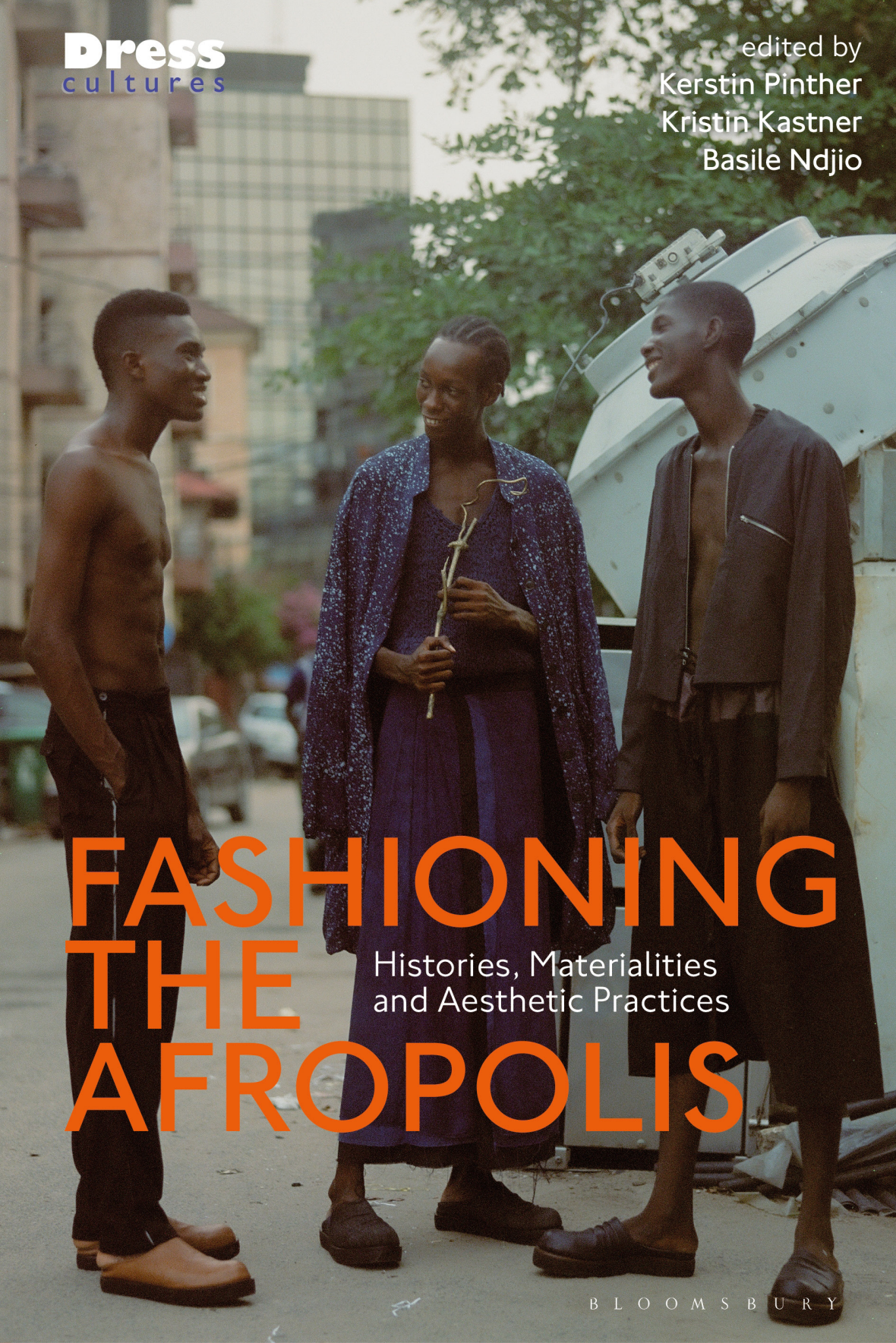
Dress cultures

edited by
Kerstin Pinther
Kristin Kastner
Basile Ndjio



FASHIONING THE AFROPOLIS

Histories, Materialities and Aesthetic Practices

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FASHIONING THE AFROPOLIS

Dress cultures

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION. FASHIONING THE AFROPOLIS

