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Producing "Fabulous": Commodification and Ethnicity in Hair Braiding Salons

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PRODUCING “FABULOUS”: COMMODIFICATION AND ETHNICITY IN HAIR
BRAIDING SALONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of
requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
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To Marlon Alberetos, whose glory I will always be.

1 Cor. 11:7,15-16

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ABSTRACT

Black women wearing *fabulous* braids are a striking feature of the Afro-diasporic cultural landscape. However, the braiders and salon owners who enable this aesthetic engineering are seldom acknowledged. This dissertation investigates the experience and role of Caribbean and West and Central African women in the hair braiding industry, a rapidly growing business in the U.S. I address the complexity of these women's multiple social roles and the multiple consciousness (King, 1988) associated with their demographic characteristics (color, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and immigrant status). The commonalities between the braiders and their mostly African American customers contrast vividly with their perception of one another as a cultural group and as business counterparts. This dissertation examines the aforementioned contrasts, and thereby enters the debate of the definition and significance of gendered blackness/racialized gender, when ethnicity transcends race. Late-20th and 21st century trans-diasporic migrations (especially the movement of Africans to and from Europe and the U.S.) have changed the make-up of the black diaspora and, consequently, what it means to be black in the modern world. As I discuss ethnicity as a for-profit construct in the U.S. and Jamaican political economy, I also propose a re-visited definition of *Africanness*, adjusted to the contemporary make-up of the African diaspora. In addition, I evaluate the label "African Hair Braiding" that features in numerous salons' names by inspecting the "African" element in the service they render. The resulting dissertation reports and analyzes participant observation narratives, field notes, and interviews with owners, braiders, and customers in Queens (NY) and Baton Rouge (LA). I also examine the hair braiding market as both product and agent of globalization, shedding light on the contribution of these workers – a contribution that is often taken for granted, underestimated, underappreciated, ignored, or simply unheard of.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Overview

When a black woman dresses up and gets a new hairdo, she looks *fabulous*. For generations, black people in the diaspora have earned the reputation of being fashion statement makers (Bazanquiza, 1992; Hanon, 2006; James, 2015; Hobdy, 2016). For example, dandyism among black men has long been prevalent (either in practice or as an ideal) in slave, post-Emancipation, and contemporary African American communities (Pham, 2015; Miller, 2013, 2010). Dressing up and looking *fabulous* reflect a desire to be positively noticed and deflect negative stigma, to be taken seriously, and to win respect. These aspirations are all the more prevalent in the African diaspora, where black people have been disenfranchised and oppressed on a historical scale. Crockett (2017) argued that African Americans are trying, through hairstyles and dress, to display their “fitness for full cultural and social citizenship” in the U.S. (Crockett, 2017:theconversation.com). In their ethnographic consumer report, Crockett and Wallendorf (2004) and Lamont and Molnár (2001) detailed that black communities tend to turn to consumerism to counter normative, hegemonic, political ideology and shape their cultural identity. Quite often, movements stemming from politically motivated reactions eventually influence subcultures’ aesthetics as well. Without trying to sound essentialist, it is my interpretation that black people in the majority of the diaspora have a cultural standard of *fabulous* fashionability. Fashionability and the *fabulous* are intensified in the U.S. because of elevated consumerism and the fact that black Americans have high purchasing power (Chin, 2001; Steven Podoshen, 2008). For instance, black women often testify that getting their hair done give them a sense of worth and respectability, especially if it is done for a price, in a salon (Cunningham, 2005). After all, hair is an avenue of *fabulous*-ness.

Braids have always been part of the African aesthetic. African hair braiding differs from other forms of braiding attributed to other continents. As opposed to French, Elizabethan, Indian, or American Indian braids, African hairstyles usually feature a larger number of braids, and the plait designs can be very intricate (Martin, 1996:5; Eglash, 1999). During slavery, the art of braiding was not practiced as often and as proficiently as it was in Africa. The postbellum commercialization hair relaxers and hot combs also contributed to the scarcity of expert braiding. During these aforementioned eras, whiteness was hegemonically set as the aesthetic and social standard of acceptability, and biological markers of blackness (dark skin, coarse hair) were demonized. Nevertheless, Afrocentric movements in Jamaica and later on in the US re-ignited a taste for these markers of blackness and African ancestry. Showing off coarse hair was more than just a political statement, it was counter-ideology reified in visible attributes situated in black communities, or, as Appadurai (1990) coined it, an ideoscape. Braids constitute an ethnic-specific care system in the sense that it is a practical and adaptive way to manage coarse hair. Braided hair, like dandyism, quickly added beauty and iconic, bold fashionability (the *fabulous*) to its political claims of affirmation and agency. Thus, if braids are an example of *fabulous* hairstyle, then hair braiders are artisans of *fabulous*-ness.

The modern hair braiding industry is both an agent and outcome of globalization, as it unites different economies. In the context presented in this dissertation, globalization is to be understood as growing international flows that tie the global to the local, and vice-versa (Cox, 1997). It is characterized by, among other notions, global citizenship and migration (Robertson and White, 2007). The need for natural hair care and hair braiding in the U.S. is disproportionate to the number of skilled American braiders. For this reason, African American customers often visit salons owned by immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, where hair braiding is a

common part of a girl's upbringing (Babou, 2008, Janks, 2006). African girls and women often braid each other's hair at home. This acquired skill is commodified when they immigrate to the U.S. and it becomes a for-profit service. The process of hair braiding requires particular technique mastery, and increasingly so, African and Caribbean female immigrants are successfully commercializing their skill to cater to a specific population: African American women. Furthermore, the Caribbean and African braiding salon has become a glocal space. Glocalization here refers to the process by which international particularities – hair braiding by immigrant stylists – is not only incorporated into and adopted by the African American subculture, but also how the braiding experience is modified to suit local tastes and legal requirements. (Sharma, 2009). Although the skill and service by foreign braiders is appealing to African American women seeking to look *fabulous*, it is adapted to the U.S. legal system. While braiding usually takes place at home in the braiders' countries of origin (Lorrain and Kwon, 2015), U.S. state regulations specifies that stylists must work in salons. They must also complete training approved by the state's cosmetology board, pass an examination, and receive a certificate (all of which at their own expense) in order to legally profit from a skill acquired abroad. Furthermore, cosmetology boards specify salons proxemics (Hall, 1963): acceptable salon dimensions, organization of the space, certificates hung on the wall, location of combs, hair dryers, barbicide jars, etc. Adapting to African American subcultures often includes modifying the braiding technique for individual braids with extensions (called box braids or microbraids, depending on the braids' thickness). For instance, African individual braids start with the extension tightly twisted around the base of the hair, then braided. African American women, however, prefer that the extension be first plaited onto the scalp, then braided (see Figure 1 and Figure 7). Compared to continental African women, African American customers often opt for

voluminous, long, dyed extensions, in accordance to the subculture's standard of mega-sized, *fabulous* fashionability. If the fashion of *fabulous* braided hair is indeed African American material culture, then braiding salons, though mostly operated by immigrant women, have become an integral part of the African American cultural landscape.



Figure 1: Box braids with black and platine extensions that match the customer's own black and platine hair

This dissertation addresses the complex, marginalized identity of the immigrant stylists who produce braided *fabulous*-ness, as well as the cultural space they create through the salon. I interacted with several salon owners, managers, and workers from Jamaica, Cameroon, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Republic of Guinea, and Benin. Some are Muslim, others are Christian; all profess their faith proudly. Furthermore, these Caribbean and African salons are women-staffed, exclusively. The salon constitutes a heteronormative space where immigrant women share a common profession, language, dark skin, and coarse hair. The Jamaican salon I studied is entirely Jamaica-staffed and operated. On

the other hand, braiders in African salons where I conducted fieldwork originate from diverse countries of sub-Saharan Africa, and almost all braiders are francophone. In these salons, braiders exhibit what I will call *Africanness*: a set of attitudes, behavior patterns, and sensibilities that they attribute to being an African woman. The notion of intersectionality helps understand the different social identities that characterize both Jamaican and African braiders. Crenshaw (1991) denounced the socio-political violence against women. She argued that this violence is linked to a system of race, gender, and class domination that oppresses women of color and isolates their voices. Crenshaw advocated feminism that helps understanding this social-political violence that targets women's intersectional identities (1991:1243). Similar concerns were transferred regarding the isolated voices of African nationals in the U.S. when Harushimana (2007) examined cultural, educational, and linguistic violence against immigrants. Again, the author denounced a system of oppression that marginalizes Africans as a separate class in the society and in the school system. Yet, the study did not examine the intersectionality of gender and political economy, an issue Collins (2000) explored with great depth. Numerous women with whom I worked throughout this dissertation research project embody characteristics that Collins mentioned, especially the "confinement to a segment of low-paying jobs," which, the author notes, demonstrates the convergence of race and gender (Collins, 2000:44). Nevertheless, Collins' (2000) article was centered on African American women almost exclusively, even though she detailed that nation was an important factor in black women's intersectional identities (2000:44). The impact of nation on blackness is very complex to analyze in the African braiding salon and, to a lesser extent, in the Jamaican salon. In effect, Jamaica shares the African American taste for the *fabulous*. The island is also geographically closer to the U.S., it shares a legacy of transatlantic slave trade and slavery, and it is Anglophone. On the other hand, African

foreignness is more pronounced linguistically, historically, and culturally. Thus, the study of the transcultural space presented in this dissertation expands Collins' (2000) discussion. Indeed, I add to her argument the notions of citizenship and linguistic complexity. In other words, this dissertation addresses the complexity of blackness in America in the 21st century.

Although this work offers a thought-provoking contribution to the field of anthropology, others have paved the way for such a discussion. In linguistic anthropology, scholars such as Jacobs-Huey (1996, 2006, 2007) have investigated salon discourse as unique in that discourse transforms the salon from a locale to a space, where black clients' and stylists' identities are mutually constructed. This dissertation extends that discussion of blackness to clients with similar demographic characteristics, and similar aspirations to *fabulous*-ness, yet in a context where the black stylists are not American.

Using the example of Jamaican transnational spaces, Hall (2010) argued that black immigrants often arrive to the U.S. knowledgeable about American culture, but with numerous preconceived notions. Moreover, he stated that the colonial legacy in the migrants' countries of origin complicates their interpretation of their own blackness, as well as the process of their cultural adaptation as black people after they arrive. In other words, the colonial legacy creates another layer of intersectionality

Clarke and Thomas (2006) detailed how globalization complicates black identity and its investigation in the social sciences. Globalization, as an internationalized redistribution of wealth, reproduces racial hierarchies of white domination. These hierarchies "articulate [...] ideas about ethnic, gendered, and cultural difference" (Clarke and Thomas, 2006:1). I concur with the authors' claim that racial formations have shaped and continue to shape global processes. In the globalized world, the way blackness is performed depends on local

circumstances and the ideas, values, and practices – what Appadurai (1990) would call ideoscapes – of the locality. Thus, Clarke and Thomas explained that anthropological ethnography is an efficient method to help understand local and translocal experiences with citizenship, belonging, and racial difference. They encourage their fellow anthropologists to examine notions such as “‘progress,’ ‘tradition,’ and ‘modernity’” and the extent to which “American hegemonies” have impacted the definition of these three terms in other diasporic loci (Clarke and Thomas, 2006:4).

Stoller (1996, 2002, 2010), among others, conducted ethnographic fieldwork in black transnational spaces. He studied the manner in which West African street vendors commodify their ethnicity in New York City into a brand of authenticity for the products they sell. They are particularly appealing to African American buyers in search for material connections with their African ancestry. Clarke (2004), who examined the commodification of Yoruba identity documented how the industry of race as culture seeks to profit from racial sameness between African Americans and West Africans. She explained that black transnational communities and networks display exceptional agency, because they challenge existing structures of power.

.As initiated by Herskovits and his followers, the idea of *Africanness* in the Americas was long confined to the remnant of cultural traits that survived slavery and the transatlantic slave trade (Herskovits and Works, 1949; Mintz and Price, 1976). Herskovits investigated and analyzed “Africanisms” and “survivals” in the African American and Afro-Caribbean religious, aesthetic, or rhetorical tradition (Herskovits, 1937, 1943, 1946, 1964, 1990). Afro-diasporic studies (africology, Africana studies, and the like) and anthropology of the black diaspora boomed as a field of study in the 1980’s and 1990’s, as it became increasingly recognized as a discipline. Gilroy (1993), in particular, is to be credited for presenting the African diaspora as

mobile and dynamic in Africa, the Americas, and Europe. He detailed that modern Afro-diasporic cultures as characterized not only by surviving Africanisms, but also by live connections between Afro-diasporic loci. The slave trade did not sever the ties between black cultures.

Nevertheless, live interactions between diaspora blacks and Africa have not always been harmonious. The colonial settlements in Liberia and Sierra Leone attest to a conscious Afro-British and African American effort to reconnect with Africa, but historians have labeled these colonies as schemes for the U.S. to spy on West African politics, to enslave Africans on-site, and for England to increase its political influence in Africa (Akyeampong, 2000:189; Everill, 2013; Butcher, 2010). Ethnographic reports such as Richard Wright's (1954) *Black Power!* constitute extreme examples of pejorative depictions of Africans by an African American. In the following decade, numerous canonical narratives promoted pan-Africanism and some sense of community between blacks worldwide as the result of common history and a common plight. Nevertheless, this movement did not acknowledge the complexity of black people's social identities in particular diasporic loci. Shepperson (1962) and Legum (1962), for example, suggested that pan-Africanists should champion black political independence, rather than focus on cultural particularities of the spaces that make up the African diaspora.

Post-WWII reconstruction in Europe generated a wave of migration of Caribbean semiskilled laborers to the French and British metropolises in the 1960's. In the 1970's, political discontent in Jamaica became a push factor for nationals, and the American flourishing economy made the U.S. an attractive destination for disenfranchised Jamaicans to relocate. (Glennie and Chappell, 2010; Cooper, 1985). Simultaneously, the creation of collaborative programs between universities in Africa and Europe, and Africa and North America increased the population of

African immigrants in Western Europe, Canada, and the U.S. The face of the diaspora had changed yet again. Since the 1980's, the African immigrant population has steadily increased, adding to international students a large number of refugees from sub-Saharan Africa. Along with Caribbean and Afro-Latin immigrants, the non-U.S. born black population in the U.S. nears 4 million people (Anderson, 2017; Chung, 2015).

In *The Other African Americans*, Taylor and Tuch (2007) detail the complexity of being black in America in the late-20th-21st century. The presence of non-U.S. born blacks and second-generation immigrants Gilroy explained how the influence of transnational spaces in the U.S. produced creative cultural, artistic, and aesthetic innovations (1993:33). He stated that, for example, hip hop is commonly associated with African American subculture, but it arose from Caribbean transnational structures of circulation and intercultural exchanges (1993:87). Likewise, the singer Brandi Norwood gained popularity in the 1990's not only for her voice, but also for her *fabulous* Jamaican braids

The current presence of African and Caribbean émigrés in New York has changed, or at least diversified, what it means to be black in America. Globalization is indeed transforming the face of the black diaspora. Patterson and Kelley (2000:11) argued that “[the black diaspora] is always in the making, and [...] it is situated with global race and gender hierarchies.” Nevertheless, modern-day Caribbean and African émigrés are still relatively invisible and muted in the media, and, regrettably so, in academia (Byfield, 2000). Studying African immigrants can be a delicate task. Indeed, in a country where an African American Zionist may wear a dashiki while a Malian youth may wear the latest denim and sneakers, a black person's ethnic affiliation and performance is not always visible to the naked eye. And if it were, it would be a diplomatic

faux-pas (a.k.a. ethnic profiling) to assume one's origin simply because they "look African." But is there any such thing as "acting African"? Can the same be asked about "acting Jamaican"?

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of braiding salons and businesses owned by Jamaican and francophone West and Central African women in New York and Louisiana. I selected these two locations to help demonstrate the extent to which these immigrant-owned institutions inscribe themselves into the (African) American cultural – and vernacular – landscape (Zelinsky, 2004; Schein, 2010). In Baton Rouge, LA, two businesses are of peculiar interest. One is owned by Andrea, a first-generation Jamaican immigrant, and the other by Jojo, a first-generation Togolese immigrant¹. Both women are licensed hair specialists. All of Andrea's helpers are Jamaican, and all of Jojo's helpers are from different West and Central African countries. I also consider other African-owned salons or businesses in the Jamaica-Queens, NY area, a location where the median household income is higher than the median Baton Rouge household income is, but where the cost of living is higher as well. While I consider several New York salons throughout the study, I centered data collection on two businesses: one is owned by Antou, a first-generation immigrant from Cote d'Ivoire, and the other by Nadia, a first-generation immigrant from Cameroon². In both salons, all braiders are from different countries of francophone, sub-Saharan Africa. While this dissertation is by no means an attempt to generalize and amalgamate all sub-Saharan cultures, I draw on the commonalities among these cultures. Effectively, Jojo, Antou, and Nadia work in "trans-African," multinational spaces, and

¹ These participants are well known and well established in the Baton Rouge community. While I will omit their last names, there was no need and no request to use pseudonyms for them.

² Antou, Nadia, and their staff are more vulnerable participants. Although they are licensed stylists, they participate in the informal economy that sustains numerous Jamaica-Queens residents. For this reason, I use pseudonyms for all salon workers in New York.

they endorsed the multinational African label, “African Hair Braiding” when naming their establishments.

Demographics and landscape differ greatly from the state of Louisiana to that of New York. Effectively, while Louisiana has a 2.59% foreign-born population, New York’s foreign-born make up 20.38% of its population (CensusScope, 2014). The population to whom braiding services are provided are also different in scope and amount. Despite the fact that Baton Rouge has 125,000 black inhabitants, they constitute 54% of the city’s population. On the other hand, 19% of Queens’ population is black, but they amount to 423,000 inhabitants (City-data.com, 2017). New York is a destination of choice for a majority of migrants, including Caribbean and African immigrants, a population that has been understudied in social sciences³. American salons commonly bear the appellation “African Hair Braiding” in their business names. In a city where braid-wearing black women are so numerous and most braiding salons’ signs are labeled “African,” this project is concerned with the importation of a skill and the cultural context in which it is practiced professionally. In all locations, the need for reliable haircare is an omnipresent factor for these black communities, and the skill of braiding (whether locally grown or imported) is an asset of which these communities are taking great advantage.

