

Adwoa Owusuaa Bobie, “Unconventional Entrepreneurs: the Youth in the Ghanaian Fashion Industry”, in «Africa e Mediterraneo», vol. 25, n. 85, 2016, pp. 11-17

---

DOI: 10.53249/aem.2016.85.03

<http://www.africaemediterraneo.it/en/journal/>



# Africa e Mediterraneo

C U L T U R A E S O C I E T À

## n. 85 | Moda e sviluppo in Africa

---

Agency, interazione, identità:  
il vestire in Africa

---

Unconventional  
Entrepreneurs:  
the Youth in the Ghanaian  
Fashion Industry

---

Quand la mode sauve le  
textile: l'engagement des  
créateurs africains

---

La moda africana in Europa  
parla un'altra lingua:  
il caso del *kanga*



**Direttrice responsabile**

Sandra Federici

**Segreteria di redazione**

Elisabetta Degli Esposti Merli, Claudia Marà

**Comitato di redazione**

Simona Cella, Fabrizio Corsi, Silvia Festi, Andrea Marchesini Reggiani, Iolanda Pensa, Pietro Pinto, Massimo Repetti, Mary Angela Schroth

**Comitato scientifico**

Stefano Allievi, Mohammed Arkoun †, Ivan Bargna, Giovanni Bersani †, Jean-Godefroy Bidima, Salvatore Bono, Carlo Carbone, Giuseppe Castorina †, Giancarla Codrignani, Vincenzo Fano, Khaled Fouad Allam †, Marie-José Hoyet, Justo Lacunza, Lorenzo Luatti, Dismas A. Masolo, Pierluigi Musarò, Francesca Romana Paci, Giovanna Parodi da Passano, Irma Taddia, Jean-Léonard Touadi, Alessandro Triulzi, Itala Vivan, Franco Volpi

**Collaboratori**

Luciano Ardesi, Joseph Ballong, G. Marco Cavallarin, Aldo Cera, Antonio Dalla Libera, Tatiana Di Federico, Fabio Federici, Mario Giro, Rossana Mamberto, Umberto Marin, Marta Meloni, Gianluigi Negroni, Beatrice Orlandini, Giulia Paoletti, Blaise Patrice, Sara Saleri, Edgar Serrano, Daniel Sotiaux, Flore Thoreau La Salle, Elena Zaccherini, George A. Zogo †

**Africa e Mediterraneo**Semestrale di Lai-momo cooperativa sociale  
Registrazione al Tribunale di Bologna n. 6448  
del 6/6/1995**Direzione e redazione**Via Gamberi 4 - 40037 Sasso Marconi - Bologna  
tel. +39 051 840166 fax +39 051 6790117  
redazione@africaemediterraneo.it  
www.africaemediterraneo.it**Progetto grafico  
e impaginazione**

Giovanni Zati

**Editore**Edizioni Lai-momo  
Via Gamberi 4, 40037 Sasso Marconi - Bologna  
www.laimomo.it**Finito di stampare**il 31 gennaio 2017 presso  
LITOSEIBO SRL  
Rastignano - BolognaLa direzione non si assume alcuna responsabilità  
per quanto espresso dagli autori nei loro  
interventiAfrica e Mediterraneo è una pubblicazione  
che fa uso di *peer review***In copertina**

Sindiso Khumalo SS16. © Andrew Ho

# Indice

# n.85

## Editoriale

- 1 Innovazione e sostenibilità:  
le sfide della moda etica**  
di Sandra Federici

## Dossier: Moda e sviluppo in Africa

- 7 Agency, interazione, identità:  
il vestire in Africa**  
di Giovanna Parodi da Passano

- 11 Unconventional Entrepreneurs:  
the Youth in the Ghanaian  
Fashion Industry**  
by Adwoa Owusuaa Bobie

- 18 Quand la mode sauve le textile :  
l'engagement des créateurs  
africains**  
par Anne Grosfilley

- 23 Second-Hand Clothing  
the Cutting Edge of the New  
Fashion in Maputo**  
by Sofia Vilarinho

- 29 La moda africana in Europa  
parla un'altra lingua:  
il caso del *kanga***  
di Marina Castagneto



- 36 Esperienze di editoria di moda  
all'africana (a ogni torta la sua  
ciliegina)** di Stefania Ragusa

- 39 Con(Texts):  
Re-Examining the Social Life  
of Kanga Cloth** by Stephanie Birch  
and Anne Namatsi Lutomia

- 46 Panos Tingidos, a New West  
African Brand: Adding Cultural  
Value to the Textile Industry of  
Guinea Bissau**  
by Laura Soriano  
and Samuel Silveira Martins

