

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Work-To-Cocktail Wear: The Macaroness Prototype as a Catalyst for the Sustainability of Indigenous Ga Women Dress Practice in Ghana

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## Abstract

This study describes the developmental approach adopted for an experimental prototype for an ongoing conceptual fashion collection. The goal was to put forward momentous *work-to-cocktail* outdoor high fashion concept including materials, colours and techniques highly influenced by a less engaged Ghanaian feminine dress culture practices among other considerations. The dress is modelled on design-led, and non-routine design strategies, targeting in this case, a career woman seen as a fashion change agent - an indigene and a perfect ambassador to diffuse the concept of the new brand. The consumer has distinct and desirable female body features. In line with present national aspirations, the *Macaroness* design is skewed to argue for increase in the consumption of made-in-Ghana products; the desire is to 'sell' Ga ethnicity to corporate Ghana. The *work-to-cocktail* design concept when applied in the ongoing project might influence choice of materials, colours and techniques for the collection.

## Introduction

The present research project is of interpretivist philosophy (Tombs & Pugsley, 2020), and focused on prototyping a conceptual dress fashion; a customised walk-in wardrobe dress stimulated by tradition and modernity, history and innovation, form and beauty from Ghana.

As part of a larger ongoing research in arts, culture and costume studies, the research

interest in the culture and costume of the people of Tema spurred the need to tell the sartorial stories of the major initiation dress culture practices (DCPs) of the marginalised women of Tema from the standpoint of *Ga* women. That project is however woven around conceptual fashion experimentation, in line with the *Wear Ghana* campaign, a State initiative towards increase patronage of Ghanaian-made fashion concepts being pursued for economic gains in Ghana presently. The present paper is the first sequel of two others, focused on discussing product development as part of style sampling, and production of a garment prototype for the more extensive PhD study on 'creating a *Ga* destination/ethnic-inspired collection.'

Gap: The gap identified is that scholarly works on concentrated African dress design (specifically on *Ga* DCPs) from Ghana [Africa] is scanty despite the research interest being shown reportedly outside Africa (Richards, 2015; Rovine, 2016; Ryan, 2016). In the meantime, exciting and important current developments exist in the field of African costume in relation to ethnic initiation dress practices, and conceptual dress fashion among others which could be points of interest for research. Interesting discussions in relation to the subject of Ghanaian women's DCPs until recently have been limited to that *Dipo* of the people of Krobo land (Asare-Danso, 2018; Boakye, 2010; Dedume et al., 2016; Dzamedo, 2009), as if they were the only female initiation practiced in the country. But the fascinating subject of women's DCPs also exist in Avatime (called *Kusakɔkɔ* or 'cloth giving') in the Volta region (Dedume et al., 2016), in Agogo (Asante-Akyem) (*Bragoro*) (Asare-Danso, 2018), among the Fantes, *Kebisanana*, and among the people of Tema, *Ashin Yoo Kpeemɔ* (or simply *Ashin Kpeemɔ*) in the Greater Accra region of Ghana (Damalie & Essel, 2024; Damalie, 2021, 2019, 2018).

Further analysis of literature on the subject suggest that where they have been discussed at all, such conversations have more often than not been mere mentions; only describing the clothing details used as espoused in the cases of Asare-Danso (2018), Boakye (2010), Damalie and Essel (2024), Damalie (2018) and Dedume et al. (2016) to the detriment of using them as a unique "source of inspiration to draw and depart from, in an attempt at fashion innovation" (Pozzo, 2020, p.1), consistent with contemporary conceptual fashion design practice (Ojo, 2016; Pinther, 2021).

It is acknowledged that sub-culturally led styles which stem from the traditional artefacts of group crafts, of religious items can influence new stylistic creations (Pozzo, 2020; Muir et al., 2008; Damalie & Yeboah, 2023). But for projects such as presented in the current paper and its antecedents, relatively very little is known in scholarly works about the *Ga* ethnic dress practice under study, let alone for it to be a source for creative inspiration (Damalie & Essel, 2024; Damalie, 2021, 2019, 2018). Meanwhile, an earlier *Ashin* (initiation) dress-inspired brand *KCascades Impressions (KIs)* first exhibited in 2019 as cited in Damalie (2021) though

innovative, is limited in scope (design strategy; materials used; colours; techniques), even as its source of influence arguably has the potential to add to that brand. There is therefore the need to develop prototypes based on critical review of unique dress details used by the maidens (Damalie & Essel, 2014) for the main collection in a more extensive ongoing project. The experimentation is thus, based on the need to test a couple of momentous high end fashion dress ideas driven by the ethnic and lifestyle concepts as suggested in Damalie and Essel's review. The *KIs* of 2019 as well as its inspirational source also had to be scrutinised as a contemporary concept to creatively impact the ideation process, and to strongly establish the extent to which the sartorial practices within the subculture could be used to facilitate the spread of fashion as suggested in the readings (Saleem et al., 2014; Muir et al., 2008).

