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The Political and Cultural Strategies of Peripheral Abidjanais Men

By
Jordanna Chris Matlon

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Sociology
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Raka Ray, Chair
Professor Peter Evans
Professor Ananya Roy

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Abstract

I Will Be VIP!: The Cultural and Political Strategies of Peripheral Abidjanais Men

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This dissertation examines the livelihoods and lifestyles of men in Africa's urban informal economy. I look at the relationship between masculinity, work and globalization from the perspective of two groups of peripheral men who symbolize the political and economic dimensions of the crisis in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: street-level political propagandists (orators) for former President Laurent Gbagbo and mobile street vendors, respectively. My analysis is premised on the fact that adult masculine identity in Côte d'Ivoire is predicated on formal work and marriage, two criteria the men I studied were unable to meet. I include analyses of public spaces where these men frequent to explore the relationship between urban informality and masculine identity.

In what I term "complicit nationalist masculinity," the orators used narratives of Ivoirian exceptionalism and invested in the ruling regime to ensure their livelihoods, gain status, and secure their post-crisis futures. Moreover, denouncing Franco-Ivoirian neocolonial relations they blamed the unemployment crisis on a "Francophone" reliance on the state bureaucracy. They advocated an "Anglophone" pro-business state and imagined themselves as patriotic entrepreneurs at the country's helm. In what I term "complicit global masculinity," the vendors had no ties to the state and were targets of informal state extraction and harassment. In seeking self-affirmation they bypassed the state and identified with media images of black masculinity from the African diaspora. They were complicit because, rendered redundant as non-productive men, they inserted themselves into the neoliberal economy through consumption-oriented identities popularized in mainstream media and corporate advertising.

In both strategies, peripheral men's relationship to the global economy has transitioned from exploitation to exclusion; men thereby respond not by resisting but by seeking to belong. In short, I argue that unable to be producers and providers via the formal economy, peripheral Abidjanais men search for political or cultural alternatives wherein they may incorporate into local and global society.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1. Then and now

1.1. République du Golfe (fictive French West African state), circa 1980-1995

The classes were overcrowded, day and night the pupils went hungry...Many children did not make it far as the *certificat d'études* [primary school completion]. They deserted their desks but refused to go back to the fields – it must be said that African farm work is one of the most backbreaking and thankless tasks of all human activity. They wandered the markets and the streets of the towns, became the first generation of the *bilakoros* (the unschooled), became the first gang members, the first birds to fly.

Many of those who passed the *certificat d'études* could not get a place in secondary school, nor a job as a messenger in the public services. They would hear nothing of going back to the machete, the *daba* [hoe], the fishing line. They preferred to join their friends in the markets and the streets.

Then the crisis came and budgets were cut back. Many of those who passed the *brevet d'études* [secondary school completion] could not get a place in the second cycle nor find jobs as pen-pushers in the civil service. They swelled the numbers of the *bilakoros* in the markets and the streets.

Those with a *baccalauréat* [high school diploma] were given no career guidance and the civil service organized no *concours general* [civil service entry examination] for teaching or administrative positions; they were obliged, forced to take to the streets and the markets.

Those with a bachelor's or a master's degree received no grants for foreign work experience. The *École nationale d'administration* (ENA) and the *École normale supérieure* (ENS) offered no entrance exams. And, since their parents could no longer support them, the graduates took to the markets and the streets to lead the *bilakoros*.

The crisis worsened. Belatedly, those who had been tossed into the streets by an ill-conceived educational system were joined by young workers driven out of offices and factories by closures, cut-backs and business restructuring. It was this diverse group, who had learned from bitter experience, from injustice and lies, who – when the bell signaling the leap from dictatorship to democracy tolled – took the reins of the République du Golfe and of ancient Africa, the cradle of mankind.

(From Ivoirian novelist Ahmadou Kourouma's "Waiting for the wild beasts to vote,"
transl. Frank Wynne (2004: 404-405))

1.2. Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 2008-2009

I was on my way home from an interview with three grubby newspaper vendors in their mid-late thirties who for over a decade had worked the same congested intersection, vying for a five cent sale among dozens of other vendors. My taxi passed a tired-looking man pushing a juice cart up an otherwise deserted street. A few days before I had also passed a man pushing a cart; he was an acquaintance of my research assistants and a humorous banter ensued between them. His last hustle had been selling women's jeans around Adjamé, Abidjan's central market. With no lack of sarcasm they predicted that at his pace moving up in the world, he would soon open his own shop: the dream of many a peripheral Abidjanais *commerçant*. In reality, most of these men settled with day to day life: as one vendor said to me, *C'est pas pour vivre mais pour survivre*, or, "It is not to live but to survive."

For this vendor in his early twenties, joking about his uncertain future was still funny. But for that tired-looking man, or for the newspaper vendors to whom I had spoken that day, the joke was on them. Their hope was like a photo handled beyond discernment, the image having acquiesced to the fantasy of how it should look supposing they had aged in a more forgiving time or sought opportunity in a fairer place. This man who pushed his cart up a pot-holed street at the end of an unfulfilling shift, his face was etched with the accumulated exhaustion of his day, his situation, and his life. Here, I thought, with the weight of his burden and the futility of his task, was Sisyphus manifest.

In this dissertation, I explore the relationship between work and masculine identity in the postcolonial city of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. It is a place where the newly independent generation embraced the French colonial model of opportunity creation: an educational structure whose graduated completion accorded individuals the reasonable expectation of a semi-permanent post somewhere in the civil service, established as the country's largest and most stable employer. Gendered notions of appropriate work and domesticity overwhelmingly allocated wage labor to men while encouraging women to assume unpaid domestic and nurturing work; women's remunerative activities were restricted to activities in the informal economy which thus became associated with women's work. New colonial-era occupations that provided a salary and a dignified worker identity – including suit and office – became requisite for men to take on the financial and social credentials to be a modern, cosmopolitan Abidjanais man, while migrants from the north and neighboring countries fueled the more degrading, low-end trades. While these identities figured around men's working lives, equally critical was its influence on men's relationships with women: the salary came to be a decisive component of what made a man marriageable, itself the core feature of adult masculinity in Africa. In short, the modern Abidjanais man was neither modern nor really a man without a job and a wife. But it was work – envisaged as a salaried, steady construct – upon which contemporary marriage and thus masculinity depended.

This dissertation is an ethnography of a colonial legacy encountering the exclusions of neoliberal globalization. It is an ethnography of the political economy of Abidjan, referred to in the vernacular as *la crise*, or "the crisis": a moment during which the Abidjanais identity centered around how one related to the political and economic dimensions of a crisis that ascended the social ladder and gangrened the country's proud reputation as the "Ivoirian

miracle.” More precisely, it is about a generation of men that grew up witnessing the miracle but when their turn came, found it a mirage (c.f. Hecht, 1983). The crisis entailed the breakdown of the public, rendered financially incompetent as a consequence of depleted government reserves and international debtors’ austerity measures. It suffered further ridicule as an ideological failure for believing in the capacity for an inchoate postcolonial state to sustain such an expansive public in the first place. My study involved the many Sisyphuses, men unmarried and engaged in informal activities. In the absence of stable work and marriage, I explore how peripheral Abidjanais men engaged in national politics or global culture as they reconceptualized an affirmed masculine identity.

2. Masculinity and the feminization of work

The African colonial state was instrumental in inculcating a masculine ideal predicated on formal sector wage labor, and men living in cities were pressured to conform to colonial models of masculinity and domesticity supported by their singular wages which were “from the start, gendered as male” (Lindsay, 2003a: 115). In Francophone West Africa, a salary such as those provided by the civil service indicated that a man was *évolué* [evolved] (Cooper, 2003). Further, traditionally to achieve “senior” or “adult” masculinity status – wherein a man held claim over his labor power (instead of being a social junior responsible to his father) and the community considered him a full and autonomous social actor – men were to be married, which first required money (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003). The new colonial occupations provided comparatively high salaries making these workers the most desirable partners (Lindsay, 2003a). Further, “Notions of legitimate control embedded in a man’s capacity to be the responsible provider became increasingly salient under colonialism” (Cornwall, 2003: 237). Though the reality of African familial arrangements has always been far from the ideal of a working father and stay-at-home mother, these colonial “expectations of domesticity” nonetheless figure prominently in the African consciousness, such that “the failure of the myth of the nuclear family...signifies...a rupture not only with an ideologically conceived ‘normal family,’ but with an imagined modernity” (Ferguson, 1999: 177). Moreover, the colonizer used differential gender and domestic relations to distance himself from the colonized (Lindsay, 2003b: 78). Urban Africans since have distinguished between the “respectable” few capable of supporting their families with steady wages and the masses (ibid: 7). Although indigenous African gender ideologies were not rigid, the male breadwinner ideal has become a standard for an aspired African masculinity.¹

While work was a central feature of the *évolué* identity, today “work” in the way men conceive of it: a stable, salaried construct, is largely absent. Indeed, the feminization of work is one of the most significant transformations evident in the neoliberalized global South. It implies the rise of female employment as well as low-end, low-paid work marked by increased insecurity, or “flexible” labor systems (Enloe, 1989; McDowell, 1991; Standing, 1999) and informality (Roy, 2003). The woman becomes the ideal worker under global economic

¹ Lindsay differentiates *discourses*, which created deeply rooted stereotypes and lasting ideals, from *practices* (2003b: 105-132).

For more general theoretical elaborations regarding the themes in this paragraph, see Ferguson (1999) as well as Lindsay and Miescher’s (2003) and Ouzgane and Morell’s (2005) edited volumes on masculinities in Africa.

restructuring. Counting on dominant narratives that situate women as secondary workers and not the family's main provider, capital and the state justify her lower wages (Enloe, 1989). Because her rights are upheld less often than those of her male counterparts, a woman's boss may intimidate her into staying overtime, paid or not. Burdened with gendered commitments to her parents' generation as well as to her children, she is more inclined to stick out verbal, physical or sexual abuse. Recognizing that society's nurturer often does as expected and nurtures those around her, microcredit schemes and other forms of development aid now explicitly target a community's women as the model entrepreneur and socially responsible citizen.

So what of the men? What happens to yesteryear's proletarian army given these dramatic changes in the nature and structure of work? Women are not simply holding up half the sky. Formal employment opportunities that offer quality-of-life benefits, not to mention a career trajectory, are drastically shrinking the world over. In their stead the informal sector has left the majority of men and women in the global South to their own enterprising ideas and socio-familial networks, often translating into painfully long, unrecompensed hours in markets, sides of roads and in the centers of streets selling the same thing as the next person and with no more success.

Africa has been particularly excluded from the wealth and opportunities generated under neoliberal globalization. As a corrective to Castells' (1996: 135) statement: "What can be said of the experience of the transition of Africa into the new global economy is that *structural irrelevance*...is a more threatening condition than dependency" (emphasis in original), is that exclusion involves not *Africa* but *Africans*. Simone (2004a: 184) sites a number of dour statistics as evidence that "The so-called new international division of labor has largely bypassed major parts of the African continent," such as the fact that between 1985 and 2020 Africa will experience an anticipated growth of twenty-two million jobs when 380 million are needed for unemployment to go below ten percent. He concludes, "Put simply, economic globalization has largely stalled in Africa. The consequences for urban economies have been severe. Stalled globalization weakens the capacity of the formal economy to general jobs." For what he calls the "implosion" of African economies, largely left out of the international division of labor and pushed underground, Mbembe (2001: 55) writes, "If a neo-liberal way out of the crisis has – so far – led to any renewal of growth, it is growth with unemployment...it is quite reasonable to hypothesize an end to a wage-employed African labor force..." For these reasons, beyond informality, the livelihoods and subjectivities of peripheral African urbanites have been characterized as "invisible" (Matlon, 2011; Simone, 2004a; Watts, 2005: 190). Given their non-participation in the formal labor market – or any known means of income generation – Watts (2005: 189) explains that economists refer to slum dwellers' survival as the "wage puzzle." In Africa, men who make ends meet by entering the informal economy – a typically female sector – find their manhood at threat (Agadjanian, 2005).

The feminization of work has left peripheral, un- and underemployed men with the painful predicament of how to define themselves vis-à-vis the women in their lives. In this neoliberalized global economy, "chronic unemployment...makes it impossible for [men] to construct a masculinity organized around being a 'breadwinner'" (Connell, 2000: 44). Wages validate a man's image of himself as provider and make him an attractive partner; without them "men of all ages...sense that they have little to offer women who can or must fend for themselves" (Lindsay, 2003b: 210-211). Denied this possibility, they cannot fully contribute to their families or communities (Agadjanian, 2005; Silberschmidt, 2005; Lindsay, 2003a; Lindsay 2003b). In these ways their "social roles and their social value" are "undermined"

(Silberschmidt, 2005: 192).

Peripheral men's connection to capitalism has transformed from exploitation to exclusion. Instead of resisting an exploitative system, men contend now between exclusion and belonging: how to participate in a system of global capital while sidestepping their failure to provide for their families (Matlon, 2010a). So while initial discourse on the postcolonial subject emphasized resistance to exploitation and freedom from dependency, men today contend with how to belong – both to their families and as affirmed men in broader society – after being rendered economically redundant. This is a particularly pressing question in sub-Saharan Africa, where men's inability to support themselves and their prospective families threatens African society at-large.

In Abidjan, the majority of men cannot live up to the model wage laborer imported under colonial regimes with physical force and ideological persuasion. A typical response to the question “Are you married?” is the statement, accompanied by a sneer or downcast eyes and always a sense of helplessness, *Je n'ai pas le moyen*, or “I don't have the means.” In short, for the men of the “sacrificed generation,” the feminization of work encompasses a double sense of failure, as a worker and as a man. His activities do not ensure the reproduction of his labor power or that of future generations. He struggles to feed, clothe or shelter himself, and what he lacks renders him unmarriageable; if he cannot support himself, he certainly cannot support a wife or children. In this way he is not even a man. The crisis of work is also a crisis of masculinity.

As to what these changes mean for African gender roles, researchers have pointed to a range of potential and actual shifts, from suggesting that the male breadwinner model is now “losing saliency” (Lindsay, 2003b: 211), to increased male-on-female violence resulting from a loss of control as men become only “figureheads” (Silberschmidt, 2005: 195),² or growing gender parity, if not role reversal (Agadjanian, 2005). Literature on masculinities in southern Africa, perhaps the most prominent thread within African masculinities literature, emphasizes disempowered men's tendencies toward violence (Campbell, 1992) and notably sexual aggression (Brown et al, 2005; Walker, 2005).

In addition, there is a burgeoning literature exploring how men seek alternative means to maintain their masculinities in the absence of affirming work-based identities. For example, Ray's (2000) analysis of domestic servants' masculinities in Calcutta demonstrates that men partially appropriate *bhadralok* [middle class] ideals, ones that allow them to insert their own identities. But they also refashion meanings to fit their subjected positions, supplanting their lack of autonomy which makes them servants instead of patriarchs, with notions of “sacrifice” and family responsibility (ibid: 700). Roy's (2003) analysis of marginalized masculinities, also in Calcutta, demonstrates how men's desires for masculine identities amidst a broader feminization of livelihood lead not only to affirming politicized identities, but also the negation of causes of informality and poverty more generally. Similarly, George's (2005) analysis of transnational migration patterns that make women nurses the family breadwinners shows that men seek identities out of the home while the greater community denigrates women for their newfound roles. This literature highlights the ways that nonrecognition or misrecognition can have deleterious effects on individual identity such that it is a form of oppression (Taylor, 1994). To

² Overlapping discourses on frustrated African “youth” also discuss tendencies of violence directed toward society more generally. This literature is not new, see Morrell (1998: 626-630) for a review. However, for more recent examples see Abdullah (2005); Biaya (2005); Diouf (2003); and Abbink and van Kessel's (2005) edited volume.

compensate, men adopt scripts that mask their oppression by reworking ideologies around masculine identity.

3. Affirming Abidjanais masculinities

To speak of “masculinity” is to speak not only of male identity but importantly of the power infused in the roles that men play, and of the multiple dimensions through which this power embeds itself in society, in both senses well beyond the power of any singular man (Brown, 1995). Masculinity is thus an ideology loaded with pre-conceived notions of a man’s role, thereby gendering social norms even when social conditions make such anticipated role-playing untenable. I use the term masculinity as it is associated with men’s presumptive roles in society as workers and heads of household. This conceptualization infers that men locate a sense of self-worth in how closely they approximate this idealized masculinity. To live up to this ideal is a source of pride, and to fall short is a source of shame.

My dissertation fieldwork on the livelihoods and lifestyles of peripheral men in Abidjan’s informal economy from 2008 until 2009 investigated how Abidjanais men without formal work or career trajectories justified their failures and articulated alternative visions of masculinity that inferred a relationship to capital. I entered the field asking how the role of producer and provider has shifted vis-à-vis neoliberal globalization when men’s sense of purpose and their connection both to the domestic sphere and the larger world have in recent history been inextricably linked to work. To answer this question I looked at the strategies men employed to reclaim a sense of visibility in their communities and society at-large. I explored the meaning of masculinity as it resonated for peripheral men lacking the tools that would allow them to become workers in the traditional wage-laborer sense, or heads of household.

I title my dissertation “I will be VIP!” to indicate how men contend with belonging in the contemporary world as socially legitimated actors. The acronym VIP for “very important person” has filtered into the Abidjanais vernacular as a malleable concept peripheral men use to measure themselves and others according to global and local standards.³ In doing so they acknowledge that belonging in today’s world is about being “someone,” and in particular being someone “important.” This not only reclaims a sense of pride, but also acts as a survival strategy to counter the anonymity of informality. However, being VIP is a hope held out for the future, something that *will* happen, a bright promise juxtaposed to the stasis of life amidst crisis.

Adopting Simone’s (2010: 39-59) many uses of the term “peripheral” when referring to urbanity as a physical location (in the city and the world), a subjectivity, a way of live, a strategy, and a way of being seen and understood by external actors, I refer to the Abidjanais men in my study as “peripheral.” This term, instead of “marginal,” also distinguishes my analysis from Connell’s (1995) use of “marginalized masculinity,” because I refer to these men’s masculinities as “complicit” (see below). Further, marginal is suggestive of a minority, while the bulk of contemporary Abidjanais society struggles as peripheral actors. Finally, “peripheral” relates to Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire’s peripheral status despite its self-image as a *semi*-peripheral state, which I discuss in the following section and in *Chapter 2*.

In the next section I elucidate on peripheral Abidjanais men’s “political” and “cultural” strategies. In *Chapter 2*, I outline the major political, economic and social characteristics of Ivoirian and specifically Abidjanais life since Côte d’Ivoire achieved independence in 1960. The

³ For further discussion of “I will be VIP!” see *Chapter 4*.

country's post-independence history may be described as two significant periods, the first known as the miracle which roughly corresponds to the initial twenty years, and crisis ever since, marked by deepening economic troubles and culminating in more than a decade of political unrest. Key components of the miracle and the crisis: neocolonial Franco-Ivoirian relations, a sense of Ivoirian exceptionalism for man and state, diverging and later converging categories of working and national-ethnic identity, and widespread underemployment with the breakdown of the formal economy, figure as the major issues that comprise my argument.

4. *Sorbonne orateurs, vendeurs ambulants* and complicit masculinities

I argue that peripheral, excluded men's strivings to belong to – participate in – the global economy drives complicity to neoliberal ideologies, in particular notions of the ideal man-as-worker and economic actor. I adapt the concept “complicit masculinity” from Connell's theory of relational masculinities: hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginal. Complicit masculinities have a relationship to the “hegemonic project” which is “constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend...” (Connell, 1995: 79). In the same spirit that Connell adapts *hegemony*, or ideological rule, from Antonio Gramsci ([n.d.] 1971), I treat complicit masculinity as a gendered analogue to Gramsci's theory of *consent* which posits that subordinate classes consent to be ruled by dominant classes through the latter's exercise of hegemony. Complicit masculinity thus indicates that men's identities as men and citizens are predicated on complicity to hegemonic political structures at the national and global level.

I use the term *complicit nationalist masculinity* to refer to the political strategies of a vast network of street-level political propagandists, or *orateurs* [hereon orators] who were paramount to inculcating President Gbagbo's desired ideologies and aversions. They delivered speeches and produced pamphlets and electronic media at the *Sorbonne*, a nationalist public space in Plateau, Abidjan's administrative center, and throughout the city in the *Sorbonne*'s associated *Parlements*. Cumulatively, on weekdays the *Sorbonne* and on weeknights and weekends the *Parlements* attracted thousands of men from peripheral communities who, often with nowhere else to pass their day, absorbed rhetoric espousing Ivoirian glory and autochthonous entitlement.

Situated in the center of Plateau, the *Sorbonne* was a site of knowledge production, a spectacle of political power and a network for southern nationalist men's sociability. Its very existence in the heart of Abidjan's proud administrative district was indicative of the centralizing effect it had on the orators and their audiences, peripheral men arriving from the urban periphery to hear self-gratifying discourse and to take part in a circuit of current events as insiders entitled to the promise of the Ivoirian miracle.

Self-described “political analysts” and “*leaders*⁴ of opinion,” orators' voices both represented and shaped the pre-electoral Ivoirian nationalist discourse. Orators held a liminal position, rubbing shoulders with ministers and business leaders yet fully belonging to the underemployed and unmarried masses struggling daily in an informal economy. They represented one tentacle of the broad “patriotic” movement that included student organizations and street militants, and which wrapped deeply around peripheral Abidjanais society. They were would-be middle class men: their parents' generation by-and-large pursued personal fortunes as plantation owners and government bureaucrats, but have witnessed their country's wealth vanish

⁴ I conducted my fieldwork in French and translations I provide are my own. Throughout the text I use italics for words the orators (and vendors) said in English.

while finding themselves incapable of providing for their future families as their fathers once provided for them. The *Sorbonne* orators made meager earnings off of their informal, insecure relationship to the state as part of their propaganda efforts. They were not those gluttons of political patronage with chauffeured Mercedes Benz and Swiss bank accounts. They were also victims of the crisis that Gbagbo's years of delayed elections, stalled development and pillaging of state resources had exacerbated. Commuting to and from Plateau in second-hand, overcrowded *bacas* [small buses] and *ouros ouros* [shared taxis], they were a distinct class below those who patronized the *Sorbonne's* adjacent cafes and boutiques. After a speech they could hold the microphone hostage for upwards of ten minutes while entreating spectators to cover their *baca* fare home.

However, as "patriots" declaring an overt allegiance to the ruling regime, the *Sorbonne* was a vehicle for work and status in a precarious present. Lindsay (2003a: 3) explains, "The African 'Big Man' provides perhaps the most enduring image of African masculinity. Across the continent and for a long sweep of history, ambitious people (usually men) have worked to enlarge their households and use their 'wealth in people' for political and material advancement." Abidjanais apply the diminutive "little" [*petit*] to denote informal and low-status occupations, as in *petit commerce* [commerce] and *petit métier* [trade]. I refer to the orators as *little big men* to indicate both their assumed role as big men in Ivoirian society as well as their peripheral position as street politicians in the political party and as participants of the informal economy. Their relationship to the Gbagbo regime offered the orators dominant masculine status as little big men within peripheral Abidjanais society, commanding respect as bit players on the political scene and access, however limited, to state coffers. Their positions as interlocutors offered status, support, and security when the state's relationship to the people was otherwise negligent at best and predatory at worst. Moreover, orators positioned themselves as privileged entrepreneurs in a post-crisis state that intended to finance its patriots' projects. Their relationship to the state revitalized masculine identities which were otherwise denigrated in the absence of work-based identities.

Further, the orators had a vested interest in the historical legacy of the "Ivoirian miracle" touted during the first generation of independent Ivoirians. In world systems theory logic, a semi-peripheral state, like the middle class, is a buffer state whose desire to ascend into "core" country membership generates complicity to the status quo (Wallerstein, 1974b).⁵ To realize the social, economic and political dividends denied to other African nations in crisis, orators drew on scripts from their childhood depicting Côte d'Ivoire as a semi-peripheral state to suggest its potentially advantageous position in the global neoliberal order.

Harvey (2005:2) defines neoliberalism and the accordant role of the state as,

...[A] theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.

⁵ Please see *Chapter 2* for further discussion on the Ivoirian miracle and Côte d'Ivoire as a semi-peripheral state.

This accurately reflects how the orators argued that the Ivoirian state should behave both in order to end the crisis and to reclaim a dominant position on the African continent. They claimed that a Francophone model of dependence on the state bureaucracy was to blame for the unemployment crisis. So they rejected the model *évolué* bureaucrat and alternatively embraced “Anglophone” models encouraging private sector development and the businessman with a risk-taking entrepreneurial ethic. Instead of a shrunken state, they advocated a redirected treasury that financed entrepreneurial projects for the nation’s “youth” – and specifically Gbagbo’s patriots. They critiqued the French neocolonial monopoly on Ivoirian resources and trade and spoke in terms of opening up circuits for Ivoirian investment and diversifying its partnerships. As they advocated neoliberal principles, the orators envisioned a nation complicit to the global political economy as it was; even as they espoused an anti-French neocolonialist/global imperialist stance, their descriptions of a future Côte d’Ivoire involved not the system’s overthrow but the refiguring of the Ivoirian state within it to reclaim its regional dominance. In this way complicit nationalist masculinity indicates the orators’ double complicity to the state *and* to the ideology that neoliberalism will benefit man and state. As a theoretical contribution, complicit nationalist masculinity examines how aspirations for masculine dominance and the selective application of state narratives generate complicity to the global.

While *Sorbonne* orators responded to the crisis by constructing a politicized masculine subjectivity – as men and citizens – that embraced narratives of the Ivoirian miracle and an exceptionally modern Abidjan for affirmation, this option was available to few everyday Abidjanais situated in the informal economy. If one could argue that the *Sorbonne* represented the political component of the Ivoirian crisis, *vendeurs ambulants* [hereon mobile street vendors, or vendors for shorthand], represent the economic crisis: would-be working class men who constitute the *lumpenproletariat*, of the neoliberal generation’s underemployed. Situated everywhere and nowhere, vendors sell their wares in the middle of the road amongst passing cars. As workers, they have no place in the city: pushed so deeply into the periphery that they have no place to sell their wares: they are literally left out in the streets. Treading a particularly vulnerable mode of commerce, they carry all their goods on their person.

Mobile street vendors symbolize the contradictory exclusions of the neoliberal market economy. The street is a place of “potentiality and refuse” (Simone, 2010: 224). As a place of potentiality, those who mete out their existence in these most precarious entrepreneurial activities find that the social relationships they establish are more important than the particular activities in which they are engaged (ibid: 229). For vendors assembled in stiff competition with dozens of others selling the same wares, survival depends more on the generosity of a few regular patrons tracking the same daily route than it does on prudent business skills. The *parents* who pass in rush hour will call to their favorite vendor to buy a paper or a pack of gum, or slip the occasional CFA note to help with a meal or the month’s rent. Thus the same group of *jeunesse* [youth] – men well past their teens – may work the same areas for years at a stretch. Slick vendors selling more expensive wares such as latest mobile phone might establish a client base in nicer, residential city streets and do the bulk of their business in private homes, selling illegally imported goods from designer suits to electronics at a discounted price. But the majority lives a precarious existence and inquiring about their earnings eventually betrays that on any given day, they are just as likely to leave owing money to whatever middleman sold them their goods. Thus survival depends on the good will of a patron, an understanding landlord, or a friend who came upon a little extra in the past few days.

The street also being a place of refuse, vendors stand in the middle of the road amidst apathetic-to-hostile drivers who discard waste out the window and whose vehicles spit toxic diesel, kick up dust, and splash muddy water at them in the pot-holed, unrepaired streets. They are both ignored and feared. They cannot help but be highly visible, these men who are exaggerated representations of Simone's notion of "people as infrastructure," mobile sellers acting as human intersections in the built environment. Though they embody a brute and gritty survivalist masculinity, this is not a source of pride in a city whose legitimacy is sourced in a concept of the *évolué*. Indeed, this is the profession assumed for foreigners, and while the crisis has pushed Ivoirians, including native Abidjanais, into this trade, they are still largely cast off in the Abidjanais imagination as "others."

The stigma that vendors were of questionable nationality made them easy victims of informal state extraction, and all experienced difficulties with the state as they pursued their economic activities. Despite all but one being in their early twenties to late thirties, the vendors lived predominantly gender-segregated lives as social juniors, unmarried and with no legitimate claim to the children they had fathered.⁶ Denied full status as men and citizens, they fragmented their identities, with their working lives compartmentalized as superfluous, irrelevant features of their personhood and asserting instead identities confirmed in a global masculine, albeit boyish, consumer culture. These were identities at play, with vendors identifying as football players or hip hop performers, two domains widely acknowledged as highly masculine and recognized as popular sites of cultural production and participation among subaltern men (for example, see Weiss, 2009; Basu and Lemelle, 2006; Vidacs, 1999). This connection indicated membership in an imagined world community of the African diaspora, a world articulated as masculine if not misogynist in the media spotlight.

I refer to vendors' cultural strategies for achieving a self-affirming masculine identity as *complicit global masculinity*. This term indicates masculine identities complicit to the global neoliberal project, not embodying the hegemonic masculinity of the transnational businessman (Connell, 1995), but nevertheless doubly inspired by an ethos of conspicuous consumption and the stylized, bombastic entrepreneur. Both of these characteristics are present in iconic black men stereotyped in mainstream media. As petty consumers and/or self-reliant men engaged in commerce, the vendors imagine themselves to be distant approximations of these neoliberal masculine figures. In these ways, they become ideal-typical economic actors in the neoliberal political economy despite their peripheral, unproductive identities.

Black masculinity from the global North represents both cosmopolitan hegemony and its urban guerilla resistance. Themselves narratives of successful masculinity, iconic black men

⁶ These are vendors from my sample. The age range for vendors I came across was wide; there were vendors in their teens and men who looked well into their forties. But given the theme of my research – failed masculinities – I restricted my sample to men who in previous generations would be of marrying age.

However, it is difficult to state precise ages because many vendors said they were younger than they were. This fact came out during interviews when their life histories were incongruent with their age, and in talking to other Abidjanais who stated flatly that it was common for men to take a few years off of one's age to compensate for their minimal achievements. It also reflects a tendency for Ivoirians to effectively reset their age to remain eligible for the *concours*, which I discuss in *Chapter 8*.

become images: flattened, glorified and malleable representations of what is possible for peripheral black men globally. Flattened, they are one-dimensional realities of life across an ocean. Glorified, the real struggles of men elsewhere are erased for an Mtv masculinity⁷ with cool clothes, fast cars and willing women. Malleable, they represent both success and resistance: success via power, influence, and association with global hegemony, particularly in the case of black American men.

The affirming worlds of black masculinity the vendors inhabit are boys' worlds. Instead of achieving identities as little big men that provide access to privileged resources, their neutral/antagonistic relationship to the state turns them toward affirming but unproductive modes of sociality. In these worlds of childhood consumption, their imagined potentiality displaces, instead of supplants, a frustrated reality. Thus, while complicit global masculinity adheres to the neoliberal economy in return for esteemed identities, this strategy is inadequate as a social process because it fails to generate social reproduction.⁸

⁷ I outline the concept of Mtv masculinity fully in *Chapter 5*.

⁸ I discuss this distinction in detail in *Chapter 3* with regards to Weiss (2009).

4.1. *The orators and vendors: A comparison*

	<i>Orators</i>	<i>Vendors</i>
Age	20s-40s	20s-30s (except one 19 year-old)
Age status	<i>Jeunesse</i> [youth], but esteemed as <i>Doyen</i> [dean]	<i>Jeunesse</i> [youth]
Income	Sporadic; estimated 5000/workday	Sporadic; estimated 1000/workday
Marital status/ Family relationship	Single, with girlfriends, most with 1-2 children	Single, few with girlfriends, some children
Citizenship status	Majority citizen	½ citizen ½ foreigner (many Abidjan-born and raised)
Class	Would-be middle class	Would-be working class
Relationship to state	Helpful	Hurtful
Complicit masculinity	Complicit nationalist masculinity	Complicit global masculinity
Complicit masculine image	Man and citizen: <i>little big men</i> and <i>patriotic entrepreneurs</i>	Youth and black (global African diaspora): <i>Mtv masculinity</i>
Self-image	Ivoirian, patriot; dignified; <i>Sorbonne</i> -based titular identity (professor, governor, doctor, pastor, <i>conferencier</i> , president)	Abidjanais if anything; <i>choco</i> ; consumption- or hobby-based identity (hip hop, <i>zouglou</i> , <i>coupé décalé</i> , rasta; musician, footballer, e.g. “MC,” “DJ”)

5. Methods

The data for this dissertation come predominantly from three sources over the year of fieldwork I conducted from 2008 to 2009. For approximately five months (November, December, February to April and some May) I attended the *Sorbonne* several times a week to listen to orators speak and more generally observe the men who frequented the space. For between two and four hours on most visits, I would alternate between mornings and afternoons, purchasing a seat with other spectators, taking notes of the speech’s content as well as men’s self-presentation, behaviors and interactions between orators and other insiders, spectators, and the vendors who sold their goods in the space. Because of the anti-French/anti-international community sentiments espoused and the tendency for people to confuse me for a French woman (at least until I spoke), I always attended the *Sorbonne* with a chaperone: an African (usually Ivoirian), almost always a male; initially these were my friends but later I hired a research assistant. During preliminary fieldwork I conducted in 2006, I interviewed an orator⁹ who later became a leading member of the *Sorbonne* organization, and friendly relations with him facilitated my regular access to the space as well as contact with other insiders, with whom I occasionally shared a drink or a meal at one of the adjacent *maquis* [open-air bar]. After a time, I

⁹ I have changed the names of all my research subjects except when I use their stage names.

became a regular fixture at the *Sorbonne* with regulars affectionately dubbing me *la blanche Ivoirienne*, or the white Ivoirian. In addition, one orator became a sort of informant, visiting with me at the *Sorbonne*, taking me to speeches at various *Parlements*, occasionally socializing, and organizing in-depth interviews with prominent *Sorbonne* orators, insiders, and ticket-takers which I describe in *Chapter 8*. These interviews culminated my fieldwork with the orators.

While the fieldwork at the *Sorbonne* was site-specific, essentially entailing an ethnography of a nationalist and masculine space for mostly peripheral men who remained relatively constant over the course of my research, my fieldwork with vendors was more scattered and sporadic, reflecting their lives and their economic activities. The majority of my interactions with vendors were one-off encounters on the streets where they worked: visits during rush-hour traffic wherein I invited men to take an hour or two away from their sales for an informal interview or focus group over a drink or a meal. Whether or not I recorded these conversations was up to them. I tried to follow-up with every vendor I interviewed at least once, but this proved difficult as vendors were often transient at a site and either lacked a way to contact them again or, as was most often the case, were unresponsive to my appeals to meet up.¹⁰ For those interested, I conducted semi-formal interviews and later socialized with them in various contexts, be it with families, friends, sports teams, or music groups, and in *maquis* hanging out as well as watching them play or perform. I conducted fieldwork with vendors over the course of my year in Abidjan, but mostly in the spring and summer months.

Finally, over the course of my fieldwork I was impressed with how locally-produced signage throughout Abidjan's peripheral cityscape consistently depicted images of men and idealized masculinities that reflected the cultural strategies I sought to analyze. I photographed these images when I saw them, and devoted my last month of fieldwork, in August 2009, to documenting the peripheral cityscape predominantly through barbershop images. I analyze these images as a stand-alone chapter to make a more general statement about peripheral Abidjanais men's vernacular. These images represent a strategy – not unlike the use of the *Sorbonne* as a masculine space for Gbagboist patriots – to re-claim an Abidjan that has been otherwise feminized.

I wish lastly to comment on why I chose to study peripheral Abidjanais men, and the possibilities and limitations inherent in my ethnographic method. I had lived in the northern city of Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire for two years in the late 1980s. My father remained until 1997, prompting annual summer stays and eventually a scholarly interest in the country. When I came to Abidjan to conduct preliminary research in 2006 I expected to study immigration patterns. I changed my topic because of what I saw when I arrived: chronic unemployment that left a generation – my contemporaries – searching for a place to incorporate themselves in their world. Even the relatively privileged struggled to insert themselves into the Ivoirian economy and I often felt as if I was poised to conduct an ethnography of waiting, of empty or dead time. Beyond recognizing that unemployment was truly a far-reaching crisis, it strained my personal encounters with Ivoirians. The inequality in our social relationships was stark. My friends spent the bulk of their days and evenings at their parents' homes watching television because they

¹⁰ Given their aversion to the police or government, many viewed me as a figure of authority and were untrusting of my intentions. Others perhaps felt I had little to offer; although I offered a meal and compensation for any interview, the time and effort to meet me could have been burdensome enough to not make it worth their while. Additionally, my appeals to talk to them about a shameful aspect of their lives could have been a deterrent.

lacked a disposable income to go out; I in turn realized how reliant my social life was on material capabilities. When we did go out, I inevitably paid the tab. My friends simply had no money; to even go to a bar or a restaurant was my suggestion. This experience was not mine alone, and other expatriates with whom I spoke were often bitter about the financial implications of their interactions with Ivoirians; many chose to disengage and inhabit a social world that left Ivoirians conspicuously absent. The personal being political, this issue troubled my conscience enough to merit studying. So I chose to investigate the consequences of the unemployment crisis on this generation of Ivoirians, as well as how interactions with the global, either real or imagined, influenced their self-identities. Men were the analytic crux of this dilemma: as the unemployed, their egos had the most to lose, and they were also the ones I perceived as being most committed to a global awareness and global identities.

I discuss the particularities of being a *métisse*/African-American woman studying black African men in *Appendix 1*. However, to explore the possibilities and limitations of the ethnographic method, my identity as ethnographer is an obvious place to begin. The blatant influence I had in my subjects' lives because of my ability as a member of their network to facilitate their sociability and afford status, as well as being an ideal-typical object of their affection – a woman from a wealthy country – dramatized the impossibility of arriving at some abstract, objective truth. If I had not taken my subjects out for the occasional drink, I might indeed have written an ethnography of waiting and empty time. My presence enabled certain interactions and the more we interacted, the more of an influence I had on their social standing.

Readers might find such an admission not only limiting but irrevocably damaging; in rebuttal, I treat positivist claims incredulously. The gulf between my subjects and me highlighted what is at times less or more obvious in any study: that the role of observer is never neutral. I believe that good research consists of first acknowledging one's limitations and then making them useful. That I was the ideal audience for the scripts and smokescreens with which men revealed their alter egos was useful in highlighting these very processes. When a vendor lied to me about his earnings he presented me with an estimate with which he expected me to be impressed, and from that I gained a sense of his financial lexicon. When he met me at a bar dressed a certain way, I gained a sense of what he wore to impress a lady. Or when I conducted an interview with an orator outside of the *Sorbonne*, I found it instructive that he took me to one of the city's only shopping malls because he considered this space sophisticated, modern, and proudly Abidjanais. All of these interactions are ethnographic truths among many potential actions and reactions; who I am certainly circumscribed this world of possible outcomes. A man, someone with darker or lighter skin, an Ivoirian or a Frenchman would have written a different dissertation, and all with merit. As I conducted my research, my control of the pursestrings lent a steady sense of inequality to my relationships, and my subjects' social inaccessibility to me as a prospective partner, if only for that reason, could well have lent a sense of inadequacy for which they attempted to compensate and which comes out in these pages. Nonetheless, in doing so they showed off what it meant to be someone in Abidjan, in Côte d'Ivoire, and in the world.

Other limitations were more obvious. Although I have been exposed to West African and particularly Ivoirian French for most of my life, my limited knowledge of the fast-talking and quickly-evolving *Nouchi* inhibited me, and I took months to feel as if I had really grasped the full depth of what my respondents were saying. At times I wondered if my presence at the *Sorbonne* influenced the content of speeches and I was certain that the orators were not forthcoming about everything in our interviews. Similarly the vendors frequently inflated positive aspects of their lives; in both cases I learned to incorporate mistruths into my argument and the significance of

what I was seeing. In addition, vendors were often transient and what I envisaged as a traditional ethnography occurred in starts, stops, and hiccups. Because so many of my respondents came and went or hesitated to fully welcome me into their lives, my closest informants – a couple of orators, my research assistants and a few vendors, became my core ethnographic subjects. But I came to realize that all of my encounters were ethnography, an ethnography not only of peripheral men but of contemporary Abidjan. During my year there, the boundaries between my personal life and research were largely irrelevant, so that my relations at the dance school where I taught capoeira in exchange for African dance and drumming lessons, conversations with my boyfriend's friends in the expatriate community (“You ride public transportation? *Are you trying to get yourself raped?*”), negotiating the price for a taxi or arguing with a *gendarme* [police officer] over an attempted bride, and even time on the couch watching music videos with my family friends was fair game. The multitude of these experiences gave me a perspective of Abidjan that neither the foreigners nor the Abidjanais with whom I associated had. No doubt quantitative data for contemporary Côte d’Ivoire are sorely lacking; I confronted this issue with frustration as I wrote my dissertation. However, I anticipate that readers will find texture in my study of peripheral Abidjan that cannot be found in surveys or statistical analysis.

As an ethnographer with the resources of a single graduate student on a fellowship, I confronted additional limitations. One person for one year was not enough to capture but a snapshot of Abidjanais life and I had to be more selective than I would have liked. I spent much of my time waiting for my subjects who were typically fashionably late (by one or two hours), or who did not show up at all. Bad roads, especially during the rainy season, made getting to peripheral neighborhoods difficult if not impossible. And because it was unsafe for me to go out and return home from those neighborhoods late at night (as much because of police roadblocks as because of criminal activity) I forewent much of the nightlife that makes Abidjan pulse and would have been rich material for my ethnography.

Finally, my biggest loss was that in my search to enter the lives of peripheral men, I spoke to so few women. The main reasons for this were threefold. First, in prioritizing my limited time I focused on the men themselves and what they reported about their social networks (including their relationships with women) instead of tracking friends and relatives down. Second, many men (mostly vendors) simply did not have women in their lives. Third, I had the impression that those with women in their lives did not want me to meet them. Possibly this was an indication of their shame. If much of what the men were doing with me were justifying their inadequacies, then it is not surprising that they were disinclined to have me meet the major proof of their failures.

I discuss all my methods in greater depth in the empirical chapters, and my experience as ethnographer in *Appendix 1*.

6. Chapter outline

In *Chapter 2* I review the central elements that comprised the Ivoirian miracle and later the crisis. As I explore its status as a semi-peripheral country, I focus on the relationship Côte d’Ivoire held with France and neighboring countries, and how this was initially a point of pride and later a target of Ivoirian frustrations. In addition, I look at how Abidjan in particular has changed as the urban periphery expanded and the core decayed. In doing so, I characterize the neighborhoods of Plateau, Yopougon and Abobo, my main fieldwork sites. I close *Chapter 2* with an overview on the state of women in contemporary Côte d’Ivoire.

Chapter 3 contextualizes the “feminized” city and surveys prominent depictions of the African crisis as it affects the city, because it is in the city where African modernity has been most deeply articulated and contested (Ferguson, 1999). I propose the utility of a gendered analysis for reading the urban crisis, for the twin projects of capitalism and modernity were always gendered constructs. Situating men in the public sphere and public spaces of contemporary urbanity, we find that capitalism’s exclusions are also gendered. The same logic of capitalist exploitation that turns to women for cheaper and subordinated labor excludes men altogether. For my theoretical departure I look at two ways of reading African urbanity: as deficient to or deviating from an imagined modernity. As a central analytical construct, I investigate how informality has dominated narratives of the African urban crisis.

I continue with an analysis of gendered spaces in *Chapters 4* and *7*. I investigate ways that peripheral men involved in Abidjan’s informal sector make claims on public space and the public sphere, masculinizing narratives of contemporary Abidjanais urbanity. They contest the feminine rendering of the city – geographies which exclude them as men in public space and strategies that exclude them as productive actors – with spaces and forms of sociality coded as masculine. These places and practices offer tangible claims against their own invisibility and redundancy. As they assert their masculinities, Abidjanais men reterritorialize the city and ideologically move Abidjan from the global periphery to the core. They contest both the narrative of an Abidjan-in-crisis and their own peripheral subjectivities within the city and in the global political economy.

Chapter 4 looks at barbershop signs, primarily from the peripheral *communes* [district] of Yopougon and Abobo. I relate these signs, representations of iconic global black men, to peripheral Abidjanais men’s general vernacular. I present literature the details the crisis of contemporary African masculinity to establish a framework that informs this chapter and subsequent chapters regarding the state of male subjectivity, work, and gender relations among peripheral urban Africans – everyday men like mobile street vendors who lack ties to the state. While I later examine political strategies in *Chapter 7*, *Chapter 4* looks at peripheral men’s cultural strategies for self-affirmation. Bypassing the state, men derive masculinist narratives from the African diaspora. The *Sorbonne* centers men within public space and the public sphere; likewise, barbershop signs imprint public space with images of men who are otherwise invisible as actors in the informal economy. The world of the sign thus fantasizes alternative masculinities engaged in the public sphere as performers and consumers. However, these strategies are inadequate as a means to establish men as providers and instead construct an alternative, boyhood ideal that does nothing to restore their worth as fathers or husbands.

Chapters 5 and *6* examine the lives at work and at play for Abidjan’s mobile street vendors, men who symbolize the deep economic crisis in Côte d’Ivoire and Africa more generally. *Chapter 5* looks at the multiple dimensions of this peripheral work. *Chapter 6* examines the ways vendors contest the stigma and struggle of vending by creating performative and consumerist identities. I begin *Chapter 5* by asking what the crisis means to the vendors. I then explore their experiences of underemployment and present a profile of mobile street vendors’ working lives: hierarchies within the informal economy including various forms of mobile street vending, an analysis of vendors’ earnings, and vendors’ survival strategies, in particular their social networks. I highlight one set of collectivized perfume vendors as an example of a relatively successful strategy. For a perspective of the turnover, frequency and earnings of one type of vending – water and juice sachets – I look at a distributor’s compilation of two months of sales. Next, I investigate the relationship between informality and illegality as

the vendors contend with the state and the negative stigma that clients associate with mobile street vending. I follow this with a discussion of citizenship. Transitioning into the next chapter, I close by considering how vendors manage their identities through denial, embellishment, or replacing their work-based identities with other aspects of their selfhood.

Chapter 6 examines vendors' lives outside of work, or what I refer to shorthand as "play." I ask how play assumes a strategy of meaning-making and self-affirmation for Abidjanais men who are excluded in local and global society as productive economic actors. Theorizing complicit global masculinity, I discuss prominent activities within Abidjan's urban periphery and consider their implications on men's identities. Foremost among these implications is an emphasis on a youth culture that doubly excludes and is excluded from women, and that bypasses the Ivoirian state to find affirmation in masculinities from the African diaspora. By contrast, the *Sorbonne* orators employed the strategy of complicit nationalist masculinity to pose as *men* and *citizens* in contemporary Côte d'Ivoire. Thus while I present complicit global masculinity as a strategy, I suggest that peripheral Abidjanais men locate ideal-typical masculinities as *youth* from a borderless and therefore citizen-less *African diaspora* in flattened, glorified and malleable media- and advertising characterizations(/caricatures) of globally prominent black men, or what I refer to as *Mtv masculinity*.

I begin by setting out a profile of vendors' spending habits: consumption-oriented budgets invoke teenage culture (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2005). I segue into the relationship between style and notoriety on Abidjan's urban periphery, picking up the themes with which I concluded the previous chapter. Borderless identities that exist more often in imagination than in reality are a major theme in contemporary discourse on urban Africa, and elaborating on what I outlined in *Chapter 4: Il est garçon*, I review discourses on African youth culture and black urbanism, emphasizing the parallels that exist when discussing youth culture and black culture under neoliberalism. Next, I look at the practices that support these identities and the gendered spaces where peripheral Abidjanais enact their Mtv masculinities. I include an exploration of the use mobile phones in Abidjan as indicative of visibility, sociability, and status. I then discuss how men articulate their relationships/lack thereof with women. My final section explores men's visions of the future, visions that conflate hopes and fantasies when they face the equally improbable prospects of formal work and instant media stardom.

Chapter 7: Politics, poverty and penises examines the *Sorbonne*, a political platform in Plateau, the city of the *colon* [colonist] and Abidjan's well-preserved administrative center. Even as men joke about their deep poverty and decry unequal international relations, the *Sorbonne* is a space where pro-Gbagbo, southern-based nationalists transition from peripheral, underemployed urban actors to critical players at the forefront of the Ivoirian political scene, and center Côte d'Ivoire from its status as yet another African crisis state to a globally dominant presence. In addition, these men define the acting political subject as male, and establish their vision of appropriate masculine comportment as well as appropriate gender relations.

Chapter 8 presents the *Sorbonne* orators and complicit nationalist masculinity. I begin by discussing the orators' experience of the crisis and proceed to demonstrate how the *Sorbonne* acts to alleviate the effects of the crisis on the orators. Generating ideological support as an ego sanctuary and practical support as an opportunity structure, the *Sorbonne* guarantees orators' complicity. I argue that the orators are "little big men" who use the *Sorbonne* as a survival strategy, a social network and a source of hope in an otherwise dim future. Drawing on interview data, I present pieces of their life histories, their relationship to the Gbagbo regime, their depiction of Côte d'Ivoire in the past and their vision of the country's future.

In the first half of *Chapter 8* I focus on how the orators frame Côte d'Ivoire as a semi-peripheral country and juxtapose their parents' generation to their own. Then I look at how they came to be orators and more generally, Gbagbo's patriots. In constructing a narrative of Côte d'Ivoire a semi-peripheral country, orators pay special attention to its role in the region and Africa more generally, its history of immigration, its relationship with France, and its natural resource wealth. Its bright past reflects the opportunities of their parents' generation but not their own; as members of the "sacrificed generation" they fell short of achieving full masculinity, and I explore how they characterized their inabilities to be fathers and husbands according to a normative, work-based masculine ideal. In contending with this failure, the orators rejected the Francophone *évolué* civil servant ideal. However, their relationship to the *Sorbonne* permitted them to reframe the notion of "sacrifice" with a sense of agency so that they, as members of Gbagbo's nationalist struggle, sacrifice themselves for a future Côte d'Ivoire.

At the time of my research elections had been stalled nearly a decade, thus representing an interregnum where orators purported to wait out the crisis. During this time, the *Sorbonne* revitalized them, providing status and acting as a network that guaranteed their livelihoods. Thus the second half of the chapter demonstrates the ways the *Sorbonne* supported them as exceptional Ivoirians in an un-exceptional Ivoirian state. Elaborating a vision of work and state, they hinged their identities on a future, post-crisis neoliberal Côte d'Ivoire with themselves as businessmen at its helm. They called this an "Anglophone" developmental model which they contrasted to the Francophone model of a large state bureaucracy. They judged Ivoirian worth based on its global position, focusing attention on its perceived or future role in the West African region. I conclude with the orators' description of the post-electoral future and a renewed Ivoirian hegemon.

I close this dissertation by reflecting on the three major sociological themes to which I contribute. First, I consider postcolonial citizenship in the context of neoliberal globalization, in particular the utility of exclusion to mediate state accountability and labor mobility. Next I discuss my specific findings with regard to belonging in contemporary Abidjan. Complicit nationalist and complicit global masculinities both represent strategies peripheral men pursue to affirm denigrated, work-based according to models that are also idealized in contemporary hegemonic discourse. Countering the Francophone *évolué* bureaucrat model, Abidjanais men look to the Anglophone entrepreneur and/or consumer as ideal actors in the global neoliberal economy. In this way, and reflecting the larger relationship that Africa has to the world order, they react to their exclusions by seeking to belong. They use the history of Ivoirian exceptionalism and in particular Abidjanais pride to do so. As their connection to capitalism shifts from exploitation to exclusion, they seek not resistance but membership. I close with my thoughts on what these two groups of men tell us about how essential, gendered identities – inextricably linked to work under capitalism – are central in generating complicity to dominant structures despite (and perhaps because of) deep exclusions. I consider how complicity, as a gendered analogue to consent, reverberates globally. As neoliberalism increasingly functions through exclusions (Ong, 2006), the questions I raise and the strategies I outline are significant the world over.

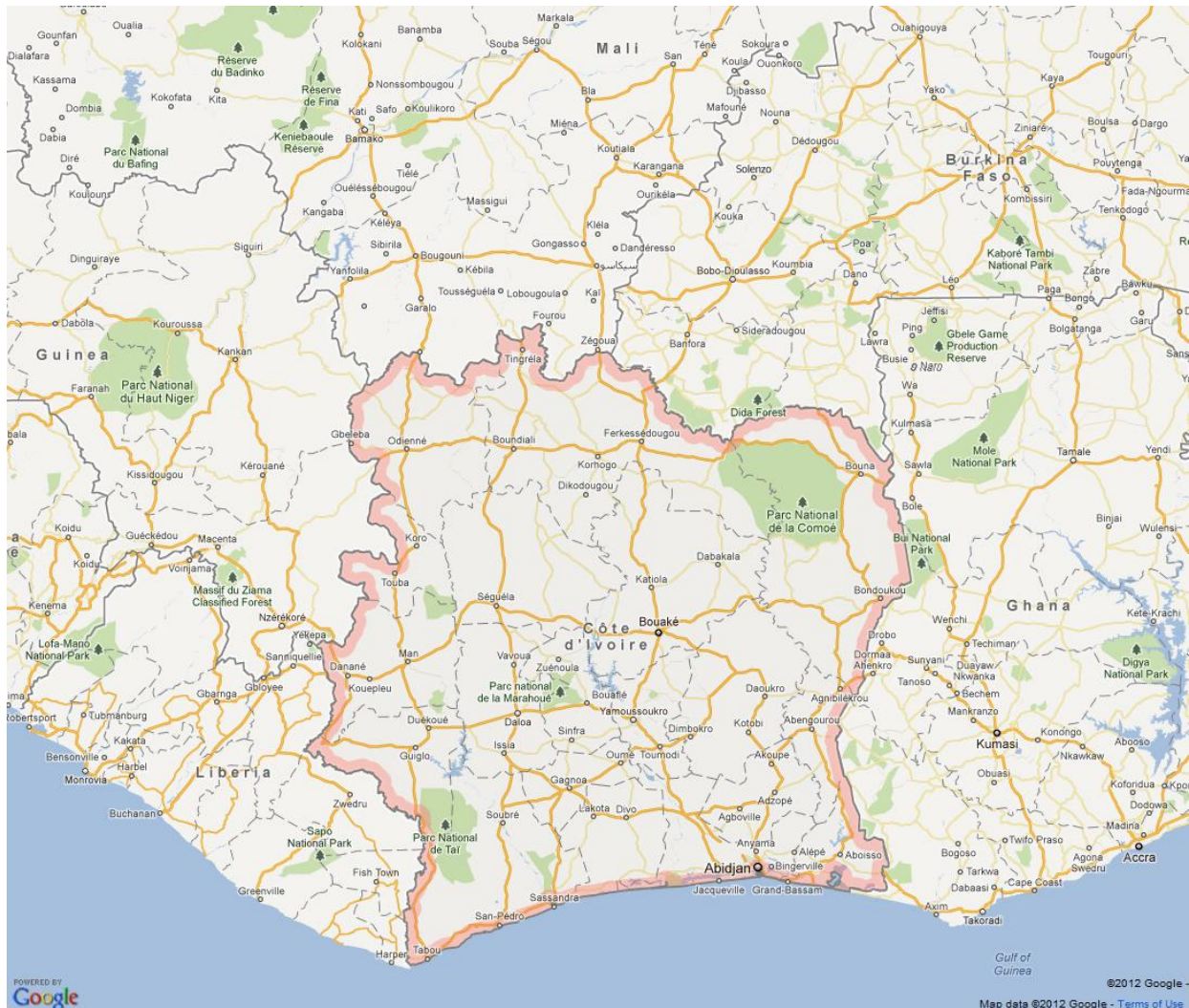
I discuss my fieldwork experience in my methodological appendix, *Appendix 1*. As I have already suggested, my identity was inseparable from both my reception in the field and the conclusions I drew, clashing against purported claims of "objectivity" within the field. These issues also coincided with First World/Third World economic imbalances, structuring my subjects' experiences as men confronted by a woman with greater economic power as well as

their ability to engage in activities that they only had access to through their contact with me. I end this dissertation with *Appendix 2*, a look at the Academy Rap Revolution: an organization in Abobo that connected the worlds of work and play so that its members could achieve marginal success in both.

Chapter 2 Miracle and Crisis

1. The semi-periphery: Discourses on the Ivoirian miracle

Map 1.0: Côte d'Ivoire and its borders



Source: Google Maps: Côte d'Ivoire, 2012.

With a growth rate above seven percent for its first twenty years of independence, scholars and policy-makers dubbed Côte d'Ivoire *le miracle Ivoirien*, or the Ivoirian miracle (Hecht, 1983; Ridler, 1985; Zartman and Delgado, 1984). This miracle had two bases, both entailing a reliance – from above and below – on foreigner involvement. From above, a close relationship to France, which acted as a steward of Ivoirian independence under President Félix Houphouët-Boigny from independence until his death in 1993, secured peace and prosperity with French military, political, administrative and financial backing (Boone, 1995; Crook, 1989; Ridler, 1985; Woods, 1988). In particular, the 1961 Defense Accords guaranteed that France would provide military support from internal and external threats, thus justifying a permanent French military base. What Côte d'Ivoire gave in return was French monopoly control

(directorial and financial) over its treasury, utilities and natural resources, in addition to a preferential trading partnership (Bouquet, 2005; Koulibaly, 2005; Mytelka, 1984). From below, under Houphouët-Boigny's open-door policy migrants from neighboring countries fueled the burgeoning cocoa plantations – Côte d'Ivoire's primary cash crop, in its heyday bringing in over a third of the country's export value and representing forty percent of global production, the most significant in the world (Bouquet, 2005) – and other cash crops such as coffee and palm oil (Konseiga, 2005; Woods, 1999), and lower-level urban trades (Bouquet, 2005; Sandbrook, 1985; Newell, 2009a). These migrants largely contributed to the country's construction and economic development (Bouquet, 2005: 182).