The definition of blackness in anthropology and other social sciences is constantly being debated and adjusted based on geographic area, social status, gender, or age (Clarke and Thomas, 2006; Shaw, 2005; Thomas, 2004). Nevertheless, the actuality outside the academic world is that

³ A few studies cover their demographic characteristics, but they mostly focus on educated men or on health issues (Djamba, 1999; Venters and Gany, 2011). More recent publications have addressed the contributions and profiles of African immigrants in the U.S. (Djamba and Kimuna, 2012; Diouf, 2004).

there is a disconnect between these peoples. Stereotypes propagated in numerous forms of media encourage misconceptions and ignorance regarding one another (Magubane, 1987). For instance, most Caribbean and African braiders are from developing countries. Although African Americans are statistically among the poorest Americans in Baton Rouge and Brooklyn, their country of citizenship is among the richest in the world, which leads many to dissociate from their African and Caribbean counterparts. Inversely, the majority of African immigrants in the U.S., including most braiders in Baton Rouge, have college education or are pursuing university studies (Hagopian et al., 2004). On the other hand, African Americans have one of the lowest rate of education beyond high-school (Ryan and Bauman, 2016). In addition to language and accent differences, some Africans have been perceived as somewhat elitist by their African American counterparts. Yet, in the salon the stances of power are constantly switching (Jacobs-Huey, 1996). The braider is the hair expert exercising authority over the customer's physical appearance. Yet, the customer may dictate her preferences and determine the braider's income.

Here, I examine not only how gender is racialized, but also how blackness is (re)defined in the salon environment, that is, when blackness (curly hair) unites braiders and customers, yet the multinational aspect of the salon population complicates what it means to be a black woman in America. I seek to investigate the salon-generated mutations of perception, image, stance, and role between Caribbean, African, and African American women. I thus examine the ambivalence between aesthetic and biological commonalities (hair texture and treatment, skin color) and schisms linked to ethnicity and citizenship.

Despite the potential conflict due to the aforementioned misconceptions between Africans and African Americans, my proposed observations also cover the unique bond created between the stylist and the client in the instance of hair braiding. This form of intimacy is linked

to the direct physical contact between the two individuals, the braider's intimate interaction with her customer's scalp, the braider's knowledge of her customer's appearance without braids, as well as the bond created by the continuous conversation that reveals cultural trends on behalf of both the braider and the customer (Willett, 2000; Diouf, 2004; Kleindorfer et al., 2008; Martyn, 2011). On the other hand, the African hair braiding salon (AHBS) is also a place where the braiders' display of exotic *Africanness* through attire and even more intensely through the practice of speaking a foreign language or in dialect, can constitute a source of frustration –and sometimes animosity – for the African American customer.

Guiding questions, goals and hypotheses

This dissertation investigates some of these transnational implications further through the lens of the hair braiders as well as the customers. Thus, this project seeks to

- Investigate and analyze processes that produce one aspect of the African American and Jamaican cultural landscape (*fabulous* braided hair)
- Document and interpret the ambivalence between performing ethnicity and performing modernity that result in a new form of *Africanness* in America
- Apply ethnographic methods to investigate the story behind an element of the Afro-diasporic cultural landscape and material culture
- Address the complexity of blackness in the Americas by identifying an alternative, contemporary application of the term “African diaspora”

Some research questions include the following:

- Why is the skill of hair braiding so intensely exoticized in the U.S. even though it is commercially consumed by mostly U.S. born American women?

- What elements of the braiding experience at the salon validate the use of the term “African” in “African Hair Braiding”? How is *Africanness* perceived or produced in the salon?
- While ideals of pan-Africanism advocate cooperation and unity among black peoples of the African diaspora, how does the hair braiding industry impact the relations between African, African American, and Caribbean women?
- In more general terms, how do these black women at the salon experience and interpret blackness, *Africanness*, and womanhood?

Organization of the dissertation

In Chapter 2, I detail the methods I utilized for collecting and analyzing data. I explain the rationale for these procedures and elaborate on the theoretical framework on which I based my methodology. Chapter 3 reviews the literature concerning the social and cultural history that made way for the emergence of braiding salons. While much can be said about hair care in pre-colonial and pre-slavery Africa, I elected to begin the genealogy in the 16th and 17th century Americas, a time when black hair care became more controversial. Indeed, during this era in this region, African hair textures were no longer the norm and standard. Displaced blacks were now confronted by a system led by a white class that valued long, straight hair. Chapter 3 examines how African American and afro-Caribbean women coped with the label of abnormality and developed a hair culture, leading to the notion of the *fabulous* that characterizes black material culture today.

Chapter 4 investigates strategies that AHBS employ to ensure customer satisfaction (*fabulous* hairdo’s) and subsequent optimal revenue. I argue that, despite the AHBS label,

capitalist, western business and space management is more profitable than traditional African approaches to commerce, bargaining, and proxemics. In a postcolonial context of hybridity, heterogeneity, and pluralism (Paolini et al., 1999), I show how AHBS embraced speed and timeliness to maximize profit. These concepts differ from common sub-Saharan African interpretation of time, even in the workplace (Nobles, 1974; Hill et al., 2000; Matondo, 2012). Then, I study braiders and customers' social interactions. In effect, AHBS stylists compromise and negotiate stances of power, not only for monetary gain, but also as part of a collectivist ideal that characterizes the majority of sub-Saharan societies. Lastly, I address the managers' and workers' own perception of the African traditional techniques of braiding and conducting business. Although the data reported applies to AHBS throughout the country, I utilize specific examples from two African-owned salons in Jamaica-Queens, NY.

Chapter 5 explores the art and business of African braiding in Baton Rouge, LA, from the perspectives of two immigrant women – one from Jamaica and one from Togo. As a cultural anthropologist, I seek to understand the personal, cultural, and social factors that influence their choice of work and how they perform it. Drawing on interactions and observation with Jojo, owner of Princess African Hair Braiding (PAHB), and Andrea, owner of Andrea's Hair Studio (AHS), the chapter examines how each woman successfully established a hair braiding business and clientele in Baton Rouge, as well as how each braider understands her own work. Interviews, photographs, and field observations reveal the extent to which caring for the black American body is part of a unique business with complex political and socio-economic ramifications.⁴

⁴ A condensed version of Chapter 5 was accepted for publication in the *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany* 27 (2017), to be released in November 2017.

Chapter 6 is centered on the fact that the majority of beauty shops labeled AHBS are owned by women from francophone African countries (especially Senegal, Cameroon, Togo, and Ivory Coast). Even in the presence of their almost exclusively African American customers, salon owners and employees –typically from francophone Africa as well – interact with one another in French. This chapter interprets the use of French as a means to exoticize and Africanize the salon space. The data is based on fieldwork conducted during three months of participant observation in two salons in Jamaica-Queens, NY. Ethnography of conversation for three speech events, including an instance of code-switching, reveals that braiders use the French language not only as a manifestation of their African consciousness, but also to justify and validate the appellation “African Hair Braiding Salon” that characterizes these transnational and transcultural establishments.

Chapter 7 is concerned with the manner in which New York braiders address one another and others in the salon. The fact that they call Anglophone customers and other non-Africans by their interlocutors’ first names or the term “my friend” suggests that the stylists perceive these interlocutors as equals, or that they do not seek in-depth socializing with them. On the other hand, braiders communicate in French with one another, and seldom address fellow workers with their first names. Managers are called “patronne” (“boss”) or “Patron” (the masculine term for “boss”) and older employees are called “Tantie” or “Tantine” (“Auntie”). Young, new employees are called “Ma Chérie” (in this context, the equivalent of “[My] Sweetheart” or “[My]⁵ Honeybun”), and young employees call each other “Ma Sœur” (“My Sister”). In sub-

⁵ The possessive adjective “my” is not commonly included in English. While the term “ma chérie” generally translates into a term of affection and endearment toward a younger female such as “Sweetheart” or “Honeybun,” these English equivalents do not connote the sense of

Saharan African cultures, calling someone by his/her first name is often considered intrusive and invasive, and first names are often unknown outside the immediate family. In addition, in the AHBS' fast-paced workplace, terms of endearments allow for politeness when giving order and directing queries in the imperative, which would have otherwise been a face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In addition, as the braiders are often informal employees, omitting first and last names gives owners and managers a sense of freedom from administrative – and fiscal – accountability and responsibility. Furthermore, braiders are often temporary employees in need of fast cash. The use of nicknames allow permanent employees to cope with the constant inflow and outflow of new, young, and presumably short-term, braiders. In all cases, French nicknames function as an acknowledgment and praise of the braider's *Africanness* and of the interlocutors' relationships. Nicknames are an inclusive strategy to identify one's function in the branded African Hair Braiding team.

ownership and adoption to the same extent as the French appellation “ma chérie.” This illustrates the complexity of working with translated terms in the field of cultural anthropology.

CHAPTER 2. METHODS

Overview

As this project examines the dynamics of sociocultural factors that pertain to the performance of ethnic braiding salons in the Caribbean and the U.S., I selected Louisiana, New York, and Jamaica for field research. Indeed, while Louisiana is one the states that has the largest black/African American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), New York has one of the largest immigrant population. I have chosen these three locations to help demonstrate the extent to which these institutions inscribe themselves into the black cultural – and even vernacular – landscape (Schein, 2010).

Data collection was centered on:

- The importation process: the circumstances in which workers arrived to America
- The workers: who they are, what their demographic characteristics are, their life stories
- The practice of the skill: not only how the skill was gained, but the technique in itself; what makes African braiding so unique to the point that it justifies *branding* braiding as African; how Jamaican women consume natural hair care
- The circumstances in which the skill is practiced: the salon environment, including the conversations that take place in it and the spatial arrangement of the settings
- To a lesser extent, observations also covered the client population to identify trends and to deduct their perception of braiders and braiding salons.

This project was a mostly qualitative study. The majority of data collection consisted of observation. I collected field notes and transcribed conversations I had with braiders and salon owners, as well as some conversations salon participants had with one another. The amount of time spent in braiding salons is summarized in the following table:

Salon name	Location	Ethnographic present	Data collection method
Andrea's Hair Studio	Baton Rouge, LA	Fall 2013-Fall 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Formal interview • Participant observation (as customer)
Antou African Hair Braiding	Jamaica, NY	Summer 2013-Summer 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Participant observation (co-braiding)
Princess African Hair Braiding	Baton Rouge, LA	Spring 2013-Fall 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Formal interview • Participant observation (as customer)
Nadia's African Hair Braiding	Jamaica, NY	Summer 2013-Summer 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Participant observation (co-braiding & as customer)

I conducted and videotaped formal interviews and transcribed them. The interviews focused on the stylists' commercialization of the braiding skills they acquired prior to immigrating to the US, their compliance with the state's licensing requirements, their reasons for migrating, and their marketing strategies, including customer service. Data collected as "Observation" and "Participant observation" was recorded in writing either on-site, or shortly after a given event. To do so, I would excuse myself to the bathroom or to my car to note the details of the recent events. I would also write entries immediately after each participant observation session. This method was useful for salons where taping was not possible or not allowed. All data reported in these instances are thus presented to my best recollection.

My personal stance

I am a naturalized American citizen born French from Congolese parents. I spent my childhood in Algeria where I attended a French school, and then in France, where I lived in three different cities, due to my father's academic profession. French is my primary language, and

even though my parents are fluent in five languages and speak Cilubà and Swahili at home, they have always addressed us – especially the younger children – in French, while simultaneously subtly blaming us for not speaking our “native” Congolese tongues. Nevertheless, most of our neighbors and family friends were Congolese; we children developed relations that closely resemble the kinship we missed so much, given that all our non-immediate relatives were living in Africa. I thus consider myself African, French, and American simultaneously. This triple identity opens numerous doors, which I intended to use in order to gain access to obtain my participants’ trust.

Jamaica, NY and the AHBS

According to the New York City Department of City Planning (2013), Queens has the largest proportion of immigrants (36%), and *African* braiding salons are visible throughout the borough. In Jamaica-Queens, NY, major arteries such as Sutphin Blvd., Rockaway Blvd., and Jamaica Ave. abound in AHBS. “Fieldwork will be a breeze,” I thought. I had watched Chris Rock’s *Good Hair* a half-dozen times, and seen how cooperative stylists appeared in front of the camera. When watching a documentary, it sometimes seems like Rock taped the entire show, traveled, interviewed, attended fashion shows, narrated and edited, by himself, in the 90 minutes it took me to watch the finished product. As a candid graduate student, I drove and walked around town, introducing myself and my fancy research, hoping to start filming right away. What a disappointment.

My first attempt was in a Ghanaian-owned salon close to Jamaica Ave. I entered the shop, glad to see a fellow-African woman with braided hair. It was Friday July 5, right after Independence Day, around 1:30 pm, at a time where most salons are full of ladies trying to get ready for their week-end activities. Yet, the shop was empty. There was only one customer, and

there were no chairs in the entire room except for the customer's. The shop sold Avon products, but there was no appearance of much braiding business, although passersby had reported to me that this business had been open for several months. The braider was standing, and another woman (who later said she was Ghanaian) was sitting on a stool by the counter. She was coiffed with beautiful short, curly blond braids. I asked to speak with the manager, if she was present. The woman on the stool replied she was the owner. I briefly explained the purpose of my study and before I had time to finish, she cut me off, "No, just look around [for other shops]." I underwent this painful rejection treatment repeatedly, naively baffled at the lack of intra-African cooperation.

Salon owners in Queens, doubtful regarding my intentions, did not allow me to interview them or their workers. I had prepared a questionnaire for customers. Salon owners did not allow me to distribute it either. I stopped at numerous African braiding salons, focusing particularly on Jamaica Avenue and 165th Street, some of the busiest and most fashionable venues for blacks in Jamaica, Queens⁶. Numerous salons on Jamaica Avenue and almost all salons on 165th Street are located upstairs another – usually clothing or shoe – store or boutique. Being 5 months into my 4th pregnancy at the time, the prospect of climbing up the stairs every time I saw an AHBS sign

⁶ The aforementioned shopping area is characterized by clothing stores, beauty supply stores, and beauty salons. It is an ideal spot for black women who care about their appearance. This section of Queens is an illustration of the extent to which the braiding business is quite a multi-level industry and is both an outcome and an agent of a globalized market. Indeed, while African immigrants own most braiding salons there, they purchase the electric equipment and cosmetic products (hair spray, setting lotion, hair gel, sheen spray, etc.) from white American-owned businesses. Furthermore, customers are required to provide their own hair extensions. In all salons I visited, stylists recommended that customers buy their extensions from the beauty supply next door. Nine out the ten beauty supply stores I visited are owned by vendors of Asian ethnicity – mostly of Vietnamese origin, but I have also met Korean, Indian, and Pakistani vendors.

was exhausting in itself, but it was what it was. I was an African Mama, after all. I would show my African sisters that I embraced the struggle.

One of my other attempts was at a shop named Habibatou. It is an AHBS in the galleries of the bus transfer, across from the Queens Branch Municipal Library. I was hoping for a linguistic connection, because the name Habibatou is common in several francophone countries of West Africa. As usual, I asked to speak with the manager. She was constantly in and out, but I eventually got hold of her. She was dressed in a long dashiki and her hair was wrapped. I found out that she was Anglophone (a few days later my husband met her again and found out she was from Nigeria), and showed but little interest in my research. She coldly explained that she was the manager, but not the owner, and that she would have to ask him. Applying the gentle persistence approach we were taught in methods courses, I asked, “When is a good time to come back?” She gave me a one-word answer: “Tomorrow.”

I noticed that Habibatou was actually a double business, with the salon on one side, and a music and video shop next door. I noticed several DVDs for sale with nude pictures on the cover. They advertised: “Haitian movies 3 for \$5.” I returned to Habibatou the next day, and met the manager, a man. He was overseeing the music and video section. Although he was the owner, he politely told me that *they* (whoever “*they*” are) could not allow a study like mine to take place in the salon. Nevertheless, he encouraged me to look around and purchase some items from his store. I thanked him and gracefully exited.

Finding Salon 1

I stopped by Nadia’s AHBS in the early evening, around 7:30 pm, on a Saturday, when women would usually get their hair done before their week-end night-out or as they would get

their hair ready for church on the following day. The shop was located on the busy Sutphin Boulevard. There were four braiders in the shop.

I asked to see the manager, and the friendly braiders, dressed in African attires, pleasantly replied that she was not there and advised that I should return in 3 or 4 days. They then pursued their own conversation in French, speaking about my accent. Perceiving that they were speaking my Native language, I immediately asked them where they were from – in French (“*Tiens, vous êtes d’où comme ça?*”). As pleasant as the stylists already were, the atmosphere instantly became more relaxed. They answered they were from Cameroon, and asked me about my origin. After I told them that I was Congolese, they immediately asked me if I knew how to braid, to which I answered affirmatively. Sensing that they were more willing to hear my cause, I re-explained my research project in French, and they took my phone number, saying, “OK, we’ll tell the boss.” I departed wishing them “*Bonne soirée.*” They replied in French, smiling.

I waited in vain for anyone to call me. I returned a few days later and started in French: “*Bonjour, la patronne est là?*” [Good morning, is the boss here?] Nadia, a beautiful, milk chocolate complexion woman was dozing off on the bench at the entrance. She had on long, black jumbo braids. There were five customers in the shop; all were being attended to, which seemed to me as a sign of good business for a Tuesday morning.

We communicated in French the whole time. Unlike the stores I had visited previously, Nadia took the time to listen, patiently nodding. Once I explained the purpose of my research, the manager – whom I found later on to be the owner – asked if I had conducted this type of study before. I answered affirmatively, referring to the project I completed in Baton Rouge with Jojo’s Princess African Hair Braiding. She said she would like to see my presentation. She never asked for compensation, but I told her up front that all I had to offer was whatever pictures I

took, whatever video I shot, my labor (braiding), and that I was also willing to get my hair and my daughter's hair done at her shop at whatever price she decided.

