



# The Long Crisis of Black Masculinity in Racial Capitalism

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Il y a de la  
**GREATNESS**  
en chaque  
homme

# Mobile street vendors (N=35)

Ethnography, interviews, and visual analysis with thirty-five former and current vendors

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Age sample</b>     | <b>19-38 (N=31); Mean reported age: 26</b>  |
| Age status            | Jeunesse [youth]  |
| Earnings              | Sporadic; estimated 1500FCFA [US\$3]/working day  |
| Marital/family status | 1 married (foreigner); 14 with girlfriends (2 in home country)<br>9 with children; 1 supporting girlfriend's child (N=28)   |
| Education             | 1 with no education; 3 with primary school (école primaire); 3 with junior high (collège); 2 with high school (lycée); 2 with baccalauréat; 8 with some university or alternative higher education route; 1 with Koranic education (N = 20) |
| Citizenship status    | 21 citizens, 14 foreigners, of whom 7 were Abidjan-born and raised  |



Public symbols of crisis



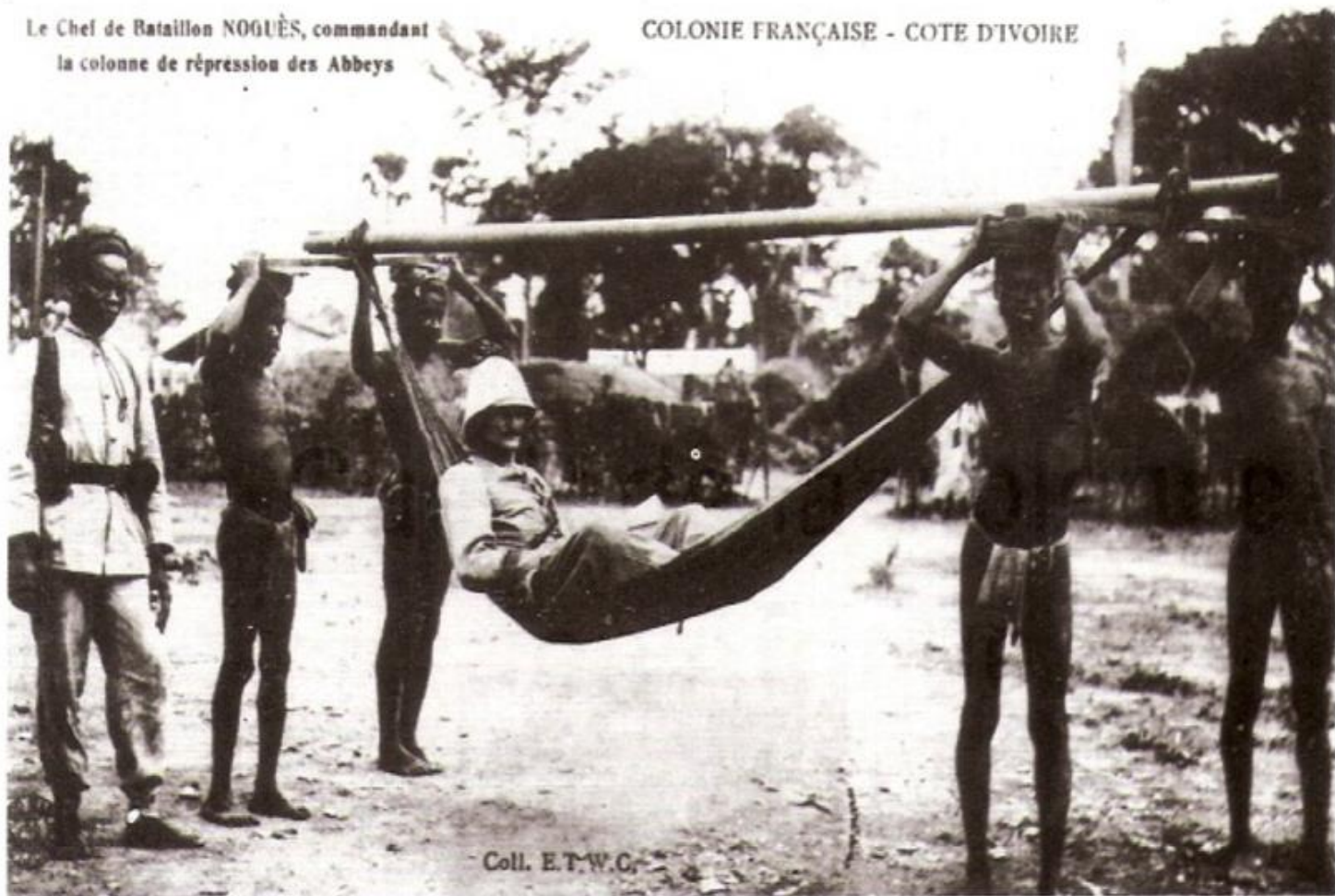
# Theorizing Black masculinity racial capitalism

