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## **Displays of Masculinity and Rituals of Display: Congolese Immigration and Xenophobia in Johannesburg**

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Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has become home to a large number of Congolese who fled the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (RC) for socio-political or economic reasons. Most have moved into central Johannesburg to the neighbourhoods of Yeoville and Berea, which, once dominated by upper-class whites, have now become havens for the arriving Congolese immigrants. Both Yeoville and Berea have transformed under the Congo influence. At the centre of Yeoville, for example, has emerged the *Gamebela* market, which, similar to the Kinshasa market of the same name, sells Congolese favourites like palm oil, cassava leaves and cassava bread. Neighbourhood restaurants advertise ‘the finest *chikwanga* [toasted] cassava bread this side of Congo’ and municipal parks support live or piped-in *Congolese rumba*, *soukous* or *kwasa-kwasa* music for the large Congolese crowds that gather there on weekends. International call shops and Congolese video warehouses have become popular meeting hubs, where Congolese share information on job opportunities, discuss the latest news from Congo or simply offer moral support. Some streets in Yeoville and Berea have become so popular among Congolese that certain blocks of apartments have come to bear such titles as ‘Zairian Town’ or ‘Little Kinshasa.’ (Bouillon 2001: 35).

Many Congolese may have arrived in South Africa with hopes to integrate but the consistent prejudices imposed against them (and other Black African immigrants) by White and Black South Africans have made those hopes of integration near impossible. “Xenophobia is widespread in South Africa,” explains Pierre, a Congolese music producer who now lives

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outside Johannesburg. “It inflicts tension, violence and hatred on immigrants. ...It makes [for the Congolese] a difficult life here” (Interview 2015). In the words of sociologist Allan Morris, the growing intolerance South Africans have developed toward Black immigrants is a result of a long-term apartheid agenda: “When a group has no history of incorporating strangers it may find it difficult to be welcoming” (1998: 1125).

Many Congolese men living in South Africa have reacted to this rise of intolerance with a renewed sense of defiance and pride. Although the goal of xenophobia may be to denigrate and marginalise, these men have responded with boasts that their culture is not only equal to that of South Africa—it is better. At the root of this argument is music and fashion, arguably popular male-pastimes back in Congo. In South Africa, they are transformed into a vehicle for “show[ing] everyone...that the Congolese are number one” (Claude Interview 2010). Soukous, the popular Congolese-based music, as example, is used in South Africa as a tool to validate social status abroad, with Congolese in South Africa hiring soukous musicians back home in Congo (DRC and RC) to sing about them and their perceived accomplishments. Further, *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes* (translated as Society for Ambianceurs and Persons of Elegance, and known by the acronym SAPE), a movement of style and fashion that originated in RC and developed later in DRC, also plays an important role in Congolese affirming status in South Africa. “We dress for respect,” says one Congolese man (James Interview 2015). As argued in this article, soukous and la SAPE, characterised here through notions of masculinity and display, reverse the hierarchies of inferiority imposed by xenophobia; they endow South Africa with a sense of rootedness and authenticity that empowers participating Congolese with opportunities for new imaginaries and practices of belonging.

This study seeks to determine to what extent rituals of display and displays of masculinity encourage Congolese in South Africa to unite and assert a renewed sense of identity, and, in the process, counter the discrimination directed against them. Borrowing from

Pierre Bourdieu, rituals of display are analysed here as ‘strategies of self-presentation’ and ‘signs of distinction’ (1984) that challenge the order of things. The expression ‘displays of masculinity’ is used here to denote the behaviors and attitudes that convey perceptions of masculinity among the Congolese men living in Johannesburg. Soukous and la SAPE, which serve as significant male-identity activities in the Congo, maintain similar functionality in Johannesburg. They afford the Congolese immigrant men of Johannesburg with opportunities for maintaining familiar, competitive constructions of masculinity from home, while providing an occasion for the subversion of norms as defined by Black and White South Africa; in effect creating a ‘society outside society’ that opposes experiences of isolation as caused by uprooting and xenophobia. As we shall see, soukous and la SAPE reconfigure exchanges with ‘home’ (both in South Africa and back in Congo) and, as a result, provide an opportunity to review connections between place, identity, culture and power, and call into question notions of the transnational and the local.

The investigation for this article was carried out between 2010 and 2016 in which Congolese living in Johannesburg were interviewed. Supporting claims that la SAPE and soukous are male-dominated activities, the majority of interviewees in this study are male. Most are aged between 16 and 32. The research is based on qualitative, content-analysis methodology, where additional questions were made and clarification was requested during the interview process as a result of what the interviewees may say.

### Historical Overview of the Congolese in Johannesburg

To view the history of Congolese immigration into South Africa is to place it alongside that country’s complex tenets of inclusion and exclusion. Years of apartheid not only separated Blacks from Whites; it also divided South African Blacks into perceived ethnic groupings and separated them into distinct areas of residence. This established and normalised attitudes of

superiority as built around ideas of difference, which helped forge the xenophobic approaches facing South Africa today (Adjai and Lazaridis 2013: 192).