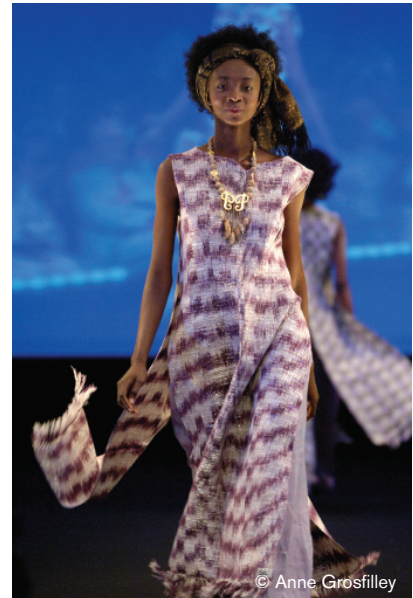
- 50 Innovation in African Textiles:  
a Move Away from Ethnic  
Characterisations**  
by Simone Cipriani



© Dili Osuhor



© Mahdi Ehsaei



© Anne Grosfilley



© Roberto Marossi/Courtesy Fondazione Prada

## Fumetto

- 54** **A Thematic and Contextual Analysis of Boko Haram in Selected Editorial Cartoons**  
by Shina Alimi  
and Michael Olusegun Fajuyigbe

## Storia

- 61** «De la terreur salitaire». Linguaggi e forme della violenza nel Congo di Leopoldo II (1900-1908)  
di Rosario Giordano
- 65** **La città di Tripoli: lo sviluppo architettonico e urbanistico promosso da Balbo durante il suo governatorato in Libia (1934-1940)**  
di Mustafa Rajab Younis

## Eventi

- 69** **European Academy of Religion: Religion Matters**  
by Andrea Marchesini Reggiani
- 70** **Focus sul Madagascar. Incontro con tre autori al Centro Wallonie-Bruxelles di Parigi**  
di Marie-José Hoyet
- 72** **Black Pride Prada**  
di Simona Cella

## Arte

- 75** **Doppia identità nelle foto di "Afro Iran" di Mahdi Ehsaei a WSP Photography a Roma**  
di Mary Angela Schroth

- 76** **A Farewell to Ousmane Sow (1935-2016)**  
by Mary Angela Schroth

## Libri

- 78** **Cumbe**  
di Martina Biscarini
- 78** **Il ragazzo di Aleppo che ha dipinto la guerra** di Maria Scivo
- 79** **In Memoriam. Gian Paolo Calchi Novati (1935-2017)**  
di Itala Vivan
- 80** **Raccontare l'immigrazione ai bambini**  
di Maria Scivo

# Unconventional Entrepreneurs: the Youth in the Ghanaian Fashion Industry

In Africa unemployment throws millions of young people into states of frustration and poverty. But there is a growing number of African youth who are embarking on ambitious entrepreneurship journeys in the fashion industry to propel their livelihood beyond subsistence.

by Adwoa Owusuaa Bobie

**T**here has been tremendous development in Africa in the last decade. During the first decade of the twenty first century, 11 African countries grew at an annual rate of 7% or more; a rate sufficient to double the economy of Africa in 10 years (Robertson *et al.*, 2012).

In addition, Robertson *et al.* (2012) note that the population of the African workforce is now more educated than most countries like the United Kingdom, United States and China during their period of economic take-off. There has also been a surge in Internet usage on the continent. In the space of 11 years, the African population of Internet users grew from 4.5 million to 140 million, led by Nigeria (Robertson *et al.* 2012, pp. 176-177). Yet another change is the growing number of youth entrepreneurs in the fashion industry. These young people are transforming the African fashion industry by moving it beyond its traditional emphasis on bespoke production of dresses to *haute couture* designs. Others are diversifying the use of African prints and indigenous fabric from its more traditional use in making clothing to the making of fashion accessories such as slippers, bangles, bags, necklaces and belts.<sup>1</sup> Driven mainly by the creativity and innovation of ambitious youth, the industry is gradually being recognised on the international scene. This study seeks to understand these youth in the contemporary Ghanaian fashion industry. The study draws on interviews with nine respondents in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. Given the lack of data on the number of such youth entrepreneurs, I drew on snowball sampling to find my respondents. Each respondent was interviewed at least twice, two were interviewed four times each. The data is analysed using a thematic network approach. Focusing on these youth allows us to offer a counter-perspective on the prevailing views on African youth.