We parted on a promising note. She said she would discuss the matter with her husband and that I must come back in 2 days with all the documents needed: permission forms, project description, as well as the presentation I had compiled from my study of Jojo's salon. Later on, she accepted that I visit the salon as often as I wanted, and invited me to braid, but she warned that no one should see me sitting with a notepad or a camera: "*Si tu es seulement là assise comme ça à prendre des notes et nous regarder avec ta camera-là, ça, ça ne va pas...* [If you just sit there taking notes and looking at us with you camera, it's not acceptable...]"

Finding salon 2

After leaving Nadia's AHBS that day, I stopped by another salon, Antou AHBS located on Jamaica Avenue and found three women in western attire braiding. They informed me that the manager was absent and that I should return in three days. I left my phone number, but found the atmosphere quite cold. After I heard them speaking French among themselves, I asked where they were from, in French, hoping for the same outcome as that which occurred at salon 1. I was disappointed when they calmly answered, "Côte d'Ivoire," with very little enthusiasm.

Two days later, I returned to Antou AHBS, and started in French again: "*Bonjour, la patronne est là?*" A young woman with hair plaited in a spiral – as if ready for a sew-in weave – said the boss was not there but that she could help. I recognized her from the day of my first visit. I re-explained my situation, and before I got a chance to finish, she cut me off and asked: "Can you braid?" I told her I could, and she retorted that this is what I should say first, instead of telling long stories. She stated: "*ces longs discours-là, ça sert à rien, tu vas pas gagner l'argent avec ça. Il faut dire, 'je cherche à tresser,' sinon tu vas seulement perdre ton temps à te*

promener de salon à salon et personne ne va t'accepter." [these long speeches, that's useless, you're not gonna make any money with those. You have to say 'I need a job as a braider,' or else all you'll do is waste your time going from salon to salon and nobody will take you.] I smiled and replied, "I see." She told me to come back early, at 8:30 am the following day. Although delighted at the prospect of starting participant observation directly from the field, I was puzzled by such reaction: did she understand the purpose of my visit at all? Did she think I lied about being a student so that I could get a job as a braider?

Applying methods

My background as a black immigrant from a Congolese family clearly facilitated my access to francophone AHBS. In addition, I have braided hair since the age of twelve and I worked in a Caribbean-owned salon as a professional braider a few years ago. Eventually, I developed strong rapport with African francophone salon owners in Jamaica-Queens, even those who refused to host me as a researcher. They welcomed me as a customer, braider, or simple visitor, but by any means did they accept to be treated as research objects.

1. No interviews, no pictures

Interviews were out of the question. For instance, I asked Antou several times when the best time would be to schedule an interview, and she would always look puzzled as if it were the first time I mentioned it. I would re-explain my situation. One day, as I re-stated my need to complete the interview for a graduate school project, Antou and Binta, one of her helper asked, "what interview?" I mentioned my student status, yet again, and Antou grinned:

Antou: Oh, so that way you're going to make a lot of money! (*Ah, alors comme ça tu vas avoir l'argent!*)

Sylviane: (I protested) No, it's for school!

Antou and Binta: What type of questions?

Sylviane: Well, things like... How did you learn how to braid, how did you come up with the idea of opening a salon, how hard has it been, etc.

Binta: I'm telling you, it's not easy. She gave all her money toward this. You see everything that's here, that's her she paid all of this herself (pointing to the glass shelf against the wall). The certificates that are here. And then you have the fees and all...

I asked again when I could interview Antou more formally, and asked if we could then take pictures and my husband could tape the interview. She agreed, and told me to come back anytime and that she would be ready. She would be glad to take pictures, she added. I returned the next day with questionnaires for her customers. She was tending to a young woman, and there were two other customers and helpers present. I discretely asked if it would be OK to pass it after she looked at it. She agitatedly asked me "what type of questions?", and I started reading from the paper. She cut me off, overwhelmed, and said "Huh huh, later." I let her know I would come back when she had more time. I arrived two days later with all necessary equipment and paperwork. Antou was alone in the shop, but was not feeling well. Nevertheless, I left the paperwork as she said her husband would look at it.

Two days later, I returned early in the morning, hoping to catch her before customers arrived. I had brought her favorite breakfast. As I stood outside, I took a picture of the salon's sign. Antou, who had heard the camera's click, stormed outside, screaming repeatedly, "I don't like what you did! Taking pictures without my permission!" I followed her inside. She was extremely upset. After I assured her I would delete the picture, she told me:

Antou: Yes, you do that, and don't come back here, you can go to the salon across the street for all I care.

Sylviane: (I calmly asked) So I guess you didn't like the terms on the paperwork?

Antou: My husband didn't look at it.

She handed me the papers back, hurriedly folded in four, wrinkled, and stained with grease. To say the least, this was a most unpleasant moment. Not only did she have no regard for my work, but she questioned my motives, my personality, and my morals. I felt insulted as a person and as a professional, and I felt unsupported as a fellow African woman, especially after she had verbally agreed to cooperate. The state in which the papers were indicated that my work had no value or that she simply could not read the document. This latter scenario would explain not only her need to consult her husband, but also her nervousness when I started to show her the questionnaire.

Likewise, Nadia, from the other AHBS, initially agreed to cooperate. She did not shy away from the spotlight: her business cards featured a picture of her flaunting Jamaican tresses. She and her business had earned several awards, and she is a well-known business owner in the community. Yet, she kept on delaying the interview. She always had an excuse: "I forgot to show my husband the papers," "You're going to kill me, I forgot again," "You can come back another day?"

The difficulties of data collection in Africanist ethnography are not a new phenomenon. Half a century ago, Akhmanova et al. (1966:363) wrote, "the African may rebel against being in the position of an object being studied if only because there is a natural resentment at being an object of research or being too well understood from the outside." Salon owners apprehended the repercussion of my project. They anticipated that my research would expose their flaws or

transgressions, or otherwise demean them. Nyamnjuh (2012) wrote that African anthropologists (a group to which I claim to belong, among others) are often criticized by other Africans outside the discipline for selling *Africanness* out to the academia, that is, the West, the intellectually colonizing power. The author explained how African anthropologists are “trapped at the frontiers of the anthropology tribe, claiming anthropological belonging” (2012:75). Similarly, Antou and Nadia initially judged me for embracing a discipline that has long been complicit with enslavement, exploitation, and colonization. Another dilemma, according to Nyamnjuh, is that that when presenting research findings to non-African colleagues, African anthropologists are often apprehended as subjects of study as well. Nadia was particularly interested in and concerned about the presentations I had previously completed regarding Jojo’s salon in Baton Rouge. Again, her reaction concurs with Nyamnjuh’s statements, as she asked me if I planned to publicized myself as a braider, or as a customer, and how this would affect her salon. Her questions (which she asked prior to letting me work for her) led me to second-guess my endeavor. Indeed, I saw my own *Africanness* as an asset, as a privilege (Nyamnjuh 2012:68) while I was in the salon. But if I revealed intimate details of life in the AHBS, would intimate details of my life be exposed as well? How can one balance immersion and belonging with scholarship and academic advancement? How far should reflexivity go?

The *Anthropology Southern Africa* journal (2005) listed ethical guidelines for conducting fieldwork with African communities, stating that these communities constitute vulnerable groups. The journal stressed informed consent as protection for both the researcher and the participants. I attempted to address all of the participants’ unspoken concerns in my informed consent forms: no mention of last names, giving them pictures of their work for free, making flyers and other advertising materials for free, generating publicity, omit tax and immigration

status information, etc. These efforts were to no avail, since salon owners had no interest in reading my documents.

Hernández et al. (2013) detailed specific vulnerabilities that must be addressed when conducting ethnography with immigrant populations. The authors explained that the immigrant status often entails feelings of fear and shame among participants. In the salons I observed, owners kept no record of their employees' demographic data, licensing information⁷, employment authorization documents, social security, and other tax information. My employers never asked me about my last name, and I was paid in cash.

2. Participant observation

Thus, I was accepted as a fellow braider, but not as an outward researcher. Participant observation turned out to be quite a rewarding experience. Indeed, Jorgensen (2015:3) explained that this method is appropriate for experiences that are “enormously rich, complex, conflictual, problematic, and diverse.” It is an artful social scientific method, and the researcher must *perform* membership role. DeWalt and deWalt (2011), who chronicled the evolution of participant observation as a formal method in ethnography, stated that this form of data collection allows the researcher to enhance the quality of information collected, because of his/her internal experiences and his/her abilities to utilize reflexivity as emic interpretation.

According Spradley and McCurdy's (1980) degrees of participation, I was a “complete participant.” I interacted with customers and blended in with the braiders. I was not identifiable as a researcher, which helped establish a climate of trust among us (Jorgensen, 2015). Instead, I

⁷ In New York, braiders must possess a Natural Hair Styling license in order to braid hair for a fee. License requirements include coursework, a registration fee, and passing an exam in English (New York Department of State, 2017).

would wait until I got home or would walk to the nearby Queens Library and write down every single observation I could remember, no matter how apparently insignificant.

My co-workers knew about my work, but we did not discuss it openly very often. Ingold (2014:387-388) explained how important it is that the participant observer does not work as an undercover informant, but rather operate with ontological commitment. He stated that the researcher must be committed to writing about things that will educate the world and make the world pay attention to the participants' experiences. For this reason, I nourished conversations where co-workers revealed themselves as producers of *Africanness*, as women, as immigrants, and as human beings. I worked, I was paid, I participated in the mundane jokes. Adler and Adler's (1987) consider the participant observer's affections and emotions. As per their classification, I operated in "full membership" with my participants. Effectively, I was performing (or learning how to perform) rules of salon behavior. I was part of the team. Spradley (2016) noted that the participant observer must also be conscious of her nature as an outsider, while simultaneously performing as an insider. In my case, I developed an awareness of my emotions and frustrations not only as a researcher, but as a braider. Looking over my reflexive field notes, I was able to experience frustration at being one of the youngest and most inexperienced workers in both salons in New York. I was also the only Congolese worker in both salons. As a pregnant woman, I also experienced fatigue. While my fatigue was the cost of research, I could sympathize with my co-workers who also had to endure this form of tiredness in order to make a living and feed their families. Simultaneously, as an outsider, I guarded my actions. Indeed, I never advocated my scholarship. I refrained from giving any form of professional or personal advice to fellow braiders. I did not recruit new customers either (aside from my daughter and myself). I was there to learn, not to rock the boat. The most challenging

element was to avoid casual conversations with customers. Effectively, Nadia, Patron (the manager at Nadia’s AHBS), and Antou were very protective of the confidentiality of my research. I could feel their piercing eyes ready to dart at me whenever I spoke to my clients. They had already refused the distribution of questionnaires. I was not to circumvent them and conduct interviews inside the shop. I synthesized the extents to which field work was framed under the premise of my insider and outsider status in the following table:

Criterion	Factors facilitating insider status	Factors facilitating outsider status
Education level		Only 4 braiders out of 16 observed (including owners) have an education level above high-school; 2 out of these 4 pursued higher education in the United States
Language	Only salons with francophone staff accepted to work with me. Interest in my research was always a result of my addressing them in French in front of the customers, because it established a certain complicity. On the other hand, salons owned by Nigerians and Ghanaians refused immediately.	My French/European accent differed from the braiders’ African accent. Only one apprentice from Benin had an accent similar to mine, and she was somewhat isolated and not included in most conversations among braiders.
Braiding skills	I was accepted at first as a braider, and not as an observer, in both salons on which I focused my research.	My braiding technique differs from that employed by most braiders in Queens. I was told at both salons that I started my microbraids “like in Africa.” One salon owner expressed the need to switch to the “American” way of attaching extensions, and a braider volunteered to teach me. I never fully mastered the skill, but, upon the owner’s advice, purchased a mannequin on which I am still practicing.
My status as a wife and mother	All braiders vividly congratulated me for being pregnant and having three children – all of them with my husband. Child rearing was a great part of all our conversations.	

3. Analyzing data

Nyamnjoh (2012) noted that African anthropologists are often blamed for their “insider anthropology” by their fellow African colleagues of other disciplines, because they leak out African secret empowerment strategies and de-construct it using un-African analytical methods. To counter this, Nyamnjoh recommends reflexivity for analyzing qualitative data. More precisely, he advises African anthropologists to involve reflexivity throughout the ethnographic narrative which should demonstrate the African researcher’s “ability to determine, surface, and factor in the extent to which our dispositions, social backgrounds, and social positions influence, in often veiled and subtle ways, the perspectives we hold on how different or similar to use those we study are” (2012:66). Accordingly, I considered and reported field notes not only as observations of my work environment, but also introspectively as a reflection of my own consciousness. I played the African card. I played the race card. I played the motherhood card. I played the wifehood card. I played the inadequate, under-experienced braider card. I did not do so as an opportunist, but because these cards *were* mine to play.

Discourse characterizes the crux of my observations. Linguistic anthropology provided a theoretical background to frame my presentation of braiders as speaking subjects. Fragments are presented as vignettes of conversation analysis (Goodwin and Heritage, 1990; Duranti and Goodwin, 1992; Moerman, 1988). I utilized theories of politeness and impoliteness (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Culpeper, 1996) to discuss braiders’ rhetoric, including gestures. The semiotic study of salon onomastics allowed me to investigate the use of nicknames and the absence of first names among braiders (Phillips, 1990; McDowell, 1981; Fleming, 2011; De Klerk and Bosch, 1996). I also considered code-switching to investigate community formation and

performance of *Africanness* among the francophone braiders (Auer, 1988; Nilep, 2006; Molinsky, 2007; Woolard, 2004; De Fina, 2007).

To compensate for the lack of formal interviews with braiders, I obtained additional background information regarding local histories and the social, economic, and geographic contexts surrounding each salon via secondary data collection. In addition, my reports are interwoven with interdisciplinary scholarly data based on the works of those who have preceded me. In particular, Moore (1994) explained that Africanist anthropology should consider the political economy and global issues outside of Africa. In a transcontinental space such as the AHBS, it is crucial to address these issues, because their impact on sub-Saharan life also influences life in African immigrant communities.

Finally, I conducted informal interviews with Jamaica-Queens residents who regularly get their hair braided in AHBS and beauty supply store workers and managers on Sutphin Blvd., Jamaica Ave., and 112th Street. My interviewees were cooperative, but insisted on remaining anonymous. The main concern they mentioned was fear that local businesses may suffer if they spoke out of turn.

Baton Rouge, LA

In Baton Rouge, I interviewed Jojo, owner of Princess AHBS and Andrea, owner of Andrea's Hair Studio in a series of three recorded interviews. Since I resided in Baton Rouge and knew them prior to starting this doctoral project, communication was smooth and fluid. During transcription, I could easily text them or stop by their shop to fill in missing gaps in my data. In addition, Jojo and Andrea invited me to visit and "Like" their Facebook pages. They avidly supported my research as they saw in it an avenue to promote their art and their businesses. They welcomed the idea of having their voices heard not only on the street, but in the academia.

Data analysis for fieldwork in Baton Rouge was less introspective than it was for the New York segments. Instead, I focused my narrative on communal affiliations, carefully transcending race and color. While the Queens reports focus on AHBS as microcosms of *Africanness*, the chapter and chapter sections on Louisiana salons consider global identities. As Lewellen (2002) indicated, the anthropology of globalization, a growing subfield in cultural anthropology, unites (though artificially so) interpretative anthropology, critical anthropology, postmodern theory, and poststructuralism, based on the commonalities of these chains of thought. This subfield investigates how globalization (the flow of ideas, finances, cultural elements, etc.) is structured. Thus, if postmodernism seeks to explore globalization in the day-to-day and local levels, I am concerned with the extent to which immigrants like Andrea and Jojo perform their Jamaican and Togolese identities in a Western locality.

When discussing the methodology of globalistic fieldwork, Peacock (2002:56) explained that the researcher should welcome “unanticipated and informal engagement” and nurture fieldwork-generated friendships. I have not returned to Jamaica since then. Nevertheless, as Stoller (1997, 1999) and Appadurai (1997) recommended, I remained committed to long-term research, albeit through mediated socialization. My interviewees are indeed my fieldwork-generated “Friends.” Facebook is by far the medium of choice for salon owners in Jamaica and Baton Rouge. They also utilize Instagram, but solely for picture posts. Andrea and Jojo are adamant about promotion and advertising via Facebook. In the context of globalizing anthropology (and the anthropology of globalization), social media provides a novel avenue for ethnographic fieldwork and observation. Participation can only be partial (Spradley and McCurdy, 1980), and membership cannot be full (Adler and Adler, 1987). Nevertheless, virtual Friend-ship and “notifications” of my participants’ statuses gave a digital dimension to this

project. It made way for representational capabilities regarding the performance and the production of the *fabulous* (D'Andrea et al., 2011; Horst and Miller, 2013). Effectively stylist-generated pictures and posts constitute narrative offerings, willingly given to me, without the muzzling, coercive impact of formal interviews.

Commodification, a marker of modernity, is a thematic trail present in all chapters. Increasingly so, anthropologists are using commodification and materiality as an approach to the ethnography of globalization (Lewellen, 2002:23). Whether they examine discourse (Heller, 2010), skills (Shepherd, 2002), or identities (van Binsbergen and Geschiere, 2005).

