(Re-)fashioning African Diasporic Masculinities

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This essay investigates the role of dress in the recreation of self that is central to the experiences of the African diaspora and the negotiation of geographical, cultural, social, and racial borders. The crossing of borders is *the* defining feature of being part of the diasporas. From an African-Caribbean-British perspective, the diasporic history begins with the forced uprooting of people in the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries because of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This history continued with waves of voluntary migration both within the Caribbean and to the metropolis. This triangulation of the Atlantic resulted in the transcultural/transnational connections underpinning the notion of the "black Atlantic."[1]

Considering two border crossings, I suggest that they each highlight masculinities refashioned via the subconscious interweaving of cultures. The two historical instances are: (1) the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), in which its leaders wore *ancien régime* uniforms, challenging the colonialists' equation of Africans with nakedness and nakedness with primitivism; and (2) the arrival of the *HMT Empire Windrush* at London's Tilbury Docks in 1948, marking the moment when the empire came home. Looking at readings of a wooden bust of Haitian leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines (fig. 25) and the characterization of Sir Galahad in Sam Selvon's 1956 novel, *The Lonely Londoners*,[2] I argue that the creolized style of dress of African diasporic men is a form of nonverbal "nation language,"[3] which is effectively a political assertion of shifting masculinities. I also apply a "carnivalized" theoretical approach in my analysis of creolized diasporic cultural forms.[4]

1 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

2 The use of sculpture and literature as resources to tell of these experiences and to map diasporic histories is key to my methodology. African diasporic histories and fashion/style/dress cultures have been largely missing from the writings of received histories and the fashion theory/history canon beyond ethnographic and/or anthropological accounts of indigenous "world dress" and subcultural or oppositional dress. Since stories of the African diasporia have been largely oral (hi)-stories and since received histories and cultural accounts directly reflect the way in which power operates, other ways of mapping histories and the genealogy of our cultural expressions have to be found. Hence the use of references to sculpture and literature in this essay.

3 Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

4 Joan Anim-Addo, *Touching the Body: Dynamics of Language, History and Publication* (London: Mango Publishing, 2007). Some sections of this text and the ideas explored within it have been included in my essay "Every Mickel Mek a Mockle: Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities," in *Beyond Borders*, ed. John Hutnyk (London: Pavement Books, 2012); and in "Stylin': The Great Masculine Enunciation and the (Re)fashioning of African Diasporic Identities," in "Asserting Creative Agencies through the Sartorial: (Re)Fashioning African and African Diasporic Masculinities," ed. Leora Farber, special issue, *Critical Arts* 31, no. 3 (June 2017).

The theater of fashion inspires me: the staging and performance of masculinities through props like a hat deliberately placed to one side, or the wearing of an immaculately pressed suit, with highly polished shoes. By crossing the border the body becomes a site of transformation.[5] This essay thus discusses creolized self-fashioning and the journey from enslavement to personhood.

Carnivalizing Theory

"Carnivalizing theory" is a methodology developed by Joan Anim-Addo to analyze creolized literature.[6] Carnivals in the Caribbean represent multi-vocal sites of dialogue where people of West African heritage assert cultural and racial difference. Carnivalizing theory negotiates multiple theories "on Caribbean terms, from the perspective of its creolized culture."[7] According to Anim-Addo: "Carnivalized dialogue in its reflective process carries the polyphony and critical juxtapositioning evocative of carnival space and 'energies.'"[8] The fluidity of this dialogue reflects the schism of migration, creolized trans-cultural exchange, and the idea of a fragmented past acting as an incubator for and cutting into the present. Anim-Addo also suggests that this method, through its critique of hegemony, exposes the absence of black women's theorizing.[9] This approach suits the creolized nature of my topic, while also affirming my voice as a female theorist of Jamaican heritage.