## Perspectives on African Youth

A perusal of literature on African youth reveals a pessimistic situation of hopelessness. The continent has grappled with youth unemployment since post-independence and with the current global youth bulge the situation is even direr. Youth unemployment forms 40% of the potential working force and 60% of the unemployed workers on the continent (Agbor, Taiwo and Smith

2012). Oppenheimer and Spicer (2011, p. 14) put it even higher at 80% in some countries. In Ghana, the 2000 population census data shows there are 3.5 million youth forming 22.6% of the working population but youth unemployment is 25%. Unemployment in Ghana increases with the increase in educational level. Thus, the higher one's level of education, the greater the likelihood that the person will not be able to secure a job (Baah-Boateng and Turkson 2005 cited in Anyidoho *et al.* 2011). It is estimated that 250,000 youth enter the labour market every year with 40,000 emerging from the various tertiary institutions. Out of this 40,000, the formal sector is able to absorb just 2%, leaving the 98% to fend for themselves in the already choked informal sector (Baah-Boateng 2008 cited in Tsikata and Darkwah 2013). The youth in Africa have responded to their predicament by adopting attitudes and behaviours that portray their marginalisation. These responses range from frustration to discouragement and the dreaming. The frustrated youth refer primarily to those in war torn contexts, such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda, where education presented very little opportunity for the youth to make an honest living. The youth frustrated by the lack of opportunity to make a living sought alternative means to livelihood, specifically combat. Peters and Richards (1998, p. 187) quote a young rebel in Sierra Leone as follows: «the pay may be derisory, but weapon training pays quicker dividends than school ever did; soon the AK47 brings food, money, a warm bath and instant adult respect.» The youth involved in these military and rebel activities come to see their acts not just as a means of survival but also payback for societal neglect of their youthful and subsequent adult needs. Other frustrated youth do not take to weaponry but form gangs instead. Known as «township youths» in the heyday of apartheid in South Africa, «rarray boys» in the ghettos of Freetown, «egbesu boys» in Nigeria's oil delta, «area boys» in Lagos and «bakassi boys» in South-eastern Nigeria» (Ukeje and Iwilade 2012, pp. 340-341), these youth turn to gangs out of frustration with their marginal status in society. The most recent expression of youth frustration with unemployment on the continent was during what has come to be known as the «Arab spring».

The discouraged refers to the youth who have settled for menial jobs out of the need to survive. Unable to find jobs that are

commensurate with their educational experiences, these youth settle for whatever job they can find in order to eke out a living. These jobs could include scavenging in landfills in Gaborone (Rankokwane and Gwebu 2006) or commercial sex work for black South African youth (Budlender and Bosch 2002). The third set of youth have turned their hopeless situation into hopeful dreams which they consciously try to live out each day. These dreams often centre on urban life as in the case of Tanzanian youth living in the countryside who aspire to make it to the “Bongoland” (the nickname for Dar es Salaam) the capital of Tanzania (Sommers 2003). Others such as Congolese youth who are members of “La SAPE” turn to ostentatious fashion not simply to demonstrate their sense of fashion but also to disassociate from the social and economic degradation of their lives (Gondola 1999). Notwithstanding, there are a number of youth who are not succumbing to the economic frustration of unemployment by turning to gangs, low wage jobs or dreaming about cities or fashion. Instead, these youth are building businesses of their own. Such are the youth found in the fashion industry. Through their passion and creativity, they are driving innovation in the fashion industry and it is to them we now turn.

#### Unconventional Entrepreneurs

The fashion industry in Africa is taking an international shape, moving from a bespoke traditional production of

\*  
**Mainly by the creativity and innovation of ambitious youth, the industry is gradually being recognised on the international scene.**  
 \*

designs to *haute couture* designs as well as fashion accessories. Driven mainly by the creativity and innovation of young people, the industry is gradually being recognised

in international fashion circles for the ways in which these young designers merge the latest trends from around the world with their own creative stamp.

In Ghana, the traditional notion of workers in the fashion industry is tailors and seamstresses who since colonial times have been involved in making clothes for the Ghanaian population. These tailors and seamstresses are mostly school drop-outs or at most junior secondary/middle school graduates. They are forced into the occupation due to financial constraints on their parents' income or their inability to attain the needed grade for the next level of education (Langevang and Gough 2008).

