Stitching Womanhood in the *Zongo*: Seamstress Apprenticeship in Accra

Ann Cassiman

Abstract: Focusing upon the daily lives of young female Muslim apprentices in the sewing shops of Accra's *zongo* communities, Cassiman argues that the sewing workshop may be understood as a playground in which young women may experiment with the normative chronologies shaping women's lives, and with ideals of female respectability, self-making, and autonomy. Opening up the possibility to subvert the chrononormativity of apprenticeship and marriage, young seamstress apprentices carve out a platform from which they can exert specific forms of agency, by suspending marriage or hastening it, while trying out various possible futures.

Résumé : En se concentrant sur le quotidien des jeunes apprenties musulmanes dans les ateliers de couture des communautés *zongo* d'Accra, Cassiman fait valoir que l'atelier de couture peut jouer le rôle d'un terrain de jeu au niveau duquel les jeunes femmes peuvent expérimenter les chronologies normatives qui façonnent la vie des femmes, avec des idéaux sur la respectabilité féminine, la construction de soi et l'autonomie. Ouvrant la possibilité de subvertir la chrononormativité de l'apprentissage et du mariage, de jeunes apprenties couturières se taillent une plate-forme depuis laquelle elles peuvent exercer des formes spécifiques d'actions, en suspendant ou en précipitant le mariage, tout en expérimentant avec un éventail de futurs possibles.

Resumo : Cassiman debruça-se sobre a vida quotidiana das jovens mulheres muçulmanas que trabalham como aprendizes nas lojas de costura das comunidades *zongo* em Acra, argumentando que as oficinas de costura podem ser entendidas como

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espaços de preparação nos quais as jovens mulheres testam as cronologias normativas que enquadram a vida das mulheres, bem como os ideais de respeitabilidade, autoformação e autonomia femininas. Ao abrir a possibilidade de subverter a crononormatividade do tirocínio e do casamento, as jovens aprendizes de costureira constroem uma plataforma a partir da qual podem exercer formas específicas de agência, seja suspendendo ou antecipando o casamento, ao mesmo tempo que experimentam vários futuros possíveis.

Keywords: apprenticeship; moral personhood; marriage; play; Hausa; zongo; Accra (Ghana)

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Vignette 1. Good News for Amina

It is around nine o'clock in the morning, and all of the apprentices are sitting behind their sewing machines in the workshop, facing the walls, with their backs toward each other in utter concentration as they roll the mechanical wheels. Two are sitting at the table outside, under the shed, for lack of space inside. Almost all of the places in the shop are occupied, apart from two chairs, the owners of which are standing next to the "madam," observing how she is cutting the material for them with a sure hand. The fan is not working, as there has been a blackout since early morning. Ruqayyah is bent over her half-opened machine, trying to find the cause of the clogged bobbin. The other machines are rattling, sometimes slowing down when the design becomes more sophisticated, but otherwise loud and steady. All of a sudden Rabiah, who is sitting outside, yells, leaps up and runs inside to grab a bottle of talc powder. Shouting, she runs out again to meet Amina, who is arriving at the shop. As soon as Amina realizes what is going to happen, she tries to run inside the shop to hide, but the others grab Amina by her dress so that Rabiah can throw the talc on her headscarf, on her back and finally in her face. Everyone shouts and laughs while Amina puts up a reproving but smiling whitened face. Amina is a slim, young, twenty-two-year-old woman from Togo. Her parents, who belong to the Kotokole ethnic group, moved to Ghana in the nineties, attracted by the buzzing markets of Accra. The rumor of Amina's approaching wedding had reached her fellow apprentices, and this talc powder shower is the appropriate blessing that the girls have to give her as a sign of their happiness and consent. The rest of the day unfolds as most other days, although the heat in the shop elicits regular deep sighs, which are audible above the noise of the chatting and the clattering of the machines. Later that day, I bring up the incident in a conversation with the madam of the shop, as I am a little surprised about the timing of Amina's wedding a few weeks later, remembering that most apprentices emphasized how their graduation as a seamstress should precede their engagement in marriage. Madam Kubra heaves a deep sigh: "I don't understand why all these young women are so much in a hurry to get married…" This remark ultimately determined the course of my research, as it turned my focus to the various synchronicities of young women's paths leading to married life.

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The increasing difficulties that accompany the transition from youth and/or adolescence into adulthood have become a core anthropological concern over the past two decades (Durham 2018; Cole & Durham 2007). Some authors discuss how African youth report being "stuck" (Hansen 2005) in their life stage due to a lack of access to jobs, a steady income, and economic autonomy, or to marriage, political adulthood, and citizenship (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006; Honwana & De Boeck 2005). Adulthood, therefore, has become a suspended or even "elusive" phase (Durham 2018). Other studies underscore the productivity and agency of this youthful and liminal phase (Masquelier 2013). The notion of "waithood" (Honwana 2012:19) combines both of these views, as it refers to both the "prolonged and uncertain stage between childhood and adulthood that is characterized by the inability to enter the labor market and to attain the markers of adulthood," while at the same time incorporating active anticipation instead of waiting passively. Adeline M. Masquelier's (2013) work on young Hausa men in Niger—who spend their days sitting on benches in conversation groups, drinking tea and making plans for their futures while building bonds with peers and managing time and the tactics of deliberate waiting—resonates very well with the rhythm of male youth's lives in the Hausaphone *zongos* of Ghana, which provide the setting of this paper. "Zongo" is commonly translated as "stranger settlement," and the zongos are mainly inhabited by Muslims from northern Ghana and from all over West Africa. In Accra's zongos, young men also meet on a daily basis in their improvised "bases," seating corners located in the small alleys between their houses, where they forge friendships and futures (Cassiman 2018). In this article, however, I turn the lens to their female counterparts, with an investigation of young women and their "active waiting" for adult femininity and marriagehood. Apprenticeship suspends the expectations linked to marriage and fosters more autonomy—economic and otherwise—among young women, but this state of suspension is hastily interrupted as soon as there is a serious marriage commitment by a potential husband, which yet again compromises the pathways to independence as the young women attempt to comply with the model of female adult personhood.

In the zongos, one's life course is not delineated as a series of coherent, universal, and ordered stages through which young people transition into adulthood. Rather, this passage is made through "vital conjunctures" (Johnson-Hanks 2002), important events conjoining structure and action, steered by aspirations and marked by uncertainty and ambivalence. Some trajectories are non-synchronous (Johnson-Hanks 2002:868) or turn the normative synchronicity, or *chrononormativity* (Freeman 2010)—referring to the assumed temporal chronologies in life—upside down. Apprenticeship can set in motion, or can be an arena to upset or invert, these synchronicities.