The differences in the current project in relation to earlier studies cited come in many folds. First of all, the subject being viewed, in this case is related to an opportunistic, in-depth, and experimental case study centred on conceptual fashion design practice. It is also in line with artistic research paradigm (Candy, 2006) adopted. As indicated earlier, it is driven by the nobility rite ethnic clothing of the women of Tema *Manhean* (Damalie & Essel, 2024; Damalie, 2021, 2018), with key influence from the *KIs* 2019 brand (Damalie, 2019). In line with the main study, the current project is highly inclined with the current movement towards traditionalism (Chew, 2007).

The purpose of the project was to create relevant prototypes using concepts which could be replicable in the main project. Specifically, the current case conceptualises a momentous *work-to-cocktail* outdoor high fashion driven by ethnic concepts including materials, colours, and techniques. These are highly influenced by the Ghanaian destination/ethnic-inspired 2019 *KIs* brand first developed. It further inspires inclusiveness and serves as advocacy towards the current quest for traditionalism in Ghana and indeed Africa.

## Literature Review

### **Conceptual fashion and design inspiration**

Pozzo (2020, p. 1) discusses how fashion is considered as an element of "cultural identity". This is because apart from nature, designers can be inspired by colour, history, fashion looks of more recent decades, fabric, texture, and trims as well as ethnic dream destinations and their cultural activities (Vrencoska, 2009). Burns et al. (2016) and Burke (2011) emphasise that inspiration for a garment can come from an infinite variety of sources and can often be linked to the social spirit of the times, also known as *zeitgeist*. In practice, events and the general spirit of popular or less known culture might be reflected in new apparel lines (Vrencoska, 2009). Burns et al. (2016) and Burke (2011) both recognise Coco Chanel and Karl Lagerfeld as style icons in this regard. This is because their individual designs, as recalled by Burke

(2011) influence fashion trends even today. Among other feats, Coco Chanel is credited with the revolutionisation of the way women dressed and, how her memorable fashion ideas of the 20s followed one after another; styles were simple with a 'throw away' elegance, we are told. Karl on the other hand is recognised as one of the iconic fashion designers of the 21st century because of his creative vision, style, and entrepreneurial spirit observed by Coscarelli in CNN style (2019).

Its noteworthy that each designer's philosophy is to position their designs different from the competition, and make them enticing to potential patrons hence the high-fashion name designers such as Alexander McQueen and Hussien Chalayan both of whom Vrencoska highly appreciate, describing them as "successful contemporary conceptual designers" who champion the creation of wearable clothes for raising consciousness and dealing with important social issues (Vrencoska, 2009, p. 879). In addition to each designer's philosophy, they each typically develop a theme for a collection and invest heavily in marketing that theme to retailers and the public. Existing literature show that often the designer's theme is based on historical or ethnic inspiration. For instance, Burns et al. (2016) identify one such design as the consequential Empire silhouette which was fashionable during the early 1800s named after Empress Josephine, wife of France's Emperor Napoleon. The Empire style has since inspired French designer Paul Poiret in the early 1900s and other designers who copied this style as the fashion look spread throughout Europe and the United States. Since then, above-the knee mini version as well as long version appeared in the 1960s, and again made fashion headlines in the twenty-first century (Burns et al., 2016).

### **Contemporary practice**

Further readings suggest that many fashion designers such as Ophelia Crossland, Aisha Ayensu of the *Christie Brown* fashion label, all from Ghana and *Cheongsam* designer Zhang Aijun from China are among successful young fashion designers, who among others are inspired by interesting destination/ethnic fashion in their works (CNC TV, 2020; Damalie, 2019, 2018; Richards, 2015; Rovine, 2016). While a designer like Zhang Aijun from China is inspired by her ancestral clothing such as the *Cheongsam* (CNC TV, 2020), yet others like Chalayan and McQueen are inspired by clothing styles of their own distant culture or that of other cultures (Burns et al., 2016; Damalie, 2021; Pozzo, 2020; Rovine, 2016; Vencoska, 2009). A case in point is Mears' (2008) mention of the famous couturier Charles Frederic Worth who often used textiles that were inspired by Japanese sensibilities in his creations. Ophelia Crossland's posts on social media in recent times show among others multi-constructed Chinese *Qipao* maxi gown with a narrow skirt made of the Ghanaian hand woven kente, Chinese silk and other fine details. Further, Chew (2007) reports that the *Hanfu* which is seen

in China as a more authentic form of historical clothing is currently trending on social media, and the movement is being led by China's fashion-conscious youth who are described as looking closer to home for a sense of traditionalism. Malian designer Maimuna Diallo's key innovations are drawn from her explorations of dress practices elsewhere in Africa (Rovine, 2016).