However, the study shows a contradiction in both the traditional perception of dressmakers and the early fashion designers in terms of educational background. All of the respondents have education to at least the senior secondary level. Six of the nine respondents have tertiary education; three out of the six undertook courses at the tertiary level which had no bearing on fashion. Two out of the remaining three took courses in textile designs from the secondary level to the university and the last respondent studied fashion at the tertiary but not at the secondary level. Of the three without university education, one respondent obtained a diploma in fashion from London after completing secondary education and fashion school training in

African Fashion in the City. © Kelechizuvaa, 2015





Lady in Gele, an african head dress. © Dili Osuhor

Ghana and working for a while. Another respondent had the opportunity of studying textiles at the secondary level and continued to a fashion school in Ghana after completing secondary. The remaining respondent is a secondary school graduate. The educational backgrounds of these youth debunk the notion that work in the fashion industry is reserved for either the school drop-out or for persons with high end training from the West. A second manner in which these youth are unconventional lies in their motivations for becoming entrepreneurs. The motivational factors behind entrepreneurship as an occupation have been argued to be varied based on both individual and societal level factors (Hessels *et al.* 2008). However, there are two broad sets of motivations for entrepreneurship: opportunity and necessity factors or pull and push factors respectively (Hessels *et al.* 2008). The pull motives include factors such as independence or autonomy, the need for freedom, status, wealth crea-

tion, challenge, and social recognition. The push factors or the necessity motives are sparked by socio-economic situation in the country like high unemployment and poor welfare programs. Thus, «people desire personal profits, or autonomy, amongst others, or are just forced into entrepreneurship because they have no other options» (Hessels *et al.* 2008, p. 324). It has also been argued that while the pull factors are prevalent causes of entrepreneurship in developed countries, most entrepreneurs in developing countries are pushed into the job due to unfavourable national economic development (Hessels *et al.* 2008). The motivations of the respondents run counter to Hessels *et al.*'s (2008) perspectives. Although resident in a developing economy, their motivations are much more of a pull than a push factor. All respondents expressed a long standing interest and passion for fashion as their main motivation for setting up their businesses. They used words like talent, skills, artistic, de-

sire to explain why they set up fashion enterprises. Salia notes, «I've always had this great desire to have my whole range of handbags, I love fashion especially handbags.» This great desire for fashion was evident among respondents at an early age:

«I am the kind of person at like age 4 or 5, the moment you say we are going out, when you enter my room I have already lined [up] my dress that goes with my shoes and my socks and will be waiting [for] who will iron it for me. The dressing I will do it myself, who is going to iron it for me and if the thing is long and I don't like it, I will find a way to tie here with thread and then raise it like a bow and you know I get a kind of style.»

They decided to turn their interest into income by doing what they enjoy while earning a living from it. They ventured into the business of designing and sewing with little or no money. Those who had no formal training in designing or sewing noted that their training most often came through learning on the job. They took up the challenge with little clue as to how exactly they were going to do it but with consistent practice they were able to succeed. Margaret reports:

«I learnt on the job basically [...] so when you see a bag, you need to think about how to, so each day you learn [...] even now like what we are doing, it's a new bag we are creating and we are trying to figure out how to».

However, all the respondents make the point that their ability to learn faster and progress in designing and sewing is due to their love for fashion and artistic talents.

Unlike what Hessels *et al.* (2008) would expect of these entrepreneurs from developing economies, none of the respondents admitted to a socio-economic factor such as unemployment or economic hardship as their reason for starting their businesses. In other words, none was “pushed” into the business. They all took advantage of one opportunity or the other which they identified as lacking in the country and worked on providing it. Margaret remarked: «I started this because back then I mean the whole African print thing wasn't in vogue, but I just wanted to make something different, make it a part of our everyday life». Thus, the concept that an entrepreneur is an “innovator” who capitalises on opportunities is made visible in the rationale of this respondent (Stam *et al.* 2012). While we are aware that the African economy offers little to its youth in terms of employment (Anyidoho *et al.* 2011; Gondola 1999), these respondents, who mostly were formerly employed in reputable institutions, found opportunities in the private sector that whipped up their already self-imbued passion for fashion and caused them to abandon their former occupation for fashion. Though most started on a part-time basis, it is these opportunities they identified that gave them the confidence to enter the industry full-time.

Determined to follow their dreams, some respondents started their business with no money at all or as little as the equivalent of 62 euros. Two respondents had the help of relatives in terms of capital to supplement their little savings. Family as sources of financial support for entrepreneurs in Africa is well established because of the difficulty in accessing institutional loans (Adeya 2006). This is made more visible in terms of the equipment re-

spondents used to start their businesses. Five of the nine respondents had to make use of the family's old machines to start their businesses. This suggests that the help of family members in sub-Saharan Africa in the creation of a business goes beyond capital provision to other factors of production as well.