- co-constitution capitalism (material) and racialization (ideological)
- slavery and colonialism as a singular project organizing and justifying exploitation of Black bodies
- Black masculinity a contested terrain offering contradictory orientations to capitalist exploitation
- Black men in three distinct but imbricated roles: commodified bodies, devalued laborers, and fraught consumers



Le Chef de Bataillon NOGUÈS, commandant  
la colonne de répression des Abbeys

COLONIE FRANÇAISE - COTE D'IVOIRE



Coll. E.T.W.C.

The wage is the means by which the African will have been “profoundly Europeanized, [such] that he has adopted our motivations and accepted our own necessities. In a word, that he has retained nothing African except the color.”

-- *Office des Études Psychotechniques, 1953*



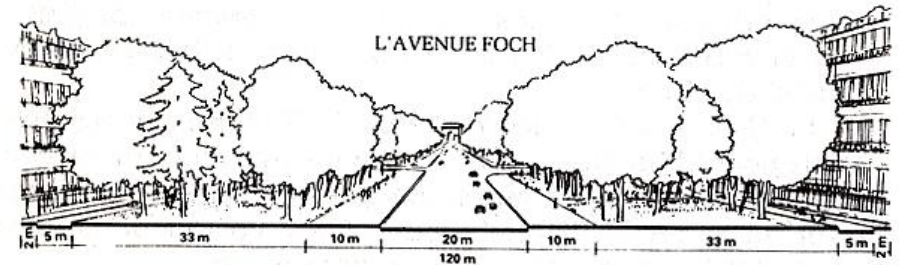
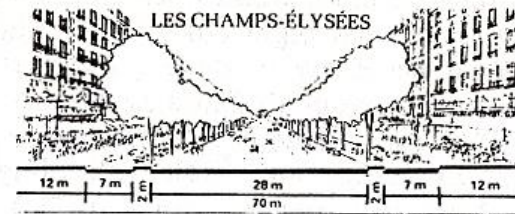
Video still from *Moi, un noir* (Jean Rouch, 1959)

- The “main subordinate variant” of the European in a racially exclusive order, the *évolué* underscores “a phallogentric vision of colonial modernity” (Gondola 2016:9)
- The European notion of man-as-worker facilitates the African designation of man-as-husband.
- Hegemony operates through race and gender identity, becoming “for the art of politics...the ‘trenches’ and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position” (Hall 1986:18).

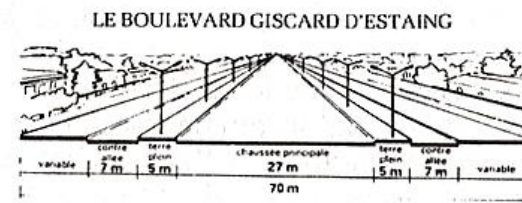


Abidjan  
 a “stepping stone”  
 between Africa and the  
 West (Newell 2009:179)

**Paris**



**Abidjan**



Ces quatre profils en travers établis à la même échelle permettent d'appréhender la dimension de la Voie Triomphale et l'ambiance générale qui ressortira de ses proportions.

“Abidjan Metropole Moderne”  
 (Fraternité Matin 1978)

New imaginary of the ideal man indicates the desire that one's mate "exhibit signs of success or status that characterize a White-oriented or -dominated world" (Ravenhill 1980:10)



Baoulé spirit mate



*Colon* statue

# La crise

- 75 percent work in informal sector
- reduction salaried men: 57 percent in 1979 to 29 percent in 1992
- proportion female-headed households increased from 9 percent in 1979 to 19 percent in 1992
- deteriorating conditions through the end of civil conflict in 2011

| <b>Sector</b>         | <b>Total of workers employed (%)</b> | <b>Monthly earnings (FCFA)</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Public administration | 5.5                                  | 221,000                        |
| Public enterprise     | 1.1                                  | 256,000                        |
| Private, formal       | 17.4                                 | 146,000                        |
| Private, informal     | 74.9                                 | 40,000                         |
| Average earnings      | N/A                                  | 71,000                         |

*Employment characteristics in Abidjan, 2001-2002*

*“Le marché du travail à Abidjan en 2002” [The labor market in Abidjan in 2002] Institut National de la Statistique (2003:40)*

US\$1 = 500FCFA



The crisis of work was a crisis of masculinity; shifts in political economy shifted the politics of representation





Mobile street vendors face the double charge of illegality as workers and as extra-nationals, and its associated stigma



“Normally in football, experts say that at thirty years old you can no longer play. But you never 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.”

