

Burkina Faso

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Burkina Faso is located at the crossroads of several important trade routes that cross West Africa from the Sahara (Niger) to the old Gold Coast (Ghana) and from the inland delta of the Niger River (Mali) to the former Slave Coast (Benin). The peoples of Burkina have always participated actively in the long-distance trade in salt, kola nuts, cotton cloth, and gold. The Mossi and other people in central Burkina speak Voltaic languages that are very closely related to the languages of northern Ghana, while the Bobo and other peoples in western Burkina speak Mande languages and are culturally related to the Bamana and Malinke. These intersections of cultural areas are mirrored by the clothing people wear: The clothing of Voltaic peoples is very similar to that of Dagomba and Mamprussi to the south, while the clothing of Mande peoples is similar to that of the Bamana to the west.

MOSSI MEN

The Mossi people are the largest group in Burkina Faso, comprising over half the country's population. They are the only people in the country with an ancient tradition of centralized political authority, so one can speak of royal dress and regalia as well as the dress of commoners. They are also very heterogeneous, so it is important to understand that people who are descended from the ancient farmers who first occupied the land may dress quite differently than the chiefs who are descended from the horsemen who invaded the region in 1500 C.E. Based on personal experience from 1970, and on illustrations in books and journals published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is possible to draw a word picture of Mossi dress or clothing before independence in 1960. By far the best early source is *Le Noir du Yatenga*, based on research in northern Mossi country from 1912 to 1913 by the French ethnographer Louis Tauxier. In 2005, the national museum in Ouagadougou published *La tenue traditionnelle au Burkina Faso*, by Sidi Traore and Margriet Renders, providing comprehensive information about dress.

The Mossi have been weavers of cotton for centuries. A particular group among the Mossi called the Yarse specialize in weaving long, narrow cotton strips that could be cut into shorter bands and sewn together selvaige to selvaige to form a whole piece of cloth. To create a piece of clothing, a buyer could go to the market and pick out the strips he or she liked, in patterns and colors of one's choosing. The merchant measured the strips against the wearer's body—a certain number for the body, a certain number for the back, another group for the sleeves. The customer then



The Mossi artist Raogo Sawadogo, from the village of Kirsi, east of Yako, Burkina Faso, 1976. He is carving an antelope mask and wearing very ancient Mossi-style clothing consisting of a cotton smock and hat. Photograph by Christopher D. Roy.

took these to a tailor, who sewed the strips together to form a shirt, trousers, wrapper, or any other garment. The long strips were also wound up into very large rolls (seventy-five centimeters to one meter [two and a half to three feet] in diameter), hundreds of thicknesses in diameter but only one band wide, which Yarse merchants then carried south into the forest of Ghana and sold to the Akan-speaking peoples who could not grow cotton in the forest.

Mossi men wore a pair of loose-fitting short trousers called *kourouga* that fell to just below the knees or midcalf. The waist was enormous, much larger than the man's real measurements, and was drawn up tight with a leather belt or a drawstring. There was often an excess of material between the legs that bunched up and left a great deal of freedom of movement. Shorter trousers that came to the knees and were worn when farming or hunting were called *kurukwega*. The trousers could be blue or white or might be warp-striped, but plain white was the most common. Men wore shirts called *fugu* that were sewn from narrow bands

into the large, roomy shirts that are also common in northern Ghana in Dagomba and elsewhere. These shirts have numerous gussets around the waist that allow them to flow or flare outward when the wearer spins in place in a dance or rotates from side to side. Many of these were sleeveless, but the most elegant and costly had sleeves and pockets and were sewn of expensive warp-striped cloth. Shirts of this type have become very popular again in the past ten or twenty years. Mossi men also wore (and continue to wear) long robes called *kolokore* that reach to the ankles; they are sewn of strips of warp-striped cloth with a keyhole opening for the head and neck. These were often embroidered by hand in the past, by machine now.