HISTORIES, MATERIALITIES AND AESTHETIC PRACTICES

Kerstin Pinther and Kristin Kastner

Figure 1.1 is the work of Adeju Thompson of Lagos Space Programme. Since its foundation in 2018, the label has steadily challenged the notion of fashion design made in Nigeria as well as of Lagos, the city where it is produced. Through a collective process between the designer, craftspeople from various regions in Nigeria, artists and photographers alike, explorations into past textile and sartorial practices not only led to the creation of new shapes but also helped to unveil hidden or sidelined societal beliefs and epistemologies. In particular, the brand's research into the blue-and-white-patterned *adire* fabric and, more recently, into the material qualities of brass, underlines its approach to adapting long-established fabrics and dress forms to the present. The results are handmade pieces, sewn from indigo-dyed silk in cuts that are usually wide and multilayered, often reminiscent of 'traditional' garments – a wrapped skirt or, as in Thompson's first collection, a modernized version of an Ifá priest's *babalawo* 'workwear'. His latest collection, as always gender-neutral, takes as a starting point the Yoruba proverb '*Aso là ńkí, kí a tó ki ènìyàn*/We greet dress before we greet its wearer' and thus emphasizes the importance of cloth and person inextricably linked to and mutually reinforcing each other (Renne 1995) – fashion and dress as techniques of the self are equally evoked as are the sensual and communicative aspects of clothing. The fashion photographs by Isabel Okoro and others accompanying his collections defy stereotypical images of a(n) (over)crowded and somehow 'chaotic' Lagos. Instead, the city's modernist architectures or 'simple' courtyard settings serve as backdrops, conveying a sense of Lagos as an 'ordinary city' (Robinson 2006).

With our intertwined focus on fashion and styles in the Afropolis, we aim to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the globalization of fashion and fashion theory within the interdisciplinary field of art history, anthropology, design studies and material culture research. Historically 'fashion and city' have been regarded as marginal phenomena within the African context, and fashion research was, and still is, not one of the core subjects within the field of African studies. Here, fashion's negative reputation as allegedly 'superficial' together with anti-fashion discourses seems to have left its mark. Barbara Vinken (2019) repeatedly pointed out how fashion has been stigmatized in western thinking as effeminate and idolatrous, and Ted Polhemus (2011) continues to criticize anthropology's unease with fashion as an important field of research even thirty-five years after the publication of his seminal *Fashion & Anti-Fashion*. Daniel Miller (2005) likewise argued against the assumption of fashion and clothing being 'superficial' – on the

Figure 1.1 Isabel Okoro for Lagos Space Programme, Lagos 2020. © Isabel Okoro.

contrary, he stressed the constitutive role they play in the production and re-production of society. However, whereas the earliest western sociological theories addressed fashion in the mode of critique alone (Veblen [1899] 1986; Simmel [1905] 1995), this negative attitude towards fashion and its assumed superficialities probably was, and is, not shared among many intellectuals and artists in Africa. Films by the Senegalese directors Sembène Ousmane or Djibril Diop Mambéty confirm this impression as works like *Xala* (1974), *Faat Kiné* (2000), *Touki Bouki* (1973), or *Hyènes* (1992) express a pronounced sensitivity to the language and meaning of fashion and dress as well as to their site-specific and place-making qualities.

This volume aims to contribute towards an understanding of fashion and sartorial practices as being a relevant and an important part of 'African' expressive cultures and contemporary life (Rovine 2015: 7). For too long, a western-centric gaze has dominated scholarship which perceived Africa as homogenous and provincial and its visual arts and textile cultures as static and folkloristic (Rovine 2009). For too long, fashion and city were discussed only within a western framework which, thereby, continued to perpetuate the deep-rooted opposition between an 'ethnographic presence' and a 'perpetual future' in discussions about non-western dress practices and western fashion (Rovine 2009: 134). This perspective is astonishing for several reasons: on the one hand, with regard to Africa's rich and entangled textile and sartorial past; on the other hand, in light of more recent developments that are turning many cities in Africa into eminent hotspots for a steadily growing and connected scene of fashion designers. More and

