

Dressing Masculinity Among Black Men in Paris Since the Mid-1970s

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Frederick and Manoucher,
my grandfathers and two of the best-dressed gentlemen I know

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that clothing shapes black men's gender and racial identifications and their relation to notions of nationhood and physical space in Paris. I explore black men's deliberate cultivation of clothing styles to assert their masculinity, meaning social authority, through readings of literature, cultural events, and images featuring clothing, thereby engaging literary and cultural studies, as well as postcolonial theory, ethnography, and history. My conclusions about black men's use of clothing for identity expression contribute to theoretical discussions of the intersectionality of race and gender performance in gender and masculinity studies and in African and African diaspora studies and offer additional perspectives on race and gender within fashion studies. Moreover, by forming a discussion of blackness and masculinity not only around skin but also clothing, I introduce race emphatically into the critical perspective of French studies.

After presenting a theoretical framing of how clothing layered on skin is also read as skin within the colonial gaze (Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Ousmane Sembène's *Le docker noir*, Le rire's "Chochotte prend son chocolat dans son lit," Simon Njami's *African gigolo*) this dissertation focuses on three key sites of black masculinity expression through clothing: the French national football team, hip-hop culture, and Congolese *Sape* community. An analysis of deliberations over black footballers' expression of muscular masculinity by way of the *maillot bleu* in two football scandals (*l'affaire Mediapart* and *l'affaire Le Pen*) reveals the linkage between black men's clothing and notions of race, gender, and Frenchness. An

examination of hip-hop enthusiasts' hypermasculine clothing styles (Lauren Ekué's *Icône urbaine* and Insa Sané's *Du plomb dans le crâne*) illustrates how clothing reshapes understandings of black and *banlieues* culture and space, and the significance of both to Parisian culture. Lastly, an investigation of Congolese *sapeurs*' motivations for sporting the *Sape* "Look" (Alain Mabanckou's *Black bazar* and Frédéric Ciriez's *Mélo*) challenges assumptions of audience for black men's gender expression through clothing. Bringing these analyses together, I identify clothing as a critical site for thinking through intersectionality and present black men's clothing as evidence of African culture's influence on French culture.

**Introduction:
“L’art d’être un homme” à Paris**

From October 15 through July 11th 2010, the Musée Dapper, a museum specializing in African art located in Paris, France, held an exhibition entitled “L’art d’être un homme: Afrique, Océanie” (The Art of Being a Man: Africa, Oceania). By way of approximately 150 edited and unedited art works, this exhibition presented to its predominantly French audience the distinctive importance of corporeal ornamentation and transformation to ancient and contemporary sub-Saharan African and Oceanic men’s expressions of masculinity in sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania (wherein masculinity signifies a man’s sense of prestige determined by age, vocation, family name, political ranking, among other fixed criteria). The art works—including sculptures, photographs, finery, and more—featured elaborate hairstyles, tattoos, scarifications, animal skins, and jewelry sported by men as a measure of their manhood and plaques alongside each of them detailing how those featured items affirmed a men’s sense of masculinity.

Whereas “L’art d’être un homme” mostly exhibited sub-Saharan African men’s masculine expression through their cultivation of notionally ‘traditional’ forms of body adornment (e.g. tattoos and animal skins indicative of men’s ranking within their respective communities), it also featured one contemporary clothing movement native to the Congo region that is prevalent in European cities like Paris today: the *Sape* or *société des ambiancers et des personnes élégantes* (Society of Ambiancers and People of Elegance). Similar to the men depicted in the exhibition’s other works, members of this now transnational dress movement, known as *sapeurs*, deliberately sport particular clothing articles to reveal their sense of

masculinity to audiences. Yet rather than simply wear corporeal markings or coverings indicative of specific degradations of masculinity recognized within a fixed, preexisting hierarchization of manliness, *sapeurs* cultivate their own clothing style known as the “Look” (comprising an elegant *griffe* [designer label] suit and accessories like neck-or bow-ties, braces, and sunglasses in no more than three vibrant colors) to convey the sense of masculinity that they feel relative to other men.¹ It is only after these men create their own “Look” that the clothing items composing that “Look” become a sign of those men’s masculinity. In other words, *sapeurs* do not represent just another example of traditional power dressing practiced by men in regions of the Africa prominently featured in other portions of “L’art d’être un homme” and widely studied in Art History and African Studies (Clarke). Through their creative cultivation of their own clothing styles, they assert the sense of masculinity that they see within themselves rather than that which is predestined for them.

The Musée Dapper revealed *sapeurs*’ more operative “art of being a man” to French audiences through its presentation of photographers Héctor Mediavilla and Baudouin Mouanda’s pictorial collections of *sapeurs* in the Congo and abroad. Yet it most strikingly introduced audiences to these men and their unique clothing styles indicative of their masculinity by inviting *sapeurs* living in Paris to its highly publicized inaugural event on October 15th. By welcoming *sapeurs* Modero, Fuluzioni, Allureux Miela, Apostle Dada Pouré, and Jocelyn Armel Le Bachelor into its doors that first day, the Musée Dapper reminded audiences of the contemporaneousness of its exhibition’s central message: that for the phenotypically black African man determined to express his sense of masculinity, “l’habit, c’est le premier vecteur de communication ” (clothing is the first vehicle of communication; “Archives”).

¹ The *Sape* and *sapeurs*’ masculine expression by way of the “Look” signify the main focus of the fourth chapter of this dissertation. Thus, for more on this particular form of masculine expression through clothing, see Chapter Four.

Of course, the Musée Dapper's choosing to include actual *sapeurs* at the opening of its exhibition was not entirely groundbreaking; it is not uncommon for museums to host artists of or subjects featured in newly installed exhibitions at inauguration events. Nonetheless, its showcasing of *sapeurs'* expression of masculinity by way of ostentatious clothing styles not recognized within a pre-established categorization of clothing, as well as in its own 16th *arrondissement* (neighborhood) incites audiences to think more about the impact of a black men's cultivation of clothing styles for masculine expression outside of this museum setting. For instance, museum attendees viewing photographs of ostentatiously dressed *sapeurs* in an exhibition entitled "L'art d'être un homme" anticipate a correlation between *sapeurs'* clothing styles and masculine expression. Yet are *sapeurs'* masculine expressions by way of clothing as apparent to audiences outside of this setting, wherein the relationship between corporeal coverings and black men's masculinity is not given? Although Paris constitutes the leading site for *sapeurs* living outside of their native Congo region, would passersby in the Musée Dapper's wealthy *arrondissement* recognize the connection between *sapeurs'* clothing and gender expression? Or might other identifications of black men prevalent in this city complicate readings of their masculine expression through clothing? Although France prides itself on its republican model of social integration and governing principles of "liberté, égalité, et fraternité" (liberty, equality, and fraternity), for instance, the notable persistence of discrimination against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities within its borders, particularly those from former French colonies bearing visible signs of their difference, would lead one to think otherwise. Simply stated, what meaning does black African and diaspora men's clothing, "le premier vecteur de communication" (the first vector of communication) of their masculine expression, hold in the capital city of a former colonizing power like Paris?

In this dissertation, I present how black men living in Paris deliberately challenge widespread, abject visualizations of black men and, more specifically, black men's masculinity through examination of literary and cultural texts and ethnographic research involving clothing. Focusing on three notable black men's sartorial styles prominent in Paris since the mid-1970s—that of the black French national footballer, the hip-hop enthusiast, and the aforementioned *sapeur*—I explore how black men's intentional cultivation of particular clothing styles shape their gender identifications and, concurrently, alter prevalent understandings of Frenchness as it relates to race and geographical space. “L’art d’être un homme”’s primary focus on sub-Saharan African and African diaspora men’s sporting of specific corporeal coverings to exhibit predetermined measures of their masculinity signifies a fitting point of departure for this discussion because it charts the well-known practice of power dressing in regions of Africa that precedes and, in many ways, inspires my consideration of black men’s more executive, unrestricted cultivation of clothing styles for masculine expression in Paris. Moreover, the Musée Dapper’s presentation of *sapeurs*’ sartorial styles at the public inauguration of this exhibition raises my discussion’s central question of the impact of black men’s identity expression through clothing within the context of a white-dominated, Western city and intimates the complex connections between clothing and gender, class, and race. By first considering the typical, abject identification of black men within this particular location in the African diaspora, and the implications of those men’s self-presentation in clothing reflective of their personal sense of masculinity there, I contribute a unique perspective on black men’s gender expression through clothing.

Of course, there is not just one, but rather there are many forms of masculine expression and manners in which black men might express their masculinity. When I speak of black men’s

masculinity or masculine expression in this dissertation, I focus prominently on those men's cultivation of clothing styles to convey what I call their masculine authority. By masculine authority, I mean those men's expression of superior social authority relative to other men, and particularly traditionally empowered (white) men in French society. My focus on this particular form of masculinity derives from the omnipresent influence of difference in skin color on arguably all black man living in France as well as other white-dominated societies' identity expression and identification. As Kimberlé W. Crenshaw famously pointed out through her description of the unique struggles of women of color often overlooked in feminist and anti-racist discourses, identifications like race, class, and gender as well as institutional arrangements and cultural beliefs shape multiple elements of the lived experiences of the systematically disadvantaged (Crenshaw). Likewise, black men in Paris experience unique challenges in identity expression in consequence of intersectionality.² Really, the primacy of race politics and the culturally-specific ideologies of race as they relate to power place a strong heterosexist, authoritative strain on black men's masculine identification in white-dominated societies more generally (McBride 68). Judith Butler aptly highlighted this point when commenting on the infamous Rodney King case in Los Angeles. She stated: "the visual field is not neutral to the question of race; it is itself a racial formation, an episteme, hegemonic and forceful" ("Endangered/Endangering" 17). That is to say that the black man's expression of masculinity in a white-dominated society—regardless of the particular form of masculinity he presents—always also signifies an expression of social authority relative to other men, and particularly white men.

² While there are many ways in which to define and/or employ the term "intersectionality," I use it as a reading strategy for my presentation of black men's masculinity as defined by Fanon in my first chapter as well as throughout the rest of my dissertation. That is to say that when I speak of black men's masculine expression, I consider such expressions deliberate presentations of social authority as well. For more on the complexity and paradoxical productiveness of a concept as open-ended as intersectionality, see Davis and McCall.

This correlation between black men's expressions of masculinity and social authority is particularly manifest in black men's expression of masculinity in Paris, wherein structural obstacles, in many ways distinct from other white-dominated societies, discriminate against them due to their racial difference. Whereas numerous scholars, like those behind "l'art d'être un homme," have investigated black masculinities in Africa (Ebron; Mugambi and Allan; Lindsay and Miescher; Murray; Ouzgane and Morrell; Uchendu) and its diasporas (particularly in the United States and England [Gibson, *Fanon*; Golden; Harris; hooks; Johnson and Henderson; Marriott; Neal, *Illegible*; Neal, *New*; Perkinson; Riché Richardson; Darieck Scott; Wright]), only a few have specifically addressed black masculinities in France (Blanchard, Deroo, and Manceron; Tardieu). Yet given France's unique colonial relation to Africa, the need for studies that speak specifically to black men's masculine expression in France is manifest. Certain elements of the black man residing in Paris's lived experience render his assertion of masculinity distinct from those of black men living in other white-dominated societies. Dissimilar to Britain's indirect rule colonial approach, for instance, France implemented an assimilationist policy in its African colonies. This strategy implied that colonial African subjects who fully adopted French language and culture would qualify as citizens of France and, accordingly, attain the full rights, privileges, and recognition of a French citizen. This (false) promise of the possibility to "progress" from French colonial *subject*—a categorization that in its name itself implies an inferior standing—to French *citizen* (a designation reserved primarily for individuals living in or originating from mainland France who possess more rights and privileges) influenced Francophone black African colonial subjects' identification in ways dissimilar to black African colonial subjects in places like England or the United States, wherein the possibility of being recognized as an equal to traditionally empowered white men was never promised and, thus,

nonexistent.³ France explicitly references this assimilationist strategy in the Preamble to its 1946 Constitution of the Fourth Republic, upheld in the 1958 Constitution of the Fifth Republic,⁴ by stating: “Le peuple français proclame à nouveau que tout être humain, sans distinction de race, de religion ni de croyance, possède des droits inaliénables et sacrés” (The French people once again proclaim that every human being, without distinction of race, religion or creed, possesses inalienable and sacred rights; “Préambule”). The Republic’s continued engagement with its overseas departments (all former colonies) has made this promise of assimilation relevant and unique to the black African man’s identity expression in France.⁵ This man—living in a nation wherein “tout être humain, sans distinction de race, de religion ni de croyance, possède des droits inaliénables et sacrés” (every human being, without distinction of race, religion or creed, possesses inalienable and sacred rights)—might identify himself and anticipate an identification from other individuals within his predominantly white-dominated society reflective of this pledged sense of equality vis-à-vis civility, authority, and gender.

In reality, the black man’s assimilation into French society is hardly ever complete.⁶ He is often not considered as possessing the same degree of masculinity or even humanity as members

³ The distinctive influence of France’s assimilationist strategy on its colonial subjects is an important topic discussed at length by numerous scholars of Francophone African history and culture, of whom Martinican writers Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon are particularly notable. See Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme: Suivi du discours sur la Négritude* and Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*.

⁴ From the Preamble to the 1958 Constitution of the Fifth Republic: “Le peuple français proclame solennellement son attachement aux Droits de l’homme et aux principes de la souveraineté nationale tels qu’ils ont été définis par la Déclaration de 1789, confirmée et complétée par le préambule de la Constitution de 1946, ainsi qu’aux droits et devoirs définis dans la Charte de l’environnement de 2004” (The French people solemnly proclaim their attachment to the Rights of Man and Principles of the National Sovereignty such as they are defined by the Declaration of 1789, confirmed and completed by the Preamble to the Constitution of 1946, as well as the rights and obligations defined in the Charter of the Environment of 2004; “Texte intégral”).

⁵ An overseas department designates the administrative level of a region of the French Republic outside of metropolitan France. It possesses the same political status as departments or regions within metropolitan France. France’s five overseas departments of France, all of which were former French colonies, include: Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Réunion, and Mayotte.

⁶ For instance, colonial subjects from only four communes of France’s first West African colony, Senegal—Gorée, Dakar, Rufisque, and Saint-Louis—experienced “complete” assimilation into French culture and recognition as French citizens. Nonetheless, the theoretical significance of this policy influenced and reinforced French African colonies’ allegiance to France.

of mainstream (white) French society on account of his skin color. He experiences this incomplete identification because “color-blind” France paradoxically keeps appearance as a central measure of its inhabitants’ right to citizenship. For instance, during the period of French colonial rule, the black man was dressed in particular uniforms (school, religious, military) to indicate his allegiance but also subordination to French officials. And today, French politicians continue to encourage former colonial subjects living in France—phenotypically and culturally distinct from France’s predominantly white population—to alter their appearance to receive the recognition and agency as citizens already granted to them under the terms of the Constitution.⁷

Still, the potential for the black man to reassert his masculinity despite France’s typical identification of individuals based on appearance is manifest. As Homi K. Bhabha outlines in his observations of colonial hybridity in *The Location of Culture*, the black man fully aligning himself to and identifying with French culture—an action that, owing to his difference in skin color, renders him “*almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 127; emphasis in orig.)—engenders anxiety in the (white) Other. That is to say that through his appearance once again, the black man actually possesses the ability to challenge typical identifications projected onto him by (white) Others. In reality, he disrupts visualizations of himself not only by likening his appearance to that of the traditionally empowered (white) Frenchman, but also by cultivating unique appearances as well.

Accordingly, I employ my skills as a literary and cultural critic to form this discussion of black men’s deliberate expressions of masculinity in Paris through clothing. In my first chapter, I examine Frantz Fanon’s presentation of the colonial gaze or the discriminating look that the

⁷ L’affaire du foulard (the Islamic Veil Debate), which has made Islamic women’s right to wear religious headwear in French public spaces like schools a heated topic of debate for over a decade, is a fitting example of how France continues to regulate former colonial subjects’ appearances and, accordingly, reinforce their inferior identifications today. See Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*.

white man casts onto the black man and deprives the black man living in white-dominated society of his personal sense of masculinity in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952). Through my close reading of Fanon's portrayal of the primary object within that gaze, black skin, as both an epidermis and a livery, and a selection of twentieth-century literary and pictorial sources (Ousmane Sembène's *Le docker noir* [Black Docker] [1973], *Le rire* cartoon "Chochotte prend son chocolat dans son lit" [Chochotte, or easy woman, takes her chocolate to bed] [1900], and Simon Njami's *African gigolo* [1989]), I highlight the centrality of both skin and clothing to the black man's identification within white-dominated societies and present my theoretical grounding for how clothing signifies a means through which the black man can assert his personal sense of masculinity within this particular environment.

Contrastingly, in my second chapter, I examine French newspaper articles (*Le monde*, *Libération*, and *L'humanité*) to show how language and rhetoric surrounding issues of black French footballers' Frenchness and particular form of masculine expression amidst two scandals in recent French football history (*l'affaire Mediapart* [2011] and *l'affaire Le Pen* [2006]) confirm the significance of clothing (in this particular case, the *maillot bleu*) to black French footballers' self-identification and identification by (white) Others. I show how use of the *maillot bleu* in debates on black footballers' right to represent France—both against and in support of that right—indicates black footballers' capacity to assert their heightened sense of masculine authority—measured in their promotion of multiracial Frenchness and a form of masculinity founded on muscularity—through their sporting of the *maillot bleu*.

In my subsequent two chapters, I switch my primary focus from how Others perceive of black men to how black men perceive of and actively represent themselves to further demonstrate the significance of particular clothing styles to black men's masculine expression.

My third chapter examines how young black men from the marginally located *banlieues* (suburbs) of Paris sporting hip-hop clothing styles (meaning attire identified with the hip-hop movement) buttress their personal sense of masculinity and challenge prominent visualizations of the Parisian landscape as it relates to race and power. Through close readings of two recent novels addressing hip-hop culture, race, gender, and the politics of geographical space in Paris (Lauren Ekué's *Icône urbaine* [*Urban Icon*] [2005] and Insa Sané's *Du plomb dans le crâne* [*A head on your shoulders*] [2008]), I reveal how these men's sporting of this sartorial style illustrative of hypermasculine toughness reshapes popular imaginings of black male *banlieusards* (suburbanites) and of the *banlieues* space, and the significance of both to Parisian culture. My fourth and final chapter considers the aforementioned *Sape* movement but focuses solely on its community in Paris and Brussels, and provides a different perspective on the anticipated audience of black men expressing masculinity through clothing in white-dominated societies. Working at the interstices of fieldwork, literary criticism, and critical theory, I challenge the common belief that *sapeurs* sport their elegant attire as a deliberate response to Western audiences. By highlighting how the *Sape*'s intercommunity dynamics inform *sapeurs*' sartorial expression of masculinity, as exhibited by real-life *sapeurs* and *sapeurs* in Alain Mabanckou's *Black bazar* (2009) and Frédéric Ciriez's *Mélo* (2013), I present an example of black men wearing particular clothing styles to assert their masculine authority relative to other black men alone. Altogether, these four chapters examine questions of identity and clothing's role in defining gender and race, and how both relate to nationhood and physical space, thereby proposing clothing as a pivotal site for thinking through black men's masculine expression.

Altogether, my dissertation makes three critical interventions. First, it contributes to theoretical discussions of the intersectionality of race and gender performance in gender and

masculinity studies and in African and African diaspora studies. Second, in its claims on clothing's relation to black masculinity in particular, it offers a fresh perspective on race and gender to fashion studies. Third, and most notably, it introduces race emphatically into the critical perspective of French studies. By framing a discussion of blackness and masculinity not only around skin, but also clothing layered on and read as skin, I reveal the mutability of seemingly-fixed categories like race and gender and offer an alternative reading of agency in shaping perceptions of race and gender. Moreover, I invert the usual perspective taken within French studies, which emphasizes France's influence on Africa, by exhibiting African culture's influence on French culture by way of clothing.

I incorporate a feminist perspective and methodology of reading grounded in intersectionality for my investigation of black men's expressions of masculinity by way of clothing. This dissertation is deeply rooted in literary studies and also draws profoundly on postcolonial theory, cultural studies, ethnographic studies, and history. Most notably, the significance of France's colonial history and complicated, contemporary relation to its former black African and Antillean colonies and colonial subjects signifies a crucial piece to recognizing the significance of clothing to black men's representation in Paris and in French culture. Additionally, the specific contexts within which each of the clothing styles featured here developed are critical to understanding the particular form of masculinity with which each is associated and how those styles contribute to black men's assertion of masculine authority. My forming my overall discussion on black men's masculine expression by way of clothing around three sartorial styles also translates into my dissertation's following thematic rather than chronological lines. Through this interdisciplinary investigation, I unveil the unique significance of black men's clothing styles to those men's sense of masculinity in Paris.

Chapter One: Can Clothes Make the Black Man? Reading Black Men's Expressions of Masculinity Through Clothing

In this first chapter, I consider the role of skin and clothing in the black man's self-identification and identification by (white male) Others in white-dominated French society from the 1950s to the present.⁸ In his seminal, psychoanalytical account of the black man's lived experience, *Peau noire, masques blancs (Black Skin, White Masks)* (1952),⁹ Frantz Fanon highlights that the black man's self-identification and identification by Others derives from his skin. More precisely, what Fanon calls the "colonial gaze"—the discriminating look that the white man casts onto the black man on account of his skin—governs the black man's agency in self-expression. However, the colonial gaze that looks upon the black man is never just reading that man's skin. I thus focus on skin as well as a second, visible attribute also captured within the gaze, clothing, and explore the impact of both on visualizations of the black man's masculinity.

This chapter begins by drawing on Fanon's *Peau noire* for three reasons: (1) *Peau noire's* astute description of the intersectionality of the black man's identity expression and, more precisely, the challenges of identity expression unique to the black man living in France's experience; (2) its highlighting of the centrality of the black man's body and bodily surface to his self-recognition and recognition by Others; and (3) its eminence in existing discourses on black

⁸ In this chapter, I use the terms "male" or "men" to speak exclusively of the biological male sex irrespective of gender (with which individual men might self-identify). My exclusive focus on black men derives from Fanon's use of the term "homme" (man) throughout his text as more than just the "usual casual sexism of using 'man' for 'human'" (Goldie 78).

⁹ This text was originally entitled *Essaie pour la désaliénation du Noir (Essay for the Disalienation of the Black Man)*. Though I follow Charles Lam Markmann's 1967 translation of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), translations included in this chapter are my own.

masculinities within French, African, and African-American Studies.¹⁰ Some critics might be inclined to interpret *Peau noire, masques blancs* as implying a conjectural, mutually exclusive dichotomy between an authentic race biologically inscribed on the body's surface (*peau noire* [black skin]) and an inauthentic mask imposed by a colonial power onto a colonial subject that, in turn, leads to his or her total cultural assimilation (*masques blancs* [white masks]). However, most literary critics, still working with this metaphorical distinction between the black man's "true" African self (*peau noire*) and his complete devotion to his colonizer's cultural code (*masques blancs*), have complicated this straightforward reading of Fanon's text by arguing for other ways in which the black man might express himself (Gibson, *Fanon*; Gordon; Hall; Judy; Julien and Fusco; Seyki-Otu; Wallace).

By examining the manner in which the gaze actually looks upon the black man, this chapter further complicates these readings of *Peau noire*. Fanon's assessment on how the black man's self-identifies and is identified by Others here—through his appearance in the colonial gaze—remains largely applicable today, thereby making this text relevant over sixty years after its initial publication. Moreover, Fanon's language, which initial readers considered too opaque (Macey 160), and more precisely, his insistence on what Benita Parry identifies as "'persistent instabilities,' on the unresolved arguments and the incomplete oscillations [...] make *Black Skin, White Masks* fundamentally an *open text*, and hence a text we are obliged to go on working on, working with" (Hall 34; emphasis in orig.).¹¹ I "[work] on [and] [work] with" two particular

¹⁰ While there has been ample dialogue on Fanon in the Anglo-American academy, there has been considerably less discussion of his work written in French. Nigel C. Gibson reasons, quoting Edouard Glissant in *Le discours antillais (Caribbean Discourse)* (1981), that the level of active engagement that Fanon demands in his writing might be one explanation for why Fanon is not as widely discussed in France or closer to his 'home' in the Caribbean: "It is difficult for a French Caribbean individual to be the brother, the friend, or simply the associate of a fellow countryman of Fanon. Because, of all the French Caribbean intellectuals, he is the only one to have *acted on his ideas...to take full responsibility for a complete break*" ("Introduction" 10; emphasis in orig.).

¹¹ Of course, certain literary critics see scholars' speaking back to Fanon's text as problematic. For instance, Henry Louis Gates Jr. questions the theory behind scholars' more recent, widespread appropriation of Fanon as a critic of

“oscillations” in Fanon’s text—his description of the discriminatory, colonial gaze and of what that gaze reads of the black man—to propose a reconsideration of what is in fact elemental to the black man’s self-identification and identification by Others. By building on Fanon’s account of the black man’s identification within French society, I present a nuanced perspective on the colonial gaze—on how it sees not only epidermically, but also sartorially—and propose the theoretical value of its subject’s, the black man’s, conscious use clothing to reclaim his lost sense of masculinity within that gaze.

Focusing on the literal rather than figurative relation between the two elements featured in Fanon’s title—mask (a covering of the skin) and skin—I propose another way in which the black man asserts his masculinity in an environment that typically deprives him of due recognition based on the look of his skin: through materials he consciously layers on that skin.¹² I argue that clothing signifies a means through which the black man asserts or defends his masculinity in this racially inequitable society. Through a detailed exploration of Fanon’s portrayal of the colonial gaze and its primary focus (black skin), and of the shared properties between skin and clothing, I present the centrality of skin to and the active function of seemingly inoperative, material clothing items in conceptions of black men’s masculinity in predominantly white French society. To further support my central argument, I then transition from a theoretical analysis of Fanon’s text to close readings of a selection of twentieth-century literary and pictorial

English texts rather than a theorist of “third world” revolution, deeming most of such readings as “academic domestication[s] of ‘Fanon’” (Gibson, “Introduction” 15). For more on Gates Jr.’s view on scholars’ use of Fanon’s work, see “Critical Fanonism.”

¹² Consider the mask’s physical relation to the skin. A mask, a material article typically worn over all or part of the face at theatrical or ceremonial rites of passage, certainly covers some skin of its wearer. However, it rarely obstructs observing audiences’ view from all of its wearer’s skin, nor remains fixed on the skin that it covers. Moreover, when a man wears a covering like a mask over his skin, he does not always do so to convey his complete affiliation with whatever that mask signifies. Wearing a covering like a mask over skin can actually enable its wearer to momentarily invert identifications typically cast onto him by Others; for example, Martinican men’s donning female-faced masks to play on societal gender norms during the burlesque marriage celebration of Martinique’s carnival (Musée 279-89).

sources that reveal the importance of both skin and clothing to the black man's masculine expression (Ousmane Sembène's *Le docker noir* [Black Docker] [1973] and *Le rire* cartoon "Chochotte prend son chocolat dans son lit" [Chochotte, or easy woman, takes her chocolate to bed] [1900]) and the black man's conscious assertion of masculinity by way of particular clothing styles (Simon Njami's *African gigolo* [1989]).¹³

The Colonial Gaze

In one succinct, forthright statement in the opening of *Peau noire*, Fanon summarizes the lived experience of the black man residing in predominantly white French society. He declares, "le Noir n'est pas un homme" (a black man is not a human; 6). This striking declaration, which challenges not just the black man's manhood, but also his humanity (in light of the term "*un homme*" denoting both "a man" and "a human"), delineates the black man's typical lack of masculine authority in the eyes of the Other. Based on the theme of *Peau noire*'s first chapter "Le Noir et le langage" (The Black Man and Language), the reader might assume that the Other's substandard designation of the black man derives in part from the black man's non-mastery of French, the primary language in this particular environment. Fanon confirms this assumption by highlighting a shared belief among black Antilleans that a strong command of French secures a man's heightened sense of masculine authority: "Le Noir Antillais sera d'autant plus blanc, c'est-à-dire se rapprochera d'autant plus du véritable homme, qu'il aura fait sienne la langue française" (The black Antillean will be more white, meaning he will come closer to becoming a true human being, the more he assimilates to/adopts the French language; 14). The black Antillean man here believes that he will become "d'autant plus blanc" (more white) and,

¹³ Readers can examine passages from these narratives alongside *Peau noire* despite the fact that the time and location in which they occur differ from Fanon's primary setting in 1950s France. As Fanon himself asserts, "le racisme colonial ne diffère pas des autres racismes" (Colonial racism is no different than other racisms; 71).

consequently, gain recognition as more authoritative, more manly, and even more human through his use of French language. Speaking French should not be too challenging for him, given that he comes from a former French colony wherein the official language is also French. Thus, in order for him to convey a greater sense of masculinity than typically afforded to him in this setting, he trusts that he must master the language. In other words, he must speak in a polished metropolitan French accent and roll his R's to counter "le mythe du Martiniquais qui-mange-les-R" (the myth of the Martinican who swallows his R's; 16), a distinctive trait of a white Frenchmen stereotyped, infantilized version of how Afro-Caribbeans speak commonly referred to as *le p'tit nègre* (the little Negro pidgin; 16).

However, the black man can never really proclaim his masculinity vis-à-vis the Other through a mastery of language alone. The reader recognizes this point when examining Fanon's comparison of the manner in which French doctors verbally address white European patients in contrast to the way that they speak to black or Arab patients:

Les médecins des salles de consultation le savent. Vingt malades européens se succèdent: "Asseyez-vous, monsieur... Pourquoi venez-vous?... De quoi souffrez-vous?..." Arrive un nègre ou un Arabe: "Assieds-toi, mon brave... Qu'est-ce que tu as?... Où as-tu mal?" Quand ce n'est pas: "Quoi toi y en a?" (25)

Consulting physicians know this. Twenty European patients come and go: "Please take a seat, Sir. ...Why have you come in? What are you suffering from?" In comes a black man or an Arab: "Sit down, old fellow... What do you have? Where does it hurt?" When it's not: "You not feel good, no?"

Doctors' word choices here illustrate a shortcoming of the black man's reliance on French language as a means to assert his masculinity or even humanity alone. Their use of *vous* (formal

pronoun “you”) when speaking to white patients and *tu* (informal pronoun “you”) when addressing black or Arab patients suggest their categorization of patients before those patients even get a chance to showcase their knowledge of the French language at all. Moreover, their shift in sentence structure—from a more standard form when treating white patients (“De quoi souffrez-vous?” [What are you suffering from?]) to a creole syntax when treating black and Arab patients (“Quoi toi y en a?” [You not feel good, no?])—signals their inferior identification of the latter (black and Arab) patients vis-à-vis the former (white) patients.

Fanon’s subsequent description of Others’ reaction to the black man who speaks French well suggests that, even if a black patient spoke French with a polished metropolitan accent, it would not make much of a difference. He states: “Ce que nous affirmons, c’est que l’Européen a une idée définie du Noir, et il n’y a rien de plus exaspérant que de s’entendre dire: ‘Depuis quand êtes-vous en France? Vous parlez bien le français’” (What we know is that the European has a definite idea about the black man, and there is nothing more exasperating than to hear: “How long have you lived in France? You speak French well”; 28). The fact that the black man might have been born in France does not deter the European from carrying this “idée définie du Noir” (definite idea about the black man). Just as in the case of the doctors’ office, the black man’s identification by Others starts prior to his utterance of a single word.

In truth, a consideration of how the Other recognizes the black man in predominantly white societies must focus on the body. Delving further into Fanon’s text, it becomes apparent that the black man’s identification is all about visibility of the body: a yearning to have his body, the most conspicuous proof of his humanity, be seen and recognized by the Other. Stuart Hall’s assertion that the Other’s racism against the black man begins in the Other’s refusal to recognize the black man on account of his black skin thus becomes pertinent to this investigation of the

black man's identification in Paris. Since the Other takes the black man's difference in skin color as an indication of that man's innate inferiority and justification for his denial of that man's masculinity or even humanity (once more, "le Noir n'est pas un homme" [a black man is not a man/human] 6), Hall contends that the racism experienced by the black man is evidenced "not just in how people treat him, [...] but actually in how they *look* at him" (*Frantz Fanon*; my emphasis). Hall's claim that abject identifications of the black man—of his sense of manhood—begin in how the Other "look[s]" at the black man certainly resonates with Fanon's own contention that the black man's identification begins where the Other's eyes meet the black man's body: at the skin. By building on Hall's and Fanon's identification of the act of looking as integral to the black man's dismal identifications and further investigating what exactly the Other is, in fact, looking at, I highlight elements, aside from skin, contributing to the black man's masculine expression.

As Fanon points out, it is not simply the black man's having black skin, but rather his seeing himself—and his skin—being seen by the Other that robs him of his sense of masculinity. The black man's deferral to the gaze of the Other does not necessarily signify an aspiration to the habits, thoughts, and/or culture of notional elites in this white-dominated society per Bourdieu. Rather, he cannot ignore the influence of the Other's look upon his skin. Fanon explains: "Déjà les regards blancs, les seuls vrais, me dissèquent. Je suis *fixé*. [...] Je sens, je vois dans ces regards blancs que ce n'est pas un nouvel homme qui entre, mais, un nouveau type d'homme, un nouveau genre. Un nègre, quoi!" (The white gazes, the only valid ones, are already dissecting me. I am *fixed*. [...] I see in these white gazes that it is not the arrival of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact!; 93; emphasis in orig.). What Fanon refers to here as "les regards blancs" (the white gazes) is more commonly known as the colonial gaze. This

gaze is more than just a mere exchange of glances between the black man and the Other. Rather, it is a power play that reinforces the hierarchical sovereign structure central to colonial rule that once lawfully kept the black man in a position inferior to that of the Other. While the colonial period is well passed, the impact of this gaze remains, signifying “the violence of everyday life” felt by the black man living in white-dominated French society and placing him entirely outside categories of humanity (Julien and Fusco 101). Fanon recognizes this legacy of the gaze himself, distinguishing the black man captured within it as an entirely different kind of being: “[U]n nouveau genre. Un nègre, quoi” (A new species. A Negro, in fact). That the black man is identified within this gaze not as man or human, but as a *nègre*—a term employed to denote persons with black skin that carries an inexact meaning somewhere between the English-language *Negro* and the more pejorative *nigger*—confirms the gaze’s association of blackness with inferiority.¹⁴ And since the black man sees himself through his image within this gaze, he self-identifies as subordinate to the Other, not as an *homme* (man or human) nor a *Noir* (Black man), but as a *nègre* (Frantz Fanon).¹⁵

The black man will see himself within the colonial gaze time and again, thereby making his awareness of the relation of his skin to his self-identification and identification by Others a

¹⁴ “The sense of *nègre* is imprecise throughout *Peau noire, masques blancs* in a rather significant way. Although always referring to a specific order of representation in which *nègre* designates an aggregate identity, that identity is at times merely descriptive, and at other times highly charged with a negative value. [...] This equivocality of *nègre* is crucial to the movement of Fanon’s thought; it underscores the extent to which even the seemingly neutral descriptive terms presume a dialectic in which *le nègre* is the antithesis of *l’homme*.” (Judy 60-1) For more on the challenge of translating “nègre,” see “Translating the Word *Nègre*” in Edwards 26-38.

¹⁵ This final characteristic of the colonial gaze is particularly significant because it distinguishes Fanon’s colonial gaze from other conceptions of the gaze, including French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s description of the gaze’s function in the subject’s development of the ego and narcissistic ideal image in the mirror stage. According to Lacan, the subject develops his own subjectivity through the *imago* that he sees inside the mirror at the ego stage and later maintains as a narcissistic ideal image of himself. The holder of the gaze, he argues, feels that the same object upon which he or she gazes, which heightens his or her anxiety about castration, is gazing at him or her. Yet Fanon does not recognize these experiences of establishing one’s own subjectivity and castration anxiety as part of the black man’s experience within the colonial gaze: “Qu’ou le veuille ou non, le complexe d’Œdipe n’est pas près de voir le jour chez les nègres” (Like it or not, the Oedipus complex is not close to seeing the day among Negroes; 123). For more on Fanon’s distinction of the black man’s experience within the colonial gaze from the Lacanian gaze, see Fanon 139 n. 25, Mercer 187-94, and Bhabha 46-56.

neurotic, self-defeating cycle. On occasion, he might ignore his perceived lack of masculinity in relation to the Other evidenced in this gaze. Yet as Fanon points out, “au premier regard blanc, il ressent [encore] le poids de sa mélanine” (at the first white gaze, he feels the weight of his melanin [again]; 122). Thus, once aware of the gaze, the black man is reminded of its abject reading of his skin once more.

Fanon’s description of how he sees himself in a gaze of a young white child on a train underscores this degrading influence of the colonial gaze on the black man’s sense of masculinity. He states:

“Maman, regarde le nègre, j’ai peur!” Peur! Peur! Voilà qu’on se mettait à me craindre. [...] Alors, le schéma corporel, attaqué en plusieurs points, s’écroula, cédant la place à un schéma épidermique racial. Dans le train, il ne s’agissait plus d’une connaissance de mon corps en troisième personne, mais en triple personne. Dans le train, au lieu d’une, on me laissait deux, trois places. (90)

“Mom, look at the Negro; I’m scared!” Scared! Scared! Now they are beginning to become scared of me. [...] As a result, the corporeal schema, attacked in several places, collapses, giving way to an epidermal racial schema. In the train, it is no longer about being conscious of the body in the third person, but in the triple person. In the train, instead of one seat, they left me two or three.

As the young child’s fear of the *nègre* grows, so does Fanon’s awareness of his corporeal form and, more precisely, the look of its black epidermal covering. Seeing himself through the child’s eyes in this way—“no longer [...] in the third person, but in the triple person”—inhibits Fanon from regarding his body or his skin as anything but abject.¹⁶

¹⁶ Fanon’s hyperawareness of his epidermal difference recalls a notable experience of Martinican poet (and prominent influence for Fanon) Aimé Césaire. As Fanon highlights, Césaire’s introduction by Others not simply as a

Fanon's feelings here—of taking up three spaces rather than one in the eyes of the young boy on account of his “schéma épidermique racial” (epidermal racial schema)—substantiate scholars' like Hall's identification of the black man's abject visualization as rooted in “the ‘epidermalization’ of the radical look” (Hall 20). So long as he sees the young boy's eyes reading his skin, the visible marker of his difference from the boy, in this demeaning manner, he will continue to perceive of not only his skin, but also himself as wretched. It is in this way that the young white boy's gaze continually fractures the black man's sense of self and, more precise to this discussion, his sense of masculinity.

The injurious impact of the colonial gaze on the black man's personal sense of masculinity appears in numerous texts chronicling the black man's lived experience in predominantly white French society. Ousmane Sembène's *Le docker noir* serves as a fitting first example. This novel focuses on the proceedings of protagonist Diaw Falla's, a young black docker by day and writer by night, trial in Marseille for the murder of Ginette Tontisane, a white woman who claimed authorship of a book that Diaw in fact wrote. In the courtroom, he sits before an audience of faces phenotypically distinct from his own, boasting “pas une tache noire” (not one black mark; 44). As he waits for his chance to make his defense, he cannot help but notice that this “auditoire n'avait d'yeux que pour lui” (audience only had eyes for him; 46). Not only spectators, but also Diaw's own lawyer, a white Frenchman named M. Henry Riou, cannot help but fix their gazes on him. Based on Diaw's impression of Henry, it appears that the reason why his audience's gaze remains fixed on him is his difference in skin color. The narrator shares Diaw's impression of Henry: “Cet homme ne lui inspirait pas confiance par la façon dont il le

poet, but rather as “un poète noire agrégé de l'Université...” (a black poet with a university degree...) or a “grand poète noir” (a great black poet) signifies an instance in which the gaze of Others granted Césaire an abject identification before any other identification on account of his skin color (Fanon, *Peau* 31). Césaire's recognition of the impact of Others' abject identification of the black man on account of that man's skin in his own work further underscores the centrality of skin to the black man's self-identification. See Césaire, *Cahier* 29.

dévisageait” (This man did not inspire confidence in [Diaw] from the way that he fixed his gaze upon [Diaw]; 45). The fact that the gaze of Diaw’s primary advocate in his case “ne lui inspirait pas confiance” (does not inspire confidence in him) suggests that his blackness is, in fact, what everyone sees and identifies him by first.

An ensuing testimonial from one of Ginette’s neighbors—a woman who noted Diaw’s presence in Ginette’s neighborhood, where “il n’y a pas d’Arabes, ni de Noirs” (there are no Arabs nor Blacks; 47)—the courtroom’s deliberation over Diaw’s “natural,” sexual obsession with white Ginette on account of his being a black man (54-55), and the judge’s inquiring if Diaw likes white women (57-8) only further reveal that the audience’s attention remains fixed not on Diaw’s actions, but rather on his black skin and the typical, abject identification associated with black skin. Justifiably, Diaw is offended by these occurrences, particularly the judge’s deliberate redirection of focus from the case’s subject matter to his sexual preferences. When Henry tries to deter Diaw from expressing his anger towards the judge, Diaw articulates his awareness of Others’ abject visualization of himself and his manhood on account of his blackness. He admits: “S’ils me considèrent comme un être humain, je peux leur rendre leur sentiment et dans le cas contraire, je serai comme eux” (If they see me as a human being, I can restore their sense and in the contrary case, I would be like them; 58). By describing this hypothetical situation, distinct from his current one in the courtroom, in which his audience considers himself as “un être humain” (a human being), Diaw acknowledges his recognition within the colonial gaze by way of his skin as a nonhuman. Inherently distinct from and inferior to Other men, he is “la bête” (the beast; 43) or “un animal” (an animal; 52) as he sees himself in the eyes of the audience.

When the judge asks Diaw to recite a portion of his book from memory to prove his authorship, the influence of the audience's gaze on Diaw's sense of masculinity becomes even more apparent. Diaw recites the last chapter of his novel without error, leaving the entire courtroom speechless. The narrator elaborates:

Personne n'osait crever le silence. Les photographes se demandaient s'il fallait fixer Diaw sur leurs plaques. Il y eut un temps lourd. Les respirations étaient suspendues. Diaw respirait, trempé de sueur, sa peau lui-sait. "Combien de jours vous a-t-il fallu pour l'apprendre?" interrogea le Président. (63)

No one dared to break the silence. The photographers asked if they should capture Diaw in their frames. Time dragged on. Breath was suspended. Diaw breathed in. His skin, drenched in sweat, knows. "How many days did it take you to learn this?" asked the judge.

The judge's implication that Diaw merely memorized the chapter echoes Fanon's description of the colonial gaze's typical reading of a black man as an unintelligent *négre*. The photographers' actions—or lack thereof—further demonstrates the automaticity of the gaze's erasure of the black man's humanity, and with it, his claim to masculine authority on account of his skin. Surprisingly, Diaw's impressive recitation of his final chapter does not warrant his picture being taken. The photographers, individuals capable of producing tangible proof of his credible performance, ask if they should capture Diaw in their camera frames. However, the ensuing silence that permeates the courtroom suggests that none of them actually take his photograph. Instead, they partake in the one activity left for the audience to carry out in the absence of speech: they gaze upon Diaw's bodily surface. As this silence grows, Diaw's words (an attestation to his role as a writer) fade. And as Diaw's sweat, an anxious reaction evidenced on

the bodily surface, suggests, the gaze within which he previously saw himself as not a respectable, authoritative man, but rather as a “beast” returns. By the time the judge finishes accusing Diaw of cheating, it is as if Diaw, the black man on trial, is not even in the courtroom.

The judge’s and plaintiff lawyer Bréa’s ensuing reactions to Diaw’s recitation squash any doubt that the courtroom audience’s dismissive response to Fanon derives from abject readings of Diaw’s skin. The judge sends the audience in recess until the next day, thereby suggesting that Diaw’s verbal confession holds little relevance to the case (64). And the following day, Bréa argues for a “réparation non seulement à la victime, mais à notre littérature, mais à notre civilisation” (reparation not only for the victim, but also for our literature [and] our civilisation; 70). In making such a bold declaration, Bréa acknowledges the minimal claim to masculinity that members of the courtroom like the judge and himself typically grant to a black man like Diaw relative to a white victim like Ginette. By stating that Diaw must repay not only for the death of Ginette, but also make reparations for “*notre* littérature, [...] *notre* civilisation” (our literature, [...] our civilization; my emphasis), Bréa also demonstrates how dark skin, captured within the gaze, becomes a means through which the Other differentiates himself from and buttresses himself above the black man.

Nonetheless, it is not until Henry speaks in defense of Diaw that the centrality of Diaw’s skin rather than words to Diaw’s masculine identification by Others is explicitly outlined. He states: “Mon client, par la seule couleur de son épiderme, semble faire la preuve de la culpabilité; il est la brute capable de tout, le sauvage qui s’abreuve du sang de sa victime” (My client, by just the color of his epidermis, seems to have proven his guilt; he is the brute capable of everything, the savage who showers himself in the blood of his victim; 72). As Henry points out, Diaw will always appear guilty in the eyes of the audience “par la seule couleur de son épiderme” (by just

the color of his skin). Owing to its blackness, Diaw will not be identified or treated as a (hu)man, but rather as a poor “savage.” Thus, just as Fanon proposes, Diaw’s identification by Others in the courtroom begins at the corporeal level.

Yet a black man like Diaw does not exactly feel inferior to the Other gazing upon him. Rather, he feels completely invisible: as Fanon says, “Sentiment d’infériorité? Non, sentiment d’inexistence” (A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of nonexistence; 112). And as the black man’s feelings of nonexistence grow, he experiences an “intériorisation ou, mieux, épidermisation de cette infériorité, ensuite” (internalization or, better, epidermalization of this inferiority; 8). So long as the gaze that makes him feel invisible surveys his bodily surface, the black man will consider the most apparent element of that surface, skin, as the cause for his denied expressions of masculinity opposite Others.

In light of Fanon’s theorization and Sembène’s illustration of the colonial gaze’s diminishing of the black man’s sense of masculinity, one might question the extent of the black man’s agency in his own identity expression in this predominantly white environment: how can he effectively assert his masculinity relative to Others if those same Others do not even consider him human? Yet by taking a closer look at the relationship between the gaze and skin, one can talk back to *Peau noire* and reconsider the parameters of its overall agenda. Fanon states at the onset of this text that his intent is to not only explain the black man’s lived condition in white-dominated French society, but also help that man liberate himself from the oppressive influence of the colonial gaze. Fanon demonstrates his commitment to this mission through his paradoxical recognition of the black man’s feeling of invisibility and non-humanity as a productive place for self-redefinition. He states, “Il y a une zone de non-être, une région extraordinairement stérile et aride, une rampe essentiellement dépouillée, d’où un authentique surgissement peut prendre

naissance” (There is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of everything essential, where a genuine new departure can spring up; 6). What Fanon suggests here is that rather than accepting the sentiments of inferiority projected onto him by the gaze, the black man should think of ways to attain greater recognition of his masculinity from the holders of that gaze—or of employing what Foucault would call “technologies of the self”—starting from that same space of non-being. In order to accomplish this goal, the black man need not succumb to pressure to either present a “true” black skin or put on a white mask. Fanon adds:

Le Noir ne doit plus se trouver placé devant ce dilemme: se blanchir ou disparaître, mais il doit pouvoir prendre conscience d’une possibilité d’exister. [...] [M]on but, au contraire, sera, une fois les mobiles éclairés, de le mettre en mesure de *choisir* l’action (ou la passivité) à l’égard de la véritable source conflictuelle—c’est-à-dire à l’égard des structures sociales. (80-1; emphasis in orig.)