Migration during apartheid also comprised a complex culture of inclusion and exclusion. Black immigration, for example, was carefully regulated while White immigration was vigorously sought. In fact, most of the country's White population are either immigrants or the descendants of immigrants arriving there during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Perbedy and Crush 1998), many 'actively recruited' through government-supported financial assistant packages (Morris 1998: 1118). In contrast, Black workers from neighbouring countries, including Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, were explicitly contracted to work as cheap labour in the mines and farms during apartheid. Yet, they were provided few rights and had limited legal protection in the country; and when their labour was no longer required, they were dismissed.

Under apartheid, Johannesburg was viewed as the 'European city' of Africa. Cosmopolitan in scope, it breathed an international sophistication, its city centre boasting high-rise luxury apartments and high-end shopping affordable only to upper class whites. With the end of apartheid and the eventual promise of integration, however, Whites fled the inner city, and moved into the northern suburbs and into gated communities. Businesses, too, relocated to northern Sandown and Bryanston, establishing a new business and financial district that is known today as Sandton (which takes its name from combining the suburb names of Sandown and Bryanston). Black South Africans, previously assigned to surrounding townships, in turn began moving into the city centre, where housing became immediately more affordable.

Immigration bans were lifted at the end of apartheid, which brought further changes to Johannesburg. An increasing number of African immigrants travelled to South Africa, eager to take advantage of its developing economy, with most taking residence in Johannesburg's city centre, including such neighbourhoods of Yeoville and Berea. It is estimated that migration by Black South Africans as well as other Black Africans into the city centre rose so sharply after

apartheid that a predicted 90% of persons living there today were not there a decade ago. Writes Graeme Gotz and Abdoumalik Simone, central Johannesburg became ‘a veritable vacuum of belonging’ after apartheid, “where almost no one presently living there can claim an overarching sense of origin in this place or profess a real wish to” (2003: 129).

Many of the entering Blacks coming from neighbouring South African countries were undocumented, the majority being Mozambicans who fled civil war in their home country (Morris 1998: 1118; Polzer 2007). More asylum seekers and refugees also relocated to South Africa after apartheid, with the majority believed to come from Congo (Kadima 1999; Morris 1998). Compared to the Blacks arriving from Southern Africa, however, the number of Congolese coming into the country “is clearly negligible...and it is only in certain of Johannesburg's inner-city neighbourhoods that their presence is prominent” (Morris 1998: 1120).

The Congolese migration into South Africa actually began during the apartheid years; their choice to migrate to the country eased by the fact that the Congolese were provided free, visa-less access throughout and directly after apartheid (due to the close ties between the DRC dictator Mobutu and South Africa’s apartheid government). The Congolese migration can be divided into three separate waves, with persons arriving in the country at different times, for different reasons and with different expectations. The first wave migrated during the mid-1980s as a way to escape the political and economic turmoil in their home country. Most were doctors, engineers and teachers, supporting Nauja Kleist’s claim that a country’s well-educated are the first to leave when war or political unrest ignites (2007: 120). The second wave arrived between 1991 and 1993, when civil war and the collapse of *Gécamines* (the state-owned mining company) resulted in high unemployment (Nest, Grignon and Kisangani 2006). The third wave—which continues yet today—began with the 1994 Rwanda genocidal killings, which brought a new onslaught of political, economic and social concerns to Congo. Contrary to previous waves, the Congolese arriving in this third wave have been largely unschooled and

unskilled.

The upsurge of African immigration that occurred after apartheid has been (and continues to be) met with critical discontent, particularly by local media. As the research of Ransford Danso and David Alexander McDonald indicates, “the coverage of international migration by the South African press has been largely anti-immigrant and unanalytical” (2000: 115). It “tends to be...reproducing problematic research and anti-immigrant terminology uncritically” (Danso and McDonald 2000: 118), regularly clumping immigrants together under the term ‘illegal’, while cautioning that they are “‘flooding into the country to find work’ and ...‘are unacceptably encroaching on the informal sector and therefore on the livelihoods of our huge number of unemployed people’” (Neocosmos 2008: 590). Newspapers have also posed connections between immigration and crime. Michael Neocosmos quotes from *Financial Mail*, 9 September 1994: “the high rate of crime and violence—mainly gun-running, drug trafficking and armed robbery—is directly related to the rising number of illegals in SA” (ibid.).

