

DRESSED IN PHOTOGRAPHS: BETWEEN UNIFORMIZATION, SELF-ENHANCEMENT AND THE PROMOTION OF STARS AND LEADERS IN BAMAKO

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Cloth has been described as a powerful means of expression and articulation in relation to politics, economy, ethnicity, age and gender. In this context, Jean Allman characterizes the capacity of dress and fashion as an ‘incisive political language capable of unifying, differentiating, challenging, contesting, and dominating’ (2004: 1). The integrating aspects of dress are most visible in uniforms. They make a specific cohort recognizable and reduce individual difference within a group, thereby emphasizing their sameness (Allman 2004; Hansen 2004; Mentges and Richard 2005). The equalizing properties of uniforms contrast starkly with the individuality of most other styles of dress, which enable self-fashioning and the expression of identity and personal status for the promotion and staging of the self (Eicher 2000; Schneider 1987; Taylor 2002; cf. Hansen 2004). As part of consumption habits, clothing has been understood as a strategy for social distinction (Bourdieu 1979), an expression of a process of social self-creation (Martin 1994; Miller 1987: 215) and an attempted realization of the image of a good life (Friedman 1994: 150). In the African context, this emphasis on individual style is particularly strong in the Congolese movement of the *sapeurs*,¹ who perfect the elegance of dress when they wear the original design labels they access during their trips abroad (Friedman 1994; Gandoulou 1989; Gondola 1999; Trapido 2011). In accordance with the well-known proverb ‘clothes make people’,² it is their expensive clothes that offer them access to opportunities that do not match their status.

Clothes, however, might also ‘make’ people other than those wearing them, when uniform dress is worn as a form of praise for celebrities or political leaders, as is described in this study of decorated cloth in Bamako. During one of my trips through the city’s Grand Marché with my local assistant, Mahamadou S. Keïta, in early March 2010, I noticed a young woman in a curious costume covered with various photographs of people connected by lines (Figure 1). We asked her

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¹The *sapeur* movement emerged under the name ‘la SAPE’ (La Société des Ambianceurs et Personnes Élégantes) among the Bacongo youth in Brazzaville during the 1970s and 1980s (Gandoulou 1989; Friedman 1994). A similar movement is found under the name *mikilistes* in Kinshasa (Gondola 1999; Trapido 2011).

²The usual English equivalent of the German proverb ‘*Kleider machen Leute*’ is ‘clothes make the man’. This translation, however, is problematic as it ignores the contribution of women.



FIGURE 1 Dress for Mande Massa in the Grand Marché, 2009.

whose portraits she wore on her dress. With a proud smile, she answered that the photographs showed Mande Massa in the centre with his team of performers. She continued that she wore this dress because she greatly admired Mande Massa's radio broadcast and wanted to show her love for this presenter and his fellow actors. She also said that she was on her way to purchase this year's new cloth, from which she would make a dress to wear at the concert that Mande Massa was organizing in the Palais de la Culture. She was not alone. We soon noticed other women dressed in this most recent version of the Mande Massa fabric, decorated with new designs, colours and photographs (Figure 2).

In March 2010, Mande Massa's image was most commonly found on dresses worn by young women. However, he was not the only personality whose picture had been used as part of a dress design. We also saw women – and men, occasionally – wearing clothing and wrappers on which pictures of different personalities and celebrities, logos and brand names were printed. We saw a great variety of politicians, religious leaders, female singers (*griottes*), school founders and the Malian football team on people's bodies, with a particular density in and around the Grand Marché, the largest market in Mali's capital city. Less often we noticed brand-name commodities on a dress. The comparatively large number of such dresses raised the question of how to understand their popularity and local meanings. Should they be considered a form of uniform as they have the same image and design? Or were they a means of enhancing individuality when they differed from each other? How did the photograph and the design influence the meaning and the value of the dress? And why did we see so many women with such dresses in Bamako in 2010? Was it a passing fashion, or had such clothing been prominent for quite some time?

In this article, I will trace some elements of the history of printing photographs on cloth in Mali. While this style of dress has existed since independence, its popularity increased in the mid-2000s when various personalities in the city began to order such fabrics to enhance their visibility at specific events. I will show that,



FIGURE 2 Dress for Mande Massa in the Grand Marché, 2010.

as with uniforms, the individuality of the wearer retreats in favour of the equality of the cohort. In contrast to uniforms, however, the photographs focus attention not on equality but on the person who is represented on the dress. Nevertheless, in some contexts the owners of the dresses display individual styles and preferences in the tailoring of the garments, and this makes them different from normal uniforms. The elaborateness of the dress reflects the means invested in the tailoring and also the attention the owner is trying to garner by wearing such a dress. There is a tendency for women from poorer backgrounds to own such dresses but they do not represent a specific social category. Each of the personalities printed on a dress attracts a different group of fans or followers, and their number increases and diminishes with the popularity of the individual or logo portrayed and with his or her ability to mobilize people. The market value of the cloth, which can differ greatly from its material value (cf. Appadurai 1986), also depends on this ability and the popularity of the personalities depicted.

In order to understand the local meanings of such clothing and their popularity in the 2000s, it is first necessary to examine the wider historical and social context of its diffusion and production. I will then explore how people in Bamako perceive such clothes, whether they are acquired as a gift or a commodity, the occasions during which such clothes are worn, and the relationship between the wearer and the individual portrayed.

THE PRODUCTION OF TEXTILES WITH PRINTED IMAGES IN MALI

Cloth decorated with photographs has been observed in Africa throughout the twentieth century. A glimpse into the fabric's history will help to explain the reasons for its great popularity in Bamako in the 2000s. Decorated textiles arrived in Mali with trade from the south, from the regions closer to the

Atlantic coast, where printed cotton cloth was first imported from Europe. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Dutch and British companies produced large quantities of cotton cloth intended specifically for sale in West Africa, where it was integrated into the existing practices of displaying prestige through clothing. It also served as a store of wealth and means of exchange (Picton 1995; Steiner 1985). Decorated wax prints quickly became popular and European companies eagerly adapted their commodities to African regional preferences of quality and design (Spencer 1982: 8). Around the same time, portraits of individuals (living and deceased) began to appear on such fabrics in Africa.

The first commemorative textiles, as cloths decorated with photographs are usually termed (Picton 1995; Spencer 1982), were imported from Europe to West Africa. John Picton (1995: 29) identified the first of such textiles in Ghana, which dated back to the 1920s. One is a fancy printed cloth from 1929 with a photograph of 'Mammy', a woman who presumably was one of the successful Ghanaian market traders.³ As wax prints are generally not a suitable medium for the detailed imagery of portraits, textiles with photographs are printed on 'fancy cloth', which is cheaper to produce and printed only on one side. The quantity of fancy cloth increased with the independence movements after 1945, and has continued to grow subsequently, as it is manufactured by local textile companies (Picton 1995: 61).