It is thus agreeable to assert that the global environment has indeed increased interest in products from the far reaches of the world. Indeed clothing styles such as Sari from India, Kimono from Japan, Cheongsam and *Hanfu* from China and Jeans from Europe are used as sources of inspiration by designers of repute. Besides, the assertion that consumers who patronise fashions inspired by other cultures may derive a sense of adventure, and vivacious enjoyment of that culture (Burns et al., 2016) still holds true.

### ***Destination-inspired fashion***

Destination-inspired fashion is very popular in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it is being replicated in the experiential tourism sector (Burns et al., 2016; CNC TV, 2020; Food network TV, 2020 - 2022; Fashion TV, 2020). For instance, Andrew Zimmern's 'Bizarre foods' show takes the chef-host to many different cultural destinations to experience their ethnic foods. Zimmern travels the world over tasting foods of various destinations amidst trying some of their DCPs. Several culinary competitions are also inspired by food cultures of other world regions. The 'Chopped' series on Food network Tv, shown between 2020 to 2022 for instance, is a typical example. Inspiration from such cultures including their clothing does lead to a better appreciation that further influence food fashion, and that can equally impact on dress fashion. Tommy Hilfiger, who travels extensively, is most inspired by the younger generations in cities across the globe (Burns et al., 2016). Inter alia, 'the most influential factor in every major city are the kids on the streets who set the trends, it is therefore not surprising if one may learn from designers that Japanese kites were the inspiration for a line of swimsuits or that graffiti was the inspiration for a line of sportswear' (Knight, 1999 as cited in Burns et al., 2016). McQueen shocks the fashion stage with his avant-garde fashion concepts but remains commercially successful" while Hussein Chalayan's work demonstrates his unique ability to combine beautiful and wearable clothes for today with an intriguing vision of the future which he offers through his shows of a cultural experience for spectators (Vrencoska, 2009).

### ***The contemporary "working woman"***

The idea of a "working woman" became popular after the World War 1. The effect of the war according to Burke (2011), had changed life dramatically; economically, socially and psychologically. After 1929, it was more common to see in a social context. With the help of

liberation organisations, the idea of a “modern woman” began to rise, and soon women had taken on men’s occupations. Thereafter, the “partying woman” could be seen even in business settings (Abaidoo, 2019). Saleem et al. (2014) identify working people including women as early adopters or early section of the diffusion of the innovation cycle. As professionals, they are socially and officially required to wear and dress up neat, clean and stylish at work places (Bakewell, Mitchell, & Rothwell, 2006 as cited in Saleem et al., 2014). In effect, “... clothes have been a significant means for working women to show their authority and self-assurance” (Eryazici & Çoruh, 2015, p.43).

Observations of some corporate socio-culture show that in practice, corporate institutions in Ghana, particularly banks from time to time celebrate the cultures of the world (Cynthia Ebbin, Personal conversation, 2024). During such occasions, the workers dress using among others exotic as well as wax cloths also known as African prints or *Ankara* as they are popularly referred to in neighbouring Nigeria to celebrate. This is to show their appreciation to their numerous clients and cultures, and attract new ones by mimicking their clients’ cultural dress forms. Such companies increasingly host cocktail parties to have an entertaining environment for employees and customers to socialise. These parties usually begin after work, and in view of that, this paper asserts that since guests are expected to walk around and meet other attendees to socialise, clothes made for such occasions should be formal but functional, and comfortable. The idea of practical and fashionable garment became popular attire for progressive elite women since the 1920s. Dress for progressive elite women should tell unique ethnic stories, particularly of women to other participants.

### ***‘High fashion’ using Haute couture approach***

*Haute couture* or *couture* as it sometimes referred to is an approach to producing clothing. It is distinguished by conceptualised fashion merchandise that is produced in small quantities, using hand sewing techniques, sized to fit an individual’s body dimensions, and uses relatively expensive materials - fabrics and trims (Burns et al., 2016). The term means “high-sewing,” and the industry developed in Paris during the nineteenth century. However, as a business strategy, *couture* designers may produce all custom work specific to a client, or they may proactively present a seasonal collection and then take custom orders selected from the collection. The term *couture* is sometimes used in the fashion industry to impart elite ambiance to a collection. Creating *couture* design is therefore a production and marketing strategy which is significant in wooing customers. Burns et al. (2016) identify designer names such as Chanel, Christian Dior, and Yves Saint Laurent, who first became famous in the realm of French *haute couture* and later became associated with expensive ready-to-wear (RTW).