The media encroached fear of immigration has been further fuelled by the post-apartheid government. In his first speech as Minister of Home Affairs, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, for example, announced in 1998 that, “If we as South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with millions of aliens who are pouring into South Africa, then we can bid goodbye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme” (Human Rights Watch 1998: 20). Buthelezi later argued that, “The employment of illegal immigrants is unpatriotic because it deprives South Africans of jobs and that the rising level of immigrants has awesome implications for the [Reconstruction and Development Programme] as they will be absorbing unacceptable proportions of housing subsidies and adding to the difficulties we will be experiencing in health care” (in Reitzes 1994: 8). Amos Masondo, Johannesburg’s Executive Mayor made immigration a theme in his ‘State of the City 2004 Address,’ saying that, “while migrancy contributes to the rich tapestry of the cosmopolitan city, it also places a severe strain

on employment levels, housing and public services” (in Landau and Freemantle 2010: 378). Such rhetoric helped to establish the formal framework out of which xenophobia emerged and eventually flourished in South Africa. Disturbingly reminiscent of the repressive apartheid regime, this rhetoric normalised the mistreatment of immigrants while giving meaning by stereotype.

Immigrants have since been blamed for the rise in HIV and AIDS in the country (South Africa faces the highest rate of HIV in the world). “We had people from Zimbabwe who have AIDS and we got it from those people,” one rural youth leader from Eastern Cape complains (in Petros, Airhihenbuwa, Simbayi, Ramlagan and Brown 2006: 74). Says a traditional leader, also from Eastern Cape, “In the past, we did not have [HIV/AIDS] in our community. It has been brought by foreigners” (ibid.).

The end of apartheid may have brought remarkable political change to the country, but any rise in employment has remained slight—in fact, the number of South Africans living in poverty continues to be high. As South Africa grapples with such issues, attention consistently turns to the influx of foreigners, who have been singled out as competition for meaningful employment and affordable housing (Nyamnjoh 2006; Landau 2011). “They [Somalis] shouldn’t come here to multiply and increase our population, and in future, we shall suffer,” complains a young man who attempts to justify his part in a 2007 xenophobic attack. “The more they come to South Africa to do business, the more the locals will continue killing them” (in Landau 2011: 13). Black immigrants, in the words of Marion Ryan Sinclair, have emerged the “convenient new source of ‘other’” in post-apartheid South Africa (1999: 469). Unlike apartheid, which was “based on discriminatory treatment at the hands of a race,” the current abhorrence directed towards Black immigrants represents a ‘new type of racism’ “based on the discriminatory treatment of the ‘other’ on the basis of the other’s national origin or ethnicity” (Adjai and Lazaridis 2013: 192).

### Displays of Masculinity and the Impact of Xenophobia

The Braamfontein Declaration, in association with the *South African Human Rights Commission*, provided the following definition of xenophobia: “the deep dislike of non-nationals by nationals of a recipient state” (SAHRC 1998). The Declaration warned against constructing restrictive definitions of belonging and entitlement that emphasised perceived cultural and ethnic differences. Yet, xenophobic attacks nonetheless continue in the country, leading the Human Rights Watch to report:

South Africa has become increasingly xenophobic in recent years, with a large percentage of South Africans perceiving foreigners – especially, almost exclusively black foreigners – as a direct threat to their future economic well-being and as responsible for the troubling rise in violent crime in South Africa (HRW, 1998).

Negative stereotypes about immigrants have developed alongside—and in turn have further contributed to—xenophobia. Writes Robert Mattes, Jonathan Crush and Wayne Richmond, “South Africans not only hold negative attitudes towards foreigners, they also have a readily accessible set of stereotypes with which to justify or rationalize their negative attitudes” (as qtd. by Crush 2001: 109). *Amakwerekwere*, for example, has emerged as a widely used derogatory term for describing “people who were identified as not properly belonging to the South African nation” (Worby, Hassim and Kupe 2008: 7). Literally meaning “those who chirp like birds” (Makoni and Makoni 2007: 107), *amakwerekwere* has been used by both Black and White South Africans to pigeonhole Black non-South Africans, pointing to difference in language as a means of division (ibid.).

While stereotyping may have categorised Black African migrants in broad terms, Black African migrant men have faced more specific stereotyping, including being labelled as delinquents, as advocates for prostitution, and as propagators of HIV (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003). Leading this practice of exclusion has been the Black South Africans (Morris 1998: 1116, 1120; Reitzes, 1995; Comaroff & Comaroff 2003; Landau, 2011; Misago, 2011), with “some of the most virulent prejudice [being] directed against Black Africans originating from

countries north of what is commonly referred to as Southern Africa” (Morris 1998: 1120).

Such bias has led to a general feeling of impermanence among many Black migrants (Harris 2002: 179). This includes the Congolese, as suggested in a quote from Pierre: “South Africa is what I must call home; it is where I live. I’m not some fellow who has just stopped by for a visit. ...But I am treated like an outsider, constantly; like I don’t belong; like [South Africa] is not—cannot—be home. ...Everyday I miss my life in Brazza[ville]” (Pierre, interview 2016).