After independence, national textile manufacturers in the different African countries continued to produce cloths with photographs of personalities, particularly in the political domain (see Spencer 1982, who collected a great variety of such African fabrics dating from the 1960s to the 1980s). From the 1990s onwards, the liberalization of the market and new computer technologies further facilitated the reproduction of detailed images such as photographs on textile designs (Bauer 2001: 105). This allowed more individuals to commission such fabrics. The reach of these decorated cloths did not end at the frontiers of the strongholds of Islam. The cult of human images, as we will see, did not pose a particular challenge to Muslim traditions in southern Mali. There is, however, a clear tendency for people who wear dresses featuring photographs to come more often from the savannah and forest regions south of the capital than from the Sahel regions to the north, where the large *boubous* of dyed cotton are more popular than dresses made of wax or printed cloth.

It is not known exactly when Mali began to produce fabrics with portraits. Malian cotton production (for external markets) dates from the early 1900s (Roberts 1996), when Bamako grew into a city during French colonial times.⁴ The expansion of cloth manufacturing began in the 1950s, when the French Company for the Development of Textile Fibres (Compagnie Française pour le

³Picton found them in the Newton Banks Archives. At the time, these textiles were produced in Europe (mainly by Vlisco in Haarlem, Netherlands, and ABC near Manchester) and commissioned by African traders. In Ghana, they were sold by the United Africa Company (UAC). The second textile from 1929 carries a photograph of Nana Premeh, the Asantehene. Shortly afterwards, in 1931, an Ewe chief (Fiaga of Peki) and the Prince of Wales had their photographs on Ghanaian textiles (Picton 1995: 29). Printed textiles exported to Africa are normally of two types: wax prints (wax batiks) and non-wax prints (fancy or roller prints) (Picton 1995: 24–9; Steiner 1985: 91–5; Adenaike 1998).

⁴Bamako grew from a few hundred inhabitants in the 1850s to 1 million in the 1990s, and during the past couple of decades its estimated population has increased to 2 million (Meillassoux 1969: 4–9; Brand 2004: 61; Philippe 2009).

Développement des Fibres Textiles or CFDT) was responsible for facilitating cotton production in southern Mali. In 1974, at a time when cloth with photographs was already popular in Bamako, the Malian government and the CFDT agreed to create the Malian Company for Textile Development (Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles or CMDT) with several sub-factories. After independence in the 1960s, crowds of people wore the image of Modibo Keita on their gowns to support his socialist propaganda (Rillon 2010; see Ayina 1987 for Togo). Malick Sidibé's photographs also document young people wearing dresses with portraits at parties (Magnin 1998: 14, 31); however, nothing is known about the identity of those portrayed. Followers of Muslim saints were seen wearing similar fabrics in the 1980s (Soares 2004: 91).

Advances in the 1990s led to the partial privatization of the textile companies and eventually to a boom in decorated fabrics.⁵ Although the Compagnie Malienne des Textiles (COMATEX) remained state-owned, another cotton-processing company, Industrie Textile du Mali (ITEMA), was put up for sale.⁶ It was bought in 2004 by a Malian entrepreneur, Bakary Cisée, who had returned from Côte d'Ivoire during the civil war at a time when the Malian cotton industry was still performing rather well. He named the enterprise Bakary Textile Commerce Industries, commonly known as BATEX-CI in Bamako.⁷ Even though it faces competition from manufacturers from other countries, particularly from cheap Chinese textiles, BATEX-CI's customers appreciate its high-quality products. COMATEX and BATEX-CI each work together with special shops in different parts of the Grand Marché in Bamako where they sell their products to clients and traders; the latter resell them in smaller shops, and to petty traders who bring them to customers in the market or in the city's main streets.

State representatives more usually procure their textiles (with images) from the state-owned company, particularly those intended for state-related events. Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT), President of Mali from 2002 to 2012, had his photograph printed on cloth in the hope of re-forging Malian national identity (Figure 3). In spring 2010, the state-owned shop displayed several types of cloth: one for Women's Day, one with the image of the (former) Malian head of

⁵Some 60 per cent of the CMDT's capital came from the Malian government and 40 per cent from the CFDT. Mali's relatively high cotton production continues to be supported by a number of policies: namely, guaranteed purchase, a fixed floor price, and credit for agricultural inputs (Teeft 2000; Moseley 2008: 84–6).

⁶In the 1980s, the ITEMMA printed several fancy cloths; one of them had a woman lamenting '*Si je savais*' while the other had money and gold bars printed on it (Picton 1995: 126, 128). Like the CMDT plantations, the COMATEX factory is situated at Segou. Meanwhile, 80 per cent of COMATEX is owned by the Chinese company COVEC.

⁷BATEX-CI had about 745 employees in 2005. Before then, the state-owned company used to produce 10,000,000 metres of printed cloth annually; since privatization, the figure has been 23,000,000 metres, according to the article 'BATEX-CI remplace l'ITEMA', *Afribone*, 7–11 March 2005: <<http://www.afribone.com/spip.php?article431>>, accessed 9 March 2009. At that time, the owner also had textile companies in Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Angola, Togo, Ghana and Congo-Brazzaville. Between 1998 and 2005, Mali was the largest cotton exporter in Africa, with an average production of 200,000 tons per annum until the prices on the world market fell, which led to financing problems and to farmers refusing to cultivate cotton. This is one reason why BATEX-CI presently receives only 20 per cent of the cotton it processes from within the country and imports the rest.



FIGURE 3 Textile featuring the former Malian president, Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT), 2010.

state with the (now also former) Chinese president Hu Jintao, and one portraying ATT and Ann Veneman, the representative of UNICEF. They also sold great quantities of cloth with the logo of the fiftieth anniversary of Mali's independence and Women's Day (see also Pommerolle and Ngaméni, this issue).⁸ Other individuals preferred to order cloth from BATEX-CI because, as I was told repeatedly, they work quickly and produce high-quality textiles with the desired design.