Going back to the story of Amina which opened this section, Madam Kubra knew very well why Amina and her fellow apprentices "are in a hurry to get married." Marriage is not a dead end of youth life, but rather a train that should not be missed for the sake of not being left behind. However, the train

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rarely follows a straight line (Munoz 2009). If things go badly, there is always the possibility to opt out, through divorce or by suspending or declining to marry altogether, even if remaining single is a seldomly chosen status. As a period in between parental and marital control, the period of apprenticeship creates a space for play, experimentation, and agency in relation to social maturation and expectations.

Apprentices become socialized into womanhood within networks which are often long-lasting, as they meanwhile work to become "moral selves." To obtain this goal, the sewing workshop offers an ideal "moral laboratory" (Mattingly 2014). Here, young women can experiment with various possible futures and moral "self-making," as wives and future mothers. We will see how "playing" allows the young women to try out different identities and engagements. The paradox, however, is that many of the young women give up this space to step into marriage rather suddenly, while, discursively at least, endorsing their wish—and also that of their mothers or caretakers—to complete the apprenticeship training.

In Hausa communities across West Africa, marriage is considered the most critical event for women to attain adulthood (Barkow 1972; Cooper 1997; Werthmann 2002). The new bride not only moves from her family house to the husband's house, carrying furnishings and personal belongings with her, but she will also start to dress and behave in novel ways to emphasize her new status as a wife, demonstrating piety and respectability. Marriage is ideally and commonly presented as a stable and life-long condition, even though divorce is very common for both genders and is permitted under shared Islamic norms and values. Hence remarriage happens more than once for many men and women. The ideal of the durable marriage bond, says Katja Werthmann (2002:127) about the Hausa in Northern Nigeria, is one of the "fictions of stability in a very fluid reality of possible social roles and relations of women."

This article deals with some of the ambivalences related to the assumed irrevocable concurrence of marriage and social adulthood (in terms of their order, timing, and priority) by zooming in on the premarital period which coincides with apprenticeship. It shows how the young women's choices are strategized to secure economic and social independence and adult femininity at the same time. The sewing shop epitomizes all of this: the competition between ideals of self-development and female agency on the one hand, and the moral standards of a respectable and moral wife on the other. It is the preamble to the continuous striving of women in the zongos to safeguard female authority and power.

"Killing Trousers" or Making Them: Seamstress Apprenticeship in the Zongos

The most common way to enter the job market in Ghana (as in many other West African countries) is through apprenticeship (Frazer 2006), which is usually organized by self-employed craftsmen and -women, or proprietors on

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the community or family level (Ayentimi et al. 2018). It is commonly believed that apprenticeship leads to a higher and quicker employability than formal education. As such, it addresses "the existing mass youth unemployment" in Ghana (Ayentimi et al. 2018:408). Moreover, it is generally perceived by the older generation as giving the younger generation some economic strength.

Particularly in the zongos, where youth unemployment is even higher than in the rest of the country, young men and women try to find a "master" or "madam" to teach them a craft such as carpentry, car mechanics, hairdressing, garment making, welding, or cosmetology. The core of the training involves various practical stages, whereby the "junior apprentice" starts at the bottom of the hierarchy, learning the simplest tasks by imitating the others and the master or madam, while often being charged with petty tasks such as ironing, hemming, sweeping the workshop, buying food, materials, and water for the others, and cooking and washing the bowls. Gradually one moves up the apprentice ladder and learns more complex tasks through "situated instruction in ongoing practice" (Lave 2011:90), possibly leading to the apprentice trying out novel creations and styles on her own. Many of these apprenticeship programs may lead to a relatively steady (but often low) income, if the apprentice succeeds in accumulating the starting capital he or she needs for the installation equipment, and depending on the artisan's skillfulness and associated reputation in relation to the (mostly local) market (Frazer 2006).

In this study, I focus on seamstress apprenticeship, which is very popular among young women in the zongos. Sewing is considered a pious female activity that does not compromise the chastity and devotion expected of a married Muslim woman. As sewing is usually home-based and small-scale, it can be easily combined with family life and with the withdrawn life of marriage. Starting one's own business after graduation is within reach for most apprentices, as they only need a machine and clientele (the latter is the most challenging part). Sitting at home doing nothing but household chores is commonly referred to as *zaman kashe wandon*, literally "sitting and killing (or sorting) trousers," meaning, wasting one's time (see also Gilbert 2016 for similar observations among young middle-class Nigerian women). Amina one day explained to me that she had started sewing because she was "just sitting at home." Other apprentices also described boredom and "sitting idle" as their condition before apprenticeship and the main reason for wanting to learn a craft. Others still were brought to the sewing shop by their parents or relatives for the same reasons. Learning (a craft, a trade, or classroom education) has a high moral value in the Ghanaian context, and it is considered a step toward a more independent position in a context of widespread poverty.

Apprentices provide free labor for their proprietor during their apprenticeship. (See Figure 1.) Proprietors can be of any gender, depending on the craft, but the majority of proprietors of seamstress workshops are women, who are referred to as "madam." In many workshops the strong hierarchical relationship between the madam and the apprentices, as well as among the

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Figure 1. Rabi Musah, Zuleya Suleiman, Amina Yakubu (from left to right), three seamstress apprentices at work in a workshop. Photo taken by the author in Accra, July 2019.

apprentices themselves, is experienced as a heavy burden. Apprentices usually respect and sometimes even fear their madam or the senior apprentices, and in some workshops the atmosphere can be grim or subdued, though in most workshops cooperation is convivial and loyal. (See Figure 2.) During the sometimes extremely long working days, apprentices can only do (unpaid) work for the madam, but in their free time they may slowly begin sewing for their own clientele. Some madams, however, make sure that the apprentice either misses the skills for crucial steps in the dressmaking process (usually the cutting of material), has no time or energy left after the apprentice work, or has no access to a machine to engage in more lucrative work. Competition among apprentices, but also between the talented apprentices and the madam, is part and parcel of apprenticeship, and this stands in sharp contrast with the motherly role that many madams seemingly embody.