While some respondents received support from family members during the start-up of their businesses, others faced family members' criticism of their choice of career. In the Ghanaian context, if one is a senior secondary graduate and cannot pursue further education due to socio-economic reasons like financial constraints, he/she seeks a lower rank occupation in the formal sector or at least tries to be self-employed in a lucrative job but mostly will not opt for sewing because it is the job for “illiterates”. The situation is worse among those who obtain tertiary education. Takyi-Asiedu (1993) argues that in sub-Saharan Africa, elite parents are more likely to encourage their children to aspire for a university education after their secondary education and would also prefer their kids finding occupation in the formal sector rather than becoming entrepreneurs in the already chocked informal sector. Due to the above explanation, some of the respondents experienced derision from their family members when they informed them of their interest in fashion after completing their university education.

These respondents are resilient and ambitious, they are not easily dissuaded from their vision and they seek high growth for their businesses. Being different from nascent entrepreneurs, growth is seen as one main characteristic of an ambitious entrepreneur though it is expected of all entrepreneurs. Hermans *et al.* (2012, p. 3) argue that «entrepreneurs are per definition oriented to growth but the ambitious entrepreneurs differentiate themselves from their less-ambitious counterparts by having above-normal expectations [...] ambitious entrepreneur demands high growth of the business at least in five years of operation». The number of years the respondents have spent in the business spans from one to eleven years. Eight of the respondents have been around for less than five years while the last respondent has operated for 11 years. However, they all expressed enthusiasm concerning the growth rate of their business since they stated. They measured the growth in terms of client base, retail shops opened and agents for the business, production and profit gains, production sites, employees and machines acquired and these growths are very significant. Lexis who had been in business for less than a year reports «I have grown. When I started, it was very hard to get a call from someone, yeah, because no one knows you but now, with every two days I get a call». Growth in production and clientele subsequently leads to growth in income which can lead to further expansion of the business, of which many testified. Some have grown as much as opening franchise shops and having agents in other countries in Africa and beyond. One respondent had a franchise shop while five have agents outside the country. Notwithstanding, respondents are not complacent about their initial achievements, they all have a clear cut development plan of how they intend to grow their business in the next immediate years. Respondents expressed the vision of making products that meet international standards and thus appeal to consumers in the international market. Their short term goal is to tap into the African market and then move into western markets, even though some already have agents in Western

countries. Salia reports, «I would love in the next five years to open a shop in South Africa, open a shop in Nigeria, open a shop in Kenya and have a shop in England and the US as well». Others also had the vision of setting up a training school in the next five years to train people in clothing and accessories. This ambition comes from the respondents' desire to transfer their inherent skills of creativity to a large number of youth so as to create employment and upgrade the training skills of professional seamstresses and tailors and other fashion lovers. One had already started a training school at the time of the study and had 30 students enrolled.

### Creativity on Display

Bird argues that, to turn an inspirational idea into a visible product, the entrepreneur needs to make "intentional" efforts to produce. Bird further explains that «intentionality is a state of mind directing a person's attention (and therefore experience and action) toward a specific object (goal) or a path in order to achieve something (means)» (Bird 1988, p. 442). This intentionality will help bring the product on the market as well as sustain its market share and value.

This intentional effort has been applied by the new generation of designers in their effort to produce fashion accessories and ready-made European styles from African prints. They used the existing African-print in novel ways to produce innovative products which were hitherto not available. Three of the respondents produce fashion accessories in the form of bags, bangles, bracelets, hair ribbons, wallets, purses and clutches, iPad cases etc. Most of the fashion accessories on the Ghanaian market are imported from European, American as well as some Asian countries. The introduction of Ghanaian made African-print fashion accessories is a creative and innovative venture by Ghanaian fashion designers intended to expand the market for African print. Prissy, elaborates on her reasons for using African-print for accessories as follows:

«I have a client who says because his mother sells fabric he doesn't like print clothes as in shirts or trousers or something because he has seen a lot of them. Ok, such a person, if I put this fabric into say a wrist watch or I've made it into a bow-tie, slippers, a bag, an earring, whatever, it will help me to sell to that person because the person would have something else in the same form with a different motif not just something he has to wear.»

Three respondents make both clothing and accessories and the last three respondents produce basically *prêt-à-porter* clothing, making accessories only on request. Those who make clothes specialise in sewing European dress styles and shirts and trousers with the African-print and will only make the traditional *kaba* and slit on request. They reason that, the *kaba* and slit style only makes sense for the older generation. Most youth and middle aged elite, particularly those who have acquired foreign tastes would not wear the African-print *kaba* and slit as everyday attire. Producing Western style clothes in *prêt-à-porter* fash-

ion makes it more desirable for their clients. In dealing with her corporate clients, Prissy states «you know they are the people who do not have enough time on their hands.... They think they are too busy to get certain things but they want certain things, so now you sit back, do all the working for them.»