There is also a sense of fear felt by some Congolese I interviewed. Says Maurice, “Johannesburg is not a safe place for a Congolese man. When I leave my house, who knows if I’ll make it back home” (Interview 2016). Reminds Pierre, who recently moved out of Johannesburg to take residence further north, “Living in Joburg, always having to watch my step, who I talk to, who I don’t talk to. It was just too much. That’s why I moved. ...I live closer to Botswana border. The people are more easy. ...more accepting” (Interview 2016).

Morris, rather surprisingly, proposes from his research into Nigerian and Congolese migrants that “the negative treatment meted out to [them] had not impacted on their own self-image” (1998: 1128). Rather, it has served to pull the migrants together into separate Congolese and Nigerian communities. “It was evident that the prejudice experienced, combined with the issue of language and a sense of familiarity with their own countrymen, greatly encouraged the groupings in question to cohere and assert their own national identity to counter the racism directed at them” (ibid.). Pierre supports the premise, explaining that any earlier ideas he may have had on integrating have disappeared since arriving. Instead, “the Congolese stick with Congolese. It’s just the way it is; the way it has to be” (2016). Through the shared experience of exclusion, then, the Congolese have re-established their own, distinct community, where, Pierre poignantly explains, “we can be ourselves” (ibid.).

Although xenophobia is racialised in South Africa, it is also gendered: Black South African men comprise the majority of the attackers, and Black African male foreigners

represent the majority of those targeted in these attacks (Mamdani 2001; Morris 1998; Landau 2004). This proposes a link in the country that connects xenophobia, migration and masculinity together. From that standpoint, Benita Moolman encourages us to view xenophobia in South Africa as being driven through masculinised struggles; as being characterised by “the persistent tension of scarce resources and ultimately the competition between different categories of Black men based on geographic, cultural and linguistic differences” (Moolman 2013: 97-98). Jason Hickel has written that Black South African men “suffer from a crisis of masculinity, having been expelled from the path to manhood that was encouraged under apartheid” (2014: 105), which, to follow on with Moolman’s hypothesis, can lead to “[r]acialized masculinities in South Africa [being] then reconstituted through ‘the foreign other’” (Moolman 2013: 99).

“Masculinity, like other kinds of social identity, is an ongoing construction in a dialogue between one’s self-image and others’ perceptions of one” (Khosravi 2009: 591). From that perspective, one can conclude that the masculine identity presented by the Congolese men living in Johannesburg are informed by their experiences had both in Congo as well as in South Africa.

In Congo, writes Desiree Lwambo, “wealth is considered as the most important prerequisite of a ‘real man’” (2013: 53). Yet, as Katrien Pyper argues, it is the ‘appearance’ of wealth that is crucial (2007: 251); and here la SAPE serves a particular purpose: through its ‘cultivation of clothes,’ la SAPE enables its members to stand out and “to become someone” (ibid.); it offers an ‘ideal of manhood’ that is ‘publicly acted out’ through choices of clothing and fashion styles (ibid.). “The training of the male body is a never-ending activity” in la SAPE (ibid.): clothing “communicates his heightened sense of manhood to other men in his community” (Logan 2014: 159), all the while confirming his status of both a ‘strong man’ and ‘leader’ of his community (Pyper 2007: 251).

The Congolese men living in Johannesburg have not only adopted this Congolese

definition of masculinity, they have pushed that definition to new extremes. Masculinity has assumed an even deeper sense of urgency in Johannesburg, used by the Congolese men as a way to distinguish themselves not just from one another, but also from other Black African men, specifically Black South African men. “The stakes are high in South Africa,” Pierre argues. “We have to dress with even more care” (Interview 2016). Says Maurice, “We use our cloth not just to say ‘I am a success’ to other Congolese men. We must use our cloth to show our success to the South Africans who try to keep us down. ... We are telling the world that Congolese men are best... that Congolese men are better than South African men” (Interview 2016).

This ‘ideal of manhood’ is displayed not solely to a Johannesburg audience, however. As explained further below, the Congolese men in Johannesburg are committed to extending that ideal back in Congo through soukous appreciation songs. These songs tout the immigrant men’s achievements to a Congolese home public through their texts. Yet, because there is considerable cost involved in their writing and singing, these appreciation songs also stand as further symbols of the men’s financial success in South Africa.

Although the Congolese men with whom I spoke discussed a desire to integrate upon arrival to South Africa, they quickly came to the conclusion that this goal has been unachievable, largely due to xenophobia. In the quest for self-preservation, it has been in their interest to develop a ‘display of masculinity’ that would allow them to straddle the borders of both South Africa and Congo; to maintain connections to both ‘here’ and ‘there.’ The notion of masculinity they adopted enables just that: it builds on a notion of masculinity purported and accepted in Congo, yet it is reclaimed with the renewed urgency and meaning that comes with living in South Africa. It is a strategic identity in that it assures constructive and mutually beneficial relations with both South Africa and Congo, thereby allowing the Congolese men to avoid having to choose between nations.