BATEX-CI began the production of textiles with photographs in 2007. First they portrayed the religious leader Haïdara, then the radio presenter Mande Massa and the *griotte* singer Babani Koné, followed by merchants, other religious leaders and school founders. In 2010, BATEX-CI offered a wide range of textiles with photographs: personalities portrayed included two radio presenters, Mande Massa and Dramane Djibo, well-known *griottes*, such as Djeneba Seck, Chéché Dramé and Nahoua Doumbia, and the singer Salif Keïta. They also produced a textile with images of the national football team (Figure 4), which was commissioned by the Association de Football du Mali, and two with the American President Barack Obama's portrait – one that showed Obama and his slogan 'Yes we can' (Figure 5) and the other with a picture of Obama and his wife, Michelle. I was told that the company had earlier designed fabrics with the image of the president's wife, with the Ouassoulou singer Oumou Sangare, and with many others that had long since sold out. A selection of textiles was displayed in front of the shop and visible from the market street.

BATEX-CI actively promoted the production of fabrics with photographs and sent out a mediator to approach public personalities and stars to provide their

⁸The textiles with the logo of the fiftieth anniversary of Mali's independence were very popular. We saw people wearing fiftieth anniversary dresses in 2010 in all corners of town, old and young of both sexes. Institutions and companies were free to use the anniversary logo in their own advertisements.



FIGURE 4 Textile illustrated with ATT and the Malian football team, 2010.



FIGURE 5 Dress with Obama and his slogan 'Yes we can', 2010.

likeness for textiles that the company would then offer to sell for them against royalties for using their image. This strategy has contributed greatly to the proliferation of photographs on textiles in Bamako. BATEX-CI prints these fabrics at its own cost and sells them for the celebrities in its shop. It also pays the artist royalties of 10,000 FCFA (approximately £13) for each bale sold, in exchange for permission to print her or his image. All parties are supposed to win from such a deal and the company assumes the risk of production and the sale itself.

An institution or individual wishing to have such a cloth places an order with either of the Malian textile companies that produce the fabrics, when they can

afford to order the minimum of five bales.⁹ They explain how the textile should look and provide the photographs. Half of the bill is paid in advance, and the other half is paid when the customer receives the product. The majority of textiles with images produced by BATEX-CI are not displayed in the shop but instead go directly from the factory to the client who has commissioned them. Individuals who commission the cloth themselves usually keep the textiles and control their distribution and sale from their own premises. Examples include fabrics featuring Maggi and Jumbo products and logos, and textiles for the popular religious leader Haïdara, the migrant association of Peuls from Ouassoulou, the Guinean president, and Ouattara, the former leader of the Ivorian opposition party who became president of Côte d'Ivoire in 2011. Cloth produced by BATEX-CI quickly became well-known for its high quality, which led to the company even receiving orders from abroad. Entrepreneurs might also ask the shop to advertise the cloth or even sell it for them. For example, BATEX-CI sold the cloth with the photographs and slogans of Obama and his wife: a Malian trader had ordered the fabric and left it in the BATEX-CI shop where it quickly sold out, as he had assumed it would.

Thus, from 2007 onwards, printed cloths with photographs experienced a boom in Bamako. The production of such textiles reached its peak in 2010, when the upcoming fiftieth anniversary of independence event encouraged even more groups and entrepreneurs to display their corporate identity on fabrics, some combining their photographs and others their logo with the anniversary's logo. When I returned to Bamako in 2011, only a few cloths with photographs remained in the shops. Sellers complained that there were too few new orders because 'all the money had been spent in the previous year on the anniversary celebrations'. The slack period worsened after the coup d'état in spring 2012.

In short, textiles printed with photographs have existed in Mali as well as in other African countries since independence. In contrast to other African countries, such textiles became particularly widespread in the 2000s in Mali; in this period, the liberated economic conditions and evolving technology facilitated private production and complex design applications and spurred the owner of BATEX-CI and other cultural entrepreneurs, from social sectors such as politics, religion, media, art, education and commerce, to produce such fabrics. These circumstances contributed to the rise of this textile fashion in Bamako. It can be termed a fashion since it disappeared as quickly as it emerged due to the political crisis.

EVENT-RELATED CLOTH AND COMMUNICATION WITH DESIGNS

A closer look at the cloth and its decoration is necessary to understand its local uses and meanings. These fancy cloths are composed of a basic design and are available in a few colours that act as the background on which further images

⁹The minimum order is five bales with BATEX-CI. Wholesalers who want to buy more than five bales place an order with the company. Purchases of fewer than five bales of a textile are mediated by the company's shop at the Grand Marché, which has been in existence since 2006. Individuals who wish to order textiles with photographs usually negotiate with the company shop first.

are arranged; these can include names, proverbs, logos and photographs. The designs are repeated across the cloth and are inspired by those on wax prints and other textile types from the portfolio of fabrics that BATEX-CI produces. These background designs consist of small floral or geometric patterns that are not supposed to be dominant or convey specific meanings. For example, *bogolan* designs, which are produced by cotton-processing companies in imitation of the well-known Malian mud cloth,¹⁰ are not found on these fancy cloths.

For African consumers, fabrics with geometric and floral designs – appreciated internationally for their aesthetic qualities – are often enriched with photographs as well as with other ‘speaking’ designs, images and symbols of modernity such as mobile phones, air conditioners or televisions. They might include anything from globally recognizable pictures to designs with culturally specific meanings. Proverbs and images of metaphorical statements printed on fabrics convey messages about interpersonal relationships that cannot be expressed verbally in the context of social hierarchies and that are only decipherable locally. Such fabrics with specific meanings can also be found in Ghana (Domowitz 1992); another example is the *kanga* cloths on the Swahili coast (Beck 2001). Fabrics on which photographs and logos are printed might be situated somewhere between culturally specific meaning and global comprehension depending on the degree of notoriety a personality, logo or brand has attained.

In contrast to fabrics decorated with floral and geometric designs, symbols of modernity, proverbs and metaphorical images, which have a longer-term appeal, the cloths with photographs are produced for and refer to a specific event such as a concert, the visit of an important personality or a religious ceremony, which means they have a large but shorter-term audience. Therefore, in Bamako, these cloths with photographs are called *textiles référentielles* or *textiles événementielles* (referential or event-related cloths), as the sellers in the textile shops explained.

They are cheap and have a limited lifespan or period of relevance. As a student in Bamako told me: ‘It is like a fashion – they are short-lived and not expensive. When one year’s edition is sold out, it is gone.’ In their endeavour to profit from them, the entrepreneurs with whose image the textiles are decorated look for opportunities to integrate them in recurring events, such as annual concerts or ceremonies, so that a new cloth has to be acquired again and again. After the event, these dresses serve in everyday contexts for housework or market visits only, continually advertising the person portrayed. In Bamako, they do not commemorate a person posthumously, unlike in Burkina Faso or Ghana, where, in addition to textiles with the image of the president, such fabrics are often produced for funerals to venerate deceased individuals and are kept by family members for remembrance (Spencer 1982).¹¹

¹⁰‘Le *bogolan*, c’est le textile qui parle,’ a seller of BATEX-CI cloth told me in spring 2010. Hunters are said to have worn the mud-died *bogolan* shirts, which had protective powers for them. In the past, the Malian *bogolan* had specific meanings, known to initiates only. This pre-colonial communicative power of textile designs was described by Calame-Griaule (1986). Mali has become well known for this cloth, which is produced in workshops and sold to global consumers (Rovine 2001).