All men wore hats, either of basketry or of woven cotton strips. The most common type, called *pugulugmaka*, rarely seen now, consisted of two rectangles of thick cloth sewn together along two adjacent sides and worn as a peaked cap, with one corner pointing straight up and two opposite corners turned up above the ears. They may be dyed brown or black or even warp-striped. Hats of this type were also worn by other Voltaic people, especially the Dogon, who live to the northwest of the Mossi. They are quite unique and picturesque. The second important type of hat, which is still ubiquitous in Mossi country, consists of various large round or circular pointed hats made of grass and decorated with red, black, and brown leather (*piriga*). Many men still wear them, especially in the countryside, and lots of tourists buy them and carry them home on the airplane. There are several centers of production, but the most famous is the large village of Sapone, southwest of Ouagadougou. Because they are twined like baskets and worn on the head, they are called Sapone head baskets or *Sapon zug peogo*. These are often worn by Mossi men

over a close-fitting skullcap of the type that is common all over West Africa, especially among Muslims. They may also be worn as extra protection over a light cotton head cloth or turban, so the hat rides on top of the turban. This is truly the mark of a man from a remote rural area, especially herders such as the Fulani.

Mossi men used to carry goatskin sacks called *wowsé*. These were fabricated of whole skins that had been stripped from the goat's carcass without cutting them, so they formed a secure container with only one opening, where the neck had been. Some of these were tanned so well that they were as soft and supple as the finest leather gloves. They are now rather hard to find.

Finally, Mossi men once wore numerous armlets and bracelets made of leather, brass, stone, or silver. These were intended to protect the wearer from accidents, evil magic, and disease and to make the wearer successful in love and attractive to the opposite sex. The most unusual of these were smooth stone bracelets worn above the elbow. The marbled stone from which they were carved comes from Hombori, in Mali northeast of Bandiagara. The Mossi call Hombori *Manogo*, and so the armlets are referred to as *manogokaka* or sometimes *kugukaka* (*kugri* means stone). They were expensive, so for many years the glassmakers of the Nigerian city of Bida made glass facsimiles that were sold by merchants to Mossi men.

The structure of Mossi society is based on two poles: the chief, or *naba*, holds all secular power and is a descendant of the horsemen from Dagomba who invaded the region in 1500 C.E. The earth priest, or *tengsoba*, holds all spiritual power and is a descendant of the farming peoples who had occupied the land for centuries before the invasion of the chiefly class. The dress of the *tengsobadamba* is distinctive. Like many such religious leaders,



Professional Mossi dance troupe at a regional fair in the city of Koudougou, 1970. The dancers are wearing the gusseted cotton smocks that are common in central and southern Burkina. Photograph by Christopher D. Roy.

the earth priest of the village of Ziniare in 1976 wore a black and white checked cotton blanket pinned over one shoulder; a broad, round, pointed straw hat; a large leather bag decorated in red, white, and black; and his sacred staff, called a *rayaka*, which has a fork at the upper end and which he uses to catch the thunderclouds and draw down lightning on his enemies, the chiefs.

For many centuries, all Mossi chiefs have worn colorful pill-box caps or bonnets (*pugulugwili*), which mark them as rulers, chiefs, and members of the *nakomse* class of political elite. These hats are round, brimless, with vertical sides and a flat top, and are crocheted of fine yarn. Each one has four crosses of equal arms at each of the cardinal points (one over the nose, one over each ear, one at the back). These crosses have nothing to do with Christianity and predate the arrival of Christian missionaries by centuries. In 1488, King John II of Portugal heard of these hats and, assuming incorrectly that the wearers were Christians, wrote a letter to the Mossi emperor asking if it were possible he were the legendary missionary priest named Prester John.

The power of Mossi chiefs comes from their position as descendants of the horsemen who invaded the region five hundred years ago. The horse is so important to the ruling class that it is a symbol of their power. A horse is kept tethered outside the home of most Mossi chiefs. The bridles, bits, saddles, and stirrups are among the important royal art forms of the Mossi. Leather and cast brass have been central to royal art for centuries, and many Mossi men, especially chiefs, commission leather sacks, brass staffs and fly whisks, and other objects made by the same craftsmen who create tack for their horses.

