

To Die For: Fashion and the Indigenous

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Much has been written about the relationship between emerging non-Western (centres) of fashion and dominant global fashion. In the examination of the construction of national identity in fashion there is less focus on the relationship with the tribal. What happens when fashion designers use the tribal as a marketing tool and source of inspiration? How does that 'traditional identity' by which 'non-Western fashion' is characterized relate to the traditional? In Indonesia, local fashion expressions inspired by the traditional dress of the Batak people of Sumatra are expanding and applauded while traditional textile production and the 'look' on which it is based is dying out. Batak fashion is eating its own tail.

Fashion expressions are part and parcel of a process of folklorization and objectification of self that are taking place. If non-Western fashion is ineluctably peripheral to Western fashion, must local fashion developments ineluctably play a folklorizing role normalizing self-objectification of the source of inspiration? Is engaged, ethical fashion a possibility in response to the current crisis of loss of human cultures in the way that environmentally-friendly fashion trends are a response to the environmental crisis?