs criticized that wigs were not the wearers' natural hair and therefore, not authentic. The wig represented hair, but since people knew that it was not the authentic hair, a wig was "regarded as "polluting" and "dangerous."¹⁴ Fortunately, since wigs were a fad, women's taste in hairdressings including wigs changed overtime.

Such a record of hairdressings and hair accessories and the contexts within which they changed in fashion allows historians to view hairdressings as a text and an archive. Jean Allman argues in the introduction to *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress* (2004) that there is need for a historical examination of how Africans have discussed and utilized ideas about aesthetics and fashion to construct their lives. She argues that the head and dressing the head among men and women were important signifiers of emancipation in Ghana during the mid twentieth century. Allman calls for a historical examination of how persons in Africa have discussed and utilized ideas about aesthetics and fashion to construct their lives.¹⁵ However, none of the chapters of this edited book, *Fashioning Africa*, discusses hairdressing and its relation to power. Rather, the chapters provide a broad-brush comparative study of debates over dress and national culture at different places and times in Africa.

Earlier, in 2000, Thomas McCaskie's introduction of *Asante Identities* walked readers through the streets of fast urbanizing Adeabeba, which until 1995 was a farming village. By 1997, it was a sprawling construction site with microfinance businesses including a hairdressing salon—"Miss Louisa, [which provided the following services:] Afro and French Roll, Cut and Curl, Braiding and Weaving."

¹⁴ Turner, *The Ritual Process* (1969), 109.

¹⁵ Allman (ed.), *Fashioning Africa* (2004).

The emphasis of *Asante Identities* is on detailing the village's history; its formation in the mid-nineteenth century and the experiences of the persons from the village during the era of British colonization.¹⁶ McCaskie, like other scholars who are interested in the dual concept of "tradition" and "modernity" assembles fragmented findings, pays attention to detail and provides "thick description" of ethnographic reports on explicit practices and implicit understandings. His objective is to draw out larger implications central to social life and social structure.¹⁷

Trying to extract what is modern from what is viewed as traditional lands a student on "slippery" academic turf. Yet, studying trajectories in how historical subjects have defined the concepts tradition and modernity could allow for further discussions of past events and behaviors that these historical subjects looked upon as relevant for their current lives. The histories of hairdressings that are manifest as Akan *kente* and *adinkra* symbols for example should help us to understand how Africans produced knowledge and memories about their history. This dissertation examines how people in the Gold Coast and Ghana communicated and worked with genres to which they have easy access such as drama, folklore, proverbs, song and drums, text books, film and other new technologies that situated hairdressings and

¹⁶ Thomas McCaskie, *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village, 1850-1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 8.

¹⁷ Historians find that the forms of modernity in nonwestern countries vary. Most recently, Frederick Cooper's *Colonialism in Question* (2005) has provided us with a bibliographical overview on the different ways historians have analyzed modernity. Earlier, Philip Curtin's edited work *Africa and the West: Intellectual Responses to European Culture* (1972) applied a comparative framework of modernization and westernization to explain Africans' experiences vis-à-vis people worldwide, in particular, those in the "developed world." More recently, James Ferguson's *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life in the Zambian Copperbelt* (1999) provides a comparative framework within a single African country. Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Philip Curtin (ed.), *Africa and the West: Intellectual Responses to European Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972); Ferguson, James. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life in the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

other arts within global contexts.

In Tshikala Biaya's chapter "Hair Statements in Urban Africa" (1998), findings about various hairdressings bring into convergence local and global ideas and experiences that are a part of popular culture and the production of knowledge. According to Biaya at the turn of the twenty-first century, in African countries, hair is regarded as a "locus of memory."¹⁸ He suggests that in English speaking West African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria fashionable women favored the hairdressings and clothing, which were introduced from the West or were generated from people's urban experiences and cultural events. In Ghana and Nigeria, advertisements depicted the hairstyles that people favored or found topical. Across the continent and in the African Diaspora people wore Ghana's *kente* cloth.¹⁹

Most of Biaya's study focuses on French speaking West and Central Africa. He charts how during the twentieth century, Sawa professional *griottes* provided the hairdressings of members of their society who were prominent such as the nobility, royalty and athletes. For more secular forms of hairstyles, married women wore headscarves "carelessly" in order to distract attention from their beauty, while unmarried women created elaborate styles with headscarves, the hot comb and during the 1960s, a soda-based hair-straightening product called *zazou*. Since both women and girls chatted while providing these secular hairstyles for their friends and relations, the process of providing secular hairdressing served as an important yet

¹⁸ Biaya, T. K. "Hair Statements in Urban Africa: The Beauty, The Mystic and The Madman" in Els van der Plas and Marlous Willemsen (eds.) *The Art of African Fashion* (The Hague: Red Sea Press and Africa World Press with Prince Claus Fund Library, 1998), 96; another book on popular culture that is relevant is Karin Barber (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Culture* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Biaya "Hair Statements in Urban Africa" (1998).

informal means of socialization. By then, although beauty care providers for the new trend of hair fashion shows were responsive to cultural practices, the global fashion in wigs together with an increased interest in cosmetics, miniskirts and beauty contests were obvious.

In Zaire, President Mobutu responded to the trends in fashion with a policy that compelled women to look authentic by turning to forms of hair-braiding that originated in the Bantu speaking areas and the Sudan. Although Zairian women continued to have an avid interest in mass produced cosmetics and wigs, the policy for authenticity fostered women's interests in a diversity of hairdressings and clothing, many of which were designed in West Africa.

Biaya argues that at the turn of the twenty-first century, in French speaking Central Africa and West Africa, "African designs and influences are more prominent than non-African ones and artistic creations borrow elements from one another." Such hairdressings that were designed in West Africa had a generic name, "African beauty" or were named after popular female singers. Ghana's neighbors are at the forefront of promoting these fashions. Lome is a major importer of textiles and Abidjan is "an entrepreneur and cultural broker, promoting and redistributing women's products in Africa and throughout the world."²⁰ Many women in Abidjan had attractive hair coloring or braids, both of which looked avant-garde. Salons in Abidjan recruited Wolof hair-braiders who combined their indigenous techniques and

²⁰ Biaya "Hair Statements in Urban Africa" (1998), 92.

styles with that of the Peuls and Toucouleurs to create contemporary designs.²¹

My dissertation builds on these theoretical frameworks and literature, to examine hairdressing as a signifier of cultural identification and urban nationalism and how hairdressing created debates and discourses about gender and the nation Ghana from the turn of the twentieth century. It is a study of how through hairdressing people in Ghana thought about, discussed and integrated into their ethnic groups and Ghana culturally and professionally. Thus, the dissertation contributes to social history that focuses on dress to ascertain the cultural heritage of ethnic groups in southern Ghana. It is labor history that focuses on performance to discuss: first, how men and women as actors were attentive to dress in their participation in leisure activities that served as socialization and transformed into a livelihood; and second, how hairdressers and beauticians sought skill training to perform as professionals. The historical works on which I focus will help to explain the ways in which men and women in southern Ghana have shown agency in their actions and reactions to local and world events.²²

²¹ Biaya “Hair Statements in Urban Africa” (1998), 91.

²² For similar studies by historians, anthropologists and theatre persons, see Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1996); Catherine Cole, *Ghana’s Concert Party Theatre* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press); Judith Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2002); Elisha Renne, *Cloth that Does Not Die: The meaning of Cloth in Bonu Social Life* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Amal Fadlalla Hassan, *Embodying Honor: Fertility, Foreigners, and regeneration in Eastern Sudan* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007); Carol Summers, *Colonial Lessons: Africans’ Education in Southern Rhodesia, 1918-1940* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2002); Terrence Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press); Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Laura Fair, *Past Times and Politics: Culture, Community and Identity in Post-abolition Urban Zanzibar 1890-1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001).

The Organization of the Chapters

This first chapter explores the context in which scholars discuss hairdressing and the need for a study of the history of hairdressing in Ghana. The next chapter examines how interpretations of hairdressing are mediated through the artistic works and social and economic practices of Akans and Gas in rural areas that transformed into urban towns. It provides a historical account of the British colonial and anthropological findings about the meanings associated with hair and hairdressings during the 1920s although by then the significance of many of the related practices had waned and the practices were relegated as “cultural” or “customary.” During the period of nationalism and decolonization such anthropological findings were an important source of cultural preservation. They provide information about the importance of hairdressing in pre-colonial education and economies and indicate the ways in which some cultural practices and institutions have transformed into other useful categories. For example, the colonial era subdued the role of queen mothers despite the military feat of Asante queen mother Yaa Asantewaa in the Asante British war of 1900. During Nkrumah’s era of “African Nationalism,” the media presented favorable depictions of queen mothers who saw to the welfare of their societies in a steadfast manner. The media promoted school-educated queen mothers’ roles and achievements as they entered the civil service and were elected into parliament. Through the symbolic medium of hairdressing the queen mother was seen promoting several other symbols with cultural values related and relevant for everyday life in the

new nation-state Ghana.²³ Arguably, the activities of queen mothers were symbolic of the actual work that all women practices in everyday life. The chapter ends with a highlight of how by the turn of the twenty-first century, ordinary women used similar cultural memorabilia including the Fante *ntakua* headgear to participate in activities that are considered as cultural, and those that are associated with contemporary service economies.

Chapter III takes the argument on how the interpretations of hairdressing are mediated through the artistic works and social and economic practices of Akans and Gas in rural areas further to show how although transformations occurred in the significance of hairdressing in pre-colonial education and economies, persons who worked with new cultural practices such as concert party performances, scripted plays, films and schools utilized the symbolic meanings of hairdressings and gave some hairdressings new meanings that were useful for the colonial urban contexts. Hairdressing became a site for negotiating class and urban affiliation during the period of British colonization and decolonization. Hairdressing was important in identifying and categorizing people in urban areas as belonging to new and changing social groups. The presentation of hairdressings in oral narratives, plays, novels, the media and performances serve as texts with immense historical significance because they express the changing definitions of class. Through the gendered description of the dress, we as audience and readers acquire a visual understanding of the new roles that persons in the societies imagined, asserted or countered.

Chapter IV presents a biography of a certified hairdresser Elizabeth Sheppard as an example of how during the 1950s and 1960s as hairdressing remained a site for

²³ United Nations, *Fear Woman* (McGraw-Hill, 1971).

negotiating urban affiliation, first, women in Ghana worked in public institutions to imagine and assert new economic roles for young men and young women, and second, young women and relatively fewer young men transformed hairdressing from a domestic activity into a profession. Sheppard worked as the makeup artist of the public film *I Told You So* and since she served as a queen mother of her extended family, she embodies the importance of queen mothers that we discuss in Chapter II. The chapter discusses the representations of hairdressings, their significance and how this woman and the film for which she worked draw into conversation the significance of geographical location and cultural legacies of British colonization, pan-Africanism and ethnicity to reform persons as cultural citizens.

While Chapter IV provides a case study and biography of a certified hairdresser who achieved her nationalist ideals through her involvement in the arts and her role as queen mother, Chapters V and VI discuss the conditions under which from the 1950s women and men provided commercial hairdressing in Accra and achieved the status of professional hairdressers. These chapters examine the importance of school-education and opportunities for jobs in the service economy in promoting commercial and professional hairdressings. Specifically, Chapter V examines how the media brought hairdressers and beauticians into the limelight and may have contributed to many hairdressers' determination to improve their skills through professional training, participate in public events that dealt with beauty, encourage journalists and fellow beauticians to feature the hairdressing service and industrial economies and direct clients' knowledge of hairdressings and their expectations from hairdressers.

Yet, as the press reported the activities of hairdressers, it organized forums for members of the public who criticized young girls and women's fad in wigs. Conceptions of wigs surpassed in popularity other hairstyles and headgears including women's hats that were regarded as prestigious, scarves that the numerous non-literates wore and even plaits that almost all women wore in-between transforming their hair into other styles. Wigs pointed to the confluence of local practices and transnational practices in Ghana that highlight western commercial interests, global fashion trends and ideas about representations that existed among artists and women in literary professions. Ghanaians' focus on wigs contributed in raising topical themes such as beauty, education, business management and imports that the press, government officials and university dissertations on fashion and art would address over the next decades.

Chapter VI discusses how although hairdressing remains a talent that girls and women develop while socializing, older women who began practicing professional hairdressing since the 1960s when Ghanaians advocated for the "African pride" transformed hairdressing into an important vocation during the 1990s. These older women helped to organize hairdressers who are a part of the informal economy into an association that belongs to the Industrial Commercial Unit of Ghana's Trade Union Congress. The hairdressers of the association standardized the provision of hairdressing services by creating networks for members to access capital for salons. They improved upon the work related knowledge and skills of hairdressers through negotiations with the National Vocational Training Institute to make a syllabus and set examinations for commercial hairdressers to acquire certificates that indicate their

levels of proficiency. During the twenty-first century, the apprentices who acquire skill training in the salons of proficient hairdressers enroll for school-education at the classes that the association organizes. Upon graduation, the apprentices contact the association for a member hairdresser to employ them.

CHAPTER II

Hairdressing as Cultural Heritage: Celebrations and Transformations

For the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, Robert Sutherland Rattray researching on social and religious values at the new Anthropological Department at Asante Mampong was appointed Section Officer. Like twentieth century historians of African Arts who find that representations of hairdressings are depicted with verisimilitude in anthropomorphic carvings, Rattray met the work demanded in two of the sections, “Fine and Industrial Arts” and “Manufactures of the Empire,” by employing highly skilled carvers who made approximately one hundred figures.¹ These figures included *Sasabonsam* (a hairy monster), *mmoatia* (fairies), “a king, a queen mother and other officials in the *entourage* of an Ashanti Court in the olden days.” “The workers...vied with each other in making the details of the figures and their dress as accurate as possible.”² Since Rattray focused more on Asante worldview than on the Exhibition, his overview was that: “the new Anthropological Department in Ashanti may turn out to have been for the best, for it is unlikely that on any other occasion, funds would have been available upon the scale generously placed at my disposal for these researches.”³

This chapter uses Rattrays’ findings to discuss the relationship between hairdressing and the potential for members of society to be acknowledged as authentic workers and members of a jurisdiction. The chapter uses other documents

¹Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 216; on the study of hairdressing among art historians, see Roy Sieber and Frank Herreman (eds.), *Hair in African Art and Culture* (New York: Museum for African Art; Munich: Prestel, 2000).

² Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 274.

³ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 217.

and oral narratives to contextualize a longer history of the changing patterns of hairdressing as well as the significance of hairdressings and hairdressers as the Gold Coast colony and Asante re-formed into a part of southern Ghana. Through hairstyles, it is possible to discuss the behavior of Ghanaians and assess their world view. An assemblage of these hairstyles by time period as well as the age, gender, social and economic status of the wearer could explicate the process through which members of societies cherished each other.

Hair, Oral Narratives and Work

The carving of *Sasabonsam* represented a monster that was commonly believed to “inhabit parts of the dense virgin forests. It is covered with long hair, has large blood-shot eyes, long legs and feet pointing both ways. It sits on high branches of an *odum* or *onyina* [silk cotton] tree and dangles its legs with which at times it hooks the unwary hunter.” Yet, the experiences and activities of hunters and priests indicate that *Sasabonsam* provided welfare.⁴ This linkage of the long-haired and potentially good *Sasabonsam* with hunters who penetrated the dense forest is significant.⁵ Hunters were regarded as persons whose lifestyles met the extremes of social etiquette. They were commended for their bravery in societies that defined a form of masculinity for which an ordinary man who hunted an animal such as the elephant successfully kept the tail, sold the ivory and was raised by the king to the position of an *Obirimpong*.⁶ Furthermore, hunters were highly regarded as unofficial medicine-men because they learnt the usefulness of several plants within the forest.

⁴ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 27-28.

⁵ See Malcolm D. McLeod, *The Asante* (London: British Museum Publications, 1981), 39.

⁶ See Thomas McCaskie, *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an Asante Village 1850-1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

As they went deep into the forest towards the abode of the long-haired *Sasabonsam* to earn their livelihood, their hair grew into long locks that the Asante viewed as a visual signal of hunters' detachment from their civilized place of residence.

Within the forest, hunters with the help of such animate beings discovered more environmentally friendly and habitable places of residence. The hunter who chose to stay there permanently could bring loved ones to settle in the new society; continue relationships with the old society; and rather than continuing to hunt, lead the society ingeniously to sustain the transforming environments of the new and old societies. Thus, stories of origin among many societies in southern Ghana are about the experiences of hunters with some divine being, even if not that of *Sasabonsam*.

One of the important reasons why the hairy *Sasabonsam* remained fearfully powerful even in the well established nineteenth century Asante society was that *Sasabonsam* rather than the *abosom* (gods) stripped a person, in particular, a witch of his or her powers. However, it was the little folk [*mmoatia*] who trained persons as priests and medicine-men. “[M]any Ashanti medicine-men claim to have lived with the *mmoatia* and to have learned all their arts of healing from them. To serve an apprenticeship with them seems indeed to be considered a necessary qualification to the profession of *Sumankwafo* or medicine-man.”⁷ During the period of study of any priestly position, trainees learned ritual dances and their hair were not cut. In the second year of training, “the novice is given various *suman* [fetish]⁸ to wear and is

⁷ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 26.

⁸ Rattray found that *suman* had the least importance in Asante religions although the interpretation of *suman* as “fetish,” a word of Portuguese origin, fascinated European merchants. See Chapter 2 of Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959) and Chapter 4 of Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Ashanti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, Part 1” *Res*, No. 9, 1985, 5-17; William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, Part 2” *Res*, No. 13, 1987, 23-45; William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, Part 3” *Res* No. 16, 1988, 105-123.

instructed in the further taboos attached to each, but he is not yet taught how to make or energize *suman*...they are fastened to his wrists, ankles and in his hair, and he is told what are the things 'hateful' (taboo) to each."⁹ As a part of the graduation ceremony, the trainee's hair was cut, after which his priest examined his head for any bad *nkomoa* in the form of lice that may have been placed there by the *mmotia* who first apprehended him for the priestly and medical professions.¹⁰ The older priest attended as carefully to the hair of their new recruit as adults attend to the hair of a new born baby.

Hair, Fertility and Work

A new born baby's hair was cut to welcome it from the spirit world into humanity. The family then waited until the eighth day to name the baby. If a parent lost a child, subsequent children could be dedicated to an *obosom*. All such children are known as *Begyina mma* (lit. 'come and stay children'). Their hair was not cut, "and to the strands is fastened every conceivable kind of charm."¹¹ The hairdressing of such children was a visual indicator of the success of the *abosom*, parent and child for sustaining life. Women who had multiple births were honored together with their children. Since twins were regarded as special, girls were the king's potential wives and boys became his elephant-tail switchers.¹²

A girl who attained menarche performed *bragro* (nubility rites), during which a well admired older woman trained her in the expectations and practices of adult

⁹ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 43.

¹⁰ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 47.

¹¹ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 65; for pictures of *bagyina mma* by Basel Missionaries see www.bmpix.org.

¹² Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 66.

women that included work, marriage and motherhood. The spiritual significance of hair in *bragro* celebrations was similar to that of the new born baby. A major difference in its performance, however, was that the girl was accepted into humanity, already. In cases where a family anticipated a negative spiritual consequence for a girl's attainment of menarche, the girl, upon performing *bragro* transformed into a woman and was deterred socially from practicing witchcraft. Early in the morning of the day of the celebration, "the girl is shaved under the armpits and pubes, and she is decked in her best attire and adorned with many gold ornaments, both her own and others borrowed for the occasion, to make a fine show."¹³

Hairdressing was of immense importance during *bragro*. In *Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti* (1977), Peter Sarpong explains that:

Hair-cutting Ceremony—The capital that comes to the initiand as of right is the 'hair-cutting' money which her father, or in his absence, his brother, has the duty to shave her... In certain places, the girl's father's sister, who brings the money prays for protection and other blessings for her, cuts bits of her hair, and 'pays' for them with her father's money, and then orders her to be shaved. Around Kumasi, the neophyte is shaved in such a way that there is a braid of hair left on the crown of her head. The father buys this tuft of hair to save his face as it disfigures his daughter.¹⁴

As the nubile girl's hair was cut, a father's wealth sustained life and provided her with capital. During the celebration of nubility rites, an Asante princess, surrounded by women of her clan received gifts such as combs, pomade and waist beads as her

¹³ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 66.

¹⁴ Peter Sarpong, *Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1977), 27.

mates sang and danced to *bragro* songs, while waving white flags as a sign of jubilation.¹⁵

A Pageant of Political Dress

By the 1920s, Asante queen mothers were recognized for their *dansinkran* short, round and black haircut that tapers at their hairline. It is alleged, however, that during the nineteenth century, an Englishman who saw young *Ohemea* Yaa Asantewa of Ejisu dancing referred to her as the “dancing crown.”¹⁶ Probably, he thought of her status as similar to his crowned Queen Victoria and her hairstyle that could represent an *Ohemea*’s crown as the “dancing crown.” One of the difficulties in imagining how the current *dansinkran* could describe a “crown” and contribute in visualizing the hairstyle that *Ohemea* Yaa Asantewa wore when dancing is that the visual, oral and written histories discuss the feat of an older Yaa Asantewa who was sporting a low hairstyle and purposefully defending the Asante state.

Yet, this finding that Asante queen mothers had variations in hairdressings, even spectacular ones, similar to Sarpong’s explanation about the significance of the nubile Asante girl’s hairdressing, supports the view that the cutting of hair in culturally aesthetic designs, sometimes in the form of tufts, may have the oldest history among Asante people. Indeed, the representations of hairdressing in Rattray’s set of carvings indicate that an Asante queen mother’s hair used to be intricately

¹⁵ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 66.

¹⁶ This comment was made during the presentation of my proposal at the Historical Society of Ghana Annual Conference, August 12, 2006.

designed. As Rattray describes, the “hair (visible only from the back) is cut in the fashion known as *atiko pua*; this coiffure is only permitted for Queen Mothers, princesses...and the king’s wives.” The carver distinguished the queen mother’s head with her hairstyle and presented ornaments for other parts of her body. She wore beads around her neck, silver bangles on her wrist; beaded garters below each knee and *toma* beads around her waist.¹⁷

Hairdressing served as a text with immense historical significance; the Asante society did not allow the carver, as an artist, the prerogative to choose hairstyles for members who belonged to different social and political institutions. Hairdressing expressed the role of a person in society. The king in the carvings was most splendidly “dressed in one of the rich silk cloths woven in the country. Upon his right upper arm is a bangle, attached to which is an amulet; upon his right wrist is another bangle called a *barim*’ *finam* (the fearless hero)...Around his head is a chaplet of silk, with the two ends standing upwards, known as ‘the bongo’s horns.’”¹⁸ Yet, when those roles acquired mainly ceremonial relevance, practitioners could wear a variety of hairstyles for multiple purposes.¹⁹ The *afona* who served mainly ceremonial purposes by then had different hairstyles including ‘*ponko tete*’ (the horses’ mane).²⁰

Although Rattray does not show or describe the clothing that carvers provided for most of these figures, it must have had historical significance and authenticity that is similar to the hairstyles that they carved and the cloth that Asante weavers wove at

¹⁷ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), figure 275.

¹⁸ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 281.

¹⁹ See Sieber and Herreman (eds.), *Hair in African Art and Culture* (2000).

²⁰ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), figure 275.

the Exhibition. Folklore attributes the origin of the silk *kente* cloth to an Asante man who watched *ananse* (spider) spinning his web and gained the idea to weave silk thread into cloth, despite the authentic history that follows. By the 1920s, most people in Asante and the Gold Coast wore manufactured or woven cloth that was made of cotton or silk. Only hunters continued to wear the durable bark cloth produced from the cambium layer of the *kyenkyen* (*antiaris*) tree. However, for important occasions during the *Odwira* festival the *Asantehene* “discarded his rich state robes and dressed himself in this coarse fabric.”²¹ From the seventeenth century, during the reign of Oti Akenten, Ota Kraban visited Gyaman (present-day la Cote d’Ivoire) and obtained a loom, which he set up at Bonwire on a Friday, a day that weavers would come to revere and declare as free from work.²² During the early nineteenth century, in addition to weaving the *kente* cloth, Asante produced the *adinkra* cloth named after a king of Gyaman. The designs, created with wooden molds that are pressed onto plain woven cloth, may have been obtained from “amulets signs or symbols” used by Islamic worshippers further north.²³

The names of designs in these cloths are historical. They explicate rank, desires and values of the Asante people.²⁴ The *Asantehene* used to own all designs; only he used to wear the *Sika Futuru* (gold dust) *kente*, a possible signal of the wealth of his society. Some designs that he allotted to different ranks of people include *Firimpoma kente*, named after the grandmother of the first weaver, Ota Kraban. Only

²¹ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 220.

²² To understand the relationship between the Asante state and Gyaman see Kwame Arhin, *West African Traders in Ghana in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London; New York: Longman, 1979), 21-24; Women were not allowed to weave; they spun cotton into thread. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 220.

²³ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 264.

²⁴ For this section on the importance of cloth designs, see Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 236-242.

women who attained her status as queen mother of Bonwire wore this cloth. The *Asantehene* could permit other Asante kings to wear *Amanahyiamu* (the nation has gathered together) that he wore at the *Odwira* festival. After the *adinkra* cloth was introduced into Asante during the first half of the nineteenth century, *Gyawu atiko* and *Kwatakye atiko* designs represented the haircuts of Gyawu who was a sub chief of Bantoma and Kwatakye who was a war captain. Each man shaved the back of his head (*atiko*) into his hairstyle for the *Odwira* festival. Women's hairstyles were represented also. *Nkontimsefuopua* designs are tufts of hair that were fashioned as a style and worn by some attendants of the *Asantehema*.

The objective of some designs was to encourage the well-being of the public. *Nkwadwe* (all my subjects are in peace) *kente* was used to cover the *Asantehene's* hammock. *Adjoa Afwefwe* (beautiful Adjoa) *kente* was named after a beautiful woman who was born on a Monday, probably. This cloth helped Rattray to remember that Bowdich found a patterned cloth that was named after the "beautiful Adumissah" because it was her favorite. *Duafe* (wooden comb) and *Nsirewa* (cowries) *adinkra* cloths are daily necessities for achieving beauty and purchasing goods, respectively.

Rattray's findings are an important form of cultural preservation. They provide important information about hairdressing as well as practices and institutions that were transforming into cultural, political economy. Yet, it was when *Ashanti* (1923) and *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1927) were republished in 1959 that they became more readily available to Ghanaians. Equally important, these researches by Rattray were conducted during the 1920s, which historians discuss as the nadir of

race relations. Rattray worked in three sections for the Exhibition that presented the British Empire at the intersection of race, location, gender, industrial work and consumerism. He stated: “I am inclined to think that someone, who really believed that none of these [“Fine and Industrial Arts” and manufacturing] existed among our native population, had suggested that these sections should be turned over to me in the hope that I might possibly have some knowledge on the subject. I can forgive this ignorance in others for I have to confess that I hardly realized that the Gold Coast could produce much of value or interest either in the Arts or Crafts.”²⁵ He was successful in presenting a wealth of information about the Asante people at Mampong, even though the very themes with which he conducted the study had the potential to limit the ability of Asante people to convey their skills.²⁶

During the 1950s, hairstyles served as an important component of Kwame Nkrumah’s programs to showcase “African personality” as ethnic, national, regional and pan-African. Hairstyles and turbans contributed in portraying the wearers’ political affiliation, as I will discuss in the next chapter, as well as their cultural attributes that were most obvious in their languages, educational practices, economic activities and the values that they cherish. For examples the *oduku* headgear was associated with the elderly and emphasize the high status that the elderly in society are accorded; politically, the *dansinkran*, which is unisex among the Asante serves as a good representation of the contributions that queen mothers make; and the Ghanaian’s love for children was shown in cultural hairstyles such as the plaited *ntakua* headgear that is associated with a sense of mutual helpfulness and generosity.

²⁵ Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1959), 216.

²⁶ For discussions about the early anthropologists see Paulin Hountondji “Preface,” *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (Second Edition) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

Hairdressing, Cultural Practices and Social Change

By the 1920s, the spiritual significance of hair in many practices had waned. Even as the colonial regime relegated the practices of chieftaincy, priests and “outdooring” (naming and nobility rites) to custom, school education grew as the practice in which most adults preferred to invest capital to increase a child’s future social and economic success. This interpretation can be inferred, first from the fact that the only *bragro* Rattray attended is that which was delayed for an Asante princess and second, more explicitly in the findings of McCaskie’s study of the 1940s Asante Social Survey.²⁷ In the 1960s, Sarpong aimed to ensure that Asante girls who did not attend school would continue to have cultural sources of work capital and be appreciated for the knowledge that they acquired from educative cultural institutions.

During the early 1950s, as Asante, the Gold Coast, the Transvolta and the Northern territories as a common jurisdiction gained political liberalization, a writer called Ablorh advocated for an emphasis on the educational aspects of the *otofu* institution of the *Me* god that was meant to teach “sex morality in the Ga state.” After about a fortnight of seclusion and training, the young girls were “publicly declared fit for the responsibilities of womanhood” and marriage at their “outdooring.” “The candidates dressed in *aggrey* beads and gold and wearing tall straw hats dance in an open place to the tune of *otofu* songs and drumming. After several days of dancing the *otofu* girls go about thanking their donors. As they walk along, young bachelors take the opportunity of watching them and making their choice.”²⁸ It is worthy of

²⁷ See McCaskie, *Asante Identities* (2000), 174-182.

²⁸ *Daily Graphic*, February 16, 1951.

note, that like the Asante *bragro*, the main objective of the ritual was to educate young girls about the practices of adults. The fact that these young *otofu* girls wore hats rather than dressed their hair when celebrating may be a sign of acculturation due to four centuries of Atlantic trade.

Among young men, as John Parker finds: “The “freeing” of an apprentice was the occasion for a solemn ceremony, the master craftsman parading through the streets of Accra sporting the silk cloth, felt hat and umbrella presented by his acolyte.”²⁹

Ga queen mothers dressed their hair for ceremonial functions. Like most Ga women, they wore the *oduku* headgear. Yet, in January 1951, Na Afipong “confided” in the reporter of the Women’s Page of the *Daily Graphic* that: “What I did not enjoy at the outdoor function was the antiquated hair-do (the *oduku* headgear). My word, it gave me so much discomfort that I had to undo it the instant I got home.” More than forty years earlier, during the coronation of Kojo Ababio, she was enstooled queen mother of James Town, while she was a pupil at Government Girls School. Her early access to school education that had a missionary bias against artifacts and cultural practices because of their assumed religious components may have influenced her uninterested outlook towards wearing the *oduku* head gear at public functions. She was a contemporary woman with a business as a “sand and luggage contractor.” Since she was known as “Mrs. Bertha Awula Ablah Nylander,” she must have performed an Ordinance marriage introduced by the British colonial administration in 1884.

²⁹ Cited in John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000), 122.

Whether known as Na Afipong or Mrs. Nylander, her actions are indicators that she acquired a multiplicity of qualities that had become available over the pre-colonial and colonial eras. As she sewed “lovely cushion-covers for her chairs,” she embraced an interpretation of domesticity that was in accord with that of the Victorian age. And it was very much a practice in the history of the jurisdiction; due to the importance of cloth in public activities, the hammock of the *Asantehene* was covered with *Nkwadwe* (all my subjects are in peace), as stated earlier. Possibly, the democratic environment of school inculcated in her the practice of personally attending to “household chores” even while meeting the press’ expectation of public relations from a queen mother. As queen mother, her duties were the “nomination of candidates for the James Town stool...and conduct[ing] arbitrations between female subjects of the stool.”³⁰ Na Afipong respected the role of arbitration that was assigned to the cultural institution of a queen mother but was uncomfortable with the *oduku* headgear that served as one of its cultural symbols.

Although Na Afipong’s reaction towards the *oduku* was practical and may have reflected the attitude of some women who wore it, such a reaction could not allow hairdressing to express cultural nationalism. A feature story that was published a year before Na Afipong’s, during the centenary celebration of governorship by the Bannerman family was perfect for imagining the historical process of national unification.³¹

In 1850, when the Danes transferred their forts and settlements to the British, James

³⁰ *Daily Graphic*, January 5, 1951.

³¹ *Daily Graphic*, December 26, 1950.

Bannerman made history as the first Gold Coast person to become the Civil Commandant of Christiansborg and later, Lieutenant Governor of the Gold Coast. His father, James Samuel Bannerman, was a Scottish merchant and his mother, Naa Abia Lankai, was a Ga from Lante Dzawe. Each of the three marriages of James Bannerman had strategic political and historical significance. Together, these marriages depict how in spite of frequent wars, the Ga, Fante, Elmina and Asante had the potential to relate well with each other through marriage, administration and education. James Bannerman first married Princess Tsere of Anomaboe. Anomaboe was a Fante state that for the English merchants had a regional importance that was second to their main residence at Cape Coast. And it was at Anomaboe that the Fante chiefs together with Queen Victoria's representatives signed the Bond of 1844 that formally gave the English limited legal jurisdiction on the Gold Coast.³²

Bannerman's son Samuel became Commandant of Winneba. After Samuel Bannerman led the British-Asante war at Dodowa, James Bannerman married one of the Asante captives, Princess Yaa Hom Kwadu Yiadom. By then, he had married Madam Konuah of Elmina.³³

The history of the Konuah household is traced to Elmina's early mercantile economy. According to oral history, during the thirteenth century, a "distinguished hunter" called Kwaa Amankwaa, a relative of the people who would form the Asante state, migrated with his cousin Tekyi southwards to the coast, where Tekyi founded Eguafo. Amankwaa settled with Tekyi at Eguafo until:

³²See David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise and Fall of Gold Coast Nationalism 1850-1928* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

³³ *Daily Graphic*, December 26, 1950.

One Tuesday, while on his hunting trip, he heard some noise and decided to find out what it was. To his surprise he found a river nearby and out of excitement he shouted “MENYA O O” which means I’ve got it. Apparently he had been looking for source of water for his people...

A spirit from nowhere took him to a sacred grove where he was schooled in the mysteries surrounding the river and how to worship it. He was also baptised by the spirit and the title of owner of the River Benya was conferred on him. Two weeks later, Opanin [Elder] Amankwa returned to his people at Eguafo and told them what had happened. Subsequently some of the people moved to the place now known as Elmina.³⁴

The columnist of the *Sunday Mirror* related the people of Elmina with their Fante neighbors by using a word such as “Menya,” although the actual name of the river, Benya, may provide more historical accord. According to Sylvanus Wartemberg (1959), Amankwaa exclaimed in Wassaw “*Be enya*” (‘I have found or got’) when he discovered fertile vegetation surrounding a stream that he named “*Anomee*,” which means that despite the frequent usage of the stream it did not dwindle. Narratives describe *Anomee* as the present lagoon that meets the sea but historians argue that Amankwaa must have found a creek that was an estuary of Rivers Kakom (or Surowi) and served as a boundary of Elmina and Cape Coast. Amankwaa’s group, who became the *Anomansfo* (lit. those with ‘inexhaustible water supply’) settled at present Bantoma, which is a distance of about eight miles west of the present Cape Coast Castle and they worshiped *Benya* the tutelary deity of the stream.³⁵

In 1482, after a decade of coastal trade between the Anomansfo and the

³⁴ *Sunday Mirror*, July 2, 1967.

³⁵ Sylvanus Wartemberg, *Sao Jorge D’ El Mina, Premier West African European Settlement: Its Traditions and Customs* (1959), 15-17.

Portuguese, Diego D’Azambuja led the Portuguese to seek King Kwamena Ansah’s permission for a place to settle. Each party dressed carefully for the meeting and took note of the other’s outfit. King Kwamena Ansah wore gold ornaments in his beard and on other parts of his body. The result of the meeting is the St Georges Castle, where they ensured the safe storage of their goods, employed the skilled artisans of Elmina and worshipped as Catholics.³⁶ The family that led the people of Elmina to convert to the Catholic faith and worship with the Portuguese under a tree—“*kon dua ase som fo no*”—and subsequently, in the St. Georges Castle are called Conduah (also Konuah).

³⁶ Albert Ellis, *A History of the Gold Coast of West Africa* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 19; see Christopher DeCorse, *An Archeology of Elmina: Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast, 1400-1900* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); and Joseph Adjaye, *Boundaries of Self and Other in Ghanaian Popular Culture* (Westport Conn: Praegar, 2004).



Figure 2.1: The St Georges Castle, Elmina ³⁷

³⁷ Photographed by the author, July 2006.

The early merchants and travelers present invaluable information about gender, class and race relations in Elmina. In 1602, for example, the Dutch trader Pieter de Marees stated that most of the wealthy women who had European fathers had a simple, short hairstyle that was devoid of ornamentation but like other wealthy Elmina women, they wore a piece of cloth wrapped as a skirt, and used another piece of cloth to cover their bust and one shoulder. They were accompanied on their daily public activities by women slaves who had elaborate coiffures and wore precious ornaments of gold and *aggrey* beads.³⁸ The people of Elmina were long established in their cultural practices. Since men and women displayed their status and wealth through their hairstyles and ornaments, the mixed race women were distinguished by the simplicity of their dress. As with the simple *dansinkran* of Asante queen mothers, the practices of this group of women of Elmina indicate that art historian Sieber's argument that in Africa, "high status was often reflected, indeed expressed, in the styles of complex coiffures" is important but needs to be contextualized by historians.³⁹

Likewise, the display of wealth by dressing one's slaves was new, probably. Throughout this mercantile era (1471-1850), the people of Elmina and other coastal societies bought *aggrey* beads from the Portuguese, the Dutch and other European merchants in exchange for gold so consistently and at such a high price that *aggrey* beads gained the name "trade beads" and served as a form of currency. European

³⁸ Pieter de Marees, *A Description and Historical Account of the Kingdom of Guinea* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987).