Mossi chiefs also wear voluminous and costly robes of the type that are common from Senegal to Lake Chad and that, in style, originate among the Hausa kingdoms of northern Nigeria. In the old days, these robes were woven of cotton cloth or wild silk and were hand embroidered in the same patterns used by the artists of the Nupe and Hausa in Nigeria. Now they are sewn of expensive damask or other imported textiles and most often embroidered by machine.

In several Mossi villages, chiefs wear very distinctive textiles that have been imported from the Akan to the south. In 1976 to 1977, the *tansoba* or war chief in Yako wore a large, yellow *adinkra* cloth stamped with black Ashanti patterns. The Yako chief used a sacred stool in the concave pattern that is well known among the Ashanti. It was kept off the ground by a goatskin laid on the ground. The Mossi and Ashanti were military allies in much of the nineteenth century, and Akan regalia influenced Mossi royal regalia rather heavily.

During the Colonial period, governed by the idea that to be civilized one must be French, French clothing design dominated the apparel of all government officials and businessmen. In the period from 1960 to the 1980s, men who worked in offices wore tailored suits called *fonctionnaire* suits. These consisted of tailored Western-style trousers and shirt jackets with collars, a row of buttons up the front, and a high breast pocket. In the late 1970s and through the 1980s and 1990s, this neocolonial style gave way to much more relaxed and appropriately traditional local dress as a symbol of growing national identity and pride in traditional culture. In the early twenty-first century, most government ministers, many businessmen, and all teachers wear so-called national dress. In Burkina Faso, the favored men's style is again the very loose flaring shirts with numerous broad gussets that are well known in northern Ghana. Men make a point of having these elegant shirts



A senior Bwa hunter wearing his hunter's hat and shirt and carrying a powder horn and musket in the village of Bagassi, Burkina Faso, 1983. Photograph by Christopher D. Roy.

tailored using expensive, high-quality, handwoven cotton strips. Loose-fitting, voluminous trousers are made to match. At official receptions, government ministers and ambassadors wear large, flowing, beautifully embroidered robes on the Hausa pattern.

MOSSI WOMEN

In the decades that led to independence in 1960, Mossi women in rural areas wore a woven cloth wrapper around the hips and legs. The wrapper was carefully tucked in at one side to hold it in place, and it was quite common to see women pause to unwrap and adjust it. Beneath this they wore a lighter cotton wrapper. The

wrapper was designed to cover the legs almost as far as the ankles, for among the Mossi and many other neighboring peoples, the thighs were the focus of sexual interest and were kept carefully covered out of a sense of modesty. In addition, women wore a white cotton shawl carefully folded over the left shoulder. This could be worn over the head or shoulders or as an extra cloth over a baby carried on the back. Tauxier wrote in 1912 that wealthy women wore the distinctive blue- and white-striped cloths made by the Marka and other peoples to the west, which the Mossi women called *torofugu*. Today these are worn by women in central Burkina, but not by the Mossi.

Before the arrival of the French in the 1890s, most women did not wear blouses, and their breasts were uncovered. The Mossi did not associate women's breasts with sexuality. Breasts were instead associated with motherhood and childbearing, and modesty did not require that they be hidden. In fact, it was considered bad form for a woman to conceal her breasts, especially in the presence of the chief. All of that changed when the French arrived in 1897. They imposed their sense of modesty on the Mossi and made it an offense to be seen in Ouagadougou bare breasted. All women wore blouses like those worn by women all over Africa during the Colonial period and ever since. Because it was offensive to the Mossi to bare the legs, they passed laws in the late 1960s against the wearing of miniskirts, and the first time the French



The head war chief (*tansoba*), of the (then) village of Yako, in the Tansobongo neighborhood, Burkina Faso, 1976. The *tansoba* is wearing an Asante *adinkra* cloth tailored and embroidered as a Mossi-style robe. Mossi and Asante have traded in textiles for centuries and are closely tied economically and politically. Photograph by Christopher D. Roy.

ambassador's wife descended from an airliner in 1968 wearing a short skirt, she was arrested. To this day, only midcalf skirts are acceptable in Burkina Faso, and white women often wear long wrappers over shorter skirts or shorts when in public.