Fig. 25
Bust of Jean-Jacques Dessalines

Outlining her rationale, Anim-Addo references Carole Boyce Davies.[10] Boyce Davies mobilizes an African proverb to describe a bricolage theoretical approach founded on "critical relationality." "Going a piece of the way with them" as a model for negotiating relations with strangers originates from an African tradition: a host accompanies an acquaintance on part of his or her journey before returning home. The distance traveled depends on their closeness. Carnivalizing theory describes an interdisciplinary mode of investigation that exhibits a "homelessness" that is similar to diasporic experiences. It mirrors the cut-and-mix character of Jamaican music, the bits-and-pieces nature of creolized cultural forms, and the bricolage traditions of Caribbean and African carnival. Various theoretical positions are examined for their efficacy to the analysis of creolized diasporic cultural forms. Binary oppositions dissipate, challenging hierarchies of value and the privileging of Eurocentric viewpoints or "master" discourses, encouraging dialogue instead of separation or essentialism, addressing the plural self and diverse other(s).[11]

Embracing a "carnivalized" strategy, this essay engages in the postcolonial debate about: (i) hybridity and creolization; (ii) the "in-between"/borderland space; and (iii) the performance of diasporic masculinities. I invoke Gloria Anzaldúa, Homi K. Bhabha, Kamau Brathwaite, and Roland Barthes.[12]

Hybridity is defined as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization."[13] Hybridization is viewed as a two-way process of exchange that challenges hierarchical binaries, essentialism, and the notion of purity. Bhabha suggests that cultures are always hybrid, and argues that cultural expressions emerge from the "contradictory and ambivalent" "Third Space of Enunciation."[14] However, hybridity has become shorthand for cultural mixing, where the displaced appropriate and refashion aspects of the host culture. In race studies, hybridity denotes the "mixed or contradictory

5 Masculine identities are seen here as psychosocial constructs, the characteristics of which are continually being created and recreated through representation and material culture—one element of which is dress.
6 Anim-Addo, *Touching the Body*, 228.
7 Anim-Addo, 275.
8 Anim-Addo, 245.
9 Anim-Addo, 250–53.
10 Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migration of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994).
11 Christine Checinska, "Every Mickle Mek a Mockle: Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities," in *Beyond Borders*, ed. John Hutnyk (London: Pavement Books, 2012), 135–52.
12 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera—The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); Homi K. Bhahba, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society in Jamaica;* Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); and Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, ed., Michael Carter, trans. Andy Stafford (Oxford: Berg, 2006).
13 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 118.
14 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 37.

identities resulting from immigration, exile and migration."[15] John Hutnyk states that "hybridity-talk," though anti-essentialist, relies on an "anterior pure" that precedes mixture.[16] It is as though within academia the notion of hybridity is embraced as means of negotiating the consequences of colonization and globalization. Used in this way, the nuances are emptied out. Paul Gilroy, who analyzes the shift from the fear of the effects of black culture on Europe's youth in the 1930s and '40s toward the "glamour of difference," notes: "The main problem we face in making sense of these and more recent developments is the lack of a means of adequately describing, let alone theorizing intermixture, fusion and syncretism without suggesting the existence of anterior 'uncontaminated' purities."[17] I agree with Hutnyk's and Gilroy's critique.[18] Hybridity has been co-opted into the glamour of difference that in turn fosters a prescriptive multiculturalism to which I object.

In Avtar Brah and Annie Coombs's book, *Hybridity and Its Discontents* (2000), they note that much hybridity talk celebrates cultural syncretism involving equal intermixture.[19] Little attention is paid to economic, political, and social inequalities. The hierarchies of power shaping hybrid cultures are ignored. In his essay "What Did Hybridity Do?" Kobena Mercer questions whether hybridity delivered the promised breakup of hierarchical binary codes that marginalize black Britons. He urges us to examine terms like "syncretism" and "creolization" to broaden our appreciation of cultural mixing as a feature of plural modernisms.[20] He asks us to recontextualize hybridization, specifying and interrogating temporal, social, geographical, and linguistic contexts.