Cases in point include Accra’s first Parisian trained Chez Julie’s *Akwadzan*; Aisha Ayensu’s

*Christie Brown* Label; Kabutey Dzieror and Sumaya Mohammed's *Pristis* label, among others, all illustrate the connection of Ghanaian cultural production with global outlooks in their works (Ryan, 2016) using wax prints for instance. Thus, it is known that in Ghana, both fashion and wax cloth designers are not known as passive bearers of ethnic identities, but as dynamic, creative producers who reconstruct and appropriate cultural 'traditions' in new designs and identities (Davis, 2015; Delhaye & Woets, 2015; Richards, 2015; Ryan, 2016). In like manner, the present project adopts this approach to create customised conceptual fashion brand, through which the researcher seeks to explore ways of wooing interested feminist patrons as well as strategies to impart elite ambiance to a *Ga* ethnic-inspired brand (Burns et al., 2016). Critically though, the current paper uniquely pays more attention to concentrated women's indigenous dress practices as key design inspiration to prototyping for the larger project.

## Methods

### **Research Method/ Approach/ Design**

The qualitative case study is practice-led, and modelled on an eclectic *Synthesis* model of subculture trend analysis, fashion design innovation and creativity, production and promotion (AU & AU, 2018; Bowstead, 2011; Damalie, 2024; Puadi et al., 2021). Creativity and promotion have been introduced as useful key design strategy in addition to innovation to improve Pasricha and Kadolph's model (Damalie, 2024; Evbuomwan et al., 1996), using a fashion innovator as a target consumer to achieve the desired impact as suggested by Burke (2011) and Burns et al. (2016).

### **Research Philosophy**

The present research project is of interpretivist philosophy (Tombs & Pugsley, 2020). It focused on making a sample of a conceptual dress fashion. It contributed to making innovative and creative customised walk-in wardrobe stimulated by tradition and modernity, history and innovation, form and beauty from Ghana. The trickle down strategy (Saleem et al., 2014) is considered as a likely means of design diffusion in line with the design strategies adopted for the final outcome. The methods are consistent with conceptual fashion design which require the identification and profiling of a consumer or patron who believes in the concept being used, and will be ready to use the product for the purpose intended (Vrencoska, 2009). This decision further impact from the creative design and product development stages (Burke, 2011; Burns et al., 2016) to the intended means of diffusion of the brand created.

### **Data Collection Instrument/ Data Analytical Plan**

The key research tool used was observation and personal conversation (Flynn & Foster, 2009). The processes include conceptual approach in creative design, selection and appropriation of

materials, colours using various techniques for production. Because of the project's qualitative nature, thematic and content analysis are used for analysing both the artefacts in the source of inspiration and the results/ outcome of experimentation process (Vaismoradi, 2013).

### **Ethical Considerations**

A live model was used in presenting the final outcome of the study to make the needed visual impact consistent with the case being argued. The consent of the model was sought to be used for the presentation of the results.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The Creative Design Process**

The creative design objective as indicated earlier was to design a unique prototype of conceptualised customised outdoor brand of *work-to-cocktail* wear. Thus, the project identified and drew inspiration from the Tema *Manhean* female subculture; outing dress concept of the nobility women of Tema *Manhean* - (*Temamei Ashin Yoo Kpeemɔ Kpojei-Hesaamɔi*) (Damalie & Essel, 2024) as regards materials, colours, and techniques. To achieve this, the main influencing product used as trend review is the 2019 *KIs* brand (Damalie, 2021, 2019). Thus, that brand's generally dressy nature was adapted.

The luxurious fabrics used in the 2019 *KIs* were swapped for classic industrialised wax prints instead. However, the brand's soft, drapery, and easy fitting nature are maintained in the prototype garment. Other aspects of the brand such as the yellow colour palette, dress silhouette, and some unique cuts and construction details have also been picked for replication. Yet others are design concepts from the age old occupation of fishing and the sea environment of the people of Tema *Manhean* (*Temamei*) (Damalie, 2019, 2018). Subsequent to that, the prospective customer's profiled details such as her hourglass body shape, personal lifestyle choices such as career, and the product usefulness in line with national aspirations guided her selection as the target customer (Burns et al., 2016). All these decisions are in line with conceptual fashion design practices where designers seek inspiration particularly from ethnic cultures' clothing styles, preferred fabrics, and accessories that are unique, with the final consumer in mind (Burns et al., 2016; Damalie, 2019; Mbonu, 2014) to make identity and/or political fashion statements (Vrencoska, 2009).

As indicated earlier, non-routine design was used as design strategy in manipulating the resources identified. Non-routine designs from design perspective are described as original

or new designs. They are classified into innovative and creative designs (Evbuomwan et al., 1996). Where new variables or features are introduced in the case of innovative designs, they still bear some resemblance to existing variables or features. In the case of creative designs, the new variables or features introduced bear no similarity to variables or features in the previous prototype and so the resulting design, in the opinion of Evbuomwan et al. (1996) may have very little resemblance to existing designs.