³⁹ Sieber and Herreman (eds.), *Hair in African Art and Culture* (2000).

merchants supplied slaves from Benin for Akan gold miners in the interior, a trend that the Atlantic trade changed. As the worth of Asante trade with Europeans increased, the Asante developed their good relations with Elmina and delegated soldiers to move to the coast to settle at Bantoma and contribute to protect the Asante traders and the Elmina townspeople who were involved in the Atlantic trade.⁴⁰ However, during the mid-nineteenth century, when James Bannerman was made Governor of the Gold Coast, the Danes and then the British abolished trade in slaves along the Gold Coast and since only the British remained to ban slavery and colonize the territory, they received the Danish Christiansborg castle as a gift and bought the Dutch Elmina castle.

By then the women of Elmina and their coastal neighbors had a wide variety of hairdressings and clothing. Princesses of Elmina went to the Konuah palace to be dressed for marriage. They looked in the Konuah mirror as Konuah women created for them the cultural *ntakua* headgear that enhanced their appearance. They wore expensive woven cloth or printed cloth and gold and beads depicted in the mural of the leaders of the Conduah house which in 2006, was visited by tourists led by officers from the tourist board.

In John Parker's book, *Making the Town* (2000), there is a picture of wealthy Ga women wearing imported cloth and elaborate hairdressing.⁴¹ The Fante of Cape Coast and the Ga of Accra have practices that are similar to the people of Elmina, wealthy and fashionable women wore a bustle beneath their cloth. On Sundays,

⁴⁰ de Marees, *A Description and Historical Account* (1987).

⁴¹ John Parker, *Making the Town* (2000), 30 and 162.

educated women were noticed for their European forms of dress. During the next decade, King Ghartey of Winneba introduced the *kabasroto* (“cover shoulder cloth” or sewn cloth) to his household for daily use. Since the women in the Gold Coast preferred to sew their own clothes, they could subtly influence the choice of material that was used in sewing clothes, the design of the clothes and the need to wear new designs each season.⁴²

A common hairstyle that prevailed among young Fante women served as the cultural hairstyle of those categorized as youth. The aesthetic ideal was to part the hair symmetrically and braid as two or three threaded plaits.⁴³ Young women with hair that was too short to be held as two or three threaded plaits divided each of the segments further for daily wear.⁴⁴ They added extensions of human hair, or plant fiber and wigs then plaited it with a lot of thread for celebrations. With the introduction of clothing and dressmaking, new forms of the *ntakua* hairdressing became popular. During the twentieth century, fewer youth wore the plaited hairstyle for cultural events. Increasingly those who dressed culturally wore the wiglike *ntakua* headgear. The wiglike *ntakua* design was uniform, however, its smooth surface (unlike the plaited *ntakua*) allowed for a diversity of ornamentation that communicated the occasion to which it was worn, the status of the wearer as well as the taste of both the hairdresser and the wearer. Girls and women wore gold for most cultural occasions such as the “outdooing” of new born babies, the initiation of nubile young women into the adult Elmina society and for the annual *Bakatue*

⁴² Cecilia Buckle, “Fashion and the Ghanaian Woman” (BA Thesis, University of Science and Technology, 1976).

⁴³ Sieber and Herreman (eds.), *Hair in African Art and Culture* (2000) 12-13.

⁴⁴ www.bpmx.org

(opening of the lagoon) festival.

Redefining Cultural Hairdressing as a Pageantry of Cultural Heritage and Work

The pomp and pageantry of festivals make visible the political, religious, social and economic dimensions of most societies. During the Elmina *Bakatue* festival, the participants ensure that their priests who wear hats made of bulrush and holly leaves request for the protection of the society in the coming year, even as their political leaders who wear bands and headgears that are decorated with gold and other minerals encourage them to celebrate the wealth of the current year. On the Monday night before the *Bakatue*, as participants keep vigil at the shrine of the Benya lagoon, they restate their allegiance to their pantheon of deities and the constitution of the society and listen to whatever messages that the priest or priestess may have for them.⁴⁵

On the next day, the society attended to the important economic dimension of the *Bakatue* festival. The royal entourage and the society as a whole assembled along the Benya lagoon, at Tutuano, for the *Bakatue* that opens the lagoon for a new fishing year. As a coastal society with one of the most convenient natural ports that first attracted European merchants, most members of the society worked in the fishing business. Furthermore, the creativity found among participants of festivals is in

⁴⁵ Irene Odotei, "Festivals in Ghana," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, No 6, 2002.

accord with the commercial needs of companies. As Irene Odotei finds about the past centuries: “The interest shown by European traders in the festival as advertisement for their goods, mainly drinks, and the tourist attraction can be compared with the tourist concerns of the commercial companies, tourists and politicians of today.”⁴⁶

Indeed, by 1990, an important source of funding for festivals was the brewery and distillery industries that compete to sponsor public events in order for their products to be the only goods in their category to be sold there. At Elmina, they sought permission from the *Omanhene* to sponsor the festival—the *Bakatue* and subsequent *durbar*.

⁴⁶ Odotei, “Festivals in Ghana,” (2002), 23.



Figure 2.2: A chief wears a silver headband with matching neck and his queen mother wears the ntakua headgear for the Elmina *Bakatue* festival in 2006



Figure 2.3: Priests of Elmina wearing hats made of bulrush and decorated with holly leaves lead the *Omanhene*'s palanquin.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Photographed by the author, July 2006.



Figure 2.4: *Omanhene* distinguished by his hat made of bulrush and decorated with holly leaves sits in his palanquin, *Oye Adom* (“it is grace”).

For the *Bakatue* and durbar the eminence of political leaders is noticed in their dress and procession. As shown in Figure 2.3, the priests who walk alongside the entourage and in front of the *Omanhene* are wrapped in a toga of a whitish cloth and wear a headgear that comprises the bulrush and holly leaves that mark one of the geographical boundaries of the society.

The *akyeame* (cultural spokespersons) who hold their staff of office, are followed by the chiefs, each of whom is surrounded by a queen mother and other royal persons. The most important chiefs wear headbands and are carried in palanquins at the back of the procession, out of which as seen in Figure 2.4 the *Omanhene* distinguished by his hat made of bulrush and decorated with holly leaves. The common hairstyle that the women of the royal entourage wear is the *ntakua* headgear that usually has gold or silver ornaments.

By the 1990s, the ordinary women of Elmina had sought Nana Konuah IV's permission to be recognized as a group of women who wore the *ntakua* headgear at social gatherings. As a social group, these women could participate directly in the *Bakatue* festival in a manner similar to other recognized categories of persons in the society, instead of remaining individual spectators who sat or stood along the banks of the lagoon and at the durbar. In 1999, Paa Kwesi Ndoum, a native of Elmina and the highest government official (he was the minister of tourism, and then became the area's Member of Parliament and a presidential aspirant) became the sponsor of another group of women who wore the *ntakua* headgear at social gatherings. The provider and most of the women resided at Bantoma. During the *Bakatue* festival,

these two groups of women of Elmina wore the *ntakua* hairdressings to clap and sing while sitting in two large canoes. As they glided along the Benya lagoon, each canoe halted at the extreme ends of the crowd, either seaward or at Bantoma for: the men of *asafo* companies to compete in boat racing; the invited dignitaries assembled at Tutuano to declare the strategies they planned to contribute in developing Elmina township and the nation; and the casting of the *Omanhene*'s net into the Benya lagoon to declare the lagoon open and begin a new year. On Saturday, both groups of women wearing the *ntakua* headgear sang and danced during the cultural parade to Compass, beside the St Georges Castle and the original Elmina town, for a durbar at which a high ranking government official was guest of honor. As these groups of women who wore the *ntakua* headgear provided entertainment and information for their society, they understood better the process through which information was garnered, disseminated and implemented in their town and nation.

By then, companies looked upon the *ntakua* headgear as an icon of Elmina's cultural heritage and the assemblage of dress as a potent medium for advertising products. These commercial enterprises advertised the events together with their products by displaying banners and posters in the town, broadcasting on radio and television, publishing in the press and having their employees wear t-shirts at the events. Furthermore, since companies had to consult the chief for approval before sponsoring an event at Elmina, they got to know about other cultural institutions and cultural organizations in the town that could contribute in making their business ventures successful. While the second group, known as the Atlantic Group looked to their Member of Parliament for sponsorship to participate in



Figure 2.5: During the 2006 Bakatue festival, as the Chief's Group of *ntakua* hairdressers sail in this yellow boat they sing to entertain the crowd at the bank of the lagoon.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Photographed by the author, July 2006.



Figure 2.6: The Atlantic Group of *ntakua* hairdressers, who have head gears that are threaded like the turn of the twentieth century Fante *bolo* style sing and clap to entertain as they sail past the crowd on land and in stationary boats.

the festival, companies employed the first group of *ntakua* headgear wearers to wear company t-shirts at most commercial events and sit in canoes that had the company's logo at the *Bakatue*, as shown in Figure 2.5.

Companies recognized the first group of women who wore the *ntakua* headgears as presenters of a cultural heritage of dress and perceptions of beauty, which they could combine agreeably with old or recent forms of clothing. As the group's business involvement with companies grew in importance, the frequent members could count on participating in public events as for their major source of income.

Yet, as the first group of *ntakua* headgear wearers sought to have direct consultation with the sponsoring companies for whom it worked, the members of the group experienced hindrances because they originated from the chief's institution, officially. Indeed, both groups of *ntakua* headgear wearers had formed through the wherewithal of political institutions, chieftaincy or parliamentary, that had difficulty changing the general male bias in governance.

This was not the case for the provider of the *ntakua* headgears for the first group of *ntakua* headgear wearers. Since the provision of *ntakua* headgears is culturally ascribed, women from families that are recognized to provide cultural *ntakua* headgears and who had shown an interest to learn the techniques of its provision worked as *ntakua* headgear providers in Elmina. Sponsoring companies that met with the chief recognized the provider of *ntakua* headgears as a professional

who they needed to negotiate with because she belonged to a distinct cultural institution. While the grease used in composing the *ntakua* headgear made the headgear delicate, the other components such as the thread called *abyssynia* (used in embroidering clothes), the rings of cloth and the plant fiber or mattress matting were durable. Indeed, the more often that the same band of thread is used in creating the *ntakua* headgear, the more the individual threads stick closely to each other and the more glossy the *ntakua* headgear appears. As the wearers of the *ntakua* headgear use the same materials to create their *ntakua* headgears, the headgear appears more beautiful and they save on the cost of dressing their heads for events. Thus, even though the provider of the headgears could gain more profit by selling the materials more frequently, she preferred that wearers use the same materials consistently for the sake of both the provider's and the wearers' professional growth.

During the period of decolonization and nationalism, as the Gold Coast colony and Asante re-formed into a part of southern Ghana, ideas about hairdressings were merged with other ideas and together were considered as artifacts that display Ghana's cultural heritage and commodify cultural habits to provide welfare for participants, and leisure for all who gather for the event. As a part of cultural nationalism, hairstyles served as an important component of President Kwame Nkrumah's programs to showcase the "African personality" as ethnic, national, regional and pan African. At the turn of the twenty-first century, some of these societies are considered World Heritage sites. One of the oldest heritage sites in the tropical world is the Elmina castle (1482) that the Portuguese constructed to facilitate their Atlantic sea trade. Most recently, the women of Elmina who formed social

groups utilize the *ntakua* headgear as their cultural artifacts to celebrate the annual *Bakatue* harvest, gender based ceremonies of nubility rites, weddings and child naming and since they wear the *ntakua* headgears to advertise the products of companies that come to Elmina, these women are a part of Ghana's service economy.

Chapter III Hairdressing, Creative Works, Education and the Media

This chapter discusses how during the twentieth century, people in the Gold Coast participated in various art forms including the pre-colonial genre of folk narratives, the twentieth century novelties of creative writing, theatrical performances and film as well as public events many of which attracted the attention of the media.¹ For all these practices, dress and makeup including hairdressing served as important tools for leisure, dissemination of information, social critique, education and political propaganda.² During the first half of the century, the providers of these art forms studied how people in the colony's hairdressings including headgears, scarves and hats contributed to the dissemination of information about social and political positions. The visibility of these hairdressings and headgears helped to establish the multiple identities that Africans assumed. Africans as subjects of the British Empire performed different roles on stage, in films, in creative writing and in life. The increased access to different levels of formal education but limited access to commensurate work and political administrative positions encouraged Africans to use visual transformations in dress to seek a national identity that they defined within the context of the empire, initially, and the African geographical landscape eventually. The 1950s and 1960s were a time of convergence for nationalists and the fulfillments of their ideals as Ghanaians, Africans and Africanists. People who belonged to these

¹ For important commentary on the genres, see Steve J Salm and Toyin Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), 59-82, and 161-162.

² For books about the history of leisure in Africa, see Terence Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); and Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

different categories used hairdressing to document and provide narratives of the different character traits of persons that they met or imagined.

Folk Narratives as a Leisure Activity

Storytelling was a traditional form of leisure par excellence for which the hairdressings of the audience, the narrator and the characters communicate about people's roles in the society, traits and how they dressed for work and leisure.³ As Emmanuel Akyeampong and Charles Ambler find, among the Akans “the etymology of *afuofi* (leisure) may be linked to *afuom* (farm), and *afuofi* could be a derivative of *ofiri afuom* (“a return from farm”), demarcating the closure of work and the commencement of leisure.”⁴ In the evenings, after the close of work and a meal, members of neighboring households bathed and exchanged their work dress for more comely house dresses. Young girls, women, young boys and men together demarcated work and leisure. As some women changed their headscarves, other women and girls modified the styles of their plaits, braids, short hair or long hair. Likewise, young boys and men combed their hair into fashionable styles. They assembled in their compounds, next to the light and warmth of a wood fire for folktales, referred to as *anansesem* (spider stories).

Anansesem blended narration, dialogue and acting, music, singing and dancing, which made the art of storytelling a very entertaining performance in most societies. A skilled narrator who controlled the mood of the audience depicted his or

³ For a classic example of a session of storytelling among the Ga during the 1740s, see Ludewig Ferdinand Romer, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea* (1760) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴ Emmanuel Akyeampong and Charles Ambler, “Leisure in African History: An Introduction,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, No.1 (2002), 7.

her own role of an old woman by dressing with a headscarf, a blouse and a cloth wrapped around the lower part of the body as a skirt. To depict an old man, the narrator draped a cloth over his or her shoulders, wrapped as a toga, artistically. The narrator used voice inflection and presented a visual account of the dress of each character to aid the audience to interpret and analyze the allegorical characters and the moral of the stories. The protagonist, *ananse* (spider) spoke with a nasal tone and had a rich crop of hair but went bald when punished. Heroines and heroes had a beauty that was manifest in their dress, while giants and demons were ugly and fearful. When narrators told entertaining stories about the long haired monster *Sasabonsam* (see Chapter II), for example, some of their aims were to deter children from wandering away from their civilized environments, express the skills of hunters, educate persons about the medicinal qualities of plants and identify the traits of animals. Narrators together with listeners developed a good sense of humor and an excellent command of the symbolisms and colloquial compositions of the language of narration. They learnt to be witty and wise. Together with the audience, they made use of the *mmoguo*, interlude to serve as an intermission that led to new scenes, sustained the suspense in the plot and allowed young people to practice the art of storytelling.⁵ The persona of the narrator and the stories were forms of art and performance that aided communication.

At the turn of the twentieth century, as some of these societies urbanized, school-educated persons of the Gold Coast and anthropologist Robert Sutherland

⁵ Adelaide Amegatcher, "The Concert Parties: A Manifestation of Popular Drama in Ghana" (MA Thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1968), 25-26.

Rattray published some of these folk narratives.⁶

Hairdressing, Urbanization and a Play as Social Commentary

By then, in the urban areas of the Gold Coast the colonial administration, professionals and entrepreneurs expanded the infrastructure, provided salaried employment for literate men as clerks and contributed in making urban lifestyles rather complex. As John Parker (2000) explains:

Those members of the established elite who were excluded on racial grounds from official posts began to move into new and more lucrative professions, most notably, law. At the same time, the growing overall demand for literate auxiliaries in the private and public sectors offered employment and status opportunities for a new generation of young men—and some women. The result was a growing and increasingly differentiated, Western-educated, urban elite. The most visible signifier of social change was clothing, the wearing of imported or locally tailored European-style garments setting the so-called “frock” or “frock coat” class apart from the traditionalist “cloth portion” of town. Although all literates were popularly referred to as “scholars,” the social identity of the younger generation began to diverge from that of the old merchant elite.⁷

These salaried workers and professionals wore their new forms of clothing to new leisure activities including social clubs. From 1913, the members of the Cosmopolitan Club in Cape Coast performed Kobina Sekyi’s play *The Blinkards* (1915) which is written in both English and Fante and satirizes the old and new social lifestyles of people in urban Cape Coast.⁸

⁶ See J. P. Brown, *Gold Coast and Asiante Reader* (London: 1929); Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folktales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930).

⁷ John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000), 136.

⁸ Kobina Sekyi, *The Blinkards*, (London: Heinemann Educational, 1974); also see Kofi Baku, “Intellectual in Nationalist Politics: The Contribution of Kobina Sekyi to the Evolution of Ghanaian National Consciousness” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Sussex, 1987). For a study of the

Sekyi used dress as a medium of material culture to criticize some members of his Cape Coast society as anglophile. The play champions the important but neglected role that Akan women played during pre-colonial times and advocates a form of education that is based on worthy African cultural practices and enables educated persons to interpret new laws such as the Marriage Ordinance of 1884.⁹

According to the story, Mr. Okadu the antihero intentionally slips, “raises his hat with a flourish” and successfully gains the attention and infatuation of Miss Tsiba the beautiful but uninspiring heroine. Miss Tsiba experiences a number of difficulties. When she is the bride for two marriage ceremonies with two different men, the police arrest her for committing bigamy, allegedly. The court judges her not guilty because even though she and Okadu had their wedding in a church, Okadu did not marry her. He never presented to her family the required marriage prestations and there were no formal witnesses to attest to the marriage.¹⁰

The characters of the play belong to a myriad of categories or social classes, which could be fluid. While some characters can move to other social classes, those members who seem to be stuck in one social class can use their dress to promote themselves within their class. Among the male subjects, a visual and hierarchical analysis of *The Blinkard* by age showed that an old man who was not literate in English put on cloth and belonged sartorially to the class of *fura tam* (wear cloth). Yet, the wealth of a rich man who could not speak English enabled him and his child

importance of dress in southern Africa, see John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, “Fashioning the Colonial Subject” in *Of Revelation and Revolution* Volume Two (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 218-273.

⁹ “Education with Particular Reference to a West African University,” cited by J. Ayo Langley in the “Introduction” of Sekyi, *The Blinkards* (1974), 8.

¹⁰ Sekyi, *The Blinkards*, (1974), 139, 143.

to move into a more respectable class. The non-literate Mr. Tsiba who reaps the riches of the recent cocoa boom wears a hat and a suit to his daughter's ordinance marriage that is instituted by the English. The confidence that he gains through his money may not be very different from that which school-educated men acquire by joining the Cosmopolitan Club.

The members of the Cosmopolitan Club who have a treatise about "How to be a Gentleman," agree that "without tailors and hatters and shoemakers, gentlemen, we are nothing" and, therefore, we imagine them wearing "frock coats, [and,] carrying their silk hats" to the wedding. Yet, they show some sensitivity to their society by amending their previous decision that (1) "No member must greet people in native dress" (*efuratamfu*) and (2) "No member must talk the native language in the daytime," with the aim that they can greet women *efuratamfu* and provide Fante translations for those who do not speak English.¹¹ Likewise the prestige that the members of the Cosmopolitan Club acquire from their school-education which manifests in sartorial adornments is not different from how the influential state of Christianity enables the parson for the wedding to move about Cape Coast holding a hat and an umbrella.

However, the members of the Cosmopolitan Club contrast with other characters such as Mr. Brofusem and Lawyer Onyimdzi. Brofusem who once traveled to England endures his wife's attempts to make him anglophile. Interestingly, his manservant Nyamekye who is really unable to master the art of speaking English enters Brofusem's drawing room wearing a straw hat, an old frock coat, white trousers and brown boots. Nyamekye smokes a cigar and tries to kiss

¹¹ Sekyi, *The Blinkards* (1974), 91, 95.

Mrs. Brofusem because he is intoxicated with both alcohol and her supposedly English mannerisms. The character who does not get intoxicated with these new mannerisms and new material culture is Onyimdzi—the autobiographical character in the play.

The logic is that men with higher education would choose not to put on cloth. Yet, in real life, as Sekyi's son alleged: "Except in the cool month of August, or in the higher courts of law he [Sekyi] wore his native togas at all times whether appearing at a meeting of the Paramount Chiefs council (of which he was a member), whether appearing before the lower courts (where his garb is said to have irritated some magistrates) or relaxing at home to the music of Coleridge-Taylor or Richard Wagner on old seventy-eights."¹² Similarly, in *The Blinkards*, when lawyer Onyimdzi (lit. "learned one") is out of the courts he removes his work clothes. When he wears "native garb" and sandals to a garden party, he must respond to the question: "Why do you wear native dress?" asked by irritated, young "frock ladies."¹³

It is obvious that female characters' felt strongly that dress was important in ascribing social status. Most of the older women who lacked school-education wore cloth and inhabited the category of *efuratamfo*. However, as Parker finds, in Accra, "changes in urban culture began to erode the sharp distinction in "Victorian Accra" between the "cloth portion of society on the one hand and the "frock" and "frock coat portion" on the other."¹⁴ In *The Blinkards*, young, *efuratamfu* women appropriated the clothes and mannerisms that were associated with "Frock ladies"—women who had acquired some school-education and sought English mannerisms. Esi the

¹²Sekyi, *The Blinkards*, (1974), x.

¹³ Sekyi, *The Blinkards*, (1974), 53.

¹⁴ Parker, *Making the Town* (2000), 203.

“fashionable” *tamfura-nyi* wore “elaborate costume, face with white chalk, holding a parasole, and carrying a hand-bag.” And, the 1st Young Woman exclaimed:

“Wonders never cease. “Cloth ladies” now-a-days sew their cloth like the skirts of “frock ladies.” They wear petticoats, chemises, stockings and shoes!”¹⁵ The young, *efuratamfu* women dressed very creatively by employing the cloths for different designs some of which were frock designs associated with “frock ladies.” Since these young, *efuratamfu* women ensured variations in their dresses they blurred the social line between the young, *efuratamfu* women and the “frock ladies.”

As the young, *efuratamfu* women claimed dress to express their social status, young women who considered themselves “frock ladies” flocked around Mrs. Brofusem who once traveled to England. Tsiba is one young “frock lady” whose family’s financial support enables her to study supposedly English mannerisms with Brofusem as her tutor. Tsiba’s father believes that Tsiba has many of the natural beauty qualities of his mother such as a “fine black skin—velvet black.” In addition, he expects Brofusem to inculcate in Tsiba the beautiful qualities of the English. Instead, since Tsiba does not gain education about national institutions and cultural practices, Brofusem taught Tsiba to dress attractively, only.

Readers would find Brofusem both amusing and irritating when she says “[Lawyer Onyimdzi could not] resist my new green umbrella, my new ten-guinea hat, and my new patent boots with white top.”¹⁶ It is an irony, then, that her initially frivolous chitchat with the lawyer turns into a conversation that has import for school-educated young women:

¹⁵Sekyi, *The Blinkards*, (1974), 109.

¹⁶ *The Blinkards*, (1974), 129.

Mrs. Brofusem: You must help us when we start to make concerts and bazaars, in order to collecting money to build a Pier Pavilion here. Of course the voices of our girls want training; but that is matter of time. I think we can manage to get some girls to serve as waitresses in cap and apron and collar and cuffs. The girls in the place have nothing to do to keep them out of mischief when they left school.

Mr. Onyimdzi: I used to wonder why some of them did not go in for typing.¹⁷

Mrs. Brofusem: I think typing is good: it would be like England. Then we know where the[y] get the money to buy all the pretty clothes they wear.

This discussion in *The Blinkards* about the need for “frock ladies” to acquire work related education and the more general discussions about the youths’ construction of beauty and their attractions to hats and hairdressing could be discussed further, first, through James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey’s ideas and achievements that relate with dressing the head and coeducation, and second, through Mabel Dove, a secretary who commented on women’s hairdressings as she worked as a journalist.

Hairdressing, James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey and Coeducation

James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey (1875-1928) was a Fante who acquired higher education in America and advocated for the provision of practical education in Africa. Aggrey’s mother was an Akan princess, his favorite sister Abonyiwa was “one of the first in Cape Coast to give up the waist-cloth and to take on the loose blouse” that Christian missionaries advocated¹⁸ and his father Kodwo Kwegyir was a

¹⁷ *The Blinkards*, (1974), 39

¹⁸ Edwin W. Smith, *Aggrey of Africa: A Study in Black and White* (9th edition) (London: Student

gold-taker. Until the nineteenth century, gold-takers were recognized as professionals who measured gold dust for transactions. They walked about with many servants and umbrellas and were distinguished by:

their heads entirely shaved, with the exception of a small patch a little on one side, from which hung a very handsome gold ornament, they had no European beads on, but round their wrists were bracelets of aggrey beads, mixed with strings charmed by the fetish man, or priest; also heavy gold manilas in the form of snakes, round each ankle was a string of gold ornaments, made in the shape of little bells, stools, musical instruments, weapons, etc.¹⁹

There is no record that Aggrey's father dressed in this manner of gold-takers. He is remembered as an *okyeame* (chief's spokesperson) who was very witty and eloquent—qualities that Aggrey possessed.²⁰

Aggrey honed in on his eloquence while studying and living in the United States of America. As his understanding of the importance of race in the lives of Americans grew, he remembered his childhood and youth in the Gold Coast. He remembered how both young men and young women attached importance to young women's long hair and stated that:

I have often been asked what is the Native African's idea about the colour of a man's skin—what shade is his preference? I cannot say exactly whether he has any particular preference, but from philological as well as sociological reasons I affirm that he prefers the type—the most pronounced shade in each type. With the light brown he admires the perfect light brown without any shadings, with the brown the deepest of that shade, with the red the deep red, not light red, with the white, the purest white, and with the so-called black, the

Christian Movement Press, 1932), 47.

¹⁹ Mrs. Lee, *The African Wanderers: or, the Adventures of Carlos Antonio* (London, 1874), cited in Edith Gott, "Precious Beads and Sacred Gold: Trade, Transformation, and the Unifying Principle of Generative Nurturance in the Arts of Southern Ghana" (Ph.D. Indiana University, 2002), 48.

²⁰ Smith, *Aggrey of Africa* (1932), 22-25.

blackest—*dukudukuduku*. And observation and history as well as tradition have recorded some special leanings towards the blackest. I remember now when but a youth, how I used to hear my elder brothers and their friends go into ecstasies over a young woman in the bloom of feminine beauty—very dark in complexion of the jet black kind, harmony of shape, long black hair and dark winning captivating eyes, pearly teeth—to them and to me her step was music and her voice was song.²¹

Furthermore, when Aggrey was a schoolchild at the Cape Coast Methodist School he boarded with the missionary David Kemp and, one day, watched as Mrs. Kemp “ordered” her husband to return home and don his sun-helmet.²² This experience, together with a close relationship that Aggrey had with his sister, may have contributed to his favorable opinion about gender relations such as the need for coeducation for school children as well as women’s role in decision making. He knew that people who communicate about dress reveal their power relations and he acquired an interest in using clothing to communicate.

During the 1890s Aggrey had taught at his old school and served as the secretary of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society.²³ His very public activities made others notice his cleanliness, personal care and dress. Aggrey remembered that: “I was so popular that if I wore my hat over my right brow all the young men wore theirs in the same way. I did not know then that I knew nothing. From the Gold Coast I went to America, where I obtained two doctorates. Then I knew that I knew nothing.”²⁴

Yet arguably, while dress remained important to Aggrey even after his experience in America, his older age affected his assessment of dress and may have

²¹ Smith, *Aggrey of Africa* (1932), 85.

²² Smith, *Aggrey of Africa* (1932).

²³ Smith, *Aggrey of Africa* (1932), 27.

²⁴ Smith, *Aggrey of Africa* (1932), 44.

contributed to his memory of his youth and young people's interest in the wearing of hats as a fad that had little commendation. Indications are that old men who wore hats were not stereotyped. Usually, they were men who had made financial and other social achievements.

During the 1920s when an older Aggrey returned to the Gold Coast, his dress style served as a protest against the intense sartorial interests of some urban people. The young training college students that he taught the history of the Akan people nicknamed him "Dr. Khaki," in response.²⁵ By then Aggrey, like the two other founders of Achimota School—the Governor Gordon Guggisberg and the educationist Alexander "Alek" Frazer—had succeeded in making Achimota School the first public, coeducational, boarding institution. These leaders of Achimota promoted the best in school-education and African cultural practices by making students learn courses as well as hobbies that emphasize technical education and the skills for providing health, industrial services and welfare in neighboring villages as well as in the students' societies.²⁶ Courses at the training college level included the languages in the Gold Coast—Ewe, Ga, Fante and Twi—Agriculture, Music, Art, Geography, History and Folklore.²⁷ From 1927, students participated in hobbies such as haircutting and racquet repairing for one term; tailoring, cobbling and basketry for a year; and woodwork, bookbinding, printing, weaving, art and music for two years. These hobbies that students developed supplemented their academic work and served as their leisure time pursuits.

²⁵ Smith, *Aggrey of Africa* (1932), 11.

²⁶ See Smith, *Aggrey of Africa* (1932), 32-34, Francis Agbodeka, *A History of the University of Ghana: A Half Century of Higher Education (1948-1998)* (Woeli Publishing Services, 1998), 169; Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana* (1963).

²⁷ Smith, *Aggrey of Africa* (1932), 41.

By then, it was common for boys who were in school and school-educated men to have short hair, which they parted to the side and called “aboy.” Some girls who were in school and school-educated women had this style too, although women tended to grow their hair longer as a visual symbol of their femininity and they braided or combed their hair into the styles that were in vogue.

Hairdressing, Mabel Dove and the Media across the Atlantic World

In January 1935, Mabel Dove who is recognized as the first woman journalist used the pseudonym Marjorie Mensah for the “Women’s Corner” column of *The Times of West Africa* to comment on the hairdressings of some of the training college students of Achimota School. By then students at all levels were making remarkable achievements in the Gold Coast colony and their graduates in the larger British Empire did likewise. Dove chastised those students that she saw “with hair cut into a fantastic shape; powdered face; adorned in a fancy cloth with a saucy hair-band just fringing the forehead full of wild suggestions and with a pair of gaudy slippers got up in the “latest” of a dangerous and objectionable manner.” She argued that: “A girl whether in or out of the College should have about her a certain atmosphere that should command respect wherever she goes...all girls attending institutions or colleges should refrain from certain indulgence and be just what they are—schoolgirls in the correct sense of the word. There is no harm in bobbing the hair or wearing the cloth. It all depends upon how these things are done.”²⁸

Evidently, school-education brought a new kind of disciplining tactics that

²⁸ *The Times of West Africa*, January 5, 1935; also see Lynne M. Thomas, “The Modern Girl in Africa: A Preliminary Sketch,” presented to African History Group of the University of Michigan, winter term 2003.

reordered gendered relations. Dove's reaction was to caution these students about their comportment and demand that they use their bodily images to project respectability. She contrasted the visual messages that emanated from the dress, make-up and manner of some students who were on vacation with the actual skill training that they acquired and with the work that the graduates practiced which made Achimota College "so famous an institution." Her acknowledgement of these girls' and young women's growing interest in dress such as the bob and the sewn cloth is an important sign that she was intuitive about women's comportment and fashions that would stand the test of time in the Gold Coast. She would react in a similar, yet more mature, manner during the 1960s when women turned to wigs as fashion statements, (see Chapter V).

For now, it is important that we study the hairstyles that were popular during Dove's childhood and formative years. We would then study the jobs that were available for the new social group of school-educated young women, including Dove, who were equipped with the skills for professional jobs.

Dove's childhood environment and personal experience of not working immediately after school must have influenced her worry about the potential visual impact of students' hairdressings, which could have an impact on professional women. She considered that influential members of the public would not understand the direct economic worth of schooling or they would remain staid in their ideas about women's role in society. Dove was born in 1905,²⁹ the year that short hair cuts

²⁹LaRay Denzer, "Gender and Decolonization: A Study of Three women in West African Public Life" in J. F. A. Ajayi and J. D. Y. Peel, eds. *People and Empires in African History: Essays in Memory of Michael Crowder* (London: Longman, 1992), 219.

first became popular in Western Europe and in the United States of America.³⁰ Her mother Eva Buckman, a Ga, and her father Francis Thomas Dove from Sierra Leon sent her to school in Freetown then to the Anglican Convent in Bury St. Edmunds and St. Michael's College in England. She then chose to study a secretarial course at Gregg Commercial College, which displeased her father. He sent her to stay in Freetown where she was not allowed to work till she was twenty-one years old.³¹

Throughout her student days, short hair was very popular among young girls across the Atlantic. In America, many Caucasian young girls who received an unprecedented opportunity to attend college chose hair cuts that sculptured their heads. Hair straighteners as well as the hot comb that was introduced from France caught the interest of many African American young women who migrated from farm economies to urban towns and found work outside their homes. From World War I, in the British and American Empires young girls and women gave short hair cuts and hairstyles that grew very fashionable a variety of names including "bobbed," "shingled" and "bingling."³² As the mass media gained importance, young girls and women of different classes in these empires watched film actresses who had stereotypical hairstyles. Usually, actresses who had long hair played roles that portrayed them as unassuming and innocent, while "bobbed" haired actresses played more sexually explicit roles and got to be identified as "vamps."³³ Yet, the members of these societies accepted "bobbed" hair as everyday wear because a cross-section of

³⁰ Keyes, *A History of Women's Hairstyles 1500-1965* (1968), 55-60

³¹ Denzer, "Gender and Decolonization" (1992), 219.

³² See Rose Weitz, *Rapunzel's Daughters: What Women's Hair Tell Us about Women's Lives* (New York: Farrar, Strous and Giroux, 2004), 12-19; Jean Keyes, *A History of Women's Hairstyles 1500-1965* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1968), 55-60.

³³ Weitz, *Rapunzel's Daughters* (2004), 12-19.

young girls and women continued to wear it during the inter war period. From 1925, even as “bobbed” hair remained in vogue, young girls and women allowed their hair to grow slightly longer and then transformed it into the permanent wave that has remained popular.³⁴

People in the Gold Coast gained access to these films and hairdressings at a time when the colonial government took on more responsibility to ensure standardized school-education. As missionary education gave way to a secular form of education that included coeducation, women who acquired the same educational qualification as men would have access to the same jobs in the Gold Coast as men. For Dove, this logic would be turned into practice more easily if parents, guardians and other members of the society demonstrated a willingness to provide professional education and young schoolgirls would show decorum in their dress and comportment.

Hairdressing, the Media and Citizenship

During this inter war period, Dove and other women columnists of the print media provided readers with topical themes, of which the most visual and casual were sketches on how to sew frocks that were in vogue, comments on young women who attended certain activities, and the clothes that they wore. Since other columnists announced the social activities that would occur in Accra over the next week, all women readers could dress in the fashionable clothes that columnists recommended for attending these events.

During this period—the 1930s through the 1960s—when Dove wrote about

³⁴ Keyes, *A History of Women's Hairstyles 1500-1965* (1968), 55-60.

young women's hairdressings, most women plaited their hair with black thread. Working women preferred big plaits because they believed that small plaits could not create the structure for styles that they tied their scarves into for special occasions. Teaching was the prominent profession that women who married and had children could continue to practice.³⁵ The numbers of students who qualified as teachers increased such that teachers were associated with a particular hairstyle. They wore very big plaits to school. The size and lengths of the threaded plaits were aesthetic and signaled that the wearer was endowed with lots of hair. Sometimes, teachers wore scarves over the plaits in order to provide variations in hairstyles, or lengthen the duration of the thread plaits.

From the 1950s, women and men with the most noticeable hairdressings were involved in politics. Women tied their turbans very high in front and inserted cotton wool or gauze and pinned them to stand erect, which they named "Nkrumah Speaking." Many of these women wore such turbans during the trial of Kwame Nkrumah who was an old student of Achimota College, and again on the Sunday after his release from prison when he spoke at a rally.³⁶ These women who were very visible in their head dressings were "skillful organizers" and "powerful orators" at the rallies of the Convention People's Party throughout the Gold Coast, Ashanti, the Northern Territories and the Transvolta.³⁷

How the men in politics dressed their heads was important. As Dennis Austin (1964) states, for members of the Convention People's Party who at one time or the

³⁵ See Takyiwaa Manuh "Women and Their Organizations during the Convention People's Party Period" in *The Life and Work of Kwame Nkrumah*, ed. Kwame Arhin, (Accra: Africa World Press, 1993), 104.

³⁶ *Daily Graphic*, February 23, 1951.