I "go a piece of the way" with Bhabha. All cultures are hybrid. However, I am mindful of Mercer's concerns. Context dictates my focus. Richard D. E. Burton defines African-Caribbean identities as creolized, as emerging from the Caribbean plantation system.[21] (I extend that to the diasporas.) Burton argues that cultural expressions, though syncretic, are informed by an African "substratum." Creolization began on the slave ships during the Middle Passage. Enslaved Africans interacted with each other and the white *massas*. Brathwaite defines creolization as "a cultural process that took place within a creole society [...] with a tropical plantation polity based on slavery."[22] This alludes to the interdependent but uneven relationship between colonizer and colonized. Violence and fragmentation within Caribbean plantation slave society coexisted with interaction. He suggests that "the friction created by this confrontation was cruel but also creative."[23] The creolization process was a creative response between the dominant and the subordinate and their new environment.

Points of convergence exist between the creole space, Bhabha's in-between space and Anzaldúa's borderlands. Transformations occur and boundaries destabilize. Bhabha writes that the in-between space facilitates the formation of strategies of selfhood that result in new signs of identity via collaboration

and contestation. Collective and individual experiences of nation-ness and cultural value are renegotiated. Cultural hybridity emerges. Yet cultural differences are also articulated. The Africanized church and Caribbean carnival, key to the creolization process, make visible such exchanges and articulations. The expression of cultural difference challenges social order. However, Bhabha foregrounds negotiation and collaboration at the expense of conflict. In describing the in-between space as the "cutting edge of translation and negotiation," violence between the colonized and the colonizer is hidden.[24] Bhabha shaped our understanding of cultures as complex intersections of multiple histories, places, and positions. Postcolonial and/or creolized identities, in the moment of enunciation within the in-between space, do reveal a sense of being "neither one nor the other but something else besides."[25] But can negotiation, collaboration, and touch adequately describe the borderlands experience or the plantation slavery experience?

Anzaldúa captures the tension between loss and newness within the in-between/borderlands space. Mestiza border consciousness emerges from multiple subjectivities, from a sense of unbelonging resulting from the constant crisscrossing of physical and metaphorical boundaries, illuminating pluralities of self or doublings of consciousness. The notion of the border as a site of transformation is counterbalanced by her emphasis on the isolation of in-betweenness. Pain *and* creativity coexist.[26] This idea influences my thesis. Within Anzaldúa's serpentine cycle of history, theory, and personal testimony, there is an undercurrent of confrontation, continual shift, reinscription, and translation. Her phrase "To survive the Borderlands, you must live *sin fronteras*, be a crossroads"[27] captures a sense of being in constantly changing realities. The recurring internal tensions in the borderlands between margin and center are highlighted. The holding of these tensions initiates "new signs of identity,"[28] then expressed through dress via creolized nonverbal "nation language," a term coined by Brathwaite.

15 Peter Brooker, *A Glossary of Cultural Theory* (London: Arnold, 2002), 127.
16 John Hutnyk, "Hybridity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 81–85.
17 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 250–51.
18 See Hutnyk, "Hybridity," 81–85; and Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*.
19 Avtah Brah and Annie Coombs, eds., *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000).
20 Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle* (London: Routledge, 1994), 25–27.
21 Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).
22 Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, 213.
23 Brathwaite, 204.
24 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 38.
25 Bhabha, 82.
26 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontyera*, 80.
27 Anzaldúa, 217.
28 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 1.

The equation of fashion and dress with language is not new. I work within the post-structuralist tradition of Barthes, where fashion and dress are languages and texts waiting to be "read." Language and dress are culturally framed individual and collective communication systems that cannot be separated from their cultural roots/routes. The displacement of just one element changes the whole and produces a new structure. Brathwaite in his analysis of Caribbean languages distinguishes between the imperial languages of Standard English, Creole English, which evolved in the new Caribbean environment, and nation language, the vernacular language of the enslaved. He notes that Jamaican nation language is influenced by West African speech patterns and rhythms. It consciously ignores the pentameter that we are familiar with in Western verbal rhythms to express the everyday from African-Caribbean life, and, by extension, African diasporic perspectives. He writes: "It is an English which is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility."[29]