### Introducing Soukous Appreciation Songs

“A way for Congolese in South Africa to raise their game and...their standing [in society] is through [soukous] appreciation songs,” explains Pierre (Interview 2015). As has become customary, some Congolese in South Africa send money to musicians in their home country in exchange for the mention of their names in song. It “has created a very lucrative business for prominent Congolese musicians in Congo,” Kankonde Bukasa Peter writes, calling it a “remittance practice” that allows Congolese migrants from Johannesburg to London to attain ‘social adulthood’ (2009: 39). “But music is not the only medium used by migrants,” Peter continues. “Similar glorifications can be seen on Congolese comedies or simple TV programs” (ibid.). Although my research has concentrated on the soukous appreciation songs, it echoes Peter’s findings in that song helps the Congolese immigrants to sustain (or even to lift) social status in South Africa as well as back home. Similarly, these songs enable the families of Congolese immigrants to acquire higher status back in Congo, both within their neighbourhoods and across their communities.

Congolese culture has long maintained a hierarchical system where social mobility could be navigated through music. Soukous holds particular relevance in this regard. It developed out of Cuban music, which arrived in Congo via Europe during the 1920s and 30s through recordings brought both by foreign soldiers and Congolese who had travelled to Europe. Having arrived as part of the global ‘rumba craze,’ Cuban music afforded Congolese a certain claim to the modern world that was separate from the modernism afforded by France and Belgium (the European colonisers of DRC and RC respectively). Recordings and phonograph players were expensive; few had enough money to buy them; and the music itself, while familiar, sounded new and modern (White 2002). As a result, Cuban music came to symbolise an elite status that Congolese assumed by proxy; attending Cuban music clubs or

playing in Cuban bands became a way to reflect membership to high class and modern authority.

Congolese musicians at first strived to imitate (with attempted perfection) the recording artists featured on the Cuban music recordings, including adopting the Spanish language and carefully transferring the *montuno* lines played by the Cuban *trés* (which was unavailable in Congo) to a single acoustic guitar. Gradually, however, the musicians started to combine the Cuban music with Congolese forms, creating a new syncretised genre that was consciously tailored to fit a Congolese vernacular. This included employing melodies that followed the tones and accents of *Lingala* and other local languages. By 1960 the electric guitar arrived in Congo, and was quickly used in pairs or in threes to cover the Cuban *montuno* lines. The music assumed a new, contemporary name: *soukous*, derived from the French word *secouse*, which, meaning ‘to shake’, had been the name of the dance accompanying the Cuban-based music in Congo. The music was closely tied to ideas of modernism. Soukous, with its reliance on the modern electric guitar, served as a vehicle for Congolese to take hold to a modern world and to lift social standing.

As argued here, soukous has maintained its ability to negotiate status in South Africa, bringing a variety of social benefits to the Congolese living in the country. Some of these benefits revolve around the family left behind. To be socially discounted in a family involves experiencing extreme alienation. By hiring musicians in Congo to sing about the Congolese living in South Africa, “we stay connected to family while living here in South Africa,” says Pierre (Interview 2015).

Hiring a soukous musician in Congo also brings pride to the family that remains behind, explains Maurice, a Brazzaville man who recently relocated to Johannesburg (but has since returned to Brazzaville). “Of course I would hire a musician back home to sing my name. I am the oldest in the family. And I need to [do this] to make sure my family continues to be respected while I am away” (Interview 2013).

Some Congolese use soukous appreciation songs to compete with other Congolese living in Johannesburg. Of course, it is difficult to mask one's true social status from other migrants. As a result, the number of appreciation songs a person acquires or the quality of the praise (a full verse sung in appreciation vs. just the name dedicated as praise) becomes an important example of symbolic exchange (Pierre Interview 2015, Peter 2009: 41). Again, these appreciation songs enable Congolese immigrants to show off their commitment to family, as Maurice further explains. "Everyone brags about their own appreciation songs. Everyone wants to show that they care more about their family than you do" (Interview 2013). With such boasting, immigrants are able to again acquire new, higher social designations within the South African neighbourhoods where they live.

Depending on the musician used, the Congolese in South Africa may spend thousands of rand in pursuit of hearing their names sung in praise (Pierre Interview 2015, Peter 2009: 39). A new social strata in South Africa has thence developed, with a division between Congolese individuals deemed successful in moving to South Africa and those deemed a failure. Explains James, "When I hire a musician in Congo to sing about me, I am showing [that] I am a success...I am a big success" (Interview 2015). On the other hand, as Pierre reminds, some Congolese use the appreciation songs to suggest accomplishment, when in reality, "they have little money and they have found little success in South Africa" (Interview 2015). In these cases soukous is used to create an illusion of achieved social status, which further blurs social lines and class values within Congolese immigrant communities.

In conclusion, soukous appreciation songs privilege a social exchange situation between and among the Congolese living in Johannesburg and their families back home. The appreciation songs provide a locus by which the Congolese can maintain their family membership and, in turn, receive positive feedback from their families. Through these songs immigrants also avoid degrading stigma and social exclusion: these songs help to create a space outside of the marginalised reality of Johannesburg and empower participants to reclaim

a sense of power according to Congo codes of aesthetics.