³⁷ Manuh "Women and Their Organizations" (1993), 106.

other went to prison, “those who were released were feted, awarded a ‘Prison Graduate cap,’ and extolled in the party press.”³⁸ On March 5, 1957—the eve of Ghana’s formal political liberalization—Nkrumah and his colleagues including Archie Casely-Hayford, Komla Gbedemah and Kojo Botsio wore their *fuguu* (or *batakali*) smock with its cap that they referred to as their “Prison Graduate caps” onto the platform of the Old Polo Grounds in Accra. Towards midnight, they removed their caps and were attentive to the national anthem. The gathering paid respect to the new nation as well as the ethnic groups of the Northern Territories to whom the *fuguu* cap and smock were culturally associated.³⁹ The fact that nationally and internationally these leaders displayed the attire that Ghanaians regarded as a material culture of the people from the Northern Territories is important. It was only since 1946 that the British administered the four territories of the Gold Coast, Ashanti, the Transvolta Protectorate and the Northern Territories as a unit.⁴⁰ Considering that the Northern Territories had the least infrastructure, such displays of cultural regalia at political assemblies identified the people from the Northern Territories as a core component of Ghana.

Yet, over the past decade, as Nkrumah sought to identify certain qualities that would define an “African personality,” the media associated him with the “disappearance” of hats. In an article, “Hats off to Nkrumah,” a columnist of the *Accra Evening News* (the party press) stated that:

³⁸Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 115.

³⁹ For pictures of Nkrumah and his ministers in the Prison Graduate caps, see Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3; and WGBH Educational Foundation and BBC. *Freedom Now, 1947* (Vermont, 1998).

⁴⁰ Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 114, cited in Janet Hess, “Exhibiting Ghana: Display, Documentary, and “National” Art in the Nkrumah Era,” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 44 No. 1 (April 2001), 59-77.

In the Gold Coast today, hats have become a rarity.

The young men walk through the sun, bareheaded, wearing their hair the Nkrumah way, and ladies have taken to the turban and the headkerchief.

For years Gold Coast citizens spent vast sums on hats & became so used to them that going about in the sun without a hat became unbearable.

Meanwhile, the men who introduced this infirmity were gradually discarding their hats...

Then came Nkrumah on the scene. He opened the eyes of his people to the danger and off went the hats...

Hats off to Nkrumah. He is a dynamic leader.⁴¹

As Jean Allman argues in the book *Fashioning Africa* (2004), this feature story reprimands anglophiles, encourages nationalist unity against colonial domination and asserts citizenship.⁴² Her argument is supported by the fact that apart from political rallies when Nkrumah wore the *fuguu* cap and smock, and even though many school-educated men sported parted hair, at many international functions Nkrumah wore the cover shoulder cloth and his hair was simple, without any parting.

Moreover, this reference, “Hats off to Nkrumah,” helps to explain the extent to which young men who wore hats remained attractive to social and political commentators in the Gold Coast. From the 1950s, film directors from the British and French empires used ideas concerning hats for commentary about juvenile delinquency and the frivolousness of some migrants.

In 1950, sociologist Kofi Abrefa Busia highlighted the state of juvenile delinquency in his survey of the Sekondi-Takoradi twin towns that experienced urban sprawl after the construction of a harbor in the 1920s.⁴³ That year, the British

⁴¹ “Hats off to Nkrumah.” *Accra Evening News*, July 29, 1953.

⁴² Jean Allman, *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁴³ Kofi Abrefa Busia, *Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi Takoradi* (London: Crown Agents for the

colonial administration made the Gold Coast Film Unit, which was set up in 1939, a part of the Gold Coast Information Unit for the West and East African colonies. Over the next two years, the Film Unit produced the first full length commercial film, *The Boy Kumasenu* (1952).

On Tuesday, July 8, 1952, at its first public showing at the Opera Cinema in Accra, *The Boy Kumasenu* generated such popular acclaim that it was shown twice on Thursday and once on Saturday. On that Thursday, the *Daily Graphic* featured a picture of the guest of honor Kwame Nkrumah seated next to American visitors Beverley Carter and Julius Belcher as well as cabinet ministers. Most of these dignitaries were with their beautifully dressed wives.

The *Daily Graphic* presented a picture of Nkrumah congratulating a pleasantly shy Nortey Engmann, the title hero Kumasenu who the medical doctor and artist (Oko Ampofo) saved from juvenile delinquency.⁴⁴ In the *Daily Graphic*'s supplementary report, Sean Graham the producer-director of the film explained that he had the most difficulty in casting because: "There were no professional actors in the film and none of the cast had any previous experience in films...the boy to play the title role...had to be a very good natural actor, he had to have a face with instant appeal, and had to be intelligent enough to understand the purpose behind his acting...Nortey had a face with immediate appeal and he acted beautifully." Indeed, since Engmann had no parting in his hair, he was a handsome young boy who does not necessarily claim the stereotype of a school boy with a hair-parting. Since the Film Unit did not document the hairdressings of school boys, by default, the moral

Colonies on the behalf of the Government of the Gold Coast, 1950).

⁴⁴ *Daily Graphic*, July 10, 1952.

that emanates from the role of title hero could be embraced by most boys.⁴⁵

Yet, the film depended on different types of stereotypes. First, the plot was created around a real family, that of Dr. Oko Ampofo, a graduate of Achimota College who practiced medicine and created sculpture and jewelry. The reading and artistic public recognized that both Ampofo and his wife acted their roles—doctor and doctor’s wife—in the film. Second, most of the other characters in the film fit the more general idea of stereotypes. A first example is the stereotype of the “fetish” priest. Since the ideas about “fetish” priests were stereotyped across African colonies, the person whom the cast and crew knew as Sayden simply “appeared one day on his bicycle and volunteered his services for the part.” As scholars have documented, African students in higher education in Britain together with African professionals criticized the British colonial administrators for stereotyping “fetish” priests in film as “African.” For a second example, the director used a cap to establish Kumasenu’s ethnic origin. Kumasenu’s uncle wears the woolen *Togbenya* cap that was iconic of men from the Ewe ethnic group.⁴⁶ A third example is that the adverse experience of migrant young men in urban areas is depicted by the young antihero Agbo in a hat and trouser suit and he smokes a cigarette. In fact, Frank Tamakloe who acted as Agboh was recruited at a dance. He acted so credibly and creditably that after the production of *The Boy Kumasenu*, the Films Unit employed him as assistant director. The Film Unit “hoped to follow the film [*The Boy Kumasenu*] with a similar story at a future date.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Daily Graphic*, Saturday supplement, July 12, 1952.

⁴⁶ See A. A. Kyerematen, *Panoply of Ghana: Ornamental art in Ghanaian Tradition and Culture* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1964), 81.

⁴⁷ *Daily Graphic*, Saturday supplement, July 12, 1952.

According to the media critics, the premiere of *The Boy Kumasenu* at the Edinburgh Festival in the United Kingdom was to determine future production plans for feature films in the British colony, the Gold Coast. Nevertheless, in the Gold Coast, between January and June 1952, when Oku Amopofa exhibited his jewelry and sculpture, the journalist Timothy Bankole praised the picture quality and the quality in acting presented in the film by the actors all of whom were amateur actors. However, he was concerned that since the film had a wider audience, including Britain and America: “Cinema audience are impressionistic and this first “great” film produced by the Gold Coast Film Unit is full of the usual stereotypes—witchcraft, drinking, jiving...[They] would expect to see a film which tells the story of the Gold Coast. But *The Boy Kumasenu* does not.”⁴⁸ Although the film received commendation at the Edinburgh Festival, the British film Unit was relocated to the West Indies.

Yet, film remained an important visual means that serves as a record of first, the importance of hairdressings in the Gold Coast and second, the vision of the people in the Gold Coast that transitioned to Ghana. During the 1950s, the Frenchman Jean Rouch presented a seminal approach to film making, the Cinema Direct or ethnographic film. He directed films in the Gold Coast and researched on the immigrants from French territories, which is important because by 1960 immigrants formed a third of Ghana’s population. These immigrants like migrants and people in urban towns who had limited school-education met their need for material culture in Ghana through their participation in the informal economy, a market that continued to

⁴⁸ *Daily Graphic*, July 14 1952.

expand and is pertinent to the history of hairdressing.⁴⁹

Rouch's films about Nigerien migrants in the Gold Coast help to explain the changing contexts in which hairdressing was discussed and the importance of hats and hairstyles for Africans who experienced life in urban Ghana. In *Les Maitres Fous* (1954), Rouch challenges his audience to interpret the religious lives of migrants from Songhai to the Gold Coast and to study their use of public icons such as the Colonial Governor's hat to assess the mental impact of British colonialism. However, in *Jaguar* that was produced at the time of Ghana's independence, in 1957, Rouch is more interested in documenting migrants' tour of the Gold Coast that was popular as a place "where people go for money, clothes and all rich things."⁵⁰

Jaguar's audience comprises us mainstream audience, Rouch and Rouch's audience which includes the cast and crew who were not in camera. This total audience watch as the film highlights the work experiences of three Nigerien friends, Damoure, Ilo Gaoudel and Lam Ibrahima Dia who, like many temporary migrants from across West Africa, left their farming societies at the beginning of their dry harmattan season to seek jobs in the urban towns of Ghana. They contrast as well as complement each other.

We watch as Demeure used hats to signify, spectacularly, his quickly gained wealth. Soon after he arrived in Accra, because he is literate, he was promoted to the position of a foreman of a timber and building enterprise and he became exposed to the experiences of a "jaguar," the theme-title of the popular francophone song of the

⁴⁹ Keith Hart, "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 67, March 1973.

⁵⁰ Jean Rouch, *Les Maitres Fous* (Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 1954); Jean Rouch, *Jaguar* (Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 1996).

1950s. He sang: “Now I walk through the streets, I’ve become a jaguar ...A jaguar is a keen young man with a nice hairdo, who smokes, who walks around [town]...nice and easy.” Soon, he learnt that being a jaguar exposes a person to many pitfalls.

Gaudel, however, had difficulty getting a respectable job and his friends teased him. Yet, since he is one of the true gentlemen of the film, even though his job searches led him to work as a poorly paid *Kayakaya* (porter) who carried heavy loads on his head at Tema Harbor, he participates in leisure. He sought a haircut during the weekend, on a Sunday, when, like most Ghanaians, he did not work and as a Moslem he did not attend Christian church service. While the unseen audience rightly showed concern that his barber shorn him of his hair that cushioned his head against the heavy loads, Demeure, the “ex jaguar,” replied that Gaoudel’s head was hard enough to withstand pressure.

In a similar sense, Dia used his first wage to buy a dress and he was attracted to miners that he saw wearing helmets. Although miners seemed to have the potential to become rich quickly because they extracted gold at Obuase, since underground miners were exposed to well-documented dangers, the film depicts mining as too dangerous. Dia who is the most thoughtful character regards mining as dangerous and pulls his fellow Nigerian immigrant from mining to petty trading.

When Demeure and Gaudel join Dia in Kumasi the capital of the Asante society, they combine ideas of leisure and work that is associated with the head by setting up a joint business which they name “little by little the bird makes his bonnet.” In their view, people “must start things little by little.”⁵¹

One of the messages from *Jaguar* is that people who were willing to

⁵¹ Dialogue in *Jaguar* is in French but the film has superscripts in English. Rouch, *Jaguar* (1996).

participate in micro economic activities, such as selling mirrors and hair accessories, could gain satisfactory results. In his research, Rouch found that immigrants in Ghana used the wages that they saved as capital to engage in a career of small scale trading.⁵² Rouch developed the theme “little by little the bird makes his bonnet” into his major research study. And several decades later, when he recalled his experiences in Ghana, he thought of the 1950s as a period when thrifty petty traders earned a lot of money.⁵³

Hairdressing in Novels and a Short Story

Just as the film *Jaguar* promotes the small scale entrepreneurship activities of migrants in Accra, Cyprian Ekwensi’s novel *Jagua Nana* (1961) extols the economic worth of women through its focus on the beauty of the title hero. Ekwensi focuses on the motives that compel Jagua to invest in dress and acquire different tastes. The novel opens by introducing readers to Jagua and the important role that hair plays in her accomplishment of femininity, beauty and masculine allure:

Jagua had just had a cold bath, and, in the manner of African women, she sat on a low stool with a mirror propped between her bare knees, gazing at her wet hair. Only one cloth—a flowered cotton print concealed her nakedness, and she had wound it over her breast and under her armpits. Her arms and shoulders were bare, and she sat with the cloth bunched between her thighs so that the mirror bit into the skin between her knees.

She raised her arm and ran the comb through the wiry kinks, and her breasts swelled into a sensuous arc and her eyes tensed with the pain as the kinks straightened. From the skin on her long arms and the beautiful

⁵² Jean Rouch, *Notes on Migrations into the Gold Coast*, translation by P. E. O. and J. B. Heigham (Accra, 1956), 45; also Hart, “Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana,” 1973.

⁵³ Manthia Diawara, *Rouch in Reverse* (San Francisco CA: California Newsreel, 1995).

shoulders the drops of speckled water slid down chasing one another.⁵⁴

As Jagua carefully attends to her toilet, her lover Freddie Namme walks by her door. The forty-five year old Jagua's beauty helped her to befriend the twenty-something year old Freddie who is handsome, young, school-educated and ambitious. Freddie shouts her nickname, "Jagwa! ...Jagwa Nana! ..." This is an accolade to her beauty. Yet, since he is more attracted to the hair in her armpit than her elaborately styled head hair, he complicates the ways that men and women deciphered women's beauty.

"[I]n the manner of African women," Jagua's skill in hairdressing makes her home attractive to Mama Nancy and her daughter Nancy Oll. As they all listened and danced to music from record plates, Jagua dressed Mama Nancy's hair "in de latest styles." These opportunities for socializing were gender specific. Although Freddie stayed in the room to study, he did not show interest or participate in these women's activities. Yet, while the art of hairdressing as a form of socialization encompassed friends who belong to the same gender, particular hairstyles were age specific. Nancy who belongs to the next generation had beautiful features that comprised: "Hair matted and boyish and glistening wet with too much pomade. She had a graceful neck and slender arms and shoulders, hard breasts, upright... [and] ever smiley teeth."⁵⁵ Girls and women enjoyed socializing together but they revealed a generational difference in the hairstyles that they wore.

Furthermore, new class formations remained one of the most important factors that distinguished women. Women's tastes and fashions were shaped by class, which cut across geographical boundaries. Readers of *Jagua Nana* gain the impression that

⁵⁴ Cyprian Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), 5.

⁵⁵ Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (1961), 16.

women who met in urban spaces and joined new classes identified with those who had similar tastes and beauty standards across national boundaries. Jaguar, a Nigerian from the village of Ogabu settles in the capital city, Lagos, and meets Mama Nancy and Nancy who are originally from Freetown in Sierra Leone. Equally important, Jaguar developed a lifestyle in Ghana that was formative in establishing her reputation in Lagos. She:

made some money in the cotton-wax prints trade, selling Georgettes and Damasks, and sheer brilliant Manchester prints—the kind which girls like Nancy tied skirt-wise over blouses. Jagua knew the West Coast of Africa from Gambia to Lagos, with Ghana as a kind of Parisian center of fashion. Before Freddie met her she used to travel regularly to Ghana and beyond, buying there and selling in Lagos. It was partly one reason why they called her Jagua. She had style. Whenever she put on anything it became the fashion in Lagos, and the girls and women came flocking to her and wanting to know where the article had come from.⁵⁶

Jagua stopped travelling to Ghana, “the Parisian center of fashion,” for trendsetting dress items because she is besotted with Freddie. However, she is unable to sustain her relationships with Freddie or Mama Nancy or Nancy because she has a fervent need to remain the center of rich men’s attention and the recipient of their money. Jagua gets sexually involved with a Syrian who is Mama Nancy’s lover, which causes a rift between her and Mama Nancy and estranges Freddie.

Readers empathize with Freddie as Jagua takes on the role of a paramour of three “strange” men. Jagua has such control over dress and fashion that she looks barely thirty years old when she “groomed her hair, combing it straight backwards

⁵⁶ Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (1961), 24.

and decorating it with a gold band.”⁵⁷ That evening, Freddie’s anguish develops into disdain as Jagua’s intense need for public acknowledgement of her beauty and control over men causes her to widen and darken the arch of her eyebrows like a prostitute for a rendezvous with the men.⁵⁸ When Freddie and Jagua’s relationship deteriorates he turns to the boyish haired Nancy and notices that Nancy “looked sweet in a simple white dress with a black belt in the middle. Her complexion glowed with youthful good looks; her eyes were dark and eager.”⁵⁹

After Freddie travels to study law in England, Jagua is contrite for endangering Nancy, her rival. Jagua designs to release Nancy from the people of Krinameh by seducing their Chief Ofubara. Her dress and make-up serve as signposts that guide readers to imagine the visual effect of her attire on a smitten Chief Ofubara. She “made herself really Jagwa.” Her Jagwa “gloss” comprised:

the brightest lipstick in her bag, her blouse was sleeveless and cut so low that only the tips of her breasts were covered. Her skirt was so tight she could not take a stride of more than six inches at a time. It was a gray skirt with three big buttons down the front and a big split down the back. Her olive skinned calves were fully on show and her feet were barely kissed by open-work wedge-heeled shoes. She carried a plastic bag and wore a wig which almost succeeded in altering her into a Malayan or an Indian lovely.⁶⁰

Through her make-up and dress that includes the false hair of a wig Jagua presents an extreme part of her femininity. She is on a mission to seduce the chief in a manner that is akin to the professionalism of a prostitute. And like a prostitute, she acquires an ultimate beauty that makes her an “other.” This is a different kind of beauty that is

⁵⁷ Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (1961), 31.

⁵⁸ Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (1961), 33.

⁵⁹ Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (1961), 25.

⁶⁰ Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (1961), 89.

parallel to the beauty and status that Jagua attained while travelling across West Africa. Her wig, a single item, has the effect of “altering her into a Malayan or an Indian lovely;” both Malaysia and India are regions that are outside the geographical boundaries of the African continent.

Men such as Freddie’s uncle acknowledge that Jagua’s acquired beauty has the power to draw their sex. Other men, represented by Chief Ofubara who is Freddie’s antagonistic relative, get smitten. Chief Ofubara’s response to Jagua is that: “We got a lot of fine women in Krinameh. But they are not like you. You’re fine too, and you got refinement...You’ve seen the world.” As he kissed Jagua’s hand, his “wild moustaches...tickled her skin.” Chief Ofubara attends to his beauty by cultivating his moustache, wearing gloves and holding a gold-headed cane. He looks like a “dandy” and could serve as the male counterpart to the wanton Jagua.⁶¹ As individuals, each works hard to possess beauty but they both acquire a category of beauty that their societies disvalue. Chief Ofubara leaves an impression that men who feel incapable of accomplishing public tasks focus on displaying their finesse. In gender socialization, societies do not expect men to present themselves as urbane in such a studied manner. Fortunately, through Chief Ofubara’s experiences with Jagua, readers learn to think of him in a compassionate manner. After he resolves the dispute between his town and that of Freddie’s father, his society at Krinameh prospers.

Subsequent authors who set their stories in the 1950s and 1960s used ideas about hairdressing and beauty to provide realism for their female characters. In *The Ashanti Doll* (1977), Francis Bebey uses tropes of Ghanaian women’s beauty and

⁶¹ Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (1961), 78.

skill in trading to activate readers' memory of the 1950s when Nkrumah became prime minister of Ghana.⁶² Yet, Bebey's aim is to create the opposite of what happened or what was usual. In other words, Bebey's *Ashanti Doll* presents the opposite of some of the germane ideas about women in Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* and in Ghana. We imagine the beautiful, non-literate Edna the title hero "laughing like a slice of summer" because during the brisk sales at Christmas she sold a plastic comb as an authentic ivory comb to a young man who looked intelligent. The young man, Spio returns. As he removes the money to pay for another ivory comb, he confronts Edna. Her grandmother decides to let other market women discipline him as a thief but Edna defends Spio and the young people become lovers.

As Jane Guyer argues, in different societies in Africa, a young girl excelled in trade if she was capable of selling her products at different prices to different people. People were successful buyers if they could argue about the quality of the product and arrive at a price that would be fair to the buyer and the seller. In the case of the *Ashanti Doll*, Spio went to purchase a comb to enhance his beauty and since he allowed himself to be cheated, he ventures to acquire a beautiful partner who excels in trade and assists him to succeed as a buyer.⁶³

Spio calls Edna his "Ashanti doll" in reference to the wooden *Akuaba* doll that among the Asantes is the quintessence of femininity and beauty. The beauty of this playmate of girls and surrogate child that foments barren women to have children is

⁶² Francis Bebey, *La Poupee Ashanti* (Yaounde: Editions Cle, 1973); Francis Bebey, *The Ashanti Doll* translated by Joyce Hutchinson (Westport, Conn: L. Hill, 1977).

⁶³ Jane Guyer, *Marginal Gains: Monetary transactions in Atlantic Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 63-64.

symbolized by its ringed neck and semblance of hair.⁶⁴

As Spio courts Edna, the market women “organize themselves into a politico-professional association” and follow a formal process to demonstrate their disapproval when the government seizes the market permit of Mrs. Amiofi whose son-in law is a Member of Parliament for the opposition. The market women who gather at the intersecting roads of Independence Avenue and a street leading to the airport “are dressed in the fine clothes usually reserved for holidays” and “a real Sunday procession.” For examples, they have: “light blue cloths, red cloths, yellow cloths, pink cloths, blouses of all colours, huge, sparkling silk headscarves tied around the head and raised at the top by carefully prepared braids of the hair, jewels of imitation precious stones shining in the sun, necklaces and bracelets of ivory or pearls.”⁶⁵ Despite these market women’s beautiful toiletry they arrive at parliament in disarray because they wore “opened-back sandals leaving much of the foot exposed to the air and the dust of the roads, all this gave the procession a joyful air that was not, properly speaking, justified by the object of the gathering,” a demonstration.⁶⁶

Edna participates in the demonstration and transforms into a leader of market women. Since the police would not let the market women into Parliament, “Edna tore off her scarf from her head and began waving it in the air as she marched boldly towards the entrance to the Parliament Building.” When the police shoot her in the back, the media coverage makes her a living martyr.⁶⁷ Edna transforms into a leader of market women and an inspiration for the public, even though she is young and

⁶⁴ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian Culture* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974),99-100.

⁶⁵ Bebey, *The Ashanti Doll* (1977), 71-72.

⁶⁶ Bebey, *The Ashanti Doll* (1977), 72-73.

⁶⁷ Bebey, *The Ashanti Doll* (1977), 79.

non-literate.

She must meet head-on the men who hold sway over literacy when Spio ignores bureaucratic rules by acquiring his minister's signature for the release of the market permit. The government sends him on a "disciplinary transfer" to northern Ghana. When she needs to communicate with him, she seeks the service of a scribe—a public letter writer, a job introduced during the colonial era. Letter writers played the important role of connecting migrants (usually in towns) with their relatives and loved ones (in the predominant rural areas). As the letter writers grew important to their communities, they presented themselves in such a manner that they caused their clients to regard them as "very educated people." Yet, during the 1950s, decolonization and people's increased access to school-education and literacy that will be discussed in Chapter V caused people to have mixed reactions towards letter writers, probably. For example, Bebey describes how letter writers placed their typewriters on medium-sized tables beneath the shade of mango trees and the Leventis stores at Accra and sat "look[ing] serious by unsmilingly sporting a pair of spectacles." And: "It also seemed essential to the job to wear a hat, although, from the physical point of view, the comfortable position in the dense shade of the mango-trees might have made this unnecessary."⁶⁸ Edna experiences an ordeal to approach a letter writer to write her letter to Spio, after which she meets Gin who accuses her of being interested in their friend Angela's boyfriend.

Through Edna, Gin and Angela, we realize that hairdressing that should be a trope for feminine bonding serves as a visual foreboding that young women's friendships are amiss. Previously, when Angela attended a dance with Spio, she

⁶⁸ Bebey, *The Ashanti Doll* (1977), 100, 139.

accused Edna of hanging onto him. “The scuffle that followed...resulted in dresses torn to shreds, and women’s heads shorn of their wigs, revealing the unfashionable sights of braidlets of hair not intended for public display.”⁶⁹ Similarly, in the setting for the climactic fight between the two school-educated friends—Gin and Angela—Gin was at home seated and doing her hair while looking into a mirror that was placed on top of a table. She had placed on the table a small spirit stove. Although she had the foresight to protect the top of the wooden table from the flames emitting from the stove, she is unable to protect herself. While Gin was attending to her hair which she considers her “one good feature,” an angry Angela causes the stove to disfigure.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, Edna the title heroine gains good tidings when she sees her beautiful Aunt Princess in her “light green hat.” This “light green hat which gave generous protection from the midday sun” completes Aunt Princess’ “Sunday elegance” and signifies her belief in Christianity. It was:

a large floppy hat that exhibited the hopefulness of its light green colour as a challenge to the weather had inspired friendly or malicious comment, but Aunt Princess had none the less clung to the superstition according to which, since the gardens of paradise are always green, her prayers would have no difficulty in being absorbed into the celestial background symbolized by the green of the hat...Under the green hat sparkled two eyes still the same, still as beautiful as the first meeting with Mr. Teteya, when they had profoundly influenced his decision to marry aunt princess. The latest fashion embellished the eyelids with horizontal lines in black pencil, throwing into even greater relief the sclerotic white surrounding the dark brown iris. Then came the cheeks, perfectly powdered for Sunday, in spite of their eternal battle against the heat and the humidity. The lips remained their natural black colour for, said Aunt Princess, one shouldn’t approach the Almighty with lips soiled by contact with any kind of lipstick. The smile was wonderful with its two rows of sparkling white ivory.... [it was] a hat full of

⁶⁹ Bebey, *The Ashanti Doll* (1977), 46.

⁷⁰ Bebey, *The Ashanti Doll* (1977), 168.

hope.⁷¹

First, Aunt Princess and her iconic “light green hat” that was “full of hope” was an icon of the fulfillment of Edna’s hope that she marries Spio and that she stays in Accra to contribute to her grandmother’s business. Truly enough, the next week, Aunt Princess and her husband Teteya visit her mother and Edna. They hear Spio propose to Edna and address the hopes of the young couple by agreeing to be the witnesses who legally endorse the marriage.

Second, Aunt Princess and her iconic “light green hat” that was “full of hope” was a visual icon of the African woman’s fulfillment of Christian doctrines. During the 1950s, such Christian women in urban areas were encouraged to influence the children in their neighborhood to attend church service on Sundays, organize games for leisure and present weekly sessions of storytelling with an ultimate aim that these children will wish to read the stories for themselves. In addition, these literate women were expected to organize talks for the non literate mothers in the neighborhood and form “mixed clubs” that include both the literate and the non-literate.⁷²

It would seem then that the needs of persons in rural areas were being ignored. We should study further this linkage of hairdressing, the color green and the need for adults’ to care for the majority of the nation’s children including young people who lived in rural settings during the 1960s. In a short story, "The Sad Story of the Green Eyed Girl" (1968) the antihero lived in the nation’s capital city (Accra) but returned often to his village, to a huge, secluded mansion that he inherited from his parents.

⁷¹ Bebey, *The Ashanti Doll* (1977).

⁷² *Daily Graphic*, 1950.

He married “a young orphan girl” to bear him a son but she died soon after giving birth to a daughter, a “poor motherless child who grew up into a sullen, moody, silent and unloved girl with long, thin, hair and piercing green eyes which had supernatural glitter.” After the daughter drowned when playing by a river that flowed through the grounds, the anti hero returned to the village with a wife who grew up in the city and a son that he spoiled with attention. The son saw the dead daughter running through his future grounds, and when chasing her away, he slipped into the river and drowned, causing his mother to break up with his father and for his father to die a lonely man.⁷³

The author used hair as the symbolism for warning people who did not redistribute their wealth to others in a society made up of human beings, ancestors and deities who were vulnerable to competing interests of other societies. He advocated that the Ghanaian society had to ensure gender equity and care for the needs of rural people and the disadvantaged, especially girls, in order to avoid future repercussions. Even the vulnerable members of society had some form of power since at opportune times they apportioned justice especially on moral and economic issues.

The green-eyed, long haired daughter stood for the spiritual and physical wealth in persons and in nature that the antihero received in life but did not take care of as a result of which he lost the only son that he prized. The girl’s hair sent a constant signal that her father, the urban antihero, should not ignore her, members of her sex and her rural community. Even when a lack of attention led to her death, her spiritual presence in the community continued to ensure ultimate justice for her and

⁷³ “The Sad Story of the Green Eyed Girl,” *Drum*, October 1968.

her community. Meeting the needs of the community superseded meeting the needs of the individual, although the individual could move across communities and cultures to attain wealth for himself or herself and for the community.

Educational Research to Develop Communities

These arguments about the construction of communities were more in tune with the aims of Ghanaians during the 1950s when the need for a common knowledge among nationals was viewed as urgent. And these arguments return us to the role and impact of higher education in Ghana's history. With the establishment of the most impressive educational institutions—the universities—the idea of using “Africanization” to educate was encouraged at the highest academic level with the expectation that the graduates would spread education to all members of the society. Here, it is important that we construct a background of the composition of the Institute of African Studies. At the beginning of the 1960s, the chancellor of the University of Ghana, President Kwame Nkrumah advocated “African Personality” and “African pride” when he inaugurated the Institute of African Studies as an institution for research and graduate studies, with the writer of nationalism in Africa, Thomas Hodgkin as director. The head of the History section was the historian of Asante, Ivor Wilks and the ethnomusicologist Kwabena Nketia ran the section on African Music and related Arts. His Senior Research Associates were Ephraim Amo (Music) and Mawere Opoku (Dance).⁷⁴ During the colonial era, Amo advocated for African forms of music and dress. He put on a cloth and walked out on the missionary administered Akropong Presbyterian Training College, and then taught at

⁷⁴ Agbodeka, *A History of the University of Ghana* (1998), 168

Achimota College. It is alleged that Opoku was a blood relation of Nana Mawere Opoku, *okyeame* (spokesperson) to the Asantehene during the Yaa Asantewa war. Opoku was a product of Achimota School, where his leisure activity was boxing and his tutor for Fine Art was the renowned H. V. Meyerowitz.⁷⁵ Opoku studied Fine Art, Dance and Drama at the Bath and Camberwell Schools of Art, and the Central School of Art and Craft in London. When he returned to Ghana, he co-founded the Kumasi *Agoromba* (players) and organized dance festivals during Ghana's annual independence celebrations. In 1961, Nkrumah requested that he form a national dance troupe that would use dance as a strategy to curb any potential for ethnic rivalries and help to achieve national and continental unity. Opoku agreed, on condition that it would be attached to a higher institution of learning and he would be allowed to promote the scholarly dimension of dance. He set up the National Dance Ensemble, which was attached to the Institute of African Studies.⁷⁶ A context analysis of the page of a feature story about the achievements of Opoku's national dance ensemble indicates that the achievements of his dance ensemble by the mid-1970s are commensurate with the feeling of pride that a columnist and his supporting readers felt for women who wore braids and plaits.⁷⁷

The government appointed Efua Sutherland, a creative writer as a research associate in the Drama section and she offered the national Drama Studio that she founded to the University, for the Institute of African Studies to start a certificate

⁷⁵ *Weekly Spectator*, March 22 1975; for his interest in boxing, see Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Bukom and Social History of Boxing in Accra: Warfare and Citizenship in Precolonial Ga Society," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (2002), 54.

⁷⁶ *Weekly Spectator*, March 22, 1975.

⁷⁷ *Weekly Spectator*, March 22 1975.

course in Drama and Theatre Studies, funded by the government.⁷⁸ Sutherland was a Fante who attended Saint Monica's Training College at Asante Mampong, and Cambridge University and the School of Oriental and African Studies in England. Her poems and short stories were anthologized and translated from English into other European languages and from 1956 she helped to form the Ghana Writers Society later called the Writers' Workshop and *Okyeame*, an important literary journal. Sutherland founded the Experimental Theatre Players who used folktales as a tool for communicating and promoting Ghanaians' pride in Akan cultural practices.⁷⁹

Sutherland, like other creative writers, grew interested in folk narratives. Her contemporaries are Peggy Appiah and a group of cartoonists who called themselves Ghanatta. In tune with Ghanaians' reference to African pride through hairdressing Appiah's stories provide details about *Ananse* and his society's attitude towards hair and fashion to emphasize common human attitudes.⁸⁰ Likewise, Ghanatta published in the media cartoons of *ananse* stories one of which explains how come *ananse* went bald.

Increasingly, Sutherland focused on gender in her plays in order to address how Ghanaians could create national transformation through common institutions such as marriage, school-education, and communal projects. Her play *Foriwa* (1962) addresses the practical ways in which young Ghanaians developed their communities. *Foriwa* is based on the Akan myth of a young woman called Foriwa who expects her beauty to lead her to marry a man who has a convergence of many attributes. Since no one in the society has all the qualities that she demands, Foriwa gets married to a

⁷⁸ *Ghanaian Times*, April 28, 1962.

⁷⁹ *Weekly Spectator*, September 2, 1972.

⁸⁰ Peggy Appiah, *Tales of an Ashanti Father* (London: 1967).

handsome man who is in fact a monster that destroys her. Fortunately, the play presents a twist in the folk tale and transforms Foriwa into a hero. In the play, the beautiful Foriwa is a teacher who returned to her birthplace Kyerefaso (lit. the merit of teaching) for the annual festival and stays to develop the society. She wins the admiration of the old man who has grey hair, a signal of his wisdom and a temperament that when calmed, signals that the townspeople are at peace and eager for the society to develop. The opportunities for development increase because Foriwa will marry Labaran the handsome, northern “stranger” who has temporary residence on prime land that was ill used as a rubbish dump. The cover page indicates that Foriwa is an everyday young woman because she wears the cover-shoulder cloth with the third piece tied as a headscarf. It is this same style that some women who had higher education, including Sutherland the playwright and Adelaide Amegatcher who first acted as Foriwa the title hero chose to wear to public events, as shown in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2.

In 1968 Sutherland founded the Kusum Agoromba (lit. custom’s players) troupe and pursued her aim to communicate through drama to all Ghanaians, including the non-literate in the remotest parts of the country. She sought to interact with Ghanaians who were skilled in the dramatic areas of Ghanaian cultural practices but were outside the universities and the institutions for theater. Furthermore, through the activities of nonacademic persons such as Mframa, a “fetish” priest and Bob Johnson (1904-1985), a concert party performer, both of whom were usually on the grounds of the Institute of African Studies, Sutherland expected to share the ideas of higher institutions with all Ghanaians.

Sutherland's attitude towards composing and disseminating drama across educational background, language and location helps to explain how come she wrote about Johnson in the book *The Original Bobs* (1970), the first known research into popular twentieth century concert party performances.⁸¹ Her research was furthered by Amegatcher a graduate of the University of Ghana, who worked as senior producer for the Ghana Television Corporation, performed radio-plays and was the first to act on stage as Sutherland's title-heroine *Foriwa*.⁸² With the sponsorship of the International Fellowship program of the American Association of University Women, Amegatcher enrolled for a Masters degree in the dramatic arts at the University of North Carolina. She wrote her dissertation on concert party performances and promoted the Carolina Girl, one of the names of the female character in the concert party trio.⁸³ Concurrently, Kwabena Bame, a sociologist and educationist who worked as Senior Education Officer of the Ghana Education Service and then Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies received a fellowship from the Canadian International Development Agency to conduct doctoral research on concert parties.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Efua Sutherland, *The Original Bob: The Story of Bob Johnson, Ghana's Ace Comedian* (Accra: Anowuo Educational Publications, 1970).

⁸² *Sunday Mirror*, February 19, 1967.

⁸³ *Sunday Mirror*, February 19, 1967; Amegatcher, "The Concert Parties" (1968).

⁸⁴ Kwabena Bame, "Contemporary Comic Plays in Ghana, A Study in Innovation, Diffusion and Social Functions of an Art Form" (MA Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1969).

KNOW YOUR ARTISTES . . .

by KWESI WOODE

Sutherland—A symbol for African theatre

Efua Sutherland is about Ghana's most widely published author. Her poems, plays and short stories have been anthologised and published in many books and magazines in many different languages. But it is not just her literary works which have placed her among the topmost ranks of Ghana's theatre movement.

In the past decade and more, Sutherland, has been spending every bit of energy to give reality to the dreams of our writers. Unlike many writers who are content to let their works in print, or at best to watch other people bring them to life on the stage, this distinguished author has been sweating over the ways to create facilities not only for her works, but also those of the many Ghanaian writers who are trying to present their visions to the world.

Thus, through the almost superhuman efforts of this indomitable woman, we now have the Drama Studio, the new modern theatre house in Accra, we have the 'Museum' Ghana's, international literary magazine and the Kwame Ninsin—a professional theatrical troupe which is carrying drama to the bank and the street, the Ghanaian populace to every nook and corner of Ghana through the use of a common Ghanaian language.



GREAT BELIEF

The belief of Afia, Efua Sutherland, is that the theatre is a powerful force for the development of the Ghanaian people. She is a woman of great conviction and she has spent her life in the service of the theatre. She has been a pioneer in the field of drama in Ghana and she has been a great inspiration to many other writers. She has been a great force for the development of the Ghanaian theatre and she has been a great force for the development of the Ghanaian people.



The National Art Exhibition, Ghana.