West African models also influenced African diasporic male dress emerging from the Caribbean.[30] I align myself to Gilroy's concept of the black Atlantic, whereby African diasporic cultural expressions connect across Britain, America, and the Caribbean.[31] In Brathwaite's analysis of the lexical features of verbal nation language, he says that "in its contours [...] it is not English," even though the garments being worn "might be English to a lesser or greater degree."[32] As with verbal nation language, tracing creolized self-fashioning to plantation slavery, the attention paid to the design of clothing maintained fragments of shattered histories and traditions. Brathwaite writes that nation language was embraced by the enslaved to express everyday experiences, while still retaining traces of their West African past. The African-ness that submerged was also continually transformed by its new environment. The sound explosions punctuating verbal nation language are alive in the detail of an outfit—the glint of an earring worn with an otherwise somber ensemble, a splash of color, or a principled clash of pattern. The performativity of refashioned masculinities through creolized dress parallels the "total expression" or "orality" of verbal nation language.[33] Echoing verbal "call and response,"[34] the styled body in movement demands a response. The enslaved (re-)fashioned their identities, deploying a creolized aesthetic to create new consciousnesses of self.

Caribbean African diasporic masculinities are rooted in or through plantation slavery. Slavery overturned kinship rites, traditions, and gender roles. Since masculinity from Western Judeo-Christian perspectives is linked to power, honor, property ownership, and familial responsibility—qualities denied to male slaves—masculinities *had* to be redefined. The everyday dishonoring, invisibility, infantalization, and silencing of people had an impact on the slaves' sense of self. The relationship between the dressed body and perceptions of selfhood, human dignity, personhood, and autonomy are connected to the wearing of clothes and the fashioning of one's appearance. Here the rationing of clothing underlined dehumanization because once the body is clothed, personhood is assumed. Clothing was rationed by the slave owners; new items of clothing were given to the enslaved at Christmas time and this was expected to last over the year. The harsh working conditions, particularly those endured by the field slaves, ensured that clothing wore out quickly. It was not unusual for the enslaved to be naked. In my view this was another form of control and dehumanization. In addition, the practicality and anonymity of slave dress became part of the process through which gender roles were constructed, experienced, and legitimized. For example, young boys from the age of twelve to fourteen wore a smock, as did young girls. The denial of clothing such as trousers or breeches that signified a transition into manhood was a disavowal of masculinity.[35] Nevertheless, the body became a canvas or a peg onto which the inner image was hung.[36] That which could not be articulated verbally was articulated through dressing and styling the body. However slavery is not solely a historical period; it is a matrix against which identities are constructed and read. While Frantz Fanon urged freedom through violence and W. E. B. Du Bois wrote of freedom through "sorrow songs,"[37] I suggest that it is partly through creolized self-fashioning via nation language that freedom from society's invisible borders based on racial and cultural difference is temporarily won.

Haiti: The Great Masculine Enunciation

Haiti, the first French colony in the Caribbean to become independent, is important because it symbolizes cultural and racial autonomy. Images of the Haitian leaders have become symbols of power and elegance. When the

29 Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, 13.

30 There was and is no single homogenous West Africa or Africa from which creolized cultural expressions emerged. It must be noted that enslaved peoples were taken from many tribes; families were actively dispersed, children taken from mothers, direct cultural and historical links deliberately broken. The plantation systems demanded this.

31 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*.

32 Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, 13.

33 Brathwaite, 18.

34 "Call and response" in West African, African American, and African-Caribbean cultures, and those of their diasporas, references a to-and-fro pattern of participation. In music forms such as gospel, jazz, folk, and work songs a first phrase of music is often immediately followed by a second, which can be viewed as a commentary on or response to the first; the two are interdependent. It is a somewhat democratic performance form since it fosters dialogue. It is also an important aspect of African diasporic oral storytelling traditions; the audience and its response is key to meaning.

35 Christine Checinska, "Colonizin' in Reverse! The Creolised Aesthetic of the Empire Windrush Generation" (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2009).

36 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1959).