The black man should no longer be placed before the dilemma ‘whiten or disappear,’ but must be aware of a possibility of existence. [...] On the contrary, my aim will be, once the mobile persons are lit, to enable him to *choose* action (or passivity) with respect to the real source of conflict: social structures.

Really, the very principles governing the colonial gaze unveil alternative ways in which the black man might “*choisir l’action*” (*choose* action) and employ his bodily surface to his advantage to exhibit his heightened sense of masculinity. To reiterate, the colonial gaze evidences the ubiquitous power struggle between the black man and the Other. One cannot emphasize the term “struggle” enough since it stresses that neither of these men’s claim of

superior masculinity is inherent or fixed.¹⁷ Fanon alludes to this point in his reading of M. Mannoni's critique of the relationship between the European and the Malgache in *Psychologie de la colonization (Psychology of Colonization)* when he says, "le Malgache existe avec l'Européen" (the Malgache exists in relation to the European; 78; emphasis in orig.). The European (like the Other) relies on recognition from the Malgache (or the black man) just as much as the Malgache depends on the European for self-identification and assurance of humanity: hence, their existence "in relation to" each other. The gaze's reliance on this mutual association suggests a possibility for the black man to reassert his masculinity opposite the Other. If, as Fanon maintains, the black man is not just being black, but being black before the Other (88), then the black man has more command over his identity expression than typically thought.

Fanon's recurrent reference to one common stereotype of the black man—succinctly, "Il est pénis" (He is a penis; 137; emphasis in orig.)—signals a second indication of the black man's capacity to assert his lost sense of masculinity within the gaze. This stereotype of the black man's large penis and bestial sexuality reveals that the gaze's attraction to the black man's bodily surface is predicated on desire. In some respects, the act of looking always encompasses some element of desire; a desire to see not only what is apparent, but also what is hidden from immediate view (*Frantz Fanon*). Thus, the gaze's desire for the black man, or more precisely, a confirmation of his sexual stereotype, evidences itself even in the Other's refusal to acknowledge the black man on account of his skin.

¹⁷ The instability of the Other's claim of masculine superiority over the black man recalls Michel Foucault's description of discourse in *L'ordre du discours* (1971) (*The Order of Discourse*), in which Foucault argues that no definition is ever truly fixed or determined outside of the systems of power that control and regulate productions of language, culture, and/or thought at a given time. See Foucault, *L'ordre*.

With the knowledge of the gaze's desire for black skin and reliance on mutuality in exchanges in mind, Fanon's proposal of how the black man might free himself from the gaze's typical, abject, emasculating identification seems feasible. He proclaims: "Puisque l'autre hésitait à me reconnaître, il ne restait qu'une solution: me faire connaître" (Since the Other hesitates to recognize me, there is only one solution: to make myself known; 93). The black man, aware that the Other's denial of recognition might, in fact, signal the Other's fetishization of his sexual stereotype by way of his skin as outlined by Bhabha,¹⁸ can thus use his skin to his advantage and "[se] faire connaître" (make [himself] known).

In some respects, skin plays a role in every individual's identity formation. Steven Connor's description of skin in *The Book of Skin* (2004) as the base against which we feel our senses and the channel through which our bodies interact with the world supports this proposition. Quoting French philosopher Michel Serres, Connor states: "Through the skin, the world and the body touch, defining their common border. Contingency means mutual touching: world and body meet and caress in the skin" (28). In other words, one should not think about skin as an inactive membrane merely holding together an individual's vital organs. Serving as much more than a corporeal covering, the skin actually shapes the real meaning of the body, of the body's perception of the world, and of the world's perception of the body. It is through the skin—the common space where the body and the world meet—that a man develops a sense of his body's boundaries and, likewise, the limits of his identity expression. Connor's description of the role of skin in an individual's sensory experience of touch or sight highlights well the significance of an individual's bodily surface to his or her classification within the world. He

¹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha identifies the epidermal schema of which Fanon speaks and upon which the gaze focuses as no secret desire: "Skin, as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognized as 'common knowledge.'" See "The Other Question; Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism" in Bhabha 94-120.

states: “If all the senses are milieux, or midplaces where inside and outside meet and meld, then the skin is the global integral of these local area networks, the milieu of these milieux: [quoting Serres] ‘The skin forms the variety of our mixed senses’” (27). The way a cold breeze feels on the skin, or blushing or goose pimples communicate, soundlessly, feelings of embarrassment to observing audiences constitute just two of many instances in which everyday experiences signal skin’s intermediary role, as “the milieu of [...] milieux” in people’s self-expression. Ultimately, skin, the bodily surface typically considered as a stationary background distinct from an individual’s inner self, signifies a living, breathing membrane that is inextricably part of a man’s body and, likewise, his personal identification.

Yet the extent to which Connor’s observations on skin relate to the black man’s identification in particular is worth considering in closer detail. Each person’s skin is different, thereby granting him or her a distinct experience and classification within the world. For instance, as Jim Perkinson argues, skin does not play as central a role in the Other’s assertion of masculinity in a setting such as white-dominated French society since “[whiteness] does not appear to itself” (187). Alternatively, Fanon reveals that the black man’s skin color greatly influences the black man’s identification in this particular environment because that man’s bodily surface, when captured within the colonial gaze, greatly impacts his sense of inner self. As Fanon points out, “c’est que le corps pour nous n’est pas opposé à ce que vous appelez l’esprit” (for us, the body is not in opposition to what you call the soul; 102). Since the Other can make the black man feel inferior through a gaze alone, the object of that gaze—skin—does seem like the most central element of the black man’s identification. Once the black man notices the abject manner in which the Other surveys his skin, he cannot help but identify himself with the Other’s abject reading of it. Fanon’s recounting of his meeting with a second young French boy

and his mother one winter day in his chapter “L’expérience vécue du Noir” (The Lived Experience of the Black Man) reveals the black man’s lost sense of masculine authority in self-expression following his notice of the boy’s reading of his skin. He states:

Regarde, le nègre!... Maman, un nègre!... Chut! Il va se fâcher! [...] [L]e nègre tremble de froid, ce froid qui vous tord les os, le beau petit garçon tremble parce qu’il croit que le nègre tremble de rage, le petit garçon blanc se jette dans les bras de sa mère: maman, le nègre va me manger. [...] Je m’assieds au coin de feu, et je découvre ma livrée. Je ne l’avais pas vue. Elle est effectivement laide. (91-2)

Look, a Negro!... Mom, a Negro!... Ssh! He’s going to get angry! [...] [T]he Negro is trembling with cold, the cold that chills the bones, the handsome little boy trembles because he thinks that the Negro is trembling with rage, the little white boy jumps into the arms of his mother: Mom, the Negro is going to eat me. [...] I sit down next to the fire, and discover my livery for the first time. I had not seen it before. It is in fact ugly.

Fanon’s negative regard for himself and feelings of helplessness in his self-expression due to his skin, increases with each of the young boy’s cries. This deterioration of his sense of manliness in the gaze of the boy—from black man to subhuman Negro—reveals how reductive the colonial gaze can be of the black man’s self-identification. The only way Fanon might escape his feelings of wretchedness is by eliminating that element of his body that qualifies him as the *nègre* in the eyes of the boy in the first place.

While literally flaying off the skin that provokes these sentiments is infeasible, at least so long as the black man wishes to live, a modification of the bodily surface that the colonial gaze reads is possible. With the exception of his face and hands, the majority of the black man’s skin always lies under some form of clothing, shielded from Others’ view. The routineness of skin’s

concealment by and proximity to clothing suggests the value of expanding on Connor's hypothesis that skin alone defines the limits of an individual's identification. Really, *all* bodily surfaces—skin and clothing—must be looked at when investigating the black man's masculine expression. Like skin, clothing serves as an interface between the living body and the world, touching either side of it. Thus, clothing signifies more than just a material covering of the body and actually comes to signify who its wearers are, both to themselves and to Others.

The significance of clothing, like skin, to the black man's masculine expression is manifest not just in the literal proximity of clothing to skin, but also in Fanon's own depiction of the colonial gaze's primary focus, skin. Fanon likens skin to material coverings of skin in his description of the purpose of his clinical study: "à secouer le plus énergiquement la lamentable livrée édifiée par des siècles d'incompréhension" (to vigorously shake the dust off of the lamentable livery built up over centuries of incomprehension; 10). One word he employs in this statement, which he will use again at several other points in his narrative, is particularly noteworthy: *livrée* (livery). Derived from the Old French *livrer*, meaning, "to deliver or hand over," this term today connotes the allowance or ration of food and clothing given by a master to his assistants or servants (Harper). Many people use this term in a comparable manner to refer to the clothing worn by male domestic servants like butlers or valets (Robert, "Livrée," def. 1). This term also signifies the servants who wear these particular uniforms (Robert, "Livrée," def. 2), an exterior mark on or characteristic of a human (Robert, "Livrée," def. 4), and an exterior mark on or characteristic of an animal (Robert, "Livrée," def. 5).

This multiplicity of ways in which one might define the term *livrée*, all of which denote permanent or semi-permanent coverings of skin, suggests an imprecise relationship between skin and coverings of skin. Typically, the context in which a person employs the term *livrée* clarifies

its precise meaning. However, Fanon's use of *livrée* in his text is varied. Fanon's first use of the term in his statement of purpose suggests its figurative application: meaning that the "lamentable livery" of which he speaks connotes a metaphorical sheet shielding those experiencing black's subordination in predominantly white societies by way of the colonial gaze from the injury of their ways. A couple of Fanon's later usages of the term similarly suggest the term's metaphorical significance in the description of the black man's lived experience: for instance, when commenting on how the black man's outward appearance makes his assertion of his masculinity via a mastery of the French language a futile effort, Fanon proclaims, "Le nègre doit, qu'il le veuille ou non, endosser la livrée que lui a faite le Blanc" (Whether he wants to or not, the Negro must wear the livery that the white man has made for him; 27). By describing the *livrée* as a product of the Other here, Fanon seems to speak of the typical or uniform, bleak reality for black men in white-dominated society, made for him by the white man, rather than an actual clothing article that he wears.

Nonetheless, the term *livrée* carries a more literal meaning at other points of his narrative. Fanon's call for readers to "toucher du doigt toutes les plaies qui zèbrent la livrée noire" (touch all of the wounds that score the black livery with a finger; 151) serves as a fitting example. The palpability of the imagery he evokes here (of fingers outlining cuts streaking a material livery worn by the black man) draws attention to the tangible site of the black man's typical identification in the colonial gaze (skin) as well as its coverings. Fanon's use of *livrée* in his aforementioned description of his self-identification within a young white French boy's gaze conjures up thoughts of a material livery worn by the black man as well. The young boy's escalating fear of Fanon does not incite Fanon to recognize his skin, but, rather, his *livrée*. He states: "Je m'assieds au coin de feu, et je découvre ma livrée. Je ne l'avais pas vue. Elle est

effectivement laide” (I sit down next to the fire, and discover my livery for the first time. I had not seen it before. It is in fact ugly; 91-2). Thus, as long as Fanon sees himself through this young white boy’s gaze, he will identify himself not just by his skin, but rather by the *livrée* that indicates his inferior sense of masculinity. Whether Fanon intends for the reader to interpret his ugly *livrée* as an article worn atop his black skin like a domestic servant’s iconic dress or as a sign of his feelings of institutionalized inferiority is unclear. Nonetheless, his deliberate use of *livrée* not just in place but also alongside of *peau* (skin) to describe the black man’s identification within the gaze intimates the significance of both to his sense of masculinity and makes a reconsideration of what an individual in fact reads as the black man’s bodily surface necessary.

Clothing as Material Masculinity

If, as Fanon highlights, the black man’s identification derives from Others’ readings of both his *peau* (skin) and his *livrée* (livery), then that man’s conscious use of clothing—a covering of the skin like a *livrée*—signifies a way in which he conveys his personal sense of masculinity to Others. Clothing can disrupt the colonial gaze’s typical visualization of the black man, thereby rendering it both a means to greater visibility for the black man and a testament to that man’s rejection of the gaze’s reading of blackness as inferior in relation to agency, civility, and gender. On the surface, clothing’s potential to mediate the black man’s gender expression between himself, Others, and society as a whole likens it to anthropologist Terence S. Turner’s “social skin,” meaning bodily adornments that an individual adopts to define him- or herself within the terms of an established set of social categories (136). Yet the fact that the black man is not typically recognized within the social categories established by the colonial gaze, or even recognized at all (to reiterate, “le Noir n’est pas un homme” [The Black man is not a man; Fanon

6]) renders the black man's use of clothing styles to assert his identification distinct from Turner's description. Through use of striking clothing articles, the black man asserts his agency as a social actor *outside* of the colonial gaze's established categories and carves a new image of himself and of his masculinity within the otherwise discriminatory environs.

To begin, clothing's proximity to skin facilitates the black man's expression of masculinity. Clothing, like a material *livrée*, is layered onto and read alongside of skin.¹⁹ In the case of the black man, who self-identifies through and is identified primarily by readings of his skin, this juxtaposition of clothing to skin is especially significant. One needs only to recall Fanon's discussion in *Peau noire* of the colonial gaze's denial of the black man of any recognition on account of his dark phenotype to see clothing's potential impact on the black man's sense of self. As Fanon puts it, "[C]'est dans sa corporéité que l'on atteint le nègre" (It is through his corporality that the black man is attacked; 133). Stated differently, the black man is seen and identified or "attacked" by the gaze at the physical level alone. Lewis R. Gordon elaborates on this distinctive feature of the black man's conception of self in "The Black and the Body Politic: Fanon's Existential Phenomenological Critique of Psychoanalysis":

Fanon has described this superfluous dimension of anti-black 'perception' of blackness as 'phobogenic,' 'anxiogenic' (*objet phobogène, anxio-gène*, that is a stimulus to anxiety [*Pn* 123/*BS* 151]). What this means is that the black body does not live on the symbolic level in an anti-black world. It is locked in the serious, material values of the real. Thus, whereas the white body can live the symbolic alienation rich with neurotic content and thereby serve as a foundation for psychoanalysis, the black body, whether in dream

¹⁹ That is not to say that clothing and *livrée* are entirely the same: people do not typically consider clothing as signifying its wearer as their use of the term *livrée* to speak of a butler might imply. Nonetheless, the significance of both clothing and a material *livrée* to its wearer's identification and sense of self, and the ambiguous readings of clothing and *livrée* alongside skin make the two comparable in this discussion.

content or awake intentions, always stands for ‘what it is’ – *the black*. (79; emphasis in orig.)

Deprived of an allegorical existence, the black man remains fixed in identifications stemming from his physical self. Thus, as Gordon points out, the gaze does not perceive the black man’s body as emblematic of certain stereotypes of blackness, be it his supposed proclivity for crime or his bestial sexuality; instead, it reads his body as those very stereotypes (79).

When speaking of the black man here, Gordon alludes primarily to his corporeal form. Yet given clothing’s fixture on the body of the black man, one must add material clothing to this analysis of the black man’s chief identification by “material values of the real.” Clothing not only increases the conspicuousness of the black man’s body; by altering the manner in which the colonial gaze confronts “*the black*,” it thus enables the black man to reclaim masculine authority in this “anti-black world” and to challenge the stagnant, abject visualization of “what [the black body] is.”

A second reason why clothing facilitates the black man’s assertion of masculinity is that it appeals to the colonial gaze in a way similar to skin. To reiterate, this gaze does not reflect realities of the black or of the Other’s place within society like a mirror; instead, it “fixes” or fabricates realities, much like the power structure rendering the Other superior to the black man throughout the colonial period (Fanon, *Peau* 163). The black man, cognizant of the gaze’s propensity to manufacture its own truths based on what it chooses to see, thus, can present new imagery and realities to that gaze through his wearing of particular clothing styles.

Fanon’s acknowledgement of the gaze’s capacity to look to the black man in a different way further supports clothing’s capacity to facilitate a re-visualization of the black man’s masculinity within this environment:

L'œil doit nous permettre de corriger les erreurs culturelles. Je ne dis pas les yeux, je dis *l'œil* et l'on sait à quoi cet *œil* renvoie; pas à la scissure calcarine, mais à cette très égale lueur qui sourd du rouge de Van Gogh, qui glisse d'un concerto de Tchaïkovsky, qui s'agrippe désespérément à l'Ode à la joie de Schiller, qui se laisse porter par la gueulée vermiculaire de Césaire. (163; emphasis in orig.)

The *eye* must enable us to correct cultural errors. I don't say the eyes, I say the *eye* and we know what that *eye* reflects: not the calcarine fissure, but the even glow of the light that seeps from Van Gogh's reds, that glides from a Tchaikovsky concerto, that clings desperately to Schiller's 'Ode of Joy,' and lets itself be carried away by Césaire's vermiculaire bellow.

What Fanon calls for here is an end to the eye's single, oppressive manner of viewing the black man. The black man strives to deter the eye gazing upon him and robbing him of agency away from its typical reading of blackness so that he might secure a new image of himself reflective of his personal sense of masculinity. But since he cannot alter the gaze's reading of his body through a figurative reorientation of that gaze alone, he facilitates his new form of self-expression by literally covering the bodily surface that that gaze surveys with particular clothing items.

Lastly, clothing's capacity to play upon the desires of Others like skin attests to its ability to disturb the power structure established by the gaze depriving the black man of his sense of masculinity. Again, the colonial gaze is grounded in desire; a desire to learn more about a given object based on what that gaze can see and what it cannot see. It is for this reason that the gaze often fixates on the black man's skin, which it perceives as both evidence of the black man's difference from and inferiority to the Other, and proof of the black man's alleged sexual

prowess. In his chapter “L’homme de couleur et la Blanche” (The Man of Color and the White Woman), Fanon alludes to the black man’s use of this knowledge of the gaze’s desire to bolster his sense of masculinity vis-à-vis the Other.²⁰ He states: “Je ne veux pas être reconnu comme *Noir*, mais comme *Blanc*. Or [...] qui peut le faire, sinon la Blanche? En m’aimant, elle me prouve que je suis digne d’un amour blanc. On m’aime comme un Blanc. Je suis un Blanc” (I do not want to be recognized as *Black*, but as *White*. But [...] who better than the white woman to bring this into being? By loving me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man; 51; emphasis in orig.). While Fanon highlights one reason why the black man might pursue a white woman—to prove that “[il est] digne d’un amour blanc” ([he is] worthy of a white love) and thus, an equal to a white man in terms of manhood (“Je suis un Blanc” [I am a white man])—he does not go into detail of how that man might actually attract her. Nonetheless, his subsequent description of the desires of the white woman for the black man, most of which derive from fantasies of the black man’s sexual nature and large penis, intimates that the black man accomplishes this goal through a deliberate portrayal of his body. The white female prostitute who Fanon quotes in his discussion of white women’s eroticization of the black man by way of body and skin suggests the effectiveness of the black man’s use of body and skin to his advantage. Commenting on her preference for black male athletes as sexual partners, Fanon states: “[Elle] nous disait qu’au début l’idée de coucher avec un nègre lui procurait l’orgasme. Elle les cherchait, évitant de leur réclamer de l’argent” (She told us that in the beginning, the idea of sleeping with a black man gave her an orgasm. She

²⁰ Although Fanon denies the existence of homosexuality in Martinique (Footnote 44 145), not only the white woman, but also the white man experiences this implicit desire to gaze upon the black man’s body. Fanon states, “Le comportement des femmes en question se comprend nettement sur le plan de l’imaginaire. C’est que la négrophobe n’est en réalité qu’une partenaire sexuelle putative, - tout comme le négrophobe est un homosexuel refoulé” (The behavior of the women in question is clearly understandable from the standpoint of imagination. The negrophobic woman is actually a putative sexual partner—just as the negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual; 127).

searched for black men, never asking for money from them; 129).²¹ Cognizant of the fact that this white woman's mere thoughts of the black man's athletic body and skin further her desire for the black man, the black man plays upon that desire through a strategic display and/or concealment of skin to secure some of the masculine authority typically restricted from him by way of the gaze. Really, he is not just showing his skin; he is also seducing with it. Seduction, a form of persuasion typically performed at the corporeal level, plays upon the sexual desires of observing audiences. Yet the black man's seduction need not be entirely sexual in this traditional sense. In fact, he can also seduce with intrigue, and entice audiences to look upon his body in a new manner. As Hall astutely highlights of Fanon's description of the colonial gaze that continues to govern the black man's relation to the white man in white-dominated societies, "the act of racism is a denial of that desire which is in the gaze itself" (*Frantz Fanon*). In other words, Others' abject visualizations and treatment of the black man actually signify those individuals' conscious rejection of the desire for the black man on account of his difference. Given this point, one recognizes that the black man can also seduce Others by playing upon Others' repressed desire or attraction to look towards the black man's body. By sporting particular clothing articles that attract Others' gazes back to his bodily surface alone, the black man challenges negative imaginings of himself and transforms that surface—typically considered a sign of his abjectness—into a sign of his masculine authority.

When one examines prior historical moments reflective of France's engagement with the African continent—moments wherein the gaze governing the black man's identification today

²¹ Of course, the supposed sexual superiority of the black man that fuels this desire is unproven. Fanon continues in his conversation with the prostitute: "Mais, ajoutait-elle, 'coucher avec eux n'était pas plus extraordinaire qu'avec des Blancs. C'est avant l'acte que je parvenais à l'orgasme. Je pensais (imaginai) tout ce qu'ils pourraient me faire: et c'est cela qui était formidable'" (But, she adds, 'Sleeping with them was not any more extraordinary than sleeping with white men. It is before the act that I get an orgasm. I think (imagine) all that they could do to me: and it is that which is terrific'; 129).

developed—he or she sees clothing playing a significant role in black men’s self-identification and identification by Others. Today, it is no secret that France’s colonialization of West and Central Africa led to the psychological and physical exploitation of countless black colonial subjects, male and female. France’s arrival in Africa led to communities throughout these regions’ governance under a new form of social hierarchization that favored whiteness over blackness and promoted France’s authority and Frenchmen’s masculine supremacy. One way in which French officials and employers communicated a person’s place within this colonial hierarchy was through clothing (Martin 154). Thus, in places like colonial Brazzaville wherein “personal display through dress was [already] essential in the wielding of power” (Martin 155)—for instance, by way of wearing raffia cloths which demarcated a person’s superior status within the city—French officials visually conveyed their superior masculinity over colonial subjects by divesting those subjects of particularly ornate attire, giving “old shorts, torn shirts and socks and broken-down shoes” to young men in football leagues, and keeping recently converted Christians to strict vestimentary codes (Martin 107). So long as they granted colonial subjects a substandard appearance by way of clothing, French officials’ assurance of their masculine superiority, which relied on the evidencing of colonial subjects’ inferiority, remained secure.

Yet even in this period of licit black subordination, one notes black male colonial subjects challenging the colonial gaze’s visualizations of blackness and asserting their masculinity by wearing particular clothing styles. Whether these styles consisted of old articles from a colonizer’s wardrobe or vibrant vestments crafted from the limited available textiles, they enabled black colonial subjects to surmount their familiar feelings of non-humanity and make themselves and their personal sense of manhood hyper visible to the predominantly white society in a most unequivocal manner. Some might consider black male colonial subjects’ adoption of

particular clothing styles for masculine expression as indication of their embracing of white aesthetic values or aspiration to be recognized as an *évolué* (Martin 159).²² Yet regardless of subjects' intention for putting on those styles in the first place, French colonialists' reactions to them, as well as colonial subjects' insistence on sporting them despite potential negative repercussions, demonstrate clothing's importance to black men's identification and capacity to challenge the masculine authority of Others. For instance, in *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (1995), author Phyllis Martin highlights that leaders' public expressions of disapproval of black men's wearing of particular clothing styles was not uncommon. One noted official in Brazzaville proclaimed the dangers of these men investing too much attention in their outward appearance in a notable newspaper publication, arguing that “[c]lothes do not make a man; and ties and shoes do not make an *évolué*” (169). Here, he suggests that any reimagining of the black colonial subject within the gaze central to this white-dominated society necessitates more than a covering of skin in particular clothing styles. Yet the fact that he must make this public statement against black colonial subjects' attention to clothing alone intimates that he speaks these words in reaction to the threat that officials like himself—who typically use clothing to classify diverse men's masculinity—feel from subjects' sporting of striking clothing styles. Of course, the colonial subjects to whom he speaks still occupy inferior standing vis-à-vis Others, both in practice and by law. Nonetheless, his sharp reactions to their wearing of particular clothing styles suggests black male colonial subjects' momentary triumph in securing greater visibility and masculinity for themselves by way of clothing.

One notes this challenge of particular clothing styles to the colonial gaze's typical reading of the black man not only in literature, but also in images circulating in France during

²² “Although the term [*évolué*] is now completely discredited, it was a label once carried consciously and proudly, for it demonstrated achievement in the new society, western education, knowledge of European manners and sophistication as a townsman” (Martin 159).

this period. For instance, “Chochotte prend son chocolat dans son lit” [see fig. 1], a cartoon originally published in a Parisian-based humor magazine *Le rire* [“The Laugh”], depicts a white woman in a negligee lying in bed with a black man, wearing a light sports coat and pant ensemble complete with high-collared shirt and necktie, perched beside her on the edge of her mattress.



Fig. 1. “Chochotte prend son chocolat dans son lit.” Cartoon. *Le rire* 7 July 1900: 2. *La cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l’image*. Web. 12 Apr. 2013.

The title of this cartoon clearly plays on the appearance of and relation between the characters it features. The white woman does not have actual, edible piece of “chocolate,” but rather a black man in her bed. The title’s presentation of this man as the woman’s possession—“*son chocolat*” (*her chocolate*; my emphasis) and exaggerated, grotesque depiction of his facial features—which cultural anthropologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse describes as typical of caricatural drawings of black men during the colonial period, including “swollen lips, [...] [among other] primitive barbarian” traits (184)—suggest the socially inferior positioning of the black man relative to the white woman that, as Fanon highlights, typifies the black man’s identification in the aftermath of colonialism as well. The woman interacts with her “chocolate” here not as her equal, but rather, her subordinate: a treat that she will (sexually) consume.

Yet when one examines this image once more without reference to its title, he or she derives another possible narrative revealing the potential influence of clothing on the black man’s masculine identification. The white woman firmly grasps onto the lapel of the black man’s sports coat, which some viewers might read as further indication of her possession of and expression of authority over that man. Yet the black man’s own hand placement (resting softly on the white woman’s outreached arm) and positioning of his left knee (facing towards the woman) makes one reconsider his sense of masculinity authority opposite the woman. It is just as likely that his touching of the white woman’s arm signifies more than a signal of his acceptance of her advances, and rather his deliberate invitation for them. Considering the ways in which the black man can seduce the white woman—through a presentation of skin and clothing—and the gaze’s capacity to read him both epidermically and sartorially, her grabbing hold of the lapel of his elegant, well-fitted ensemble can be a sign of his strength rather than his weakness, his success rather than failure in his masculine expression.

Black men consciously adopt striking clothing styles to assert their masculinity in France in this manner in literary works dating well past the end of French colonialization as well. Simon Njami's *African gigolo* is one such text in which black men utilize clothing to tactically claim greater recognition from and assert their heightened sense of masculinity to the Other in a white-dominated environment. This text's protagonist, Moïse Ndoungué, is a 28-year-old Cameroonian man living in France who makes a living of seducing white women. He makes it clear from the onset of this narrative that he is not interested in his Africanness (meaning his difference, or blackness) so much as he is in his own personal identification. He states: "Je n'ai ni combat ni credo. Je suis libre, totalement" (I have no fight or principle. I am totally free; 17). In other words, he is supposedly not concerned with how Others identify him and feels no need to "fight" to be seen by Others as he sees himself.

However, Moïse's actions throughout this narrative do not match his words. Since he abandoned the university studies that brought him to France in the first place, he has committed his time to seducing women (42), thereby revealing his use of his body—its skin and clothing—to assert his sense of masculinity. In order to heighten his predominately white female conquests' desire for himself, he regularly wears dapper outfits: "[Il] s'habillait avec une nonchalante élégance aux boutiques les plus huppées de la rive gauche" ("He dresses himself up with a nonchalant elegance at the most posh boutiques on the left bank"; 62). And at many of the fanciful events that elegantly attired Moïse attends alongside his most prized conquest, an older white woman named Mathilde, Moïse meets other black men who similarly wear extravagant clothing. The manner in which these men talk about their clothing suggests their use of clothing for reasons other than complete cultural assimilation to the predominantly white French society within which they circulate. Moïse's brief exchange with Édouard-Dieudonné Mpondo, the

former minister of Foreign Affairs in Cameroon, at a reception held in honor of a former French ambassador to Cameroon, underscores this difference. The narrator highlights:

Le bonhomme portait avec une insouciance tapageuse ses soixante-dix ans. Petit de taille, rond, les cheveux coupés ras séparés par une raie anachronique et ridicule sur ce crâne noir. Cravate lavallière, costume noir et cher. Moïse tendit la main. -Excusez-moi, je pensais à autre chose. -Ne vous excusez pas. Je suis ridicule dans ce déguisement. À quoi pensiez-vous? -Au Sénégal. -Vous avez raison. Le panafricanisme est l'avenir de l'Afrique. (128-9)

The gentleman wore his seventy years with a blatant carelessness. Small size, round, cropped hair parted by an anachronistic and ridiculous part on his black skull. Ascot tie, black, expensive suit. Moïse extended his hand. -Excuse me, I was thinking of something else. -Do no apologize. I am ridiculous in this disguise. What are you thinking about? - Senegal. -You are right. Panafricanism is the future of Africa.

Mpondo's calling his clothing a "disguise" and primary interest in issues pertaining to Africa challenge the accepted notion that a black man wears elegant attire to repudiate his African roots. Rather, this wearable "disguise" alters the gaze's approach to his black skin. The nonchalant attitude he exhibits toward his attire suggests that he alternatively considers his clothing style not as the end, but as the means through which to contest the colonial gaze's typical deduction of himself—and of his masculinity—based on his skin. The white waiters' negative reaction to having to serve well-dressed black men at this event following this exchange suggests the achievement of Mpondo's tactical use of clothing styles in his proclamation of masculine self (129).

Moïse's adoption of not only dressed up, but also dressed down styles reveals the strategic value of clothing to black men's masculine expression as well. He himself wears an outfit that is far from glamorous to the same event where he meets Mpondo: "Moïse mit pour l'occasion une chemise à col cassé, une veste de smoking, un jean et des baskets blanches Stan Smith" (Moïse puts on a collared shirt, a tuxedo jacket, jeans, and white Stan Smith sneakers for the occasion; 127). The justification Moïse offers Mathilde for choosing these particular garments reveals his explicit intent to contest the elder, predominantly white partygoers' standard reading of his skin and the black partygoers, such as Mpondo, who use elegant dress to gain visibility. The narrator highlights: "[I]l avait répondu qu'il désirait emmerder tous les vieux qu'il ne manquerait d'y avoir à cette soirée. –Pour eux, l'habit fait le moine. Comme ça, ils seront servis" (He responded that he wanted to piss off all of the elder guests who would not fail to be at this party. –For them, the clothes makes the man. This way, they will be served; 127). A few partygoers' shocked reactions to his clothing demonstrate the effectiveness of Moïse's dressed-down look in affording him the heightened sense of masculinity that he craves. Nonetheless, the negative manner in which the elegantly attired Gabonese minister of Foreign Affairs, Eugène Mpango, responds to Moïse's dressed-down attire when introduced to Moïse alongside the former French ambassador best reveals the success of Moïse's mission. The narrator describes Moïse and Mpango's first encounter:

Ce dernier lorgna Moïse avec circonspection. Il marqua un temps d'arrêt sur ses baskets, le jean. Il portait un monocle. Il salua d'un bref signe de tête à Durand qui ne s'était pas levé. Ce dernier murmura un "Excellence" contraint, salua également l'ancien ambassadeur. [...] Moïse dit: "Enchanté" aux deux hommes, ne se leva pas. - Jeune homme, fit Mpango, j'aurais pu vous fesser pour l'affront que vous me faites. Non

seulement vous vous présentez chez les gens vêtu comme un clochard, mais en plus vous nous privez, notre hôte et moi, du respect que vous devez à vos pères. (131)

Mpango stared warily at Moïse. He paused on his sneakers, jeans. He wore a monocle. He made a brief nod to Durand, who had not stood up. He murmured a forced “Excellence,” and also greeted the former ambassador. [...] Moïse said: “Delighted to meet you” to the two men, not standing up. -Young man, said Mpango, I could spank you for the affront you made to me. Not only do you present yourself dressed as a bum, but also you deprive us, our host and myself, of the respect that you owe your fathers.

Moïse’s failure to rise before Mpango and the former French ambassador certainly fuels Mpango’s anger here. However, the precision with which Mpango first surveys his dressed-down outfit suggests that his refusal to stand might actually be the final blow that pushes an already offended Mpango over the edge. Mpango’s opening his address to Moïse with a reference to Moïse’s tramp-like attire (“non seulement vous vous présentez chez les gens vêtu comme un clochard” [not only do you present yourself dressed as a bum]) shows the influence of clothing on Mpango’s identification of Moïse, clothing which Mpango recognizes as a challenge to the white French ambassador and to black men who consider dressed-up attire as indicative of their masculinity.

Though Mpango’s comments here confirm the achievement of Moïse’s assertion of masculinity by way of clothing, it is not always easy to determine the precise impact of clothing on Other’s identification of black men. One recognizes this persistent challenge for the black man who uses clothing to assert his masculinity when he or she reconsiders the two, previously outlined readings of the well-dressed black man sitting opposite the white woman in “Chochotte prend son chocolat dans son lit.” While some might interpret this black man as the more

authoritative of the pair on account of his elegant dress, others might consider him in a light reflective of the colonial gaze's typical reading of blackness, meaning as inferior to the white woman on account of his skin regardless of his accouterments. In other words, that the black man's use of clothing will be considered proof of his masculinity in the eyes of the Other is never guaranteed.

Yet Others' precise understandings of the black man's particular clothing styles matter only to a degree. Yes, the black man who self-consciously presents himself in particular clothing styles feels more manly in his own eyes and the eyes of other men who, like him, perceive clothing as a means to heightened masculinity. And yes, the black man's conception of self derives from how he sees himself within the gaze of Others. However, the disruptive influence of his clothing on the gaze's normative reading of himself as a non-man or non-human alone—meaning, its capacity to challenge the gaze's typical, inferior visualization of the black man and blackness in relation to agency, civility, and gender—attests to the black man's success in masculine expression via clothing within this environment. Thus, regardless of the precise meaning that the Other derives from his use of clothing, the black man's capacity to inspire the Other to derive new identity meaning from his clothing at all attests to clothing's pivotal role in the black man's masculine expression.

Conclusion

Clothing plays as central a role as skin in the black man's expression of masculinity vis-à-vis the Other in predominantly white French society. These clothing articles do not inhibit the gaze from examining the black man's skin. However, their proximity to and shared characteristics with skin—including an ability to fix rather than mirror realities as well as to

seduce and, consequently, heighten the gaze's desire for the black man—challenge the gaze's typical, abject reading of blackness. It is the style of clothing that the black man puts on, as well as the weight that he places on the utility of his dress, that enable him to assert his masculinity vis-à-vis the Other in a variety of ways, be it his fellow human being (as in the case of black colonial subjects) or societal equal (as shown by Moïse in *African gigolo*).

Prior to investigating black men's deliberate use of particular clothing styles to reassert their lost sense of manhood in Paris, it is instructive to think more critically about how Others' perception of black men's right to wear certain clothing styles attests to the potential influence of black men's cultivation of clothing for masculine expression as well. The next chapter will ground my theoretical reading of clothing as elemental to black men's identification in the real-life context of a popular site of masculinity performance in France: football. Through an examination of French politicians', journalists', and spectators' use of one particular clothing item—the *maillot bleu* (blue jersey)—in arguments for and against black footballers' right to represent France, I reveal how black French footballers' sporting of the *maillot bleu* challenges and reshapes discriminatory understandings of Frenchness and of black men's masculinity opposite other (white) players.

Chapter Two:
Blacks in Blue: Challenging Discriminatory Visualizations of Black Men and of Frenchness with the *maillot bleu*

In *Le Différend* (1983), French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard highlights language's impact on widespread cultural and political understandings through a detailed description of its fragmentary nature. After contending that language is actually composed of “phrases”—each signifying distinct meanings within different genres of discourse—that are uniquely linked together, he draws attention to two points at which analyses of language's influence on familiar understandings should begin: (1) the *différend* (disagreement) of its title, a moment wherein the phrases used by two parties in conflict are so distinct from each other that no accord can be reached and one party is silenced; and (2) the *événement* (event), a moment wherein the phrases employed by one party signify “something [that] happens which is not tautological with what has happened” (79). While both of these language points disturb the flow of grand narratives upon which seemingly established knowledge relies, the “event” stands out for its capacity to challenge referential frames of understandings put forth by hegemonic powers. As Lyotard points out, the reason is that the singularity of the “event” not only captivates audiences; it also incites them to question accepted beliefs and, in many cases, to develop alternative opinions.

Two incidents or “events” stand out in recent French football history for disturbing widespread notions of football as it relates to masculinity and to what I term “Frenchness,”

meaning characterizations of France’s inhabitants, values, and customs: (1) *l’affaire Mediapart* (the Mediapart Affair) (2011), wherein the French national team’s organizing body, the *Direction technique nationale de la Fédération Française de Football* (National Technical Direction of the French Football Federation) or FFF, attempted to promote a more “authentic,” *Français de souche* vision of Frenchness and of what a true Frenchman should look like through the establishment of a racial quota favoring white footballers; and (2) *l’affaire Le Pen* (the Le Pen Affair) (1996), wherein then president of the National Front and candidate for president of the French Republic, Jean-Marie Le Pen, upon observing the appearance of members of France’s national team (*les Bleus*) at the 1996 European Cup, stated that it was “artificiel que l’on fasse venir des joueurs de l’étranger en les baptisant équipe de France” (artificial that we have players brought in from overseas, baptizing them the French team”); “Une équipe ‘artificielle’” 22).²³ Whereas the precise details of these two events differ, the fiery responses they instigated from French journalists, politicians, footballers, and the public more generally were similar. First, newspapers’ dubbing these incidents as *affaires* (affairs) and their recurrent focus on them transformed *l’affaire Mediapart* and *l’affaire Le Pen* into veritable *moments discursives* (discursive moments) in French footballer history wherein the widely accepted belief that all of *les Bleus* signified archetypal representatives of the French Republic was contested.²⁴ Second, the actions of the FFF and Le Pen brought race as a measure of a man’s masculinity and

²³ The French media’s labeling these disruptive moments as *l’affaire Mediapart* (the Mediapart Affair; my emphasis) and *l’affaire Le Pen* (the Le Pen Affair; my emphasis) supports my reading of them as Lyotardian “events.” The term *affaire*, which commonly connotes “[l’ensemble] de faits créant une situation compliquée, où diverses personnes, divers intérêts sont aux prises” (the ensemble of facts creating a complicated situation, where diverse people and interests are struggling; Robert, “Affaire,” def. 4), also designates a shocking moment in time; most notably, “[un] scandale social, politique venant à la connaissance du public” ([a] social, political scandal coming to public knowledge; Robert, “Affaire,” def. 4) or “[un] procès, objet d’un débat judiciaire” ([a] process, object of judiciary debate; Robert, “Affaire,” def. 5), such as *l’affaire Dreyfus* (the Dreyfus Affair).

²⁴ French media discourse scholar Sophie Moirand defines a *moment discursif* (discursive moment) as “un fait ou un événement [...] [qui] donne lieu à une abondante production médiatique et qu’il en reste également quelques traces à plus ou moins long terme dans les discours produits ultérieurement à propos d’autres événements” (a fact or an event [...] [that] gives rise to a large media production and of which some traces equally remain more or less long term in later discourses about other events; 4).

Frenchness—a taboo topic in republican France—and into mainstream media discourse.²⁵

Third, and most interestingly, discussants of both *affaires* voiced their opinions of select footballers’ right to represent France by drawing focus to not just players’ civil status, but also players’ self-presentation—their appearance and agency in choosing to appear—in the French football jersey or *maillot bleu* (blue jersey).

Through close analysis of the “phrases” or language used in French media coverage of these two “events,” *l’affaire Mediapart* and *l’affaire Le Pen*, this chapter explores how the appearance of black French footballers sporting the *maillot bleu* impacts prejudiced understandings of black men’s masculinity and of Frenchness prevalent in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century French football. I argue that by wearing the *maillot bleu*, the black French footballer challenges and reshapes discriminatory understandings of Frenchness and, concurrently, of his masculine authority opposite other (white) French footballers. By exploring the black French footballer’s capacity to disrupt these visualizations by way of sporting this particular sportswear item alone, I underscore the *maillot bleu*’s connotative significance, habitually unaccounted for in the minimal studies devoted exclusively to the *maillot bleu* (Delage and Place), and contribute a new perspective from which to investigate how racized bodies among *les Bleus* reveal the variableness of seemingly established characterizations of manliness and Frenchness perpetuated on the pitch in France.²⁶

²⁵ To reiterate from the Introduction, I read black men’s expressions of masculinity as signifying those men’s expressions of social authority in a white-dominated society.

²⁶ I employ the term “racize,” a translation of the French *raciser* employed by French social scientists Colette Guillaumin and Pierre-André Taguieff, to mean to “discursively [make] into a racial grouping and discursively [separate] from the dominant group (Taguieff x). This description is distinct from the term “to racialize,” which connotes the production of racism or imposition of a racial interpretation. For more on the distinction between “racize” and “racialize,” see “Translator’s Preface,” Taguieff ix-xii. While there is ample literature that highlights how the performance of *les Bleus*’ black players facilitates new understandings of what it means to be French (Basse; Boli, Gastaut, and Grognet; Crolley and Hand 151-63; Dubois; Gastaut; Guérin and Jaoui), there are few studies devoted exclusively to how those players’ appearance alone influences visions of Frenchness.

In contrast to the previous chapter wherein I employ close readings of literary works to articulate my argument, here I use media discourse presented in reputable French national newspapers (*Le monde*, *Libération*, and *L'humanité*) to demonstrate how the black footballer sporting the *maillot bleu* disturbs discriminatory visions of Frenchness and of black men's masculinity proposed by xenophobic, hegemonic leaders in France. I focus on these three newspapers in particular because they represent a range of political leanings: *Le monde*, France's most popular daily newspaper, is reputed as holding the least biased view of the French press, whereas *Libération* is regarded as presenting a more socialist view, and *L'humanité*, a communist perspective.²⁷ Through my examination of the FFF members' references to the *maillot bleu* in their defense against black *Bleus* in l'*affaire Mediapart*, I highlight their consideration of black footballers' wearing of *maillot bleu* as incompatible with their particular connection of the French football and its jersey to distinct notions of masculinity, nationhood, and race in France. My subsequent consideration of journalists' and black footballers' use of the *maillot bleu* in their defense of those footballers' right to represent France amidst the l'*affaire Le Pen* reveals how black *Bleus*' sporting of the *maillot bleu* transforms the *maillot bleu* into a site of masculine and national identity redefinition capable of reframing discriminatory visualizations of black men prevalent in this white-dominated society.

What is Frenchness?

In view of the fact that both *affaires* transpired in consequence of hegemonic leaders' questioning select players' right to represent France, or really, their right to wear the *maillot bleu*, it is imperative to first consider the criteria that deem an individual French, meaning what

²⁷ For more on media discourses' establishment of particular interpretations of reality within the French context, see Hailon and Moirand. For more on the inherent ideological nature of news discourse, see Fowler; Fowler, Hodge, Kress, and Trew; Hartley; John E. Richardson.

actually constitutes Frenchness. I intentionally define Frenchness in a vague manner—as characterizations of France’s inhabitants, values, and customs—to underscore its indefiniteness. Some scholars have presented seemingly straightforward perspectives on what signifies Frenchness, describing it as everything from embodying notionally French ethos and values of universal equality and humanitarianism (epitomized by the famed adage *liberté, égalité, fraternité* [liberty, equality, fraternity [Stovall and Peabody]) to an appreciation for the arts and literature and a “natural and ‘authentic’ pace of life with its roots in a still vital rural tradition” (Kidd 155) to merely holding a French national identification card (Marchard and Ratinaud 43). Yet several other scholars’ discussion of conflicting mandates regarding these more idealized visions of Frenchness—primarily through the example of many legal French citizens of African descent’s denied claim to Frenchness—attests to the subjectiveness of this term (Brubaker; Hargreaves; Rosello; Tschimanga, Gondola, and Bloom). Just as the legislation designating who qualifies as a French national citizen has changed substantially from the seventeenth century to the present, the notion of Frenchness, which is typically founded on personal opinion rather than established law, has transformed over the years. Consequently, to understand what Frenchness signifies, one must closely examine the manner in which individuals employ this term in a given event or time period.

For the hegemonic leaders whose words and actions instigated *l’affaire Mediapart* and *l’affaire Le Pen*, white footballers signify the archetypal specimens of Frenchness. Based on their public remarks, it is apparent that they maintain a discriminatory vision of white men as signifying true Frenchmen possessing superior masculine authority that, in many ways, recalls Fanon’s description of the black man’s lived experience in white-dominated societies outlined in the previous chapter. And by presenting the white man as the model French national footballer,

they, accordingly, intimate his opposite—the black man—as inherently inferior to and distinct from the white man: in terms of Frenchness and, as Fanon highlights, of masculinity. Intriguingly, they convey their interpretation of Frenchness most patently through their reaction to black players’ sporting of a clothing item considered as emblematic of France as the French national flag itself: the *maillot bleu*. That the *maillot bleu* could be employed in these discussions to represent players’ masculinity and national belonging is evident when one considers Roland Barthes’ astute description of clothing in *Système de la mode* (1967). Clothing, as Barthes highlights, possesses two meanings: a material one signified by its design and a conceptual one implying particular beliefs associated with it (261; *The Fashion* 258). Thus, the codes inscribed and identified in a given clothing article through language influences how one defines the wearer of that clothing article (261; *The Fashion* 258). Yet in order to truly recognize how the FFF and Le Pen communicate their discriminatory visualization of Frenchness and of what the model Frenchman looks like by way of their discussion of the *maillot bleu*, one must first take into consideration the significance of the bodies cloaked in the *maillot bleu* to their visions of masculinity and Frenchness.

L’affaire Mediapart and Meanings of French Football and its Jersey

On April 28, 2011, French investigative website Mediapart leaked the FFF’s secret plan to actively recruit more white players for its national team and training camps to the public. In an article published on this date, entitled “Football français: les dirigeants veulent moins de noirs et d’arabes” (French Football: Managers Want Less Blacks and Arabs), Mediapart disclosed direct excerpts of a transcript from a closed FFF meeting held in November of the previous year, detailing FFF officials’ attempt to promote a more “authentic,” *Français de souche* vision of

Frenchness. In the eyes of Espoirs trainer Erick Mombaerts among many other FFF officials, France's *blanc, black, beur* (white, black, Arab) team had been inundated with nonwhite players since its historic 1998 FIFA World Cup win, subsequently transmuting it into a *black, beur, blanc* (black, Arab, white) one (Arfi, Hajdenberg, and Mathieu).²⁸ Since the FFF did not consider a team on which black players comprised the majority at all representative of France, it proposed introducing a quota that would limit the number of nonwhite players in its football academy's 12-13 year-old division—an integral precursor to the national team—to thirty percent (Arfi, Hajdenberg, and Mathieu).