Decades ago, women wore a distinctive hairstyle called *gyonfo*, in which the hair was carefully braided up into a high crest that ran from the forehead to the back of the head. There was a small pigtail at the back if the woman was married (Tauxier said this looked like a scorpion's tail) and small braids over each ear. Silver or brass combs or coins were sometimes incorporated into the hairstyle, as Fulani women continue to do to this day. This crested or sagittal hairstyle may be seen frequently in Mossi figurative sculpture. The hairstyle has long since gone out of fashion, to be replaced by a thousand different elegant styles of the type seen all over black Africa.

Until the late 1970s, all wives of chiefs wore on their left wrists distinctive brass bracelets called *kobre*. These bracelets were spherical, with an opening to allow them to be put on the wrist and a broad sharp ring at the equator like the rings of Saturn. In the old days, commoners were not permitted to speak to the wife of the chief, and these women were identified by the distinctive bracelets intended to warn off commoner men. Mossi chiefs' wives also once wore heavy cylindrical anklets called *fodo* that covered from ten to twenty centimeters (four to eight inches) of the lower leg.

A century ago, most people in Burkina wore bracelets, rings, anklets, and pendants cast of brass or carved from stone. These objects were intended to provide protection against disease and misfortune of all kinds. Many of them were nonfigurative, but a significant number incorporated images of the spiritual beings that were to provide protection to the wearer. Most Burkinabes stopped wearing such objects in the early 1960s, and now it is very unusual to see any being worn in rural villages or in the city. In the 1970s, tons of old brass bracelets were gathered up by scrap metal dealers and sold by the kilogram to brass casters in Ouagadougou, who turned them into ashtrays and chess pieces for tourists.

Mossi brass casters used to cast a wide variety of shapes and types, including *kambanga*, small bracelets worn above the elbow; *kalemanga*, made of copper and iron twisted together and worn on the wrist to prevent eye diseases; *zouwèra*, twisted bracelets of solid silver or copper; *karzouri*, massive round bracelets that are fitted to the wrist with a great hammer and are almost impossible to remove; and *zusokadaga*, which have a section that separates to permit the bracelet to be removed from the arm.

There are dozens of intricate and attractive bracelet and anklet shapes that were once made in various places all over Burkina Faso. While many were intended to provide some form of protection to their owners (the way some Americans wear copper or iron bracelets), fashion plays an important role, so many others are worn simply because they look attractive. A style originated by a Mossi caster may become fashionable among Fulani or Bwa women, and hundreds of them may be worn only by women in those groups. They come to be called Fulani bracelets regardless of whether they were the work of a Fulani artist. Such bracelets are still very common in many parts of Burkina Faso and are proudly worn by very beautiful and elegant women. Although few people wear bracelets for spiritual protection these days, many people still wear them to enhance their appearance.

Burkinabe men who belong to families that use wood masks once wore cast brass rings that bore tiny models of their masks to



A senior Nuna *griotte* (female musician) in the village of Tisse, central Burkina Faso, 2001, sings praises and greetings for guests to the village. She wears a factory-printed head tie and blouse. Photograph by Christopher D. Roy.