Often tedious and tiresome and at times seemingly playful, the days in the shop require a lot of work: arduous work to become a good seamstress, work to become a moral person, work to build social capital and knowledge, and work to find the right husband at the right time. Starting an apprenticeship opens up new worlds and may give a new direction to the lives of the young women, either postponing or speeding up their entry into married life, as we will see. A small source of income as a seamstress is increasingly considered an asset for a wife-to-be in the eyes of both the women and their suitors, most men and women confirmed. "Life has become so hard that every man will want a wife that contributes to the family budget," Baba explained to

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Figure 2. Hureirat Salis, the madam of the workshop, showing her senior apprentice, Faiza Mahmoud, how to cut the fabric. Photo taken by the author in Accra, July 2019.

me. Nafisah, one of the elderly women of the neighborhood, confirmed the importance of economic power for the unmarried women: "If you work hard and you know you will have your little income, men will want to marry you, so you can be more selective in what type of man you engage with." Young women are anxiously on the lookout for a suitable marriage partner, and they use their fellow apprentices to help them liaise with possible suitors. Most women confided to me that remaining unmarried was their worst nightmare, as the unmarried woman is heavily stigmatized and excluded from societal platforms. "You see what happens when women are too picky, tsss," a store owner named Mohammed whispered when the lady I was chatting with walked away. "She is a nice-looking woman, but look at her age; who will want to marry her now?" She was in her thirties, and Mohammed explained how she had turned down some suitors as she was doing higher studies. Fear of missing the marriage boat was a much-debated topic in the sewing shop. "Pray that I find a nice husband, sister," Habiba one day almost begged me, while removing a faulty thread from a dress. With the help of her aunt, she had started this apprenticeship training at the age of twenty-two, to escape an unwanted and premature marriage arrangement. However, six months later, she had disappeared from the shop, after a spectacular wedding feast with a different suitor, whom she had been meeting secretly around the bus stop.

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Figure 3. Aisha Salifu (left) and Amina Saffiu (right), two apprentices at work in a workshop. Photo taken by the author in Accra, January 2020.

Since I started working in the shop in 2016, at each of my returns to the shop, usually after five-month breaks, some apprentices had discontinued, or "interrupted" as they would say themselves, their learning trajectory, mostly keeping the promise of a speedy return to the workshop alive. The main reason for the interruption was marriage. As marriage implies moving into the husband's house, for some the commute became too tedious, while others did not get permission from their husband to come to work, some became pregnant quite quickly and dreaded working while nursing, and still others said they were not ready to return yet. Almost all, however, expressed their wish to come back to the shop, as they were just "sitting home."

"We Are a Family"

Madam Kubra's sewing workshop (*shaago dunki*, literally "shop for sewing" in Hausa) is located in one of the small alleys of one of the largest zongos in Accra, just opposite a mosque.[1] It is one of the numerous "sew and sell" small-scale enterprises that makes ready-to-wear dresses for women and children from printed fabric. Usually there are about ten to twelve female apprentices who are simultaneously being trained by Madam Kubra. (See Figure 3.) Kubra, a married woman and mother of two, is a well-established "madam" who has a strong professional reputation and who is known to be sympathetic

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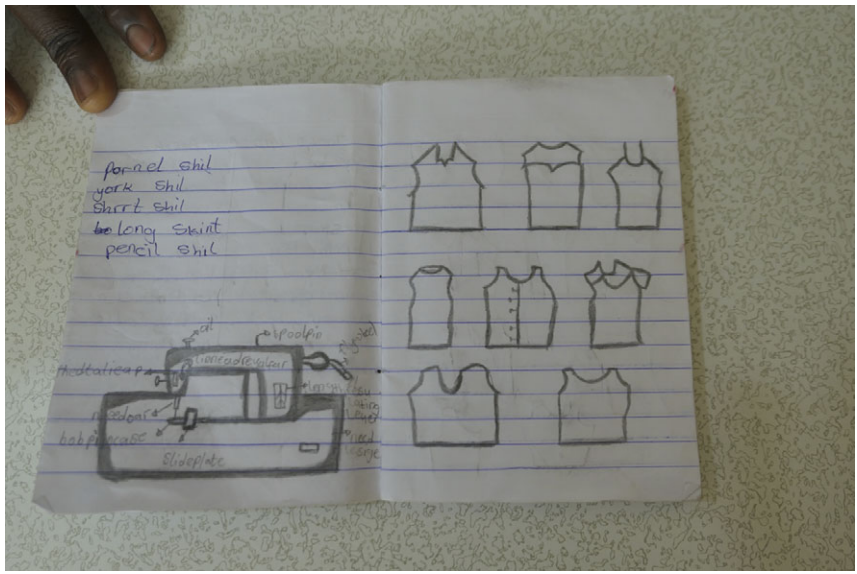
Figure 4. A new apprentice's notebook. Photo taken by the author in Accra, January 2020.



and generous toward her workers. Her vast network of customers is composed almost exclusively of women, who bring the needed length of printed fabric to the shop to be sewn into a dress of their choice.

At the start of the apprenticeship, a predefined fee is given to Madam Kubra, accompanied by two crates of soft drinks to be shared with the other apprentices. Some madams demand very high fees and some goods from the apprentices, but Kubra is considerate, and sometimes girls from a deprived background do not even have to pay the fee. A seamstress apprenticeship usually takes about three years, and it is the madam who decides when an apprentice is ready for the final graduation ceremony. At the closure of my research (2021), Madam Kubra had handed out a final certificate to some thirty apprentices, while eleven others were still in training. Their ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-four years, plus two married apprentices who were twenty-eight and thirty-four years old. (See Figure 4.)

In 2016, I entered the shop as a "junior" apprentice myself. My access was eased by my friendship with Madam Kubra, my humble sewing skills, and the fact that I already knew most of the apprentices because of my regular stays in the neighborhood since 2014, when I started doing research work in the zongos. Apprenticeship being a model of the anthropological method, my time at the shop doubly immersed me in the world of sewing and learning, and even more so in the worlds of the young women preparing to become social adults. Field work stretched over intermittent periods of six weeks each, twice per year, from 2016 to 2019, with a short follow-up in February 2021.

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Vignette 2. Fatima and her Friends

Fatima was a young woman from a neighboring zongo who had been introduced to Madam Kubra by her aunt, who shared Madame Kubra's Mossi ethnic background. Fatima was one of the few apprentices who had completed their secondary education and who had some prior know-how of sewing. Having been brought up by her aunt with mainly male relatives in the house, she had a glib tongue and could hold her own ground. She was the only one who brought her own sewing machine to the shop—others borrowed one from Madam Kubra—and she stood out as hardworking and a fast learner. Soon she started to help others with their work, working increasingly long days in the shop. Especially after Madam Kubra had left in the evening, her voice and laughter filled the shop. In this way she became very close with Ladi and Habiba, and the three of them would always pray together, share food, and chitchat throughout the day. "Hey! These girls! Always talking talking, tsss!" Madam Kubra would complain when the squabbling and giggling became too enervating. Ladi had some difficulties supporting herself during her apprenticeship, so on her days off she hawked the streets with sachets of water. She was also desperately on the lookout for a husband, who she hoped would help her to make ends meet. It was Habiba who finally introduced Ladi to one of her own brothers, and on my next visit, Ladi had already married and left the shop, long before her graduation. One of the women of the house adjoining the shop had noticed Fatima's diligence and flair, and she advised Musa, a young unmarried man

Figure 5. Apprentice Hasiya Mustapha checks her phone after praying in the workshop. Photo taken by the author in Accra, July 2019.