37 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1961); and W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1994).

revolutionaries Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Baptiste Belley, and Jean-Jacques Dessalines—former slaves—entered the global political stage, they were elegantly dressed in stark contrast to the near nakedness of the plantation slaves discussed above. Through their self-fashioning, the Haitian leaders visually announced their status as free, equal, and part of humanity of all men.[38] Deploying a creolized aesthetic, they visually articulate the notion of being "neither one nor the other, but something else besides."[39]

According to Western fashion studies, modern menswear began with the democratization of dress owing to the French Revolution (1789–99). This period is referred to as the "Great Male Renunciation."[40] Fashions in male dress shifted from an ancien régime reliance on color and ornamentation, which denoted social rank, toward clothing that was functional, discrete, and suitable. From the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, sumptuary laws ensured that aristocratic dress was distinct from clothing worn by the lower classes. The ethos of equality that emerged from the French Revolution saw the simplification or democratization in dress; the new social order demanded it. From the perspective of the African-Caribbean and by extension the African diasporas, the Haitian Revolution (1791–1803) fueled another form of democratization of dress. Dress changed from being the functional and anonymous (un)dress of the slaves to being elegant, embellished, and personalized, announcing the status of the wearer as free, equal, and part of the humanity of all men. What took place could be termed the "Great Masculine Enunciation." This is evident in the creolized self-fashioning of Dessalines in particular.

The National Maritime Museum (NMM) in Greenwich houses a tropical hardwood bust depicting Dessalines (fig. 25). He wears a Napoleonic bicorn hat with three feathers and a jacket embellished with tasseled epaulets and a laurel leaf pattern. However, the presence of a skullcap beneath his regulation headgear moves Dessalines dress beyond mimicry. (The etching, seen in fig. 26, clearly shows him wearing a geometrically patterned skullcap.)

Dessalines had been enslaved and transported to San Domingo at sixteen. The skullcap references his West African past. In the 1810s, Osifekunde of Ijebu (located between Oyo and Benin) wrote: "The common people [...] contend themselves with the botiboti, a simple cap made in the country. The more well-to-do prefer the akode or brimless hat."[41] When juxtaposed with Western dress, the skullcap is reinscribed, becoming a potent cultural symbol. By including the skullcap, the sculptor conveys Dessalines's West-Africanness *and* his journey from slave to soldier to general to emperor: the creolized nature of Haitian society and the creolized aesthetic of the enslaved people is suggested.[42] Drawing on Barthes, I suggest that the "soul" or "meaning" of an outfit is revealed in the "detached detail."[43] Dessalines's skullcap is significant.

Fig. 26
Portrait of General
Jean-Jacques Dessalines

Military uniforms denote belonging and status. They signify physical and psychological discipline. The disciplining of the body required to wear them is an education in self-governance, shaping the social and inner self. Daniel Roche writes that the military uniform is "at the heart of the encounter between

38 I deliberately draw on the slogan of the French Revolution, "Liberté, equalité, fraternité," to highlight the absence of the rights of the enslaved people.
39 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 82.
40 Examples of historical and theoretical texts referring to the simplification and democratization of European male dress during the Great Male Renunciation include in Barthes, *Language of Fashion*; Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Farid Chenoune, *A History of Men's Fashion* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993); and J. C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966).
41 Helen Bradley-Foster, *"New Raiments of Self": African American Clothing in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 268.
42 Checinska, "Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities."
43 Barthes, *Language of Fashion*, 63–65.

appearances and social discipline."[44] "Detached details," such as gold buttons, braids, and epaulets, are insignias of power.[45] Echoing masking in West African masquerade and Jamaican Jonkonnu, the military uniforms take on the associated characters. For some African diasporic males, the wearing of a military uniform could be instrumental in the reconciliation of "double consciousness."[46] As Susan B. Kaiser writes, those who have been historically constructed as objects may use dress as a vehicle for subjectivity. Using the symbols present within the dominant culture, individuals reconstruct their everyday truths. The dominant cultural norms are subverted.[47] Notions of "who I am" or "who I am becoming" are thus articulated through self-fashioning. Dessalines employs a creolized aesthetic to personalize his uniform, appropriating and contesting the hierarchies of power within the plantation slavery regime and the aesthetic values of *massa*.