more fashion labels operate successfully on an international scope as well as within Africa, where locally produced fashion, ranging from haute couture to prêt-à-porter and street style, is on the rise, not to lose sight of fashion networks and collaborations along a South-South axis (Odu 2019). Since the mid-1990s, fashion weeks have been popping up everywhere: in Johannesburg, the South Africa Fashion Week took place for the first time in 1997; in 1998, Alphady launched the Festival International de la Mode Africaine (FIMA) in Niger, and Lagos Fashion Week was founded by Omoyemi Akerele in 2011, to name but a few, and not to mention earlier events dating back to the 1960s.[1] In addition to more established fashion centres like Dakar, Abidjan, Accra, Lagos and Johannesburg, many other cities on the continent such as Douala, Kampala and Nairobi entered the scene – with The Nest Collective being among those initiatives that link creative scenes on a transregional level. Founded in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2012, the collective around Sunny Dolat under the title *Not African Enough* (2017) opposes stereotypical ideas about design from Africa and has thus shaped cultural production in Kenya in its very own way. These developments represent an enduring change in the cartography of fashion and question the dominance of western fashion centres hitherto (Breward 2011; Segre Reinach 2006).[2] All this calls for an updated empirical and theoretical foundation. Inspired by designers and labels such as the aforementioned Adeju Thompson (Lagos Space Programme), Amaka Osakwe (Maki Oh), Bubu Ogisi (IAMISIGO), Gozi Ochonogor (U.Mi-1), Papa Oyeyemi (Maxivive), Adama Paris, Selly Raby Kane, Stoned Cherrie, Sun Goddess, The Nest Collective, MaXhosa by Laduma, we depart from an understanding of fashion design and sartorial styles as genuine urban yet entangled phenomena that by far transcend the cities' physical boundaries and also encompass the multiple imaginary localizations.

In addition to our focus on the interplay between fashion and its respective city, our empirical approach drew our attention to other current tendencies. In line with research on the political roles of textiles and sartorial styles, frequently connected to times of crisis and transition (Allmann 2004; Nuttall 2008), fashion design plays an ever-growing part in (cultural) activist performances (de Greef 2018). Fashion is thus approached as a highly relevant area of contemporary culture and is considered a seismograph of societal issues and conditions. Analogous to 'global trends' (Teunissen 2005: 9–10) and despite the fact that handicraft has never completely lost its central meaning in many parts of Africa, there has recently been a growing preoccupation among (fashion) designers and artists alike with crafts, materiality, tactile processes, skilled labour and technologies of the 'past' – with the latter underscoring fashion's archival potential. Such reinterpretations and re-appropriations of craft techniques like dyeing and weaving locate the work of memory within the tactility of fabric. Textiles and fashion design in this regard are considered repositories of technical and body knowledge.[3]

Fashioning the Afropolis proposes the city and more precisely each individual urban centre as a common starting point for all the contributions.[4] According to Sarah Nuttal and Achille Mbembe (2008), the concept of the Afropolitan and accordingly the Afropolis was introduced to provoke a re-reading of African metropolises beyond normative urbanist and development approaches and to discuss them within the field

of cultural theory. The term 'Afropolis' emphasizes the cosmopolitan nature as well as the transnational networking of cities in Africa and, at the same time, affirms the search for each city's specific situatedness. Hence, the Afropolis is anything but a monolithic and fixed setting, but, instead, it encourages the idea of each city being the product of, among others, its own history and stories, religious and cultural contexts, practices, politics and economy. Accordingly, fashion and sartorial styles are likewise shaped by the respective city as they contribute to the making and remaking of its spatial and imaginary production. By building on the concept of the Appaduraian 'scapes' (1990) which Calefato (2019: 33–4) recently adopted for fashion, the essays in this volume follow an understanding of culture and place that is no longer marked by unity (if it ever existed), but by flows. The notion of the fashionscape, first coined by Vicki Karamina (Calefato 2019), allows for departing from the 'classical' western models to describe changes in styles such as imitation and distinction or the assumed flow from the streets into high fashion (Calefato 2019). Hence, *Fashioning the Afropolis* also looks at the interstices, connectivities and flows of fashion within, between, and across cities, and the ways fashion makers and consumers, materials and ideas move, converge and affect each other.