Conceptual designers typically want to use fashion for “ideas and meanings” having identified “customers who are interested to wear such fashion as a symbol” (Vrencoska, 2009). Hence, for this prototype, the researcher in line with the *Wear Ghana* campaign and from best practice in *haute couture* fashion (Axelsson, 2021; Burns et al., 2016; Mbonu, 2014), chose to use a prospective target customer/patron who is an indigene of the cultural setting, a millennial corporate career woman with curvaceous African silhouette with the desire to ‘sell’ her ethnicity through her love for ethnic fashion. She is of an average height of 6.2 feet, fair in complexion, and falls within British standard sizes 16 - 18. The trickle across theory of Sproles (1979 as cited in Saleem et al., 2014) is in support of using fashion leaders, not necessarily elites. The philosophy was adopted as a branding viewpoint for the project, where the customer becomes the target market segment leader in line with that theory which proposes every class has its own leader that has a great influence on them as compared to any other person, consistent with Damalie’s *Synthesis* model used (Damalie, 2024).

❖ *Product design: Theme/ Fabric and selection criteria*

Wax prints in Ghana are cultural artefacts that enjoy wide patronage (Impraim-Swanzy et al., 2018). They are also symbolic and are valued based on the status of the wearer, occasion and message to be communicated to observers. For the present project, the key criteria used for the selection of classic wax print or cloth (referred to as *Mama* in the *Ga* language) is based on its popularity, quality, and prolonged use among those observed being used by *Ashin* (rite) maidens for their nobility ceremony. Apart from its interesting local *Ga* name, the wax print, and its characteristics were identified as ideal for further manipulation to achieve creativity in the product design, and during production. The Akans of Ghana call the print ‘*afi bi ye esan*’, implying that ‘some eras are disastrous’. However, a popular name for the print among *Ga* people is *Macaroni*, reminiscent of the popular Italian food, and also because the undulating spaghetti strings are used as motifs in the surface design of the print. This reflects how events and motifs have influenced names ascribed to the industrialised wax prints used in this part of the world (Impraim-Swanzy et al., 2018).

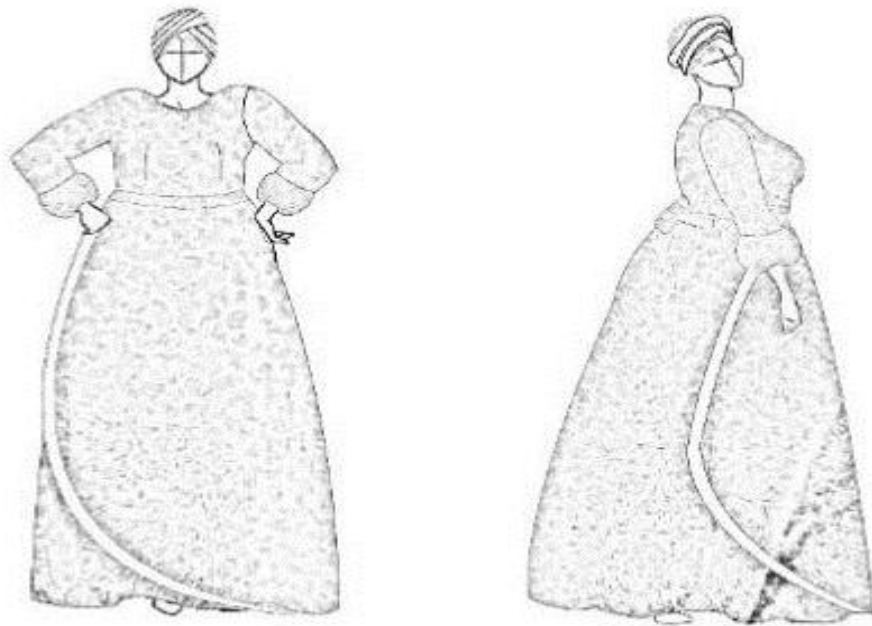
Besides, the cotton fibre print is exciting, and reflects one of the preferred colour palette in relation to the project theme. It is made of natural cotton fibre, and absorbs sweat thus comfortable in feel and long wear. The motifs or patterns are relatively small and technically appropriate for the large matured figure, and size of the wearer on one hand, and easier for flexible manipulation techniques intended (Amankwah & Howard, 2013) on the other hand. Based on these criteria, the *Macaroni* cloth which is a popular wax cloth used in Ghana, and bears a local *Ga* name was purposefully sampled for purely aesthetic and easy feminine cultural identity reasons. Generally, such popular timeless wax prints which are known are valued by the generality of Ghanaians including *Temamei* (the women folks of Tema *Manhean*) as good quality textiles, and used as wealth and status signifiers (Damalie & Essel, 2024; Damalie, 2018; Delhaye & Woets, 2015; Gott & Loughran, 2010 & Impraim-Swanzy et al., 2018). Given the challenges with wax print technicalities when it comes to dress design (Amankwah & Howard, 2013), the motifs in the cloth were critically considered before being selected as they have the potential to make or mar the design (Amankwah & Howard, 2013). On top of that, the colour of fabric sampled was influenced by the constant yellow colour palette used by the maidens in dressing up during the post-camping rite (Damalie & Essel, 2024; Damalie, 2018) as implied from the themed collage chosen as inspiration for the project.