Aligned with dominant political economy perspectives, Côte d'Ivoire was hailed as a developmental model for the rest of Africa, one of the continent's few "emerging economic magnets" (Shaw and Grieve, 1978: 3). In the definitive book on Côte d'Ivoire of its time, Zartman and Delgado (1984: 12) say that dependency theory "assigns [its success] to Ivory Coast's¹¹ well integrated position in the Northern or world capitalist economy, operating through both the cooptation of Ivorian elites into Western economic values and circuits." Catherine Boone (1995: 445) introduces her article on "Ivoirian exceptionalism" by writing,

The republic of Ivory Coast has long been identified as an anomaly in sub-Saharan Africa, as an island of liberalism in a sea of statist and socialist regimes. Its overall economic strategy was progrowth. An open door to foreign investors and private control over commercial circuits gave Ivoirian economics a market-oriented cast. These aspects of policy set Ivory Coast apart from its neighbors, placing it in the exceptional category of African states that adopted relatively probusiness policies and achieved high growth rates in the 1960s and 1970s.¹²

Cushy relations with its former colonial power and the West more generally in addition to regional dominance led theorists to call Côte d'Ivoire a semi-peripheral state (Mingst, 1988). Wallerstein (1974a: 13) characterized the Franco-Ivoirian semi-peripheral model as "development by invitation." Zartman and Delgado (1984: 12) labelled it a "subcenter in the periphery." And Shaw and Grieve (1978: 11) called it a "sub-imperial" state that acted as a "regional hegemon."

Côte d'Ivoire's good reputation vis-à-vis global finance institutions and the Franco-Ivoirian relationship secured an artificial prosperity into the 1980s despite steep drops in the price of cocoa – which in 1989 was worth twenty-five percent of its 1978 value – and the highest per capita debt in sub-Saharan Africa (Crook, 1990). Unable to pay a debt that rose from \$4.7 billion in 1970 to \$7.5 billion in 1980, global finance institutions implemented structural adjustment policies in 1981 and a major currency devaluation in 1994 that cut in half the value of Ivoirian exports, thus precipitating the contemporary Ivoirian crisis. Over the next decade three

¹¹ Ivory Coast is the English translation for Côte d'Ivoire although the latter is common in English as well, as with my use.

¹² This early optimism regarding Côte d'Ivoire's adherence to liberal economic models was short-lived however, ending once analysts began to take a closer look at how Ivoirian growth was actually manifesting (Woods, 1988); a point which becomes significant in my argument regarding the "Francophone" bureaucratic model to follow.

additional, increasingly severe austerity programs were instituted, stripping the Ivoirian government of its substantial public sector and much of its sovereignty (Bouquet, 2005: 242-247). Crook (1990: 669) says, “Historians will no doubt try to discover how it was that the I.M.F. and the World Bank allowed such a manifestly impossible austerity programme to be announced in February 1990...did they want the whole regime to collapse?” Between 1988 and 1997 the World Bank changed its classification of Côte d’Ivoire from a middle-income country to a low-income country (N’Diaye, 2001: 113), and in 1997 a World Bank study estimated that thirty-seven percent of Ivoirians were living below the poverty line (Bouquet, 2005: 247). In 2010, Côte d’Ivoire’s public debt represented sixty-three percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) and it had an external debt of \$11.52 billion (CIA World Factbook: Côte d’Ivoire, 2012). In 2011, Côte d’Ivoire ranked 170 out of 187 countries with a Human Development Index (HDI) ranking of 0.400 which was below the sub-Saharan African regional average of 0.463. While Côte d’Ivoire has seen a minor improvement in its HDI since 1980, its rate of improvement has been slower than both sub-Saharan Africa’s (of which Côte d’Ivoire was slightly higher in 1980) and what the United Nations considers “low human development” (UNDP, 2011). In the past decade, per capita GDP has averaged -1.7 percent (World Bank, 2011).

The national economy remains predominantly agricultural, employing sixty-eight percent of the population (CIA World Factbook: Côte d’Ivoire, 2012). Although official unemployment rates in the global South are questionable, the Ivoirian National Institute of Statistics (2008) cites urban unemployment at 27.4 percent. According to the CIA World Factbook: Côte d’Ivoire (2012) national unemployment rates are unavailable but could be as high as forty to fifty percent as a consequence of the civil war.¹³

For the middle class man, success under the first Ivoirian government depended on connections to the state while adopting an urbane sensibility was part of the natural progression of the *évolué* identity. An emerging middle¹⁴ class of wealthy plantation owners and bureaucrats had strong familial and other close ties to the political leadership, if not being “one and the same” (Woods, 1988: 109). Owning land in rural areas did not entail obligations to cultivate, and migrants commonly tended the plantations. New graduates, educated with hefty state-sponsored scholarships, staked their futures in national examinations that placed them, depending on some combination of skill, money and connections, somewhere in the Ivoirian bureaucracy, where after a lifetime of work they expected to retire with generous pensions. As a real path to power, the civil service provided entry into the highest echelons of government, such that one analyst dubbed Côte d’Ivoire the “Republic of good students” and the “civil servant republic” (Crook, 1989: 216). For the Houphouët-Boigny government, hefty urban subsidies were a major component of placating the politically powerful Abidjanais constituency, and the population came to expect such support (Cohen, 1984).

This sure path to middle class life fell apart for the neoliberal generation. Freund (2007: 182-183) writes, “In the good times, education, access to the civil service, the move to town, and ultimately Abidjan was the golden road to success, to becoming a real *patron*¹⁵ to one’s friends,

¹³ See *Chapter 3* for a discussion on Abidjan’s informal economy.

¹⁴ The emerging middle class never constituted the bulk of African postcolonial society; instead, while not the elite they were among the relatively privileged (Lindsay, 2003b; Ferguson, 1999).

¹⁵ Literally, “boss,” a French equivalent of the “big man.”

family, and ethnic group for more and more Ivorians; now the road was virtually cut off.” While for three decades the civil service was “the principal purveyor of jobs in the Ivoirian modern sector,” in the 2000s it provided around 5.5 percent of formal sector employment (République de Côte d’Ivoire, 2007: 176-177). In 1991 the World Bank demanded a one-quarter reduction in the civil service (Bouquet, 2005: 207). From 1980 to 2005 the number of state bureaucrats increased by about half¹⁶ although the population nearly tripled (République de Côte d’Ivoire, 2007). Wages were also notably less impressive: by the mid-1990s the real salary of civil servants was twenty-eight percent that of their 1985 earnings (Bouquet, 2005: 247). Considering that in 1980 the state was by far the largest investor in the economy with fifty-six percent of Ivoirian investment (ibid: 100), cuts to state workers took a toll on the entire national welfare. A member of the “sacrificed generation,” the story of the would-be middle class man today roughly parallels that of his father’s generation up through university, after which, despite a degree from a once-respected university, no job in government opens to him. Instead, he waits and waits, often a decade or more, for work that does not exist.

The economic crisis was compounded by political crisis: a coup d’état in 1999 and a civil war in 2002 that left the country split between a rebel-controlled north and a government controlled south. The north-south divide reflects the country’s unequal development since independence, with the more fertile south home to cash crops as well as to Abidjan, a major West African port city and economic and cultural hub. Not only were northerners scripted out of the narrative of the Ivoirian miracle, but they also largely shared the ethnic, cultural and religious identities of migrants from neighboring countries who provided the hard labor to make the miracle possible but served as scapegoats for the country’s economic woes.

As part of the continuing war efforts, in 2004 the Ivoirian government bombed a French military base in the rebel capital of Bouaké. The government claimed it was an accident, but the French did not take well to the loss of seven French soldiers and one American civilian. In retaliation they destroyed the Ivoirian Air Force. Already tense over decades of Franco-Ivoirian neocolonial relations and bitter over debt and austerity measures, the Gbagbo regime and the Ivoirian people, especially riled up by the nationalist youth group the *Jeunes Patriotes* [Young Patriots], were furious. They had previously claimed that France was covertly funding the rebellion and they argued that France’s response was heavy-handed, arrogant, and colonialist affront to Ivoirian sovereignty. Gaining sensationalized international media attention, Ivoirians took to the streets to violently protest Franco-Ivoirian relations. The French military opened fire on the protestors, killing twenty by its official count. The tense aftermath left an atmosphere of emergency evacuations with French and other expatriates afraid for their lives; the majority fled the city permanently. After this incident the international community vilified Côte d’Ivoire, such that Mercer Human Resources Consulting rated Abidjan second only to Baghdad as the most dangerous city for expatriates (Skogseth, 2006: 21), and the West Africa Lonely Planet (2006: 256) gave potential visitors the menacing warning that “British Foreign & Commonwealth Office advises against all travel to only two countries: Somalia and Côte d’Ivoire.” In these ways the very bases of the Ivoirian miracle: regional migrant labor and close Franco-Ivoirian relations, became the foci for populist aggression in the context of the crisis.

The first elections in a decade were held in November 2010. They brought back the same rivalry of the 2000 elections between President Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara. In 2000,

¹⁶ In real numbers, the number of civil servants increased from almost 74,000 in 1980 to almost 105,000 in 2005.

Ouattara, a northerner, had been disqualified on the grounds that he was not an Ivoirian citizen. In 2010 Ouattara won. Gbagbo refused to concede to the results declared by international observers and his personally-appointed electoral body named him victor. This led to an upsurge in violence; northern rebels and the international community, with France at the helm, intervened to overthrow Gbagbo, thus confirming southern-based nationalist conspiracies accusing Ouattara of supporting the rebels with covert aid from France and the United Nations. Gbagbo was arrested in April 2011 and Ouattara has since been recognized as the new President, but bouts of violence, fears of instability, and deepened civil discord persist.

2. Decadent Abidjan

Abidjan is too large and too complex a city to say that globalisation has finished it off; its capabilities remain large compared to almost any other West African city. But there is no question that this classic city of import substitution, of the strong state, of peasant export crops, and of the neo-colonial bargain of 1960 is reeling from the impact of a turn inwards. This turn inwards must be related to the decline and presently limited prospects of the previous economic system that created the Ivorian miracle. (Freund, 2007: 185)

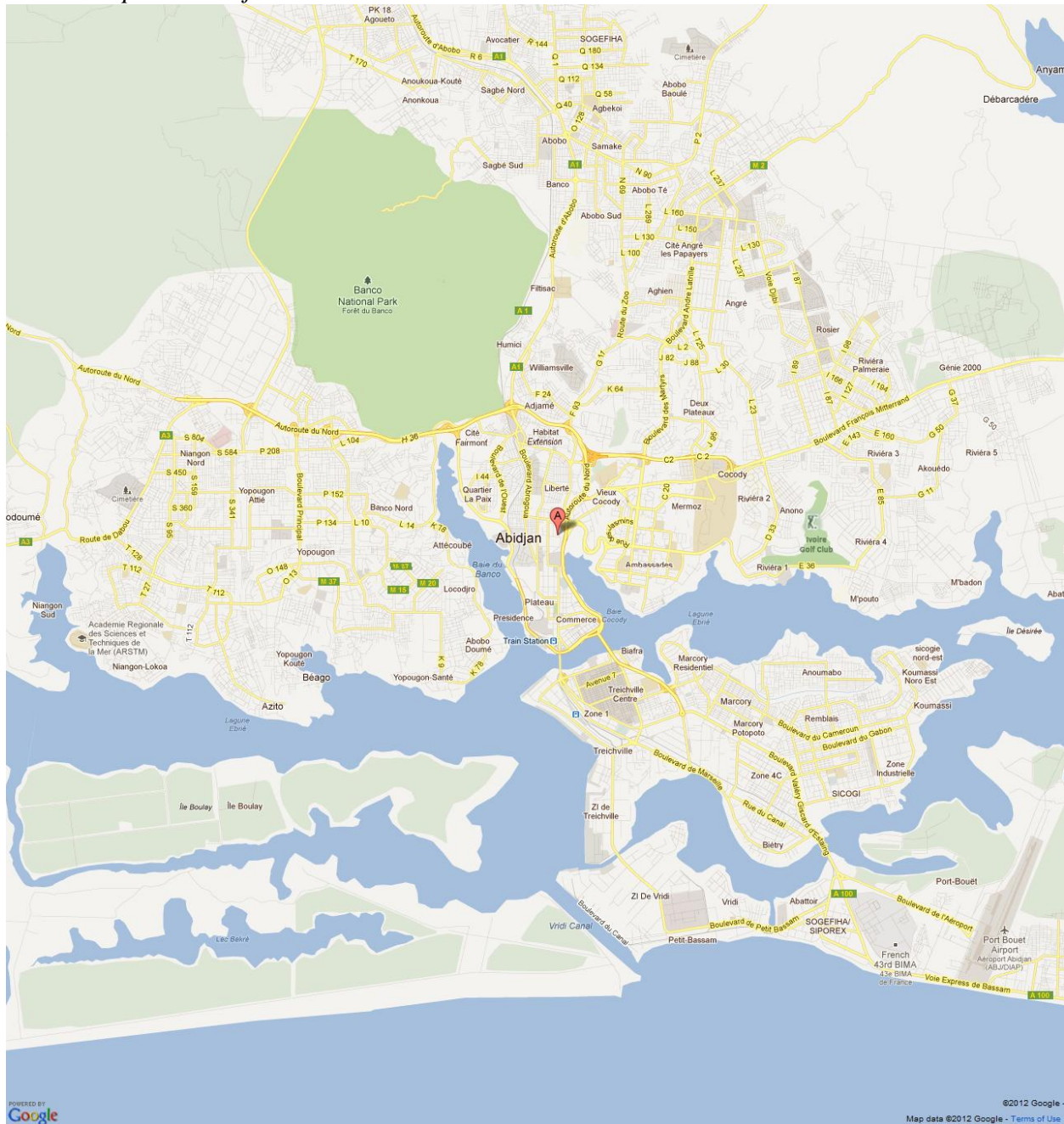
A predominantly rural territory before European settlement, Abidjan was free to develop along the lines imagined first by colonial officials and later the Ivoirian administration. As common throughout Africa, “Urban planning was considered a strategic instrument for determining how European and African political, economic, and social relationships should evolve” (Cohen, 1984: 58-59). The land on which Abidjan is situated consisted of a scattering of villages at the start of the twentieth century. In 1920 the French established it as a city because of its suitable potential as a railway terminus; its development as a deepwater shipping port to facilitate inland and transatlantic trade in 1950 “confirm[ed] Abidjan’s location as the core of colonial development...in French West Africa” (Freund, 2007: 177). Abidjan became the Ivoirian capital in 1934 and remains the seat of government and the country’s primary city despite the fact that Houphouët-Boigny designated his home village of Yamoussoukro as the official capital in 1983. Freund (ibid: 178) notes that “a striking feature of Abidjan lay in the presence of numerous French people and the apparent replication of a French provincial city,” echoing the layout of “settler cities of East and South Africa” that intended to create segregated districts for the colonizers. Thus for example, besides just intending a separation between Ivoirian and French residential districts, planners intentionally left absent bridges connecting the two in a city naturally split by lagoons (Cohen, 1984: 59). Since independence, Abidjan has been Côte d’Ivoire’s unrivalled economic and cultural center and largest city. It now claims an estimated population of slightly over four million out of a national population of a little under twenty million (UN Population Division, 2009).¹⁷

“Decadent” is an apt word to characterize Abidjan. Decadence pertains to both the excessive indulgence the Ivoirian state lavished on Abidjan during its heyday as well as to much of the city’s current condition of disrepair. Minimal funds go into rehabilitating the roads that are regularly inundated during the annual rainy season, towering apartment complexes are stained

¹⁷ This number is likely much higher due to the significant amount of informal settlements in Abidjan, especially since the destabilization of the country’s north after the 2002 civil war.

and crumbling and putrid rubbish accumulates on the sides of major highways like added infrastructure.

Map 2.0: Abidjan



Source: Google Maps: Abidjan, 2012.

Despite its decline Abidjan continues to boast a sizable foreign population which stood at twenty-nine percent in 1997 (Bouquet, 2005: 180), consisting mostly of regional migrants predominantly from Burkina Faso and Mali, but also Lebanese and North Africans, French, and a small hodgepodge population primarily working for international organizations and non-

governmental organizations (NGOs). Abidjan is spatially segregated by class as well as the generally coinciding categories of race, nationality/ethnicity, and religion. Though obvious and exacerbated as a result of the crisis, segregation is not however excessively rigid and in the elite *communes* especially, other categories are less salient. Reflecting the development patterns of the colonial period wherein, despite initial ideas of segregation, the French rewarded workers with plots of land in enviable locations within Abidjan, poorer settlements sprung up adjacent to wealthy neighborhoods to provide ready labor, and the increasingly Ivoirian bourgeois were often found living in mixed-class neighborhoods (Freund, 2007: 178-179). Thus the older core *communes* have extraordinarily nice neighborhoods a stones' throw from slums. Gated communities are more imposing than authentic: those who know how to navigate the locale move fluidly in and out.¹⁸

The French expatriate community now predominantly lives, eats and shops in Zone 4, an enclave near the industrial sector on the airport side of town that guarantees a quick escape if necessary.¹⁹ However, while Zone 4 is “the” destination for bars, restaurants, clubs and expatriate sociality – at expatriate prices – more generally it is absent in the everyday peripheral Abidjanais imaginary. Their references are by contrast Cocody and Plateau, the exclusive districts colonial planners intended for the white settlers (Freund, 2007: 178). Cocody comprises a set of elite, expansive residential *communes* including Cocody proper and the Riviera neighborhoods. The French and American embassy, the presidential residence, and homes of wealthy locals in addition to some wealthy but mostly middle-class expatriates are in Cocody. Plateau is Abidjan’s administrative district, figuring as the pinnacle of Ivoirian and more generally West African urbanism. Predominantly a hub of activity during the day with government offices and shops oriented at wealthy customers, Plateau empties out at night save for the hotels and scattering of restaurants catering to business travelers. Unlike Cocody where the democratic flair of the periphery appears side by side with amenities catering to a distinguished clientele Plateau is markedly stale, with controlled land use, minimal impromptu activity on the streets or sidewalks, and well-printed, formalized signage and advertising.

While wealthy neighborhoods are oases of civil and infrastructural upkeep and central-city *communes* remain impressively cosmopolitan, the urban periphery now constitutes the bulk

¹⁸ Two examples will suffice. Firstly, a residential enclave in Deux Plateaux closes its gates late in the evening. However, once leaving that area with a friend who lived there, he took me on a “shortcut” through what had the distinct feel of a rural village. Directly behind these beautiful residences and accessible with an insider’s knowledge, little had I known that an entire community lived in shanty-style conditions. Secondly, the neighborhood in Riviéra 3 where I lived during preliminary investigations in 2006 and 2007 increased its security with gated entrances upon my return in 2008. But asking a security guard how I could get in after the gates had closed at night, he simply walked me twenty meters past the gate to an opening up a knoll, directly off the main road.

Locals explained to me that the proliferation of shanties throughout the city and not simply on the periphery has been a result of the crisis: as people could no longer afford a home and a work site, they began living where they worked.

¹⁹ Zone 4 became the main French expatriate enclave after anti-French demonstrations in November, 2004.

of Abidjanais space and population. Though accurate, up-to-date figures are lacking, locals say that Abidjan's population has doubled since the civil war, as many came from the interior for security reasons and to maintain their livelihoods: activity elsewhere in the country, particularly the north, has stalled or remains largely in the control of rebel fiefs. However, many companies in Abidjan also shut down and the substantial expatriate population that ran businesses and hired domestic workers has departed. The demographic upsurge simultaneous with vanished employment opportunities has compounded the unemployment crisis and led to a sharp increase in informal practices in a short time. Therefore despite a historically impressive industrial sector and civil service compared to other West African cities, the majority of Abidjanais try their luck in small-scale, service-oriented petty trades. Most recent figures indicate that the informal economy employs an estimated seventy-five percent of Abidjan's working population (Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine, 2001-2002); these numbers are certainly higher now after a decade of political conflict. Once-strong distinctions affiliating trade and nationality are now blurred with residents doing what is necessary to make ends meet, and with minimal necessary investment. Apart from Plateau, the typical cityscape consists of a predictable assortment of vegetable and food prep stands, hair salons and barbershops, *maquis*, carpenters, tailors, repair shops, clothing boutiques, houseware vendors, bakeries, internet cafes that also serve as international phoning stations, mobile phone "cabins," photocopy shops, stations for various forms of public transport, churches, "Lebanese shops" [small-to-mid-sized marts often owned by Lebanese expatriates], and a growing number of banks and Western Unions.

The disparate characteristics of the central city and the *quartiers populaires* [literally "popular," or peripheral neighborhoods] reflect the "cultural feeling" of Abidjan's "*maquis*-restaurants and cuisine, its distinctive French argot and its cosmopolitan character" (Freund, 2007: 180, emphasis in original), qualities that for a half-century have existed side by side without appearing to have much to do with one another. Of a visit to Côte d'Ivoire in search of a romantic longing to discover "France in Africa," V.S. Naipaul (1984: 80) writes that although he knew this notion was largely fantasy, "I hadn't expected that in the Ivory Coast France and Africa would still be like separate ideas." My research sites represent these two sides of Abidjan: in addition to the many street corners where mobile street vendors hawked their goods, I conducted most of my fieldwork in three *communes*: central Plateau, the site of the *Sorbonne*, and peripheral Yopougon and Abobo, where most of the vendors lived and socialized.²⁰

The sense of an Ivoirian miracle is tangibly validated in the urban core. Plateau's bygone splendor remains impressively intact, with tree-lined boulevards accommodating high-end boutiques, five-star hotels and glittering buildings headquartering government bureaus, international banks and international developmental organizations. Most administrative business requires a trip to Plateau from one of the many outlying *communes* in the *quartiers populaires*, and each visit reinforces the notion that Abidjan maintains the boastful sense of modernity lost to other African cities. Further, the migrants from neighboring countries who continue to flood this economic capital greatly reinforce residents' sense of Ivoirian exceptionalism, even as Paris and

²⁰ There are a number of other *communes* where I spent minimal time. The biggest and most well-known, yet largely absent in my discussion, are Treichville and Marcory. Sasha Newell conducted his fieldwork in Treichville, and AbdouMaliq Simone discusses Treichville in-depth as well. At the time of my research and among the population I studied, however, the *communes* which figured most prominently were Plateau, Cocody, Adjamé, Yopougon and Abobo, so this is where I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork.

Atlanta are highly sought-after alternatives. In short, Plateau affords the ability to envision an “imagined world community” of early independence despite political and economic exclusions (c.f. Ferguson, 2006: 166). Thus claims around an authentic Ivoirian identity involve an assertion of place absent in other manifestations of the African urban crisis: Abidjanais pride is potent.

Yopougon represents the nucleus of Abidjanais culture and Abobo symbolizes the depth of its poverty. So outlying are these *communes* that neither makes it onto AbdouMaliq Simone’s (2010: 200) map of Abidjan his recent book on peripheral urbanism. Yopougon is somewhat built up, with a scattering of multi-story office towers and intersecting paved roads. But it is largely characterized by unsigned, unnumbered neighborhoods of shanties, or *bidonvilles*. The Abidjan for Abidjanais, this *commune* is memorialized in Ivoirian Marguerite Abouet’s *Aya de Yopougon* comic books which keep domestic and expatriate Ivoirians smiling with accounts of life in the metropolis. As a burgeoning site of Ivoirian cultural production, Yopougon’s *Rue de Princess* hosts a dizzying array of *maquis* blasting Ivoirian music interspersed with hip-hop, neon signage, and adjacent food stalls that tempt customers with succulent smells of grilling fish and chicken. On weekends throngs of savvy Ivoirian party-seekers in their evening finest turn this thoroughfare into a pedestrian-only space.

Abobo figures as the target of derisory jokes about hard-knock Ivoirian urbanity. Abobo’s many makeshift settlements make it the city’s most populated though undercounted/unaccounted for *commune*. Roundabouts on Abobo’s main road serve as heavily used public spaces where florescent puddles of urine with remnants of rotting fruit and the occasional lost sandal become breeding grounds for malarial mosquitoes. Here men can be seen relieving themselves freely within meters of women squatted on low footstools peddling wilting vegetables, vendors selling first world, second-hand clothing spread out on muddy tarps, and chickens pecking liberally at whatever nutritious refuse they find. Beyond the central paved roads – escapes out – dusty dirt roads wander for miles. Large segments of Abobo are beyond the city’s official parameters and thus unapologetically lack basic amenities associated with urban life, including electricity, potable water, and sanitation services. Abobo is a hub for the poorest Ivoirians and migrants from neighboring countries, while clashes between them only adds noise to the many complaints going unheard on this outer periphery.

3. Women in contemporary Côte d’Ivoire

Côte d’Ivoire is a relatively progressive state with regards to West African norms for gender equality. In 2010 the life expectancy for women was sixty-one years compared to fifty-eight years for men (UN World Statistics Pocketbook: Côte d’Ivoire, 2010). Forty percent of secondary school children are girls and one-third of post-secondary school students are women. In 2000 thirty-nine percent of women compared to sixty-one percent of men were literate (CIA World Factbook: Côte d’Ivoire, 2012). In 2010 women occupied nine percent of seats in Parliament (UN World Statistics Pocketbook: Côte d’Ivoire, 2010). The ratio of female-to-male participants in the labor force was .619 in 2011, and the overall UN measurement for gender inequality [gender inequality index] stood at .655 (UNDP Human Development Report, 2011).

Based on my empirical observations, Abidjanais sociality was not heavily restrictive on women’s self-presentation, although dramatic differences may be seen by neighborhood, and as in elsewhere in Africa, the introduction of Salafism aid and other forms of support from the Middle East has led to a turn toward a more conservative and misogynist interpretation of Islam. Although most peripheral women wear fitted tank tops and *pagne* wraps, it is not taboo for a woman to be seen out on the town in a dress baring ample leg and cleavage or low, thong-baring

jeans, and popular songs give shameless odes to the female *derrière*. Women of privilege, often well-traveled, may take special liberties to embrace hip Western style. As per Newell's (2009b) discussion of gender dynamics in Abidjan, locals describe the city as fast and materialistic, with a money-based hierarchy dictating which men have multiple girlfriends and which men have none. On the other hand, it is common to hear of a woman dating multiple men to meet her financial needs. Such preconceptions – and reality – regarding male and female behaviors relate to a colonial system that granted men sole dominion over wages. This structure established interpersonal dynamics at odds both with indigenous notions of gendered labor divisions that permitted women with means to achieve financial self-sufficiency, and with the structure of the neoliberal economy that inhibits the masculine producer-provider ideal (Ferguson, 1999).

Chapter 3 Work and nationalism in postcolonial Abidjan

1. Nationality, work, and idealized masculinities

1.1. Working and national identities

Because Abidjan and Ivoirian territory generally were sparsely populated, Houphouët-Boigny's policy of importing labor was actually a continuation of French colonial policy. Cohen (1984: 61) notes that Abidjan's port and industrial zone created demands for urban labor which the French solved not by training Ivoirians but instead "promot[ing] the recruitment of foreign Africans into the country to perform skilled jobs, including the administrative sector....The resulting patterns of employment, along with growing French presence in the colony, led to a situation where most urban jobs by the end of the 1950s were occupied by non-Ivorians" – leading, for example, to anti-foreigner rioting and the expulsion of 20,000 Africans in 1958. At independence, Ivoirians secured their place in government while former colonizers and regional migrants remained fixtures of Abidjanais demographics.

Hence for the everyday Ivoirian living in the country's south and particularly in Abidjan, a direct consequence of the Ivoirian miracle was the tangible sense of their country as a regional hub, within which the Ivoirian identity was intimately linked to nationalist-*cum*-social hierarchies (Newell, 2005). French nationals were a strong presence: while the white settler population of Abidjan was around 10,000 before independence, after 1960 approximately 50,000 French personnel were in the city (Crook, 1989: 216). Abidjan's overall population size was 180,000 at independence (Freund, 2007), and 330,000 by 1965 (Kouamé 2003). Thus the proportion of French citizens in this burgeoning city effectively tripled, with nearly one in seven residents being French in the initial post-independence period. During this time regional immigrants comprised twenty-eight percent of the total Ivoirian population (Nyankawindemera and Zanou, 2001)²¹ and a quarter of its workforce (Sandbrook 1985). In 1970, foreign Africans made up half of the city's population (Cohen, 1984: 66), and as noted above, comprised twenty-nine percent of Abidjan's population at the turn of the century.

In 1963 Abidjan's male-female ratio was 1.22, substantially higher than in other urban centers such as Accra, Dakar, or Brazzaville, indicating "the attraction of job opportunities perceived throughout the region and the ability of Ivory Coast economy (sic) to generate incomes several times higher than those found in poorer neighboring states" (Cohen, 1984: 62). A man's worth related to his position in a work-based national hierarchy that sandwiched Ivoirians below the French but above regional migrants. For example, French technocrats and businessmen, and Burkinabé, Malian or Guinean chauffeurs (among other low-end trades) represented hegemonic and marginal masculinities, respectively. The former gave living form to the aspired *évolué* while the latter offered an example of the provincial, backwards native. Nestled between these extra-nationals, "Ivorians exerted dominance in general in government work and in the formal working class" (Freund, 2007: 180). Within this schema labor was a crucial index of class and culture, such that menial work represented personal debasement for those Ivoirians pushed into performing it (Newell, 2005). Newell found that Abidjanais called their city *Yere City*, meaning

²¹ Most recent statistics, unfortunately from 1998, put this number at twenty-six percent (République de Côte d'Ivoire 2007).

a civilized city. The Nouchi²² term *yere*, or “seeing,” is directly contrasted to *gaou*, meaning “ignorant,” and refers to migrants, considered “undeveloped” or of “low value” (2009: 166). Thus Abidjan was the city for the civilized, not the backwards migrants. Ivoirians set the cosmopolitan standard by proximity to French culture, such that the defining feature of the modern Ivoirian identity was Frenchness (ibid: 167).

Playing off of these divides and the Houphouët-Boigny development model more generally, the Gbagbo regime’s primary concern was foreign interference. There was already a steady undercurrent of xenophobic sentiment since Ivoirian independence (Crook, 1997; Daddieh, 2001; Konseiga, 2005; Sandbrook, 1985) and even before (Banégas, 2006; Cohen, 1984) which intensified under second President Henri Konan Bédié’s electoral rallying call of *ivoirité* (Banégas, 2006; Bouquet, 2005).²³ And in the context of economic decline, Ivoirians had

²² Abidjanais dialect fusing French, local languages and the occasional English word. For a lengthy discussion on the origins of *Nouchi* and the men who speak it, see Newell (2009a).

²³ *Ivoirité* as a rhetorical device has shifted to that of the “patriot” (Banégas, 2006). However, *ivoirité* was the central framework for Ivoirian politics in the 1990s and early 2000s after Bédié introduced the term in the 1995 electoral debates (Touré, 1996). Riding off of the anti-foreigner backlash following Houphouët-Boigny’s open-door policy of regional migration and targeting the exclusion of former Prime Minister Allassane Ouattara (a northerner of questioned Ivoirian citizenship) as presidential candidate, Bédié coined *ivoirité* as a measure of “authentic” Ivoirianness. In the 2000 elections, the *ivoirité* zeal corresponded with changed citizenship regulations that excluded many long-term residents and northern Ivoirians with family histories that crossed national borders (Skogseth, 2006).

Picking up where Bédié left off under the auspices of a “patriotic movement,” the Gbagbo regime caricatured Allassane Ouattara, his most serious presidential opponent, as the anti-patriot, representing everyone – the French, immigrants, northerners – except the deserving, authentic Ivoirian populace. He asserted that Ouattara and his powerful foreign allies were clandestinely behind the 2002 civil war and would not rest until Ivoirians lost all claims to Ivoirian territory and resources, political power and financial assets.

Like migrant scapegoating elsewhere in the world, focusing on an “other” is a simple way to garner political support. The exclusions that resulted from these changes decreased state accountability to peripheral populations in the economic context of diminished resources. As a “politics of belonging,” African regimes find their interests better served to produce “autochthons” than to invest in the more difficult project of “nation-building” (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2001: 161). Therefore in contemporary Africa, constituents have begun to rearticulate conflicts between ethnic groups into issues of citizenship. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh say, “A striking aspect of recent developments in Africa is that democratization seems to trigger a general obsession with autochthony and ethnic citizenship invariably defined against ‘strangers’ – that is, against all those who ‘do not really belong’” (ibid: 159). For more on autochthony see also Geschiere and Jackson (2006).

In Côte d’Ivoire, the statistical between “foreigner” and “citizen” is illuminating. Whereas the Ivoirian government’s *Côte d’Ivoire en chiffres* (2007) reports that as of 1998 (its most recent year of collecting data) twenty-six percent of the population was foreign, in 2005 the United

begun to decry French neocolonial relations wherein they achieved a short-lived prosperity in exchange for French monopoly control over Ivoirian resources and business (Bouquet, 2005). Gbagbo instrumentalized hostility toward Houphouët-Boigny's cozy ties to France and picked up Bédié's autochthonous movement²⁴ asserting title to southern Ivoirian wealth and distancing the country's successes from immigrant labor and that of and northern Ivoirians who tended to share immigrants' culture, ethnicity and religion (Banégas, 2006; Daddieh, 2001).

The patriotic movement reverberated across Ivoirian society, creating new claims to entitlement. Because the Ivoirian state is young and without the sophisticated documentation systems of wealthier nations, "authentic" citizenship is a malleable concept that southern-based constituents used to exclude northerners and foreigners. For example, many residents lack identification papers, and this alongside a name ethnically contiguous with those from neighboring countries can lead to the denial of one's Ivoirian citizenship irrespective of whether the individual in question is in fact Ivoirian by the legal standards.²⁵ Additionally, the burden of proof that both of your parents are Ivoirian-born is near-impossible, especially given the fact that many parents were born before Ivoirian independence, and thus before Côte d'Ivoire was even a country.

1.2. Changing idealized masculinities: Francophone to Anglophone

In the context of economic decline and political conflict, the Abidjanais neoliberal generation²⁶ contends with what it means to be Ivoirian from the perspective of the "miracle"

Nations Population Division reported that immigrants made up twelve percent of the country's population, with only a 3.7 percent decline from 2000. The discrepancy can be accounted for by the fact that by the turn of the century almost half of the country's foreigners were born in Côte d'Ivoire (Bouquet, 2005: 182).

²⁴The autochthonous movement is in sharp contrast with West Africa's history of continual migration flows before and after colonization (Konseiga, 2005).

There are four major ethnic groups in Côte d'Ivoire, all of which spill into neighboring countries: the Kwa and Krou in the south and the Gour and Mandé in the north. The Baoulé are of the Akan, a subset of the Kwa (Skogseth, 2006). Houphouët-Boigny was a Baoulé, as was Bédié; Gbagbo is Bété, of the Krou; Ouattara is Dioula (an ethnic group *and* euphemism for "stranger"), of the Mandé.

²⁵ Newell, for example, notes instances of those with foreign-sounding names having their identity papers ripped up by authorities (2009a), a phenomenon I also heard described during my fieldwork.

²⁶ I use the term *neoliberal generation* to denote the Abidjanais population that has come of age in the second generation of an independent Côte d'Ivoire: in the aftermath of the Ivoirian miracle, the neoliberal generation faces instead the crisis, a time in which neoliberal globalization had already diminished the size of the state, the value of Ivoirian exports, and the availability of job opportunities. However, as I demonstrate in my empirical chapters, this generation nonetheless espouses neoliberal values.

and the “crisis,” and independent of French social and cultural domination. Likewise, after long-denigrating the immigrants who fueled the economy from the bottom, participation in these sectors signals a humiliating plunge for modern Ivoirian masculine subjectivity. Thus in addition to important continuities, the Ivoirian decline, rise of the patriotic movement, and shift away from France more generally have generated new discursive strategies around what constitutes an ideal masculine identity.

In contending with what it means to be an Ivoirian with a stake in the Ivoirian miracle narrative but independent of the empire that supported this sub-imperial identity, men supplant the *évolué* Francophone with an Anglophone businessman ideal. This serves a doubly affirming purpose: it negates an unrealizable model for another that is nevertheless hegemonic in an era of neoliberal globalization. Moreover the entrepreneurial free market man is a not-too-distant approximation of the unattached, self-reliant informal sector worker. For participants in an overwhelmingly informal economy, men may glorify their activities as part of a *business* model.

As a counter to the southern nationalist patriotic movement, men of questioned nationality assert belonging along other scales: while not contesting their veracity of their Ivoirian origins, they make claims on the city and the world via being fluent in Abidjanais vernacular and by and being black men of a shared African diaspora. The former is a precursor to the latter, as Abidjan’s role as a regional cosmopolitan hotspot validates its self-perception as an important node among cities of Africa and the diaspora. In this way Abidjanais may view their metropolis as an appropriate location to enact fantasies of iconic black media masculinity. Men may simultaneously articulate a cross-national narrative of struggle, one in which “Pain is the generative principle of the habitus of the informal sector” (Weiss, 2009: 123). This malleability to which I referred in *Chapter 1* is particularly salient for the image of the black American man whose nationality suggests hegemony and his race, counterhegemony. Media portrayals of black American masculinity appropriate and merge these contrasting identities such that he espouses a self-stylized business identity: iconic athletes or performers who achieve immense success without adhering to normative avenues to success, namely education and a structured work history. Without replicating the look or underlying suggestion of a generic white businessman, his adherence to the corporate worlds of music and sports and his hyper-consumerism are nonetheless mainstream. Thus he offers the dual appeal of business and style, so that these two themes consistently appear in *Nouchi* as English words: “black,” “ghetto,” “nigga,” and “job,” “business,” “VIP,” and “time is money,” for example. When expressing appreciation for a particular icon in the black diaspora, the standard Abidjanais man would either tell me, “I like his style” or, “I like how he does his business,” if not the two together. For nationalist Ivoirians turning away from Francophone norms as well as for everyday down-and-out men, the Anglophone model of business, often used interchangeably with blackness, offered a convenient alternative.

In the sections that follow I consider how the neoliberal generation’s failure to meet expectations of Francophone civility, namely the rise of informality, constitutes a feminization of urban space and of men’s employment strategies. I overview major theoretical paradigms concerning modernity in the African city, arguing that one thread proposes African urbanity as

I contrast the neoliberal generation to the *neocolonial generation* which I use to refer to the first generation of an independent Côte d’Ivoire, one that pursued national and individual success based on proximity to France and French values regarding work and the large role of the state as a developmental strategy.

deficient and the other as a *deviation* from what constitutes modern forms of urban sociality. I argue that while men from the neocolonial generation were concerned with how Abidjanais modernity represented a deficiency from the Francophone ideal, men from the neoliberal generation, in seeking an Anglophone alternative, propose a deviating Abidjanais modernity.

2. Urban informality: Discourses of the feminized city

Probably the most widely used description of life in the African crisis city, informality is a frequent victim of dualist characterizations that portray African urbanity as deficient or deviating from a normative way that urbanities elsewhere live, work, and socialize (Meagher, 1995). Locally, this dualistic perspective classifies peripheral Abidjanais men's informal economic activities as feminine and non-work, thereby resulting in economic marginalization and social rejection. Ananya Roy and Nezar AlSayyad rightly propose a non-dichotomous vision of informality, calling it instead an "organizing logic" that "operates through the constant negotiability of value and the unmapping of space" (2004: 5). Acknowledging this fruitful perspective, in this chapter I however highlight gendered binary characterizations of informality and the African crisis city more generally. Such characterizations, disparaging the livelihoods of informal actors, influence masculine subjectivities. Men's search for legitimacy to counter their stigma affects how they use urban public space and how they articulate their role in the public sphere.

The city being the central site for the colonial project in Africa, a gendered analysis holds rich potential for demonstrating the incompleteness of this project in addition to the encroaching feminization of the city as people survive via informalized mechanisms. Persistent colonial approaches to urban planning contain strong anti-informality sentiments (Skinner, 2008: 18). A gendered analysis pays particular attention to the value-laden dualisms that colonial domination established and which linger in popular perceptions of the crisis. Further, it explicitly links these elements of the crisis city to men's responses. If in the colonial context a man's place on the social evolutionary ladder made him modern, in the neoliberal crisis city his involvement in informal or formal activities fits this criteria.

2.1. The African crisis city: Deficiency and deviation

In colonial Africa, legal standards decreed that citizens lived in the city and subjects in the rural areas (Mamdani, 1996). The African city was thus a special site of the *mission civilisatrice*. "Regulating the city became a map for regulating the territory of colonial jurisdiction" (Simone, 2001: 20). Segregation in the Francophone colonial city was qualified, and the French allowed the African select, those *évolué* who in livelihood and lifestyle approximated the *colon*, to reside in the urban core.²⁷ Of Abidjan, Simone says, "the geography of the city facilitated the development of discrete enclaves to go along with the conventional divisions in colonial towns between the 'real' city of the Europeans...and the 'popular' city of the Africans" (2010: 202).²⁸

²⁷ For readings on the use of the built environment to establish divisions between colonizer and colonized, see Nezar AlSayyad (1992).

²⁸ Although as I note in *Chapter 1*, French colonists achieved these divisions with only limited success.

Oppositional relations between core and periphery linger in the postcolonial city, and are exacerbated in the context of crisis. The crisis signals a reversal from the initial postcolonial years, when independence suggested potential for unbounded economic growth and major investments in the built environment that put the Abidjan on par with first-world cities (Cohen, 1984). Colonial central-city vestiges are fast fading as disrepair and the expansion of the urban “periphery” marks contemporary Abidjan, so that Plateau and Cocody are symbols equally of an imagined future and a brilliant past, while the outlying *communes* represent the crisis moment, a suspended interregnum of contemporaneity (see Mbembe and Roitman, 1995). At the same time, the core – not of the central city but the Euro-American metropole – becomes one of few solutions out of a life lived in crisis while core-periphery oppositional relations takes on a three-fold quality: that of the African urban core and periphery, that of the African periphery and the Euro-American metropole, and that of the metropole’s core and periphery, with *émigrés* escaping out, only to arrive in segregated cities where their lives and livelihoods are nudged out of view.²⁹ The widening gulf between the core and the crisis city lends empirical proof to dualist perspectives that denigrate life on the periphery.

Scholarship on the Africa urban crisis falls into two broad categories. One highlights how the African experience falls short of an idealized modernity while the other explains the African experience not as a deficiency but as a deviation, embracing some variation of the “multiple” or “alternative” modernities perspective, which Roy (2001: 11) describes as constantly contesting hegemony and subverting any singular ideal. These latter perspectives often describe other ways of being in the city as “cosmopolitan” (Simone, 2010: 283; Diouf, 2003: 6), a term directly contrasted to a sense of local provinciality suggested by its place at the periphery, and reframing the territory-less quality of peripheral quasi-citizens into one of unboundedness. Critiquing such perspectives, Frederick Cooper (2005: 149) posits that “What is lost on opposing European capitalist imperialist ‘modernity’ to ‘alternative modernities’ or spaces of the nonmodern is the boundary-crossing struggle over the conceptual and moral bases of political and social organization.” In such aestheticized interpretations of alternative modernities, Michael Watts (2005: 189) questions the utility of scholarship that celebrates the “commodity fetish” – analyses that accord preeminence to indicators such advertising and an active service sector – rather than traditional measures of “commodity production.” Portrayals of deficiency, on the other hand, emphasize the failures of the modernist project and continued unequal relations between core and periphery. They reveal the fact that “modernity” as a project and a discourse is political (Ferguson, 1999). However, proponents of deviation nonetheless put forth critical analyses that, beyond celebrating Africa’s deviations, focus on how alternate ways of being in the city emerged out survivalist imperatives which contested rule under the dual colonial-African city. These strategies persist today under the auspices of informality, or “black urbanism” and “peripheral urbanism” (Simone, 2010). I explore these two visions of contemporary urban Africa with an eye toward how both demonstrate ways the crisis city is othered and feminized.

According to Mbembe and Roitman (1995: 323-324), the crisis is marked by “contemporaneity” that is “defined by the acute economic depression, the chain of upheavals and tribulations, instabilities, fluctuations and ruptures of all sorts...that make up the

²⁹ For similar reasons Anthony King (1992) questions the utility of framing the contemporary moment as “post”-colonial. Jane Jacobs (1996) finds it theoretically constructive to refer equally to the metropolitan city – in her case, London – as the colonial city as postcolonial, considering the frequent overlap of history, populations, and livelihoods.

fundamental experiences of African societies over the last several years.” Urban space, in their case Yaoundé, Cameroon, bears the signs of the crisis in crumbling material and social architecture. Crumbling, decaying, the crisis is juxtaposed to the brilliant affluence of a recent past when Cameroon “seemed to be on a continuous and irreversible path of progress” (ibid: 328).³⁰

However, Mbembe and Roitman’s object of investigation is not the crisis *per se* but the “regime of subjectivity” which involves not only how individuals experience daily life, but also ways of making sense of what rarely makes sense any longer. It is a “system of intelligibility” that frames thoughts and actions (1995: 324); it is “lived experience” when all around is “incoherence, uncertainty, instability and discontinuity” (ibid: 325). Crucially, casting off attempts at explanation, subjects normalize the crisis and use a “register of improvisations” to confront and routinize daily life (ibid: 326). In this context, forms of domination lose legitimacy while confusion and chaos replace public authority (ibid: 344). This suggests an erosion of the orderly, bureaucratic city envisioned by colonial administrators.

Ferguson’s (1999) study of diminished quality of life on the Zambian Copperbelt makes similar points. City life is proof of a disappointing, short-lived modernity. Urbanites face a constant “set of situations in which unintelligibility was not a riddle to be solved but the riddle’s solution itself” (ibid: 209). The mineworkers whom Ferguson studies tell a tale of declining value, production and salaries, and hence the declined worth of urban life and its subjects vis-à-vis greater Zambia and beyond. As such, the crisis means that the urban is no longer viable for the duration of one’s life course, and a key survival strategy involves returning to one’s rural origins in old age.³¹ Urbanity is as much a myth as the modernization narrative that accompanied it. For these authors, modernity’s failures in urban Africa are part physical fact, part experiential reality and part epistemological crisis. In these ways, the crisis also entails a refiguration of individual subjectivity: how individuals perceive themselves as citizens of a decadent city and its/their accordant place in the world.

Additionally, Ferguson (1999: 166-206) explores the “expectations of domesticity” comprising this imagined modernity. The modernization *teleos* culminated in a household composed of the nuclear family, a wage-earning husband coming home to his domestic wife and well-kept (biological) children at the end of a productive day at work. While this was never the reality for most African families, financial life amidst crisis has generated especially diverse family arrangements. Further, the reality of male mineworkers possessing almost all wage work while women were confined to the precarious informal sector created a dependency on male incomes whose real value could not keep up (ibid: 193). Enterprising wives made ends meet through independent economic activities and often via extramarital relationships, bringing added

³⁰ References to African crisis states typically set out contrasting the present to rosier, albeit short-lived, times. Ferguson (1999) outlines the high hopes the Copperbelt held as Africa’s urban industrial center for those trying to replicate Western capitalist-industrial economic and social developmental models; Weiss (2009) discusses Arusha’s global cosmopolitan character; and in Anglophone West Africa, analysts held high hopes for Nigeria as the “beacon” of Africa, especially with its oil wealth, although it is now better known as the “crippled giant”: see, for example, Osaghae (1998).

³¹ Although an integral part of his analysis is that any clear urban-rural distinction was always part of the modernization myth (Ferguson, 1999).

confusion to how to define appropriate family relations and what constitutes appropriate gender roles. The constraints of these “gendered political economic structures” have generated serious male-female antagonisms and an overall climate of distrust (ibid: 194). Hence the crisis produces social conflicts that are themselves direct products of modernization’s gendered promises and betrayals.

While deficiency theorists argue that African urbanity never fully reflected modern lifestyles or livelihoods and attention to this fact highlights the failures of a teleological colonial and later developmental agenda, deviation theorists posit that African urbanity represents an alternative modernity. This modernity reflects the particular struggles of African urbanites to assert their livelihoods and lifestyles in the face of dominating and restrictive authority. Mbembe and Nutall (2004: 353) say that “[w]ays of seeing and reading contemporary African cities are still dominated by the metanarrative of urbanization, modernization, and crisis.” They counter with a view of the city as a “borderland” full of “leakages” that resist its planned vision (ibid: 353-354). Mbembe and Nutall use Johannesburg to contest the African urban crisis narrative. Instead of portraying this South African metropolis as deficient, they posit that contemporary Johannesburg is the “expression of an aesthetic vision” (2004: 353). That vision is a testament to the spatial configuration of the colonial project that imposed its biases onto the built environment. Johannesburg is thus a “breeding ground for modernism” as it “grew as a frontier city closely tied to the global market economy and the world of consumption while at the same time mired in bigotry and prejudice, constantly caught between what it could be and what it ended up being” (ibid: 362). This is to say that brilliant promise of modernity always existed with its ugly opposite.³² Mbembe and Nutall (ibid: 364-365) call this “other modernity” the “underneath”; it is the world of extraction, of the mine and the migrant worker who experience the city as “radical uncertainty, unpredictability, and insecurity,” within which a “parallel economy – informal and transnational – has emerged.” In the enduring colonial tradition, that ugly underneath was nudged off the map of what constituted civilized spaces or civil society.

AbdouMaliq Simone (2004a) characterizes informality as a distinctive quality of city life for the everyday African. Though informality is a catchword for the urban crisis in much of the global South, Simone traces its continuity with longer-term practices whereby survival strategies grated against the exclusive formalizing logics of the colonial city. On the part of the colonial administration, the “objective was to access labor without encouraging wage labor” (ibid: 144). Posing everyday urban strategies as deficient to a predetermined norm decontextualizes the African experience: the colonial state’s attempt at order was also a mechanism of control (Scott, 1998; Rabinow, 1995). Consequently, resistance to colonial domination entailed remaining out of formal view.

As a practice informality has positive and negative features. It is positive because it protects the subject from oppressive institutions. However, it also prohibits claims to entitlement or stability. Thus African urbanites face a dilemma when they attempt to make roots and establish empowering local and external ties without also being trapped in a web of obligations or overburdening local resources (Simone, 2004a). A further element of the crisis is temporal: urban citizens are so preoccupied with satisfying basic needs that they have little time to plan

³² This is a classic postcolonial perspective: that modern, Western industrial man was not only contrasted against, but depended on an “other” summarily erased or pushed to the edge of the capitalist-Enlightenment story. See also Rabinow (1995) for an application of this perspective on French colonial urbanism.

ahead. One experiences time as “rupture” (Simone: 2010: 217). The urban poor are reduced to “bare life” or the “narrowing of everyday life conditions to a minimal domain of safety or efficacy” (ibid: 225).

Exploring the manifold meanings of “peripheral,” Simone (2010: 39) notes that the cities of Southeast Asia and Africa are peripheral to urban theory and policy-making. As a result, theorists and practitioners consistently find that these cities fail to approximate a conceptualized norm. This relates to another definition of peripheral that Simone (ibid: 47) provides: that of the marked lack of attention paid to the urban economies and modes of residence of the *quartiers populaires*. Hence peripheral refers to informality, a means of invisibility and bare life. To cope, people have become infrastructure (Simone, 2004b).³³ In the absence of other forms of infrastructure – physical, social, economic, institutional – people in crisis cities take its place: “...their selves, situations, and bodies bear the responsibility for articulating different locations, resources, and stories into viable opportunities for everyday survival” (2010: 124).

Both depictions of the crisis – as an inadequate deficiency or a necessary deviation – situate urban Africa, and the individual, on a global periphery. The crisis has reaffirmed Africa’s othered place in the colonial order. To manage the crisis – the incessant uncertainty, distrust, rupture, chaos and bare-life existence, African urbanites contain and rationalize reality, or accept it as unintelligible. But they always measure the crisis against the normative modern, and something – a future – that is better “elsewhere” (Diouf, 2005). The future exists as a fleeting moment, the heyday of African independence during which the metropolitan core (Europe and the circumscribed city of the *colon*) promised to spread its values and lifestyle into the periphery. In a reversal, the periphery now “encroaches” onto the core (c.f. Bayat, 2004). Urban subjectivity is under threat as individuals struggle to define the modern and their place within it. The *évolué* identity is unstable. But as I argue below, these are particularly gendered ideas and it is theoretically clarifying to treat them as such. Changes that threaten urban modernity: informality manifested as decrepit infrastructure, un- and underemployment, are changes that indicate a failed imposition of gendered structures on urban life and figure into a gendered discourse on the crisis. In particular, they suggest a failure for masculine identity. Which narrative Abidjanais appropriate to affirm their city vis-à-vis the metropole is however a reflection of what they perceive as viable path to achieving modernity in a global context, largely circumscribed by the Franco-Ivoirian relationship.

2.2. Gendered promises, gendered betrayals: The feminized informal city

Contemporary African urbanity contrasts with cities in the global metropole in binary terms, be they core/periphery (deficiency) or modernity/other modernity (deviation). Framing the African city as either deficient or as a deviation, neither perspective avoids operating under a dualistic understanding of modernity such that the African crisis city, like the African colonial city, is either inferior or absent of a certain fullness or normative quality. In the Saussurean sense of binary oppositions defining the thing by what it is not, binaries operate in hierarchies with negative connotations referring to the secondary or weaker term. My gendered analysis of the African city highlights the normative and valuational qualities of binary analyses that are implicit in colonial and neoliberal ideology.

³³ Critiquing Simone’s notion of “people as infrastructure,” Watts (2005: 184) says that it “appears as a flimsy sociality for the inner city poor.”

In his foundational postcolonial text *Orientalism*, Said (1978) argued that the colonial project operated through gendered binaries that positioned the “other” as a feminized object. Hence racialized categories took on gendered qualities, with whiteness and the Occident representing masculine qualities of dominance, order, and civility. To insert these qualities on the other legitimized interference on foreign terrain and with a foreign civilization, one immediately perceived as weaker and in need of the colonizer’s traits. Contemporary discourse likewise others the African crisis city: it stands for the weaker term that, then as now, is feminized. When European colonizers instituted an economic and ideological infrastructure in the African city, wages fell strictly within the man’s domain (Cooper, 2003; Lindsay, 2003; Mckiltrick, 2003). Women were left to participate in the informal economy (Ferguson, 1999), and they “largely paved the way for alternative forms of accumulation” in the city (Simone, 2004a: 173). Men, on the other hand, were the appropriate masters of public space and the public sphere, as colonizers believed that “rooting male labor in nuclear families” would lead to a “new generation of fully urbanized workers” (ibid: 158).

Today, as in Abidjan, around seventy five percent of basic needs are met informally in urban Africa (Simone, 2010: 21). And like other cities in crisis, despite its continued growth Abidjan offers few opportunities for everyday men to gain viable incomes.³⁴ As the crisis pushed men into the female-dominant informal sector, the diminutive *petits métiers* or *petits commerces*, their working identities were feminized. Like elsewhere in Africa, “...in the context of an entrenched patriarchal gender hierarchy...for men, formal sector jobs constitute not only the most appropriate and desirable type of work, but also part of their masculine status” (Agadjanian, 2005: 261). Thus Africans’ informalized worlds are discordant with notions of modernity and appropriate gender roles.

The twin colonial projects of capitalism and modernity were gendered; so are their betrayals. In the crisis city, men face a dearth of resources to buttress their masculine identities via traditional producer/provider mechanisms; in this way they lose their “rights to the city” that indicated life as modern subjects (Ferguson, 2006). There is no doubt that the crisis hits women – who have less social, political and economic authority – hard.³⁵ Nonetheless, the effects on *male identities as men* are deleterious.³⁶ Women may attribute their failures to assume domestic roles

³⁴ For a general portrait of this bleak reality in global Southern cities, see Davis (2006). For an accurate depiction of the crisis in Abidjan, albeit before being exacerbated by the additional onslaught of political crisis, see the World Resources Institute (1996).

³⁵ Of the willingness of indebted governments to accept International Monetary Fund conditionalities, Enloe astutely remarked, “Crucial to this political calculation...is the absorption capacity of individual households: how much financial belt-tightening can each family tolerate?”

This question depends on the skill and willingness of women – as wives and single mothers...Thus the politics of international debt is not simply something that has an *impact* on women in indebted countries. The politics of international debt won’t work in their current form *unless* mothers and wives are willing to behave in ways that enable nervous regimes to adopt cost-cutting measures without forfeiting their political legitimacy (1989: 184-185).

³⁶ The “crisis city” as referred to in this discussion is largely a product of neoliberal restructuring. It is worth noting another catchphrase circulating the academy: the “crisis of the

as wives on the men who do not marry them. The men blame themselves, because they cannot provide if they do not produce: men's subjectivities are under siege.