¹¹I carried out interviews on the topic in Burkina Faso in 2012. In the South West Region of Cameroon, such cloth is more usually ordered on the occasion of a chief’s installation festivities (Röschenthaler 2011: 408–9).

Such a fabric is a medium, like a second skin, that communicates and helps to advertise the personality whose image it carries. It also acts as an object that reminds people of the event at which it was worn. Many of these dresses periodically reappear in the public space in different colours and designs, indicating the temporal proximity to the event they advertise. Days and weeks in advance and afterwards, these dresses enable fans to recognize each other and draw attention to the event in a far livelier manner than the immobile billboards could ever achieve. The dresses also animate communication while people move around town. Wearing a cloth is a statement of belonging to a group or a promotion of an idea. It expresses a readiness to be identified with the image on the dress. Closely connected to these meanings is the value of the cloth, which largely depends on what or who is depicted on it. The fabric's market value reflects how such cloth is perceived, whether it changes hands as a commodity or a gift, and, to a lesser degree, whether it becomes a uniform or an individually styled dress.

BETWEEN UNIFORMITY AND INDIVIDUALITY: DECORATED CLOTH ACQUIRED BY OBLIGATION OR PERSUASION OR DUE TO ADMIRATION

The dresses made from decorated cloth reflect a range of social relationships that influence their respective meanings and value. I will show that the value of the cloth is connected to the form of acquisition – that is, by persuasion or obligation, or due to admiration and feelings of support. There is a tendency for the dresses of associations, which require their members to wear uniforms of wax cloth at certain events, to have the same designs and forms with little individual variation but not to carry portraits. Rather, dresses with portraits are worn in contexts where larger heterogeneous groups of people meet more voluntarily and the uniform with the photograph is often combined with individually styled dresses. The popularity of the person portrayed increases the market or sign value of the cloth and, in some contexts, encourages the individuality of the dresses, which reflects the amount of money wearers are ready to invest to tailor the cloth into clothing.

Uniforms and the acquisition of textiles by obligation

In Bamako, most of the uniforms used by home-town associations do not display photographs of individuals, particularly when all the participants have the same status. There are many such associations in Bamako. Migrants, even those who have lived there for generations, keep contact with their home villages because, in an insecure environment such as the African city, people continue to rely on their social networks from the countryside, regardless of whether they are kin, clan, the ethnic group or a social category¹² (Little 1965; 1973; Vaa *et al.* 1989;

¹²To these categories belong the free-born of different ethnic backgrounds, artists of different specializations (the praise singers or *griots* included), and the descendants of slave families (together, these three categories form a social whole). The families of traders and *marabouts* play a supplementary role in this social arrangement (Schulz 2001; Diawara 1996; 2003; Hoffman

2001). In Mali, such associations do not reproduce social categories (such as artisans, freeborn or former slaves) but rather they transcend them, reflecting the same regional origin or common social or urban professional interests. Migrants from abroad (particularly those from countries to the south) also form such associations. At festivities where members of the association celebrate together, they often wear uniforms of printed wax cloth with the same colour and design. When such uniforms are ordered from a textile company, all members are obliged to contribute to the production costs and subsequently buy the cloth before the festivities.

Associations' uniforms are decorated with a photograph of a member only when he or she is an outstanding individual or public personality. In such cases, these photographs begin to indicate an asymmetry in social relations. For example, members of the association for the Guinean migrants in Bamako had a uniform depicting the president of Guinea-Conakry in 2010¹³ and, in 2010, those from northern Côte d'Ivoire had dresses with the image of Ouattara, the former leader of the opposition party. An example in which the popular personality of an association declined to have his photograph printed on a textile is the well-known photographer Malick Sidibé. In 2010, the 'Association des ressortissants pour le développement des Yallonkoro Soloba', which unites Peul migrants from the Malian region of Ouassoulou in Bamako and of which he is a member, wanted to celebrate Sidibé's achievements, for which he had received a trophy. The members organized a concert in the garden of the Palais de la Culture in March 2010. For the event, they ordered a cloth that depicted the trophy and Sidibé's name, but not his portrait. They paid the advance and then bought the cloth to reimburse the association for its expenses. Women and men alike wore clothes that were made from the textile but varied slightly in style (Figure 6). Some people also wore T-shirts with his photograph.¹⁴ The goal of the textile was to raise funds to finance the event, not to make a profit.

Founders of private schools also require their students to acquire uniforms. Several school founders have profited from the business potential of such cloth. They order a textile decorated with their photograph and sell it at the beginning of the school year. The pupils' parents have to buy the decorated cloth to provide their children with the obligatory school uniforms. The individual differences in the uniforms are reduced here to a minimum and the cloth is produced and sold to make profit. This example also implies asymmetry between the popular figure and those wearing the clothes, as was the case with the previously mentioned political leaders and their followers who came from the same home region.

2000). The 'Mande world' includes the present states of Mali, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, the Gambia, Senegal, southern Mauritania, northern Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and western Burkina Faso. The uniforms of home-town associations, professional groups and rotating savings and credit associations are widely known but are often found in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Women have been reported to be more active in associations than men. Personal networks are particularly important for women, serving to build relationships among different families and friends (Brand 2004: 79; Vaa *et al.* 1989).

¹³Many of the Guinean women sell Western textiles for the young at the southern part of the Grand Marché.

¹⁴The photograph is reproduced on a transparent cling film that is attached to a white shirt.



FIGURE 6 Concert in honour of Malick Sidibé, 2010.

Cloth disseminated as gifts worn as boubous and wrappers

Fabrics with the photographs of heads of state are found in many African countries (see Spencer 1982). Heads of state often face difficulties encouraging the population to buy fabric decorated with their portrait, and so they often give the cloths as promotional gifts that are usually distributed shortly before an important event. Most people told me that they were reluctant to wear clothes with such portraits, and only did this when the leader of their own political party was represented or when he was from their home region. I was also told that these textiles were mainly produced for women, and men were often given decorated T-shirts instead. Some politicians even provided the women with the money for the tailor to ensure that they would be able to wear the textile and not just put it in their cupboard, complaining that they cannot afford a dressmaker.