CHAPTER 3: GENEALOGIES OF BLACK BEAUTY AND THE MODERN BRAIDING INDUSTRY

History of black hair care in the Americas

Slavery through the 1950s

Early accounts and depictions of African peoples purposefully presented black female bodies as inhuman and wild. Authors targeted the body parts that were particularly associated with their femininity: their facial features (eyes, nose, and lips), their genitalia, their breasts, and their hair (Pieterse, 1995; McKittrick, 2010; Henderson, 2014; Gordon-Chipembere, 2011). It is now widely acknowledged in the academia that early ethnographic accounts of remote lands such as the New World (including white-authored plantation depictions), the East Indies, and Sub-Saharan Africa, were largely charged with distortions and superficiality (Madison, 2011; Buikema, 2009; Gilman, 1985). Nevertheless, the presentation of deformed bodies reveals a crucial part of the colonial and slavery agenda. It argued that domination of the Other was based on the pretext of his/its inhumanity (Virey, 1819; Cuvier, 1833). When it comes to hair, the black Other was reified through exoticized, kinky hair. In the New World, depictions of black femininity in Eurocentric imagery often presented black women and girls as hyper-sexualized, naked (or dressed in a revealing manner) creatures with short, uncombed, “nappy” hair. Examples include the iconographic depictions of Sarah Baartman or *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* character Topsy (Brown, 2009). In Figure 2, for instance, Topsy's seemingly uncombed hair contrasts with Eva's manicured curls. Thomas Jefferson (1894:178) wrote that black women’s absence of “flowing hair” could only make them attractive to male orangutans, while black men were naturally attracted to the “superior beauty” of white women. He detailed that the black woman’s assumed shamelessness was proven by her monochrome “black veil” of a skin, while

white women's ability to blush betrayed their natural chastity and modesty. Alternatively, depictions of large, asexual "Mammies" with covered, non-visible hair were perceived as a non-threatening image of blackness to the white ruling class. Indeed, they contrasted with the frail, pale figure of the ideal white woman promoted in popular culture. For instance, the 1940 ad from *Good Housekeeping* ad shown in Figure 3 presents Aunt Jemima as a large, robust black woman whose head is covered with a neutral color handkerchief. On the other hand, the homemaker who consumes the product is married and has a child, which implies that she is not asexual yet confines to the sexual sanctity of marriage.



Figure 2: Illustration from "Rememb'ring" music sheet by the Duncan Sisters (1923)
Source: <http://www.rubylane.com/item/135611-3522a/Remembx92ring-Topsy-Eva-Uncle-Toms-Cabin>



Figure 3: Aunt Jemima ad
Source: *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (1940:133)

Plaits were common among female slaves. They typically protected their braids from sweat and sun with a bandana during field labor. There is little documentation on the actual braids, because white observers – in whose company hair was covered – wrote the majority of written reports of these times. White and White (1995) detailed how black slaves were taught to be ashamed of their “wooly” hair. Men were required to cut it short, and women were required to cover it when working in white company. On the other hand, being proud of one’s own coarse hair and letting it grow were associated with defiance and black nationalist rebellion. For

instance, “wooly hair” was a common identifiable trait listed on runaway slaves’ advertisement posters.

As much as white authors used black hair as a dehumanizing strategy on the etic premise, an emic interpretation of plantation life in the black community also shows that hair was a point of focus. It had social and political significance. Indeed, hair dress on the American and Caribbean plantation was a common Saturday activity as the slaves would prepare for Sunday’s religious service. Sunday was the only day where the existence of their souls was acknowledged. It was also the day of rest, that is, the only day their bodies were not exploited for labor. Consequently, hair dress was associated with the instance in which their humanity could be asserted. Historians reported that, for that very reason, shaving slaves’ hair off, along with other forms of disfiguration and mutilation, were a common punishment by slave masters and overseers (White and White, 1995; Hill, 2007).

After Emancipation, up until the late 1950s, the pejorative connotation of kinky hair still persisted in America. Authors such as Malcolm X (X and Haley, 1940) and Roger Wilkins (1982) have reported going to extra lengths to ensure their hair was as smooth as it possibly could be. They resorted to harsh, dangerous chemical treatment, daily conditioning, and wearing stocking caps. Evidently, such spite for wooly hair was even more severe among black women, which explains the excitement and euphoria that followed the commercialization of the first hair relaxers (Robinson, 2011).

Madam C.J. Walker, who commercialized hair-straightening products, was a pioneer in black cosmetology in the 1910’s. She was the first individual to open a college for black women designed for the instruction of black hair care. She understood that blacks were the most appropriate teachers of black cosmetology and proceeded to offer such in a formal institutional

setting. As a businessperson, she also understood that only a black woman could be a credible expert whom black female customers would find trustworthy enough to give her power over their appearance and their beauty, one of their most valuable assets at the time (Aller, 2007; Lommel, 1993). Walker justified her endeavor by her commitment to black female economic independence, rather than any aspiration to whiteness. Nevertheless, several social scientists have addressed the contradiction between black pride advertised by such entrepreneurs and unnaturally straightened hair (Caldwell, 1991; Johnson and Bankhead, 2014).

White and White (1995:75-76) argued that in the postbellum U.S., straightening hair was a protective strategy. In effect, any pro-black ostentation could lead one to be targeted and physically harmed, especially in the South. However, Madam C.J. Walker and other marketers promoted the idea that straight hair was a mark of progress and modernity, and a way to leading a successful social and professional life. For example, a 1905 newspaper ad in the *Rising Son* newspaper from Kansas City, Missouri (also printed in the *Richmond Planet*, page 5) read: “You owe it to yourself, as well as to others who are interested in you, to make yourself as attractive as possible. Attractiveness will contribute much to your success – both socially and commercially. Positively nothing detracts so much from your appearance as short, matted, un-attractive, curly hair” (Lincoln Chemical Works, 1904:5). The ad promoted a line of Curl-I-Cure products by the Illinois company Lincoln Chemical Works. The brand’s name is problematic in that it implies that natural curls are an ill that needs correction. It negates the wholeness and validity of the black female body. Furthermore, the company’s name “Lincoln,” reminiscent of President Lincoln who issued the Emancipation Proclamation, suggests that straight hair brings about freedom from bondage. Again, this notion is problematic because it implies that the cause for

bondage and enslavement originates within the black body. It suggests that the way out of this justified bondage is to do away with a biological trait inherent to blackness.

Rooks (1996), who chronicled early 20th century hair cosmetology, indicated that leading figures such as Madam C.J. Walker, used hair to construct group identities in which women with straight hair were elevated at the expense of women with natural hair. Walker's contemporaries accused her of valuing whiteness and straight hair and rejecting black natural beauty. Likewise, black nationalists such as Marcus Garvey often blamed women who straightened their hair for denigrating blackness from within the community, and for aspiring to look "white" because of their adherence to European standards of hair beauty (Davis, 1994)⁸.

Aesthetic decolonization and the advocacy for natural black hair

In the 1960s, efforts were made to counter this imitation of European hair texture that appeared to affirm the superiority of Eurocentric standards of beauty, cleanliness, and appropriateness. Afro hairstyles attested of such efforts (White and White, 1995; Robinson, 2011; Peterson-Lewis and Bratton, 2004; Davis, 1994; Rosette and Dumas, 2007; Tate, 2007; Thompson, 2009). Braids and other natural hairstyles promoted detachment from Eurocentric aesthetic standards.

As the black media started to promote natural hairstyles (Hill-Collins 2005), braids constituted a means to manage kinky hair without having to alter it chemically (Johnson

⁸ Garvey's comments could, though anachronistically so, be classified as postcolonial. Indeed, in cultural anthropology, postcolonial theory defines appropriation as the internalization of the racial and national inferiority perpetuated by the colonial – and slave – masters worldwide (Madison, 2011). Appropriation and what has commonly been called mental slavery also refer to speech, dress and adornment, mannerisms, and economic status that is described as "white" or "European."

2011:148). Until the 1960's, urban African American women commonly braided their daughters' hair, and braids were not considered an adult hairstyle (Carpenter, 2011). Likewise, in the Caribbean, straightening hair gave black women the belief and appearance to be more employable. Yet, it was not a mere effort toward financial security. According to Barnett (2016), hair straightening took the importance of a ritual, as it marked the transition from being a girl (with braids) to being a woman. As the Afro-Caribbean immigrant population began to grow in the 1970's African Americans were exposed to Rastafarian ideology and experienced a new way of performing Afrocentricity. The Rastafarian philosophy supported dreadlocks hairstyles, along with deepened connections with pre-colonial Africa. In the 1980's, the modernization of this Afrocentric/pan-African paradigm led black pop culture and media to increase connections with contemporary Africa and the Caribbean (hence the production of movies and shows such as *Roots*, *Chaka Zulu*, and *Coming to America*). This relatively new interest, in combination with the increasing number of African immigrants in the U.S., popularized the use of African forenames, as well as African clothing styles, fabric prints, jewelry accents, and African hairstyles. The African American community endorsed the art of braiding as authentically African. Yet, black women incorporated and stylized the art as a modern black American beauty icon. African women often learn how to braid hair proficiently from a young age. Those who migrated to the US also imported their skill. Today, African braiding salons have grown to become an emblem of quality, yet affordable, haircare for African American women who refuse to straighten their hair – that is, who decide to embrace their African hair rather than conforming

to European⁹ standards of aesthetic hairstyles. With braid care products brands such as African Pride and Africa's Best, braids are now an emblem of a black woman who carries her African kinky hair with pride¹⁰.

More recently, Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) conducted an experiment in which they surveyed African American public school students of northeastern city in the U.S. A questionnaire asked students what "acting black" meant to them in several categories (academic, artistic, aesthetic, etc.). Interestingly, the authors report that an "aesthetic dynamic that respondents mentioned for 'acting black' that is readily observable among females is 'wearing braids.'" This testimony from black teenagers illustrates the strong cultural attachment manifested through one's hairstyle.

Hair and status in the 21st century

Good v. bad hair, straight v. nappy

To a great extent, relaxed, long hair is still associated with sophistication and assimilation in the hegemony. Coarse hair has become more acceptable, but it is still perceived as deviant

⁹ One must read the term "European" with caution as it refers to hair being straight, smooth, usually long, and often in colors other than black. Women of non-European origins (Asia, Native Americans, some Semites) also have hair that features the aforementioned characteristics. Also, some European women have curly hair. Nevertheless, I use the expression "European hair" because it is tied with the notion of straight, long hair worn by women of the ruling or colonizing class (and by association of European descent) in this narrative.

¹⁰ The black environmentalist community and numerous black scientists are also proponents of natural hair care. They brought to the forefront relaxers' destructive effect on black hair and on the environment due to their chemical content. Indeed, these products contain sodium hydroxide, a chemical known to erode hair cuticles and to destroy the bonds within the hair strands. Even more recently, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics (CFSC) denounced the toxicity of hair relaxers as pollutants. The CFSC is pushing for new FDA legislation that would regulate cosmetic ingredients recognized to be harmful for users and for the environment. Hair relaxers were reported to rank the highest in the CFSC's database of toxic and dangerous chemicals (Bonner, 2010).

when exposed¹¹. Such perceptions were illustrated by the debate surrounding meteorologist Rhonda Lee (Shreveport, LA), who was fired from a local TV station after an altercation with a white, male viewer who publicly criticized her short, curly hair (Starr, 2014). The comment resounded the opinion that coarse hair was not appropriate for her professional and social stature. In 2006, radio host Neal Boortz compared Representative Cynthia McKinney (D-GA) to a “ghetto slut” because her hair was styled in twists (Maloy, 2006). Likewise, the scandal generated by Don Imus’ 2007 comment regarding Rutgers University’s women basketball team bears witness of the persistent, degrading, association of coarse hair and hypersexuality (Chiachiere, 2007). This hegemonic perception of positions black women with natural hair as a caste of unrefined, inferior citizens characterized by loose morals.

Even inside the African American and Afro-Caribbean community, women and girls with coarser hair textures are said to have “bad hair.” Softer hair – commonly linked to non-black ancestry – is labeled “good” (Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Rock, 2010). Hill-Collins (2005) explained from a feminist stance the importance of hairstyling in the shaping of African American women’s identity: “Because a good deal of women’s beauty is associated with their hair, the aspect of women’s physical appearance takes on added importance in the process of constructing hierarchies of femininity” (Hill Collins, 2005:195). The distinction between what is commonly called “good” hair (malleable, long, and approaching smooth texture) and “bad” hair (short, kinky, and harder to comb) has often been a marker of hierarchy within black aesthetic standards, at a level comparable to skin complexion.

¹¹ Comedian Paul Mooney (2012) authored the iconic line “When your hair is relax, white people are relax. When your hair is nappy, they aren’t happy.”

In Afro-Caribbean immigrant enclaves such as Queens, NY, for example, Dominican women traditionally provide hair-straightening services mostly to fellow Caribbean women. Candelario (2000; 2007) considers hair as both a cultural manifestation and commodity in Dominican communities of New York City. As she explores the complexity of the Hispanic racial identity, she reports that Dominican citizenship is often enacted and reified as hair. Nevertheless, the Dominican hair salon appears to value and promote straight hair textures, while vilifying coarse hair. As mentioned earlier, the ideoscape of good hair v. bad hair is prevalent among blacks in the Americas. In Dominican communities, this paradigm is known as *pelo bueno v. pelo malo*. Candelario explains that Dominican culture is characterized by a certain rejection of the Négritude dialectics, as she discusses the notion of “honorary whiteness” as a distinction from black Africans and Haitians (2007:35-127). Subsequently, straight hair – whether naturally straight or chemically or thermally straightened – are part of a “whitening” process (*blanqueamiento*) which, as paradoxical as it may seem, results in a strong sense of femininity, respectability, unity, and national pride. Other scholars have recently documented straight hair as embodied Dominicanness (*Dominicanidad*) in New York City and in the Caribbean (Badillo, 2016; Hazel, 2014; Dupper, 2010; Coleman, 2007; Saunders, 2013; Summons, 2008; Perez, 2015; Amezquita, 2010; Liberato and Feagin, 2007).

Hair as an emblem of femininity: performing black beauty

Black women are aware of the fact that beauty is a racialized concept. While white beauty may be standardized in terms of a slim figure, blue eyes, youthful glow, and long, blond, “flowing” hair (Jefferson, 1894), black beauty is often standardized in terms of a curvier figure (especially hips, buttocks, and thighs (Tate, 2007) and adornment. For this reason, white beauty is *performed* differently from black beauty. To use Appadurai’s (1996) terms, ideology that

characterizes whiteness as a social space of beauty (the ideoscape) translates into expenses that are tied to this aesthetic ideology (financescape). White women tend to invest a considerable amount of time, money, and effort in fitness, spa treatments, dieting, and age-defying cosmetics. On the other hand, black women invest in clothing, nail care, and, even more so, hairdo's. The hair care business thus constitutes a critical element in the ideoscape and financescape of black beauty.

This black beauty paradigm is observable throughout Afro-diasporic societies, and can be – to a large extent – traced to Africa. Since the 1600's, anthropological reports have documented the use of tignons and complex braiding patterns in sub-Saharan Africa as a beautification practice (Eglash, 1999; White and White, 1995; Boone, 1990; Sagay, 1983; Thornton, 1998). As beauty is commonly considered an agent or result of social status among women, the more appealing and painstaking braiding patterns were associated with elevated femininity, heightened beauty, and a more desirable social position, as were the tallest headdresses. White and White (1995) explained that, in American and Caribbean plantations, slaves no longer had the opportunity to invest as much time and physical effort to complex braiding, they often developed creative ways to wear their bandanas as one would a *gele* or *kitambala* in Africa. In the 19th century Americas, the scarves meant to cover hair disgraced through hard labor were also headdresses for beautification and adornment, as depicted in several descriptions and portraits of Marie Laveau's tignon (Salvaggio, 2008; Cocuzza, 2000; Ward, 2009). Furthermore, headscarves were a popular fashion statement, because the white mistresses supported the

practice¹². Several white men and women expressed curiosity and admiration for the exotic icon of black feminine fashion (White and White, 1995).

Tate (2007) described black beauty as mobile. This notion is validated by the changing acceptabilities of styles that emerged out of circumstance (the bandana, the afro), yet were massively stylized into new aesthetics. She explained that preoccupation with black beauty is “part of a continuing historical trajectory of how to locate oneself” both aesthetically and politically (Tate, 2007:301). In Afro-diasporic societies, beauty and its performative production have been used to delineate and to re-define the socially acceptable, and the socially desirable.

The word “fabulous” is probably the most appropriate term to explain the epitome of the performance of modern black beauty worldwide. Black communities are characterized by a culture of the fashionable. Fashionable men are “dandies” in Anglophone Africa, Jamaica, the U.K., or the U.S. (Irvin, 2013; Hope, 2010; Khabeer, 2017) and *sapeurs* in Francophone Africa, Canada, France, or Belgium (Newell, 2012; Dugrand, 2016; Badibanga, 2012; Hanon, 2004; Charpy, 2015; Brodin et al., 2016). Their colorful, tailored attires are carefully pieced together to make a fashion statement at church, at work, or any space involving an audience of fellow fashionable people. Even informal attires can be “dandified” based on color coordination, brand, and a strong dandy attitude. Contemporary and modern black dandyism is promoted in media through figures such as Steve Harvey, Nigerian “Nollywood”¹³ actors, Chris Tucker, singers like

¹² White and White (1995) detailed that, rather than desiring to see coarse hair covered, most white mistresses sought to hide their female slaves’ beautiful curls that would otherwise entice their white husbands sexually.

¹³ “Nollywood,” which combines the names “Hollywood” and “Nigeria,” is a popular term for the Nigerian film industry and its products, much as popular Indian films referred to as “Bollywood.”

Maître Gims¹⁴ (France), Fally Ipupa (Democratic Republic of Congo), Kevin Downswell (Jamaica), and Beenie Man (Jamaica), to name a few. Dandyism demands, implicitly, respect and admiration.