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staying in her house, to keep an eye on her. And so it happened. Quite unusually, Musa started to slow down as he passed the shop, greeting the girls and having little chats. After evening prayers, he would pop up in the shop to greet the women and chat with Fatima. Since he was close to Madam Kubra, this was not considered inappropriate. Soon after, Fatima was informed about Musa's interest in her. She did not decline, and the small visits became longer and more nocturnal. Madam Kubra turned a blind eye to it, as Musa was her younger brother's best friend.

Most of the apprentices I spoke to had completed school up to Junior Secondary level, and some had already gained a little working experience, mostly in trading or hawking. Some of the older apprentices also had their own job, usually petty trading or preparing food for sale. Apprenticeship provides an avenue for networking socially and economically beyond the spaces of known resources and support. Apprentices who live far from the workshop may be compelled to sleep in the shop or in their madam's house, as commuting is often too costly or time-consuming. Others arrange to sleep in the shop just to be with their friends and to escape the parental control and boredom at home. On weekdays, three to four of the apprentices usually slept in Madam Kubra's shop, on their prayer mats or on the benches. (See Figure 5.) They cooked and ate together, watched serials on their phones, read out messages from boyfriends, and shared WhatsApp images associated with new fashion styles and romantic love. Sometimes they closed the doors and shutters of the shop, turned up the volume of their little speaker, and started singing and dancing. Veils and wrappers were removed, and the young women would lie together on their prayer mats in their underclothing. Life among apprentices behind closed doors always became very intimate, tactile, and girlish, sometimes evoking the excited atmosphere of a school's playground, and often tinged with sexual overtones. At the same time, these were important instructional coming-of-age moments, learning from peers about boyfriends, relationships, romantic love, and breakups, or about how to seduce a man and give him sexual pleasure, about pregnancy and married life. These moments not only strengthened the bonds of friendship among the women, but they were also moments of taxing one another in terms of reliability and care. Travels, for example to a wedding or another event, were equally moments of learning, intimacy, and bonding. When shutters and doors were not closed, however, the shop also served as a window on the (sometimes barely known) world outside.

"We are a family" said one of them, and when I inquired if they would call themselves friends or sisters, they all agreed that they were sisters (*yaruwa*). Reference to sisters can be compared to *kawa* in Nigerian Hausa communities, which is usually translated as "bond-friends" (Werthmann 2002:117). Being a sister or friend equally involves kin-like obligations of exchange and solidarity (*zumunci*). Sisters are generation-mates one grows up with and is very loyal to, with whom one moves together to events and with whom food, time, prayers, and beds are shared, but without, however, entrusting them with all one's inner thoughts.[2] Apprentices are obliged to attend each other's

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Figure 6. Seamstress apprentices at work. Photo taken by the author in Accra, April 2018.

weddings and birth ceremonies, and they visit the one who is sick or bereaved. There are strong mechanisms of loyalty, support, and reciprocity at work among the apprentices, and most relations of loyalty continue after graduation. A friend (*amini*), on the other hand, refers to someone you share your intimate secrets with, someone "you can trust your wallet to," and in the zongos people claim they usually have just a few intimate friends (Cassiman 2018). (See Figure 6.)

Sisterhood in the shop is also an ambivalent issue. Sometimes deep intimate bonds grow during work, but at the same time, conflicts, rivalry, and suspicion breed, and the daily sharing of a small space with others who have similar—and thus competing—interests comes with a price. Nonetheless, during the years of apprenticeship, kin bonds may grow deep, and investing in sociality is part of the productive work that the young women need to do to establish themselves as adult women involved in larger female networks characterized by solidarity (*zumunci*) and exchange. As in a family, apprenticeship also implies the moral upbringing of the young women, preparing the apprentices to become respectable women, as the next part will show.

Becoming a Respectable Woman

During apprenticeship the young women learn the discipline of hard and independent work, of creativity and originality, but especially of decency and

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morality, not only professionally, but also in the personal sphere. (See Figure 6). Writing about the apprenticeship of masons in Mali, Trevor Marchand (2009) discusses how becoming a mason implies learning various kinds of knowledge, establishing networks of social and economic relations, and transforming selfhood: "Masons [are] effectively re-making themselves" and thereby "communicate their social position" (Marchand 2009:89). Similarly, apprentices all over the world emphasize in their accounts how apprenticeship has transformed their identity (Lave 2011). Learning to sew is not only acquiring new knowledge, but it also "relates to the whole being of person" (Dilley 2010:184) and drastically changes one's self. The social performance of the graduation ceremony gives the new seamstress recognition and redefines her new identity in the zongo. Among artisan apprentices in Crete, the power of the occupational habitus of artisans used to be interwoven with moral identity, as Michael Herzfeld (2004:60) notes. However, today, Cretan shoemakers operate in a context of an international tourist market with an extremely high demand, where there is hardly any time and space for moral training (Herzfeld 2004). Among the dressmakers in Ghana's zongos, on the contrary, the market pressure is not so high, and the moral education of apprentices continues to be an essential part of apprenticeship. Moreover, a graduated seamstress must be able to train apprentices herself and thus represent moral personhood.

In the predominantly Muslim communities of the zongos, being a respectable woman is defined by a mixture of religious, social, and cultural norms, expressed in the way one dresses, greets, and behaves in public spaces, and governed by rules of modesty, avoidance, and shame (*kunya*). From the moment a woman enters marriage (*matar aure* means a married woman), she is expected to start dressing and behaving in a distinct way; the most visible sign is the wearing of the large, usually very colorful, veil (*mayafi*) which covers one's hair, head, and shoulders like a shawl. Whenever a married woman leaves the house, she is supposed to wear the *mayafi*. The way she greets, moves, and speaks in public, and especially in the presence of men, also drastically changes; her bodily articulation is supposed to be softened, modest, and serene (as extensively described by Cooper [1997] for Hausa women in Northern Nigeria). Girls, too, are supposed to be quiet, veiled, respectful, and obedient, and cultural norms of honor and dignity are taught from childhood onward, although the norms are more loosely exacted. Conversely, a young married woman is continuously monitored by her environment, including elderly women, men, her husband, and the family elders, for the whole family's reputation is at stake. A married woman needs permission from her husband to leave the house, but once outside there is room for diversion from the originally approved plan (Werthmann 2002). By abiding or not by the cultural and religious norms, women manage their social status and reputation, as well as that of their husbands (and vice versa). Infringements can lead to gossip, rejection, and shame (*kunya*), which is to be avoided at any cost in an environment that thrives on social relations and reputation.