She has been a great force for the development of the Ghanaian theatre and she has been a great force for the development of the Ghanaian people. She has been a pioneer in the field of drama in Ghana and she has been a great inspiration to many other writers. She has been a great force for the development of the Ghanaian theatre and she has been a great force for the development of the Ghanaian people.

PLAYWRIGHT
The Ghanaian playwright has a modern theatre which he has created by the production of his works. He has been a pioneer in the field of drama in Ghana and he has been a great inspiration to many other writers. He has been a great force for the development of the Ghanaian theatre and he has been a great force for the development of the Ghanaian people.

DRAMA GROUP
The drama group in Ghana is a powerful force for the development of the Ghanaian people. It has been a pioneer in the field of drama in Ghana and it has been a great inspiration to many other writers. It has been a great force for the development of the Ghanaian theatre and it has been a great force for the development of the Ghanaian people.

Figure 3.1: Efua Sutherland in a cover shoulder cloth with the third piece of cloth tied as a headkerchief.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Weekly Spectator, September 1, 1972.

GHANAIAN STUDENT NOW PLAYMAKER

..At U.S. Varsity

THE playbill for the Carolina Playmakers' production of "Finian's Rainbow" fluttered in Adelaide Amegatcher's hands backstage at the University of North Carolina Memorial Hall.

The Ghanaian girl had only a moment to find her name on the list of members of the stage crew before hurrying back to her post on the stage before the curtain rose on Miss Amegatcher's own original play.

The curtain will be going up on Miss Amegatcher's own original play before the end of the Playmakers' current season, as she works towards a master's degree in dramatic arts at the University of North Carolina.

Miss Amegatcher's arrival was sponsored by the International Fellowship program of the American Association of University Women.

The organization's grants are made to provide advanced training for women of outstanding abilities who may be expected to lead their nations to economic leadership on returning to their home countries.

Miss Amegatcher's parents, Dr. and Mrs. J. E. O. Amegatcher, live in Kumasi, where her father is in charge of the hospital.

SEVERED HAND JOINED

The operation was performed by the General Surgeon at the University of North Carolina Memorial Hall.

It was early in November when the accident occurred. The woman was sewing on a fragment of wood when the sharp edge of the wood struck her hand.

After the woman was brought to the hospital, the hand was severed at the wrist.

The woman's hand was reattached to her arm.

After the woman was discharged from the hospital, she was able to use her hand.

No. 1 HOVERCRAFT NOW IN USE

The world's first hovercraft was developed in Britain.

The vehicle, a 40-ton craft, is designed for heavy loads.

The hovercraft is used for transport of goods and passengers.

The hovercraft is used for transport of goods and passengers.

The hovercraft is used for transport of goods and passengers.



Miss Adelaide Amegatcher (right) and Harry Harris, head of the drama department at the University of North Carolina, pose backstage before the play. The playbill is in her own hands, prepared by the Carolina Playmakers company, as Miss Amegatcher prepares to make her debut in the play.

...She's Amegatcher

Early next week the play will be on the stage.

The play is a comedy about a man who goes to Africa to find a woman.

The play is a comedy about a man who goes to Africa to find a woman.

The play is a comedy about a man who goes to Africa to find a woman.

Figure 3.2: Adelaide Amegatcher in a cover shoulder cloth, with the third piece tied as a headgear. She first acted the role of the Efua Sutherland's title hero *Foriwa* and then wrote a thesis on concert party performers at the University of North Carolina. She helped to form the Carolina Playmakers, which brings to mind the "Carolina Girl," a name that in the 1920s Afro American sailors at Sekondi who watched concert party performances gave to the concert party lady.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Sunday Mirror, February 19, 1967

Hairdressing and Concert Party Performances

The concert party theatre began as an all male traveling performance genre, a novelty of twentieth century Gold Coast. At the turn of the twentieth century, members of missions and schools organized and performed poetic recitals, cantatas of Bible stories and hymns for church ceremonies, school prize presentations and Empire day celebrations. In 1918, in Sekondi, a teacher called Yalley worked at an elementary school and performed at Empire Day celebrations that were called concerts. He hired a brass band to announce his performances and adopted the box office to sell his tickets to a varied class of African elites and British colonial officials who sat in an auditorium that faced a proscenium stage.⁸⁷ In 1927, a young man called Ishmael Johnson and his friends met Yalley in person when they carted chairs to Yalley's concert:

The young man was fascinated by his experience. Yalley's show was a one-man show. He dressed in Wigs and false moustaches, and wore black-face make-up for several of his acts. His eyes and mouth were thickly rimmed with white. He changed his costume frequently. Sometimes he wore huge shoes shaped "just like feet which made his feet look enormous." Sometimes he wore *asafuwa*, the beautiful raffia skirt worn by priests and priestesses.

He sang, he danced, and talked a lively patter to the accompaniment of jazz music from a snare drum and organ.⁸⁸

Johnson and his friends formed into the Versatile Eight and performed in neighboring towns and villages during vacations. They combined the structure of Yalley's performances with folk narratives popularly called *anansesem*, church and school performances introduced by missionaries since the nineteenth century and the cinema

⁸⁷ Efua Sutherland, *The Story of Bob Johnson, Ghana's Ace Comedian* (Accra: Anowuo Educational Publications, 1970), 7.

⁸⁸ Efua Sutherland, *The Story of Bob Johnson* (1970), 6-7.

that operated in the towns of the Gold coast from the 1920s.

From 1930, when Johnson graduated from Standard Seven and performed fulltime, the concert party travelling genre grew popular throughout the colony. The same play was acted in the towns and villages of the Gold Coast and Asante for each tour, which lasted about two years. Performers hired cinema halls in towns and the large compounds of houses or durbar grounds in villages. A large audience comprised persons from neighboring villages and ranged between five hundred to seven hundred people.⁸⁹ From 1921, these concert party performers influenced their audience in villages (and small towns) to make transactions with the new silver coins issued by the West African Currency Board.⁹⁰

Concert party performers comprised an all male cast and since they used little artistic design, performers depended on costume and makeup even more than dialogue to transmit verisimilitude and comedy. Initially, the groups were called concert party trios because they performed around three stock characters: the gentleman, the houseboy and the lady. The gentleman and the houseboy—also called the joker—wore top hats and striped suits reminiscent of British theatre performances and American minstrel shows. The gentleman and the houseboy focused on creating laughter through burlesque practices but the “lady” used headgears and costume to assume his character and portray the femininity of elite school-educated women in the towns.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Amegatcher, “The Concert Parties” (1968), 4.

⁹⁰ See Kimble, *Political History of Ghana* (1963), 268.

⁹¹ Bame, *Come to Laugh* (1985), 8-12; Cole, *Ghana’s Concert Party Theatre* (2001), 1; Braun, *Stage-shakers!* (2001).

The headdresses that are associated with the lady allows for an understanding of the complexities of gender, race and class that occurred in the colony. As noted, plaits, braids, combed hair and scarves were the everyday hairstyles of African women in the Gold Coast. Women who wanted additional hairstyles could turn to styles that they created from portable stretching combs (and in fewer cases, the permanent wave). However, since many lady impersonators could not use their short hair cuts to create most western oriented hairstyles, they depended on hair accessories, women's hats and berets for urban women and scarves for rural and older women.

Concert parties stalled introducing women onto the stage. One of the reasons is that the very use of female impersonators created comedy. Although they aimed to affect realism on stage, it was an open secret that the "lady" performer had assumed the posture of a woman. Performers and the audience acted as keen observers to ensure that the female impersonator was as true to form as possible. To achieve such verisimilitude, according to Amegatcher, Mr. Bampoe who was a concert party director taught his female impersonators to "wriggle slightly when they walk, to let their arms fall loosely by their sides and to swing them backwards and forwards." Such bodily movements were culturally informed. A beautiful woman was culturally ascribed as shapely and plump enough to swing the biceps of her arms backwards and forwards, "*oto n' abasa.*" Amegatcher explains that: "When the audience encounters a special difficulty in representing the reaction or behavior of women, under special circumstances, a member of the group creates the circumstance with a girl for the

observation of the role player—this is never known to the girl.”⁹²

After World War II concert party performers peaked in popularity as they disentangled themselves from appearances of elitism, performed in the languages of southern Ghana (mostly Akan), employed professional musicians as bandsmen and employed women to enact female roles. As the number of actors increased, their audience referred to them as concert party troupes rather than concert party trios. Despite the diverse characters that concert party performers presented, they continued to use hairdressing and costume as well as music for stereotyping. Stereotyping helped to ensure that in the cities, towns and villages, concert party performances conveyed moral themes such as the components of a successful marriage, career choices, patriotism and historical events, the most popular of which is the Bond of 1844, which emphasized the important effects of education and discernment.⁹³

The members of societies recognized protagonist of such moral performances as stars and some bands and bandsmen as favorites. One such star, Kwasi Awotwe (1925-1993), better known as Bob Cole, achieved the public title Lord Bob Cole and remains one of the few Ghanaians who owned their concert party groups, led their groups in performing and used to act as the female character. Bob Cole’s bodily features were masculine. He sported bushy hair and grew a beard. His voice was well modulated, perhaps baritone.

Bob Cole’s physical appearance and voice ensured that in any mainstream play, he would be cast as a male authority figure. Concurrently, his masculine features had helped to create comedy when he was cast as a female figure. When he

⁹² Amegatcher, “The Concert Parties” (1968), 79.

⁹³ Amegatcher, “The Concert Parties” (1968), 39; W F Ward, *A History of Ghana* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), 194.

was cast as a non-literate old woman, he simply shaved his beard, put on a scarf and wore the cover shoulder cloth. Thus, during this period (1950s and 1960s) of rapid social, economic and political change in the new nation Ghana, Bob Cole was a multitalented professional performer and entrepreneur who had the right attitude.⁹⁴ Since he believed that he was born a comedian, he achieved the burlesque as well as the seriousness that the audience expected from concert party performances. More important, he understood how both men and women acted, and he could act as well as direct others on the best ways to communicate effectively to Ghanaians.

Bob Cole's troupe performed "Kwame Ataapem and His Daughters" in which Kwame Ataapem who was the chairperson of the Timber Contractors Association lavished luxuries on his daughters Ewura Esi and Naana who studied Law and Midwifery, respectively, in London. Together, they maltreated his niece, Awuraa Akua and ridiculed his farming partner Kwasi Tsuii (Bob Cole) for his dirty clothes and rustic appearance. Later, Ataapem convinces Tsuii to seek the divination of a "fetish priest called Mframa (lit. "Wind")" who "danced to beautiful drumming and Kwasi Tsuii joined in." The priest warns Ataapem to take good care of his niece. When a young man called Johnson seeks employment with Ataapem, the "London girls" gauge his level of education as low because when he speaks English his grammar is wrong. Ataapem employs Johnson who marries Awuraa Akua. The married couple experience social and economic problems that occurred as rural persons adjust to urban lifestyles, until Johnson wins the lottery. As the Johnsons rejoice, they spend some of their money with Tsuii because he always gave them good advice. Probably there is a reverse in the quality of clothing of the "London

⁹⁴ Bame, *Come to Laugh* (1985), 14.

girls” and that of Awura Akua when Ataapem and his daughters experience an adverse economic situation and his daughters follow Tsuii to work on the farm in Koforidua.⁹⁵

Two of the important facts that this story presents is first, the stereotype of the “fetish” priest that concert party performers developed was contrary to that which was seen in colonial films and second, there were new ways in which the gendered categories of men and women were viewed.

First, as Bame argued: “in agreement with the African’s rediscovery of himself, and his justifiable wish to show to the rest of the world that he has a distinctive and rich culture, of his own, the comedians make conscious effort to introduce many items of Ghanaian culture into their plays.”⁹⁶ When a play included a fetish priest, performers ensured that he was costumed and performed in verisimilitude. To depict his hairstyle known as *mpesempese* he wore an old, matted wig similar to the costume required for hunters and mentally disturbed persons. These categories of people—hunters, priests and mentally disturbed persons—were expected to have locked hair that reflected their unusual ability to be away from fellow human beings because they were away in the forest or communicating with spirit beings or mentally incapable of caring for themselves, respectively.⁹⁷ In 1950, as a real “fetish” priest explained, “I was forbidden to have my hair cut or bathe or wash it with water. I only cleaned my head with the towel I used in drying myself anytime I had my bath. My tutor prepared a special decoction for my hair with

⁹⁵ Bame, “Contemporary Comic Plays in Ghana” (1969), 144-146.

⁹⁶ Bame, “Contemporary Comic Plays in Ghana” (1969), 104.

⁹⁷ See Roy Sieber, “Prologue” in *Hair in African Art and Culture*; McLeod ; on hunter see photograph in Cole, *Ghana’s Concert Party Theatre* (2001).

certain herbs he collected.”⁹⁸ Furthermore, the very fact that the plays depicted the “fetish” priest with rough hair and costume and named him Mframa is a sign that through the Institute of African Studies, intellectuals were studying the activities of all Ghanaians, whether they had been educated in western or nonwestern ways. Apparently, cross section of society, including those who were not in higher institutions of education, understood the integrative role of concert party performances and the ability of their performers to disseminate information and educate the public.

Second, the plays assumed a moral tone as they promoted the prevalent idea of the African personality. Men and women were successful when they were comfortable in both rural and urban environments. Young women worked and both sexes saved money. To achieve such a moral tone, the plays ridiculed and criticized through depiction. Thus, Bob Cole’s plays criticized the “rustic” niece in a scarf, who, out of no fault of hers, lacked the material wealth and nurturing to meet the demands of the fast urbanizing towns. Although both the ‘London girls’ and the “good-time girls” wore expensive, even ostentatious forms of dress, the “London girls” were expected to show more taste and decorum. They were expected to show more taste in the manner in which they dressed and set trends in fashion. The character called the “London girl” remained attractive especially because such girls had access to cosmopolitan ideas. The message is that these girls would be more valuable if they worked—even if farm work.⁹⁹

There was a third category of young women, called “the good-time girl” that

⁹⁸ Sam Akesson, “The Secret of Akom,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 196, (July, 1950) 241.

⁹⁹ Bame, “Contemporary Comic Plays in Ghana” (1969), 104.

another of Bob Cole's plays explicates. In the play "Knowledge is Power," an aged Kwasi Tsuii agrees to his son Jones' request for help to set up a bar. Jones gives drinks on credit to "good-time girls" who are disinclined to pay. He ignores the cautions of John, his friend and Salami, his Yoruba employee and misuses the profits from the bar. While John farms, saves the proceeds and becomes prosperous, Jones marries one of the "good-time girls," Ewura Esi and together, they "squander" the capital for his beer bar. As he gets desperately poor he looks so unkempt that the "good-time girls" mistake him for a thief; Tsuii and John rush to apprehend the thief but recognize Jones.¹⁰⁰ The "good-time" urban young women were interested in quick money.

Bame enquired from his interviewees what, apart from entertainment, they learned or got from the plays. Many responded that they gained knowledge about fashion in dressing, dance and new songs. They learnt how to interact better with other people and how to "live a good moral life." They learnt about marital life, potential common problems within it and ways of solving these problems. More than 80 percent of the interviewees believed that the comic plays were useful their societies because people were more dynamic and they made more friends. Two out of three interviewees responded that the moral lessons and pieces of advice regulated and guided their daily lives. It helped them to:

know how to treat their husbands, boy and girl friends, other people, to obey their parents and how to live in harmony with other people...[they] declared that the lessons from the plays helped them to shape attitude to life—helped them to avoid bad company, lead decent lives, not to be profligate or licentious, be economical and avoid borrowing money or clothes from other

¹⁰⁰ Bame, "Contemporary Comic Plays in Ghana" (1969), 147-148.

people.¹⁰¹

There was little difference in the extents to which the plays influenced men and women. Increasingly, companies used these plays and performers to advertise products,¹⁰² and the performers participated in government activities as we will discuss in the next chapter.

This chapter has discussed the increasing importance of folk narratives, twentieth century historical literature, plays, films and novels that document hairdressing in the Gold Coast Colony and southern Ghana and may have generated dialogue about the significance of hairdressing. In important ways, these films, short stories, novels and theatre adhered to popular cultural forms and had ideological values that were commensurate with people's political experiences.¹⁰³ The creative works drew their audience's attention to the benefits of hard work, how to accumulate wealth through the new avenues introduced by the twentieth century cash economy and how to acquire different forms of dress with which to attend a variety of entertainments and ceremonies.

The next chapter will study the hairdresser Elizabeth Sheppard who worked as the costume designer of the public film *I Told You So*. The film is based on a play of the same title that Bob Cole's Dynamic Ghana Trio performed when, in 1965, he won

¹⁰¹ Bame, "Contemporary Comic Plays in Ghana" (1969), 91, 92.

¹⁰² Bame, "Contemporary Comic Plays in Ghana" (1969), 95.

¹⁰³ Rouch, *Jaguar* (1957); Adjeso, *I Told You So* (1969).

the public contest for a song to introduce Ghana's currency notes, the New Cedi. The chapter will discuss the importance of hairdressing in highlighting values and economic desires that the film promotes.

Chapter IV
**Performing Gender and the Nation: The Hairdresser Elizabeth Sheppard and
the Film *I Told You So***

On March 1 1969, the weekend preceding Ghana's independence anniversary, the *Weekly Spectator* presented hairdresser Elizabeth Sheppard in a front page epigram and photograph:

This is Mrs. Elizabeth Sheppard, well-known beautician and make-up artist who featured some of her creations at the recent Fashion Show which formed part of the activities of the Eighth Annual Cultural Show in Kumasi. A popular hairstylist, Mrs. Sheppard is pictured wearing some of the latest hair-styles. She helped to make up stars featuring in the Film Corporation's latest production: "I TOLD YOU SO."

Mrs. Sheppard has modeled for a number of advertising firms in Accra since coming home on holidays in June.



Figure 4.1: Elizabeth Sheppard of Elmina and James Town, Accra.¹

¹ *Weekly Spectator*, March 1, 1969.

Sheppard's wig dominates her photograph. Her right hand that forms a fist to support her chin seems to bear the weight of her head. She looks youthful, and she reveals a pleasant yet pensive mood. She embraces Ghana's past and she seems to look into the future. The epigram that accompanies the photograph blurs the possible messages that viewers who were also readers received. Words such as "beautician," "make-up artist," "popular hair-stylist" and "Fashion Show" situate her and her work within a gendered public space in which she lived and worked. Through Sheppard and the works that she helped to create, we see in transnational and cosmopolitan contexts how women transformed hairstyles and hair accessories including hats, wigs and wig-lets from their origins in elite cultures, both customary and colonial to meet the demands of male and female workers and to create a profitable beauty industry.

Yet other key words: "Eighth Annual Cultural Show" and the film "*I Told You So*" resituated her within a context that supports a variety of public spaces, always emphasizing that men and women should actively use the new cultural and economic resources available in Ghana to direct social change. This second context does not necessarily focus on hairdressing as an industry. Instead, it represents an environment of female bonding through popular threaded and braided hairstyles among girls, adolescent girls and women, and cultural and political status hairstyles of girls, adolescent girls, women, men, priests, chiefs and queen mothers.

This chapter studies Elizabeth Sheppard to document the early stages of the growth of hairdressing as a certified profession and understand how Ghanaian women provided hairdressing as advocacy for cultural practices and for the promotion of the arts. It is a study of how Sheppard combined her cultural skills with her urban knowledge in order to participate in hairdressing as a form of female bonding in Sierra Leone and a profession in England and Ghana. Equally important, Sheppard served as makeup artist when the Ghana Films Corporation with the assistance of the Ministry of Civic Education transformed the concert party play *I Told You So* into a film. This chapter is a documentation of the public film and how it draws attention to hairdressing as one of the visual components that highlight the importance of work in forming the nation, Ghana.

The Hairdresser Elizabeth Sheppard

Elizabeth Sheppard was born in 1922, at Elmina, of a Fante father and a Ga mother and named Elizabeth Mamford. She went to school at Elmina and Accra until puberty when she was fostered by her father's relatives in Sierra Leone. Over the past century, British colonial ventures in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast encouraged Gold Coast persons to attend Furreh Bay College in Sierra Leone, and persons of both colonies intermarried. One of the best known marriages was between Joseph Casely Hayford, a lawyer and pan-Africanist and Adelaide Smith, an educationist who ran a vocational school for girls in Sierra Leone.² In Sierra Leone, Sheppard learnt

² See Adelaide Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist: The Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford, 1868-1960* (London: Cass, 1986).

dressmaking, but as she practiced hairdressing on her family and friends, she found that hairdressing was creative, fashionable and lucrative.³ Sheppard returned to Ghana in her late teens, ca. 1940, and entered into an unsuccessful, brief marriage with a teacher named Mr. Williams. She began her work life as a dressmaker and provided hairdressing services with her hot comb. Soon, she concentrated on providing hairdressing services only and introduced her clients to forms of hairstyles for which plant fiber was attached to the hair. These were styles that she wore after she learnt how to provide them in Sierra Leone. In Accra, as Sheppard grew popular and her clients and apprentices increased in number, she had to move from Mamprobi to bigger premises at James Town.

As Sheppard's repertoire of services in hairdressing grew, she visited Florida (America) at about the end of World War II. By then, among the people of the Gold Coast there was an upsurge in global travel and an interest in domestic consumer goods including women's beauty products. Sheppard is remembered as one of the first women in the Gold Coast to wear and instigate the trend in wigs that grew into a fad in that decade, and helped to maintain Ghanaians' interest in hairdressing.⁴ She may represent Roy Sieber's "women of high fashion" who wore wigs in the 1960s.⁵

In 1956, Sheppard traveled to Britain to study beauty culture, after which she opened a salon in London. After she trained as a model, she "extensively toured many European countries and trained many girls, mostly African and West Indian.

³ For women's participation in hairdressing in Sierra Leone, see Simon Ottenberg, "Artistic and Sex Roles in a Limba Chiefdom" in Christine Oppong (ed.), *Female and Male in West Africa* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 81-82.

⁴ Interview July 26, 2004.

⁵ Sieber and Herreman (eds.), *Hair in African Art and Culture* (2000), 9.

Since Sheppard stayed in London for eight years, she had the opportunity to participate in filming.⁶

By 1967 Sheppard was in Ghana and had opened a beauty salon at Community No. 2 (Tema). Over the next year, she regained her acclaim as “an affable, smart and extremely nice lady” who was successful in her business that provided beauty care for women and men. At a cost of over 1000 pounds sterling, she opened a branch of the beauty salon on the Ring Road Central (Accra), which she named Liz Beauty Parlour.⁷ She married Mr. Frank Sheppard, an English engineer who worked with the British Overseas Airways Corporation (B.O.A.C.) in London. Although they both resided in London, Sheppard did not let go of her interest in hairdressing. In 1968, during her vacation in Ghana, she reorganized and re-staffed her salon.⁸ Sheppard employed qualified hairdressers and beauticians; trained others at her salon; encouraged the press to feature the hairstyles that she created and named; participated in fashion shows for which she provided the hairdressings and augmented the skills of the models; worked as the model in advertisements; and aimed to set up a beauty course.⁹ Sheppard told the columnist of the *Weekly Spectator* that: “My primary ambition is to help our young women to bring out the best in them.”¹⁰

In 1969, the book *Accra Tema in Pictures* featured men and women who made achievements in the Greater Accra Region. The book made distinctions in

⁶ *Sunday Mirror*, November 27, 1968.

⁷ *Sunday Mirror*, November 27, 1968.

⁸ *Weekly Spectator*, March 1, 1969.

⁹ *Accra-Tema in Pictures* (Accra: Advance Press Ltd., 1969), 142; *Weekly Spectator*, March 1, 1969.

¹⁰ *Weekly Spectator*, August 31, 1968.

women's dress and performances and indicated an ideal manner in which young women could dress. Sheppard, as its personality for "Ghanaian Arts," appeared in several poses that she used in advertisements. The Miss Ghana 1968, Lovell Wordie who may have straightened her hair with the hot comb was a manageress of Atico Limited, a cosmetic company at Kaneshie. And on its page for cultural practices, the caption for a young woman in a scarf and a dress plaiting the hair of another young woman in a dress reads: "Although the wig is fast displacing hair-plaiting, there are many girls who would rather have their natural hair exposed than cover it with a wig." This picture is next to the caption of a priestess whose "hair is plaited in a special style." If the priestess tied a small scarf around her forehead, she would transform the style into the *bolo* cultural hairstyle that some Fante and Ga women including queen mothers wore at festivals.¹¹

During the decade after *Accra Tema in Pictures* was published, as Sheppard lived according to her understanding of the cultural significance of hairdressing and beauty, she was made queen mother of her family stool in Elmina and she gained a new name, Nana Kuffuah II. Many people of Elmina called her *Nana Hema* (queen mother) affectionately, and extended the reaches of her authority and power.

Although Sheppard preferred to wear simple wig styles with gold jewelry and beads, she continued to transform her hair to suit the various styles that came in vogue.

¹¹ See Kyerematen, A.A. *Panoply of Ghana: Ornamental Art in Ghanaian Tradition and Culture* (New York; Frederick Praeger, 1964), 70; Sieber and Herreman (eds.), *Hair in African Art and Culture* (2000), 96; *Weekly Spectator*, October 22, 1966 and T.K. Biaya "Hair statements in Urban Africa: The Beauty, the Mystic and the Madman" in *The Art of African Fashion* (1969), 106-142.



Figure 4.2: Elizabeth Sheppard, also known as Nana Kuffuah II in a simple wig instead of an *ntakua* head gear.¹²

¹² “Obituary, Nana Abena Kuffuah II” September 2000.

Sheppard's skill in creating a diversity of styles that communicate about the personalities of different people and fictive characters is well represented in the Ghana Films Corporation's film *I Told You So* (1969).

The Ghana Films Corporation's Film *I Told You So*

In 1969, people in Ghana watched a folkloric film on urbanization, education, work, youth and marriage entitled *I Told You So*.¹³ This film by the Ghana Films Corporation was based on the unscripted concert party play performed by Bob Cole's Dynamic Ghana Trio to advertise Ghana's change in currency from the Pound Sterling to the New Cedi. The Ministry of Civic Education provided consultation to the Ghana Films Corporation.¹⁴ Concert party performers focused on presenting verisimilitude in costume and hairdressing and like the Ministry of Civic Education, they communicated with people in everyday life by speaking Akan, the primary language of more than forty percent of the country that served as a lingua franca in most towns.¹⁵

In the film's opening scenes, soon after the Ghana Airways Flight 601 plane takes off from Beirut to Ghana, two hostesses wearing wigs push a trolley to serve the passengers. The passengers include a woman wearing the Nigerian Gele headscarf, a young man who wears a hat and a trouser suit and behind him are two men wearing

¹³ Egbert Adjeso, *I Told You So* (Accra: Ghana Films Corporation, 1969).

¹⁴ Among the cast of the film Rosina's mother Araba Stamp is Margaret Quainoo, one of the first women to act in twentieth century popular theatre performances, a genre that Bob Cole (Rosina's father Kwasi Tsuii) had a great influence. Ekow Ansah, the stage designer is Ghana's most renowned film director; he focuses on gender dynamics in relationships and Ghana's pre-colonial and colonial heritage in films.

¹⁵ Albert Adu Boahen, *Ghana Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Longman, 1975).

gowns and caps that are associated with Nigerians and Moslems. As the plane lands in Accra, a male hostess wearing a cap checks the seatbelts of passengers.

The story serves as a chart of the activities and intentions of all persons in Accra who encounter the young man who seeks to marry. The young man checks in at a hotel that has several sculptures and then he goes to a bar for a meal. As the bar maid who wears a wig and an African print cloth-attire serves him, a man in a small wool hat requests to share the table and asks of the young man's origin. The young man is Kobina Jones, a Ghanaian who stays in Nigeria where he acquired a lot of money and he is in Ghana to marry. The older man responds that he can be of assistance; in Accra, everyone knows him as Osua Abubuor the chief letter writer who cannot save money. Abubour bids farewell to Jones, but a scuffle outside the bar causes him to run back to the bar. Jones reprimands him that it is unsightly for a chief letter writer to be involved in a street brawl and gives him money to pay his debt. Together, Abubuor and Jones leave to meet the former's sister Araba Stamp. Stamp commends Jones for his intent to marry her daughter and his wealth and then she laments that she experienced problems with childbearing and that her husband's only gift to her is her marriage prestation, which comprised the cloth and scarf that she wears. Her message is that she cherishes her beautiful daughter and she expects to receive money from Jones. Jones consoles Stamp and as he requests leave, he gives her one New Cedi, which she uses her cloth to accept, dramatically.

In a flash, an old, bearded man with bushy hair uses his hands to wash clothes. He sighs, and then exclaims that rich men's numerous instructions restrict their wives. He would rather have his beloved daughter Rosina marry a poor man.

The next scene takes place in front of Abubuor's house. Stamp in her signature scarf and cloth introduces her daughter Rosina who wears a wig and *papa-pata* clothing to Jones.¹⁶ Stamp tells Rosina to attend to all his requests. Rosina asks about Jones's profession, and establishes that some young men do not possess the goods about which they boast.

In a flash, the old, bearded man with bushy hair is hangs the washed clothes on a clothesline.

Jones suggests that he will open a shop for Rosina but she replies that young men who are attracted to young women make such promises even when they do not have money. She accepts four New Cedis as taxi fare to and from Adabraka where her friends live.¹⁷

The next scene is Jones' hotel room. Rosina introduces her friends who wear wigs and printed cloth-attires: Grace is Fante and Serwa is Asante. Jones gives them a seat, asks what they will drink and states with familiarity that Rosina drinks only whisky. Grace drinks both whisky and beer. Rosina explains that she plays a game of hide-and-seek with her father who does not accept Jones' marriage proposal.

In a flash, the old, bearded man with bushy hair who washes sighs and states that he would rather have a poor man marry his daughter than a rich man. Any poor man who wants to marry her should come to him.

Rosina on behalf of her friends requests leave of Jones; in the evening, they will all meet at the Ringway dance. Jones gives them some New Cedis for taxi-fare.

¹⁶ *Pata-pata* is cloth that is designed and sewn as a long, flowing blouse. It became popular during the 1960s. Mariam Makeba who is a renowned vocalist and civil rights advocate from South Africa sang a song called *Pata-pata*.

¹⁷ The film does not make explicit the part of Accra that Rosina lives.

Grace asks to speak to Jones alone. Rosina takes offence and complains that Grace made the request because she has seen so many New Cedis. Rosina warns Grace that Jones belongs to her. Likewise, Serwah reprimands Grace and then leaves with Rosina. Grace offers her brother as Jones' spokesperson for his marriage proposal. He thanks her and gives her one New Cedi.

In the next scene, Grace's brother with bushy hair serves as an elder in the town and attests to the humility of the wealthy Jones. The old, bearded man who has bushy hair is called Kwesi Tsuii. Tsuii responds with anger and sends Grace's brother away. When leaving, Grace's brother walks past a young man, an Ewe called Kodzovi, ironing clothes. Tsuii tells Kodzovi to send the ironed clothes to their owners and then informs Stamp that Jones seeks to marry Rosina and then settle in Nigeria. He asks for her opinion. Stamp responds that he knows that she is a woman. Whatever he, a man, thinks is fine with her. Tsuii explains that he would rather not have a rich man marry his daughter because in this world, women are wise yet only men decide about public concerns. In other words, Rosina as a rich wife will not be able to make use of her wisdom because she and her husband's domestic lives will be a part of public discussions.

Smart points to the only clothing that she wears everywhere; she does not understand his opposition to this rich young man who is attracted to their daughter and would uplift them from their dismal economic situation. Suddenly, she stands up in anger and asks "did I grow your beard with you?" They insult each other in a burlesque manner at a time when they have the opportunity to decide, together, about Rosina's suitor. Finally, Smart threatens to call forth her brother the "scholar."

Stamp's brother Abubuor arrives at Tsuii's house and threatens to stay to see to Rosina's marriage. After Tsuii leaves the siblings alone to deliberate over his reasons for not accepting Jones, Stamp chastises her brother because when Tsuii sought to marry her, she said no but Abubuor would not listen to her. They decide to demand thousands of New Cedis for Rosina's marriage prestation, with which Abubuor would construct a high-rise building and buy a Benz car. Stamp plans to live with him but Abubuor disagrees because her rightful place is in the abode of her husband. Stamp agrees and tells her brother not to fear Tsuii because his beard is in reality a sign of poverty.

As Tsuii, Stamp and Abubuor sit in front of Tsuii's house, Abubuor demonstrates his literacy when he sends Stamp to "get home and callable the Rosable and comable..." Tsuii asks Rosina wearing a wig and an African print clothing whether she knows the rich man from Nigeria who has requested to marry her. Rosina hedges and excites all those who are gathered there. Tsuii exclaims that she does not know the young man, while Abubuor and Smart shout: "She knows him!" Rosina joins them, assertively. Grace's brother presents the drink for the marriage proposal which Abubuor accepts and explains, "I don't fear who" (lit. I don't fear anyone).

In the following scene at the dance, Rosina, Grace and Serwa are resplendent in designs of wigs and *pata-pata* clothes and Jones and his "short friend" Kawewe wear trouser suits and hats. They dance to a medley of highlife songs. There are several young men dancing with young women in wigs or with hair curls or with short haircuts.

In the next scene, Grace's brother welcomes Rosina and her friends to a table and reports about his successful meeting with her relatives.

In a flash, Tsuii hangs the washed clothes on his clothesline.

Rosina notes that she will need about 300 New Cedis to shop for her marriage ceremony. Jones offers 500 New Cedis because everyone will comment that his wife is shopping for their grand wedding.

In the next scenes, Tsuii sings songs at home and at the palace. The first song is a folktale about an intuitive cat that warned camel and horse that satiated camel's misbehavior could lead all domestic animals into trouble. The camel and horse dismiss cat's foreboding and remind cat that he is a thief. One day, as a result of camel's misbehavior horse runs several furlongs to bring the doctor to the master and the other animals serve as meat for a ceremonial meal. Tsuii leaves for the palace in response to the summons of the *Odikro* (village chief). As Tsuii and the chief sing about a poor, itinerant tailor and then discuss the potency and addictiveness of alcohol, Tsuii explains that when he gets drunk, he signals that trouble is brewing. The *Odikro* explains that since the doctor says he should not drink, he does so stealthily.

The elders meet Tsuii at the palace and Grace's bushy haired brother is the elder who gives an account of Tsuii's disagreement with Rosina's marriage to a rich man who will help to improve the town. Tsuii disagrees. The *Odikro* threatens to make Tsuii an outcast and dismisses him. Abubuor appears and receives praises from the elders who are leaving the palace. Abubuor and the *Odikro* scheme that as a part of the procedure for the wedding, Abubuor will collect a sum of money from Jones

and give the *Odikro* his share.

At the marriage ceremony, Jones wears his usual suit and hat while Rosina wears a veil, a white lace blouse and a *kente* cloth that is tied as a sarong. The attending men and women wear clothes with African designs and sing *Nwonkoro* Christian hymns in Fante. Abubuor dances to the call and response mode of the songs and removes ten bottles of alcoholic drink from his pocket for the marriage ceremony. He pours libation and drinks to the health of the couple. After Rosina refuses to drink, Abubuor calls Grace and advises that because of her lifestyle, she could reach the old age of 24 years without getting married. Grace responds that she will marry when he removes his dirty coat. As the crowd dances to a highlife tune, a police car pulls up to the house. The “CID man” manhandles Jones, causes his hat to fall off and then sends him to the police headquarters because Jones stole diamonds from Akwatia. As Abubuor cries that his money is gone, Tsuii appears. Tsuii sacks Stamp who is still wearing a cloth and scarf even if they appear to be new.

In a flash, the police with Jones arrive at the police headquarters.

Rosina changed into braids and a cloth that is tied around her body like a sarong and carries her first bucket of water to pour into the barrel for laundry. She exclaims when she pours the water because someone is in the barrel. Rosina and her father command the person to get out of the barrel. A bedraggled and wet Abubuor rises, sans his little hat.

The Importance of Hairdressing in the Film

The possible implications of hairstyles, civic behavior and national cultural

values circulating in Ghana during the 1950s through 1970s manifest in *I Told You So*. The film focuses on age, gender and location to portray the changing social types and moral positions of men and women.¹⁸ Since hairdressing continued to be one of the important icons that identified people as belonging to new and changing social groups, we could locate *I Told You So* in the ideas of hairdressings in twentieth century fiction about Ghana that I outlined in the previous chapter.

According to the outline about the depictions of women in writings and performances that I provided in the previous chapter, at the turn of the twentieth century, women who did not attend school were stereotyped for wearing pieces of cloth or for sewing cloth into the *kabasroto* (“cover shoulder cloth”) that became fashionable from the 1860s. During the colonial era women who wore cloth designs only were distinguished from those who wore frocks. It seemed more important for women to use frocks and accompanying hairstyles to communicate that they were conversant with the colonial and international fashions. After World War Two when people of the jurisdiction experienced decolonization and political independence, women who wore cloth designs only were called “colo” (that is, they belonged to a past, colonial era).

Women and men used fashion to express their understanding of “Africanization” and they progressed in their societies when they made use of their increased access to national and international school-education. School-educated women and men dressed their hair to suit the particular cloth or frock for the different categories of events that they attended. Thus, although during the pre-colonial and

¹⁸ See Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

colonial eras, women who wore European cloths and then frocks were regarded as enlightened, by the 1960s, it was more important for women to use dress to communicate that they were conversant with the intra-national and international fashions.