### Introducing La SAPE

“Immigrants struggle to be respected in South Africa,” reminds Claude, a young storekeeper from Brazzaville who now lives in Johannesburg. “That’s where clothes become important. If you dress for respect, you get respect” (Interview 2010).

Fashion has a long history in Congo. It is “part of a broader identitarian agenda associated with the shifting cultural, political and social coordinates of the colony and postcolony” (Thomas 2003: 949). Valued cloth was a luxury item that few individuals outside royalty were able to own. With the arrival of colonialists, however, clothing shops popularly inundated the streets of Leopoldville (the capital of DRC, known today as Kinshasa) and Brazzaville (the capital of RC), with merchants selling cloth and pieces of European clothing to anyone with available cash. Local tailors and seamstresses also set up businesses, often recreating European fashions advertised in foreign magazines and order catalogues. Used clothing, left behind by American and European soldiers, also became available, sold in local African markets. African men started to wear suits and employed accessories like canes, monocles, gloves and chained pocket watches. These well-dressed Congolese represented the new urban elite, their clothing emerging as the mark of success and modernism, “demonstrat[ing] achievement in the new society, Western education, knowledge of European manners and sophistication as a townsman” (Martin 1994: 408). A local movement of fashion and style developed, known, as mentioned above, as *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes*, whose acronym SAPE ironically is French slang for clothing. Members (called Sapeurs) competed for status by acquiring French designer clothing and wearing it as part of a flashy lifestyle.

For the Congolese living in Johannesburg, la SAPE provides a further occasion for the subversion of established modes and the rejection of accepted norms. “It is a true statement

that life for Black foreigners living in South Africa is hard; very hard,” reminds Claude. “We are at the centre of attacks. We are told we don’t belong. We are told we are dirty, unclean. ...When we wear our Prada suits and our Giovanna shoes the world forgets the lies South Africans tell about us. They see that Congolese are important” (Interview 2010). To again borrow from Bourdieu, “fashion offers one of the most favourable terrains and which is the motor of cultural life as a perpetual movement of overtaking and outflanking” (2001: 101). For Congolese relegated to secondary status by the general South African society, the adoption of la SAPE presents itself as a symbolic gesture aimed at reclaiming power. It is a form of intercultural communication that, as pointed out by Fred E. Jandt, “say[s], ‘I’m somebody’” (2007: 380).

At the same time, la SAPE enables a sense of status that Congolese consider higher than that of Black South Africans. Explains Olivier, a young man from Kinshasa who joined la SAPE while living in Johannesburg, “South Africa is a country that has no culture, no fashion, no style. [South Africans] consider us a threat because we have all the style and they have none” (Interview 2010). To again quote from Maurice, “What you wear tells the public who you are. When Congolese dress they are telling the public that we are first in fashion and style and class” (Interview 2013). From these perspectives, la SAPE constitutes the creation of a ‘particular form of resistance’ that disrupts societal hierarchies, inaugurating a space for “an oppositional, counter-hegemonic culture. Within this culture, they assert their identity and compete for status according to their own system of values. In this process, they exclude those who are part of the system that has excluded them” (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 137).

Rue du Faubourg is a clothing store in Yeoville that, named after the fashionable shopping street in Paris, caters to South African members of la SAPE. The store is small, its racks of clothing dominating the narrow, rectangular room. The merchandise is carefully divided, with the shirts, slacks and jackets hung on one wall of racks while tunics, vests and

shoes are on show at the other. The store manager Shado travels around the globe to find the latest fashions. “We only buy one-of-a-kind outfits,” he explains proudly. “That is why this store is so popular with Sapeurs” (Interview 2015).

Claude has been a frequent client at Rue du Faubourg, and explains how this store is different than clothes shops found in Paris. La SAPE is part of a cyclic tradition in Congo, he clarifies, with Sapeurs in Congo traveling frequently and in steady numbers to Paris to find the latest fashion. “Paris is the promised land. French designers are the gods” (2010 Interview). However, “Italy is number one for fabric here in Joburg” (ibid.). Claude opines that Johannesburg “is unique. It has a lot of Europe in it, but [is] completely African” (ibid.). In Kinshasa and Brazzaville “it is all about France. French clothing, French food, French [architecture]. You don’t find other Europeans there. ...In Johannesburg it is different. You find more people from all over Europe here. ...That means there is more choice [in European fashion]. ...There isn’t just France here in Joburg; there’s all of Europe” (ibid.).

Continuing, Claude points out that in Congo, suits are often in an exaggerated style. There is preference for large zoot suits set in flamboyantly bright colours. “Here it is different. Suits need to be slim and streamlined. Colours are subdued. Greys, browns. ...We have a different definition of elegance in South Africa” (ibid.).