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In the particular pre-marriage segment of their lives, the young apprentices juggle with different identities and with the expectations that each of these identities entails. While they are supposed to uphold the image of respectable and pious young women ready for marriage, they may also behave as young, childish, puerile girls (called *buduruwa;* this term literally means "a girl whose breasts have come to grow but who is not yet married" [Barkow 1972:319] and is generally used to refer to an unmarried woman)[3] when they are alone in the shop, or as coquettish, flirting, and even dangerous seductresses when loitering with men. At other moments they might be addressed as seamstresses-to-be, as independent and able businesswomen.

In the eyes of many parents in the zongos and beyond, schooling or apprenticeship provides a better preparation for marriage, as the young women will take time to choose a proper partner and will become more desirable wives, being armed with an income-generating skill. Besides, becoming an apprentice to a renowned madam guarantees social and moral control over the young women, and consequently guarantees that they will be steered away from the stigmatized image of the "loose" girls without etiquette or manners. When an apprentice arrives too late in the morning, she will be sanctioned by having to stand in front of the door for a long time, or having to fetch water, sweep, or clean. Sometimes the sanction consists of having to close her eyes while the madam teaches a crucial sewing technique. In serious cases the apprentice can be beaten with a stick, sent home for several days or weeks, or sacked for good. This disciplining is part and parcel of the training, and some proprietors are known to be severe and merciless. Moreover, training (formally in school, or informally through apprenticeship) is believed to avert early marriage and childbirth (see also Johnson [2018] on delayed marriage in Malawi). Various madams control the use of mobile phones by forcing the girls to drop their phones in a box at the beginning of the working day. "These girls, they are only thinking boyfriend boyfriend!" one senior apprentice would complain. "They are here to learn, not to be talking to their boyfriends." The apprentices also all emphasized how important "learning" was for them and how they wanted to wait before marrying and starting a family until they first had become good seamstresses, with a strong reputation, as this puts them in a position of strength, allowing them to be pickier with suitors and more independent once they are married.

The Sewing Shop as a Moral "Play" Ground

Apprenticeship life is sprinkled with moral biddings as the apprentices craft their new selves in a trajectory of moral becoming (Mattingly 2014). It is not so much about the madam acting as the arbiter of their acts and bodies as it is about disciplining the apprentices' selves in line with the imaginings of being a "good" seamstress. At the same time, becoming a good marriage candidate is another, parallel, striving of the women, and notwithstanding the concurrence of the two kinds of moral strivings, they sometimes also clash or compete, for the temporalities of both trajectories are not always in tune.

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The shop offers a space for the critical appraisal of new norms and moral prescriptions, which the apprentices may subscribe to while also critiquing, questioning, opposing, and redefining the moral challenges. The shop can therefore be understood as a "moral laboratory," to borrow a term from Cheryl Mattingly (2014), as it is a spatiotemporal unit in which explicit moral training (by the madam, the senior apprentices, and the neighboring community) is embodied and knitted together with the personal and self-monitoring moral becoming of the young apprentices. The shop offers "a metaphorical realm in which participants are researchers or experimenters of their own life," characterized by "transforming one's view of oneself" and "suggesting possible futures" (Mattingly 2014:16). As the notion of playground suggests, play (*wasa* in Hausa) is understood as an essential technology of moral becoming during apprenticeship. (See Figure 7.)

Once the madam leaves the shop in the evening, many of the apprentices metamorphose into young playful girls (buduruwa), loud and tittering, and the bolder ones take over the helm. Some do work for their own clients to have some pocket money, while others hang around chatting, laughing, and playing music, though some feel constrained by their own moral norms, or they feel controlled by neighbors and relatives. A young woman invests a lot in the management of her reputation, and in order to construct or maintain a good reputation as a possible wife she will have to make sure that she shapes a

Figure 7. Hureirat Salis (left), the madam of the workshop, and her apprentice Mariam Bukari (right). Photo taken by the author in Accra, July 2019.

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public reputation of moral flawlessness. When darkness falls, some of the apprentices go out to meet friends or boyfriends. The zongo's narrow alleys are a popular place for young men and women to meet at night. The rooms where they stay are packed with people, and youngsters often do not have access to spaces of privacy. The dimly lit alleyways in between the large compound houses therefore offer the ideal setting for more intimate meetings between lovers.

Playing ranges from verbal play, making jokes, using nicknames, and often inventing new ones in relation to hilarious situations, teasing one another about family heritage, ethnicity, the neighborhood one lives in, or one's boyfriends, to bodily teasing, such as pushing and hitting, but also touching or squeezing breasts or buttocks, sometimes in homoerotic ways. Other playful behavior consists of stealing one another's material, scissors, money, or food. One day, senior apprentice Rabiah was complaining that the girls were all too distracted by WhatsApp messages, and she collected all the phones from the girls until the end of the working day. Before returning them to the apprentices, she read out loud the names of the missed calls and the unopened messages of supposed lovers on each phone. All apprentices were cheering and yelling, beating, and pushing her, trying to snatch their phone from her hands before their missed calls were revealed. The event caused much laughter and fuss, especially when names like "sweetheart" and "mylove" of callers were announced, but no one was offended or shy at the disclosure of their digital exchanges. Having to share (parts of) private information or being mocked and scolded were part and parcel of apprentice life, and on this occasion it happened in a relatively safe surrounding.

Some boys of the area became more familiar with the girls, and even openly flirted with some of them, sending them food or drinks, giving them presents, or just teasing them or calling them "my wife." Hussein, one of the neighbors, one day entered the shop—a rather uncommon act—loudly installing himself behind Habiba's sewing machine, shouting "I also know how to sew!! Watch me!" and making the machine rattle on her piece of work. Habiba laughingly pushed him away while the others were giggling and yelling, or jokingly sucking their teeth disapprovingly. We all knew that he was interested in Habiba. Madam Kubra responded to my surprised face with a smile: "He is just playing." When referred to as "play" (*wasa*) and thus situated within the conventional boundaries of respectability, flirting is acceptable and part of the common social interaction between unmarried men and women. It involves teasing, gift-giving, pleasing, and pushing the limits of what is morally acceptable. It offers a venue to express particular emotions within the grey zone of the admissible, and a precinct to explore and discover unknown registers. Once someone is married, the grey zone disappears, and playing between sexes is banned from all registers, though in the case of married men a blind eye is often turned to their flirting with women other than their wives, as long as these women are not married. Wasa also happens between men (joking,

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nicknaming, mock fighting), and between women, especially among peers training or schooling together.