In the film *I Told You So*, Stamp belongs to the restricted social type of “colo” women and she occupies a very limited moral position. She portrays older women’s lack of school-education, limited access to participating in the educational activities of nubility rites, and their interest in high fertility because couples who gave birth to many children received awards. Stamp thinks that she is poor, even though in her matrilineal society, her brother received school-education during the colonial era with which he works as a letter-writer. Furthermore, not only did Stamp and her brother inherit riches, she married Tsui who is a wealthy stranger and she gave birth to several children—even if only Rosina survived childhood. Arguably, Stamp’s main problem is that she never developed a facility or capacity to choose wisely mainly because she and her society can envisage and label her as a “cloth woman” only. Stamp could vary her clothing to express her taste. Instead, she complains of poverty; that the only clothes she ever had in her adult life are the cloths and scarves that Tsui presented to her at her marriage ceremony. She could consider whether she used these marriage prestations to make economic contributions to herself, her family and society—such a consideration was expected from women who had participated in nubility rites.¹⁹ Rather, Stamp depicts a perpetual need to enhance her status by acquiring money, Ghana’s New Cedi notes from men whom she thinks of as a part of her family. The extent to which she focuses on her dress and men’s appearances

¹⁹ Peter Sarpong, *Girls’ Nubility Rites in Ashanti* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1977).

makes her wrongly assess situations and people's characters, be it hers or others.

Stamp aimed to progress by encouraging her beautiful daughter Rosina to marry the most eligible bachelor, Jones, however, the film's portrayal of wigs encourages adults to enable urban, young women to work.

Indeed, some of the main purposes of *I Told You So* are to celebrate the arts and encourage women to use their personal knowledge, school-education and economic potentials to contribute in developing their societies and the nation. Since it was a given that young women would attend to their beauty, influential members of the society presented examples of how young women combined their educational qualifications with their beauty in order to engage in employment that showcased the African pride. The film encouraged young girls who were conscious about beauty but had limited school-education to work in service provider jobs such as attendance at a bar. Yet, the waiter's limited access to school-education and her dependence on tips from her customers increases the possibility that even though she wears a wig and works, she is vulnerable to the staid and gendered attitudes of a man such as Abubuor the letter writer who wears a small cap. Fortunately, Ghanaians' increased access to school-education is important in determining the new kinds of service sector work to which women had access. The most obvious work, internationally, was the recently introduced job of an airhostess and airport receptionist both of which had uniforms, as we will discuss further in the next chapter. While the cloth and frock places the waiter at the bar and the frock ladies who work as Ghana Airways hostesses in different social groups, historically, the fact that they both wear wigs and they belong to the service economy give them a common point of view. Each young woman

communicates that her labor that requires an investment in glamour provides for her needs and that of the society in a pleasant manner.

Although these two categories of young women's dress served as a common identification of their vitality, femininity and beauty, many other young women including Rosina who we see transforming into a heroine and her friends needed to remove their wigs to reveal their "natural" hair that was woven into braids and plaits. The targeted Ghanaian audience of the 1960s knew that such a hairstyle protected Rosina's natural hair from breaking, even when she wore wigs during previous scenes. Her new hairstyle that is based upon old practices of braiding is practical for carrying everyday loads unlike the wig. Despite the high quality of her education, Rosina's uncovered local hairstyle now leaves her at par with the other girls in urban towns who are earning their livelihoods. She will help to expand her father's laundry business into a family owned business. Through the use of wigs and local hairstyles, *I Told You So* shows how Rosina's father tries to shape her identity.

Rosina's father Tsuii is the hero and the truly wealthy man of the film. He sports bushy hair and a long beard, a combination of facial and head hair, which make him comparable with the masculine, authentic, rough haired hunter in Rattray's anthropological findings discussed in the previous chapter. His beard together with his serious attitude is in tune with the fashion in beards and studious aura that was the fashion among persons with higher education.²⁰ His name Tsuii in Ga has dialectic meanings, "patience" and "long-suffering," characteristics that Tsuii possesses. He portrays how Ghanaians needed to be thoughtful when making personal choices

²⁰ See Catherine Cole, *Ghana's Concert Party Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

because their decisions could contribute to the welfare of their societies. His wife, Araba Stamp, never developed a facility or capacity to choose wisely mainly because Stamp and her society can envisage and label her as a “cloth woman” only.

The majority of the members of the society who are not well-read may admire Tsuii's *akonta* (brother-in-law) Abubuor, who wears a small cap and has a pen in his hair until the final scene when Rosina pours water into a barrel in which he hides. As the town's chief letter writer he knows all the townspeople. He is alert enough to spot strangers such as Jones and he easily gets dazzled by their money to the extent that when Jones tips the wig-wearing waiter for serving him a meal, his wealth dazzles Abubuor. One of the problems revealed through Abubuor's sister is that like his little cap and the wrong English that he speaks, Abubuor generates ideas that are too small or too huge. His ideas yield inadequate results. As a result, Abubuor is inadvertently outsmarted by Jones who wears a bigger hat and does not provide the marriage prestation.

As Jones, wearing a hat, flies from Nigeria to Ghana the audience recognizes him as the most urbane male character in the film. The audience sees Jones bare headed only once, at his wedding ceremony, during which the police expose his identity. Apparently, Jones did not bring corruption from Nigeria, outside Ghana, to Accra. Rather, he first stole diamonds from Akwatia, within the country, then tried to escape from the reaches of the law by traveling to Nigeria. The police arrest him for theft.

On the other hand, although Jones' counterpart, the chief is called *Nana* (chief) and *Odikro* (village or lineage head, head of the smallest political unit), he

always appears bare headed or wearing a small hat. Since such appearances do not match photographic representations of chiefs of the time, he is a symbol of an urbanized chief who needs a grounded sense of history and belonging.²¹

This chapter discussed how during the nationalist period of the 1950s and 1960s, hairdressing was important in the fashioning of Ghanaians as persons who fit into new and changing working groups. The presentation of hairdressings in creative works such as the performances of concert party theaters and the career of the certified hairdresser Elizabeth Sheppard including her work as the makeup artist of the public film *I Told You So* serve as texts with immense historical significance. Through artistic mediums including hairdressing, Sheppard, the concert parties and the film express the changing definitions of class and provide a visual understanding of the new roles that persons in urban Ghana imagined and asserted or countered with their performances. The next chapter extends the discussions in this chapter about how Ghanaians looked to hairdressing to depict nationalist and transnational ideas and the history about the professionalizing of hairdressing in Ghana.

²¹ Culturally, a drunken chief had to be destooled. For the experiences of chiefs during the twentieth century, see Kofi Abrefa Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Asante: A Study of the Influence of Contemporary Social Changes on Ashanti Political Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951); Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana, 1951-1960* (Accra: F Reimmer; Athens: Ohio University Press, Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Sara Berry, *Chiefs Know Their Boundaries: Essays on Property, Power, and the Past in Asante, 1898-1996* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; Oxford: J. Currey; Cape Town: D. Phillip, 2001).

CHAPTER V

Professionalizing Hairdressing: Mediating Beauty, Gender and Class

Throughout the twentieth century, girls and women participated in hairdressing as an expression of their femininity. Hairdressing was a domestic, female activity that was practiced among relatives and friends who depended on their talents to create styles that were available in popular and public cultures. As casual wear the majority of women in the Gold Coast combed their hair, wore scarves, braids or plaits. For more formal occasions women wore other hairstyles that they created by using the hot comb to straighten or curl their hair, modifying their combed hairstyle, braids and plaits, changing the size, name and type of material used as scarves and the style of the scarves, tying the third, barely sewn part of the cover shoulder cloth into different styles of head gears, or by wearing wigs. Women's hairstyles in Accra increased as their societies became more varied.

By the 1950s, as more young girls and women gained opportunities to attend different activities, the functions that they attended determined their choice of dress, including hairstyles. When they attended colonial, administrative ceremonies as dignitaries they wore hats, wigs (less frequently), combed their hair or straightened and curled their hair with the hot comb. Usually, women who attended colonial, administrative ceremonies were the wives of African government officials. They attended such functions on their own merit rarely because school educated women of the Gold Coast had limited access to salaried work. Most women employed by the colonial government were required to quit their jobs when they began childbearing.¹

¹ See Takyiwaa Manuh "Women and Their Organizations during the Convention People's Party Period" in *The Life and Work of Kwame Nkrumah*, ed. Kwame Arhin, (Accra: Africa World Press,

Since women lacked encouragement to develop a sustained life in public service and were denied the opportunity for promotions to managerial levels, few women in the Gold Coast found need to demarcate types of dresses (hairstyles and clothes) for daily office wear.²

From the 1950s, the measures for nationalism and decolonization encouraged an unprecedented number of young girls and women to gain school education, work, seek leisure and participate in public activities. The visual impact of hairdressing was so strong, that in October 1966, a columnist of the *Weekly Spectator* newspaper commented on the impact of hairdressers' services in urban Ghana:

Differences between the present hair-dos in Ghana and those in the Gold Coast era are becoming too striking to omit mention when discussing fashion...

[U]ntil quite recently, the hot comb played a prominent part in hair-dos. A result of excessive use of the hot comb was that most women who used it lost a good deal of their hair...

Many women were combing their hair backwards without shaping it to any style. Others plaited their hair in one or two rows to the side of the head. These hairstyles were meant for many occasions including dances, parties and for the office.

It was fashionable to leave curled hair unshaped. But today the roller has come in handy and curled hair is rolled and combed to produce a beautiful hair-do. A well curled, rolled and nicely combed hair can be beautiful for social parties, and does look quite sophisticating for normal office duties.³

Women demanded prevailing hairstyles and new ones at commercial rates that were unprecedented, which contributed to the interest of the press in hairdressing and beauty care services.

1993), 102.

² For Gold Coast women's access to education and their sense of fashion see Audrey Gadzekpo, "Women in the West African Newspapers" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2001), 208, 226; Akosua Perbi, paper presented at the Ghana Historical Society Annual Conference, August 2006.

³ *Weekly Spectator*, October 22, 1966.

This chapter focuses on the 1950s and 1960s to discuss the contexts within which hairdressers provided commercial services in Accra and how hairdressers and beauty culturists constituted a new group of certified professionals in who provided fashion oriented hairdressings, many of which were worn by women salaried workers. It discusses the education that these providers of beauty care sought and the social capital that they accrued when they joined the press to inform Ghanaians about the beauty service economy and beauty industry and address public concerns about the new trend in wigs.

The Changing Ideas of Nationalism, Patterns of Residence and Work

During the 1950s and the 1960s, women's hairstyles mirrored national and international ideas and events. The demands for hairdressing among women in the Gold Coast grew alongside political liberalization that resulted most obviously in a change of name to Ghana but also a change in residential patterns and an expansion of the capital and its infrastructure. An airport that was constructed at the northeast of Cantonments to train artisans during World War II was extended as the Airport Residential Area for Europeans and senior African officers; this helped to change the racial segregation in patterns of residence.⁴ Ghanaian women and expatriate women (Euro-American, African and of African descent) living in these residential areas were usually the wives of Ghanaian men and expatriate men who were employed to help construct the Accra municipality, into a city (1961) and Greater Accra (1963)

⁴ Frank Amoah, "A Study of the Development of a West African City" (MA Thesis, University of Ghana, 1964), 78.

that incorporated Tema and surrounding districts. The men expanded the public sectors of the economy including institutions of higher education, civil and public services and industries.⁵ The women expanded a class that was commonly referred to as elites and they were the first to contribute in creating a market for additional forms of hairstyles, which encouraged women of different classes to study hairdressing as their certified profession.

This new market for hairdressing grew with Ghanaians' increased mobility. Travel by sea, railway, road and air accelerated people's ability to contextualize their actions as related at ethnic, national and transnational levels. The most spectacular mode of travel was by air and the most pervasive was by road, which surpassed rail. International travel that used to be by sea (the Elder Dempster Line steamships) competed with air travel. On July 4 1958, Ghana Airways was formed as a partnership in which the government owned two thirds of the shares and the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) one third. In October, Ghana Airways started operating with mostly junior staff from the West African Airways Corporation (WAAC) that was based in Nigeria and a senior management of mainly European expatriates.⁶ Air travel grew very popular as Ghanaians associated the national airplanes with visually attractive job opportunities.

In 1961, as Ghana Airways sent Ghanaians to London for training, according to *Drum* magazine, teenage girls vied for the jobs of the air hostess as a "glamorous profession."⁷ *Drum* originated in 1951 in South Africa and was by March 1957, publishing local editions in Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya. As it provided political and

⁵ Amoah, "A Study of the Development of a West African City" (1964), 84.

⁶ *The Ghanaian*, April 1960.

⁷ *Drum*, March 1961.

popular information to entertain and instruct, *Drum* served as an important space where journalists discussed hairstyles and other fashion oriented practices to highlight and promote the image of women in Ghana and Africa.⁸ It appraised the work of Ghanaian air hostesses as excellent, arguing that: “During their training, the girls take courses in sea and jungle survival.” After they qualified in Ghana as different categories of receptionists, they trained in England as flight stewardesses. Furthermore, for a fortnight, “they concentrate[d] on beauty culture at a famous London mannequin school,” which emphasized their need to maintain a svelte “figure... [for] the trim grey uniforms they will wear for international flights,” and guided them in “the arts of make-up,” “elocution” and “walk[ing].”⁹

The uniforms of these air hostesses and their instructors were attractive. Among the several photographs of the air hostesses that *Drum* showed, one presents them as recruits; only their two instructors are in white uniforms that comprise a cap, a blouse and either a skirt or a pair of shorts with socks. The rest of the photographs presented the air hostesses in caps together with their gray skirt suits or a white blouse and skirt or *kente* skirt suits with their hair straightened or curled. The young woman in one photograph waits to welcome a “VIP” (Very Important Person) who has just arrived, while in the two other photographs, each of the two young women in *kente* skirt suits carries a baby, Black or Caucasian.¹⁰ Through the visuality and literature that readers gained from these air hostesses, *Drum* conflated Ghanaian’s love for women’s domestic performances as hostesses and nurturing mothers with

⁸ Kenda Mutonji, “Dear Dolly’s” Advice: Representations of Youth, Courtship and Sexualities in Africa, 1960-1980,” *The International Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2000), 1-23.

⁹ *Drum*, March 1961.

¹⁰ *Drum*, March 1961.

young women's new desire to work in the most public realm, internationally.

Similarly, in March 1962 *Drum* featured Star Annan, the first winner of the Miss Ghana pageant who now worked as an airhostess. *Drum* wrote that since 1959, “glamorous Star Annan” was in the public’s eye view as an icon of national beauty. During the 1960s, while serving as a hostess with Ghana Airways Corporation, she contributed in showcasing her workplace as the new means of transportation that ushered in the changes in fashion, and new forms of labor that welcomed women globally.¹¹ One of her colleagues, Agnes Tay together with other women working in the airline industry in Ethiopia, Turkey and England were guests of a radio and a television program in London each of which emphasized the “loveliness of girls employed by airlines.”

In addition, *Drum* encouraged women to wear clothing and hairdressings that exhibit an “African pride” that is cosmopolitan. It featured the cosmopolitan hairstyle, “the Ghana Line:”

In America, it’s called the Tress Line, in England they know it as the Short Craze and in France it’s Ullo Paris. Now the same style has come to Ghana—where naturally it is called the Ghana Line.

Hair stylists predict that the Ghana line and its variations will soon be one of the most popular coifs among smart women in West Africa.

But other styles are not being neglected. In fact, hairdressers in Ghana and Nigeria are adding their individual touches to overseas lines with exciting results. The Princess Coif ... is a good example. So is Carefree.¹²

For those Ghanaians who wanted the country to enter a global political-economy as coequals with western nations, *Drum* sold its discovery of an overseas hairstyle that

¹¹ *Drum*, March 1962.

¹² *Drum*, March 1961.

depicted royalty, the “Princess Coif,” and freedom, “Care Free.” Just as hairdressers in America, England and France were appropriating and exhibiting these hairstyles, so could individuals in Ghana, by naming it “Ghana Line.” “[S]mart women in West Africa” would wear the hairstyle, which had “variations,” to help solidify impressions of Ghana’s emerging nationality. For the group of readers who already preferred a specific hairstyle, *Drum* conceded that their styles would not be “neglected.” Overall, *Drum* proposed a blend or a recreation of different styles, newly imported but with “individual touches” that highlighted the wearer’s appearance for “exciting results.” Indeed, the young girls and women who were interested in wearing such hairdressings had also a vivid interest in fashion, comportment and jobs that require school-education.

Hairdressing and Increased Access to School Education

From the 1950s, an unprecedented number of Ghanaians acquired school-education. Many women and men who had never been to school had access to mass education, with which they were attentive to visual images and gained the skills to read their languages and fundamental English. The major languages—Ga, Twi, Fante, Ewe and Hausa—used in writing columns in a national newspaper such as the *Sunday Spectator and Vanguard* may have encouraged these adult students and graduates to read or flip through the pages to know about events within and outside Ghana. Since there was much emphasis on the African personality, these students and graduates could study the portraits that had the fashionable hairdressings of distinguished women who attended the events that were topical and recreational.

Equally important, they could encourage their girls and boys to attend school.

The 1960 census indicated that in Accra, the number of girls enrolled in primary schools came closest to that of boys. This realization may have facilitated the 1961 Education Act that made primary education compulsory for girls and boys of school going age. Although more boys than girls continued to middle and secondary schools, more than ever, young women who sought salaried work studied to graduate in commercial, secretarial and secondary schools, colleges for teaching and nursing and polytechnics and universities (including Adult Education and extramural programs). Many workers attended evening classes in the major towns and the city of Accra or enrolled in correspondence courses in Britain. The heterogeneous composition of Accra facilitated the migration of school educated young men and young women from different ethnic groups to Accra where they lived with relatives, sought salaried work and enrolled in these institutions of higher education.¹³

The increased demand for hairdressing among students in higher education, workers and housewives provided an incentive for many women who were Ghanaian or African migrants to provide commercial hairdressing services such as braids and plaits. There were two categories of this type of hairdressers; sedentary and itinerant. Sedentary hairdressers had a signboard made of scrap lumber (or plywood) on which were painted several styles of braids and plaits. The majority of African women who could not let friends or relatives provide their hairstyles sought the services of sedentary hairdressers at the hairdresser's house or the hairdresser's stall in markets

¹³ See Table 3.1 Occupations of adult African urban dwellers by sex, 1955-1975 (percentages), in Claire Robertson, Claire Robertson, "Women in the Urban Economy" in *African Women South of the Sahara* ed. Margaret Jean Hay and Sharon Stichter (New York: Longman, 1995), 47.

such as Adabraka, Selwyn (renamed Makola No. 1 and Makola No. 2) in central Accra and Mallam Atta at New Town or near some transport stations.

Itinerant hairdressers comprised two categories. The first category of itinerant hairdressers that provided braids and plaits advertised their services by carrying on their heads a small plastic or enamel bowl in which they arranged a few combs, needles and black thread. As they walked from place to place, they provided to their customers the same hairdressings that sedentary hairdressers provided.

The second category of itinerant hairdressers provided a locally prepared black hair colorant. They advertised their services by carrying on their heads a bigger enamel bowl in which they arranged a small gallon of peroxide, pieces of a black substance, possibly kohl, white camphor balls, kerosene, a soft brush (which was sold as a shoe brush), pieces of linen or cloth which they used to cover their clients' shoulders and an enamel plate in which they poured the peroxide to dissolve a piece of the black substance. After soaking the brush in the solution they brushed the hair of their clients, who comprised children and adults of both sexes. The belief was that the sun discolors the naturally black hair, while colorants restore it.

A rather high number of the clients were children. Since children's hair was infested with lice, they applied the hair colorant and crushed camphor balls. In some cases these children applied only a solution of camphor balls and kerosene, or if they did not have lice, they sought solely to color their hair.

Older adults applied the hair colorant to restore their hair color that the sun bleached and they maintained a sense of youth by regulating their sense of aging. In Accra, the popularity of the hair colorant among all persons and the brisk activities of

most women resulted in the coinage of a phrase, “Yomo be Ga,” meaning it is impossible to differentiate between young and old persons in Accra.¹⁴

The places and events that women attended and the frequency with which they attended rendered for consideration other hairstyles that women wore at similar functions, globally. Some women met this prevalent demand for this category of hairdressers and beauty culturists by setting up beauty salons after they enrolled in courses for hairdressing and beauty culture or apprenticed with hairdressers and beauty culturists. In accordance with Ghana’s “Africanization” policy, when Ghanaian men traveled for higher education in Europe and North America their wives who traveled with them took the opportunity to study an occupation. Hairdressing and beauty culture together with millinery and modeling were popular fashion oriented courses. Courses traditionally associated with women such as dressmaking, home economics, nursing and midwifery continued to be well patronized. These courses were attractively structured as short, practical and certified. Since the completion of each part qualified the certificate holder to work, these young wives were able to study and practice a vocation while fulfilling their reason for travel, which was to keep their husbands company and have children.

In the United States of America, these graduates and other housewives who were interested in fashion, individually and in groups, organized shows for which they served as cultural brokers to demonstrate patterns of dress that were created by Africans and could be associated with different societies in Africa. The changing modes of travel that facilitated travel to Western Europe with the possibility of continuing to North America accelerated the immediacy of the fashion shows and

¹⁴ Interview, August 2000.

engendered interest within Ghana, while the short duration of courses on dress and fashion provided an incentive for many women and rather few men to travel to study in Britain, Paris, the United States of America and Germany.

Ghana's history with Britain meant that many Ghanaians knew about British schools and the requirements for enrollment. Ghanaians studied at Morris School of Hairdressing, London Institute, Mamore College, Hollywood Limited, Eve's Academy of Hair Dressing Salon, Eugene Method and Technique Salon and Hopes Beauty School. Hairdressing schools concentrated on the hair, while beauty culture schools and programs provided additional courses in manicure and massage. The requirements of courses in both hairdressing and beauty culture allowed students to elect the treatment of the hair of Blacks (Caribbean), Caucasians (European) and the weaving of natural and synthetic hair into wigs. Furthermore, the hairdressing programs were gender specific, such that the curriculums emphasized ladies' hairdressing. Ghanaian women studied women's hairdressing and some studied courses on men's hairdressing in addition. Possibly, Ghanaian women preferred to attend schools that had training facilities than schools that required salons to provide the practical training.

Many Ghanaian women attended the Morris School of Hairdressing, which required that upon passing its written exam and providing 1000 hours of training a student graduated with a diploma. The school had about a hundred and fifty students enrolled each year; about a fifth comprised foreign students who later set up their own businesses in their countries. Many graduates returned to take new courses in

hairdressing and beauty culture as well as refresher courses in high fashion.¹⁵

Hairdressers and beauty culturists were entitled to join not for profit, nongovernmental organizations. From the 1950s, the British Hair Dressers Association attracted the largest number of foreign trained Ghanaian hairdressers. These hairdressers in Britain together with the producers of beauty care products were members of the Hairdressing and Beauty Industry Authority (HABIA).

Ghanaian hairdressers and beauty culturists were members of an informal pan-African group. As students or professional hairdressers and beauty culturists who specialized in “Caribbean Hair,” these Ghanaians provided beauty care for a rather large representation of people in Britain who were originally from the Caribbean and the West Indies. Many Ghanaians who stayed to work found jobs in their beauty salons. Likewise, people from this region formed the majority of the clients of Ghanaians who set up their own beauty salons. Since Ghanaian hairdressers and beauty culturists worked diligently and were pleasant, they became members of a common Diaspora of Africans and people of African descent.

As Pan-Africanists, they provided beauty care and acted as hostesses to dignitaries from each other’s country and region. By the end of the 1950s, in the United States of America, these graduates as well as dressmakers and other housewives who were interested in fashion, individually and in groups, organized shows for which they served as transnational cultural brokers to demonstrate patterns of dress that were created by Africans and associated with different societies in Africa.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Sunday Mirror*, May 4, 1968.

¹⁶ Interview, June 2001.

Hairdressers and beauticians who returned to Ghana had some common experiences. Some hairdressers and beauty culturists converted into beauty salons their garages, verandahs or rooms in their houses. Many of them found need to maintain a close relationship between their chosen profession and their domestic work, including taking care of their homes. While initially, these hairdressers and beauticians sought work in large scale beauty salons, eventually, they developed a clientele through their relatives, friends and the colleagues of their husbands. These hairdressers and beauty culturist lived near the roads and streets of Osu, Adabraka, Asylum Down, the Ring Road, Ridge, Cantonments and Airport Residential Area; the vicinity in which Ghanaians with higher incomes lived and business proprietors set up beauty salons. By 1963, clients, students and apprentices came from all over Greater Accra to these places that served as the common location of beauty salons and beauty schools, the beauty service sector.¹⁷

Since 1960, at Accra Central, there was a hairdressing salon in the Kingsway shopping mall. Run by an expatriate woman, her clients were probably her colleagues including educated Ghanaians as well as women who came to shop and conduct other businesses in the premises. During that same year, a group of proprietors set up the first formal beauty school at the Hollywood Hairdressing Saloon next to Kingsway and within the premises of Cocobod (Cocoa Marketing Board). Hollywood operated as a daytime salon and an evening school. The beauty

¹⁷ From the twentieth century, anthropologists documented the important role that apprenticeship played in the acquisition of skills in Ghana, even of not on hairdressing. See Esther Goody, *Parenthood and Social Reproduction: Fostering and Occupational Roles in West Africa* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Esther Goody, *From Craft to Industry: The Ethnography of Proto-Industrial Cloth Production* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Christine Oppong, *Growing Up in Dagbon* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1973).

school provided six months courses in hairdressing and beauty culture but did not provide specialist courses for graduates. Its first eight students learnt various services including hairdressing, facial, manicure and pedicure. The first batch of students started working in the beauty salon barely three months after classes began; but as workers, they specialized in providing only one of these services. Most of the first group of students continued to work at Hollywood after graduation. It was comparatively easy for them to form contacts with subsequent students because the school was an important source for supplying the staff of other large scale beauty salons.

The courses at Hollywood were almost identical to those of schools abroad. To some hairdressers of this period, Hollywood set a precedent such that Ghanaians who studied hairdressing and beauty culture in schools within and outside the country did not receive formal training in some aesthetics in hairdressing such as braids and thread plaits that are prevalent in Ghana and Africa.

Instead, as the provision of salon type hairdressings grew popular, hairdressers had to travel overseas to increase their knowledge about hairdressing and improve upon their skills. As a women's columnist of the *Sunday Mirror* stated:

[Beauty] Saloons have lately been springing up in the country, especially in the cities. One of such saloons is Bea's Beauty Palace situated on Ring Road Central in Accra. The saloon, established in 1961 has four sections: wig styling, hairdressing (European and African sections), manicure and body massaging, and barbering.

Bea's Beauty Palace which is very modern has 23 employees, qualified hairdressers and weavers. Six of the Beauticians and one weaver were trained abroad. It has also on its staff two expatriates. Two female beauticians and a male wig weaver will be leaving soon to the United Kingdom for further training on the ticket of the saloon. The saloon has very modern hairdressing equipment [and] places the comfort of its clientele on

very high basis. On the average, the palace serves...European and...African customers...The management of Bea's Beauty Palace hopes to come out soon with new wig styles and new hairdressing. It also plans opening a new saloon which can accommodate all its employees as well. It is estimated that the new saloon including new equipment would cost about NC24000 [\$ 17200].¹⁸

Beatrice (Bea) married to Bob Dadson, a former concert party theatre "lady" and a minister in Nkrumah's regime, set up Bea's Beauty Palace salon as a trade vocation. She owned the enterprise and employed a manager and a staff of certified hairdressers and beauty culturists. The hairdressers and beauty culturists were composed of those who were trained in the country and others who were trained abroad.

The hairdressers and beauticians who were trained in the country included Bea's brother, Jacob Eggay and his colleagues from Hollywood. Eggay, who was one of the first students, married Margaret Sappor who was with the second batch of students.

Between 1962 and 1964, Sappor and other certified hairdressers and beauticians tried to construct their identities as professionals through the formation of an association. One of the reasons why their association did not last is that during this period, the public and professional events and activities in which women organized or participated were linked directly to the women's wing of the Convention People's Party. Since the hairdressers did not belong to the vibrant trade union, which had women members from the formal public and private institutions,¹⁹ their most important avenues for the promotion of their skills and profession were beauty salons, beauty schools, fashion shows, beauty contests and the press.

¹⁸ *Sunday Mirror*, January 4, 1967.

¹⁹ see Arhin, Kwame (ed.). *The Life and Works of Kwame Nkrumah: Papers of a Symposium Organized by the Institute of African Studies University of Ghana* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1993).

While the lack of specialist training within the country encouraged some salons including Bea's Beauty Palace to sponsor hairdressers and beauty culturists for further training outside the country, other hairdressers funded their own expenses for further training. An example is Marian Mann the owner of the Mayfair Hairdressing Saloon, which was in the premises of the Ghana Employers Association on the former Boundary Road that used to demarcate the original Ga societies and the developing Adabraka residential and commercial township. From 1959, Mann traveled to Britain and attended the Hopes Beauty School and Morris School of Hairdressing for two years and "gained certificates in hairdressing, manicuring, facial massage, scalp treatment and all other branches of beauty culture." In 1962, after she had worked with a London hairdressing salon for a year, Mann returned to Ghana and worked with Hollywood Hairdressing Saloon. In 1964 she went back to the Morris School of Hairdressing for an advanced course. "She excelled herself in the examination of the World Hairdressing Federation by gaining a diploma with honours. She's believed to be the first Ghanaian woman to hold the World Hairdressing Federation Diploma." A year later, Mann was in Ghana "with the intention of setting up a beauty salon but found out that wigs were fast becoming popular in the country and so she returned to London a few months later and pursued a six month course in wig manufacture." Mann had "a machine which styles either wigs or natural hair within a very short time" and she displayed her numerous certificates on her walls. She was pictured attending to clients, while several of her friends admired her work.²⁰

Yet, by then, people who wrote to the press advocated that all forms of hairdressings that were created in Ghana could be studied in an educational institution

²⁰ *Sunday Mirror*, June 18, 1967.

in Ghana, where there would be a process to develop and document variations in the styles and improve upon them. In May 1966, a columnist of the *Sunday Mirror* wrote “Don’t Imitate Others:”

Our women can only pride themselves in the eyes of the world by playing big in their culture, by displaying our traditional hairdos, and making adaptations or improvements in our headgears but not blind copying of others which are no better than ours.

Is this our culture?

In most of our educational institutions it looks nice to see our student ladies with their hair plaited in the traditional way. They look very smart indeed, and by it they can absorb any stuff that is imparted to them...

We always meet the Nigerian lady with her national headgear on. However, on certain occasions we see them with the wig, but never on any occasion have they resorted to our headgear. But we have added theirs to ours. Why should this be the case?

I feel that it is because they always wear it hence they find ways and means of improving upon it... let us prove to them that we too can improve upon ours which can carry us to any function.

Any young woman who wears the wig almost every day will tell you that it is because her hair is short, and [she] cannot style it.

As a Ghanaian I know that the only means of making our hair grow long is to plait it...most of us feel that wearing wig to business makes us charming and attractive.

Our hair dressers must be serious and embark on hair plaiting in addition to the styling of the wigs so that the standard of the plaited hair can be raised to the wig level.

Fellow women, though modern fashion comprises the wig and the Nigerian headgear which is a foreign culture, let us try to give meaning to ours that others too might appreciate it.

In some countries such as Nigeria and Uganda, they have got special designers who design their headgears. Can’t we do the same to the headkerchief? Let us be true Ghanaians by observing our Traditions, Customs and Culture for these are important that is why some well educated men are suggesting that these things may be taught in our school.²¹

Some proprietors began to provide hairdressing in their vocational schools.

Nkawkaw No.1 Girls’ Vocational Training Centre provided elective courses in

Hairdressing, Needlework, Dressmaking, Crocheting, Child Welfare and Domestic

²¹ *Weekly Spectator*, May 14, 1966.

Science. Elementary English, Reading and Writing, and Religious Knowledge were the compulsory subjects. The proprietor, Mrs. Yeboah advertised that:

OPPORTUNITY

Enlist as a student in this well established Vocational Center today. We prepare you today for greater opportunity tomorrow.
NKAWKAW NO. 1 GIRLS'
VOCATIOAL TRAINING CENTER

During the mid 1960s, several of the graduates of Nkawkaw No.1 Girls' Vocational Training Centre worked in different parts of Ghana.²²

Yet, some Ghanaians went beyond hairdressers' access to formal science based training to identify the type of education that young girls sought. The caption of a picture in the "Mainly for Women" column of the *Weekly Spectator* states: "Some women choose professions that will enable them to get employment in time. This young woman prefers to be a telephonist receptionist which is an attractive employment for our girls." At a glance, the picture shows the pride of Ghanaians, the newspaper columnist or the photographer for the attractive looks of such young women in salaried work and the expansion in education and work in both the public and private sectors that facilitated the civilian government's aim to employ qualified young women. A comprehensive study of the page reveals that the presenter of the picture depends on viewers' admiration to put forward new views about the limitations that people found with school-education and curriculums.

Beneath the caption of the picture is an article titled "Vocational Guidance" by Kofi Asamoah Anane. After Anane discussed the amounts that the government invested in secondary and tertiary education, he complained that many graduates were

²² *Weekly Spectator* October 15, 1966.

equipped with education that was mainly intellectual, not vocational. He argued that the graduates had no idea about the work that they could do with their education:

Comparative studies of the pattern of education in many European countries reveal that Ghana needs proper vocational guidance councils in our school systems as it prevails in Europe and elsewhere. It is also known that in Europe the IQ's (intelligence quotients) of children of school going age are tested by means of toys etc.

After being in the primary school for some years, both their teachers with the cooperation of their parents work to determine the capabilities of the students. They are then advised and guided up till a certain stage where they are seen to have set on the right course.

Anane concluded that it was good but not sufficient that students wrote a few stereotyped essays that made them think and write about their future careers and the work they hoped to do after school. It was important that those students in secondary schools receive guidance in the examinable subjects that they studied.²³

Remi Clignet and Philip Foster's study of neighboring la Cote d'Ivoire is of relevance to Anane's discussion of the types of education that young people sought in Ghana. The authors found a lack of diversity in the new nation-state because even though the French colonial government developed specific forms of vocational education through its post primary level that was more differentiated than those in British colonies, the colonial context in which the French planned their provision of education caused educated Africans to demand educational parity with the metropole.²⁴ The state of education in Ghana was no different, despite the fact that Africans in the Gold Coast had requested for a more Africa sensitive form of education long before that recommended by the Phelps Stokes committee. Clignet

²³ *Sunday Spectator and Vanguard*, October 3, 1965.

²⁴ Remi Clignet and Philip Foster, *The Fortunate Few: A Study of Secondary Schools and Students in The Ivory Coast* (Northwestern University Press, 1966), 6.

and Foster emphasized that the new nations in Africa needed to develop a more varied range of schools, although a major problem they had noticed with vocational and technical schools was a lack of “multitrack systems” that would provide “structural arrangements to enhance” each program. The authors recommended an “internal readjustment and process of reallocation of students that take place within the overall post primary institution—based on students’ academic ability, their taste or inclinations” and “to consider the values and attitudes of African secondary pupils themselves, as manifests in their occupational preference.”²⁵ While families of lower economic and social status were more likely to view education as entry into specific occupations, those with longer educational traditions would be informed about the ultimate advantage of general types of training. For the latter, education was a long run investment not immediately linked to specific short-run opportunities.²⁶

Such ideas about education and the need to define appropriate forms of school-education transcended the ways in which Ghanaians learned hairdressing in the country. Yet, it is important for understanding how come many girls who had some primary and middle school education sought apprenticeship in hairdressing.²⁷ In addition, the visual component of hairdressing served as a constant activator for writers to discuss how school-educated persons could run their businesses.

Businesses and Pageants

From November 1967 through October 1968, one Nzeribe, a business

²⁵ Clignet and Foster, *The Fortunate Few* (1996), 6.

²⁶ Clignet and Foster, *The Fortunate Few* (1996), 99.

²⁷ See Richard Rhoda, “Migration and Employment of Educated Youth in Ghana,” *International Migration Review*, Vol. 14 No. 1, Spring 1980, 53-76.

consultant wrote a series of articles in the *Sunday Mirror* analyzing that every business needs proper management that is attained through a well planned business development program. Since school trained and competent administrative personnel were usually “absorbed by foreign enterprises,” local companies that could not afford to employ trained personnel could seek the services of business consultants who would guide the business in buying, selling, producing and interacting with the service sector.²⁸

Next to one of such articles on anger management at the workplace is the picture of a smiling, pleasant looking hairdresser that attracts the reader’s attention. An application of what Nzeribe stated about a company’s corporate personality to the hairdressing and beauty culture service indicates that a business develops with the attention that the staff give to the appearance of: advertisements in the press; the beauty salon; and clients.²⁹ While an administrator who needed to control situations and individuals could get angry with her subordinate, anger affected the administrator’s poise and discouraged subordinates from sharing information with her.³⁰

In the *Sunday Mirror*’s subsequent article on business, the Mirror Lawyer focused on the 1962 Registration of Business Names Act that encouraged the registration of “One Man businesses.” The columnist argued that first, many people who were involved in economic activities did not realize that they were in business and second, since not only that person was involved in performing that economic activity, people in business did not regard their work as “One Man Businesses.” One

²⁸ *Sunday Mirror*, November 5, 1967.

