

Symbolic Economies of the Logo: Contemporary Senegalese Streetwear in Historic Perspective

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Abstract

In order to produce their own Senegalese version of urban street wear, young graffiti artists create logos and brands. In what appears simple imitation of U.S. mass-consumer lines, the artists create an original fashion within the Senegalese, fashion system. Through their hand-made logos they resignify the mass-market logos and brands of U.S. corporations like Nike and The Gap. They aim to create a liberating identity for their generation and to declare independence from neo-colonialism. The graffiti artist/designers transform the mode of production, the meaning and the purpose of the U.S. corporate logo. Because they had no models for producing logos on clothing, they re-invented the production process through a self-taught odyssey of trial and error. They produce within the cherished, inherited values of artisanal creativity and pride in the ingenuity to create fabulous things with a dire lack of material resources. The meaning of the logos, as pioneer graffiti artist Big Key says, "reflects daily life." Artists require their logos to embody what they call a "concept," to convey a complex, socially conscious message. As artists in a culture that values the "aesthetic," they believe they have the responsibility to lead the younger generation to progressive action through their urban murals and their urban fashions.

Key Words: African fashion, Senegalese fashion, Dakar fashion, hip hop, graffiti art, street wear, logos and branding.