Merchants also followed suit and ordered cloths with their brands. Merchants, however, have never placed their portrait on the cloth, only their brands and logos. Like politicians, they try to oblige followers to wear dresses with their brands and logos, and distribute the cloth with their brand-name products as promotional gifts.¹⁵ Lobo Dramera is one such entrepreneur. In 2007, he ordered textiles decorated with his brands from BATEX-CI. His good customers received the 3 metres needed to make the classical women's dress – wrapper, blouse and head-tie – transforming the woman, so to speak, into a mobile human billboard. In spring 2010, Dramera began to distribute another cloth, which was decorated with his company logo, the logo of the fiftieth anniversary of Mali's independence and a

¹⁵During national fairs – in Mali, the annual fair is called the *Foire Exposition Internationale de Bamako* (FEBAK) – companies often order textiles with their logos and images of their products to decorate their stand. Their employees wear costumes made from the cloth during the fair.



FIGURE 7 Fabric showing Dramera's Santa Lucia spaghetti together with a logo for Mali's fiftieth anniversary, 2010.

package of Santa Lucia spaghetti (for which he has the sole licence of importation from Italy) (Figure 7).

Both merchants and politicians make promotional gifts to people in an attempt to persuade them to accept the gift – acceptance suggests a partial commitment – and wear the textiles by way of reciprocation. Customers agreeing to do this would, in effect, be promoting the products or political ideas of the suppliers – but they seemed reluctant to do so. In contrast to textiles that display photographs of stars, it was rare to see people wearing cloths printed with local brands or politicians. Where women did so at all, it was as simple *boubous* or wrappers rather than paying for a tailor to make them up – as was the case with fabric bearing photographs of stars or radio presenters. Wearing such a cloth appeared to evoke less pride.

Individual dresses from cloth bought because of admiration for a star

Textiles with photographs demonstrate their potential most powerfully when individuals voluntarily spend their money to own them and wear tailor-made dresses using them to express their admiration for the personality depicted on the cloth, be it a religious leader, a singer or a radio presenter.

In 2010, various church groups and a number of Muslim preachers such as Mahamane Touré and Kassim Koné sold textiles with images. The most popular and influential of the Muslim preachers is Haïdara (Schulz 2006; 2012; Soares 2005: 234–5, 252–5). Seid Cherif Ousmane Madany Haïdara is the spiritual guide of his movement, the Association Ançardine,¹⁶ and has his own mosque in the quarter of Banconi. Haïdara first ordered his textiles from China, but when

¹⁶The Ançardine association exists worldwide in twenty-four countries, and all the branches order their textiles in Mali where the centre of this Islamic movement is located. This explains why they are able to sell so many. For the different spellings of the name, see Soares (2005: 277, note 45). It should be noted here that this religious association is different from the radical



FIGURE 8 Dress featuring the religious leader Haïdara and his mosque for the Maouloud, 2010.

BATEX-CI opened, he switched to them. After delivery from the factory, the textiles are taken to his mosque. Here, the women's branch of the movement fixes the price and sells the cloths to followers and mobile traders. An entire industry has emerged around Haïdara's mosque, with tailors and dressmakers from whom people can commission a costume after the purchase of the cloth, or they can buy tailored Haïdara shirts for men. Female dresses made from such cloth are not available *prêt-à-porter* on the market.

Haïdara's textiles (Figure 8) are produced for two religious events. These are the Maouloud, the birthday of the prophet Mohammed, and the Ziyarat, the annual pilgrimage to Tamani, the home village of the movement's founder. In the past few years, Haïdara has ordered about 300 to 500 bales annually for the Maouloud, and the same quantity again for the Ziyarat. Following BATEX-CI's recommendation, the colours and designs of the textile change for every event. The textile for the Maouloud in early 2010 was available in green and blue and included his portrait, his mosque, the movement's name and the date of the event. In 2010, Haïdara was by far the biggest seller among all the textiles with images.

The popularity of dresses with images of the Muslim preachers demonstrates that, in the 2000s, followers do not have reservations about the visual portrayal of their spiritual guide.¹⁷ Haïdara's movement certainly could have decided to print the mosque and written information only, particularly in light of accusations of idolatry made against Sidi Modibo Kane Diallo of Dily in the 1980s (Soares 2004: 91–3).¹⁸

Islamist movement of the same name in northern Mali that received much attention during the Malian crisis of 2012 (see Lecocq *et al.* 2013).

¹⁷For a discussion of the use of images in Islamic culture, see Naef (2007).

¹⁸Apart from appearing on cloth, his image was also sold as a portrait and on other religious commodities (lapel buttons, badges, and so on). Reformist Muslims are Wahhabis (in the wider

Dresses that feature the picture of religious leaders are individually styled but decently cover the entire body. They differ from the dresses that have the images of singers and media figures, which exhibit the greatest individuality in style of all these dresses. Babani Koné was among the first of the *griotte* singers to have her photograph printed on a cloth, together with her name and telephone number, in 2007. The mediator of BATEX-CI approached her, she agreed, and several hundred bales with her image were produced. She received royalties for each bale the shop sold. She also acquired her cloths from the shop on consignment, and took them along to her concerts to sell them. ‘C’est vendre son image,’ some of her fans told me with admiration for her entrepreneurial skills: ‘Elle [Babani] utilise son nom pour vendre les tissus ... et elle laisse son image partout.’ Other *griottes* followed, such as Diallou Damba, Djeneba Seck, Nahoua Doumbia and the late Chéché Dramé, and also other female singers such as Oumou Sangare. Salif Keïta did so as well – but it appears that cloth depicting female singers sells better.

In 2010, two presenters on private radio stations likewise decided to have their image printed on textiles. One was Dramane Djibo from Radio Guintan, who has a large female audience and is known for his popular broadcast in which he promotes women’s rights and interests. The other, Boubacar Konaté, alias Mande Massa – the ‘Mande King’ mentioned at the start of this article who was working at Radio Djekafo at the time – was even more successful (Röschenhaler [forthcoming](#)).