Alternative means of surviving in the city, namely through informal mechanisms, face the charge of being non-modern, both from above and from below, including from peripheral men themselves. Men's turn toward informality, a mode of survival that appears to lag behind notions of the modern, refers to the crisis's first gendered betrayal: capitalism. Further, the city represented the ideological, bureaucratic, and normative underpinnings of modern African social organization (Mamdani, 1996). After independence, "Cities were increasingly to be experienced as the purveyors of modernity...They were, moreover, to be the domain of men" (Simone, 2004a: 164). Though Abidjan "once was considered the most cosmopolitan in Africa" (ibid: 201), Abidjan today clings more to the myth of the Ivoirian miracle than its reality. When the future exists in the past, modernity appears illusory. Because modernity was a masculine project, this is a distinctly gendered betrayal (Ferguson, 1999). Abidjan's faded prosperity and turn toward a generalized informal sociability marks the second gendered betrayal: that of modernity.

The informalized city, as an unkempt reservoir of disorder and underemployment, bears the stigma of a feminized city. Incapable of accessing formal, wage-labor employment, Abidjanais have lost a crucial masculine designator. And a now-tenuous model of modernity in Africa, Abidjan has lost much of the masculine qualities associated with a progressive, global city-oriented built environment. A man cannot demand the same respect by virtue of the status associated with his Abidjanais origins as he could a generation before, when being Abidjanais implied wealth, sophistication, and street smarts above and beyond those who originated from other Francophone West African cities.

Therefore the "crisis" implies very different consequences for men than for women. As a physical and ideological fact, the "crisis" threatens the informal, peripheral, alternative or non-modern male subject's masculinity. In reacting to the crisis, he reacts also to his own emasculation, while facing the dilemma that how he survives and counters the dominant paradigm will be classifiable as "feminine." Like the Algerian *casbah* that, offering retreat against the invading *colon*, fell victim to personifications as a veiled woman (Roy, 2001), informalized modes of survival are un-manly.

3. Masculinizing publics, contesting exclusion

The Ivoirian self-image as a country on the semi-periphery is predicated on a value-laden and hierarchical vision of modernity whose affirmation involved distance from the rest of Africa. The Abidjanais man articulated a vision of modernity that claimed *proximity* to, or minimal deficiency from, the metropole. The first generation of independent Ivoirians prided Abidjan for its reputation as the "Paris of West Africa" and the population's international character offered tangible proof of its role as a global player. However, Ivoirians buttress contemporary claims to modernity by opposing Francophone and Anglophone modernities, rejecting the former for the latter (Newell, 2009a). In a crisis state, they construct a vision of an *alternative*, or deviating modernity, one that is nevertheless also built on a hierarchical ideal. In both cases, their sense of Ivoirian exceptionalism precludes contests to hegemony; their purported semi-peripheral identities justify their complicity.

black male" which in that case refers to urban poor African-American males, also notable victims of the global neoliberal political economy.

Aihwa Ong (2007: 23) emphasizes that neoliberalism works as “exception,” such that, “Economic globalization is associated with staggering numbers of the globally excluded.” In a time when control increasingly operates via exclusion over exploitation, complicity involves whatever tools are available to affirm the masculine subject in his search for belonging. From one generation to the next, Abidjanais embraced visions of modernity, initially articulating their minimized deficiency to, and later deviating from the Francophone model. The latter perspective originated out of crisis and the deep disappointments of Ivoirian independence and the postcolonial Franco-Ivoirian relationship.

Reconciling changes in the global economy, men find ways to contest their exclusion and denigrated statuses as migrants, youth, or generally as workers in the informal economy (Diouf, 2003; Gerschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2001; Mamdani, 1996; Mbembe and Nutall, 2004). In this chapter I explored the theoretical relationship between gender, informality and modernity in contemporary Africa. In my chapters on masculine spaces that become literal and figurative constructions in Abidjanais men’s lives, I present modes of sociality and a vernacular for the everyday Abidjanais man with and without access to the state. Specifically, taking as a theoretical point of departure the context of the feminized city and livelihood strategies, I examine spaces that indicate a sense of belonging, contesting narratives of peripherality (*Chapter 4*) and abjection (*Chapter 7*). I demonstrate how the right to the city is an essential first component of making claims of belonging in the world.

In Abidjan’s *commune* of Treichville, Simone (2004a) describes the *zawiyyah*, a religious site that facilitates “brotherhood” through accommodation, worship, and organized collective action; associated *zawiyyah* incorporate migrants into cities across West Africa and around the world. Exclusive to Sufi Muslim orders, these migrants who may otherwise face exclusion insert into a community, associate, and develop economic opportunities through the networks the *zawiyyah* generates (ibid: 123-128). The *zawiyyah* organizes men, giving them a physical space and a community of membership. It acts as a “circumscribed domain of publicity” (ibid: 124). The *zawiyyah* offers belonging for peripheral men in contemporary urban Africa, a belonging predicated on membership that operates through its own exclusions.

Similarly, the *Sorbonne* is a space apart, one that defines membership via exclusion, privileging a subset of peripheral men with a place and a language by which to redefine themselves and, as I discuss in *Chapter 8*, to develop a social network and survival strategies. Barbershop signs, on the other hand, create imagined spaces that affirm men in an elsewhere that surpasses national boundaries (see also Diouf, 2003). They territorialize local space and connect men to a global African diaspora, all equally incorporated in an imagined public. In vastly different ways, the *Sorbonne* and the barbershop sign contest peripheral Abidjanais men’s exclusions via expressed belonging – complicity – to a national or a global project and its correspondent masculine ideal. Just as the orators and vendors symbolize the political and economic crisis, respectively, the spaces I describe in the chapters on masculine spaces are cause and consequence of the crisis, symbols of how peripheral Abidjanais men respond to, and contest, their own marginalization.

Peripheral Abidjanais men face the poor choice of engaging in feminine practices as they try to make ends meet and measure up to an impossible ideal. A gendered analysis of city life and the use of urban public spaces examine ways men contest the feminization of the city and construct masculine subjectivities despite the crisis. In the proceeding chapters I investigate how the use of public space, cultural practice, and political discourse respond to the failures of modernity and the lived experience of crisis. These spaces’ public character inserts them into the

culture of the street, falling “outside normative social life” (Simone, 2010: 223); remember, however, as with the concepts of core and periphery, normative here is not majority. In my descriptions below, I evaluate the spaces and the strategies of the men who inhabit the periphery as they measure themselves against a sought-after masculine subjectivity. How do these spaces contest the crisis narrative and confirm masculine subjectivities? In my analyses of Abidjan I assert through empirical observations of the *Sorbonne* and barbershop images ways that men masculinize the city and their own feminized identities. I use these analyses to segue into a more general discussion of vendors’ and orators’ livelihood strategies in the context of the African urban crisis.

Chapter 4

Il est garçon:

Peripheral Abidjanais masculinity and the politics of representation³⁷

1. Belonging: Africa and “elsewhere”

Recent accounts of African peripherality highlight a longing for elsewhere that arises out of comparing the self to a perceived other. The media offers peripheral Africans a significant connection to the global, contrasting sharply with local realities: lowered living standards and decreased opportunities in social, political and economic life (Diouf, 2003). Ferguson (2006), describing Africans’ heightened exposure to other ways of being while facing increasing exclusions, argues that such a disparity destroys their membership in an imagined global community. He calls this “abjection.”³⁸ Weiss (2009: 115-116) uses fieldwork in Tanzanian barbershops to describe the “...juxtaposition of expansive potential and declining opportunities” as definitive of “these young men’s biographies.” His findings “illustrate that the dynamism and force of the global world constructed by these urban actors are clearly felt to lie *elsewhere*, and the crucial structuring principles and media of value that organize the world are inaccessible, even irrelevant, to life in Arusha” (ibid: 127; emphasis added). In short, peripheral Africans see a better life beyond their reach. For Ferguson (1999), this indicates “expulsion” from the global and a corresponding crisis of meaning of ordering principles around modernity. For Weiss (2009: 32), the “margins” become “highly productive spaces” for the generation of popular culture and lived aspirations.³⁹

In this chapter I demonstrate how barbershop images in Abidjan offer visual evidence of a vernacular among peripheral Abidjanais men that contests narratives of exclusion through representations of idealized masculinities across the African diaspora. The images celebrate an Abidjanais-specific lifestyle and claim participation in the global political economy as black male actors. These are direct responses to men’s marginalization, indeed exclusion, from being

³⁷ A version of this chapter with ethnographic data from my chapters on the vendors appears as a 2011[b] article under the name “Il est garçon: Marginal Abidjanais masculinity and the politics of representation,” in *Poetics* 39(5). Material from this article also appears in the introductory chapters.

³⁸ Like Judith Butler, Ferguson (1999) adapts this term from Julia Kristeva.

³⁹ Weiss (2009) elucidates on his theoretical departures from Ferguson with regard to belonging. He says that the “abject condition...is not simply a material circumstance with which African people’s practices contend,” emphasizing instead the productive potential of the abject’s position (2009: 30-31). I argue that in his disagreement with Ferguson, Weiss conflates his *what*: cultural performance, with Ferguson’s *why*: social, political and economic disconnect, while not in fact making discordant arguments.

Borrowing from Frederick Cooper’s (2005: 132) examination of the analytic category “modernity,” to focus on the performances of marginal African men over their causes/consequences, while doubtlessly fascinating, “[looks] for multiple modernities [while missing] the importance and the tragedy of this story of possibilities opened and closed in a decolonizing world.”

productive members of Abidjanais society while simultaneously reflecting a history of Ivoirian “exceptionalism” (Boone, 1995). Peripheral Abidjanais men engage in a politics of representation that stresses their likeness to icons from the African diaspora. This affiliation plays a redemptive role in their lives, for their consumption⁴⁰ of global culture obscures their inadequacies in face-to-face social relations. These images represent expressions of masculinity that embody the desires and disappointments of peripheral Abidjanais men.

Like Ferguson (2006), I argue that “mimicry” relates centrally to “membership” in a global neoliberal order that excludes Africans. And I concur that the styles these men display in the barbershop signs are “modes of practical action in contemporary urban social life” (1999: 221). However, I argue that this is an explicitly *gendered* practice. Though Ferguson (1999: 36) acknowledges that his study of mine-workers was “inevitably a male-centered one” and that the “modernization story...is, after all, a gendered story,” gender is not his analytical crux. Additionally, given Abidjan’s particularity as a regional center drawing immigrants from poorer neighboring countries and its postcolonial designator as the Ivoirian miracle, in my case men contest their abjection with localized cultural affirmation. Côte d’Ivoire’s history also establishes a critical difference between my study and Weiss’s. While his discussion of the limited opportunities and insecurities of the Arushan informal sector closely approximates Abidjan’s, the historical divergence between Arusha and Abidjan, namely the latter’s sense of exceptionalism and proximity to the metropole, provides an important comparison to the relationship our respective African locales have to the signs’ content and hence to the global. Far from “conceding the deprivations” (Weiss, 2009: 45), the barbershop images I examine challenge them, suggesting membership through global participation.

I differ from Weiss in other ways. He says, “In contrast to prevailing views that see consumption as replacing production as a mode of value formation and as a social process more broadly, under global neoliberalism, I am interested in the ways these processes articulate in novel, popular configurations” (2009: 19). I however stress that consumption-laden barbershop images are *responses* to neoliberal processes that exclude men from work-based identities; they relate men to capitalism without connecting men to women. As a *mode of value formation*, consumption replaces men’s productive identities as a mode of self-affirmation. But it is inadequate as a *social process* because it fails to secure men’s social statuses as men or to facilitate processes of social reproduction. Thus I am as interested in what a sense of global belonging means for extra-local interconnectedness as I am in what its conditions of membership say about *intra-local disconnectedness*. So when men “[expel] women from urban sociality” (ibid: 84) and declare that when women “exceed” men it is a “[sign] of the end of the world” (ibid: 87), I suggest that men’s insistence on global membership and adoption of global masculine forms compensate for their failures to assume the roles of men in their society. Hence the category of youth that beyond having “no voice” (ibid: 206), becomes a permanent category; I take the terms “young men” and “youth” not to be interchangeable categories as Weiss does, but the latter as a designator that denies men their manhoods. Similar to Nigerian “small boys” (Lindsay, 2003b) and Ashante “youngmen” in Ghana, youth refers to subordination (Obeng, 2003: 201). “Youth” is a social, not demographic category designating unmarried and underemployed men (Newell, 2009a).

⁴⁰ By “consumption” I refer primarily to the passive consumption of media forms, secondarily to the active consumption of consumer goods, and thirdly to participation in the consumer culture-laden worlds of music and sport.

The images used to call men to the barbershop are global, black, and male. The fixation that peripheral Abidjanais men, not women, have with global media personalities relates to the particular exclusion of black men as producers and breadwinners as a consequence of global neoliberal restructuring. Excluded, peripheral Abidjanais men seek to partake in the global economy; images of successful black celebrities offer another way to belong. Hence the *global* aspect of the icons celebrated in barbershop signs allows these men to identify with – belong to – the world beyond Africa.

The historical significance of the colonial project continues to resonate with deep connections between identities and rights, wherein freely residing in the colonial city was synonymous with citizenship (Mamdani, 1996). For colonized black men especially, articulations of citizenship, manhood and “what it means to be a full human being” were “deeply intertwined” (Morrell and Ouzgane, 2005: 12). Only the *évolué*, adopting an identity close to the colonizer, inhabited the French colonial city as citizen. The heritage of the *mission civilisatrice* and the powerful impact of present-day hegemonic media sources strongly associate identities and rights in postcolonial cities; images of black men as full participants in the global political economy with unique approaches to an urban lifestyle respond to continuing mechanisms of domination. Therefore celebrating the appearance of *blackness* is a significant move toward self-affirmation in the political battle toward representation.

Finally, related to global belonging are African men’s desires to adhere to capitalist-modernist gender roles. Hailed as the model of successful French colonization, Abidjanais men were particularly inclined to embrace these categories in lieu of indigenous manifestations of masculinity that would call to mind “traditional” or village ways. An oft-repeated theme in Abidjan is that a man’s worth is measured by his suit, air-conditioned office, and chauffeured vehicle. While never a reality for the majority, Abidjanais juxtapose this gendered working ideal to women and migrant workers in the informal economy (Matlon, 2011a).

Images that masculinize the cityscape provide visibility to men rendered redundant or invisible as underemployed, informal workers in Abidjan’s economy (Matlon, 2011a). Given the critical connection between work and manhood, “youth” and boyhood become fixed, extended categories within which these men find themselves alternatively venerated and disparaged. A consumption-oriented masculinity celebrates teenage culture for informal sector men who are not classifiable as (working, productive) men. This is then a failed masculinity – eternal boyhood – that connects them to global capitalism as consumers but not to their hoped-for families as providers. The emphasis on *men* in the signage celebrates a masculinity that may be achieved through consuming pop culture. It gives them both visibility and purpose in a city where, without work or wives, they lack full status as men.

2. The barbershop sign as Abidjanais vernacular

Images of men on barbershop signs become more flamboyant the deeper one goes into Abidjan’s *quartiers populaires*; barbershops in center-city *communes* such as Cocody and Plateau tend to plainly advertise their shops or commission formal printers instead of local

artists.⁴¹ It is in Yopougon and Abobo, maintained by the informal economy and characterized by the improvised precariousness of informal life, that I identified particularly colorful images.

The legacy of pre- and postcolonial adherence to Francophone modes of sociality, the sense of Ivoirian exceptionalism and status at the “semi-periphery of the world-economy” (Mingst, 1988) remains pervasive to the Abidjanais, identity. These factors rub against visible and experiential realities of decline, placing Abidjan’s margins at the center of a tension between what Abidjan is purported to be within the region and what it is. It both allows dispossessed men to insist on their own centrality while also looking to cues from elsewhere in the absence of local affirmation.⁴² The visual presentation of the cityscape via local art attests to the contradictions of a post-miracle Abidjan: surrounded by decay, these signs proudly claim that their city is at the forefront of African cultural production. This photograph of a barbershop decorated with American imagery, and children playing among refuse in the foreground, encapsulates such contradictions.

Figure 2a: American flag and Statue of Liberty



18 August 2009, Abobo

As glorified images of men in addition to global symbols of wealth – dollar signs, the American flag, the *Nike* swoosh, the *Lacoste* crocodile, to name a few – become fixtures of street-level art in ubiquitous barbershop storefronts, men make claims on public space. Barbershops especially

⁴¹ Producing signs such as these has become a trade, and the artists are local men from the same demographic as their audience. For a portrait of an African sign painter, see Saidi (Weiss, 2009: 101-104)

⁴² Newell (2009: 179) makes similar observations about contemporary Abidjan. Perceiving Côte d’Ivoire as a “gateway” to modernity in Africa, Abidjanais in particular view their city as indicative of everything cosmopolitan and civilized about the country. His discussion of *nouchi* identity that “derives its authority from the externality of modernity” (ibid: 172), in particular borrowing from American popular culture as an alternative to a Francophone identity, corroborates my argument.

feature images of well-known, trend-setting men. These images are indicative of the manner urban dwellers choose to represent ideal masculinities from abroad and articulate their own.

Figure 2b: 50 Cent, American rap musician



04 August 2009, Yopougon

Figure 2c: Denko Denko, aka "Petit Denis," Ivoirian zouglou musician



19 August 2009, Yopougon

Barbershop signs⁴³ represent pervasive themes in peripheral Abidjan. They reflect the ways men confront their inadequacies, making meaning for themselves and their city. They

⁴³ Barbershop signs are a fixture of contemporary African urbanity. They have sparked the interest of scholars (Weiss, 2009) and art *aficionados*, appearing in gallery and museum exhibits throughout the United States and Europe. For a detailed study on the history and production of barbershop (and hairdresser) signs in Africa, and a more general exploration of the sign as a medium of contemporary African art, see Njegovanović (2009) and Floor (2010), respectively.

situate their consumers in urban space and the imagined world of the sign itself. The signage draws on and domesticates imagery from throughout Africa and its diaspora. Representations of elsewhere are flattened, glorified and malleable; thus despite the likenesses, Abidjanais depictions depart from how a black American, Brazilian or Jamaican may choose to portray similar themes.

While the mass of locally-produced signage throughout Abidjan's periphery repeats the general themes I present here, I focus on barbershop images in this chapter for several reasons. First, the barbershop is a quintessentially masculine space in diverse contexts internationally.⁴⁴ This has been especially dramatized in media portrayals of black American popular culture which feature barbershops as places where men gather and exchange; consider for example, the 2002 film *Barbershop* directed by Tim Story. Researchers have found rich potential in the barbershop as a site to study issues related to black American masculinity.⁴⁵ My analysis nods to the barbershop's cultural significance in men's communities globally.

Figure 2d: Inside a barbershop



18 August 2009, Abobo

Within the informal economy, the barber's work ranks relatively high: barbers are their own bosses and have their own space. Given the informal sector's unpredictability, a place to where one may return daily with tools and products in place affords a modicum of stability (Weiss, 2009). This leads to another point: among peripheral populations these spaces offer rare opportunities to exhibit cultural affiliations and global awareness. Additionally, the popularity of using stylistically embellished and celebrity males in Abidjan barbershop advertisements, as throughout the African continent, is omnipresent and striking. These images provide a fixed

⁴⁴ Signs often advertise *Homme, Dame, Enfant* ("Men, Women and Children"). This was more of a hopeful appeal than reality; on no occasion did I see or hear of a woman custom a barbershop. In any case, barbers lacked the products to service a female clientele.

⁴⁵ See as examples: Alexander (2003); Franklin (1985); Harris-Lacewell (2004); Wright II and Calhoun (2001).

framework from which to examine a masculinized cityscape more generally. By focusing on barbershops I may directly relate the significance of their symbolic themes in Abidjan to a place that men almost universally frequent. Importantly, as I show in this chapter, barbershop signs offer visual cues that resonate with the larger themes of this dissertation: peripheral men's identities, the gulf between young men and women, and the ways men more readily appropriate a consumerist global culture. The signs are almost always of famous international or local media heroes.⁴⁶

In the same way that Abidjanais men adopt nicknames like "MC Black," "Busta Rhymes" and "Boyz," thereby aligning with a global black identity, these images document a vernacular linking Abidjan to the African diaspora. However, whenever I asked a barber why he chose a particular image to represent his shop, his standard response was a dismissive "I like his style" or "I like the way he does his business." Many barbers did not choose the image, but had recycled the sign from a previous owner. Well-preserved signs can last decades, though like many objects in sub-Saharan Africa, a second-hand or third-hand sign was used as long as it was still discernable; some signs I passed by were decrepit with the wood cracked off and the paint faded. But as McDonnell (2010: 1838-1839) notes of hairdressers' and taxi drivers' use of AIDS campaign posters and stickers, respectively, they "rarely...[had] a cogent reason" beyond a "decorating aesthetic of availability." Most often, they replied that the images were "nice" (ibid).

Instead of trying to find deeper meaning than "nice" or "just because" (see for example Ferguson's (1999: 209-211) discussion of "Asia in miniature"), I emphasize that at some point along the course from imagination to production to display, peripheral men have reached a consensus that certain motifs resonate with an Abidjanais sensibility. As a normative backdrop, beyond the personal choice of the barber or his client, the predilection for such images situated in Abidjan's peripheral *communes* clearly resonates with everyday men while also indicating their vision of an ideal-typical masculinity. I relate this to the fact that despite dominating public space, peripheral Abidjanais men are invisible, or at least insignificant, as actors in the public sphere: as community members, husbands and fathers, and as workers. The visibility of men who are integral parts of the global political economy, often as conspicuous consumers but always as renowned media personalities, is, I argue, a response to Abidjanais men's own marginalization (Weiss, 2009: 107; Matlon, 2011a). It is with this in mind that I interpret these images' significance for peripheral Abidjanais masculinity.

3. Consenting consumers and global belonging

Man the hunter becomes a parasite. (Silberschmidt, 2005: 196)

3.1. Belonging to a global politics of style

⁴⁶ I identified the media personalities on the signs by first asking the barber who it was (if he was around when I took the photo) and later, irrespective of whether the barber had designated a certain man, I asked Abidjanais friends and research subjects (totaling fourteen men). At times they disagreed on poorly replicated likenesses of non-Abidjanais artists so in those cases I went with the majority's opinion. Even then, all the men were nonetheless convinced that this was a media icon, supporting my general argument around venerated media personas.

The barbershop signs use a shared set of consumerist cues to indicate belonging among men locally and throughout the African diaspora. With the help of mass advertising campaigns and a constant media onslaught, minimal consumption capacities – a beer here, a pair of second-hand sneakers there – allow peripheral men to engage with the global system despite their exclusion via work-based identities. Hence Weiss (2009: 52) garners how “the enactment of sociocultural values...can create a frame of action in which participants feel their claims have validity – in short, a world to which they belong.”

Referencing Lagos, Nigeria, Watts (2005: 185) calls theirs a “‘postresistance’ generation” marked by an alternative politics of style. Images of global celebrities personify consumerist lifestyles. Of pop culture personalities, Chang (2005: 447) says, “Here was the media monopolies’ appropriation of dub logic...The biggest artists were brands themselves, generating lifestyles based on their own ineffable beings.” On the Abidjanais social scene, artists are synonymous with brands that are in turn synonymous with lifestyles, roughly split between the four categories of hip-hop, *rasta* (reggae), *zouglou* and *coupé décalé* (the latter two being Ivoirian music forms). Hip-hop celebrates Americana and a hardened, thug life; *Rasta* and *zouglou* signify a concern for social justice and a poetic awareness of poverty’s struggles; *coupé décalé* suggests a fast, stylish and “Euro” sensibility. Music styles and fashion trends indicate allegiances to popular culture and thus belonging to the world that cannot be demonstrated through now-defunct productive capacities. For example, the local counterfeit brand of choice, Dolce and Gabbana is known for *coupé décalé* sensation Douk Saga (Matlon, 2011a). Manly one-liter Bock Solibra brand beers are called *drogbas* after Ivoirian football hero Didier Drogba, contracted to England’s Chelsea Football Club.

Consider Tupac Shakur, an iconic figure in Abidjan. Representing immense fame alongside an early death that leaves him eternally youthful, his image resonates particularly well with men who are themselves unable to reach the thresholds of adulthood. Barbershop images embellish Tupac, suggesting an entire personality-*cum*-lifestyle of a generic, young black urban male, well beyond the short-lived existence of a West Coast American rapper from a generation whose moment has since passed.⁴⁷ Further, his image is set against the American flag, despite his history of artistic and social activism speaking out against an oppressive American system.

Figures 3.1a&b: Tupac, American rap musician



18 August 2009, Abobo & 15 August 2009, Deux Plateaux

⁴⁷ For an exploration of Tupac’s significance for African men, see Weiss (2009: 105-108).

As consumers, men remain consensual actors in a neoliberal global economy even when excluded as workers. Much of contemporary global identity revolves around hobbies, musical preferences and favorite sports teams; one need only think of the fast rise of Facebook and YouTube as testaments to the geographically-unbounded urge to demonstrate connections to networks intimate and anonymous. As a backdrop to a typical street scene, the barbershop sign becomes a way for Abidjanais men to insert the global black male into the urban landscape, thereby suggesting a self-referential subject. In this first image, American hip-hop musician Fat Joe is depicted as a comic strip hero, blinged-out in gold *grillz* teeth, hoop earrings and a large gold chain necklace. He wears a matching Champion brand tank and backwards hat exposing the logo. Bulging muscles, he strikes a pose with the word “Bad” scrawled under him.

Figure 3.1c: Fat Joe, American rap musician



18 August 2009, Abobo

3.2. “I will be VIP!”: The global as a social practice

A poignant memory from early in my fieldwork was of a young student sitting proudly at the desk in an office at University of Abidjan, a now-decrepit institution, surrounded by a random collection of journal publications and UN reports, many a decade old, and a barely-functional air conditioner humming loudly in the background. He entreated me to photograph him there, in a self-aggrandizing posture, declaring enthusiastically that one day he too would be VIP. The use of the acronym VIP is an example of the way Abidjanais have reworked what it means to be a very important person. Originally denoting elitist, consumption-oriented environments and adopted by American hip-hop music vernacular, Abidjanais designate their circle of friends or holes-in-the-wall as VIP locations. VIP is no longer about certain perks, a select clientele or high-end services on offer. Liberally used, this term indicates participation in the global economy, where every man can be very important if he says he is. This “Salon VIP” barbershop is a little shack with Tupac just visible inside.

Figure 3.2a: Salon VIP



19 August 2009, Yopougon

More than fantasy, imagining a world beyond the African continent becomes a social practice, or a collectively lived experience (Appadurai, 1990), through the meaning that symbols play domestically and considering the opportunities and restraints facing peripheral Abidjanais men. The repeated themes in barbershop images represent status markers and tangible means of improving one's life chances. For example, the most popular practitioners of *zouglou* and *coupé décalé* live in France where they are mavericks of a new urban chic. Ivoirians are proud of this cultural export that has gained notoriety across Africa and in the metropole (Newell, 2009a). Images of these men who have attained stardom beyond the local make for constant reminders of the economic opportunity and geographic possibility in Abidjan's own. Two examples are: Yodé, a renowned Ivoirian *zouglou* musician popular in France, and La Fouine and Jimmy Sosoco, popular North African French rap artists living in Paris's *banlieues* featured on two sides of the same sign.

Figure 3.2b: Yodé, Ivoirian *zouglou* musician



19 August 2009, Yopougon

Figure 3.2c&d: *La Fouine* and *Jimmy Sosoco*, French rap musicians of Moroccan origins



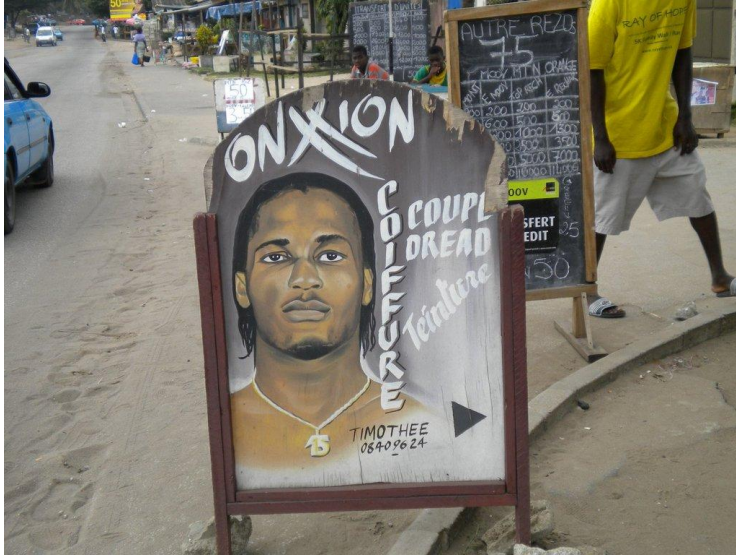
14 August 2009, Riviera & 14 August 2009, Riviera

Music and football, the two dominant themes in barbershop images, are also dominant strategies for escape in the local imagination.⁴⁸ Peripheral men engage the global through their own participation not out of mystification but in the distant hopes of becoming global players themselves. Where anticipating a steady wage is equally unlikely, these activities are among the limited opportunities for peripheral men world-wide to gain substantial income and status in contemporary capitalism. And even locally, music and football allow men to achieve status within peripheral Abidjan (see *Chapter 8*). As social practices, these activities provide a language through which peripheral men may articulate a position in the city and beyond. In the following image, the “Onxxion” barbershop sign features Didier Drogba, an Ivoirian with an international following who plays for England’s Chelsea Football Club.

Figure 3.2e: *Didier Drogba*, Ivoirian footballer

⁴⁸ When considering the origins of these music genres, recall that their roots are in fact from the African continent. Indeed, there has always been a relationship between African and African diasporic musical forms.

Albeit an activity of European origins, football is a truly global practice. Moreover, heroes for men everywhere hail from the global South, mainly South America but increasingly Africa also.



19 August 2009, Yopougon

As men monopolize the music and sports scenes they embody every man's potentiality and claim masculinity's entitlements. Frequently juxtaposed is the global/external on one side of the sign with the local/African on the other. Suggestive, this elevates both to a comparable status. In the first image Alsafo, an Ivoirian from the popular group Magic System, with a successful career in France, towers down from the rooftop of a barbershop; on the other side is American hip-hop musician Usher. On the next sign internationally-acclaimed Brazilian football legend Ronaldho shares space with Djibril Cissé, an Ivoirian footballer playing in France.

Figures 3.2f&g: Alsafo, Ivoirian zouglou musician & Usher, American hip hop musician



04 August 2009, Yopougon & 04 August 2009, Yopougon

Figures 3.2h&i: Ronaldo, Brazilian footballer & Djibril Cissé, Ivoirian footballer



04 August 2009, Yopougon & 04 August 2009, Yopougon

The signs also use local signifiers to appropriate the images' content. An example is the term *choco* in a number of salons. *Choco*, short for chocolate, is slang for someone/something ultra-cool. The source of Ivoirian wealth for the first twenty-five years of independence, Côte d'Ivoire country remains the world's largest cocoa exporter. *Choco* references a homegrown product Ivoirians use to claim "number one" status in the global economy. In the first image, Snoop Doggy Dogg advertises the "Salon Chocos" barbershop. Painted on the barbershop's wall are reggae artists Ivoirian Alpha Blondy and Jamaican Bob Marley against a ghetto cosmopolitan cityscape.

Figures 3.2j&k: Snoop Dogg, American rap musician & Alpha Blondy, Ivoirian reggae musician/Bob Marley, Jamaican reggae musician



11 August 2009, Abobo & 11 August 2009, Abobo

4. Vindicating blackness: Race and the politics of representation

...[T]he appropriation of a common 'blackness' can operate as a vehicle through which black residents in Dakar, Brooklyn, Kingston, Bangkok, London, and Recife not only

compare their distinctive urban experiences but cultivate a discourse through which they generate particular understandings of the city and their place and possibilities within it. Here, blackness becomes a device of inter-urban connection...It is a way of seeing oneself as part of a larger world of operations, powers, and potentials. (Simone, 2010: 49)

Integral to the barbershop signs' politics of representation is the shared blackness of the men depicted. In the rhetoric of the *mission civilisatrice*, "native" and "man" were incompatible categories (Brown, 2003: 157). Given the role of race in colonial domination and in contemporary media, images of black men irrespective of their origins are not simple examples of cultural imperialism. Race remains resilient in contests over power and representation today. As a signifier, "blackness" stands in for peripheral spaces, people and survival strategies (Simone, 2010: 263-333). The barbershop images play into these ongoing struggles.

4.1. Finding the self reflected in the "other"

Hip-hop and football personalities are iconic representations of lower class men who rose above their birth status. Abidjanais men perceive others who match their demographic profile yet claim international renown, while two-dimensional, televised images of black stardom crossing the Atlantic flattens their American and European brothers' deep experiences of violence and repression. Suffering in Abidjan as direct experience and part of a global narrative of a degraded Africa contrasts with salvation elsewhere. Alternatively, testimonials of shared experiences of racism as part of the African diaspora's lived urbanity construct commonality through shared pain (Weiss, 2009) such that it is a malleable category suggesting either dominance or resistance. Simone (2010: 285) explains, "Blackness as a device embodies a conceptual solidarity" so that, just as "past uses of blackness" stood in for "[exclusion] from certain norms and rights to the city," it now "implies the existence of undocumented worlds of limited visibility thought to haunt the city's modernity or posit radically different ways of being in the city."

The white *colon* is rarely seen on contemporary Abidjan's periphery. Instead, representation plays into the anonymous, faceless, and institutional character of "othering" of the daily Abidjanais experience, and men's familiarity with the world beyond their borders predominantly reflects mass media and advertising. In his writing of the imagination as social practice, Arjun Appadurai (1990) refers to different landscapes. The media-generated barbershop images/imaginaries of black masculinity are like "mediascapes" which "...tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places" (ibid: 9). Music videos, for example, contain neatly compacted scripts creating entire realities of what life is like elsewhere while providing glamorous storylines to disempowered urban narratives.

Prominent images of black men mark a distinct change from an earlier era when Frantz Fanon (1967 [1952]: 100) spoke of colonized people's deep inferiority complex, and the black man's choice was to "turn white or disappear." The media was especially central in guaranteeing domination and negating the image of the black man: "In the magazines the Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, the Savage are always symbolized by Negroes or Indians; since there is always identification with the victor, the little Negro, quite as easily as the little white boy,

becomes an explorer, an adventurer, a missionary ‘who faces the danger of being eaten by the wicked Negroes’” (ibid: 146). Just as images that denigrated blackness denigrated the viewing subject, iconic black representations serve as self-portraits that exalt men across the African diaspora. The juxtaposition in the following images clearly indicates the changed place blackness holds from one generation to the next. The only image I took from a salon whose owner was markedly older than the otherwise general cohort of men in their twenties and thirties, this first image generically depicts a model: a white man with conservatively cut straight hair cut and outfitted in a suit and tie. The next image features Zai Roi, a Congolese musician, also in a suit, but with a stylized high-top, goatee and diamond earrings.

Figures 4.1a&b: Generic white model & Zai Roi, Congolese musician



17 August 2009, Abobo & 19 August 2009, Yopougon

Critics within the black community legitimately question the real affirming possibilities of stereotyped figures like the athlete and the musician – both of whose bodies becomes the tools of their trade, and who are regularly hyper-sexed symbols. Fanon (1967 [1952]) explores in great length how the emphasis on the black body and its physical potentialities “others” the black man, and a rich conversation on the matter has since followed suit.⁴⁹ Nevertheless I underscore that these images glorify the black man and *affirm* his role as a contemporary idealized neoliberal subject – even if that subject has emerged out of corporate media and advertising industries’ aim to co-opt and brand his image (Chang, 2005). With designer threads and flashy props, black celebrities are “hegemonic” ideals of the “transnational businessman” (Connell, 2000) in the subcultures of music and sport. On the African continent, black American style assumes elite status (Pattman, 2005). Depicted within mediascapes, what black stars have, own, and display appear endless. Even if smokescreens obscure what they produce or how, music videos and gossip magazines hyperbolize their consumption practices. For the peripheral Abidjanais man without direct access to the reality of life on the other side, the texture of hardship for men in the Paris *banlieues* or the Chicago ghetto is easily lost in translation, captivating instead the imaginative potentialities of their shared “black skins” (c.f. Fanon, 1967 [1952]).

⁴⁹ For example see Hopkinson and Moore’s (2006: 29-34) discussion of Thelma Golden’s 1994 show entitled “Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Art”; for a historical account see Saint-Aubin (2005).

Though barbershop images depict men from Africa and throughout the African diaspora, the black American is a particularly popular image in the Abidjanais imagination. The United States, with its highly commercialized black population and muted colonial legacy offers an attractive model of hegemony around which Ivoirians may rally instead of the French *colon*. The “paradoxical location” of the black American (Hanchard, 1990: 32) suggests both participation in and marginalization within the global hegemon. Thus it is from the vantage point of the American that Abidjanais men often locate their black identities. Here is *Africa Coiffure*, or “Africa Barbershop.” Noteworthy is that this barber chooses neither to designate his shop “Afrique,” the French translation, nor the pan-Africanist “Afrika.” Instead he writes the English translation of Africa, thus elevating Africa through an Anglophone, and presumably black American-led pan-African narrative. This reference point for “Africa” is historically contiguous with cultural interchange between the continent and its diaspora (Patterson and Kelley, 2000). A similar point applies to the term “Black” instead of *Noir* in the next barbershop sign. As a feedback loop of cultural production, the African diaspora’s representation of Africa becomes a means by which peripheral African subjects gain global cultural legitimacy (see also Weiss, 2009: 41).

Figure 4.1c: DJ Chechevara, Abidjan DJ, “Africa Coiffure”



04 August 2009, Yopougon

Figure 4.1d: Le Patron, Ivoirian zouglou musician, “Black Coiffure”



19 August 2009, Yopougon

4.2. Barbershop images as local visibility and global participation

In writing about mimicry, Ferguson (2006: 161) notes that when “urban Africans seized so eagerly on European cultural forms...they were asserting rights to the city...and pressing, by their conduct, claims to the political and social rights of full membership in a wider society.” The urban denoted cosmopolitan, civilized society, and in Francophone Africa a civilized, or *évolué* was to have transitioned out of the childlike state of the native into the full adulthood of the European. The white/black distinction figured into a civilized/savage binary, accompanied by tangible rights and entitlements. Using the cityscape to indicate contemporary being-in-the-world is a nod to the global social order’s emphasis on display and consumption to indicate *participation*. Painting urban public space with images of black men is a way for them to make history, a territorialization that affirms their access to the city and its accompanying rights. It signals a new chapter in African narratives of urban sociality. The barbershop signs constitute a politics of representation that redresses colonialism’s attempt to paint white men’s blackness.

As abject subjects, African urbanites’ desire to be modern assumes a “social status implying certain institutional and economic conditions of life” which they are themselves denied (Ferguson, 2006: 168). However, barbershop signs indicate ways that peripheral, informal sector men self-identify in order to elevate their status and gain a sense of belonging in the world *and* in their city. Exogenous symbols and practices generate a social practice where they contest their invisibility at the periphery (Matlon, 2011a). These strategies involve displaying one’s metropolitan existence and emphasizing consumption practices (Mbembe and Nutall, 2004). In complex and contradictory ways, the black men that barbershop signs showcase figure into colonial and contemporary history and local and global context. Locally, they provide visibility to peripheral men embedded in an ongoing history of being rendered invisible in urban spaces. Globally, they provide proof of citizenship – active participation in “civilized” society – for men who fall short of the criteria for manhood in capitalist society.

5. Eternal boyhoods

[Consumption] is the invisible hand, or the Gucci-gloved fist, that animates the political impulses, the material imperatives, and the social forms of...capitalism in its neoliberal, global manifestation. (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001: 4)

Abidjan's gendered barbershop images and consumption practices more generally demonstrate how consumption has become a redemptive force for men lacking productive capacities. While wage labor initially gave youth an unprecedented autonomy from their elders as they pursued adulthood and its accompanying entitlements, it now denies men the ability to achieve adulthood, notably marriage, without recourse to alternatives (Lindsay, 2003b). Failing as producers, peripheral Abidjanais men are not fully "men" in their society but boys. Accordingly, youth are consumers and adults, defined by their active productive capacities and their accompanying entitlements, are workers.

5.1. Men's spaces: excluded, and excluding

As I discuss in the chapters on mobile street vendors, Abidjanais men, unable to act as breadwinners for the families they do not have, reject the roles their society expects of them and the relationships they are to cultivate with women. As an alternative, male-dominated images in public space validate a masculinist culture. Men have their hair cut while surrounded by images of Abidjanais and international personalities. They are all men in a man's space. The implicit claim of an advertisement is an equalizer: the man in the image is a potential – albeit ideal – client.⁵⁰ On this sign the artist has superimposed a razor over Barack Obama – a particularly appealing example of a hegemonic black man.

Figure 5.1a: Barack Obama, American President



03 June 2009, Yopougon

⁵⁰ In practice, the vast majority of Abidjanais men wear the staple haircut of a buzzed/shaved head. Thus the actual hairstyles of the men in the images do not reflect looks that clients intend to replicate.

Barbershops signs serve the dual purpose of attesting to consumption capacities and to peripheral men's participation in Abidjan and beyond. Though Abidjan is one of West Africa's less conservative cities, rarely did barbershop interiors contain pinups of women. The male-dominated barbershop images reinforce a gender-segregated culture (see also Agadjanian, 2005; and Weiss's discussion on gendering public spaces, including barbershops, 2009: 79-86). Further, barbershops display male celebrities; while similar images are appearing in women's salons, they use generic models to advertise particular hairstyles instead of to suggest iconic personalities and lifestyles. Perhaps this is because changes in the global economy do not threaten women's roles as mothers and wives:⁵¹ though deep marginalization is certainly a shared condition of urban African men and women, the latter need not look elsewhere for affirmation of their gendered roles. They need not validate themselves by linking their identities to mass media personalities. By contrast, men embrace identities suggesting they are something, or someone, else. In the following image a black American in athletic attire squats below a sign boasting that this barbershop is both "international" (abbreviated by "inter") and "high class."

Figure 5.1b: Black American in athletic attire



18 August 2009, Abobo

Despite the power of the capitalist man-as-provider narrative, the peripheral Abidjanais man's minimal and unsteady earnings do little to attract women. His masculinity is at threat. These images offer a redemptive response to his inadequacies. Barbershop images contain models – alternative ideals – of legitimated affirmations of masculinity, men whose identities are predicated on consumption patterns yet still get the ladies. The following images of Ivoirian *zouglou* artist Molière and American musician LL Cool J demonstrate a dignified blackness marked by "clean" and "honorable" looks, respectively.

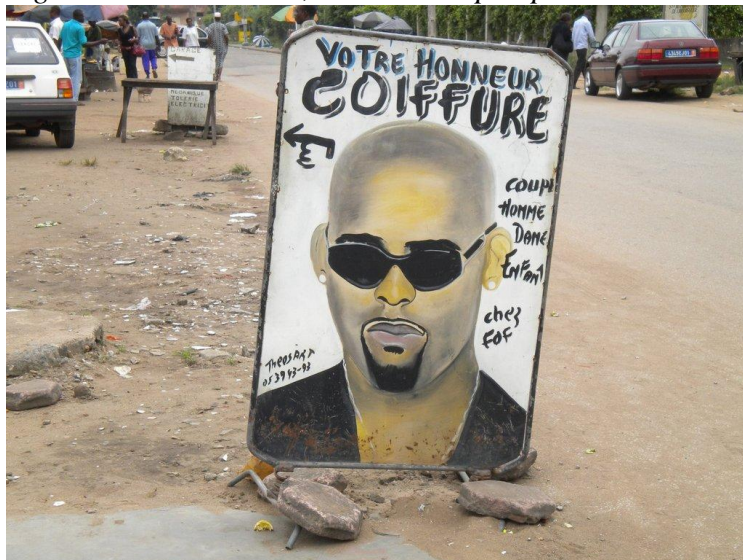
⁵¹ To restate from *Chapter 3*, this is not to suggest that women are more privileged than men within the neoliberal global economy. It is to say that these changes have jeopardized men's identities as men under capitalism in ways that women's identities have not similarly been threatened.

Figure 5.1c – Molière, Ivoirian zouglou musician



17 August 2009, Riviera [Anono]

Figure 5.1d: LL Cool J, American hip hop musician



17 August 2009, Riviera [Anono]

5.2. Youth as a social category

Because these men cannot live up to social expectations of manhood, they remain youths.⁵² If in contexts of greater opportunity we think of “youth” as a period to explore what is possible and adulthood as the time one settles into a constructive/productive identity, then “youth” in landscapes of deprivation takes on a broad, porous category. Despite Côte d’Ivoire’s

⁵² Youth is a category both extended *and* gendered. The majority of studies that I have read on African youth culture are gendered male. See, for example, de Boeck and Honwana (2005).

2005 average life expectancy of 48.7 years (African Development Bank, 2009),⁵³ men in their late thirties still commonly refer to themselves as “youth.” Youth has become an extended category, now encompassing the bulk of a man’s life. Peripheral men remain linked to youth culture because they lack the jobs to support a family that would identify them as adults (see also Newell, 2009a). The following images of *Jeunesse Coiffure* or “Youth Barbershop” feature Senegalese musician Akon who lives in the United States, and American singer Usher.

Figures 5.2a&b: Akon, Senegalese musician & Usher, American R&B musician, “Jeunesse Coiffure”



04 August 2009, Yopougon & 04 August 2009, Yopougon

Men’s limited earnings offer greater potential to consume petty goods that embellish their person than to invest in “wiser” expenses such as a house or a child’s education. In contrast to women burdened with family responsibilities, their financial behavior is suggestive of a teenager’s “play” money. Consumption practices “[highlight] the status of youth, both as a social category and a problematic condition (Weiss, 2009: 237). It also reflects neoliberal capitalism’s buy now, worry later ethos. Comaroff and Comaroff (2005: 25) write that teenagers have become “actors-through-consumption, [buying]...into mainstream interests at the same time as they contested them.” This “politics of style” became “the predicament of would-be subversaries in advanced capitalist contexts, of those who struggle to seize control of commodified signs and practices...” (ibid). Peripheral Abidjanais men face the dilemma of engaging in a battle around cultural forms that brings them no closer to destabilizing either the powers that be or an oppressive system more generally. Nonetheless, popular culture provides an escape for the imagination and a promise of possibility for the self and membership within a masculinist subculture. Peripheral men throughout the global South have responded to disempowerment by cultural appropriation, particularly through the tropes of hip hop and football.⁵⁴

⁵³ This figure does not adjust for child mortality; otherwise the life expectancy would be somewhat higher.

⁵⁴ For essays on the global hip hop movement, see these edited volumes: Samy Alim, Ibrahim and Pennycook (2009), Basu and Lemelle (2006), and Mitchell (2001). For a discussion of football’s influence on identity in a West African context, see Vidacs (2009).

The rigidities of socioeconomic exclusion are very real. “Hip hop, Air Jordans, and Manchester United colours may animate youthful imaginations almost everywhere, often serving as a poignant measure of the distance between dream and fulfillment, between desire and impossibility, between centres of great wealth and peripheries of crushing poverty” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2005: 27). But these men are no longer teenagers; their imaginations are youthful though they are not. The difference between boys and men demarcate the distance between dream and fulfillment. With men at the center and boys abandoned to the periphery, this is the latest rendition of colonial civilized/savage distinctions. However they may suffer from the pain of abjection, mediascapes that transform peripheral Abidjanais men into cultural consumers of the African diaspora constitute them as a collective, borderless and eternalized youth. They are visible.

In Abidjanais social vernacular, to call someone *garçon* – literally, boy, is the ultimate compliment: *il est garçon*. Men whose productive capacities are partial and inactive appropriate the diminutive *garçon* as a designator that has historically suggested failure as a man. Compare this to an earlier generation of which Ferguson (2006) speaks, when rights to the city required fitting into the mold of what constituted a civilized *man*. Indeed, throughout the African continent, the designator boy was a deeply contested colonialist insult that denied the possibility of black men being men at all (Brown, 2003; Shear, 2003). *Garçon* counters the fact that men cannot assume masculinities predicated on notions of adulthood, elders, or “big men” statuses within their communities (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003). This celebration of reversal, glorifying an eternal boyhood, responds to global cues of a consumption-based youth culture at the same time as the extended category of youth contends with masculine lack and failure. It celebrates the minor term of a colonial binary, suggesting survival in a hard-knock life.

6. Conclusion: *Tu connais pas Abidjan?*

My analysis of barbershop images and their resonance among peripheral Abidjanais men contests a predominant theme in contemporary African scholarship, namely that peripheral urbanites’ global fascination necessitates a turn away from “nationalist and pan-African narratives and with them their attributes, biographies and times” (Diouf, 2005: 231). As a politics of representation, peripheral Abidjanais men (“youth”) connect to globally successful men in the African diaspora. In doing so, they co-opt discourses from elsewhere. As Ferguson (2006) indicates, however, the success of the colonial project was largely predicated on linking inclusion in civil society with the social and cultural attributes of the colonizer; this was not a matter of mindless “mimicry” but importantly about “membership” with those rights to the city that membership accrued. When considering the contradictory state of abjection peripheral African men face today, falling shamefully short when confronting ideals of what a man ought to be, it is clear that membership has in no way receded into the background of what is either desirable or necessary.

Abidjan’s barbershop images counter men’s exclusions. Constructing local and pan-African narratives is highly relevant to this neoliberal, media- and advertising-saturated age. Responding to the destructive effects of structural adjustment on African economies, Africans “substitute for this an ‘elsewhere,’ either near or distant, and the illusions of economic globalization” (Diouf, 2005: 231). Neoliberal realities have indeed rendered these men redundant in their local economies. And, pushed out as men and citizens, they look beyond their national borders to define themselves (Diouf, 2003; Simone, 2010). They find affirmative likenesses in masculine icons throughout the African diaspora, potent symbols given the continuing

relationship between blackness and exclusion. But peripheral Abidjanais men also celebrate their history of exceptionalism and claim parity with the global which they are constantly domesticating. As they assert a revised definition of what it means to be Abidjanais today, they shape this identity with practices from within and without.

West African social, economic and political history since Ivoirian independence raised Abidjan to the status of a formidable regional center, a civilized city. Nonetheless, contemporary Abidjanais contend with defining their culture independent of continuing French domination. On the urban periphery, the Abidjanais identity is free of the mark of French civilization. In the *quartiers populaires* a new generation engages in a politics of representation, selecting cultural cues with which to create externally *and* locally legitimated identities.

Upon seeing a taxi driver make a traffic-congesting blunder in one of Yopougon's or Abobo's busy intersections, one hears a chorus of angry passers-by question facetiously *Tu connais pas Abidjan?* meaning "Don't you know Abidjan?" While residual pride in Abidjan's faded status as the "Paris of West Africa" certainly exists, a new pride has emerged wherein to know Abidjan is to know how to navigate those spaces excluded from the *colon's* city, where rules are not written in clear signage but understood collectively through the trials and errors of time and experience: the street smarts of Abidjan, a city in the global periphery. It is to know the grittier Abidjan invisible to outsiders, the brushed-aside shame of a decaying and largely absent state whose abandoned spaces do not figure onto its postcards. The same applies to these barbershop signs: no advertising company sent marketing consultants to the *communes* to determine what would most appeal to young Abidjanais men; these signs sprung up as local, collective processes of articulating what it means to be a black man in Abidjan's periphery and in the global neoliberal economy.

Contests of representation marked colonial cities since their inception, with the built environment an integral tool for dominating and othering native populations (AlSayyad, 1992). These images contest this history. What Abidjanais men display in these barbershops signs are a particular form of postcolonial, African diaspora, and peripheral masculinity affirmed through a politics of representation. Domesticated global symbols structure a social practice through which Abidjanais men mold local belonging, both imagined and realized, countering their irrelevance through proof of their participation. They respond to postcolonial domination through the appearance of blackness. They assert belonging through the practice of consumption.

In Weiss's (2009: 154) study, "women were concerned about finding men who would demonstrate their trustworthiness by accepting responsibility for their children." They reject the "thugs" at the barbershop. But it is also clear that those thugs can barely get by. I suggest that men's rejections of women are responses to their own rejection; the "expulsion of women from urban sociality" (ibid: 84) is a response to their expulsion as productive actors in the public sphere of work and the private sphere as breadwinners at home. Thus this is a failed masculinity because it is one that does not – *cannot* – assert them as men in their society but rather as boys restricted to the male-segregated spaces of the city and the fantasy worlds of an abstract media.

Peripheral Abidjanais men confront a global economic climate wherein they are no longer exploited but excluded. They respond accordingly, desiring not to resist exploitation but to counter exclusion with belonging, achieved through representing themselves through iconic male images from the African diaspora. However, the desire to belong links this generation's desire to those of previous generations, in both cases insisting on Abidjan's place in a global order. As hybrid signifiers, the barbershop images are foremost about knowing and understanding Abidjan, because for the peripheral Abidjanais man the first stage of belonging in

the world is belonging in this city. Belonging is of special significance for men since it is the man's role that the capitalist-colonial project linked to the modern, the public, and the productive: the essence of masculine identity is at stake in the politics of representation. For and by men, the images situate men in a man's world. The distinct absence of women as participants or as spectators no doubt speaks to a troublesome male-female disconnect wherein the contemporary African generation surely continues to share a bed but not a common discourse around inspirations, imaginations, goals or ambitions. This is a dilemma that is unfortunately beyond the scope of my analysis. What these barbershop images indicate, however, are ways that Abidjanais men articulate their identities and validate themselves as men in the city and beyond despite their peripheral positions. Perhaps the most telling indication that these men are self-referencing as central players in their worlds is the emerging trend to figure themselves – neither local nor global personalities – in the images. It is a literal elevation of their own status as individuals equal to any celebrity near or distant. It suggests a redemptive possibility that, in eizing and domesticating a popular trend, they may become their own superstars. Fanon (1967 [1952]: 112) puts in plainly: “All I wanted was to be a man among other men.”

Figure 6a: Barber, self-portrait



18 August 2009, Abobo

Chapter 5
The Sisyphean tasks of *vendeurs ambulants*

1. Greatness *en chaque homme*

In the commercial district of Treichville is a busy traffic intersection nicknamed “Solibra” because of its proximity to the Solibra beer factory. Dozens of mobile street vendors descend during rush hour to sell inflatable balls, car mats, camcorders, toilet paper, or phone recharge cards, to name a few. Dominating this intersection is a massive Guinness advertising billboard.⁵⁵ Eight black men stand in a descending line with a man-sized Guinness bottle in the center whose label states, in English, “Foreign Extra.” All proud, distinguished-looking black men, beginning left to right are what appear by their dress to be a retiree, a business man, an athlete, a mechanic, an “average” guy with no discernable trade, a pilot, a doctor, and a disc jockey (DJ). Here are representative trades in the Abidjanais social imagination, from the fantastical notion of becoming an athlete (or a doctor), to the relative prestige within the informal sector of becoming a DJ or a mechanic. By leveling these trades, Guinness conveys equality among peripheral Abidjanais men, their fantasies, *and* the ideal-typical working professional. The retiree indicates a lifetime of steady work guaranteeing stability and status in old age.

The average guy whose dress indicates no discernable trade stands near the center, just right of the bottle, waving a banner that declares *Il y a de la GREATNESS en chaque homme* or, “There is GREATNESS in each man.” The use of English for only the word “greatness” signifies the qualitative value assigned to Anglophone culture. The emphasis on the brand’s foreign-ness with “Foreign Extra” suggests that the Guinness consumer is cosmopolitan. Drinking a Guinness allows the Abidjanais man to have a relationship to the outside world, an essential status marker in the contemporary global South.

That the average guy whose work is a mystery bears the banner for all working men illustrates how Guinness has tapped into the same predicament between men and work that I explore in mobile street vendors’ livelihoods and lifestyles. It is a validation, a claim that equality with or without work exists – contingent on something else: in this case a Guinness beer. Guinness gives the peripheral man a brand, a consumer’s identity, to replace his workplace identity. For those Treichville men who work underneath this billboard, making a few dollars on a good day, Guinness promises them a means to achieve status, to shows off their discerning tastes which they cannot via cars or houses. For these men, local hierarchies demarcate who drinks a Guinness, who drinks a local beer, and who drinks at all.

These next chapters explore the lives of Abidjan’s mobile street vendors at work and at play. I investigate their survival strategies, sources of status, social networks, relationships with women, and visions for the future. After casual, preliminary discussions with vendors at various intersections across Abidjan, I conducted informal interviews and focus groups lasting between twenty minutes and three hours with thirty-six current and former vendors at their work site or in follow-ups at *maquis*. I made single visits to intersections known for mobile street vending throughout Abidjan’s central and peripheral *communes* and made repeat visits to three intersections to watch vendors sell their goods. Of these men I further socialized with thirteen vendors, going out with them at night, sharing afternoon drinks, watching them play football,

⁵⁵ See also Matlon (2011a) for similar commentary on this Guinness billboard advertisement.

rehearse, record and perform music, visiting their homes and meeting their families, and generally just hanging out.

2. Being somebody

Informal street trade has grown fastest in sub-Saharan Africa (Lyons and Snoxell, 2005: 1077). Simone (2004a: 168) suggests that the greatest change in the post-independence African city “has been the reorientation of the city from being the center for a modernist elaboration of formal public and private employment to an arena for highly improvised small-scale entrepreneurial initiative” which he calls “survivalist in nature.” Symbolic of Abidjan’s economic crisis and comprising the lowest tier of street traders, mobile street vendors are deeply peripheral informal sector workers who overwhelmingly described their existence as meted out with a day-to-day sense of uncertainty.