One fascinating product which all the respondents make is the *nsasawa*, the Akan word for patched cloth. This type of cloth was formerly worn by the poor who could not afford a full 12

yards or half piece (6 yards) of cloth. Different pieces of cloth gathered from people's print cuttings were therefore sewn together for them in quite haphazard fashion as a full piece. Now, *nsasawa* is very fashionable among all class of people. These new designers have turned the design of *nsa-*

*sawa* into fashionable Western style dresses. In fact, Afia spent the entire year only making *nsasawa* designs. She explains, «like this year it was patch dresses and patch tops. After the patch, it will be there but we are not going for patch again, if it's going to be a patch then it's going to be another pattern and not cubes and straps again». The *nsasawa* concept has been extended to the making of accessories such as bags.

Each respondent's products were unique either in terms of style or quality. Quality is determined by either the quality of the fabric used, proper finishing of the product or both. Lexis in describing the uniqueness of his style explains:

«I don't know, it's just the mind-set. [...] Hmm, those earrings you saw, I am the only one who makes them. I have a friend from outside who buys my earrings from me. He says I am the only one who does them; he has never seen any before.»

Others highlighted the unique quality of their products. They used words such as "detailed", "excellent finishing", "exotic" and "eccentric" to describe their products. One respondent also reports creating customer loyalty through her commitment to what is unique about her business. She designs to suit the taste of the clients as well as providing custom-made ones too.

A renewed sense of African identity backs respondents' reason for using the African-print fabric for their products. The time for Africa to be heard, the time for Africa to shine, the spirit of African renaissance as developed by Thabo Mbeki (1998) seems to resound across the entire continent. The people on the continent are experiencing a heightened sense of identity, which they are translating into their various endeavours. Lexis notes «our culture is being thrown away, I mean what we have, what we value most, [it is] being thrown away.» For this respondent, to not just preserve African culture but also make it more visible is to transform it into something that can be used on an everyday basis.

The print, though not originally from Africa has come to be identified with West Africans in particular, who have developed local versions of the product. There is a self-conscious effort on the part of the respondents to portray "Africanness"

\*  
**The introduction of Ghanaian made African-print fashion accessories is a creative and innovative venture by Ghanaian fashion designers intended to expand the market for African print.**  
 \*

in every product of theirs. Paul professed «I love using African-print because that is the only thing that can set me apart from the others because I travel a lot to Europe to do shows and stuff like that and the only difference between me and them is what we have [the print]». Some designers also prefer the use of the African-print for their designs because of the texture of the fabric, its bright colours and the patterns.

The diversification of the use of African-print can be seen both in the new styles of sewing and the consumption base. Six respondents admitted their products, especially the accessories serve all classes and ages of people. They make products that suit all people including kids in some cases. One even extended his client base to include expatriates. However, even with those who claim to serve all classes and age, the type of fabric they use determine their target consumers. So these six respondents use different types of fabric for different designs which suits different classes and ages of people. The Dutch Visco brand and the English ABC wax print being the oldest and highly valued African-prints are used for products targeted at the middle and upper class as well as the elderly. The local and Chinese prints are consumed by the lower, sometimes the middle class, the middle aged and the youth especially those preparing for marriage. The three remaining respondents admitted their clients are the middle and the upper class. Afia professes:

«It is for the high class because of the detail of the work and the way we come out with our work. I don't want to use some fabrics, cheap fabrics, excuse my language, so if I use Visco or GTP [...] I use GTP for my patch and I use Woodin, you know that skirt we used about 15 yards of Woodin and we used two months to do the patch. So after that, the way we sew, the things we use; my zips, I use expensive things [...] I don't use the normal ones because the thing I'm bringing out [making] is expensive so I can't afford to use cheap stuff [...] When you check the things and you see the prices of our things you can tell the people I target [...] a dress that cost about 294 euros or 310 euros.<sup>2</sup> That is how high some of the products cost.»