Likewise, fashionable black women are those that can put together a color-coordinated, well-fitted outfit. Nevertheless, their appearance does not classify as fabulous unless the hair-do (or church hat on Sundays (Craig, 2002:34)) is equally memorable. While, as detailed earlier, black women in the Diaspora have successfully stylized headdress of circumstance (the bandana) and political hair (the afro), hip hop as a cultural movement has certainly exacerbated the fashionability and boldness of black hair. The notion of the “ghetto fabulous” associated with hip hop fashion, is flashier, more erotic: waist-long hair extensions, fro’hawks and assymetrical fro’hawks (Mohawk-like hair cut where hair is shaven or trimmed low, sometimes on only one side; the remaining kinky hair is often twisted or curled), faux-hawks (fro’hawk where the hair is plaited in cornrows on the sides instead of shaven), afro-futurist hair dyeing (platine, silver grey, pink, mauve, blue), etc. Hip hop as a movement emerged from the economically marginalized from Jamaica and the U.S. (Perry, 2004; Cobb, 2008; Rivera, 2003). Yet, it promotes elevation from rags to riches. Hip hop imagery advertises glamorous, lavish lifestyles as the ideal to be desired and sought after (50 Cent and Sheridan, 2005; Mukherjee, 2006). As the disenfranchised masses – from which the artists emerged – listen and watch hip hop beauty, they are encouraged to experience the lavish, fabulous lifestyle and appearance (Ratele, 2003). This “fabulous”

¹⁴ In 2015, Maître Gims released the hit “Sapé comme Jamais” (somewhat equivalent to “Best Dressed Ever”) for which he obtained a Victoires de la Musique award for Original Song of the Year. In the video of “Sapé comme Jamais,” (and his Victoires de la Musique performance), he invited several of the most famous Congolese *sapeurs* to exhibit their dandy outfits.

lifestyle is made available to them by way of creative hair-dos and inexpensive but bold clothes, make-up, and jewelry.

Thus, the quest for the fabulous has become the most visible performance of black beauty. Cunningham (2005) explained that fabulous hairdo's for black women are both essential and therapeutic. In modern black cultures, hairstyles give a sense of confidence in a world where black female bodies are negated universal beauty (Shaw, 2005). For this reason, close to nothing can threaten a black woman's self-assurance faster than a bad hair-do.

Braids, braiders, and the law

Because natural black beauty is denunciary and countercultural, legislation surrounding admissible hairstyles explicitly embodies the stigma against natural hairstyles. Bell (2007) compiled a summary of legal cases that illustrate the contemporary politics over black hair. Among these cases are that of a woman being fired from her flight attendant employment because of her coarse hair. The author also reports Baltimore's Police Department's policy to forbid officer from having any hairstyle other than short or straight. More recently, comedian Jessica Williams (*The Daily Show*, 2014) presented a footage documenting similar discriminatory practices among U.S. Army servicewomen. Again, black women's natural hair continues to legally limit the extent of their professional and social contribution to the society at large.

Likewise, the law has long been unfavorable to braiders. Even though the skill of braiding constitutes manual (not chemical) alteration of the hair, U.S. cosmetology boards, until recently, required that stylists undergo hours of coursework and pass an examination to obtain a license to practice hair braiding. Today, 24 states have deregulated braiding and the need for a cosmetology license. Instead, boards issue alternative licenses that allow stylists to perform any

service not involving chemicals (AASC, 2016; Carpenter, 2011; Institute for Justice, 2017). Nevertheless, these licenses still require coursework and fees. Braiders nationwide, who are majorly foreign-born women, have denounced the boards' targeting immigrant, non-white women and their black customers. Indeed, the curriculum for most U.S. cosmetology schools does not include teaching how to braid. This skill is mostly imported from their countries of origin. Instead, braiders are required to enroll in grooming and chemical handling classes that are not specific to African hair and that are irrelevant to the practice of braiding.

The hair braiding business and globalization

A structuralist analysis can demonstrate the numerous parties involved in the global braiding market. There is a wide range of parties involved: the beauty schools, beauty supplies vendors, labs (and the FDA), state and federal legislative systems, salon site landlords, and many more. Documentaries such as Chris Rock's *Good Hair* (2010) and Al Jazeera's *Hair India* (Brunetti and Leopardi, 2009) traced the origin of the human hair extensions sold in beauty supply stores that black (and increasingly so white and Indian) women utilize for weaves, wigs, and micro-braids. In both documentaries, researchers traveled to India and filmed portions of the ritual where Indian girls offer their long hair to Kali. Priests sweep the hair and traders disinfect and sell it. For weaves, Indian female workers (as well as workers from other countries) sew the hair along a hem and it is manufactured to be shipped, with the U.S. being the major importer.

There is also a wide range of synthetic hair extensions. Ceramic, kanekalon fibers are one of the most common artificial hair materials. Likewise, such products are often made and manufactured overseas. For example, Toyokalon, a very popular brand, is part of a Japanese firm. Another well-known company, Outre, is part of the Chinese group Sun Taiyang. Bobbi Boss products, also commonly found in U.S. beauty supply stores, are manufactured in China.

raw and manufactured human hair extensions (India, Bangladesh), synthetic hair manufacturing (China), and beauty supply store owners (South Korea).

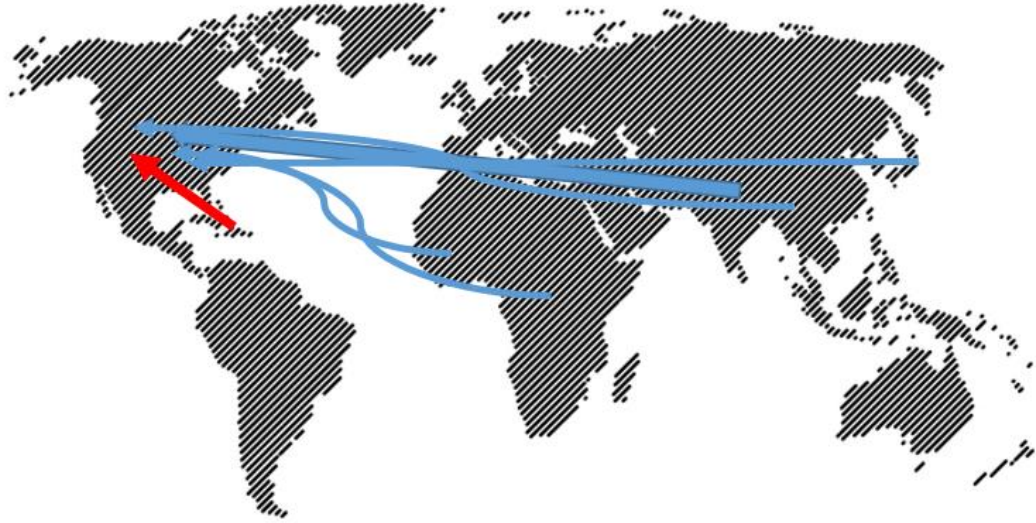


Figure 5: Inter and intracontinental ramifications of the hair braiding business.

Thus, the contemporary braiding industry is both a by-product and facilitator of globalization. It is also common to see synthetic hair labels feature “Made in Vietnam,” or “Made in Korea.” Thus, these products manufactured in Asia are designed for a largely African, Caribbean, and African American clientele (not to mention the more complex African diaspora groups in Europe). Asian (mostly Korean) immigrants own the majority of beauty supply stores in the US (Yoon, 1995). They dominate the hair extension market and sell their supplies to African American women who get it braided by an African or Caribbean stylist. Nevertheless, taxes paid by the beauty supply stores and the salons eventually benefit Uncle Sam. In addition, Foner’s (1997) study on transnational communities in New York, along with other studies on the economies of immigrant enclaves in the U.S. (DeSipio, 2002; Portes, 1996; Schiller et al., 1995)

report that it is common for late 20th century migrants to perform manual labor and send a large portion of the wages thereof to their countries of origin.

Caring for natural hair

For black women, keeping hair natural is not always political. African hair can be considered as complex to handle, compared to that of other ethnic groups (Robinson, 2011). For instance, it is particularly sensitive to contact with humidity and water, under which conditions it tend to increase or trigger curling and make hair coarser, that is, more difficult and painful to comb and detangle. For instance, the rain-related alteration of relaxed hair can generate what is commonly referred to as “bad hair days and the fear of the unknown” (Jacobs-Huey, 1996:45). Braids constitute a convenient alternative to counter weather in that when the hair is pulled and locked in one position, humidity and rain have little effect on its curliness (Greaves, 2017; Parks, 2014). In addition, cornrow plaits (Figure 6) can be kept for up to 3 weeks, while micro-braids (Figure 7) can be kept for 6 weeks to 2 months without any major damage. It is therefore a time-effective option for women who want a clean, professional look without much upkeep.

African hair braiding refers to the art of manipulating strands of hair in order to create a specific pattern of braids. In the U.S., African stylists have been credited for providing more authentic braiding services. Hence, the label “African Hair Braiding Salon” (AHBS) is commonly used for African-owned, natural hair care salons. Individual/microbraids, cornrows, and Senegalese twists (Figure 8) are in high demand in most salons. Individual braids are one of the most common braiding style. The extension is knotted or otherwise attached at the root, then braided downward. Based on the extension type, the attachment can be braided until its end or its end can be left unbraided to reveal curls or smooth endings. Depending on the thickness of the braid and the size of its base, individual braids are called under different names, such as box

braids or microbraids. Senegalese twists start as a microbraid but the extension is twisted with 2 strands rather than braided with three strands.

Flat twists (Figure 9) can be done with or without extensions. The hair is parted in lines or curves to create a pattern. The braider then flattens the hair of a given section. To do so, she twists the hair with two strands, starting in the front and twisting her way to the back, continually replenishing the flat twist with hair portions from the given section. The hair is tightly twisted onto the scalp. Extensions may be infused within the twist for additional volume. Hair gel is often used to ensure the twist remains flat onto the scalp. Cornrows (Figure 6) are similar to flat twists, but consist of a 3-strand braid braided onto the scalp. The hair is parted in sections, and the braid is continuously replenished with hair from the given section. Braiders have displayed creativity in their designs, as cornrow allow for intricate traceability. For this reason, cornrows are often considered the most artistic form of hair care¹⁵.

Sew-in weaves (Figure 10) are extension hems sewn onto a bed or cornrows. As shown on Figure 10, cornrows can be covered with a weaving net to protect the natural hair and to allow the sew-in to last longer. Women often leave the front portion of their own hair unbraided to cover the sewn attachment. This style is often considered more glamorous than the aforementioned styles, possibly because the braids are invisible as the result conforms to straight, long hair aesthetic. Nevertheless, afro weaves and other curly extension hems allow women to also adopt a style that resembles natural hair, while providing more length and volume. Although weaves, which require mastery of cornrow crafting, are extremely popular as well, they are not

¹⁵ Eglash (1999) who studied African fractals in Central and West Africa argued that the intricate hair patterns found in cornrows are a manifestation of complex African fractal geometry, transcending Euclidean geometry.

typically associated with African hair art, presumably because the end result often resembles relaxed or straight hairstyles, making the braided part invisible. Depending on the kind of extension fibers, the weave can be styled in the same manner as relaxed or straight hair. While most AHBS provide weave services, African American women commonly choose to obtain this service at African American salons. This is possibly due to these salons' expertise in the styling relaxed hair (flat ironing, curling, trimming/layering, etc.). Crochet braids (Figure 11) are an innovative alternative for sew-ins that can weigh heavily and tug at the hair roots. The artificial hair is crocheted through the cornrows, then knotted two or three times to prevent the extensions from sliding out. The braids are invisible as in the case for sew-ins. This style is more appropriate for voluminous styles that blur the visible sections of the scalp where the hair is parted, as the part would otherwise betray the artificial hair knots. The cornrow base offers multiple ways to part the hair.



Figure 6: Cornrows



Figure 7: Microbraids



Figure 8: Senegalese twists



Figure 9: Flat twists

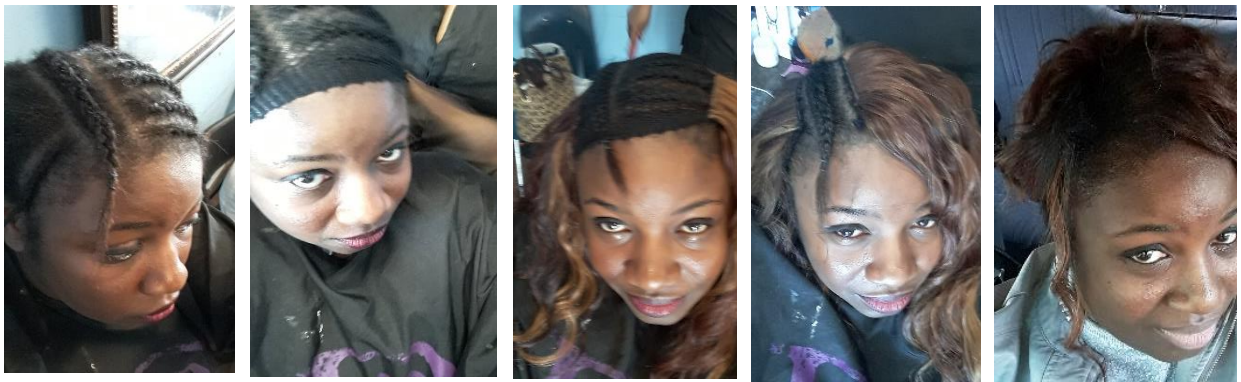


Figure 10: Sew-in weave process



Figure 11: Crochet braiding process

The braiding salon as a space

Bourdieu (2003) demonstrated how – consciously or not – space can easily be gendered. He also refers to antonym associations to express the contrast between male or masculine and female or feminine space. On a similar note, the African or Caribbean hair salon, similarly to the Vietnamese or Korean nail salon, are examples of places associated with femininity – female workers, female customers. The salon is also a space of intimacy between the braid artisan and her client, in that the stylist must be physically close to her customer and tends areas of the client’s body that not commonly touched by others (scalp, entire length and surface of the hair, cuticles). In other words, the salon is a space where the laws of proxemics (Hall 1963) are temporarily defied, where female intimacy is a temporary agreement between the beautician and her client.

Several anthropological studies have been conducted on black hair salon as a cultural space. The studies concur in that hair salons are heteronormative loci for folklore and rhetorical performance. As demonstrated in the works of Majors (2001) and Jacobs-Huey (1996, 1997, 2003, 2006, 2007), stylists (and, separately, stylists and clients) constitute a speech community where women perform rhetorical blackness. Whether the salon treats straightened or natural hair, it also serves as a therapeutic space where women find comfort in cathartic conversation, which Majors (2001:121) called “invigorating girlfriend talk.” Women also experience a sense of renewal through a new hair-do. Other studies related to black barbershops have documented a similar phenomenon among black men (Franklin, 1985; Mukherjee, 2006; Barber, 2008; Alexander, 2003).

Nevertheless, traditional black salons differ from braiding salons in several respects. First, braiding salons typically appeal to women who value natural hair over chemically altered

hair. In the U.S., another difference is that braiders are often immigrant women from Central or West Africa, and, to a lesser extent, from the Caribbean. Braided styles are overall cheaper than services offered in the traditional black beauty shop (Carpenter, 2011). Given the insistent elevation of straight hair as a norm of acceptability, the fact that braiding salons are a relatively new trend, and the association between immigrant braiders and cheap labor, braiding salons do not have the credibility that other black salons have acquired over the years (Carpenter, 2011). Furthermore, since braided styles last up to two months, customers do not visit their stylists as often as traditional black salon customers do. The latter commonly visit a salon every week or every other week (Roseborough and McMichael, 2009). On the other hand, braiding a headful of microbraids, Senegalese twists, crochet braids, or a weave, takes several hours. It is a lengthier process than relaxing, conditioning, or trimming. Hence, a customer's visits to the braiding salon are scarcer than the traditional salon, but she stays at the former salons for many hours longer than she would in a traditional black salon.

CHAPTER 4. OUR DAILY BRAIDS: AFRICANNESS AND AMBIVALENCE IN BRAIDING SALON CUSTOMER SERVICE

Introduction

With near half of its population being foreign-born, Jamaica-Queens, NY is an immigrant enclave that hosts dense communities of African and Caribbean immigrants¹⁶. Over the years, African and Caribbean women have established a tradition of hair care services that cater to for the most part African American women. My West Indian Jamaican mother-in-law lives in South Jamaica-Queens, and I spent the summer of 2013 walking and driving in virtually all neighborhoods of Jamaica's map, occasionally proceeding to informal interviews with *fabulous*-haired women. I noted a visible division in the salon/hairstyle landscape, which I will call "hair turfs." Janique¹⁷, one of my interviewees confirmed the turf principle: "If you want your hair relaxed and straight, you need to go to a Dominican salon. Now when I want a good weave, I go to this Jamaican salon down the street. But if I want my hair braided, I go to an African salon, 'cause *they* really know what they're doing."

The literature also concurs with the turf attribution. Throughout Queens, it is common to see salons featuring the label "Dominican Hair Salon" on their signs, as much as it is common to see the 'African Hair Braiding Salon" (AHBS) sign. Amezcua (2010) explained that in a manner similar to AHBS, Dominican salons often constitute informal labor avenues for Dominican women. This space promotes and commodifies *Dominicanness* (*dominicanidad*) to the same extent as AHBS promote *Africaness*. Likewise, Dominican stylists, whether licensed

¹⁶ Despite its large Jamaican resident population, this area of Queens borough was named after the local Algonquian tribe, the Yamecah, not after the Caribbean island (Troncoso, 2014).

¹⁷ Pseudonym

or “underground,” have exploited their reputation as expert straighteners to claim the straight hair turf: “Dominican women have always been known to be the best hair straighteners in the industry.” (Amezquita, 2010:1). On the other hand, Candelario (2000:143) and Simmons (2008) documented disdain against coarse and braided hair in Dominican communities, where natural black hair is often interpreted as distasteful racial pride that threatens national unity, or *dominicanidad*. Nevertheless, this disdain is less prevalent among the new generation of Afro-Dominicans in the U.S. and in the Caribbean, who are characterized by a more global consciousness (Simmons, 2008). While pan-ethnicity still dominates the Dominican ideoscape in New York and in the Dominican Republic, an increasing number of immigrants identify themselves as black (Torres-Saillant, 1998; Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral, 2000; Logan, 2003; Nadal et al., 2014; Chun, 2016). Young Dominican immigrants are more and more aware of the dilemma of race as a construct as opposed to actual phenotype. Many in New York City embrace the African American aesthetic of the “ghetto fabulous.”