Though the FFF's quota technically worked to the detriment of all nonwhite players, it was designed primarily to minimize the number of black footballers representing France. This distinction was made clear in the minutes that Mediapart published of the FFF's secret meeting. In this discussion, FFF members did not talk about the *maillot bleu*, but rather the bodies and color of the bodies sporting the *maillot bleu*, and how they related to the FFF's notions of masculinity and Frenchness. A prevailing characterization of *les Bleus* voiced at this meeting came from then head national coach and former national footballer Laurent Blanc, who avowed that the purpose of the quota was to improve the team's performance, yet measured performance by players' race and physicality. He stated:

En France, on a l'impression qu'on forme le même prototype de joueurs: grands, costauds, puissants. Grands, costauds, puissants. Qu'est-ce qu'il y a actuellement comme grands, costauds, puissants? Les Blacks. [...] C'est comme ça. Je crois qu'il faut recentrer, surtout pour des garçons de treize-quatorze ans, douze-treize ans, avoir d'autres critères modifiés avec notre propre culture. (Dhers and Schneider 20)

²⁸ The Espoirs are the team of the best young footballers in France, up to 21 years of age, under the authority of the FFF. The adage *blanc, black, beur* was attributed to the *Bleus* following its first FIFA World Cup win in 1998 by then president of the French Republic Jacques Chirac.

In France, we are under the impression that we form the same prototype of players: tall, beefy, strong. Tall, beefy, strong. What actually is there that is tall, beefy, strong? Blacks. That's how it is. [...] I think we need to re-center, particularly for thirteen-fourteen-, twelve-thirteen-year-old boys, to have other criteria modified to our own culture.

Most notably, Blanc's use of the term "Black" here indicates that the FFF's quota did in fact target phenotypically black footballers. In the domain of football, this term—which typically denotes someone "qui a la peau noire" (who has black skin; Caradec, "Black")—signifies players from its latest wave of immigration, meaning the children of Sub-Saharan African immigrants born in or emigrated to France in the 1980s through 1990s (Beaud and Noiriel 26-7). Blanc's distinguishing these "grands, costauds, puissants" (tall, beefy, strong) black footballers from the footballers who would benefit from the FFF's proposed quota—and whom Blanc would go on to identify as possessing not only white skin but also a superior intelligence—further highlighted the FFF's mission to reduce the number of black footballers in particular. By basing the distinction he recognizes between himself, his fellow (white) FFF members, and the (white) footballers endorsed by the quota—members of "*notre propre culture*" (*our own culture*; my emphasis)—from "les Blacks" (the Blacks) on intelligence and physical form, Blanc establishes an "us" versus "them" paradigm in many ways reminiscent of Arthur de Gobineau's late nineteenth-century description of the inherently superior, intelligent white man opposite the inferior black man or the *code noir* (1685) distinguishing the white *homme* (man) from the black *nègre* or *meuble* (movable property).²⁹ That is to say that he makes the distinction between "us" and "them" seem inherent and fixed, wherein players comprised in "us" always qualify as real Frenchmen and those represented by "them" (just as Fanon highlights in *Peau noire*) hardly

²⁹ For more on Gobineau's theory of racial determinism, see Comte de Gobineau. For more on the official subjugation of black men opposite white men in *Le code noir de 1685* (The Black Code of 1685), see "Le code noir."

count as (hu)man at all.³⁰ Accordingly, Blanc demonstrates how the FFF's favoring of intelligent (white) players signified not just a deliberate categorization of those "grands, costauds, puissants" black players as inherently distinct from, and thus, non-representative of "*notre propre culture*" (*our own culture*; my emphasis) or Frenchness, but also a repudiation of physically strong (black) players' form of masculine expression established on bodily strength.³¹

Mediapart's leakage of FFF members' like Blanc's discriminatory vision of Frenchness and of what the French footballers should not look like ("grands, costauds, puissants" [tall, beefy, strong]) transformed the FFF's clandestine meeting into a full-blown media *affaire* (affair) and instigated a public debate on the criteria by which a man qualifies as French. Yet this widespread deliberation over black footballers' right to represent France transpired not only because FFF members' explicit comments on race went against France's republican model of social integration and its associated claim to colorblindness; it also infringed upon the game of football's longstanding association with notions of masculinity and nationhood in France. Although France did not invent the game of football, France is widely recognized as "a footballing country" (Crolley and Hand 45). The game actually first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century in English aristocratic public schools as a planned site of masculine identity construction, wherein young men balanced their sedentary, academic lifestyles with a form of masculinity founded on the notion of "muscular Christianity" in which "manliness came to mean

³⁰ In *The Politics of the Veil* (2007), Joan Wallach Scott highlights the significance of maintaining an "us" versus "them" paradigm to preserving a fixed notion of Frenchness through her discussion of arguments made against the integration of Muslims in France. She states, "Unless 'they' become exactly like 'us,' integration is not possible and, by definition, 'they' are not 'us' and can never be 'us'" (84). That is to say that (in this particular context) even if the non-white French players ("they") self-identify as Frenchmen ("us"), they can never be true representatives of Frenchness ("us") based on their inability to express an alternative form of masculinity not founded on muscularity of the body and, accordingly, to fully adopt Blanc's conception of Frenchness.

³¹ Blanc's subsequent remarks in this meeting confirmed the FFF's advocacy of this quota to diminish the number of black footballers. Directing members' attention to the racial makeup of the then World Cup champions, Spain, Blanc stated: "Les Espagnols, ils disent 'Nous, on n'a pas de problème. Des blacks, on n'en a pas'" (The Spaniards, they say "Us, we don't have a problem. Blacks, we don't have them"; Arfi, Hajdenberg, and Mathieu). Here, Blanc suggests that the key to success is racial homogeneity.

a commitment to muscle, and to arduous physical activity” (Chandler and Nauright 6).³² It was through repeating the demanding, physical acts encompassed in this game—what Judith Butler in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” would call an intentional, “staged performance” of acts of gender³³—that these young men developed this particular form of masculine expression by way of football. France first adopted the game from England and “invented [the] tradition” of young men employing it to express a similar form of masculinity deriving from players’ physicality in 1872 in Havre, a city in close proximity to England.³⁴ By 1892, just one year after the formation of football clubs devoted exclusively to football in hexagonal France’s capital region, the first “club de football authentiquement français,” (authentically French football club) came into existence (Pickup 55). However, it was not until 1904 that France’s national football team, the central focus of this chapter, was established. From these inaugural years, French football, just like English football, signified a means through which young men could assert their personal sense of masculinity through their conditioning of their bodies while performing on the pitch. One notes a clear illustration of this point when he or she considers football’s popularity among the French military, particularly during the period of mandatory military service from the 1880s to the First

³² Football was first introduced in England in schools like Rugby, Eton, Westminster, and Charterhouse during a time when these schools lacked auxiliary activities to “restrain young mind[s] from vulgar and pernicious immoralities” (Chandler and Nauright 6). Simultaneously, Victorian upper- and middle-classes were embracing a new understanding of what it meant to “be a man”: namely, the aforementioned “muscular Christianity.” Pupils’ participation in sports in addition to their studies became compulsory “to counteract an otherwise sedentary lifestyle, and the need for an area to provide a sense of traditional masculinity, which the development of an increasingly urban-industrial society was eroding” (*ibid*, 5). Through their participation in team sports like football against other schools, young men developed bonds with fellow pupils, a strong sense of affiliation to their institutions, and virtues central to this form of “traditional masculinity,” including: unselfishness, fearlessness, and self-control (*ibid*, 6).

³³ Butler underscores the variable and performative nature of this identity through the example of drag, stating that we must “consider gender [...] as a corporeal style, an “act,” as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where “performative” itself carries the double meaning of ‘dramatic’ and ‘non-referential’ (521-2; emphasis in orig.). For more on the performativity of gender, see Butler, “Performative.”

³⁴ The term “invented tradition” comes from Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, who define it as a “set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1).

World War, when “[it] became a common recreation, with inter-regimental and inter-regional games,” and a useful manner in which to fortify bonds between soldiers within each regimen (Hare 18). Thus, as young men strengthened their bodies and developed bonds with their fellow servicemen through the playing of this game, they also reinforced their personal sense of masculinity.

What troubled reporters and French audiences was the FFF’s explicit denial of this form of masculinity characterized by a commitment to physical strength and traditionally promoted in the arena of French football. The corporeal traits of footballers repudiated by Blanc—“grands, costauds, puissants” (tall, burly, strong)—fit with the standard vision of “muscular Christianity” endorsed by the game of football since its inaugural days in England and in France. Blanc’s promotion of a new form of masculinity among *les Bleus*, measured in mental strength, would actually advance the intellectual lifestyle that football was initially meant to counter.

Of course, Blanc dismissed players who exhibited muscular masculinity in large part due to its primary association (at least in his mind) with black footballers. As he said: “Qu’est-ce qu’il y a actuellement comme grands, costauds, puissants? Les Blacks” (What actually is there that is tall, beefy, strong? Blacks). His racization of muscular masculinity understandably angered French audiences; as aforementioned, it suggested that black men were inherently unfit representatives of the type of masculine expression the FFF intended to promote by way of its players, or more generally, of the French Republic. Yet his denial of one racial group the right of claiming Frenchness based on the appearance of their gender expression also went against other tenets of French football. In addition to serving as a means through which young, pre-World War I soldiers asserted their personal sense of masculinity through the conditioning of their bodies, football signified a site of national identity construction in France. One needs only to think of *les*

Bleus' tricolored kit, comprising the *maillot bleu* and socks in the colors of the French flag (blue, red, and white) to recognize the sport's pivotal connection to visions of French nationhood. Yet as Rebecca Wines highlights in her dissertation "Sporting Frenchness: Nationality, Race, and Gender at Play," football also signified a symbol of a broadly defined French race. Paraphrasing Eugen Weber, she states that during the final decades of the nineteenth-century, "the health of the nation was deemed dependent on the well-being of individual bodies" (116). The "health" to which Wines and Weber refer signified a nation's economic and civic strength. Cognizant of the fact that individuals were actually responsible for France's "health" and the perceived strength of its race vis-à-vis other European nations, the French government devoted ample resources to fostering soldiers' physical fitness through sports like football, particularly in the aftermath of its loss of Alsace and Lorraine in 1870 in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1). The philosophy was that muscularly strong, masculine soldiers attested to the "health" or strength of the French race. In this respect, football also served as a republic-building tool, helping the then-weakened, defeated Republic fortify the image of its national body and race.

By the early twenties, football became more accessible to inhabitants of France outside of the upper class, including the industrial working class and countryside residents (Hare 19). This expansion of football's reach and its subsequent professionalization in 1932 made the sport even more appealing to young men from working-class and poor backgrounds.³⁵ These young men's attraction to football, owing to its potential to lead to social advancement, coupled with the Popular Front's promotion of "temps libre" ["free time"], solidified the correlation between football and a form of masculinity measured in muscle, as well as between football and

³⁵ One notable initiative that promoted football's reach substantially was the French Ministry of War's 1917 proposition to diffuse physical education beyond military ends (Callède 19), which transformed sports into "un domaine dans lequel [s'affirmait] l'action gouvernementale" (a domain in which government action asserted itself; Callède 27).

Frenchness for men of various classes and backgrounds throughout hexagonal France (Callède 55).³⁶

In an attempt to fortify the strength of the French Republic as a whole, France then began introducing football into its sub-Saharan African colonies as a measure of Frenchness from as far back as the twenties and thirties. Football signified another means through which French colonialists sought to promote their *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission), a political tool to spread French values and the semblance of unity between the mainland and its colonies (Barbier and Derouet 18).³⁷ France's welcoming of black players onto its national team and into its national uniform (*maillot bleu*) following its introduction of football into its colonies reinforced this mission while fortifying football's connection to a more racially inclusive vision of Frenchness. Even the most rudimentary review of the *Bleus* player roster attests to the long history of phenotypically black players from then-colonial territories deemed as apt representatives of France. In 1931, Raoul Diagne of French Guyana, born in Senegal, became the first black African man "à porter la tunique bleue" (to wear the blue tunic/jersey), representing France in the 1935 World Cup competition (Guérin and Jaoui 49).³⁸ Lari Ben Barek of Morocco, also known as "la perle noire" (the black pearl) on account of his black skin, first put on the *maillot bleu* in 1938. As directors Pascal Blanchard and Morad Aït-Habbouche point out in "Des noirs en couleur" (Blacks in Color) (2010), a documentary celebrating the plethora of black

³⁶ The Popular Front's "temps libre" (free time) encompassed limiting workweeks to forty hours, prolonging obligatory schooling to fourteen years, institutionalizing sports policies, and making outdoor sports more accessible to society through the development of vacation camps among other regulations. See Callède 55.

³⁷ As outlined in the introduction, what this strategy suggested was that French colonial subjects who fully adopted French language and culture would technically qualify as French citizens and, accordingly, attain the full rights and privileges of a French citizen. France's claim to not discriminate against any man or citizen based on his personal differences suggests that it recognizes all members of its Republic as French, and, thus, as equals.

³⁸ Raoul Diagne's familial background supported this notion that black players' inclusion on the French team promoted a more diverse vision of Frenchness at this time. He was the son of Blaise Diagne, "a colonial civil servant who became the first black African member elected to the French Chamber of Deputies in 1914, and a French mother" (Alegi 80).

footballers who have played on France's national team, Diagne and Barek paved the way for many other black players to follow, from Marius Trésor to Jean Tigana, Basile Boli to Thierry Henry.

Though France's inclusion of black players on the *Bleus* and in its iconic blue jersey technically deemed those players representatives of the French Republic, some individuals held contrary opinions of those players' Frenchness. Much like Blanc of the FFF, these individuals based their opinion not on tangible signs of those players' Frenchness, like those players' sporting of the *maillot bleu*; rather, they primarily based their understanding on what lied beneath that clothing item: skin. While black *Bleus*' origins have varied substantially (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Mali, and New Caledonia to name just a few places), most have experienced or experience discrimination on account of their difference in skin color.³⁹ That Diagne and Barek were the victims of explicit acts of racism due to their black skin does not come as a complete surprise, considering that they represented France around the Second World War, a time when fascism and nationalism were prevalent throughout Europe and sports, like football, were considered big platforms for not only the "health" or strength of individual players and nations, but also the "health" of a nation's race.⁴⁰ Yet more recent black *Bleus*' encounters

³⁹ "Quand on observe de près l'histoire individuelle des joueurs qui ont obtenu au moins une sélection avec les Bleus, on constate que la couleur de leur peau est leur unique point commun" (When one closely observes the individual history of players who held at least one selection with the Bleus, one notices that the color of their skin is their only common point; Boli 149).

⁴⁰ The fascist Italian press' infamous reaction to Ben Barek playing for France at a 1938 match against Italy in Naples illustrates this point best. By brazenly celebrating its ability "de ne pas compter parmi les *azzuri* des hommes de chocolat" (to no count chocolate men among the *Azzuri*), it transformed "les footballeurs en défenseurs de la 'race'" (footballers into defenders of 'race') and confirmed its expectation of France's national footballers' representing a more essentialist vision of a pure white, *Français de souche* race (Dietschy 27). Even prior to the Second World War, certain nations maintained analogous visualizations of footballers as archetypes of race. For instance, in 1921, Epitácio Pessoa, then-president of Brazil, created "un décret de blancheur" (a decree of whiteness) that restricted recruiters from selecting players with black or brown skin, "pour des raisons de prestige patriotique" (for reasons of patriotic prestige; Galeano 48). In effect, existent black players like Arthur Friedenreich (Brazil's first national footballer of African origin with Afro-Brazilian and German roots) were not given as much opportunity to participate in championship competitions and only permitted to enter the pitch after whitening their bodies with rice powder (Galeano 48).

with discriminatory comments and acts—be it the throwing of bananas and emulation of monkey noises when they walk onto the pitch or more explicit condemnations of their dark skin like Bulgarian footballer Hristo Stoïchkov’s infamous verbal attack on Marcel Desailly in 1994 (one of the most haunting instances in recent French football history wherein “la couleur de [la] peau était mis à mal” [the color of [black] skin was insulted; Thuram, *Lilian* 127])—indicate a persistent resistance to those players’ sporting of the *maillot bleu* and representing France.⁴¹

Accordingly, the FFF’s conviction that French footballers must promote a form of masculinity not founded on muscularity—one that would limit the number of black *Bleus* and promote a whiter vision of Frenchness—constituted just one more illustration of this trend. In many journalists’ perspective, the FFF’s quota breached French football’s historic promotion of an ostensibly inclusive notion of Frenchness. Moreover, the FFF’s favoring of white footballers to the detriment of nonwhite ones was illegal. Individuals perturbed by black *Bleus*, mindful of France’s republican model of social integration, typically did not express their opinions in as frank a manner as Blanc did at the FFF’s secret meeting. Guérin and Jaoui highlight this point in *Noirs en bleu: Le football est-il raciste? (Blacks in Blue: is Football Racist?)*. Quoting black historian Pap Ndiaye, they state:

Établir des distinctions est déjà une manière d’ébrécher le pacte républicain car elles sont lourdes de menaces dans la perspective d’une hiérarchisation, d’une exclusion. Vous trouverez des républicains qui vous diront que parler des Noirs en équipe de France de football est déjà un acte raciste. (23)

⁴¹ Marcel Desailly’s notorious confrontation with Bulgarian player Hristo Stoïchkov occurred during France’s qualifying match against Bulgaria for the 1994 World Cup. Standing before Desailly on the pitch, Stoïchkov muttered, “Pays de merde, Noirs de merde, peau de merde” (Shitty country, shitty Blacks, shitty skin; Dubois 97; Thuram, *Lilian* 127), an injurious statement that he repeated even after the match when an irritated Desailly and newspaper journalists asked him if he recognized the error of his words. In categorizing everything by which he identifies Desailly—his “country”, “black”(ness), and “skin”—as “shitty,” Stoïchkov confirms the common, visual correlation between footballers’ appearance (in this particular case, their skin color) and their cultural belonging.

Establishing distinctions is already one manner of tarnishing the republican pact because they are heavy with menaces in the perspective of hierarchization, of exclusion. You will find republicans who will tell you that talking about Blacks on the French football team is already a racist act.

Given that, as Ndiaye highlights, the singling out of a particular group—in this case, black players—goes against the very principles of republicanism promoted by France, any action distinguishing one racial group from others qualifies as a racist act.

Of course, that is not to say that France's official opposition to explicit commentary on race inhibits individuals from discussing race in public discourses: the French sports newspaper press actually is reputed for relating sports to not only the nation as defined by Renan, but also to issues of race and ethnicity (Crolley and Hand 47). Rather, the manner in which journalists and other individuals discuss race typically takes more seemingly innocuous forms. That is to say, rather than speak directly about race as it relates to notions of masculinity and Frenchness, they address the topic through discussion of or reference to other, seemingly unrelated topics.

FFF members' eventual clarifying to the press that select players' binational status, not their racized expression of masculinity, actually inspired the quota signified a clear attempt to abate the FFF's negative public image in the wake of Mediapart's exposé. Numerous journalists re-cited Blanc's aforementioned remark to expose the FFF's illegal action against black players and promotion of an alternative form of masculinity and a xenophobic vision of Frenchness linked exclusively to whiteness (Dhers and Schneider 20; Delaporte 16)—or as Paul Gilroy would say, its conviction in a “new racism” wherein those players' race determines their lack of national belonging.⁴² Yet when FFF officials spoke directly to French newspapers, they did not

⁴² In *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, Gilroy distinguishes “the new racism” (a term used previously by Martin Barker among others) he perceives in 1980s Britain from widespread

describe their understanding of Frenchness, the impetus behind their quota, as based on race or on masculine expression. Rather, they argued that this quota was a response to black footballers' possession of dual citizenship in France and in their respective African nation of familial origin. Convinced that its "grands, costauds, puissants" (tall, beefy, strong) players' allegiances did not lie entirely with France on account of their bearing a second citizenship, they deemed a mandated promotion of the number of white footballers to preserve their idealized vision of manliness and of Frenchness as necessary.

Respondents to the FFF, including Franco-Guadeloupian former defensive *Bleu* Lilian Thuram, duly recognized the FFF's describing its discriminatory quota as a response to binationality as a "faux-problème" (false problem) ("Affaire"; Delaporte). The FFF's attempt to recruit more white players was hypocritical following its celebration of France's ethnically and racially diverse team, filled with physically robust players (including key "grands, costauds, puissants" [big, burly, strong] black players like Christian Karembeu and Thuram himself), just decades prior at the 1998 FIFA World Cup. Respondents also found the FFF's allegation that black footballers' ability to claim two nationalities inspired its quota suspicious for several other reasons, including: (1) the extensive history of binational members of *les Bleus*⁴³; (2) France's prominent ranking in the international football league (which made it highly unlikely that its binational players would even choose to play for other nations ["Affaires des quotas"]); and (3)

racist ideologies for "[its] capacity to link discourses of patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, Englishness, Britishness, militarism and gender difference into a complex system which gives 'race' its contemporary meaning" and to operate across various political opinions (43). As he highlights, "the new racism is primarily concerned with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. It specifies who may legitimately belong to the national community and simultaneously advances reasons for the segregation or banishment of those whose 'origin, sentiment or citizenship' assigns them elsewhere" (43). For more on the connection between "new racism" and notions of nation and national belonging, see 43-71.

⁴³ As journalists Thomas Baietto, Noê Gandillo, and Camille Maestracci highlighted in their *Le monde* article "Les 'binationaux,' enquête sur ces footballeurs français qui ne jouent pas en bleu" ("Binationalists," Investigation on Those French Footballers Who do not Play in Blue), "l'histoire du football compte des précédents célèbres de joueurs qui ont porté les maillots de deux sélections nationales" (football history counts on preceding celebrity players who wore the jerseys of two national selections).

the FFF's minimal concern for phenotypically white players possessing dual national affiliations and expressing their non-French affiliation by sporting another nation's jersey.⁴⁴ In other words, binationality could not have inspired the FFF's proposal of a quota that negatively impacted black footballers above all. This public discussion on binationality did not signify, but rather camouflaged the real stimulus for the FFF's quota. But if it was not just black footballers' possession of dual citizenship, then what provoked the FFF's proposal of such a discriminatory quota?

“Nous n'avons pas besoin d'un joueur qui ne soit pas attaché au maillot bleu”

Though FFF officials identified binationality as the core motivation for the quota, they frequently mediated this assertion through discussion of a material item worn by all of its national team players: the *maillot bleu*. It was clear that, by focusing on binationality, the FFF attempted to distance itself from the discriminatory remarks its members voiced during its secret meeting regarding the inaptness of black footballers representing France on account of their possession of a few physical traits: namely, a muscular physique and black skin. Paradoxically, FFF officials' describing binationality by way of the *maillot bleu* just brought audiences' attention back to the location of the *maillot bleu*—on black *Bleus*' bodies—and, accordingly, confirmed their anxiety over what they considered tangible proof of those players' inherent distinction from the typical Frenchman in terms of masculine and racial expression. Mombaerts' statement to the press—which would become a leading sound bite of this entire *affaire*—

⁴⁴ In *Les miscellanées des Bleus: Chroniques dérangés de l'Équipe de France (Miscellaneous Facts about the Bleus: Deranged Chronologies of the French Team)*, Ronan Boscher and Thomas Pitrel highlight the vast number of naturalized French citizens, originally from Eastern Europe and South America, “qui ont porté le maillot français” (who have worn the French jersey; 27). See “Quand la France naturalisait des joueurs européens” (When France Naturalized European Players; 27-9) and “Quand la France naturalisait des joueurs sud-américain” (When France Naturalized South-American Players; 58-9).

signifies the most prominent example of this trend. To justify the FFF's quota, he proclaimed: "Nous n'avons pas besoin d'un joueur qui ne soit pas attaché au *maillot bleu*" (We have no need for a player who is not attached to the blue jersey; Arfi, Hajdenberg, and Mathieu; my emphasis). Like Blanc, Mombaerts paved a clear distinction between the players he deemed representative of the French republic ("nous" [us], epitomized by white players) and black players possessing dual citizenship (whom he alludes to here through his use of the term "un joueur" [a player]). Yet rather than describe the FFF's judgment against the latter group as deriving from that group's disengagement with the French team or nation—meaning through their explicit favoring of another national affiliation over their affiliation to France—Mombaerts claimed that it stemmed from that group's "unattachment" to the uniform (*maillot bleu*).

On the surface, Mombaerts' highlighting what he considered select players' "unattachment" to the *maillot bleu* seems to suggest black footballers' conscious refusal of national belonging alone. The past participle "attaché" means to be "fermé par une attache" (closed by an attachment/connection) or "lié par un sentiment d'amitié, une habitude, un besoin, un goût" (linked by a sentiment of friendship, a habit, a need, a taste); Debove and Rey 165-6). Based on this definition, its opposite, "détaché," can be used to characterize someone who is independent, lacking connection, or indifferent (Debove and Rey 166). Mombaerts identifying black players as "unattached" thus might read as his acknowledgement of black players' indifference or disloyalty to *les Bleus* and the French Republic as a whole. Yet considering the lack of standard measure to determine any individuals'—black or white—allegiance or loyalty to *les Bleus*, one must question whether Mombaerts' statement actually speaks to players' personal sentiments of the team or the Republic that that team represents.

What Mombaerts more likely meant to highlight by stating that the players rebuffed by the FFF's quota—meaning black players “ne [soient] pas attachée au maillot bleu” ([are] not attached to the blue jersey)—is what he considers as a clear incompatibility between the FFF's vision of manhood and Frenchness, epitomized by the *maillot bleu*, and these black *Bleus*: in other words, an discordancy between the FFF's archetypal Frenchman and black men. His singling out black footballers alone as those “unattached” to the *maillot bleu* (despite the FFF's inability to truthfully measure the “attachment” or loyalty of the white players it favors most) indicates his and the FFF's recognition of national belonging in France as determined by race and masculine expression.⁴⁵ Regardless of the fact that the majority of the black *Bleus* at the time of *l'affaire Mediapart* were born in the French Republic—a fact that likely influenced those players' allegiance to France as evidenced in their playing on the French team in the first place—Mombaerts labels them as “unattached” or disloyal, thereby suggesting that only white individuals whom, as Blanc highlighted, exhibit their masculinity via mental rather than physical prowess on the pitch, can claim Frenchness (53).⁴⁶

Yet Mombaerts' articulating black footballers' incompatibility with his and the FFF's idealized vision of manliness and Frenchness as those players' unattachment to the *maillot bleu* here signals what likely guided the FFF's discriminatory actions in the first place; namely, the

⁴⁵ In many ways, his assertion typified the manner in which black athletes living not only in France, but in white-dominated societies around the world, are identified in and disassociated from the nations they represent on account of their difference in skin color. Stuart Hall illustrates this point in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, by stating, “In 1995, the cricket magazine, *Wisden*, had to pay libel damages to black athletes for saying that they couldn't be expected to display the same loyalty and commitment to winning for England because they are black” (“The Spectacle” 230).

⁴⁶ Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the “Third Space of enunciation” is useful for understanding how the presence of black footballers on the national team disturbs Mombaerts and Blanc's established vision of Frenchness in this manner. Bhabha proposes the Third Space in a psychoanalytic analogy to how we produce meaning from language, stating that it signifies the gap between “the act of cultural enunciation – the *place of utterance* – [...] [and] the *différance* of writing” (52). It is in this space in-between the lines of language that ambivalence in the production of meaning and new forms of agency appear. This ambivalence “challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People” (52). For more on the Third Space, see Bhabha 51-6.

FFF's consideration of the *maillot bleu* as a site of masculine and national identity construction. Based on Mombaerts' identification of black *Bleus* as unfit representatives of the French Republic by way of the *maillot bleu*, it is evident that to him, the *maillot bleu* represents the FFF's vision of masculinity and of Frenchness promoted by French football. Of course, Frenchness, as I highlighted earlier, is a very nebulous concept. The racial, ethnic, religious, and diversity of France's inhabitants alone make any attempt to define Frenchness in concrete terms fraught with complication. Yet this lack of a single, established manner in which to define Frenchness is precisely what makes the *maillot bleu* so central to Mombaerts' anchoring of his discriminatory vision of nationhood and overall argument against black *Bleus*' Frenchness.⁴⁷ The *maillot bleu*—the clothing article most emblematic of football—thus becomes a site at which individual players' aptness on the team is most visibly tested. In other words, Mombaerts indicates that sporting the *maillot bleu* signifies more than just wearing a sports clothing article; it represents an individual's expression of Frenchness and of masculine authority. However, it is how players are literally "attached" to the *maillot bleu*—meaning how the (black or white) skin of their (heavily or slightly) built bodies appears alongside its fabric—that truly determines an individual's Frenchness.

Other FFF officials' focus on black footballers' sporting of the *maillot bleu* in their defense of the quota further underscored the influence of this clothing article on how people

⁴⁷ For more on the *maillot bleu*'s connections to notions of nationhood and race since the inception of the game of football in France, see Boli, Gastaut, and Grognet 8-9. The *maillot bleu*, unlike the French rugby jersey, was not an accouterment typically worn by sports fans prior to 1998. This trend changed substantially during the World Cup, as evidenced in an unprecedented record in *maillot* sales and reputable newspapers devoting portions of their sports sections to the history of the game's accouterments. French fans were now sporting the *maillot bleu* to reveal their support of a concept of nationhood epitomized by France's diverse team: a more inclusive vision of society wherein all French citizens, regardless of race, were recognized as French. As then-sponsor Adidas described, this widespread shift in the abstract meaning attached to the *maillot bleu* made it a fitting clothing article for anyone to wear: "Lorsque l'on se promène dans la rue avec un maillot bleu-blanc-rouge, on ne passe plus pour un beau, un supporter attardé, voire un dangereux nationaliste" (When one walks in the street with a blue-white-red jersey, one no longer passes for a yokel, a backward supporter, a dangerous nationalist; Normand and Wurstemberger). For more on how the 1998 World Cup propelled interest in the *maillot bleu*, see Normand and Wurstemberger.

conceive of the national and masculine identification of those players sporting it. Like Mombaerts, Blanc referenced black footballers' binationality as the inspiration for the FFF's quota. However, he too addressed this topic by way of the *maillot bleu*, thereby directing audiences' attention once more to these black footballers' bodies and their display of what he previously identified as a racized form of masculinity through the fabric of the jersey. He insisted: "Ça n'a aucune connotation raciste. Quand les gens portent les maillots des équipes nationales des 16 ans, 17 ans, 18 ans, 19 ans, 20 ans, espoirs, et qu'après, ils vont jouer dans des équipes nord-africaines et africaines [...], ça me dérange énormément" (That has no racist connotation. When people wear the national team's jerseys at 16 years, 17 years, 18 years, 19 years, 20 years, Espoirs, and later, they are going to play on North-African and African teams [...], that disturbs me tremendously; Dhers and Schneider 20). Although Blanc paints a fuller picture of the consequence of binationality for the FFF than Mombaerts (lost investment of time, practice, and finances), his depicting black players' binationality as those players' wearing of jerseys other than the *maillot bleu* and their clothing choice as inspiring the FFF's quota ("ça me dérange énormément" [that disturbs me tremendously]) reminds readers once more of the integral link between this particular clothing article that shares the colors of the *drapeau nationale* (national flag) and understandings of Frenchness based on race and gender.

Blanc's use of the *maillot bleu* in his defense against black footballers on the French national team might seem counter-intuitive to the FFF's mission: the FFF's quota would make black footballers' don jerseys other than the *maillot bleu*, which is precisely what Blanc claimed as inspiration for the quota's enactment in the first place. Yet it actually illuminates what about black *Bleus* wearing of the *maillot bleu* perturbs the FFF in greater detail. From Mombaerts' description of the *maillot bleu* as an article to which those footballers negatively impacted by its

quota are “unattached,” it is clear that the FFF considers black footballers’ wearing of this clothing article as a challenge to not only their idealized, discriminatory vision of Frenchness, but also of which players possess superior masculine authority. And as Blanc intimates, it is not just the appearance but also the very act of black *Bleus*’ sporting the *maillot bleu*—of wearing the *maillot bleu* when training in France’s camps and later taking it off to replace it with the jersey of a different country—that menaced the FFF. In other words, black *Bleus*’ agency in self-expression by way of sporting the *maillot bleu* on top of their black, muscular bodies disturbed Blanc’s abject visualization of the “grand, costaud, puissant” (tall, burly, strong), unintelligent black footballer as inherently distinct from what he recognized earlier as “notre propre culture” (our own culture). The FFF’s discriminatory quota would not just safeguard the FFF and its model (white) footballers’ masculine authority over black footballers through its promotion of a form of masculinity measured in intellectual dexterity; it also would restrict black players from asserting their masculine authority over the FFF and its celebrated (white) players by sporting the *maillot bleu* and challenging their particular vision of what constitutes a true Frenchman in the first place. By inhibiting these players from putting on and, accordingly, claiming any “attachment” to the *maillot bleu* or to their French identification, the FFF would, accordingly, preserve its masculine supremacy relative to those players and secured the boundaries to its discriminatory vision of Frenchness and manhood in the arena of French football.

Ultimately, Mediapart’s exposé and the negative reaction that it generated from the public prompted politicians to bar the FFF from implementing its quota and to publicly reprimand the FFF’s leader Blanc and National Technical Director, François Blaquart. Nonetheless, the FFF’s marked focus on the *maillot bleu* in their arguments against black *Bleus* incites one to investigate the success of black *Bleus*’ deliberate use of that same clothing article

to assert their heightened sense of masculinity opposite xenophobic leaders in a visual manner and, consequently, confirm their Frenchness. By examining newspaper coverage of *l'affaire Le Pen* (1996), an antecedent *affaire* wherein journalists and black footballers themselves reinforced black *Bleus'* Frenchness through discussion of the *maillot*, one recognizes the significance of this clothing article to black *Bleus'* personal sense of masculinity relative to (white) Others and resultant claim of Frenchness.

L'affaire Le Pen

Much like *l'affaire Mediapart*, *l'affaire Le Pen* transpired in the aftermath of a prominent French official's questioning of black *footballers'* right to be on the French team and to serve as models of masculinity and Frenchness. On June 23, 1996, one day after *les Bleus* beat the Netherlands at the 1996 European Championship, Jean-Marie Le Pen delivered a statement that drew audiences' attention away from team members' performance and focused it back on those players' appearance. He disdainfully stated that it was “artificiel que l'on fasse venir des joueurs de l'étranger en les baptisant équipe de France” (artificial that we have players brought in from overseas, baptizing them the French team) and regretful that most of these “foreign” players on the French team “ne chantent pas *la Marseillaise* ou *visiblement* ne la savent pas” (do not sing *La Marseillaise* or *visibly* do not know it; “Une équipe ‘artificielle’ 22; my emphasis). Le Pen, a representative of neo-fascist, nationalistic politics and known for his xenophobic views, actually represented a more general trend in French public opinion at this time: a movement towards a discriminatory vision of Frenchness epitomized, just as in *l'affaire Mediapart*, by the white, *Français de souche* male footballer.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, his remark instigated an outpouring of

⁴⁸ Although Le Pen held particularly extreme views on race as it relates to the Republic, a national survey taken just two years following *l'affaire Le Pen* revealed that, “sans partager les idées de Jean-Marie Le Pen, deux Français sur

negative responses from newspaper journalists and members of the national team itself whose views represented the majority of the French population.

What unnerved French journalists was not Le Pen's admonishing players for failing to confirm their Frenchness by singing the national anthem; stating that a player could not claim this identification because he failed to sing *la Marseillaise* would be ludicrous since so many players typically refused to sing the anthem.⁴⁹ Rather, his labeling select players as foreign—a singling out of individuals that, as Ndiaye pointed out earlier, went against France's republican values—upset them and initiated a public debate on how Le Pen defined Frenchness.⁵⁰

Le Pen's calling any member of *les Bleus* foreign was preposterous, since possessing French citizenship was a requirement of all men playing on the national team. And given the variety of ways in which any individual qualifies as French, it was clear that Le Pen measured select players' foreignness by something other than their actual civil status. *Le monde's* Pierre

cinq (40%) se disent tentés par le racisme et estiment, par exemple, qu'il y a trop d'Arabes et de Noirs sur le territoire national" (without sharing Jean-Marie Le Pen's ideas, two out of five Frenchmen (40%) claim to be tempted by racism and estimate, for example, that there are too many Arabs and Blacks on national territory; "Racisme" 1). Thus, readers can recognize his vision of what it means to be French as representative of a sizeable portion of the population.

⁴⁹ In his only public response to Le Pen's remark, national team coach Aimé Jacquet suggested the foolishness of Le Pen's employing certain players' failure to sing *la Marseillaise* as proof of those players' non-Frenchness in saying, "quant à *la Marseillaise*, je sais beaucoup la marmontent et que personne ne les oblige à la chanter" (as for *la Marseillaise*, I know a lot [of players] mumble it and that no one obligates them to sing it; Fièvre 2). Journalists like Jean-Jacques Bozonnet further indicated that Le Pen's concern was not over players' (physical or verbal) performance with recourse to notable instances in French football history wherein players consciously refused to sing the national anthem as a whole. For instance, "Le 28 janvier 1940, dans un Parc des Princes comble, les footballeurs français ne chantaient pas *la Marseillaise* à pleine voix ; ils l'écoulaient, respectueusement alignés dans le rond central, comme leurs adversaires portugais. Jean-Marie Le Pen [...] aurait-il reproché leur silence à ces hommes qui revenaient du front tout exprès pour ce match international?" (January 28, 1940, in a packed Parc des Princes, the French footballers did not sing *la Marseillaise* aloud; they listened to it, respectfully aligned in the central round, like their Portuguese adversaries. Would Jean-Marie Le Pen [...] reproach the silence of these men who deliberately returned from the [war]front for this international match?; 1).

⁵⁰ Due to France's complex citizenship laws and ongoing struggle against the influx of undocumented immigrants, many French citizens who were born on French soil, but to immigrant parents, are still often referred to as "étrangers" (foreigners). Nonetheless, Le Pen's describing these "étrangers" as coming from overseas suggests his complete disregard for such citizens' French citizenship. For more on France's citizenship laws and the complexity of its categorization of citizens—either by birth or naturalization—or foreigners whose racial and ethnic backgrounds are taken at face value, see Hargreaves.

Georges satirically stressed these pivotal points in his June 25th article, “Bleu, blanc, noire” (Blue, White, Black):

Mais sont-ils bien Français? Totalement Français? Français de naissance, d’ascendance, Français de Clovis et de baptême, Français de couleur française, Française au champ d’honneur, Français de patronyme française, Français de droit du sang, Français des tranchées, Français de France? Jean-Marie l’a dit: footballeurs, pas vraiment Français!
(32)

But are they really French? Totally French? French by birth, by descent, French by French color, French by field of action, French by French family name, French by right of blood, French of trenches, French of France? Jean-Marie said it: footballers, not truly French!

By punctuating this list of ways in which individuals justly self-identify as French (birth, descent, color, familial blood lines) with terms of gradation—“Mais sont-ils *bien* Français? [...] *totalement* Français? [...] Français de France?” (But are they *really* French? [...] *totally* French? [...] French of France?; my emphasis)—Georges lampoons Le Pen’s deeming certain players as more French than others. This wide range of ways in which individuals qualify as French exposes the inherent subjectiveness of Le Pen’s seemingly fixed notion of Frenchness. The majority of the foreign players Le Pen singles out actually do fall into the first category that Georges lists here as a measure of an individual’s “total” Frenchness (all of the players, with the exception of Marcel Desailly who was originally from Ghana, were either born in hexagonal France or in the DOM-TOM).⁵¹ Yet several of *les Bleus*’ white members—players who epitomized Le Pen’s vision of Frenchness—could not even fulfill this list of criterion by which

⁵¹ DOM-TOM is an acronym used to refer to France’s “départements et territoires d’outre mer” (overseas departments and territories), meaning all regions outside of Europe (OM or “d’outre mer” [overseas]) wherein France maintains administration and that are represented in the Parliament of France.

one qualifies as French. Certain measures of “true” Frenchness that Georges lists—“Français au champ d’honneur [...] Français des tranchées, Français de France (French by field of action [...]) French of trenches, French of France) are challenging for any player—black or white—to clearly define, let alone claim. Moreover, other criterion—for instance, a player being truly “Français de patronyme française” (French by French family name)—might actually work against Le Pen’s white players, thereby challenging their assertion of Frenchness: the name Marcel Desailly does not seem any less French than Éric Di Meco after all.⁵² Le Pen’s proclamation that (foreign) footballers do not fit into any of these categorizations and are, alternatively “not truly French,” thus indicates his basing his understanding of foreignness on a generalization rather than on footballers’ civil status (a point that Le Pen himself would confirm in subsequent statements to the press).

Le Pen actually deemed certain players as foreign based on their physical appearance first and foremost. In fact, he inadvertently verified this point when defending his initial comment at a gathering in Lille on June 26th. At the outset of this gathering, Le Pen acknowledged that the DOM-TOM was actually a part of the French Republic and, accordingly, why players from this region might have especially taken offense of his initial remark.⁵³ Nonetheless, he defended his right to judge *les Bleus* as he did while they stood quietly, side-by-side, at the inauguration of

⁵² Although Marcel Desailly was born in Ghana, he has often expressed his feeling completely French, having moved to France at the age of four, a time at which his name changed from his birth name, Odenke Abbey, to his current, more notionally French moniker. Éric Di Meco is an Avignon-born footballer of French descent.

⁵³ Le Pen’s statement here is significant because it recalls the historic tension between Francophone Antillean and Sub-Saharan Africans’ self-identification and underscores the incongruity between Le Pen’s perception of and the reality of select players’ Frenchness. Fanon highlights in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*) that the Antillean’s location within the French Republic inspires his identification with (white) Frenchmen over (black) Africans, stating, “Nous avons connu et nous connaissons encore des Antillais qui se vexent quand on les soupçonne d’être Sénégalais. C’est que l’Antillais est plus ‘évolué’ que le Noir d’Afrique: entendez qu’il est plus près du Blanc” (We have known and still know Antilleans who get annoyed when one takes them for Senegalese. It is because the Antillean is more “evolved” than the Black African—meaning that he is closer to the white man; 20). Le Pen’s diplomatic remark that the DOM-TOM’s status might lead players from the region to self-identify as French, and subsequent defense of his identification of those players based on their physical appearance—and more specifically, their visible “foreignness” or blackness—nonetheless, highlights the irrelevance of this distinction of civil status to the individual categorizing black players by way of the colonial gaze.

their match against the Netherlands. He declared: “Je suis un téléspectateur payant, ce qui me donne le droit de juger les acteurs du spectacle” (I am a paying television viewer, which gives me the right to judge actors in the spectacle; “M. Le Pen”). “Un téléspectateur payant” (A paying television viewer) watches the images projected before him or her on the screen, and like this figure, Le Pen watched and “judged” *les Bleus* based on what he saw displayed on the screen before him.⁵⁴ The spectacle that Le Pen anticipated seeing on television that day featured white footballers representing France, a racially homogenous team that he believed French football and the National Front promoted.⁵⁵ However, what he saw instead was a “‘spectacle’ of otherness,” a highly visible display of racial difference evidenced in select *Bleus*’ black skin that contradicted this particular vision of Frenchness.⁵⁶ Perturbed by this disruption to his understanding of what French footballers (and representatives of France) should look like, Le Pen labeled the players who epitomized this otherness as foreign.

As appalling as Le Pen’s admission to discriminating against certain players based on their physical appearance was, it did not surprise most members of the press. Journalists’ descriptions of Le Pen’s foreign players even prior to Le Pen’s subsequent disclosure confirmed this point. Despite the fact that there were eight non-white players on France’s team at the time, most recognized Le Pen’s use of the term “foreign” as a euphemism for its six black players of

⁵⁴ Le Pen’s expectation that the television spectacle of the game would support his discriminatory vision of Frenchness makes sense when one considers Guy Debord’s notion of the “Society of the Spectacle,” wherein the spectacle in modern societies is described as a falsified version of reality produced and controlled by ruling authorities that visually displays the social relations between different demographic groups. Debord’s understanding of the spectacle speaks to Le Pen’s conviction in his right to judge players based on what he, a hegemonic figure in French politics, saw of the game as “un téléspectateur payant” (a paying television viewer). For more on the “Society of the Spectacle” (which will also be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapter), see Debord.

⁵⁵ The closing of his statement—that many players on the French team did not know *La Marseillaise* “ou visiblement ne le savent pas” (or *visibly* did not know it; “Une équipe”; my emphasis)—further attests to his privileging of what players look like over which nationality players lawfully claim (either by birth or through naturalization).

⁵⁶ Stuart Hall identifies the “‘spectacle’ of otherness” as the unfortunate reality of differentiation that many black sportsmen in white-dominated societies experience on account of their difference in skin color (“The Spectacle” 231-2).

African descent (a trend that was further supported by reporters including chiefly comments from black footballers of *les Bleus*' nonwhite members as well as Le Pen's own referencing black footballers' ancestral origins alone when attempting to justify his xenophobic claim). Journalists confirmed Le Pen's foreign footballer's blackness with language. For instance, Georges, in his aforementioned *Le monde* article, presented football from Le Pen's perspective as a spectacle "du genre rasta-rap plutôt que festnoz" (of the rasta-rap genre rather than Fest Noz [the traditional Breton night festival]; 32). By categorizing football as part of "rasta-rap," a movement closely tied to the Rastafarianism (the spiritual ideology inspired by Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, that started in Jamaica in the 1930s and has since developed a distinct visual cultural identity intimately tied to black diaspora culture) and rap (the popular music movement that actually originated among African-American and Latino young men yet is primarily associated with the African-American community)—Georges presents the foreign footballer in question as being of black African origins.

Other members of the press confirmed Le Pen's foreign footballer's blackness with images, the cover of *L'humanité*'s June 25th issue serving as a prime example (see fig. 2).