Obviously, the prices of products can also help determine the target consumers of the product. Each respondent has different prices for his/her products depending on the product one buys. Among the six respondents who target consumers of all classes, the prices of products range between 3 euros and 93 euros. The cheaper products are mostly the less complicated accessories such as bangles, earrings and purses. Bags can be very expensive, with some costing more than clothes. The price of clothes among the respondents ranges from 15,50 euros for a simple shirt to 93 euros for a complicated dress. Observing the prices of the products, it can be inferred that most of the respondents' products target the middle class and not necessarily all classes. The fabrics they use may be purchased by all classes but the cost of the finished product is above the means of the lower class population. Aside the type of fabric used, the design also deter-

\*  
**A current crop of youth, whom I refer to as  
 unconventional entrepreneurs, are reviving the  
 fashion industry in Africa and giving it international  
 exposure.**  
 \*

mines the price of the product and subsequently the class of consumers. In sourcing for designs, some of the designers get their designs from their surroundings, ranging from observing people in interesting outfits, to using concepts,

themes and initiating designs of their own. Respondents such as Margaret and Bello had an independent way of coming up with their designs, others admitted surfing the internet sometimes for designs. They surf the internet to update them of the current trends of fashion and not as a way of copying other's designs. This is the argument of "glocalisation"<sup>3</sup> in African fashion. Rovine observes that, «many of the styles of clothing that are produced in Africa's highly internationalized urban centres draw from diverse sources, enriching rather than impoverishing their distinctly African styles» (Rovine 2009, p. 135). So then, even if designers study the designs of others and apply them to African fabrics, they add their distinctive ideas and styles that make the designs distinctly theirs.

### Conclusion

The pessimistic story about African youth is changing and so is the perception of African fashion being traditional and static. A current crop of youth, whom I refer to as unconventional entrepreneurs, are reviving the fashion industry in Africa and giving it international exposure. They are taking advantage of opportunities in their society, that is, the need to expand African print clothes to the young generation as well as non-Africans. The young designers are therefore diversifying the use of African print fabric from the traditional *kaba* and slit designs to Western fashion dresses and accessories which appeals to both the young and the old in their societies and beyond. Moreover, their display of creativity and innovative use of the fabric makes their products originally African and internationally appealing. Though they face challenge of finance and family resistance, these youth are resilient and ambitious. With their ambitiousness and determination, they seek the growth of their business in terms of client and accessibility beyond the boundaries of their country.

### NOTES

- 1 - «The term African prints allude to how this product originally was manufactured elsewhere but for an African market» (Axellson 2012, p. 30).
- 2 - The exchange rate of cedi to euro as January 2014 was 1 cedi to 0.30959 euro.
- 3 - The interaction between global phenomenon and the local context (Robertson and White 2007).

### REFERENCES

- N. Adeya, *Knowledge, technology and growth: The case study of Suame manufacturing enterprise cluster in Ghana: Knowledge for Development Programme*, World Bank Institute, 2006
- J. Agbor, O. Taiwo and J. Smith, *Sub-Saharan Africa's Youth Bulge: A Demographic Dividend or Disaster?* Retrieved from [http://www.brookings.edu/-/media/research/files/reports/2012/1/priorities%20foresight%20africa/01\\_youth\\_bulge\\_agbor\\_taiwo\\_smith.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/-/media/research/files/reports/2012/1/priorities%20foresight%20africa/01_youth_bulge_agbor_taiwo_smith.pdf) on 12/04/2013. 2012
- N. A. Anyidoho, I. Baidoo and B.B. Pupilampu, *Claiming the 21st Century: Young people's perceptions and aspirations of future employment in Ghana.*