Jamaican-owned salons typically provide weaves, twists, and dreadlocks to a majority of African American and Jamaican women clients. Historically, Jamaicans have been very vocal concerning the beauty of African curly hair. Jamaican salons promote a sense of the *fabulous* that is quite similar and appealing to African American women’s tastes. For this reason, Jamaican beauty shops are more characterized by blackness and racial pride than by national promotion. Despite my numerous attempts, I did not see any establishment bearing the appellation “Jamaican Hair Salon” in Queens during my stay. Neither did my search engine. I did, however, meet Jamaican salon owners and managers who took pride in making “black” women *fabulous*. In her chapter, “We’re Just Black,” Butterfield (2004) confirms that Jamaicans and African Americans in Queens undergo similar socio-economic experiences, and that second generation

Jamaican immigrants tend to identify themselves as African American. Blackness and the slavery legacy alone cannot explain such closeness. To these experiences, I would add that linguistically, it is also easier for Jamaicans to assimilate in Anglophone African American communities. On other hand, African Americans do not share this language commonality with hispanophone Dominican and francophone African hair stylists.

African-owned salons usually specialize in micro braids and cornrows styles to a nearly exclusively African American clientele. While Dominican communities appear to isolate themselves from other immigrant populations, Jamaican and African communities often reside and work in the same neighborhood. African and Jamaican immigrants exhibit a contradictory mixture of mutual disdain and admiration for one another's historical past, tradition, and sense of fashion styles. Findings also reveal that salon gossip contradictorally constitutes an alternative for offensive confrontations while simultaneously peacefully establishing mutually agreed-upon shares of the African American hair care market.

This chapter presents and analyzes strategies that African salon managers and workers employ in order to ensure customer satisfaction and subsequent optimal revenue in Jamaica-Queens, NY (Nadia AHBS and Antou AHBS¹⁸) and, to a lesser extent, in Baton Rouge, LA (Princess AHBS). I argue that the ethnic branding of the service provided ("African hair braiding") is paired with tactics of customer service that are more typical of American/western business management. To do so, I contextualize the postcolonial narrative of hybridity, heterogeneity, and pluralism (Paolini et al., 1999). First, I show how the elective performance of ethnicity is visible through the salon's insistence on speed and timeliness. These concepts are

¹⁸ Pseudonyms

remote from the common African – or Caribbean – interpretation of time, even in the workplace. Secondly, I examine social interactions between braiders and customers, drawing on the manner in which braiders tend to compromise and negotiate stances of power for maximized monetary gain and to preserve a form of collectivist organization that characterizes most sub-Saharan societies. Finally, I investigate the reasons for abandoning the traditional African braiding technique in favor of the African American one. I address the managers’ and workers’ perception of the African traditional methods of braiding and conducting business. This chapter is not a critique of the salon managers’ capitalist agenda, but rather an examination of the performance of ethnicity (or lack thereof) as it is commodified and profitized by salon owners, and consumed by salon customers. In concurrence with Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), I argue that the manifestation of ethnic consciousness is extremely selective, as the performance of *Africanness* is only occasionally profitable in the presence of African American customers.

Adapting to the time zone

The woman who told me to come to Antou AHBS arrived around 8:20, her hair beautifully wrapped in a thick scarf. She was wearing a fitted shirt, jeans, and flip-flops. Upon hearing customers and braiders address her, I later found out that she was the owner, Antou. She had seen me twice before, yet had told me the manager was not there each time I asked. She waved at me from across the street. When I entered the shop, she said in French, “You’re an early bird, that’s good.”

The notion of time in the African diaspora is commonly quite elastic. In the western perspective as expressed by David Lamb (1982:227), the African generosity concerning time may seem aberrant. Indeed, corporate America – which operates in a time-space compression context – does usually not play by these rules of the somewhat fuzzy notion of time. A relaxed

attitude contradicts the average American's performance in the western political economy. Philosophers such as Nobles (1980:283) have argued that the philosophical and psychological interpretation of time in West Africa does not allow for planning and envisioning the future with much authority. Most black peoples acknowledge their tardiness as a cultural manifestation (Hill et al. 2000). Nobles (1974; 1976) also explained that time is commonly approached as a commodity in black cultures. As such, he wrote that the extension of time constitutes bargain power to be used as cultural resistance against racism and oppression. In such context, the African American vernacular phrase "CPT/Colored People Time" is often employed as a putative separate time zone. Africans also refer to "African time/*l'heure africaine*" to address the legendary lack of punctuality. African business studies have also investigated this tendency. Matondo (2012:42) reported that in Africa, business owners tend to prioritize social duties over professionalism when it comes to time management. Time is of social value rather than a capitalist asset. Getting the job done is the focus, more so than getting it done in a timely manner.

Yet here, Antou's comments equated punctuality with professionalism, and, evidently, monetary gain (which would always be her bottom line). The salon experience reveals that the combination of space, place, and financial goals (the African-owned salon in America as a source of revenue) generates a negotiation, de-construction, and re-construction of *Africanness*. By naming her business *Antou African Hair Braiding*, Antou elected to adopt the positive stigma of the authenticity and quality of braids done by African stylists. Yet, she detached herself rhetorically from the negative stigma of African legendary tardiness, adopting a more western notion of time and punctuality, thereby hybridizing the *African* salon experience. The vignette I presented illustrates the selective extents to which African salons are indeed "*African*."

That same day, Antou would urge me to braid faster, because I had been working on a customer's head since the salon opened, and had seen others come and leave with headfuls of braids. Fatoumata, a fellow-braider and friend of Antou's did not have any customer this day, but was very pleasant and helpful to me, though as bluntly honest as Antou was regarding my lack of speed. She asked me how much experience I had. I proudly answered, "I've been braiding since the age of 10!" She and Antou laughed and looked at each other. "You mean to say that you've been braiding all these years, and yet you're the slowest one in here." Fatoumata started braiding alongside me to speed up the process, and she played tag team with Antou. Observing their braids, I realized why they were so fast. They never braided the extensions all the way to the end of the natural hair¹⁹! They only braided for four or five centimeters, then tied the extension and moved on to the next braid. I braided mine all the way to the end of the natural hair, because that's what I would expect salon quality braiding to be (preserve the natural hair, braid a lot, charge a corresponding high price). When I made the remark, "so that's why you're so quick, you don't..." Antou cut me off. She nodded and opened her eyes wide, looking at me. I nodded as well, silently communicating my understanding. She continued to braid. "You must finish quickly, if not she will get mad because she was the first to get here and the last one to leave. See what I mean, right? (*Tu comprends que je dis, hein?*)"

In the meantime, she was calling other braiders to check whether they would come that day, amusingly blaming them for being late – Antou was a loud-spoken woman who loved to

¹⁹ Leaving the ends loose is damaging because it exposes hair strands to external drought, as the moisture is not locked in mechanically. This style is opposite to the appellation "protective hairstyle," a category under which natural braiding styles fall (Carter 2015).

talk and entertain her friends. She would use her humor to assert her authority and express reproach over the braiders' lack of punctuality. Time was money.

It is clear that cultural spaces and places have different ideas of time. While the AHBS is an evidently ethnically-bound space, it is also located within a geographic, cultural, and economic American place. In this place's capitalist mode of production, adhering to the African lax time would conflict with the culturally dominant (that is, American) notion of time economy. Thus, me taking too long could hinder the reputability of the African salon as a space of efficient service. Space was conflicting with place.

One could argue that for the sake of time, Antou's braiders sacrifice quality over speed and mass production. Yet they did not seem concerned at all about their reputability in terms of quality of service. Throughout my stay in Queens, I witnessed no complaint nor awareness of flawed braids. Quite the opposite, they had become expert in the McDonaldization of braiding (Afino et al. 1998; Ritzer 1998; Smart 1999). Indeed, not only did they understand how to produce braids en masse in record time, but they also calculated (consciously or not) that customers operated in a framework of mass consumption. Those who were serviced rapidly with flawed braids were more likely to return than customers who were provided perfectly symmetrical and time-consuming braids. To the same extent that fast-food patrons do not expect healthy, perfectly presented meals, the salon customers' expectations did not require the perfection that *I* had imagined lay behind a most polished display of *Africanness*.

Technique

My observations indicate that the quality of a microbraid depends heavily on adapting to the African American technique preference. In Africa, stylists twist-wrap extensions at the root to begin a braid. In the U.S., black women prefer that the extensions be braided onto the scalp

immediately. Copeland (2011:173) noted that African braiders learn how to braid the African American way with ease when they enter the braiding business. I was not so lucky.



Figure 12: In American salons, braid extensions are commonly attached to the scalp by braiding immediately rather than wrapping the extension around the natural hair roots.

At Nadia's, my braiding technique did not follow the manager's standard of choice. Ever since I learned how to microbraid, I was instructed to wrap the extensions around the root of the portion of natural hair, then proceed to braiding, with 2 strands of extension and one strand of natural hair. When other braiders saw this, they said "*Ah, donc toi tu tournes comme en Afrique*" [Oh, so you wrap it around like in Africa]. They explained to me that in Africa braiders wrap the extension around, but that in America, customers do not like that, and that they rather having

their braids starting like cornrows and then braided down. For this reason, I was only asked to braid the back of the customers' heads (see Figure 13), and for long braids, to finish braiding down as someone else (often *Tantine* and *C*) would braid the roots.

Likewise, on my first day, Antou instructed me to braid at the back of the customer's head at first (the latter wanted small microbraids with a mixture of blond and dark brown human hair extensions). She peeked and immediately voiced her disapproval of my technique ("*tu tournes comme en Afrique*," she would say, echoing the critique of Nadia's braiders). She also complained that the one braid I had just started was not tight enough – although it looked very tight to me. She advised that I must try to do it the American way, saying that people here do not fancy the African technique of wrapping the extension around the natural part of hair ("*ici ils n'aiment pas ça*" [Here they don't like that]). As I explained that the African way was all I knew, she took over and started braiding. The customer spent the whole time with earpieces in her ears, listening to music from her phone.

Antou showed me a mannequin, to which she referred using the term "*la poupée*" [the doll], on which I could see someone else had trained. I started practicing, but with much difficulty. Yet, she suggested that I should not train in front of the customer, because it would discredit me as a professional. I put the mannequin aside and instead peeked at her technique. Again, she said that such behavior could lead one to believe that I was not an expert in the skill ("*ils vont dire tu connais pas tresser, tu comprends que je dis, hein?*" (they will say you don't know how braiding²⁰, you understand what I'm saying, right?)) She directed me to resume

²⁰ In French (as is the case in most Romance languages), two main verbs can be used as a translation of "to know." *Connaître* means to know as in to be familiar, acquainted, or even intimate with someone or something. *Savoir* means to know as in to master a skill or to have

braiding in the back with her. I would regularly look at the work she had done, to ensure that my braids' size was consistent with hers. Once more, she told me that checking on someone else's work could lead the customer not to trust me ("*ils vont dire tu connais pas tresser*" (they will say you don't know braiding)). I expressed my appreciation for her professionalism, and she nodded.

The postcolonial theoretical approach is probably the best fit to interpret this phenomenon. Appadurai (1996:2) explain that the obsession for the modern among formerly colonized people is "postcolonial subjectivity [...], American-style." Likewise, Featherstone (1990:2) stated that global culture demands Americanization of everything produced. Here, the Americanization of braiding bears witness of a technical hierarchy where twisting the extension is associated with a lack of modernity. In the framework of *Africanness*, our initial common postcolonial subjectivity that coerced all of us braiders to speak French was not unifying enough to compete with the division caused by technique.

My immediate nickname was "*la nouvelle*" ("the newbie"). Other trainees or new teammates were given the same appellation. I understood that nicknames were attributed so that the very busy stylists (and especially the managers) would not have to remember our names – a difficulty due to high turnover, and an avoidance of intimacy. This particular nickname was

memorized something. *Savoir* would have been the appropriate verb to use in the above situation, but Antou did not apply the subtleties of translation into French. She often sounded as if her French was a word-for-word translation of English. Likewise, French grammar dictates that she should have said "*tu comprends ce que je dis*" (literally "you understand this that I'm saying") The word "*que*," here a relative pronoun ("that"), can also be directly translated as "what." It appears that "*tu comprends que je dis*" was a word-for-word translation of "you understand what I'm saying." In Cote d'Ivoire, secondary education is completed in a French immersion context. Antou's unfamiliarity with – or disregard for – French syntax and grammar possibly indicate that she did not pursue secondary education. This possibility would corroborate my suspicion of her illiteracy that I detailed in Chapter 2.

reserved for those associated with the *African* way of braiding, as opposed to the African American way. Newbies who braid “the African way” would braid the back, and more experienced braiders would do the front. For example, I braided the back of my daughter’s head (Figure 13) while my co-worker plaited the front. Although our linguistic *Africanness* (we spoke French) got us accepted in the team (see Chapter 6). Yet, our technical *Africanness* (performing *Africanness* through our braiding technique) was detected as such (“*comme en Afrique*”) and rejected²¹. There was an implied notion that technical *Africanness* is somewhat backward, even among an all-African braiding team. The African American preference was associated with quality, sophistication, customer satisfaction, professionalism, and eventually profitability. It fit the substitutive pattern of appropriation and mimicry that Bhabha (1984) criticized for leading Africans to reject their own *Africanness*. It also fit the pragmatic pattern of appropriation and mimicry that Ferguson (2002) discussed as an adaptive strategy in order to succeed in a cosmos of institutional modernity. Modernity paid the bills. It was their daily bread.

Social interactions and stances of power

In the salon, power stances are ambivalent (Jacobs-Huey, 1996). The expert braider has authority over the customer’s physical appearance, yet the customer can dictate her preferences as she provides the braider’s income. Within this power dynamic, my observations point to a unique bond created between the stylist and the client. This form of intimacy is linked to the direct physical contact between the two individuals, the braider’s intimate knowledge of her customer’s hair and scalp, the braider’s knowledge of her customer’s appearance without braids,

²¹ Let it be noted that I have not witnessed any newbie who intentionally tried to be *visually* ethnic. For instance, I dressed in rather western clothes, and so did the other “newbie” at Antou’s.

as well as the bond created by the conversation (however limited it may be) that goes on in the salon, as it reveals cultural trends on the part of both the braider and the customer (Willett, 2000; Diouf, 2004; Kleindorfer et al., 2008; Martyn, 2011). In this respect, the African salon differs greatly from the African American hair salon that is geared toward socialization (Jacobs-Huey, 1996, 2006). One of the major and most obvious reasons for the customer's silence at the AHBS is the barrier of language, a discursive aspect of *Africanness* that I detail in a later chapter. All braiders were francophone African women. Antou and Fatoumata would occasionally speak to each other in Anyin, one of Ivory Coast's numerous indigenous languages. Nevertheless, they would address the rest of the team in French and code-switch to English to address the clients. Such rhetoric linguistically excluded the monolingual Anglophone African American clients from the speech community and the sociability therein

As Collier (2006) reported, there is but minimal verbal and nonverbal communication between the African braider and the customer during the time of service. Words uttered are usually restricted to the domain of service itself (e.g., size of the braids, style desired, etc.). The few instances where I noticed any attempt to initiate more social interactions were on occasions where the braiders were entertaining habitual clients. Even these instances were very brief (no longer than 2 to 5 minutes). It would be common for customers to be texting or playing games on their smart phones during the braiding session. Some would listen to music for entirety of the service. Both behaviors indicate lack of expectation of interaction.

On my first day of active participant observation at Nadia's, Patron instructed me to start with an 11-year-old girl who was waiting in the back. There were too many customers and not enough stylists. As I started, the girl appeared to be quite particular regarding the length of her braids, and I found her difficult to please, especially given her young age. Her hair was

extremely tangled, and I struggled to part it without hurting her. Biased, I assumed she had been a brat, too spoiled to comb her hair before coming to the salon, and then felt guilty for making such assumptions despite my ignorance. Her mother came later on, bringing her food. The girl did not thank the hand that fed her. Instead, she complained that the sandwich she got was not what she wanted, yet ate it anyway. The mother apologized to my client and checked on her other daughter who was getting her hair braided across from us.

As I progressed, the hair was more and more tangled in the middle. The poor girl would twitch every time I parted the hair. She almost reached her threshold and was trying not to cry. My interpretation of her pain was polyvalent. Could it be the logical consequence of her own neglect, divine retaliation for being a narcissistic prima donna (this was the most convincing interpretation at the time), or the heartbreaking distress of a helpless child? Patron spotted me and came over. I whispered, “How could her mother drop her off with her hair like that? It looks like it hasn’t been combed in days!” Patron just took the comb and told me, “That’s why I always comb the whole head thoroughly, starting from the end and progressively moving to the roots.” I was dumbfounded. How could she not take my side? From the seriousness on her face and the vigorous combing, I understood: business first. We’re here for business, not to educate mothers on how to care for their daughters’ hair.

The situation could have escalated quite effortlessly on the part of both the customer and me. Chi et al. (2013) studied frameworks in which customer negative events (complaining or otherwise voicing their unequivocal dissatisfaction) in hair salons create a climate of hostility. In such context, it is common for stylists to retaliate through service sabotage (a flawed hairstyle or here, inflicting excessive pain). My frustration at the sight of my client’s attitude and tangled hair was approaching what Chi et al. refer to as the “hairstylist’s neuroticism” that makes service

sabotage statistically predictable (2013:302). The segment I just described could fit in the hierarchical linear model the researchers elaborated. Luckily, Patron perceived and interpreted the linear escalation, and she intervened. Service sabotage was not an option. The customer's painful experience combined with my insistence on parting her hair without taking the time to gently comb it could have hurt the salon's reputation. Patron did not deny the fact that someone had neglected my client's tangled hair. Nevertheless, the salon's welfare was the priority, not my anthropological search for the moral cause of tangled roots.

The notion of collectivism can help shed light on Patron's reaction. Anthropologists and social scientists commonly describe sub-Saharan Africa as characterized by collectivist cultures that emphasize occupational and kinship roles (Triandis 1989, Ma and Schoeneman 1997). Collectivists are more likely to embrace subordinate social behaviors that benefit the group as a whole (Triandis et al. 1990:1006). Ohbuchi et al. (1999) explained that collectivists aim for conflict avoidance and rapid conflict resolution instead of being argumentative. This strategy helps maintain healthy relationships, which benefit the well-being of the group (here, the salon community) as a whole. Thus, Patron exercised the pragmatic subordination that restored peace. She performed a collectivist act for the benefit of the salon (including mine and my customer's). She performed *Africanness*.