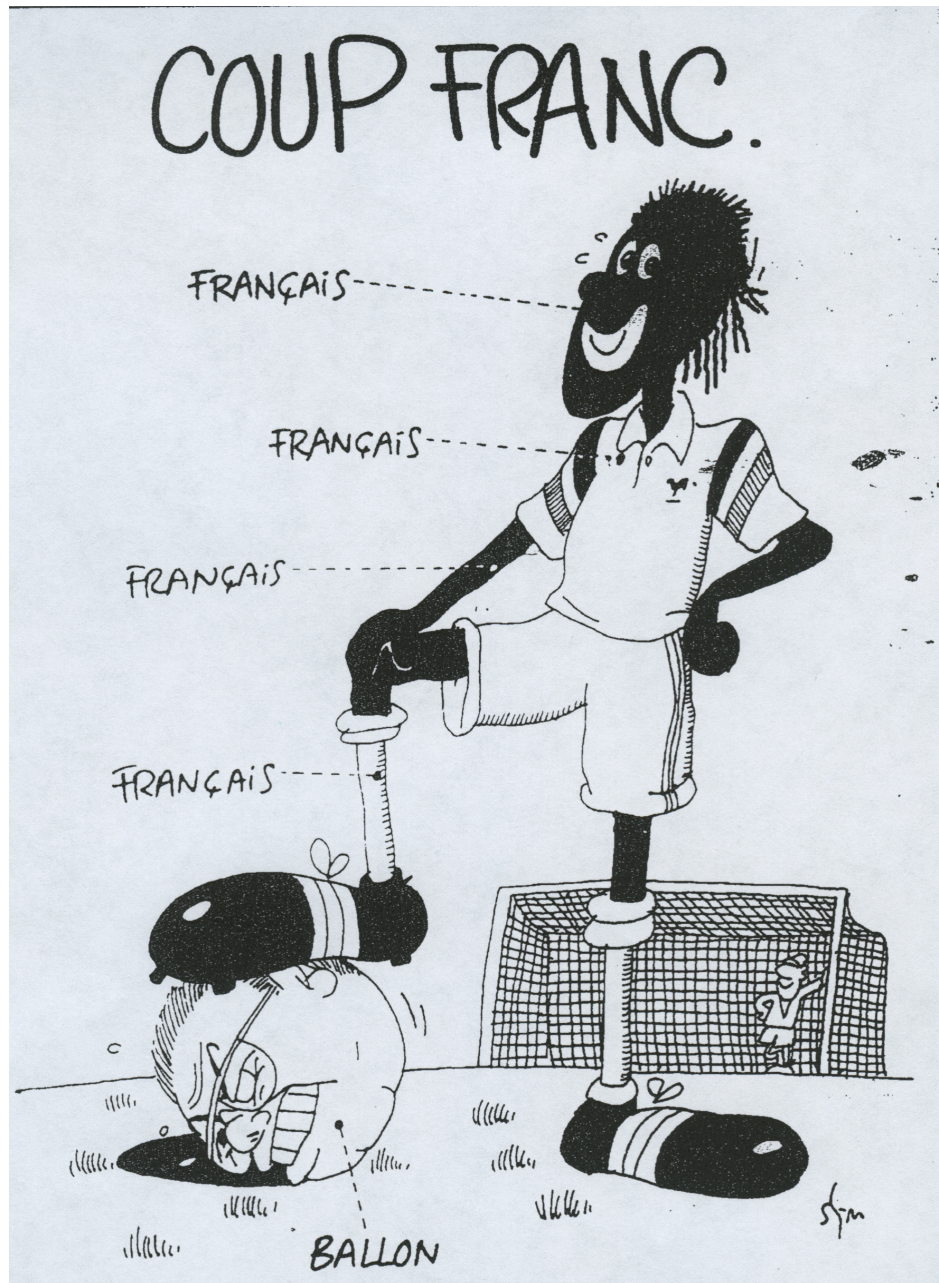


Fig. 2. "Coup franc." Cartoon. *L'humanité* 25 June 1996: 1. Print.

This editorial cartoon, entitled "Coup franc" (Penalty Kick), depicts a smiling black footballer posing on the pitch in front of a goal with a *ballon* (ball) in the image of Le Pen's head under his right cleat. Based on the date of its publication, it is clear that it responds to Le Pen's remarks and contributes to the public debate that his words instigated on black *Bleus'* Frenchness. Several elements of its foreign footballer's physical attributes are exaggerated substantially more than

others, granting him a caricatural appearance that leads observers to perceive of his image as a form of satirical commentary. Not only does he look like the clear phenotypic opposite of Le Pen and the white football coach standing in the goal, a “spectacle of otherness” with skin shaded the same color of the cleats he wears on his feet; his onyx complexion, so dark that it matches the letter text featured in the frame, renders his thick lips and the whites of his large eyes as his only distinguishable facial features in a fashion similar to late nineteenth-century African savage animation or early twentieth-century United States minstrel makeup and coon caricatures (Pieterse 118-122; 132-6).⁵⁷

By granting this foreign, black footballer these satirical, depreciating physical traits, the cartoonist effectively conveys Le Pen’s xenophobic visualization of black men as inherently inferior to white men. Yet by situating this same black “grand, costaud, puissant” (tall, beefy, strong) footballer in the center of the cartoon frame and positioning him in a commanding stance (his left hand resting casually on his hip and right foot applying pressure to and aggravating the Le Pen-shaped ball), he or she also intimates that footballers’ possession of an elevated sense of masculine authority relative the white men pictured. While Le Pen’s remark did suggest black footballers’ inherent foreignness and inaptness in representing Frenchness, the fact that those footballers’ appearance on the French team alone incited such an inflammatory response from “téléspectateur payant” (paying television viewer) Le Pen in the first place suggests the might of black footballer’s sense of masculinity in this particular instance. By appearing in the *maillot*

⁵⁷ The visual similarities between the black footballer featured in “Coup Franc” and late nineteenth-century African savage animation as well as early twentieth-century United States minstrel and coon imagery is significant because it grants the viewer perspective on the typical power relation between that black footballer and the other (white) individuals featured in it. These earlier animation styles gained popularity during times when blacks were considered inferior to whites by law, well prior to the establishment of legislation outlawing explicit forms of discrimination against men based on their color or creed (such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964). Consequently, the portrayal of the black footballer in “Coup Franc” appears as commentary on the status of black French men in France, who, despite their claim to equality per the French Constitution, customarily experience a compromised sense of masculine authority opposite white men due to the color of their skin.

bleu on the pitch, black men like the featured black footballer in “Coup Franc” challenge rigid, discriminatory visualizations of not only Frenchness, but also of black men as less powerful and less masculine than white men in white-dominated societies.

Thus, despite this featured black footballers’ more ostensible, inferiorizing depiction in this cartoon—by way of his skin, eyes, and mouth—he appears as an exceedingly authoritative, masculine man and fitting participant on the French national team. That black athletes like the one featured in “Coup Franc” challenge white men like Le Pen’s sense of masculinity is nothing new. As sportswriter Mike Marqusee highlights in “Sport and Stereotype: From Role Model to Muhammad Ali,” sports serve as a setting wherein the black man can assert his superior sense of masculinity vis-à-vis the white man through his physical performance after all.⁵⁸ He states:

On sport’s level playing field, it is possible to challenge and overturn the dominant hierarchies of nation, race, and class. The reversal may be limited and transient, but it is nonetheless real. It is, therefore, wrong to see black sporting achievement merely as an index of oppression; it is equally an index of creativity and resistance, collective and individual. (5)

In other words, black players’ superior performance in sports perturbs the white man’s typical, abject visualization of those players as inferior in terms of race and gender.

Yet “Coup Franc”’s portrayal of a black *Bleu* suggests that Marqusee’s observations on black sportsmen’s capacity to challenge notions of hegemonic masculinity as well as “dominant hierarchies of nation, race, and class” by way of performance can be extended to appearance as

⁵⁸ Marqusee’s identification of the sports arena as a site of black men’s masculine expression recalls Michael Messner’s broader distinction of sports in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as relating as much to men’s social class and racial relationships with other men as to men’s relationships with women. As Messner points out, “the turn-of-the-century ‘crisis of masculinity’ was, in actuality, a crisis of legitimation for “*hegemonic masculinity*.” [...] [U]pper- and middle-class, white, urban heterosexual men were most threatened by modernization, by changes in the social organization of work, by the New Woman’s movement into public life, [...] by the working-class, ethnic minority, immigrant, and gay men (17-18; emphasis in orig).”

well. This editorial cartoon's disturbing of typical visualizations of black men's masculine expression is arguably less conspicuous as in the *l'affaire Mediapart*, wherein Blanc and the FFF promoted a distinct, alternative visualization of what a true French man looks like in the reverse image of most "grands, costauds, puissants" (tall, beefy, strong) black footballers. Nonetheless, "Coup Franc"'s depiction of its featured black *Bleu* indicates how black men's assertion of agency in self-expression by sporting the *maillot bleu* might challenge such discriminatory visions of black men and of Frenchness and, accordingly, reveal their heightened sense of masculinity in this particular environment. Its featured footballer is not in the midst of a game (as the coach's standing in the goal confirms), but rather standing confidently with Le Pen's crushed face underfoot. By way of dotted lines, each labeled with the word "Français" (French), the editorial cartoonist draws readers' attention to two elements of the black footballer's look—his skin and his kit (comprising his *maillot bleu* and socks)—that confirm this footballer's Frenchness yet likely perturb Le Pen. Considering that skin is an inalterable feature distinguishing the black footballer from Le Pen's vision of the "true" Frenchman, readers look to the clothing articles that he chooses to wear as the means through which the black footballer exercises his agency in self-expression (and, thus, exhibits his heightened sense of masculinity) to challenge Le Pen. Just as for the FFF in *l'affaire Mediapart*, in Le Pen's perspective, this particular clothing article signifies his idealized form of Frenchness. Thus, "Coup Franc" intimates the black footballer's conscious wearing of this clothing article and the French kit more generally as spurring Le Pen's public recognition of black footballers as foreign, its featured footballer's smirk substantiating this point.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Le Pen's aversion to black footballers' in the *maillot bleu* recalls Fanon's description of the black man's self-identification and identification by Others within the colonial gaze. To reiterate, this gaze reads the black man's skin as indication of the black man's inherent distinction from and inferiority to the white Other, in terms of race, gender,

Several respondents further indicated the black man's capacity to contest discriminatory notions of Frenchness and to assert his heightened sense of masculinity through his clothing choice by framing their replies to Le Pen's allegation around the *maillot bleu*. As Yvan Gastaut demonstrated in *Le métissage par le foot: L'intégration, mais jusqu'où? (Intermixing through football: Integration, but up to what point?)* (2008), a public debate on black footballers' Frenchness mediated through discussion of the *maillot bleu*—what it signifies more generally (Frenchness) and what it signified to Le Pen (a vision of Frenchness wherein white players alone signify the most masculine)—highlighted the clothing article's pivotal role in Le Pen's identification of certain *Bleus* as foreigners or inherent inferiors to (white) Frenchmen in terms of masculinity. Gastaut observed:

Selon Jean-Marie Le Pen, la bannière tricolore ne doit rassembler que de “purs enfants de la patrie” affichant un patrimoine génétique irréprochable: revêtir le maillot frappé du coq gaulois exige ainsi d’avoir les signes extérieurs du “Français de souche” à la peau blanche et au nom français. (22)

According to Jean-Marie Le Pen, the tricolored banner must only assemble “pure children of the mother country” showing off an irreproachable genetic heritage: to wear the jersey stamped with the Gaulois cock thus requires to have the exterior signs of the “French of France” of white skin and a French name.

Reflecting back on journalist Georges' earlier itemization of the manner in which an individual can claim Frenchness, the reader recognizes the difficulty of the latter of the two exterior signs mentioned here—a French name—confirming players' Frenchness alone. Rather, Le Pen identified only white, *Français de souche* players as fitting wearers of the national jersey and,

and civility. Yet as I proposed in the previous chapter, certain clothing articles actively turn visualizations of black men's racial and gender identification against this gaze.

accordingly, representatives of France. By underscoring “les signes extérieurs du ‘Français de souche’ à la peau blanche et au nom français” (the exterior signs of “French of France” of white skin and a French name) as stringent requirements of wearing the *maillot bleu*, Gastaud, like the cartoonist behind “Coup Franc,” stressed the significance of not only skin, but also clothing worn on top of skin to understandings of what a true Frenchman looks like, as well as the heightened masculinity of its wearer.

But what about the many black footballers who justly represented France as *Bleus* well prior to those populating this 1996 team? Cognizant that the sight of black footballers who do not bear “les signes extérieurs du ‘Français de souche’ à la peau blanche et au nom français” (the exterior signs of the ‘French of France’ of white skin and a French name) in the *maillot bleu* contradicted Le Pen’s xenophobic visions of Frenchness of black men more generally, several journalists maintaining a more inclusive understanding of what it means to be French recalled the extensive history of black footballers who sported the *maillot bleu* as their first defense of black *Bleus*’ right to represent the Republic. For instance, in a June 26th *Le monde* article “Ces champions français venus d’ailleurs” (Those French Champions from Elsewhere), journalist Jean-Jacques Bozonnet reminded readers of the plethora of players of foreign origins who represented France. Yet rather than attest to these alleged foreigners’ Frenchness through reference to their participation on the French team or citizenship alone, Bozonnet verified those players’ Frenchness—and their heightened sense of masculinity, evidenced in their capacity to assert this national affiliation—through reference to their sporting of the *maillot bleu*. He lists the names of France’s most famous footballers of foreign origins, focusing prominently on those of Sub-Saharan African origins “[qui] ont porté le maillot de l’équipe de France” ([who] wore the French team’s jersey), including: “l’ex-joueur de Marseilles Basile Boli, né à Abidjan, dont le

but contre le Milan AC, en 1993, a donné à la France sa première Coupe d'Europe des clubs, mais aussi Jean Tigana, d'origine malienne” (the ex-player for Marseilles Basil Boli, born in Abidjan, whose goal against Milan AC in 1993 gave France its first European club cup, but also Jean Tigana, of Malian origin; 16). Bozonnet’s drawing attention here to the clothing first and accomplishments next of past black *Bleus* who today are recognized as national treasures in French football history reminded readers of the significance of this clothing article to black footballers’ gender and national expression and identification by Others. And his choosing to include it in his written defense of foreign footballers’ Frenchness suggested the ability of those players to challenge those typical, inferior identifications of themselves—of their masculine authority relative to Le Pen’s white, *Français de souche* player—through their deliberate sporting of the *maillot bleu*. Thinking back to Gastaut’s observations, one recognizes that a juxtaposing of black footballers’ skin to the *maillot bleu* “frappé du coq gaulois” (stamped with the Gaulois cock) disturbed Le Pen’s visualization of the Frenchness and of black, foreign men as inferior to white Frenchmen in terms of masculine identification. By recalling various instances in which black footballers sported the *maillot bleu*, Bozonnet challenged Le Pen and facilitated those footballers’ insertion of themselves into a more inclusive vision of the *Bleus*.

In the June 25th *Libération* article, “Et tout ça, ça fait d’excellents Français” (And All of That Makes Excellent Frenchmen), journalist Michel Chemin similarly employed the *maillot bleu* to demonstrate black *Bleus*’ exhibition of their heightened sense of masculinity and subsequent rightful expression of Frenchness. First, he acknowledged Le Pen’s discriminatory vision of black men’s masculine authority and Frenchness by sarcastically declaring “que Français ne peut être synonyme que de blancheur de peau et de souche gauloise” (that French can only be synonymous with whiteness of skin and Gaulois descent; 3). To counter this

argument and further his own—that sports like football actually support a much more multicultural and multiracial vision of nationhood and of what it means to be a man of a respective nation in many ways reflective of the reality of citizenship in France—Chemin then declared: “Chacun de ces “*étrangers*” selon Le Pen, qui donnent leur sueur et leur talent sous un maillot frappé du coq gaulois, est une histoire bien française” (Each of those ‘*foreigners*’ according to Le Pen, who give their sweat and talent under a jersey stamped with the Gaulois cock, is truly a French story; 3; emphasis in orig.). Like Bozonnet, Chemin rebuked Le Pen’s attempt to castigate black footballers as foreign by directing readers’ attention to the material they willfully wear during every match: the *maillot bleu*. His description of the *maillot bleu*, the veritable proof of all players’ Frenchness, as also the site of players’ “sueur” (sweat)—a bodily secretion that manifests itself on the skin—reminds readers of the pivotal role of both skin and clothing worn on the skin in black footballers’ identification. Like the sweat that dampens a player’s jersey, the racial identification of the black footballer sporting the *maillot bleu* that, in Le Pen’s perspective, deprives him of his claim to Frenchness, remains palpable to audiences. Nonetheless, audiences’ attention will stay primarily on the black footballer’s more prominent *maillot bleu* over the sporadic, fluid manifestations on his skin, and accordingly, recognize him as French. By claiming that each of these “*étrangers*” (*foreigners*), regardless of skin color, exerting their talents and asserting their often unaccounted for sense of masculinity via the sweat they shed while sporting the *maillot bleu* is “une histoire bien française” (truly a French story), he asserts the primary influence of this clothing article on the identifications of the individuals who sport it.

Prominent *Bleus* supporters also employed the *maillot bleu* to articulate their support of black *Bleus* by recognizing those players’ assertion of masculinity opposite xenophobic

individuals like Le Pen and, accordingly, securing their Frenchness by way of this clothing article. Though then-head national coach Aimé Jacquet gave minimal commentary on the *affaire*, the little insight that he offered signified the first line of defense from the national team itself against Le Pen's disavowal of black footballers representing France. Speaking only to the press after France's match against Czechoslovakia in the semifinals round, he affirmed: "Je peux vous dire une chose, c'est que le maillot de l'équipe de France est très bien porté, et, quant à la Marseillaise, je sais que beaucoup la marmonnent et que personne ne les oblige à la chanter" (I can tell you one thing. It's that the French team's jersey is very well worn, and as for *la Marseillaise*, I know that many mumble it and that no one obliges them to sing it; Fièrè 2; Michaud). Dissimilar to reporters like Bozonnet and Chemin who highlighted how the *maillot bleu* sported by black footballers rendered those footballers models of Frenchness and confirmed their heightened sense of manhood—namely, the strong correlation between the *maillot bleu* and notions of masculinity and nationhood as well as the extensive history of black footballers who have sported the *maillot bleu*—Jacquet more clearly portrayed black footballers as active agents in their assertion of masculine authority and of Frenchness by way of the *maillot bleu*. By describing the "maillot de l'équipe de France" (the French team's jersey) as "très bien porté" (very well worn)—meaning, consciously sported by its members—Jacquet redirected readers' attention to those footballers' deliberate expression of masculinity by way of their clothing choice and subsequent overturning of Le Pen's portrayal of black footballers as passive foreigners recruited by and introduced into the French national team (implied in Le Pen's remark that it is "artificiel que l'on fasse venir des joueurs de l'étranger en les baptisant équipe de France" (artificial that *have players brought in* from overseas, baptizing them the French team; "Une équipe 'artificielle,' my emphasis). Regardless of the means through which members of the

Bleus claim their French national identification (birth, naturalization, etc.), they all intentionally wear the *maillot bleu* and wear it “very well.” By recognizing black footballers’ agency in self-expression by way of *maillot bleu*, Jacquet consequently points out the deliberateness of those players’ expression of masculine authority by way of their sartorial style. These men do not merely sport this clothing article and assume the identifications derived from and associated with it; rather, they deliberately wear the *maillot bleu*, and in doing so, disrupt discriminatory visions of black men suggesting their inferior masculine sense relative to white men. Capable of actively sporting the *maillot bleu* (a material clothing item emblematic of Frenchness), these players upset Le Pen’s idealized vision of Frenchness and welcome in new understandings of what it means to be a man in France.

Still, black *Bleus*’ own responses to Le Pen’s remarks attested to their capacity to actively challenge exclusionary vision of Frenchness and exhibit their heightened sense of masculinity by way of the *maillot bleu* most. In fact, *l’affaire Le Pen* is recognized today as the first instance in French football history wherein *les Bleus* collectively offered public statements on the matter of French nationhood as it relates to race and immigration (Dubois 97-8).⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly, only a small selection of France’s national team members actually offered their opinion of Le Pen’s remark to the written press.⁶¹ Still, those few players whose retorts were most prominently and recurrently featured in French newspapers were all of black African origins (Bernard Lama, Marcel Desailly, and Christian Karembeu). This trend in the French press’ choice of

⁶⁰ The French press certainly did cover the remarks of individual black footballers on the receiving end of discriminatory behavior either on or off of the pitch prior to *l’affaire Le Pen*, its coverage of Marcel Desailly’s frustration following his aforementioned confrontation with Stoïchkov serves as a prime example. Nonetheless, black footballers’ remarks following Le Pen’s statement here signified the first instance in which members of the French team who were typically discriminated against came together and spoke out against the larger issues surrounding nonwhite footballers’ exclusion from conceptions of Frenchness; namely, its relation to those players’ personal identifications such as masculinity.

⁶¹ As *Le monde* journalist Philippe Broussard pointed out, “les joueurs, conscients du piège de l’engrenage, refusaient pour la plupart de s’exprimer sur ce sujet” (the players, conscious of the spiral trap, refused, for the most part, to express themselves on the subject; 8).

representative voices of the national team is worth noting because it further substantiated that Le Pen's foreign players were black players. Yet more importantly, journalists' insertion of mostly black footballers' statements in this debate over what a Frenchman looks like granted these "grands, costauds, puissants" (tall, beefy, strong) foreign footballers the occasion to confirm the means by which they assert their masculinity and Frenchness for themselves. Like coach Jacquet and the many journalists in support of their inclusion on the team, these footballers used the *maillot bleu* in their retorts to Le Pen. By outlining the transitive relation between wearers of the *maillot bleu*, the *maillot bleu* itself, and notions of masculine authority and Frenchness, these black footballers effectively confirmed their belonging on the French national team and crushed Le Pen's discriminatory, emasculating vision of black men. They could have forthrightly negated the legitimacy of Le Pen's claims by confirming their having been born in France or reminding readers of their lawful recognition as citizens of the French Republic as members of *les Bleus*. Nonetheless, two of the three black footballers exhibited their strong sense of masculinity via their acknowledgement of their confirmation of Frenchness by way of the French jersey.

According to Christian Karembeu, a midfielder of Neo-Caledonian origins, his wearing of the *maillot bleu* sufficed to disprove Le Pen's visualization of black *Bleus* such as himself as abject, emasculate, unfit representatives of France. He stated: "La diversité des joueurs de l'équipe de France, c'est ce qui fait sa force. Je suis fier de porter ce maillot" (The diversity of players on the French team is what gives it its strength. I am proud to wear this jersey; Fièvre 2; Michaud 18). Karembeu's highlighting that all of the French team's players are responsible for its strength incites readers to first recognize the racial and ethnic diverse reality of the national team that, in many ways, mirrors France's multiracial and multiethnic population. Through his subsequent affirmation of pride in being a part of that team ("Je suis fier de porter ce maillot" [I

am proud to wear this jersey]), Karembeu signaled his as well as other foreign players' expression of masculinity through their attire. The *maillot bleu* is the national team's uniform, and, thus, a compulsory clothing item for all team members. The fact that Karembeu directed readers' attention to this clothing article in his defense thus highlighted his awareness and conscious use of the pivotal connection between the *maillot bleu* and widely-held exemplary visions of Frenchness to confirm his rightful claim of Frenchness and, accordingly, his heightened sense of masculinity. He did not express pride in his Neo-Caledonian heritage here, but rather in the jersey that he wears, thereby underscoring the accomplishment of this clothing article in challenging Le Pen's rigid vision of black men, standing in direct opposition to his vision of what a true representative of the French Republic can look like. As Karembeu's comment shows, the wearer of the *maillot bleu* has the agency to define or redefine the notions inscribed in it as much as the *maillot bleu* defines its wearer.

Marcel Desailly also underscored his awareness of the pivotal role that he, the wearer of the *maillot bleu*, played in shaping visions of black *Bleus'* masculinity and claim to Frenchness by sporting this clothing article. He stated: " Je suis français, que ça lui plaise ou non. Je porte le maillot de l'équipe de France, c'est ma manière à moi d'être patriote. Elle en vaut bien d'autres" (I am French, whether that pleases him or not. I wear the French team's jersey, it is my way of being a patriot. It is worth much more than others; Michaud 18). Desailly's proclamation here is particularly indicative of the influence of black footballers' wearing of the *maillot bleu* on prominent, discriminatory notions of what the exemplary Frenchman looks like. Unlike his fellow black teammates, all of who either came from or bore ancestral ties to former French colonies, Ghanaian-born Desailly possessed no historical link to France upon which he might have based a claim to Frenchness and the heightened sense of masculinity granted to Frenchmen

opposite foreigners. Yet he himself pointed out that it was not these colonial connections, or just his being a part of the team (as Le Pen's allegations suggest) that most effectively convey his Frenchness to audiences (most of whom he cannot assume even know his familial background). Rather, he asserted his rightful claim to Frenchness and, accordingly, exhibited his heightened sense of masculinity relative to other (white) footballers through his sporting of the *maillot bleu*: "Je porte le maillot de l'équipe de France, c'est ma manière à moi d'être patriote" (I wear the French team's jersey, it is my way of being a patriot). Wearing the *maillot* signifies the primary means through which he claimed his allegiance to the French team and nation; as he contends, "elle en vaut bien d'autres" (it is worth much more than others). Cognizant of the fact that Le Pen first identified players like himself as foreign based on their appearance, Desailly thus drew readers' attention to his *maillot bleu* to confirm his Frenchness and challenge Le Pen's visualizations of French nationhood. Moreover, as his indifference indicates, his assertion of Frenchness through his wearing of the *maillot bleu* granted him a heightened sense of masculine authority in self-expression relative to Others: "Je suis français, que ça lui plaise ou non" (I am French, whether that pleases him or not).

Even remarks from black *Bleus* who did not explicitly draw attention to the *maillot bleu* further revealed the potential for black players to reshape visions of black men's sense of masculinity and of Frenchness by way of this clothing article. While the third, prominently-featured black *Bleu*, Guyanese Bernard Lama, did not mention the *maillot bleu* in his rebuttal to Le Pen, his remark reminded readers of one key reason why black *Bleus* like Karembeu's, Desailly's, and his own sporting of the *maillot bleu* perturbed Le Pen in the first place and, thus, signified clear expressions of masculinity. Lama offered an arguably sterner response to the National Front leader, asserting, "[ses] ancêtres n'ont pas demandé à être déporté en esclavage"

([his] ancestors did not ask to be deported into slavery; Michaud 18). What made Lama's remark so significant was its recognition of the black footballer's typical, abject identification as inferior to and inherently less masculine than Le Pen's archetypal white, *Français de souche* footballer. Through his reference to "esclavage" (slavery), he acknowledged hegemonic leaders' like Le Pen's identification of himself with his ancestors, individuals of Guyanese descent who were once formally subjugated by the French and considered hardly men or even human on account of his black skin. Thus, Lama reminded readers of the archaic quality of Le Pen's vision of Frenchness, which suppressed black players like himself and contributed to his being labeled as foreign and inherently less masculine just as during the times of slavery. Keeping in mind Lama's remark alongside Karembeu's and Desailly's, readers recognize once more the impact of black footballers' assertion of masculinity and of Frenchness through reference to their wearing of the *maillot bleu*. Black footballers' wearing this clothing article challenged xenophobic conceptions of Frenchness because the image of a black man sporting this clothing article infringed upon Le Pen's typical identification of nationhood as well as his abject identification of black footballers as possessing an inferior sense of masculinity. Together, these three black *Bleus* thus confirmed the significant role that their wearing of this clothing article played in how they identified themselves and how individuals identified them.

Conclusion

The black French footballer challenges and reshapes discriminatory visualizations of the black man's masculinity and Frenchness by way of sporting the *maillot bleu*. Journalists', prominent leaders', and black footballers' use of the *maillot bleu* in public debates on black footballers' right to represent France—whether against (*l'affaire Mediapart*) or in support

(*l'affaire Le Pen*) of that right—indicates his capacity to assert his heightened sense of masculinity in this environment through his sporting of this clothing article. The conclusion of these two *affaires* in the wake of public debates that they instigated—mediated through discussion of the black *Bleus*' wearing the *maillot bleu*—confirms this point: the FFF immediately abandoned its quota proposal and Le Pen was denounced so forcefully for his discriminatory remark that a vision of a more multiracial and multicultural France slowly began to take root.⁶²

Of course, certain incidents in French football can also change individuals' understandings of black players' masculine authority and the aptness of those players' wearing the *maillot bleu* and claiming Frenchness; for instance, France's 1998 FIFA World Cup win, another famous moment or Lyotardian "event" in recent French football history wherein the national team earned the legendary moniker *black, blanc, beur* as homage to the team's racial and ethnic diversity. Nonetheless, French politicians' and officials' abject identifications of black *Bleus* from this same 1998 team shortly after their monumental win indicates the primacy of players' appearance over even the most exceptional performances in how those players are identified by Others and, more importantly, the lost sense of masculinity in self expression that those players experience in the absence of the jersey.⁶³

⁶² Select antiracism organizations' famous ad campaigns against xenophobic visions of Frenchness—including SOS Racisme's October 1998 three-poster collection, featuring an image of Marcel Desailly's *maillot bleu* with the text "Ce soir-là tous les Français ont été scandalisés par l'expulsion d'un black" (That night, every French person was scandalized by the expulsion of a black person) written on it (Perelman), and Adidas' 2008 "Ce maillot n'est pas à moi" (This maillot is not mine) ads, which featured individual shots of black and Arab footballers in the *maillot bleu* with various texts, all ending in the phrase "Ce n'est pas moi qui porte ce maillot, c'est lui qui me porte" [It is not me that wears this jersey, it's the jersey that is me]—attest to black footballers' ability to challenge discriminatory visions of Frenchness and assert a greater sense of masculine authority by way of the *maillot bleu*. For more on the impact of SOS Racisme's campaign on visualizations of Frenchness, see Mallaval.

⁶³ Guadeloupian William Gallas' detainment at an airport gate before boarding a flight with his team at Roissy airport in Paris for London shortly after France's 1998 World Cup win reveals the supreme influence of appearance on his identification as a black man in the absence of his *maillot bleu* (Guérin and Jaoui 93-4). Guadeloupian Lilian Thuram's denied access to bathroom facilities at restaurant La Paix in Brussels in 2011 by a restaurant employee who did not recognize him when not wearing his *maillot bleu*—which Thuram called "un acte stupéfait de cette

By taking advantage of the *maillot bleu*'s correlation to visions of Frenchness and sporting the *maillot bleu*, black footballers challenge the boundaries of abject visions of black men as less masculine than and inherently distinct from white Frenchmen. American sportswear designer Nike's 2011 public unveiling of *les Bleus*' *maillot bleu* at the Quartier des Célestins de la Garde républicaine in Paris serves as a fitting illustration of this point (see fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Still of Nike's Unveiling of France's 2013 National Football Jersey. "Nike dévoile son nouveau maillot des équipes de France de football." *Dailymotion*. Daily Motion, 23 May 2013. Web. 5 June 2013.

Press coverage of this grandiose display—which opened with an aerial shot the Garde républicaine's barracks followed by a shot of the French flag as a dramatic, military-inspired musical score played in the background—first captured ten white French soldiers saddled on brown horses, five on either side, forming an aisle in front of the entrance to this indoor equine arena. Another white French soldier riding atop a white horse then entered the arena, followed by ten national footballers (eight male and two female, four white and six black) outfitted in Nike's

discrimination visiblement liée à la couleur de (sa) peau" (a stunning act of that discrimination visibly tied to the color of his skin; "Thuram")—further attests to the significance of the *maillot bleu* to even the most successful black French footballers' assertion of masculinity in France and Europe more generally.

maillot bleu on foot.⁶⁴ Once these footballers reached the end of the manmade aisle, they formed a horizontal line, the soldiers creating a second line behind them. At that moment, audiences gained their first, full glimpse of France's first jersey by Nike, featuring light and dark blue horizontal stripes reminiscent of the French *marinière* (fisherman), a short collar "inspiré des uniformes à la française" (inspired by French uniforms) worn by soldiers in the second row, a light blue patch stitched on the right chest bearing the Gallic rooster, one star in honor of France's 1998 World Cup win, and the acronym "FFF" for *Fédération française de football* [French Football Federation]), and the phrase "nos différences nous unissent" (our differences unite us) imprinted on its collar in place of a label.⁶⁵

Elements of this *maillot bleu*'s material design (the *marinière* pattern, military-inspired collar and signal to France's national animal) clearly prompt audiences to reflect on the *maillot bleu*'s and football's historic promotion of Frenchness. Yet Nike's deliberate staging of this clothing article here (on the bodies of a racially diverse selection of footballers, including the same "grands, costauds, puissants" [tall, beefy, strong] ones deemed unfit representatives of French masculinity by Blanc that same year, surrounded by French soldiers in the riding stables of the segment of the French Gendarmerie responsible for protecting France's capital region) to promote a more multiracial and multiethnic vision of Frenchness (epitomized by its slogan "nos différences nous unissent" [our differences unite us]) reaffirms this chapter's central assertion: namely, the great influence of the wearer of the *maillot bleu*, in this particular instance, the black footballer, on visions of Frenchness and how it relates to notions of gender and race. Of course, it is in Nike's favor to feature a diverse selection of players in its *maillot bleu* and promote a more

⁶⁴ Nike's 2011 sponsorship deal with the FFF deemed it the official outfitter of the French national men and women's football teams. It is for this reason that Nike includes both men and women in this highly publicized event.

⁶⁵ This final phrase, originally proposed by former French national manager Raymond Domenech in accordance with the FFF's 2011 partnership with Nike to raise awareness of and appreciation for racial and ethnic diversity on France's teams, was actually hidden from immediate view in this presentation of the *maillot bleu*.

tolerant, united vision of Frenchness here; Nike's mission is not only to unveil the *maillot*'s new design, but also to gain profits through the form of sales of it as well. Yet the fact that this particular presentation of the *maillot bleu* stood out from preceding presentations of France's new jerseys as a veritable "event" in recent French football history just further corroborates the influence of the individuals who wear this particular clothing article on notions of its wearers' sense of masculinity and Frenchness.⁶⁶ As this chapter's review of *l'affaire Mediapart* and *l'affaire Le Pen* highlights, black footballers' wearing of the *maillot bleu* greatly challenges prevalent, discriminatory visualizations of black men as emasculate and of Frenchness signifying whiteness alone. In the subsequent chapters, I demonstrate how black men's larger range of choice in clothing in which to self-present in two other popular sites of masculine identity construction facilitates those men's greater assertion of masculine authority relative to other men.

⁶⁶ Nike's casting of only white men as soldiers, and staging of those soldiers just behind its racially diverse cast of footballers sporting its new *maillot*, conveys the potential for particular footballers—in the context of this chapter, black footballers—to challenge discriminatory, *Français de souche* vision of Frenchness in a visual manner.

Chapter Three: Claiming Masculine Authority and Space with Hip-Hop Clothing Styles

From June 22nd through July 7, 2013, activist group Hip Hop Citoyens hosted the eight edition of its annual hip-hop festival, “Paris Hip Hop: la quinzaine du hip hop” (Paris Hip Hop: Fortnight of Hip Hop), in France’s capital city.⁶⁷ To further its longstanding effort to valorize hip-hop culture in the Republic, Hip Hop Citoyens presented approximately 40 events featuring over 400 international hip-hop artists throughout the festival’s two-week run at venues throughout Paris. These events—which showcased the wide variety of creative expression encompassed within hip-hop culture (rap music, dance, graffiti art, literature, fashion, etc.) and mostly took place in or near Paris’s *centre ville* (city center)—attracted diverse spectators from all over the world (myself included). Nonetheless, the majority of its predominantly black, male audience did not travel far to participate in these events, but came instead from outlying regions of Paris itself known as the *banlieues* (suburbs).⁶⁸

Young black male *banlieusards* (suburbanites) most prominently displayed their affiliation with hip-hop culture at “Paris Hip Hop” not only by attending its many events but also by sporting clothing styles typically associated with hip-hop culture. These styles (what I refer to

⁶⁷ Hip Hop Citoyens is a collective of artists and members associated with the French radio station Générations 88.2, formed in 2002 following Jean Marie Le Pen’s second campaign for president of the French Republic.

⁶⁸ As French journalist and author Luc Bronner aptly points out, “La banlieue n’existe pas. Ou, du moins, n’a pas de sens au singulier” (The banlieue does not exist. Or, at least, not in the singular sense; 22). To account for the diversity among the regions that qualify as suburbs of Paris, I accordingly employ the term *les banlieues* (plural) as opposed to *la banlieue* (singular) throughout this chapter.

throughout this chapter as “hip-hop clothing styles”)⁶⁹ comprised clothing items first popularized in hip-hop’s birth country, the United States, and prevalent among youths around the world, including but not limited to: baggy pants, oversized T-shirts, necklace chains, designer sneakers, and doo-rag caps. While young black male *banlieusards*’ wearing of hip-hop clothing styles at a festival celebrating hip-hop culture is certainly apt, their deliberate sporting of these styles in Paris’s *centre ville*—wherein, according to a 2009 national study, a strong correlation between those men’s sporting of vestimentary styles associated with French youth culture like hip-hop attire and their likelihood of being stopped by police exists⁷⁰—intimated that it signified more than an emulation of a popular clothing trend. That is to say that young black male *banlieusards*’ sporting of hip-hop clothing styles represents not just a copying of the American sartorial form, but rather a deliberate means to represent self and space.

Working at the juncture of literary criticism and critical theory, I reveal the distinct impact of young black male *banlieusards*’ cultivation of hip-hop clothing styles in Paris since hip-hop’s introduction in France in the mid-1980s. I argue that young black male *banlieusards* sporting hip-hop clothing styles evocative of a particular form of masculinity that I recognize as hypermasculine toughness challenge two common visualizations prevalent in France’s capital city: one of black men as abject, emasculate subordinates to traditionally empowered (white)

⁶⁹ I use the term “hip hop clothing styles” to mean apparel reflective of the hip-hop visual aesthetic, meaning that pairs everyday clothing items with highly embellished items (I will define in further detail later on in this chapter). Although these particular clothing articles were originally conceived in in urban areas, I choose not to refer to them as “urban streetwear,” as the term “urban” to some in the fashion industry “carries a stigma similar to the derogatory word ‘nigger’” (Romero xx).

⁷⁰ *Police et les minorités visibles: les contrôles d’identité à Paris* (or *Profiling Minorities: A Study of Stop-and-Search Practices in Paris* in its English version) (2009) by the French National Center for Scientific Research and the Open Society Justice Initiative, signifies the first-ever quantitative data study on the practice and scale of racial profiling in Paris. This study, which detailed the proceedings of over 500 police stops carried out across five locations in and in proximity to central Paris’s Gare du Nord and Châtelet-Les Halles commuter train stations from October 2007 to May 2008, revealed that young men perceived to be black (of sub-Saharan African or Caribbean origin) or Arab, and who were wearing clothing styles like hip-hop attire were considerably more likely to be stopped by police than those perceived to be white or not wearing hip-hop clothing styles (Erlanger). For more on the French National Center for Scientific Research and the Open Society Justice Initiative’s study, see Open Society Justice Initiative and Erlanger.

men (highlighted extensively in my reading of Fanon in Chapter One); and a second of the Parisian landscape wherein certain territories (in this case, the *centre ville*) are considered as more influential on and, thus, more significant to French culture than others (here, the *banlieues*). By wearing a variation of hip-hop clothing styles in this modern Western city wherein an individual's visibility translates to his or her power, they make themselves visible to not only other *banlieusards*, but also powerful leaders and members of mainstream (white) French society, and assert their heightened sense of masculine authority and the substantial influence of *banlieues* culture (often equated with hip-hop culture) to French culture.

My analysis of young black male *banlieusards*' sporting of hip-hop clothing styles in Paris distinguishes itself from most literature on hip-hop culture in France, which focuses primarily on youths' making their voices heard through their cultivation of hip-hop (rap) music (Béthune; Boucher; Gaetner; Marti; Marc Martinez; Puma). Unlike the minimal extant literature on hip-hop accouterments (most of which chronicles changes in its material designs and none of which centers specifically on styles prevalent in Paris or France; Fleetwood, *Hip Hop*; Oh; Romero), I highlight the significance of hip-hop clothing styles as measured in its wearers' securement of elevated senses of masculinity. To reveal the accomplishment of young black male *banlieusards*' representation of self and of geographical spaces within Paris by way of their hip-hop clothing styles, I first highlight the relevance of visibility before mainstream society on common understandings of Paris's territories and of inhabitants based on their location within those territories. I derive this correlation between young black men's visibility and sense of masculinity through my reading of French philosopher Guy Debord's notion of the "spectacle," wherein images presented by governmental leaders shape social relations between different groups of individuals. Next, I briefly examine the history of hip-hop culture in the United States

and France with emphasis on its core motivation to eradicate minority youths' feelings of powerlessness, to highlight the appeal of this culture and of its signature clothing styles to young black male *banlieusards* in Paris. To further my argument, I examine how black male *banlieusards* secure their heightened sense of masculine authority in Lauren Ekué's *Icône urbaine* (Urban Icon) (2005) and Insa Sané's *Du plomb dans le crâne* (A Head on Your Shoulders) (2008). Through my reading of these two novels, I demonstrate how black male *banlieusards* assert their masculinity by sporting hip-hop clothing styles that grant themselves of new form of visibility before other *banlieusards* and mainstream French society and facilitate movement (of people and fashion) between the *centre ville* and the *banlieues*.

The Relation of Space to Identifications in Paris

To recognize young black male *banlieusards*' challenging of common visualizations of black men and of physical space prevalent in Paris by way of hip-hop clothing styles, it is imperative to first highlight the precise details of the visualizations that inspire their deliberate cultivation of hip-hop clothing styles. Young black male *banlieusards* living in Paris today, much like the black man featured in Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Black Skin, White Masks) who figures as the focus of Chapter One, are often abjectly identified by way of the colonial gaze on account of their difference in skin color. Yet the individuals identifying these men by way of that gaze (Others, or white men) also often grant them a second, discriminatory identification owing to their location within the city of Paris (meaning their residing in the marginally-located *banlieues* region). A foundational understanding of the Parisian landscape and of the regions recognized within it elucidates how young black male *banlieusards*' identification with the *banlieues* space negatively impacts their sense of

masculinity relative to Others. Like most other metropolitan cities, Paris is officially divided into municipal districts or neighborhoods (*arrondissements*) among other territorial regions. One of its most notable distinctions is between its *centre ville* and its surrounding, peripheral *banlieues*. The division between Paris's *centre ville* and *banlieues* presents itself in geographical terms: for instance, by way of the Boulevard Périphérique de Paris (a dual-carriage ring road), which outlines the notional parameters between these two regions, and the concentration of Paris's most famous landmarks in the *centre ville*. Yet the distinction between these two spaces presents itself in demographic and economic terms as well. Today, the *banlieues* primarily houses working-class immigrants from former French colonies.⁷¹ And in contrast to the ample wealth and majestic landmarks housed within the *centre ville*, decrepit, low-incoming housing projects typically populate the *banlieues* backdrop.⁷² Unsurprisingly, this territorial distinction between *centre ville* and *banlieues* shapes the lived experiences of inhabitants of each respective region. Relegated to the periphery of Paris, *banlieusards* often experience social and economic alienation from the *centre ville*, and accordingly do not feature prominently in popular visualizations of Paris.⁷³ And the times that *banlieusards* do figure in common portrayals of Paris, they are often presented as the *étrangers* (outsiders) meaning inferior and less influential residents of the city.

⁷¹ This demographical distinction between the *centre ville* and *banlieues* space results largely from city officials' relegation of the poor and diseased to the outer regions of the city from as far back as the late 1800s, settling of immigrant factory workers in the periphery of the city after World War I, and more recent situation of immigrant workers in the *banlieues* in the HLM (Habitation à loyer modéré [rent-controlled housing]). For more on how transformations of the Parisian geographical and demographic makeup contributed to this distinction between the *centre ville* and *banlieues* spaces in common visualizations of Paris, see Silverman 76-120.

⁷² Of course, not all of Paris's *banlieues* fit this description: Versailles and Neuilly-sur-Seine are two of several *banlieues* regions characterized by affluence. Nonetheless, the term *banlieues* has increasingly become synonymous with a space inhabited by working-class immigrants and marked with poverty and destitution.

⁷³ *Banlieusards*' feelings of isolation within this marginal region of Paris in many ways substantiate the meaning behind the term *banlieue*—the product of French words *ban* (banishment or exile) and *lieue* (league, measuring approximately 4 kilometers).

Unsurprisingly, the manner in which young black male banlieusards appear—in the colonial gaze in the former case and within a peripheral physical space in the latter case—feeds their abject identifications by Others. While how these men’s appearing within the colonial gaze negatively influences their identification by Others is pretty straightforward (particularly following my analysis of the black man’s identification within that gaze in Chapter One), how their appearing within a particular physical space impacts their identification is not quite as clear. French theorist and filmmaker Guy Debord’s famous description of the manner in which inhabitants are socially organized within urban landscapes and of what he terms the “spectacle” accordingly offer constructive tools for clarifying this correlation between appearance and authoritative identifications. In his work *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Debord highlights the chief significance of images in modern, Western capitalist societies to social relations between and identifications of different groups. Urban landscapes, as Debord describes them, are organized around the “spectacle,” or a falsified version of reality shaping “social relations among people, [that is] mediated by images” (2). The individuals responsible for the creation and promotion of this spectacle are those in possession of the most economic development, meaning the bourgeois class and hegemonic leaders (i.e. state and government officials). By perpetuating this spectacle, rooted in the “oldest specialization, the specialization of power,” through the media, hegemonic leaders uphold their own heightened sense of power by generating the image of a united, though hierarchical society wherein they figure at the top (8). The spectacle’s reliance on historical pasts and passive acceptance by inhabitants of a given urban space facilitates its conflation with the truth. Reality does not shape the spectacle; rather, as Debord states, “reality rises up within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real” (3). Although the social relations established within the spectacle appear fixed (since they come to shape real social

relations between different groups in society), Debord argues that the spectacle's founding upon change and spontaneity in its diffusion of images reveals the ability for those relations to be altered. And not only altered by those traditionally in control of the images establishing the spectacle but also by the individuals experiencing "concrete alienation" at the base of the social hierarchy it establishes (11).

Although Debord, a Marxist known for espousing a leftist perspective on the organization of urban territory, underscores how images establish a social hierarchization of spaces in and inhabitants of a city, he arrives at this point through a focused discussion of class and does not take race into consideration. Still, his unveiling of the substantial influence of visuals and visibility within the spectacle promoted by hegemonic leaders on understandings of urban space and groups within given spaces as they relate to power is relevant to this investigation of the black male *banlieusards'* identification by Others in Paris. Building on Debord's findings with the black man's aforementioned abject identification on account of his skin, one recognizes how young black male *banlieusards'* visibility, or lack thereof, within common visualizations organizing the Parisian landscape shape their typical, abject identification by Others.⁷⁴ To challenge these particular notions of not only themselves, but also of the *banlieues*, these men thus must bring new forms of visibility to themselves and to that particular space. Through their cultivation of hip-hop-culture in the mid-1980s, young black male *banlieusards* would craft a

⁷⁴ French philosopher Henri Lefebvre raises a similar point in his work *The Production of Space* (1991) when he states: "(Social) space is a (social product)" (26). Like Debord, he recognizes that space is never neutral or apolitical, but rather reflective of the modeling of power imposed upon it by hegemonic leaders. Pierre Bourdieu also speaks to the relation between social space and figurative senses of power, contending that one group's construction of a space secures that group's sense of dominance by objectifying the position of other groups. However, the distinction between Debord's, Lefebvre's, and Bourdieu's works lies in Debord's focus on consumption and on the image's central role in hegemonic powers' assertion of their authority by way of urban landscape. For more on how one group secures authority by way of creating and positioning social spaces, see Bourdieu, *In Other Words* 123-39.

sartorial style accomplishing just that and, accordingly, represent themselves and the *banlieues* in a new manner in common imaginings of Paris.