Challenging definitions: Fashion and style

The above-mentioned studies clearly reject the notion of homogenous and static textile and sartorial practices. They also challenge long-lasting assumptions of fashion theory whereby fashion has been understood as a purely western phenomenon, seemingly determined by its European history – from the Renaissance through the Industrial Revolution until today – and distinguished by the promise of endless novelty and the ephemerality considered typical of modern western society (Bieger and Reich 2012; Skov and Riegels Melchior 2010). At the same time, the existence of fashion phenomena in other parts of the world, such as Africa, the Arab World or Asia, was ignored or classified as costume that has perpetuated long-standing power relations (Niessen 2003). Victoria Rovine asks what 'fashion' means if it is not defined by the conventional proximity to western clothing innovations, and concludes, in line with other authors, that change is crucial when distinguishing fashion and other dress practices. This presupposes that 'recognizing change requires an appreciation of the historical and cultural context within which dress innovations occur' (Rovine 2015: 15), setting change as a constant in every culture. This also includes the existence of fashion worlds that do not necessarily participate in the global fashion system, but, instead, draw inspiration from 'their own histories, economies, and precedents' (Rovine 2015: 29). In line with this field of contemporary research, we emanate from a broad understanding of fashion. Additionally, we propose an approach that deliberately blurs the distinction between 'low' and 'high' fashion or 'world/cosmopolitan fashion' (Eicher and Sumberg 1995: 300; Calefato 2019: 33) as opposed to haute couture by underlining the existence of what could be called a 'popular haute couture'. Bespoke and unique clothes are, for many regions on

the continent and especially in Western Africa, a common mode of fashioning the self. Indeed, the practices associated with haute couture fashion in the western context are often the defining and predominant fashion-making processes in many places in Western Africa. So-called street fashion and designer-made high-end fashion mutually influence each other, while street-corner tailors and craftspeople like dyers and embroiderers create and innovate on a daily basis. What is more, many conceptual fashion designers who 'address contemporary anxieties and speculations about body and identity' (Rovine 2015: 158) and who blur the boundaries of fashion and art often reflect and update these handmade capacities.

Certainly, fashion unfolds its multi-sensory and communicative potential only when worn on the body, a long-neglected concept in fashion studies (Entwistle 2000: 4–5). Karen Tranberg Hansen introduces the terms 'fashioning' and 'fashionability' to 'capture the performative qualities of dress practice' and to stress the experiential dimension of dress, in terms of both wearing and viewing (Hansen 2013: 6). She refers to fashionability as 'an aesthetic sensibility involving discerning skills from a variety of sources in creating an overall look that results in pride, pleasure, and experiences of feeling good' (Hansen 2003: 303). Thus, there is more to fashion than the various garments a person might wear, which is reflected in the notion of style. While, following Daniel Miller, fashion implies the 'dissolution of individual identity through appearance', style 'appears as a highly personalized and self-controlled expression of particular aesthetic ability' (Miller 1994: 74) and 'a personalized context for fashion items' (Miller 1994: 75). The recent fashion video *Looku* (2021) directed by Sunny Dolat and Noel Kasyoka from The Nest Collective also engages in the matter of style which they intimately relate to their city Nairobi as the English subtitles to the comment in urban Swahili convey:

> Style. It means different things to different people. To some, it's clothes. To others, it's how you speak. Some use it to make a statement. To some it is how they walk . . . how they relax at the end of a long day. Just how you carry yourself. In our area . . . Style is all the above. We call it 'Style', 'Stylé', 'Fashion', 'Looku'. It's got many names. But it's all the same thing. . . . And our . . . style is one of the few things we own in this city.[5]

Such self-definitions resonate with Carol Tulloch's use of the term 'style' (in a diasporic context) as agency (2010: 276). They are crucial when reasoning about terms such as fashion and style that, alongside others, are 'in need of reconsideration to progress critical thinking on dress' (2010: 274).

Fashion and textile (research) in time and space

Fashion in its spatial and temporal references has played only a marginal role in previous research on Africa's art and visual cultures. Nonetheless, earlier art historical and art anthropological studies on the aesthetic and symbolic premises of textile production

exist – notably analyses of materiality, technique, form and iconography of specific tissues (Picton and Mack 1979; Sieber 1972). Research since the 1980s has attempted to identify aesthetic principles and specific visual qualities of selected textiles (Adams 1989; Renne 2010), and clothing has been examined as a marker of political, religious and ethnic identity in pre- and postcolonial contexts (Allman 2004; Eicher 1995; Masquelier 1996). Fashion design in its globally connected form has, however, been established as a research topic only in the last decade. In particular, Victoria Rovine's seminal studies on Bamako's fashion history (2008) and *African Fashion, Global Style* (2015) not only underscored the narrative qualities of fashion design but also made a strong point for the integration of local, 'indigenous' sartorial practices in the field of fashion studies. Besides her studies, other (survey) editions (Gott and Loughran 2010; Jennings 2011; Pivin and Fall 1997; van der Plas and Willemsen 1998) have addressed the dynamics of change within clothing and fashion practices and were important cornerstones for our research.