The gendered wage labor system – particularly the belief that informal work is feminine – and the barriers men face in acting as providers as a consequence of unstable and meager earnings both emasculates vendors and renders them redundant. Further, in Abidjan as elsewhere in Africa, street vending’s low barriers to entry have attracted migrants in particular and thus urbanites typically identify this as foreigners’ work (Matlon, 2011a; Newell, 2009a; Skinner, 2008). For foreigners who are excluded as less-than-men, and for all vendors who find themselves victims of incessant state harassment, they have no recourse to work-based masculine pride via an association with the patriotic movement. Therefore vendors must bypass both the women in their lives and the state to affirm their masculine identities.

Despite their deep poverty, constant struggles to make rent and put food on the table, and status as social juniors, the vendors were no less susceptible to the human longing to be someone and to stand out in their neighborhoods as men of worth. For those coming from villages, many would respond to my question of “Why come to Abidjan now, despite the crisis?” by stating matter-of-factly that here, at least, they could be somebody. And many were determined not to return to their villages unless they had achieved this goal, which for them – as for most of us living in the modern world – associated *being* with *having*. Hence Thierry (thirty-two, Ivoirian from north) says, “It is when you have something you are respected, yeah? You have nothing, you have no respect.” To make it and to make a name for themselves in an unforgiving Abidjan required a variety of strategies, networks, and scripts which I explore in this chapter on vendors’ work. Deriving status from identities imagined over those realized, vendors attributed great significance to the *potentiality* in their earnings and work. This was against a backdrop of highly stigmatized work and regular state harassment. In *Chapter 6* I look at vendors’ non-work identities, identities inflated, forged or otherwise tweaked, but always reconceived to take precedent over what they do to earn their keep. I look at their relationships with women and the boy’s worlds they carve out to affirm themselves in the absence of women. Lastly, I explore the dreams they articulate for their futures: two equally improbable visions of formal work or media stardom.

My analysis highlights crucial features of vendors’ lives: their precarious livelihoods, their sense of exclusion from the national identity, and scripts that vindicate their non-productive masculinities. My analysis of vendors’ livelihoods offers a close look at the lowest tier of informal work amid war and economic crisis, when little other data exists on the subject. The central feature of this work is its unpredictability, and at the time of my research it was clear that the majority of vendors were unable to live off of their earnings alone. Furthermore, the social cost of precariousness was high. As a counter, vendors heavily relied on peer solidarity and

familial/community/immigrant networks. Given the low status of most of the people they knew this did little to raise them up but was nonetheless a buffer to homelessness or starvation. Because their working identities were highly stigmatized vendors dwelled in a realm of illegality; contextualized within a greater autochthonous movement, this was a charge that merged conceptions of foreignness. Finally, I explore the scripts vendors adopt to embrace a non-productive masculinity. Without denying their status as social juniors, vendors connected with identities at play, identities glorified in the mainstream media as ideal-typical black masculinities.

3. *C'est pas pour vivre mais pour survivre*

Among the vendors I met were men who pursued higher education or trades but were squeezed into vending at the onset of political conflict. Others were unskilled Ivoirians and foreigners who a decade before could have hoped to situate themselves as regulars at a particular intersection and eventually accumulate enough to open a fixed stall in the market or to begin an apprenticeship in a trade. As symbols of the economic crisis and the dead-end work available to the lowest tier of informal sector men, the vendors are themselves “figures of the [subject in times of] crisis” (c.f. Mbembe and Roitman, 1995). There is no wage-earning period whose loss they lament; they belong to a generation where the majority of men never assumed productive, working identities. The entirety of their lived experience juxtaposes as failure against a presumed normality lived elsewhere.⁵⁶ In this way the vendors, constantly compared their lives against “others” living a “normal” life. Stephane, twenty-six, an Abidjan-born Ivoirian, says, “The crisis is all we have ever experienced.” Still, they attest to a worsening Abidjan. Their earnings markedly declined after the onset of war and the evacuation of the international community. Those with substantial tenure wistfully recalled a pre-war, pre-Gbagbo era and viewed his anti-foreigner stance as biting the hands that fed them. By contrast, they spoke approvingly of Houphouët-Boigny’s close relationship to France.⁵⁷

Mobile vendors’ activities are part remunerative and part charity; many fondly recounted the good times when clients would give them a little money with or without a purchase and check up on them if they were ill. Like Liebow’s (1967) Washington, D.C. street corner day workers, often the only difference between their work and “hanging out” were the goods on their person. Since the political crisis, the vendors report the closure of companies and subsequent disappearance of clients who sat in rush-hour traffic on their daily commute. Further, competition among vendors has grown as more desperate men are pushed into the roads. Finally, the police increasingly look to vendors as sources of petty extortion. Police harassment adds a

⁵⁶ Compare this to the men from Lindsay’s (2003) or Ferguson’s (1999) studies who measured themselves against their brighter, wage-earning pasts.

⁵⁷ Whereas the orators relied on a Gbagboist state that articulated an Ivoirian-specific, party-centered clientelism, the vendors’ patronage relationship with the expatriate and/or foreign business-supported elite imbued a neocolonial reliance that dependency theorists may interpret as reactionary. Along with the many workers who relied on a stratified service economy predominantly oriented towards foreigners – chauffeurs, cooks, security personnel, gardeners and house cleaners – many vendors decried the absence of expatriates, not only welcoming their return but also doubtful of the potential for a viable Ivoirian economy without them.

dimension of risk to their work, sharpening their experience of the crisis as doubly economic and political, and they as victims of both.

The vendors called themselves *chômeurs*, or unemployed. Arnaud, twenty-six, an Ivoirian from the interior (north), explains, “Yes, I am unemployed, because...I do not work in a company.” As poor men, they had no luxury to wait for a “good” job and instead *se débrouiller* or “get by” while looking or hoping for something else. Vending passes time and alongside other strategies, brings in enough to scrape by or to have a little “weekend money” (Thierry). Compare this to the model Ivoirian worker of the Houphouët-Boigny generation: the well-heeled, salaried bureaucrat. Using “bureaucrat” to denote regularity and predictability, Romaric, twenty-eight, an Abidjan-born Ivoirian, says,

When you practice a trade, this has nothing to do with someone who is a bureaucrat. A bureaucrat, either one of the state or of a private business, has nothing to do with those who get by [*se débrouille*]. Because you receive a monthly salary. He who gets by, it is daily; today he makes something, maybe tomorrow, two days, three days [later], he will have nothing...He who gets by, as they say in Africa, he lives day to day...See, that has nothing to do with a bureaucrat. So for the moment, I am unemployed [*un chômeur*].

Agadjanian (2005: 260) notes similar classifications in Maputo, where work in the formal sector, particularly the government, drew a sharp distinction with “traditionally female occupations, such as street commerce,” so that today Mozambiquans differentiate between “selling” and “working.” Similarly, Cooper (2003) describes how the family wage that facilitated the European ideal of civilized life was mainly restricted to civil servants. In Francophone Côte d’Ivoire, the colonial notion of *évolué* is a persistent theme among these peripheral men shut out of formal work and its accompanying pretenses, and lingers strongly in postcolonial notions of real work that are considered appropriate for men (Newell, 2009a). Indeed, a recent survey of market and street vendors in Abidjan found that over seventy percent of all traders were women (Adiko and Anoh Kouassi, 2003). But the sophisticated, civilized *évolué* in his suit sharply contrasts with vendors’ experiences. Most dress down for work in grubby, ripped clothing – what Prospère, thirty-eight, Abidjan-born Burkinabé calls the “vagabond” look because they recognize that the street is a place of refuse. Thierry explains, “If you say that man has *evolved*, it is [because he had] the means...I know that if I have money, I will create a business.” What he does now – selling shoes at the market – this is not a business. To have a real business involves fitting an idea of how a businessman should live: to be seated in a swivel chair in an air-conditioned office, not sweating on a corner or at a market stall.

The vendors emphasized that their activities were a result of an absolute lack of choice in a desolate labor market. To find work in formalized trades given their minimal skill sets and low status presents its own barriers in a city that runs informally, with unwritten rules: a few vendors explained that a factory job, for example, requires paying both a hefty finders’ fee to the policeman or whomever else had introduced him to the work site, in addition to giving his boss a regular cut of his earnings. A man could find work as a temporary hand, but after working two three-month periods, the company would be obliged to hire him, thus paying a full wage. Given the army of unemployed, companies preferred to simply continue taking on new temporary workers. Even for informal skilled trade, unpaid apprenticeship periods were not options for men without sturdy safety nets. One vendor who had migrated from Guinea explained that he had

wanted to be a mechanic, but the brother with whom he lodged threatened to kick him out if he pursued this trade since he would not be contributing to the household earnings.

Fidel, a twenty-nine year old from the interior, describes this work as something “imposed” on him – the invisible hand of the market existing only to knock him down. He says, *C’est pas pour vivre mais pour survivre*, or “It is not to live but to survive.” If living in the modern world is to make it and to make a name for oneself, to *be* and to *have*, then survival is to make do with the bare minimum. So in the same conversation Marc [twenties, Ivoirian from interior] says, “This is not a job; not only that, it makes us look ridiculous.” Jaurès, twenty-five, from Niger, says he vends only because he has “no solution,” and Romaric reasoned that vendors are “obliged to go backwards...you may end up with white hair and still you have not made it.” Frustrated with my questions, “Do you have a girlfriend, do you have a mobile phone, do you go out on weekends,” Danon, nineteen, a recent arrival from Guinea-Conakry, stated simply, “All of that depends on the means.” In the same vein, Fabrice explained that such things – a girlfriend, leisure activities – were barred to those who were “not there yet”; they were only at “the introduction.” The vendors represent the stagnant non-productivity of the crisis. They represent economic collapse and the correspondent precariousness of the informal sector, the state’s extortion, and the wide gulf between men and women and fantasy and reality. These barriers leave them to contend with a dearth of choices or opportunities.

In later chapters I demonstrate how the orators drew on the history of the Ivoirian miracle to buttress their own claims of self-worth, negating the present interregnum for a narrative of the semi-periphery that promised a hopeful future for themselves and the state. The vendors, however, understood how fully they reflected the present moment in an Africa excluded. Thierry says, “At thirty-two years old...I have nothing to say, ‘Look, I have worked.’ At my age I have nothing of worth.” Samuel, twenty-eight, an Ivoirian from the interior, frustrated to be in his fifth year of vending when he initially imagined he would not surpass one, says, “The years pass so fast. You find you are still at point A, and you aspire for a better tomorrow to find yourself at point B, but you are suspended always at point A.” Josue, a born-and-raised Abidjanais Burkinabé who claimed to be twenty-eight though judging from his life history was well into his thirties, has been vending off and on for fourteen years. He describes his activities as “only going in circles.” He says, “Often we stop, we do other little trades but they do not work, again we return to the corner to get by, to search for a little something...” Waiting is the dominant narrative of life in the informal sector: men wait for long periods hoping something will shift, to move them forward, out of a present that goes in circles, taunting them with more waiting for rush hour traffic, for a sell, for the next meal, and for another day to do it all again. Yaio, twenty-six, an Abidjan-born Ivoirian whose family came from the north says, “We live in the suspense of day to day.” As I discuss later, the orators, with their privileged relationship to the state, were acting subjects; they had *agency* to manipulate the status quo for personal gain. So when they spoke of the sacrificed generation, they referred also to their sacrifices. The vendors on the other hand were objects, embodiments of failure. Simone (2004a) describes “movement” as paradigmatic of the African urban subject. Though referencing the migrant, the mobile street vendor also resonates with his description “dispossession,” wherein he “seeks to configure a certain capacity for improvisation so as to best capitalize on economic and social opportunities opened up by the very inability of the city to fully incorporate – house, employ, and service – all those who make demands on it” (ibid: 120). The vendors are car-dodging, fume-inhaling, police-eluding, hand-to-mouth proof that the Ivoirian “miracle” was in fact a “mirage” (Ridler, 1985: 407; Hecht, 1983).

4. Profiles at the bottom

I was particularly impressed with the strategies and earnings of a collectivized group of eight perfume vendors with some university education (whom I reference as vendors from the “Gesco corridor” below). I told Tino and MC, my research assistants and two vendors who sold perfume in Adjamé market on what could only graciously be described as a booth (but closer to a stool) in a *de facto* pedestrian-only road during working hours, that they could learn a thing or two from these men. I knew there were weeks when they would not make 2000CFA while the Gesco vendors averaged 3000CFA a day. “Aaah, but Jordanna,” Tino explained to me in the slow speech one reserves for children and stupid foreigners, “We are *installed*.” A step above the mobile vendors within the pecking order of Abidjan’s informal economy, their fixed location was an advantage that despite their minimal earnings, bestowed precious status.

4.1. Potentiality as value

Informal economy hierarchies are not based solely on earnings. For vendors, location, tenure, and goods sold are preeminent: relative permanence and/or substantial capital counter the inherent precariousness of informal activities. Men value such factors independently of earnings which are inherently unsteady and in any case generally minimal. These hierarchies relate to status among vendors, work that constitutes the bottom tier of informal activity. And because earnings are uncertain, vendors prize *potentiality* of what the goods are worth and derive status by way of their association to these goods. Therefore higher-status (but not necessarily higher-earning) vendors buttress their identities by aligning themselves not with their emasculating earnings but with the fantasized potentiality and prestige of their products. So when I asked vendors what they earned, they would readily reference the amount they sold, not made. Moreover, it often took a moment for them to recall their personal profits apart from the money that passed through their hands.⁵⁸

Informal workers in Abidjan esteem skilled trades that require years of apprenticeships to master and thereby increase the value of the worker himself. Further, mastery of a particular craft suggests planning and stability. By extension, investing time and(/or) money in a license makes it a precious commodity, so drivers, for example, enjoy particular status. A fixed location, such as a car or bus, booth, stall, or ideally a shop, similarly bestows status. A vendor’s status level is obvious in a place like Adjamé market. Those with permanent, sheltered shops rank highest, followed by those with semi-permanent stalls stationed on the sidewalk, then temporary stalls carried home at night, and finally those who carry their wares on their person, either in pedestrianized spaces or in traffic, i.e. mobile vendors. What one sells is also important. A

⁵⁸ Identification-by-association extended to other areas of their lives: Robert stated that his American “501” jeans cost 35,000CFA, and when I remarked that this was much higher than his stated 25,000CFA of monthly expenditures, he clarified that he had paid second-hand. For Robert, the jeans’ worth related to his estimation of the brand’s value. Similarly Arnaud explained that certain women were out of his league: “I see a girl selling in a shop of value, she sells things worth 20,000CFA, and me I am just getting by like this, you try to get with her and it is sure she will reject you. That is for sure. So you know your categories.” In all cases, vendors associate personal worth with the value they accord their goods.

barbershop with a mirror and razor is not the same as a shop full of shoes, and neither compare to a shop of electronic equipment.

On the other hand, the more one has, the more one has to lose – a real risk in a climate informality, where security is poor and where the state may raze shops or seize goods at will. Harvey's (2005: 5-38) poignant co-option of Janis Joplin's hit, "Freedom's just another word..." in *A brief history of neoliberalism* stings true for mobile street vendors, the underbelly of neoliberal dogma. Their products limited to what they can hold, they have no fixed location. Their work offers "an easy point of entry into the urban economy for workers with the lowest levels of financial and human capital" (Agadjanian, 2005: 259). Free in the meanest sense of the term, their being-in-the-world is as "bare life" (Simone, 2010: 225). They inhabit non-pedestrian space and their work is day to day, or even hour to hour depending on weather, traffic conditions, or the police. They undeniably fall to the bottom of the informal economy's hierarchy.

4.2. Mobile street vending: Hierarchies and strategies

But even among mobile street vendors there are a multitude of categories and some are more successful than others. Those with the true grunt work: selling water for 50CFA⁵⁹ per sachet or newspapers for 200CFA each (their personal profits are 15CFA and 20CFA per sell, respectively) – means that to gain a pittance they will work through the day and into the night. For example, for a newspaper vendor to earn 2000CFA he must sell 20,000CFA, or 100 newspapers. And he will indefinitely be one of many vendors occupying the same space. However, newspaper vendors' predictable demand generates somewhat predictable earnings, and they can expect to make between 1000 to 3000CFA a day. Thus despite the low esteem of being a mobile street vendor, they are not necessarily the worst off financially; market vendors like my research assistants could go weeks without a sale.

Other vendors sell more expensive products but with sporadic success; I interviewed one man, Attia, who sold 50,000CFA and upward mobile phones. Wearing boat shoes he said cost him 40,000CFA and selling a 60,000CFA Blackberry, Attia looked like he belonged in the cushy residential neighborhood of Deux Plateaux where he sold his goods. He bought his product at Adjamé's *black* and claimed to make 10,000CFA on a good day and on a bad day, a few thousand.⁶⁰ Gueï, a well-dressed Guinean vendor who arrived in Abidjan in 1999 and stated an age far too young for his life story, was adorned in a gold necklace that set him back 20,000CFA for the chain and 45,000CFA for the pendant; he also sold phones at Deux Plateaux. He explained that he used this location only as a base to attract clientele. Gueï purchased most of his goods from the *black* and from Ghana where he made regular trips. But his best custom was on-demand, selling Armani suits to clients in their private homes and offices. He cut costs on his daily commute – a huge drain on many vendors – by making deals with *baca* drivers for discounted goods in exchange for free rides. Proudly describing himself as a businessman, he said that in his ten years of vending he has established a clientele of movers and shakers who buy his imported suits at the discounted price of 50,000CFA to 100,000CFA. Refusing to be recorded and never fully trustful of me, he declined to say where he came across these designer threads.

⁵⁹ At the time of my research 500CFA was approximately US \$1.

⁶⁰ Although I question how often a client buys Blackberry off the street – if the police do not get to them first.

But everything about him, from his self-presentation, dress and accessories, goods on offer and vending strategy, suggested that he was a cut above the typical vendor. Newell (2009a: 163) explains that "...display of success in this world [is] a key way of building the social networks that formed the principle means of support and accumulation." In other words, Gueï's ability to look the part was itself a credential within an economy of smokescreens. And both what he sold and how he presented himself fed an image of himself as an authentic businessman. Arnaud, a twenty-six year-old Ivoirian from the north, sold things "of worth" – he might purchase a product for 1000CFA and sell it to clients for 1500CFA – but said that his daily earnings "depend on luck." I asked if he sold water, and he replied, "*Nooo*, I do not sell water. I am above that." I asked why, and he explained, "Money from water, I have had enough of that. So I prefer to put it into big merchandise." However, profits going directly to the vendors are a small proportion of the total cost of such goods, such that what Arnaud was "above" was the stigma of being a water vendor by virtue of its availability to nearly anyone.

Elaborating on his theme of "weekend money," Thierry explains, "What we make is not enough to live. Because often what you make, that is only enough for you and your friends to amuse themselves." Like teenagers with summer jobs, the vendors make enough to play, not to be taken seriously. Survival depends on a number of strategies at work and elsewhere in their lives. While there are potentially infinite ways to make it through a day or a year, the vendors I observed relied on five strategies to combat the uncertainty of their bottom-rung informal activities. Regarding their lives outside of work, I focus solely on their insertion into networks, which I discuss in the following section.

First, some vendors established themselves over long periods of time in particular neighborhoods and/or in wealthier neighborhoods, in both instances developing a regular clientele. Vendors who began before the onset of war in 2002 held a privileged position over newcomers, territorializing certain intersections prior to the influx of desperate competition. With this advantage many had become the favored *petits* [little ones] of businessmen who took a personal interest in their lives. The first vendors whom I befriended worked a major intersection that I frequently passed by in a taxi, and a familiar scene ensued whereby if they caught my eye they would come running to me. We would engage in a hasty transaction for some chewing gum or tissues; if there was not enough time to complete the exchange, they would simply indicate that I could pay them the next time I passed, ensuring that I nonetheless took the product and thus guaranteeing a future sale. After knowing them for some months, I was dismayed when one casually mentioned that my father was "friends with the minister." I learned that some years ago three of these men had developed a patronage relationship with a former minister under President Houphouët-Boigny who was indeed an old friend of my father's. Although this man had since found work with an international organization abroad, on holidays the vendors still dressed in their finest and dutifully visited the home of his wife and family, receiving encouragement in the form of kind words and some spending money. In such patronage relationships the line between sales and charity blurred. Souma says,

A *monsieur* will come and take you for his *bon petit* [good little one] and buy something out of your hands. If you have a problem of 7000[CFA], 10,000, as he works where money comes in, you can explain it to him and he will lend you 10,000, 15,000 and you can go pay your rent. If you are sick and he has not seen you for a few days, he will ask, 'Where is he?' The others will say he is sick and he will ask, 'Where does he live?' They will send him to you, and there are even ones who will pay your medicine.

But he adds that now “all those people have left.” But even with low-end clients such as drivers of public transport vehicles, favoritism helps. Erick says approvingly, “It really pleases me when clients like taxi drivers and truck drivers, if they call you and others come to serve them they refuse them categorically and ask that the other one they called comes to serve them.”

Vendors with the longest tenure claimed ownership of sorts over their micro-territories. Many vendors recalled beginning this work with the encouragement of a friend already vending. They described their initial sales from borrowed stock, with the established vendor usually letting them keep all or a portion of these earnings. Busta, an Ivoirian twenty-three year-old from the north, explained the process: a newcomer approaches a vendor and asks where he purchased his product. If this vendor is nice, he will tell you the ins and outs, such as where to buy discounted stock.⁶¹ Next, you find an unoccupied space; this was important because if other vendors did not want you there, soon you would be kicked out. Ideally friends would show you the ropes, because staying somewhere when others had been there a long time was very difficult. While orators used their political capital to lay claim to Abidjan and Côte d’Ivoire more generally, the vendors were left to defend the dusty, congested intersections distributed across Abidjan’s most crowded thoroughfares. Vendors explained that the unwelcome do not last: they are not forced out *per se*, but in the context of working together so closely, it quickly becomes obvious who does and does not belong.

Secondly, vendors work collectively to distribute effort and uncertainty.⁶² Lyons and Snoxell (2005: 1077) find that street vendors “deliberately create and adapt their networks, opportunistically building relationships of trust in the marketplace which enable them to survive.” As noted above, vendors with the longest tenure – the ones who had managed to make vending marginally profitable – worked alongside the same men for years at a time. The vendors in my neighborhood went to work and returned home together. None of them sold on Sundays, and when I suggested that breaking this arrangement would entail exclusive earnings for an individual they first looked surprised at the novelty of this idea, but after a moment of consideration agreed that while this was possible, it was something they would never do. Among such a group of vendors whose marginal success was no doubt due to the group’s cohesiveness, breaking this solidarity was not in their personal interest.

Working collectively helps pass time and lighten the psychological burden of the job (Agadjanian, 2005). But it also serves the practical purpose of a social safety net. Jaurès says, “There is solidarity between us. We get by little by little, if you can you give 200[CFA], 500, if

⁶¹ Some vendors sell for a particular distributor (who absorbed the risk of goods being damaged or stolen), forming a community like the one I describe of Nigerien migrants in the section on networks below. Others may work for a shop owner, particularly Lebanese; this was a strategy I encountered only once although I had expected it to be more frequent. Vendors explained to me that there was not enough trust for this to happen frequently since working for someone implied selling their goods on credit. However, I suspect that during holidays, when I would pass an influx of vendors all selling the same things (i.e. inflatable balls or Christmas decorations), shop owners hired men out for sales. Otherwise, men sold what they had purchased. The exceptions are newspaper vendors who work for the newspaper company and often wore aprons with the logo of the daily.

⁶² See *Vendors, respected and respectable*, below.

you have the means you give 1000.” He recounted the story of a fellow vendor who had recently hurt his leg. The other vendors came together to make sure he received food and medicine while he was out of work. In contrast, vendors that appeared particularly desolate to me described a solitary workday. Besides very occasional help in the form of 100CFA or 200CFA for some *garba* after a day without earnings, these men did not associate and knew little to nothing of fellow vendors’ personal lives. One vendor sold far from his neighborhood out of fear that people he knew would see them, and told no one, neither friends nor teammates from his neighborhood football club, of his vending.

A vendors’ range of activities made it difficult to establish set hierarchies among classes of vending. Street vending in general is highly variable and the number of vendors on the street at any given time fluctuates (International Labor Organization, 2002). For example, newspaper vendors work early in the morning through the afternoon, while men selling electronics descend for two hours during evening rush hour. Most vendors do not work in heavy rains which are frequent during the rainy season. A vendor peddling his wares in the market may move down the vending hierarchy the moment he circulates between passing cars. At times he may be stationary, standing at the side of the road or seated under a sheltered stall as with vendors in the Adjamé slum of Boribana who become stereotypical *vendeurs ambulants* only during peak afternoon rush hour. A vendor may work in another trade altogether; some men appear at a regular time and location while others work a variety of jobs depending on the time of day and season, or personal preference at the moment. As this work is so uncertain in almost every way, finding men who vend as a steady and constant trade is difficult. Therefore, offsetting the precariousness of mobile street vending and informal activities more generally by casting one’s luck in multiple gigs simultaneously constitutes a third survival strategy for vendors.

In his vending days, Thierry picked up a leatherwork apprenticeship on the side, using this to repair broken shoes which he then sold at a profit. Busta, who had sold mirrors in Adjamé market also sold juice and ice cream in a push cart, and worked as a waiter, media pirate, and in temporary state clean-up projects. And with whatever he was doing, he also rented out a juice cart and took partial profits from the vendor, acting in essence as a sub-contractor. Zapin, a twenty-three year old from Abidjan, was a vendor, barber and musician. Erick was a water and juice vendor and distributor, profiting from the fact that his mother-in-law owned the depot. Additionally, his wife made yogurt that he sold alongside his other products.

Fourthly, vendors make themselves known as figures in their communities via other activities or through aspects of their personality they have successfully promoted. Lastly, socially adept vendors tap into local community networks, including neighborhood police and community members of influence to ensure a privileged place in the local market. I discuss these last strategies with regard to the Gesco vendors, the Academy Rap Revolution in *Appendix 2* and in the section on networks below. Given how often this work *does not* pay, when not relying on handouts from friendly drivers vendors depend on family or community networks for their shelter and daily bread. These networks are essential means of survival in the context of informality that leaves them otherwise invisible.

5. A street corner in Abidjan

Table 5.1: A street corner in Abidjan

Erick's sixty-day data ⁶³ of Tampico and water sachet sales between 19 April 2009 and 25 June 2009 at the Yopougon Kuwait intersection							
	work days	earnings CFA ⁶⁴	average daily earnings CFA	high profit CFA	low profit CFA	2nd high CFA	2nd low CFA
Vendors selling at least one work week							
A	48	66100	1377	4475	75	3425	175
B	43	93125	2167	6050	100	4925	225
C	32	24475	765	1900	150	1575	350
D	31	62700	2023	5000	125	4875	200
E	29	87300	3010	8925	550	5550	1175
F	29	53850	1857	6950	50	3675	250
G	29	28725	991	6725	50	1850	300
H	24	84025	3501	6750	175	5950	575
I	20	47900	2395	5025	550	3875	550
J	19	39625	2086	3900	150	3350	950
K	11	14625	1330	3000	50	2875	225
L	8	6875	859	1650	200	1125	350
M	8	21175	2647	3850	875	3425	1100
N	7	14000	2000	3175	725	2600	1550
O	6	6575	1096	2700	175	1650	600
P	5	5475	1095	1650	350	1650	550
total: 16	total: 349	total: 656,950	daily av.: 1825	av. high: 4483	av. low: 272		
Vendors selling less than one work week							
Q	4	4025	1006	1650	500	1275	600
R	4	6175	1544	2100	1025	1950	1100
S	3	3275	1092	1550	250	1475	*
T	3	1275	425	625	150	500	*
U	3	425	142	175	100	150	*
V	3	4000	1333	1625	1150	1225	*
W	3	2650	883	1850	250	550	*
X	2	1650	825	1100	550	*	*
Y	2	950	475	600	350	*	*

⁶³ Erick had no data for eight days: 27 April until 01 May (Monday through Friday), 24 May (Sunday), 07 June (Sunday) and 14 June (Sunday).

⁶⁴ To restate, at the time of my fieldwork 500CFA was equivalent to approximately US\$1.

total: 9	total: 27	total: 24,425	daily av.: 858	av. high: 1253	av. low: 481		
One-day vendors							
AA	1	175	175	175	175		
BB	1	375	375	375	375	*	*
CC	1	1275	1275	1275	1275	*	*
DD	1	50	50	50	50	*	*
EE	1	50	50	50	50	*	*
FF	1	550	550	550	550	*	*
GG	1	600	600	600	600	*	*
HH	1	750	750	750	750	*	*
II	1	2025	2025	2025	2025	*	*
JJ	1	550	550	550	550	*	*
KK	1	?	?	?	?	?	?
total vendors: 11	total work days: 11	total: 6400	daily av.: 640	av. high: 640	av. low: 640		
Vendor totals:							
total: 36	av. work days: 15	total av.: 19639	daily av.: 1238	av. high: 2554	av. low: 431		
total excl. 1- days: 25	av. work days excl. 1- day: 21	total av. excl. 1- day: 27239	av. excl. 1-day: 1477	av. high excl. 1- day: 3320	av. low excl. 1- day: 347		

Additional Yopougon Kuwait intersection figures:

Total work days: 387 ...excluding one-day vendors: 376

Total vendors' earnings: 687,375CFA ...excluding one-day vendors: 680,975CFA

Average vendors per day: 6-7 (6.42) ...High number vendors in one day: 10 ...Low number: 3

Figures in italics indicate high for all vendors.

Erick, who manages a water and Tampico juice sachet depot at the intersection locally known as "Kuwait" in Yopougon, provided me with the raw figures for the table above. A street vendor himself, Erick also manages the depot that his mother-in-law owned. During a visit with his partner and child, we spoke about my research and he provided me with these figures: data he had begun collecting two months previously. Here I provide highlights, totals and averages which I calculated, in support of themes relevant to this chapter. Erick's raw figures are of individual vendor's Tampico (juice), water, yogurt and milk stock purchases, stock sold, and stock returned, as well as periodic notes of vendor's debts to him since he often sold stock on credit. Vendors would go to the intersection with varying amounts of stock which they requested from the depot. They tended to sell out and only one vendor consistently overestimated his sales, so that earnings also reflect the vendor's initial expectations/intentions for the day.

Erick sold Tampico one-hundred sachet packets at 7500CFA, or 75CFA per sachet, which a vendor then sold at 100CFA, leaving him with a 25CFA per-packet profit.⁶⁵ He sold thirty-sachet water packets which included four free sachets for a total of 600CFA. These he sold in half- or whole packet segments so that vendors earned 550CFA for a half packet and 1100CFA for a whole packet. (Individual sachets cost the vendor 20CFA and they sold for 50CFA, so vendors made 30CFA profit off of each.)

The central point this data illustrates is the high variability and erratic nature of mobile street vending, even for relatively predictable sales such as water and juice. With regard to both vendors' attendance and earnings on any given day, this work is inconstant. Of the thirty-five vendors who sold for Erick, only nine, or one-quarter, put in the equivalent of four work weeks (twenty days), or one month out of the two. Sixteen put in at least one work week (five days). Eleven vendors only sold once.⁶⁶ The most any vendor worked was A, at forty-eight days, essentially working "full time." For this reason I break the data into three categories: vendors who sold more than one week, vendors who sold less than one week, and vendors who came only once. I provide averages per group in addition to total averages including and excluding the one-timers. The average days worked per vendor was fifteen days, or three work weeks. The average vendor (excluding one-day vendors) made a total of 27,239CFA over an average of twenty-one days of work, or 1477CFA a day. An average of between six and seven vendors sold at the Kuwait intersection on any given day, with the most vendors on the corner being ten in one day, and the least, three.

Regular vendors established a rhythm of higher earnings, with the first category averaging 1825CFA per day compared to 1238CFA per day for the entire group. Their average high earning was 4483CFA compared to 2254CFA for the total group, almost double. However, their average low was also lower than the total group, at 272CFA compared to 431CFA, respectively.⁶⁷ And among the ten most regular vendors, the low sales average was C at 765CFA compared to H's high of 3501CFA. E sold the most on any given day, at 8925CFA. But his second highest earnings were significantly less, at 5550CFA, and his daily earnings were 3010CFA. Further, indicating the true grunt nature of this work, to make this high profit of 8925CFA, Erick's data indicate that he sold 71 Tampico sachets and 195 water sachets. On that day, he worked alongside six other vendors.

Regularity was not necessarily an indicator of income. While the constant vendors earned by far the bulk of the total earnings, at 656,950CFA of the total vendors' profits of 687,375CFA over the two months, Jose earned 84,025CFA in literally half the days (twenty-four) that A worked (forty-eight), while the latter earned 66,100CFA. E and G both worked twenty-nine days,

⁶⁵ Erick also sold milk and yogurt at the rate/profit as Tampico, which I include under Tampico sales.

⁶⁶ Vendors who worked fewer days tended to work in a chunk of time; few were sporadic workers sustained over the entire two months.

⁶⁷ A few vendors only made 50CFA profits in one day, or the equivalent of two Tampico sachets. I discuss limitations of the data above, including potentially faulty assumptions, but will note here that since my figures come from the depot and not the vendors themselves, it is possible that on these days the vendors had not in fact working but simply purchased sachets for their personal consumption, such that these days do not reflect sales at all.

but the former earned approximately three times the latter, at 87,300CFA versus 28,725, respectively. Impressively however, the high earner was B at 93,125CFA from forty-three days of work. This number is not dissimilar to the 50,000CFA that the orators were purportedly paid per month for their political activities (although without extraordinarily long hours in between passing cars, and with extra perks and in-kind support of their political networks). But despite the exhausting and degrading nature of this low-level street vending, it was possible to earn as much as the dignified Gesco perfume vendors (see below).

As I did not collect this data myself and did not speak to the vendors, the data is more reliable as an indicator of sales at a particular *place* than for a particular *vendor's* earnings. For example, I do not know if these vendors had other jobs which would explain the frequency of their attendance. I do not know if a vendor had been sick during this time, or had returned home to his village to attend a funeral. I do not know the personal situations of any of the vendors and hence their motivations to sell; some of these vendors may be students living with their families as was Yaio, a vendor from Boribana, who sold on the corner not to pay his rent but for money for schoolbooks. Nevertheless, this data is invaluable. I have not come across accurate data on mobile street vendors' earnings, and the political situation in Côte d'Ivoire at the time of my research compounded the difficulty of accessing reliable figures. Erick's data provides a snapshot of mobile street vending on a particular intersection, indicating vendor turnover and regularity of work in addition to their high, low, average and total earnings.

6. Friends in low places

Social networks constituted an essential safety net for vendors. They find support in networks based on neighborhood ties, intra-vendor tenure at a given intersection and client patronage (as I detailed above), extra-national identity, and via their hobbies. Their limited successes hinged on their relative competence in navigating their work world and the wider social spaces they occupied. As I noted previously, the most pitiable vendors I met were also the most atomized: recent foreign arrivals who had failed to integrate into a community of fellow nationals yet were distrustful of other vendors around whom they worked. With a nervous stutter, emaciated body and broken demeanor, Danon, for example, recounted arriving in Abidjan in 2007 only to be turned away from the extended relatives whom he had expected would shelter him and help him find work. He does not spend more than 200CFA on a meal and is grateful to be staying with a sympathetic compatriot in a 5000CFA per month unit, but says that if he does not pay his rent – which he skips meals to make sure he can – he will surely be cast on the street, an experience that has already subjected him to police officers' painful batons. He explained,

In fact here I see that things are not well at all. I search until I am tired but I find nothing. I have no parents here, no blood relatives, I have no one else. I am here alone. At times I have slept in the market. Sometimes I work until evening but I do not make enough money to eat that night. It is very difficult.

The most successful vendors, by contrast, were themselves neighborhood personalities. With the easy charisma of street-level diplomats, they introduced me to the big men of the neighborhoods where they lived or sold. Because few vendors find their trade sufficient to feed, shelter and clothe them, monetary and in-kind support from family, friends, and neighborhood elders, and the willingness of landlords and others to look the other way when they are short of

money, makes up for inconsistent earnings. Yaio says, “If things are not going well, you try to see people of good will who may help you...so I have uncles from the neighborhood, big brothers in a good situation.”

The simple fact of being inserted within a locale is not enough to attain relative success. As social scientists have observed with black Americans, the wrong social networks can be a drain (see for example Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Smith, 2007). Simone (2004a: 172) observes, “...there is a preoccupation on the part of many residents in African cities with the extent to which they are tied to the fates of others whom they witness ‘sinking’ all around them. At the same time, they hope that the ties around them are sufficiently strong to rescue them if need be.” Elsewhere he describes the tension urban Africans face between integrating into a local network and having the sufficient autonomy to move outside of these linkages which also keep them down (ibid; 2004b). Josue (questionably twenty-eight), Prospère (thirty-eight) and Rodrigue (thirty-four), Abidjan born-and-raised Burkinabé, despite their decade-plus tenure selling newspapers at a prime intersection near the city center and Adjamé market, and centrally placed within their community of vendors, are desperately poor. Josue has not bought new clothes since 2005 but was the only one among them with a mobile phone (whose number the others would then use as their contact). Prospère was the only one to report going out on weekends. Their drink of choice was a caustic 100CFA sachet liquor shot which they passed among themselves over the course of our interview. I contrast these men to Patrick, a twenty-one year-old ex-vendor and footballer who is the pride of that same neighborhood, belonging to one of Abidjan’s *centres de formation* [training centers] where aspiring footballers go to improve their skills and possibly to be selected onto a professional team. He had spent a few years playing for a club in Togo. While they all know each other from the neighborhood and may be seen hanging around the vendors’ local, the *Maquis Mondial*, Patrick depends entirely on his family and neighborhood elders for basics such as food and shelter and extras such as training gear and equipment. He stopped vending or seeking other work years ago, when football became his primary focus. Although his three-and-a-half hour daily training regime ends before midday, he explained that he is too tired to work afterwards. But he is grateful for the full support of the community, who believe that one day he will make them all proud. Though Patrick inhabited the same spaces and for a time worked the same job as Josue, Prospère and Rodrigue, his status allowed him to tap the community in a radically different way. This difference illustrates that vendors’ competence in navigating their social arenas assures them more or less success. In other words, it takes more than being part of a network; a man should also rise to prominence within his social circle.

For immigrants especially, compatriot networks are essential in a country of heightened xenophobia. Fellow Nigeriens have been essential to Jaurès’s survival in Abidjan since arriving from Niger in 2006. This includes a fraternal community of Nigerien vendors and Antoine, another Nigerien who arrived in Abidjan in 2002 and has since moved up to owning his own stall that supplies other vendors. Jaurès explains, “Most of us are *zamanman* [slang for Nigerien]. So when there is an expense, even if you do not have the money they can do you a favor until you have enough. So until now my landlord has not kicked me out. Because currently I owe him two months, and I have not paid...”

Aware of the importance of social networks, a number of vendors likewise attributed the problems in Côte d’Ivoire to a breakdown of support from elders. Prospère, the thirty-eight year-old whose working life has consisted of selling newspapers ever since leaving his father’s plantation, describes his ideal: “If it were me, *I would want to help my little brothers*. I would call them and tell them to get in [the car], if I was director of a company...Abidjan is ruined. I

speak of Abidjan, but Côte d'Ivoire is ruined." In this statement Prospère paints an idyllic portrait of the big man and his clients, imagining this to be his role were he to be a man of means. His friend Rodrigue optimistically described how one of their clients, a "boss" at Sitarail, a major transport company, was planning on finding work for him: "I have a project with one of my bosses, one of my clients. He has pity on me and he said he would help me." And Thierry explained that theirs is the "sacrificed generation" because "There is no one behind us... There is no man who will defend you to say, 'Look at that young man, he has courage, he is working'... There are no rich men to support the youth and give them money." Later I describe how the orators waited for the politicians and businessmen to "finance their projects"; similarly, the vendors imagined entrepreneurial lives generously funded by their clients' apparently limitless start-up capital although their relationship was in reality circumscribed to the occasional 200CFA exchange. Besides rotating in and out of informal sector trades, the only vendor I came across during my fieldwork who had moved into a formal job – in the port of a second-tier city – secured this work with the help of his uncle who was already there. They were a far cry from approximating adult masculinity and the elder status that steady work and its subsequent networks enabled.

To truly escape the precariousness of life at the bottom meant to be associated with Côte d'Ivoire's movers and shakers, as we will see with the orators. For the average peripheral Abidjanais, life without connections means a life scraping the bottom. Of contemporary Côte d'Ivoire, Fidel remarks, "Sure you can make it here. But if you do not have parents in the public sector or the current government, you cannot make it. So you see, it is the lack of relations." As I demonstrate in the proceeding section on illegality and stigma, this lack of association with the state is an active hindrance to surviving in the context of informality. But first I provide an account of vendors who have inserted themselves into their neighborhoods as respected and respectable men.

7. Vendors, respected and respectable

Travelers, good day. Allow me to introduce you to my super perfume, the *perfume of respected men and respectable men, the perfume of VIP class*. This perfume launched *internationally* in Casablanca. Endorsed by the Queen of England, this is the *exclusive* perfume of Air Afrique's⁶⁸ VIP lounge, the one-and-the-same for travelers to Manhattan, Baghdad, Toulouse and Tokyo. It is produced in a laboratory in Paris, precisely in the 5th Arrondissement, No. 65, Avenue Henri de Chiffon. Liverpool, Marseille or Rome, this is the perfume distributed, the perfume they choose. Clients pay 8500[CFA]. I will let you have a smell for free... (Guillaume, thirty-one, from interior)

In this section I present eight collectivized perfume vendors who, since 2005, have situated themselves at the "Gesco corridor." All vehicles pass through here and stop for a police check on their way to the country's interior. Drawing from a focus group, an interview, repeat visits to their work site and socializing at *maquis* and a football match, I explore the strategies they pursued to gain an edge in mobile vending as well as the scripts they adopted to market their wares and affirm themselves.

⁶⁸ Air Afrique shut down in 2002.

The Gesco vendors split earnings which they then distributed individually on a rotating basis. This “merry-go-round” (MGR) system constitutes a form of “rotating savings and credit association” (ROSCA) popular among male and female informal workers throughout sub-Saharan Africa, and has important financial and social dimensions (Lyons and Snoxell, 2005; see also Skinner, 2008; Agadjanian, 2005). Despite its ubiquity elsewhere, these were the only mobile street vendors I met who had such a sophisticated level of organization.⁶⁹ Samuel, a twenty-eight year old from the interior, explains, “It belongs to the *petit commerce*, especially in the markets, in the women’s markets... Generally men work alone, and when they have money, perhaps they put it in a bank account. And generally men, they do not do the *petit commerce* that women do.” If vendors gained some dignity by characterizing their work in the tradition of the lone entrepreneur, the feminized ROSCA system countered these characterizations.⁷⁰

Nonetheless, a few years previously the Gesco vendors’ second “president” introduced the system and they have followed it since. Individual members contribute 15,000CFA per week or 3000CFA at the end of the day as he preferred. They could collectively decide to delay payments if they agreed that they had not earned enough. While they found it optimal to keep their numbers low, they have at times taken others into the system, for example women vendors working next to them who they also trust to guard their money. A new man receives the group’s total earnings every week, so for example, every two months one man receives 120,000CFA. This system provides peer pressure to work and to work hard, a pooled income that evens out irregular earnings, encourages saving and allows vacation days. The vendors also established an emergency fund for which members made a daily contribution of 300CFA (if after a month the money had not been used, it was something extra for them to enjoy together).

Confident and well-mannered men with some university education, the Gesco vendors also established themselves within a local network of bus drivers and police, who in turn gave them preferential treatment in their sales and did not harass them as was typical of vendor-police relations, and often they were the only vendors among dozens crowded together to be allowed on a bus during its obligatory stop. Their position was strategically brilliant: located at the exit out of Abidjan, their clients were beginning a journey and thus necessarily had some savings (laughingly, they dismissed approaching *bacas* or scruffier-looking buses, saying that if the passenger had only paid 500CFA for his ticket, he would never pay that much for perfume). Additionally, passengers were likely to be visiting their home village, and the perfume gave them a last-minute and affordable option as gifts for families expecting something from the city.

They established strong relations with adjacent vendors; the women who would guard their money, for example, also helped with transactions, watched their goods and generally socialized (see also Agadjanian, 2005). Their tenure and neighborhood relations helped them to become semi-installed. While their work was mobile, entering buses to sell their wares (and sometimes having to walk a mile back to their station if the bus continued on while they were still aboard), they had set up a bench with an umbrella where they gathered between sales. They

⁶⁹ This may also be a consequence of mobile street vending’s high fluctuation and impermanent nature. Alternatively, because the informal sector was so strongly attributed to women’s work it is possible that men shied away from organizing, either because it suggested resignation to the job, or it followed in the tradition of women’s tactics which as men they were too proud to adopt.

⁷⁰ Indeed, as a form of ROSCA, microcredit has made these collectivized systems of savings and credit famous as a system particular to women.

joked with their client about notions of dignified work stating that they could always be found in their “air-conditioned” office.

Mounting a bus two at a time, the Gesco vendors constructed a story about their perfume’s international origins and renown. To keep things fresh, especially with repeat customers, they regularly rotated brands. Dressed neatly in button-down shirts and slacks, they presented themselves as businessmen dealing in an industry of global luxury commodities. They similarly inflated their potential clientele, associating their status as “travelers” with a jet-setting global elite buzzing between metropolitan centers. They referred to the Queen of England and the King of Belgium; they gave the precise address of the lab in Paris that manufactured their perfume and said that there was a sister lab in Manhattan, although the label clearly read “Made in Abidjan.” This, they boasted, was the “perfume of VIP class” selling for 8500CFA on international airlines – but available to these lucky travelers at a discount price of 500CFA each. Guy reasoned, “As the Ivoirian loves everything that comes from abroad, from the United States, from the Occident, there you go, quickly the guys take it.” They gave out sample sprays, both to their clients and to the market women who, laughing, would implore them to spray a little into their armpits while they adjusted large food platters on their heads, and regularly gave complimentary packets to bus drivers and police as part of their arrangement to monopolize the bus sales. Customers who made large purchases also received bonus packets.

The Gesco vendors reported going through four to five cartons a week, with twelve packets in a carton. Each packet contained twelve perfumes. They purchased a packet for 4000CFA and sold it for 6000CFA, leaving 2000CFA for profits per packet (not accounting for the perfumes they gave away). On the occasion that I watched a vendor make his sell, within fifteen minutes he had sold three packets. But some days, they acknowledged that irksome bus drivers or unfriendly police chase them away, or disinterested passengers buy nothing, and they do not take home 500CFA. Calculating sales of four cartons per week, each vendor makes 12,000CFA; at five cartons, each vendor makes 15,000CFA. So only at their higher level earnings would the vendors be able to meet the expected daily contribution of 3000CFA, and in fact they reported making between 2000 to 3000CFA on most days. So while the system they established was a good way to minimize unpredictability and guarantee savings, meeting their daily contribution was a struggle similar other vendors’ difficulties in, for example, paying rent. In effect they had transferred the stress of precarious work to their collective dues instead of removing it altogether. And despite their insertion into the local community and their efforts at appearing respected and respectable, their daily earnings were only marginally higher than the newspaper vendors who earned between 1000 and 3000CFA per day or Erick’s water vendors who, depending on their skills, could meet these averages. However, the social support of the group and neighborhood personalities was an important buffer that differentiated them from other vendors I met during my fieldwork, and in speech and comportment they purported to fare comparatively well.

8. Public enemies: Contending with accusations of illegality and stigma

They say they have given six billion to clean Abidjan, that the guys at the mayor’s office have given six billion. To clean Abidjan, that means to chase away all those who sell along the road, to clean it, to get rid of the dirty, the garbage. (Danon)

As I was capturing a few minutes of footage of street vendors selling between cars, a passing driver yelled out angrily that this was not something I should be filming. MC, my research assistant, quipped back, “Be proud – this is Gbagbo’s Côte d’Ivoire!” The same strains that encouraged Ivoirians to cast out certain people as illegally making claims on the nation also charged informal activities as illegal, in both cases finding fault with the powerless. Given the institutional framework of legality/extra-legality – despite the informal poor’s restricted possibilities – the informal and illicit merge conceptually (Hansen and Vaa, 2004). Informality provides a foundation for rendering peripheral masculinities inadequate/illegitimate. Participation thus makes workers victims of economic and social rejection. Running, hustling, desperate symbols of the crisis, vendors contend with stigma daily.

In the next chapter I explore how vendors managed this stigma outside of work, but here I first detail the association between informality and illegality both from the vendors’ perspective and as a rationale for state harassment, and second I address the stigma of vending. Given that the Ivoirian economy is mostly informalized, the blanket association between informality and illegality gives state agents *tabula rasa* to victimize peripheral populations. Negative associations with informality originate from both early-era Ivoirian expectations of work when the industrial sector was experiencing promising growth and when the Ivoirian state supported a robust civil service. Furthermore, post-1970s Urban Studies and Planning discourse, initially in Nairobi but predominantly in Latin American cities, identify informality as a major concern for underdevelopment and it is an issue increasingly in the spotlight as cities in the global South undergo ever-more rapid urbanization (for example, from the far left, as in the case of Davis (2006), to the far right, as with de Soto (2000)).

Highly stigmatized, vendors faced accusations that their activities dirtied Abidjan’s streets and shamed the state; they angrily described drivers who rolled up their windows and locked their doors when they would approach. Defensively the vendors countered the narrative that informal activities did nothing for the state by pointing out that they purchased goods from formal shops whose taxes in turn contributed to state coffers. They emphasized that they were honest and hard-working but poor, in contrast to the Ivoirian elite who were either born into privilege or turned toward corruption. The vendors explained that state targets them because they are vulnerable while leaving alone real criminals, with whom the police are in cahoots. Yaio says, “They say it is not legal because we do not contribute to the fiscal charge and that we create disequilibrium on the level of commerce. But what does the state do for us! If the state does nothing, what would you do? We are obliged to work according to our own means.”

Simone (2004a: 169) says, “Urban areas are arenas for a protracted struggle over the legitimacy of self-employment and of the right to survive in the city.” Indeed, the state’s petty officials used the charge of illegality and its accompanying ill treatment to negate their right to exist as they did. In strapped post-structural adjustment program governments, illegality is functional. Framing mobile street vending as a problem of *illegality* instead of *economic crisis* simplifies both the problem and solution: like the urban renewal programs of post-war American cities or more recently the razing of homeless encampments in areas like Los Angeles’ Skid Row,⁷¹ dealing with poverty becomes a matter of wiping it from public view without addressing the roots of unequal development or the present and future livelihoods of those targeted. Additionally, governments fail to see the contributions that workers make to the urban economy

⁷¹ For an analysis of struggles over public space in the US context wherein property rights and the “right to the city” are conflated, see Mitchell (2003).

(Skinner, 2008). Josue says, “They say they are bandits who come and sell but in fact it is the children of the poor who you see trying to get by in the sun morning, noon, and night, to get 1000CFA just to feed the family.” Because the majority of Abidjan’s residents engage in an informal economy, this discourse normalizes informal state extraction, and effectively silences the most vulnerable populations.

Despite the fact that the Ivoirian state itself operates by-and-large via informal mechanisms (or because of it), it is unsympathetic to those surviving on the margins in increasingly tenuous ways. Simone (2004a: 175-176) charges that the “frequency with which postindependence governments have attacked these very means through which most urban residents sustain themselves is an assault against the coherence of the city and the nation – especially as this attack makes the very process of feeding the city even more precarious.” The vendors concur. Souma describes how in the past vendors’ goods were seized but at least they were left alone. Now, vendors are imprisoned and compelled into what they describe as forced labor, released only when family or friends have paid a bribe: the going rate being 50,000CFA. Thierry angrily described how as a mobile vendor, authorities found guilt with his absence of a fixed location, but when he finally saved enough to rent a space in the market, the state wanted to raze his stall. The youth, he contended, are given no opportunities to advance without the state summarily shutting them down. Yaio says, “To be a guy [*garçon*] you must struggle, and that is what we do. But when [the police] see this, they find or they invent a pretext to say that in fact what we do is not legal. So they come and hound us, they take our merchandise.”

The vendors contrasted their activities with activities that really were illegal. Drug dealers, Yaio charges, “move about at will” because they are capable of paying off the police. Souma says, “The *junkies* live better than us, among the sellers at the traffic light... We who get by looking for something to eat, it is us with the problem.” Further, they are defensive about charges that they sell stolen goods or do not pay taxes. They note that the stores from where they purchased their goods have already paid taxes, so in fact there is no tax evasion occurring (see also Nnkya (2006: 89), from Skinner, (2008: 20) for similarities in Tanzania). In one focus group, a number of vendors offered to show me their receipts, which they carried with them as proof of their legitimate purchases; adding to their insult was the fact that drivers never asked to see them and instead assumed the worst.

Resonating with Danon’s reference to the state’s maltreatment of vendors, Tibaijuka (2005: 7, from Skinner (2008: 14)) reports that the Zimbabwean government called its May 2005 “clean-up” wherein it razed 700,000 vendors’ stalls in Harare *murambatsivna*, which in Shona translates literally as “getting rid of the filth.” In Ghana, local authorities believe that evictions are a “common way to impress the public” (Skinner (2008: 15) drawing from King (2006: 117)). And indeed, urban residents see street trade as a “symbol of decline” (Lyons and Snoxell, 2005: 1078). Additionally, police harassment of informal workers is prolific throughout urban Africa, from high-profile incidents to “on-going and low-level” daily experiences of being chased away and bribed (ibid). Of the double effect this treatment has on its victims, Agadjanian (2005: 265) notes that police raids “do not just disrupt commerce but also publicly humiliate vendors.” Considering that mobile vendors hold the lowest status among street traders, their presence in the road is deeply embarrassing for African governments. Living, mobile manifestations of all that is not well in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, and more broadly, the informal city and the African crisis state, the state is both ashamed of the failures they represent, and blames them for these failures.

In these ways, vendors are also stigmatized. Jaurès says, “You must imagine: you, a vendor, trying to get by, and you are taken for a criminal, someone who killed a man, who raped.

You are put with them, and how would that make you feel?” Souma asks, “Who in their lives wants to be treated as thieves?” He describes that when drivers lock their doors upon approaching, “you feel bad.” And Robert, one of the university-educated Gesco vendors, complains, “When you see us on the side of the road running to sell perfumes, you have no respect for us. You take us as thieves, as street children, abandoned children, children like parasites who never went to school, unconscientious children who never wanted to go to school and who spend their time running in the streets...*vendeurs ambulants*.” Such assumptions “oblige” Guy to “hide” if an ex-girlfriend is a passenger on the bus where he sells perfumes. But in fact, Prospère insists, “We are just and decent men.”

In this section I have demonstrated what Bayat (2004: 90) refers to as “quiet encroachment”: ordinary people advancing in the city “in order to survive and improve their lives.” As a conglomeration of urban poor or “floating social clusters,” they “challenge the notions of order, the modern city, and urban governance espoused by Third World political elites” (ibid: 91). Bayat (ibid) contends that conflict with the state is “inevitable,” and that the conflict is most pronounced on the street; he includes as “street politics” the struggle of street-subsistence workers to earn a living confronting state attempts at public order.

Although all street vendors find themselves targets of state excess and in this way engage in a street politics of survival that constantly pits them against the authorities, Côte d’Ivoire’s high immigrant population is especially vulnerable. State charges of illegality extend not only to modalities of existence, but to entire sub-groups. Côte d’Ivoire’s decline coincided with changed citizenship regulations, thereby narrowing the state’s constituency within a framework of xenophobic, “patriotic” zeal. Thus Arnaud, an Ivoirian citizen, explains his moderate good fortune like this: “They have taken me numerous times, but when they do *I am proud of myself. I am in my country*, I have done nothing, I have not stolen. It is only to sell.” In the next section I investigate the interaction between themes of illegality facing mobile street vendors as informal actors and the issue of citizenship in contemporary Côte d’Ivoire.

Below is a breakdown of my sample of vendors by place of birth/upbringing and citizenship status, split between Ivoirian and foreign, and Abidjanais-born and migrant.⁷²

Table 8.1: Vendors’ origins

⁷² I do not suggest that the men I researched comprised a representative sample of street vendors in Abidjan. When I began this research I was looking for more Ivoirians, and specifically Ivoirian Abidjanais, as I was interested in how Ivoirian citizenship as a status indicator influenced these men’s sense of self. But I soon decided that it would be inaccurate to conduct a study of mobile street vendors in Abidjan without also talking to non-citizens. In addition, I found that “Ivoirians” tended to come from other parts of Côte d’Ivoire while “foreigners” were often born and raised in Abidjan, a point I will discuss in a later section of this chapter. Finally, the majority of my sample came from groups of men who worked together, and these groups, particularly the close-knit ones, tended – albeit with some mixing – to share citizenship status and place of birth. So the majority of my sample comes from four groups of men: eight Ivoirians from the interior working at the Gesco corridor, five Nigerien migrants (and one Ivoirian) working at Adjamé Boribana, three Abidjan born-and-raised Burkinabé working in Adjamé adjacent to the Maquis Mondial and fire station, and an additional three Abidjan born-and-raised Burkinabé working in Riviera Deux. The vendors themselves, however, overwhelming articulated a politics of cross-citizenship solidarity.

Place birth/ Upbringing	Abidjan	Interior	North	Abroad	Total
Number vendors with Ivoirian citizenship	5	12	4	0	21
Number vendors with foreign citizenship	7	1 (naturalized)	0	6	14
Total	12	13	4	6	35

Note: I differentiate “interior” from “north” because of the political context whereby northerners are associated with foreigners.