The design silhouette obtained was so desired based on creating (i) dual functionality (*work-to-cocktail*) of use of the outfit by the prospective wearer; (ii) optical illusion of height and slimness; and (iii) the visually pleasing, and comfortable nature intended for the fashion brand to be used by fairly large to plus size [body statistics within British standard sizes 16 - 18 (Aldrich, 2012)], and to attain an influential brand.

*Product design development and production:*

Six (6) yards of wax print were acquired for the design; five yards were used for making the skirt suit - blouse and skirt, and one yard for a head scarf. The blend of the manual flat pattern, and 'free hand' cutting (Aldrich, 2012; Forster, 2009) approaches were applied in the development of stylised patterns used for cutting the top blouse, skirt, and scarf.

Specification sheet:

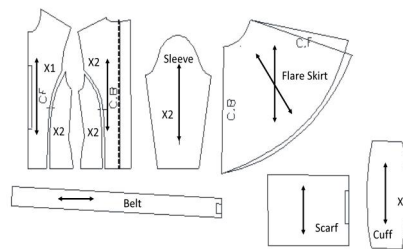


**Fig. 1:** Computer sketch of the *Macaroness* design in two dimensional views.

**Body Measurement (Inches “)**

- Neck - 16 “
- Nape to Waist – 15 ½”
- Shoulder to Shoulder-16”
- Half Across Back 7 ¾”
- Bust – 42”
- Waist -38”
- Hip – 46”
- Blouse Length – 26”
- Skirt Length – 38”

**Final Pattern Pieces**



- Sleeve Length – 17”
- Around Arm 14 ½”
- Around Wrist – 8”

Note: Final patterns include top bodice pieces – front, back and sleeves and cuff attachments; wrapped skirt and waistband; scarf.

Construction: Lock stitches used for joining, chain stitches for neatening,

1 cm seams allowed, 1/8 inch top stitching on princess seams.  
 Double folded turn at hem.

**Cost Sheet**

Item	Quantity	Unit Price (GHS)	Total Cost (GHS)
Wax print	6 yards	40 x 6 yards	260
Buttons	1 pack	50 x1 pack	50
Organza Trim	3 yards	10 x 3 yards	30
Elastic band	1 yard	1 x 2 yard	2
Yellow Thread	1 reel	5 x 1 reel	5
Vilene	1 yard	5 x 1 yard	5
Overhead charges and packaging			150
<u>Labour</u>			<u>250</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>752</b>

**Fig. 2:** Customised measurements of wearer, pattern pieces and construction details used, and cost sheet for sketches shown in **Fig. 1**.

**Production**

Contrary to the *Mama Bumo* (cloth wrapping) principle used by the nobility maidens, where fabrics are mostly unstitched, the cut pieces of the dress needed to be stitched together to make it fit for purpose and more use-friendly. The workmanship is in accordance with *haute couture* design requirements ensuring comfort in fit, high quality workmanship, and attention to dress details. Hand sewing techniques like tucking and running stitches were used during construction where temporal stitches were required. Permanent stitches used for the apparel construction as indicated in Fig. 1 were lockstitches, and chain stitches. Their properties combine high standards of appearance and performance with the right seam economy of a centimetre (Carr & Pomeroy, 1992 as cited in Damalie, 2019). Medium weight fusible interfacing was used only in the waistbands, openings and neck facings for stability and reinforcement (Kludzi et al., 2019) for soft tailoring effect.

**The Macaroness**

The *Macaroness* design in Fig. 1 is a *work-to-cocktail* skirt suit. The brand details include: *Macaroni* patterned rich radiant yellow wax cloth. The colour yellow is referred to in *Ga* as *Wuofɔ*. The top blouse feature high round jewel neck, 1/8" top-stitched princess seams, short stitched side slits, six ornate bronze-beaded buttoned full back opening, slightly shaped hem, 7/8 slim-fitted inserted drum stick sleeves featuring puffed hem attachment, and elasticated

edge details inspired by the beaded arm accessories of the maidens. The wrapped around asymmetric skirt has an inserted waistband with strap ends for multiple girlish tying effects inspired by the waist strap called *Hao* used by the *Ashin* (nobility rite) maidens to secure their wrapped cloth (dress) at the bust and waist lines respectively. A ruched white organza-trim inspired by the white sea form has been used as emphatic asymmetric detailing, and to further add weight to the distinct curved edge. The outfit has an accompanying multi-pleated head scarf, inspired by the maidens' silky *Odasobō* (head scarf). The fit model's dress in Fig. 3 is accessorised with gold jewellery and strapped slip-on footwear barely covering the top parts of the feet, all in a bit to reflect the source of inspiration.