Historical research has shown the crucial role of textiles as vehicles for transcultural and transregional transmissions of ideas and forms (Benjamin 2016; Kriger 2006; LaGamma and Giuntini 2009; Rabine 2002). Trans-Saharan trading in fabrics is one example, others refer to the cotton waxprints travelling across Asia, Europe and Africa (Gott, Loughran, and Quick 2017; Picton 1995) or to the trade in *African Lace* (Plankensteiner and Adediran 2010), the material worlds of the Indian Ocean (Machado, Fee and Campbell 2018), or the more recent circulation of patterns and cloth within Chinafrique fashionscapes (Sylvanus 2016). Rabine (2002) has also investigated the global circulation of African fashion in relation to three cities: Dakar, New York and Nairobi, showing that informal economies, eminent in many African cities, provide channels for the dispersal of fashion trends and practices of dress; she explains how the visual codes of the 'African' or 'authentic' transform depending on the context in question.

Besides research on textile histories and the circulations of fabrics and sartorial styles, an important impulse for our project stems from debates on fashion cities and fashion's world cities (Breward and Gilbert 2006). Since the 'spatial turn' in fashion studies (Breward and Gilbert 2006; Lehnert 2012; Potvin 2009), the interconnections between the fashion industries and genuine urban cultures have been examined predominantly within a Euro-American context (Steele 1998). Until very recently, fashion capitals in the west like Paris, London, and New York were perceived as the only major trendsetting sites for global fashion design.[6] The recognition of polycentric fashion industries is gradually gaining ground – with the allegedly historic centres in Paris, London, Milan, New York and Tokyo being increasingly interlinked with or bypassed by fashion cities in the Global South and a planetary urbanism (Brand and Teunissen 2005; Breward and Gilbert 2006). Research has neglected the fact that, alongside these key urban centres, a number of fashion cities have emerged in Africa which contain both the networks and the necessary infrastructure required to produce, distribute and present fashion on the local and international market. Furthermore, research on western fashion centres often followed a 'cultural economy approach' (Gilbert and Casadei 2020: 26–7) that led to studies concentrating on fashion cities' typologies of possible urban fashion formations.

Although it is important to anchor fashion design in its respective economies and production conditions, our approach focuses more on the visual, sensual and aesthetic as well as on the social and cultural aspects that link cities and sartorial cultures in time and space. On the one hand, work begun on the interrelationship between the Afropolis and its artistic production and the urban imaginaries (Pinther, Förster and Hanussek 2012) is partly continued. On the other hand, our approach is informed by the work of Christopher Breward (2004, 2011) on the merging of fashion and cities. Resonant with Joanna Grabski's theoretical paradigm of the 'art world city' which she developed for Dakar's art world to 'account for the imbrication of the creative economy and the urban environment as well as the interplay of local and global dynamics' (Grabski 2017: 3), we ask not only how fashion and fashion makers are shaped by the city and the sensual and material experiences associated with the urban but also how they project and add new visions and images to the city and thus contribute to its ever-changing constitution. Each city thus provides the setting and stage for sartorial displays and, at the same time, is often referenced in the designs of tailors, stylists and designers – categories that are frequently blurred and transcended in contemporary fashion contexts on the African continent. Thus, the relation between fashion and city is a reciprocal one: fashionable styles are important devices to create and recreate the sense of urban spaces as well as each city's distinctive atmospheres, and styles add important layers to fashion design.

Cities as crossroads of ideas, forms and fashionable styles

In the African context, this area of inquiry has been limited to a few cities in North Africa (Jansen 2014; Pool 2016) as well as to Dakar (Grabski 2009; Mustafa 2006; Rabine 1997), and also partly to Accra (Richards 2016). Research that systematically relates the themes 'fashion and city' has come out of Johannesburg, in particular. Its fashion industry is one of the few on the continent that has been promoted through political and structural programmes such as the establishment of a genuine 'Fashion District' relying on a competitive city branding (Rogerson 2006). Fashion and sartorial styles, as Nuttal (2008), Farber (2010), Rovine (2015) and most recently de Greef (2019) among others have demonstrated, were and still are considered an eminent arena for social negotiation in times of resistance and transition and of political and social upheaval. South African fashion labels such as Stoned Cherrie and Sun Goddess have picked up styles from the past in order to overcome the former marginalization of certain groups and to create alternative points of references for the future (Nuttall 2008). As a literal material mode of accessing the past, Stoned Cherrie inserted images from the *Drum Magazine* in contemporary designs, remembering and celebrating Sophiatown's counterculture of the 1950s.