²⁹ *Sunday Mirror*, November 19, 1967.

³⁰ *Sunday Mirror*, December 12, 1967.

of the requirements of the Act was that each business should identify the principal owner and the place where the business was located, physically. This means that the itinerant hairdresser as well as the hairdresser who sat in the shade and advertised her skills with a small sign board that she removed every evening did not own a “One Man Business.”³¹

What remained unclear is whether the majority of hairdressers who provided services within their homes were obliged to register them as businesses. They were disinclined to register their services as a business because of the difficulties and expenses of locating a suitable place in fast urbanizing Accra and the cumbersome process of arranging for utilities and paying for monthly usage at the Electricity and Water Corporations, each of which had only one office in Accra.³²

A brief yet detailed study of A J Seward of Ghana Limited, an international beauty company based in Ghana provides us with the most important qualities that Ghanaians expected from any business, especially one that provided for women’s beauty aids. Since February 1963, A J Seward produced cosmetics and beauty aids such as hairsprays, pomades, powder, perfumes and aerosols. Ghanaians appreciated the company because it produced and packaged its beauty aids in Ghana, employed many Ghanaians, including women, provided business of about NC300000 (\$210000) to local firms that manufactured packaging materials and thus, saved Ghana foreign exchange. Furthermore, A J Seward produced high quality goods. Its laboratories in Ghana tested for stability, color, smell and form and performed market research.

³¹ *Sunday Mirror*, September 15, 1968.

³² *The Ghanaian Times*, April 14, 1962.

Concurrently, it worked with researchers in London to formulate new ideas.³³ A J Seward advertised its cosmetics throughout the range of media, including newspapers as shown in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2, as well as journals, radio, television and short films. As a result, the company produced very popular individual brand names including the Curl Out pomade, Nku Cream and Saturday Night Talc powder and its Monica Smart range became a fad of this era. Its products were synonymous with beauty, leisure and entertainment.

Advertisements of the company were placed next to themes that were of relevance to Ghanaians, popular events and celebrities.³⁴

³³ *Sunday Mirror*, January 21, 1970.

³⁴ *Sunday Mirror*, September 12, 1965.

BETTER WAY TO HANDLE SECRETARIES

By Ofosu Semuah

MANY pamphlets have criticism might be it been issued about the duties of a secretary, secretaries, but I find it difficult to write to the editor about the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary.

I would like to see a list of the duties of a secretary. I would like to see a list of the duties of a secretary. I would like to see a list of the duties of a secretary. I would like to see a list of the duties of a secretary. I would like to see a list of the duties of a secretary.

A lot of these would be... I would like to see a list of the duties of a secretary. I would like to see a list of the duties of a secretary. I would like to see a list of the duties of a secretary. I would like to see a list of the duties of a secretary.

QUALIFICATIONS
I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary.

OTHER WORKS
I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary.

HURRIED WORK
I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary.

KNOW YOUR LEADERS

ALEX-HANNAH was born... I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary.

OTHER WORKS

I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary.

HURRIED WORK

I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary. I think it is essential to have a clear idea of the duties of a secretary.

From the world of *Monica Smart*



Make your hair irresistibly beautiful with *Monica Smart* HAIRSPRAY. The Hairspray with the exquisite perfume that gives your hair a lasting stay-in-place. Monica Smart's Hairspray that lasts and lasts.

Figure 5.1: A J Seward's Monica Smart Hairspray. ³⁵

WORKERS MUST BE REPRESENTED IN ASSEMBLY

IMPOSITION

When a company imposes its will on workers, it is imposing an unfair burden on them. The T.C.C. can be used to ensure that the company does not impose its will on workers in a way which is unfair and unreasonable.

NEGOTIATION

The T.C.C. can be used to ensure that the company does not impose its will on workers in a way which is unfair and unreasonable.

PRIVILEGED CLASS

It is an unfortunate fact that a small number of people in the country are able to enjoy a standard of living which is far above that of the majority of the population. This is a result of the fact that these people are able to exploit the labour of the majority of the population.

WHY YOU SHOULD ADVERTISE IN THE WEEKLY SPECTATOR

Let's help you to sell your wares or services. The Weekly Spectator is the paper which is popular with the people. Business, industry, agriculture and manufacturers all read the Weekly Spectator. If you want to reach the greatest number of people with your goods, place your advertisement in the Weekly Spectator.



NKU cream

gives you a smoother lighter skin

AND CREATES CONFIDENCE IN YOUR OWN SKIN. The cream is made from natural ingredients and gives you a beautiful complexion. For more information, contact the manufacturer.



Figure 5.2: A J Seward's Nku Cream featured a model who wears a wig.³⁶

³⁶ Weekly Spectator, May 31, 1969.

Yet, the most notable event that dealt with dress and beauty during the 1960s was the Miss Ghana beauty pageant of 1967. The previous Miss Ghana was that of 1959, mentioned earlier, generated a lot of pride among Ghanaians because the winner continued to present herself and the nation as beautiful through her job as an international air hostess. Unlike the Miss Ghana 1959, the Miss Ghana 1967 aroused public interest because it generated controversy. Ghanaians who opposed the decision of the judges argued that the pageant was not representative of the country since contestants were mainly from the nation's capital, Accra. These protestors raised questions about what features in a woman made her identifiable as Ghana's *obaa sima*, ideal woman. Clichéd ideas on beauty included the legendary Serwaa Akoto, an Akan woman, who always showed her beauty through her laughter and her pleasant ways.³⁷ In the thick of these constructions of- and debates over ideal beauty Miss Ghana 1967 was chosen as the first African to enter the semi finals of the Miss World beauty pageant.

Not only did that year's Miss World beauty pageant present the largest number of African competitors, but for the first time, the six member panel of judges included an African, Princess Elizabeth of Toro, in Uganda. In other words, an African who qualified by a diversity of global standards as one of the prettiest, most fashionable and highly educated women contributed in deciding who qualified as the most beautiful woman. The 1967 Miss World beauty pageant had six African entrants from Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda. The government of each contestant supported them officially. Each national contest was

³⁷ *Weekly Spectator*, September 20, 1969.

arranged by government agencies including tourist boards, airlines and broadcasting houses. In London, African diplomats organized several events for their national beauties to attend. Uganda's Rosemary Salmon and Ghana's Martha Vroom were easily the prettiest Africans.

Equally important for the press in Ghana, the African contestants had a variety of qualities in addition to their physical attractiveness. Twenty year old Miss Nigeria Roselin Balogun looked dignified and had the highest educational qualification. She was in her second year at the University of Lagos, studying the Humanities with the aim to graduate as a librarian. Along the corridors of her hotel, her fellow contestants referred to her as "Miss Book." Twenty-one year old Janney Jack was a typist at the Audit Department in Barthurst (Gambia), while 20 year old Zipporah Mbugira was a receptionist who aimed to become a fashion model.³⁸ These beauty contestants from Africa "looked extremely fit and happy and exuded self assurance." To the Mainly for Women columnist of the *Weekly Spectator*, Africans' confidence in their attractiveness and high education had begun to encourage them to change their reactions towards the idea of beauty pageants as of the West or competitions among people of Euro-American descent. Miss Ghana, the highest scoring African contestant was invited to represent the continent in the Miss Universe pageant the next year in America.³⁹

In Ghana, the media pondered over the earlier controversy that surrounded the Miss Ghana contest and requested that young women in the society with a national and international sense of self should "fashion" qualities that most citizens would

³⁸ *Weekly Spectator*, November 25, 1967.

³⁹ *Weekly Spectator*, June 1, 1968.

agree are national values and beautiful. Vicky Tetteh, the columnist, pondered over the very meaning of Miss Ghana. In her assessment, the contest had lacked nationwide patronage because the organizers rushed it to meet the Miss World pageant. The Miss Ghana contest should have gone through the district and regional levels before the national level. “In this way the eventual winner would have passed through a number of checks and crosschecks to ensure that the available best represents the nation at the world contest in London.”⁴⁰ She called on university students and working girls to participate in competitions to uplift Ghana’s image.

People working in the fashion industry, especially hairdressing, responded. On February 28 and 29 of 1968, the Globe Press and Public Relations Consultants, under the management of Mr. Kwaku Joffa organized a two day hair fashion show at the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). Although hairdressers were driven with a desire to be spectacular, the organizers stated that “the hair fashion show is not intended to test the skill of any particular hair dressing salon or hairdresser. Rather, we want those in the hairdressing profession to demonstrate their products to the Ghanaian public so as to convince it about their quality.”⁴¹ This aim would remain important for producers of beauty aids, hairdressers and their clients.

Yet, such a variety of hairstyles were shown by hairdressers in Accra that members of the general public hoped for a winner to be announced. Therefore, after the show on Wednesday and Thursday, a “Hairdressers’ Night” was organized on Saturday. Tetteh expected that the contest would be keen partly because of the “T

⁴⁰ *Weekly Spectator*, October 21, 1967.

⁴¹ *Weekly Spectator*, March 2, 1968.

Chandirams' Silver Cup at stake," which, it is possible, became the name of the junction that intersects the Asylum Down road behind YMCA with the Ring Road. Several prizes were displayed, including the complete range of Monica Smart cosmetics, six months supply of Laquer hair spray, hair pomades, 99 hair sprays, ladies dresses, ladies shoes and sandals, wax prints, Sanyo Akasanoma radio sets and NC50 donated by firms such as A J Seward, Ebekorant and Company, Chez Julie, Florida Fashions, Ambassador Shoe factory, the Ghana Textile Prints and SCOA. Tetteh expected avid contestants from well known salons such as Bea's Beauty Palace, Beautirama, Cincinati, Elegance and Salon de Beauty all in Accra and Janet's Beauty Palour in Kumasi. On the night of the hairdressing competition the Planets sang, the Armed Forces Dance Band performed and the hairdresser who danced best won the title Best Hair Designer.⁴²

Furthermore, the women's pages of the weeklies commonly presented for public admiration a brief profile of hairdressers and the different hairstyles that they created. Margaret Sappor who graduated from Hollywood and became the proprietor of Maggie's Inn beauty salon had a natural haircut. Yet, she organized a hair fashion show at the YMCA and presented about forty hairstyles for children and adults, including the styling of wigs and wiglets for adults. "Greek Goddess" was a twined and cascading hairstyle she recommended for "occasions" and as "ideal for the young and pretty bride." The "Pony tail" hairstyle hanged from the model's crown to her waist and was interspersed with ribbons. It was described as "a combination of natural hair, wiglets and the falling wig," while the "afro" was "a mini wig" with a texture similar to the natural hair of many Africans and ornamented with silk and

⁴² *Weekly Spectator*, March 2, 1968.

velvetine ribbons. Sappor dressed the hair of the MC, Lilly Whittaker, a face that appeared frequently on television.⁴³ Likewise, During Easter, Newton Donkor, owner of the Newton Salon in Accra designed hairstyles such as: the “Roque Special” for “state dinners, parties, or church services;” his “Queen of Sheba,” had “glamour” that was “ideal for weddings and parties;” and the “Fix me somewhere” was for “shopping and the popular afternoon-jumps.” He designed the “Trade Fair” hairstyle for as many as ten clients a day, in conjunction with the organization of Ghana’s first International Trade Fair. Although each hairdresser aimed to create the “Trade Fair” hairstyle in a manner that clients would regard as unique to that salon, the “Trade Fair” hairstyle was “V shaped at the forehead and it flows freely down, ending in two tight knots at the back of the neck.”⁴⁴

The media presented these hairdressers as business people, and communicated with the clients as people who were savvy, or could learn to be savvy. Articles about hair that the press featured are: “Eat Your Way to a Healthier Hair;” “Skin Types and How to Recognise Them;” “The Art in Hairstyles;” “Woman’s Beauty is Her Hair;” “The Hair Needs Reconditioning;” “Take Good Care of the Hair;” and “Treating the Hair the Right Way.” The bar lines of these columns provided the names of the columnists or, increasingly, a descriptive title such as “beauty culturist” and “fashion expert.”⁴⁵

In November 1968, for example, the *Sunday Mirror* featured an article, which explained that since the beauty and health of a person’s hair depends on her

⁴³ *Sunday Mirror*, January 6, 1967 and *Weekly Spectator*, November 1, 1969.

⁴⁴ *Sunday Mirror*, March 20, 1968.

⁴⁵ See *Sunday Mirror*, October 27, 1967; *Sunday Mirror*, December 16, 1967; *Sunday Mirror*, August 28, 1968; *Sunday Mirror*, November 18, 1968; and *Sunday Mirror*, November 25, 1968.

hairdresser, it is important that a woman chooses her hairdresser carefully. In cases where the woman, as a client was meeting the hairdresser for the first time, she should describe her hair to the hairdresser by explaining the texture and whether she often had dandruff. She was to tell the hairdresser whether she had colored, bleached or straightened her hair in the past and the products that were used. The client needed to provide her hairdresser with such personal information and be patient as the hairdresser got to know her hair, a slow process.

Clients had to be well versed in contemporary hairdressing in order for their hairdressers to achieve the most complimentary versions of the hairstyles in vogue. It was important for clients to state the styles to be cut or the colors that they desired before any hairdresser began shampooing their hair. In cases where a client was not satisfied with the results, she was not to show any scorn or hurt the hairdresser's feelings. It was better that the client stated clearly that she had "visualized something different," which she would like the hairdresser to provide.⁴⁶

The columnists who featured such articles served as an important buffer for hairdressers and many women, as controversies arose over the trend in wigs.

Authenticity and the "Controversy over Wigs"

During the first two weeks of May 1965, the *Sunday Mirror* presented two panel discussions on wigs:

The wearing of wigs, commonly known as "artificial hair" is now a popular feature in the grooming and make-up of nearly every Ghanaian woman... But this vogue is not without its disfavours. That's why we have,

⁴⁶ *Sunday Mirror*, November 4, 1968.

today asked these six men to tell us what they think about the wig craze in this country.

On the male panel, K Darko, a businessman argued:

Nature has kindly endowed Ghanaian women with enormous beauty. Their hair, black and nice. Some have them enough which they can style into any form to suit all tastes...Ghana has reached a stage in her social reconstruction where money must not be used for trifles and luxuries, and I wish there was a law now in this country to ban the use of these wigs.⁴⁷

Most male panelists were concerned that a wig is “artificial” and, therefore, lacked the authenticity they equated with beauty. For such panelists, wigs did not meet the measure of beauty that required that women’s efforts towards enhancing their femininity should be performed backstage for their beautiful hair to look natural.⁴⁸

They worried that wigs were costly and money used for their purchase could meet the society’s needs. In general, they thought about the wig within a broader context; that of Ghana’s defunct, Socialist political economy.

On the women’s panel the next week, Elizabeth Abban, a Brigadier⁴⁹ explained:

It takes quite a long time and labour to get the natural hair into the required shape and style, notwithstanding the amount of money we often use to ship-shape them. Wigs are therefore of particular relief to us. The argument is that they are costly. They may be so, but if one uses say 25 pounds sterling on a good quality wig, it is more economical than having to pay 30s every week-end to a hairdresser.

⁴⁷ *Sunday Mirror*, May 2, 1965.

⁴⁸ See Sumaya Villanueva, “Beyond the Barbie Doll Image: Beauty Ideals and Practices among African American and Puerto Rican Women” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2002), 3-4.

⁴⁹ She worked with the Boys and Girls Brigades that were structured along the lines of the Boys Scouts.

If men will think of the glamour and radiance and the wonderful charm that these wigs give to our personalities, they will have no qualms whatsoever about our wearing them.

Naomi Buxton, a salesgirl added:

Continuous stretching of hair results in hair becoming short and as short hair cannot be made into any attractive style, we resort to using the wigs to make our hair grow. Wigs are also of special relief to our working girls, especially bankers, salesgirls and others who because they come in contact with people everyday, have to be attractive and well-trimmed. Sometimes they have little or no time to plait and stretch their hair before going to work but when a wig is ready on hand, it is easy, it saves time and it sets the girl away and spruced.

The *Sunday Mirror* concluded that:

Fashions are never static. They keep on changing with the growth of civilization. It is therefore natural that we accept them as they come, having our eyes, of course on their suitability to social and economic conditions of individual communities...If one wants to keep one's hair long enough for the different styles, then one has to keep it plaited most of the time so they now wear wigs to cover the plaited hair, thus allow the natural hair to grow undisturbed. Apart from this, we do not agree to the contention that wigs add beauty and charm to the personalities of the girls who wear them...There is nothing radically wrong for our girls to wear wigs.⁵⁰

Among the female panelists, Lucy Finley (a storekeeper) explained that: "One of the easiest ways of keeping the hair always neat and ready for all eventualities is the ownership and wearing of a wig." She felt that wigs were economical, unlike the two other women who discussed the cost of wigs. Indeed, the cost of wigs served as such a disincentive to Felicia Voduh, the housewife on the panel, that she opened her discussion with: "The fact that wigs cost so much and on many occasions drain the

⁵⁰ *Sunday Mirror*, May 9, 1965.

pockets of many a woman makes me say without hesitation that they are not good for our women.” None of her arguments were in favor of women who wore wigs.

Elizabeth Abban, however, assessed the arguments that would favor or disfavor the wearing of wigs. She agreed that wigs were expensive, as noted in the quotation above, after which she argued that purchasing a wig with a bulk sum was cheaper than the sum of consistent visits to the salon. Abban must have found it difficult to schedule salon visits on her itinerary. Since many clients had to wait for their turn, some salons had a waiting room. However, on Friday afternoons and the early mornings of Saturday these waiting rooms served as “parlours” for dressing brides and their attendants. Clients who needed to attend to their hair on weekends because they worked on weekdays or had social functions to attend over the weekends had to wait longer.

Clients who wore wigs had more favorable services. Wigs made a difference because clients could leave them at a beauty salon on any day of the week for pick up. Possibly, this advantage that wigs had caused Abban not to perceive that after wearing wigs for a while, they needed to be washed and set, thereby incurring costs in a manner that was similar to setting hair.

Hairdressers who washed and created women’s hairstyles provide accounts of the frequency with which they washed and set wigs. They reveal that wigs were more expensive than Abban or even the *Sunday Mirror* columnist realized. According to Jonas, while working as a clerk at Hohoe in the Volta Region, he went to Nsawam, in the Eastern Region for holidays and met a male instructor of hairdressing from Accra who showed him that hairdressing was lucrative. He studied hairdressing with the

instructor and set up “Jonas Red Carpet Beauty Salon.” Since he and his colleagues who were mostly men viewed hairdressing as a lucrative service industry, they gained the most profit when as weavers they designed and produced wigs in the form of artwork. Jonas’ combination of artistic excellence in the design and production of wigs as well as the novelty of a man practicing hairdressing served as incentives for his clients to seek his services for the washing and setting of more than two dozen wigs on wig stands per visit.⁵¹

Wigs served as an item of convenience. They acquired such popular use because like hot combed hair they fitted within the lives of a new, urban, sedentary class of women who worked at the front desk, that is, at the first line of service such as “sales girls,” “bankers,” receptionists and telephone operators as well as clerks and typists. These workers needed to be associated with a common set of hairdos that they wore daily to the office, shops or markets to earn their salaries. However, unlike the hot comb, wigs could provide several more styles that required short, medium or long hair and a color or shade that could be different from the black hair of most Ghanaians. Furthermore, while the adverse effects of hot combed hair were visual and difficult to conceal by styling, most of the styles to which wigs were set outlasted both the hot combed styles and braids. In fact, wigs could be worn over most hairstyles, no matter the extent to which those hairstyles were dishevelled or uneven. Wigs remained popular.

A Harry Firth of Scarborough in Britain who produced nylon wigs on a large scale and “received orders from many countries in Africa” surmised that “Women all over the world are realizing that by owning an attractive wig which is right up to date

⁵¹ Personal conversation, July 2000.

from a styling point of view and absolutely undetectable from real hair, they can at a moment's notice glamorize themselves and be ready for a hastily arranged date.

When a woman has a wig she never has to say that she can't go because her hair is in a mess."⁵²

As the "controversy over wigs" continued, some columnists and writers assumed a gender based perspective. To understand them, of relevance is Stephanie Newell's statement about audience (writers) reactions and manipulation of characters (Ghanaians) and plots (events) in concert party performances (see the previous chapters). Newell argues that: "A sexual division of interpretation carves the performative space into two spheres: women are reading for feminine models of behaviour, while men are entering the narrative through a masculine point of identification...Clearly divided in their loyalties, the audience are extracting a moral order from their chosen characters and intervening in the plot, advising characters and seeking to transform the outcome of the tale."⁵³ Newell argues that women writers of fiction assumed a "feminine positionality" by "taking up commonly acknowledged interpretive positions and exploring the flip side of male-authored narratives."⁵⁴

Similarly, the *Sunday Mirror*'s male panelists presented their views about women's fashion in wigs, upon which the women acted as audience and deciphered whether what they heard was in consonance with what young girls and women did. As the predominantly male governments banned- or imposed high taxes on wigs, women and men columnists and writers continued to state their opinions. In general,

⁵² *Sunday Spectator and Vanguard*, September 26, 1965.

⁵³ Stephanie Newell, "Making up Their Own Minds: Readers, Interpretations and the Difference of View in Ghanaian Popular Narratives" *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (1997), 392.

⁵⁴ Newell, "Making up Their Own Minds" (1997), 397.

when women, mostly those who were in a position to make decisions that have an impact on the public or who were affected spoke and acted, not only did they acknowledge or refute what they heard, those who left the most impact recreated the scenarios that the men acted with new interpretations, hoping that these scenarios would result in new experiences among all members of the society.

Thus, in September 1965 Mabel Dove, the first woman journalist that we encountered in Chapter III, argued in her article, “Wigs have come to Stay” that: “Women like wearing wigs just as men like keeping moustaches and beards. Even though some of the hair gives some women unpleasant scratches and tickles they put up with the eccentricities of men. After all, why shouldn’t the strong sex do what it likes and if women make no objection why should there be a hue and cry over wigs?” Dove drew readers’ attention to the similarities between women’s interest in wigs and men’s fashion in moustaches and beards. She argued that: “A great many women feel happier with these smart modern wigs, not only do they feel more glamorous but they have the illusion of beauty which gives them a certain radiance.” For example, among women who preferred to sport the very popular “high dome” a short woman “feels taller” and a tall woman “feels more majestic.”⁵⁵

Doves’ arguments favoured women who wore wigs, provided a history of the hot comb among Afro-Americans and criticized unskilled hairdressers. She stressed that the Afro-American beauty care providers were “experts” because “[t]hey enter a Beauty school and there they are taught the techniques of this art.” Dove limited the causes of the adverse effects of the hot comb to “[c]heap hairdressers who know very little of the techniques of hair pressing.” Her class position and age may have

⁵⁵ *Sunday Spectator and Vanguard*, September 12, 1965.

clouded how she assessed the providers of hairdressing in Ghana and America. As southern Ghana had grown socially and economically more complex, very frequently the hot comb was used at home and in a variety of salons to press women's hair as stated in the first quotation for this chapter.⁵⁶

Subsequently, in June 1966, Dove presented a more extensive commentary on wigs. It is worth noting that this commentary is a direct response to the *Sunday Mirror's* first panel discussion by men about wigs. When this response is considered alongside that first male panel discussion, one wonders whether the *Sunday Mirror's* panel discussion played the role of agenda setting. If the answer is yes, then Dove grew increasingly displeased with the effects that the public focus on wigs played in writing off young girls' and women's interest in femininity.

Dove championed young girls' and women's interest in femininity when she stated that:

A Panel of men in the *Sunday Mirror* of May 2 castigated women for wearing wigs, unless for one lone male who stood up for the weaker vessel. I very much doubt whether the masculine gender's dislike of wig[s] will stop the present fashion which has given the "crowning glory" to every Ghanaian woman who can pay for it...

Some of the wigs in the stores are so natural that male cannot tell the difference, and if the lady—even the most astute partner looks glamorous and is the cynosure of all eyes the male sticks out his chest but if the wig is cheap and nasty and can be detected a mile off then the boy friend feels as if he has been let down.

A young acquaintance of mine is now the possessor of a wig costing £25. She had a cheap wig when her boy friend took her out to the Star Hotel and though she was her gay and charming self she noticed her partner was not in the best of spirits. She pretended not to notice his grumpiness and was her sparkling self. When he took her home he came out bluntly. Where did you buy that cheap wig? "Do you call it cheap?" She answered, innocently, it cost £3 3/- and I had to pinch and scrap to get it. "Why don't you use your

⁵⁶ *Sunday Spectator and Vanguard*, September 12, 1965.

natural hair?” he asked. “And fashionable ladies now wear wigs and I too must be in the fashion”, she replied.

The boyfriend sighed—How much does a good wig cost? “25 pounds” she answered promptly and he signed a cheque and his cheque was honoured too. A generous boyfriend, not all women are that lucky. Some wigs cost more than £25 and many women feel more on top of the world when they have on a smashing wig... There are many women who dislike wigs and nothing would induce them to wear them but others just enjoy changing their wigs and hairstyles as often as they can.⁵⁷

Dove chose to focus on the actions and reactions of men and women that would favor women who wore wigs. Even though socially and economically, men were more favored in their positions and salaries, women purchased their own wigs to enhance their hair, their “crowning glory.” She makes clear that many men did not disapprove of women who wore wigs. Men wanted beautiful women. It is when wigs caused men to challenge the authenticity of women’s beauty that men expressed disapproval. Although wigs cannot be as authentic as a woman’s own hair, since wigs were in fashion, men, who were generous or exasperated, could consider their higher economic status and purchase a wig that was more expensive and of a better quality for their women.

Here, Dove was aware of her own image as a successful journalist, politician and an advocate for women. She is the first woman journalist and first woman to be elected democratically as a legislative member, she browbeat the “male panelists” whose aim, it seemed, was to undo the successes that women had achieved. Elsewhere, she argued that: “With the emancipation of women from age old customs and traditions, women are now moving with the men in many of the newly independent countries of Africa. Yet, women still have a long way to go to bring their feminine qualities to influence policies and temper down masculine

⁵⁷ *Sunday Spectator and Vanguard*, June 6, 1966.

characteristics which tension in the world.”⁵⁸

Dove shared the “Women’s Column” with Vicky Tetteh, whom we met earlier, a secretary who trained on the job as a journalist. Tetteh’s opinion about wigs was that:

The wig is foreign to our society, but there is no doubt that it has caught up well with our girls. Just look at the girl with that lovely hairstyle in your office. See how smart she looks. Look at your wife in her wig in front of your car, you bet you could not have a more beautiful wife. Does your receptionist not look dull and a drab if her hair is not properly made?...[I]n fact does she not brighten your office with that expensive wig on her head?

We must admit that the wig costs much, but a good wig is worth having.⁵⁹

Indeed, some men approved of wigs. They purchased wigs for their loved ones, which sometimes resulted in jokes in the press. One of such jokes is titled “Felicia:”

A rich man from a village went to Accra to buy a wig for his wife. He went to a store where a variety of wigs were displayed in the showcase and told the salesman that he was after Aunti Felicia.

The salesman told him no one in the store was known as Aunti Felicia. The rich man therefore pointed to the wigs and said that was what he meant by Aunti Felicia.

It was there the salesman got to know the rich man meant ARTIFICIAL and not Aunti Felicia.⁶⁰

By then, governments had reacted differently to the mounting controversies over wigs. President Nkrumah, the leader of the Convention People’s Party, appreciated the beauty and aesthetics of dress of Ghanaian women to the extent that he promoted the parade of hairstyles at cultural shows and on television. During the

⁵⁸ *Sunday Spectator and Vanguard*, October 11, 1964.

⁵⁹ *Weekly Spectator*, October 22, 1966.

⁶⁰ *Weekly Spectator* January 31, 1970.

military government of the National Liberation Movement (and the democratic government of the Progress Party), however, wigs were banned intermittently and attracted exorbitant import taxes.⁶¹

The ban and taxation of wigs may not have achieved the government's aim to limit women's ability to purchase and wear wigs. Wigs were rather light and tiny material objects that could be mail ordered.⁶² The increasing numbers of women who traveled could return with a few wigs without causing any legal problems because wigs are considered a part of women's adornments. Arguably, potential and professional hairdressers and beauty culturists who felt that they needed to have access to authentic looking wigs and other accessories as hairdressing would belong to the groups of women who traveled across the Atlantic World or manufactured wigs within Ghana.⁶³

At the beginning of May 1967, when organizers "prohibit[ed] wig-wearers from attending" the "May Ball" and beauty contest held at the University of Ghana, on May 21 Togbi Yao a male columnist of the *Sunday Mirror* supported women who wore wigs by "ask[ing]...What Man Hates Wigs? Come Ye Apart Awhile:"

To confess, some of us male onlookers are not particularly averse to the wig which our women have taken to in a big way not so long ago!

In fact, we are rather amused and delighted at the surprise when the image of a woman we have known all along becomes suddenly transformed into something else!

⁶¹ *Weekly Spectator*, October 22, 1966.

⁶² *Sunday Spectator and Vanguard*, September 26, 1965.

⁶³ In the next decade, Carmel Dinan interviewed rather few ethnic migrant, young secretaries and telephone operators who "had quite extensive traveling experience. They tended to shop on a fairly regular basis in neighboring Togoland where the stores and European goods were more to their taste than similar shops and goods in import restricted Ghana." Carmel Dinan, "Sugar Daddies, and Gold-Diggers: White Collar Single Women in Accra" in *Female and Male in West Africa* ed. Christine Oppong, (London: George Allen & Unwin 198), 361.

Especially if that something else is exalted, transcendent and arty!⁶⁴

Based on his name, the title of his column and the opening sentence Togbi Yao meant to turn as on a pivot men's attitudes towards wigs and "the creativity [in wigs] that "suddenly transformed" a woman to look "beautiful" or its opposite. Togbi in Ewe refers to a distinguished elderly person, usually a chief or honorary father.

Concurrently, Togbi Yao's aim was "to confess." This aim and his style of English make him analogous to a Catholic father in twentieth century industrializing Ghana, whose sensitivity towards society lets him avoid the wrongs about which William Blake documents for nineteenth century industrial England. Togbi Yao allows his religious and social role of listening to others confess their misdeeds to "come apart a while" so that he can confess to enable them to envision the good deeds surrounding them. He felt that "[c]hanging the visage [of a woman] once in a while should be welcome in this rather humdrum existence." It was "unkind" of men to "describe" the visual effect of women who wore wigs as "synthetic" and take on a "hostile attitude" when the "synthetic products" "do not harm."

Despite Togbi Yao's wry sense of humor, he was serious in criticizing that:

The other day, it was a number of organizers of beauty contests who had ruled against the wearing of wigs. The day before, it was a legal import prohibition...

Unless it be by the high cost of wigs certain male victims who had been imposed upon to provide the money, or who fear being required to pull the dough, have formed themselves informally into a lobby if such there be the case, why, even then, it is downright unfair to the women...

The apparent discrimination in the matter [which makes me suggest that women rather than men should be entitled to import licenses for wigs] is not limited to the gender; it extends in relation to footwear, dresses, other

⁶⁴ *Sunday Mirror*, May 21, 1967.

forms of head-gear like scarfs, “kerchiefs,” hats (male and female).⁶⁵

The next week, the newspaper devoted a page to the rather passionate responses of three men: Yeli Yeli, N. B. Klu and Asare Opoku.

Opoku focused on how girls and women in Ghana could present themselves as beautiful. In his opinion, Togbi Yao “missed the most important consideration in the controversy over wigs,” which was “the growing conception of what ‘constitutes beauty in Ghana.’” He asked whether “the Ghanaian girl [could not] be beautiful without trying to look European.” Beauty from Ghana had to be “original” and a “cultural heritage,” but not “of a primitive simplicity.” While Opoku could name wigs as a component of hairdressing that “exasperated” Ghanaians he did not mention any hairstyles that Ghanaians could embrace. His arguments remain abstract and idealistic.

The two other critics discussed women’s dress sense. Klu refuted Togbi Yao’s claim that the high cost of wigs makes men criticize women. He focused on the appearance of some of the women who wore wigs to emphasize that the sizes and styling of wigs need to suit different facial types. Yeli Yeli explained that: “I do not approve of wigs because they do not fit into my ideal of a properly dressed Ghanaian girl or women. My idea of the properly dressed woman is the one with plaited hair or similar style, covered with a “dukku” or scarf depending on where she is going.”⁶⁶

None of the respondents discussed Togbi Yao’s assertion that only men had the legal right to import items of fashion and dress, a situation that had such economic impact on women that he requested revision.

⁶⁵ *Sunday Mirror*, May 21, 1967.

⁶⁶ *Sunday Mirror*, May 28, 1967.

Advertisements reveal the resolution that Ghanaians arrived at concerning the wearing of wigs. In general, advertisements of products which were used in the homes targeted the users and specific types of families. It was common for advertisements of washing products to show a woman who wore a scarf and a cover shoulder cloth, as indicated in Figure 5.3. During this period of nationalism, this woman in a scarf and cloth was sometimes shown next to children in school uniforms. Apparently, she was a non-literate mother who provided services that made her children look smart as they attended school. Such advertisements for washing soap could be contrasted with advertisements for baby products.

In Figure 5.4, the advertisement for Baby Royal is a woman, a baby girl, a boy and a man. The woman who plays the role of a mother wears a dress and her hairdressing indicates that she has either used a hot comb to style her long hair, or she wears a wig. The point is that regardless of the authenticity of her hairdressing, she is a caring mother. The baby that sits on her lap has hair that is designed as big braids and serves as an indicator that she belongs to a family that lives in an urban area and is interested in school-education. This advertisement emphasizes that the mother and daughter belong to a nuclear family that has an equal balance of sexes—two females and two males—and the family is interested in schooling because the man who plays the role of the father and husband looks on and holds a newspaper and both he and his son have the hair parting called “aboy” that children who attended school and school educated people wore. Although the advertisement is set in an urban context, the name of the product—baby royal—embraces aspects of a lifestyle that was considered cultural. Both adults sit on chairs, yet there is a stool that lies on its side

and assists the observer to think of the Baby Royal product as for “royal” babies. Thus, the name of the product (Baby Royal), the hairdressings and property (a stool) embrace the visual and intellectual qualities that Ghanaians demanded in a manner that the advertisement for Surf detergent did not.

A Lever Brothers company advertisement of the Omo powdered detergent converged the ideas that hairdressing generates in the Baby Royal and the Surf advertisements. This advertisement for Omo detergent featured young women who wore the scarf on top of their wigs, and created additional styles that were different from that of a scarf or a wig.⁶⁷ It portrayed the infinite possibilities that Ghanaians could use their femininity, talents and skills to achieve, which is in consonance with *Drum* magazine’s aim for women, and its portrayal of how hairdressers resolved the “controversy over wigs” by using wiglets.

In April 1969 *Drum*’s response to the controversy it termed “wig war” was to make the natural sensational. Readers of *Drum* inferred from its cover page, “Rema—au naturel!” and feature story about Rema, a West Indian model in New York that they should use wigs for “professional engagements (modeling, but more likely office wear) and go “au naturel” when “[a]t home, or visiting friends or going to parties.” Certainly, a new fashion, international and Pan-African in scope, that drove women to go “au naturel” especially by sporting short, natural hair would be of exceptional benefit for those women who worried or argued that they lost their hair when they responded to the trend in stretching combs, which led them to depend on wigs.

Yet, *Drum* maintained its aim that hairdressers and beauty culturists in Ghana,

⁶⁷ *Sunday Mirror*, June 16, 1968.

who were composed of a majority of women, provide early the hairstyles that would gain universal acclaim. Thus, while one could argue that *Drum* did not promote verbally the wig because the staff was mostly men and may have had negative attitudes towards wigs similar to other men in the press, it is more in line with *Drum's* vision that it promoted women as hairdressers and beauty culturists who had the potential to be creative with wiglets. In May 1972, *Drum* acceded to the arguments of women whose jobs compelled them to wear wigs by featuring “beautician and hair culturist” Margaret Oduro in its women’s page. Oduro “claim[ed] to have utilised the best of both worlds, to produce fashions which are smart and manageable, yet remain essentially African.” Under the caption “Tailpiece to the Wig War,” *Drum* concluded that:

It will probably go on for ever: the argument as to whether a woman looks smarter in a wig or with her hair in a natural style.

Certainly hair is (or should be) a woman’s crowning glory, so she is entitled to use any and every means available to style her hair in the most attractive fashion.

But while everybody argues, an Accra beautician and hair culturist Margaret Oduro has come up with a very clever compromise: using hairpieces (or wiglets) to augment natural hair.

The big advantage here is that hair retains the attractive natural look, while having the additional length and body that allows a whole variety of charming styles to be easily created.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ *Drum*, April 1969; and *Drum*, May 1972.



Figure 5.3: Surf powdered soap advertisement of a woman wearing a scarf and cover shoulder cloth and pleasantly working on her household work.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *Weekly Spectator*, August 16 1969.

• OF OUR WOMEN WHO STRIVELY TO GAIN THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP A.D.D.



Trust Baby Royal

For the baby who is
born with a head of hair
that is naturally curly
and wavy, Baby Royal
is the perfect hair
preparation.



For the baby who is
born with a head of hair
that is naturally straight
and smooth, Baby Royal
is the perfect hair
preparation.