Mande Massa began broadcasting in Bamako in 1996, presenting a traditional form of theatre, the *baroni*, with a team of actors (in 2010, five women and one man). He explained to me that his aim was to sensitize social norms and mediate potential conflicts in the Mande family with entertaining role-playing. His programme is a kind of local soap opera and is very popular with women. In 2006, the Malian president honoured his broadcast with an award, and, a year later, Mande Massa organized his first concert to which he invited singers and musicians to perform as well as staging some pieces of *baroni* theatre. In 2008, he brought out the first cloths with photographs of himself and his team. He ordered about fifty bales, which were quickly sold. In 2009 and 2010, he sold more than 200 bales annually (a bale has fifty pieces of 6 metres each, so this equates to costumes for at least 5,000 people). The cloth sold well, and so, before his concerts, he produces cloth every year with a different design, colour and image. So far, he has brought out five different cloths for his concerts in the Palais de la Culture – the last concert so far took place in early March 2012, a couple of weeks before the coup. Until that time, Mande Massa had the second best-selling cloth, right after Haïdara.¹⁹

The 2010 concert I attended in the Palais de la Culture sold out on the spot (3,500 tickets). Large numbers of fans wore clothing made of the relevant cloth at the event, multiplying Mande Massa’s image, with each costume tailored in a

sense of the word) (Soares 2005: 8, 181–209). In Burkina Faso, in 2012, I was also told that Muslims did not agree with placing photographs of individuals on cloth.

¹⁹In 2010, an entire bale of fancy cloth was worth 350,000 FCFA (depending on the quality), and one bale contains fifty *pièces* for two complete dresses – i.e. 100 sets of complete dresses (wrapper, blouse and head-tie). BATEX-CI sold one set of fancy cloth for 3,500 FCFA.

slightly different way. The audience members did not wear the old cloth from the previous year. An estimated 80 per cent of the audience was female, the majority young women. Some men wore Mande Massa shirts and trousers, but most of these were employed as helpers by the concert organizers. The hall vibrated with excitement when Mande Massa or one of the invited *griottes* reminded the audience of the women's important role for the nation, and when Mande Massa told them they were like the beautiful daughters and wives of the Mande King who loved their pride and beauty, and who needed their support.

Young women actively contribute to promoting the image of their stars and representing them in public spaces when they wear dresses with the same image. They have spent money not only to acquire the cloth but also to tailor the dress. Therefore, many women also indicate their love for an artist when they wear elaborately tailored dresses. In a visual way, fans and followers perpetuate the Mande social practice (carried out verbally by *griots* only) of praising or advertising venerated people. These are the kinds of acts from which commercial advertising has tried to profit, for example by creating love marks: these are brands that consumers buy because they love to identify with them (Foster 2008). As we have seen in the examples of Santa Lucia spaghetti, Maggi and Jumbo cubes, merchants as well as politicians have tried to seize this opportunity by buying decorated textiles in an attempt to encourage consumers, followers and supporters to wear them. Unlike the stars, they cannot sell these textiles in shops, and so they give them away as promotional gifts. They do not benefit directly from their sale, but can only hope to enhance their reputation or business through gift-giving. Most of the dresses with their image that their followers wear are simple in style, because people do not spend extra money to have them tailored. The stars and religious leaders, however, have been able to convert their fame into money by selling their image and making followers and fans support them in this venture. More than for the religious leaders, the dresses for the stars and media presenters clearly combine the uniform appearance defined by a specific colour and photograph with the individual styles carefully selected by the young women.

People's voluntary decisions to make the image of individual personalities their second skin does not amount to simple uniformity. It differs from a context in which one is obliged to acquire and wear a uniform because of membership of an association or a school, and/or because of a commitment to express belonging and corporate unity at a specific event. Whereas religious gatherings do not seem to encourage individual styles of dress, events hosted by media presenters and stars' concerts do. Here, the individuality in the tailoring of the dresses reflects the admiration (and the financial possibilities) of the wearer, who seeks out the opportunity to stand out as a fan in order to attract the attention of their preferred star.

DRESSES WITH PHOTOGRAPHS: A FEMALE POPULAR CULTURE

By attending the concert and wearing the cloth with a portrait, the young women express their love for the artist in a visual way. By wearing a dress that bears the same image, fans and followers express their belonging to a spontaneous group whose members come from various parts of the town and who have no common regional or ethnic background. These new forms of sociality differ from more obligatory forms of belonging to regional associations and social

categories. This belonging is driven by a different sentiment than affiliation to a professional or home-town association or a school. Instead, it reflects a sense of belonging to an ‘imagined community’, which in this case might rather be termed a ‘community of sentiment’ (Appadurai 1990; Schulz 2002).²⁰ These new forms of gathering take place in an urban context and highlight the fact that the city is a privileged place of cultural invention and for the creation of popular cultures (Barber 1987; Fabian 1998; Falola and Salm 2005), and an arena of symbolization (Amin and Graham 1997: 415). Events such as Mande Massa’s concert open up new forms of sociality in the city and instance Karin Barber’s idea of new forms of public in an urban context (Barber 1997; 2007: 137–74).²¹ The women who attend such events do not necessarily know each other – unlike the members of the home-town associations – and they know their star only through his radio broadcast and as a media personality, not as a person from a specific region in Mali.

The women who gather at such concerts represent communities of Mande Massa and other radio broadcasters’ listeners. When they wear the dresses with Mande Massa’s portrait, they recognize each other in urban space. My research shows that these women have come from less educated family backgrounds. They are petty traders, housewives, young women who work at home and do the cooking. Others come from rural areas to work as helpers in their urban relatives’ homes. They include women who live with their parents and wives who often live in polygamous households where they have to cope not only with their co-wives but also with their parents-in-law, according to whose wishes they have to carry out the daily tasks in the same way as their own mothers have done earlier. Whether they are young or old, many of these women love to listen to the *griottes*’ songs and Mande Massa’s broadcast, feeling that they appreciate their hard work and take their worries seriously, and that they acknowledge their daily suffering and make them dream about a better future. In their songs, the *griottes* also refer to these women and their important role in society and the keeping of Mande values. Women appreciate the educational aspect of their praise songs, their moral character and consolation effects (Schulz 2002: 802ff., which also relates to song contents).²² This is even truer for Mande Massa’s radio theatre *baroni*. He specifically addresses the women’s hard work and suffering in their daily lives, and their difficult situation in current society. This helps to explain the particular success of the *griottes* and radio presenters with special women’s programmes, as well as the fact that these women regularly acquire the cloths to advertise their idols.

Women have repeatedly told me that they wear the cloth because they love the *griottes* and radio presenters such as Mande Massa because they provide

²⁰The term ‘imagined community’, coined by Anderson (1983) in the American national context, became prominent in anthropological debates on various kinds of forged feelings of belonging and identity. For a criticism of the concept, see Tamir (1995). The young women’s consumption of popular music contrasts sharply with the behaviour of young men, who often gather in small groups to discuss their concerns in so-called *grins* while drinking Chinese green tea.