- Retrieved from [http://www.general.assembly.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/Nana\\_Akua\\_Anyidoho-2.pdf](http://www.general.assembly.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/Nana_Akua_Anyidoho-2.pdf), on 12/04/2013, 2013
- B. Bird, *Implementing Entrepreneurial Ideas: The Case for Intention*, in «The Academy of Management Review», n. 13 (3), 1988
- D. Budlender and D. Bosch, *South Africa child domestic workers: A National Report. International Labour Organization: International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour*. Retrieved from <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/southafrica/others/domestic.pdf>, on 14/06/2013, 2002
- D. Gondola, *Dream and Drama: The Search for Elegance among Congolese Youth* in «African Studies Review», n. 42 (1), 1999
- J. Hermans et al., *Ambitious Entrepreneurship: Antecedents and Consequences*. Retrieved from <http://www.unamur.be/eco/economie/recherche/wpseries/wp/1210.pdf>, on 05/04/2013, 2012
- J. Hessels, M. Van Gelderen and R. Thurik, *Entrepreneurial aspirations, motivations, and their drivers*, in «Small Business Economics», n. 31 (3), 2008
- H. Jennings, *New African Fashion*. Retrieved from <http://www.randomhouse.de/content/edition/excerpts/265259.pdf> on 19/07/2013, 2011
- T. Langevang and K. V. Gough, *Diverging Pathways: Young Female Employment and Entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa*, in «The Geographic Journal», n. 178 (3), 2011
- T. Mbeki *The African Renaissance*, retrieved from <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/1998/mbek0813.htm>, on 2012, 1998.
- K. Peters and P. Richards, «Why We Fight»: *Voices of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone* in «Africa: Journal of the International African Institute», n. 68 (2), 1998
- B. Rankokwane and T.D. Gwebu, *Characteristics, threats and opportunities of landfill scavenging: The case of Gaborone-Botswana*, in «GeoJournal», n. 65 (3), 2006
- C. Robertson, Y. Mhango and M. Moran, *The Fastest Billion: The Story Behind Africa's Economic Revolution*, Renaissance Capital, London 2012
- V.L. Rovine, *Viewing Africa through Fashion*, in «Fashion Theory», n. 13 (2), 2009
- M. Sommers, *Urbanization, War, and Africa's Youth at Risk Towards Understanding and Addressing Future Challenges*, retrieved from [http://www.beps.net/publications/beps\\_urbanizationwaryouthatrisk.pdf](http://www.beps.net/publications/beps_urbanizationwaryouthatrisk.pdf) on 09/07/2013, 2003
- E. Stam et al., *Ambitious Entrepreneurship: A review of the academic literature and new directions for public policy*. Retrieved from <http://www.awt.nl/upload/documents/tinymce/as41-Ambitious-Entrepreneurship.pdf>, on 05/04/2013, 2012
- S. Takyi-Asiedu, *Some Socio-cultural Factors Retarding Entrepreneurial Activity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, in «Journal of Business Venturing», n. 8, 1993
- D. Tsikata and A. K. Darkwah, (eds. Tsikata, Dzodzi), *Ghana Social Development Outlook, 2012*, Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (IS-SER), Accra 2013
- C. U. Ukeje and A. Iwilade, *African Youth and Violence* in «IJCV», n. 6 (2), 2012

## Adwoa Owusuaa Bobie

is a doctoral candidate at the University of Basel, Switzerland. She has a BA degree in Sociology from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana and MPhil degree from the University of Ghana. This article is based on her MPhil thesis.

## Imprenditori non convenzionali: i giovani nell'industria della moda in Ghana

**N**el mondo al momento il 18% della popolazione globale ha un'età compresa fra i 14 e i 24 anni e la disoccupazione e la sottoccupazione sono fenomeni preoccupanti. In Africa la situazione è particolarmente critica, perciò molti studi concernenti la gioventù africana e l'occupazione si sono focalizzati su come la mancanza di lavoro e la conseguente frustrazione dei giovani abbia prodotto fenomeni sociali preoccupanti quali le bande di strada, i furti a mano armata, l'attività di recupero di rottami, la nascita di sette religiose e le rivolte politiche. Ciò nonostante, un numero crescente di giovani si sta avventurando nell'imprenditoria al fine di migliorare il proprio livello di vita al di sotto della sussistenza. In particolare, l'industria della moda in Africa è un settore in rapida crescita. È noto che il *design* africano è diffuso in tutta Europa e si sta facendo strada nelle collezioni di famosi stilisti, come Louis Vuitton e Diane von Furstenberg, tanto che le stampe di tipo africano sono ormai presenti ovunque. Nonostante gli studi sul *boom* economico africano siano aumentati, ancora pochi lavori di ricerca si soffermano sull'analisi e la comprensione del fenomeno dell'innovazione imprenditoriale portata dalla gioventù africana, che è in parte responsabile di questo *boom*. Questo articolo riporta i risultati di una inchiesta condotta, secondo un approccio qualitativo, presso nove giovani imprenditori del settore della moda in Ghana. Dalle interviste di approfondimento è emerso che il desiderio di fare impresa è la principale forza che spinge la creatività e l'innovazione dei giovani. Nessuno di questi giovani imprenditori di un Paese in via di sviluppo ha affermato di essere stato portato a fare impresa dalla disoccupazione o dalla povertà. Spinti dalla loro passione per la moda, essi ricercano le ultime tendenze della moda in internet e le "geolocalizzano" per adattarli al contesto africano. Ciò rende i loro prodotti di *design* originariamente africani e al contempo interessanti agli occhi del pubblico internazionale. Sono ragazzi e ragazze altamente ambiziosi, desiderano una crescita veloce per i loro affari così come una diffusione al di là dei mercati locali. Per questo, la tecnologia è la chiave delle loro strategie di *marketing*. Coi *social media* e altri mezzi forniti dalla rete, i loro prodotti raggiungono una vasta gamma di clienti in tutto il mondo.