The flare nature of the wrap skirt silhouette used for the influencing brand *K/s* 2019 was repeated so as to attain the product purpose; which is, comfortable and multi-functional in wear, and styled to influence the main project. The value addition is in the choice of materials, the partial introduction of white onto the otherwise one colour (blue on yellow) industrialized printed wax cloth, the type and nature of embellishment inspired and its application, and the sewing techniques inspired and further used as style details.





**Fig. 3: A four-dimensional view of the *Macaroness*.**

## Discussion

❖ Design objective/ theme/ title:

The project's design objective to conceptualize unique outdoor brand of *work-to-cocktail* dress, inspired by the traditional outing dressing styles of Tema *Manhean* maidens (*Temamei Ashin Yoo Kpeemɔ Kpojei-Hesaamɔ*) relative to the design, cut details and make described in Fig. 1 and 2. The influencing *Ga* destination/ethnic inspired dress trend reviewed impacted on the soft, easy fitting tailored features in the traditional walk-in wardrobe for the client. Because the clothing brand is further aimed at making a case for the 'Wear Ghana' concept in encouraging corporate Ghana to consume Ghanaian fashion, and also as an African contribution to on-going global conversation on design and sources of inspiration (Damalie & Essel, 2024; Damalie, 2021, 2019, 2018; Pozzo, 2020), it was appropriate to draw inspiration

from unique concentrated ethnic concepts including such as was revealed in the description of the project theme, to make a distinctive destination/ethnic inspired 'meaningful' fashion brand, consistent with the interpretivist philosophy premise which argues that the social world consists of meaningful actions (Tombs & Pugsley, 2020).

The nexus between the individual style details in the prototype include popularity of the classic industrialized wax print used by the subculture under study, the versatile "all ways" motifs or patterns in the wax print, the *Wuofɔ* (yellow *Fers*) colour, the functionality of the product type, the ease in fit, elements of the sea – blue colour, undulating sea-waves, white sea foam, creatively re-interpreted in the cuts and trims respectively, and level of coverage of the formal skirt suit. It thus, insightfully and aptly reconstructs *Ga* ethnic "cultural identity" (Pozzo, 2020; Schwandt, 1994) in the new fashionable designs as exceptional Ghanaian fashion brand, consistent with conceptual fashion design practice in the *couture* fashion industry (Ryan, 2016; Vrencoska, 2009). Other conceptual fashion brands such as *Christie Brown* choose to use a touch of wax print on exotic fashion fabrics, but that idea may not be useful under the present product outlook.

The blend of innovation and creative re-interpretation (Pozzo, 2020) is a viable option in designing the prototype. For instance, the design strategy considered informed the use of the classic popular wax print *Macaroni* instead of the arguably more ceremonial imitated kente prints used for the *KIs* brand. Albeit, the project maintained the smart option of similar skirt suit, silhouette and dress length as in the case of the *KIs* brand. The number of dress items in the case of the *KIs* skirt suit ensemble were more (numbering four items instead of three in a dress suit for the present case of the prototype designed). The strategy further informed the decision to have the wrap skirt creatively worn in a clockwise rather than anticlockwise style, observing in a refined manner 'rule-breaking' in creativity thereby defying logic (AU & AU, 2018). The front wrap is reversible, and could also be worn at the back instead. Yet another strategy is the weighted asymmetric hem style used for hang appeal. The white sea-foam influenced ruched organza embellishment used as an attention seeking emphasis.

The client's passion for ethnic fashion, and the focus on the timeless popular wax cloths /prints used by the maidens informed the brand concept *Mamamemejin* to wit 'old cloths or prints' or classics. Together, those concepts as well as the fabric selected outwardly propelled the development and production of the *Macaroness* prototype. The practice is consistent with creating high-fashion brands, and is encouraged by professionals for getting the needed attention of consumers as demonstrated in literature (Burns et al., 2016; Pasricha & Kadolph, 2009 as cited in Damalie, 2019). Hence, it is deemed appropriate in the current creative case as well. Certainly such high-end clothing brands are typically inspired by a theme and also

reflect the value proposition made to the client (Damalie, 2019; Namkyu, 2021; Vrencoska, 2009).

Indeed, current literature suggests that successful designs are ones that are appropriately interpreted for customers, and that, it constitutes a critical part of the market and fashion research activities conducted by designers under the research and merchandising strategies when creating conceptual fashion brands, be they *haute couture* or seasonal collections/ lines (Burns et al., 2016; Vrencoska, 2009). The design features as observed in the portraits in Fig. 3 are flattering (yet does not objectify) to the curvaceous silhouette of the average Ghanaian woman who desires to project her Ghanaian identity to the world. Saleem et al. (2014) found that fashion involvement, opinion leadership and status of consumers positively influence their intention to adopt new fashion. The choice of a career woman was thus deliberate. It was used as an emotional branding strategy (Kim & Sullivan, 2019) to influence discourse on the usefulness of clothing as a tool for national 'identity', as well as share the design philosophy with her peers' and clients'. The cost (721GHS) incurred for such a high end product as illustrated in Fig. 2 is assumed affordable for many a Ghanaian culturally-inclined corporate career woman.