²¹This publicness differs from that described by Habermas in Europe (Schulz 2002).

²²Dorothea Schulz has described such fan communities of female adolescents in Bamako and other parts of urban Mali in the late 1990s. She also noted that female consumption and fan culture are largely understudied (2002: 799).

entertainment, consolation and advice about how to define their role in the Mande social fabric within often polygamous families. Like the young woman at the beginning of this article, many women told me that they wore the decorated dress of Mande Massa and the *griottes* because of their great admiration for the celebrity, and that wearing the cloth was 'a way of supporting your star'. The women we interviewed at the market told us that they went to look for the cloth in the months before an event such as the Mande Massa concert, eager not to miss its appearance and to have their outfit in time. Others had been given the cloth as a gift by their sister, mother or husband. Outfits with portraits are not exclusively worn by women, but men only rarely wear textiles with radio presenters' or music stars' photographs on them. If they wear a cloth with portraits, they choose one with their football team or political or religious leaders, preferably from their home area.

The explanations of the women are corroborated by merchants and radio presenters. For the merchants as well as the celebrities, women are clearly the primary target group. Mande Massa told me in spring 2010 that he organized the concerts and invited *griottes* to reward women for their enthusiasm for his broadcasts. He also made textiles with images of his team available for them. Merchants such as Dramera also stated that their idea was to create textiles for the women to wear, and reflected that the goods represented on the cloth must be those that women use (a cloth with images of a brand of Chinese green tea would not be worn by women, he said). This reflects our observations in the public space, at concerts, and at other large events.

While merchants and radio presenters claimed to address women in general, women with a more bourgeois social status were less keen to wear textiles with photographs. When I showed her pictures of women wearing clothes with images of *griottes* on them, one young female graduate explained: 'They are paying [money] for the love they have for the artist.' And a young doctoral student explained: 'It [the textile] shows the love one has for a particular thing; it is something beneficial to identify with.' They both stated that they would not wear such dresses because they felt that a different, less educated class of people wore them.

Wearing these dresses decorated with the images of stars is a practice that is neither 'elite', 'bourgeois' nor 'traditional'; it also lacks purely commercial connotations. It is above all a popular culture of less educated women who do not belong to the growing middle or elite classes, thus rendering the term 'popular culture' difficult to delineate. The dresses form part of a fashion for women (see also Fokwang, this issue) who are dreaming of a better future. Radio presenters respond to these dreams, and the women who listen to them express their admiration through such textiles in the urban context. However, this sharply contrasts with the fashion of those with whose pictures they decorate themselves and who form part of a different class of people in the urban context.

SELF-CREATION, BELONGING AND STATUS ASYMMETRY

The individuals whose pictures are found on such textiles would normally not wear a dress made from fancy cloth – and particularly not one with their own picture on it. Furthermore, the singers and Mande Massa wear the most precious

and skilfully ornamented garments when they perform on stage. At Mande Massa's concert, for example, the prestige that expensive clothing represents was reflected in the spatial arrangement of the concert hall. The most important women and men sat in the first rows, wearing expensive dresses that matched their affluent status. The young women who wore the Mande Massa costumes and constituted the majority, in contrast, sat further back, accepting the social hierarchy corroborated by the spatial arrangement. Those who wear dresses with photographs thus publicly communicate a subordinated status in relation to the individuals whose image they wear and whose achievements they acknowledge. In these textile constellations, the relationship between the individuals on the cloth and the crowd wearing their picture on their clothing is asymmetrical, with fans multiplying and advertising the image of their stars in public space. As is characteristic for 'big men' more generally (Godelier and Strathern 1991), such acknowledgement is not permanent but needs to be maintained in a continuous struggle for appreciation. In contrast to *sapeurs*, who make use of the prestige that expensive clothes confer, cloth-wearers do not challenge established social hierarchies.

The asymmetrical relationship between a famous person and his or her community of followers encourages the prominent placing of photographs on clothing. While Sidibé declined to have his photograph printed on the uniform, a shift can be observed when one person is more prominent than the others in a supposed group of equals. This is evident in the home-region associations, as an individual from that same region who has become a politician might have their image printed on the association's uniform, as was the case in the examples from the Guinean and northern Ivorian associations.

These dresses express individual styles when worn by followers. This is most prominent when the dress displays photographs of a star. When young women wear dresses with photographs of their idols and collectively express their praise for the individual portrayed, they combine both their wish to express individuality by designing their own dress and collective sociality through uniformization. The eye-catching portraits again reflect the asymmetrical relationship between the fans and the celebrity who is depicted on their clothes. The dresses make the individual retreat into the background in favour of the promotion of another person, the prominent individual whose image is represented in the photographs printed on the dresses. The fans and followers who wear these dresses are women from poorer social backgrounds; the middle classes tend to be absent in this constellation. Thus, cloth might be considered to be a contributing factor in a cultural process that constructs class through consumer culture (Hansen 2004: 370) or else visualizes loosely connected female fan communities (Schulz 1998) from a certain social background. In this way, wearing a dress with the same photograph emphasizes not only connectivity (cf. Miller 2005: 6) but also its converse: exclusivity.

However, the class idea does not fit neatly into the pattern that this staging follows. The constitution of the followers is dynamic; it can encompass the female fans of an artist or large parts of the nation assembling for the president. It can expand according to the event; at best, it reflects a tendency in which less educated women show their affinities for wearing such clothes. The dynamics of the group goes beyond class distinctions. It is a fashion – a fashion from below – that comes and goes. It became prominent in Bamako during the 2000s due to evolutions in the textile sector, the liberalization of the market, the emergence

of individual entrepreneurship in various social sectors, and perhaps also as a reaction to a growing middle class in a dynamic urban environment.

Wearing such dresses might be a matter of style, but this does not mean that these women follow only *one* style. The same women who accept the asymmetrical relationship with their stars or leaders by wearing their portrait on their dresses might wear uniforms when assisting at an association meeting and more expensive garments made with damask, wax or silk²³ when they participate in a wedding or funeral celebrations. So far, these cheap fancy textiles with a portrait are not considered appropriate dress for a marriage or a funeral in Bamako. All this corroborates the view that dress may express belonging to social groups at the expense of individuality, but it does not necessarily codify social status or identity in a definite way. This is even more pronounced in the urban environment, where people do not necessarily know each other and dress and social status can easily be manipulated (Raban 2004). Thus, dress can advertise individuality, prestige and exclusivity; it can be used to dress up, stage and disguise in specific situations. Furthermore, it can stress belonging to a group for a while, thus making a social group 'imaginable and intelligible to itself in the form of external representations' (Mazzarella 2004: 346).