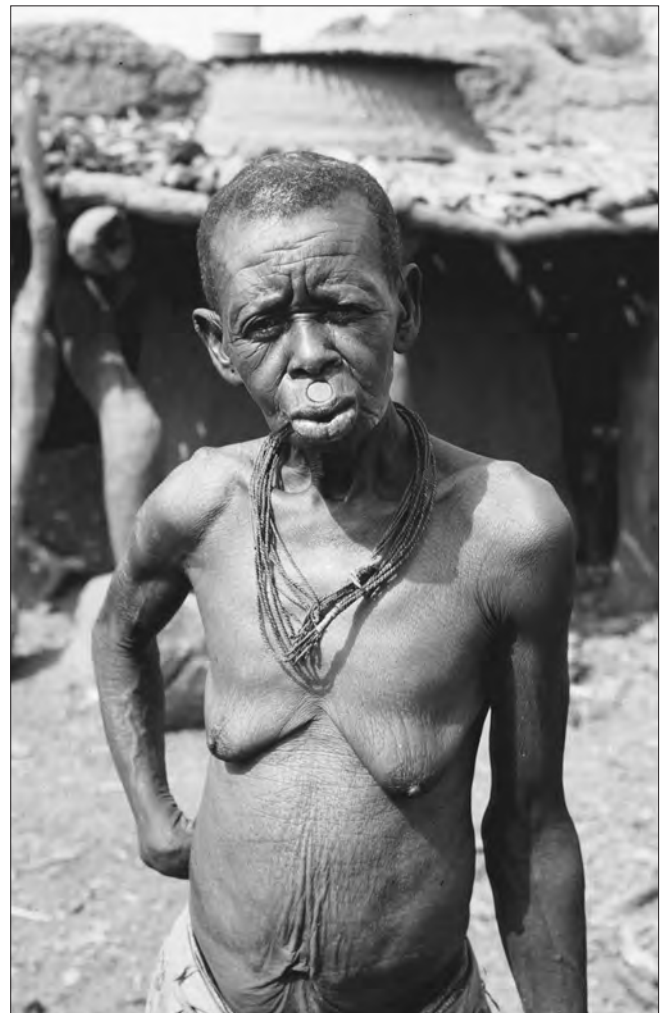
secure the protection of the spirit represented by the mask. Similarly, Nunuma, Winiam, and Nuna men wore cast brass rings bearing tiny masks. These serve the same purpose as women's cast brass crescent pendants—to secure the blessings of the mask spirit. Casters in Nunuma villages make rings with masks, which they place along the wood stems of long tobacco pipes. Some old pipes in Nunuma villages had up to fifteen small masks. In the past two or three decades, casters have made large numbers of these pipes to sell to tourists.

Since the 1950s, the large number of mopeds made by Peugeot or Motobecane have been the most important means of transportation. These motorbikes have engine blocks cast in a white metal that looks like aluminum, although it is an aluminum alloy. Casters have been very adept at casting jewelry from this light alloy. Bwa women wear anklets made of aluminum or brass that are cast for them by Dafing smiths. These anklets are curved upward at the front and back and bear on the front a representation of the leaf mask that represents Dwo and an elaborate plaque sometimes decorated with feather shapes at the back. Bwa women whose families wear leaf masks also wear these anklets for spiritual protection. When a woman becomes ill or cannot conceive a child, her brothers commission such an anklet to provide her

with the blessings of Dwo. The same protection is provided on aluminum bracelets and pipe bowls.

Many Bwa and Gurunsi wear pendant brass crescents on the chest. These protect the wearers from disease, and very simple, small examples were still worn in the mid-1980s in large numbers by children. The most elaborate examples, frequently bearing miniature models of wood masks, are worn by Gurunsi women, especially in the north among the Nunuma. These are named *tchienê lui ni benê*, “crescent shape with a figure,” and, again, like Bwa anklets, represent the mask owned by the wearer's family. A woman who is suffering from a reproductive disease may consult a diviner, who instructs her to seek the help of her family's protective spirit. She then returns to her father's home, where her brothers commission a crescent bearing the family mask. It is her brothers who commission these amulets for her, because they are responsible for the family masks. The mask spirit cures the woman after she returns to her husband's home. Similar brass crescents are worn by the Senufo, Lobi, Bobo, and other peoples in southern Burkina Faso.

All of the elegant women in cities such as Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, Koudougou, and Ouahigouya wear expensive, carefully tailored, high-fashion couture of the type that is ubiquitous



Elderly Lobi woman, Mrs. Hien, wearing an ivory lip labret, Kampti, Burkina Faso, 1984. Photograph by Christopher D. Roy.

everywhere in Africa. Tailor shops for men and women are everywhere in the cities, and women search the markets for the most unusual and beautiful textiles. Tailors travel from city to city and country to country to see the latest fashions and to bring the ideas they have collected home to their clients. The best designers fly to Paris to show their work in fashion salons.