When girls play in a bounded space controlled by adults with moral authority, such as a school or a workshop, they can safely and intensely experiment with the prevailing norms. In a public space or in a party with many elderly people around, play must be more subtle and covert, or it must express just having fun. Apprenticeship gives the legroom to stretch moral limits, as the cover of play and being an apprentice serves as an accepted pretext. Sometimes the apprentices imitated explicit sexual gestures when narrating a story, or mimicked men harassing the girls, causing much laughter in the shop, but when their merriment was deemed too inappropriate, even in the context of play, they were usually reprimanded by the madam, or a colleague, especially when the latter was a senior. When the girls were dancing at night with the doors closed, the neighbors mostly did not mind. But when they danced in plain view, in front of outsiders, and especially when making the sexualized moves they were so fond of, it caused a lot of condemnation and "tsss" among adult viewers. Play pretends to be fiction and thereby examines the reality; play has the structure of a metaphor and refers to the "as if," and this is exactly where its ambiguity is situated (Hamayon 2016).

Wasa, translated as "play" or "game," is also used for that part of the wedding or namegiving ceremony where women dance and have fun, expressing their happiness about the marriage or with the newborn child. A theatre play or festival play is called wasa as well, and one of the most well-known forms of wasa is the *Bori* ceremony, widespread among the Hausa of West Africa. Bori is a performed spirit possession cult that is predominantly staged and attended by women; it involves music, a set of particular songs, joyful and erotic dance, and the invitation of a family of spirits. It is considered ritual therapy, but also entertainment, "sacred theatre," and a refuge for the socially marginal, especially young, divorced, or excluded women, and it also allows acts of promiscuity (Sullivan 2005; Masquelier 2001). As a space of play and transgression, where women could redress female autonomy in an increasingly Islamic context (cf. Danfulani 1999), Bori has seemingly almost disappeared because of the intensified Islamization of the zongos. Yet, even though an apprenticeship workshop can obviously not be compared to the space of a possession ceremony, it does echo the playful staging of the young women's various identities in wasa. Bori is simultaneously diverting and transformative, involving "transcending established boundaries and dealing with threatening forces, of which prostitution and other socially 'deviant' practices are but an expression" (Masquelier 2001:131).

Referencing Johan Huizinga's classic work, Deborah Durham explains how play is "imaginative and actively engaged in new kinds of order … and [how] it is also serious work indeed" (2005:162). The latter point indicates the ambiguity and ambivalence of determining whether an activity is work or play, especially when it is moral work. It is exactly this ambivalence that typifies wasa or the playful relationships and acts of the women in the shop;

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Figure 8. Apprentice Bariya Idriss prepares a blouse for sewing. Photo taken by the author in Accra, July 2019.

through play they are agentive and they engage in a new kind of order as they become adult women and seamstresses. Play allows them the legitimacy of improvisation, transgression, and behaving beyond their age or in deviant ways. In their play, within the safe confines of the shop, they are doing serious moral and social work, and thus experimenting within the field of what Mattingly calls "narrative potentiality" (2014:73). When the girls are dancing and laughing at night, for example during an apprentice's birthday party, the people around smile, "they are just playing," thereby qualifying their acts as accepted youthful play. As soon as Fatima got married, however, she was warned by Madam Kubra whenever she talked and laughed too noisily, as neighbors would consider such behavior inappropriate for a married woman.

Wasa thus gives a pretext to the young women to try out other, often deviant, registers of self, in ways similar to what the wasa performance *par excellence*, the Bori cult, used to do, through intimacy, flirting, sex, and humor. And while apprentices more formally asserted that they were in the shop because they desired learning and education, most did not hide how much they enjoyed these aspects of apprenticeship, this pleasurable period in life that one hopes to live to the full and that allows for investigating boundaries together with peers. (See Figure 8.)

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Playing with Chrononormativity and Finding a Good Husband

Many parents lament the behavior of the current generation of "stubborn" teenage girls: they dress inappropriately; they hang around with boyfriends and sometimes even live with them (also called "camping" in popular discourse); some have several boyfriends at the same time; and many get pregnant outside of marriage and without anyone claiming fatherhood. These girls are often referred to as *karuwai* ("loose girls"; *karuwa* is usually translated as "prostitute" [plural *karuwai*], or as "courtesan" or "someone who knows how to *play* with men"), or in urban slang as *shashasha,* while young men jokingly call the roaming girls *wakawaka* [walking-walking], "always walking around, like Johnny Walker!", as Faisal and his friends explained.[4] Some girls are pressured to marry early, before the first child is born. In the zongos, most adults and imams alike discursively assert that marriage and parenthood were—and still are, to a large extent—the conventional points of entry into social adulthood in a sequential and linear line of coming of age, and that these institutions are lifelong and irreversible. Education, including apprenticeship, is a conventional period in the life of young women preceding adult life; one "learns" (at school, or in a workshop), and after the completion of her education, a woman gets married. This is the norm of chronology, parallel to the notion of "chrononormativity" that Elizabeth Freeman (2010) coined in the context of the noncontinuously gender/ed life narratives of transsexuals as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity." This notion critiques "a singular normative 'straight' logic of development" (Daniels 2017:116), and more precisely, the heteronormative organization of time. Elizabeth Freeman (2010) uses queer theory to show how age, sexuality, and specific stages in life are normatively organized. Time is orchestrated, with normalizing temporal assumptions about the chronology of stages in life. In the case of the seamstresses, the orchestration and chronology of youth life is also normative, but apprentices bargain the various paths to becoming a seamstress and becoming a married woman within the moral laboratory. The synchronicity of apprenticeship and maidenhood is considered the norm, and while these are ideally concluded with a graduation (a moment which is determined by the madam) and a marriage ceremony (mainly determined by the husband) respectively, and in this order, reality often turns out to be different. The young women themselves increasingly challenge this normative linear pace of time and the normative synchronicity associated with it. It is through play that they can try out and tinker with the ruling norms, and based on their experiences, make decisions on their own arrangements of their time of life.

Revisiting Amina's allegedly "rushed" marriage (see Vignette 1), as well as Ladi's sudden wedding to Habiba's brother, it becomes clear that the vital conjunctures of both apprentices were not necessarily built on the conventional order of graduation leading to marriage. Today's youth life constantly generates loops in this "straight time" (Munoz 2009), and becoming an adult can follow divergent paths despite the strong moral horizon and

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"chrononormativity" of conventional adulthood (Durham 2005; Honwana 2012). Young women fracture the conventional imperative of time and age through playing with their dedication to work and learning, and by playing with their sexuality—for example, by having multiple boyfriends, or by engaging in lesbian experiences with their fellow apprentices—and with their reproductive power, by becoming pregnant before marriage. Social maturation today, in the zongos as well as elsewhere in Ghana, implies various unfoldings of growing up, not necessarily following an outlined temporal corollary, but exploring alternative paths, often marked by drawbacks and deviations, U-turns, and radical pauses, rather referring to a "nexus of potential social [and I would add *moral*] futures: a vital conjuncture" (Johnson-Hanks 2002:871). As already noted, divorce and remarriage have always been commonplace. What is new is that motherhood, too, is increasingly detached from marriage, and often precedes marriage or is interrupted and outsourced to parents for reasons of young age, education, and work.