One day at Antou's around noon, a young woman, whom I shall call Q, entered in the salon. I had heard Antou speak on the phone with her several times this day. On each phone conversation, she would promise Antou she would be there "soon." She was originally supposed to arrive early in the morning, but she took her time ("African-style"), Q was a trainee, somewhat like me. Her skin was of a light complexion. She did not have braids; her hair was relaxed and coiffed with a long, black and blond ponytail. She was wearing a long, elegant black

dress with a shiny and glittery belt and bold, flashy jewelry. Despite her tardiness, her appearance did not evoke the stereotypical African immigrant. She explained that she arrived late because she had a doctor appointment related to her pregnancy, although the other braiders were teasing her and playfully accusing her of lying because she was not showing – unlike me who was visibly well-advanced in my pregnancy. Of all braiders, she was the only one wearing make-up, and the only one not to have an African accent, which is something else we had in common. She told me she was Beninese, but her French accent suggested she must have spent a long time in some European francophone environment, as did mine. Antou instructed Q to braid in the back with me, but the customer complained that her braids were not tight enough. My client esteemed her pain to be a sign of the tightness and quality of my braids. She said that she “couldn’t feel anything” with my co-stylists’s braids. Antou told Q to stop and train on the mannequin.

I wanted to ask “what about not training in front of customers?” But I kept my peace (the inquisitive ethnographer almost got the best of the compliant employee in me). In this case, the customer had already made public knowledge that she “*connaît pas tresser* [doesn’t know braiding].” The mannequin would not discredit her, because she had already been humiliated, there was no reputation to ruin.

In both salons, the supervisors’ calm yet firm remonstrance show that braiders must adhere to the policy that “the customer is always right.” Bonacich (1987) argued that immigrant entrepreneurship tends to favor co-ethnic hiring and ethnic solidarity despite the fact that managers often exploit, humiliate, and oppress their co-ethnic employees to the benefit of their own capitalist agenda and that of the U.S. capitalist system. I distance my narrative from Bonachich’s Marxist interpretation, not because I question her argument’s validity, but because

the braiding salons do not function as tools of larger corporations, and the raw materials (the braiders' bodies) are not purchased from U.S. wholesale retailers. It is true that the vignettes that I previously described illustrate the managers' prioritizing profit over social bonding. Nevertheless, an African approach to business management would seek to conciliate the two (Legesse, 1973), rather than opposing them.

For customers, style options are limited by affordability. Usually, smaller braids are more expensive. Most customers in New York came in for black box braids (thick individual braids with extensions). For such customers, both Nadia and Antou would send them to buy the cheap extensions at the foreigner-owned beauty supply across the street²². In Baton Rouge, however, Jojo would provide her own extensions from Togo (she would either order them or bring some when she would travel) and add the cost to the bill. The underlying agreement (or co-dependency) between the New York salons and their neighbor stores attests to the contribution of Africans *into* the foreigners' community at large. The business owners' otherness – and subsequent geographic proximity – united them as business partners. On the other hand, Jojo singled herself out as her otherness (her *Africanness*) is manifested by marking a clear distinction *from* the community. This phenomenon is more understandable when we consider that Baton

²² These beauty supply stores are often owned by Korean and Vietnamese immigrants. Several anthropologists have written on the interaction between African American consumers and immigrant Korean store owners. There is a similar pattern between African American salon customers and immigrant African stylists. Furthermore, the salon constitutes an economic booster in the community and the world-wide braiding industry. Although the contribution of African braiders is relatively muted, invisible, and understudied, it sustains a wide range of ethnic and minority populations aesthetically, socially, and economically.

Rouge's population is significantly less abundant in immigrant inhabitants and foreign business owners than Queens²³.

One morning, two women arrived at Antou's, a mother and her daughter. They had come for black microbraids. They both wore their hair natural and had attempted to tie it in the back. The coarse hair in the front was too short to reach the ponytail, so it was simply brushed backward. While waiting for the helpers to arrive, Antou sent the daughter to buy breakfast, since she needed to buy her synthetic extensions at the beauty supply store next door. She left the shop timidly, patting her hair. We started watching a bootleg movie as they waited for the customers to return. The women had an appointment, but there seemed to be a misunderstanding about the pricing. The daughter's style cost \$140, yet the mother was only willing to pay \$100. As her daughter re-entered the shop, she mentioned going to a different salon where she could get the job done for that price, and Antou agreed to lower the cost to \$120, since they were "friends" and given that she had been a long-time, faithful customer. She whispered to them, "Don't tell anyone! I'm doing you a favor, do you see what I mean?" She started braiding the daughter's hair immediately.

Antou clearly did not give the customer any time for reflection, and given their tone, it was evident that neither wanted to cause a scene. The American customer chose her words carefully. She did not want to hurt anyone's feelings. It was in Antou's interest not to be confrontational: don't bite the hand that feeds you. Nevertheless, the boldness with which she undertook the braiding was double daring. First, as I noted earlier, being seen with one's hair undone is the ultimate taboo in the African American female community. This customer-stylist

²³ As detailed in Chapter 1's statistics.

privilege can be, as some have noted, even more intimate than nudity or sexual intimacy (Rock, 2010). Here, the customer was already embarrassed to be seen in such a state. It would have been even worse for her to leave now that Antou had untied the ponytail and started untidying the back of her hair. Second, Antou played with the legal standard that demands that workers must be paid for their labor, knowing that lawsuits are a common underlying threat in the American workplace. As she serviced the customer, no matter how small the service was, she already had one hand in her mother's wallet. Additionally, the speed and neatness of her first braid was undoubtedly taunting and enticing, indicating that they would be pleased by the finished product. It was *worth* \$20 more than the competitors.

Conclusion



Figure 13: Microbraids with extensions were attached the “African way,” and a Nadia's AHBS stylist braided the front.

Aspects of salon operation adhere to what other scholars classify as pertaining to modernity and what others (such as Gilroy (1993) in *The Black Atlantic*) classify as countermodernity. This latter term refers to the deliberate effort to divorce from modernity in order to favor ethnic or nationalistic representations. Paolini et al. (1999) explained that exploiting one's own otherness is intrinsic to cultural survival in this modern, postcolonial age. Notions of modernity and progress are inextricably tied to the West, while African "ways" are often commodified because they are perceived in terms of their profitability or their economic hindrances (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009). Yet, at the end of the day, the metapragmatic discourse among stylists in both New York and Baton Rouge was always very favorable to African identity overall. They exploited their otherness by stressing *Africanness* in their businesses' names. They proclaimed their distinction from black American salons. They resisted the amalgamation that globalization engenders. Their *Africanness* did not reject the modern. It countered it. The following table shows that salon owners deliberately choose when to be "African" and when to embrace "modernity," based on how a particular cultural stigma can be commodified.

OBSERVATION	MODERN	COUNTER-MODERN	COMMENTS/EXPLANATION
Punctuality	✓		Rigorous time management to please African American clients; remonstrance of African “newbies” who were more nonchalant with timeliness
Attire	✓	✓	Mixture of fashion styles among braiders and managers
Braiding technique		✓	The salons’ appellation “African Hair Braiding” does not accurately reflect the braiding itself. Instead, the experience of <i>Africanness</i> resides in other aspects of the service provided.
Language		✓	Speaking French establishes a soundscape that excludes Western African American customers cognitively. It restricts knowledge to the African braiders as a speech community.
Teamwork		✓	Collectivist approach to salon management; managers intervened and exercised servant leadership (Chen et al., 2015).

Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:5) described scenarios where the image of *Africanness* is exploited for material gain. One can ask, “At whose expense?” In the case of the braiding salon, I argue that the branding of *Africanness* truly applies only to the manufacturers of the braids. They, not their service per se, embody *Africanness*. The form says “African Hair Braiding,” but the substance is “African Hair Braiders Doing American Braids.” The product itself is devoid of African form. As a matter of fact, the product is denied any connection to African manufacturing (which is denigrated): it is infused with African American aesthetics and technique and it is completed rather hastily. Customer service in the salon illustrates the extent to which the stylist’s cultural identity has tangible benefits that substitute for her product’s local identity.

The influence of and admiration for the U.S. beauty culture among African women is undeniable. When discussing postcolonialism, Madison (2012:55) explains that it considers “the multiple forms and locations of discourse, performance, politics, value, and the ‘everyday’ – both past and present – that emanate from the history of colonialism.” Furthermore, she explains that “postcolonial theory examines the silenced expressions and subordinated practices that occur on the margin of power and brings them to the center of analysis. It debunks that taken-for-granted superiority of the metropolitan or imperial ‘center’ that occupies not only the material institutions of power and dominance, but also how superiority figures into the imaginations of both the oppressor and oppressed” (Madison 2012:57). The permeability to American culture and the numerous economic interests that the U.S. has collected worldwide has led the country to earn the reputation of a neocolonial power. Because postcolonial theory includes notions of appropriation and mimicry (Madison 2012; Bhabha 1984; Ferguson 2002), there are ramifications that relate the case of salon braiders I met in New York and Baton Rouge. Studies among the black youth in and from the sub-Saharan Africa tend to argue that, despite their strong patriotic sentiment, young Africans tend to somehow emulate the African American imagery that is propagated in the media (Hoffman 2011; Newell 2012). Although the stylists I observed dress in a relatively western fashion style, their boldly proclaimed decision to serve in the name of *Africanness*, or to provide employment to fellow African braiders evokes cultural resistance. The following chapters analyze the extent to which the salon is a space where the definitions of *Africanness* are reformulated and negotiated via a series of discursive and performing strategies.

CHAPTER 5. ETHNIC BRAIDING SALONS IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

Introduction

With its 32.5% African-American population, Louisiana is an ideal venue for hair braiding salons. Here, as in other parts of the United States, quality hair braiding is often associated with foreign stylists from the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa, although salon customers are almost exclusively African American. Black immigrants are a small minority in the U.S., and there is little literature available on this specific population. In Baton Rouge, only 5.4% of the population is foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), and people of African and Caribbean descent are a minority among this demographic group.

Baton Rouge has 125,000 black inhabitants; they constitute 54% of the city's population (Suburban Stats, 2017). While most black salons in Baton Rouge treat chemically relaxed hair, which has been popular with African American women for many years, braiding services are part of the contemporary movement in the black aesthetics that promotes a certain "return to African roots" and more natural hair care. Yet braided hair is such a common sight in the city's African American community that one could argue that braiding salons have visibly transformed Baton Rouge's black American landscape.

This chapter explores the art and business of African braiding in Baton Rouge, Louisiana from the perspectives of two immigrant women from Jamaica and Togo. As a cultural anthropologist, I am particularly interested in understanding the personal, cultural, and social factors that influence their choice of work, and how they perform it. Drawing on data I have collected over five years of interactions and observation with Jojo, owner of Princess African Hair Braiding (PAHB), and Andrea, owner of Andrea's Hair Studio (AHS), I examine how each

woman has successfully established a hair braiding business and grown a clientele in Baton Rouge, as well as how each braider understands her own work. My interviews, photographs, and field observations reveal the extent to which caring for the black American body is part of a unique business with complex political and socio-economic ramifications.

Although it has always been common for immigrant African braiders to serve their customers unofficially in the braider's home, the emergence of branded "African braiding" salons is a relatively new phenomenon. African American stylists who perform braiding services typically work in beauty shops that do not exclusively specialize in braiding. These establishments also occasionally hire African braiders. Mo' Hair, whose owner is originally from St. Lucia, is an example of a multi-service salon that provides both chemical and natural hair treatments. The salon employs African and African American braiders. Likewise, the Hair Tamers Studio provides a diversity of black hair care services. The braiding services they offer (twisting, box braids, and cornrows) are listed as "African Hair Braiding" on their menu, as their hired braider is Congolese.

It is quite challenging for immigrant women to set up their own braiding salons, because they must first satisfy governmental regulations for training and licensing. The Louisiana State Board of Cosmetology refers to techniques such as twisting, wrapping, weaving, and braiding as "alternative hair design." Braiders must take 500 hours of coursework and pass an examination before they can obtain a special permit that allows them to offer alternative hair design (Louisiana State Board of Cosmetology, 2011). Their success depends heavily on extensive planning and years of perseverance.

Until 2003, Louisiana braiders had to possess a cosmetology license, which required 1500 hours of coursework, covered within a minimum of 36 weeks. Out of the curriculum's

twenty courses, only five were somewhat related to skills needed for braiding. The Board now issues braiders a special permit, valid for one year.

Baton Rouge: defining the area

Salons in Baton Rouge

While braiding services have always been available in Baton Rouge, the emergence of branded “African braiding” salons is a relatively new phenomenon. **Error! Reference source not found.** presents registered businesses in the metropolitan area. In addition, it is common for immigrant braiders to service their customers in their home, unofficially. Photographs of some of these establishments are presented in Figure 14, Figure 15, and Figure 16. As synthesized in the table below, during the last decade, the label "African Hair Braiding" has become an increasingly conventional phrase to evoke Baton Rouge stylists' authenticity and expertise.

Business name	Date registered
Sisters African Hair Braiding	2007
Princess African Hair Braiding	2008
Touba African Hair Braiding	2010
Dakar African Hair Braiding	2011
Fifi African Hair Braiding	2011
African Hair Masters	2012
Isha’s African Hair Braiding	2014
Destiny African Hair Braiding	2015

These salons are located in areas of urban Baton Rouge close to African American neighborhoods. Most of them lie along Florida Boulevard, one of the most navigated artery in the city.



Figure 14: Isha's African Hair Braiding is operated by stylists from Senegal, West Africa.



Figure 15: Sisters African Hair Braiding is owned by two Senegalese women.



Figure 16: Dakar African Hair Braiding is owned by a Senegalese woman.

African American stylists who perform braiding services typically work in beauty shops that are not exclusively specialized in braiding. These establishments also occasionally hire African braiders. Mo' Hair (Figure 17), whose owner is originally from St. Lucia, is an example of a multi-service salon that provides both chemical and natural hair treatments. The salon employs African and African American braiders. Likewise, the Hair Tamers Studio provides a diversity of black hair care services. The braiding services they offer as listed as “African Hair Braiding” on their menu, as their hired braider is Congolese. The Salon Mall (

Figure 18) is a compound of salon suites that feature several natural stylists. Stylists rent suites on a week-to-week basis. They can paint and decorate their booths as they wish, as long as it does not interfere with safety regulations. The flat rate rent includes light, water, cable, and internet. Several Salon Mall African American renters provide braiding services, but they do not utilize the term “braiding” in their salon name, implying that they do not particularly specialize in this skill.



Figure 17: Mo Hair is one of the most famous black salons in Baton Rouge. Formerly located at the heart of the Gardere community, one of the largest African American neighborhoods in the city, it is now conveniently located at half way between historically black neighborhoods such as Mayfair, Gardere, Sagefield, Hermitage, and Perkins Village.



Figure 18: While the Salon Mall’s website lists braiding services on their website, the directory does not list any business officially described as a “braiding salon.” Simplistic Hair Design is the only studio listed as specializing in natural hair care.

The legislation

The Louisiana Board of Cosmetology refers to techniques such as twisting, wrapping, weaving, and braiding as “alternative hair design.” These techniques exclude the application of reactive chemicals and dyes that would alter the structure of the natural hair. Alternative hair designers may, however, apply antiseptics, powders, oils, clays, lotions, and tonics. Until 2003, Louisiana braiders had to obtain a cosmetology license, which required 1500 hours of coursework, covered over the course of a minimum of 36 weeks. Out of the curriculum’s 20 courses, only five were somewhat related to skills needed to braid hair. The Board now issues a special permit for alternative hair designers, valid for one year. To obtain it, braiders must take 500 hours of coursework and pass an examination.

While 26 states still require a cosmetology license for braiders, alternative hair design licenses are more and more common nationwide (AASC, 2016). In March 2017, Louisiana

Representative Julie Emerson (Carencro-R) authored and filed House Concurrent Resolution 5 to eliminate the law for alternative hair design, and House Bill 468 that would allow hair braiding to be an unregulated practice. Emerson echoed the braiders' complaints as she argued that no school in Louisiana offers the 500 hours required by the Cosmetology Board as listed. The House Committee passed and moved the two measures in May 2017. The Cosmetology Board expressed that sanitation coursework should remain mandatory. The bill is currently subject to call at the Senate. Across states, governors and legislators usually support deregulation, because it helps improve employment rates, but trade boards generally lobby against deregulation (Bergal, 2015).

Although this mandated curriculum is more targeted toward braiding and scalp care, braiders claim to learn very little. They also state that the knowledge they acquire has no influence on their abilities as stylists and shop owners. The common outcry is that cosmetology boards are simply motivated by financial gain on their own behalf, and provide nothing useful in return. For this reason, licensing disputes are emerging across the country. Disputes highlight that state laws target and marginalize black, female immigrants who make up the majority of unlicensed braiders, and their African American female customers. For this reason, 10 states so far have deregulated their hair braiding practices.

The state Cosmetology Board specifies required equipment for salons, most of which is geared to maintain cleanliness, hygiene, and presentation/attractiveness. Students who pursue a cosmetology license enroll in an "OSHA Requirements" course that details the use of chemicals. Interestingly, however, very few ergonomic standards exist to protect the stylist. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has no universal regulations in the salon industry for braiders. Salon professionals must take it upon themselves to find adequate postures

to minimize wear and tear generated by performing repetitive tasks and inappropriate handling of equipment and tools. Shock absorber mats are common for stylists to stand on to minimize back pain, and adjustable stools and chairs are also found in almost all salons, but they are not legally required.

Princess African Hair Braiding (PAHB)

Jojo, the owner of PAHB, is originally from Togo, a Francophone country in West Africa. I interviewed Jojo on several occasions over the course of five years, and often observed her at work. Sometimes I mixed business with pleasure as she braided my hair. Now 28 years old, Jojo came to Louisiana as a refugee in 2000 when her father, a former military man, received death threats following the country's regime change. The family first escaped to Benin. Jojo spent most of her childhood there before landing in Baton Rouge. She speaks Mina, French, and now English.

