

ten articulations." (Burman and Turbine 2002: 375) More concerned about social structure social scientists relegated clothing to the minor status of "accessory in symbolic, structural, or semiotic explanations". (Hansen 2004: 370) In more recent times, a change of paradigms is taking place with a general shift towards social agency and practice. Fashion in Africa is of high relevance and interest in the field of cultural studies as it is situated at the crossroads of several interconnecting developments: between history and contemporariness, between politics, economics, and culture, between subjectivity, individuality, and sociality, between locality and globality. It has emerged in the context of, and as a response to, various developments of the 20th century. The main forces were colonization, the nationalist movements before and after independence, urbanization, modernization in general, and globalization. Both local, and external, international factors were influential in the structuring of the fashion system. The main agents and leaders who made fashion an instrument of identity construction were women in urban areas, tailors and professional designers.

A Multitude of Styles – So what is African Style?

Nowadays, when strolling around a major city in Africa, you will be surprised to see that there is not only one style or even a "typical" style which could immediately be identified as the definitive African style. (Hendrickson 1996, van der Plas 1998, Bauer 2001, Rabine 2002, Allman 2004, Grosfilley 2004, Picton 2004, Geoffroy-Schneiter 2005). Instead, your eyes are struck by a multitude of fashions and styles, appearing side by side. There are European or Western looks; some are so called "originals" imported from Europe, while others are locally made copies. (Scheld 2003, Bauer 2005 a and b, Ruschak 2006, 2007) Moreover, there are western inspired dress types that have turned into icons of ethnicity, in the case, for example, of the long dress of the Herero women in Southern Africa. (Durham 1995, 1999) Then you have fashionized African garments (Rovine 2004); traditional or ethnic types of dress made of hand-woven and hand-dyed cloth (Luttmann 2005 b) or of imported textiles from Europe, China or India (Eicher 2006). And, of course, there are the even more spectacular creations designed by the young generation of African fashion stylists (Grosfilley 2004, Chassany 2006; 2007).

All these styles coexist at the same time, and they may all be worn by the same person in different situations or subsequently in course of their life.

A person's income and level of education also plays a decisive role in their way of dressing. In Ghana, for instance, it seems that "European dress in West Africa is associated



Fig. 1a What makes a style worn in Africa "typical African" – the colour, the materials like leather, hand-woven or hand-dyed textiles, the patterns, or specific dress styles? – The manually painted textiles in earth colours are often referred to as typically African. What about these cloths with a bold mixture of motifs with ethical connotations? Photo: New African 1993, march: 14.