Likewise, Loxion Kulcha created a popular fashion icon for urban youth by reworking garments like the miners' overalls associated with the townships during apartheid (and which were looked down on by the white mainstream culture). A permanent remix and a selective crossover finally led to an upgrade in value and a re-coding of hitherto

marginalized styles into a 'high-urban experience' (Nuttall 2008: 437). More recently, South African fashion activists the Sartists set out to uncover hitherto untold stories of 'urban black sports culture, black identity, and forgotten heroes' (Kungwane cited in de Greef 2019: 1). In Kinshasa, a rudimentary urban infrastructure continually generated new techniques of the body and fashionable styles. In this context, Filip de Boeck (2004) cites bodybuilding as the only available option to 'build' and thereby emphasize the potential of fashion for identity 'construction'. The *sapeurs*, who move between Kinshasa, Brazzaville, Brussels and Paris, embody this potential to the extreme (Friedman 1990; Gondola 2010).

These examples highlight that fashion and the cultures of dress in Africa are to a large extent urban phenomena and very much shaped by their often-cosmopolitan conditions. Cities like Kaduna, Kano, Kumasi or Foumban (Rovine 2015: 10–11) as well as Saint-Louis in Senegal were historic fashion centres in their own right – with (female) fashion trendsetters such as the precolonial Senegalese *signares* (Jones 2013) or the Asante *premanfoo* (Gott 2009) and with a long history of adapting and integrating external cultural forms and practices into local sartorial practices. Urban centres in Africa, pre- and postcolonial alike, were and are shaped by transnationalism, transculturalism and hybridity (Förster 2017; Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Simone 2004). They are veritable crossroads in the circulation of ideas, forms and fashionable styles. This is where fashion, from streetwear to haute couture, from ready-made clothes to bespoke garments, are being produced and consumed. They are the places of site-specific practices, relying on existing forms of body modifications, established yet updated textile techniques and materials or an understanding of clothes suitable for an individual person. 'Apart from the social, aesthetic, and other implications of clothing', John Picton writes, 'there are the clothes of masked performers as well as, in given circumstances, of houses and shrines' (2010: 290). Cities are the nodes where globally circulating trends or second-hand clothes from Europe are adapted according to local needs and aesthetics (Hansen 2000) – and they are the nodes from which new styles are distributed to smaller cities and rural areas. Conversely, fashion designers working in African cities take their designs to the world (Rabine 2002). At the same time, cities like Dakar, Lagos, Kampala or Johannesburg are firmly embedded in reciprocal relations with smaller towns and rural regions in their respective countries. In particular, with craft playing an ever-bigger role in contemporary fashion designs in Africa and beyond, rural communities have also (re) gained attention.

'Fashion and Styles in African Cities': The project

Fashioning the Afropolis stems from the joint research project 'Fashion and Styles in African Cities' by art historians and anthropologists from Germany, Nigeria and Cameroon. We started from the assumption that fashion cultures are linked to their cities in manifold ways. We asked how the visual and material cultures of the urban centres affect fashion and fashion designers, and how, for example, a lack of infrastructure shapes the work

of designers. How is each city represented through patterns, materials and accessories? How do city and fashion mutually condition and infiltrate each other? We deal with the spatiality of fashion systems and look at the various ways fashion and city intersect. What are the respective places 'for fashion as social practice, body language, narration of time, and a means of communication of style' (Calefato 2019: 31)? Until the end of the twentieth century, the shop, the gallery and the theatre in Europe were the arena for fashionable appearance. What comparable locations and events can be identified in Dakar or Lagos? What role does fashion play in the construction of identities and self-representation of the manifold urban social milieus? How does it influence and challenge notions of gender in predominantly heteronormative societies? What is the role of sartorial styles in protest movements? Furthermore, we consider the transnational relationships of fashion designers and producers, and processes of globalization, along with the growing importance of new media and online social networks.

During the course of our research, we were confronted with the notion and imagination of certain attitudes and beliefs about each city's specificity. Far from conceiving cities as possessing an all-encompassing and unique *Eigenart* that would have an effect on each and every part, we strove to find connections between distinctive metropolitan cultures of consumption, shops and shopping, the wearing of fashionable dress in the spaces of the city, the long history of representation and media. The dynamism of each city seems to be particularly evident in its form of mobility and public transport – with Dakar's *car rapide*, the Lagos *danfo* and the *matatu* in Nairobi, all lavishly converted and designed, the latter being put centre stage in the fashion clip *Looku* produced by The Nest Collective. Thus, it is hardly surprising that these icons appear again and again as design references or backgrounds in fashion photography.