SECONDHAND CLOTHING

Not all Burkinabe men and women wear only traditional, hand-woven, African-style clothing. In fact, secondhand clothing that is imported in enormous bales from the United States and Europe is ubiquitous in Burkina. Thirty years ago, only a few people wore white people's cast-offs, but now it is rare to see rural farmers who wear homespun cloth. American T-shirts and soccer shirts are sold in all rural markets for a fraction of what traditional clothing costs, and, because these imported secondhand items are generally in good condition, people appear to be well dressed. In Ghana, people call these clothes "dead white men's clothing," but the term is not used in Burkina. Although people who may once have worn rags can afford to be better dressed now, used clothing has had a detrimental impact on the manufacture of homespun and dyed African styles.

From about 1970 until the late 1980s, there was a very large, modern, efficient cotton textile mill called Voltex in Koudougou, in the center of the country. The factory turned out huge quantities of fairly inexpensive cotton cloth that was printed with bright, colorful patterns of the styles known as Dutch wax. Shops were full of these textiles, and people wore colorful shirts, blouses, and skirts sewn from them. The factory was fed by the large cotton plantations in the center of the country. In the late 1980s, the factory was nationalized, high-ranking officials sold all the assets, including machinery, to feed their bank accounts, and the factory went bankrupt and shut down. Now printed cotton cloth is again imported from Côte d'Ivoire and Europe, to the detriment of the Burkinabe economy.

BWA/MARKA

The Marka or Marka-Dafing live in north-central Burkina around Safane and farther north. They play an important role in the economic life of the country, because they are merchants, weavers, and dyers. Dafing women dye cotton and local silk yarns blue with indigo, and Dafing men weave the blue yarns into narrow strips on horizontal double-heddle looms. There are never any weft patterns, but the warp stripes alternate several shades of dark, medium, light blue, and white. Women associate each of the warp-striped patterns with aphorisms about the course of life and human relationships, as is common among peoples all over Africa. The very beautiful blue-striped cloths, two by one meters (seventy-nine by thirty-nine inches) in dimension, are marketed by Dafing merchants all over central Burkina, and they are avidly collected by the women of many different cultures. The cloths are rather expensive, ranging from 2,000 CFA (US\$8) for the cheapest, coarsest cotton, to well over 10,000 CFA (US\$40 in 1985) for the finest silk textiles. Bwa women avidly collect them, store their collections carefully in wooden boxes in their bedrooms, and wear them on important occasions, especially religious celebrations. On such days, every woman in a large village might be wearing the beautiful blue-striped Dafing cloth as wrappers

with the stripes arranged horizontally. The effect is impressive and pleasing. The Dafing area is one of the few in Burkina where indigo dying is still an important industry. So little indigo is worn elsewhere that most dyers have given up their trade.

LOBI

The Lobi are by far the most independent and picturesque people in Burkina. The Mossi and other Burkinabes describe them as obstreperous and difficult. They refuse to recognize any authority other than that of their village diviners and have battled first the French and later the government of Burkina for their independence. Although there is a significant amount of literature from the Colonial and post-Colonial periods about the Lobi, there have been few photographs published of them, and far fewer of them that show their bodies below the waist. This is because, until the 1970s, Lobi dress was rather minimal and offended French sensibilities. Decades ago, Lobi men wore only a thin cord around their waists, into which they inserted the head of the penis, allowing the testicles to hang free. They wore their hair long, to the jaw line, and dressed it with clay and fat, forming tight thin locks that stuck out all over. They wore numerous leather and brass amulets on their wrists and around the neck that provided magical protection of the *wathil*, the spirits of the wilderness. That was all they wore. Women dressed in a similar way but wore two small bundles of fresh green leaves tied to their belts in front and back for the sake of modesty. Of course, like almost everything else in Africa, all of this has changed, and nowadays Lobi men and women dress much as do men and women in any other area of rural Burkina: in secondhand American T-shirts and shorts or wrappers. The Lobi were also famous for the quantities of ivory jewelry they once wore. (Burkina still has the largest herds of wild elephants in all of West Africa.) Like the Gurunsi to the east, they wore large armlets above the elbow cut lengthwise from the elephant tusk. Lobi men wore pendants carved in the shape of whistles on their chests called *thungbubiel*. All Lobi women wore ivory lip plugs, or labrets. These were usually small, no more than the size of a silver dollar, but they were, nevertheless, rather striking to see.