Figure 5.4: This Trust Baby Royal advertisement shows that both the man and the boy have their hair parted, popularly called an “aboy.” Both the woman and the girl have long hair. The woman’s hair could be a wig also. The girl’s hair is woven as *mesa*. The hairstyles, setting and properties of the advertisement convey the ideas that these people who form a family unit embrace both cultural practices and the consumer patterns that were associated with school-education.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ *Weekly Spectator*, May 31, 1969.

The press helped to create beauty salons as a space of desire based on gendered ideas about family and nationalism. Even though girls and women continued to practice hairdressing as a domestic activity and occupation, the press featured the provision of hairdressing and beauty culture as a certified profession of rather wealthy women and the wives of public workers. The press featured hairdressings that created admiration for the beauty care provider, which generated controversy for the wearers of wigs. These media portrayals of the providers of hairdressings and the controversy over wigs fanned young people's interest in professional hairdressing and beauty culture. The new hairdressing and beauty culture profession's international training facilities, "multitrack" certified structure, concentration on fashion, and service to an increasing number of young women salaried workers made it attractive to increasing numbers of young women and men, many of whom had migrated to urban centers after completing elementary school or soon after enrolling in secondary schools or teaching and nursing colleges. At the same time, the idea that it is possible to provide domestic hairdressing professionally was necessary because it helped to allay the worries of people who were concerned with the movement of persons to more urban places to look for jobs or learn a trade.

The increase in salaried workers and the numbers of graduates from compulsory basic education compelled studies in the variations and structure of educational systems as well as the number and sex distribution of qualified workers. One of the findings was that more people were engaged in private economic activities outside the purview of the government. In the press, business consultants advocated for professionalism through the comportment of workers and the registration of

economic activities as “One Man businesses.” However, the economic and political experiences of Ghanaians and other nationals of the “Developing World” meant that it was not until the 1980s that a concerted effort by private and public organizations, the International Labor Organization especially, resulted in the definition of these micro-finance workers as a part of the “informal economy.”

The next chapter discusses the composition of beauty salons at Lapaz, a part of the city of Accra that got industrialized during the 1990s. After 1972, when Mr. Kenneth Morris, the Director of the Morris School of Hairdressing visited the alumni in African countries and inaugurated the hairdressing groups that they formed, his graduates formed the Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association (GHABA). However, the major economic problems in Ghana during the 1970s and 1980s, served as disincentives for the members of GHABA to explore their potentials on a consistent basis until the 1990s. The chapter examines the relationship between hairdressers at Lapaz with GHABA, and the negotiations of the members of GHABA with the Industrial and Commercial Unit of the Trades Union Congress to ensure better terms for public utilities and with the National Vocational Training Institute to transform the prevailing apprenticeship system into a school-curriculum structure.

CHAPTER VI

Transformations in the Hairdressing Profession: Beauty Salons, GHABA

This chapter examines the practice of hairdressing since the 1990s in the particular locale of Lapaz as well as in wider national and international contexts. First, we zoom in on Lapaz, a new town in Accra to examine the makeup of beauty care providers and their technology, education and financial resources. On one hand, these hairdressers could be classified according to the structure of their beauty salons—a kiosk, a container or a store (shop). On the other hand, the technology within each beauty salon determined the range of services that the hairdressers provided and was important in assigning class to beauty salons. Second, the chapter presents a scope of the measures that Ghanaian hairdressers and beauticians used to operate the beauty service sector and interact with beauty care companies in the industrial sector, and governmental and nongovernmental organizations. We study the activities of the Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association that many hairdressers in Ghana joined and that has formed an alliance with hairdressers transnationally.

The Location and Space of Beauty Salons

As hairdressers accrued capital and invested in technology, they made space to provide beauty care services.¹ A hairdresser who did not own a room for a beauty salon was a nonstarter because she had no place along the roads of Lapaz. Yet, she created her space by placing a small signboard that was made of scrap lumber along the road to

¹ For the increase in hairdressing services in Ghana, see Sieber and Herreman; and in Tanzania, Brad Weiss, *Hip Barbershop* www.wm.edu/anthropology/faculty/weiss/index.html

advertise the skills and services. Usually, she had a table on which she arranged the combs that she used for braiding hair on the premises of a house nearby. If the hairdresser had acquired some formal training in using chemicals to transform the hair, she would provide the services in a room inside her house or on a verandah and display a sample of her hair care products on a larger table. Her clients patronized her services because she proved her worth even as an apprentice. And although such a hairdresser used the same products to provide services as did the other hairdressers inside beauty salons, the prices that she charged were lower than those in beauty salons.

People from a variety of places in Accra sought sites for beauty salons and other businesses at Lapaz. Many Ghanaians constructed their houses or rented rooms in towns that sprang up around Lapaz. The very popular towns that are nearby include Nii Boi Town, Awoshi, Fan Milk, Santa Maria, Chantan, Tabora and Dzorwulu. Other hairdressers came to Lapaz from places that are further along the motorway such as Abeka, Fadama, North Kaneshie, Flat Top, Akweteman and the towns surrounding the 37 Military Hospital. People who lived in the new sites together with those who lived in the older neighborhoods started enterprises along the Lapaz roads because of first, a West African road network that intersects at Lapaz and second, their ready access to infrastructure and public utilities that were developed and available at Lapaz, which is an offshoot of Abeka.

The beauty salons of hairdressers varied in quality by the material used in construction. Many beauty salons were kiosks, made of scrap lumber and ceiling board. They were built on land that was owned by an individual or a family or rented from an individual, a family or a municipal office such as the district assembly of the Accra

Metropolitan Authority. The owners of these beauty salons rented a small portion of land and placed the kiosk onto a row of cement blocks. In cases where they still had some capital for construction, the owners of these kiosks could use cement and broken tiles or wooden boards to construct a couple of steps or a small porch. Overall, the kiosks did not seem to belong to the side of the roads. They seemed transient because it was common to see several young men heave and mount a kiosk on a cart and then tow it to a new destination. Invariably, the land owner requested for the land or demanded a much higher rent, or the owner of the kiosk: had a better site for it; sold it to another business person who had a vocation or provided services in communication; or owned a more permanent structure.

In some cases, a hairdresser continued to practice beauty care but changed her beauty salon. Usually, the change in the size or type of beauty salon indicated her upward mobility in business. For example, Mary, a hairdresser used to work in a kiosk that was on the premises of her house. As her sons constructed a wall around the house, they built a store as a part of the front of the house. By 2000, she had moved from the kiosk into the store.

The most permanent and cherished beauty salon was a cement structure that Ghanaians described as a store. Other than Mary, the hairdressers at Lapaz rented their stores. Renting a store was much more expensive than constructing any other structure for beauty salons. Hairdressers paid a goodwill fee of about ₵8000000 (\$1376) that made their transaction with the owner of the store valid for a period of ten years. The hairdresser then paid a monthly rent of between ₵35000 (\$6.02) and ₵50000 (\$8.60).²

These stores were within many buildings that were still under construction.

² Interview, July 2000.

Along the Abeka route, the front sections of houses that were razed, rebuilt as store and rented for commercial purposes. Along the Lapaz motorway stores were in new commercial edifices. Organizations and private business persons rented the floor of almost any edifice that got completed. One such edifice was:

at the business center and in front of two bus stops (along both sides of the road), meshed between the two main transport stations and quite opposite the filling station and the Standard Chartered Bank...The ground floor has six shops, with a staircase between the third and fourth shops. The first shop sells assorted "provisions," the next sells whole and spare parts of used electrical equipment like TVs, tape recorders, and video decks. The next is packed with sacks of flour, sugar, rice, soap and canned tomatoes. The next shop sells crates of Pepsi and Muscatella at distributor prices. The last shop is always closed. On the first floor, all the shops are closed, except for the second and third which have been merged into one huge multipurpose beauty salon: unisex, manicure, pedicure, facial, setting of eyelashes and eye brows, perm, cutting, tonguing, braids, decoration of bride, boutique, cosmetics, hair accessories and skin products, soft drinks...A good site for filming. The last floor, which is still under construction, is a mosque!³

As this field notes indicates, beauty salons were an important part of the making of the business class.

During the afternoon drive time, as cars moved slowly through the Lapaz commercial district, passengers and pedestrians peered into the different work places. The exterior of beauty salons were among the most attractive stores and kiosks because they had portraits of women. For the kiosks, the graphic artists painted on scrap lumber portraits from their own imaginations of how details of the hairstyle would look on the head of a woman who appropriated images of beauty or they sketched the hairstyles of models that they saw on locally made posters such as Figure 6. 1 or posters of women with beautiful coiffures on the packages of beauty care products. Many of the stores had glass windows on which hairdressers pasted the posters of these women who advertised

³ Author's field notes at Lapaz, June 2001.

the hair care products. These posters were pasted on dark, glass doorframes of the most attractive beauty salons and the class of the owner of the beauty salon and the clients who sought beauty care services were manifest in the proximity of beauty salons to other important commercial enterprises.

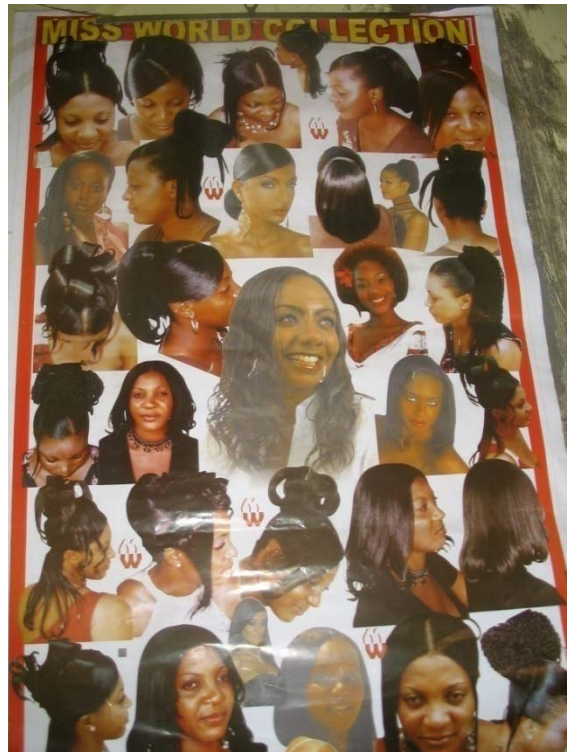


Figure 6. 1: In this poster titled “Miss World Collection,” attractive women model hairdressings that are created from permed hair, with wiglets added in some cases. These hairdressings are appropriate for a variety of occasions, although those that are combed were favored as day time wear and those that are pinned up were described as evening wear.⁴

⁴ Photographed by the author, August, 2006.

Both the outside and the inside of beauty salons indicated that hairdressers were a part of global networks and that they were aware of global trends. For example, a salon that had the same brand name as an international business, which deals in cosmetics seemed more attractive than most of the other salons at Lapaz. It had prime space close to the Shell and Goil fuel stations (where several cars parked to purchase oil and that served as a popular gauge of the inflation rate of Ghana's currency), the Standard Chartered Bank, the Atlantis FM, which served as a signal of how since 1995, private radio flourished as persons could call the phone-in segments of programs, the Ghana Denmark Friendship Association that is an indication of Ghanaians' alliance with other nationals; the Fan Milk Depot that provided ice cream and drinks to quench the thirst of those who moved about in Ghana's tropical climate; and several popular places for shopping and entertainment. During the 1980s, Auntie Abena, strategically situated her beauty salon along the Lapaz roads in order to attract passersby and she expected that women who waited to do business with an enterprise nearby would enter for a quick set of their hair, a manicure or a pedicure.

Inside this lovely beauty salon there was a wood paneled room that was partitioned into a large powder room and a smaller inner room with eight standing, electrical dryers that enabled the hairdressers to serve as many people at a time. The salon had a comparatively large outer room with walls that were fitted with huge mirrors in which the client saw how the providers of beauty care transformed her body to meet current aesthetics and ideas of beauty.

However, there were no clients in this beauty salon. Several young women wearing wine check dresses—apprentices—stood braiding the hair of their madam,

Auntie Aggie. Since she aimed to be abreast with the equipment used in beauty salons worldwide, she had a contemporary clipper for cutting and styling hair, a steamer and an electric sterilizer for her tools for manicure and pedicure.⁵ Yet, Auntie Aggie complained that the year 2000, was particularly difficult. For days on end, nobody entered her salon for business. Subsequent, the research findings are that her salon was lucrative because she had so many apprentices, and that even when she did not have many clients, she was able to keep her apprentices because first, she had the variety of equipment, and second, she and the apprentices served as models for demonstrations on how to provide a variety of services in hairdressing.

The Equipment and Products

The technology within a beauty salon helped to determine the possible range of services that hairdressers provided. Since the majority of hairdressers who provided a range of beauty services had equipment for working with the permanent relaxer kit to provide a variety of hairstyles, the equipment for the perm was important in classifying beauty salons. By the mid 1990s, standing hairdryers were a visual sign that determined the class of a hairdresser and her beauty salon. In 2000, a good quality standing hairdryer cost about ₱500000 (\$86.00), while a touch-up for a perm cost ₱5000 (\$0.86) and washing and setting of the perm cost ₱3000 (\$0.52). Many salons had two standing hairdryers and those that had only one had a hand hairdryer, which cost about ₱50000 (\$8.60). The hairdresser used the hand dryer in situations where she had more than one client who needed to use the standing hairdryer at a time. Although the hand hairdryer was cheaper than the standing hairdryer, hairdressers preferred the standing hairdryer

⁵ Some other salons were using the ordinary hair dryer to steam hair.

because it ensured that despite Accra's humidity clients' hairstyles remained set for more days and, therefore, helped hairdressers to establish a clientele.

Until 2000, government officials of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly counted the number of standing hairdryers in a salon to quantify how much tax a hairdresser needed to pay. Yet, the findings from hairdressers' daily earnings are that the number of standing hairdryers in a beauty salon did not necessarily indicate the income of a hairdresser. Some hairdressers who had more than two standing dryers kept them at home and brought them to the beauty salon mainly on weekends, when they had many clients. Hairdressers kept their standing hairdryers at home because possession of more than two standing hairdryers increased the taxes of the beauty salon and attracted thieves to rob the beauty salon. In 2000, other equipment that were important in displaying the class of the salon were the set of tongues for tonguing hair for a fee of ¢12000 (\$2.06), a steamer for reconditioning damaged hair and a footbath to clean and massage the feet during pedicure for a fee of ¢8000 (\$1.38). As more services were provided in beauty salons, the factors used in categorizing beauty salons grew complicated.

Another reason why the factors used in categorizing beauty salons grew complicated is that the braiding of hair grew popular in urban areas. Initially, women who did not have any formal training in hairdressing together with women who received training in braiding in the neighboring French speaking countries of Togo and Côte d'Ivoire sought tiny kiosks. The only equipment that this group of hairdressers needed was small plastic combs and a few stools that carpenters made from plywood and painted white. The clients, who usually brought their own hair extensions for a hairstyle, sat on the stools, in front of the beauty salons, while most of the hairdressers stood and used the

combs to part the hair and braid the styles. The result was that first, the tiny wooden beauty salons looked sparse and unattractive because these hairdressers did not invest in equipment such as chairs, wash basins or electric hairdryers. Even when their income was rather high, their workplace made onlookers categorize them as of a lower class because they did not need to invest in equipment. Second, most of this category of hairdressers did not have reason to invest in utility services such as water and electricity, which could encourage them to expand their services. If this category of hairdressers had water and electricity, they could buy equipment such as chairs and washstands to wash the hair or braids of the clients and hairdryers to dry the washed hair before braiding or the braids that were a few weeks old. Since hairdressers who braided hair only did not have much equipment, many clients who sought their skilled services went to wash and dry the hair and braids at the salons of the hairdressers who provided the permanent wave. The general impression was that hairdressers who possessed the equipment to provide a wider range of beauty services were of a higher class.

Hairdressers aimed to achieve a high class through the skill with which they provided a wide range of services and their profit margins. An example of a successful salon is CT beauty salon which was filled to capacity with both hairdressers and clients, all of whom were busy. A young woman in ordinary clothes—the madam—applied a perm to the hair of a client and then gave the small comb and gloves that she used for the touch-up to an apprentice in order to receive a call from her mobile phone. A client booked an appointment. The madam ended the call and looked around the crowded, small salon at the three other women clients. One client moved her fingers through her disheveled hair, as a woman in ordinary clothes—an employee—together with an

apprentice wove hair extensions together with her hair into big braids. The madam instructed an apprentice who had almost finished curling a client's hair around plastic, brush rollers to wash the cream out of the hair of the first client. The madam turned to a client who had a towel wrapped around her washed hair and watched as an apprentice gave the foot of this client a dab of nail varnish, removed the foot from her lap, gathered the equipment for pedicure into a rubber bowl, added shampoo and water and then sent the bowl outside, to the side of the beauty salon that used to be a metal container for shipping goods. The apprentice used a soft brush to wash the tools and then sanitized them in a solution of a disinfectant and very hot water that she created with a plastic cup with a small electric wire heater. This apprentice, like the other hairdressers worked without a break.

Next, the madam demonstrated her expertise in using the equipment to style hair. She removed the towel from the client's head and used her fingers and then a medium sized comb to disentangle the hair. The apprentice who helped with the first touchup was ready with two tail combs, a small container of styling gel and a bottle of spritz. The madam applied big blobs of the gel to the hair, combed it backwards and applied more gel where she thought necessary. She used one of the tail combs to lift the hair upwards slightly and the other to plaster a part of the hair firmly onto the scalp so it formed a wave. She was creating finger waves. Systematically, moving from the client's hairline towards the crown, the madam sometimes asked the client whether she wanted the hair parted in an additional way as an added style. Since usually the madam simply parted the hair and created the style, she must have sculpted the hairstyle in her mind's eye. She seemed barely in her twenties. Yet, she moved with the precision of a certified

professional. The message that this madam emanated is that she has control of her comb and the trends in fashion.

CT beauty salon provided important findings for the study. The major finding is that the small plastic comb is one of the most important equipment over which both hairdressers who provided braids and the permanent wave must wield control over in order to have a profitable and successful business.

In addition, global market economies compelled hairdressers in beauty salons in a fast urbanizing locality such as Lapaz to think that they needed to invest in the most recent technology. When hairdressers used their equipment to make clients fashionably beautiful, the small size of the beauty salon was not a deterrent to clients. One of the reasons why hairdressers could make good use of their equipment—despite the clustering of beauty salons at Lapaz—is that the introduction of mobile telephones in 1992 and the expansion of the landline telephone services during that decade enabled clients to keep personal contact with their favorite hairdressers and schedule visits to the beauty salons.⁶ The equipment that made it possible for hairdressers to provide a motley of services in a beauty salon was very convenient for clients because they could have a range of beauty care services either simultaneously or consecutively, especially in salons where there were many hairdressers to provide the services. Since there was such close contact between clients and hairdressers certain labor relations and social interactions were perceptible in the beauty salons at Lapaz.

The Labor Relations, Wages, and Life/Social Interactions

The comments that hairdressers made about their labor relations and social

⁶ In 1992, Millicom Ghana Limited was the first company to operate cellular phones in Ghana.

interactions show that health care is vital to the success of work in beauty salons. Hairdressers needed to stand for long periods to provide most services and they stooped to provide manicure and pedicure. They saw to their health, first, by ensuring that they always assume the correct, upright posture when standing and they avoided slouching because they sat on very low stools to provide manicure and pedicure. Even then, hairdressers had health complaints. Among the madams, Juliana complained that constant standing caused aches in her legs, waist and backside, Vic stated that the spray that she used to set the hairstyle contained alcohol, which caused her to catch a cold, and Bernice complained that the pedicure solution discolored her fingers. Esther, an apprentice stated that when providing pedicure, the back of her neck, shoulders and spine hurt. Most of the hairdressers who provided only braids complained that constantly twisting the hair extensions caused their fingertips to thin. Since hairdressers worked with potentially hazardous chemicals, the ideal was that they use gloves during both the application of the creams on the hair and the washing of the hair. However, some hairdressers did not use gloves and complained that they had painful, yellowish fingers. In general, the hairdressers stated that because they make women look beautiful, their work seems glamorous and easy, which attracts young people for apprenticeship. During the first few months of apprenticeship, however, almost every hairdresser fell ill from overwork and required some form of medication.

Hairdressers who worked with perm relaxers or worked as beauticians aimed to prevent infections and other health problems. They tried to follow simple rules that turned into good habits. For example, some hairdressers helped a client to remove jewelry such as earrings and necklaces that she wore for several reasons. They removed

the jewelry to ensure that there was no likelihood that a small item such as an earring would remove accidentally and be washed into the drain and away as the hairdresser washed the client's hair. If the hairdresser forgot to remove the jewelry against which the customer's hair brushes, the chemical that she applied to the client's hair could come in contact with the jewelry and cause it to corrode—any corrosion could affect the skin and health of the client. Thus, the hairdressers who removed the jewelry of their clients were attentive to the health of each client.

Hairdressers used water to wash the hair and other parts of the bodies of their clients. In cases where clients incurred burns, hairdressers had to immediately wash the part of the body with lots of water. Likewise, it was important that the hairdressers washed the hair of their clients carefully. The hairdressers adjusted the positions of the chair and the basin or washstand to ensure that the amount of water that they had would wash out all of the relaxer from the client's hair. The color signal of the neutralizing shampoo confirmed when the hairdressers washed all of the relaxer out of the hair. Washing clients' hair into a basin caused health risks because there was a greater possibility that the chemicals used on the hair could come in contact with the client's skin including her face and her eyes and cause irritation or harm. As the hairdressers gained access to cheaper and more portable washstands that require that clients lean backwards to wash their hair, fewer hairdressers were constrained to wash their clients' hair in a basin. The hairdressers then focused on limiting any potential for pains in the back and neck of both the client and the hairdresser due to the client's posture as her hair got washed next to the washstand.

Some of the actions that hairdressers took had sanitary implications. Any comb

that fell while the hairdresser was attending to the client had to be sent to the washstand, although there were cases where the hairdresser used a towel or a comb to wipe the comb. Likewise, hairdressers were expected to send combs that were used on a client's hair to the washstand. Since several different combs were used in the process of attending to each client, immediately the client left, or when there was a lull in clients' patronage of the beauty salon, the hairdresser had to wash the combs and sterilize them in a container filled with a solution of water and a disinfectant. The number of combs in each beauty salon and the number of clients to whom hairdressers attended helped to determine the length of time when the combs were in the solution.

The class of the salon made a difference in how hairdressers provided these services. The hairdressers wanted to wash their clients' hair into washstands that were constructed as sinks that had taps to provide both hot and cold water. However, many hairdressers owned plastic washstands that did not have taps. No client at Lapaz had to wash her client's hair in a basin. The hairdressers who washed clients' hair into plastic washstands for the suds to drain into a bucket rather than into a drain together with those hairdressers who used to wash their client's hair into basins had opportunities to retrieve the lost jewelry (of a recalcitrant client) before pouring the sudsy water into a gutter. Some hairdressers remembered that when they used basins they had to dip their fingers into the basin to rinse the plastic combs and plastic bowls that were used for the service. They used their fingers to feel the bottom of the basin to ensure that there was no other item in the basin before pouring the water outside, into a gutter. Since some parts of the Lapaz road had no gutter or it was under construction, some hairdressers poured the water onto pathways, which contributed to the erosion of the land. There were ditches in

which passersby could throw trash, or puddles that bred larvae and could cause diseases. The lack of equipment that helped persons to categorize the beauty salon as of a lower class and the lack of infrastructure at Lapaz resulted in the degradation of the environment.⁷

Despite these economic and environmental constraints that generated new concerns among Ghanaians, the hairdressers were interested in their health conditions and they preferred that persons in their salons achieve an ideal look. The hairdressers categorized their own ideal look as “day time” hairstyles that could not fall into their faces and distract their attention while they worked. Concurrently, it was fashionable and cost effective for women, including hairdressers to use synthetic hair to create various long and elaborate hairstyles that fell within the category of weave on and rasta, which they could wear for several weeks. Likewise, although hairdressers did not make up in the beauty salon, yet as they provided make-up as a part of beauty salon service to clients, increasingly, some hairdressers made up using subtle shades of colors that suited their daytime jobs. They did not wear dangling earrings and bangles when in the beauty salons because they did not want their jewelry to get entangled in the client’s hair.

Hairdressers expected their clients to come to the beauty salon with their hair products and body accessories, including jewelry such as earrings and necklaces that they intended to wear with the hairstyle. This expectation among hairdressers cut across the class of women who went to beauty salons. It is a fact that hairdressers expected to make a profit on the permanent relaxer creams, holding sprays and other products that they sold

⁷ See Jacob Songsore, John S. Nabila, A. T. Amuzu, K. A. Tutu, Yvon Yanguoru, Gordon McGranahan and Marianne Kjellén, *Proxy Indicators for Rapid Assessment of Environmental Health Status of Residential Areas: The Case of the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA), Ghana* (Stockholm: Stockholm Environmental Institute in collaboration with Sida, 1998).

or used in their shops. Yet, the expectation that clients would bring their own products meant that the hairdresser could use as much of the product that the client's hair needed in order to hold the style, rather than the quantity of the product that the client could afford.

The hairdressers preferred to create a hairstyle and make-up that suited the main occasion for which the client had come to be dressed. Some of the hairdressers believed that the clients who were of a higher class paid attention to the clothing that they wore to the beauty salon, while other clients left the beauty salon with the rollers still in their hair. They returned to remove the rollers and style their hair when they were about to attend a function. Hairdressers who aimed to keep their clients were compelled to be artistic in creating hair styles and makeup that enhanced each client's beauty and would suit most occasions. One wondered how most beauty salons acquired such standard skills and behavior patterns.

The health measures and beauty patterns that hairdressers followed seemed to be an indicator of the class of the beauty salon but further research resulted in a number of findings that emphasize the importance of observation among the hairdressers in beauty salons and the fact that the hairdressers who formed professional associations standardized the hairdressing curriculum. These hairdressers gained education that affected their manners and they believed that those who were not in associations observed and practiced the admirable beauty care services encouraged by the association. Indeed, since the different categories of hairdressers—madams, employees and apprentices—in beauty salons had a strict hierarchical structure, the more subordinate apprentices observed the employees and madams as well as clients and persons in the

public that they admired and then put their observation into practice.

The Owners of Beauty Salons (Madams)

Madams owned most of the beauty salons at Lapaz. They were at the top hierarchy of beauty salon work since they had the money to set up a beauty salon and the skill to provide both services and training. In the two examples above, the madam of CT beauty salon helps us to understand how young madams were skilled in providing beauty care services that were in vogue, and in the other beauty salon, Auntie Aggie helps us to understand how the older madams who had the capital to provide different services to several clients at a time attracted several young women to apprentice in their beauty salons.

Nevertheless, there were cases where initially, the madams were not skilled in certain techniques, that of braids especially. Vic, for example, stopped operating her salon in order to apprentice for six months at a beauty salon that provided braids including “rasta.” Two other madams employed hairdressers. One madam learnt the techniques for braids from her employee. She and her apprentices observed the employee and then practiced under the guidance of the employee. The other madam divided the fee that clients who requested for braids paid into three. She took one part of the fees and gave the rest to the employee that provided the service. At the time of the study, she turned her focus to a trade in fashion goods that she purchased during her travels to Benin. This madam who is Ewe, had relations in Benin. During the 1990s, after her children became adults and moved from home, she resumed a close relationship with her relations in Benin and realized that the CFA currency network among the neighboring French speaking countries meant that fashionable goods were cheaper there than in

Ghana. In Ghana, the traders in Benin had a good reputation for selling cheap fashion jewelry and their stable currency meant that their hair care products and clothing were cheaper than that sold in Ghana. Whenever the madam returned to Accra, she distributed most of her fashionable goods and hair care products to shops and beauty salons. And although she paid her employees the low salary of ₵60000 (\$10.32), she compensated them with an agreement that they add their profit margin to the goods that they sold for her, and that they keep the money that they received for braiding clients' hair, for which she had no training.

Many madams who aimed to expand the services of their beauty salons concentrated on developing their public relations and marketing skills to win more customers and increase profit. First, they invested in personal appearance. In their presentation of self, many madams wore clothing to the salon that is comparable to the clothes of senior staff in offices.⁸ Second, they welcomed customers, started conversations, and styled the clients' hair in order to be the beauty care provider who bid the client farewell.

Since the 1990s, it was common to see both the hairdressers and their clients read a copy of the tabloid newspapers, in particular, the *People and Places* (P&P) biweekly that was written and published at Compuprint, along the Abeka-Lapaz road. A hairdresser, Niki Boaponsem wrote its beauty page. From the mid 1980s, after she had studied biochemistry in England and gained interest in women's health and beauty therapy, she returned to Ghana with her husband, contributed in setting up Compuprint and provided hairdressing in her house. Boaponsem joined international hairdressing

⁸ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1966).

associations, and was one of the beauticians that representatives from international companies sought when they introduced a new product to the market in Ghana. For example, in summer 2003, the Pro-line International Company invited her to the national theater to observe and comment on a demonstration of how to use the Motions COLOR RETURN hair colorant.

Similarly, Boaponsem was one of the hairdressers that Carsons Company Limited contacted during the 1990s. By 1997, Carsons manufactured the Dark and Lovely hair care products in Ghana under the Free Zone Company Act, which required that it export 70 percent of the hair products. Out of the 30 percent left, it made sales, presented product demonstrations to hairdressers and consumers and ran a training school at Adabraka, the center of Accra's work district. Its students comprised hairdressers, and graduates of junior secondary schools and senior secondary schools. From 2001, when L'Oreal bought and merged the Carsons and Softsheen hair care companies, in Ghana, the new company, Softsheen.Carson made some important changes. It imported most of its products from the US and South Africa, stopped manufacturing Dark and Lovely products and discontinued using its training school at Adabraka.

Boaponsem moved her beauty salon from her home into the old premises of Carsons' beauty school at Adabraka. She transformed her workplace into the 2nd Image Hair and Beauty Clinic and operated it as a school and a dermatology clinic. Boaponsem employed one of the hairdressers who worked at Abeka-Lapaz to teach six months courses on a range of beauty subjects for which she charged a fee of ₵1500000 (\$178.50). In addition, whenever students from the Accra Polytechnic prepared for their school's examinations many of them implored her to teach the components of their Higher

Diploma courses in Fashion. In 2006, as Boaponsem celebrated twenty years of her work as a beautician at the Adabraka Presbyterian Church she advertised her new courses:

2nd Image Academy

Have you finished your basic beauty therapy training and want to advance and add character make up for stage and film work?

Do you want to learn how to use High Frequency Galvanic, Faradic Vacuum Suction and other facial electrical equipment to improve on your services?

2nd Image Academy is organizing special courses in Advance make up and Facial Electricals. Call 221376 for more details.⁹

By then, she shared her work premise with the country representative of City and Guilds International, some of her students studied courses for the Guild's exams, and she worked as an examiner for the Guild.

Boaponsem concentrated also on making 2nd Image a place that welcomed her clients. Both her clients and students had access to a variety of beauty care products. In addition to the hair care products that she provided, she contracted the public organization, the Ghana Cocoa Board (Cocobod) to use cocoa to produce soap for 2nd Image. Cocoa, one of the most important exports of Ghana, provides cream that complements that of the shea nut as the cheapest nutritious balm for the skin and hair, respectively, and Cocobod is the place where the first known beauty school began as noted in the previous chapter.

Boaponsem's educational activities and beauty care services serve as reflections of how since the 1990s, all hairdressers sought to standardize hairdressing and beauty care in Ghana by providing several levels of education as well as beauty care that would transform the system of apprenticeship.

⁹ The *Mirror*, July 17 2006.



Figure 6.2: 2nd Image beauty school and clinic.¹⁰

¹⁰ Photographed by the author, June 2006.

Apprentices

Within most beauty salons, apprentices were the largest category of beauty care providers. Apprentices could serve as the yard stick that measured the performance of their beauty salons because of the visual impression that they made on observers. Apprentices wore uniform clothing that was sewn from the same fabric and sometimes had the same style. The number of apprentices in a beauty salon made observers deem the madam highly skilled in providing beauty care. Parents and guardians sent their children and wards for training at beauty salons that could provide excellent services. In cases where the parents or guardian did not already have a beauty salon in mind, a potential apprentice and an adult had to move around the town and neighboring towns until they saw a suitable beauty salon. An important criterion was to study the number of apprentices in a beauty salon, the way they dressed and the way they related to each other. Where there were many apprentices in bright uniform clothes of a combination of at most two colors, and these apprentices quietly attended to the hair of some persons, potential apprentices felt that when they became apprentices of that beauty salon, they would go through the same process and learn quickly. Equally important, the observers needed to feel that there was a leader among the providers who were working. Even without the madam, there should be hairdressers from whom an apprentice learnt in a beauty salon.

Upon choosing a beauty salon, the potential apprentice and the adult entered it and asked for the proprietor's requirements for apprenticeship. The duration of apprenticeship was about two years and the fee paid to the madam ranged from ₪300000 (\$51.6) to ₪1000000 (\$172). Those who paid the lower fees provided tools for the

vocation which comprised on average four packets of brush rollers, half a dozen: tail combs, styling combs, medium sized towels and black thread. All potential apprentices had to provide a crate (24 300 milliliter bottles) of minerals and about ₪50000 (\$8.6) as *anbantem sika* (“you didn’t come early money”). The madam shared this money and drink among all the hairdressers in the beauty salon according to seniority. The potential apprentice had to provide all these materials and a substantial portion of the money before she was accepted as a hairdresser in the beauty salon. Whatever she paid was not refundable.

A new apprentice learned the trade by first, ensuring that the beauty salon was always clean and neat, and it had water for washing clients’ hair and nails. Apprentices had to be in the beauty salon at half past seven in the morning, and they had about half an hour to prepare the premises of the beauty salon for clients. Since most of the beauty salons had madams who were Christian, the apprentices had a prayer session about ten minutes before the beauty salon opened for clients. Most salons closed between six and seven in the evening, but had to remain open if there were clients. Some salons were closed on Sundays. Increasingly, it was common for the salon to remain open throughout the week, and for each hairdresser to take one day off. The majority of hairdressers had their day off on either Mondays or Tuesdays, when fewer clients went to the beauty salons.

A second way that a new apprentice learned the trade was through an initial period of observation, which lasted a couple of months. Each new apprentice realized that there was a complicated relationship between madams and apprentices and between senior and junior apprentices. There was an intrinsic hierarchical structure of which

madams were at the top, senior apprentices wielded a lot of power and the apprentice who joined the beauty salon last entrant was at the bottom. Since during the period of observation the apprentice was sent to do menial chores for the beauty salon as well as individual seniors, she was not with the hairdressers who were gathered around a task. Apprentices in beauty salons where the madam did not come to work often had the least opportunity to learn through observation the variety of skills for hairdressing.

There was a positive aspect to the period of observation. Since all the apprentices were either teenagers or in their early twenties and they were either graduates of the public junior secondary schools or had some basic school education, they wore short hair when they attended school. Only a few girls who attended private preparatory schools in Accra wore braids and plaits. This means that most of the new apprentices who wore braids, plaits or perms had practiced hairdressings on their own heads only during school holidays or after they no longer attended school. Thus, in the beauty salons, the new apprentices became adept at deciphering trends in fashion, and the alternative ways of producing hairdressings that make fashion statements. The apprentice had opportunities to study the different styles that her seniors created on their own heads, and she felt privileged when they created styles on her head. She learnt by practicing the styles that she saw each morning, as she came to work and in the evenings, as she left and she picked up ways that she herself could dress and how she could learn to work independently. Most of the apprentices chose the vocation they wanted to pursue and they showed a vested interest through their determination to learn as much as possible.

During the second year of apprenticeship, the apprentice made hints to the madam and junior apprentices that she aimed to graduate soon. Usually, the madam observed the

senior apprentice until she felt that the apprentice had acquired the requisite skills for providing hairdressing commercially. She told the apprentice to let her parents or guardian come to discuss the process of her graduation. In cases where the apprentice showed maturity, the madam told her the graduation process. The madam set a day when the apprentice would bring her own model to demonstrate that she knows how to provide a perm or braids.

There was a two part examination for those who provided the perm. The madam graded how the apprentice studied the hair to ensure its elasticity and porosity. The idea is that a smart apprentice would choose a model with an ideal hair texture—hair that is elastic, moderately porous and medium in thickness. The apprentice needed to provide the correct shapes of hair partings and make sure that she applied the chemical hair relaxer cream to the model's hair without the cream coming into contact with the scalp. The apprentice had to use the correct combs at each stage of processing the hair, and she needed to check how much time she used. The madam examined how the apprentice washed the relaxer from the model's hair. The towel needed to be draped well around the client who sat in a reclining manner, such that the back of her neck rested against the washstand. In many cases, the client's chair was not adjustable. Likewise, most of the the washstand could not be adjusted. Yet, an efficient apprentice had to guide the water to run through the client's hair without wetting any other part of the client's body or clothes. The madam examined how the apprentice studied the apprentice's scalp to ensure that the cream had not caused any cuts, the hair was neither under-processed nor over-processed, the shampoo and water washed all the cream out of the hair and the conditioner improved the texture of the hair. The apprentice then used rollers to set the

model's hair.