In furtherance to the design objective, the end product/ brand was purposefully named, after the main fashion fabric used for the dress which is popular, of good quality among the many varied classic African print designs patronised for the nobility rite maidens as indicated earlier (Damalie, 2018). The motifs in the wax cloth used are small repeated all-over shapes, thus allowing for a flexible degree of interpretation in lay (Amankwah & Howard, 2013), and contributed to the optical illusion of slimness achieved in the clothing to suit the client's figure type. The main yellow colour (*Wuofɔ*) of the fabric falls within the colour palette from the design theme, hence re-echoing the link between the maidens' DCPs, fabric selected, and the design outlook. More significantly though, the vibrant colours further help the product/design and the client to pop up; in the words of Pozzo (2020), 'acting ... as a source of attraction...' needed for the brand.

The cut dress form as shown in the portraits (in Fig. 3) is graceful. Arguably, the skirt suit complements the selected hourglass body shape and adds to the height of the model. The dress does fit well, hence is suitable for *work-to-cocktail* activities. In terms of colour, style, extent of coverage, and the illusion of height desired it appears suitable, and reflective of the source of inspiration (Damalie & Essel, 2024). More so, it is dignifying and holds true to culturally influenced conventional clothing, but beyond that the dress comes with interesting 'audacious' details apt for the purpose of high-end *haute couture* brand created.

Apart from the interesting blend of cut grain directions of the fabrics used as demonstrated in Fig. 2, other tailored style codes within the product such as the outstanding hourglass enhancing feminine silhouette, and the white pleated organza trim are highly influenced by details from the theme of the design, and are highly likeable because they are exquisite. On top of that, they focus on the client's figure pluses. While the tailored silhouette is alluring for a *work-to-cocktail* high-fashion wardrobe that can give the client the urge to proudly 'sell' her ethnic identity, the toned down yellow colour together with the product name derived, are equally catchy and appropriate for purposes of promoting the value proposition imbedded in the *Macaroness* brand as a conceptualised product for corporate Ghana in particular. The dress produced are aptly accessorised with gold and beads jewellery, and strapped and easy slip-on footwear to consistently reflect the source of inspiration with corporate business undertones.

The refreshing styles created exhibit high degrees of comfortable fit, freeness and graceful volume, and are all in line with the design theme. Meanwhile, from a glance it can be deduced that the design, and style variables created can be further developed into other work-and-leisure versions (either as one unit garments, dress suits or separates) for different corporate fashion forward clients to suit their individual tastes and occasions.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The main aim of the research is to conceptualise a prototype *Ga* destination/ethnic inspired dress; a *work-to-cocktail* corporate wardrobe. The brand, the ethnic clothing and lifestyle concepts used for *Temamei Ashin* (Tema rite) maidens, their environment and the *KIs* brand have all been responsible for the very exciting adaptable changes in three key areas; materials, colours, and techniques used, as well as detailing achieved in the first of the three *Mamamejin* prototyped. The fabric selection has been done in line with current upsurge in the use of the African prints (Dogoe, 2013), which is yet underutilised for *work-to-cocktail* wear by corporate Ghana as part of branding the country. The use of the wax print is further in appreciation of popular classic Ghanaian-celebrated wax cloths (prints). The ease in the design has been carefully developed from the way of cloth wrapping worn as dress by the rite maidens for comfort, and to complement the much desired curvy hourglass shape, with consideration to *work-to-cocktail* activities in colour, style lines, coverage and silhouettes. The resulting brand achieved, in the words of Amankwah et al. (2012) carves a distinctive look which is Ghanaian, and could indeed inspire corporate Ghana fashion to expand initiatives such as the *Friday wear to Every work day wear*.

In conclusion, the present project is worthy of note as it could particularly impact the larger ongoing project in many positive ways including anticipated cost of production and issues of

desirable fit. The brand further contributes to scholarly discourse as intended with the ongoing collection about the design influence of ethnic dress practice of the 'cleansed' women of Tema *Manhean*. The dress design strategy adopted for instance, when applied might influence the anticipated materials, colours, techniques, and even dress values to be used. The cost of production may also influence the planning stage of the ongoing collection.

It also broadens discussions of design opportunities of Ghanaian women's DCPs as a potential means for socio-economic signification if co-opted into policies for a country in dire need of growth at this point of its economic development. The project further calls for a search into how to contribute strategies (knowledge) in expanding the *Wear Ghana* campaign, and the *Friday Wear* as preferred work wear for economic growth in the interest of the nation. The idea of creativity introduced in the model used might prove useful in adopting it for the main project.

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