The Haitian Revolution and spectacle of its leaders' dress challenged eighteenth-century Western thinking about race. The revolution was unthinkable, as was the sight of ex-slaves in full military regalia, conducting themselves in the manner of Versailles. (From 1758 until the start of the revolution, free blacks and mulattos were legally forbidden to wear swords, sabers, and European dress.[48]) Bonaparte referred to the revolutionaries as "gilded Africans," boasting that he would not leave a single epaulet on their shoulders.[49]

Arise Sir Galahad

Nearly 150 years later, in 1948, the men who sailed into London's Tilbury Docks on the *Empire Windrush* brought with them history, culture, and style. The near-aristocratic formality of their dress bore traces of ongoing creolization. Post-emancipation entanglements between West Africa, the Americas, and Europe were manifest in their self-styling. They embody what is considered an in-between borderlands space. Inhabiting the liminal space between one sense of being and another, they appear on the brink of a new identity.

Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), which chronicles the everyday lives of West Indians,[50] was published at a time when migration from the Caribbean to Great Britain peaked. Arriving from Trinidad, Henry Oliver Esquire makes his entrance through the smog and grime of London's Waterloo station to meet Moses Aloetta, an established inhabitant of the "big city."[51] Moses, having scrutinized this "specimen" who "land up from the sunny tropics on a powerful winter evening wearing a tropical suit and saying that he ain't have no luggage,"[52] christens him Sir Galahad.

Like the Sir Galahad of Malory and Tennyson, Selvon's urban knight is a heroic figure.[53] His zest for life and determination to "make it big" in England, and

dismissing Moses's advice to return home to Trinidad on the next steamer, is similar to the daring spirit of the Knights of the Round Table in their search for the Holy Grail. As the book progresses, the conspicuously underdressed Henry Oliver disappears behind the mask of his newly acquired title. Selvon elaborates on Sir Galahad's appearance: his preferred style, the ritual of dressing, the ceremony surrounding the commissioning of a new suit from a Charing Cross Road tailor rather than an East End one. We learn that "the first things [… Sir Galahad would] do after he [gets] a work was to stock up with clothes like stupidness."[54] Sir Galahad is aware of the latest cuts. Money is no object. It is impossible to palm off "slack work" on him because he has an eye for quality and perfection in dress. Self-fashioning, for Sir Galahad, is a priority. There is a suggestion in the book that prioritizing fashion is a common trait among Caribbean men; Jamaicans, for example, are regarded as being particularly *hep* (cool).

According to Gilroy's hypotheses, African American culture is emblematic of the cultural expressions of the African diasporas throughout the West.[55] Gilroy, in his extrapolation on the black Atlantic suggests that black American cultural and political histories are not solely the inheritance of African Americans. He argues that the historical crisscrossing of the Atlantic by black people, whether involuntarily through slavery or voluntarily through migration, facilitated continual cultural exchange. I have seen influences of classic English menswear alongside African American style on Windrush Generation "fine dressing." For example, the preference for suits made of 100 percent English wool despite tropical climates. In the context of the Caribbean and its diasporas, these exchanges manifest in strategies like the clashing of print and pattern, exaggeration in silhouette, asymmetry, and the dressing of the head.[56]

Sir Galahad displays a zoot approach to dress. When preparing to go out on a date, "the crowning touch [of his outfit] is a long silver chain hanging from the fob, and coming back into the side pocket."[57] As with African American

44 Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress, Fashion and the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 222.
45 Barthes, *Language of Fashion*, 64.
46 Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*.
47 Susan B. Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing* (New York: Fairchild Books, 1997), 79–83.
48 Kaiser, *Social Psychology of Clothing*, 38–41.
49 James Cyril Lionel Robert, *The Black Jacobins* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980), 271.
50 "West Indian" is the term used to describe Caribbean peoples during the mid-twentieth century.
51 Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (New York: Longman, 1956), 52.
52 Selvon, 34.
53 See Alfred Tennyson, *Idylls of the King and Other Arthurian Poems* (London: Nonsuch Press, 1968), 384; Thomas Malory, *Le Mort D'Arthur* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
54 Tennyson, 85.
55 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*.
56 See Checinska, "Colonizin' in Reverse!"; and Checinska, "Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities."
57 Selvon, *Lonely Londoners*, 87.

