Sapologie: Performing Postcolonial Identity in the Democratic Republic of Congo


Information

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Abstract: As open-market policies reinforce global power imbalances, postcolonial subjects in Africa often find themselves dislocated from the promises of modernity that accompanied independence movements. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the transnational movement la Sape appropriates fashions from the metropole centres of Europe and re-enacts them in Africa, using the body as a representative surface through which to negotiate socio-economic adversity. This paper analyzes la Sape in terms of its relationship to dandyism, the gendering of performativity, and the ongoing search for an ‘authentic’ national identity in postcolonial Congo in order to explore the complex visual phenomena it evokes. In so doing, the paper demonstrates how la Sape is more than a subversive and/or passive appropriation of fashion, but rather a means by which fashion is mobilized as a tool for decolonization to produce alternate identities that resist categorization.

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Uncontrolled keywords: global power imbalance, postcolonial, Africa, modernity, independence movement, Democratic Republic of Congo, fashion, socio-economic adversity

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