When Khadija, an eighteen-year-old unmarried apprentice, became pregnant, she was sent back to her mother's village and thus discontinued her apprenticeship. Faizah was already a single mother before she started sewing, but all of a sudden and without any announcement, after a second failed marriage she abandoned her sewing work and disappeared to Saudi to make money as a domestic worker, leaving her child with her older sister. The chrononormativity—first apprenticeship (and graduation), ideally leading to marriage—that is openly endorsed by all of the apprentices (and their elders) with whom I spoke was reversed by six out of eight of the young women who got married between 2016 and 2021, the timeframe of my fieldwork, an observation that was equally confirmed by findings from other workshops.

The institution of marriage (*aure*) in the zongos is mainly defined by Islamic values and principles. These have been changing over the past decades, and even more significantly in recent years (see also Masquelier 2005). While in former days a marriage alliance was arranged by the two involved families who would decide on suitable marriage partners, on the brideprice, and on the planning of the ceremony in the mosque, the young generation more often opts for a "love marriage" (*aure soyayya*) in which they themselves choose who they marry only when there is "real love." The material requirements and expectations (for both husband and bride) have altered as well. However, the consent of both families (of bride and groom) remains indispensable and crucial in the concrete planning of the various stages of preparation and the brideprice payments.

In my conversations with married and unmarried women, the complaint that "men [referring to the unmarried men] are not serious" repeatedly returned. In the urban worlds of contemporary Ghana, young men frequently have several girlfriends at the same time and often make (false) promises that they will marry them, in order to make them feel bound by an engagement, or to convince the girlfriends to sleep with them. Several apprentices complained how it has become difficult to find a sincere boyfriend who keeps his promises and engages himself to marry, as this is

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officially the principal aim of courtship for both men and women. An engagement is formalized—and therefore taken seriously—when it is honored by the "knocking" of the boyfriend (and his relatives and friends) on the girl's family door.[5] On this day, of which both families are informed in advance, the man and his brothers bring an amount of money to the woman's family and expresses his intent to marry her. This event does not give any guarantee that the marriage will take place, but it becomes more probable as both families have given their consent. During the four years I did fieldwork in the zongos, I came across numerous stories of girls desperately waiting for their boyfriend to do this knocking. A girl herself cannot propose marriage to her boyfriend or "she will look cheap," as one of my (married) interlocutors explained. "She can only give him signs, or ask a friend to talk to him, still risking to ruining her reputation."[6]

In popular discourse, many young women talk about "hit-and-run-boys," referring to those who date a girl and "run away as soon as she hints at marriage," as one female interlocutor explained.[7] Some girls became frustrated, others married another suitor, and a few expanded their horizons by dating more men at the same time. The sewing shop in that sense serves as a window opening up to a new group of possible husbands, while at the same time offering the possibility of consulting fellow apprentices and seeking advice from their older associates. In this context, play is used as a technique to experiment with different temporal norms and synchronisms, in an environment that is relatively safe—despite the competition—and relatively controlled and approved of as a playground, at least in daytime and during formal working hours.

The many women, older as well as young, with whom I have been discussing marriage, unanimously validated marriage as the most important step into social adulthood, a step which is visible in the woman's behavior and appearance from the first day of marriage, and in that of her environment. Ideally young women "wait" to complete their apprenticeship before their wedding, endorsing present-day chrononormativity, and knowing that their identity as seamstress and their potential relative autonomy will give them more status and power in the husband's house and in married life. However, the perceived unreliability of suitors, the lack of decisive power in the timing and performing of the wedding, and the fear of remaining in the heavily stigmatized position of maiden or karuwa sometimes hastens marriage, and thus often curtails apprenticeship as the next section shows.

The Work of Waiting

Even though some men have a deep wish to engage in the marriage process, many face their own challenges. During the dating process, it is expected that the man "entertains" the woman, which means that he pays for her food and finances her other wishes (such as dresses and accessories), or he gives her some cash. "No money, no date," as Musa said while shaking his head disapprovingly.[8] "Money is power," said Faisal in a discussion with his peers

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in their base. "We get girlfriends, but they don't respect [us] (…) at least with money you get to choose your girl."[9]

As described above, many young women are accused of dating several boyfriends at the same time. Some girls, in the zongos in particular, have the reputation of being "stubborn" and (materially) greedy girls, or whores (karuwai), as several interlocutors said, referring to these girls as irresponsible and insensitive to parental advice. Such girls are accused of chasing men and having loose morals which lead to pre-marriage pregnancies. Young men such as Musa, for these reasons, find it difficult to know which girls are serious and honest when they contemplate engaging in a relationship.

Courtship has therefore become a thorny issue, with high levels of skepticism and mistrust about genuine intentions on both sides. Relationships preceding marriage are stressful times of suspicious calculation and taxation of the other's intents. "You have to study your boyfriend very well before you make any promises. Everyone is pretending, you can never be sure," Khadija confided to me. In many cases, the element of play and flirting that is central to the initial stages of dating has become an almost cynical Russian roulette, contrary to the very essence of play as a joyous, noncommittal, and lighthearted mode of interaction. Today dating has become serious play and a mode of hedging, which involves investing resources or funds (materially and emotionally) in volatile relationships, hoping that the carefully chosen risk will yield the desired effects, yet knowing it might turn into a total loss. The response of many young men, but especially of the young women (as they have more to lose) is an attitude of alert waiting in anticipation. Women who engage in relations with non-committing men might easily lose their reputation or even their virginity (risking pregnancy), and for many this is a price that is too high to pay. The young men are in a less vulnerable position for various reasons. For a man, losing his virginity is not an issue in the zongos, and one's reputation is not damaged by dating several girls without marrying them. What men can lose is mainly money and an affective investment. A man, however, has one major advantage: he is the one who takes the initiative to do the knocking. He is the one who decides how serious his marriage intentions are and whether to finalize his intentions in the actual performing of the knocking. A woman can only hope and wait for this moment and meanwhile try to hint or manipulate the man. Some women exploit the situation of being courted by several men and raise the price to finally choose the most capable and wealthy one, while others attempt to use spiritual powers to bind a man to them unconditionally.