zoot-suiters, the then classic markers of Western male dress, such as discretion and suitability, which reinforced standards of appearance based on Judeo-Christian values, are challenged. The shining of the shoes, the new socks, the Van Heusen shirt, all serve to create an impression. As Erving Goffman states, when appearing in public one consciously and subconsciously projects a concept of one's inner self, while simultaneously projecting a reading of the situation.[58] Sir Galahad transforms his appearance to fit his new inner image. In London, he feels like a lord and so he dresses like a lord: "he feel like a new man." The angularity of his suit's square shoulders and razor-sharp creases become the armor in which he goes into battle, cruising around Piccadilly Circus or Charing Cross Road; the white shield with red cross of the medieval knight is replaced by the zoot-suiter's elongated silver watch chain. The donning of the suit could be seen as a signifier of the rite of passage from one life to the next; the formality of the suit is like a mask within the masquerade of his (re-)fashioned masculinity. The bulk of the suit increases his physical stature and perceived status. Sir Galahad demands to be seen. The cut of his suit and choice of accessories are strategic.

Barthes describes jewelry as the "soul" of an outfit, a "next-to-nothing" that is "the vital element in getting dressed, because it underlines the desire for order, for composition, for intelligence."[59] In the late 1940s to the early '50s, the period when Selvon's book is set, tasteful jewelry in a British context was meant to be discreet. As Barthes continues, jewelry plays a crucial role in making meaning; the detached term—a silver watch chain—is significant. This is particularly true of the male suit, where subtleties of cut and cloth can be misread. Jewelry worn to accompany the zoot-suit punctuated the outfit in a similar fashion to the "sound explosions" in Brathwaite's nation language, metaphorically emphasizing the journey from enslavement. To reference Brathwaite's nation language, dress in the moment of arrival from the Caribbean to Britain, from the Jamaican perspective, may have "English" features, but in its contours, its silhouette, its "riddimic" use of accessory, it is not English. It is shaped by a creolized aesthetic.[60]

Conclusion

> **In the world in which I travel I am endlessly creating myself. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate my cycle to freedom.**
> **—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks***

Frantz Fanon speaks of the recreation of the self at the border crossing. However, freedom from society's constraints based on racial and cultural difference is fleeting since slavery and colonization are the matrix against which African diasporic male bodies are continually read—black-skinned bodies are at the center of colonial fantasy. As Mercer writes: "[Black men] are implicated in the same landscape of stereotypes which is dominated and organized around the needs, demands and desires of white males."[61] The role of the audience in making meaning or "fixing" us as other cannot be ignored. Creolized aesthetics and strategic nonverbal nation language may herald signs of refashioned African diasporic masculinities; however, the racialized visual field and colonial gaze instigates perpetual flux. There follows an endless crisscrossing of borders and quest for personhood.

58 Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 235.
59 Barthes, *Language of Fashion*, 63.
60 Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*; Checinska, "Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities."
61 Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 133.

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Fashion and Postcolonial Critique: An Introduction
Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton

Fig. 1
Young women cutting and fitting clothing in class at Agricultural and Mechanical College, Greensboro, NC, 1899. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC; b/w film copy neg reproduction number: LC-USZ62-118917, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97510089/. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.
Fig. 2
Photograph of exhibit of the American Negroes at the Paris exposition, 1900. Taken from the *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 22, no. 130 (November 1900): 576. Library of Congress Washington, DC, reproduction number LC-DIG-ppmsc-04826 (digital file from original), LC-USZ62-132752 (b&w film copy neg.) http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001697152. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.
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"The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line," chart prepared by Du Bois for the "American Negro" exhibit at the 1900 Paris World Exposition to show the routes of the African slave trade and the economic and social progress of African Americans since emancipation. Drawing, ink, and watercolor on board, 710 x 560 mm. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC; Digital ID: ppmsca 33863, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.33863. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.
Fig. 4
Portrait 1899, displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit at the Paris International Exposition, 1900 [African American woman, half-length portrait, seated, facing right], Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC, Digital ID: (b&w film copy neg.) cph 3c24691, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c24691. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.
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Traveling Fashion: Exoticism and Tropicalism
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Incommensurate T-shirts: Art/Economy from Senegal to the United States
Leslie Rabine

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