CONCLUSION

Fabric that is decorated with photographs proliferated in Bamako in the 2000s. Decorated cloth, I have argued, includes obligatory and voluntary forms of belonging that can highlight uniformity or individuality, and might reflect relationships that are more equal or more asymmetric. However, equal relationships, like those found in home-town associations, do not encourage photographs of individuals on the textiles that the members wear. Instead, they adopt uniforms with the same design and a similar style, as in the dresses worn by members of such associations. School uniforms, which have photographs on them, follow the ideal of the pupils' equality. These clothes seem to be an exception because they focus attention on the asymmetry between the pupils and the school founder. Most of the cloths with portraits have emerged in more spontaneous formations in the urban context; they reflect more dynamic forms of belonging and the fans' individual dress creations with cheap fancy cloth. This brings a new angle to the discussion of the uses and purposes of dress. The dresses that bear portraits combine aspects of the uniform, which reduces individuality, and the great care that is invested in dresses that bear the photograph of an admired star. In these dresses, the wearers' bodies become a mobile medium for promoting their star and his or her project, thereby pushing their own individuality into the background and making the dress the means through which these women enhance the fame of their stars. At the same time – and confirming that the clothes still 'make' the person – a moment of self-stylization is visible in the individual tailoring, which is intended to attract the star's attention.

²³For examples of expensive African fashion, see Mustafa (1998) and Rabine (2002), and for fashion in Bamako, see G rimont (2008).

The portrait on a cloth increases or diminishes its market value. In Bamako, textiles that bear the portraits of politicians and logos of products are most often distributed as promotional gifts to persuade people to wear them, while fabrics that have the images of singers and radio presenters on them are profitable. The individuals and institutions working with such fabrics – the politicians, merchants, preachers, media presenters, musicians and founders of private schools – all seek to promote themselves and their activities by placing their photograph or logo on fancy textiles. The cloths with images of religious leaders and stars are sold in the market, while associations and schools require their members to buy the relevant fabric. Others give such cloths away as promotional gifts. The value of the cloth largely depends on its decoration and its capacity to transmit positive popular feelings. Almost paradoxically, both artists and popular religious leaders are able to sell these cloths for profit while the commercial entrepreneurs have to give the textiles away.

Dresses with portraits of singers and radio presenters reflect new social communities that share their love for stars – local celebrities whose art is rooted in Mande culture – and bring fans together irrespective of their geographic origin, thereby transcending neighbourhoods, ethnic groupings and social categories. Several strong tendencies are evident: the majority of the fans are women from poorer social backgrounds; the middle classes do not like to wear such dresses; and the portraits of important individuals from different sectors of society are represented on various cloths. While the stars and leaders themselves wear expensive dresses made of precious materials tailored in extravagant styles, the majority of the female fans' dresses are made from the uniform and cheap 'fancy cloth', which is acquired primarily for a single event to acknowledge their support in this asymmetrical symbiotic relationship. The women support and promote their star or leader when they collectively wear these dresses, which combine the concept of the uniform – which is otherwise made of cloth that does not feature portraits and is worn by members of associations that have a common home region or interest – with individual styles that express the preferences of the women. The clothes therefore make the person, and, in our case, they make two people at the same time: the women who wear them and – even more so – the stars whose portrait they bear.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article evolved from a research project I started in Bamako in 2005. Research for the project was carried out within the framework of supervision of research projects of students from Goethe University Frankfurt in Bamako in 2005, 2007 and 2010 (supervision was conducted together with Mamadou Diawara in the research centre Point Sud). It was funded by the Vereinigung der Freunde und Förderer, the Stiftung für Internationale Beziehungen, the Centre for Interdisciplinary African Studies (ZIAF), the International Office, all at Goethe University Frankfurt, and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Since 2008, the project has been part of the Cluster of Excellence, 'The Formation of Normative Orders', at Goethe University Frankfurt. I am particularly grateful for comments on earlier drafts of this article by Katrien Pype, Filip de Boek, Karin Barber, Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle, Nadine Machikou Ngaméni, Jude Fokwang and anonymous readers of *Africa* as well as to the late Elliot Klein and to Janine Murphy for their help with editing this article.

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ABSTRACT

Most literature on cloth focuses on its capacity as a medium of identity construction in relation to politics, economy, ethnicity, age and gender. As such, the equalizing properties of uniforms are often contrasted with the creation of individual styles of dress. This article discusses a further dimension in the complexity of

the meanings of clothing: it explores the history, uses and local meanings of fabrics on which photographs of public personalities are printed in Bamako. In Bamako in the 2000s, entrepreneurs from different sectors of society, such as politics, religion, media, art, education and commerce, rediscovered this type of cloth as a business opportunity. They have produced decorated fancy textiles for events where large, heterogeneous groups of people participate most often, and where they multiply the image printed on their clothing. Some of these personalities distribute the cloth as promotional gifts, while others make their fans and followers purchase fabrics as evidence of their admiration. The uniforms decorated with photographs reflect a tendency towards asymmetrical relationships between the owners of the dresses and the personality depicted on them. Some of these relationships even encourage individual styles that transgress the uniform character of the dresses.

RÉSUMÉ

L'essentiel de la littérature consacrée au tissu porte sur sa capacité en tant que moyen de construction d'identité dans le contexte politique, économique et ethnique, ainsi que dans le contexte de l'âge et du genre. À cet égard, les propriétés égalisatrices de l'uniforme sont souvent mises en contraste avec la création de styles vestimentaires individuels. Cet article traite d'une autre dimension dans la complexité des significations de la tenue vestimentaire ; il examine l'histoire, les usages et les significations locales des tissus sur lesquels sont imprimées des photos de personnalités publiques à Bamako. Dans les années 2000 à Bamako, des entrepreneurs de secteurs de la société aussi divers que la politique, la religion, les médias, l'art, l'éducation et le commerce, ont redécouvert ce type de tissu en tant qu'opportunité commerciale. Ils ont produit des textiles élaborés décorés pour des manifestations rassemblant le plus souvent d'importants groupes hétérogènes de personnes qui multiplient l'image imprimée sur leurs vêtements. Certaines de ces personnalités distribuent le tissu sous la forme de cadeaux promotionnels, tandis que d'autres font acheter le tissu à leurs fans et sympathisants en gage de leur admiration. Les uniformes décorés de photos reflètent une tendance vers des relations asymétriques entre les propriétaires des vêtements et la personnalité qui figure sur ces vêtements. Certaines de ces relations encouragent même des styles individuels qui transgressent le caractère uniforme des tenues vestimentaires.