(Patrick)



“I see the way they live...and it touches my heart.”

(Modeste)





“We just came from a recording.  
*We are artists.*  
Now we are going to Cocody.”  
(Tino and MC Black)





In the Abidjan of *la crise*, modernity acted as a “force or quality [inhering] in places, objects, and people, rather than a state of development” (Newell 2012:178)



Marginal men in Abidjan and throughout the Black Atlantic “have used the body – as if it were, and it often was, the only cultural capital [they] had. We have worked on ourselves as the canvases of representation” (Hall 1993:109)





Hegemonic  
counter-  
imaginaries  
of the Black  
Atlantic

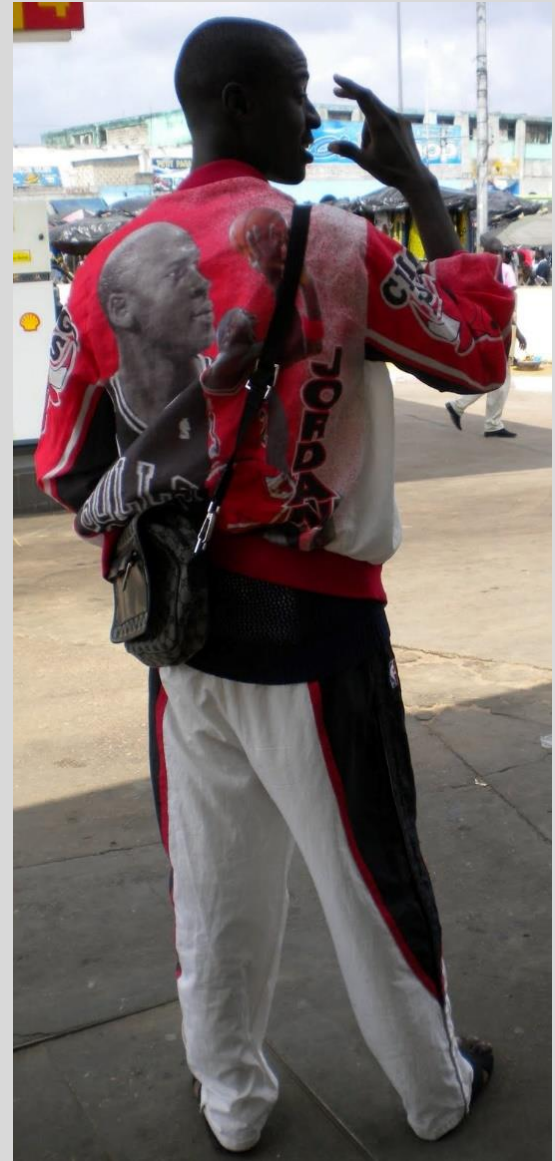


“Black  
masculine  
alterity”  
(Fleetwood  
2011:154),  
aestheticized  
resistance to the  
salaried status quo





Francophone civilized  
*évolué*



Global icons of Black  
masculinity



Hank Willis Thomas, *Branded Head* 2003

# A MAN AMONG OTHER MEN

THE CRISIS OF BLACK MASCULINITY  
IN RACIAL CAPITALISM



JORDANNA MATLON

# Methods discussion questions

- project funding
- IRB
- process of data collection/evidence
- adoption of new methods to analyze the data/evidence
- dissemination of research results in academic outlets, media outlets, policy outlets, or to populations studied
- particular challenges and time consuming elements
- aspects of research that were (surprisingly) easy
- relative time for each part of project, from designing ideas to publication



## What will be the geopolitics of climate change and environmental devastation? Topics to consider are:

- how places made inhabitable by food scarcity, high temperatures, or rising waters will shape former metropole-colonial political relationships, including but not limited to migratory politics
- accountability demands to wealthy nations and corporations or calls for reparations by formerly colonized countries that are hardest hit by climate change
- the building of eco-enclaves that are locally sustainable yet exclusionary
- the political economy of degrowth demands and of waste, recycling, and alternative, “sustainable” resources extracted from poorer nations

## What will be the consequences of increasingly jobless populations? Topics to consider are:

- national-level and regional political stability with populations unable to support themselves or their families
- a universal wage that is tied to citizenship in the context of increasing migration trends
- charting novel linkages to global capital within informal economies
- surveillance industries, particularly with the rise of artificial intelligence, and the criminalization of the poor



First President Félix  
Houphouët-Boigny

“the kind of African *‘évolué’*  
with whom the French  
wanted to cooperate”  
(Cooper 1989:753)