The Johannesburg men involved in la SAPE often adhere to the ‘cult of appearance’ against a backdrop of poverty. James explains his participation in la SAPE: “I wear the best clothes [that] money can buy” (Interview 2015). Each paycheck would be spent on buying clothing. He owned few other possessions, and preferred to sleep in a one-room single-bed accommodation than to forgo fashion. “It is what we do as Sapeurs. Every season has new cloth, new designs. And it is very important that you own that new cloth and that you own that new design. When you have money you do not spend it on a lamp you might need or a bed that you might need. You spend it on fashion. You spend all your money on fashion. ...You can live without almost anything, except the best clothes” (Interview 2015).

James admits he could scarcely afford his passion for style. He worked two part-time jobs so that he could buy “world class designers—Valentino, Gucci. I own them all” (ibid.). More recently, however, he has lessened his role in la SAPE, choosing instead to spend his money on extending his education, and on saving money to send home to his family in Congo. “But I still am a Sapeur,” he confesses. “Once you are a Sapeur you are always a Sapeur. That never changes. ...And I will go back to it full-time when the time is right” (ibid.).

As James specifies, however, “wearing the best clothes is only part of being a Sapeur. You must dress like a gentleman, yes. But you must also act like a gentleman” (Interview 2015). James explains how manners and attention to ‘gentleman detail’ is of paramount importance. He promptly demonstrates how to walk like gentleman, how to sit like a gentleman, how to stand like a gentleman. “Being a Sapeur, it is all about being high class.”

#### Sankayi Lounge and Club: Where soukous and la SAPE converge

La SAPE and soukous converge in Johannesburg at the Sankayi Lounge and Club, located in the neighbourhood of Morningside. The club is situated in a stark 1960s-styled industrial complex, its second floor entrance accessible only by walking up a dimly lit cemented staircase. Given the industrial feel of the building, one may expect the club to be equally stark and simple; and, given the few cars parked in the adjacent lot, one may expect an audience that is both quiet and small. Yet, stepping through the tall, darkly-painted doors of Sankayi, a very different experience awaits. The club is surprisingly full of people, primarily men, most of whom are handsomely dressed, their involvement in la SAPE instantly noticeable. Dozens line the hallway, and even more crowd around the main dance floor. Women in attendance are few. Most stand either alone or next to the groups of congregating men.

In the foyer stand long tables serving homemade Congolese foods in buffet-style. There are large tinned platters of goat stew, chicken marinated in peanut sauce and cassava

leaves filled with smoked fish. Smaller containers provide the side dishes, from plantain balls and braised cabbage to prepared salads and fufu. The cost of the buffet is included with the entrance cost to the club. Yet, few seem to partake in the food—at this club, dancing to the music and showing off fashion are definitely the main events.

The club itself is lushly decorated, walls painted in shiny, red chairs and booths upholstered in black leather and door entrances framed with gold trim. The club shouts of a glamorous past that remains ever-present. As I later learn, the interior of Sankayi has been consciously decorated to replicate the elegant French salons of days gone by.

Owned by a gentleman who emigrated from Kinshasa over 20 years ago, Sankayi serves “as a link to home. We try to create a little bit of Congo right here in Joburg. ...Many Congo people live in Joburg now. We needed a place where we could relax, and where we could get away from the troubles of the city. That’s why I organised this club” (Interview 2010).

A DJ prominently sits in a glass-framed studio at the side of the dance floor. He carefully selects his sets for the night, ensuring that the music he chooses spans all Congolese preferences. Early evening, the DJ usually plays old Cuban standards, “the music your grandparents listened to,” including the classics by Benny Moré and Arsenio Rodriguez. As the night progresses, he starts to include some soukous, playing first the early hits of the 60s and 70s before moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by switching to the more contemporary kwasa-kwasa and a few selections of Congolese hip-hop. Asked about the set list, the DJ explains that, “What I do is set the scene for the audience. I create the ambiance so people can relax, feel at home” (Interview 2010).

The dance floor serves as “a backdrop for competitive manliness” (Khosravi 2009: 605). With men in attendance outnumbering the women, the dance floor comprises several groups of men who dance together. They dance with authority and pride, all the while competitively showing off their clothing and personal style. Here masculinity is actively constructed and can be best understood as a performance. Sankayi in turn emerges as the space where the men

learn not just the mechanics of performing that masculinity, but about the values of competition as well.

Although Sankayi may have been created as a space specifically for a Congolese audience, it has since become a popular hub for other Black Africans living in Johannesburg. “The vibe is on Africa, not South Africa,” explains an Angolan woman attending the club. “That’s why a lot of Black foreigners like me come here” (Interview 2013). The club attracts Angolans, Zimbabweans, Botswanans and Nigerians. “I appreciate the fact that here [at Sankayi] we are African in spirit,” she continues.