The Birth of Hip-Hop Culture and its Clothing Styles

Given the popularity and prevalence of hip-hop clothing styles around the world today, it is easy to overlook their particular significance to young black male *banlieusards* living in Paris. Yet a review of the origins of the culture with which it is associated expounds the primary correlation between this particular clothing style and its wearers' attainment of greater visibility within Parisian society and superior sense of masculinity within themselves. Hip-hop culture as understood in the context of contemporary popular culture originated in the mid-1970s Bronx, then the most decrepit borough of New York City.⁷⁵ African-American, Caribbean, and Latino youths—dispirited by city officials' failure to rectify the detrimental impact of the recently-completed Cross Bronx Expressway on this borough's poor and working-class communities (*Hip*)—felt dejected and ignored by hegemonic leaders and other members of mainstream society. Accordingly, in 1976, they crafted a “parallel culture”—officially named “hip-hop” by rapper “Cowboy” Higgins of the South Bronx group Grandmaster Flash and the Furious 5—from resources at their disposal as a deliberate response to city officials' disregard for their predominantly minority community.⁷⁶ To them, “invisibility was the enemy and the fight had

⁷⁵ I recognize the mid-1970s as the origins of the hip-hop culture as perceived within popular culture in light of more recent discussions within Sociolinguistics on equally possible ways in which to chart the origins of hip-hop culture back to a more universal ethos of hip-hop well prior to the 1970s around the world. For more on alternative, linguistic manners in which to define hip-hop culture's origins, see Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook.

⁷⁶ This notion of hip-hop as a “parallel culture” derives from Lilian Thuram's astute summation of the global artistic movement at its inaugural stage in the United States as a culture developed, in complete autocracy, or as Thuram states, in FUBU (“for us, by us”) mentality (*Mes étoiles* 358). Recognizing hip-hop as a parallel rather than a counter- or sub-culture is useful because it accounts for hip-hop's creative (make something out of nothing), multiracial, and multidimensional origins that distinguish it from other music subculture. As media theorist Dick Hebdige highlights, other music subcultures typically develop within homogenous communities and use one

multiple fronts,” wherein invisibility signified their feelings of dejection from city officials (much like Debord’s “cultural[ly] [alienated]” proletariat) and the multiple fronts comprised: MCing, (break)dancing, graphic expression (tagging and graffiti art), fashion, and (rap) music (Jay-Z 159). Although hip-hop culture continued to traverse ethnic and racial boundaries from its inception on this multiplicity of “fronts,”⁷⁷ its foremost recognition with its three founding fathers DJs Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, and Kool Herc (all of Caribbean descent) contributed to its eventual identification as “the very *blackest* culture” (Gilroy, *Against* 181; emphasis in orig.), the term “hip-hop” itself becoming a powerful metonym for who “A.B. Spelman once referred to as ‘the most despised and feared group of people on the face of this earth, the African-American working class’” (Tate, Prashad, Neal, and Cross 36). African-American youths throughout the United States’ and black diaspora youths’ embracing of this culture throughout the 1980s reinforced this association between hip-hop and blackness. Recognized as a creative means through which they could effectively fight their distinctive feelings of isolation or inferior representation within their respective communities, black youths everywhere started forming their own variations of this culture.⁷⁸

France would become home to hip-hop’s second largest community in the world following its introduction into the Republic in the mid-1980s (Mitchell 12; Thuram, *Mes étoiles* 358). Similar to American hip-hop, French hip-hop rooted itself and flourished among individuals living in regions of cities neglected by city officials and, accordingly, underrepresented in common visualizations of mainstream culture, which in the context of

trademark clothing style that is a mutation rather than a “‘pure’ expression of creative drives” to convey their difference from mainstream, dominant society (130-1).

⁷⁷ Latino breakers as well as white Jewish entrepreneurs played a substantial role in hip-hop’s formation and growth (George 57).

⁷⁸ The plethora of studies on hip-hop culture throughout the African continent attests to the culture’s promotion of visibility of not only individual black young men, but also its establishment as a transnational, black brotherhood. See Basu, Lemelle, and Kelley; Charry; *Les États-Unis d’Afrique; Fangafrika*; Ntarangwi; Saucier; Weiss.

France's capital city, Paris, signified the *banlieues*. While youths of various racial and ethnic backgrounds living in this peripheral region gravitated towards hip-hop, young black male *banlieusards* became the followers most synonymous with this culture, owing once more to hip-hop's transnational recognition as a black culture, its primary association with men,⁷⁹ and select racial and ethnic minority groups' creation of their own stylized forms of hip-hop heavily inspired by other forms of music.⁸⁰ Like the African-American youths from hip-hop's inauguration, these men experienced feelings of neglect and powerlessness in Parisian society on account of their racial distinction from members of mainstream Parisian society and identification within the notionally inferior *banlieues* space. Young black male *banlieusards* thus gravitated towards hip-hop for its capacity to challenge these abject visualizations with resourceful devices (musical, lyrical, performative, etc.) they created themselves.

While many often consider their celebration of rap music as the most common manner in which these men secured a new form of visibility for themselves within familiar visualizations of Paris, many challenges to rap music's proliferation in France during hip-hop culture's inaugural days suggest otherwise.⁸¹ These men's most explicit "way of announcing [their] existence in the world" and of asserting of their personal sense of masculine authority actually was and continues

⁷⁹ Although many women certainly do identify with and participate in hip-hop culture, it continues to first and foremost be recognized as a man's culture, the limited number of works on women in American hip-hop and French hip-hop attesting to this reality. For more on women's marginal presence in American hip-hop, see "Missy" and *My Mic*. For more on women in French hip-hop, see Dole. For more on the persistent silencing of females voices in the *banlieues* in particular, see Amara.

⁸⁰ One notable example is Franco-Maghrebi *banlieusards*' gravitation towards forms of hip-hop that draw inspiration from *raï* music, a musical form with origins in coastal and Western Algeria recognized today as "a register for the changing dimensions and boundaries of Algerian, French and Beur identities" (Lipsitz 124).

⁸¹ France's strict radio content rules initially controlled the amount of hip-hop music actually disseminated over the airwaves and made accessible to the French public. It was not until 1981/2, with the creation of free radio stations like Radio Nova and Carbone 14 that the amount of African-American music, primarily rap, began to flourish in France (Bazin 21). The short-lived run of DJ Sidney's program "H.I.P.H.O.P." (1984-1985)—both the first television program hosted by a black man and on hip-hop in France—signified a second notable disruption of the distribution of rap music in France. As French hip-hop scholar Hugues Bazin highlights in *La culture hip-hop* (1995), citing DJ Dee Nasty: "C'était l'époque, 1984/85, où les disquaires te disaient que le RAP n'existait plus" (It was a period, 1984-85, where record dealers/store owners would tell you that RAP no longer existed; 23).

to be through their sporting of hip-hop clothing styles (George 14). The culture's promotion of ostentatious clothing trends both in song and in real life since its beginnings certainly inspired hip-hop clothing styles central role in black male *banlieusards'* representation of self.⁸² How hip-hop clothing styles further young black male *banlieusards'* revisualization of themselves within the spectacle of Paris—reconfiguring their identification from marginal *étrangers* (outsiders) to exceedingly masculine men and contributors to *banlieues* and French culture—is apparent when one considers the distinctive elements of this particular clothing style.

In truth, there is not one but many clothing styles that qualify as hip-hop clothing styles. The six fashions featured in illustrator Renée Pumon's drawing included in Guénolée Milleret's *Modes du XXe siècle: Le streetwear* (Fashions of the 20th century: Streetwear)—which chronicle the evolution of hip-hop clothing styles since its inauguration—clearly allude to this truth (see fig. 4).

⁸² The Coliseum Mall was a famous shopping center located on Jamaica Avenue in New York City where hip-hop's earlier enthusiasts would purchase regular clothing items—sweat suits, t-shirts, bandanas—that they would then bring to hip-hop fashion giants like the Shirt Kings of South Side Jamaica, Queens, or A.J. Lester and Dapper Dan on 125th Street for one-of-a-kind airbrushing, embellishments, and additions of other extravagant elements (Romero ix-x; Sacasa and Maridueña). The most famous illustration of how rap music itself promotes hip-hop fashion as a leading means through which its followers can assert their identity is Run DMC's "My Adidas," a song that would compel tens of thousands of fans to hold up their sneakers during a 1986 Madison Square Garden concert and even landed the group a sneaker endorsement deal (Romero 29).



Fig. 4. Chart of Hip-Hop Clothing Styles since Hip-Hop's Origins in France. Renée Pumon, illus. *Modes du XXe siècle: Le streetwear*. By Guénolée Millertet. Paris: Éditions Falbalas, 2011. P. 32. Print.

Although each of the sartorial styles featured here originally appeared at different points in hip-hop's history—starting with “la customisation” (the customization) of t-shirts, sneakers, and jeans to more contemporary trends like “le style des rappeurs” (the rapper style) and the tough “style gangsta-rap” (gangsta-rap style), they all coexist today, alongside newer, equally ostentatious hip-hop clothing styles that developed and continue to develop throughout the twenty-first-century.⁸³ Hip-hop culture's simultaneous promotion of and identification with a wide array of clothing styles harmonizes with its foundational roots, wherein its followers created everything they presented as part of the culture from what they had at their disposal.⁸⁴

Nonetheless, certain traits shared among these many styles distinguish hip-hop clothing styles from others. First, all hip-hop clothing styles espouse what I recognize as the “hip-hop (visual) aesthetic,” meaning a coupling of ordinary clothing articles with more ostentatious clothing articles or accouterments.⁸⁵ The centrality of this aesthetic is manifest when one considers the wide array of ways in which leading American hip-hop artists alone pair regular accouterments with extravagant ones and, accordingly, develop distinctive, highly conspicuous styles of their own (Flavor Flav's clock necklaces, Queen Latifah's head wrap worn like a crown, Humpty's plastic nose, Slick Rick's trunk jewelry, Nicki Minaj's candy-colored wigs) as well as popular hip-hop clothing trends (preppy polos and dungarees worn three sizes too large

⁸³ Hip-hop clothing styles have diversified even further by way of message boards and microblogging platforms like Tumblr and, accordingly, entered markets from which they are traditionally deemed distinct, such as menswear (Caramanica).

⁸⁴ These men's deliberate creation of multiple hip-hop clothing styles representative of their masculinity recalls Michel Foucault's “technologies of the self,” wherein individuals use their own means to secure their personal self-identification with “happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (“Technologies” 18).

⁸⁵ Several hip-hop scholars have employed the term “hip-hop aesthetics” in reference to the intellectual value of the culture's iconic 16-beat rhymes (Bazin; Béthune; Jay-Z). However, considering the fact that many individuals who identify with hip-hop may not understand or pay close attention to the music that they listen to, or possess a platform from which their own lyrical voices can be heard, I alternatively consider “hip-hop aesthetics” as relating to individuals' appearances. *The Village Voice* reporter Elizabeth Mendez Berry's famous interview with Jay-Z for his first pre-release promotion, wherein she focused on and wrote about the rapper's Jesus piece chain worn around his neck more than his music serves as a fitting reminder that however captivating hip-hop lyrics may be, they can easily be drowned out by other visual distractions or with the switching off of a radio. For more on Berry's interview, see Jay-Z 22.

with diamond studs, the baggy designer jean and hoodie look, P. Diddy luxe look, Farnsworth Bentley dandy look). It is in consequence of hip-hop followers' emulation of such a broadly defined aesthetic that hip-hop clothing signifies "the most multilayered (pun intended) aspect of hip-hop [...]," encompassing not one but many clothing trends (George 156).⁸⁶ Of course, young black male *banlieusards* do not always have as many resources from which to craft their hip-hop clothing style as leading hip-hop artists do; nonetheless, they effectively capture its highly accessible, duplicable aesthetic by complimenting regular clothing articles (tee-shirts, sneakers) with conspicuous compliments, be it a pair of bling earrings, gold grillz, backwards overalls, XXL hoodies, or gold size stickers on the visors of their baseball caps.⁸⁷

A second distinguishing feature of hip-hop clothing styles is their conceptualizing of a particular form of masculinity that I call "hypermasculine toughness," meaning a form of manliness characterized by heightened virility and hardness. It is not a secret that hip-hop culture is typically considered an exceedingly masculine, heterosexist, and violent man's game, both inside and outside of the culture (*Hip*).⁸⁸ Hip-hop clothing's general characterization as hard, gritty, and exceedingly masculine derives in large part from hip-hop culture's overall mission to present a more "authentic" visualization of the black male living in the an urban setting. Expectedly, authenticity, as conceived within hip-hop culture, stands in contrast to typical, abject, emasculate visualizations of black men, and "imbues its wearers with a mythic sense of

⁸⁶ Unlike the black footballers in the previous chapter who assert their heightened sense of masculinity by sporting the same clothing item (the *maillot bleu*), young black male *banlieusards* cultivating hip hop sartorial styles possess a multitude of ways in which to bring visibility to themselves by way of clothing.

⁸⁷ "Bling" is a term used within hip-hop culture that was originally coined by rapper BG (Baby Gangsta) of Cash Money Millionaires in his song "Bling, Bling" (1998). Referring to the imaginary sound produced when light reflects off of diamonds, it is often used to connote flashy or ostentatious jewelry or clothing. "Grillz" are caps worn over the teeth that are usually made of precious metals such as silver, gold, platinum, or diamonds. For more on bling in hip-hop fashion, see Oh.

⁸⁸ Certain readings challenge this depiction of hip-hop culture, including gay hip-hop artist Tim'm West's reading of homosocialism and homoeroticism in male hip-hop artists' embracing of the bare, oiled chest aesthetic in music videos for their predominantly white male audiences (*Hip*).

virility, danger, and physicality” (Fleetwood, *Troubling* 152).⁸⁹ That an overwhelming majority of hip-hop clothing styles cater chiefly to a young urban male demographic corroborates this attire’s promotion of a harder vision of masculinity.⁹⁰ Moreover, the subsistence of particular hip-hop clothing articles—for instance, oversized baggy pants and unlaced shoes inspired by uniforms worn by prison inmates⁹¹—further the notion of its wearers’ authenticity and challenge typical imaginings of black men’s masculinity in Paris. Young black male *banlieusards*’ assertion of their masculine authority by sporting hip-hop clothing styles evocative of hypermasculine toughness presents itself clearly in Lauren Ekué’s *Icône urbaine* and Insa Sané’s *Du plomb dans le crâne*. Through close readings of select characters’ descriptions of and reasons for cultivating hip-hop clothing styles in these two narratives, I underscore the aforementioned

⁸⁹ That is not to say that there are no hip-hop clothing styles catering to women (brands like Baby Phat and Apple Bottoms alone certainly indicate otherwise). Nonetheless, this notion of hypermasculine toughness still imbues these women’s styles and, in many ways, influences how women hip-hop followers dress. American hip-hop artist, Missy Elliot’s comments regarding how her transformation in hip-hop clothing style contributed to her breakout success underscores this point. While Missy, a larger-sized female, initially struggled to make herself known in the music industry, she finally caught the general public’s attention by donning raingear that resembled a large, black, air-inflated garbage bag and drew attention away from the feminine features of her body in her first video “The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)” (1997). When asked of her reason for wearing this particular outfit, Missy responded: “I told myself, I’m going to make a record and I’m gunna be big...and I’m gunna be *big* too...I mean, literally” (“Missy”; emphasis in orig.). Complementing her (real) larger size with this (exaggerated) air-filled garbage bag suit in her espousal of hip-hop aesthetics, Missy gained visibility and credibility within this hypermasculine culture. Moreover, hip-hop clothing styles’ promotion of hypermasculine toughness in no way speaks to the sexuality or sexual identification of its wearer, as the rise of homothugdragsterism in the late 1980s and early 90s—wherein brown and black gay men, thrilled by the macho posturing of gangsta rap and hip-hop culture, “wore their masculinity like armor” (Tan 210). For more on homothugdragsterism, see Tan.

⁹⁰ Black men’s deliberate movements in their hip-hop clothing styles, such as the “cool pose,” “mean mug,” or “street swagger,” further these men’s assertion of a more powerful, hypermasculine image for themselves. Quoting Richard Majors and Janel Mancini Bilson in his book *Back in the Days: Remix* (2011), Jamal Shabazz defines the “cool pose” as ““a ritualized form of masculinity that entails behavior, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single critical message: pride, strength, and control.’ [...] [B]y acting calm, emotionless, fearless, aloof, and tough, the African American male shows both the dominant culture and the black male himself that he is strong and proud. He is somebody. He is a survivor in spite of the systematic harm done by the legacy of slavery and the realities of racial oppression or the centuries of hardships and mistrust. For sure, the cool pose represented a way for many young brothers to defend themselves against the indignities and inequities of ghetto life.” For more on how men’s racial and gender performance, in addition to their hip-hop clothing styles, contribute to these men’s assertion of hypermasculine toughness, see Shabazz and also White.

⁹¹ Oversized, baggy pants and unlaced shoes are two hip-hop clothing articles that were first popularized in the late 1980s by West Coast gangsta rappers. They both convey their wearers’ toughness through their derivation from prison culture. Prisoners are forbidden to wear belts and, accordingly, sport pants that sag around the waist. Additionally, they are not allowed to wear shoelaces. Since the introduction of baggy pants and unlaced shoes into hip-hop culture through gangsta rap, both clothing items have become mainstays of hip-hop clothing styles.

connections between hip-hop clothing styles and its wearers' visibility as well as hypermasculine toughness, and reveal how those styles concurrently heighten its wearers' sense of masculine authority and reshape Others' visions of the *banlieues* space.

Hip-Hop Clothing Styles in Literature

Îcône urbaine chronicles the everyday affairs of narrator Flora D'Almeida, a twenty-five-year-old Togolese magazine columnist for a black lifestyle magazine, Afro International, who splits her time between reporting on trends in the world of French hip-hop and finding herself a respectable partner to marry. Although Flora was born and raised in an unspecified region of the Parisian *banlieues*, her training and work as a writer lead to her moving from the periphery to the *centre ville*. Accordingly, she possesses both an insider and outsider perspective on the lived experience of Paris's *banlieusards*, both of which she presents to the reader through her elaborate descriptions of the young black male *banlieusards* often featured in her work assignments. Throughout this narrative, Flora exhibits a fervent interest in the popularity of hip-hop culture and hip-hop clothing styles in particular among young black male *banlieusards* and black diaspora men more generally. Her recognition of the appeal of hip-hop culture and attire to young black male *banlieusards* derives not only from her acquaintance with black men who exclusively sport this particular clothing style, but also from her first-hand observations of men at the events she attends for work, including more mainstream hip-hop concerts in large venues (such as a Wu-Tang Clan concert) as well as underground gatherings in less conspicuous locations in the *banlieues*.

Du plomb dans le crâne recounts the events leading up to the 2005 suicides of a Martinican man from Villiers-le-Bel with a fervent love for hip-hop fashion named Prince Cisko

and his mother, Fanny. It begins with a single “BANG!” of a firearm heard in the early evening of November 6th and then backtracks to the day before, slowly tracing the incidents preceding the time of this gunshot and these two individuals’ untimely deaths.⁹² In the place of titles, each chapter features the exact date, time, and location of the events it recounts as well as the name of the character featured as its protagonist at its onset. While the majority of the novel’s chapters showcase Prince, many individuals close to him or whom he encounters during his final days serve as protagonist to several chapters as well, including: Fanny; Prince’s brother, Sonny; a young Senegalese man from Sarcelles named Alassane; Alasanne’s older brothers, Tierno and Djiraël; Alassane’s mother, Abi; a notorious pimp named Pasteur; and neighborhood policeman Tonton Black Jacket (Uncle Black Jacket).

The narrative begins after Prince’s four-month stint in prison for misdemeanors including disorderly conduct, speeding, driving while under the influence, and theft. Yearning for a change of pace, Prince plans to move with his mother Fanny (a victim of domestic violence who now lives alone in a mental hospital) to Brussels to start a new life. Unfortunately, his trip is postponed before it even has the chance to begin when he visits his bank to withdraw his life savings and discovers that one of the two keys needed to open the security box holding his savings is missing. In order to retrieve this missing key (which bank manager, M. Haurain, has forfeited to the pimp, Pasteur, as collateral in his absence), Prince must retrieve a briefcase filled with money from a man named Alchimiste on Pasteur’s behalf. Yet after Prince witnesses Alchimiste kill his friend, Braco (whom Alchimiste mistakes for Prince), he realizes that he has been set up. With the help of a group of young male *banlieusards* that he meets in a chance encounter (of which the young Senegalese, Alassane, is the leader) and Carine, a former lover

⁹² The chapter commencing immediately after the initial “BANG!” is one exception to this chronological progression, taking the reader back to September 1999 to inform the reader of Prince’s release from prison.

who once worked as a call girl for Pasteur, Prince outsmarts the Pasteur and retrieves the second key to his security box. It is after he concludes this mission that Prince decides to take his own life. Following a heated argument with his brother, Sonny, on the car ride to the hospital where Fanny resides, Prince drives into a tree and then shoots himself in the head. The narrative wraps up with Fanny taking her own life in her hospital bed after hearing of her son's fate, ending the same "BANG!" of a firearm heard at its start.

The most apparent commonality between these two hip-hop-themed or "lit hop" novels is their in-depth portrayal of not only French hip-hop culture but also the abject, typical identification and lived experience of the young black male *banlieusards* who typically adopt the culture and its fashion.⁹³ Consistent with "lit hop"'s more general mission to authentically depict the urban peripheries (just as hip-hop itself), both of these narratives commence with detailed descriptions of the Parisian *banlieues*' assumed inferior position opposite the *centre ville* and of the negative impact of those visualizations on *banlieusards*' self-identifications and identifications by Others. In *Icône*, Flora stresses how hegemonic leaders' alienation of Saint-Denis from common portrayals of Paris stimulates Saint Denis residents' geographical and mental isolation from and subordination to inhabitants of the *centre ville*. She states:

Je viens de la banlieue parisienne, la plus vile et la moins saine. A l'ombre de Paris: la banlieue pourrie. Les monumentales portes de la capital nous tiennent à l'écart.
L'environnement urbain est un désastre architectural. Le gris de ces immenses tours déteint sur ces habitants devenus maussades et grincheux malgré eux. (31)

⁹³ I borrow the term "lit-hop" from American author Adam Mansbach, who uses it to distinguish a growing body of literature that exhibits form and topics related to hip-hop culture. This genre includes literature about hip-hop culture, written by hip-hop artists, as well as literature ostensibly unrelated to hip-hop, yet that "[takes] up the aesthetic and political concerns of the culture" (95). For more on what signifies foundational features characterizing this form of literature within the American context in particular, see Mansbach. For more on its distinguishing traits in French contemporary literature, see Sané, "Le hip hop."

I come from the Parisian suburb, the vilest and the least healthy. In the shadow of Paris: the decayed suburb. The enormous gates of the capital give us the cold shoulder. The urban environment is an architectural disaster. The gray of these immense towers rub off on these people, [who have] become sullen and cranky despite themselves.

In fact, the “decayed suburb” from which Flora originates and to which she frequently returns for her reportage on French hip-hop is both literally and figuratively situated in “l’ombre de Paris” (the shadow of Paris; 31), wherein “Paris” signifies the *centre ville* alone. Like a bit of shade trailing silently behind the bright, prosperous nucleus of this metropolis, the Saint-Denis *banlieue*—described here as “la plus vile et la moins saine” (the vilest and the least healthy)—appears as the darker, gloomier neighbor of France’s capital city. Yet just as a shadow that temporarily rather than permanently appears at the rear of the object it emulates, Saint-Denis’s presence in the typical imaginary of Paris is ephemeral at best. As Flora highlights, “Les monumentales portes de la capital nous tiennent à l’écart” (The enormous gates of the capital give us the cold shoulder; 31): that is to say that by turning a blind eye to the *banlieues*, hegemonic leaders (the metaphorical keepers of the enormous gates of the capital, and more precisely, overseers of the spectacle organizing its territorial spaces and social relations) separate this peripheral region from visualizations of France’s capital city, thereby propagating the notion of the *banlieues* as the invisible, inferior, and distinct counterpart to the *centre ville*.

As Flora points out, this view of the *banlieues* as substandard relative to the *centre ville* adversely impacts *banlieusards*’ personal identifications. Saint Denis’s “architectural disaster” (the most tangible proof of hegemonic leaders’ giving the *banlieues* the cold shoulder) “rubs off” onto the regions’ inhabitants and, accordingly, renders their lifestyles seemingly less significant than the lifestyles of members of mainstream society in “Paris.” Like Saint Denis’s decrepit

geographical space that lingers in the shadow of the Parisian *centre ville*, its “sullen” and “cranky” inhabitants are deprived of the brilliance typically attributed to those living in the *centre ville*.

The impact of negative conceptions of the *banlieues*’ space on young black male *banlieusards* in particular presents itself in *Du plomb*, and more precisely, in its narrator’s introduction of Alassane and his friends. These young men habitually experience feelings of inferiority and powerlessness relative to inhabitants of the *centre ville*. While feelings of subordination certainly derive in part from their abject identification by members of mainstream society on account of their racial and ethnic differences (Alassane is of Senegalese origins and the majority of his friends also have African backgrounds, having either been born in France or lived a significant portion of their lives in France’s capital), they also stem from negative portrayals of the *banlieues*.⁹⁴ Alassane and his friends pass the majority of their time together in the one place within their Sarcelles neighborhood that they can call their own: an abandoned room in the second basement of a building that they aptly call the “Underground” (51). Similar to the structures that populate Flora’s “banlieue pourrie” (decayed suburb), the building that houses the “Underground” is decrepit and covered in corrosion: “Tout était gris, les morveux semblaient immunisés contre la poussière et les odeurs de moisissure. Les minots cohabitaient avec les ordures et les rongeurs. [...] Pour eux, l’ascenseur social était bloqué au -2” (Everything was gray, the snotty-nosed kids seemed immune to the dirt and the smell of mildew. The crew cohabitated with garbage and rodents. [...] For them, the social elevator was stuck at -2; 52).

⁹⁴ The narrator underscores how these young men’s location in the *banlieues* reduces their already-inferior visualizations of self. He or she states: “Dans l’underground, y avait pas de couleurs ou de religions [...] Les marmots était frères dans la misère et l’ennui. [I]ls avaient admis que le monde existant en dehors de l’underground n’était pas le leur. [...] Tous nés du mauvais côté du périph” (In the Underground, there were no colors or religions. [...] The kids were brothers in misery and boredom. [...] They had accepted that the world existing outside of the underground was not theirs. [...] All born on the wrong side of the periph[ery]; 54-5).

Again, the reader notes a correlation between the substandard image of this Sarcelles building (completely grey in color and replete with dirt and mildew) and the inferior placement of Alassane and his friends within that space (they are actually invisible by being literally below ground, on the same level as the building's garbage and rodents). The narrator intimates the endurance of this substandard representation of Alassane and his friends within common visions of Paris through his or her description of these young men's relation to the "l'ascenseur social" (the social elevator); "stuck" on the floor of this second basement, these young men, conditioned to "la poussière et les odeurs de moisissure" (the dirt and the smell of mildew) of the "Underground," appear passively accepting of their feelings of dejection and powerlessness.

For young black men like Alassane, a marginal, invisible presence within the typical imaginary of Paris translates to a lost sense of masculine authority. *Du plomb's* narrator emphasizes this connection when he or she highlights Alassane and his friends' frustration over Others' inaccurate assumptions of their distinction from French culture on account of their race and location in Paris. The narrator points out: "Alassane et le reste de la bande voulaient qu'on les considère comme des hommes, ils réclamaient qu'on leur donne le droit d'être de couleur dans un pays de Blancs" (Alassane and the rest of the group wanted people to consider them men, they reclaimed that one gives them the right to be of color in a country of Whites; 189). By stressing Alassane and his friends' belief in their "droit d'être de couleur dans un pays de Blancs" (right to be of color in a country of Whites), the narrator reminds the reader once more of the impact of Alassane and his friends' racial and geographical location within Paris on visualizations of themselves within the spectacle of Paris. Alassane and his friends (all men of color) feel excluded from the "pays de Blancs" (country of Whites), also known as the *centre ville* or the site of mainstream French society. Overlooked and, thus, emasculated by hegemonic

leaders, these young black *banlieusards* yearn for a manner in which to represent themselves, “comme des hommes” (as men) in this particular setting. How exactly do these men confront these feelings of invisibility and assert their stifled sense of masculinity in the spectacle Paris?

Without doubt, explicit acts of rebellion capture hegemonic powers’ and mainstream society’s attention. The growth in awareness of Paris’s *banlieues* and its inhabitants’ dismal lived experiences following the 2005 *banlieues* riots clearly demonstrates this point. Yet given that impact of explicit acts of violence are often temporary or not always as effective as imagined, it is useful to consider other manners in which young black male *banlieusards* habitually convey their masculine authority and demonstrate the *banlieues*’ significance to French culture. In fact, young black male *banlieusards* sporting hip-hop attire reclaim their lost sense of masculinity through their clothing choice. While French hip-hop culture as a whole is often considered a means through which young black male *banlieusards* combat sentiments of invisibility and emasculation, these men’s conscious wearing of attire characteristic of this culture and suggestive of hypermasculine toughness signifies a most explicit, widespread, and routine manner in which they realize this goal. Their self-presentation in hip-hop clothing within Parisian society challenges hegemonic powers’ hierarchization of individuals based on those individuals’ visibility within common conceptions of Paris. To reiterate Debord’s findings on the spectacle, since our eyes serve as a primary source, a person’s prestige is no longer measured in his or her *having* but *appearing* (5; emphasis in orig.). Of course, Debord employs appearing here to speak of the images promoted by hegemonic powers and media outlets in the spectacle. Yet these young men’s capacity to effectively disrupt typical, abject visualizations of themselves by most literally appearing in this ostentatious clothing style reveals how his consideration of the spectacle and its capacity for change contributes to this discussion.

How these men's hip-hop clothing styles challenge typical visualizations of his sense of masculinity in particular is evident when one considers Michel Foucault's observations on how visibility impacts power's relation to sex and sexuality in *Histoire de la sexualité: La volonté de la savoir* (History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge) (1976). He states that modern power relies on visibility to identify, classify, and regulate individuals. Given that complete visibility or transparency facilitates modern power's total classification of individuals, Foucault intimates the value of utilizing alternative forms of visibility to evade the taxonomies of power and preserve a sense of authority for one's self. He states: "Il faut admettre un jeu complexe et instable où le discours peut être à la fois instrument et effet de pouvoir, mais aussi obstacle, butée, point de résistance et départ pour une stratégie opposée" (We must accept a complex and instable game whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also an obstacle, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and departure for an opposing strategy; 133). In other words, visibility is not emancipatory in itself; rather, it is how one makes oneself visible.

Considering that the hip-hop clothing styles that black male *banlieusards* sport to gain greater visibility for themselves are ever-changing and in no way fixed, it is evident that their visibility by way of those styles is far from transparent. The fact that the primary trait tying various hip-hop clothing styles together is their espousal of the hip-hop aesthetic further underscores the transience of this clothing style.⁹⁵ The plethora of creative ways in which these young black men can craft their hip-hop clothing styles as well as the development of new hip-hop clothing styles and constant recreation of old ones complicates hegemonic powers' attempts to isolate and classify these men according to the visibility of their clothing style alone and assert

⁹⁵ The rapidity and ease with which seemingly regular clothing articles become essential elements to hip-hop attire is well evidenced in rapper T.I.'s making a street code item a part of his iconic clothing style. Nicknamed the "Rubber Band Man," he sports rubber bands on his wrists as drug dealers from his home neighborhood did to hold discreet bank rolls. T.I. states, "Now, if you wore three or four rubber bands then you were anticipating making a lot of money. And suddenly, those rubber bands look like jewelry to everyone around you" (Oh 185).

masculine authority over them by relegating them to the periphery. Consequently, these youths' appearing in spectacular hip-hop styles signifies a way in which they make themselves appear more masculine, and the *banlieues* space that they inhabit more influential within visualizations of Paris.

Young black male *banlieusards* featured in *Icône urbaine* cultivate hip-hop clothing styles for this precise re-identification purpose. In a chapter aptly titled “Bling-Bling,” Flora describes the crowd she sees at a hip-hop soirée in the *banlieues*. In her perspective, what unites this group of individuals is not just a mutual appreciation for hip-hop culture, but also a pronounced desire to stand out from or attain greater visibility in the crowd. They are all striving to be recognized as what Flora terms “[un] [m]ini-star du ghetto” ([a] mini ghetto Star; 11). She elaborates: “Savez-vous ce qu’est une mini-star du ghetto? Vous êtes Blanc? Je tolère votre ignorance. Vous êtes Noir? C’est une autre histoire [...] Le jour, vous n’êtes rien, ni personne. Le soir, vous êtes une star” (Do you know what a mini ghetto star is? Are you White? I’ll tolerate your ignorance. Are you Black? That’s another story [...] By day, you are nothing and nobody. In the evening, you are a star; 11). While Flora uses the term “ghetto” here insinuates that the crowd members aspiring to become a “star” are either from the *banlieues* (which many recognize as the “ghetto” of Paris on account of its peripheral location, decaying structures, and predominantly working-class, minority population) or self-identify as *banlieusards* themselves (meaning they identify the ghetto within themselves),⁹⁶ she specifies which inhabitants of the *banlieues* in particular she notes at this hip-hop soirée through her subsequent inquiries to the

⁹⁶ Flora’s use of the term “ghetto” here as a substitute for the *banlieues* is clearly based on her previous mention of this party’s location in the overlooked periphery of the capital city. Yet while some scholars would support Flora’s categorization of the *banlieues* as a ghetto (Bronner; Lapeyronnie), others do not endorse this association of terms (Wacquant), contending that “unlike the black American ghetto, the French banlieue is not a *homogeneous advanced organizational autonomy and institutional duplication*, based on a *dichotomous cleavage between races* (i.e. fictively biologized ethnic categories) officially *recognized by the state* (160-1; emphasis in orig.). For more on arguments in favor of the interchangeable use of the terms ghetto and banlieues, see Bronner 23. For more in arguments against calling the *banlieues* a ghetto, see Wacquant 135-61.

reader. Her tolerance of certain (white) readers' unawareness of what signifies "un mini-star du ghetto" (a mini-ghetto Star) over others ("Vous êtes Noir? C'est une autre histoire" [Are you Black? That's another story]) indicates that the individuals composing the party's crowd are black men. The moment that these men enter this soirée, they exhibit a clear transformation in sense of self: no longer displaying their typical feelings of powerlessness and invisibility ("le jour, vous n'êtes rien, ni personne" [By day, you are nothing, nor nobody]), they now appear confident in themselves and their agency in self-expression ("Le soir, vous êtes une star" [In the evening, you are a star]).

The meticulous attention that Flora pays to these partygoers' appearances throughout the remainder of the evening reveals that what facilitates these young people's transformation in self—from a nobody to a prestigious "mini-star du ghetto" (11)—is not the party itself or hip-hop culture as a whole but, more precisely, their sporting of hip-hop clothing styles. She notes: "Tous les ingrédients sont là: mecs en baggy, casquettes, tee-shirts XXL, mains ornées de bagoues, cailloux strassés masquant les lobes. L'homme hip-hop est viril et macho, il aime les filles" (All of the ingredients are there: guys in baggy [pants], caps, XXL tee-shirts, hands adorned with rings, cheap rocks masking earlobes. The hip-hop man is virile and macho, he likes girls; 12). Together, all of the "ingrédients" (ingredients) or clothing articles that these men wear (everyday clothing items like pants sized in baggy or XXL, baseball caps, and tee-shirts artfully complemented with ostentatious bling rings and rocks decorating hands and earlobes) encapsulate the hip-hop aesthetic. By making themselves hypervisible in these hip-hop clothing items, these men represent themselves in a new fashion as "mini-star[s] du ghetto," veritable celebrities within the *banlieues*, and accordingly, gain greater visibility for themselves.

These men's attainment of greater visibility in a most literal sense among the party crowd

translates to their securement of a greater sense of masculine authority. Flora highlights this point in her ensuing description of one partygoer's transformation into a "mini-star du ghetto."

She states:

Tenez, par exemple, lui, à ma droite. Hier matin, il bossait à la station service de Villiers-le-Bel. Je le sais. J'y ai fait mon plein. Ce soir, il se cache derrière ses coûteuses lunettes Cartier sur le nez. La semaine dernière, il me jurait les plus grands dieux d'être rappeur et producteur de la Mafia K1'Rfy. (14)

Take, for example, him on my right. Yesterday morning, he was working at the gas service station of Villiers-le-Bel. I know him. He filled me up there. Tonight, he hides behind his expensive Cartier glasses on his nose. Last week, he swore on the biggest gods to me to be a rapper and producer of Mafia K1'Rfy.

Although this young man "hides" behind his expensive Cartier glasses, it is clear from Flora's description here that he sports them to exhibit rather than to conceal himself in this soirée setting. Thanks to his inclusion of this particular item in his wardrobe, his sense of agency in self-expression and of masculine authority within this community of black men increase significantly. No longer does he go unnoticed, as he typically does while working at the gas station during the day; he now ardently identifies himself as an active part of and foundational force behind Mafia K1-Rfy (roughly translating to "African Mafia"), the famous collective of French hip-hop male artists (rappers, taggers, beat boxers, MCs, producers, etc.).⁹⁷ By sporting these lavish sunglasses, he accordingly exudes a heightened sense of masculine authority relative to the other black male *banlieusards* at the soirée.

That hip-hop clothing styles fuel this man's claim to being a member of Mafia K1-Rfy—an all-male collective known for a tough, hypermasculine image that it promotes via its

⁹⁷ "K1 Fry" is the verlan term for "Afrique" (Africa).

members' fashion as well as its own Mafia K1-Rfy clothing line—further underscores his reclaiming of his lost sense of manhood by way of his attire as well. In fact, Flora intimates hip-hop attire's capacity to facilitate black male *banlieusards'* assertion of masculinity by way of their exhibition of hypermasculine toughness earlier on in the narrative. In her aforementioned remarks regarding this hip-hop soirée's crowd, she alludes to its partygoers' exhibition of a particularly hard form of masculinity when transformed into "mini-star(s) du ghetto" (mini-stars of the ghetto), thereby suggesting a correlation between hip-hop clothing styles and its wearers' sense of manhood. Most notably, she concludes her listing of the key sartorial "ingrédients" by commenting on their sense of manliness while sporting those clothing items ("L'homme hip-hop est viril et macho, il aime les filles" [The hip-hop man is virile and macho, he likes girls]). Flora reveals this link between hip-hop clothing items and its wearers' personal sense of masculine authority more clearly when speaking of a small group of female partygoers she also notes at this soirée. Although black men form the majority of this hip-hop party's crowd, women (including Flora) are also in attendance. And according to Flora, these women primarily attend these hip-hop soirées to find themselves male partners. Flora notes:

Ces soirées sont peuplées de blondes, souvent fausses, de beurettes à la recherche d'un homme, ayant tous les emblèmes de l'identité masculine hip-hop. Il faut que ça claque, faut que ça brille, que ça en jette. Elles courent après la panoplie du hip-hopper comme je cours après le dernier Vuitton. Elles persistent dans l'idée que nos hommes sont génitalement mieux pourvus que les leurs...plausible erreur. (12)

These soirées are populated with blonds, often fakes, beurettes in search of a man having all the emblems of the masculine hip-hop identity. This must slam, that must shine, that must be classy. They run after the panoply of a hip-hopper like I run after the latest

Vuitton. They persist with the idea that our men are genitally better equipped than their own...plausible error.

Women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds—true blonds, fake blonds, Arabs, etc.—as well as from various regions of Paris attend these parties for the sole purpose of finding themselves a male partner who possess all of the emblems of “l’identité masculine hip-hop” (the masculine hip-hop identity): stated differently, a virile, hypermasculine, and tough image. Given the criteria that these women utilize to determine which of these black male *banlieusards*’ actually hold this masculine hip-hop identity in these gendered encounters (“Il faut que ça *claque*, faut que ça *brille*, que ça en *jette*” [This must *slam*, that must *shine*, that must be *classy*; my emphasis]), it is evident that these men’s clothing—the bagginess of his designer jeans, the shininess of the diamonds decorating his earlobes, the classiness of their jersey—plays a central role in exhibiting a man’s manliness. Flora’s equation of women’s pursuit of black male *banlieusards* here to her own hunt for a coveted designer handbag further intimates these women’s gauging of black male *banlieusards*’ masculinity based on more tangible means like their hip-hop attire and accouterments. As she highlights, these women run after “la *panoplie* du hip-hoppeur” (the *panoply* of the hip-hopper; my emphasis), wherein the term “*panoplie*” signifies “ensemble d’armes présenté sur un panneau et servant de trophée, d’ornament” (collection of arms presented on a board and serving as a trophy, of decoration or vestment; Robert, “Panoplie,” def. 2) or a “jouet d’enfant, comprenant un équipement, un *déguisement* (vêtements et instruments)” (child’s toy, comprising gear, a *disguise* [clothing and instruments]; Robert, “Panoplie,” def. 3; my emphasis). In other words, they assess whether these men possess the hypermasculine toughness they seek by way of those men’s complete array of hip-hop clothing articles reflective of this particular form of masculinity. Whether the men sporting these hip-hop clothing styles

are, in fact, more hypermasculine and tough (meaning more virile or genitally-endowed) than other men is besides the point; their hip-hop attire corroborates women's notion that black men (or as Flora identifies them, "nos hommes" [our men]) exhibit a heightened sense of masculine authority opposite men of other racial and ethnic backgrounds whom these women pass over.⁹⁸

These men's capacity to not only satisfy the desires of these women by conveying hypermasculine toughness, but most literally attract those women from various regions in Paris to the peripherally-located, marginalized *banlieues* underscores their greater sense of masculine authority over not only personal, but also geographical visualizations in Paris by way of their hip-hop clothing styles. Thanks to these men's ostentatious clothing designs, the *banlieues* no longer lingers in the shadow of the *centre ville*. It becomes a clear destination to women of all walks of life for hypermasculine, virile men, thereby intimating the heightened visibility and authority of the *banlieues* region in Paris as well.

In *Du plomb*, hip-hop clothing similarly plays a critical role in Prince's assertion of masculinity opposite other men through its perpetuating the image of Prince's hypermasculine toughness. Based on the narrator's description of Prince, it is clear that he typically self-identifies as a macho man and holds a reputation as such in his home neighborhood of Villiers-le-Bel as well as surrounding *banlieues* neighborhoods. Yet unbeknownst to the reader (at least at the beginning of this narrative), Prince also suffers from multiple personality disorder, granting him a second personality (whom the narrator presents throughout as Prince's brother, Sonny) that is the exact opposite. Whereas Prince exhibits a more dominant, hard, and commanding personality

⁹⁸ These women's conviction in these black men's heightened sense of masculinity over men of other racial backgrounds (based on their sporting of clothing reflective of "l'identité masculine hip-hop" [the masculine hip-hop identity]), regardless of whether there is truth behind such a supposition, recalls Fanon's observations on white women's eroticization of black men by way of body and skin in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*). Speaking of men's virility, Fanon states: "La supériorité du nègre est-elle réelle? Tout le monde *sait* que non. Mais l'important n'est pas là" (Is the superiority of the Negro real? Everyone *knows* it isn't. But that isn't important; 129; emphasis in orig.).

and a fervent interest in hip-hop attire, Sonny is timid, fearful, and could care less about the hip-hop or its emblematic clothing style.⁹⁹ This stark contrast between Prince and Sonny's sense of masculine authority relative to other men, both inside and outside of the *banlieues* space, evidences itself in how they move about the City of Light as well: whereas Prince confidently navigates from region to region, from *banlieues* and the *centre ville*, to complete his mission for the Pasteur, Sonny spends the majority of this narrative locked indoors in his home in Villiers-le-Bel, hiding from an ex-cellmate of Prince seeking revenge on Prince who has mistaken him for his brother. The distinction between Prince and Sonny also presents itself in the manner in which these two men dress. The first time that the reader encounters Prince on November 5 (the day preceding his suicide), he is sporting an outfit that he describes as more unique to Sonny's style. This seemingly innocuous fact bears a strong impact on Prince's self-identification. The narrator points out:

Prince se sentait mal à l'aise dans les fringues de "gentil garçon" qu'il portait: un manteau marron tout con, déchiré au niveau des manches. Une chemise blanche à rayures bleues, sans marque, complètement démodé. Un jean *Stone*, quatre saisons, taillé sans imagination et troué à l'entrejambe. Des imitations Timberland qui faisaient la gueule. Une vraie dégaine de péquenaud, indigne de son standing; on aurait dit Sonny! (68)

Prince felt uncomfortable in the "nice boy" clothing that he wore: a completely stupid brown coat, torn at the sleeves. A white shirt with blue stripes, unbranded, completely outdated. A *Stone* brand jean, four seasons, unimaginative and with holes in the crotch.

⁹⁹ Prince's interest in hip-hop attire alone and disinterest in other "fronts" of hip-hop culture like rap music supports my argument that clothing signifies as the first hip-hop front through which young black male *banlieusards* represents himself. Prince strongly dislikes hip-hop music, preferring the melodic tunes of George Michael, Elton John, and Boy George (86).

Imitation *Timberlands* that spurned. A real draw of hillbilly, unworthy of his standing.

One might say Sonny!

When analyzing the narrator's remarks here with the knowledge that Prince and Sonny are, in fact, the same person, the most probable reason why Prince finds himself in clothing so atypical of his usual style is clear: prior to this moment, Prince likely self-identified with the Sonny side of his personality and, thus, dressed himself in his brother's image. However, for the first-time reader, Prince's donning of clothing more suited for Sonny's taste might seem like a mere coincidence. Regardless of where these clothing articles actually came from, there's no mistaking that Prince does not find feel like himself while wearing them (as the narrator highlights, "Prince se sentait mal à l'aise dans les fringues de 'gentil garçon' qu'il portait" [Prince felt uncomfortable in the "nice boy" clothing that he wore; 68]). Considering the manner in which the narrator describes the clothing articles that complete Prince's outfit, it is apparent that what makes Prince so distressed is their poor quality and commonplace features (the torn sleeves, unbranded and outdated shirt, etc.), all of which contrast with the hip-hop clothing styles he typically wears. While sporting these dull, "nice boy" duds, Prince senses himself reverting to his more timid and emasculate (Sonny) self whose presence typically goes unnoticed and masculine authority relative to other men is virtually nonexistent. No longer feeling like the authoritative, hypermasculine man of the Villiers-le-Bel community he knows himself to be, Prince feels comparable to "une vraie dégaine de péquenaud, indigne de son standing" (a real draw of hillbilly, unworthy of his standing; 68).