9. No man is illegal?: The double exclusion of informals and migrants

This section explores the Ivoirian citizen/foreigner conflict from the perspective of mobile street vendors, both migrants and Ivoirians. I look at how vendors internalized distinctions that shaped how they perceived their rights as citizens or non-citizens, thereby creating barriers to accessing the state and limiting the claims they felt entitled to make.

Yaio explains that a northern name often excludes one from formal work or from registering for the *concours*. Such exclusions effectively restrict migrants from formal sector participation, thus further reinforcing depictions of vending, as with other menial trades, as migrant work (Newell, 2009a).⁷³ In this way all vendors, whose realities are already structured around informal life, are particularly victim to accusations of being foreigners and its subsequent mistreatment. Perhaps this is why vendors will help one another out irrespective of nationality, as Jaurès, a Nigerien, asserts. That said, the state treats citizens differently. Echoing Arnaud above, Yaio (despite having recently been imprisoned for vending) says, “I am Ivoirian, but often our foreign brothers are victims of certain things... Since they are not nationals, they are victims of harassment by men in uniform.” Though they deride the state for its predatory and obstructive presence in their work, citizen and foreign vendors alike were, however, vocally non-political, disassociating from political activities they viewed as corrupt and the source of Ivoirian ills. Yaio says corruption has “gangrened” Ivoirian society.

Who is and is not a “national” holds particular meaning in a politics of belonging, when nativity is tenuously defined and has blatantly political imperatives. Danon asks, “When they take Ivoirians they let them go but us, the foreigners, they bother us, why?” I asked him to elaborate, probing with the query, “Even the foreigners who are born here in Abidjan?” He replied, “*Yeeesss, born here, grew up here, but they bother us*. If they know only that you are a foreigner, they will bother you.”

Aligned with the economic crisis, rights for foreigners sharply contracted from the time of Houphouët-Boigny when he pushed to extend to foreigners the right to vote, and land belonged to anyone who cultivated it. In the decade since, “foreigners” know their new place: they readily qualify that irrespective of being born and raised in Abidjan they are not Ivoirian.

⁷³ As I state elsewhere this was a historical truth: before the crisis pushed Ivoirians into informal trades, they considered these activities below them, instead glorifying the bureaucrat.

Moreover, they defer to “real” Ivoirians any political engagement. Rodrigue explains, “I am not Ivoirian, I am 100% Burkinabé, but I was born here...I was born here, I grew up here, I have done everything here...”⁷⁴ Prospère says, “I was born in Abidjan...I have never known my country [but] I know I am Burkinabé.” I asked two vendors I had just met on the street where they were from. Both replied they were born in Abidjan and had been here all their lives. I smiled, probing, “100% Abidjanais?” – a popular expression of pride for locals. They said yes. But then I asked if they were Ivoirian and quickly one qualified that no, his parents were from Mali, and that made him Malian. This was a formulaic exchange for vendors whom authorities had well-versed to acquiesce to “real” Ivoirians. As the orators insisted, Côte d’Ivoire is a welcoming country, as long as you know your place. And one’s place is certainly not on the voters’ roll. The irony is that these “foreigners” are arguably more Abidjanais than anyone else, as unlike their Ivoirian counterparts who either arrived in Abidjan for work or who in any case have family ties in villages, Abidjan is all they know.

While they formally concede to their second-class citizenship, these “foreigners” who know nothing but Côte d’Ivoire are caught in a purgatory of non-belonging. It is a theme that many a *zouglou* artist has sorrowfully crooned in songs famous throughout the Abidjanais *maquis* scene. During an evening out at the *Maquis Mondial* with Christophe, Roland and Fabio, the latter two being technically Burkinabé, one such song came on. The singer lamented being a child of Burkinabé and Ivoirian heritage. He implored, “What am I? Where do I belong?” I remarked that these lyrics must pique. They brushed it off, but as the singer continued they both went quiet, eyes downcast, and in their own worlds they began to sing along, swaying rhythmically to the melody.

10. Style: Alternatives to work-based identities

I was out with the Gesco vendors, meeting the neighborhood personalities and big men. They introduced me to a man they described as a local, well-known and well-respected *zouglou* artist. I was shocked. Dignified, polite and smooth in a crisp, white button-down, jeans, a flashy watch and several bracelets, he was the one-and-the-same feral hustler in ripped and soiled clothing that I had seen on my first visit to the corridor, jostling passengers into buses for a few CFA. At one point, standing behind an unsuspecting passenger who had rejected his custom, I witnessed him exact a silent revenge: he picked his nose and wiped the booger on the back of the man’s shirt. Sociologist or not, I had look away. So grimy and inappropriate I had assumed he must be homeless, but here he was, popular and respected *zouglou* artist by night. (Field notes, 20 June 2009)

If dominant masculinity in Côte d’Ivoire hinges upon access to “real” work and an unquestionable Ivoirian identity, what recourse did mobile street vendors, engaged in activities as visible as they were degrading and generally considered non-citizens, have to affirm themselves as men? As I argue in *Chapter 4*, peripheral men’s concern with being-in-the-world begins with at once a highly localized *and* cosmopolitan sense of being-in-Abidjan. To restate, Newell (2009a), who conducted fieldwork in Abidjan from 2000 to 2001 (during the lead-up to the civil war) found that street-smart Abidjanais differentiated between the *yere*, or well-versed

⁷⁴ Moments later he uttered a statement I never heard repeated from a “foreigner”: “We are like Ivoirians, we are even more Ivoirian because we were born here and did everything here.”

urbanites, and *gaou*, those dismissed as hick, undeveloped, and northerners/immigrants. In Newell's framework, this was a moment when the nation was defining *ivoirité*, and when entitled citizens still resisted participation in the informal economy. Nationals identified *ivoirité* with a particularly cosmopolitan, modernist, and Abidjanais identity.

By the time I had arrived in Abidjan, the average Abidjanais meted out daily life amidst a context of informality. Instead of symbolizing a country's proud national reckoning, *ivoirité* was defensively implicated with the xenophobic charges on the part of international observers and an alienated north.⁷⁵ As I note in *Chapter 1*, "patriot" was the new nationalist catchword. However, among the deeply peripheral men I studied, the *Abidjanais* identity – with its hodgepodge of nationalities all struggling to make a place for themselves at the bottom – was divorced from the larger question of how to assume a postcolonial Ivoirian identity. When the vendor with whom I spoke qualified that despite his Malian citizenship he was "100% Abidjanais," his proud participation in Abidjan inhered claims of global participation, bypassing the Ivoirian state even while drawing from the Ivoirian exceptionalism narrative. Further, despite Newell's (2009a) astute observations in Côte d'Ivoire amidst a moment of great transformation, I suggest that since inception the cosmopolitan Abidjanais identity was always to an extent up for grabs. As a creation of France and later renowned for the many foreigners living under President Houphouët-Boigny's pro-French and open-door migrant policy, Abidjan derived status from its position as a regional hub, an international city. In this city of immigrants, being Abidjanais means something beyond being Ivoirian. Moreover, given the generalized recourse to informal activities to make ends meet despite masculine pride hinging on jobs demarcated by suits and air-conditioned offices, the *classes populaires* allow as "participation" another, non-work-based criteria while negating the work day in a mutually respected collective amnesia, a "public secret" (Newell, 2009b: 385).

Gueï indicates how men develop non-work-based identities when he boasts that, "People in my neighborhood, they know me, they appreciate me, because I have style." Similarly Stéphane asks rhetorically, "Man is defined by his person, yeah? When you saw me just now, what did you retain from me? It is my style." He negates that work defines a man, suggesting that instead preeminently important is one's self-presentation, something that to an extent all Abidjanais men can control. In the next chapter I elaborate on themes I developed in *Chapter 4* to argue that the Abidjanais identity adheres to a global sense of belonging within an African diaspora, where media-centric black masculine identities are concerned with consumption over production. I further develop this idea with the theoretical concept of complicit global masculinity. To transition into the proceeding chapter on identity management as it relates to non-work identities, here I outline ways that vendors manage their work-based identity, through common scripts that reinterpret or obscure their daily activities. I center my discussion around the notion of the *bluffeur* (Newell 2005; Newell 2009a; Newell 2009b), identities as counterfeit as the designer labels they wear when out on the town.⁷⁶ This is one way for them to manage relations with friends and with the women in their lives.

⁷⁵ And despite their anti-imperialist stance, as I argued previously, the ideological distance between Africa and the world under neoliberal globalization and Côte d'Ivoire's imagined place at the semi-periphery both make external legitimation extremely important. If *ivoirité* was a stain on the Ivoirian reputation, they would rather do away with it.

⁷⁶ This practice has been best documented in Kinshasa, DRC. There the men are called *sapeurs*. See for example, Tamagni (2009).

Whenever I explained to my Ivoirian friends my interest in the relationship between consumption culture and global identity among peripheral men and especially the juxtaposition of their low status work to their flashy, bombastic identities, they would unanimously respond with some variation of “Duh. The poor guys need to establish self-respect somehow.” Further, in trying to identify vendors when out on the town, they told me that I would never guess by their self-presentation; they were much too well put-together. Romaric says, “On the matter of clothing, the Ivoirian youth dresses very well. Even if you are a shoe shiner, if you wash cars, you are whatever, when you go out at night you are well-dressed, you are appreciated by the girls.” Patrick, the ex-newspaper vendor who trains for a *centre de formation* says that vendors save to buy expensive clothes. Although difficult, he said it was important for them to have “some clothes of value.” One friend, a dancer for one of the Côte d’Ivoire’s top performance companies, explained that in Côte d’Ivoire, going out is a great equalizer because men care so much about their looks. In fact, he mused, a vendor may likely present himself better than a man with a well-paying job. He explained that this was a very proud comportment to say, “You are not better than me. Look: I am wearing the same clothes as you.”

A few times when having such discussions I heard, “Oh, you mean *bluffeurs!*” My friends explained this was a term commonly applied to men with nothing who went out in full style. I brought this up with some vendors and they laughed, proudly admitting that at times they too are *bluffeurs*, implying a mutable persona that lasts only as long as the masquerade. Newell (2009a) explores the *bluffeur* and more specifically the bluff at length in several articles emerging from his fieldwork in Abidjan. The bluff, he explains, creates the illusion of success and wealth focused on conspicuous consumption, for example through wearing name-brand labels. It “required a symbolic mastery of a culture from which [the *bluffeur* was] excluded, a proof of potential membership” (ibid: 163). The bluff is a public performance. Engaging in this activity can lead a *bluffeur* to spend all of his meager earnings on an outfit or a night out.⁷⁷

Elsewhere Newell (2009b) elaborates on the bluff with specific reference to its role within Abidjan’s sexual economy. He argues that both sex and the economy operate under the same informal exchange structure. Just as Ivoirians have conceived of “work” in terms of a Western ideal, they draw from Western notions of romantic relationships. But within a realm of informality that shapes both economic and sexual exchange, the bluff reigns. It is in this context that one day Tino and MC passed a friend wearing a curious mix of Adidas sneakers, a white wife-beater and a loose-fitting blue suit. Teasing him, they proceeded to stick their fingers into his empty pockets, saying he was *bizness*, a fake; “You have nothing – you just want to impress the ladies!”

To establish self-worth and counter the stigma of their work, Abidjan’s mobile vending population was indeed heavily concerned with identity management. They denied, embellished, and replaced their work identities. To repeat, as forms of denial, many vendors remained silent about their work when speaking to others, responding vaguely if asked that they “kept

⁷⁷ However, as I have suggested and will discuss at greater length in the next section, among the men I studied, they were less concerned with authenticity than the pure illusion of participation in consumption culture, and did not in fact spend elaborately on what they had. This difference in my findings and Newell’s (2009a) could relate to either (or both): a difference in population – Newell studied criminals while I studied mobile street vendors who were proudly *not* engaged in high-earning illicit activities; or the difference in time, where in my findings eight years later, poverty was more widespread and hence means of survival more desperate.

themselves busy,” or “got by,” generally accepted code among Abidjan’s informal population that the questioner should ask no further. Romaric explains that if he is with a woman,

In the morning you go to work, and you tell her you are going to work...You return at night and you are together, she asks you what you do, you tell her ‘*Je me débrouille.*’ *Je me débrouille*, this is more than enough for a girl asking you what you do. *Je me débrouille*, what is essential is that when [she asks] me for something, I give it to [her]. So it is not good to go deeper, because what she asks, really that is what I do.

Even among his friends, Romaric says that “No one knows I am here.” Arnaud explained that “a *garçon* must not speak too much about what he does to people. Because there are those who say it is fine, but the day you have a small argument, he will say ‘What does he do? He is a vagabond, he sells on the bridge.’”

Furthermore, vendors embellished their identities, as I demonstrated in *Profiles at the bottom* when vendors associated themselves with the profitability of their goods, and from the Gesco example. Or a vendor might stop at the vaguely affirming description of working in “business,” thereby obscuring his status within the vending hierarchy. For example, Arnaud says, “I tell people I am a *commerçant*. You ask me what market I sell in, I may say in the Treichville market. Because you know, where you saw me the other day, there is a market below [that intersection].” Others replaced their work identities with their hobbies or the general demarcation of “student” who is perhaps “waiting to pass the *concours*.” Among the down-and-out newspaper vendors Josue, Rodrigue and Prospère, Rodrigue was held in particular esteem; the others respectfully addressed him as “President” because, he explained, he was the most “intellectual.”⁷⁸ Men who played football for neighborhood teams could say “I am an aspiring footballer waiting to be selected by a *centre de formation*,” or a musician could describe this as a period before his CD hit the market. In affiliating with their hobbies, their fantasy aspirations and social worlds outside of work become authenticated alter egos, just as earnings potential stands in for what vendors have in their pockets at the end of a long day. Thus reversing the Western relationship between profession and hobby, Guillaume explained that the first thing he says when he meets a woman at a *maquis* – with the initial caveat that he always looks good – is that he is a footballer, and after that, he is a “commercial agent.” Guy explained that when a woman asks what he does, “never in my life” will he directly respond. “First I give her my title of student...and after that, I am in business.”

Finally, some vendors simply lie. Vendors regularly inflated their earnings at our initial meeting: a newspaper vendor, for example, would report that on a bad day he made around 3000CFA and 7000CFA on a good day. If I asked again an hour into our interview or in a later encounter after we had established more trust, the numbers invariably decreased, with the initial “bad” day’s earnings often being their all-time high, and a (real) bad day coming home with 200CFA if anything. The practice of fudging earnings, or identities, was not just reserved for foreign researchers: Guillaume explained that if he only wants to sleep with a woman, he tells her he is a police officer. For Josue notes, “Really, it is not easy to have a woman *and* keep her.

⁷⁸ He recounted wistfully how he had made it all the way to the 4^{eme} (8th grade) and was the top five in his class. Perhaps to some exaggeration, he described how others he used to help with their work moved on to becoming policemen, gendarmes, and directors of companies. Despite his promise, he was unable to stay in school because he “lacked the means.”

We are not bureaucrats.” To save face and in defiance of the close association between work and masculinity globally and particularly in the proud Ivoirian social space, the contemporary peripheral Abidjanais asserts, like Romaric, “Your trade: that has nothing to do with you yourself, who you are, yeah?”

Mobile street vendors fragment their identities between work and play, often casting off the former as an anonymous, opaquely articulated and rarely discussed activity. Work does not define them. Alternatively, they connect with a masculine, albeit youth, culture from the African diaspora. In their worlds of play, they are part of an elsewhere that is unashamedly masculine.

Chapter 6:
Boys' worlds

1. Weekend money

Jordanna: How much do you pay in rent each month?

Yves: 10,000[CFA].

J: And your food expenses?

A: Well, the expenses are too much for me. Often I cannot even pay rent and I have to explain to the landlord...

J: You buy clothes?

A: Yes, yes, that is normal. It is normal, because when you are a man...you must be comfortable, you must be well-dressed, you know?

J: How much do you spend on clothes each month?

A: Me, well, it is every two months, around. Two or three months, I may spend 20,000CFA on clothes.

As Thierry noted in *Chapter 5*, vendors believed that their limited earnings provide only “weekend money”: just enough for a cheap night out at a local *maquis*. Therefore, while their long-term goals may be to assume productive identities, their short-term goals and daily realizable ambitions are as consumers. There are two implications to these perceived financial capabilities: first, they prohibit vendors from assuming responsibilities as self-sufficient men who may potentially provide for a family, and second, they limit the temporal sense of their earnings to present and near-future needs. In effect defining the parameters of what vending can do, they normalize the sense that their earnings are “play” money, not real, “work” money that could make them family men. It is a far cry from the Ivoirian imagination of a suited *évolué* bureaucrat who supports a wife and children. Limited not only by a sense of *how much* but *how long* this money can sustain them, they dismiss the viability of constructing futures from mobile street vending, a point upon which I elaborate in the final section of this chapter.

Because the vendors identified their earnings as little more than superfluous chump change, they reported spending superfluously even when they could not make rent. So Yves, above, struggles to make his 10,000CFA monthly rent payment yet reported spending 20,000CFA on clothing every couple months. He explained that it was “obligatory” in Abidjan for a man to look good on a night out. Guillaume said that once a year he purchases one pair of high-end, 50,000CFA shoes and other wardrobe pieces of around 20,000CFA several times a year. He splits his 35,000CFA rent with Samuel, who reported that often they do not manage to pay rent until the 25th of the month, living as they do “day to day.” Regardless, Samuel explained that as men they have “biological, sentimental, and social needs” that they “must fulfill.” For this reason, he continued, “Everyone enjoys a little pleasure. I, for example, have a Sony Ericsson mobile phone.” Jaurès, who had not paid his rent for some months, had in the past two years saved enough to purchase a 45,000CFA television and a 65,000CFA mobile phone. Nonetheless when I asked “What is the nicest thing you have in your closet at home?” he looked at me incredulously and said, “At home, in my closet? Ha! A sack, I have no *closet*. I have a sack.”

Referencing his “weekend money,” Thierry, whose frugal ways permitted him to move up within Abidjan’s informal economy, acknowledged, “When I was a [mobile street vendor], I never saved, yeah? To say that in the month I could save, no.” Indeed, vendors’ belief in their

earnings' potentiality acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy so that it *became* weekend money and nothing more. To afford the luxuries of a new pair of shoes or a *design* pair of jeans (Calice), vendors go without. Most of the vendors reported eating 500CFA to 1000CFA worth of food in a day, and their standard rent payments ranged between 7500CFA and 15,000CFA. Yet only two vendors reported spending less than 5000CFA on a phone, and despite the mind-boggling array of used clothing that sold for pittance in Adjamé's *black*, only the most desperate vendors described paying less than 3000CFA for an article of clothing.

2. Embodying modernity: Complicit global masculinity

Peripheral Abidjanais men's cultural pursuits fall well within neoliberal ethos. Like their black brothers elsewhere, in consuming things and images they participate in the global political economy despite their nonproductive identities. They connect to capitalism as ideal economic actors: consumers (Matlon, 2010a). Icons from the African diaspora offer narratives of successful masculinity that transcend national boundaries. For peripheral populations the world over, "black urbanism" offers connections, ways of being and belonging that look past local confines. But it is also a deterritorialization that threatens to push residents further into the urban periphery (Simone, 2010: 283). This is the same dilemma (and language) theorists have used to describe Africa's urban "youth" whose exclusions within national territories force them to define themselves through global narratives (Diouf, 2003: 6). In both instances, the respective terms (black, youth) assume exclusion, peripheral status, invisibility, otherness – all weaker terms or "shadow-like dimensions" (Simone, 2010: 299) in binary conceptualizations of cityness to which I referred in *Chapter 3*.

Likewise, the axes around which vendors' social identities pivot are blackness and youth. Identities at once global and peripheral emphasize the former while their social worlds consign them to the latter. As a rhetorical device blackness, validated by way of its affiliation with the African diaspora, *counters* the denigrating bracket of youth when vendors are incapable of assuming the producer/provider identity of adult masculinity. Both blackness and youth, however, figure into a narrative of *otherness*, in the global and the local, respectively. I discussed these narratives in *Chapter 4* and return to them here as I explore self-affirming, peripheral urban African masculinity.

2.1. Discourse on blackness

From the perspective of *deviation* from modernity that I discussed in *Chapter 3*, for urban Africans the double arrival of colonization and capitalism meant engaging alternative economies as a way to resist complete incorporation. The "fluidity" that resulted was "both a strength and weakness" (Simone, 2004a: 159). These fluid strategies consisted of remunerative activities and a more general engagement with modernity: Africans set out to define for themselves what it meant to be modern while being denied entry into this modern world that *othered* them. "To break this circuit...meant using the language of modernity to argue that these cities...would have only limited use to Europeans in the future" (ibid: 162). When peripheral Abidjanais men embrace their black identities they embrace a narrative of modernity that extends to members of the African diaspora. Thus "black urbanism" (Simone, 2010) advances Simone's (2004) description of alternative modalities. As a form of urban popular culture, black urbanism "draws lines between different places and different ways of doing things" (2010: 307-308). It is both an individual subjectivity and a survival strategy. Simone (ibid: 281) explains,

Because black urban residents have had to maneuver their residency across incessantly shifting lines of inclusion and exclusion, overregulation and autonomy, their experiences provide an incisive platform for coming to grips with the combination of possibility and precariousness that seems to be at the forefront of urban life.

The strategies of black residents in colonial cities and metropolitan diasporas share the experience of otherness that more generally underscores Simone's (ibid) definition of peripheral urbanism. Popular culture connects reality with imagination, holding out hope for something better that is yet unrealized. Realistically, however, "instead of showing the new horizon or the pathway into the future, [urban popular culture] may simply be about buying time as productively as possible" (ibid: 316). In the meantime, it offers "elements – of speech, gesture, and materials" that "provide a haven for people's passions to live differently" (ibid). For peripheral Abidjanais, this otherness constitutes a way of being in the city that both accepts the terms of the modern yet establishes an affirmed identity that is not white but black. In what I call *complicit global masculinity*, vendors employ the blackness of the African diaspora to assert participation, simultaneously belonging to and defying the metropolitan order. Fluid survival strategies coalesce around blackness which, by insisting on an "ethos of egalitarianism" (ibid: 328), acts also as a source of pride.

Black urban popular culture emphasizes style and notoriety; as individuals adorn their bodies they become "field[s] for representation" that are personal and public, doubly "susceptible to individual manipulation" and having "social import" (Hendrickson, 1996: 2). Embodied style locates modernity in "places, objects and people versus as a state of development" so that consumption becomes a "partial migration" (Newell, 2005: 171). As a survival strategy etched outside of the official gaze and as an embodiment of alternative subjectivities, blackness is political. Complicit global masculinity employs referents like style to support identities in a context where men lack other ways of distinguishing themselves.

If globalization has to an extent standardized what we want, then there is equal possibility that measuring up to an imagined "elsewhere" will meet with disappointment or success. The latter outcome is most plausible when subjects domesticate the object of their desire, thereby rendering it accessible. Peripheral Abidjanais men do this with a counterfeit brand on a shirt or sneakers. When Thierry boasted to me that an "Anglophone" once confused him for an American because of his hip hop attire, he had transformed himself into a "more potent social be[ing]" (Newell, 2005: 171). Newell's (2009a) *nouchi* men opposed their fashioned black American identities to the Francophile *boss* despite acknowledging the latter as a distant ideal. *Nouchi* offered an indigenous Ivoirian modernity, a "space within popular culture from which to escape the dilemma of post-colonial Franco-centrism without favoring any particular ethnicity – a source of national identity that [was] packageable, exportable, and outside of state control" (ibid: 178). In short, peripheral Abidjanais culture elevates itself under a global banner of blackness. In demonstrating complicity to consumer culture, peripheral Abidjanais garner status for themselves: the *bluffeur's* complicity transforms him into a full social being within an imagined global community.

2.2. Discourse on youth

But it does not transform him into a full social being where the effects are most tangible. Jobless, the bluff offers peripheral men enough for a big night out, but not enough to marry and

thus achieve adult masculine status. Their looks may win them notoriety, but they still go home to an empty bed – at least in the morning after. And as I argued in *Chapter 4*, identities oriented around consumption instead of production relegate men to youth culture. I further explored how literature on African “youth” refers to a social, not demographic distinction, a point which the vendors I studied confirmed when they referred to themselves as *jeunesse* and *garçon*. In this sense, Diouf’s (2003) essay *Engaging postcolonial cultures: African youth and public space* is useful for situating peripheral Abidjanais identities locally and globally. Youth is a period of “life on hold” (ibid: 6). Excluded from the family, the community and the nation, youth are transnational, establishing “new places of socialization and new sociabilities on the margins” (ibid: 4). Like blackness, youth constitutes identities pushed so far to the outer periphery that they belong finally to a borderless global. And like the haven for people’s passions to live differently, they also seek a narrative to enable “territory for the free play of the imagination” (ibid: 6). For Europeans in the Middle Ages, miserable conditions demanded outlet in the forms of a fantasized heaven of milk and honey; for African youth of the neoliberal generation, this outlet is Mtv. Peripheral men/youth set their sights on the global and particularly the American consumer market; the rise of digital and audiovisual technology feed this imagined trans-border identity (ibid).

While youth culture signals “the globalization of desires,” it also “reflect[s] and participate[s] in the worldwide accentuation of inequalities” (Diouf, 2003: 5-6). This world is then a contradiction, one that like colonial modernity, offers a specious sense of belonging. Complicit global masculinity is thus a strategy of limited success. Men affirm themselves among themselves using a common vernacular of style, but persistent inequalities are thinly veiled below the surface. The irony, then, is that their global identities are successful only within micro-territories on the periphery and otherwise imagined spaces. It is within these confines that they are *garçon*.

2.3. Embodying Mtv masculinity

Because the body figures among sparse terrain for vendors to contest their marginalization, its accessorization takes on heightened import. Piles of second-hand clothing in Adjamé’s *black* emblazoned with select symbols assume currency and status for vendors and consumers alike. Within a hierarchy of clothing, English language testifies to a man’s Mtv masculinity and thus complicity to a global order. Equivalent is a reference to a designer brand name, to the United States (also popular are Jamaica and Brazil) or to money, particularly the dollar sign. Finding one of the above is a diamond in the rough for the status-conscious, and thereby increases the clothing’s value. Kelley, a shoe vendor with a stall on a street medium in the *black* had an affection for a sneaker covered in dollar signs. Holding it up he stated proudly, “Each shoe has its value.”⁷⁹ Thierry concurred: “What is sure is that when you sell American things, it works.” Finding such clothing displays a man’s cosmopolitan sensibilities regardless of how poor he may be (Newell, 2009a).

I distinguish Mtv masculinity from the more familiar term of “hip hop masculinity” often associated with black popular culture and indicating black American hegemony across the

⁷⁹ See Matlon (2011a) for a photo of Kelley with his dollar sign shoe.

African diaspora.⁸⁰ Newell (2005; 2009a; 2009b), for example, strictly opposes dominant Ivoirian culture's Francophilism to Ivoirian counter-culture's Yankee fascination, a point that my research corroborates. Tino and MC, for example, were renowned for their hip hop personas. As we walked through the market I often heard approving shouts of "hip hop!" in their honor.⁸¹ However, I also found that the simple and unidirectional link between Ivoirian style and hip hop identities had begun to unravel. Despite a fair number of die-hards (like Tino and MC), men across the Ivoirian social spectrum told me that hip hop style was outmoded; it peaked in the late 1990s when men walked Abidjan's streets with boom boxes on their shoulders. Nevertheless, the same men who dismissed wearing this style themselves spoke highly of hip hop icons and the lifestyles they embodied.

The rise of *coupé décalé*, a music form that has made Ivoirian popular culture famous across Africa and in France where it began on the Parisian Franco-Ivoirian social scene, has reoriented Ivoirians to the style of the colonial metropole. This time they have, however, played a role in shaping it. In this way the Ivoirian pride for exporting its culture abroad involves a new claim on French popular culture (Newell, 2009a). Although hip hop and black American popular culture hold a firm place in the Abidjanais imagination, *coupé décalé* tells Abidjan's story – it is its lived reality.⁸² Thus upon my arrival, *coupé décalé* was the new look, one that my American sensibilities defined as European chic, with low-riding but exceptionally tight-fitting pants, boat shoes, and fine, button-down shirts, often adorned with a tie; a look more *couture* than that of a body hidden in an one-size-fits-none oversized hoodie. Over Nike or Timberland, Italian Dolce and Gabbana was the designer of choice, made famous by its relationship to original *coupé décalé* DJ sensation Douk Saga and worn as a proudly counterfeit label on Abidjan's streets (Matlon, 2010a).

As complicit global masculinity also indicates, the hip hop/*coupé décalé* distinction demonstrates that neither hip hop nor *coupé décalé* are as important as their underlying messages. American or European, both instances involve black identities formed under the immediate gaze of the hegemon, in the spotlight of the mass media. And both images, underscoring complicit global masculinity, merge the themes of *black* and [show]business. Thus I place both under the broad banner of Mtv masculinity: an embodied (and adorned) identity that

⁸⁰ See for example Kitwana's (2002) *The Hip hop generation* for a discussion of black American popular culture and Weiss's (2009) *Street dreams and hip hop barbershops* for a discussion of Tanzanian popular culture, both of which predominantly discuss men. Often used interchangeably to refer to black American populations, hip hop culture also takes on an implicit reference in innumerable studies that discuss the hegemony of American popular culture, especially among global subaltern youth. An example of one such collection is *The vinyl ain't final: Hip hop and the globalization of black popular culture*, eds. Basu and Lemelle (2006).

⁸¹ Tino and MC's hip hop identities set them apart, a strategy of visibility using non-work identities that I have discussed already. Even when police stopped them, they explained that they dressed differently because they were artists, showed them their CD single (which they carried on their person), and often the police would leave them alone. I further discuss an instance of Tino and MC's brush with authorities in this chapter.

⁸² This is also the case with *zouglou*. As I recount in *Appendix 2*, Zapin says that *zouglou* is local but rap is universal.

develops in (perhaps uneasy and certainly unequal) cooperation between the black subject and mainstream media. In the end the image exists to affirm the viewer. This involves approximating an ideal, and the complicity exists in this approximation. While *coupé décalé* is perhaps more refined, as fashion statements the mainstream interpretation of both looks glorifies *business* and the artists as successful, self-made entrepreneurs embodying a neoliberal ethos. To my question, “Why do you like hip hop?” Yves responded, “Because I like what Americans *do*...It is *le business*, you see.” Styles, like other capitalist forms of creative destruction, come and go. Men’s loyalties reside in what the images say about, and how they validate, them. Although hip hop is no longer the “it” look on Abidjan’s periphery, the media representation of the black man, his Mtv masculinity, remains a thing-in-itself – a narration by image. Modeste said of Tupac and R-Kelley, “When I see their *clips* [music videos] I see the way they live and that does something for me, it touches my heart.”

Despite the similar dearth in work opportunities, models of black American masculinity assert outlandishly successful, visible, and hyper-masculine identities that attest to global participation through conspicuous consumption (Matlon, 2010a; Matlon, 2011a). Ideas of America and the Mtv persona who embodies the flattened, glorified and malleable masculinity of the neoliberal imagination still absorb Abidjanais men, and the same ones who sport *coupé décalé* looks dream of making it big in Atlanta or New York City.⁸³ These cities, unlike Paris, are a safe distance from reality: peripheral men have little knowledge of the country via migrated relatives or standard local media outlets to contradict what its Mtv rendition. In other words, black America is a fantasized potentiality in the way that France is too real to be: 2000 data indicates that of around the 175,000 Ivoirians who emigrated abroad, twenty-six percent went to France (the country with the largest pull) compared to four percent to the United States (Migration Profiles Project, 2010).

I close this chapter with the fantasies of peripheral Abidjanais men, but next I segue into the spaces where men realize their consumerist partial migrations and enact their Mtv masculinities.

3. Producing identities at play

3.1. Recording a song

Identities at play give mobile street vendors opportunities to “be something” when other aspects of their lives leave them wanting. Nearing the end of my fieldwork, I recorded a song with Tino and MC and a street vendor who went by the stage name of Busta (after Busta Rhymes). We were introduced to the nondescript studio in Yopougon’s Maroc neighborhood through Doug MC (stage name), a successful musician on Abidjan’s circuit who fused reggae with indigenous beats. The production staff had recorded an impressive number of Abidjan’s reggae talent, and despite their dingy studio, their walls were arrayed with a proud collection of photographs of locally esteemed artists. We recorded two songs at 10,000CFA each, a one-night rush job that the studio’s two-man team nonetheless completed with engineering talent and a sound melodic ear. In the month leading up to this recording we had met perhaps five times to

⁸³ Halfway through my research Barack Obama was Abidjan’s new darling. Often pictured along with the words “The Office,” Obama, no football hero or singing sensation, proved that a black man could play the game according to white society’s rules, and win.

rehearse. Busta spoke a little English so I wrote a bit for him to rap which he worked on during his free time. I did not think much of it; we had put in minimal effort and for a professional recording it all happened very quickly, with few stylistic or directional interventions on our part.

Nonetheless, it was a major accomplishment for the men. Busta was visibly touched; near tears he repeated several times that after all that work it was so satisfying to see it realized. Here was a man who had come to expect failure in his life: abandonment from his family after his mother's (his father's second of three wives) death, an aborted history of schooling after fleeing the northern city of Bouaké amidst civil war, a sporadic and unfulfilling work history, and always total neglect from the state. As for structuring ambitions around self-initiated activities, committing oneself to the *concours* falls apart without money or the right connections, and the widespread reality of underemployment translates "work" into dead time waiting for a custom.

Tino and MC were similarly inflated with pride, and when a police officer stopped our taxi as we returned home late in the night, they reported confidently, "We just came from a recording. We are artists. Now we are off to Cocody," a fantastical sequence to exit the mouth of a peripheral Abidjanais man. And while encounters with the police tended to cause trouble for Tino and MC this officer gave them their due, eagerly asking for a shout-out the next time they performed in a *maquis*. That night, they were Mtv masculinity. The dream of "Who knows?" begins here, a whisper of potential discovery. That night and for a few weeks after they spoke incessantly about dropping off the CD at *Radio Télévision Ivoirienne* [RTI], the first step to becoming Abidjan's newest sensation.

Rehearsing, producing and owning a CD with their voice on it gained Tino, MC, and Busta entrée into that world of media noise. The glamorized Mtv life with stars producing music in studios and people desiring them enough to make commodities out of them was theirs that night. Beyond the important sense of achievement, such activities left a record – literally and metaphorically – of their existence. Such participation counters the anonymity that comes from a lack of identification papers, a lack of attention, and generally a lack of recognition. In Abidjan's peripheral spaces, music and football offer a sense of accomplishment and tangible proof of work realized. Recognized as individuals, participants have something to show for themselves, even if it is only to perform on-stage for like-minded aspiring artists. They at least have a stage and an audience. On a smaller scale, *maquis* sociability also serves this purpose.

Complicit global masculinity implies complicity to the neoliberal global order defined in the terms of blackness and youth. And as we saw in the previous chapter, vendors are stigmatized men. To affirm themselves they carve out a sense of being-in-the-world that begins with being-in-Abidjan. The football field and the hip hop stage are sites where Abidjanais men deep in the periphery enact their connections to an imagined elsewhere. These are the spaces and the practices they mark as their own.

3.2. Football on the periphery

In neighborhoods poorly connected to main thoroughfares, dirt fields menacingly arrayed with broken glass, jutting cement and in the rainy season, fetid puddles, neighborhood football leagues gather to train and compete, pausing unceremoniously as goats and chickens wander on the field and workers pass through pulling heavy carts. Most men kick balls on the hazardous surface in flimsy plastic sandals. Abidjan's sanctioned football clubs connect Abidjan *communes* horizontally and vertically and feeder clubs bump their best up to higher division leagues. Unless playing at the elite divisions, team membership means paying for a uniform, renting facilities and transport; if the captain or coach has hustled well, sponsorships will cover a minimum of these

costs. Uniforms reflect player's favorite teams: instead of their own logos they may wear Unicef jerseys with the Barcelona emblem or Samsung jerseys with Chelsea emblems. They rent these uniforms for around 2500CFA per match, or 200CFA per player. At home matches, players purchase their own water and pay a *gendarme* 500-1000CFA to lease the land. For away matches each player contributes 1000CFA for transport, water and uniforms, with left-over money for drinking together after. The local community heavily supports these activities.

Wealthier upper league clubs organize tournaments, and select two of the best players from neighborhood teams and perhaps five additional men from winning teams to train at the club's camp for potential selection on the national league. Scouts may approach promising young talent, or more often determined men will come to annual tryouts hoping for a *centre de formation* to select them for an intense, annually held training period that might lead to an affiliation with a higher division league. This period is unpaid and players must be creative as to how to feed themselves and cover rent.

As with professional sports the world over, hope – to make the Ivoirian national team or a West African regional team, or possibly even a European team – overshadows reality. Many of the men who make up the lowest-level teams are in their late twenties and early thirties, their moment already passed. But hope springs eternal. According to Patrick, “Normally in football, experts say that at thirty years old you can no longer play. But football as it is, you never know, you do not know when your chance will come. One sees people at thirty, thirty one years-old, that is when they signed their professional contract. So we play, we train.” In the meantime, the reward in the form of local status is sufficient. The entire neighborhood knows these players, and local big men will come out to watch a game. Women know who they are too, and their friends recall with obvious pride the year that so-and-so made it to the annual training try-outs for a particularly esteemed team. In the micro-territories of their social networks, they become football legends.

3.3. *Maquis* sociability and performing on the periphery

*Maquis*⁸⁴ sociability has a two-fold emphasis: to be noticed and to be distinguished. Mobile street vendors dress in their finest for a night at the *maquis*. On one evening out with several vendors, Guillaume modeled his imitation designer “Cacoste” (instead of “Lacoste”) pants. Later that night beer spilled on them and markedly upset he disappeared to clean it up, complaining that his “suit” was ruined. To my embarrassment I once arranged to meet the vendors working my neighborhood for a casual after-work drink near their designated intersection only to learn that they had left work hours early to go home, shower, dress and return, losing a half-day of potential earnings and spending double on transport for what I considered a lazy afternoon rendezvous. I had overlooked how important it was for men – especially low-status vendors – to present themselves as belonging to a space of sociability. My privilege to never question whether or not I belonged led me to view this neighborhood *maquis* as an easy-going venue where I could lounge in sweatpants and old sandals, whereas their tattered clothes permeating with dust and exhaust were utterly impermissible.

⁸⁴ *Maquis* are one of a number of forms of entertainment. *Bars climatisées* and *discoteques* are also prominent, but more expensive and less prolific, especially among the peripheral Abidjanais crowd. For this reason I only describe *maquis*.

Nicer *maquis* feature large mirrors situated at the dance floor so men (there are always more men than women) can watch themselves while they dance, which they do unashamed, practicing their expressions and admiring their style. Talented teenagers and young men approach tables and dance for money. DJs in claustrophobic boxes constantly interrupt songs to give paid shout-outs, or to advertise that they give paid shout-outs.⁸⁵ The elite set themselves apart in the VIP area: cordoned-off sections with leather seats and their drinks, often Heinekens, chilling in ice buckets. Cheaper one-liter *drogbas* are not available for purchase there, nor are many other local brands. Whoever in a given group has the greatest means picks up the tab, but often to avoid the burden men will bypass the server and go directly to the bar, paying each drink at a time. The big man at a vendors' table may be honorifically referred to as a *travailler* [worker] if not more generally a *responsable* [authority figure]. Tables display their wealth via uncollected bottles of beer that accumulate until the end of the night (the servers know not to clear them), and on the table poised next to their empties, they place their mobile phones. Until the music begins, phones play tunes loud enough for themselves and adjacent tables. The phone (or phones, since it is common to have more than one) is always displayed on the table. And those with only a little to spend may buy a 100CFA packet of *lotus* [paper tissues] and leave them on the table as proof of their purchase. In the *maquis* sociability I describe, going out is about showing off, displaying what you have and situating yourself in a hierarchy. A night out offers myriad opportunities to conflate *being* and *having*, displays targeted at both friends and strangers.

On special occasions *maquis* come alive for *zouglou*, *coupé décalé* or hip hop performances. At the hip hop shows I attended in Abobo and Yopougon, different groups arrived outfitted in varying manifestations of Mtv masculinity: big shirts and baggy pants with Nike shoes, full matching sweatsuits, bling jewelry and flashy sunglasses. The prolific English writing on clothing featured typical hip hop and money insignia to anything goes. A collective among the artists will have rented out the space for the budding talent to perform and decorate it with stereotypical themes rendering homage to the African diaspora. At one show a big banner for *Business Productions* painted on a dollar bill adorned center stage. To the left was a poster of images of Barack Obama, Tupac, and a little rapper generically named "City Boy" in a Lakers jersey. On the right was a poster of Bob Marley and Haile Selassie The MC's stage name was *Black Poison*. *Ghetto Productions* organized another event I attended; there, the MC wore a shirt covered in diamonds and dollar signs, and the artists threw out random English words and made familiar gangsta hand symbols to the riotous applause of the spectator-performers.

Rarely is a woman in sight. I saw only one woman perform at any event. Of the spectators, events I attended averaged one woman for every five men. At Abidjan Rap Tour held annually on Yopougon's *Rue de Princess*, I counted around two hundred men and eight women. With sixty groups performing, almost everyone in the audience was also a musician. While waiting for their turn to lip-sync their song, men performed with other groups, rushing the podium and to join in as back-up dancers and thus maximize every man's stage time. A group's favorite (or only) song might circulate these shows for years and friends sung along to songs they had by now memorized. These were boys being boys, performing for more boys. They afforded peripheral men opportunities to be in the spotlight, to have a platform and an audience to

⁸⁵ Another noteworthy practice common on Abidjan's social scene is for imitation paparazzi to appear at important functions and entreat to take your photo – for a price.

appreciate their work. Like football, these performances gave men a name in their *quartier* and connected them to men in other *communes*.

The *maquis*, the football field and the hip hop stage confirm masculine subjectivities for peripheral Abidjanais men lacking work-based identities. Extreme examples are the *bluffeurs* who transform out of their grubby day clothes, diligently clean and style themselves to become men among men, or boys among boys. In the African crisis city, the street is a denigrated work space; these play areas are symbolic spaces within the periphery that connect to an imagined elsewhere. Fragmenting their identities into work and play, the latter affirm their belonging in a masculine, albeit boyish, global subculture of music and sport.

Participation in these spaces is of course not available to all men. Many of the vendors to whom I spoke scoffed at the idea of having free time or disposable income to partake in such scenes. Instead, these were men with “style” who made an effort to stand out – be somebody – locally, just as the orators made an effort to stand out among peripheral informal sector men by way of political participation. Access to petty consumption, such as the ability to buy a drink for oneself and a date on a Saturday night out, indicated high status in the way a car, or a yacht, may for men of a higher socioeconomic class. In deeply peripheral social networks, disposable income is a sparse commodity. Thus even the ability to “bluff” inserts men within a social hierarchy (Newell, 2009b), and the neighborhood little big men, or *responsables*, stand out as the ones who pay the group’s tab at the end of the night.⁸⁶ While conferring status on the big spender (and in continuity with African traditions of old), this resource maximization of social networks allowed the have-nots to enjoy Abidjan’s night life more frequently than their means would otherwise permit. Vendors often explained that the moment you had a little you shared it, just as your friend would do for you. However, this was rarely a reciprocal arrangement, instead confirming one’s relatively fixed place within the social hierarchy.

In sum, to have a minimum disposable income and to be able to show off an Mtv masculinity is a relative success. Among peripheral Abidjanais men, these are the ones who get the girls, even if they skip the occasional meal to do so. Most often, however, these Mtv masculinities lack the sexy back-up dancers who beg to be taken home in lyrical refrains. Of the street vendors in Agadjanian’s (2005: 266) study, he notes that “...gender boundaries remain particularly potent in male vendors’ leisure socializing – hanging out, drinking, or sports – that is, in activities where traditional gender ideology and stereotypes are further cultivated.” Separated from women in their social lives and without the recourse a previous generation had of coming home to women in the private sphere of the home, peripheral Abidjanais lived gender-segregated lives. In the following section I explore vendors’ sentiments regarding their limitations as men, as well as their impressions of women in contemporary Abidjan.

4. Abidjan’s mobile phone culture

I love expensive phones, you know, *serious* phones. Because once you have this, people respect you, you see? (Jaurès)

A pitiable sight in Adjamé’s *black* is the section for used and stolen mobile phones. Hundreds of men line up single-file on either side of a popular street. Each man has one or

⁸⁶ Unable to remain outside of this hierarchical system, often that little big man was me, a point I discuss in *Chapter 1 and Appendix 1*.

several phones on his person which he flashes at passersby, desperate to stand out from the anonymous mass. The vendors whisper, hiss or call out; some make appeals with silent expressions, others follow for a couple of paces, bargaining down from their starting price before being asked. They offer dinosaur relics and latest-name brands, gaudy pieces with little substance that nevertheless promise to stand out on a *maquis* table, and *bona fide* smartphones equipped with technology that a fraction of Abidjan's population understands or will ever use. Of a similar demographic to mobile street vendors, these hawkers range in age and dress, some barely teenagers in grubby tees and frightened faces, others smooth, self-aware twenty- and thirty-somethings sporting Mtv masculinities, and tired-looking men past their prime in respectable, casual Friday-type shirts and slacks. If supply indicates anything about demand, Abidjan's market for mobile phones is ringing off the hook.

Mobile phone advertisements are themselves like music videos stills featuring images of predictable, patterned selection of cool Mtv masculinities accessorized by flirtatious young divas. These suggestive lifestyles are effective: around seventy percent of Ivoirians have a mobile phone (CIA World Factbook: Côte d'Ivoire, 2012). In Abidjan periphery and center, the mobile phone is the must-have accessory, particularly for men. Decorative status markers, phones are a relatively democratic means of gaining visibility and accessing the global materialist world of modern communicative technology. In addition, they play a significant role in *maquis* sociability, dating culture, and social network hierarchies.

When I met Calice, a hard-up twenty-three year-old Tampico vendor, he wore headphones in his ear, mimicking the ubiquitous Mtv masculinity look. It was only a look: he had been out of batteries for some time and could not afford new ones. The nice accessory, however, cost him 27,000CFA up-front and he was paying the rest of its 40,000CFA cost in installments.⁸⁷ Widely available at a full range of prices, mobile phones are generally accessible even among deeply peripheral populations. And even cheap mobile phones can offer a veneer of *bling* despite limited functional capabilities, a fact not lost on marketers who embellish basic phones with bright colors, metallic faceplates or bizarre fringes. Phones/mp3s play music at impressively loud volumes, drawing attention and providing entertainment. And familiar site upon entering a *maquis* is to see entire tables of men sitting together silently, playing games on their phones.

Attesting to their visibility, phones counter the anonymity of peripheral life. A name and phone number, and sometimes only a phone number, makes for common graffiti around Abidjan. They are scrawled on street-side stalls, in the backs of taxis and on *maquis* tables, perhaps with the distant hope that someone, somewhere, is looking for a good time. A friend employed in one of Abidjan's foreign embassies returned from his last day of work with his shirt marked not with good-bye wishes, but phone numbers. Phone numbers are one of few forms of documentation for peripheral populations who, wholly disparate from a Foucauldian notion of the modern panopticon state, live lives under a guise of informality: unregistered, undocumented, unseen.

⁸⁷ A number of vendors justified exorbitant phone purchases – men who lived “day by day” reported having phones of 60,000CFA and upwards, and unlike clothing, this was the actual cost and not their estimated worth – by stating that this was a way to keep their money instead of cash, and if they were desperate they could always sell the phone and buy one cheaper. Despite the high risk of theft, without bank accounts they believed this was a relatively safe way to store their savings.

Phones signal participation, in modernity as well as in local and distant social networks. As I note in *Chapter 8*, proof of one's status rests in a phone's contacts list. During one of our conversations Doug MC showed me a magazine featuring an Ivoirian artist now performing in New York City. As evidence that they were old friends, he showed me the man's US number on his phone. He boasted that his friend often called him, a line I heard several times from vendors who had friends or relatives abroad. By extension, when I returned to California even distant acquaintances insisted that I give them my number, and a few times I did indeed receive unexpected calls from people who I struggled to remember.⁸⁸

Receiving a phone call is proof that someone cares enough to not only think about you, but to spend the money to call you, and if you speak loudly enough everyone around will bear witness to this fact. At weddings, in classrooms, amidst somber meetings and at official functions phones go off, always with ringers set on high volume.⁸⁹ This is not a simple case of forgetfulness. During a three-hour long meeting I attended to resolve an artists' strike at a top Ivoirian performance company, I do not exaggerate to say that phones went off at least twenty times. Among the meeting's ground rules were that phones were to be shut off with the threat that anyone who ignored this rule would be summarily asked to leave. Every few phone calls, the organizers would emphatically repeat this (nonetheless unenforced) rule in a lengthy diatribe about regard for their fellow artists and deference for the company's leadership. The crowning moment occurred when, nearing the end of the meeting, a distinguished board member who had been lecturing the artists on their lack of respect himself received a call – which he answered.

If the American standard is that a man needs a car to snag a woman, in Abidjan he needs a phone (and if and when he lands a girl, he should probably buy her one too, credit included).⁹⁰ Even among the mobile street vending population, most men had at least one phone; on only three occasions did I come across men without phones, and then they referenced a member of their social network whose phone had become the *de facto* way to get in touch. But those were the most desperate cases. To have a phone was to have respect. When I asked Erick if he ever wanted to upgrade his 5000CFA mobile phone, he replied, "Of course I want to change. I am a human being, every person is ambitious." As I noted with regard to weekend money, ambitions (and capabilities) to consume supplants that to produce: for Abidjanais men, this defines the realm of the possible. And the more phones the better: there is nothing bizarre about carrying around two or three phones, the official justification being that each phone corresponds to a different network, so you can call friends within various networks at the cheapest rate.

However good they may be as decoration, entertainment or to receive calls, Abidjanais seldom use phones to make calls. Three phones or none, the typical line was "I have no credit."

⁸⁸ International calls are impressively inexpensive when made from internet cafes. And the money is well worth the bragging rights to report to your neighborhood buddies that you just returned from calling your American friend.

⁸⁹ And I never saw an Ivoirian reject a call. This makes sense: to have to call someone back means paying for the call, so to answer it is to save money.

⁹⁰ As one of my girlfriends remarked, this is both a blessing and a curse: a man buys his girlfriend a phone not just to impress but to keep tabs on her, and it comes with the expectation that she will answer his call.

When I received calls, they tended to be from unfamiliar numbers: a 100CFA per-call ubiquitous mobile phone stand, Abidjan's equivalent of the pay phone. Otherwise, a person calls and immediately hangs up, or "beeps" you: sends an automatic and uncharged text message requesting that you call them back. But unlike *tag, you're it*, who calls whom indicates the hierarchical relationship between the caller and the called. Just as with picking up the tab after a night out drinking, for purely social calls, those who have more call those who have less. And if expecting a call, a friend or partner can send credit to the caller via a public phone stands.

Caught in a frustrating limbo, the orators I discuss in the remaining empirical chapters regularly complained of the high expense of making phone calls to important people, calls their *Sorbonne* affairs and personae expected them to make from their own phones, thus registering as familiar numbers to possibly sensitive political contacts. Irrespective of their status as underemployed men they stood somewhat outside the social hierarchical who-calls-whom distinction because their calls were work-related, so they regularly doled out money they did not have. This was similar to my status as a researcher and (generically wealthy) foreigner, thereby doubly charged with the expectation that I make all phone calls, and this was indeed a large chunk of my research budget once in the field. However, men's inability to call me (without directly hanging up) also countered the potentially uncomfortable boundary-crossing distinction that my role as a sociologist interested in men's personal lives/the cool American friend posed: while I constantly received "beeps" from my research subjects, their sheer inability to actually call on any regular basis afforded me privacy when I wanted it.

5. Informal men, illegitimate children

5.1. Men without women

Here in Abidjan, women are money. If you have money you can choose; you can change them [around] like clothing. (Danon)

Well, effectively if you speak of a girlfriend, there is, there where you are, you can't have a girlfriend, someone who loves you as you are like this, or not? (Modeste)

I have argued that without state affiliations or work-based identities that afford adult masculinity, mobile street vendors pursue a strategy of complicit global masculinity: they seek alternative, black identities through style (Mtv masculinity), identities at play, and consumption culture that position them not really as men but as youth. My review of African masculinities literature corroborates these findings. Further, I have shown that vendors affirm their masculine subjectivities in gender-segregated spaces. Here I argue that this is because they lack access to roles as husbands and (legitimate) fathers. They exclude because they are excluded: of the thirty-six vendors with whom I spoke, four reported having girlfriends in Abidjan, only one cohabiting, and an additional two described girlfriends from home, outside of Abidjan. Nine reported having one child.⁹¹ All the vendors spoke of the financial burdens that women brought into their lives, in

⁹¹ Not all the vendors stated whether or not they had children; for several I learned only after repeat meetings. While all fathers spoke with visible pride of their children, it was not something that appeared on the forefront of their consciousness, and only two reported seeing their children regularly (daily or several times a week).

the larger sense of their duties as husband and father, and in the smaller sense of social norms dictating that men pay for their girlfriends when they go out, buy them new clothes, give them money for the hairdresser, and provide pocket money. Yves says, “I have no money, so to find a girlfriend, to stay with her, to buy her what she wants to be comfortable...I do not have the means for that.” When I asked Zapin if he had a girlfriend, he replied, “I am looking for money first.” By contrast, vendors with girlfriends demonstrated their masculine prowess by readily bragging about paying for her mobile phone (Modeste) or giving her what she asks for whenever he had a little (Jaurès). Modeste, whose girlfriend he has not seen since he left Niger in 2007, explains, “I do everything for her, whatever she asks, you see. Well, I do all that because if I do not she will forget me, I am sure.”

Newell (2009b: 379) describes Abidjan as having a “widespread urban sexual antagonism” with men believing women want them for their money – all of their money – and women believing that men are untrustworthy, a divide that Ferguson (1999) explained well as a condition of the African colonization-modernization project’s gendered wage labor system. Samuel believes this is an urban malaise: women see things on television and want them, and will have “two or three official boyfriends” to have them, so that men become a means to an end (money), whereas for men, money is a means to women.

Yaio described an incident with his last girlfriend: New Year’s Eve, a big party night in Abidjan, was approaching. She said, ““It is the 31st, you must give me 40,000[CFA] for my [outfit].”” He replied that she knew he could not. She persisted, ““Look, I said 40,000; I know your situation. I told you 40,000 and I know there are others who would ask for more than that. And if you tell me you do not have 40,000, we will not party together on the 31st.”” Then, he said, “She told me that every day is the 31st.”” A comparable incident happened to Thierry:

One day she asked me for something, I said fine, I will give her 30,000[CFA]. She found that 30,000 was little. Hmph, look what I said – I have no salary and I have to give her 30,000, and she finds that 30,000 is little so how much am I supposed to give her? Ha, 30,000CFA, she says it is a little. It is not worth it, ha, that is a lot, no? But she says it is little. What did I do? I let her go. So because of that, often when I think of her and then I think of the expenses, I find that no, it is negative, you see. Because she comes but it is not because of me, it is not love you know. Because she came for material [reasons]. It is like I am a shop or what?

Neither Yaio nor Thierry have had girlfriends since.

5.2. Unmarriageable

While having a girlfriend signaled relative status, all the vendors strongly believed that marriage was out of the question. As I noted previously, although the ideal of marriage remains it is increasingly elusive as relationships mimic the informality of the economy (Newell, 2009b: 379). Despite yearning for children, Prospère believes that this is impossible as a vendor: “I am going to be thirty-seven but I live day to day. If I grow old and I have no job, I stay selling newspapers, how will I make it? ...It is misery. How will I make it, how will my children make it?” So if you love her, set her free. Of his girlfriend, Jaurès said,

I always advise her, ‘Baby, I love you, you know, you and me, but what is sure, you never know. One sees people who spend ten years together, fifteen years together, and at

the final count they do not get married. So if God gives you a husband who could take care of you, you must go and it is not a problem. Me, I give you the green light you see, because I do not have the means.’

Samuel recalled an ex-girlfriend who began dating a lieutenant in the army. He explained that he had been with her to “build something together, to have a future together.” Chivalrously he stepped aside:

Estimating that I was not against her, I wanted what she wanted. I told her that if this guy wanted to marry her, if he could take care of her, then you can go [with him]. Because in fact, she comes from a poor family...I said, ‘Well me, I am no big thing you know;’ often if I had 1000CFA I would give it to her, I could give her 2000CFA.

This interview with Samuel, who currently had a girlfriend, was illuminating in his analysis of what made marriage distinct from “concubinage” or fatherhood. He began like the others:

No, ha, to marry you must have the means, in fact it is for this reason that a man searches for a better tomorrow...Because imagine, currently I have a problem [paying rent], I go marry a woman, I have children and daily expenses, maybe by day it is 2000CFA for food so at the end of the month it is how much, 60,000CFA. Well, then you have to pay the house, the power and the water. For all that you must at least have a monthly income...You must make at least 150,000CFA, at least 160,000 or even 200,000CFA and then on top of that you have insurance, you have social [security], if your child is sick, yeah, you can go with him to a hospital or at present, take your social contract card to get a discount.

But I probed, “You already have a daughter?” He acknowledged that he did. So I said, “It is the same thing?” Emphatically he insisted it was not. I asked how, to which he replied,

Hmph, because, no, it is not the same thing, it is not. If it was the same thing, me I would be happy with that, huh? I say no, in every way it is not the same thing, it is not the same thing even. It is very, very different. It is very, very different. Because me, I see what I have accomplished, me too, from my side I see how it goes. The reality is there, it is hard, it is cruel. It is not the same thing, huh, to marry is not the same thing. I want [it different], I want to have a family like we think about families: you are in your home, the children are there, your wife is there. Your wife does something that is true, but at night you are both at home [together].