All such objects have been collected years ago and are now in public or private collections outside Burkina Faso. In about 1980, the renowned art dealer Merton Simpson displayed in New York thirty or so of the thungbubiel whistle-shaped pendants, patinated in colors from white to orange to red to black. As late as the 1980s, people in Nuna villages showed me nose ornaments in ivory, but by that time hardly anyone wore them.

FULANI

There are large numbers of Fulani in northern Burkina Faso. They comprise the second-largest group of people in the country after the Mossi. The Fulani are very important across West Africa, from Senegal to Lake Chad, and are very numerous in Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. Ever since the first European explorers trekked across the savanna grasslands of Senegal and Nigeria in the early nineteenth century, they have described the great physical beauty of Fulani women and their wonderful sense of style in dress. The Fulani are very heterogeneous. There are many different Fulani peoples, including the Wodaabe in Niger; the Uda-lan and Liptako in Burkina; settled town Fulani; nomadic cattle



A young Fulani mother with an infant in the market, wearing a fashionable Jelgobe women's dress. Dori, Burkina Faso, twentieth century. Photograph by Christopher D. Roy.

Fulani; and the famous Fulani of Mali, who specialize in weaving elaborate wool and cotton blankets with weft patterns in brick red, black, white, and yellow.

The Fulani women in northern Burkina are as fashion conscious as Fulani women everywhere. Pastoral Fulani women wear very bright shawls and scarves of imported rayon and wear their hair in elaborate coiffures—of which the most common is the sagittal crest from the front of the head to the back, heavily decorated with rows and rows of silver coins and other silver ornaments and amber beads. In the 1970s and 1980s, the favored cotton wrapper was of blue or black warp stripes worn with a colorful machine-printed cotton blouse and lots of amber and silver jewelry. Settled town or village Fulani women near the town of Dori wear very intricate and beautifully tailored blouses and skirts of colorful imported printed cotton cloth. These are sewn into elaborate gussets, frills, collars, layers, wide puffy sleeves, and other intricate combinations of cloth in bright colors by tailors in the Dori market who cater especially to Fulani clientele. The women also tattoo their lips and chins and paint black dots on

their foreheads and cheeks. The overall impression is of great elegance, a powerful sense of individual style, and stunning beauty.

Fulani men also pride themselves in their personal beauty, but their clothing is very much more plain and darker than that of their wives. The Fulani herders around Barsalogo, Djibo, Aribinda, and Dori wear unique cotton shirts sewn of narrow strips dyed brown or black and covered with row upon row of white plastic buttons. The sleeves are very large, almost like wings, and are not sewn along the inside seam, so they fly and flap free of the arms if a wind comes up. It is quite usual to see a young Fulani herder with his cattle and goats wearing one of these spectacular shirts covered with buttons, along with baggy trousers bunched around the waist, purple or white plastic lace-up shoes, and a large, disk-shaped basketry hat. Fulani herders always carry a long, heavy stick with a large round boss at the end that they use to encourage their cows to move in the desired direction.

In the past twenty years, the economic and political elite of Burkina have shown a strong interest in African fashion, and several skilled and talented couturiers have established businesses

in the capital. The most prominent are Martine Some and Bazemsé, who showed their work on March 2, 2007, at a *défilé de mode* at the president's palace in Ouagadougou during the week of FESPACO (Festival Pan-Africain du Cinema). Women's dress in Burkina features bare shoulders, high, stiff bustiers, and skirts that reach to the ankles. Into the twenty-first century, modern couture follows ancient local tradition, and short skirts are never shown. The two Burkinabe designers showed their work in company with Michael Gamor of Ghana and Eloi Sessou and Gilles Toure of Côte d'Ivoire. The high point of the evening was the work of the tremendously talented and original couturier Oumou Sy, from Senegal. Fashion shows are held regularly in Ouagadougou and several other cities and towns in Burkina, and are often sponsored by Madame Chantal Campaore, the wife of the chief of state. These *défilés* are attended by the very small, affluent economic elite of the country.

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