To vanquish these feelings of powerlessness and emasculation, Prince immediately purchases new hip-hop clothing items, thereby confirming a correlation between hip-hop clothing styles evocative of hypermasculine toughness and black *banlieusards'* assertion of

masculinity. He replaces his Sonny-inspired attire with new hip-hop clothing items following a shopping spree. The narrator states:

Les portes du RER E s'ouvrirent, larguant Prince sur le boulevard Jaussman, à Saint-Lazare. Jean délavé *Diesel*, pull jaune *Von Dutch*, blouson *Avirex*, une chaussure beige *Timberland* bûcheron au pied droit et une basket *Air Force* blanche au pied gauche, grosse paire de lunettes noires à montures jaunes *Versace* sur le nez, chaîne en or au cou et deux montres au poignet, démarche à la "Huggy les bon tuyaux": notre héros s'était payé une allure de *pimp*. (86)

The doors of the RER E opened, leaving Prince standing on Jaussman Boulevard, at Saint-Lazare. Faded *Diesel* jeans, *Von Dutch* yellow sweater, *Avirex* jacket, a beige, lumberjack *Timberland* shoe on the right foot and a white *Air Force* sneaker on the left foot, big black with yellow frame *Versace* sunglasses on the nose, gold chain on the neck and two wrist watches, approach to "Huggy the good pipe": our hero had paid a pimp look.

The range of colors and well-known brands encompassed in Prince's new outfit substantially outshine those featured in Prince's previous attire. Several elements of his new hip-hop clothing style—for instance, his sporting of "une chaussure beige *Timberland* bûcheron au pied droit et une basket *Air Force* blanche au pied gauche" (a beige, lumberjack *Timberland* shoe on the right foot and a white *Air Force* sneaker on the left foot; 86)—encapsulate the hip-hop aesthetic and, accordingly, make him hypervisible to passersby. Yet these features not only grant Prince greater visibility within this environment; they also facilitate his securement of the hypermasculine, authoritative image with which he typically identifies. The narrator's characterization of Prince following his change into this new outfit underscores the transformation in masculine

identification that he experiences once wearing it in the place of his former, dull outfit. No longer appearing like a frumpy hillbilly, Prince now has a full “pimp look.” The narrator’s choosing to describe Prince’s appearance in this new clothing as that of a pimp, rather than the more ostensible response—hip-hop enthusiast—is noteworthy: by likening him to a figure known for securing his sense of masculine authority through his control of women (prostitutes) and over other men’s sexual encounters with those women, the narrator effectively conveys the connection between Prince’s new clothing and his personal masculine identification.

Really, Prince exhibits his superior sense of masculinity here not only by way of sporting hip-hop clothing styles expressive of hypermasculine toughness, but also by his capacity, while wearing those styles, to appropriate non-*banlieues* space as his own. His transformation of visualizations of himself and of geographical spaces within Paris makes sense when one reconsiders American hip-hop’s inauguration in defense of minority groups living within a particular geographical territory (the South Bronx) as well as hip-hop’s more general discourse on location in urban space. As Murray Forman highlights of American hip-hop in *The ‘Hood Come First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (2002), geographical space and place signify central, historical sites in hip-hop culture. Global hip-hop musical artists’ naming of themselves after neighborhoods or referring to familiar regional sites in their songs, graffiti artists’ tagging their names on buildings within their respective neighborhoods, as well as the more general regional wars waged between members of this culture—West Coast versus East Coast in the United States, Paris versus Marseilles hip-hop styles in France—support Murray’s point. This deliberate claiming of geographical space also evidences itself in the very clothing styles worn by hip-hop followers; for instance, their sporting of baseball caps featuring the colors or logo of major sports teams in or near their hometown.

In this particular scene, Prince first assembles his new clothing style and reasserts his masculinity (by way of his sartorial display of masculine toughness) in the *centre ville*, actions that can be read as his claim to greater visibility and geographical space in France's capital city. Prince's desire to reclaim his lost sense of masculinity is what motivates him to ride on the RER R from Villiers-le-Bel to the *centre ville*, "larguant [lui-même] sur le boulevard Jausman, à Saint-Lazare (leaving [himself] standing on Jausman boulevard, at Saint-Lazare) and, consequently, in the heart of Paris. With the exception of his *Avirex* blouse, every clothing item that completes his new hip-hop clothing style comes from a store located in the *centre ville*. While some might consider this fact as just a testament to the perpetual authority of the *centre ville* and its inhabitants over the *banlieues* and its residents, the fact that Prince puts together these individual clothing items into one visually-striking hip-hop clothing style that grants him greater visibility within the *centre ville* (une chaussure beige *Timberland* bûcheron au pied droit et une basket *Air Force* blanche au pied gauche, grosse paire de lunettes noires à montures jaunes *Versace* sur le nez, chaîne en or au cou et deux montres au poignet [a beige, lumberjack *Timberland* shoe on the right foot and a white *Air Force* sneaker on the left foot, big black with yellow frame *Versace* sunglasses on the nose, gold chain on the neck and two wrist watches]) suggests otherwise. As aforementioned, the fluidity of hip-hop clothing styles work to its wearers' benefit, granting them a distinctive form of visibility within the spectacle that can evade the taxonomies of power put forth by hegemonic powers. His sporting of two different types of footwear alone—a clunky work boot on his right foot and trendy sneaker on his left—evidences this point, likely drawing passersby at Saint-Lazare in the *centre ville*'s eyes to him regardless of whether those passersby actually recognize the meaning behind his choice of footwear. By sporting this ostentatious hip-hop clothing style that makes himself feel and look like a tough

pimp, Prince contests the typical visualization of black men like himself as powerless, emasculate man relevant in the marginal *banlieues* space alone.

It is important to keep in mind that the narrator speaks from Prince's perspective when attesting to Prince's reassertion of masculinity and appropriation of the *centre ville* space by way of his hip-hop clothing styles evocative of hypermasculine toughness. However, the manner in which outside audiences read his hip-hop clothing styles is more challenging to determine, their more negative readings signifying how some might refute the effectiveness of young black *banlieusards'* challenging typical, abject identifications of themselves and of the *banlieues* by way of their clothing choices. The distinction between how *Du plomb's* Alassane self-identifies versus how members of mainstream society (meaning those inhabiting the *centre ville*) identify Alassane per his hip-hop clothing styles serves as a fitting illustration of this point. Alassane, an unofficial leader among his friend group, sports one key hip-hop clothing article to secure his sense of masculine authority throughout this narrative: a vintage Sergio Tacchini tracksuit "tout blanc, avec le liseré bleu et le logo à hauteur de poitrine" (in all white, with blue piping and the logo on the high chest; 39) handed down to him from his older brother Djiraël. Based on the time that the narrator devotes to describing this article when first introducing Alassane, it is clear that this tracksuit, in the eyes of Alassane and of his friends sporting hip-hop clothing styles themselves, plays a significant role in communicating his masculine authority. The Sergio Tacchini brand was popular during hip-hop's inaugural years in France and remains a veritable sign of its wearers' pronounced sense of power both inside and outside of the *banlieues*.¹⁰⁰ The narrator highlights:

¹⁰⁰ "[L]a marque *Sergio Tacchini* avait fait fureur dans les cités françaises au début des années 80" (The *Sergio Tacchini* brand was all the rage in the French projects in the early 1980s; 38; emphasis in orig.). *Du plomb* author Insa Sané emphasized the significance of this particular hip-hop clothing brand by shaping his opening remarks on the power of hip-hop culture around its clothing styles at Paris Hip-Hop's panel, entitled "Le hip hop: Une nouvelle

Le mec qui avait sur le dos survêt' [*Sergio Tacchini*], sur la tête le bob *Kangol* et aux pieds les *Adidas Run DMC* ou les *Baldwin*, c'était un boss qui jouait dans la cour des grands. Même si le survêt' était devenu marron tellement le mec l'avait squatté, ça restait un *Sergio Tacchini*, fringue de prestige. (39)

The guy who has a [*Sergio Tacchini*] tracksuit jacket on his back, a *Kangol* hat on his head, and *Adidas Run DMC* or *Baldwin* on his feet was a boss who played in the big leagues. Even if the tracksuit jacket had become so brown that the man squatted it, it remained a *Sergio Tacchini*, clothing of prestige.

This “fringue de prestige” (clothing of prestige) signified one of three key clothing articles elemental to the most authoritative and, thus, most masculine black male *banlieusard*'s hip-hop clothing style. Alassane's insistence on sporting his Sergio Tacchini jacket to secure his sense of masculine authority indicates the everlasting impact of this particular hip-hop clothing brand on Alassane's identification. Recognized by Alassane, his friends, and other black male *banlieusards* (including Prince) as a foundational brand in French hip-hop fashion, this Sergio Tacchini makes Alassane look and feel like “un boss” (a boss) to his crew of the Underground.

Unfortunately, outside audiences unaware of Sergio Tacchini's street cred might not recognize Alassane's hip-hop clothing styles as a testament to Alassane's masculine authority.

And while some do recognize his clothing as a testament to his hypermasculine toughness, they

source d'inspiration pour la littérature contemporaine” (Hip Hop: A New Source of Inspiration for Contemporary Literature). Sané pointed out, “*Sergio Tacchini*, sa tenue est devenue une référence dans les rues de Sarcelles, dans les rues de 19^e arrondissement. [...] [C]es survêtements ont été, après, réutilisé et on va dire ‘bourgeoisisé’ avec les banlieues qui sont un peu plus chic, comme Sarcelles, Pierrepinte, Garges, Saint-Denis. [...] Tout ça pour expliquer un peu que le hip-hop, la rap, et ces codes, il s’agit de repenser la façon dont on conçoit et dont on produit lui-même. Et dans la littérature comme dans la musique, il va le même schéma de travail et de création” (*Sergio Tacchini*, his clothing became a reference in the streets of Sarcelles, in the streets of the 19th district. [...] These tracksuits were later reused and, one will say “bourgeoisified” with the banlieues that are a bit more chic, like Sarcelles, Pierrepinte, Garges, Saint-Denis. [...] All that to explain a bit that hip-hop, rap, and its codes are about rethinking the way in which one conceives and produces oneself. And in literature as in music, it goes on the same schema of work and creation; Sané, “Le hip hop”).

convey a dismissal of this particular form of masculinity through their identification of Alassane as a “une *caillera* ou un *thug*” (a hoodlum or a thug; 58).¹⁰¹ That is to say, they might deem hip-hop clothing styles and those styles’ emulation of its wearers’ hardness and virility as further proof of the common visualization of the black male *banlieusard* as inferior and marginal to members of Parisian society.¹⁰²

Flora’s African-American husband, Aaron, acknowledges the potential for outside audiences to misread young black male *banlieusards*’ expression of masculinity by way of hip-hop clothing. As a longtime employee of Afro International (and its eventual heir), he has worked extensively with individuals from both inside and outside of the *banlieues*, thereby granting him a firm understanding of how Others outside of the *banlieues* often interpret black male *banlieusards*’ sporting of hip-hop clothing styles. Reflecting on mainstream society’s perception and presentation of hip-hop culture more generally since its introduction in France in the mid-1980s, he contends: “Les rappers reproduisent l’image caricaturale du Noir dans l’inconscient des Blancs. Hypersexués, grossiers, mal-honnêtes et dangereux dans leurs paroles et vidéos, ils se conforment à l’esthétique que l’on attend d’eux” (Rappers reproduce the caricatural image of the Black in Whites’ unconscious. Hypersexed, crude, dishonest, and dangerous in their lyrics and videos, they conform to the esthetic that one expects from them; 144). Stated simply, Aaron suggests that by sporting hip-hop clothing styles, black male *banlieusards* actually further harmful, stereotypical visualizations of themselves and of the *banlieues* rather than represent themselves in a new, more positive manner.

¹⁰¹ “Caillera” is verlan for the pejorative term “racaille,” and is employed to designate a “voyou” (hoodlum; Caradec, “Caillera”).

¹⁰² Recent global events that transpired in consequence of young black men’s sporting of hip-hop clothing styles—including British Prime Minister David Cameron’s distinguishing of young black British youths from white British population in his 2006 “Hug-a-Hoodie” speech and George Zimmerman’s fatal shooting of the hooded Trayvon Martin—signify additional examples of members of mainstream society identifying black males as dangerous and threatening primarily based on those black males’ sporting of hip-hop clothing styles.

While Aaron certainly raises a valid point here, the impact of young black males' assertion of masculinity by way of clothing styles redolent of a harder, hypermasculine image is not as damaging as he makes it seem. Western cultures' like France's typical exposure to violent, hypermasculine visuals through the media highlights this point. Many hip-hop scholars, artists, and followers who investigate mainstream depictions of hip-hop in Western societies have astutely pointed out that "hip-hop culture is no more or less violent or sexist than other American cultural products" (*Hip*; Sharpley-Whiting 58-9). Given many Western cultures' like America's fascination with visual displays of hypermasculinity and aggression alone, the same negative traits that hegemonic discourses might associate with black male *banlieusards* sporting hip-hop attire—hyper-virility and violence—paradoxically keep those men in the popular image and likewise, in common visualizations of Paris.

Certain young black male *banlieusards*' choosing to exhibit their personal sense of masculine authority by way of hip-hop clothing styles reflective of hypermasculine toughness rather than through explicit actions of violence (regardless of these more obvious negative readings by outside audiences) further suggests the advantage of those men's representation of self and of (*banlieues*) space through clothing. As Homi K. Bhabha points out in *The Location of Culture*, stereotypes, though dependent on the concept of fixity, are granted their currency by their ambivalence or capacity to be repeated in changing historical contexts (94-5). Keeping in mind these traits of the stereotype, the effectiveness of young black male *banlieusards*' expression of masculinity by way of hip-hop clothing styles expressive of hypermasculine toughness is manifest. Really, one should not consider their sporting of these styles as an attempt to eradicate existent, stereotyped visualizations of black men or of the *banlieues* in Paris completely. Rather, he or she must recognize those men's reidentification mission by way of

clothing choice as a deliberate challenging of those seemingly fixed identifications bearing what Bhabha calls the “effect of probabilistic truth” about all black men (95). This mission, through its process of altering audiences’ visions of black men and the *banlieues* (even if just momentarily), demonstrates black men’s heightened sense of masculine authority relative to those audiences. The notion that black male *banlieusards* might adopt abject characterizations of themselves by way of hip-hop clothing styles recalls Mirielle Rosello’s notion of “declining the stereotype,” whereby an individual “make[s] a conscious use of mental or literary device that repeat a version of a stereotype in order to renounce it” (13). By wearing clothing items that visually suggest black male *banlieusards*’ hypermasculine toughness—imagery which, as outside audiences’ reading of Alassane indicate, might actually support more general visualizations of black men as socially inferior, violent inhabitants of Paris’s periphery—these men perform an “ambiguous gesture of refusal and participation” (13) in the stereotype of themselves as dangerous, thereby reducing the stereotype’s harmfulness.

Prince exhibits a clear conviction in his capacity to “decline” certain elements of stereotyped visualizations of himself (as socially inferior and dangerous) and, nonetheless, reassert his heightened sense of masculinity through his attire best after he officially agrees to retrieve the briefcase of money waiting for the Pasteur. Following his arrival in Pierrefite, where he witnesses Alchimiste (the Pasteur’s accomplice) kill his friend Braco (whom the Alchimiste mistakes for himself), Prince enlists the assistance of Alassane and his friends to retrieve the briefcase of money. As aforementioned, Alassane and his friends are particularly disenchanted by mainstream society’s disregard for them on account of their race and location in the *banlieues*. When Prince first encounters these young men, they have just set fire to an old gymnasium, their first act expressive of their frustration. Eager to continue engaging in explicit

acts of violence, Alassane stands face-to-face with Tonton Black Jacket and Lait de Vache (two neighborhood policemen) with a 9-caliber model 92 *Beretta* handgun that his friend Cyril has lent to him. Yet before Alassane pulls its trigger, sending a bullet straight into Tonton's body, Prince stops him, reminding him that killing of a man would just confirm stereotype vision of young black men like himself as dangerous outlaws (and outliers) in the spectacle. He states: "Vous serez peut-être des super bougnoules ou des super négros, mais vous porterez jamais des costumes de super héros au pays du vin et du fromage. Par contre, si vous pensez un peu à votre gueule, y a moyen de se faire des coquilles en or" (Maybe you are super Blacks or super Negros, but you will never wear the outfit of the superhero in the country of wine and cheese. On the other hand, if you think a bit about your look, there is a way to make shells into gold; 135).¹⁰³ What Prince advises Alassane to do here can be read as a form of "declining" rather than embodying the dangerous black man stereotype often promoted by hegemonic leaders in the common imaginary of Paris. By killing the officer—a clear cry for attention for himself and his native, overlooked *banlieues*—Alassane might feel like he is asserting his masculine authority opposite traditionally empowered (white) men of mainstream French society. Yet as Prince points out, by committing this crime, he will never effectively convey his heightened sense of manhood, or "wear the [metaphorical] outfit of the superhero," in the "land of wine and cheese," meaning the region most emblematic of Paris: the *centre ville*. Prince's encouraging Alassane to think more about how his "gueule"—meaning his "visage, bouche" (face, mouth; Robert, "Gueule," def. 2) or "figure" (face/look; Robert, "Gueule," def. 3)—can transform visualizations for the better (de se faire des coquilles en or [to make shells into gold]) intimates his conviction that Alassane can attain what he seeks most (recognition of his heightened sense of masculinity)

¹⁰³ "Bougnoules" is a familiar pejorative name given by Whites in Senegal to Blacks native in the region (Robert, "Bougnoules," def. 1).

through a more literal transformation of his physical image. Considering Prince's conviction in hip-hop clothing styles' capacity to convey his hypermasculine and tough image both inside and outside of his *banlieues*, it is apparent that what Prince means here is for Alassane to rob the dangerous black man stereotype of its power by sporting hip-hop clothing styles that are visually suggestive of the stereotype alone. By cultivating hip-hop clothing styles that promote more authentic visualizations of the black male *banlieusard* as a tough, powerful, and virile figure in Parisian society, Alassane still might not sport what members of mainstream society would consider the "outfit of the superhero"; nonetheless, his ability to gain greater visibility for himself in this outfit visually reflective of his stereotype alone indicates how Alassane detracts from abject visualization of black men and conveys his masculine authority by way of his hip-hop attire.

Still, the clearest sign of black male *banlieusards'* effective expression of masculinity relative to other men and of the *banlieues'* significance to understandings of Paris by way of their hypermasculine hip-hop clothing styles (regardless of how outside audiences may typically read those styles) is the widespread popularization and emulation of this clothing style both inside and outside of the *banlieues*. Today, young men of all racial and ethnic backgrounds and of all geographical spaces in Paris sport these hip-hop clothing styles typically inspired by black male *banlieusards'* hip-hop attire. While it may seem that these men sport hip-hop attire solely to keep up with general popular culture trends, many don these clothing items to convey a hypermasculine, hard image of themselves as well. Flora draws readers' attention to this point when presenting her friend Myriam's boyfriend, Sébastien, to the reader. Dissimilar to Myriam and Flora's exclusively black African friends and friends' partners, Sébastien is a white

Frenchman originally from the *centre ville*. Nonetheless, he, as many others like him, sports hip-hop clothing styles. Flora describes him:

Sébastien, trente-et-un ans, baggy-man, lobes percés, cheveux châains lisses et tresses, vit un étrange phénomène d'acculturation. Il me parle en agitant les mains comme les rappers du Bronx en plein freestyle, ponctuant ses phrases de “tu vois ce que je veux dire, Yo!” [...] L'existence lui a permis de naître sous la forme humaine la plus respectée: celle de l'homme blanc de civilisation chrétienne. De cet aspect physique, découle des situations que seule la tolérance et le travail acharné rectifient pour ceux qui ne lui ressemblent pas. Aujourd'hui, le masculin domine toujours et le blanc vaut toutes les couleurs. [...] Négligeant la richesse des cultures françaises et européennes, il s'abreuve de la créativité afro-américaine qui, par la force de l'Histoire, développa une culture pour renouer avec ses origines ancestrales. (97)

Sebastian, thirty-one years old, baggy-man, drilled earlobes, smooth brown hair and tresses, lives a strange phenomenon of acculturation. He speaks to me, shaking his hands like rappers from the Bronx in open freestyle, punctuating his sentences with “you know what I mean, Yo!” [...] Existence has allowed him to be born under the most respected human form: that of the white man of Christian civilization. This physical aspect arises from situations that only tolerance and hard work correct for those who do not resemble him. Today, men still dominate and white is worth all colors. [...] Neglecting the richness of French and European cultures, he quenches the African-American creativity, which, by the force of History, developed a culture to reconnect with their ancestral origins.

Flora takes issue with Sébastien's cultivation of hip-hop clothing styles because of his racial distinction from whom she considers its typical wearers (meaning black male *banlieusards*). As

she highlights, Sébastien inherently possesses the greatest form of masculine authority in this particular environment—which these men gain by way of sporting hip-hop clothing styles—thanks to the fact that he was born “sous la forme humaine la plus respectée: celle de l’homme blanc de civilisation chrétienne” (under the most respected human form: that of the white man of Christian civilization). In her perspective, Sébastien’s wearing of this particular clothing style—so closely tied to the *banlieues*, Paris’s black population, as well as African-American and black diaspora populations around the world—accordingly signifies an unfair capitalization on visibility within imaginings of Paris and, likewise, on masculine authority within Paris.

Yet if one considers what inspires Sébastien’s attraction to hip-hop clothing styles, and the implications of his wearing attire emblematic of the *banlieues*, he or she recognizes how Sébastien’s sporting of hip-hop clothing styles paradoxically reveals black male *banlieusards*’ masculine authority relative to (white) Others like himself. Sébastien’s deliberate repudiation of his French and European culture and adoption of black *banlieusard* culture suggests that his interest is not in depriving hip-hop’s primary demographic of its power. His comportment with Myriam’s friends while wearing his hip-hop clothing—“agitant les mains comme les rappers du Bronx en plein freestyle, ponctuant ses phrases de “tu vois ce que je veux dire, Yo!” (shaking his hands like rappers from the Bronx in open freestyle, punctuating his sentences with “you know what I mean, Yo!”)—further intimates that he adopts this clothing style to adapt to Myriam’s *banlieues* community. By wearing these hip-hop clothing items—the baggy pants that grant him the moniker “baggy-man” and the bling that adorns his “drilled lobes”—he most literally puts on a cloak of masculinity by which he expects his *banlieusard* girlfriend Myriam and her friends measure his manliness. Sébastien’s sporting of this particular clothing style to convey a harder, hypermasculine impression of himself to Myriam and her friends in many ways complements

Flora's aforementioned observation of how women, from all regions of Paris, seek out black male *banlieusards* sporting hip-hop clothing styles as partners. That is to say, by choosing to wear hip-hop attire, Sébastien himself signifies proof of the substantial influence of black male *banlieusards'* sartorial expression of hypermasculine toughness on widespread understandings of what a virile, masculine man should look like.

Sébastien's sporting of hip-hop clothing styles—a clear illustration of the influence of not just hip-hop culture, but *banlieues* culture on mainstream, French culture—accordingly attests to black male *banlieusards* masculine authority as well. Whether intentional or not, Sébastien's being a “white man of Christian civilization” facilitates the popularization of the hip-hop clothing styles he sports throughout all regions of the French capital. This spread of interest in and sporting of hip-hop clothing styles across Paris's landscape reveals that what Flora previously recognized as “notre” (our) culture—meaning black *banlieusard* culture—is no longer as distinct and mutually exclusive to mainstream or “traditionally French” culture as she might typically think. Stated simply, the influence of black male *banlieusards'* hip-hop attire on Sébastien's own dressing practices and his conviction in that attire's serving as a reflection of his own sense of manhood reveals the great impact of black male *banlieusards'* clothing choices and of *banlieues* culture more generally on mainstream Parisian society. The *banlieues* and its inhabitants define and shape the *centre ville* as much as the *centre ville* defines common visualizations of Paris.

Conclusion

As Prince, Alassane, and the men featured in *Icône* reveal, black male *banlieusards* reclaim their lost sense of masculinity through their sporting of hip-hop clothing styles redolent

of hypermasculine toughness. Concurrently, they rework subordinate visions of the *banlieues* as well as its black inhabitants by demonstrating that space and its culture's substantial influence on mainstream French culture by way of hip-hop clothing styles. These young black male *banlieusards* might not permanently alter how Other identifications themselves or the *banlieues* space by way of their hip-hop attire. Nonetheless, their ability to unsettle typical visualizations of themselves and to facilitate movement of people and fashion between the *banlieues* and the *centre ville* with their hip-hop clothing styles reveal their capacity to exhibit, if even just momentarily, their heightened sense of masculinity within this particular environment.

Bearing in mind this link between hypermasculine hip-hop clothing styles and visualizations of masculine authority, the impact of black male *banlieusards*' sporting of this clothing style at an annual event, "Paris Hip Hop" is evident. Numerous followers of hip-hop culture, of which black male *banlieusards* formed the majority, attended this event held throughout Paris's *centre ville* sporting the latest, most ostentatious hip-hop clothing styles. Throughout the festival's run, they brought not only those styles, but also themselves and the *banlieues* culture with which hip-hop is most commonly associated into the heart of France's capital city and of mainstream French society. Yet black male *banlieusards*' familiar sporting of this clothing style well prior to and past this event committed to underscoring the connection between Paris, meaning mainstream *centre ville* culture, and hip-hop or *banlieues* culture (which in many ways inspired the creation of this event in the first place) reveals that the significance of this form of dress is much greater than this two-week festival might imply; or, as *Du plomb* author Sané says, that "quand on parle de la 'culture banlieue,' on parle de la 'culture française'" (when we speak of "banlieue culture," we speak of "French culture"; Sané, "Le hip hop").¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ The popularization of hip-hop culture (which as Sané points out, is really representative of *banlieues* culture) among individuals outside of the *banlieues* space attests to its significance to French culture by corroborating

The following chapter discusses black African immigrant men's assertion of masculinity by way of another transnational black men's sartorial movement originating outside of and now followed extensively in Paris, known as the *Sape*, or *la société des ambiancers et des personnes élégantes* (the Society of Ambiancers and People of Elegance). Yet dissimilar to the black male *banlieusards* featured here, the men following this clothing movement, known as *sapeurs*, sport an even more ostentatious, stylized "Look" as less of a response to hegemonic leaders and members of mainstream society's typically visualizations of black men and more of a confirmation of how they see themselves, for themselves and for a much more exclusive audience. Through an exploration of *sapeurs'* cultivation of their distinctive clothing style, I highlight the even greater potential impact of clothing styles on visualizations of black men's self-identification and identification by Others in Paris.

Fanon's description of emulation as testament to one group's masculine authority over another through the example of language. See Fanon, *Peau noire* 30.

**Chapter Four:
The Congolese *Sapeur* and the Motivation for Elegant Menswear**

Mais tout à l'heure, très bientôt, Parfait de Paris, le maître incontesté de l'élégance masculine made in Baongo, digne héritier des plus grands maîtres sapeurs de l'histoire, va quitter son déguisement de chauffeur de camion-poubelle et mettre sa peau de lumière. Ô mes frères, que j'ai hâte d'être beau! (Parfait de Paris, Mélo 141)

But just now, very soon, Perfect of Paris, the undisputed master of masculine elegance made in Baongo, a worthy heir of the greatest sapeur masters in history, will leave his garbage truck driver disguise and put on his skin of light. Oh my brethren, I cannot wait to be beautiful!



Fig. 5. *Sapeurs* in a Littered Alleyway in the Baongo Region of Brazzaville. Tamagni, Daniele. *Gentlemen of Baongo*. London: Trolley, 2009. N. pag. Print.

In Daniele Tamagni's *Gentlemen of Bacongo* (2009), viewers see a photograph of three Congolese men standing in an alleyway typical of the Bacongo region of Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, a Central African city with one of the lowest standards of living in the world as of 2012 (see fig. 5).¹⁰⁵ This alleyway, which doubles as a dump, is covered with daily refuse, plastic bags, and scrap metal. The men dressed in brightly-colored designer suits with matching ties, hats, waist-belts, and polished shoes are members of a transnational dress movement known as the *Sape*, or *la société des ambianceurs et des personnes élégantes* (the Society of Ambianceurs and Elegant People). Seemingly oblivious to their environs, they face the camera lens in strong stances that flaunt their pristine, elegant attire.

The sharp contrast between the vibrantly-colored attire of *sapeurs* (members of the *Sape*) such as those featured in Tamagni's photograph and *sapeurs'* environs has instigated many scholars', artists', and Western audiences' investigation of the motivations behind *sapeurs'* extravagant style of dress.¹⁰⁶ *Sape* photojournalists like Tamagni respond to this inquiry with staged photographs like this one that implicitly suggest the *sapeur's* adoption of this style for widespread audiences (Mouanda; Sambu). News media critics identify the *sapeur's* appearance, known by *Sape* scholars as the "Look,"¹⁰⁷ as supporting an existing argument within fashion studies that black men adopt certain modes of dress as a deliberate affront to traditionally

¹⁰⁵ Mercer's 2012 Quality of Living Index ranks 221 cities' quality of living based on matters like political and social environment, economic environment, medical and health consideration, public services, transportation, and consumer goods, using New York as its base ("2012 Quality"). In this ranking, Brazzaville placed at number 215.

¹⁰⁶ Existing media on the *Sape* includes: films (*Black mic mac* [1986]; *Dimanche à Brazzaville* [2011]; *Ghetto Millionaires* [2010]; *The Importance of Being Elegant* [2004]; *Pièces d'identité* [1998]), novels (*Bal des sapeurs à Bacongo: nouvelles* [2012]; *Black bazar* [2009]; *Bleu blanc rouge* [1998]; *L'impasse* [1996]; *Mélo* [2013]), photostories ("SAPE" by Francesco Giusti [2009]; "Sapologie" by Baudouin Mouanda [2008]; "La vanité apparente" by Yves Sambu [2012]; *Gentlemen of Bacongo* by Daniele Tamagni [2009]), museum exhibitions ("L'art d'être un homme" at the Musée Dapper in Paris [2010]; "La Sape! Gentlemen from Congo" at De Markten Museum in Amsterdam [2010]), and music video productions (Solange's "Losing You" music video).

¹⁰⁷ The term "the Look" is not used by *sapeurs* themselves; rather it has been ascribed to them following Justin-Daniel Gandoulou's description of *sapeurs'* appearance in his groundbreaking work, *Au coeur de la Sape* (At the Heart of the Sape; 145-8) by English-speaking scholars like MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga. While this term once more signifies a moment wherein Others are speaking for the *sapeur* and not vice versa, I nonetheless make use of this term throughout this chapter to address the *sapeur's* appearance in a succinct manner.

empowered subjects in the West (i.e. white men) (Ashman; Brooke; Sullivan).¹⁰⁸ However, these interpretations often derive from readings of the *sapeur*'s visual appearance alone.¹⁰⁹ Of the few scholars who have studied the *Sape* in greater detail, some have taken ethnographic approaches (focusing on the influence of social relations in cities like Brazzaville, Kinshasa, Paris, and Brussels on the *sapeur*'s adoption of this particular style) and even fewer have investigated the limited fictional accounts of this sartorial movement (Gandoulou; Gondola; Dominic Thomas; Wrong). While these works contribute greatly to general understandings of the *Sape*, they are generally outdated (Gandoulou), region-specific (Wrong), or perpetuate the notion of the *sapeur* adopting this style solely to attract and affront white audiences (Gondola).

Working at the interstices of fieldwork, literary criticism, and critical theory, I present the *Sape* community in Paris to challenge the common notion that the *sapeur* first and foremost sports his elegant attire as a deliberate response to the Western world and its discriminating colonial gaze.¹¹⁰ Instead, I argue that the intercommunity dynamics of the *Sape* are critical to understanding the primary significance of the “Look” to the *sapeur*'s personal sense of masculine authority within his predominantly black African immigrant community. The Western world's recent fascination with the *Sape* certainly attests to the *sapeur*'s accomplishment in captivating auxiliary audiences and disturbing those audiences' typical visualizations of himself by way of his elegant apparel. Nonetheless, the *sapeur*'s own recognition of his “Look” as a sign of his heightened masculinity relative to other black African immigrant men in particular and consideration of his most critical audience as a black African immigrant one indicate that the

¹⁰⁸ One notable example of a black African diaspora male figure known for using fashion to affront white men who comes to mind when making this comparison is the African-American zoot suiter. See Alvarez.

¹⁰⁹ Existing literature on black men's fashion primarily considers the visual aesthetics of those styles within an art historical context and focuses either on African-American men in particular or African diaspora men more generally. See Boston; Duane Thomas; Tulloch; White.

¹¹⁰ While a small number of women identify as members of the *Sape* today (which I will discuss later in this chapter), it remains a predominantly male movement. For this reason, I use the possessive pronoun “his” here and throughout.

impact of his clothing on Western audiences is actually a derivative of his primary cultivation of his clothing style.¹¹¹

Dissimilar to the black men featured in the previous two chapters who deliberately challenge hegemonic leaders and members of mainstream (white) French society by sporting styles suggestive of distinct forms of masculinity (in the case of the black *Bleu*, the *maillot bleu* symbolic of muscular masculinity and, in the case of the black male banlieusard, hip-hop clothing styles suggestive of hypermasculine toughness), the *sapeur's* masculinity is primarily measured in his explicit expression of social authority or prestige relative to other *sapeurs* and members of his African immigrant community. This equation between a *sapeur's* personal sense of masculinity recalls my earlier description in the Introduction of the distinctiveness of the lived experience of the black man living in a white-dominated society. The influence of the intersectionality on the identity expression of the *sapeur* living in this white-dominated society, in addition to the extensive history of men's power-dressing in the *sapeur's* ancestral Congo region (wherein the most elaborately dressed man is recognized as the most authoritative and most masculine), uphold this primary reading of the *sapeur's* expression of masculine authority throughout this chapter as his exhibition of social power and prestige over other *sapeurs* and black African immigrant men by way of his clothing articles.

In this chapter, I redress the dearth of literature on the *sapeur's* use of clothing for masculine expression within the *Sape* and larger black African immigrant communities in Paris and Brussels by foregrounding a methodology that is more suitable to the study of the *Sape* movement: that is to say, one that looks not just as what clothing its members are wearing, but also, in its members' own words, to what end. First, I briefly examine the history of the *Sape* in

¹¹¹ Originally, this audience comprised primarily immigrants from Francophone African nations; however, changes in immigration patterns in recent years has led to an influx of immigrants into Paris and Brussels from other black African nations as well, particularly Nigeria. See *Noirs de France*.

the Republic of the Congo and neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo to underscore the cultural and social particularities of its members' use of elegant clothing for self-expression. I then present real *sapeurs*' perspectives on the relation of the "Look" and the agency to consume clothing to their sense of manhood.¹¹² To further support my argument, I investigate the circumstances in which *sapeurs*' acquire and present their elegant attire to affirm their superior sense of masculinity in two *Sape* novels: Alain Mabanckou's *Black bazar* (2009) and Frédéric Ciriez's *Mélo* (2013).

The History of the *Sape*

It is not too surprising that many *Sape* critics focus their attention on the *sapeur*'s "Look" when considering the *sapeur*'s motivation for sporting elegant attire, given its extravagance and vibrancy. Yet in order to legibly read the "Look" as a sign of the *sapeur*'s self-expression, one must first understand the intricate history behind it. An understanding of the cultural and social particularities of the "Look," since the *Sape*'s inception in the Republic of the Congo and Democratic Republic of the Congo, is a first step towards unveiling to whom the *sapeur*'s elegant dress is in fact an intended response.

The term *Sape* derives from the French verb *se saper*, which means, "s'habiller" (to get dressed; Robert, "Saper (se)," def. 1); yet it is also used in a familiar sense to mean, "to dress elegantly." While most *Sape* scholars concur that this dress phenomenon began among the (Ba)kongo people of the Bantu ethnic group (Gandoulou; Gondola; Tamagni),¹¹³ few agree on

¹¹² These *sapeurs*' views come from ethnographic and photographic material I gathered during field interviews conducted with *sapeurs* and individuals knowledgeable of the *Sape* in the predominantly black African immigrant neighborhoods of Goutte-d'Or in Paris and Matonge of Ixelles in Brussels during the summers of 2012 and 2013.

¹¹³ Though minimal, there is some aversion to recognizing the first *sapeurs* as members of the (Ba)Kongo people alone; for instance, Rémy Bazanquisa alternatively asserts that the *Sape* took root more collaboratively, with West-African and Beninese influences, during the colonial era (152).

the precise date and location of its inception. Some *Sape* scholars identify Brazzaville towards the beginning of the colonial period, a period when “interaction with Europeans [...] influenced taste in clothes,” as the birthplace of the *Sape* (Gondola 26; Martin 158-9; Tamagni). Others identify the original members of the *Sape* as men wearing brightly colored Western suits in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a political protest in response to then President Mobutu Sese Seko’s institution of the abacost as the national uniform in the early 1970s.¹¹⁴ And others still credit individual public figures for instigating this movement—most notably, André Grenard Matsoua, a Congolese intellectual who returned to the French Congo in 1922 after living in Paris, and Papa Wemba, a Congolese Rhumba singer known for his brazen dress style (Boeck and Plissart; *The Importance*; Wrong 27).

While these discrepancies in critics’ findings do not elucidate our understanding of the *Sape*’s precise origin,¹¹⁵ they nonetheless remain instructive because they collectively challenging the popular claim that its members sport elegant attire solely as a direct response to traditionally empowered (white) men. In fact, there were various time periods in and circumstances under which Congolese men identified themselves with this sartorial movement through their wearing of elegant attire. One must then look for more than visible signs of the *sapeur*’s “Look” and delve deeper into the features of the *Sape* to recognize the motivation for the *sapeur*’s dress.

¹¹⁴ The term “abacost” is short for “à bas le costume,” or “down with the Western suit.” It is a “uniforme national quasi-officiel imposé, en 1967, par le régime mobutiste dans le cadre des mesures de retour à l’authenticité.” La *Sape* est souvent considérée comme un mouvement de contestations de cette ‘dictature de l’abacost’” (“semi-official national uniform imposed, in 1967, by the Mobutu regime as part of the measures for a return to authenticity.” The *Sape* is often considered a movement of contestation against this “tyranny of the abacost”; Hanon 129).

¹¹⁵ One reason for this understanding is that there is extensive evidence of Westerners in the present-day Congo region, and Western clothing influences on Congolese communities, dating well back in history. For instance, Nichole Neyses Bridges’ thorough investigation of souvenir ivories from the Africa’s Loango Coast dating as far back as the seventeenth-century, some of which depict Congolese men in this region wearing Western-style clothing, underscores the challenge of distinguishing the start and end of the *Sape*’s earlier generations based solely on those men’s appearance. For one illustration of this long exchange of clothing styles between Western and African men, see Bridges’ analysis of an Ivory container and lid housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Bridges 117-21.

The *Sape*'s "third generation," dating from the 1970s to the present (Gondola 27; Dominic Thomas 953), remains the focus of this chapter, as it affords the reader the clearest understanding of the sartorial movement's distinguishing features. Starting well after the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo attained independence from France and Belgium respectively, this generation did not experience explicit colonial rule and, thus, was never obligated to express its allegiances to Western powers as in times past (Martin 158-9). Succeeding Congolese leaders like Mobutu expressed their authority over Congolese inhabitants by way of clothing articles like the abacost. Nonetheless, members of the third generation—initially young, unemployed men and now men from various social classes—possess greater agency in choosing how to dress than members of earlier times. In turn, they represent arguably the most expressive of *sapeurs*' personal motivations for adopting the "Look."

The *Sape* "Look," which combines no more than three colors, typically comprises a well-tailored suit, a crisp button-down shirt, and an assortment of accessories including a neck- or bowtie, waist belt, suspenders, hat, and fashionable shoes. To develop and maintain it, a *sapeur* makes shopping trips that can often develop into extended five- or even ten-year periods of life abroad, traditionally in Paris or Brussels, and now also other metropolitan European cities like London or Milan.¹¹⁶ He resides and/or congregates in African immigrant neighborhoods or suburbs of one of these cities—such as the Seine-Saint Denis arrondissement in Paris or the Matonge region of Ixelles in Brussels—and works meager paying jobs or engages in black market activities such as the resale of designer clothing to finance his clothing purchases

¹¹⁶ While the journey to Paris and/or Brussels to acquire *griffes* is a significant rite of passage for *sapeurs*, a plethora of reasons, including a lack of funds, might restrict certain aspiring members from making this journey. This contingent of *sapeurs* who remain in the Congo region might purchase or rent *griffes* from *sapeurs* who have completed a journey abroad. For works on *sapeurs* in the Congo region, see Bazanguisa; Boeck; *Dimanche à Brazzaville*; Wrong.

(Douma, *L'immigration* 104).¹¹⁷ There, he exclusively purchases high-end designer clothing items or *griffes*—Yves Saint Laurent, Robert Cavalli, Jonathan Lobb, Yohji Yamamoto—to craft as many outfits as possible in the image of the “Look.”¹¹⁸

In addition to adopting this “Look,” he abides by the *Sape*’s ten commandments. These commandments, which in reality include only eight written items, declare that members (2) never sit down, (6) “maintain a strict hygiene with both clothes and body,” (7 and 8) not be racist, discriminative, violent, or arrogant, and (3) honor the *Sape* wherever they go (Tamagni). Thus, a true *sapeur* does not just “dress elegantly” (as the aforementioned definition of the term *se saper* suggests); by keeping himself and his pristine clothing on permanent display (by never sitting down), and in good character (by not being racist, discriminatory, or violent), he actually adopts an elegant lifestyle.

Yet many scholars who base their readings of the *sapeur* on the appearance of this “Look” alone miss this nuance among other cultural particularities of the *sapeur*’s carefully curated, elegant appearance. More often than not, they distinguish the *sapeur*’s adoption of this distinctive mode of dress not just as a sign of what Immanuel Kant terms a “judgment of taste” (meaning a disinterested appreciation in universally shared imaginings of the beautiful),¹¹⁹ but

¹¹⁷ The sizeable presence of *sapeurs* in these two cities is supported by Jean-Baptiste Douma’s population study which lists *sapeurs* as a distinct category among its list of reasons for Congolese entrance into France in 2003 (“Immigration” 5).

¹¹⁸ In addition to signifying the designer mark on a clothing item, the term *griffe* also carries several other connotations, including: a “symbole d’agressivité, de méchanceté, de domination cruelle, [ou] de rapacité” (symbol of aggression, malice, cruel domination, [or] rapacity; Robert, “Griffe,” def. 1c), the “ongle pointu et recourbé (de certains animaux [mammifères, oiseaux, reptiles])” (pointed and curved nail [of certain animals [mammals, birds, reptiles]]); Robert, “Griffe,” def. 1a), and the “empreinte imitant une signature” (mark imitating a signature; Robert, “Griffe,” def. B1). This term’s correlation to clothing, signs of domination and ownership (signatures), and the objects with which one might leave such violent marks (nails) furthers my proposal of the *sapeur* utilizing his *griffe* “Look” to effectively convey his heightened sense of masculinity relative to other black African immigrant men.

¹¹⁹ In “Analytic of the Beautiful,” the first book in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, Kant typifies aesthetic judgment, or the “judgment of taste,” as that deriving not from actual representations of the beautiful, but universally-shared, and thus, disinterested imaginings of the beautiful. Since an individual does not derive the same type of pleasure from the beautiful as he or she does the pleasant or the good (both of which reference to desire), individuals’ wants and needs do not come into play when appreciating beauty. He states, “On the other hand, the judgment of taste is

rather proof of the *sapeur*'s likeness to other elegantly dressed black men, namely the black dandy, who deliberately emulate or affront Western culture through clothing.¹²⁰ While the twenty-first-century *sapeur*'s "Look" is composed primarily of elegant clothing, for instance, *sapeurs* from earlier in the third generation adopted a "Look" that necessitated their purchasing of *griffes* as well as adherence to "a special diet that [gave] them large stomachs and buttocks and chubby cheeks, [...] lightening their skin in order to have what [was] called the "papaya yellow" tint and [...] simulating the early stages of baldness with a particular hairstyle" (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 139).

Scholars basing their reading of the *Sape* primarily on visuals thus read *sapeurs*' skin bleaching as a sign of their desire for whiteness or of a Fanonian colonial inferiority complex. However, what such a reading fails to take into consideration is the culturally specific meanings attached to the elements that compose *sapeurs*' "Look"; in this particular instance, the meaning of whiteness in Kongo culture. Whiteness signifies a higher caste in many cultures. For the Kongo people in particular, whiteness is not just a color or something relating only to Europe; rather, it represents a sign of strength, firmness, and power of the invisible world opposite the living one in the Kongo cosmos (Victor W. Turner 140-3). *Mpemba* is a noun used in the Kongo language meaning "a being white," employed to denote a person who possesses a quality of whiteness (Bentley 558). This whiteness, as defined in the world of the ancestors, conveys "a

merely *contemplative*; i.e., it is a judgment which, indifferent as regards the existence of an object, compares its character with the feeling of pleasure and pain. But this contemplation itself is not directed to concepts; for the judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment (either theoretical or practical), and thus is not *based* on concepts, nor has it concepts as its *purpose* (44; emphasis in orig.). For more on the nonutility of "judgment of taste," see Kant 37-81.

¹²⁰ Several scholars recognize similarities between the *sapeur*'s style and the dandy of late eighteenth-century England and France (Gondola 33), as well as the black dandy, an important figure in the history of the African diaspora who adopted ostentatious clothing to challenge the authority of white slave owners (Miller). Yet the *sapeur*, dissimilar to the Brummelian dandy, does not put on elegant attire to convey an overall elegant image and pass for a specific aristocratic role within established societal structures governing Paris or Brussels. Nor does he compose his "Look" from clothing articles given to him by members of the predominantly white populace to challenge that same audience like the black dandy. For more on the Brummelian dandy, see D'Aurevilly and Baudelaire. For more on the black dandy, see Miller; Patton; and Read.

sense of legitimacy, a justification for being, a source of social order and truth” (Janzen and Arkinstall 23). In light of the particular meanings attached to whiteness in the Kongo cosmos—power, strength, legitimacy, and social order—it is evident that the white (or, actually, papaya yellow) skin of *sapeurs* from early in the third generation need not signify those *sapeurs*’ likening themselves to or slighting of historically-empowered (white) men.

The circumstances under which *sapeurs* consider an individual eligible to even sport the *Sape* “Look” serves as a first indication of the distinction of the “Look” from other sartorial movements. *Sapologie*, a popular DVD series on the *Sape* movement in Paris that features interviews with and performances by notable *sapeurs* of given time periods, provides insight on *sapeurs*’ personal views on this matter. In its fifth installation, *La Sapologie 5*, one cameraman meets “Nganga le féticheur” (Nganga the African medicine man/witch doctor), a white French man wearing light gray Connivences pantsuit with thick white trimming, bright red necktie, shiny black crocodile skin J. M. Weston shoes, and a checkered Louis Vuitton bowler-style handbag. Nganga, who reveals that he has lived for some time in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is confident in his *griffes* and his adoption of the moniker “féticheur”—a term regionally specific to Francophone Africa designating priests of traditional (animist) religions who make use of fetishes (Robert, “Féticheur,” def. 1)—as well as his self-identification as a *sapeur*.¹²¹ However, the cameraman’s reaction to Nganga indicates Congolese *sapeurs*’ association of the “Look” with one particular skin color alone. “Par rapport à la couleur de votre peau, vous êtes blanc, c’est pas ça?” (Regarding the color of your skin, you’re white, isn’t that right?), he asks,

¹²¹ In recent years, some white men like Nganga have adopted the “Look” and claimed their allegiance to the *Sape* movement. However, these men’s reception within the *Sape* community, as Nganga’s interaction with the cameraman indicates, is not always warm. With the exception of one *sapeur* whom I interviewed, Le Bachelor (owner of a menswear clothing store who is likely motivated by economic interests), no one with whom I spoke considered the *Sape* as suited for white men. As Le Bachelor himself admitted, “je suis le premier bénéficiaire de la sape” (I am the first beneficiary of the *Sape*). In other words, he profits monetarily from any man’s adoption of the *Sape* “Look,” regardless of skin color.

insinuating that the “Look” is more suitable for black men. Even with the widespread diffusion of its “Look” into other black immigrant communities, the *Sape* remains primarily made up of black men.¹²² In other words, an individual’s eligibility to be a *sapeur* is determined, even if only in part, by his skin color.¹²³

Most of the *sapeurs* and individuals knowledgeable of the *Sape* whom I interviewed, like this cameraman, recognized the *Sape* “Look” as a style fitting for and appreciated by black African immigrant men first and foremost. Le Bachelor, owner of *Les Connivences*, a menswear store located in the Goutte-d’Or region of Paris’s 18th arrondissement frequented by *sapeurs* throughout Europe, addressed the aptness of the “Look” for black men in an explicit manner. The environs of Le Bachelor’s main store, located on rue de Panama just a few short blocks from the Château Rouge metro stop, furthers the association of *Les Connivences*’s clothing items, reflective of the “Look,” with the black African immigrant cultures that characterize the neighborhood.