In order to contribute to the above-mentioned debates, we aimed at empirical research that systematically, and with concrete examples, captures the interplay between fashion and the city, between the various actors, as well as the importance of the media. Our joint research project started with a regional comparative approach in three cities: Dakar, Douala and Lagos, selected because these West African countries share a long and rich history of exchange in fashion and textiles. While Lagos and Dakar have long established themselves as creative capitals with a global scope, it is only in recent years that the urban fashion scene in Douala has taken shape. Bearing in mind that research on urban Africa should not focus solely on megacities (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1993), comparing Lagos as a megacity and Dakar and Douala as medium-sized cities proved to be highly fruitful.

DAKAR: All over the continent, fashion made in Senegal is associated with elegant beauty, and Senegalese tailors are widely accredited with inventiveness and creativeness. The rich history of fashion in Senegal is intimately linked to an early cosmopolitanism connected to a taste for the new in the fashioning of the persona. Soon after trading posts had been established along the Atlantic coast in the mid-eighteenth century, they evolved into urban centres, most of all Saint-Louis. Up to today, this city celebrates and re-enacts its cosmopolitan past and the heritage of the signares. These female entrepreneurs functioned as cultural mediators between local and European middlemen and traders

during the epoch of the slave trade and they exercised considerable influence on urban culture in terms of social life, fashion and architecture (Jones 2019). When the seat of the former colonial capital of French West Africa was transferred from Saint-Louis to Dakar in 1890, the latter soon took on the role of a fashion capital too. In the context of French colonial assimilation politics, the European suit was part of the sartorial convention and habitus for the men of the *évolué* class before independence and also later on during the presidency of Léopold Sédar Senghor, whereas women acted more freely in terms of fashion. They navigated between wearing so-called traditional and western-style fashion as well as *tradi-moderne*, which alludes to a combination of both styles. A prime example is the voluminous fashionable *robe bloc* which became famous in the 1940s and 1950s and was, like any new style and fabric, more popular in Dakar than anywhere else in the country (Konaté 2009: 239). Associated with Lamine Gueye's political party Bloc Africain, the robe bloc showed how urban women in Senegal used clothing to 'reinvent themselves in powerful new ways' (Konaté 2009: 240).

The importance of a public self that strives to represent to the highest standards is also reflected in the concept and practice of *sañse*, a Wolof expression derived from the French *(se) changer* that points towards a key aspect of fashion, namely change. The linguist Deborah Heath analyses sañse as a code and context of performance (1992: 20), as an arrangement of social relations and as a starting point for the construction of social identity and distinction: 'Sañse forges the link between having and being, displaying both wealth and social identity' (1992). Seminal studio photographers in Senegal like Mama Casset and Meïssa Gaye produced unique insights into the practice of sañse over a period of one century (Paoletti and Biro 2016).

That lifestyles and fashions from Senegal far exceeded the country's border and became vanguards for the Francophone world is also reflected in the groundbreaking magazine *BINGO*. Founded in 1953 and published in Dakar and Paris, it was the first glossy magazine dedicated to a Francophone audience that 'saw themselves as cosmopolitan even when limited material resources made this an imaginative rather than realized project' (Jaji 2013: 116–17).

The steady colonial comparison between Paris and Dakar, which, before independence in 1960, was often called the 'Paris of Africa', has long waned and Dakar has transformed itself from a colonial to a global city (Mustafa 2006). What is more, the fashion city of Dakar has eclipsed the fashion city of Paris as Senegalese living in the European, North American and Asian diasporas are strongly geared to the latest fashion trends created in Dakar. With Dakar being the epicentre in terms of fashion production, distribution and consumption, a fashion system in its own right has been established in the country which, at the same time, strongly relies on the import of fabrics, mainly from Europe and Asia.

Fashion in Dakar was exploding in the 1980s during a period of great financial instability in which urban middle-class women, 'ordinary cosmopolitans' as referred to by Hudita Nura Mustafa, entered tailoring as entrepreneurs (1998: 30). She convincingly argues that the making, circulation and display of fashion resulted from this crisis and, up to today, functions as both strategy and expression – in a city whose fashion signature