Samuel does not need to be the sole provider, but he must nonetheless provide. His ardent conviction that his reality is not only prohibitive, but set against a standard of normality, was typical for the vendors.⁹² As I note previously, the belief that their lives are deficiently measured

⁹² Even salaried bureaucrats noted the twofold burden of 1) salaries not set for inflation, so that their earnings were a pittance compared to the cost of living; and 2) that salaried family member bore the exorbitant expectations of supporting all the unemployed members of his extended

against some *out there* despite Abidjan's widespread poverty was a repeated theme for the vendors and the orators. But "normal" was in fact an exceptional condition that, within these men's direct social networks, existed only in rumor.

6. When the possible is impossible

When I asked Yves what he wanted to do with his life, he stumbled, trying three times to articulate his hopes. Finally he said, "To live like others live, to do good things, to be relaxed, to do my business." Given that what is normal is not on the radar of lived experiences for peripheral Abidjanais men, the dream of instant media stardom is as impossible – and conversely, as possible – as finding formal, salaried work.⁹³ There was such minimal evidence of the potential for formal work that the promise of global fame and heavy returns neatly packaged in the music video or commercial featuring local boy-made-good footballer were equivalently-posed opportunities. Perhaps for this reason a popular Abidjanais expression is "*L'homme propose, Dieu dispose*" or, "Man proposes, God disposes."

When the possible is impossible, future meets fantasy; these blurred distinctions are particularly appealing when projected onto a distant, uncertain future. Most vendors could not predict where they would be in two years or five, but they were sure that they would not be selling in traffic, irrespective of tenure. As Arnaud surmised, "There is no future in this." Their futures had to be elsewhere then, and a vendor would enthusiastically describe his future wife and children sleeping in the house that his job would one day provide. Agadjanian (2005: 266) finds that

[M]en see [street commerce] as a temporary stumble in their working careers, anticipating upward mobility either to higher volume/capital trade...or finding [work] outside of commerce...Underlying either scenario is men's strong wish to get off the streets into more secure, lucrative, and prestigious jobs, commensurate with their dominant gender status. Characteristically, even the interviewees who had been selling for years still harbored such desires.

family network. A professor I spoke to noted that he regularly supports over twenty family members. And even for the relatively privileged Ivoirians with whom I made contact, they experienced constant worries about getting by, especially considering the children of worse-off relatives they took in, fed and educated.

⁹³ Vendors also partook in the widespread African dream of leaving altogether, be it for work or fame as an artist or athlete. This phenomenon has been well documented in other scholarly works and I add nothing to the discussion in reviewing it here. I will only add two points: 1) none of the vendors took this as a serious possibility, stating only that if the opportunity were presented to them, they would certainly take it up; and 2) to complicate matters slightly, the existing literature passes off this desire for elsewhere as a way to *disconnect* from Africa (e.g. Diouf, 2005). But the men from my study overwhelmingly spoke of the advantage that achieving exteriority would have for their lives *here*. Many, for example, described distant relatives or neighborhood acquaintances who had made themselves legendary returning after a few years with the means to build a house for themselves or their parents.

Rodrigue, the thirty-four year-old newspaper vendor who had worked the same corner for eighteen years, said with a questionable confidence, “At the age of forty or fifty I could have a child, yeah? My life must stabilize: once it stabilizes I can have a child.” Samuel told me that in ten years he would have to start thinking about retirement although he had sold at the same corner for four.

Whether they had any idea what their future job would look like, they were painfully aware of the urgency in getting it. When I asked Erick what kind of job he was looking for, he could only say, “A job that permits me, well actually I do not have a choice, but a job that will permit me to have a consistent salary because I am getting old.” Similarly Romaric said, “We in Africa, we *fréquent* [hustle] because we must *fréquenter*. This is to say, you do not even know what job you must do in the future.”

6.1. Hustles to trades: bizness

Like the orators, some vendors spoke of their “projects” and had the mind to convert skills they acquired within their niche to open a shop. Romaric, who currently sold mobile phones at the *black*, imagined opening a phone accessories shop, and Samuel, one of the Gesco perfume vendors, described becoming a perfume merchant. Modeste said “The same trade I am in, it is what I prefer: sales, *le business*.” Serge said, “I want to stay in commerce but at least *grow up*, be in *grand commerce* [big commerce], you know?” Here Serge differentiates “little” informal sector work from “big” formal sector work. However, their work in “commerce,” “sales” or generally “business,” resonated with an entrepreneurial businessman ideal.⁹⁴ Some vendors said that working on their own schedule ill-equipped them to more constrained work structures; Arnaud, for example, explained that he vended because, “Me, I am a guy. I do not like working for people.” Combined with the time and experience the vendors had accrued, prospects of business careers appeared reasonable ideals. The biggest dreamers imagined global enterprises: import/export (Stephane and Zapin) or joint venture companies with foreign partners (Erick). However, a total lack of savings consistently blocked men from advancing beyond mobile street vending.

Further the barriers to entering the formal sector in repressive, nepotistic and dysfunctional states are formidable; as I have argued, informality is as much as survival *strategy* as it is a guarantee of living a bare life existence. Thus the “problem” of informality is an *outcome* of the neoliberal economy, not a missing component that has yet to be absorbed (AlSayyad, 2004; Davis, 2006; Hansen and Vaa, 2002). Seventy-two percent of urban Africa’s working population participates in the informal economy (African Centre for Cities, 2002). This

⁹⁴ Rodrigue believed his experiences had in fact prepared him exceptionally well for work in the United States, “the El Dorado for us, the African youth.” He explained, “I already know the American system, I am already adapted to the American system because in America over there, it is *le business*, it is *le boulot* [job].” He explained that he knew all about this because he had watched “*black* films, American films.”

Interestingly, Boyz and Germain explained that the United States offered ample opportunities for business because there was less paperwork – a noteworthy contrast to the Francophone Ivoirian state constantly demanding “papers” that informal sector men do not have. Caught up in arbitrary bureaucracies, deregulation can certainly sound like freedom.

is on par with estimates for Abidjan, which doubtlessly undercount Abidjan's army of underemployed on the periphery who, beyond lacking any official form of identification, move in and out of sectors and trades on a given day, season or year. To get a "job" in the sense these men imagine getting a job would not be entirely different from winning the lottery.

While formal work is largely out of the question, "A vast world of unofficial economies is one of the few real opportunities for substantial wealth creation in the continent" (Simone, 2004a: 135). Two former vendors with whom I spoke had the thrift and good fortune to set up permanent stalls, however precarious and questionably legitimate they remained. For years Thierry vended between passing cars while also apprenticing as a tailor, a double occupation that served the advantage of purchasing broken, discounted shoes from Malians and Ghanaians and repairing to sell at a profit. He moved up to renting a stall in Adjamé's *black*, and proudly recounted standing up to Adjamé's mayor when the city attempted to raze the stalls in his area. He explained that the youth were left with no choices: they were chased away for selling without stalls, and when they had worked up to having stalls, these were pitilessly destroyed. That time around, the mayor was sympathetic to his case.

Antoine, a twenty-eight year old migrant from Niger who has lived in Abidjan for a decade, opened a shack of electronics and an array of random appliances that the majority-Nigerien Boribana vendors peddle during rush hour. He began vending in 2002 and has had the shop for three years. He reports earning highs of 100,000CFA a day, but on bad days less than half of that. From these earnings he estimates daily profits at around 15,000CFA: what many of the vendors pay monthly in rent. His shop affords him the status of a little big man in the neighborhood, watching out for his product and his compatriots/ salesmen, but also includes the burden of shouldering the regular losses that come from theft or seizure. He described mobile street vending as markedly more successful in the first years of the new century, proof being his accumulated capital. But now he says vendors have little chance of making a fraction of what had made.

6.2. ...Or instant media stardom

Then why not instant media stardom in the worlds of music and sport, worlds in which successful black protagonists parade across television screens and on advertising billboards? This is an equally unlikely fiction as hoping for formal work in a failed economy and much more glamorous. And in the media world men can imagine that they have some measure of control; instead of as yet another unskilled hand, his talents, persistent training, or local notoriety could buttress him up into moderate and local renown, and eventually...well, who knows? Hence Patrick's earlier comment that he could still sign a professional football contract at thirty-one years old, or MC describing how our CD single would launch on RTI. During our interview Patrick twice mentioned the legendary Koutouan, a friend who had sold newspapers and went on to play professionally in the United Arab Emirates. When I asked him if this was rare, he insisted, "It is not rare." Moreover, like Partick, Tino, and MC, every neighborhood, family, and social circle has a local media personality.

Further, given the disassociation between men and formal work, being televised, heard on the radio, or even performing at a *maquis* gives peripheral men a sort of notoriety. In this way, mobile street vendors may to varying degrees approximate a masculine ideal through the media world. As deeply peripheral Abidjanais men, vendors are clear that practically and ideologically, the state does nothing for them. In their search for self-affirmation they bypass the state and their work-based identities to pursue a strategy of complicit global masculinity, identifying with

models of consumerist, media-glorified men from the African diaspora. They place their faith not in the nation but in global cultural cues that vindicate peripheral black masculinities. Moreover, they share with their heroes narratives of overcoming insurmountable odds. MC, for example, explained that he loved black America because seeing men similar to himself make it out of the ghetto offered him strength, encouragement, and hope. For these reasons complicit global masculinity affirms peripheral Abidjanais men.

7. Conclusion

Disconnected from productive identities and from the Ivoirian state, my research with mobile street vendors was central to unpacking the relationship peripheral Abidjanais men have to global consumption culture. In this chapter I began with a look into vendors' spending habits to argue that their sense of hopeless inadequacy at work redirected them to affirming (and affirmed) consumption capacities that further reinforced their diminished capacity for adult masculine status. But their identities at play, encompassing their sense of style as well as their social activities and referencing icons from the African diaspora gain them legitimacy within their social networks. Black urbanism indicates subjectivities and strategies, personal and political, that peripheral Abidjanais men embody. However, these identities constrain men to a gender-segregated, protracted youth culture whereby they enact dominant masculinities on stage, but cannot carry project such legitimated identities into the private spheres of their lives or use them to make claims on the state. Nonetheless hope springs eternal, and the men are equally optimistic about the improbable goals of attaining formal work in the distant future, or instant media stardom whenever.

I have demonstrated that mobile street vendors pursue strategies of complicit global masculinity. While the orators look to the state for status, work and secure futures in a post-crisis Côte d'Ivoire, the vendors bypass the state for either urban or global identities. They embrace a consumerist ethos that offers peripheral black masculinities a media-sanctioned status. As I note in the next chapter these are identities that the orators denigrated in their *Sorbonne* speeches, parodying men with low-riding and lambasting the proportion of Abidjanais earnings that goes toward *drogbas* in same way adults scold the next generation of youth. But the Ivoirian state bars the vendors from the orators' politically affirming strategies, and left out of politics they have no incentive to reinterpret or deny the severity of the crisis. Recognizing the dysfunctions of the Ivoirian state and its restrictions on their potentiality, the vendors do not imagine a post-crisis Côte d'Ivoire. Instead, they place their bets in a hazy global world of *business* or media culture. They argue that their experiences in the deregulated world of informal commerce adequately prepare them to pursue their "projects" or alternatively dream of making it in worlds of music or sport, clinging to flattened, glorified and malleable images of a black Mtv masculinity that rises above the crowd, be it amongst a group of men in an Abobo *maquis* or in a World Cup stadium. The vendors look beyond Côte d'Ivoire's borders, but only as references to belong to something larger than themselves, belonging that is at once global and wholly Abidjanais.

Chapter 7

Politics, poverty and penises: Constructing masculine subjectivities at the *Sorbonne*

1. Introduction: Periphery in the core

...Ivorian ‘patriotism’ and its radical offshoots must be placed in a perspective that is continental or even global. Only in this way is it possible to understand the ultranationalism expressed in speeches at the Sorbonne, the informal meeting place in Abidjan’s central business district favoured by political activists. (Banégas, 2006: 537)

Claims to Abidjan’s still-proud administrative district of Plateau, the city’s persistently cosmopolitan *commune* where informal practices still appear out of place, are full of messy residuals concerning the *évolué* identity. The European expatriate population still dominates the metropole while all but Abidjan’s elite make transient appearances as low-end workers, street hustlers or visitors wandering about the district like wide-eyed country folk. Above one of the major commercial centers offering *haute couture* clothing and top-of-the-line electronics is a billboard advertisement for an elite jewelry designer. The viewer faces an elegant, statuesque black woman, eyes downcast, in a slinky evening gown. She fingers an extraordinary diamond necklace that her beau, rich as he is adoring, places around her neck. Standing closely behind her, he is a handsome white man in a fine tux. This advertisement plays equally to the fantasy of the white male expatriate who scores something better than a business deal on his trip to Africa as it does to the ambitious, glamorous young Ivoirian woman who frequents forbiddingly expensive clubs targeting white male clientele in Plateau and Zone 4. Not only is the advertisement clearly *not* targeting the Ivoirian man, given the colonial and contemporary Franco-Ivoirian context, its sensitive use of racial tropes either precludes consideration of the Ivoirian man-as-client or plays to his sense of himself as *évolué*, thereby interchangeable with the white man.

Across the road and down the street, another set of racialized tropes are at play. Situated at the *Sorbonne*’s main entrances, vendors sell pirated electronic and print media featuring hard pornography. A close-up of a stereotypically large, round, black behind is adorned in a lacy thong; pedestrians shamelessly gape at full-frontal views of massive black penises penetrating platinum blondes, as if these images are some special revenge for a colonial history that gave black men secondary access to black women’s bodies and denied them access to white women’s bodies altogether. The *Sorbonne* is in Plateau but not of Plateau. The men who frequent the space carry with them the tropes, practices and discourses from the periphery as an unspoken admission of their tentative belonging, while insistence on their own centrality drives complicity.

In this chapter, I explore a set of practices that contest African narratives of exclusion by instrumentalizing the legacy of the Ivoirian miracle and thus the centrality of Côte d’Ivoire and its undisputed citizens. Unlike the generalized cultural strategies in the previous empirical chapters, these strategies were only available to a subset of the Abidjanais population: President Gbagbo’s patriots. At the *Sorbonne*, the epicenter of patriotic ideology that disseminated throughout peripheral Abidjan via orators’ speeches, pamphlets, and CDs, otherwise idle men enacted a dominant masculinity and asserted their own relevance in the city and their country’s relevance in the world.

2. The *Sorbonne*

2.1. The *Sorbonne* as a space

The *Sorbonne* was a site of knowledge production and dissemination in Plateau where politically astute Gbagboist-nationalist men utilized the Ivoirian geopolitical terrain to situate themselves in a local and regional hierarchy.⁹⁵ Literally and ideologically they centered themselves, constructing a dominant masculinity within the core of the former colonial city, and manipulating the colonial and postcolonial narrative to their advantage. The *Sorbonne* centered peripheral men's identities to construct a status-bearing masculine subjectivity. The men – the spectators and insiders – involved in making the *Sorbonne* function were part of a larger network of patriots who regulated access to the Ivoirian state and constructed the appropriate

⁹⁵ In this analysis I discuss the *Sorbonne* specifically with regard to how it buttresses peripheral men's identities as men and citizens in the context of the crisis. Framing my analysis around concepts of “core” and “periphery” and men's roles in public space and the public sphere, I focus on the *Sorbonne* and not the larger network of *Agoras* and *Parlements* that have appeared throughout Abidjan, predominantly in the outlying *communes*, which run in the evenings (presumably when men have returned to their respective *communes* and from my experience, espoused a markedly more explicit radical political stance; perhaps because, fully at home and out of the potential spotlight of the international community, they were not concerned with auto-censorship). This network refers to itself as FENAPCI, or *Fédération Nationale des Agoras et Parlements de Côte d'Ivoire* [National Federation of Agoras and Parliaments of Côte d'Ivoire].

Further, while my analysis obviously involves a discussion of the *Sorbonne*'s political perspective vis-à-vis France and the international community as well as regional migrants, I consider this alongside a number of narratives and strategies the *Sorbonne* as a public space and a public sphere employs, including sexuality and social critique. Others who have specifically analyzed the *Sorbonne* network as a political platform are Arnaut, 2004 (unpublished conference paper); Bahi, 2003 (who unlike others suggests it is a politically neutral space of free speech); Banégas, 2006 (discussing the Yopougon *Parlement*); Thérroux-Bénoni, 2009 (unpublished dissertation).

Moreover, there is a growing literature on the men themselves, generally referred to as *patriots*, of which the orators form a part. The loose network of *Jeunes Patriotes* [Young Patriots] has received the most press, with its outspoken Charles Blé Goudé appointed Gbagbo's “Minister of Youth” and long under UN sanctions and wanted to face crimes against humanity charges on the international community; his whereabouts are currently unknown. Another major branch is Gbagbo's FPI student organization FESCI, or *Fédération estudiantine et scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire* [Student Federation of Côte d'Ivoire] which was born amidst the loosening of the one-party state in the 1990s and is now accused of political violence and racketeering, especially on college campuses. Blé Goudé is a former FESCI President. For a detailed analysis, see Human Rights Watch (2008). Arnaut (2008) examines the GPP, or *Groupement Patriotique pour la Paix* [Patriotic Group for Peace], a southern militia that rose after the political events of 2002. Many of the orators are former FESCI “militants” – as they described it – and current *Jeunes Patriotes*. The *Sorbonne* acted as a public broadcast for these perspectives. Of the *Sorbonne*, Thérroux-Bénoni writes that “*radio trottoir* [street talk] broadcasts the Young Patriots' perception, interpretation and meaning of current events” (2009: 203).

autochthonous Abidjanais subject. The *Sorbonne* embodies both the political crisis and the nationalist response, at the heart of which is a contest of belonging to the city, the country, and a greater world.

The *Sorbonne* was conceived as a forum for free speech amidst the demise of one-party rule in the 1980s.⁹⁶ Initially in a public park adjacent to its present location, men would gather and speak their minds about anything: the economy, religion, society, and politics. As it became more structured, the *Sorbonne* conferred degrees to its sanctioned “professors.” By the turn of the century the *Sorbonne* had settled into a city block taken over by markets selling goods to a primarily male clientele.⁹⁷ Distinct from other parts of Plateau, this interior hosted the gritty market atmosphere of the *quartiers populaires*, the periphery encroached upon the core. On one side, dozens of stalls sold men’s suits, clothing and accessories, office supplies, and miscellaneous market goods. The other side was dominated by snack and beverage stalls. Closest to the center were newspaper stands and traditional medicine vendors. To reach the speaking areas required finding a break in the chain of stalls and winding into the center as if navigating a maze. Speaking areas⁹⁸ were spacious, unpaved squares simply adorned with a wooden table and large speakers around which orators paced as they spoke and vendors and pamphleteers circulated with their wares. Enclosing this area, ticket vendors assembled benches and plastic chairs every morning to fit a capacity of several hundred spectators. The speaking areas were adjacent to an abandoned high-rise in the center of the block with shops such as tailors, internet cafes and printers at its base and top levels reserved as *Sorbonne* leadership office space.⁹⁹ Open from 10am until 6pm on weekdays, on any given the *Sorbonne* day attracted dozens to hundreds of spectators, Abidjanais in Plateau for administrative business, working bureaucrats on their lunch break, students,¹⁰⁰ and a hodgepodge population of unemployed.

2.2. The *Sorbonne* as a strategy: Politics, poverty and penises

⁹⁶ All of the data I provide on the *Sorbonne* comes from interviews with orators and *Sorbonne* leadership as well as personal observations from my ethnographic fieldwork.

⁹⁷ *Sorbonne* earnings came from selling seats and pamphlets/electronic media at the speaking area, but predominantly from vendors’ and market stalls’ daily tribute that leadership authorized to sell.

⁹⁸ I discuss the *Sorbonne* as a singular entity here. Officially there were two *Sorbonnes*, each with its own leadership and membership structure. The first, smaller and less popular with a slightly older demographic, was the *Sorbonne Originale*. The second, which attracted larger crowds and thus where I spent most of my time, was the *Sorbonne Solidarité*. The leadership to whom I refer here and in *Chapters 4* and *5* was from the *Sorbonne Solidarité*.

⁹⁹ Rumors in Abidjan circulated that the abandoned building was also a prostitution racket, a fact I was never able to verify, nor did I witness anything to support the assertion. However, I frequented the *Sorbonne* during the day, not at night when the stalls sold alcohol in a maquis atmosphere.

¹⁰⁰ “Student” is also a euphemism for the unemployed. One may be a student for a decade or longer, paying the minimum fees to maintain the student status while looking, or rather hoping, for work.

After the 1999 *coup d'état* and civil war in 2002, President Gbagbo and his party the *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI) established the *Sorbonne* as a vehicle for street-level propaganda. Without noting the contradiction, the orators described the *Sorbonne* as a space of “free expression” yet insisted on the necessity of a singular, state-supported voice in the context of the “rebellion.” It was clearly an FPI propaganda machine. As a *political strategy*, the *Sorbonne* constructed narratives of belonging that positioned Christian, Gbagboist southern Ivoirians as the appropriate citizens. It constructed a “we” of “patriots,” “resistors,” “brothers,” and “friends” powerful by association and united in a struggle to claim the country from “them”: inauthentic Ivoirians and a resource-greedy French-led international community. It provided its public with a narrative of current events locally and globally, inserting Côte d’Ivoire into the center of international affairs and spearheaded by Gbagbo. As men presenting these narratives as insiders broadcasting breaking news, they portrayed the organization and its spectators as privileged members of a global scene. In doing so, the *Sorbonne* gave men, many of whom would have been otherwise idle, an affirming sense of self-importance and inclusion into a wider nexus of current events.

In addition, the *Sorbonne* was a space of *sociability* and *social critique*. Even while it purported to center men in the public space of the city and the public sphere of politics, orators related to their audience with the shared experiences of unemployment, struggle and deep poverty. Orators lamented the fact of prolonged unemployment, humorously related stories about life on the periphery and angrily beseeched spectators to contribute to their *beca* fare home. They hawked booklets on business entrepreneurship and referred to the *Sorbonne* as a community, collecting fees for sick members and discussing ways to collectively invest. To the best of each one’s ability, orators and spectators alike presented themselves in the image of a man who belonged in Plateau. Yet despite the “we”-ness of the *Sorbonne*, hierarchies clearly demarcated those who authentically belonged – upper-level membership, bureaucrats and other employed, the *doyens* [deans] – and the rest.

Lastly, the *Sorbonne* was a *men’s* space. The great majority of women present were silent, there to serve the almost-exclusively male clientele. It articulated a form of masculinity set to approximate the hegemonic, neoliberal businessman in dress and comportment, and inculcated this ideal among junior men, juxtaposed to Mtv masculinities idealized in other popular Abidjanais public spaces. In speeches and advertisements it addressed the male subject. Orators infused nationalist discourse with misogynist symbolism and rhetoric so that penises and politics were explicitly linked. When otherwise rendered invisible, the *Sorbonne* was a vehicle for peripheral men to assert prominence as public actors within Abidjan’s core.

Though I discuss the orators’ profiles in detail in the following chapters, here I emphasize the fact that these were peripheral, unemployed men who were highly educated. Had they come of age in the first decades of independence they would have likely found cushy jobs within the Ivoirian bureaucracy. The spectators represented a range of class and educational backgrounds and the hierarchies among them were generally acknowledged and respected, although they united under the autochthonous banner of “patriots.” Moreover, the fact that they were available to attend the *Sorbonne* during weekday working hours suggests that many of the men were unemployed, although the orators often surmised that spectators stopped there on their way to and from the business activities that brought them to Plateau. As a crucial defining characteristic of the average *Sorbonne* attendee, the orators, the regulars, and gawkers were overwhelmingly men. The pornography stalls at its major entrances gave the immediate impression that women

were unwelcome, and inside men talked men's issues: politics, the economy, and the social, all from an unabashedly misogynist point-of-view. The *Sorbonne's* construction of masculine subjectivity points to the manner in which men insist on their own relevance within public space, contesting their powerlessness as actors in the context of the informalized, feminized city. In accessing the city center and constructing a narrative of Côte d'Ivoire and in particular Abidjan as a city within the global core, the *Sorbonne* contested the crisis narrative of a failed modernity. In doing so, it offered men a space to define what it means to be an Ivoirian citizen with exclusive entitlements. And it allowed peripheral men to imagine themselves as core players while nonetheless acknowledging their struggles and recognizing a hierarchy of authentic and inauthentic dominant masculinities. Within this codified system, it asserted that men are the appropriate actors of a modern, global Abidjan.

Nevertheless a great number of women were also present, working the food and drink stalls, squatting over basins of boiling oil frying fish and plantains, and pacing the speaking area peddling large plates of snacks and refreshments balanced on their heads. In the early morning when workers assembled benches and cockroaches scattered about undisturbed, the *Sorbonne* belonged to women in *pagne* wraps. They tied their undernourished infants to their backs while more half-dressed and unkempt children ran about; as the day advanced it became clear that these children had no plans for school. During these off-hours, women and children owned this space. Contrasted to the otherwise elite women strutting Plateau in stilettos, these scenes of reproductive labor exposed the *Sorbonne's* peripheral status, the feminine face of poverty in the center of Abidjan's proud bastion of steel-and-concrete modernity.

3. Politics: Manufacturing a global-local nexus

3.1. Global nation, global leader, and global everyday man

As a site of knowledge production, the *Sorbonne* reconstructed current events to generate its own truths through speeches, pamphlets, and electronic media. In the *Sorbonne*, all domestic affairs had an international dimension, which Côte d'Ivoire headlined. The orators based Ivoirian centrality on lore of its unprecedented resource wealth, the international community's object of desire. Thus amidst the global financial crisis of 2008, pamphlets explained how the Ivoirian crisis played a pivotal role in destabilizing the French economy. The American International Group (AIG) disaster on Wall Street was in turn linked to the Ivoirian economy. One orator explained that with their virtual economies crumbling, the global North eyed Ivoirian resource wealth with renewed greed. When Israeli forces bombed the Gaza strip in late 2008, spectators were reminded of a post-Independence history of unimpeded Ivoirian-Israeli relations, even when other African countries had expelled Israeli embassies. When Pope Benedict visited Africa but not Côte d'Ivoire in 2009, the orators implicated the Vatican in the crisis. Rome and the Vatican, the orator explained, were at the root of nefarious activity involving global economic inequality. This, he continued, was the only explanation for the Pontiff's decision to bypass Côte d'Ivoire where the world's largest basilica was located.

Sorbonne discourse commonly situated President Gbagbo in a global, not a domestic context. Thus despite the blatant fact of crisis with Ivoirian affairs – and lives – on hold, as their ideal man Gbagbo vindicated peripheral identities through his attention, and reception, by the

global community.¹⁰¹ Therefore when Barack Obama won the 2008 presidential race, orators emphasized his close friendship with Gbagbo. And they reported that he was the sole leader on close terms with both Obama and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez; France was in fact his only foe. Speeches and pamphlets made much ado of President Gbagbo's election as "Vice President of the International Follow-up Conference on the Financing of Development" at the 2008 Doha Summit. There, they said, he proved himself an Africa leader standing up to France. Without fail, the orators boasted that Gbagbo was a forerunner in a global anti-imperial movement, bravely resisting French monopoly control and acting as a model for Côte d'Ivoire's weaker African brothers and sisters. In this way he was also Africa's foremost leader – one orator reported that Nelson Mandela had singled him out as the continent's next figurehead. Notable in these instances was not their praise of President Gbagbo – after all, it was a partisan space – but that they praised him by manufacturing narratives of his high international esteem.

The global orientation of much of the information disseminated at the *Sorbonne* made it true by virtue of the audience members' inability to verify it: how the president was received internationally was not something the average peripheral man could fact check. As "political analysts," the orators proclaimed to educate the public, and would merge familiar truths detailing French neocolonialism with un-sourced statistics on Ivoirian wealth and behind-the-scenes activities, particularly the clandestine alliance between the French, the United Nations, northern rebels and Burkina Faso. Many orators further sensationalized events by adding a religious or spiritual dimension to the story; they commonly referred to Côte d'Ivoire as the Chosen Nation, a new Israel which God had blessed and which was soon to realize its destiny.¹⁰² Côte d'Ivoire, in fact, would bring all of Africa closer to knowing God.

Orators framed audience contributions as part of this war effort, so that the more a man gave, the more patriotic he became.¹⁰³ Embracing the crisis narrative, their historical recounting of major events that shook the nation's sense of tranquility took on a cathartic effect. As they relived these communal experiences, they added an insider perspective. Moreover, they linked

¹⁰¹ Bayart (2000) discusses this phenomenon as pandemic for African leaders whose external gaze detracts from attention, or blame, regarding internal problems.

¹⁰² The spillover of religion into other discourses is part of the larger evangelization of Africa.

In a New York Times Op-Ed during Gbagbo's refusal to step down after the November 2010 elections, Venance Konan wrote, "After last fall's election, Mr. Gbagbo and his wife, Simone, refused to accept the results, in part because they had become evangelical Christians, and their pastors convinced them that God alone could remove them from power. Every day on state TV, fanatical clergymen called Mr. Gbagbo God's representative on earth, and the winner of the election, Alassane Ouattara, the Devil's. Many young Ivoirians, poor, illiterate and easily brainwashed, believed this" (2011: A29).

The crisis generally had a largely spiritual dimension, and orators sold pamphlets to unveil the truth of the crisis, peddling its antidote alongside medicinal cure-alls and magic classes. In this context, where the spiritual and the mundane are easy companions, the crisis has a special place. (See Mbembe and Roitman, 1995 in *Chapter 1*; see also de Boeck, 2005; Diouf, 2003).

¹⁰³ Audience members did not buy into it. Getting donations, regardless of how enthusiastically received a speech had been, could at times feel like pulling teeth.

the recent past to the present, insisting that a new development to the crisis was about to unfold. I often remarked that sitting there was like being witness to a bad *novella* unfolding; you were constantly lured to the next episode, listening to strung-out conspiracy theories with the constant assurance that some big new development was about to happen, or had happened but had been covered up. The orators said their information came from secret sources, top men in the legal and illegal worlds of Ivoirian and international activity that circulated around a shadowy Abidjan. This made them (and the audience members with whom they divulged information) insiders on the front-line of an anti-imperial war, privy to all things classified.

In one particularly gripping speech, an orator discussed an attempted prison break out of Abidjan's main prison that had been big news for about a week. From the *Sorbonne* perspective, the United Nations (UN) was involved, trying to support the anti-Gbagbo rebellion. Of the prisoners, he said that 200 had been ready to fight. The UN had recently visited on the pretext of inspecting prison conditions, and was thus surely behind it. The orator described where the conspiring rebels were hiding, in Abidjan and in a nearby village. Convincingly, he gave directions as you would to a friend taking a taxi to your home, citing familiar landmarks such as pharmacies and petrol stations. It gave his story a feeling of intimacy both of the events and with the crowd. This had been a close call, the orator warned, a serious attempt to take Abidjan overnight. He added that rebels were also here in their midst, covering as fellow patriots but in fact spies hiding in wait. For men accustomed to life on Abidjan's periphery, the *Sorbonne* offered a space and a script to imagine another reality, one in which their country and President were global actors. Furthermore, their attendance implicated them in global affairs.

3.2. Entitled insiders

Orator: If you are Ivoirian, clap! [To audience's applause.] Now if you have Ivoirian *citizenship*, clap! [To audience's markedly louder applause.]

In a context of contested nationality, with northerners sharing many of the characteristics – ethnicity, culture, religion, name – of migrant populations, being Abidjanais was synonymous with being Ivoirian, and being a patriot was synonymous with being a Gbagbo supporter. Everyone else was not only an outsider, but potentially an enemy of the state. The *Sorbonne* was the epicenter of this autochthonous logic where orators passionately advocated narrowed conceptions of who did and did not deserve to profit from the fruits of the Ivoirian miracle. It offered a way to assert a privileged belonging, one accorded by birthright, during a time when “authentic” Ivoirians struggled alongside migrants to earn their daily bread.

In 2008, during one of Côte d'Ivoire's attempts at voter registration when officials tried to determine who was and was not Ivoirian, the *Sorbonne* sold pamphlets with photocopies of men's identity cards, duplicate names with different faces, same faces and names but one card claiming Ivoirian origin, another Malian, as proof of extra-nationals meddling in affairs where they did not belong. Speeches directly associated rebels with foreigners, so that the solution to the crisis was retaking the country from both the French and the migrants. The orators prayed to the Lord and thank Jesus – Christianity being the dominant religion of the South – always invoking *hallelujahs* from the crowd. They cracked Muslim jokes such as one in which a frightened lamb sought sanctuary in a church for protection on the aftermath of Eid al-Adha.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ This holiday commemorates Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son for God. On this day Muslims sacrifice a lamb and share the meat with family, friends and the poor.

Similarly, they joked derisively about the poor northerners and their arid terrain, or the foreign foods they ate, like couscous and *garba*. One orator teased about the mode of transport people use on the way to Bouaké, the rebel stronghold in the north. Twenty-two people will be seated in regular seating, another twenty-two in the area reserved for luggage. And the man who travels like this, the orator concluded, is the same man who robs you at night.

Some orators couched xenophobic remarks – foreigners are welcome so long as they know their place – with statements attesting to Ivoirian hospitality, *ipso facto* its high foreigner populations. Others were more blatant, saying that the country of yesteryear was sold to foreigners and President Gbagbo planned to retake it for his people. It is the Ivoirians, one stated, who must begin making decisions for the country; foreigners had the choice to agree or leave. He listed these countries by name: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Liberia.

4. Poverty: *Sorbonne* sociality and social critique

A full hierarchy was at play at the *Sorbonne* among staff and audience. Authentic- and inauthentic-looking businessmen came for hours at a time to listen, socialize, or sleep. It was a place to be, or at least look, busy. In speeches, the orators presented the *Sorbonne* as an internationally recognized platform for information, a place where national and international media listened in on debates for insight and truth. While perhaps not international, it was a definitive feature of the Ivoirian political scene, a site where patriotic elite assembled and a generalized consortium of southern-based Gbagboists affiliated to partake in its exclusive status. Despite their shared membership as authentic Ivoirians, men upheld the distinctions that existed outside this political space.

Comprising a small community of patriotic insiders, elite audience members rubbed shoulders with *Sorbonne* leadership. While making rare, discreet appearances in the main speaking area, these elite came to talk business and politics with certain higher-ups, often in the preferred *maquis* near one of the market entrances. They typically consisted of upper-level members of the larger Gbagbo-patriotic network of *Jeunes Patriotes* and FESCI [Fédération Estudiantine et Scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire, or the Student Federation of Côte d'Ivoire], as well as government officials. The *Sorbonne* being a liminal space, these members represented the potentiality of its affiliation for peripheral men who faced few opportunities otherwise, and the most successful orators could cross over, working their way up to either leadership within the patriotic network, or into formal work through these contacts.¹⁰⁵ This attention also moved them from the fictive world of *Sorbonne* knowledge production to the world of local media as they made appearances at ministerial functions and rubbed shoulders with the upper echelons of the Ivoirian state.

Lowest on the pecking order of *Sorbonne* workers were the women vendors and pre-teen shoe shiners. Next were the pamphleteers, often teenagers, sometimes making an effort in their presentation but just as often in old tee-shirts and broken sandals. The ticket-takers followed: twenty- and thirty-something men also varying in their self-presentation. After this were the master of ceremonies and the orators themselves who treated their gigs with the dignified dress and comportment of an office job.

¹⁰⁵ See *Chapter 4* for orators' life histories and *Chapter 5* for examples of orators who used the *Sorbonne* to make important contacts and find work.

The orators, though self-described as unemployed and unequivocally among the everyday Ivoirians with few readily available opportunities, nonetheless treaded a nebulous middle ground with a regular audience affording them local celebrity status, and the names of the occasional government minister and director of some company registered in their mobile phones. While unlikely, these men harbored hopes that their public activities and regime loyalty would launch careers in government or in the private sector.

The *Sorbonne* leadership was composed of men of realizable political ambition who had lunched with ministers. When they made appearances among the orators their high status was obvious, the latter offering them their chairs and exhibiting other signs of deference. They were dutifully greeted by name and title at the start of each talk. Usually, however, these men were too busy behind the scenes to grace their publics, and when at the *Sorbonne* could be found in their offices in the partially-abandoned high-rise. To reach the President's office one passed the base floor of shops and ascended a dingy staircase smelling of urine. There a long line of a broad public waited: dignified men in suits, tired-looking women vendors, nervous, shifty teenagers, all waiting their turn to see the President. Some came to resolve a dispute, discuss some pressing private matter, present a case for some financial support, or to make a plea for work. A group of well-dressed men, some orators and all from the loyal inner circle, sat on couches in the waiting room. The President would be poised regally in his office, surrounded by more of his men with, for what he insisted was transparency's sake, the door always open. He referred to himself by *nous*, the French royal "we."

Despite these distinctions, the orators were emphatic in articulating a common "us" against the threats they depicted from foreigners. In fact, what bonded the larger *Sorbonne* community was not what they had in common but what distinguished them: the stated constant, nefarious threats from outsiders bent not only on devastating the country but also on sullyng its proud reputation as the Ivoirian miracle.

In a speech picking up the common theme of stalled elections, an orator described France and the United Nations as "collaborators," an undesired presence there not to mitigate but to manipulate outcomes. He added that Ivoirians were already *évolué* and thus capable of deciding their own fate. Similarly, another orator described how for years President Gbagbo put up with former French President Chirac calling him "Laurent" instead of his formal (and respectful) title, but now his conciliatory behavior was over. At the *Sorbonne*, men countered their peripheral identities by portraying themselves as informed and important. As the orators framed the *Sorbonne* as a site on the forefront of global affairs and its audience members as privileged participants, they oscillated between appealing to the audience's construed self-image and reality: that the majority of the men were in fact deeply peripheral, with pressing business more likely to concern finding bus money home than purchasing property in Cocody. The authentic businessmen and political insiders, however, held a coveted place apart. They were easily identified and others gave them the respect befitting of a "big man" in African society, thus upholding reverential status systems that have otherwise eroded in the context of the crisis (see Diouf, 2003).

Regulars often arrived finely dressed. Sitting with legs crossed, they half-listened to the orator's speech while also engaged in the morning paper. Signaling participation in the buzz of greater Plateau, a man might arrive with a briefcase in hand and commission a pre-teen to shine his shoes. The action of shining shoes took precedent over function so that men with rubber shoes and canvas shoes beckoned boys over for the service. I watched one man fuss angrily about getting his white soles perfectly white again. The various women vendors sold bags of

peanuts, water sachets, and other small products. An espresso vendor circled the speaking area with a large blue plastic thermos, giving the men dainty, matching blue cups and saucers, and stirring their sugar at demand. Another woman selling boiled eggs squatted before her client to peel his egg while he hardly shot her a glance.

All of these rituals added to a feeling of authenticity and self-importance for the spectators, yet they remained affordable services: peanuts and water cost ten cents each, a shoe shine around forty cents. The charge for seating was similarly reasonably priced. For a higher fee (around twenty cents), *doyens* or *parents* sat in the front rows of white plastic chairs brought out by ticket-takers at their request. The less expensive bench seats cost half; this was where the general public sat. But as a testament to the deep poverty of these spectators, an argument often ensued with ticket-takers over who had and had not paid and loiterers were grudgingly ordered out of their seats of momentary rest. Others, the *jeunesse* [youth] stood in the back, free of charge.

Encouraging a neoliberal business mentality, orators speckled their talks with how economic independence begins with the individual, often a segue into advertising how-to start-up pamphlets (the introduction stating that everyone in the United States wants to work in the private sector) which sold to a public interested in entrepreneurialism.¹⁰⁶ They contrasted the Anglophone business mentality to the Francophone's lethargic dependence on the bureaucracy. Africa's poverty, one orator explained, was due to a poverty of thought and fear of risk-taking.

Other pamphlets featured contacts of various country embassies – Japan, Germany, India, Israel – in Abidjan on the pretext that they could support good business ideas as well as offer information on how to solicit a visa. Special guests discussed investment and the master of ceremonies made occasional announcements for available properties. On one visit I arrived at the end of a promotional question-and-answer section for a credit cooperative. The speaker explained details such as how to make payments in installments and used the Lebanese expatriate community that invested among themselves as an example of successful collaboration. The smooth-talking speaker had a large entourage, including two intimidating bodyguards. He captivated audience members who peppered him with questions after the talk's end. A few weeks later I arrived during an uproar, when it was revealed that this man had been a sham, running off with people's money. The *Sorbonne* President came out for an exceptional appearance to share his anger and guarantee that this would not happen again.

Despite these masquerades of class status and business activity, many an orator related to his audience with a shared narrative of life lived on the periphery. In his opening salutations, an orator made his usual rounds greeting the higher-ups, and next the unemployed. He described how the political crisis had put men's lives on hold: if he was twenty at the time of the *coup d'état*, now he is twenty-seven, just three years from thirty. He repeated this for a man of forty. The spectators nodded in solemn agreement. One orator joked that poverty is so endemic that a man can buy three wives with 100CFA. Another contrasted the use of language in Cocody and Plateau to Yopougon and Abobo: when discussing food the former used the verb "to nourish" and the latter "to eat."

An orator began a speech by asking what life was worth without money, concluding that it was worthless. To be happy and poor, he said, is to be an imbecile. Even in death money matters: a rich man's body is different from a dead man's cadaver. This orator localized his

¹⁰⁶ This emphasis on the private sector as the key to economic growth also served to absolve the Gbagbo regime of responsibility for the country's limited progress.

humor, comparing the behavior of a dog in Yopougon or Abobo who competed with his equally hungry owner for dinner, to a dog in Cocody so sure of his meals that food could sit under his nose undisturbed. The orator then described what happens when a poor man tries to speak to a woman. Too shy, he will follow her, faintly calling out to catch her attention. When she finally turns around, so fearful he will be at a loss for words, finally explaining he thought she was his cousin from another *quartier populaire*. A rich man on the other hand will just ask a woman if she wants to join him for a meal. The word “food” tweaks her interest. In these ways the orator equated poverty with stupidity, fear and humiliation. Describing Abidjan’s socioeconomic terrain, he established that dogs in the center-city *communes* live better than men on the periphery. Amidst deep poverty, a rich man can appeal to a starving woman by offering not to adorn her with luxuries, but to feed her – a basic good that a poor man cannot.

At the end of a talk spectators demonstrate appreciation as well as relative means by throwing money to the center¹⁰⁷ at the gracious thanks of the speaker; those elite who presented paper notes took proud strides to the center of the platform and handed it directly to the speaker. But mostly 50CFA and 100CFA coins tinkled in (ten and twenty cents, respectively). Donations petered out nearing the end of the month when salaries had dissipated, and a master of ceremonies could pace the area for ten minutes or more with his microphone, refusing to transition to the next speaker until the crowd of a few hundred collectively relinquished enough to pay the last speaker’s transport back to his *quartier populaire*. Those who gave impressively, however, could be sure that their donation was gratefully and visibly acknowledged: a hand shake, reference to the man as a gentleman or a *doyen* and often the applause of impressed fellow audience members. And men who appeared to have genuinely been in Plateau on some business were specific targets with refrains like, “I see you are coming from work. God bless you, you must have something to give.”

Often frustrated by the poor contribution record, an orator would let the *Sorbonne*’s veneer as a privileged space crack, asking rhetorically how the spectators could afford the *baca* ride into Plateau but have nothing for the orator. One orator irately emphasized that this was his job; were he doing something else he would be unable to inform the public as he did. He, too, deserved a salary – a much-discussed but rarely seen thing within a peripheral man’s world. Another orator derisively thanked the crowd for their donations, remarking that he was earning no more than a Burkinabé.

5. Penises: Men and misogyny

Kaffa: At the *Sorbonne* we talk politics, but politics is about penises...The penis is power. When your wife denies you, it means you have not been elected.

In this space where men claimed the urban center for themselves and their country vis-à-vis rearticulated global core-periphery relations, they imprinted the space and the political world as masculine. As I describe above, women were in their proper place, traditionally dressed and bearing trays on their heads, there to provide services to *Sorbonne* orators and patrons. And in

¹⁰⁷ This is a traditional Ivoirian practice at performances where contributions are received at the end of a performance in lieu of an entrance fee. The big men are singled out with respect, and expected to give the most; highly visible, the contribution becomes part of the act and a way to bestow status on patrons.

the normative behaviors and gender relations established at the *Sorbonne*, it was not only a masculine, but also a misogynist space where men were at the center and women at the periphery of Abidjanais sociality. Insiders instilled these normative values to their younger peers and social juniors alongside notions of appropriate masculine demeanor. I once saw a woman who walked through the large open speaking area during a speech (something men did occasionally to no response) subjected to verbal abuse from insiders and audience members. While I frequently saw the shoe shiners or pamphleteers rest in an empty seat – and promptly ordered out of it by a higher up – I only once saw a woman vendor take such a liberty.

The masculinity the men sought to embody approximated a neoliberal business ideal. Higher-ups gave fatherly tips to younger *protégés* on the appropriate way to wear a suit and behave with dignity and style.¹⁰⁸ One, for example, explained to a man that although he was well-adorned, his two expensive-looking phones bunched in his pocket thereby ruining the line of his jacket. To the audience's applause, orators decried the *maquis* culture encouraging men to dress in low-riding pants with their cracks exposed and spend their money on *drogbas*. Orators insisted that a man's role as a political patriot involved developing the national economy. The models they provided at the *Sorbonne* were "respectable," titular identities that suggested learning, such as "professor," "doctor" and "master," or political-organizational status, such as "governor," "secretary" and "president."¹⁰⁹ The younger men who came to listen or work were exposed to a model of dominant masculinity which they were encouraged to imitate. As models of fatherhood as well, occasionally a proud audience member or insider would arrive with his young son who sat on his lap or wandered about during speeches. On the microphone, orators congratulated higher-ups for a newborn child.

There were, however, more often inauthentic businessmen whose suits appeared tethered and poorly-fitting. The first time an insider took me around, he introduced me to a number of interesting figures who comprised the *Sorbonne*'s regulars. The frequent incorporation of religion into political and social speeches justified the presence of the *Sorbonne* "mystic," attired in a red plaid shirt covered in *Looney Toons* characters. Another man in large cowboy hat had a toothpick sticking out of his mouth. To accommodate his oversized suit, he wore his pants high up on his waist so that the behind sagged awkwardly. Another man wore a tattered green Mao suit, under which he had nothing but a thin undershirt.

Around noon, the speakers took a break and medicine vendors advertised their goods. They sold a range of potions: one woman peddled a soap that would help you regain faith in yourself and help you meet your needs; after washing, she promised, job-seekers would be job-finders. She said that she herself had come across three million CFA.¹¹⁰ Others sold cures to

¹⁰⁸ A popular theme in contemporary African literature is the breakdown between elders and youth (see for example Diouf, 2003). The *Sorbonne* not only allowed members to enact dominant masculinities, but also reinscribed a hierarchical order of respect and subordination to elders, who in turn are charged with "big men" responsibilities of providing for their followers (see *Chapter 8*).

¹⁰⁹ An indication of the delicate balance between authentic and inauthentic dominant masculinities at play at the *Sorbonne* is the quickness with which orators will distinguish a guest speaker who is a "real" professor, or doctor, or pastor.

¹¹⁰ One day as she recited this line some spectators began to laugh incredulously, and even she could not keep a straight face as she continued.

AIDS and other chronic maladies. To make his potions and pomades more credible, one vendor said he had foreign clients, a Brit and an Irishman. In theatrical acts that had spectators roaring, most sold concoctions guaranteed to increase sexual potency, size, and sperm count. One woman promised that her medicine would “break the bed.” Another vendor brought to stage satisfied customers and as they walked, he commented on how much space the man needed in his pants to accommodate his enhanced member.

Selling medicines on the side, the most popular speaker held the coveted lunchtime spot, attracting an audience and riling up the crowd to preempt the main political speech in the mid-afternoon. Nicknamed Kaffa, or cockroach, he carried a large black dildo as his prop. To the delight of the hundreds of men assembled, any woman within sight became the target of his act with verbal and non-verbal prods. His jokes included suggestive remarks about what he or an audience member could and would do to her, with his narration including impersonating the woman in speech and walk, usually a noxiously shrill voice and a wide-legged, uncomfortable hobble – after being penetrated by the large black penis. In one speech he recounted penetrating a woman who had been begging him for sex when he realized he needed to urinate. So he urinated inside of her. Reversing the peripheral Abidjanais man’s struggle to find a mate, Kaffa’s humor involved a woman desiring, begging and wanting the man. He, in turn, left her in pain or degraded.

Kaffa’s punch lines usually involved a nexus of the penis, power and race. Often he assumed the character of a white – and particularly French – woman pretending to hate or fear the black man, but always succumbing with giggles and moans when he pulled out his penis. The stories involved familiar themes, such as a visit to the French embassy. In this instance the secretary asks him what he plans to do in Paris and what his profession is in Abidjan. Pulling out his dildo, to the spectators’ applause Kaffa says that this is his job. White women, he explained to his eager audiences, may not like black men. But the black penis is enough to convince them to have sex. Additionally, Kaffa often infused his jokes with politics. Among his favorite themes was President Sarkozy’s inadequate penis – the reason his first wife left him – measured against Gbagbo’s infallible sexual appetite. Gbagbo’s rivals, Bedié and Ouattara, were equally incompetent between the sheets.

When Kaffa talked about the Ivoirian crisis, he portrayed a decidedly male protagonist supporting his family, and his mistress on the side. Often he picked a man out from the crowd to be the purported protagonist, thus making the everyday Ivoirian the masculine hero. Life is difficult, he explained, because women cost so much. And when you go to work, she only misses your penis. Playing to the fantasy of a dominant masculinity, he explained in detail how to cheat on your wife with the maid, mounting her as you calmly explain that she has just received a raise. In this way Kaffa constructed an image of the Ivoirian man who is doubly masculine in his financial and sexual potency. To audience’s cheers he decried condoms, explaining that it caught the HIV virus in the penis and that extended use makes men impotent. Worse, he warned, was *coco*, which leaves men blind and makes their penises fall off – a little-known fact to which men were not informed. Furthermore, condoms wasted the precious sperm working hard to plant itself in a woman’s egg. The release of sperm, he said, is the essential moment that proves a man. To carry a man’s sperm, and eventually his children, is what God made women for – presumably leaving men to the all-important tasks of work and politics.

6. Conclusion

Contemporary African urbanity, survival etched in crisis, involves a feminization of life and work. In this chapter I have shown how peripheral Abidjanais men assert masculine subjectivities that contest their place in the urban crisis narrative. Christian, southern-based Gbagboist nationalists derived legitimacy from a centered Ivoirian identity, to the exclusion of regional migrants and with a stated disdain for the former *colon*. Additionally, for its most successful members the *Sorbonne* offered a tangible route to the ruling regime. As it centered peripheral men, it assumed a gendered order whereby women exist as sexual or servile objects to the satisfaction of the male orator and spectator, who is informed, politicized, and global. In short, contesting their political powerlessness as informal sector actors and their questionable mastery of modernity amidst crisis, the *Sorbonne* seized public space and political discourse, imprinting a masculine subjectivity and a centered narrative of themselves in the city and their country in the world.

Chapter 8

Complicit nationalist masculinity:

Little big men, neoliberalism, and the Ivoirian crisis

1. Introduction: Bureaucrat to businessman

Possibly the most popular symbol of colonial-era Ivoirian art is the *colon* statue. The *colon* stands erect, as if called to attention by some superior. Past his twilight years, he betrays a slight paunch, and the dark skin coupled with his exaggerated large lips and wide nose indicate that he is African. But he dresses as the white man, in a crisp pastel suit and stiff hat. His accessories change depending on his profession: sometimes he holds a briefcase or a book, other times a camera hangs around his neck, or a doctor's stethoscope; all signify that this man embodies one of the new, European trades imported during the French colonial conquest. The origins of these *colons* derive from Baoulé "spirit mates" where it is imagined that every person has an ideal mate in the spirit world that these statues represent (Ravenhill and Vogel, 1980). The proliferation of spirit mates in Western dress indicated the desire that one's mate, albeit remaining of Baoulé ethnicity, "exhibit signs of success or status that characterize a White-oriented or -dominated world" (ibid: 10). The *colon* figure, as a portrayal of dominant colonial professions and the *évolué* as a suitable husband, clearly indicates the manner in which European society influenced public and private life and shaped individual imaginations in Côte d'Ivoire.

Among the Ivoirian people, this representation of the *colon* was an enduring point of pride. After achieving independence in 1960 Côte d'Ivoire was renowned for having a close relationship to France, which President Houphouët-Boigny cultivated during his thirty-three year tenure. Houphouët-Boigny's story brings living form to the *colon-as-évolué*. Beginning as a chief in his native Baoulé village of Yamoussoukro, he quickly immersed himself in the colonial regime, taking on various posts as doctor, plantation administrator, and union chief before gaining international renown as an African of influence among the most powerful Europeans (Toungara, 1990). He acted as the first African minister in the French government before Ivoirian independence and advocated membership within a "French Community" of West African Francophone states instead of outright independence. France rewarded his loyalty with military, political and financial backing, helping Côte d'Ivoire achieve an unrivalled stability and prosperity in the otherwise tumultuous West African region.

A significant shift has occurred in expectations from the previous Ivoirian generation to the present one, corresponding with the weakened Ivoirian state in addition to changes in the global political economy. This shift has influenced the way Ivoirian men view themselves and their nation. Those men who in the neocolonial era would have acceded to a middle class life via the Francophone model of civil service employment continue to derive pride from the Ivoirian miracle and to anticipate a privileged place for themselves as undisputed Ivoirians. Unable to find steady work, they seek to justify their failures without negating the international esteem of the Ivoirian state. They achieve this by embracing neoliberal ideology, which far from making the state accountable for soaring unemployment, blames the large bureaucracy of yesteryear for the extended crisis. The transition from neocolonialism to neoliberalism facilitates this stance as the patriotic movement reels from Côte d'Ivoire's Francophone legacy. In this chapter I explore how the orators articulate this logic and assert a privileged place within their vision of a neoliberal Ivoirian state. I demonstrate that, in the context of their otherwise peripheral position as unemployed and unmarried men, they emphasize their proximity to the state to justify their

status as patriotic entrepreneurs, and use their *Sorbonne* affiliation as a source of status, livelihood, and as a hope for a post-crisis future.

In Houphouët-Boigny's era, the ideal Ivoirian man was the bureaucrat, coinciding with a period of dependent independence wherein Franco-Ivoirian relations defined Ivoirian foreign and domestic policy. Connell (2000) posits that today the ideal global man is the transnational businessman. Having derived a good reputation since independence by way of adherence to externalized structures, Ivoirians remain committed to dominant global ideals regarding citizen and worker. The orators, rejecting the bureaucrat as neocolonial, embrace the businessman as an alternative hegemonic ideal worker. As they wait for the country to exit out of the crisis, they engage in politics, the one business with a steady return. Responding to global norms and affirming their places as citizens, and men, in the contemporary global political economy, they are complicit to the neoliberal project: a belief that the solution out of the crisis is via state-supported entrepreneurial initiatives.

2. The interviewees

The data for this chapter comes from in-depth interviews with eighteen prominent *Sorbonne* personalities – current and former orators – and two ticket-takers in the spring and summer of 2009. As *leaders* of opinion, the orators' voices both represented and shaped the pre-electoral Ivoirian nationalist discourse. Members of the *Sorbonne* leadership that I interviewed include the President and the Secretary General of the association of orators, and the Vice President and the President of the *Sorbonne*. One of the interviewees won a competition put on by former First Lady Simone Gbagbo, sending him on a state trip to South Africa; he was also Blé Goudé's opening speaker.¹¹¹ The speakers' titles ranged from orator, professor and analyst to the more esteemed ambassador, master, *confrencier* and governor. The majority of interviewees had been active participants in the *Sorbonne* from five to nine years, though three respondents had less than five years. Some described themselves as among the *Sorbonne*'s founding members, with participation spanning nearly two decades.

The interviews, ranging in length from one to two and a half hours, were partial life histories and part recounting of the crisis, interpreting its political and economic origins as well as sharing their personal experiences. Of the orators, seventeen were men and one was a woman – one of two female orators since the *Sorbonne*'s informal inception in the early 1990s.¹¹² I included ticket-takers to provide another perspective from within the *Sorbonne* structure. Seventeen of the interviewees were Ivoirian (basing this on legal stipulations that both oneself and one's parents are born in Côte d'Ivoire). Of the three who self-described as foreign, two were born and raised in Côte d'Ivoire (one of whom has since been naturalized), and one

¹¹¹ Blé Goudé was President of the *Jeunes Patriotes*, former President of FESCI and Gbagbo's Youth Minister. He is wanted for war crimes.

¹¹² My interview with a woman provided a contrast for the men's *Sorbonne* experience and was an interesting indicator of how she fit into – and used – its network. Because she was the only woman in my sample, to protect her identity I neither state her gender nor provide details regarding our particular interactions.

migrated to Côte d'Ivoire when he was fifteen years old.¹¹³ All of the foreigners came from neighboring countries.¹¹⁴

The orators mostly described upbringings with their fathers working in the public sector or as planters in rural areas, and most first came to Abidjan for university after graduating from high school. All but four had some university experience; seven had or are in the process of receiving their Master's or other advanced degrees. They ranged in age from twenty-six to forty-three years old, with the majority in their late twenties to mid-thirties. Although all but four of the respondents had children, only two were married, and these were both foreigners. While the majority cohabited with their girlfriends and informally referred to these women as their wives, they had not gone through any official or legal ceremony. The overarching reason for not marrying was that they "lacked the means."