¹²² Since the *Sape*’s start in the Congo region, men from other Francophone African nations, including Senegal, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, and Benin, and those nations’ communities abroad in Paris and Brussels, have adopted their own variations of the *Sape* “Look” (Le Bachelor).

¹²³ *Larousse dictionnaire du Français argotique & populaire*’s definition for *sapeur* confirms this distinction of the *sapeur* by skin color: “Black qui se sape avec élégance” (A black man who dresses with elegance; Caradec, “Sapeur”).



Fig. 6. Window display of *Les Connivences*, Goutte d'Or, Paris. Personal photograph by author. 18 Aug. 2012.

One cannot help but envision black immigrant men as the target market for ostentatious designs like black-and-white checkered and yellow-and-green plaid suits (see fig. 6). The Marché Dejean, the famous West and Central African outdoor market featuring everything from fresh manioc and aubergines to fake designer sunglasses and second-hand hair extensions, trickles from the metro stop to the end of the shop's street, which is lined with black hair salons as well as West and Central African restaurants.

According to Le Bachelor, *sapeurs'* understanding of the "Look" as fitting for black men derives only in part from their particular location within the city; more importantly, the "Look" grants the black man a certain sense of authority in self-expression. He explains: "Je pense que ça donne le pouvoir... moi, je pense que l'Africain, lorsqu'il s'habille, il a besoin d'être vu. Tout. C'est ça la chance de la Sape. C'est un phénomène qui gagne pour l'Africain en quête identitaire" (I think that it gives power... me, I think that the African man, when he dresses, he must be seen. Completely. That is the fortune of the *Sape*. It is a phenomenon that wins for the African man on a quest for identity). In other words, "l'Africain" (the African), a man typically distinct from and invisible to the predominantly white Parisian population and who "a besoin

d’être vu” (must be seen), benefits most from a conscious adoption of the *Sape* “Look”; a sartorial style that makes him stand out within his given neighborhood and, accordingly, “gives [him] power.”

Yet Le Bachelor’s own self-presentation suggested a second, nuanced motivation for adopting the *Sape* style. Whenever asked to have his picture taken, he cheerfully agreed and stood in front of his store’s window display such as in Figure 7.

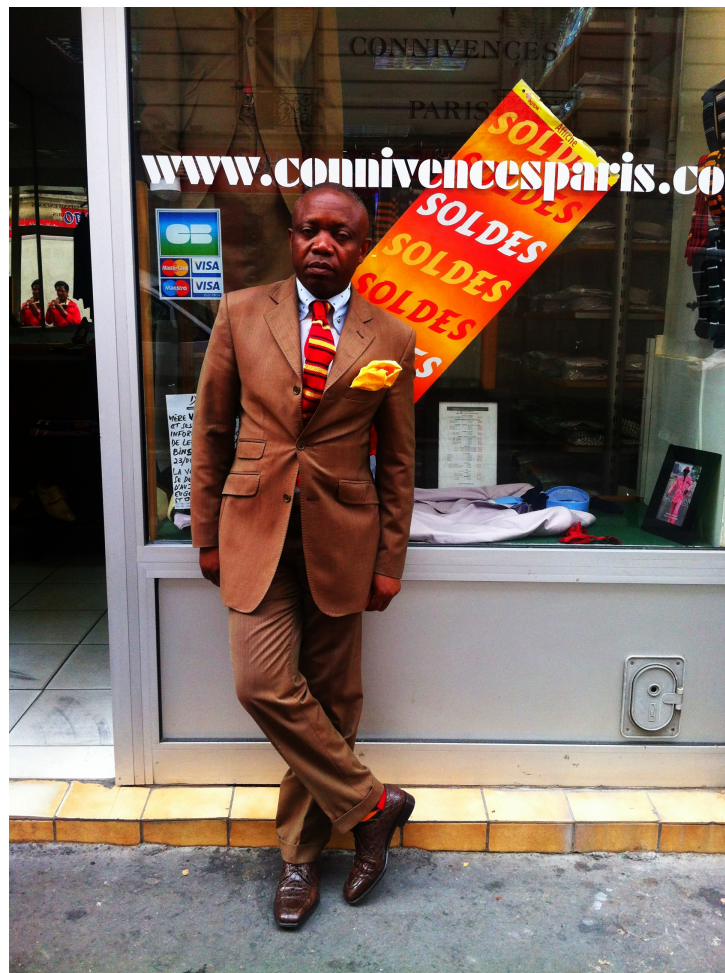


Fig. 7. Le Bachelor Standing in Front of *Les Connivences*, Goutte d’Or, Paris. Personal photograph by author. 28 June 2013.

Based on his self-positioning here—his buttoned suit, shoes, socks, and handkerchief are in three main colors (tawny brown, yellow, and red) and he stands before the small framed, iconic photograph by Tamagni of a *sapeur* in a bright pink pantsuit and bowler hat in the background—

there is no mistaking his association with the *Sape*. His insistence on being photographed in front of his store's window display indicates his desire to be seen not only by myself (the cameraman), but also by passersby in this predominantly African immigrant neighborhood. However, the confident stance he assumes here—his stoic facial expression, impeccable posture, and knee bent so as to draw attention to his well-shined shoes and socks—suggests that not just being seen, but also the actual clothing articles that compose his “Look” might also be a way of claiming the greater sense of “pouvoir” (power) or masculinity of which he previously spoke. But what “power” does the “Look” actually instill in the *sapeur*?

The Power of the “Look”

The “Look” grants the *sapeur* a great sense of “pouvoir” or authority in his masculine expression relative to other men. Considering the manner in which elaborate dress has most often been gendered in the West since the late nineteenth-century (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 9), it is not too surprising that certain *Sape* critics overlook this association of elegant Western-influenced menswear to masculinity.¹²⁴ Yet men in the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, similar to many other nations in the African continent, have used and continue to use elaborate dress articles and body adornments to express their masculine authority within their respective communities since the pre-colonial period (Clark; Michelman and Erekosima; Musée; Vues d’Afrique Collection).

Over the course of my research in Paris and Brussels, I interviewed fourteen *sapeurs* and individuals knowledgeable of the *Sape* (including Congolese immigrants and European artists),

¹²⁴ There are a few notable periods wherein men’s adoption of ostentatious forms of dress in the West was the norm, including the Regency Period of the celebrated English dandy. Nonetheless, Western cultures and audiences have typically associated not only grandiose dress, but also body adornment and beautification of the body with femininity since the “Great Male Renunciation” of the late eighteenth-century. For more on the “Great Male Renunciation” and the withdrawal of men’s right to wear brighter, more elaborate forms of dress, see Flügel 103.

six of whose first-hand perspectives I feature here in this chapter. All interviewees deemed the legacy of powerful Congolese men wearing particular forms of dress as a sign of their masculinity within an established hierarchization of men as fundamental to understanding the *sapeur*'s motivation for sporting his more nuanced, creative "Look." Gilles Remiche, the Belgian filmmaker of *Sape* documentary *Ghetto Millionaires* (2010), pointed out that through a meticulously curated "Look," these mostly unemployed or "ghetto" men (as Remiche's title labels them) attain an elevated sense of manliness like "millionaires." Sara, a mixed French and Congolese woman from Paris who spent a portion of her childhood in Brazzaville among male relatives who self-identified as *sapeurs*, similarly insisted that, "the Congolese have always paid careful attention to their dress throughout time, especially the men. And people throughout all of Africa know this. Dressing well for our community to see is a part of our culture, and probably why the *Sape* started there, not somewhere else." By recognizing all Congolese individuals' "careful attention" to dress, Sarah explicates why the *Sape* began "there," meaning in the Congo region. And in highlighting Congolese men's historic attention to dress—evidenced by pre-colonial chiefs' fervent commitment to ornate body adornment as well as men's adoption of the aforementioned abacost in the postcolonial period—she confirmed the anticipated link between the legacy of powerful Congolese men's attention to dress and *sapeurs*' adoption of their ostentatious appearance and emphasized the relation of clothing to masculinity in the Congo region.

Yet the *sapeur*'s understanding of which element of his "Look" actually conveys his sense of manhood distinguishes him from his elegantly dressed ancestors. The *sapeur* measures his sense of masculinity not in the clothing articles he wears, but rather in his ability to create a certain appearance with those clothing articles and his possession of the most ostentatious

clothing items that make up that appearance. Stated differently, it is not really the overall details of his “Look,” but rather the brands that compose the “Look” that gauge a *sapeur*’s sense of manhood. In this light, Gondola’s highlighting of *sapeurs*’ fervent interest in *griffes* is worth noting. He states: “If a *sapeur* believes that clothing makes the man, he also believes that *griffes* make the clothing” (34). In making this statement, Gondola means to recognize extravagant designer labels—Church, Kenzo, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Giorgio Armani—as the key to *sapeurs*’ attainment of higher masculine standing within the context of white-dominant French society, also known as the “colonial debt” owed to them by their former colonizers (35). Yet given *sapeurs*’ reflections on the importance of acquiring *griffes* to their personal sense of masculinity, and their interest today in both Western and non-Western *griffes*, Gondola’s claim should be taken further. It is not just the *griffes* that make the clothing, but the agency to consume those *griffes* that makes the *sapeur* a man. The superb quality of *griffes*’ fabric, texture, colors, and cut certainly make the *sapeur* stand out in a crowd. But it is the *sapeur*’s capacity to acquire and sport diverse, extravagant *griffes* from the likes of expensive, top designers like Yves Saint Laurent, Yohji Yamamoto, Paul Smith, and Le Bachelor’s *Les Connivences* that secures his heightened sense of masculinity.¹²⁵

Hugo, a *sapeur* originally from Pointe Noire, Republic of the Congo who has lived in Paris for the past four years, articulated the importance of exhibiting his expensive *griffes* and knowledge of how to wear those *griffes* both in conversation and through his self-presentation. While taking long, exaggerated high-knee strides down boulevard Barbés in Paris’s 18th arrondissement so that his magenta socks, pulled up high to display their Japanese label, Comme

¹²⁵ Some might employ *sapeurs*’ traveling to Europe and sporting of *griffes* by European designers like Yves Saint Laurent as proof of *sapeurs*’ primary concern for western audiences and interest in emulating notionally empowered (white) men. However, I reference other notable designers of great interest among *sapeurs* in this list, namely Le Bachelor’s *Les Connivences* and Yamamoto (who, although established his brand power in France, is a Japanese designer) to disprove this common misconception of the motivation behind the *sapeurs*’ cultivation of the “Look.”

les Garçons, poked out from under his flood-length canary blue pants, he said: “L’essentiel, c’est les griffes. Tu dois reconnaître que je ne porte que *Comme les Garçons*. Je n’achète que *Comme les Garçons*. Tu sais que je sape bien parce que je porte que des *griffes*. Donc, je suis le top du top” (The essential point is the designer labels. You must recognize that I only wear *Comme les Garçons*. I only buy *Comme les Garçons*. You know that I dress well because I only wear designer labels. Therefore, I am the best of the best). Based on Hugo’s remark that *griffes* are “essential” to the *sapeur*’s “Look” and his expressed conviction that his own ostentatious “Comme les Garçons” *griffes* make him stand out as superior to all other *sapeurs* (which he intimates through his proclaiming “je suis le top du top” [I am the best of the best]), it is clear how his wearing of this particular clothing style can be read as a way of claiming a heightened sense of social authority.

Fervent interest in brand names is not entirely new to the African continent. Yet what distinguishes the *sapeur*’s fascination with *griffes* is his craving for purported authentic labels only. Whereas many West African individuals purchase prêt-à-porter knock-offs of designer garb made in China—“Abbibas” for “Adidas,” Capetown-based “Dolce & Banana” for “Dolce & Gabbana,” “Cuggi” for “Gucci”—the *sapeur* strives to exclusively acquire authentic *griffes* that he tailors to his body. The reason why these genuine *griffes* alone influence the *sapeur*’s self-identification is that they require a substantial monetary investment to obtain and knowledge to choose wisely.

The *sapeur*’s consideration of authentic *griffes* as most reflective of his masculinity is consistent with the belief held in the Congo region that consumption relates to power. On its surface, this understanding of consumption does not seem too different from Thorstein Veblen’s notion of “conspicuous consumption” among the nouveau riche in post-Second Industrial

Revolution American society—meaning the use of wealth as a means to publicly display social power (or to invoke jealousy in others)—or many postcolonial African societies’ utilization of consumption as a sign of power under the influence of global capitalism.¹²⁶ Yet Justin-Daniel Gandoulou draws a distinction between Veblen’s reasoning and *sapeurs*’ consumption practices through his description of the principal influence of consumption on Congolese society as a whole:

Au Congo, l’idée de richesse ne s’identifie pas seulement au pouvoir de production de biens ou de services. Il se mesure aussi au niveau du pouvoir de consommation, qui lui-même ne prend de la valeur que dans la mesure où il s’identifie au modèle de consommation occidental. (41)

In the Congo, the idea of wealth does not only identify with power of production of goods or services. It also measures up to level of power of consumption, which in itself only has value to the extent that it identifies itself with the occidental model of consumption.

As opposed to Western societies wherein a particular class of individuals portrays their wealth through their power of production or “conspicuous consumption,” in the Congo, all individuals’ wealth derives from consumption alone. In this light, all members of Congolese societies, not just a narrow selection of those in possession of the discretionary income to do so, are responsive to the mentality that consumption signifies a reflection of an individual’s prestige. For the *sapeur* in particular, authority derived through consumption of clothing relates exclusively to his authority in masculine expression relative to other men. Thus, by way of particular *griffes*, he communicates his heightened sense of manhood to other men in his community.

¹²⁶ For more on conspicuous consumption among the American *nouveau riche*, see Veblen 49-69. For an example of how the rise of global capitalist, commodity culture fortified this link between consumption and power as it relates to the body in postcolonial, capitalist African nations, see Burke.

The fact that the *sapeur* does not send a portion of his meager income to his family back the Congo, but rather invests it all in *griffes* that he himself wears further supports his consideration of consumption as a reflection of personal sense of manhood. Again, many *sapeurs* come from underprivileged backgrounds in the Congo region. Their economic situation often does not improve while living as immigrants in Paris or Brussels, whether documented or not. Thus, when the *sapeur* invests all or most of the little money he earns into *griffes* that he alone wears, he makes an investment in himself by way of his clothing.¹²⁷ Through his consumption of expensive clothing, and the extravagant display of the extreme contrast of his personal and *griffe* economies, the *sapeur* reveals his superior sense of manhood relative to other *sapeurs* as well as other men in his predominantly African immigrant neighborhood.

Since the *sapeur*'s consumption of *griffes* becomes synonymous with his authority in self-expression and personal sense of manhood, the *sapeur* strictly controls both his purchase and disposal of *griffes*. The recycling of clothing is a very common practice in regions throughout the African continent, either through the formal second-hand clothing market or informal handing down of clothing to friends and family members.¹²⁸ Yet since the *sapeur* considers each *griffe* he acquires a reflection of himself, he typically avoids such practices of clothing reuse.¹²⁹ Amah, a fashion stylist at Comptoir Général, a museum, cultural, and conference center in Paris dedicated to “ghetto art,” stressed the extreme measures that *sapeurs* take to avoid clothing reuse when

¹²⁷ This investment in the self through clothing is reminiscent of lower-class black males investing in “bling bling” culture mentioned in the previous chapter. For more on “bling bling” culture’s promotion of commodity consumption as means to economic success, see Mocombe 216-7.

¹²⁸ For more on the formal second-hand clothing markets in Africa, see Hansen, “Crafting Appearances” and Hansen, *Salaula*.

¹²⁹ *Sapeurs* may rent out their *griffes* for other *sapeurs*, particularly those who stay in the Congo region and do not make a trip to Paris and/or Brussels; however, even in this scenario, the *sapeur* maintains control and ownership of his *griffes*.

describing his most striking observation of *sapeurs*' treatment of *griffes*.¹³⁰ Reflecting back on *sapeurs*' use of Comptoir Général's space for exclusive gatherings like *défilés* (parades) as well as photograph and film shoots, he stated:

Pour les sapeurs, les codes vestimentaires sont liés au pouvoir. Yves Saint Laurent et Yamamoto, ils adorent ces marques. Ils brûlent leurs vêtements! Ils brûlent leurs vêtements de 2...3 milles euros. C'est juste pour montrer à l'autre: "Voilà, je suis plus fort. Je porte la plus belle veste et, en plus, la plus chère." La raison pourquoi ils brûlent leur vêtements...bah...ça veut dire, "Si je ne peux plus les porter, c'est pas possible pour les autres à les porter."

For *sapeurs*, vestimentary codes are tied to power. Yves Saint Laurent and Yamamoto, they love those brands. They burn their clothes! They burn their clothes worth 2...4 thousand euros. It's just to show the others: "Look, I am the fittest. I wear the most beautiful and most expensive jacket." The reason why they burn their clothes...well, it means, "If I can no longer wear them, it isn't possible for others to wear them."

By deliberately destroying clothing in this manner, the *sapeur* not only prevents his dress from circulating and reaching the hands of other *sapeurs*; he also obliterates the power he perceives within that *griffe* and attributes as a reflection of his own sense of authority ("Si je ne peux plus les porter, c'est pas possible pour les autres à les porter" [If I can no longer wear them, it isn't possible for others to wear them]). Amah suggests here that through this ritualized burning of clothing to restrict other *sapeurs* from claiming ownership of that clothing, the *sapeur*

¹³⁰ "Ghetto art," as defined by Comptoir Général: "C'est ainsi qu'il a choisi de désigner toutes ces cultures marginalisées, méconnues, exotiques et dépourvues de moyens qui fleurissent aux quatre coins de notre planète, et tout particulièrement sur le continent africain" (So it chose to designate all marginalized cultures, unknown, exotic, and lacking resources that blossom all over our planet, especially in the African continent; "À propos").

communicates that the utility of *griffes* ends in the self, the primary consumer.¹³¹ By employing a Foucauldian “technology of the self” and controlling (or, in this instance, eliminating) other individuals’ access to his *griffes*—“codes vestimentaires [qui] sont liés au pouvoir” (vestimentary codes that are tied to power)—the *sapeur* preserves his sense of masculine authority vis-à-vis other *sapeurs*.¹³²

Still, the *sapeur* does not secure his sense of masculinity by adopting the “Look” alone. Others who recognize or are knowledgeable about the relation of consumption to manhood must acknowledge and confirm his assertion of manhood. The *sapeur* then actively presents his *griffe* “Look” to an exclusive audience comprising the *Sape* community in the Congo region and abroad, as well as to black African immigrant communities. In some respects, the plethora of films, exhibitions, and literature on the *Sape*, produced by Congolese and non-Congolese individuals alike, has internationalized the spectators of the *sapeur*. However, this occurrence merely reflects the increase in popularity of the *Sape* in recent years. One needs only to consider the internal organization of the *Sape* to recognize its members’ primary audience. The *sapeur* typically self-identifies not just as an individual *sapeur*, but also as a member of a club characterized by a unique style of dress, location, and/or its members shared origins within his larger *Sape* community. These clubs take names that profess their members’ heightened sense of manliness relative to other clubs: for instance, Brussels-based clubs like “Al Qaeda Bourgeoisie,” named after the powerful, militant Islamic organization, and “G8,” a nod to the

¹³¹ The *sapeur*’s deliberate destruction of *griffes* recalls the extravagant destruction that occurs in potlatches, the Native American festivals wherein chiefs and warriors proclaim their superior political or social standing by ceremoniously destroying valuable pots among other tangible goods. Yet whereas a chief or warrior preserves his sense of public superiority by either giving away these goods or destroying more goods than other chiefs, the *sapeur* does not give away *griffes* and his ownership of those *griffes* and assertion of his superiority are only declared through their destruction.

¹³² “Technologies of the self [...] permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, “Technologies” 18). For more on the development of technologies of the self, see Foucault, “Technologies” 16-49.

forum comprising governments of eight of the world's eleven strongest national economic systems.¹³³ “L’ossature de [ce] ‘club’ repose sur la permanence d’un petit cercle que les sapeurs prennent pour un ‘état-major’” (the skeleton of [this] club rests on the permanence of a small circle that *sapeurs* consider a ‘general staff’; Gandoulou 46).¹³⁴ One *sapeur* who has made several successful *aventures* (adventures) to Paris and/or Brussels and back to the Congo region, known as the *grand*, presides over each club’s general staff, ensuring that club members comply with the *Sape*’s codes of conduct and maintain the *Sape* “Look.”

Much like the elaborately dressed chieftains who headed clans throughout the pre-colonial Republic of the Congo and Democratic Republic of the Congo,¹³⁵ the *grand* is typically recognized as the most elegantly dressed and, thus, the most masculine and authoritative of his club. Yet unlike these ancestors who sport specific corporeal coverings based on fixed criteria like age, vocation, and family name, *sapeurs* strategically put together and display their own *griffes* to other *sapeurs* in pursuit of prestigious titles themselves. This competition is central to an individual *sapeur*’s masculine identification within his club as well as his larger *Sape* community.¹³⁶ At almost every occasion at which the *sapeur* presents his “Look,” he invites the possibility for another *sapeur* to challenge him. He convinces other *sapeurs* of his masculine supremacy by presenting his “Look”—its fabrics, designs, and labels proving its *griffe* status—at *Sape* gatherings, *défilés* (parades), *diatances* (funeral walking processions), and his highly anticipated *danse des griffes* (dance of the *griffes*), “[une] exposition ritualisée qui a lieu lors de

¹³³ Certain *Sape* group names carry stronger negative connotations than others (e.g. Al Qaeda Bourgeoisie). Regardless as how one reads them—as a reflection of its members’ actual affiliation to such violent organizations or not—these group names encapsulate and put across its members’ heightened sense of masculine authority relative to other groups.

¹³⁴ This grouping and hierarchization of *sapeurs* within *Sape* clubs recalls the drag queen concerts in New York City featured in *Paris is Burning*.

¹³⁵ For visual depictions of pre-colonial Congolese chiefs’ ornate dress and body ornament, see Musée Dapper and also the Vues d’Afrique Collection.

¹³⁶ This competitive dressing is reminiscent of many other competitions noted among men in black communities, such as hip-hop mic and dance battles. See *Paris is Burning*.

la descente [...] pour les protagonistes à mettre en lumière, en dansant, les différentes griffes des vêtements portés” (a ritualized exhibition that takes place during the return to the Congo [...] for the protagonists to highlight, while dancing, the different brands of clothing worn; Gandoulou 1989; Hanon 132).¹³⁷ Additionally, a *sapeur* might convey his superior sense of masculinity to this audience through his participation in a *griffe* battle, wherein one *sapeur* “fights” another with his *griffes* alone (for instance, by displaying his jacket’s label or intricate design, or wittingly criticizes his opponent’s *griffes*).

All of the *sapeurs* and other individuals whom I interviewed acknowledged the dependency of the *sapeur*’s sense of manhood on this most critical audience of *sapeurs* and black African immigrants’ reception of the *sapeur*’s “Look.” Tigana, a *sapeur* living in Matonge and originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, demonstrated that his wearing particular *griffes* signified his way of claiming his personal sense of masculinity first-hand by strutting, turning, and sashaying to display the Robert Cavalli label stitched to the inner pocket of his jacket when two other elegantly dressed Francophone black African men congregated outside of the barber shop in which we conducted an interview. Myclo, a thirty-two year old *sapeur* native to Brazzaville who has lived in Paris for the past five years, spoke directly on the matter of audience. As we conversed on rue du Faubourg Saint Denis, many passersby—potential audience members—slowed down and stared to catch a good glimpse of Myclo’s “Look,” comprising a clean-cut, well-tailored black suit jacket and white pants, both by Yves Saint Laurent, complemented with shiny black shoes and a black bow tie (see fig. 8).

¹³⁷ The term *diantance* stems from the Lari word for walking.



Fig. 8. Myclo. 18th arrondissement, Paris. Personal photograph by author. 29 June 2013.

Since this particular street boasts restaurants featuring cuisines and goods from regions all over the world (the Congos, India, Malaysia, etc.), the group of passersby examining Myclo's sartorial style was diverse. Cognizant of my awareness of these individuals' taking note of his "Look," he explained: "Comme tu vois, je sape bien ici à Paris...regarde, Yves Saint Laurent partout, et mes Weston [gesturing at his shirt, suit, and shoes]. Mes griffes fascinent mon public français, je sais que les Français admirent mon style. Néanmoins, ceux qui me jugent le plus? Ils sont à Brazza" (As you can see, I dress well here in Paris. Look, Yves Saint Laurent everywhere, and my Weston [shoes]. My designer clothing fascinates my French audience; I know that the French

admire my style. Nonetheless, those who judge me the most? They are in Brazza[ville]). Even though Myclo recognizes that “[s]on public français” ([h]is French public)—whom he went on to clarify as this particular neighborhood’s inhabitants, namely, African immigrants—admires his clothing style, he stresses his interest in other Africans’ consideration of it through his subsequent admission that his most critical audience remains a predominantly Congolese one: more specifically, “Ils sont à Brazza” (They are in Brazza[ville]). In other words, *sapeurs* like Myclo present their dress primarily to audiences that are aware of his consideration of the “Look” as reflection of his personal identification. Sarah similarly identified the Congolese and black African immigrant neighborhoods in Paris and Brussels as the *sapeur*’s target audience. She stated:

Sapeurs exaggerated Western standards and styles of dress and do look better than Whites, but this message was first and foremost for people in Bacongo and not for White people in France whom they had limited contacts with. As matter of fact, *sapeurs* barely dressed like this to go to work here in Paris.

By stressing both the physical and social segregation of these *sapeurs* from the “white people in France”—a form of separation within the city reflective of Bourdieu’s “habitus” and Fanon’s recognition of colonial segregation as demarcating decolonized societies¹³⁸—Sarah too identifies

¹³⁸ Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus,” or socialized norms that influence thinking and actions, describes how individuals’ shared cultural aspects and social experiences within a particular space incites those individuals’ physical segregation and sharing of a common social space. For more on Bourdieu’s relation between “habitus” and class segregation (as described through food habits and taste), see *La Distinction* 189-97. In “De la violence” (On Violence) in *Damnés de la terre (The Wretched of the Earth)*, Fanon highlights the legacy of colonial segregation in decolonized societies: “Le monde colonial est un monde compartimenté. Sans doute est-il superflu, sur le plan de la description, de rappeler l’existence de villes indigènes et de villes européennes, d’écoles pour indigènes et d’écoles pour Européens, comme il est superflu de rappeler l’apartheid en Afrique du Sud. Pourtant, si nous pénétrons dans l’intimité de cette compartimentation, nous aurons au moins le bénéfice de mettre en évidence quelques-unes des lignes de force qu’elle comporte. Cette approche du monde colonial, de son arrangement, de sa disposition géographique va nous permettre de délimiter les arêtes à partir desquelles se réorganisera la société décolonisée” (The colonial world is a compartmentalized world. It is obviously as superfluous to recall the existence of “native” towns and European towns, of schools for “natives” and schools for Europeans, as it is to recall apartheid in South Africa. Yet if we penetrate inside this compartmentation we shall at least bring to light some of its key aspects. By

sapeurs' primary audience as individuals living within *sapeurs*' communities or working alongside *sapeurs*: other African immigrants.

The fact that *sapeurs* present their *griffe* "Look" to this particular audience decenters the belief that *sapeurs* adopt that "Look" for the consideration of Paris's and Brussels's predominantly white populaces alone. Auxiliary audiences certainly notice the *sapeur*'s "Look" and the *griffes* that compose it; and *sapeurs* recognize such audiences' gazes upon them. Yet *sapeurs* do not anticipate these auxiliary audiences understanding the true meaning behind or motivations for their sporting the *Sape* "Look." Consequently, the *sapeur* is not as dependent on auxiliary audiences' reception of or responses to his "Look" as he is on his target audience for acknowledgement of his masculine expression.

The circumstances in which fictional *sapeurs* strategically present their "Look" to assert their manhood highlight their intended audience as black African immigrants. Alain Mabanckou's *Black bazar* (2009) and Frédéric Ciriez's *Mélo* (2013) acknowledge the meticulous curating and exorbitant investment necessary for the *sapeur* to maintain his "Look." Yet each text, in its own way, argues against the familiar reading made of the *sapeur*'s "Look" as primarily in dialogue with members of Paris and Brussels' predominantly white population. These texts reveal the importance of the *Sape* "Look" and the *griffes* that compose it to the *sapeur*'s sense of masculinity, and they underscore the agency that that "Look" grants the *sapeur* to reshape other black African immigrant individuals' notions of his manhood within his respective community.

Sapeurs in Literature

Black bazar recounts the everyday affairs of Fessologue, a *sapeur* from Brazzaville so

penetrating its geographical configuration and classification we shall be able to delineate the backbone on which the decolonized society is reorganized; 31; emphasis in orig.; Fanon *The Wretched* 3).

named for his love of women's derrières, and who lives in an African immigrant neighborhood in Paris.¹³⁹ The novel begins four months after Fessologue's wife, nicknamed Couleur d'Origine (Color of Origin) or La Franco-Congolaise (The French Congolese), leaves him and flees to her homeland, also the Republic of the Congo, with Lucien Mitori or L'Hybride (The Hybrid), a secret lover posing as her cousin.¹⁴⁰ To quell his grief over Couleur d'Origine's departure, Fessologue spends most of his free time at the Afro-Cuban bar, Jip's, and upon the suggestion of his friend, the Haitian writer, Louis-Philippe, he starts keeping a journal of his thoughts and experiences in Paris. Over the course of this novel's four chapters, Fessologue details (1) his courtship of and marriage to Couleur d'Origine, (2) increased encounters with her "cousin" L'Hybride and split from Couleur d'Origine, as well as (3 and 4) attempts to find himself following his split and reflections on his life in Paris.

A more recent *Sape* narrative, *Mélo*, chronicles the events that transpire just before and on May Day 2013 for three individuals living in Paris: a white Breton trade unionist on the brink of suicide, a Congolese garbage truck driver striving to make his mark in the Parisian *Sape* community, and a young Chinese saleswoman trying to make a living through the sale of trinkets like cigarette lighters. It devotes one chapter to each of these characters; its second, entitled "Transformation," focuses on the *sapeur* truck driver who goes by the name "Parfait de Paris" (Perfect of Paris). In this chapter, Parfait takes the reader through his meticulous preparation for and attendance at the Congolese Workers Association's annual May Day party at the Chic Club

¹³⁹ Fessologue is actually the narrator's nickname. Following his service in the Angolan war, he used a dead compatriot's papers and resident card to gain entry into Europe by way of Portugal, and consequently, adopted that compatriot's name as his own (194).

¹⁴⁰ Fessologue addresses Lucien, also Congolese, as "L'Hybride" not because he has a mixed background, but rather to slight him. He states: "[L]ui on dirait un primate qui aurait raté de justesse sa mutation vers l'espèce humaine. Donc le surnom de L'Hybride que je lui ai donné lui va comme un gant" (He looks like a primate that narrowly missed his transformation to the human species. Thus, the nickname L'Hybride that I gave him fits him like a glove; 42). L'Hybride's name, reminiscent of Homi K. Bhabha's hybrid, colonial individual who is "almost the same, but not quite", suggests how his mere presence menaces Fessologue.

de Montrouge, “l’une des fêtes de l’année” (one of the parties of the year; 182) for *sapeurs* from Paris, Brussels, and other cities across Europe.

These two novels’ plots are distinct; nonetheless, the experiences that their protagonists share as members of the Parisian *Sape* community make them equally pertinent to a discussion of *sapeurs*’ motivations for adopting the “Look.” Fessologue and Parfait are both natives of the Republic of the Congo, aged mid-thirties, and leading bachelor lifestyles since their wives, along with their young daughters, have left them. Both men hold menial jobs, Fessologue working part-time at a printing house and Parfait as a garbage truck driver. And, perhaps most notably, both men are not only protagonists, but also narrators in their respective tales. Since *Black bazar* is framed around Fessologue’s writing of his own story, also called *Black bazar*, “tout semble nous porter à croire que le texte de Fessologue est celui que nous avons entre les mains” (everything seems to lead us to believe that Fessologue’s text is the one that we have in our hands; Anyinefa 289). Similarly, the first-person narration and Parfait’s numerous soliloquies throughout “Transformation” make it appear that it is Parfait, not author Ciriez, who speaks to the reader directly, and from whom the reader should derive meaning from this narrative. And since both novels focus primarily on the protagonist/narrator’s lived experiences, the reader can consider these two men’s actions as fitting representative of the actions of a typical *sapeur*.

When the reader first meets Fessologue and Parfait, both men are well known and established in their respective Parisian *Sape* communities. Neither novel presents images of either of these gentleman; nonetheless, the reader can visualize the elegant “Looks” that attest to Fessologue and Parfait’s membership in the sartorial movement based on their detailed itemization of their dream and real wardrobes. The *griffes* that inspire Fessologue’s “Look” most could easily be featured in window displays at Bon Marché, Paris’s oldest and largest left bank

department store: “Vestes en lin d’Emanuel Ungaro qui se froissent avec noblesse et se portent avec délicatesse. Vestes en tergal de Francesco Smalto. Vestes en laine vierge 100%, voire 200%, avec un tissu pur Cerruti 1884. Chaussettes jacquard. Cravates en soie” (Emanuel Ungaro linen sports jackets that crease with dignity and are worn with delicacy. Terylene sports jackets by Francesco Smalto. 100%, nay, 200% virgin wool sports jackets with a pure Cerruti 1884 fabric. Jacquard socks. Silk ties; 144). Similarly, Fessologue’s shoe collection comprises expensive *griffes* exclusively, including: “des Weston en croco, en anaconda ou en lézard, et [...] aussi des Church, des Bowen et autres chaussures anglaises” (crocodile, anaconda, and lizard Westons, as well as Church, Bowen, and other English shoes; 43). The care that Fessologue takes to both catalog his *griffes*’ designers for the reader (Weston, Smalto, Cerruti) and also stress their impossibly high quality (Vestes en laine vierge 100%, voire 200% [100%, nay, 200% virgin wool sports jackets; 44; my emphasis]) makes his devotion to the “Look,” and interest in showcasing his possession of its features, undeniable. While wearing these accouterments, including a pure Cerrati fabric from 1884 (the final year of African autonomy and self-governance from Western rule realized by the Berlin Conference [1884-5]), he possesses a strong, unfettered sense of autonomy within his community.

Parfait similarly presents his adoration for elegant accouterments when describing his new *griffes* for the May Day Party. He ventures to rue de Panama in Goutte-d’Or and visits Le Bachelor’s store, *Les Connivences*, to pick up clothing that he has specially ordered just for the occasion from England. His overall “Look” for the party comprises “une chemise de soie jaune électrique, [ses] boutons de manchettes en argent massif gravés P & P, une cravate courte en lézard argenté, un pantalon cigarette jaune électrique, [et] une ceinture en lézard argenté” (an electric yellow silk shirt, massive silver cufflinks engraved with initials P & P, a short, silver-

colored lizard tie, electric yellow cigarette pants, and a silver-colored, lizard belt; 162). The vibrancy of Parfait's new *griffes*' colors (electric yellow and silver) and exotic lizard pattern, and Parfait's complementing these *griffes* with large, personalized cufflinks, engraved with his initials "P & P", suggest his derivation of his personal sense of self from ostentatious dress in particular. In fact, Parfait's conviction that *griffes* communicate his heightened sense of masculinity in particular is so strong that he actually keeps his body "dressed" at all times. Beneath whichever *griffes* he dons on a given day, he wears a second layer of elegant accouterments permanently attached to his skin, including: three tattoos on his upper torso that read "l'élégance" (elegance), "ma liberté" (my liberty) and "Parfait de Paris" (Perfect of Paris), and two small diamonds pierced onto his scrotum. As Parfait explains, these tattoos and piercing keep his first skin forever *saped*: "Même quand je fais l'amour je suis sapé. Le créateur lui-même qui habite entre mes jambes est sapé" (Even when I make love I am dressed. The creator himself who lives between my legs is dressed; 157). The language that Parfait employs here in his explanation of the importance of his tattoos and piercings demonstrates the significance of the overall "Look" to the *sapeur*. By having these additional accessories, Parfait ensures that he appears elegant at all times, even when he is technically not clothed at all. Parfait's recognition of his tattoos and less conspicuous piercing as elemental to his appearance as his brightly-colored *griffes* goes against typical understandings of the "Look" as composed exclusively from clothing. Nonetheless, it conveys the distinction of the *sapeur*'s motivation for adopting an elegant "Look" at all. Parfait does not sport this outfit just to look nice. Rather, he adopts this stylized appearance to express a sense of masculinity that he feels within himself as frequently as he wears his tattoos and piercing, meaning all the time; thus, the logic behind Parfait's mentioning

that he is well-dressed even when he is making love (“même quand je fais l’amour je suis sapé” [even when I make love I am dressed]).

Through his description of the “Look”’s primary function, Fessologue explains how exactly sporting *griffes* signifies his and other *sapeurs*’ way of claiming masculine authority. He states : “Si je suis toujours habillé en costard c’est qu’il faut ‘maintenir la pression,’ comme on dit dans notre milieu de la Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes, la SAPE. (If I am always dressed in a suit, it’s because one needs to “keep the pressure on,’ as we say in our world of the Society of Ambiancers and People of Elegance, la SAPE; 43). Here, Fessologue underscores a distinguishing factor of the *sapeur*’s sartorial style and that style’s purpose. He outfits himself well, “toujours habillé en costard” (always dressed in a suit”). Yet what distinguishes Fessologue, a member of the *Sape* (“Société des ambianceurs et des personnes élégantes” [Society of Ambiancers and People of Elegance]) from any other man who simply dresses well (meaning someone who “se sape bien” [dresses him- or herself well]) is his deliberate cultivation of his outfits reflective of the “Look” to exhibit his personal sense of masculinity, evoked here in his need to “maintenir la pression” (keep the pressure on) or exert power over other men by way of his dress. In other words, it is by wearing the right suit and possessing the knowledge of how to wear that suit well that Fessologue, a *sapeur* confident in his manhood, exhibits and preserves his personal sense of masculinity.

Considering how eye-catching the colors, patterns, and fabrics of Fessologue and Parfait’s “Looks” are, it is not surprising that both men “keep pressure on” diverse passersby by way of their clothing. However, Fessologue and Parfait deliberately present their “Looks” before one audience first and foremost: the African immigrant community (and more exclusive *Sape* community within it). Fessologue’s detailed identification of men he sees pass in front of Jip’s,

based on the knot of their neckties, illustrates how both his “Look” and more general knowledge of how to curate it augment his sense of manhood. After proclaiming his love of the feel of high-end Italian collars against his skin, Fessologue challenges the reader:

Dis-moi comment tu noues ta cravate, je te dirai qui tu es – voire qui tu hantes. [...] Devant le Jip’s il m’arrive d’éprouver de la commisération, d’éclater de rire ou de retenir à peine mon envie d’aller secourir l’imbécile qui aurait négligé ce petit détail qui fait la différence. (44)

Tell me how you knot your tie, I will tell you who you are – even the company that you keep. [...] In front of Jip’s, I sometimes feel pity, burst out laughing, or hold back my desire to go save the imbecile who would have neglected this little detail that makes the difference.

Fessologue’s reactions to other men’s neckties—pity, laughter, rescue—underscores his explicit assertion of superior knowledge of high-quality ties. As he says, “Dis-moi comment tu noues ta cravate, je te dirai qui tu es – voire qui tu hantes” [“Tell me how you knot your tie, I will tell you who you are – even the company that you keep”). His subsequent classification of those men by way of their neckties further demonstrates his use of his attire to secure a heightened sense of masculinity vis-à-vis other men through his sporting of his “Look.” While timid men keep their knots well-tightened, he argues, austere men constantly readjust their knots, talkative men wear loosened knots, brutish men wear their knots very close to their throats, and egoists, who never learned how to knot their ties themselves, never undo the knots ties by salesmen in the store (44-5). By categorizing these men in this manner, and stressing their obliviousness to the nuances of “ce petit détail qui fait la différence” (this little detail that makes the difference) in a man’s self-presentation and reception by others, Fessologue presents himself as the most knowledgeable of

this men's fashion detail and, accordingly, secures his feelings of heightened masculinity opposite these men.

Parfait also adopts his “Look” to assert his greater sense of manhood relative to other men, only in his particular case, members of the *Sape* community exclusively. Parfait's conviction that his elegant appearance communicates his masculine authority best is particularly manifest following his retrieval of his electric yellow and silver outfit from *Les Connivences*. Unable to contain his excitement over these new *griffes* that will make him stand out at the party, he sends a mass text to other *sapeurs*, his compatriots and competitors, who will be at the party. Parfait boasts: “Je suis tellement heureux qu'une fois arrivé au camion j'envoie un SMS à ceux qui m'admireront ce soir: ATTENTION CONFRÈRES PARFAIT DE PARIS VA RUGIR” (I am so happy that as soon as I arrive in my car, I send out a text to those who will admire me tonight: ATTENTION BROTHERS, PARFAIT DE PARIS IS GOING TO ROAR; 121-2). Here, Parfait becomes assured of his superiority relative other *sapeurs* once his flashy yellow and silver *griffes*—clothing articles with which he is sure to stand out in the *Sape* community—are in his possession. He is so confident in his *griffes*' capacity to communicate his heightened sense of masculinity vis-à-vis other *sapeurs*—to unleash a commanding “roar” like a lion king in the jungle vocalizing his authority (“ATTENTION CONFRÈRES PARFAIT DE PARIS VA RUGIR” [ATTENTION BROTHERS, PARFAIT DE PARIS IS GOING TO ROAR])—that he challenges all other party attendants with a single click of a “Send” button. Parfait's certainty that his *griffes* will secure him the title of most elegantly dressed and, thus, most authoritative and masculine *sapeur* at the May Day party presents itself in later messages he sends to friends in Paris, London, Brussels, and Brazzaville as well. “NOBODYS PERFECT EXCEPT PERFECT FROM PARIS GONNA WIN” (143), he types. By drawing a link between the quality

of his perceived appearance and moniker through a repeated use of “PARFAIT” (PERFECT)—a term bearing positive connotations, including one’s faultlessness, exemplarity, and accomplishment (Robert, “Parfait,” def. 1)—he suggests the innateness of his penchant for elegant clothing and of his superior sense of manhood.

Parfait’s text message blast does not go unopposed, thereby further demonstrating the centrality of the “Look” to *sapeurs*’ sense of manhood. Most notably, one unidentified *sapeur* warns Parfait to change his outfit because another *sapeur* has already purchased the same one. He types : “PARFAIT TU ES UN GUIGNOL CONSEIL D’AMI CHANGE VITE DE TENUE UN AUTRE A LA MÊME QUE TOI EN CENT FOIS MIEUX” (PARFAIT YOU ARE A CLOWN FRIENDLY ADVICE CHANGE OUTFIT FAST ANOTHER HAS THE SAME AS YOU IN ONE HUNDRED PERCENT BETTER ; 137). Despite the fact that Parfait is almost completely certain no one aside from *Les Connivences*’ store clerk, Jean-Louis, has seen his vibrant *griffes*, this malicious message chips away at his confidence. He starts to worry, exhibiting atypical behavior for a man supposedly secure in his position within this community: “J’ai les mains qui tremblent, la nuque froide. Ça doit être une plaisanterie” (I have trembling hands, a cold neck. This has to be a joke; 137). In light of Parfait’s psychological and physical reactions to the mere discussion of another *sapeur* wearing his same “Look (trembling hands, a clammy neck), the reader recognizes how intimately he ties his appearance to his sense of manliness, evidenced by way of his sense of authority within the *Sape*.

This correlation between the “Look” and a *sapeur*’s sense of masculinity becomes even more apparent when Fessologue and Parfait try to assert their superior standing within their respective communities by drawing audiences’ attention to the uniqueness of their *griffes*. To reiterate, since consumption of *griffes* conveys a *sapeur*’s sense of manhood, *sapeurs* strive to

own as ample a supply of *griffes* as possible. In turn, individuals controlling *sapeurs*' consumption of *griffes*, like designer menswear shop owners, hold a revered position within the *Sape* community. When Couleur d'Origine becomes pregnant, Fessologue takes a second job to account for the extra expenditure of a child that places him in such a valued position. He travels to Italy on weekends to purchase *griffes* that he later resells in the streets of the Château Rouge region of Paris. His description of his reception within Château Rouge's predominantly black African immigrant community demonstrates that his possession of these unique *griffes* elevates his already-heightened sense of masculinity within this particular *arrondissement* (neighborhood) even further. He states:

Je ramenaient des costumes et des cravates. Puisque mon goût pour la Sape était connu de tous, j'avais des clients en pagaille. Ils me suivaient jusqu'au pied de notre immeuble ou m'attendaient devant la boutique de notre Arabe du coin. Mes anciens colocataires de Château-Rouge avaient le privilège de prendre de la bière avec moi dans notre studio. (97)

I brought back suits and ties. Since my taste for the *Sape* was known by everyone, I had a mess of clients. They would follow me right to the foot of my building or would wait in front of the boutique of our neighborhood Arab [who lived down the street]. My old roommates in Château-Rouge had the privilege of having a beer with me in our studio.

Fessologue suggests that it is his access to Italian *griffes*—*griffes* distinctive from those more readily available in France and, thus, more highly coveted by *sapeurs*—that grants him a respected position within the Château Rouge region. As he points out, his own interest in the *Sape* and sale of Italian *griffes* brings him ample recognition, primarily from his “mess of clients,” likely *sapeurs* themselves, that would “follow” and “wait” for him outside of his

apartment.¹⁴¹ When one reconsiders the importance of *griffes* to not only *sapeurs*' appearances, but also their self-identification and identification by other individuals, the connection that Fessologue draws between his sale of Italian *griffes* and his feelings of celebrity becomes clear. In Fessologue's mind, he does not just sell clothing; by granting other *sapeurs*' access to these unique *griffes*, he also sells them a means to express a greater sense of masculine authority. And based on his final estimation of the worth of his presence within this community ("Mes anciens colocataires de Château-Rouge avaient le *privilège* de prendre de la bière avec moi dans notre studio" [My old roommates in Château-Rouge had the *privilege* of having a beer with me in our studio]; my emphasis), it is clear that influencing other men's self-expression in this way buttresses his own feelings of masculinity as well.