The second part of the examination occurred a day or more after the first examination and doubled as the graduation day. Sometimes, the second examination and graduation day were delayed because the apprentice had not paid all of her apprenticeship fee. A madam could agree that the apprentice would graduate and then work at the salon for a few months without pay in lieu of the rest of her fee. Even then, the apprentice incurred costs in her preparation for her graduation day. She needed to buy drinks, pastries and sometimes cook food that she, her fellow hairdressers and her well wishers would eat and drink in celebration of her successful graduation. The apprentice planned for her graduation party even as she studied for her examination that was set for the same day.

The madam began the events for the graduation day with a prayer. On Awura Ama's graduation day, her madam prayed that:

God, this child of mine is about to pass out of my salon and out of my hands.
I pray for her handiwork.
You know that salon work seems light, but it is deep.
I pray for her handiwork.
That every work she touches brings her name, respect, fame.
And that what is evil is cast away from her path.

The madam then began the examination. She pointed to several combs that were arranged on a table in front of the well wishers. When she mentioned a type of comb, Awura Ama had to pick it and explain the procedures in hairdressing that required that a hairdresser used that comb, and some of the hairstyles that she would use the comb to create. The madam held each comb until Awura Ama mentioned all the correct answers. Awura

Ama then ushered in her model and used the comb and others to demonstrate how to provide a hairstyle that her madam requested. The madam assessed the extent to which Awura Ama studied the client's face and attire to create the style in a manner that suited the model, whether she used the correct comb at each stage and whether Awura Ama looked hospitable as she provided the hairstyle.

If successful, Awura Ama would graduate as a certified hairdresser. The madam assessed Awura Ama's handiwork, declared her successful and brought forth a certificate on which was printed the name of the beauty salon and it had blank spaces for the graduate's name, date of graduation and the madam's signature. The gathering of well wishers clapped as Awura Ama received her certificate from the madam and then listened as the madam welcomed her as a fellow madam, and offered to mentor Awura Ama to overcome problems that a new madam may experience. An apprentice placed a bowl on the table and as she led the gathering of people to sing a lively Christian song, everyone who danced past the bowl presented Awura Ama with an offertory. Afterwards, they stood as one of Awura Ama's well-wishers, a young evangelist, prayed and gave thanks for Awura Ama's success in the hairdressing examinations and for the money that her well wishers offered her. Afterwards, as the apprentices served the drinks, pastries and food, the madam and other adults wished Awura Ama well through their advice. Intermittently, the prominent members of her family or from her neighborhood donated money for her to use to start her own beauty salon Awura Ama focused on setting up her own beauty salon near her home at Chantan. While she was an apprentice, she purchased a stand dryer, chairs, hair rollers, shampoo and conditioner, with which she used to offer services on her verandah to her clients. As a graduate, she expected her older brother, a

car mechanic to use the offertory and donations that she received during her graduation together with his own money to build her a kiosk.¹¹ Awura Ama had more finances than many other graduates who paid a lower graduation fee, served their madams for about six months after graduation, and then in order to accrue capital to set up their own beauty salons they sought employment in other beauty salons.

Employees

Very few hairdressers were employees in the beauty salons. They completed training in different beauty salons and a hotel that was not the beauty salon in which they worked. There was no fixed hiring process. The new graduate or her adult friend or relation who knew the owner of a beauty salon, approached the owner and enquired for a position for the new graduate. The owner, usually a madam explained the services that she expected an employee to perform, and the salary that she could pay the employee.

Three of the employees worked at the beauty salon in the multipurpose story building described earlier. The owner of the beauty salon migrated to France, where she fixed nails. She ran the beauty salon at Lapaz as a family business. Her brother was the accountant and the most qualified hairdresser was her sister, Edna. Edna is a middle school graduate who apprenticed at a salon in Kaneshie and then attended the Dark and Lovely school at Adabraka. As the most qualified hairdresser, her salary was ₵180000 (\$30.96), a reasonable amount within the context of the hairdressing business. Edna advertised the shop in new magazines that were published and circulated locally and she requested for her sister to supply the beauty salon with the fashion products that sold quickly. Her major worry was that she applied the new products that they sold to her

¹¹ Field notes, November 2000.

own hair as a form of advertisement to her clients because she was both an employee and a relation of her employer. Initially she enjoyed the attention that she received from her clients whenever she modeled new products but as she acquired more education about hairdressing, she tried to discourage her family from expecting her to model products. Another employee, Sheila earned the same amount as Edna. In 1997, after she graduated from apprenticeship in hairdressing at Lapaz, she was employed at a hotel in Airport for about a year. She had to leave within a year because few clients came to the beauty salon. Nevertheless, her exposure to beauty work inside a hotel made her services more marketable.¹²

The two employees in the other beauty salon had low salaries. While the minimum daily wage was ¢2900 (\$0.50), they earned ¢60000 (\$10.32) per month plus commissions. In addition to their salary, they took the fees for the braids that they provided and the profit on the hair products and hair accessories that they retailed in the beauty salon for their madam. They both lived near the beauty salon and did not need to pay for transportation to work. Yet, it was not clear how they could provide their food, clothing and shelter as well as save enough to set up their own beauty salons. Like other employees and senior apprentices, both of them expected to combine their savings with money that loved ones, such as their husbands and relatives gave to them to set up their own beauty salons. Over the next decade, employees' needs would grow into a priority for the hairdressers who were in associations, the most popular of which is the Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association (GHABA).

GHABA: History, Structures, Activities and Domains of Interventions

¹² The third employee did not wish to be interviewed.

From 1972, after the principal of the Morris School of Hairdressing en-route to Nigeria visited his students in Ghana, about twenty hairdressers including Fanny Otchere, Bertha Dola, Millicent Ocansey and Margaret Sappor organized into the Ghana Hairdressers And Beauticians Association (GHABA) “with the purpose of safeguarding the profession.”¹³ The group met at the Accra Community Centre, then the Young Men’s Christian Association and subsequently, at the Ambassador Hotel, where on November 3 1979, Frances Ademola, a literary artist and art collector inaugurated the association.

GHABA’s structure was composed of executives, general members and a board of directors. The President was Diana Boateng, Vice President Margaret Sappor, Secretary Mary Mensah, Financial Secretary Irene Afriyea, and Public Relations Officer Mary Nortey. There were about 200 member hairdressers and beauticians who were predominantly in Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi. Unfortunately, within the first decade that GHABA was inaugurated, as members rehearsed a play that explained about good hairdressers and quack hairdressers, many of the hairdressers who acquired training in institutions that are abroad were dissatisfied with GHABA. They dissociated with GHABA and over the next decade, formed into the Professional Cosmetology Association of Ghana (PCAG). Almost two decades later, when GHABA had an office at Kaneshie to set up a secretariat for its 6000 member hairdressers the association went through fission again. The faction that broke away formed the National Association of Beauticians and Hairdressers. Nevertheless, the association grew numerically because each year, many hairdressers joined GHABA.

During the 1990s when Margaret Sappor was national president, the association

¹³ “A Brief History of Hairdressing in Ghana,” in GHABA News, Vol. 1, September-December 1999, 2, 5.

joined the Industrial Commercial Unit of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), which assisted the executives to develop its constitution and seek members in most parts of Ghana. The members of GHABA who worked in a neighborhood formed a zone, the smallest unit. Each of them had a zonal membership card in which she paid monthly dues to help run the zone and the national secretariat. Each member could pay the dues piecemeal or in full during the weekly meetings, before the secretary made a roll call and began the week's agenda. During these weekly meetings, the members gave an offertory of money to increase the association's financial resources. And when a member married or gave birth or experienced the death of a close relation such as a mother, father or spouse each member paid a specified amount that the executives would give to that member. Several zones joined to form districts and all the districts made up the region. There were zonal, regional and national executives and a combination of general members and executives formed committees to address the member of the association's need for a common education and skill training, and national development.

The members of GHABA participated in current events that shaped and enhanced citizenship. GHABA was a nongovernmental association with a board of directors that represented the association to negotiate with the government to form laws and policies that encouraged the provision of viable hairdressing services. In 1991, the association was a non-partisan group that had a representative at Ghana's consultative assembly for democratic rule. In addition, the members of GHABA assisted the needy in the society. They sent food and clothing to children at the Osu Children's Home,¹⁴ and between 2002 and 2005, some member hairdressers provided free apprenticeship to street children when the government created the President's Special Initiative to promote technical education

¹⁴ GHABA News, Vol. 1, September-December 1999, 2-3.

for street children through charity.

By then GHABA had overhauled its structure. Since GHABA's membership comprised anyone who practiced hairdressing or provided services in beauty care in a beauty salon, the executives understood that they needed to negotiate with relevant public and nongovernmental organizations to shape and address members' professional needs. The executives of GHABA aimed to streamline the vocation by addressing members' cost of production and providing a standardized education for hairdressers and their apprentices.

The owners of beauty salons paid utility bills to the electricity and water corporations. By the 1990s, since many hairdressers practiced their craft within their houses, the utilities that they used were quantified as household use, and they paid a domestic rate. During the 1990s, the hairdressers who provided their services in kiosks tapped the utilities from the homes that were nearest to their beauty salons. The utility companies frowned upon the actions of these hairdressers. The water company could do nothing about the usage of its water services because each hairdresser did not feel compelled to construct taps in a kiosk that was located at a place temporarily. The officials of the Electricity Corporation of Ghana, however, enforced the correct wiring of beauty salons and ensured that the owners paid commercial rates. Many hairdressers disputed with the officials from the corporation because if they paid the commercial rates, they would not have viable beauty salons. By 2000, the executives of GHABA had negotiated with the corporation for its member hairdressers who owned beauty salons to pay commercial rates that were slightly higher than the domestic rates that they were used to paying for homes.

Similarly, the owners of beauty salons paid taxes to both the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the metropolitan or municipal assemblies. The executives of GHABA negotiated with the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) to reduce the fixed rate that each beauty salon paid, and they helped to phase out the IRS' system for the collection of taxes from beauty salons. The standard IRS procedure was that its officials calculated the tax that the owner owed by counting the number of standing hairdryers in a beauty salon. They reasoned that the total number of standing hairdryers allowed a beauty salon to provide a certain number of services at any given time. The owner of the beauty salon had to pay the tax for the full year, or it could be divided for each half year or quarterly. In 2000, the executives of GHABA negotiated with the IRS for member hairdressers to pay ₵100000 (\$17.2) for the four quarters, two half years or full year tax. Those who could only afford the taxes fortnightly or monthly paid a total of ₵108000 (\$18.58). GHABA members paid their taxes to their representatives who presented the bulk amount to the officials at the IRS. This arrangement enabled the executives of GHABA to negotiate for favorable terms of payment and avoid confrontations between individual beauty salon owners and tax collectors, as used to occur in the past. The IRS in turn was more assured of receiving payment from the many hairdressers who are categorized as a part of the amorphous informal economy.¹⁵ There is need for further research on whether such favorable terms for payment of utility and taxes encouraged hairdressers to move the practice of their vocations from their homes and verandahs into commercial structures and to register their businesses with the government.

¹⁵ See Takyiwaa Manuh, "Ghana: Women in the Public and Informal Sectors under the Economic Recovery Programme," in Pamela Sparr (ed.), *Mortgaging Women's lives: Feminist Critiques of Structural Adjustment* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1994), 61-72.

As GHABA's membership grew, the hairdressers met weekly to discuss how to generate money for sorority needs and the well being of their beauty salons. In 2000, the members paid monthly dues of ₦1000 (\$0.17) and occasionally, they paid up to ₦2000 (\$0.34) to help to address the needs of their members. They made suggestions to regulate the fees that they charged for their services, although no one was obliged to implement their decisions. For example, they suggested a rate of ₦3000 (\$0.52) for hair that was washed and set and ₦5000 (\$0.86) for touch ups. But some beauty salons charged ₦2000 (\$0.34) and ₦3000 (\$0.52) respectively, or ₦5000 (\$0.86) and ₦10000 (\$1.72) respectively, ₦25000 (\$4.30) for tongued hair and between ₦15000 (\$2.58) and ₦20000 (\$3.40) for touch ups. The members of the association left other services, such as dressing brides, manicure and pedicure and braids to the discretion of the providers. Invariably, word went around about the different charges. The beauty salons that provided the range of services in a given neighborhood arrived at equilibrium prices in order to maintain clients.

By then, Sappor the president of GHABA had published the maiden edition of the magazine, *GHABA News* in celebration of the association's twenty-fifth anniversary. She encouraged the members of the association to:

“Keep the Image Positive”

The hairdressing profession is a noble one, and it must be regarded as such. If so, then hairdressers as a group must have a code of ethics to enhance the image of the profession...

On this occasion of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Association, we urge members to be concerned about customer care as a way of boosting their businesses...

We urge members to use only approved creams, chemicals and cosmetic products so that clients do not complain about services rendered and damage to

their hair. Needless to say, some chemicals are dangerous. Let us be careful.

Last but not least we urge GHABA to be mindful of their responsibilities as members of the association, to contribute their dues, attend meeting and participate in the activities of the Association.

The executives of GHABA to equip hairdressers with a common knowledge about the beauty culture vocation. They emphasized how madams could provide healthy physical beauty, as a result of which the client gained a lasting sense of well being. The executives of GHABA related the generic activities in households with those in beauty salons. Once, for the madams to understand how they should treat clients, a GHABA executive drew a homology between the clients and the madams' husbands. When a husband came home from work, the madam welcomed him with a smile, took away his bag or briefcase as he sat in chair, asked him about his day's experiences and then led him to a nicely laid table for a meal. If the client was a regular patron, the provider needed to start a brief welcoming conversation that asked about her well being. The provider then needed to ask the client what service she sought and it had to be provided satisfactorily.

Furthermore, at the meetings, the madams listened as companies advertised hair care products and demonstrated how to use some of the products which they sold on tables and in cars in front of the meeting places of GHABA. For example, after the representatives from Jeba parked vans on which were painted the Jeba shampoo, Jeba conditioner and Jeba pomade, as well as the telephone number and location of Jeba in Accra Central, they gave a step-by-step explanation about the proper ways to use their shampoo, conditioner and pomade to ensure that the clients had lustrous hair and healthy scalps.

Likewise, the members of GHABA had a close relationship with Carsons, the company that we discussed earlier in this chapter. On one occasion, the technicians of Carsons' Dark and Lovely perm relaxer taught the GHABA members how to apply its professional package to clients' hair and emphasized that the hairdressers needed to wear gloves, follow the directions on each kit and work with the stipulated time in order to achieve the best results and avoid health complications. On another occasion, a technician of the Dark and Lovely range of products demonstrated how to style a bride's hair, put on the veil and keep her looking radiant throughout the wedding ceremonies. Sometimes, the technicians from Carsons visited the GHABA zones and organized the hairdressers in a number of zones that comprised about five hundred members for product demonstrations workshops and the distribution of posters that the hairdressers pasted on the windows of their salons. Each workshop had a theme that was based on cutting, relaxing, coloring or styling. Carsons organized point sales for some hairdressers and helped those who scored high points to repair their equipment such as standing hairdryers. Some madams who were active in the hairdressing business and the association allowed the representatives from Carsons to paint their beauty salons with the company's purple theme color.

Carsons encouraged GHABA members to compete with each other to reveal their skills. In 1998, it introduced in Ghana the Golden Scissor Award, a continent-wide hairdressing competition that began in South Africa in 1996. Countries that compete for the Award include Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Carsons introduced the Golden Scissor Award in Ghana when it sent

GHABA members to view the competition in other countries. The next year, members in GHABA zones chose representatives to compete at the super zonal levels, and then the national level. The winner and her runner up competed at the regional level for the West Africa Final Golden Scissor Award.¹⁶ When the West Africa Award was held in Ghana, at the Accra International Conference Center, Carsons donated tickets to the executives of GHABA to sell to members and the public and use the proceeds to augment the activities of the association. One of the important activities is that the members of GHABA acquired formal training in hairdressing and beauty care from the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI).¹⁷

The aims of the NVTI are:

To provide for vocational guidance and career development in industry;

To develop training standards,

To evolve effective trade testing and certification policies and programmes;

To establish and maintain technical and cultural relations with international organisations and other foreign institutions engaged in activities connected with vocational training.¹⁸

The officials of NVTI control the quality of crafts in Ghana by setting a standard to train and examine persons in vocations in the country. Apprenticeship and schooling

¹⁶ Message from Mr. Jerome Camus, the General Manager of Softsheen.Carson West Africa Limited FZE Golden Scissor Award 2006.

¹⁷ The NVTI is the nationally accredited institution that organizes examinations for all technical and vocational training schools and individuals who choose to take the exam. It sets two types of exams: the Proficiency that examines orally students' practical skill in a particular technical field or vocation, and the Trade Test that examines orally and verbally the students' competency up to the level that they would qualify as journeymen.

¹⁸ *NVTI in Perspective* (Unpublished: 2000?), 6.

are two of the forms of vocational training. The syllabuses of the NVTI serve as training requirements for over eighty trade areas and the officials conduct examinations twice a year for individuals and vocational institutions, both public and private.¹⁹

Augusta Olympio, a professional nurse who worked as a hairdresser together with some of the Ashanti regional executives of GHABA arranged with the NVTI for the association to structure a curriculum and an examination on hairdressing. GHABA and NVTI collaborated to set up syllabuses for two types of examinations, the Proficiency Test for skilled hairdressers who lacked formal school education and the Trade Test for hairdressers who had some school-education. The executives of GHABA created awareness among the members about the need for hairdressers to seek formal education about their vocation while the NVTI published the syllabus. Each month, certified members of GHABA, many of whom attended training colleges for nurses or teachers and fashion courses at the polytechnics, volunteered to teach courses about the hairdressing vocation to hairdressers who met at the Been To entertainment spot at Lapaz, where the GHABA members at Abeka-Lapaz held meetings. The facilitators taught in English and a Ghanaian language, usually Akan or Ga.

The executives arranged that between 2000 and 2004, once in a year, the officials from NVTI would examine all the hairdressers who registered for the examinations. The executives aimed for the members in every region to have an educational committee and that a national committee would set an internal examination that would be similar to the NVTI examinations.

¹⁹*NVTI in Perspective* (Unpublished: 2000?).

Subsequently, the executives of GHABA organized for the senior apprentices of their members to take lessons and internal examinations that was administered by GHABA but designed like the syllabus of NVTI. Initially, some of the madams complained that the apprentices who would learn the techniques of hairdressing at their separate association called Baby GHABA (see Figure 6.3) would disregard the hierarchical structure within salons. In other words, since the apprentices had access to training elsewhere, they would not respect their madams. In addition, they would have less time to attend to clients at the beauty salons. The worries of the madams were resolved as the executives of GHABA started the School of Cosmetology and each month, provided a couple of hours of teachings about the anatomy, health, hairdressing and cosmetology, and declared the time that the members of Baby GHABA spent in beauty salons as their hours for practical work.

The educational committee of GHABA could not resolve the minimum educational qualifications that the apprentices who join Baby GHABA must possess. The members of GHABA preferred persons with junior secondary school education or its equivalent as apprentices. Yet, some of these members believed that the media and the government's poverty alleviation schemes compelled the hairdressers who formed GHABA—like associations of other vocations in the informal economy—to train non literate, unemployed young women. Thus, the instructors of Baby GHABA taught the apprentices who had different levels of school-education, some of which may be too low for any individual to succeed at the NVTI examinations. After the apprentices pass the GHABA examinations and graduate from apprenticeship in the beauty salons, they register with the NVTI for examinations in hairdressing and cosmetology.



Figure 6.3: An apprentice who attends Baby GHABA wears a t-shirt with the motto of “Grooming and Perfection.”²⁰

²⁰ Photographed by the author, July 2006.

GHABA formed an alliance with the Synacoifto Union of Togo and hoped to organize with the other hairdressers that are in the region called the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) into the West Africa Hairdressers Association. The hairdressers in these associations would benefit if the ECOWAS committee implemented policies that aimed for people in West Africa to travel and work in member countries without need for visas and work permits.

Concurrently, in Denmark, the Women Workers Union (Kvindeligt Arbejderforbund i Danmark—KAD) that was affiliated to the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (Landesorganisation—LO) sought a relationship with associations of trade unions in Africa that comprised members who worked in the informal economy. Briefly, the KAD was one of Europe's most important women's unions. In 1885, the washing and cleaning women in Aarhus formed the first women's union and in 1901, together with other women unions founded the KAD to organize both skilled and unskilled women workers, many of whom belonged to the informal economy.²¹ The officers of the association bargained over members' hours of work, wages, conditions of work and holidays and vacations with the employer, which was usually the government.²² In addition, by the 1990s, they provided education about the government's rules and regulations for unemployment benefits, which members who experienced unemployment sought. Since employed women received hourly wages, they had little motivation to leave their workplace for the guidance classes at the premises of the KAD. As a result, from the 1990s, the officers of the KAD provided "guidance corners"

²¹ Alice H. Cook, Val R. Lorwin and Arlene Daniels, *Women and Trade Unions in Eleven Industrialized Countries* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1984).

²² Alice H. Cook, Val R. Lorwin and Arlene Daniels, *Women and Trade Unions in Eleven Industrialized Countries* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1984).

(Vejledningshjõner); they met each woman worker at her canteen and linked her with appropriate training institutions in order to address her educational needs.²³ The government paid for the training and provided a stipend. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the officers of the KAD honed their skills to promote ethnic forms of hairdressings and to work as educational ambassadors.²⁴

The officers of the KAD sought the services of Barikisu Larsen, a Ghanaian immigrant who studied hairdressing in Ghana during the 1980s. In 1998, upon migrating to Denmark, she studied Dansk, after which she joined the Copenhagen hairdressers union that is a part of the KAD and she opened a beauty salon in which she provided mainstream beauty care services as well as braids and plaits that her fellow hairdressers viewed as ethnic hairstyles that originate from Africa. Larsen taught students and professional hairdressers how to provide braids and plaits and she worked on different projects of the Copenhagen hairdressers union.

For example, on September 28 and 29 2002, the Copenhagen hairdressers union together with the Copenhagen school for hairdressers that provided courses in afro hair design collaborated to produce the Copenhagen Hair Festival for a professional audience at the Royal Danish Library and Copenhagen Marriot Hotel. One of the main attractions on the program was the “Black Hair Show” that Larsen helped to organize. According to Jacob Crawford, a reporter:

The Black Hair Show was among the main attractions for a professional

²³ Peter Plant, “Guidance Corners and Educational Ambassadors in Denmark,” www.gla.ac.uk/wg/pilotdke.htm; also see Louise Dignard and Jose Havet, *Women in Micro and Small-Scale Enterprise Development* (London: Westview Press, 1995).

²⁴ In 2004, the KAD merged with the Working Men’s Union (SiD). See Dan Gallin and Pat Horn, “Organizing Informal Women Workers,” Global Labour Institute, http://www.global-labor.org/pat_horn.htm

audience in the two day festival program. The show took place in the Royal Danish Library and was complete with drums and singing as the models did their catwalk.

Models at the festival were presenting spectacular hairstyles made by invited hair artists from Burkina Faso and South Africa. Part of the show was devoted to inform about the background for the traditional hairstyle...African hairstyle and fashion often has a deeper meaning...besides making a woman look beautiful, African hairstyles and clothes can have a symbolic value and send messages. One hairstyle signaled "go away I am just married," while another meant "come closer I am single."

At a look and learn session later in the day, the hairdressers talked to their European colleagues about the more technical details and problems of black hair care. Techniques such as braids, twists, cornrows, weave on and water curls were discussed and demonstrated.²⁵

Larsen as one of the principal members of the KAD met with some members of GHABA, and officials from the ICU and NVTI to design a standard curriculum similar to those used in Western European countries yet sensitive to the aesthetics of hairdressers and clients from different geographical and cultural locations. In 2006, NVTI taught this new curriculum to the members of GHABA from selected zones in the Accra and Tema regions.²⁶ Thus, women in Ghana and South Africa practiced the most advanced version of the curriculum in hairdressing that has a transcontinental design and may meet the desires of women globally.

After women indicated interest in hairdressing during the 1950s and 1960s, the crises of nationalism that was manifest in coup d'états and economic malaise during the 1960s and 1970s and 1980s stalled the efforts of hairdressers to form professional associations.

²⁵Jacob Crawford, *Coloured Pictures Magazine* (Netherlands) issue 5, 2004; <http://crawford.dk/photos/blackhair.htm>.

²⁶ Several interviews with GHABA executives and officials of NVTI. The most recent was when an official of NVTI briefed Greater Accra Region's Baby GHABA examination candidates about NVTI examinations on August 7 2006.

During the 1990s, the women certified hairdressers formed the Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association (GHABA) and worked with the Industrial Commercial Unit (ICU) of the Trades Union Congress to regulate the hairdressing service economy to improve their conditions of service. GHABA negotiated successfully for better tax rates and utility rates, which attracted women who provided hairdressing commercially within the informal economy either because it was a gendered domestic activity that they practiced, or because they acquired skill training as apprentices of hairdressers. The executives of GHABA sought the assistance of the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) to make syllabuses and set examinations for commercial hairdressers. Hairdressers who train in Ghana in individual salons or in schools could take NVTI's practical and written examinations as Trade Tests; non-literate hairdressers could take the practical examinations only as Proficiency Tests. In 2006, some of these certified hairdressers as GHABA members could enroll in standard continent wide classes that the Denmark Trade Union helped to plan.

By 2000, GHABA faced the challenge of ensuring that there were democratic elections for its executive positions, and that graduates would find work and continue to improve upon their skills. GHABA sought to assist new graduates who did not have the financial support to start their own salons to work with GHABA members who had established a good reputation and would pay a favorable salary. In 1999, the elections for GHABA executives were challenged, however. The hairdressers who were dissatisfied with the GHABA elections formed the National Association of Beauticians and Hairdressers. One of the effects is that young girls and women who seek their livelihood in Ghana's expanding informal economy are attracted to hairdressing which seems well

regulated and has professional associations that seem to compete to meet the needs of hairdressers.

The hairdressers in professional associations developed a close relationship with industries that produced hair care products. During the 1990s, GHABA, for example, worked closely with Carsons Company Limited. A recent development is that banks and non-governmental associations create grants to assist individuals and associations that belong to the informal economy. A nongovernmental association such as BUSAC formed by the Danish International Development Assistance (Danida), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) that advocated for Ghana's private sector granted funds to the branches of both GHABA and NABH and the member hairdressers who provide evidence of their ventures.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

This dissertation examined how during the twentieth century, persons in Ghana provided, discussed and promoted hairdressings as: regalia, symbolic of topical events and ideas, fashion and a new profession. This concluding chapter examines hairdressing in Ghana within the context of pan-Africanism and global events.

At the turn of the twentieth century, European colonization of most of Africa accelerated urbanization and made class structures more complex. Hairdressing and hair accessories including hats symbolized the elite status of Africans who belonged to royal families or had extensive trade networks. By the 1920s, in urban areas, older men and their families attained the respectability of elites or “frock men” and “frock women” due to a combination of factors including early conversion to Christianity, access to school-education and success in new economic activities such as the cultivation of cocoa, clerical work and professional work. These older men invested in their children’s school-education and expected these children to acquire knowledge and mannerisms that depicted enlightenment in the Gold Coast colony and metropolitan Britain, as represented in Kobina Sekyi’s satirical play *The Blinkards* (1915).

During the colonial era, Africans’ interest in hairdressing developed as a paradox, a visual symbol of attainment of class status for Africans in urban areas, and avoidance of the demarcation of class and subjectivity for African intellectuals. African intellectuals who traveled across the Atlantic turned to artistic creativity. These artistic forms that they promoted as cultural nationalism contributed in unifying them as pan-Africanist. Pan-Africanists, defined widely as Africans living across the Atlantic who have common

ideas and ideals, challenged the ideas that circulated about the social and political implications of phenotype, including hair texture that identified racial types. Joseph Casely Hayford, one of the earliest pan-Africanists from the Gold Coast colony wrote *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911) an autobiographical novel about race relations. He contributed in establishing the press as a credible and influential medium for communicating to Africans in the colony and across English speaking West Africa and he married Adelaide Smith who administered a vocational school in Sierra Leone, a category of school-education that was sought by some hairdressers in Ghana from the 1960s. James Kwegyir Aggrey, the renowned advocate for coeducation gave presentations across the Atlantic that include Africans' ideal phenotypes, hairdressing and beauty at a time when pan-Africanists celebrated the Harlem Renaissance in the United States of America. During the 1930s, Jamaican Rastafarians sported locked hair and favored Ethiopia—that Europeans did not colonize—as the Promised Land. Aimé Césaire from the French colony Martinique in the Caribbean and Leopold Senghor from the French colony Senegal discovered Negritude that celebrated the environment of Africans including attributes associated with African women to address pan-Africanists' feelings of ostracism and identify their lives as worthy. During the 1930s and 1940s, Kwame Nkrumah studied in United States of America and England and met with prominent pan-Africanists.

From the 1950s, hairdressing was one of the icons with which Nkrumah negotiated for the political liberalization of the Gold Coast colony. Nkrumah and his followers projected him as the folk heroes and epic heroes in Africa's past. He demonstrated "African pride" through anti-colonial movements that yielded a peaceful

transition to democratic rule. His “Prison Graduate cap,” a small hat that people from the Northern Territories wore with their *fugu* smocks serves as an icon of first, how the leaders of Akan ethnic groups used to seek inscriptions from the *Koran* that they attached to their war clothes—the *fugu*, also known as the *batakali kese*—for protection and victory.²⁷ Second, the “Prison Graduate cap,” is an icon of how Nkrumah and his colleagues sought to achieve an egalitarianism that is in accordance with his socialist aims for under-privileged working-class African nationalists to overthrow the ruling class, the British colonizers.

The success of Nkrumah’s anticolonial struggles enabled pan-Africanists to highlight their ideals. The Gold Coast colony became the country Ghana, in celebration of the wealth and achievements of the African state, Ancient Ghana and to portend “African Nationalism.” One of the ceremonial dresses of the leader, President Nkrumah was a simple hairstyle and the *kente* cloth of the renowned Asante, a visual icon of “African pride.” The name of Ghana’s ships, the Black Star Line made historical reference to the pan-Africanist visions of the West Indian, Marcus Garvey, and Nkrumah welcomed leading pan-Africanists including C. L. R. James, George Padmore, and W. E. B. Du Bois and his wife Shirley to Ghana to share in “African Nationalism” and “African pride.” Pan-Africanists depicted “African pride” when they wore regalia to state functions and fashionable dress to the dance halls and theaters to enjoy the cosmopolitan highlife music and celebrate how Ghana the first African colony south of the Sahara achieved independence and signaled freedom for pan-Africanists.

Our study of the history of hairdressing as Africans experienced decolonization

²⁷ Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

and independence helps us to understand that Nkrumah conceptualized pan-Africanism as a racial category that encompassed Africans across the Atlantic and in its implementation embraced Arabs who occupied the African continent, experienced European colonization and sought political liberation. Nkrumah's implementation of nationalism as continental was broader than Negritude and similar to the ideas of the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). Fanon, a freedom fighter also from Martinique in the Caribbean worked as the Provisional Algerian Government's ambassador to Ghana where he wrote *The Wretched of the Earth* (1966). He explained in the chapter "On National Culture" that the reply of colonized people was continental. Indeed, Nkrumah sought for Africans to form one polity and he played a key role in the formation of the Organization of African Unity. An intimate rendition of Fanon's explanation is Nkrumah's marriage to the Egyptian Fathia Halen Ritzk. Fathia's hair was representative of Arabs and when she wore Ghana's *kente* cloth, as a cover-shoulder cloth, she won the admiration of the Ghanaian market women who supported Nkrumah. A set of designs for a *kente* cloth was popularly called *Fathia fata Nkrumah* (Fathia befits Nkrumah).

Ghanaians promoted "African pride" and performed the nation through dress, oral narratives, theatre, film and television that utilized visual and aural senses to provide entertainment, information and education for social and political transformations. During Nkrumah's government, nationalists, performers, writers, film makers and other educationists identified hairdressing as a symbol with which they expressed themselves to achieve their needs and desires. The concepts and artifacts that ethnic groups used to demonstrate their cultural heritage and British anthropologists used to justify colonialism were reworked by artistes to reaffirm that they engender the nation and equip young

women and young men with jobs. The nationalist ideas of the artistes competed with the equation of ethnic practices and lifestyles in rural areas with “authenticity” and “custom.” Ghanaians performed hairdressing, a gender-based domestic activity as a part of cultural nationalism and as an indication of femininity in the all male concert party theaters. Concert party performers of popular, improvised theater and intellectual women such as Efua Sutherland, for example, used hairdressings and costume to depict characters in oral narratives that were theatrical and pithy. The content of their plays played the role of social work to educate children about how human beings controlled the environment, they identified demographic shifts in their depictions of the new ways that urban migrants related with people in urban and rural areas and they addressed gender-based problems in cities symbolized by “modern” young men in hats and “modern” young women in wigs. Sutherland constructed the national theatre, adapted folk tales into nationalist scripted plays and together with her cast, promoted the cover-shoulder cloth as the clothing of everyday people. And the public officials who created the Ghana Films Corporations’ film *I Told You So* showcased the skills of hairdresser Elizabeth Sheppard in a manner that brought to the fore the ways in which Ghanaians used visual transformations in dress to communicate about fashion, leisure, how people formed their identities and young women’s need for jobs in the capital, Accra that was a city by 1964.²⁸

Furthermore, women who had the wherewithal to travel across continents studied hairdressing as a gender-based transnational service economy. The extent of demand of clients for hairdressing indicated the nature and role of commodities and the development of new needs for the consumption of Ghanaian women and women across the Atlantic.

²⁸ Frank Amoah, “A Study of the Development of a West African City” (MA Thesis, University of Ghana, 1964), 78.

As school-educated Ghanaian women worked, they acquired taste transfer because they transformed their discretionary cash requirements into necessary requirements. Urban women used money to address their recurrent need to dress their hair and some purchased cosmetics to enhance their beauty.

Between the 1930s and the 1970s, the media played a central role in shaping readers minds about dress, beauty and the roles of school-educated women in their communities. During the 1930s, Mabel Dove, the first woman journalist wrote under the pseudonym Marjorie Mensah to caution young girls on vacation from their pursuit of higher education not to wear a hairstyle such as the “bob” that was fashionable across the Atlantic but could have detrimental social implications on a Gold Coast woman’s reputation. Three decades later, after Dove’s society elected her by popular vote as the first West African woman to the legislature, she used her own name to contribute to debates in the media over wigs. Dove asserted that women had the right to wear fashionable dress and she persuaded hairdressers to seek professional training by directing readers’ attention to hairdresser Madam C. J. Walker, the renowned African American businesswoman. Dove and other media practitioners helped to create the workplace of hairdressers as a space of desire based on gendered ideas about family, nationhood and skill training that was transnational.

Dove and other media practitioners helped to create the workplace of hairdressers as a space of desire based on gendered ideas about family, nationhood and skill training that was transnational. Frequent coup d’états and economic malaise that was exacerbated by famine, lack of imported goods in the markets and shops and the high fuel prices of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) caused Ghana to incur

debts.²⁹ The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank gave the government of Ghana loans and directions to implement Structural Adjustment measures that reduced the workers in the public sector, transferred ownership of public enterprises to businesses that dismissed the workers from the public enterprises, and liberalized trade. These former public workers together with the recent graduates from schools became traders or practiced vocations such as hairdressing, barbering, dressmaking, tailoring, catering and car mechanics or gained employment as ancillary staff. In general, they lacked work benefits and belonged to the pool of workers in the informal economy that labor organizations regarded as amorphous and difficult to organize.

Women and men in Ghana's informal economy created ethnic and cosmopolitan networks that aimed to transform gendered practices into professions. The ordinary women of Elmina took advantage of concepts such as "African pride," "World Heritage site" and more recently, "Structural Adjustment" to rework the concepts of hairdressing as regalia to include ordinary women in the activities that celebrate their society. They formed an occupation by exhibiting cultural *ntakua* headgears. These *ntakua* hairdressers modeled the cultural regalia of headgears combined with the clothes that each company or organization preferred, usually a t-shirt and a *kente* wrap or a pair of jeans trousers. Increasingly, the premier group of *ntakua* hairdressers sought business skills to bargain with the companies.

Similarly, from the 1990s the mainstream commercial hairdressers and beauticians sought skill-training and certificates to provide hairdressing as their vocation transnationally. The hairdressers formed professional associations and with the guidance

²⁹ Takyiwaa Manuh, "Migrants and Citizens: Economic Crisis in Ghana and the Search for Opportunity in Toronto Canada" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2000).

of the Industrial Commercial Unit of the Trades Union Congress, they negotiated successfully for new tax rates and utility rates. During the weekly meetings of the association, hairdressers promoted a code of ethics that served as preventive health care and social welfare and the educational committee that they formed worked with the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) to create a national syllabus for hairdressers. In 2006, the educational committee, the NVTI and women trade unionists from Denmark created Ghana's version of a syllabus that would be studied by hairdressers in African and European countries. These hairdressers in Ghana were a part of global networks and aware of global trends.

As this dissertation examines a long history of hairdressing in Ghana, hair serves as a symbol that is straightened and combed or braided into new styles to depict the varied ideas and ideals of persons who worked with Africans. Hairdressing encompassed far more than the style of any woman or any man and any specific colonial or postcolonial period in Ghana's history. Hairdressing embodied the social and political struggles of pan-Africanists of the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century, contributes in the shifting possibilities of defining the lifestyles of transnationals.

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