Four of the orators and one ticket-taker self-described as employed and three of the former had found their work through their *Sorbonne* associations. Of those employed, four had jobs in the public sector. They all supported themselves fully or partially through odd jobs from their *Sorbonne* contacts or received occasional or regular support from the *Sorbonne* network.¹¹⁵ Everyone stated professional goals in business or politics; those interested in pursuing political careers were higher up within the *Sorbonne* organizational structure. The orators expressed a general consensus that their *Sorbonne* experience would be a great help for them in achieving their future goals, but only after the crisis was over.

Being public figures and prominent members of Abidjan's orator circuit, this was not a random sample of peripheral Ivoirian men but a select group who represented a critical node in the Gbagboist social and political scene. I present the voices of local personalities who spoke the party line and represented the broader patriotic movement, a highly visible yet little known, (Banégas, 2006: 545) and understudied collective (Théroux-Bénoni, 2009). It is worth closely following what they have to say because in addition to narrating their own past, present and

¹¹³ The fact that even among these "patriots" there were foreigners indicates how deeply foreigners have integrated Ivoirian society despite the xenophobic environment. The *Sorbonne* foreigners were, however, explicit that Côte d'Ivoire belongs to Ivoirians, especially its politics, and expressed their gratitude for being welcomed to this great country that was a forerunner in the anti-neocolonial movement. They represented a "pan-African" perspective which the Ivoirian orators also espoused – albeit with Côte d'Ivoire at the head.

¹¹⁴ To guarantee anonymity, I do not use specific titles when quoting the orators. Additionally, I do not mention when I am quoting the female orator, foreign orators (who I instead identify by whether or not they were from Abidjan, treating "abroad" the same as "the interior") or ticket-takers. While this unfortunately loses texture, it does not contradict the argument that I build.

¹¹⁵ Whether or not the orators received a "salary" was a touchy subject and all but one (besides the leadership, who called it a "prime" to pay their transport as I note in the text) denied it ardently. However, a ticket taker said that the orators received 50,000CFA per month. Additionally, on one occasion I asked an orator if he would like to get a drink at the end of the day, and he explained to me that he was waiting to be paid. While I suspect they received around 5000CFA for each speaking engagement to "pay their transport," in any case I believe the orators when they said that their main incentive was not a salary but contacts and irregular support.

futures, they constructed a party-line account of Ivoirian glory. Additionally, they characterized a phenomenon of politicking in sub-Saharan Africa more broadly.

Engaged in a highly volatile strategy for self-affirmation and self-realization, their strategy is now an historical artifact. Here is a precious snapshot of an intra-electoral, interregnum Côte d'Ivoire, though the country has since marched on without these men. If the orators' potential for return was great, the electoral events of 2010-2011 that culminated in Gbagbo's ousting shows how equally deleterious these strategies are for man and nation when things do not go as planned.

3. Recounting the Ivoirian miracle

3.1. Affiliating with the miracle

Although it did not pass out of the third world, it had reached a point where it could be called intermediary...Compared to other third world countries it was Côte d'Ivoire and Argentina. Because these two countries had lots of natural resources. So these countries were given a future. (Keïta)

Recounting the Ivoirian miracle, orators spoke of Côte d'Ivoire's former status as an oasis of political stability and economic prosperity within West Africa, its natural resource wealth, and its cosmopolitan character as a regional hub. To prove its greatness they cited sustained impressive growth rates and continued global dominance in cocoa production, bragging rights that sounded like they had been taken out of a World Bank report. In these ways, it was clear that the orators had internalized mainstream developmental narratives of Africa's first post-independence generation.

Keïta, a thirty-three year-old from the interior, characterizes the area as lacking a history until the French designated one, so that Ivoirian history is synonymous with that of a Europeanized Africa. In this way, the orators believed that Côte d'Ivoire acted as a "stepping stone" between Africa and the West (Newell, 2009a:179). For example Yeboah, a thirty-four year-old from Abidjan, explains that Côte d'Ivoire was "the first place to develop" because of its resource wealth and the port city of Abidjan that acted as a liaison between Europe and the African interior. Further, acquiescence to France allowed enduring stability. For these reasons, he says that Côte d'Ivoire, vis-à-vis neighboring states, "is like rain in the desert." Peace allowed prosperity, and orators described this prosperity as making Côte d'Ivoire a West African leader with a striking likeness to the West. Tioté, a twenty-seven year-old from the interior, calls Côte d'Ivoire the "locomotive of West Africa." As evidence he said that it dominates the regional economic union, *Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine* [UEMOA], with more than forty percent of its total economic activity. He continues, "We are currently the majority of the BCEAO [Central Bank of West Africa] and control the regional economy. This is why the first leaders of the BCEAO were all Ivoirians. We hold the economy of the zone." Neighboring countries "have to wait for what we say; this is why we are the big brother."

For peripheral men confronting a shrinking distance between themselves and Abidjan's regional immigrant population, the orators were deeply invested in legitimating the account of the Ivoirian miracle and its exceptionalism in the region. They used the Ivoirian history, in particular Abidjan's moniker as the "Paris of West Africa," as evidence of its superiority, comparing this against neighboring countries' lower levels of development. According to

Ousmane, a forty-one year-old from the interior, the Ivoirian man has been associated with his dominant currency and dominant economy. Sangaré explains,

When you consider the region, with all modesty, [Côte d'Ivoire] has a status above all the other countries. So Côte d'Ivoire has a real problem: young Ivoirians, we in Côte d'Ivoire, we do not aspire for a life like in Mali or Benin....But people in Mali or Burkina Faso, they see it as a mirror. For them it is a little Paris...For the little Burkinabé: Abidjan. Malians: Abidjan. Because for them, Abidjan has everything.

Yapo, a thirty-five year-old from the interior, remarks that “We think that someone who lives in Europe and comes to Côte d'Ivoire will not be too disappointed.” Cissé, a forty-two year-old Abidjanais native cites a twenty-six percent foreign-born population as proof of Côte d'Ivoire's unique status in the region. Such numbers are variable in the Ivoirian imagination: Tioté, for example, claims that forty percent of the population is foreign-born. He states, “We are the country with the most foreigners in the world even, not only in the region.” Yapo associates the high foreigner population with Ivoirian free market principles. Of such unrivalled rights and liberties, Zokora, a thirty-six year old from the interior, says that Côte d'Ivoire is “the only country in black Africa where a foreigner is free like in his own country to do what he wants.” He compares this with an incident in Niger when an Ivoirian tried to drive a taxi, and all the taxi drivers went on strike.

The tension between boasting the country's diversity and using migrants as scapegoats (Crook, 1997; Sandbrook, 1985) was inherent in interviews, where orators alternated between celebrating Côte d'Ivoire's international dimension as proof not only of their benevolence but also of their cosmopolitan nature, and claiming the country as their own. Thus despite the fact that there was “no difference” between Ivoirians and migrants in all areas of life, Keïta, placing the foreign population at twenty-one percent, calls it “insupportable.”

3.2. Resource wealth and the neocolonial yoke

Contemporary scholarship looks at sub-Saharan Africa's natural resources to argue that Africans are poor precisely because Africa is so rich: a phenomenon coined “the resource curse” or “paradox of plenty” (Auty, 1993). One strand of this argument posits that while most civil conflicts eventually exhaust themselves for a lack of money, in resource-rich countries fighters may be fed, clothed and armed simply by digging up another diamond, and/or that the powerful engines of global capital who profit from resource extraction may continue to legitimate questionable regimes (see Brannon and Collier, 2003; Ross, 2006; Watts, 2004). Further, instability guarantees the unequal exchange of resource extraction and most locals do not benefit from the country's resources.

The orators, however, came of age in an era when, due to its resource wealth, the developmental paradigm predicted a strong potential for Africa to become a powerful geopolitical actor. The Ivoirian miracle was itself fueled principally from high cocoa prices. So they believed that Côte d'Ivoire's plethora of natural resources – primary among them coffee and cocoa, but they also named rubber, petrol, cotton, palm oil, wood, kola, manganese, gold, and diamonds – figured centrally in distinguishing Côte d'Ivoire. That the general population has not benefitted from the wealth found in the Ivoirian soil is a fact not lost on the orators. However, deemphasizing unequal terms of trade, they believed these resources could revitalize the country. They isolated the role of France and the Houphouët-Boigny regime as a temporary and passing

misstep in Ivoirian development that President Gbagbo could and would eradicate. While a few emphasized the need for domestic industry to exploit those resources, using, for example, the lack of local cocoa processing (or consumption) as a policy oversight, many used the fact of its resources as evidence, *sine qua non*, of its path out of crisis and toward its destiny.

The orators' main point of contention was the Defense Accords, signed between Côte d'Ivoire and France in 1961 which gave France monopoly control over the exploitation and profits of Ivoirian resource wealth. Lola, a twenty-six year old from the interior, says "We have everything. We do not deserve the poverty that has been attributed to us at this moment." He asks,

How can one understand that Côte d'Ivoire is the world's number one producer of cocoa and that our parents who produced it live in houses that are falling apart?...Leave Abidjan and see how the peasants who work live. What do they have? Nothing at all, because France recuperated sixty-five percent of revenues in primary materials.

He compares the Ivoirian struggle to the notorious in-fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo:

The Belgians pillage the Congo, the Congolese become more and more impoverished, and Brussels becomes prettier and prettier. France pillages Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina and other countries, and France is well developed. Even their unemployed are paid while we suffer here, and they say they are rich. The Europeans and Westerners, they say they are rich, but the minerals come from us, but all that they produce they sell back to us; everything they sell to us comes from us. They say they are the best-equipped countries, they are big powers, that they are rich. But they are rich with our wealth, and we are poor with their poverty.

The orators merge resource-wealth optimism with neoliberal philosophy: eradicate the Defense Accords, diversify the market and set it free. Inherently inefficient, the French welfare state functions only because of its expropriation of African labor. The solution is not to incorporate a social safety net in Côte d'Ivoire, but to trim French largesse. Similarly, in an anti-imperialist-meets-neoliberal critique, Koné, a thirty-four year old from the interior, links France's strong social support network with its exploitation of the Ivoirians government and its consequent neglect. He says,

How can we develop if the value of us, the work of our citizens, must go to another country to permit those people to live?...A student like me who has an MBA in France, the French state gives him a certain [monthly] amount that is equivalent to 250,000CFA¹¹⁶ over a period of three years while he is looking for work. In other words, they have raised the social standards in France with the value of our work. I cannot accept this.

For a man like Koné: thirty-four, single with one child and chronically unemployed despite his higher education, the French welfare state is indeed a bitter contrast to life in Côte

¹¹⁶ To restate, the exchange rate at the time of my research was approximately 500CFA to US\$1.

d'Ivoire given strained postcolonial relations. In short, instead of blaming structural adjustment for Côte d'Ivoire's protracted economic crisis, the orators used structural adjustment rhetoric to blame President Houphouët-Boigny's reliance on a bloated public sector, a dependency inherited from France. The solution is to diversify partnerships to *more efficiently* exploit Ivoirian wealth, and as I show below, to buttress its inchoate private sector.¹¹⁷

So despite their firm understanding of the imperialist nature of Franco-Ivoirian relations, the orators equate Ivoirian – state and citizen – worth with resource wealth. Considering that *Africans* are largely excluded while *Africa* is central to the global economy by virtue of its raw materials, merging resource wealth with personal worth allows the orators to assert belonging to the global economy. Thus Cissé says, “The international community must know that we are part of a council of nations. We are a reservoir of natural resources, and they must respect us.” Just as the external perception of Côte d'Ivoire cited cocoa and coffee production and impressive growth rates as evidence of the not-completely tangible notion of what “development” was, these indicators comprised the Ivoirian developmental narrative even when terms of trade continued to decline. The orators grew up hearing that their country's resources made it exceptional and this narrative is more palatable than one pointing to a quarter-century of state collapse.

In describing their country's resource wealth and its role as a gateway to Europe and intra-African magnet for trade, commerce, and people, the orators believed their country to be a step above others in the global South. Like Argentina, Keita calls it “intermediary.” Côte d'Ivoire is a regional hegemon: a country that, for its poorer neighbors, may as well have been Europe. This perspective suggests that the crisis is a passing phase, a minor hurdle as it advances toward its “destiny” (Lola). In addition, it distinguishes Ivoirians from other West Africans. Developmental discourse either denounces Africa for being *undeveloped* or denouncing the West for *underdeveloping* it. In both cases, Africa falls outside a linear narrative of progress. But for a brief moment, one that coincided with the orators' own upbringings, Côte d'Ivoire was an outlier. This moment resonates powerfully in the orators' sense of what it means to be Ivoirian. As they claim to stand outside of a greater African narrative, they depict Côte d'Ivoire in the same manner as a sub-imperial state, echoing post-independence literature. This is the first indication of complicit nationalist masculinity: nationalism anchored in the hegemonic discourse of the global political economy and external narratives of successful modernity. The orators derive pride from Côte d'Ivoire's historical status as a darling of the West,¹¹⁸ and as I demonstrate in later sections, their vision of a neoliberal state is an attempt to regain this position of Ivoirian exceptionalism.

In the following section, I situate orators' conceptions of appropriate employment for the postcolonial Ivoirian, an ideal that has changed from the neocolonial to the neoliberal

¹¹⁷ These conflicting articulations, at one hand acknowledging Côte d'Ivoire's historically privileged position because of its cozy relationship to France while on the other blaming this same relationship for its current stagnation illuminates the difficulty in articulating a semi-peripheral status that is also “sub-imperial,” whereby intra-African dominance was ensured only through “exploit[ing] the process of regional integration but remain[ing] dependent on the metropole” (Shaw, 1979: 348).

¹¹⁸ According to Crook (1989: 208), “The World Bank, and other neo-classical economists of the 1980s, have argued that Ivorian success is based upon the pursuit of ‘liberal’ economic policies.”

generation.¹¹⁹ As with their framing of the Ivoirian miracle, orators' notions of a successful job market are implicated in Franco-Ivoirian relations. Distancing themselves from the strategies of the neocolonial generation, they anchor their new vision of work in neoliberal ideology.

4. Defining work: Salaried "business"

When you take the Anglophone countries, colonized by the English, they are not in the same place. We were colonized by France. It is clearly different. We were formed in the bureaucracy, but when you go to Ghana, it is *le business*. It is *le fifty-fifty*. (Keïta)

As excluded, would-be workers, the orators seek to belong to the global political economy and they do not question its terms of membership as inherently problematic or disadvantageous to them as peripheral men from a marginalized continent. Their desires to partake as businessmen in the formal economy indicates masculinities that are complicit to the neoliberal economic regime yet distanced from immigrants that historically dominated the Ivoirian informal sector. In other words, they identify the large public sector as emblematic of the Francophone state and a legacy of French colonial rule. But they have no desire to occupy the informal sector which has largely supplanted the bureaucracy since the crisis, as workers in this sector carry the stigma of foreignness and illegality. Therefore the orators both reject dominant/French and subordinate/migrant masculinities while constructing a contemporary Ivoirian masculinity based on an "Anglophone" businessman model. The former establishes an opposition between the complacency of cushy, salaried employed and risk-taking, independently-managed entrepreneurialism while the latter establishes an opposition between formal (dignified) and informal (degraded, un-Ivoirian, and feminized) activities.

Despite the fact that the FPI is purportedly socialist, the orators' visions were decidedly neoliberal. A central critique they launched at the Houphouët-Boigny regime was its heavy reliance on the public sector, creating unrealistic and burdensome expectations for an inchoate postcolonial state. Ousmane describes the Ivoirian mentality under Houphouët-Boigny: "I go to school, I get out, I take my exams, I work in an office." A generation of potential Ivoirian entrepreneurs sits secure in cushy government jobs while missing out on business opportunities, the true source of wealth. Koné compares his ambitions to the more tradition-minded: "If you go to my village, everyone wants me to be a minister... That is good, but me, I say that I prefer to be an entrepreneur." He describes how entrepreneurs in Côte d'Ivoire are foreigners.¹²⁰ Those few Ivoirians educated abroad take business jobs, but those educated in Côte d'Ivoire continue to look for work in the public sector. Koné believes that the solution to the crisis is greater Ivoirian entrepreneurial activity.

¹¹⁹ I designate the initial post-independence generation of Ivoirians as the *neocolonial generation* to account for the state of Franco-Ivoirian relations. I designate this current, post-miracle generation of Ivoirians as the *neoliberal generation*.

¹²⁰ Indeed, in 1989 regional migrants and Lebanese dominated ownership of Ivoirian "boutiques" (small shops) with nationals in charge of only twenty-two percent of such businesses, according to a nation-wide survey (Boone, 1993: 71). Further, in 1980 twenty-three percent of investment in the Ivoirian economy came from the French compared to eleven percent of private Ivoirian investment – the rest being from the state (Woods, 1988: 100).

Boubacar, a thirty-two year old from the interior, defines work as “a system of payment that permits you to feed yourself, save a little, take care of yourself and your family.” For him, work as a construct generates those capacities that society expects of men: the ability to care for oneself and one’s family. He speaks for himself and no doubt many of the orators when he says that informal activities are not “job[s] for us.” This work is left for lesser men: migrants. For an Ivoirian, “to put his hands in the sand, in the mud, to fish, this is disgusting, disorganized, it is dirty. He cannot do these jobs” says Ettien, a thirty-four year old from the interior. Instead, Ivoirians were singularly focused on a narrow conception of work. In doing so, Ivoirians missed out on fully developing the economy. Ettien blames the French:

...[T]he French system, made it such that none of the Francophone countries produces businessmen...Ghana, the Anglophone countries, they have business systems, *le marketing*...That means that if you are not a bureaucrat, your village will say that you did not succeed...If you are a businessman, you have a bar, sell things, have a store, you could make ten million, fifteen million [Cfa] a month, an Ivoirian will not see you as someone who has money. The moment they hear you are a bureaucrat they will say, ‘Oh, he has money.’

Explaining why foreigners migrated to Côte d’Ivoire, Lola says that they took advantage of easy profits in business while Ivoirians were distracted by status markers such as suits, air-conditioned cars and offices, a “mental prejudice” that was the fault of the colonizers. Though an Ivoirian may find these other forms of work acceptable upon migrating to Europe, just as foreigners will take lowly jobs in Côte d’Ivoire, Touré, twenty-five, from Abidjan, says that here, an Ivoirian thinks to himself, “I prefer to work in an air-conditioned office, I must have a *chauffeur*,’ but when he cannot have that here, he looks for two million [CFA] to go to Europe. When he gets to Europe, it is to wash dishes.”

To reiterate, Ivoirians see themselves as situated between two ideal types of men – the Western man (French, and later American) and the regional migrant, most often the Burkinabé or Malian. And if the Ivoirian is held to higher standards in his own country, when he migrates to Europe he becomes the other who, content to wash dishes (itself a feminized job) finds that he has left his self-respect back in Abidjan. According to Touré, an Ivoirian would rather take his life savings to find a Euro-paying but low-status job in Europe than to take something designated as below him here.¹²¹

Many of the orators echo Ettien in their belief that the Anglophone system of colonization better prepared African countries for the global economy than the Francophone system. The orators associate unemployment with an Ivoirian faith in the university-to *concours*-to bureaucrat route. This entails a major reversal of the critical association between work and masculine identity in postcolonial Africa with regard to the Francophone civil service *évolué*. And it overturns the rigid organization of work within Abidjan’s nationalist hierarchy. It suggests a new complicity between masculine identity and the nation, one mediated by the neoliberal political economy. Moreover, the structural problem of unemployment becomes a problem of the wrong *attitude* on the part of Ivoirians: public sector dependency. Absent are the orchestrators of

¹²¹ It is worth noting that although many of the respondents envied and themselves desired those who went abroad, the logic that Ivoirians who go abroad only find low-order work was a counter-narrative to vindicate their own continued presence in Côte d’Ivoire.

structural adjustment policies that crippled African countries. Theirs is a distinctly neoliberal rhetoric that places blame for poverty and chronic unemployment on an entrepreneurial torpor caused by state dependency. Again, this manifestation of nationalism is complicit to the neoliberal political economy.

The state's inability to absorb a new generation of Ivoirians – in particular students like themselves – was a central component of the orators' personal narratives. This change has left them without opportunities on par with those of their parents. Though a few spoke of structural adjustment's role in handicapping the Ivoirian state and most pointed to the Defense Accords and unequal relations with global corporations as bankrupting Côte d'Ivoire, they nonetheless targeted French state dependency as the crucial roadblock to their country's and their personal development. This allowed them to remain committed/complicit to dominant paradigms and hence their own centrality. As a neoliberal critique of their neocolonial legacy, they blame the large French state for their current predicament of joblessness.

5. Dwindling fortunes, redirected opportunities

The contemporary moment is a marked contrast to the high times of the Houphouët-Boigny generation, a contrast I explore here to elucidate the differences between the past and the present. Education, work, savings, and family are all achieved in struggle – if achieved at all – and still the orators are a far cry from boasting their fathers' successes. Though none of the orators describes a childhood of luxury, the majority depict a solidly middle class adolescence. The orators typically described a life of steady decline as the country descended into crisis, sometimes punctuated by the death of a father or parents' separation.¹²² They felt the crisis most severely when, upon completing their studies, they were cut from parental support. In other words, what a previous generation would mark as the transition from dependent childhood to autonomous manhood was instead a confirmation of personal failure. Discussing the mounting xenophobia in Côte d'Ivoire, Woods (1999) writes of the disgruntled sons whose hopes for inheritance disappeared with the crash of commodity prices on the world market alongside the slow encroachment of land by foreigners working the plantation. The *Sorbonne* orators are those sons: those would-be middle class men who came one generation too late.

The educational system, which caps the age to take the *concours* and thus enter the public administration at thirty, is a bitter testament for Ivoirians whose realities do not accord to this artificial limit set during better times by a state modeled on the French bureaucracy. It is a farcical reminder of “young” and “old” demarcations that hold as some objective truth despite the extended category of youth in which they live (Diouf, 2003; Newell 2009a). If their crime is their age, then their punishment is this limit that slices through their futures like a guillotine. As with many, Ettié changed his age so he could remain eligible to take the *concours* and holds out hope that a door will eventually open to him. And as with many, this is why he has spent nearly a decade enrolled in university. Passing the *concours*, commonly perceived as the best chance for a

¹²² That the loss of a father, either through death or separation, significantly diminished the orators' life chances is worth noting when considering these men as husbands as fathers. Recognizing their dependence on their father's financial security must be very near to their hearts. As fathers who are absent because they are unable to provide, in life they reflect a loss to their children they themselves only witnessed through death or familial break-up.

better life, is realistically available to a small, well-heeled, and well-connected proportion of the population. For the rest of Ivoirians, their possibilities wilt with age.

A prominent consequence of these wilted opportunities is the inability to have families like their fathers. For example, only two of the orators had fewer than two siblings; it was common for these men to describe families with a dozen or more siblings. Aside from one respondent, all of their fathers had multiple wives. However, not one respondent had more than two children and only two, both self-described foreigners, were married at all. Unable to support their girlfriends, this was core reason they had not yet married. Though monogamy and fewer children is also a sign of changing times, it is nonetheless difficult for these men to contrast the families their fathers were capable of supporting with their own inability to support even one wife or child.

Keïta begins his story as such:

My father was a planter, mostly of cocoa, with four wives. I am the third child of a family of thirty-five children [laughs]. I am a student. I received my Master's in law last year. Today I am thirty-three years old and counting, very much alive. I am not married; I have two children from the different adventures I have known. Currently I live with a girl but we are not married, we are *concubines*.

As he recounts his personal history, Keïta directly contrasts his father's life to his. He is unmarried and lives apart from his children who were born out of his "adventures," while his father was capable of raising and supporting thirty-five children through high school. Koné similarly describes a situation whereby his family's finances gradually lessened. Though he does not describe his family as wealthy, he says that "proof" of their middle-class status nonetheless rested in the fact that, "My father paid my studies, paid the studies of my brothers. The smallest diploma in my family is the *bac*¹²³...I would not say we were poor. Okay, well now that I do not work, I will say that *I* am poor." Again, Koné weaves socioeconomic events with those of his life course, noting that despite the crisis, his father was able to give to his children things that he is not. Here he juxtaposes his personal poverty against his family's middle-class status; elsewhere he speaks in detail about his desire but inability to marry, and his shame for being unable to provide his daughter with a decent education.

Despite the many faults the respondents launch at the previous regime, their view of contemporary Côte d'Ivoire as a country with shrunken opportunities is clear. For this they fault the previous regime's excesses and shortsighted relations with France. As children of planters and bureaucrats, in a previous generation the orators would have been almost guaranteed a life of relative privilege (Woods, 1988). As I have already stated, for the first leaders emerging out of the colonial era a formal education was the way into the administration or the public sector more generally. These bureaucrats were a class apart from the masses and often entered positions of political leadership. Though the respondents critiqued the generation of Ivoirians that grew up dependent on public sector employment, it pains them that this door has closed without another opening.

Taking their futures in their own hands, the orators' political engagement opens a rare path to power in a context of few available opportunities. They depict their political awakening

¹²³ The *bac*, or *baccalauréat*, is the diploma one receives after completing high school in the Francophone educational system.

as an emergence into adulthood, supplanting the traditional route of work and marriage. As the orators recalled becoming blossoming Gbagboists, they described events that caused loss or sacrifice. A few described episodes of repression on the part of the French or the former Ivoirian regime. In both cases the respondents drew linkages between their ongoing *Sorbonne* participation and their experience of crisis.

The orators justified their positions and the conflict's gravity – often equating the events to Angola's twenty-seven year civil war and to the Congo – in citing specific atrocities that turned the tide of Ivoirian stability. Boka, a thirty-five year old from the interior, described the 2004 demonstrations against the French airstrikes that destroyed the Ivoirian Air Force fleet. Largely initiated by Blé Goudé and the Young Patriots, scores of Ivoirians took to the streets to protest these airstrikes and French involvement in all areas of Ivoirian affairs more generally. Providing a potent example of Franco-Ivoirian neocolonial relations, this event was a defining moment for Gbagbo's patriots. Of the formative moments in post-independence history, Boka says,

I prefer the dates of 04, or 05, 06, 07 November 2004, when the Ivoirian people stopped before the French army at the school to demonstrate, because the tanks, five French tanks went to the house of the Chief of State. It was the students from campus [went] to the French army to ask, 'What are you looking for?'...Unfortunately France fired on the population. *They made the face of a young Ivoirian explode; he was named XX, his father was XX, Korhokolais, his mother was Baoulé, she was named XX. And this young man who was born of his mother, he is dead, because he came for the Republic, he came as a patriot.* The French army shot this man, and exposed his head, the tape is available at the *Sorbonne* and all over...*This shows that this was not an intra-Ivoirian story but a story of colonizer and colonized.*

Talking about being “part of the scene” and “experiencing” the events, gathering reinforcements of water and food, and returning when the French had begun to shoot, Boka concluded, “This event really forged the Ivoirians. *It was evidence that what Gbagbo says is true...*” This account indicates that the anti-French struggle is against President Gbagbo in particular. As patriots, it was their duty to safeguard the President by securing his private residence. And in describing the French atrocities, Boka laments the loss of a “comrade,” a fellow young, full-blooded patriot of Ivoirian parentage.

The student movement unfolded over a decade before the French fired into a crowd of Ivoirians. Cissé, a forty-two year old from Abidjan particularly high-up within the *Sorbonne*, describes when he realized his loyalty to the movement, and in particular to the student organization FESCI:

In 1992, Houphouët-Boigny sent the Ivoirian police and army to the campus, where there was a massacre of Ivoirian students. And the commission of inquiry that they put in place at that time showed that it was the Ivoirian army who committed these actions...So all who were students, all who were revolutionaries took to the streets. And when I took to the street, I was living with my big sister and her husband. My sister's husband gave me an ultimatum: to choose between FESCI and staying at his home. And I preferred to choose FESCI.

He went on to describe how for a time he slept in campus hallways, and additional sacrifices during his early days in the movement as a “FESCI militant.” For example, he gave up a lucrative tutoring job earning 90,000CFA per month because his student critiqued FESCI. Although Cissé’s resolve lost him shelter and work, they eventually brought him to the elevated position he holds in the movement today.

A number of the orators stated past FESCI involvement, most simply as members but also others in positions of leadership. FESCI is an organization that, birthed in resistance to the vestiges of the Houphouët-Boigny regime under then-President Bedié, remains a powerful actor in the anti-French and pro-Gbagbo movement; again, the respondents see these as one in the same. According to Lola,

We all fell under the spell of Laurent Gbagbo. And it put in our minds the desire to be militants with FESCI. [Since junior high we all began in the movement]. So my personal history begins with resistance. Before the crisis even began, since 1996, we [began this movement] even when the police, the military chased us, we remained constant in denouncing the dictatorial regime of the PDCI [Parti Démocratique de la Côte d’Ivoire].

This movement focused on absorbing the next generation at a very young age. In the orators’ recollections, their early activism still captures their imaginations and political determination as they associate a movement toward greater personal freedom as students with a struggle against French neocolonial relations. They associate both with Gbagbo.

6. A second independence

In a country where “national unity was viewed as being synonymous with unanimous support for the PDCI” (Zolberg, 1964: 261), it has been easy transfer a sense of national loyalty to Gbagbo’s FPI [Front Populaire Ivoirien]. In doing so, however, orators’ complicity to the regime in power remains an unchanged fact from their parents’ generation to their own. Complicity plays an important role in shaping these men’s identities as Ivoirian citizens. For men with political capital, affiliating oneself with the state is a way to belong, especially given the absence of other forms of capital. The powerful belief that their nation is exceptional for the place it occupies in Africa – the forgotten continent – is a home-grown ideology to which they may turn for affirmation of selfhood and statehood.¹²⁴ In the previous sections I have presented the orators’ depiction of the Ivoirian miracle, idealized conceptions of work, and their politicization in the absence of employment opportunities, all of which are predicated on shifting neocolonial relations. This section further explores the Franco-Ivoirian neocolonial relationship in the context of the political-military crisis.

¹²⁴ Compare the Ivoirian case to Ferguson’s (2006) discussion of turn-of-the-century Zambia. Ferguson looks at the short-lived Zambian internet magazine *Chrysalis* as an example of nationalist self-denigration and the rejection of a faith in an African “renaissance” when its elite founders’ stated claim to establishing a modern Zambian culture quickly gave way to a contributors’ overwhelming sense of backwardness and cultural inferiority. The orators, as Ivoirian nationalists, do not reject the modernization myth. Their assumed place in the semi-periphery justifies their superiority as men, posing adherence to the world capitalist framework, via the regime, as a tried-and-true solution to growth. As a result, they deny the regime’s – and neoliberalism’s – accountability in the national and their personal crises.

Côte d'Ivoire received praise by virtue of its status as a semi-peripheral/semi-imperial state, implying a relationship both with the core (France) and the periphery (migrant populations). As the orators explained the miracle and crisis, they treaded between celebrating Ivoirian history and allotting blame to the past. Sandbrook (1985: 29) remarks that the "Ivoirian strategy" of modernization depended on "maintaining a neocolonial orientation to France and exploiting migrant labor from poverty-stricken neighboring countries...The costs entailed were considerable – not only to the alien Africans who comprise about half the Ivorian labor force, but also to the Ivorian national pride..." A quarter-century later, the orators' frustrations as they articulated a new brand of nationalism referred directly to their bitterness over these issues. They identified the civil war as France's last-ditch effort to arrest the tide of Ivoirian independence. In doing so they embraced a "narrative framework" to interpret societal problems and create scapegoats (Banégas 2006: 546).

The orators said that Gbagbo instigated France's wrath when he began prioritizing the Ivoirian state and people, citing for example his termination of the Defense Accords. Lamenting the lessons never learned under a neocolonial state, Zokora allows that France managed critical Ivoirian affairs, but at the expense of true growth and self-determination. He says, "It was France that did everything for us, but in return, we gained nothing. We could not construct schools, we could not provide jobs, we could not pay our workers a good salary. All that was France...The current crisis is one of sovereignty, a war of liberation." Côte d'Ivoire's incomplete independence generated an infantile state that never learned to provide for its citizens. "Sovereignty" and "liberation" suggest power and responsibility: the power of being an independent state with a role to play globally, and the responsibility of providing schools, jobs, and a decent quality of life to its citizens. When colonized, a country has neither. No different from colonialism, this is a state of dependence.

But instead of seeking isolation from foreign powers, the orators envisioned an Ivoirian state with diversified partnerships. They identified the intra-electoral moment since 2000 as an interregnum wherein the state had shrunk but political turmoil kept the private sector away. Tioté, for example, argued that insecurity blocks the country's ability to attract investors. Employing an African "strategy of extraversion" (Bayart, 2000), he says of foreign investors, "[W]hen he invests, he creates jobs, he creates wealth, he contributes to the country's economy..." Tioté believed foreign initiative serves Ivoirian interests. He and other orators rarely conceptualized a model of national growth without foreign investment. What was new about the Gbagbo regime, however, is that they perceived Gbagbo as capable of enabling equal relations between local actors and foreign business interests.

Hence the manner in which the orators articulated the Ivoirian crisis had much to do with Côte d'Ivoire's ability to identify foreign powers as friend or foe. Poverty and incomplete independence – interpreted here as the inability to negotiate with foreign interests – operate as a vicious circle. For the orators, Gbagbo's election broke out of this circle. They pitted "sovereignty" against "recolonization" (Cissé) and situated the FPI and the *Sorbonne* as core elements of the liberation movement. While awaiting a post-crisis Côte d'Ivoire, they became remarkable characters in a narrative that established their country within the scope of the postcolonial African experience: the crisis. Their *Sorbonne* activities distinguished them, despite their unemployment, from the other unfortunate Ivoirian youth.

7. Suspended nation, suspended masculinity: The sacrificed generation

Major economic problems began to impinge on the “Ivoirian miracle,” as energy prices and world economic recession reduced the Government’s margin for maneuver in macroeconomic policy and sectoral investments. While these pressures might suggest that decision-makers should seek cheaper, more modest solutions to the problems of urban growth, this was not evident in a country whose political stability had been based on ever increasing personal income and material goods. (Cohen, 1984: 71)

[The seemingly limitless creation of wealth and material welfare] was translated for urban and rural families in concrete terms by the possibilities for investing in children’s education, attaining health care, buying real estate or a car, building a house, or even engaging in entrepreneurial activities, in brief, of raising their standards of living. This ensemble of virtual and real possibilities included both that which had been acquired, insofar as this involved specific possessions, and that which was assured, to the extent that one imagined the present and the future, and thus elaborated ideas about society and community on the basis of these possibilities...And it is this entire material and symbolic architecture that has crumbled under the weight of the crisis. (Mbembe and Roitman, 1995: 6)

In the quotes above, Cohen (1984) emphasizes the social contract that the first Ivoirian regime instituted between political complacency and a comfortable urban, middle-class life, and Mbembe and Roitman (1995) demonstrate how material gain and loss are inextricably linked to the experience of crisis. As would-be middle-class men, the orators associated their inability to achieve tangible status markers such as a house or a car with loss of manhood. Lacking opportunities for material gain, they are the “sacrificed generation.” As I show in this section, however, the orators made “sacrifice” a malleable concept. First, it refers to the sacrificed victims of a lost generation. For example, Yapo says, “If I was given a job, every day I would go to work. I prefer work over going to *Parlement* and speaking about Gbagbo Laurent, speaking of the country, speaking of all that. *So today we are prisoners, we are obliged to be there.*” As a “prisoner” he was helpless; Yapo did not feel in control of his fate. He preferred to live a life other than the one he lives now. But his lack of options compelled his political involvement. As an orator he occupied a liminal place in Ivoirian society, one that the public and (he hoped) the Ivoirian leadership would eventually recognize and reward. As Yapo waited out the crisis, he invested in the regime.

Thus the *Sorbonne* orators articulated the crisis from both an objective view of Ivoirian societal decline as well as the painful personal experience of lost opportunities and unreachd potential as members of the sacrificed generation. They generally agreed that the country’s political and economic woes were interrelated, causing the social instability that they and their compatriots felt so strongly. But the crisis trope also *justified* the orators’ failed masculinity, reinscribed as masculinities suspended, or in-waiting. While waiting, they embraced the idea of “sacrifice” in a second sense: as political *agency*, portraying themselves as self-sacrificing for the greater good, the patriotic movement. They reclaimed the loss of control that the crisis’s “regime of subjectivity” had imposed (Mbembe and Roitman, 1995). Banégas (2006: 545-546) explains that the patriotic movement is a rare vehicle for power for social juniors as well as a “register that lends itself to the explanation of misfortune, in a context of generalized crisis.” In this way *Sorbonne* involvement offered both a way to see and be seen.

It is their generation, which Sangaré roughly establishes as born between 1970 and 1985, which the orators identified as those “sacrificed,” the demographic lost to the crisis. “The poor, it is us. Us, the new generation,” Touré says. Ivoirians, even educated Ivoirians, have descended into a desperate state where they accept work once in the sole domain of regional migrants. Ettien says, “We go far to succeed. Someone who has his Master’s, but heads a [phone] cabin...This is not because this trade pleases him. This is not because he wants this to be his future. It is because he is obliged to do this.” Always oscillating between the comparisons and contrasts of the haves and have-nots, the orators measured Ivoirians against Africans and themselves in particular to other Abidjanais. They held fast to a sense of exceptionalism while dourly contending with the reality into which their country had sunk. Their reality was of aborted schooling, schooling completed without its earlier rewards, job loss, and job searching, and all with the same consequence: the inability to become adult men with careers and families to call their own.

7.1. Fatherhood in crisis

The crisis meant joining the African narrative of exclusion and closed-off opportunities. It was a loss of privilege. Critically, the neoliberal Ivoirian generation cannot establish the family units that others of a different time or place may have. Boka contrasts the experience of African parents – in particular, the working father – with their European counterparts:

In Africa, parents do not have the means to open a bank account for their children. But in Europe, when the father provides, he is well paid and can open an account for his children until they are eighteen and then they can take this money and choose to go to school or start a business.

Hence unequal global relations create deficient personal relations; African fathers are unable to ensure that their children realize their dreams. For this reason, Boka says that men remain single, preferring to have girlfriends for ten or twenty years without marrying. The coupling of public and private deficiencies means that African parents are suspended in the temporal dimension of crisis: the immediate present. They cannot plan ahead or think beyond basic necessities, a provisional mentality that rubs against the long-term planning expected of responsible parenthood. Further, explaining that most “unemployed” are men, Boka differentiates the stigma men experience compared to women:

The men, for them it is very difficult. The majority of unemployed are men. The women are open to *petit commerce*, they sell *attiéke*¹²⁵ and juice, they are open to that but men do not do that. They need to work in an office, open up a tailor shop or all that. It is more expensive. But women do not need anything big to do their commerce. A little shop of 20,000[CFA], 10,000, can be enough to provide them with some money later.

Boka is clear that for a man, a job is about more than an income. As I discussed previously, Ivoirians reserve *petit commerce* and informal sector activities for migrants – and women. For

¹²⁵ A root pounded into a grain-like substance that is a staple of the Ivoirian diet.

men, work is an essential status indicator. But for women, the sole purpose of work is to make “enough.” So it is the men who society designates “unemployed.”

Koné lost his job in accounting and information technology because of the recession. “One no longer even has the means to have a *normal* life,” he says. To provide the minimum for his daughter requires much more effort than his father required raising him, and for this reason he had only one child. He adds, “The crisis has made it so one cannot do much. I have not even married the mother of my child yet.” I asked why, and he answered, “It is not prudent [to marry.] A marriage is a contract. I do not want to be a bad father.” I probed, “But you are already a father, and a good father.” He laughed and replied,

If you say so. But I want to be more than I am. I am already too late for the world that we see. It is not possible. The level of education that I have, normally, should permit me to have a car, a house. I will not say that I need to have a car and a house before I marry. I will say that I should have a telephone at home, internet, *all the rights of a man to exist*. If I do not have that, that is a lack.

Here Koné distinguishes two types of fatherhood: a strictly biological reality whereby, knowing that he does not have the minimum to make him a man – rights which he describes as rights to property – he cannot assume the total responsibility of marriage, a “contract” cementing his duty to provide material resources for the mother and child. This contrasts with his ideal, one of legal fatherhood that requires consistent support. In the meantime, Koné does all he can to support his daughter and ensure that she lives well.

At twenty-six, Lola had a four year-old child but believed marriage would create too many problems. The child is with her mother, who married another man and lives in her village. Of his choice, he says,

A young student who takes a wife, this is a bit difficult. *Do not create a problem where there is not one...* Right now I struggle to meet my needs, something to eat, because in Africa, when you take a wife, it is the wife’s family that you must care for, there are all kinds of problems in the family, the wife has needs to which you are obliged to respond financially. *I have decided to abstain from all that* and then well, wait until I have a social situation...

In Koné’s remarks it is clear that there is more shame involved in being unable to provide for a child in the context of marriage. In Lola’s remarks, responsibilities associated with fatherhood occur only with marriage. Suspended, he was waiting for the appropriate social situation. Unmarried, men may be occasional fathers to their children and because they are not legally bound, any and all help may be met with gratitude. But marriage is a promise to provide that translates into a constant reminder of shame. Their fatherhoods are caught up in the crisis.

Their refusal to marry indefinitely, despite no foreseen amelioration in their financial situation, spoke to the power of normative ideas of what constitutes appropriate fatherhood. Rather than adapt matrimonial expectations, an entire generation is adapting their domestic arrangements to their informalized worlds (Newell, 2009b). That both of the self-described foreigners were married while the Ivoirians were not indicates *perceptions* of masculine achievement: Ivoirians may well have greater expectations as to what a man should provide his

wife and child vis-à-vis their foreign counterparts. The legacy of the would-be Ivoirian man is a standard against which he measures himself.

Those fortunate few employed are responsible for the many family members without work, adding another dimension to the difficulties of contemporary Ivoirian social life. For example, Faé depended on a public salary that had remained fixed for years despite the higher costs of living. Members of his extended family, rendered jobless, had arrived at his doorstep. Thus, even with an equivalent income, the Ivoirian man is still unable to meet the expectations of a provider. Problems such as these lead to the “marriage crisis,” whereby, according to Koulibaly, “[M]en no longer take care of women.” Men like Faé or Koulibaly employed in the public sector were quick to point out that despite the privilege this work affords they still struggled substantially, and fell short of the father-as-breadwinner ideal.

My interview with Boubacar exposed many of the ideas men have around marriage, work, relations between men and women amidst the crisis, and the role that the *Sorbonne* assumed for men struggling to find alternative ways to define themselves. Single with one child, the mother left him after he rejected her ultimatum to marry. As a student, he said he had nothing to offer her, and remained in this precarious situation at the time of our interview. He believed that the crisis is more severe for men because in Africa it is the man’s responsibility to solve his own problems, while a woman may depend on her husband, her family, or her husband’s family. He further explained,

Men do not have shortcuts. But women have a shortcut. A woman can use her sex, which is a power for her, to obtain her objective. When a man marries a woman, as the father of the family he does everything. So the woman, she has her job on the side. She is expected to be beautiful, that is all. You need to be beautiful, so the man takes you, houses you, feeds you, dresses you. And when you have a baby, he cares for it. You, you have nothing to do. You have to be at home, he gives you money and you prepare [food], So naturally when there is a crisis like this you can no longer marry because you no longer have the means. How will you feed your family?

A woman’s femininity is not put in doubt as a consequence of the crisis in the way a man’s masculinity is. A woman remains a wife despite the epidemic of joblessness. Boubacar paints a bitter portrait of men’s and women’s roles that do not measure up to the reality of contemporary Ivoirian life (see also Ferguson, 1999; Newell, 2009b). In Boubacar’s portrait of marriage, he works, she enjoys. Perhaps Boubacar’s bitterness stemmed from the fact that his transition into adulthood has been marked by consistent compromises with his dreams. For now he says, “As we do not work, and there is a war, we engage in great debate.” Given the restricted context, at least he could claim to assume an important role.

That Boubacar made some choices, albeit compromised ones, was more than many Ivoirians could claim. Some orators, especially older long-timers, emphasize not only the element of choice, but in that choice, self-sacrifice, situating themselves as veritable heroes in the liberation struggle. Faé, the oldest orator in my sample and among the *Sorbonne*’s founding members, says, “We put the patriotic struggle before everything.” In the double sense that Boubacar narrated his life, with both the existence of choice and lack thereof, the orators were privileged members of the sacrificed generation. A suspended nation creates a suspended masculinity. Some of them however, maintain their agency.

7.2. Sacrifice and agency

I have illustrated how the *Sorbonne* orators articulated the crisis on a national and personal level. Their framing of the crisis relates not only to how they perceived its resolution, but also to their perceived place in it. Defining the sacrificed generation, many pointed to the diminished role of the state as the would-be middle class's steady source of post-university employment. For Dindane, a twenty-nine year old from Abidjan, the crisis suggested instability, no guarantee to a home, wife, or the ability to support many children. For Tioté, it was the lost right to a good education and social services. For Faé, it was lack of choice: to save, to travel, to develop "projects," or to have a career. Nevertheless, the orators were particular in that when they referred to their *Sorbonne* activities, sacrifice implied agency. A "sacrificed generation" is acted upon and helpless, but "sacrifice" itself suggests benevolence, even heroism.

Their political role allowed them to speak of their own lost dreams as an unfortunate but necessary sacrifice of war. In contrast to Yapo's depiction of himself as a prisoner trapped at the *Sorbonne*, most used the idea of "sacrifice" to revitalize their lost masculinities, posing themselves as brave warriors absorbing the beatings of an entire country – or continent. As agents of change, the orators depicted themselves as frontrunners in the African anti-neocolonial movement. They spoke of sacrificing for the greater good. For example, Yeboah portrayed his *Sorbonne* activities as a personal sacrifice given that he has two children. In doing so, he offered the next generation of Ivoirian youth something priceless: freedom, and thus a means to a better life, while his pocketbook and generally denigrated status among the unemployed could not do this for his own children. Thus the orators redeemed their failures with their political involvement.

Touré explained,

The sacrificed generation is a name for us who fight...We say 'sacrificed' because the fruits of this struggle will not come now. So we prepare for this psychologically. The sacrificed generation is a generation that will not benefit from the revolution, of the resistance. It is one that is put in front of the guns, the ones that are killed...*The ones who do not yet have jobs, who are unemployed, but who fight despite all.*

Touré described those killed during the week of demonstrations in 2004 and more generally the months of conflict that occurred in the country's north two years previously, events that fit in the patriotic narrative of political awakening in which the *Sorbonne* was a central component. Instead of partisans in a civil war, they were revolutionaries in an anti-colonial struggle. After painting this picture, he conflated political-military sacrifice with the unemployment crisis.

Zokora insisted that the crisis had "precise" origins, causally linking war as the trigger to the unemployment crisis despite over a decade of prior economic decline. In reversing causality, not only did he simplify the solution: end the war, end the crisis, but also his political activities became integral to that solution. So while he denied being salaried and elsewhere lamented his meager day-to-day life, he described orating as practically a trade which demands extensive research, time, and personal resources that prevented him from holding a job simultaneously. This sacrifice is therefore active, not passive: the orators acted, "handled" the crisis.

Their futures tied to the nation, most of these men had only experienced manhoods under political catastrophe. Hope that elections would reunify their divided nation glossed over the deeper economic issues. In the meantime they waited. Suspended into categories that were codes for failure, men remain youths, the unemployed called themselves students, and fathers deny the

responsibility of fatherhood by denying the women in their lives husbands. However, as they redefined the sacrificed generation according to their roles as orators, they reclaimed agency and self-determination. In this way they asserted their masculinities in the context of crisis. As privileged members of the *Sorbonne*, “sacrifice” became more than shared suffering. If Côte d’Ivoire’s claim to exceptionalism is rusty, at least they could claim to be exceptional Ivoirians. A masculinity waiting for a nation to break free, the orators became men – productive, public, and capable – through their associations with its political struggle. Koulibaly explains,

We know that when there is a war in a country, there are all kinds of consequences... And especially concerning Africa, when this kind of situation arrives there is a loss of jobs. The loss of jobs will disorganize the family. And when you do not eat at home, that becomes complicated. *So me, I leave university, I am looking for work, my country is in crisis: well in this case, what can I do? So in this situation, it is obligatory for me to join the forces of change.* Because I myself, I frequented the *Sorbonne* when I was in university, though I did not speak... So in 2002, when the war struck, it was necessary to organize marches, to mobilize the Ivoirians to stand up against the occupation, stand up against the rebel advance.

Koulibaly’s joblessness created an opportunity for his *Sorbonne* involvement. It had since brought him not only a high position within the organization but also contacts that financed his *concours* and found him work in the public sector – he is now a tax collector – setting him apart from most of the other orators. “Sacrifice” was a double entendre, referring to the orators’ cohort of Ivoirians generally, but then to themselves as men apart from the anonymous, voiceless masses. In this way the *Sorbonne* harbored their battered egos. Compared to those masses, these men were somebodies in Ivoirian society with access to people and spaces that afforded them respect as well as financial and in-kind support.

Boubacar said that when he needed something, occasionally he could call on leaders, but this was not a consistent option. When asking about work, often he heard, “For the moment my [son], we are at war, things do not go, you must wait, you must wait...” But in his political participation he “concentrate[s] on the resolution of the crisis,” thereby remaining productive as one of Gbagbo’s patriots. His relationship to the state made a man out of him as work did not. In the meantime, his contacts buffered his suffering, “relations” that allowed him to take care of himself, and he anticipated that these same contacts would launch him onto greater things – as soon as the crisis ended. “So I wait,” he says.

With their generation situated as hopeless victims, participation at the *Sorbonne* allowed orators to take charge of their fates, for as Ettien states, in a crisis-ridden Côte d’Ivoire “the one business that works is politics.” Their firmest hopes lay in carving out a place in the present regime to prepare for a post-crisis Côte d’Ivoire; the *Sorbonne* appeared an institution for Ivoirian self-realization. As street politicians – little big men – the orators fashioned identities as exceptional Ivoirians that put them a step above others living precarious lives in the context of informality. When asked what strategy the Ivoirian government should pursue to end the economic crisis, Yapo replied, “One must finance projects for youth. The youth need to organize, have projects, and have those projects financed...Us, the organization of orators...we have projects. Finance these projects!” Here Yapo establishes the exceptional place that he envisions the state should accord the orators. If, as Koulibaly claimed, the *Sorbonne* was an institution that educated and gave voice to the Ivoirian youth, then it made sense that the orators should merit

special positions spearheading a coming generation of vital, gainfully employed men. Until then, they kept themselves occupied at the *Sorbonne*.

8. The *Sorbonne* as ego sanctuary and opportunity structure

In the absence of alternatives, the orators' political engagement took on the semblance of work as well as dedication to a greater cause. They assumed a narrative of an African independence movement, the birth of nationhood: a palatable account by virtue of its familiarity and of the allure that those dreams at the moment of African self-rule – dreams of growth based on resource wealth and “democracy” – remain viable today. Reeling from the effects of the bottom falling out from underneath them, the orators embraced this narrative. But history has since yawned at this glorified vision of African independence; the orators' hyper-nationalist stance reflected a territorial allegiance to the nation as a poor recourse to exclusion from global power or wealth.

I contrast this to Cohen's (2004) discussion of the Moroccan “global” middle class which she juxtaposes to the “modern” middle class of the previous generation. Identifying the state's ineptitude in providing a middle class life, she argues that those middle class Moroccans capable of doing so reject the state and the country's political and economic elites for global opportunity circuits. Would-be middle class men, the *Sorbonne* orators had no such leverage to reject the state and were instead dependent on those political and economic elites – their cherished “contacts” – for their present means of survival and to realize their future ambitions. In Cohen's classification, the orators would fall into the third of her “new social groups” in the face of contemporary globalization: the unemployed and insecurely employed. Though I call these “would-be middle class” while she breaks down the category of middle class into three groups, my findings corroborate hers in that a fundamental characteristic of this category is “their process of waiting” (ibid: 95).¹²⁶

Confronting their manifold failures and hopelessness, the orators found general notoriety and a social network for personal redemption in the *Sorbonne*. It was a place where they increased their chances for work, and a source of status in a period when few opportunities to elevate oneself socially existed. Keenly aware of the importance of contacts in a constrained socioeconomic climate, political engagement at any level offers access to the political and business elite. And while they insisted that President Gbagbo offered a new dawn to the corrupt, socially rigid old guard, many openly hedged their bets on a post-crisis FPI regime. For these reasons, the orators linked their personal fortunes to the success of the ruling party. As an ego sanctuary and opportunity structure, their *Sorbonne* activities produced a masculinity complicit to the status quo – the FPI – despite their frustrations at the suspended state of the country, a suspension that the country's stalled elections exacerbated.

Ettien described the *Sorbonne* as a place to make contact with bureaucrats and others in high positions, and thus find work. While until then he had met only empty promises, he believed the orators would expect more once the country had stabilized. Cynically, he says, “[A

¹²⁶ In my analysis, one may differentiate these would-be middle class unemployed nationalists who hinge their hopes on the state from the would-be working class unemployed whose terse relations with the state leads them to bypass the state altogether. As I demonstrate with the vendors however, this latter group nevertheless depends on the more fortunate for its daily bread. In other words, my distinction runs along the lines of those with and without a relationship to the state to identify as men amidst political and economic crisis.

student] decides to enter into politics because he can have more. So he stops to do politics, *perhaps he becomes an orator*, he is obliged to be president of *Parlement*, he is obliged to follow these political men, just to have a bit of money.” For this reason, he surmised, the Ivoirian has become a “political man.”

Zokora was unapologetic about what the *Sorbonne* provided him: “In fact, what we do, there is not money in it...If you want money, it is not worth going there. But the advantage, it is the relations...*So, the relations that I have in politics, it is this which permits me to live.*” Denying that his activities were remunerated, the occasional support he received through his relations proved vital nonetheless. It was a way to survive in an economy with few other options. He regularly sought the aid of various patrons to pay his daughter’s tuition. Within the *Sorbonne* structure itself, he asked for money when he was particularly desperate, but only small amounts such as 500 or 1000CFA. In a country without a social safety net, this nonetheless served as an important buffer.

For most, the *Sorbonne* promise stood just out of reach. In the interim it provided just enough to keep them surviving – and contributing to the machine. Such was the typical story of the orators: some money here, an odd job there, and always a promise and a pat on the back. Yapo had been speaking at the *Sorbonne* since 2000. He waited out the crisis on odd jobs and support in the form of as much as 15,000CFA from politicians, leaders, and organizations, but this was not support that he could depend on. He remarked, “There are orators who are poor, who have nothing. The state has not yet found something for them to do. They live on hope.”

9. Little big men

The *Sorbonne* acted as a network wherein the orators made frequent contact with the Ivoirian political and business elite, and the hope this generated ensured their complicity. Further, while these networks provided nothing so steady as their daily bread, their odd jobs necessitated that they enter ever deeper into the realm of FPI politics, with invitations to speak at conferences, rallies and other political gatherings in Abidjan and the interior. Bamba, a thirty-eight year old from the interior with five years’ *Sorbonne* experience, traveled widely in his role and believed that the many contacts he made would bear fruit in one of those realms. He says confidently, “I have their numbers, they have mine. I have their contacts. I approach people, I [associate] with these people...So after the crisis, two or three years after the crisis, I can do something with this.” Proof of his potential was then stored in his cellular phone. For Koné, obtaining critical information about the country was only a phone call away. “Many, many!” he replied when I asked him if he was in touch with various Ivoirian leaders, of whom he named one after another. He knew these men from political meetings. When I asked Sagbo how his life had changed as a consequence of the crisis, he replied,

I can say that my life has changed a bit...Today I can say that the crisis has made it so that I have made certain relations. I approach a good number of authorities in the country. I enter into places that before I would not have had access...Even if I do not have much money, for the moment it is okay.

Despite his struggles, his position as a result of the crisis allowed him to navigate a world of people and spaces that were previously closed to him, and people often predicted that he would be a “big man” in politics. At the moment, he was a little big man.

Navigating the political system in a country rife with corruption and run by unwritten rules has benefits beyond monetary support or contacts leading to occasional or steady employment. As Mbembe and Roitman (1995: 25) observe of the Cameroonian crisis, when things cease to work, the state, from the bottom up, generates rents through informal mechanisms. For state bureaucrats, the “end of the salary” is the beginning of bribery to replace one’s regular income. Most Ivoirians experienced this directly as exploitation, often targeted randomly yet consistently through, for example, road blocks at various points throughout Abidjan with police or military demanding one’s “papers” and finding problems with them where they do not exist. And just as a crime may be determined and mediated according to an individual exchange with a lower official, so may punishment. The relationship to the state in addition to name- and face-recognition that regular *Sorbonne* and *Parlement* appearances afforded generated their own special benefits. Their notoriety entitled them to relative immunity from informal state extraction, itself a major incentive in a country that functioned largely off of bribes. Faé, for example, explained that his *Sorbonne* renown kept his nephew out of jail when he stole a 293,000CFA mobile phone. Walking into the police station, he was instantly greeted with the honorific “Patriot Faé” and offers of any possible help. He concluded, “So these are the small benefits of our relations, of this way of being known.” Faé’s notoriety as a *Sorbonne* personality – a founding member, he was involved since the 1980s – allowed him to placate a potentially explosive situation. And in this way he became a big man – a central, essential elder – in his family.