Everyone arrives at the club dressed to impress. While the Congolese attending may be deeply entrenched in la SAPE, other Africans in attendance quickly learn the expectations of Congolese style. As an Algerian man who frequently goes to Sankayi explains it: “You don’t wear old jeans here. And you don’t arrive without your shoes shined first. You might try it once, but you will not do it again!” (Interview 2013).

Dancing, too, follows expectations dictated by la SAPE. Claude calls it, “the dancing of the designer labels. ... You dance in ways to show off your clothing. ... You move in ways to show off the labels of your suit, your shirt, even your socks” (Interview 2010). With arms outstretched, he demonstrates the dance moves typically utilised in soukous. Swaying back and forth to the steady beat of soukous, he opens his suit jacket to display the designer label otherwise concealed. He then raises his pants far above the ankle to show the label sewn to the top of his socks.

During that night at Sankayi I meet a middle-aged businessman from Kinshasa who, it becomes clear, is recognised as a father figure for the youths in attendance. Dressed in a shiny black satin suit, he sits at the club’s largest table, set near the dance floor. At his immediate left is a young woman, and to the right sit four additional men. When youths enter the club many walk to this man to offer greetings. Noticeably, he acknowledges some of these youths with a casual nod or glance, yet others he ignores.

The businessman points out that he is a ‘role model’ to these youths. “They aspire to be me,” he claims. What is clear is that this businessman has been transformed into a marker of prestige, further responding to an existing and significant demand among Congolese in South Africa to secure alternative approaches to raising status. He carries considerable clout, and holds the social rank of ‘a big man’ in the community (Pype 2007: 258). For the youths to whom he provides acknowledgement they achieve a certain sense of distinction that night; those youths are provided ‘proof’ of higher social status and they are able to further extend a ‘narrative of social triumph’.

### Conclusions

Discussing migrants in South Africa, Sinclair shows that a common theme occurs among them, mainly the discrimination they face in the country. Some migrants, Sinclair writes, “respond with anger and indignation, understandably because the anti-apartheid struggle had been supported—often materially—by the countries and communities of these people” (1999: 469). Yet, as shown in my work on the Congolese living in Johannesburg, rituals of display—la SAPE and soukous appreciation songs—and their related displays of masculinity emerge necessary social and cultural resources in the fight against such discrimination.

Xenophobia classifies and categorises people. “How we name things affects how we behave towards them. The name, or label, carries with it expectations,” writes John Clarke and Allan Cochrane (1998: 26). Xenophobia not only shapes how South Africans think about and act towards foreigners, it denies these foreigners the “right to name and define themselves” (Pickering 2001: 73). Because the power “to name one’s Self” is “a fundamental human right” (Riggins 1997: 8), the politics of representation become crucial. Yet, again, through the power of devising their own success stories and style images, accomplished through appreciation songs and la SAPE, the Congolese resist the ways they are represented in South Africa.

This article has suggested the need to more thoroughly examine notions of masculinity

among immigrant communities, to view more closely how immigration brings about cultural change within immigrant communities and how expanded concepts of agency may be required, particularly in environments of xenophobia. An examination into how music and fashion inform displays of masculinity and rituals of display, for example, is necessary in order to understand the full impact of immigration as a basis for cultural change among the Congolese living in Johannesburg. These displays of masculinity and rituals of display emerge as two possible frames around which more detailed examinations into immigration and masculinity can take place.

Soukous and la SAPE affirm a sense of competition both among the Congolese men and between the Congolese men and the South African Black men, all suggesting a particular relationship to display and masculinity that can also be found in Congo. Yet, we must refrain from discussing these acts in simple terms, i.e., explaining them as rooted in the Congo and just repeated in Johannesburg. Rather, we should view how they are connected to new Congolese positions in South Africa and why they are revised because of anti-Black African immigration sentiments. Doing so enables further understanding of masculinity and immigration, while also providing a conceptual model that may be useful for studying other male immigrant communities, both in and outside South Africa.

Displays of masculinity and rituals of display enable the participating Congolese to “experience new ways of doing and being” in the world, and to “escape [its] disciplining eyes” (Ghannam 2011: 795). They provide a specific opportunity for the Congolese to re-insert themselves into the city of Johannesburg, reshaping an otherwise foreign space into a local place of meaning; releasing participants from real life circumstances. A poignant example comes from Maurice. The discrimination he has faced in the city has been consistent and intense, and has included harassment from the police—who have regularly stopped him and his friends, particularly at night in the Yeoville area. The police would question Maurice and his friends’ right to live in South Africa, and would threaten physical harm or incarceration if they

did not pay a bribe. It taught Maurice and his friends about the importance of social capital. “You can’t go to police if you’re in danger,” Maurice reminds. “Not here in Johannesburg! You really are on your own here. ... We are treated very badly in South Africa. It is not a good place. ...When I wear nice clothes or have my name sung in a soukous song I am telling the world I am important. ...It helps me to deal with being here” (Interview 2013).

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