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The spaces of Diplomacy of Mobutu's *Recours à l'Authenticité*. The interior designs of *New Form/Ndako Ya Sika* in 1970s Kinshasa

by

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In the late 1960s president Mobutu Sese Seko initiated his nation-building project of a “Recours à l'Authenticité”, through which he aimed, first, to restore the country's unity after the turbulent years following Congo's independence on June 30th 1960, and, second, to give Kinshasa and Congo/Zaire a strong presence on the international scene. I have argued elsewhere how concrete as “liquid stone” was a crucial instrument for shaping this political project that claimed to “draw” on the “values” and “legacy of the country's ancestors”, as Mobutu would articulate it in a famous speech given at the UN Headquarters in New York on October 4th 1973. Kinshasa's skyline indeed was changed significantly in those years with the construction of among others the *Tour de l'échangeur* or the highrise tower for the national radio and television broadcasting company. In this paper, however, I seek to extend this analysis to the interior spaces of the particular built landscape produced by the “Recours à l'Authenticité”-policy. More in particular, I will focus on the Kinshasa based furniture & interior design company *New Form/ Ndako Ya Sika*, which was founded in 1971. Run by Aleksandra Kosinska, a female entrepreneur of Polish origin who moved to Congo/Zaire with her husband and chemical engineer Cyprian Konsinski around 1968, the company became responsible for many of the most politically charged interiors in Congo/Zaire's capital city. Using publicity source material from the firm, Kosinski's memoirs as well as information drawn from archival research and oral history in Belgium and Congo, I seek to demonstrate that any discussion of diplomatic interiors in 1970s Kinshasa not only needs to encompass the furnishing of the assembly hall of a major public building like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also of other, more intimate spaces of encounter of “le Tout Kinshasa”, such as “le Privé”-nightclub.

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