Then there were the exceptions to keep the dream alive: those who had assumed notable positions within the *Sorbonne* structure, and a few who had found steady work through its contacts. Lola, an “ambassador,” described the manifold ways the *Sorbonne* has opened doors. Singularly focused on a career in politics, he believed he was already on course to achieve this goal:

I am among the orators who have succeeded, who have put out in the market CDs on the Ivorian crisis, analyses, information on the Ivorian crisis that I sell. I am currently on the fourth CD...so today they are in Belgium, they are in France, they are in Benin and others. People who do not know me over there have my CD and the call me and congratulate and encourage me.

Through his expanding reputation Lola had made political contacts at home and abroad. Beyond simple political association, he called those leaders his friends and regularly spent time with them outside of the *Sorbonne*. Though he did not have steady work, at twenty-six he expected his degree the following year from one of Abidjan’s private universities and believed his prospects were bright. Tioté also believed the *Sorbonne* would advance his goal of assuming authority in Côte d’Ivoire. At twenty-seven, he described himself as unemployed and actively seeking work. However, he intended to continue his *Sorbonne* activities irrespective of employment status. When I asked him if he was rising to a position of leadership, he replied affirmatively: “Yes. That is one of my objectives. I want to be one of the deciders in this country.”

The *Sorbonne* elite – the leaders who ran the organization behind the scenes – indeed had extraordinary opportunities for advancement. Primarily men of realizable political ambition, they were situated on the other end of the patronage divide, charged with redistributing *Sorbonne* coffers to orators and the general public. These were the little big men who had almost become big men themselves. Among the highest within the organization were Koulibaly and Cissé.

Koulibaly was employed in the Ivoirian bureaucracy and he held a “consultative” role in the *Sorbonne*. He earned 120,000CFA a month as a bureaucrat and at the *Sorbonne* he made a daily “prime” of 250CFA for transport regardless of whether or not he attended – hence an additional 50,000CFA to his monthly income.¹²⁷ Included in his varied responsibilities were helping Ivoirians find work and travel. He once appeared on international television. He was vague about how much an orator could make on any given day (emphasizing that such earnings were predicated on donations), but quick to answer how much he gave per week: “At least 10,000 [CFA],” funds he reported to come from his *Sorbonne* income as well as out-of-pocket. In his position he received constant appeals, thus assuming the role of the benevolent chief charged with disbursing profits to his constituents. He had assumed the ultimate role of provider and father figure to the Ivoirian people, despite the fact that he had not yet married the mother of his child.

Cissé was emphatic that a central purpose of the *Sorbonne* was to provide the Ivoirian populace with financial support as a means to end the crisis, but this was not without his own personal benefit. Using the French royal “we” as he referred to himself he said, “Our objective it to lead a *commune* one day...to be in politics and development. We want to become ...the mayor of Plateau.” I asked if he was already achieving this goal. He replied,

Yes, I am already there...You see when you are at this stadium here, you have many people around you. And so to win political elections, it is the people who transform a candidate into an elected [leader]. If in my little stadium where I am, I do social [work], I take care of people, then [they will not think] that when I am mayor I will not do this. That is the reality.

I then asked him if he was already known around Abidjan and Côte d’Ivoire. He answered, “My [reputation] has already passed the Ivoirian borders. Modestly speaking, the media knows me. So in Abidjan I am known, in Plateau I am very well known, in the interior I am known. There is not a place where I can go where at least someone knows me.” Cissé believed that his relations with the public at the *Sorbonne* had begun to establish him as a popular politician. Surpassing other orators who sought support, he was a little big man on the scene, and was convinced that this would eventually propel him towards former membership within the political machine. Through his capacity at the *Sorbonne* he had a ready constituency consisting of thousands of regular audience members, many of whom had made personal appeals to him, and he headed a group of men who could publicly advocate for him.

Zokora described his *commune* of Abobo as an opposition stronghold: “Often my photo appears in the opposition newspaper...So it means that people know us...So I must take the minimum of precaution. I can no longer walk down the street like I used to. No.” He offered to phone me the next time he appeared in the newspaper. In describing the dangers involved, Zokora also described his renown – strangers went out of their way to drive him from Plateau, the city center, to Abobo, far on the outskirts – and worth as a personality worth threatening. Koulibaly said that in addition to higher up political personalities, “When I walk down the street, youth, children, congratulate me.” For men largely incapable of being legitimate fathers to their children and otherwise marginal as men in Ivoirian society, their role at the *Sorbonne* allowed

¹²⁷ Calculating a pay of five days per week multiplied by four weeks.

them to be fathers to an Ivoirian public that looked up to them: the *Sorbonne* centered their peripheral masculinities.

I have shown how the *Sorbonne* made the orators productive and public when, in a suspended nation, they could not be otherwise. Here I have elaborated on how the *Sorbonne* afforded orators status, substituted work, and for some (but to the hopes of all) transformed them into wage-earning men. As I have stated elsewhere (Matlon, 2010b), although the tangible returns were more often fiction than reality, to appear as a guest speaker here, to get help to pay a medical bill or a child's tuition there and to be relatively immune to the informalized state extraction in the form of the regular bribes – are all heavy incentives in the absence of gainful employment. Moreover, each [orator] boasted of meeting warm congratulations after a speech, having his name called when walking down the street or being bought a beer from an admiring spectator he encountered when out on the town. Marginal though they were in the economy and in their own families, through the *Sorbonne* they held roles that had potential consequences for all Ivoirians.

The orators expected their post-electoral contacts to launch their careers and finally permit them to be for their families what they purported to be for the general public: indispensable. In the meantime the relationships to the women and children in their lives were failures; even the *Sorbonne* elite were unmarried, distanced from the duties of fatherhood. Suspended and yet harbored by the *Sorbonne*, their complicit nationalist masculinities held both infinite and declining potential. The status quo offered hope and sustenance. The orators' post-electoral futures hinged on Gbagbo's election; without him, Yapo acknowledged, they would lose everything.

The Gbagboist Ivoirian crisis narrative had clear perpetrators and victims, sharply opposing the PDCI, portrayed as France's puppet party, and the FPI, Ivoirian patriots/liberators. The orators were the protagonists: real, down-to-earth characters acting as Gbagbo's "instruments of propaganda" (Ousmane), thereby treading a liminal space between the party machine and the peripheral Ivoirian populace. Knowing not to bite the hand that fed them, they allowed the FPI politics to absorb them with the dim potential of being among the next generation of leaders. So the Ivoirian today is a "political man" (Ettien).

The orators envisioned a post-electoral FPI program predicated on neoliberal principles with themselves as patriotic entrepreneurs, the first plucked among the Ivoirian masses with arms outstretched, palms wide open, and projects begging to be financed. "Liberation" from postcolonial bonds embraced American imperialism as the orators imagined Côte d'Ivoire transitioning from the "Francophone" to the "Anglophone" model. Such conflictive principles were evident in Tioté's interview when he eloquently lamented the implementation of structural adjustment and the privatization of state resources under the first administration. Shortly after, he cited Gbagbo's plan to liberalize the café and cocoa sectors as the key to empowering planters. Additionally, he proposed attracting investors to the rebel zone with tax holidays. In brief, the orators celebrated the promise of the private even while their sacrificed lives bore witness to the perils of a devastated public. Within their vision of free market liberation, they believed for each patriot his project financed, and a renewed Ivoirian hegemon.

10. For each patriot, his project financed

When Gbagbo arrived in 2000, the sacrificed generation experienced some encouragement. Because the program that he presented, one could still find something for us inside. Effectively, after the first year of his leadership, the United States, Europe, the

Bretton Woods institutions said, ‘Côte d’Ivoire is doing well, we may renew our relations with it.’ So there is no more danger. The Chief of State has now begun a fund called the National Solidarity Fund where the youth can come with their projects and they will be supported to implement their projects. (Sangaré)

We are made in the political milieu. We have made relations with men with power. So for us, it is normal that these people will find something for us to do. (Sagbo)

The orators proposed a resolution to the crisis via neoliberal socioeconomic programs: business investment, entrepreneurialism, and resources transferred to the private sector. They situated themselves and their business dreams within this vision. In the last section I explored orators’ political ambitions, particularly those of the *Sorbonne* elite. Here I focus on orators who perceived their political activities as their ticket into the business world. I argue that complicit nationalist masculinity drove the orators’ perceptions of the ideal Ivoirian man and policy, buttressed by its self-image as a semi-peripheral state. I refer to their double complicity to the dominant political regime and to the global economy.

The orators spoke in depth about liberation from France’s neocolonial shackles. That liberating force was the free market knocking on Côte d’Ivoire’s doors, and they were begging to let it in. Sangaré says, “What do we say? If the country is liberated, the investors will come. If the investors arrive, unemployment will decline.” Liberation is foremost economic, because they relate the neocolonial yoke to their direct experience of the crisis: unemployment. That “investors will come” suggests that the investors are out there, somewhere *beyond* Ivoirian borders. The orators emphasized the inevitability of a globalized Côte d’Ivoire, and thus focused not on isolationism but the capacity to choose their partnerships and negotiate on better terms. Predicting that Côte d’Ivoire was destined to provide Africa with a model of independence and facilitate inter-southern cooperation, Lola cited talks with Benin, the existence of Tunisian-built roads and the proliferation of African mobile phone companies. Shed of French monopoly control, he says that Côte d’Ivoire will allocate contracts to the most deserving foreign bidders of which he named China and India as two “great and emerging powers.”

The orators believed the state’s role was to support private initiatives. Tioté’s solution to the crisis was, “A fund for each person to create his own job. Once he has created his job, he will reimburse the fund and equally give to someone else to create his job. In this way unemployment will decline.” This description, essentially a microcredit scheme, is the private sector’s contemporary solution to underdevelopment, tapping into the “fortune at the bottom of the pyramid” (Prahalad, 2005) and actively promoted by organizations such as the World Bank.¹²⁸ Touré argued that Africa needs to finance a robust banking community for its citizens to escape its economic and developmental problems. He proposed a national investment bank to lend the “youth” money to create employment and thus share in the country’s wealth. He wishes for Africa to have the economic conditions to produce a Bill Gates, because, he explained, Gates’s wealth generated many jobs.

Despite the FPI’s official status as a socialist party, few orators articulated a socialist program of strengthened unions, market regulation, or redistribution. Even industrialization, unless linked to the idea of creating a healthy business climate, received sparse mention in our interviews. Some conflated “financing projects” with state support of industry, like Bamba who

¹²⁸ For a discussion of the neoliberal nature of microcredit, see Roy (2010).

argued for this as part of state monies to support orators' "projects." Of developing industries Keïta said, "The politics of industrialization has not yet arrived here...The public [sector] does not create jobs! It is the private [sector] that creates jobs." I asked how this would happen and he described generating healthy fiscal policies. The only consistent exception to a business-as-development stance was with reference to the education system. The most tangible loss these men experienced, this was the crucial social area where they called for greater state support.

Ettien described three stages in life: first, you work for another, then you work for yourself, and finally, others work for you. According to this narrative, full, independent adulthood is predicated on becoming an economically independent [man] charged with making his own business decisions. Although the goal of many, this was far from most orators' experience, dependent instead on the patronage support of their political and private contacts. However, they expected their *Sorbonne* experiences to provide skills that would convert to the business world.

Boubacar, in his hopes for a "new economy," wanted to be an entrepreneur. He exclaimed, "Me, I have the possibility to create a business like everyone else...But as I do not have the means, I cannot create my business. I am obliged to take a *concours* or to hope that someone hires me in his business." Boubacar emphasizes that like *everyone* else – given the dearth of jobs "everyone" likely refers to those outside of Côte d'Ivoire whom he holds as a normative measure – he is capable and worthy of his own business. He must insist this point since the global political economy has not made this self-evident. Elsewhere he mentioned that since finishing his studies in 2004 he has never worked. Nonetheless, his ambitions were great. He dreamed the neoliberal entrepreneurial dream and considered the state bureaucracy or working for another second-rate. In this way he reiterated Ettien's life-course model and dismisses the ambitions of a previous generation: the *concours* route.

The clearest program the orators articulated was for the state to foment a business climate, with or without foreign investment. They heavily invested in the state so that it would invest in them, or more accurately, in the "projects" that they envisioned cultivating in a post-crisis Côte d'Ivoire. The returns they expected from their time at the *Sorbonne* were not hand-outs but returns on investments. To reiterate, neoliberalism does not suggest the absence of the state, but the redirection of the state in favor of business interest. The orators sought an institutional environment that buttressed property, markets and free trade. This, compared to the bloated bureaucracy of the Francophone system, was the state's one true purpose. Their identities as men depended on the state's success which they perceived within a neoliberal framework. Further, the fantasy of these would-be middle class men was to be self-made, Connell's (1995) enterprising transnational businessmen involved in business activity throughout the African continent and the world. They were complicit men in a likewise complicit state.

11. Imagining a Renewed Ivoirian Hegemon

President Houphouët-Boigny embodied Côte d'Ivoire's ideal colonial and postcolonial masculinity, the *colon-as-évolué*. A new era has emerged. The pendulum has swung from the public to the private, the dream shifted from bureaucrat to businessman. The *Sorbonne* was a link to tangible power: President Gbagbo and the FPI. As Gbagbo's little big men, the orators saw themselves building a bridge to their futures. While they rejected Houphouët-Boigny's close relationship to France, they nevertheless remained committed to a state called exceptional by virtue of its place in a global order: as a sub-imperial state, Côte d'Ivoire's status hinged on its

liaison with hegemony. Thus they embraced President Gbagbo's anti-France rhetoric but turned to the United States for an alternate model of hegemony.¹²⁹

Sangaré says, "Our fight today, it is against the oppressors, against the imperialists. France, but in addition to France, the European Union... We are in a fight against... the economic plan, with the Americans who are close to the Africans." Here, the Americans are at odds with the European Union, which is at odds with Africa. Thus the Americans support the Africans in the struggle against imperialism. This narrative fits neatly into the orators' broader storyline. Just as they depicted President Gbagbo as guiltless in the current crisis, the global status quo was less relevant than what occurred in the past. The orators adopted the history of African independence movements and inserted themselves as the protagonist-liberators. In this way they talked about "revolution" and "resistance" despite acting as "instruments of propaganda" for the regime.

Sangaré compared their struggle to the American war of independence. Referencing an earlier era of African repression, the United States is conveniently absent from this account. Furthermore, its rise from colony to superpower represents a postcolonial ideal. While covert American governmental involvement and associated economic interests are widespread in the history of twentieth-century African repression, these facts are distant from the Ivoirian consciousness. Instead, the Ivoirian history of success via regional dominance, immigration and "easy business" approximates the model of American exceptionalism.

Likening Côte d'Ivoire to Africa's America, a number of orators used the United States as a model for Ivoirian social, political and economic development. Faé describes a conversation he overheard between two Ghanains. One called the other "wild...from the bush." The other replied,

'You see me this way because you are coming from Abidjan.' That is to say, he came from a milieu more civilized than his friend. It is like in Côte d'Ivoire...someone will say, 'He is an Ivoirian but he lived in the United States. You see that people will receive him with respect right away because he lived in the United States. So he is civilized. He has the means...

Faé uses the term "civilized" – the same term accorded to the Ivoirian *évolué* for having mastered the ways of the French. In his account civilized refers primarily to finances. The US being the new "country of reference" (Ettien), Faé constructs three classes of men: the African (Ghanain), the Ivoirian as the exceptional African, and the American. In this schema the Ivoirian rejects France while retaining his special place on the semi-periphery.

Gneki, a thirty-five year old from Abidjan, calls Abidjan a "center of business." He attributed the country's diversity to its bustling economic activity, echoing many orators when he says that in Côte d'Ivoire "business is easy." His narrative of his country as a promised land echoes the American dream, while the high number of foreign nationals supports the image of a state with a favorable business climate. Zokora describes Côte d'Ivoire as full of business opportunities, the incredible potential to make money and to be successful. Required are entrepreneurial traits: a creative spirit, an imagination, and a viable project – all reflecting classic stereotypes of the American ethic. All that lacked for the Ivoirian was start-up capital. He added,

¹²⁹ The pro-American Gbagboist stance has obviously changed since President Obama supported President-elect Ouattara in President Gbagbo's 2010-2011 cling to power.

The only difference between us and the Americans is that the Americans live on another continent, in the United States. We are in Africa: this is the difference. Otherwise, the Americans have their way of life, it is liberty. Here it is that. Here it is liberty. Everyone is free. When a foreigner comes from his country, even if he has no money to eat and it is night, by tomorrow he will have something to eat.

Zokora attributed American success to liberty, specifically the liberty of a *laissez faire* economy. Côte d'Ivoire was no different, because here foreigners can hustle. In this way, Zokora employed the Ivoirian history as a regional migration hub to construct an image of entrepreneurial exceptionalism and hegemony in the contemporary global neoliberal political economy. He has envisioned a renewed Ivoirian hegemon.

Calling Côte d'Ivoire the "pride of Africa," Boka believed it taught and inspired other Africans: "When you say you are Ivoirian [in Cameroon] people are content because they say 'Oh, you are an exception. You have confronted the French. You have uprooted the *colon*. So we want to be like you.'" Boka further described Gabonais who study in Côte d'Ivoire and return to their country with the culture and fighting spirit of Ivoirians, saying to themselves, "The black can change. The African can change his manner of working. He does not have to keep saying 'Yes, yes' to the *colon*. He does not have to keep saying 'Yes' to the imperialists.'" In this portrayal of continental politics, the contemporary Ivoirian generation leads the struggle against an exploitative Occident, embodied by the French *colon*/imperialist.

Within this framework, the orators described President Gbagbo as a political marvel. Touré says, "I have appreciated [Laurent Gbagbo] since my childhood. I appreciated him for his struggle...For me, Gbagbo reflected the image of Martin Luther King, of Marcus Garvey, of Malcolm X. For me, Gbagbo is like a Fidel Castro, a Nelson Mandela. So I must bring my contribution to this fight." Following him since childhood, and dedicating himself to the struggle, Touré portrays President Gbagbo as a father figure and a hero. He likens him to formidable black and revolutionary leaders, predominantly from the African diaspora. In doing so he situates him within an important lineage of leaders who embodied a postcolonial/Civil Rights black masculinity.

The orators argued that other African leaders have accepted infantilization for too long, noting for example that Francophone African leaders have historically required France's permission leave the continent. Lola says,

When Gbagbo came to power, he decided to put an end to these kinds of things, as he had promised us. This is why the majority of students followed him in this struggle, such as FESCI...So when he came to power, he decided to discuss on [equal terms] with all the countries in the world...If ever an African leader lifts his little finger and says no to [France] it infects power. This is how Thomas Sankara, the Lumumbas are dead...For him, Côte d'Ivoire accepts having been colonized by France, but [now] it belongs to the Ivoirians.

Referencing French monopoly control, he said that France prefers to be Côte d'Ivoire's "only master," and concludes that President Gbagbo will no longer accept this. Lola adds, "Today we play a real leadership role for a [reborn] Africa, a new Africa." Led by President Gbagbo, the Ivoirian people have become adults, their own masters; he has taught them equality, pride, self-sufficiency, and self-mastery.

The orators portrayed Gbagbo as a man who inspired, controlled, and signaled a transformation of African foreign relations. But they also upheld a narrative of Ivoirian exceptionalism vis-à-vis a global order. To resolve this contradiction they blamed not complicity in itself but complicity to France and its large public sector. The crisis was the culmination of years of developing in the wrong direction, so that Côte d'Ivoire has not slid in rankings, but is in fact wiping off the muck to rise from a semi-peripheral to a core country. For example, Sangaré says the 2007 Ouagadougou Accords, during which President Gbagbo met with the rebel leaders, was an historical event because, "It was the first time the Ivoirians in particular and the Africans in general showed the Occident or Europe that it was Africans themselves capable of handling it; a crisis may enter a country, but what is important is that they resolve it themselves." Like their double entendre on sacrifice, the crisis had an additional significance: it afforded an opportunity to prove to the Occident, to Africa, and to themselves the true character and strength of their country. For this they had President Gbagbo to thank: it was he who initiated these talks, insisted on Africa's independence and that its leaders were not children needing Western mediation to sort out their differences. In this new model, President Gbagbo was a father to whom they were complicit in return for first dibs on a post-crisis future.

Unlike other "yes-men," the orators explained that President Gbagbo was assured not by the *colon's* approval, but his people's, or more precisely, his patriots. Trust was reciprocal. Lola says,

[We think] Côte d'Ivoire...will be a real economy, it will be the lungs of hope for Africa's economic plan. This is a very first! To see an African Chief of State attacked by a great power and still succeed in paying its bureaucrats. And paying its debts. It has never been seen in Africa. In all of African history you have never seen an African Chief of State do what Laurent Gbagbo has done. For us, if he is given the time to direct the economy in Côte d'Ivoire, we will see a real boom.

All he needed was time to reinvent the Ivoirian miracle. He was the hope and the model for a new Africa, a responsible father who supported his children and paid his rent on time. Boka's vision for President Gbagbo's growth strategy was "entrepreneurship," and shortly after, "He must open many doors for the youth the exit out of. He must *defend* the youth." This consisted primarily of loans so that graduating students could start factories, businesses "to help their brothers," thus generating a cycle of self-sufficiency. In Boka's description, echoing earlier remarks of financed projects and microcredit cooperatives, President Gbagbo taught his people to be self-sufficient like him. So when the crisis ends, "The President will have time to help the population so that the population can get out [of the crisis]."

With President Gbagbo as the protagonist in the orators' imagined futures, only the crisis – and not his stalled elections – stood in the way. It was a convenient trope in a future whose hope otherwise sprung eternal: change is pending, change is right around the corner, the orators only need patience to see their dreams realized and their country to take its rightful place among the "council of nations."

12. Conclusion

World systems theory posited that the semi-periphery generated a hotspot of consent to a hegemonic global order. A generation after Côte d'Ivoire lost its place in the semi-periphery and

among a most unlikely group of hyper-nationalist anti-colonialist men,¹³⁰ this theory is strikingly relevant. As an incentive structure and a rhetorical logic, complicity to dominant structures revitalized the orators' own denigrated identities. The Ivoirian history as a sub-empire provided a powerful counter to the crushing African crisis narrative that denies man and state pride in what they are. Thus the orators' complicit nationalist masculinities manifested firstly in their selfhood as privileged members of the regime, and secondly, in their vision of statehood: a new Côte d'Ivoire that replaced the model of the old guard of Europe and a strong public with the American entrepreneurial state. They rejected Houphouët-Boigny's politics, lambasting his complicity to the *colon* and acting as a "yes-man," and they described themselves as revolutionaries. But they advocated liberation via the free market.

The orators' identities as peripheral men in a crisis state imperiled their masculine roles in the public and private spheres of their lives; at the base of their double complicity were their essential identities as men. Beyond national pride and entrepreneurial zeal, complicity to the state offered the orators status and support as little big men, and complicity to the neoliberal political economy promised a work-based identity. In both instances, as street politicians the orators converted themselves into patriotic entrepreneurs capitalizing on a precious opportunity.

To conclude, complicit nationalist masculinity suggests that would-be middle class Ivoirian men-turned-street politicians contested their marginality within the local and global political economy by linking their personal fortunes and self-identities to the Gbagbo regime. Their *Sorbonne* involvement offered status, livelihoods, and hope. It revitalized their identities as men, thereby constructing masculinities that were complicit to the ruling regime. In addition, their complicity reflected the developmental discourses of their youths which established Côte d'Ivoire as a regional hegemon, and of their adulthoods: neoliberal globalization celebrating the American entrepreneurial free market. They hinged their hopes on belonging within, not overturning, the Gbagbo regime and the dominant economic system. The orators' double complicity provided a framework for the ideal man and citizen in Côte d'Ivoire and the world.

13. A moment passed: A note on the orators and a post-electoral Côte d'Ivoire

While the men I interviewed are definitively out of favor with a post-electoral Côte d'Ivoire, complicit nationalist masculinity could well remain the practical strategy and ideological vision of President Alassane Ouattara's insiders. Indeed, despite the fact that his constituency is made up primarily of northerners who were excluded from the southern- and Abidjan-based "Ivoirian miracle," Ouattara's role as Prime Minister of the Houphouët-Boigny regime, post at the International Monetary Fund and strong support on the part of the international community makes it likely that his patriots will also closely identify with past and present developmental narratives.

For Gbagbo's little big men however, the international community's condemnation – including from American President Barack Obama – of Gbagbo's post-electoral power grab leaves them little choice but to adopt an isolationist stance. Although this supports the anti-imperial and "revolutionary" rhetoric President Gbagbo long used, it bars them from embracing a globally complicit framework that sought out an alternative, non-French hegemonic model. Paradoxically, their ability to maintain the guise of Gbagboist hegemony relied on the

¹³⁰ President Gbagbo's foot soldiers, as stated in the interviews they had already proved ready to take to the streets during the 2004 anti-France protests.

international community's disinterest with Ivoirian politics. Hints of an isolationist perspective – and how Côte d'Ivoire may have looked without international intervention – exist in the orators' sustained defense of President Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe.¹³¹ For example, during my fieldwork at the *Sorbonne* Zimbabwe suffered a severe cholera outbreak and President Mugabe's cries of international conspiracy were echoed in *Sorbonne* speeches. Orators made identical claims about illegal toxic waste dumps at eleven locations in Abidjan in 2006, drawing parallels to the two events. While the event in Abidjan was indeed the result of “a dark tale of globalization” (Polgreen and Simons, 2006) it almost certainly arrived in Abidjan with the collusion of local authorities receiving under-the-table pay-offs. Presidents Mugabe, Gbagbo, and their respective cronies have justified their dictatorships using anti-colonial rhetoric, rhetoric that in the face of their universal condemnation creates a vicious circle of increasing isolation. This stance is incompatible with the notion of complicity I present here. Before the elections, the orators worked within a framework that supported both man and nation. But if they must choose between using a framework that moves the state out of the periphery or pursuing a strategy that moves them out of the periphery, the latter wins – even at the expense of the national well-being.

¹³¹ Drawing parallels to Zimbabwe and the Congo, Banégas (2006: 551) suggests that integral to the Ivoirian struggle for anti-colonial self-affirmation was exclusion from the international community. I however present evidence that its history as a subimperial state led the orators to reject France but not the global system. Despite the FPI's stated revolutionary-socialist position, I demonstrate that the orators in fact embraced a decidedly neoliberal stance. But the “patriots” now face Banégas's alternative.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

1. Neoliberal citizenship and the postcolonial African state

What one needs to understand is the politics of the governed in these vast urban spaces of exclusion and invisibility. (Watts, 2005: 190)

While the global reach of the colonial project sought the exploitation of African land and labor, neoliberal globalization continues to exploit its land but not its laborers. Men of the neoliberal generation across the African diaspora relate to capitalism more often as excluded, surplus laborers than as an exploited working class. These men call themselves “youth” with their primes constructed as a period of “life on hold”; they are of a generation “situated between a glorious past, a present of sacrifices, and a radiant future” (Diouf, 2003: 6).

I have adopted Simone’s term (2010) “black urbanism” to denote the survivalist strategies and networks of groups sidelined to making other people’s histories and pushed to the urban periphery of both colony and metropole. Man – or youth – cannot live on bread alone, and as such black urbanism is also a coping strategy, an imaginary constructed around legitimated scripts of the modern neoliberal masculine subject. At its core is a literal or figurative sense of belonging, if not in the family, then in the city, the state, or the world. Framing the dilemma of excluded subjects paradoxically situated in an age of porous borders,¹³² I have shown how scholars explore the dichotomy between Africa and the “elsewhere” of the African imagination (Diouf, 2005: 231; Weiss, 2009: 127). For example, in *Chapter 4* I employed “abjection” (Ferguson, 2006) to illustrate the difficult contradictions peripheral Africans experience when their perceptions of the quality of life elsewhere render their own realities ignominious. At the same time, Ivoirians, and in particular Abidjanais, approach the future with a proud sense of exceptionalism, faith in a postcolonial history that defied negative depictions of the stalled African continent. *Chapters 7* and *8* illuminated scripts wherein patriots repositioned themselves and their locale vis-à-vis regional and global geopolitics. Nevertheless, the crisis has left the everyday Abidjanais man – citizen or not – excluded from the producer/provider narrative. Given traditional ideologies which associated marriage with adult masculinity and hence full social participation, French colonial notions of legitimate work which excluded informal activities, and the structural reality of exclusion to global capital, I have argued that peripheral Abidjanais men devise coping strategies through alternatively affirming masculinities that nevertheless draw on hegemonic local political and global cultural scripts.

Like the colonial regime, neoliberalism creates the conditions that render black urbanism so necessary. Indeed a defining quality of the postcolonial African state is its continuity with inherited colonial rule (Mamdani, 1996; Mbembe, 2001; Simone, 2010). Mbembe (2001: 24-65) calls this rule “commandment”; it operates via violence, transfers and allocations. As an allocation, the salary constituted political subjects, a claim on “clients” such that “the state granted means of livelihood to all it had put under obligation” (ibid: 45). The state also created allegiances through the private appropriation of public resources. In these ways “economic *things* were converted into social and political *things*” (ibid: 46, emphasis in original). The state

¹³² Perhaps *paradigmatic* is a better way to describe the excluded subject, since neoliberal globalization generates freer flows of capital, goods, information and communication, but heightened regulation of people.

no longer capable of ensuring a salaried or “productive” identity or of redistributing goods to ensure a subsistence life, this state-society arrangement has broken down. Mbembe (ibid: 83-84) writes that the postcolonial state’s main concern is now “...controlling access to the parallel economy...Henceforth, ‘citizens’ are those who can have access to the networks of the parallel economy, and to the means of livelihood for survival that the economy makes possible.” This consists of extraction in the form of, for example, bribes at traffic stops or questionable payments for identification papers. In doing so, postcolonial citizenship for the neoliberal generation confers to those with direct access to the state and by extension, their social and familial networks. The *Sorbonne* orators were in the privileged position to make claims on what remained of the Ivoirian miracle. They achieved this by developing a relationship to the state whereby they were its sole *citizens*. As surplus non-citizens, the vendors were subjected to a constant barrage of informal state extraction.

The autochthon’s rallying cry is another prominent characteristic of neoliberal postcolonial citizenship. In a period of contested citizenship, claims on authentic belonging increase. Focused on family origin and birthplace, localized identities give “rise to exclusionary practices, ‘identity closure’ and persecution...” (Mbembe, 2001: 87). Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2001) attribute the rise of autochthony to neoliberal labor control, predicated on a “seesaw” of belonging and exclusion. As capital demands more flexible labor systems, making labor increasingly insecure, its history since colonialism of both “freeing and containing labor...has been crucial in setting the stage for the emergence of autochthony movements...” (ibid: 180). Experiencing prolonged economic crisis, the Ivoirian state engages a xenophobic climate to narrow its legitimate constituency. Autochthony generates a “politics of belonging” with the state more interested in separating insiders from outsiders than in fomenting national citizenship (ibid: 159).

Migration has been a definitive – and welcomed – pattern of African labor well before colonialism (Konseiga, 2005; Mamdani, 1996). However, neoliberal citizenship has “developed separate links to new spaces, becoming rearticulated, redefined, and reimagined...Such de- and relinking of citizenship elements, actors, and spaces have been occasioned by the dispersion and realignment of market strategies, resources, and actors” (Ong, 2007: 7). In short, neoliberal citizenship in an increasingly autochthonous Africa reflects a global trend toward greater exclusion. The mobile street vendors in my study were endemic of this trend. In postcolonial Côte d’Ivoire, the working-nationalist hierarchies clearly associated migrants with their trades and low-level informal work typecasts all such workers as non-citizens, justifying their constant harassment and desperate poverty. Rejecting citizenship claims takes a burden off of the crisis state while scapegoating and stigmatizing peripheral men. In response the men bypass the state in search of affirming masculinities in the culture of the African diaspora.

Writing at the dawn of African independence, Fanon ([1961] 1963) described how the national middle class – in other words the urban classes, those initial few to embrace the modernization narrative and profit from the colonial labor system – led but did not reflect the global South’s revolutionary class in philosophy or livelihood. He predicted that a peasant-initiated revolution would instead find its “urban spearhead” in the *lumpenproletariat*, that surplus population found “on the outer fringe of the urban centers” (ibid: 129). But he warns of the middle class’s persistent dominance, representing “the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism” (ibid: 152).

Far from revolution, Côte d'Ivoire transitioned peacefully to independence, and in fact rather reluctantly with President Houphouët-Boigny inclined to a "French Community" of West African countries. A proud bastion of African European civility, Abidjan was renowned for its tall buildings and planned boulevards, not peripheral shanties. Ivoirians of the post-independence generation experienced the Ivoirian miracle as steady employment in Plateau's climate-controlled offices and homes in cushy, well-manicured Cocody homes; in other words, steadily improving middle-class materiality carved out in spaces once regulated by the French *colon*. The *lumpenproletariat* consisted of foreigners and migrants. This implicit social contract between state and citizen was secured under President Houphouët-Boigny's open-door policy welcoming regional migrant labor while simultaneously expressing national solidarity through periodic xenophobic outbursts against these outsiders (Banégas, 2006; Crook, 1997; Daddieh, 2001; Konseiga, 2005; Sandbrook, 1985). Of Ivoirian ethnic-nationalist tensions, Fanon ([1961] 1963: 156) wrote about how "These foreigners are called on to leave; their shops are burned, their street stalls are wrecked, and in fact the government of the Ivory Coast commands them to go, giving their nationals satisfaction."

Conflating class and citizenship by creating a common, despised "other" ensured complicity to both the state and its neocolonial arrangements. When this social contract fell apart, the privileged children of the post-independence generation became *would-be middle class* citizens. They joined the ranks of the foreigners/northerners they long despised, individuals of questionable belonging. Those foreigners/northerners constitute the neoliberal generation's *would-be working class* of tenuous citizenship. They compete for work and dignity in a post-miracle Côte d'Ivoire against the smokescreens of neoliberal ideology that define the parameters of potent masculinity.

The Ivoirian miracle was predicated on complicity to a Franco-Ivoirian neocolonial regime and cheap regional labor. With remarkable stability it guaranteed inclusion for a few and enough to get by for the majority. Later, it generated mounting autochthonous claims amid a shrinking resource base, and eventually a decade of political conflict. President Gbagbo entrenched his rule under the auspices of a southern-based patriotic movement which he also framed as an independence "revolution" against neocolonialism, using conspiratorial allegations to mute northerners' claims of mistreatment. Over his ten-year tenure he repeatedly accused Ouattara of collaborating with the French and masterminding the northern "rebellion." His constituents seized the revolutionary narrative as their own. Like the "pimps, the hooligans, *the unemployed*, and the petty criminals, urged on from behind," they "throw themselves into the struggle for liberation like stout working men... These *workless less-than-men* are rehabilitated in their own eyes and in the eyes of history" (Fanon [1961] 1963: 130, emphasis added). In search of what they believe belongs to them, the would-be middle class, workless less-than-men found meaning for themselves in the patriotic movement, the "revolution." But this middle-class's calls to independence were predicated on exclusion. "Since the sole motto of the bourgeoisie is 'Replace the foreigner'" (ibid: 158), a struggle ensued to define authentic belonging and thus entitlement to the crumbs of yesteryear's miracle. For the patriots from the south, as "nationals of these rich regions [they] look upon the others with hatred, and find in them envy and covetousness, and homicidal impulses" (ibid: 159). In a rhetorical twist the *revolution* opposes the *rebellion*: a civil war of would-be middle class citizens pitted against the would-be working class of tenuous citizenship.

2. Masculinity and belonging on the periphery

African ethnographies of the crisis entertain new forms of space, sociality, and resistance. Confronting the struggles of informal life, its treacherous uncertainties and the bureaucratic obtuseness of an elite state, its authors have emphasized that operating under the radar has proven a crucial means of survival. Peripheral urban residents expand the state's, and capital's, ruptures and leakages, seizing opportunities that come their way to carve out an ugly, but stubbornly persistent existence amidst decaying social, physical, and institutional structures. In this dissertation I introduced gender as a critical node of the African crisis. Identifying the continuity between colonialism's gendered conquest and the neoliberal crisis, I emphasized the normative binaries it assigned to depict the African city. The city, the loci of the twin projects of capitalism and modernity, was also the centerpiece for a masculine subjectivity set on conquering the periphery's chaos and establishing a "civilized" mankind at the workplace and in the home. As properties, capitalism and modernity accrued to the male subject. Aimed at producing a formalized order, the core was to expand outward and subsume the periphery with the same ideological thrust as the colonial campaign to encompass the territories.

Thus I emphasized in *Chapter 3* that gendered promises brought gendered betrayals. The impact of crisis on the city, the public sphere, and a wage-generating economy bore negatively on male subjectivity. My gendered approach toward understanding sociality constructed in crisis emphasizes the continuity in derogatory, gendered binary conceptualizations of the colonial periphery and of the contemporary crisis city structured around informal activity. I highlight how peripheral men counter negative perceptions with stated complicity, their worth as modern masculine subjects hinged on the success of the colonialist/capitalist project.

In *Chapters 4* and *7* I demonstrated ways men with and without access to the state contested the crisis narrative and buttressed their masculine subjectivities through their occupation of public space. Through imagery or discourse, both engaged a localized vernacular pertinent to the crisis. For the former, men territorialized Abidjan's city center, using a discourse that also centered Côte d'Ivoire in the world. For the latter, men territorialized public spaces with images of a borderless black, consumerist and youthful masculinity. While the *Sorbonne* attempted to define a dominant masculinity irrespective of the crisis, the barbershop signs imagined a gender-segregated world where, in the absence of women, their failures as men were irrelevant. There, they could be *garçon* with pride.

Chapters 5, 6, and 8 looked at men themselves: orators who symbolized the political crisis and the strategies they as informal actors pursued when capable of accessing the state, and vendors who symbolized the economic crisis and the strategies they as everyday men pursued when the state was either a neutral or adversarial agent. In vastly different ways, all of the men from my study seized available strategies to vindicate their peripheral masculinities. For the orators, this strategy was political; for the vendors, it was cultural. But both worked within the framework of a regionally hegemonic city, a postcolonial state, and a neoliberal world.

The entrepreneur and the consumer present dominant and socially legitimated participative models of masculinity in the neoliberal economy. The entrepreneur implies the capacity to restore a productive identity and the consumer mimics the provider identity. However, falling short of secure means to support oneself and one's family according to the colonialist-capitalist promise of modern – and male-dominated – formal wage labor, neither accomplishes the task of securing adult masculinity. Instead these identities orient peripheral men away from their families and toward the market, validated by way of their complicity to capital. The orators' and vendors' masculinities are complicit while remaining peripheral, even

as the former rose to the status of little big men straddled between peripheral Abidjan and the country's powerbrokers.

Patriotic entrepreneurs, the orators garnered a privileged place on Abidjan's periphery in return for complicity to the promise of what Côte d'Ivoire was and still could be. As they articulated their vision of the Ivoirian miracle the orators exhibited a neoliberal ideology behind their concept of freedom, in effect a double complicity vis-à-vis the Gbagbo regime and the neoliberal economy. They hedged their bets on a state charged with generating the appropriate infrastructure – financed projects and international investment, not job creation or a welfare state – to produce the modern, neoliberal man and his family.

The vendors are figures of the African crisis. They illustrate the state's failed gendered producer-provider narrative and the privatization of national economies (Diouf, 2003). They are extreme examples of global financial institution's austerity measures and the flexible labor regime that has rendered so many peripheral men financially-*cum*-socially inadequate. And indicative of the neoliberal state, despite offering little in the way of opportunity, it operates considerable authority over their lives. Bypassing the state, the vendors trespassed onto modernity's frontiers, negating the Ivoirian miracle to become protagonists of a black urbanism, a narrative at once localized and borderless. Cynically Danon, a migrated vendor remarked, "They say Côte d'Ivoire is the most beautiful. But they lie, there is nothing here, they have nothing. It is a beautiful country but they have nothing, they have no money. This is why they chase us." However, vendors' Mtv masculinities are nonetheless complicit. The alterity with which they identify emerged out of surplus black male body's search for place in a capitalist world.

Banégas (2006: 545) writes, "The ultranationalist mobilisation of 'patriotic' youth...[is] a means for social juniors to take power by imposing themselves in the public sphere as a political category in their own right." Similarly, Weiss (2009: 169) remarks that "...what we might call aspirational consumption and its attendant politics of appearances can be grasped as part of a wider problem of participation." Peripheral men are suspended youth, demographic indications of a malignant legacy that predicated gendered worth on a place within the colonial, and later neocolonial, political economy. As they shifted from exploited workers to excluded *chômeurs* they sought social legitimacy as participants in the neoliberal world. They found this legitimacy as patriotic entrepreneurs and Mtv masculinities.

Both orators and vendors were complicit to neoliberalism, ensuring the continued dominance of gendered political economic structures that penalize "feminine" work and workers – categories that have expanded rapidly in the past quarter-century. Although their masculine worth suffered from these conceptualizations they purposefully embodied identities celebrating the neoliberal paradigm. Insistent on participation, peripheral Abidjanais men facilitate a relationship to capital in the absence of a marriageable, adult masculine identity. But as Prospère explains, "Here in Africa, here the vision of each human being is to have a child, a child to keep the name of his father...If you have no children you are forgotten."

Peripheral Abidjanais men's desires to affirm their masculine identities as neoliberal actors demonstrate gender's capacity to monitor belonging and secure consent to a hegemonic system. While the state-supported producer-provider bureaucrat is a dwindling reality, entrepreneurialism and consumerism purport to operate democratically, with individuals the world over *free* to make something of themselves and to spend with abandon. They suggest that market identities carry enough social standing to supplant their failures as husbands. They

effectively redefine the appropriate orientation for peripheral men, away from their prospective families and toward the neoliberal economy.

3. Complicity and belonging in Africa and the world

I have demonstrated that peripheral Abidjanais men with state connections borrowed from semi-periphery *and* neoliberal discourse to articulate nationalist-autochthonous subjectivities, using world systems framing that positioned Côte d'Ivoire as an exceptional state to similarly position themselves under contemporary globalization. Men without state connections referenced the African diaspora for media-inspired, consumerist black masculinities. I called these strategies “complicit nationalist masculinity” and “complicit global masculinity,” respectively. Imagining themselves connected to the global economy as entrepreneurs or consumers, they reacted dialectically to Africa's, and African men's, excluded relationship to neoliberal capitalism.

Belonging is a crucial issue in global society today, and the theoretical implications of this dissertation extend beyond Africa: first, the enduring ideal of productive masculinity ensures complicity to capital despite deep economic marginalization; and second, internalized global scripts for workers and citizens, cultural or political, are powerful tools individuals employ to establish their being-in-the-world. While most starkly illuminated by the African case, belonging is the central concern for contemporary global society given that capital and its accompanying hegemonic ideologies work as easily by exclusion as by exploitation. It further confirms that power operates as a dialectic: those who set the terms of the debate also frame its response, hence the neoliberal conflict predicated on exclusion and belonging. The script is also essential. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, I have shown that global scripts (developmental discourse for politics, consumption for culture) are tools that people on the ground internalize *and* domesticate (i.e. black urbanism, Ivoirian miracle, Paris of West Africa) to establish their own sense of being-in-the-world. Thus we find articulations of complicity on the level of man and citizen, and in the realm of culture and politics.

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Appendix 1 Zapin and the Academy Rap Revolution

Commandant Zapin¹³³ and the Academy Rap Revolution offer examples of how identities at work and at play may mutually reinforce one another on Abidjan's periphery. An inspiring twenty-three year-old, Zapin was a well-known musician in Abobo and within his means was actively involved in his neighborhood community. He was the president and founder of Academy Rap Revolution, an organization that educated neighborhood youth, performed community service, taught trades and provided job placement, had an emergency insurance fund and put on rap shows. His popularity as an artist and active community member greatly helped his sales: friends in the music network doubled as clients and many in his neighborhood exclusively patronized Academy shops. His activities were thus a source of notoriety and a survival strategy – a slight edge within an insufficient informal economy.

Though far from being a big man, like a little big man his renown helped him secure business contacts for his various trades, while he also established petty patronage systems, such as giving free haircuts (regularly 200CFA) to friends or young neighborhood men down on their luck. He had “adopted” two boys, regularly feeding and clothing them. In this way he approximated a father: “Here in my home, my neighborhood, I have a little family that I take care of.” Zapin's dream of becoming a famous musician abroad involved returning to Côte d'Ivoire to build houses and orphanages in Africa like Tiken Jah Fakoly, an Ivoirian reggae musician who had made it big abroad. A tour I took of his neighborhood's Academy influence included visiting several Academy and affiliated shops, the *maquis* where they held performances and the studio where they rehearsed, a road rehabilitation project, one group of Academy mobile street vendors, a school where they had a designated space for teaching reading and writing and sex and health education, members' houses, and meeting members, supporters, and patrons on the street.

Dressing in hip hop, inserting English words and rapper's posturing into his act, Zapin admired black Americans for the global influence they commanded. He described formative moments as a young boy watching rappers on television, saying that, seeing they were black like him, he resolved that “we were the same.” I asked him why he preferred this style over *zouglou* and he replied,

Zouglou describes the realities of life for students, of daily life here. But [hip hop], me I know that here we live like shit, in Burkina [Faso] they live like shit, in Kinshasa they live like shit, even in Brazil, they live like shit. So one must speak of it all, to make it known, see. *Zouglou* is local, it's here, yes, it's only for Ivoirians or the sub-region...But I say, I want that you, you in America, I want that you know me, Zapin here in Abobo or in Yopougon, [to know that] things are not good...So rap, it's universal. *Zouglou*, it's not universal.

Nonetheless, shortly thereafter he described Ivoirian music as the “platform” of African music, and a country with a “beautiful culture” where all African musicians pass through on their way to Europe. Zapin's account indicates themes that have figured centrally in my analysis: oscillating between the Ivoirian reality of crisis and reputation as a regional hegemon; an appreciation for

¹³³ Commandant Zapin is his stage name.

black Americans because of a shared sense of likeness; the notion that black American music is mutually representative of an African and African diaspora identity beyond what is possible locally, but also that it offers a means out and a thus a method to enhance one's reputation in Abidjan and Côte d'Ivoire.

Further, in Zapin's vision of the Academy Rap Revolution, blackness and business are fused such that his project was both about music and an entrepreneurial venture. Emphasizing solidarity and the need for economic gain, in the late 1990s Zapin founded Academy Rap Revolution, a neighborhood association intended to form local rappers, and more generally to develop men in local trades and provide support with start-up capital or in case of illness or accident. There were approximately forty-three Academy members at the time of my fieldwork, ranging from their late teens to thirties, though all the men with whom I spoke were at least in their mid-twenties. Zapin said there were a few women, but I never met any while visiting Academy shops or attending performances. All of the men were single, a few had children. Beyond barbershops, they supported a variety of other local trades, including commissioning paintings and signage for local venues in addition to booking musicians for gigs (and in all cases Academy leadership worked actively to secure contracts for its members), and mobile street vending. There were around fifteen *commerçants* (including mobile street vendors). All members paid monthly dues, and they had accumulated three collective barbershops whose profits went fully to the Academy in addition to supporting independently-owned barbershops within the organization. They calculated dues according to the profitability of the trade; for example, barbers paid out thirty percent of their earnings, mechanics fifteen percent, and *commerçants* five percent.

The Academy organized business and emergency funds into two separate accounts, and the leadership, composed of eight central members, or "counselors," included a treasurer charged with managing those funds. Members could disburse funding only by the consensus of two leadership members and the receiving party. Regular group meetings allowed members to collectively agree on who received money and the terms of its disbursement on case-by-case bases. They emphasized that business loans were aimed at generating profits. Zapin gave the examples of typical loans in the form of 60,000CFA for equipment or 100,000CFA for a new space. Members who received money for illness or emergencies were not required to pay it back.

For earnings from performance gigs secured from Academy networks, members returned forty percent. Academy-sponsored shows were opportunities to make money as well as to exchange with other neighborhoods, advertise their organization, and encourage men from other neighborhoods to adopt similar systems. Zapin boasted that the Academy model had picked up in a number of Abidjan neighborhoods and even in the country's interior.

Zapin's typical workday involved cutting hair from 6am until 9am, mobile street vending from 10am until 6pm, and returning to his barbershop to cut hair until as late as 10pm. He began vending in 2002 as a consequence of the crisis. He referred to his inner circle of friends within the collective as "VIP," and they secured much of their clientele through their renown in their Abobo neighborhood and on Abidjan's music scene. For example, many of the customers who bought the clothes he peddled on the street were other hip hop artists and through these networks he could trust selling to them on credit, thereby generating a somewhat-steady income. He explained, "People come, when I rap they come to buy...There, it is a network, that is it. Moreover, my friends, my fans come to see me, to buy things from me, they come to cut their hair at my barbershop. So I think with my music, I gain." Furthermore, to speak to their local renown, while I was in the field the Academy had entered into talks with the Abobo mayor for

authorization to vend in front of the mayor's office, directly confronting charges of illegality in mobile street vending.

In making communal 50,000CFA monthly contributions, Zapin's three-man hip hop group *Eastwave*, all Academy members, had saved enough to purchase a recording studio: a small room with a computer and recording equipment in addition to a homemade soundproofing room. *Eastwave* members rotated vending responsibilities along Abobo's main thoroughfare, with one man typically setting out shirts on a tarp along the medium and another walking down the street with a loudspeaker and samples. They purchased their goods in bulk from Ghana, with shirts for 200-300CFA that they sold for a "negotiable 1500CFA" (they would bargain down as far as 500CFA). As part of a well-organized, collective effort, Zapin explained that at any given moment, someone was always on the street selling.

The Academy Rap Revolution provides an example of how what appears at first to be a simple fascination with American culture and an Mtv masculinity-inspired dream is in fact a way for marginal men to not only establish themselves in their local cultural scene but also, through solidarity and establishing a local reputation, to improve their livelihoods.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Sadly, despite an impressive near decade-long tenure, only months after leaving the field I learned that Zapin's finances were in crisis with the sudden death of his mother, two founding Academy members had been arrested for marijuana possession, and struggling to maintain its funding, organization and leadership during this difficult period, the Academy was on the brink of closure.

Appendix 2
La correspondante

I had just met Tino and MC in Adjamé market and we were navigating the main thoroughfare to catch a *baca* to Yopougon. Tino and I were engaged in conversation a few paces ahead when we noticed MC no longer with us. He was thick in a discussion with a police officer. I did not ask how it started but I knew that MC, in his dark sunglasses, do-rag, and baggy pants easily found trouble with authority figures, and his fast talking did not always get him out of it. As usual, the problem became official when the identification card MC produced at the officer's request was barely discernable. The flimsy thing looked like a dog had gone to work on it, but it was all he had and not easy to replace. Thus MC was at the officer's mercy: he could demand a bribe, seize his identification, or even take him to the station.

If there was any progress being made when Tino and I approached, it was towards making MC's life a little more difficult. I stepped in to bear witness to the injustice, confident that my obvious foreignness – my light skin color – would avert the unfolding disaster. The officer looked at me. Then he looked me up and down. He smiled, suddenly MC's ally. Knowingly, congratulatorily – indeed respectfully – he asked MC, *Tu t'as trouvé une correspondante?* or, “You have yourself found a correspondent?” Within moments they were doing secret handshakes and MC was explaining that he was an *artist*. His hip hop attire no longer signaled rebellion, but access to a world *elsewhere*, one that entailed women – *foreign [white] women*. MC was *the man*. After a few more chuckles with MC and hungry looks at me, he sent us off with the best of wishes.

If asked to choose one subject that my life and research consistently touched but is absent in my dissertation, and hence a “direction for future research” to recommend, it is the phenomenon, alive and kicking, of the peripheral subaltern man in search of a *correspondante*. In the happily-ever-after version of this story, it ends with a marriage visa, but even without, there are abundant kudos in being seen coupling with a woman from the metropole. Almost every man I met within my generational cohort at some occasion waxed lyrical – and pointedly – about his fantasy to have an American woman.¹³⁵ It could begin with a correspondence: they might phone each other, email, or write letters. Eventually they would meet. She would take him back, take him away. She would make a man out of him in a way the Ivoirian women could/would not: beyond her financial independence if not abundance, for prospective takers the exotic circumstance of cross-cultural love made him an attractive, even marriageable catch in a way his ordinariness in Abidjan forbade. Further, his association with her assured status despite anything he was or was not in Abidjan. And finally, a marriage visa afforded unbounded opportunities to revitalize his denigrated masculinity with the hopes for a better life, one with work, money, and the unbounded material possessions of the global North. In our run-in, I expected the officer to curb his trivial oppressions out of, I admit, the intimidation suggested by the inherent authority of my skin color. MC was no longer invisible with me, and this fact was a privilege I used to help out my friends and research subjects whenever the police confronted us.

¹³⁵ The ideal woman was Canadian for my Canadian girlfriend, Dutch for my Dutch girlfriend; the point was that the grass was greener on the other side. And I do not intend to exclude my French sisters: although Ouattara's critics are quick to point out that his wife is a blonde Frenchman, they ignore the fact that so was Gbagbo's first wife.

But I had not expected him to back off out of a boy's club respect – the assumption that I was MC's score.

Issues of gender, race, class, and nationality all came up repeatedly over the course of my fieldwork. As an African-American *métisse* woman studying peripheral black African men this came as no surprise, and a significant concern for my research was how to handle these situations in the moment they arose and as a broader framework structuring my interactions. In *Chapter 1* I discussed the possibilities and limitations of my ethnographic study. In this appendix I explore these encounters further, repeating some themes but expanding on them specifically with regard to the influence my various identities had on my subjects. My identity transmitted economic capabilities and possibilities for social and cultural crossover. As a figure in my subject's lives I stimulated creativity and hope, yet illuminated the deficits that set apart the imagined elsewhere from everyday reality.

As an American, I opened a path to a figurative, temporal and spatial borderland. My presence – and interest – in their lives affirmed my respondents and provided a much sought-after local visibility. For the duration of my fieldwork, I was an abbreviated escape out of the worlds they inhabited. From their perspective, my seemingly limitless resources offered a direct path out of peripheral Abidjan and into the lifestyle – consumption capacities – of the central city. Our association allowed men to shift into worlds otherwise denied to them, awaking desires and tendencies that without my access remained dormant. Moreover I was an outlet to a more permanent elsewhere, my respondents dimly hoping that our contact could help them escape. A few hours into a meeting, conversations inevitably turned toward the good life that was America, near-mythical accounts of distant acquaintances who had journeyed over, and earnest inquiries into contacts I may have at the American embassy.

As a member of the African diaspora, I gained automatic entry into the world of peripheral Abidjanais men that, while not one of them, was the next best thing – or better. I have described how respondent reported his emergent consciousness as a young boy watching African-American musicians perform and recognizing that they were “black like me.” Another bragged of being mistaken for an “Anglo” because of his hip hop attire. In seeking to stand apart from other men by participating in local music or sports scenes or creating a persona by virtue of their dress, I became an accessory: a precious and rare, tangible commodity. Further, my attention in their lives legitimated the identities they sought to embody for themselves and for their friends and acquaintances. Finally, I was a source of information, a live node through which to compare imagination against reality.

As a *métisse* I could be white or black as the situation necessitated. The first question the *Sorbonne* president asked me was if I was a black American, and was satisfied at my affirmative response. Upon hearing *la blanche!* [the white woman!] at the *Sorbonne* an informant quickly qualified that I was an American *métisse* – thereby affirming that I was on their side, part of their struggle. This same informant walked with pride when my visiting white American girlfriend and I met up with him for a drink at his local *maquis* in Yopougon. For months following he asked after her, telling me how she was the most beautiful woman he had ever met. Kaffa, the orator with the dildo, made a point to incorporate me into his act. To an eager crowd, he often played off the fact that I had arrived with an African man by shaking his hand and congratulating him for his “adventure” in France. With vendors whom I more frequently met in public spaces in peripheral neighborhoods, the prideful strut with me in tow was familiar, as was hearing approving shout-outs to the men and *la blanche* to me. But they also accepted me unequivocally as a real-life artifact of black America and everything it embodied, and they treated me as an

expert on all things in black American popular culture. In short, my race conveniently served whatever purpose they wanted it to, advantageous for me as much as them.

And lastly, as I stated initially, as a woman I figured into the emerging fantasy of accessing elsewhere through a marriage visa. Men shamelessly shared their desire to find a *correspondante* – if not me, any friend of mine would do – for a potential partnership. However, the social and economic opportunities of my citizenship also entailed a gendered role reversal, rendering me in charge, a powerful producer and consumer, and entitled with opportunities that existed only in their imaginations. While my affiliation afforded them a modicum of these opportunities and legitimated their cultural personas, they did not eradicate the embarrassing fact that I did for them what they wished to do for the women they did not have.

Thus within our exchange remained the constant “global shadow” (c.f. Ferguson, 2006) that they were excluded, my time with them was transient as was the status my contact afforded; though our exchange was to propel me onto greater things, their futures were riddled with insecurity and uncertainty. Despite our shared black identities, they were youths unable to provide for me in the way that men elsewhere certainly could: all things aside, I was still a woman and they were still men. Hence the question from the boldest among them: would I ever marry an Ivoirian?

My closest informants were my research assistants Tino and MC, hip hop musicians and perfume vendors whom I paid a small salary and helped invaluablely by storing their music online, and producing and performing with them. Their rising local repute nevertheless faded when I left Abidjan. Occasionally they still call me, asking for money or just to recall the “good times.” Wistfully, perhaps a bit desperately, Tino recently said to me over a poor connection, “Jordanna, life in Abidjan is very hard.”