The care that Parfait takes to feature the rarest of *griffes* in his May Day "Look" to ensure his high rank within the Parisian *Sape* community further indicates the primary impact of the "Look" on a *sapeur*'s sense of manhood. Not only does he go to great lengths to keep his brazen yellow and silver outfit from *Les Connivences* under raps prior to the party; he also complements these special-ordered *griffes* with additional items to stress the uniqueness of his overall "Look." Rather than walk or drive to the party in an extravagant, though predictable vehicle like a limousine, Parfait arrives in a luxurious Rolls Royce driven by his good *sapeur* friend, Honoré, dressed as a chauffeur (165). The exorbitant cost and prestige of the Rolls Royce brand, as well as the rarity of spotting the brand in the 18th arrondissement, certainly inspire Parfait's selection of this vehicle over others. Parfait explains: "L'Angleterre n'a pas inventé la Rolls Royce pour

¹⁴¹ Of course, as with any sartorial movement, not all members of this community receive Fessologue's *Sape* ways in a favorable manner. The most notable critic of Fessologue's ostentatious appearance in his neighborhood, an elderly Martinican who self-identifies with white Frenchmen rather than black Africans and whom Fessologue calls Monsieur l'Hippocrate. Disapproving of the exorbitant cost of leading a *sapeur* lifestyle, he states, "Pour déposer les ordures dans un local est-ce qu'on est vraiment obligé d'être bien sapé comme si on se rendait à un mariage, hein? Ces habits doivent coûter très cher!" (Does one really need to be well dressed like one is going to a wedding to put out the trash on the premises? Those clothes must be very expensive!; 28).

les Noirs mais pour les nobles, les vieilles dames et les émirs. Mais indubitablement, les derniers aristocrates, ce sont les Sapeurs” (England did not invent the Rolls Royce for Blacks but for nobles, old women and emirs. But indubitably, the latest aristocrats are *Sapeurs*; 170). As he points out, people from a higher social class (“nobles, les vieilles dames et les émirs” [nobles, old women, and emirs]) historically used this designer vehicle. By making a grandiose entrance at the party in a Rolls Royce—a car not typically associated with members of his community (“L’Angleterre n’a pas inventé la Rolls Royce pour les Noirs” [England did not invent the Rolls Royce for Blacks])—Parfait does not just set himself and his “Look” apart from the crowd; he appropriates the symbolic power implicated in this posh vehicle for himself. Again, it is the value and uniqueness of the vehicle, just like his *griffes*, that makes Parfait’s “Look” stand out and elevates his sense of masculinity. He continues: “Nous sommes une tache de beauté sur le boulevard qui dégouline de lumière et d’immeubles épouvantables. [...] C’est moi le maître” (We are a spot of beauty on this boulevard, dripping of light and appalling buildings. [...] I am the master; 171). The fact that the rarity of a black man such as himself driving a Rolls Royce and particularly stark contrast of a Rolls Royce against his neighborhood’s “appalling” buildings make Parfait feel like the “master” of dress within this community of well-dressed gentlemen only further highlights his securement of masculine authority by way of his overall “Look.”

Parfait’s inclusion of “un [autre] accessoire supplémentaire de [sa] tenue” ([another] supplementary accessory to his outfit; 168)—a young, white male stylist named Frédéric—further elevates his conviction in the distinctiveness of his appearance at the party and its reflection of his masculinity. After Honoré meets Frédéric looking through *Sape* films in a store in Château Rouge, he recruits Frédéric to act as a Mazarin, or personal valet, for Parfait the evening of the May Day celebration. Frédéric’s primary responsibility in this role is to

accompany and attend to Parfait at all times. But since he also complements Parfait's overall "Look," he fulfills this duty while maintaining a low profile, speaking as minimally as possible and wearing understated, worn-out attire in drab colors so as not to distract from his boss.¹⁴² By sporting this dull attire, he maintains and reinforces the masculine power hierarchy—wherein elegant dress signals its wearers' masculine supremacy—central to the *Sape*.

According to Parfait, many *sapeurs* consider Mazarins as essential to their "Look" as clothing and have Mazarins accompany them to complete their "Look" even back in the Congo (170). However, these Mazarins are typically younger black men. Frédéric, on the other hand, is white and, thus, arguably "le premier Mazarin blanc de l'histoire de la sape" (the first white Mazarin in the history of the *Sape*; 168). Many partygoers are initially surprised by this distinction.¹⁴³ However, Parfait assures them all that his inclusion of Frédéric, "[sa] griffe" (his *griffe*; 191) in his "Look," is not to deliberately challenge white audiences:

J'entends des commentaires élogieux et jaloux: *il a un boy blanc, c'est la première fois qu'on voit ça...Il a osé, c'est un styliste...[...]* Je ne suis pas là pour humilier mais pour montrer ma puissance et passer une soirée d'exception – même si mon désir secret est tout de même d'entre dans l'histoire. (180-1; emphasis in orig.)

I hear rave and jealous commentaries: *he has a white boy, this is the first time I have seen that...He dared, he is a stylist...[...]* I am not here to humiliate but to show my strength and to pass an exceptional evening – even if my secret desire is to become a part of history all the same.

¹⁴² "Des chaussures blanches deux trous à bout pointu, un jean foncé, une ceinture à damier noir et blanc, un T-shirt noir, des lunettes noires à monture blanche, mal habillé comme il faut" (White shoes with two holes at the point, dark jeans, a black and white checkered belt, a black T-shirt, [and] dark glasses with a white frame: poorly dressed as he should be; 67).

¹⁴³ Readers might be shocked as well, reading his placing Frédéric in this position of inferior standing as a direct insult to Paris's hegemonic white population. Yet in light of the fact that Frédéric voluntarily partakes in this role as well as Parfait's expressed motivations for completing his *Sape* "Look," it is clear that Parfait does not intend for his primary audience to perceive of Frédéric in this way.

Parfait keeps Frédéric Mazarin by his side to render his “Look” more unique and, consequently, “montrer [sa] puissance” (show [his] strength) or masculine authority within the *Sape* community. In Parfait’s perspective, it is the novelty of a white Mazarin like Frédéric that enhances his likelihood of being named the most elegant and most masculine *sapeur* of the evening. The fact that, as audience members’ shocked reactions indicate, his having such a Mazarin also satisfies his “désir secret [...] d’entre dans l’histoire” (secret desire [...] to become a part of history) is not his primary goal, but certainly a welcome bonus.¹⁴⁴

Still, it is Fessologue and Parfait’s use to their appearance to rebut characters that deliberately challenge them that reveals the unique relation between a *sapeur*’s “Look” and a *sapeur*’s sense of masculinity best. Whenever Fessologue attempts to put down his wife’s lover, L’Hybride, he stresses the stark difference between his and L’Hybride’s clothing styles. Dissimilar to Fessologue, African drummer L’Hybride does not invest as much thought or time into his clothing. While some might consider L’Hybride’s grungier style typical of most musicians, Fessologue disagrees. The first time that Fessologue really acknowledges L’Hybride in this narrative (aside from his brief mention that L’Hybride is the man for whom his wife left him), he shares his understanding of why L’Hybride dresses so poorly: “Quant à sa manière de s’habiller, c’est la catastrophe! Est-ce que c’est parce qu’on est artiste qu’il faut s’habiller comme ça? C’est du pipeau, je connais des artistes qui sont toujours bien sapés avec des lunettes noires et un éventail pour mieux frimer” (As for his manner of dress, what a catastrophe! Is it because one’s an artist that one must dress like that? That’s rubbish, I know artists who are always well dressed with black glasses and a fan to better show off; 42). Fessologue stresses the

¹⁴⁴ Parfait’s desire to become a part of history by presenting himself alongside a white Mazarin recalls Fanon’s call to his comrades of the Third World in the conclusion of *Damnés de la Terre (Wretched of the Earth)* to create a history of their own distinct that is unfettered from the influence of Europe: “Il s’agit pour le Tiers-Monde de recommencer une histoire de l’homme” (The Third World must start over a new history of man; Fanon *Damnés* 241; Fanon *The Wretched* 238).

fact that not all musicians dress poorly here to highlight that L'Hybride's clothing is no uniform. Rather, l'Hybride's attire, a "catastrophe" (catastrophy) in his eyes, is a reflection of L'Hybride himself: his lack of elegance and manliness.

Once Fessologue starts chronicling the events that led to Couleur d'Origine's departure, it becomes clear that the thought of l'Hybride alone signifies a threat to Fessologue's sense of masculine authority. Not only did l'Hybride spend an ample amount of time alone with Couleur d'Origine under the guise of her cousin: as Fessologue's friends at Jip's point out, he might in fact be the biological father of Fessologue's only child with Couleur d'Origine, Henrietta, based on certain shared physical traits (105). Understandably angered by this discovery, yet powerless in keeping l'Hybride out of his home, Fessologue focuses on l'Hybride's unpolished clothing style to preserve his fractured sense of manhood once more. He asks, rhetorically:

Est-ce qu'il a déjà porté des chaussures Weston dans sa vie? Est-ce qu'il sait nouer une cravate en soie? Est-ce qu'il sait pourquoi certains cols des chemises ont trois boutons? Est-ce qu'il peut reconnaître un tissu 100% laine vierge? Est-ce qu'il possède un costume Francesco Smalto avec doublure surpiquée? [...] NON, NON ET NON! Je dois me calmer sinon je risque de donner un coup de poing sur ma machine à écrire. (125)

Has he ever worn Weston shoes in his life? Does he know how to knot a silk tie? Does he know why certain shirt collars have three buttons? Can he recognize a 100% virgin wool fabric? Does he own a Francesco Smalto suit with overstitch lining? NO, NO AND NO! I have to calm down or I risk punching my typewriter.

Fessologue lists his own *griffes* (Weston shoes, Francesco Smalto suits) to remind himself of his superior standing over L'Hybride. Not only does L'Hybride not own any of these elegant *griffes*; he would not know how to recognize or wear them as a true *sapeur* like Fessologue would ("Est-

ce qu'il sait nouer une cravate en soie? [...] NON, NON ET NON!" [Does he know how to knot a silk tie? [...] NO, NO, AND NO!]). That L'Hybride has managed to woo Couleur d'Origine, and thus challenge Fessologue's sense of masculinity in a more traditional sense in spite of his lack of elegance clearly angers Fessologue, as evidenced in his nearly "punching" out his frustration on his typewriter.

Still, the most explicit instance in which Fessologue uses his "Look" to assert his masculinity over L'Hybride occurs just before Couleur d'Origine leaves Fessologue for good. Approximately one month after L'Hybride starts spending more time at Fessologue and Couleur d'Origine's apartment (still under the guise of Couleur d'Origine's cousin), Fessologue returns home to find L'Hybride sporting one of his most prized *griffe* articles: "[son] T-shirt Marithé & François Girbaud" (his Marithé & François Girbaud T-shirt; 141). A *sapeur* considers anyone replicating his "Look" a threat to his masculinity (Parfait's aforementioned, unsettled reaction to rumors of another *sapeur*'s plans to wear the same yellow and silver *griffes* that complete his outfit for the May Day celebration certainly resonating with that point). The fact that the person wearing Fessologue's *griffes* here is also sleeping with his wife, thus, pushes Fessologue over the edge.

L'Hybride, unaffiliated to the *Sape*, thinks Fessologue is overreacting. He informs Fessologue that Couleur d'Origine actually gave him the t-shirt to wear. Yet all the while offering this seemingly sincere apology, l'Hybride criticizes Fessologue once more, retorting that "cet habit ressemble à une serpillière, y a des trous partout, on ne peut pas le porter dehors" (this clothing item looks like a floor mop, there are holes everywhere, one can't wear it outdoors; 141). Here, L'Hybride insults Fessologue where he is sure it hurts Fessologue most: at the level of clothing.

And by describing the designer t-shirt to a “floor mop,” riddled with “holes everywhere,” L’Hybride makes a deliberate dig both at Fessologue’s “Look” and his sense of manhood.

Yet the fact that L’Hybride continues to wear this shirt despite this insult enrages Fessologue even more. The two men almost come to blows when L’Hybride, who refuses to take off the shirt, threatens to send Fessologue to the emergency room (141-2). Fessologue, remaining faithful to the *Sape* commandment to lead a nonviolent lifestyle, does not accept L’Hybride’s challenge to a physical battle. Instead, he demands that L’Hybride remove his T-shirt once more and enlightens L’Hybride of the offense of wearing it in the first place: “Je lui ai redemandé calmement d’enlever mon vêtement, de porter ses merdes à lui, j’ai conclu: ‘Ce T-shirt il est à moi, ça coûte la peau des fesses, et pas n’importe quelles fesses, même pas celles de Couleur d’origine!’” (I calmly demanded once more that he remove my clothing, to take his own shit. I closed, “That T-shirt is mine, that cost the skin of butt cheeks, and not just any butt cheeks, not even those of Couleur d’origine!”; 142).¹⁴⁵

Up to this point in the narrative, Fessologue, avid lover of women’s backsides, sang the praises of Couleur d’Origine’s ample-sized buttocks. But his allegation here that his T-shirt is worth more than Couleur d’Origine’s prized behind underscores the greater value that Fessologue places on his attire. Fessologue both insults his wife, who L’Hybride, a non-*sapeur*, likely considers a testament to his superior manhood, and stresses Fessologue’s consideration of *griffes* as true measures of his own masculine supremacy. Fessologue does not apologize for making this offensive comparison between his clothing and Couleur d’Origine’s backside even after L’Hybride repeats it to her and she later confronts Fessologue. In the end, it is the

¹⁴⁵ One phrase that Fessologue employs here—“ça coûter la peau des fesses”—typically signifies a familiar way of saying the American-English saying “that cost a fortune.” Yet a more literal translation of this phrase—“that costs the skin of butt cheeks”—captures the essence of Fessologue’s play on the word “fesse.”

possession of a *griffe*, not the relationship with Couleur d'Origine, which secures Fessologue's sense of manhood vis-à-vis l'Hybride and dissolves his frustration over this love triangle.

Like Fessologue, Parfait draws the reader's attention to his "Look" to squash other partygoers' explicit challenges to his masculinity. His use of his appearance as a weapon against partygoers' criticisms is not too surprising when one recalls his actions immediately following his retrieval of the brazen yellow and silver *griffes* that complete it. The mass text messages he sends to everyone he knows who will be in attendance at the May Day celebration reveals his conviction that his "Look" signifies his strongest defense against other *sapeurs* also vying for the title of most elegant and, thus, most masculine of the Parisian *Sape* community. To repeat his words: "NOBODYS PERFECT EXCEPT PERFECT FROM PARIS GONNA WIN" (143). Thus, even before he finds himself in a situation in which he must defend his masculinity against other *sapeurs*, he considers his "Look" as essential to his conveying just how 'Perfect' Parfait is within the *Sape* community.

However, it is not until after Parfait enters the party venue that he consciously utilizes his "Look" to safeguard his superior sense of masculine authority. Not long after Parfait greets a few acquaintances with Frédéric by his side, a first unnamed *sapeur* tries to capture Parfait's attention by standing in Parfait's pathway and addressing him loudly. Only after this "play-boy sans grâce" (graceless playboy; 190) as Parfait describes him stops directly in front of Parfait and smacks his feet on the ground does Parfait recognize this *sapeur*'s intention: to set up a *défi* (a declared battle) against Parfait. As a crowd encircles the two men, Parfait examines his adversary's *griffes*:

Costume noir à rayures tennis bien taillé avec une décoration à la boutonnière, chemise blanche et lavallière rouge de chanteur des marais de Louisiane, chaussures rouge à bouts

carrés – des John Lobb, [il] pense –, [il n'a] pas encore vu ses chaussettes... Ça y est, il attaque. (190-1)

Black pinstripe suit with well-cut decoration on the lapel, shirt and red floppy neck tie of a Louisianan swamp singer, red shoes with square ends – John Lobbs, I think –, I still did not see his socks. That's it, he attacks.

Here, Parfait notes the most discernible distinction between himself and his opponent: the coloring and styling of their “Looks” (the unnamed *sapeur*'s black and red versus his yellow and silver, his adversary's classic, “pinstripe” pattern versus his electric rocker design). Yet before Parfait even has time to note all of his opponent's *griffes*—a prime indicator of a *sapeur*'s elegance—his opponent criticizes or “attacks” him for bringing a white Mazarin to the party.

Parfait wastes little time before directing partygoers' attention back to his opponent's “Look.” Typical to *griffe* battles, these two men question the quality of each others' *griffes* to make their opponents appear inauthentic and, concurrently, less authoritative. Thus, after confirming his affiliation to Frédéric with confidence (“Oui, c'est mon nom et ma griffe” [Yes, that's my name and that's my griffe; 191]), Parfait makes his first jab at his opponent, asking, “On t'a refusé le baptême de Sapeur à la naissance? Tu es né paysan dans une clinique Tati?” (Someone refused you a *sapeur* baptism at birth? You were born a peasant in a Tati clinic?; 191). By alleging here that his opponent received all of his knowledge of how to dress from “Tati,” the famous bargain department store deficient of any authentic, high-end fashion labels, Parfait boldly claims the inauthenticity of his opponent's “Look” and the limitation of his masculine authority.

His opponent retorts that Parfait is, in fact, the one wearing “une peau de bête synthétique” (the skin of a synthetic beast; 191) and presents his own *griffes* to the surrounding

audience to prove the authenticity of his dress: “Il lève un pied et dit: ‘John Lobb!’, avant de lustrer sa chaussure avec la manche de sa veste, en répétant cinq ou six fois ‘c’est du cher!’” [He lifts his foot and says “John Lobb!,” before polishing his shoe with the sleeve of his jacket, while repeating five or six times, “It’s expensive!”; 191-2). His display of his designer shoe and repeated chanting its brand (John Lobb!) in particular confirms the *sapeur*’s sense of masculinity derives from his “Look.” “It’s expensive,” he cries, in a clear attempt to prove his heightened sense of masculinity over Parfait by way of his agency to consume this particular *griffe*.

As the *défi* continues, Parfait’s opponent sadly forgets one of its most integral conventions and tries to actually fight Parfait. Yet Parfait reminds his angered adversary that engaging in a physical altercation violates the 8th Commandment of the *Sape* (194). Thus, Parfait secures his first victory, and preserves his sense of masculine authority, without further contest. As partygoers put it, “Parfait l’a fracassé, y a pas eu match!” (Parfait shattered him, there was not match here!; 194).

When Baudouin Star, a Belgian *sapeur* originally from Kinshasa, lays out a second *défi*, Parfait similarly contrasts his “Look” to Baudouin’s to prove his superior sense of manhood. Parfait makes fun of Baudouin’s golf-inspired outfit, likening him to a little kid dressing up in the image Tiger Woods. He teases: “Mais crois-tu vraiment que Tiger Woods joue au golf avec une veste de yeti sur le dos?” (But do you really think that Tiger Woods plays golf with a yeti jacket on his back?; 199). Through this swift shift in comparison of Baudouin “Look,” first to the attire of one the most accomplished black golf pros in the world to the outfit of a “yeti,” or abdominal snowman, Parfait effectively derides Baudouin in front of the large crowd.

Baudouin responds to Parfait’s remarks by directing partygoers’ attention to the tags of his *griffes* to prove his authenticity. Parfait notes: “Je le vois sans réponse, paniqué. Puis il

enlève son blouson et montre l'étiquette à l'assistance en s'agitant comme un épileptique. 'Di-or, Di-or, Di-or, Di-or!' (Je crois entendre 'Di-eu, Di-eu, Di-eu, Di-eu!')” (I see him speechless, panicked. Then he lifts his shirt and shows the tag to the audience by shaking it like an epileptic. “Di-or, Di-or, Di-or!” [I think I hear “G-od, G-od, G-od!”]; 199). Between the vigor with which a panicked Baudouin displays his *griffe* tag to the audience (“shaking it like an epileptic” while chanting the name of its high-end designer) and the similarity in sound that Parfait points out between the name of that designer (“Di-or”) and the name he hears (“Di-eu” or God), the link between the “Look” and a *sapeur*'s sense of masculinity appears sacred.¹⁴⁶

Rather than let his Dior shirt speak for itself, Baudouin then throws more insults in Parfait's direction. He states : “Toi, Parfait, des poubelles de Paris, tu penses que Tiger joue au golf avec des couleurs d'éboueur?” (You, Parfait, of the trashcans in Paris, you think that Tiger plays golf in the colors of a garbage collector?; 199). Baudouin's explicit mention of Parfait's vocation immediately silences the crowd. As Parfait highlights, “Baudouin Star [s'attaque] sur [son] métier, ce qui n'est pas fair-play et hors cadre déontologique” (Baudouin Star [attacks him] by his profession, which is not fair play and outside of the deontological frame”; 199). This misstep alone should make Parfait the uncontested victor just as in his first *défi*. But to assure everyone that regardless of Baudouin's remark, he is, in fact, the better dressed and, thus, more masculine *sapeur* of the pair, Parfait showcases the beautiful jewels that adorn the same hands with which he handles garbage on a daily basis. He states:

J'ai l'impression qu'un rayon de gloire jaillit de mes chevaliers en or gravées P & P et va frapper les yeux éblouis de chacun des spectateurs. Je sens la peur chez mon adversaire.

¹⁴⁶ While *sapeurs* like Baudouin revere particular *griffes* to exorbitant degrees (as demonstrated through Parfait's conflation of the label “Dior” with His name [“Dieu”]), the negative reaction that certain designers have to *sapeurs*' sporting of their *griffes* only further suggests *sapeurs*' primary interest in how members of the African immigrant community interpret their “Look.” For more on certain designer's ambivalent reactions to *sapeurs*' sporting of their *griffes*, see *The Importance*.

[...] On acclame la bijouterie de mes mains. J'aimerais hurler ma victoire mais c'est juste dans ma tête que ça crie ahhhhhhh! (200)

I feel that ray of glory spring from my gold knights, engraved P & P, and hit the dazzling eyes of every spectator. I feel the fear in my enemy. [...] One acclaims the jewelry on my hands. I would like to scream my victory but just in my head it screams ahhhhhhh!

Parfait allows his shimmering *griffes*, his “gold knights,” to fight to the victory in this battle, hitting spectators’ eyes and instilling fear in Baudouin with each of its dazzling rays. Once more, Parfait secures his superior sense of masculine authority vis-à-vis another member of the *Sape* community through use of the *griffes* that complete his “Look.”

The ease with which he beats these first two opponents leaves Parfait feeling confident that he has earned the title of the most elegant and, thus, most masculine *sapeur* of the party. But before long, he finds himself in a third and final *défi*. One factor that distinguishes this *défi* from the previous two, however, is that the opponent is a woman or *sapeuse*.¹⁴⁷

In recent years, a relatively minute number of women have started self-identifying as members of the *Sape* community.¹⁴⁸ Just as their male counterparts, they sport what Le Bachelor typifies as “[une] mode de masculine” (a masculine style) of dress—short slicked back hair, pant

¹⁴⁷ While this *sapeuse* might surprise the reader, Gilles points out that women have always played a meaningful role in the *Sape* movement. While not as substantial a number of women as men were actually involved in it in the past—the most commonly cited reasons for this discrepancy being that women were more interested in traditional African prints like *pagnes* (African cloth prints) (Martin 168), restrained from embarking on trips abroad to Europe (considered a “man’s adventure”) (Gondola 28), or timid with styling of European clothing (Bindickou)—“[f]or many *sapeurs*, the women [that were involved] were more like an item of clothing or what some call ‘des signes extérieurs de richesse,’ external signs of wealth. It was more like, ‘I got the clothes, I got this, I got that, and I got the lady who goes with it.’” (Remiche). Thus, much like Parfait’s Mazarin Frédéric, women signified parts of a *sapeur*’s overall “Look.”

¹⁴⁸ Throughout the time that I conducted research on the *Sape* in Paris and Brussels, I did not meet any *sapeuse*. Moreover, the majority of the *sapeurs* whom I interviewed knew no more than a couple. The few female *sapeurs* actually featured in *Sape* documentary films like *Une dimanche à Brazzaville* (*A Sunday in Brazzaville*) and *La Sapologie 5* confirmed that women constitute a very small subset of the *Sape* community, often presenting themselves as token figures, and even acknowledging the rarity of their participation. For instance, when a cameraman in *La Sapologie 5* asks one *sapeuse* to comment on what it is like being a woman in the *Sape*, she concedes, “En fait, c’était l’homme [...] qui accompagner toujours cette sapologie” (In fact, it was men [...] who always accompanied this sapologie).

suits, neck ties—with a few supplemental accessories typically associated with the feminine like designer handbags and high heels. How they participate within the *Sape*, however, demonstrates that the sartorial movement has nonetheless preserved its primary association with masculinity. Most notably, as Remiche observes, *sapeuses* present their “Looks” as part of co-ed *Sape* clubs and challenge other *sapeuses* in one-on-one *défis* alone.

However, Vénus Style, the *sapeuse* who challenges *Parfait*, has personal motivations that incite her to disregard this standard practice. Murmurs among audience members inform the reader that “Vénus Style est téléguidée par Yvonne” (Vénus Style is radio-controlled by Yvonne; 220), *Parfait*’s former lover and the mother of his child. Based on the one short conversation that *Parfait* has with Yvonne earlier on in this chapter, it is clear that *Parfait* and Yvonne did not part on amicable terms and that bitterness subsists between the two. Thus, *Parfait* deduces that Vénus likely instigated this *défi* to ridicule *Parfait* and fracture his sense of manhood on her friend’s behalf.

The manner in which *Parfait* responds to the *défi* instigated by Vénus Style attests to this primary association of the “Look” with masculinity. It does not take him long to recognize that she is the same woman he takes notice of earlier in the evening on account of her impeccable style. He describes her: “Elle est remarquable, dressée dans un smoking crème avec lunettes, ceinture et escarpins blancs. Elle a les cheveux courts gominés, un je-ne-sais-quoi de guerrière avec un cigare sous cellophane enfoncé dans la bouche” (She is remarkable, dressed in a cream suit with sunglasses, a belt, and white stilettos. She has short, slicked hair, a certain something of a warrior with a cigar in cellophane pushed in her mouth; 196). Impressed by Vénus’ opulent take on the “Look’s” masculine style—her cream pantsuit suit, short and slicked hair, and cigar—*Parfait* attempts to woo her by showcasing the same opulent rings that would also lead to

his victory against Baudouin. Yet unlike the other women at the party who shower him with attention on account of his elegant dress, Vénus brushes him off, giving him the finger (196).

In this challenge, Vénus continues to insult Parfait, only this time verbally, calling his crocodile skin vest borrowed and fake, his harmonization of colors precarious, and his jewelry mere junk (216). She then calls his overall “Look” is completely unoriginal. She states: “Tu te prends pour le roi de reptiles, mais ta peau est la même que celle de mon sac à main! Que dois-je en conclure, Parfait de Paris? Que tu me copies, moi, Vénus Style?” (You take yourself for the king of the reptiles, but your skin is the same as that of my handbag! What must I conclude, Parfait de Paris? That you copy me, Vénus Style?; 217). By alleging that Parfait wears the “same [reptile skin] as that of [her] handbag” and, more generally, that he “copies” her style Vénus deliberately presents herself as more powerful than Parfait within the *Sape* community (a figure worthy of emulation) than Parfait. Vénus stating that Parfait does not create his own, but rather derives his style from her suggests his derivation of his own masculine clothing style from a woman’s interpretation of the *Sape*’s iconic masculine sartorial style. That is to say that Parfait exhibition of masculinity by way of his “Look” is questionable in the competition for most masculine man at the party.

Expectedly, Vénus’ inflammatory remarks shock Parfait. Yet rather than jibe back at her “Look” as he did with his previous two opponents, he remains silent. In his perspective, any response is simply not acceptable. He explains: “Jamais une femme ne lance de défi à un homme; des couples entre eux qui s’attaquent, cela arrive souvent mais une Sapeuse qui provoque un Sapeur, cela n’arrive jamais” (A woman never lays down a challenge for a man; couples that criticize each other amongst themselves, that happens often, but a *sapeuse* who provokes a *sapeur*, that never happens; 217). *Sapeuses* typically compete against other *sapeuses*

or as part of their larger *Sape* club. Parfait reminds Vénus of this specification of *défis* here in a likely effort to preserve the authoritative image that his “Look” have granted him up until this moment in the evening.

To ensure that neither Vénus nor partygoers interpret his silence as his concession of his inferiority, he explains his refusal to respond to her challenge directly: “Tu sais parfaitement que je boxe dans une catégorie unisexe et que *nkelo* n’est pas mixte! J’ai du respect pour ta personne et apprécie ta tenue d’apparat, mais je ne peux lutter contre toi. Femme, ne te trompe pas de combat” (You know perfectly well that I fight in a unisex category and that *nkelo* is not mixed! I have respect for you as a person and appreciate your ceremonial clothing, but I cannot fight against you. Woman, make no mistake of combat; 217-8). By describing *nkelo* (the banter between *sapeurs* during *défis*) as not a “mixed” enterprise in which men and women compete each other, Parfait means to remind audience members that only men like himself can benefit from it, thereby rendering Vénus’ remarks ineffective. As he says, “Je ne peux lutter contre toi” (I cannot fight against you; 218); thus, he finds no need to showcase his “Look” to preserve his sense of masculinity.

Once Vénus recognizes Parfait’s stalwart refusal to respond to her challenge on account of her gender—an act that could potentially tarnish his well-respected and hard-earned position within the *Sape* community (220)—she stops criticizing the *griffes* and, instead, insults his manhood directly. She states: “En vérité, tu ne veux pas répondre à une femme parce que tu te penses supérieure...mais peut-être aussi parce que tu n’es pas un homme! (...) Oui Parfait, la vérité est cruelle, tu n’es pas un homme” (In truth, you do not want to respond to a woman because you think of yourself as superior...but maybe also because you are not a man! Yes Parfait, the truth is cruel, you are not a man; 221). Vénus’ commenting on Parfait’s feelings of

superiority in relation to herself certainly refers to Parfait's expressed conviction in his social superiority over all of the party's guests on account of his remarkable *griffes* and overall "Look." Yet it also can be read as speaking to Parfait's, as many other *sapeurs*' , culturally shaped, gendered understanding of which individuals can, in fact, possess the most social authority. In Fessologue's perspective, as Vénus points out, her being female in itself inherently inhibits her from claiming a superior position relative to any man, let alone from express social authority over himself, the most masculine partygoer of all, by participating in this *défi*. By challenging Parfait's masculinity in such a public venue, claiming that he is, in fact, not a man at all ("tu n'es pas un homme!" [you are not a man!]), Vénus thus breaks the spirit of the *défi*, first by challenging a member of the opposite sex and second by explicitly attacking Parfait's sense of manhood rather than through his dress. She riles up Parfait to the point that he must engage in the battle to salvage any sense of masculine authority that he earns for himself by way of his "Look" up until this point.

Parfait responds to Vénus' accusations in two ways. First, he argues that she is much less of an expert on masculinity than him, given her biological sex:

Toi Vénus Style, la matrone de la fringue, es-tu expert en habit ou en virilité? Confonds-tu la fête des travailleurs élégants avec le marché Dejean à Château-Rouge? Sais-tu que tu parles comme une poissonnière à l'homme le mieux sapé de l'année? À l'homme pour qui la sape est une conversion? À l'homme pour qui la sape est totale ou n'est pas? (222)

You, Vénus Style, matron of clothing, are you an expert in clothing or in virility? Are you mistaking the party of elegant workers with the Dejean market at Château-Rouge? Do you know that you are speaking like a fisherman to the best-dressed man of the year? To the man for whom the *Sape* is a religious conversion? To the man for whom the *Sape*

is all or nothing?

She might sport a masculine “Look”; however, her proficiency in the art of elegant dress as a *sapeuse* does not, as he points out, make her equal to her male counterparts, or an expert on virility. His suggestion that Vénus has mistaken the evening’s *Sape* party for the Dejean market (the unofficial, Francophone black African market by Château Rouge) furthers his conviction in her ignorance to the nuances that distinguish the *sapeur*’s adoption of authentic elegant attire from other individuals’ sporting of brazen, knock-off items.

In a second and final retort to Vénus’ injurious remark, Parfait presents the *griffes* that compose his “Look” as testament to his superior masculinity. However, he displays his *griffes* quite differently than he does in previous *défis*. First, he requests that all of the lights in the room be turned off. Once the lights are out, Parfait then removes his yellow and silver outfit, one article at a time. It is not too long before he is standing in the room practically naked: “Jamais je ne me suis exhibé à l’envers, dévêtu dans le noir, cerné d’ambianceurs muets, à côté d’une flaque de sape jaunâtre” (I have never exhibited myself in the inverse, undressed in the dark, surrounded by mute ambiancers, next to a puddle of yellow; 222-3). The most conspicuous elements of the “Look” that Parfait took so much time and care to put together now lie strewn on the floor, distinct from his corporeal form in a “puddle of yellow.” At first, his removal of these *griffes* seems counterintuitive to his mission. However, what catches partygoers’ attention amidst this darkness next reminds the reader that Parfait’s *griffes* are not limited to his *Connivences* outfit.

Once Parfait is nude, two rays of light jet across the room amidst the darkness. These two rays—the only traces of light in the room—emanate from the two diamonds pierced on Parfait’s scrotum. Rather than his yellow *griffes*, he thus uses these elegant gems adorning the skin of his

penis as his final defense against Vénus' claims to his unmanliness. Parfait spins around in circles to make sure that everyone witnesses his ability to literally light up a dark room with this more intimate *griffe* completing his "Look:"

Je tourne, tourne et tourne, même nu, je suis sapé. Deux sources de lumière s'éjectent de ma personne en un geyser perpétuel. C'est comme un prodige. Je n'en finis pas de tourner sur moi-même, sans effort et sans peine. J'illumine une salle dédiée aux événements interchangeables. Je suis unique. Je suis la joie de vêtir. (223)

I turn, turn, and turn. Even naked, I am dressed. Two sources of light eject themselves from my person in a perpetual geyser. It is like a prodigy. I did not finish turning on myself, effortless and painless. I lit a dirty room dedicated to interchangeable events. I am unique. I am the joy of dressing.

As Parfait "turn[s], turn[s], and turn[s]," he both directs his audience's attention to the *griffes* that make him truly "unique" from the rest and to the organ most commonly associated with a man's virility that Vénus, as a biological woman, is without. Thus, by challenging Vénus with his diamond-pierced scrotum in particular, Parfait stresses the imperative link between a *sapeur's* *griffe* and his sense of masculinity. The manner in which he anthropomorphizes the two rays of light emanating from his diamonds—two lights that "eject" in a "perpetual geyser"—recalls a penis' ejaculation and, thus, only furthers this association between the *griffes* comprised in a "Look" and *sapeur's* sense of manhood. In the end, no one, and certainly not Vénus, dares to rebut, let alone speak following Parfait's display. He takes the audience's silence as a sign that he has proven what he considers his right to the title of most elegantly dressed man of the evening's gathering: "Je n'ai rien à prouver concernant mon aptitude à l'élégance et mes références de Sapeur. J'ai gagné la lutte à mort des paraîtres. La sape, c'est moi" (I have nothing

to prove concerning my aptitude for elegance and *sapeur* references. I won the fight of appearances to the death. The *Sape* is me; 224). Thanks to the light show originating from his penis, Parfait's audience finally confirms the heightened masculinity that he feels within ("La sape, c'est moi").

Conclusion

Altogether, while the *sapeur*'s sartorial style might share visual similarities with that of other well-dressed diasporic black men, his motivation for adopting that style remains distinct. Based on real-life *sapeurs* as well as fictional characters Fessologue and Parfait's regard for and deliberate uses of their respective "Looks," one sees that the *sapeur* does not adhere to this distinctive dress code as a response to the culture of his former colonizer first and foremost. Alternatively, the *sapeur* sports his "Look" to assert his masculine authority relative to other *sapeurs* and members of his predominantly black African immigrant community. The prime importance of consumption of *griffes* that make up a "Look" to these *sapeurs*' senses of self indicates this argument. Moreover, the occasions during which these men play up and draw attention to their "Looks" most—walking down boulevard Barbès in the Goutte-d'Or region of Paris or Matonge region of Brussels, or at annual gatherings of other *sapeurs*—further reveal the inspiration for their sporting such an elegant code of dress.

Of course, auxiliary audiences in Paris and Brussels also notice *sapeurs*' elegant appearance. And often, it is thanks to members of this audience, who display the *sapeur*'s "Look" throughout the world at fashion shows, films, and museums, that the *Sape* "Look" is so widely recognized as a distinctly Francophone African style today. Yet the fact that *sapeurs* exhibit substantially less concern for these audiences' reading of their "Look"—as Myclo

affirmed earlier, “ceux qui me jugent le plus? Ils sont à Brazza” (those who judge me most? They are from Brazza)—just further supports this understanding of *sapeurs*’ primary motivation for adopting the “Look” in the first place. Fessologue’s encounter with a group of travelers at Gare du Nord on his way to a Congolese party one evening provides a fitting illustration of this point. After suiting up in “un costume Yves Saint Laurent vert bouteille avec des Weston bordeaux” (a green Yves Saint Laurent suit and Weston Bordeaux shoes”; 47), he decides to walk through his predominantly African immigrant neighborhood in the 18th arrondissement—from metro Marx Dormoy to La Chapelle and then Gare du Nord—so that he can showcase his “Look” to members of his intended audience along the way. Yet upon entering the train station, the demographic of his audience expands. The fact that, as Fessologue notes, “Les gens n’arrêtaient pas de [se] regarder” (the people did not stop looking at [him]; 48) incites his impromptu presentation of the *griffes* that complete his “Look” that he would typically reserve for his black African immigrant audience alone: he adjusts his tie, straightens his pants so they fall neatly over his shoes, and even opens the buttons of his vest so that the Dior label of his *griffe* belt is visible (48). Unfortunately, it is not too long before Fessologue realizes that these individuals have mistaken him for a striking RATP worker on account of the similarity between the green of his suit and that of the RATP uniform. Fessologue is understandably embarrassed. “C’était une humiliation, je n’en suis toujours pas revenue” (It was a humiliation. I still haven’t returned; 45), he states, in a passing admission when trying to convince the reader early on in that narrative that “l’habit fait le moine” (clothes make the man; 45). But when one considers Fessologue’s reaction to this audience’s (unwitting) slight to his “Look” (a redirection of his focus to his central point that “clothes [does] make the man”) versus his reaction to his members of his intended audience’s criticisms (his critiquing those members’ clothing articles to buttress

his own), he or she sees that auxiliary audiences' opinions and reactions to the "Look" are not nearly as pertinent as those of black Africans to the *sapeur's* sense of manhood.

Parfait takes Gustave and Alexander's, two of four white men also in attendance at the Congolese May Day celebration, reading of his "Look" into as little consideration as Fessologue does of this group at the train station. Like Frédéric, Gustave, Alexander, and the other two white men clearly stand out from the rest of the partygoers on account of their difference in skin color. As Parfait reveals, the quality of their attempted *Sape* "Looks"—comprising a suit and no brazen, accessorizing *griffes*—makes it clear that they, at best, are "[s]apeurs débutants" (sapeur novices; 187). Yet while Gustave and Alexander might not exactly adopt the "Look" as convincingly as other partygoers, they carry strong opinions about it as fashion entrepreneurs planning on launching a new clothing line. In their perspective, *sapeurs'* sporting a style consisting primarily of European styles attests to *sapeurs'* renunciation of their Congolese culture in favor of Western culture. Gustave explains to Parfait their mission to change this trend:

[C'est] [c]omme si les Congolais manquaient de confiance en eux...On cherche donc des opportunités avec les compétences sur place pour légitimer l'idée d'un luxe noir qu'on écoulait en mode mondial. [...] on veut vraiment les aider et les décomplexer. [...] Qu'est-ce que tu en penses, Parfait? (203)

[It is] as if the Congolese lack self-confidence...Thus, we are looking for opportunities with the skills on hand to legitimize the idea of a black luxury [brand] that people would follow around the world. [...] We really want to help and decomplex them. [...] What do you think about this, Parfait?

Gustave's reading of *sapeurs'* "Look" as indication that they "lack self-confidence" and still suffer from a colonial complex from which he and Alexander can help "decomplex" themselves

would suggest that *sapeurs* sport that “Look” not for themselves, but for their former colonizers—white Frenchmen—first and foremost. Parfait’s reaction to this critique of the “Look”—to offer no response and walk away in the path that Frédéric has opened for him (204)—reveals not only the inaccuracy of Gustave’s belief, but also the insignificance of the opinion of audiences outside of the black African immigrant community to the *sapeur*’s sense of masculine authority.

Overall, the *sapeur* signifies more than a mere illustration of a black man adopting a particular clothing style for white men’s consideration often construed from readings of his image alone. It is through a multidimensional investigation of his motivations for adopting this particular style—exploring his self-presentation in real-life (interviews), visuals (photographs), and literature—that one recognizes how the *sapeur*’s regard for his “Look” as expressive of his sense of masculinity within his African immigrant community actually complicates existing understandings of the *Sape*.

Conclusion: Contesting Boundaries, Sporting Significance

This dissertation has highlighted connections between black men's clothing and masculine expression in Paris. I have demonstrated how visions of race and gender prevalent in this white-dominated society intersect in the creation and reception of clothing styles through my analysis of three sartorial styles followed by black men since the mid-1970s—that of the black *Bleu*, the hip-hop enthusiast, and the *sapeur*. By highlighting the unique lived experience of black men living in Paris, I have revealed the singular importance of social authority to black men's masculine identification and proposed clothing as a new site through which those men might purposefully reclaim their lost sense of masculine authority. My close readings of a variety of texts involving the three aforementioned clothing styles have further demonstrated the pivotal role of not only skin, but also clothing in constructing visualizations of black men and, more precisely, black men's masculinity. Given that the clothing styles featured here developed from distinct cultural histories, the particular brand of masculinity that each visually recalls, and through which each of their wearers exhibit masculine authority varies: for instance, whereas the black *Bleu* displays a form of masculinity grounded in muscularity of the body by way of the *maillot bleu*, the young black male *banlieusard* projects a hypermasculine tough image while sporting his hip-hop clothing styles. Moreover, black men's display of masculinity by way of these three sartorial styles figures in different forms: through their challenging of discriminatory

visualizations of Frenchness (*maillot bleu*) and of Paris's geographical landscape (hip-hop clothing styles) as well as exhibiting primary interest in appearing for black African immigrant audiences alone (the *Sape*).

In further writings on black men's clothing styles in Paris, I plan to expand on a few topics that I briefly raised in this dissertation in greater detail, including: (1) the implications of thinking of fashion as a semiotic system; (2) the transnational influence of the featured clothing styles; and (3) how exceptions to certain style rules (i.e. women in the *Sape*) not only complicate but also inform the meaning behind those styles. While my dissertation primarily focuses on how black men living in Paris consciously disrupt typical visualizations of black men and black men's masculinity through their sporting of particular clothing styles, it inspires my thinking of alternative manners through which black men use clothing to convey their sense of masculinity authority as well. The rise of black male clothing designers in the Parisian fashion scene in the past decade alone signifies a fitting first example. Celebrated black male menswear fashion designers like *Les Connivences'* Le Bachelor are often revered by individuals who sport their clothing pieces and, accordingly, exhibit an elevated sense of masculine authority within their respective communities. As Le Bachelor himself avowed in his interview with me at his store, the popularity of *Les Connivences* around the world has grown to such an extent that he has earned a heightened sense of prominence within the *Sape* community in Paris and abroad and recognition from individuals outside of the *Sape* interested in the sartorial movement. His appearing at events related to the *Sape* not only throughout Paris (such as the Musée Dapper's aforementioned "L'art d'être un homme" exhibition) but also at museums, clothing stores, and cultural celebrations in cities like London, and Amsterdam (in other words, his widespread recognition as a spokesman of this distinctive black male sartorial movement) attests to his

securement of a supreme measure of masculine authority by way of his designing clothing as well. Based on the prominence of Le Bachelor and his store *Les Connivences* within my dissertation alone (evidenced not only by real-life *sapeurs* I interviewed, but also by the Musée Dapper's inclusion of Le Bachelor in its inaugural ceremony for its exhibition and Parfait's recognizing *Les Connivences* as the source of the most elegant, meaning the most masculine, clothing articles in all of Paris in *Mélo*), the potential to expand on my investigation of black men's cultivation of particular clothing styles for masculine expression—from their sporting to their creation of clothing styles—is manifest.

Social media signifies a second lens through which I plan to further build on my dissertation's examination of black men's assertion of masculinity through clothing. The rise of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter has not only changed the manner in and speed with which individuals communicate with each other; it has also motivated individuals to lead well-staged and -documented lives. This mode of living not only in real-time, but also for the image or tweet that it produces is most clearly epitomized by the selfie, or photograph that one takes of oneself with a smartphone or camera for the sole purpose of posting it on a social media platform. The impact of this change in how individuals self-curate and self-present—not just for passersby or localized communities but for global, cyberspace audiences—opens up and further complicates the manner in which black men assert their masculine authority by way of clothing. Parfait de Paris's use of text messages (an older form of communication technology) to elevate his personal sense of masculinity in *Mélo* serves as a useful sign of the greater sense of agency that social media grants black male users exhibiting their masculinity through clothing. As managers of their own social media profiles, they possess greater control over not only how they appear to others (thanks to specialized camera lenses and filters) but also

when they appear before others (meaning their ability to spontaneously post multiple images in a single day with the click of a single button). Black men's capacity to curate their self-image by way of social media photograph sharing serves as an important reminder of the variability of notionally-fixed identification categories of race and gender, and the continuous importance of the visual and clothing in shaping perceptions of race and gender today.

My dissertation's presentation of not only skin's but also clothing styles' significance to black men's self-identification and identification by Others suggests a new way in which scholars may approach the topic of race and processes of racialization in France today. By introducing race emphatically into the critical perspective of French Studies, a field wherein I would argue that the republican model of social integration endorsed in France, and its associated claim to colorblindness, has inhibited productive theoretical discourses on race, I propose an innovative contribution to the field of African Studies within French Studies by investigating transnational clothing choices that, owing to the cultural relevance today, incite reflection on Africa (football attire), are directly imported from Africa (the *Sape*), and originate among descendants of Africa living elsewhere yet are widely reproduced and perceived as bearing African roots (hip-hop fashion). By revealing the importance of clothing, like skin, to black men's identification from the stance of black men themselves, and the influence of clothing on perceptions of black masculinity, I counter the usual perspective taken within this field, which stresses France's influence in Africa and rarely the reverse. Cameroonian author Calixthe Beyala best summarizes this common outlook in the epigraph to her novel *Les honneurs perdus* (1996), stating: "Le Français est francophone mais la francophonie n'est pas française" (A French person is francophone, but francophonie is not French"). Yet the capacity for the three featured sartorial styles to rework visualizations of not only black men's masculinity but also of

nationhood and geographical space in Paris indicates that the reverse is equally true; that “francophonie,” epitomized here by black male sartorial culture prevalent in France’s capital, is also French culture.

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