Not all the seamstress apprentices are in such a position or have the power to play these stakes hard. Their main concern is finding a good husband "who respects and provides," and to find him in time. Once they are above a certain marriageable age, women are considered too old to marry, a stage that is heavily stigmatized and that many women try to avoid at all costs, even when it means marrying a man they do not really love. Several young women also explained how younger girls or sisters getting married before them was experienced as a disgrace, putting them under more pressure. Consequently,

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the temporality of marriage has undergone stark changes as well. In former days, early marriage was a strategy to move out of poverty for many women, and for some it still is. More recently, however, young women not only want to have time to study their suitors first, but they also hope to complete their schooling or training before engaging in wedlock, thereby stepping into married life with some economic autonomy. The fear, however, remains that asking a suitor to wait might make him lose interest and turn to another woman. Bargaining one's studies or training is a hard bet, as Habiba and Ladi both explained to me. A man can be impatient to marry for several reasons: he considers the time is right to marry, he wants to become more independent, or he cannot wait to sleep with his girlfriend and live with her. For the latter reasons, most interlocutors observed that the timing of marriage had been brought forward in the past few years. Women are "in a hurry" to marry, as Madam Kubra said in the first vignette, as they are afraid to remain single nowadays or to be rivalled out by their younger cohorts.

In summary, women's bachelorship has become a "serious" game, while women invest in more masculine roles such as being economically independent (through sewing), actively assessing possible husbands and hedging the one who is truthful, thereby minimizing the risk of disillusionment and of a postponed or unaccomplished marriage. While actively waiting for the right partner and exploring, experimenting, and building a social network in the meantime, women try to speculate who could be the ideal partner who combines trustworthiness, capability, respect, and care, and who can win their love. Although men play the last chords in the courtship song, women can also accept the knocking and still marry a different man. Volatility in relation to chrononormativity thus remains a reality until the day of the ceremony in the mosque.

Apprenticeship plays a crucial role in all these undertakings, in which the shop acts as a kind of playground. But this playground requires serious moral and social work and commitment. Engaging in training to become a seamstress runs synchronously with readying oneself for marriage and building respectability and reputation, but at the same time it intervenes with marriage in various ways. Grace was one of the few apprentices who was able to convince her husband to postpone their marriage until she graduated, but Amina, for example, did not succeed in convincing her lover to wait. He made it clear that he was in a hurry to marry, so she accepted his timing, but meanwhile she negotiated the continuation of her training after marriage with him, and he agreed. The other apprentices were not very convinced by this continuation, as they had witnessed the apprentice Ladi's dropping out some months before due to pregnancy complications after marriage. Childbirth too often upsets one's ambitions and causes discontinuations and dropping out.

Apprenticeship may be used as an ultimate excuse to suspend marriage and to hang on to an in-between status, between being a girl and being a wife. However, this cannot be stretched to the extent of being left behind and unmarried. Herein is the main paradox: apprenticeship prepares the young women for womanhood and enables married life, meanwhile acting as a reason and strategy to suspend it, at least discursively. In practice, however,

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young women are quick to jump into marriage as soon as they sense the risk of being opted out as a marriage partner. The paradox is double, as the period of suspension gives women the opportunity to explore various moral paths and possibilities in the laboratory of the shop, and it gives them better marriage prospects as the exposure to other, urban, men is enlarged.

Conclusion: Stitching Womanhood

As Durham (2018) states, adulthood is considered "elusive" when the path to adulthood is—often erroneously—perceived as one of a predefined order of clear-cut steps, an idea that does not find validation in many parts of the world. Rather, a focus on the relationality of age status and the structural context by which age status is defined, making a distinction between pragmatic claims, discourses about adulthood, and the metasocial elements indicated in adulthood, gives more nuanced indices of adulthood (Durham 2018:17). The sequence of steps leading to social adulthood are not always predefined either. Despite temporal assumption of chronologies, it is through unstable vital conjunctures, and careful negotiations and concessions, that social maturation grows.

While apprenticeship is not strictly tied to a particular age group, it is linked to a particular status. Most commonly, seamstress apprentices are young women who only partially completed school, have dropped out early, or who enter the long apprenticeship track while actively "waiting" to find a good husband. Committing to marriage is consequently a process of negotiation and finding a compromise between various competing stakes and stages: enjoying the intimate time with peers and learning the indispensable knowledge to enter married life; acquiring enough competence, network, and a certificate to settle independently as a seamstress; finding the right husband without putting his patience to the test; and/or waiting long enough to make sure he is a good husband. Compared to previous times when men were able to assume responsibility for the financial care of the family, and consequently did not like their wives to have a profession or to earn their own income, nowadays in Accra's zongos seamstresses have a better status and can thus better negotiate their options in the marriage market.

So, while the apprentices are dancing behind closed shutters and joking about each others' boyfriends and working hard, stitching their peers' wedding dresses, they have to investigate and speculate on how to make the right life-changing decisions for themselves. This is the only period in their lives when they have this kind of limited agency in making decisions for themselves, while they are actively waiting, and this is exactly the essence of their coming of age. In this window of opportunity that their work of waiting creates, they must actively build and manage, in playful ways, their status and social web, and their moral reputation, as a way to "capitalize on time otherwise lost" (Gilbert 2016:15).

It is in these moral choices between rivaling conjunctive paths of transformation to skilled seamstresses, to womanhood, wifedom, and

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motherhood, that apprentices are stitching and crafting their selves. By subverting linearities of maidenhood and apprenticeship, they challenge the chrononormativity and expectations of conventional corollaries of time, thus producing a narrative re-envisioning in which the young woman sees herself in a novel way. In all of this, play (wasa) is a performative tactic of experimentation and tricking that allows the young women to test the boundaries in collectively controlled ways through subtle transgressions and testing of the potential futurity that life has in store for them.

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Notes

1. The names of informants are replaced by pseudonyms for reasons of privacy. The name of the shop is not given for the same reason.
2. Interview with Mariam (July 2019), Ruqayyah, Habiba (August 2018).
3. Jerome H. Barkow (1972) discerns six stages in the life of a Hausa woman: "*yarinya* or young girl; *bera* or nubile girl; *buduruwa* or girl whose breasts have begun to grow but is not yet married; *matan aure* or married woman; *bazawara* or woman between marriages and *tsofuwa* or old (post-climacterium) woman" (Barkow 1972:319).
4. Conversation with Faisal, April 2016.
5. A marriage celebration involves various phases: it starts with the man and his friends and relatives showing their intent to marry a daughter of the house by 'knocking' (*kudin gaisuwa,* literally 'money to greet') on her family's door. In the next step he will bring part or the complete brideprice and finally a date is set for the performance of the wedding ceremony in the mosque, usually followed by a feast in the wife's family house.
6. Conversation with Halima, March 2017.
7. Interview Hureirat August 2018.
8. Conversation with Musa, July 2019.
9. Conversation with Faisal, April 2016.

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