Upon arrival in Louisiana, her family was directed to an apartment complex, off Brightside Drive, where most refugee and immigrant families from Africa were placed. Her neighbors were her classmates. (Although this complex no longer exists, the Brightside families have remained in contact, and see one another at graduations, weddings, and other gatherings) Jojo was placed in her middle-school's English as Second Language (ESL) program, where she met most of her lifelong friends, and continued the program through her high-school years. She then attended Baton Rouge Community College, where she pursued a medical assistant degree, with the intention of returning to Togo and contributing to her country's progress in the medical field.

Early Years

Unlike most of her African counterparts, Jojo did not learn how to braid at a young age. She has an older sister who married when Jojo was still young and now resides in Togo. Jojo thus grew up as the only girl among her four brothers. She spent her childhood with very short, natural hair, as girls did in Beninese schools (Projet Enagnon Dandan, 2013). As she grew up, she enjoyed growing her malleable hair, and kept it relaxed and loose. In her teenage years, however, she started to anticipate getting married (although she was not engaged until last year) and having a large family:

I always knew I would have a lot of kids and especially a lot of girls. But in this country, I don't know where I would take them to get their hair done. So I started to read and search around about how to take care of hair, and I really got into the whole braiding thing. I learned everything on my own. I practiced on my friends. I watched videos, and it became my passion.

Her frequent trips to Togo fueled her enthusiasm and helped her keep up with the latest fashions, extension styles, and techniques. When she returned to America, she would develop creative ways to incorporate what she had learned into the African American aesthetic. It was always a success. She now often does her own hair, but she also lets her helpers braid her hair for practice.

Jojo earned her stylist's license while pursuing a medical assistant degree simultaneously. She would assist her sister-in-law, who operated a braiding salon, in the summer. Her first customers were older, African women, some were her mother's friends. At that time, Jojo was also a singer in the African band Voice of Praise, which performs at Living Together in Christ International Church. This establishment is a place of gathering and networking for numerous members of the African community in Baton Rouge, and her membership has helped her

business bloom with African customers. The Christian atmosphere in the salon helped generate publicity. Yet, she noticed that customers would often ask to pay for her services at some undetermined time (“later”), and most of them – “mostly Nigerians,” she added, laughing – ended up not paying at all. Because of the respect younger Africans are traditionally expected to show their elders, Jojo did not pursue these women in quest of her wage. Remaining in good standing with fellow Africans was a priority. Instead, Jojo resolved to avoid African customers altogether.

While in training, she decided to rent a booth in the Salon Mall under the name PAHB, which she shared with an African American fellow trainee, Erica, who provided relaxing and other styling services for relaxed hair. The shop was a spacious room on the second floor of Hammond Aire Plaza, which Jojo and her roommate designed as soothing environment. Its theme color, purple, covered the walls, and decorations and accessories such as blow dryers and baskets were mauve, lavender, and violet (Geboy, 1996; Altimier, 2004²⁴). Within a year, she was so overbooked that the now full-time medical assistant had to hire helpers. Her reputation grew, and customers returned.

When Jojo was not tending to patients or at the salon, she would consult, negotiate, and plan with customers from home, where she felt more comfortable. Although her initial decision to open a formal shop was based on beauty school requirements, her customers preferred the formal environment of a salon as a public sphere rather than the private home. Indeed, as scholars have previously noted, that salon provides a space where socio-cultural stances are determined, and everyone *knows their place*: customers dictated what they wanted, and Jojo complied. In

²⁴ These authors studied the effect of color of space in marketing and body care environments.

contrast, neither the customer nor Jojo was not “in charge” in her parents’ house. The customer was required by protocol to behave as a respectful guest there, and was not in a position to make demands that could potentially debase Jojo as a service provider.

When Jojo’s father passed away in 2014, the African community of Baton Rouge mourned for weeks. Returning the body home for a proper Togolese burial, as custom required, demanded more time away from work than Jojo’s medical workplace could allow. She decided to resign and flew to Togo to bury her father the African way. When she returned to Baton Rouge a month later, her medical assistant position was no longer available, but one thing remained unchanged: her reputation as a braider. She traded her salon booth for a full suite on Florida Boulevard, which would be the new home of PAHB. Although she has a website for her salon, most of its content has expired as she does little or no website maintenance. “I let my work speak for itself,” she said. Word of mouth is her primary advertising medium.

Exacerbating the exotic

Jojo decided that her new salon would reflect its name. She painted the walls and trims white, red, yellow, and green, the colors of the Togolese flag, and her salon window displays jewelry with cowrie shells and gold from the Gold Coast. “Nollywood” movies are the main entertainment available on the salon’s flat screen TV. It is also common to hear Jojo and her helpers’ lively conversations in Mina, “broken English” (as she calls it), pidgin, and “Frenghish,” interspersed with loud laughter and phone conversations with customers booking appointments.

Jacob-Huey (1996) analyzed the linguistic implications of price negotiation between African American stylists and customers. She explained that various discursive stances are employed and that price negotiation is often client-initiated. Nevertheless, because the black American salon is a site of performance as well as social positioning, the stylist/client stances are

usually understood and abided by. Despite the bold Africanism (see Figure 19), Jojo remained popular with American customers. In fact, she favors them for their financial and professional safety, as opposed to her mother's friends, whose hair she would rather braid for free or not at all. "With African Americans, I don't have to fight," Jojo explains. For this reason, Jojo is generally satisfied with the assurance that her American customers arrive aware of the cost required, and they are usually willing and ready to pay upon completion of the service. In African cultures, bargaining is an art at which women often excel (Clark, 1994), but to Jojo it is painstaking, time-consuming, and does not generate enough profits.

Jojo's helpers prepare extension strands for her, and sometimes braid, under her supervision. According to the regulations, helpers do not need a license to practice under the business owner. During field observation, I interacted with helpers from Cameroon, Ghana, and Congo, all of whom were university students. When I asked Jojo why all her helpers are African, she explained that few African American stylists micro-braid. According to Jojo, those who do are outrageously expensive, or they simply do not perform up to her and her customers' standards. In addition, African American customers commonly ask for African braiders. Jojo has met customers who refused to let American braiders touch their head, as if "being served Chinese food by a non-Asian," she joked. Jojo once recruited a U.S.-born friend whose parents are Nigerians, to assist her with a customer. The braider had no foreign accent, which initially made the customer apprehensive. Both braiders assured her the helper was Nigerian. Two weeks later, the customer returned complaining that all braids the helper did had come loose.

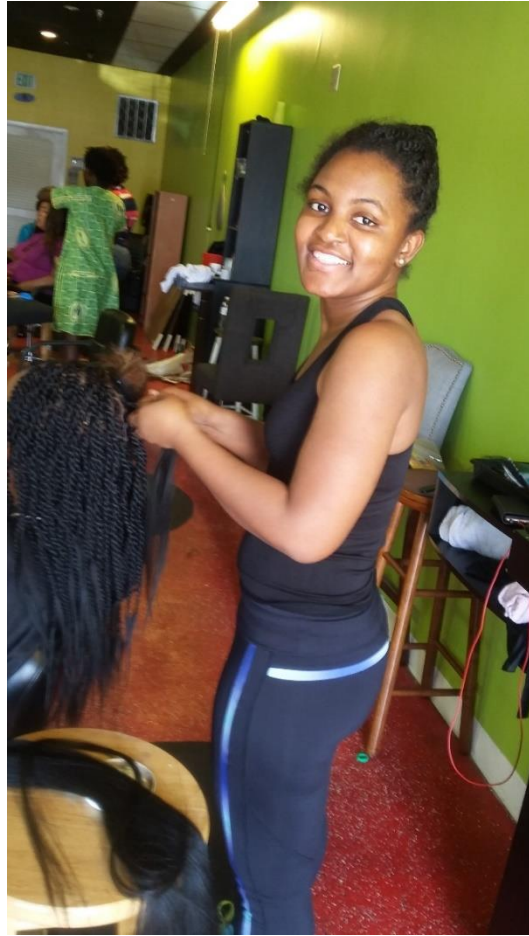


Figure 19: Jojo (front) twisting a customer's hair using extensions. The bold wall colors match her helper's (back) green bazin dress.

Since then, Jojo resolved to make PAHB exclusively African-staffed. The exotic connotation and the presence of African braiders is now an image she utilizes to promote their otherness as a guarantee of the quality of her services. Jojo uses the stigma attached to African manual labor for promotional purposes. *Africanness* constitutes cultural and economic capital, as it is commodified as a label of authenticity. And it is working: business is booming.

To complement the African experience, customers have the option to bring their own hair extensions or to use those from the salon. During her trips to Togo, Jojo shops for the trendiest extensions. Prices there are relatively low, and packs are twice as full as those sold in U.S.

beauty supply stores, so she can buy large amounts for herself and her friends. Customers who want authentic Togolese extensions (though they are Made in China), are charged a small extra fee.

Stylist-customer interactions during service

When she worked at the Salon Mall, Jojo and her roommate E. would often chat with their customers about health, fashion, hair care, and courtship. However, such exchanges were very minimal when Jojo consulted from home. There, it would be common to only hear the TV playing in French and Jojo interacting with her family members in Mina, while the customer remained silent, looking at braiding models and extensions. Likewise, at the new shop, I observed few casual conversations between the customers and Jojo or her helpers, which strongly contrasts with what one might see at an American beauty shop.

Countless customers admitted that they felt a bit uneasy when surrounded by braiders who do not speak English. Some directly asked “What are you saying, are you talking about me?” Others would jokingly warn, “Don’t talk about me, now!” Eventually, customers concluded that they are willing to bear the discomfort, because it was compensated by the quality of care they received and Jojo’s affordable prices. Several customers also stated that they enjoyed the exposure to African culture. Getting their hair braided at PAHB allowed them to view Africa and Africans in a new light. They particularly appreciate the Nollywood drama shows that contrasts with cable television shows commonly viewed in American salons.

Commodifying *Africanness*

Through PAHB, Jojo re-creates Africa in a pan-Africanist ideal that extends far beyond her native Togo. Having grown up in a foreign land, but surrounded with friends from Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan, Liberia, and Kenya inspired her to infuse her business with sensibilities

that reflects commonalities within her community. Bourdieu's sociological notion of habitus considers that humans are "characterized by a set of acquired sensibilities, dispositions, schemata, and tastes that are not based on biological instinct but are culturally learned modes of being, thinking, valuing, and behaving that derive from deeply positioned home-place worlds that we inhabit with others" (Madison, 2012:12). This cultural identity led Jojo to visibly tailor her salon to be a microcosm of Africanness. She validates the label "African Hair Braiding" through a series of exposures: the colors of her shop, the service she renders (braiding as African aesthetics), the languages she speaks, the clothes and jewelry she advertises, and the nationalities of her staff.

As excluding and limiting as this process might appear, it is also what attracts her African American clientele. Women proudly praise "this African girl who does [their] hair." As they consume her services, they willfully surround themselves with a landscape and soundscape of exotic foreignness, if only for a couple of hours (Feld and Brenneis, 2004)²⁵. They consume *Africanness*.

Andrea's Hair Studio (AHS)

I first interviewed Andrea in her salon suite, as she was servicing a repeat client with Senegalese twists on a Saturday morning (Figure 20). At that time, she was also working at the Salon Mall, which hosted but a few natural hairstylists: Andrea, Coco (who owned A Natural You), and PAHB. Andrea's shop was a spacious room. With its light emerald walls, it was a

²⁵ Anthropologists and social scientists have documented a similar disapproval among American customers in Korean and Vietnamese nail salons (Kang and Kang, 1997; Federman et al., 2006; Brettell and Alstatt, 2007).

relaxing environment (Geboy, 1996; Altimier, 2004). All equipment was neatly stored in straw baskets and trays. Teal blue decorations enhanced the aura.



Figure 20: Andrea was pacing herself as she was tending to her client. She divided her hair into 4 sections to keep track of her progress and finish within a maximum of 4 hours.

How it all began

Like Jojo, Andrea and I have known each other for quite a few years, as we both attended LSU at the same time. Andrea is originally from Jamaica, where she was born and raised. She came here in 2005 after being offered a scholarship to run track at LSU. She recalls her childhood there as “fun.” She was a very driven person from a young age:

A lot of young ladies in my community got pregnant and I knew I didn’t want to end up like that. So I started running track. I thought, I got the talent, and I can probably use it to propel me to get to where I wanna be, and so... I got recruited from my Catholic high-school in Spanish Town put me in the scene and started getting noticed. First in Philadelphia where I won the triple Penn Relay. [...] I got recruited by 5 different universities, but I chose LSU because there are a lot of Jamaican athletes [there] so I could fit in more than I would anywhere else.

Although Andrea always admired track athletes, she perceived sports as a way *out*. She is the first person in her family to finish college. Upon graduating in 2008 with a journalism

degree, she started her Master's program in broadcasting. She married soon after, and got pregnant. Along with the bundle of joy came a bundle of bills. More than a degree, Andrea realized she needed income. In her emotionally charged account, she explained that she always wanted better for her and the family she now has (her husband and two sons) than what she had growing up.

Andrea started braiding at the age of 12 (she is now 33). Unlike Jojo, Andrea grew up in a household where braiding was a routine activity. She quickly got the hang of it, as she argued that this is an innate ability: "It takes natural talent. Not everyone can do it, not everyone can call themselves a braider." During her years at LSU, she would often braid her track and field teammates' hair. By 2013, she was licensed to braid in Louisiana and Texas.

Andrea invests a significant amount of time advertising. She unashamedly exploits any opportunity to promote her art in the social media. Her business cards read: "I let my fingers do the talking." Not only does she use her dexterous hands to express her creativity, but Andrea also insists on letting her visible work speak for itself: "It's kind of hard to tell someone, "Well, I do hair." That doesn't really mean anything. They really *wanna*... see the work, see what you're capable of doing and that's why I started that fan page on Facebook." In contrast to Jojo, Andrea posts virtually every picture of her work on Facebook, as well as photographs of her own new looks. "I do my own hair, I don't let anyone touch my crown [...]. Braids or twists, and I'll wear it like that for about three months at a time, shampooing it bi-weekly, the same thing you would do wearing your own hair. After those three months I take it down and do a deep conditioning treatment or a hot oil treatment just to make sure my hair is still healthy." This advertising strategy has even attracted numerous African American licensed hair stylists, who visit her suite to learn how to braid.

Staffing the team

Andrea's first objective in her business venture was to get her station at the Salon Mall in order to stop working from home. Then, after spending months searching for dependable braiders in Baton Rouge, she elected to recruit Jamaican helpers only, as she opined that local braiders were too unreliable. She also sees her salon as an opportunity to help young women get a professional future. Her wish list includes selling her own products, funding new Jamaican braiders' licensing, and hiring them in a salon of her own where she can employ even more people, and maybe even write a book about how to do all of the above. "The possibilities are endless," she commented. And she is on her way there. In June 2017, she purchased her first business property, the new home of AHS.

Andrea does not belong to any specific network of braiders, despite her effort to reach out to others. She deplores the lack of solidarity in the trade. A few years ago, she invited three local stylists with excellent braiding skills to join her business. She offered them greater compensation than what they were making, she said, since her prices are typically on the higher end. They refused her offer. She also left her portfolio in another well-established Baton Rouge salon, but its owner never called her back, despite promising to do so. Andrea attributes braiders' isolation to misconceptions and misunderstandings. Others perceive her as competitive, while her intent is to be more collaborative.

Interacting with customers

Like Jojo, Andrea had sobering experiences that led her to now filter her clientele, which she describes as "high-end clients:" nurses, doctors, teachers (and their children), a few college and graduate students. She used to accept all customers indiscriminately, until one of them refused to pay, because she did not fancy the resulting style. With customers willing to travel

from Houston and New Orleans to get their hair braided with her, Andrea can afford to profile with whom she wants to work.

Conversations between Andrea and her clients are typically centered on hair care, for which she, authoritatively so, holds her returning customers accountable. She commonly asks them, “Are you eating your fruits and veggies?” “Are you drinking enough water?” She also warns them, “Well, if you don’t eat a right diet, how do you think your hair will get healthy?,” or “Your hair is a reflection of how you take care of yourself!” In the same lines as Martyn’s (2011) or Linnan and Ferguson’s (2007) findings, recurrent conversation topics both at AHS and PAHB are family, traditions, celebrations of the current season, health concerns, and foods. In both salons, customers also express much concern for their weight, but while they spend hours lecturing one another against the ills of diabetes, heart disease, depression, alopecia, and pregnancy, weight gain was often presented as compensable once a woman has a *fabulous* hair do.

Apart from a few occasional jokes with her helpers, Andrea does not speak Creole (commonly called Jamaican Patois) in front of her customers. She insists on remaining professional at all times. Actually, she emphasizes “good conversation” as part of the treatment she offers. Clients come to get pampered, and therefore they must be given the attention they came for. In contrast with Jojo, who immerses her customers in African colors, music, and visual arts, AHS’s practice of speech therapy (or speech *as* therapy) is somewhat reminiscent of the African folkloric practice of palaver. Palaver is the sub-Saharan practice of community or familial conversation and debate. Because these conversations are often long, they typically take place in the comfortable shade of a tree (the palaver tree). Interlocutors are encouraged to be extrovert, and conversations are cathartic. For this reason, scholars have argued that palaver

constitutes the vernacular/folkloric equivalent of therapy sessions that Western patients might have with their psychologists or psychiatrists (Zempleni and Collomb, 1968; Adejunmobi, 2004; Melone, 1983).

Here, Andrea perceives that these women need to be listened to, and they need to release energy “off their chests” through effective communication. Because of her journalism background, she feels quite comfortable centering the conversation on her clients so that they will in turn leave content and affirmed. As braiding provides healing for one’s hair, conversation provides healing or care for the inner person.

Conclusion and reflections: internationalizing African American fashion and resisting alienation

From the Congolese *sapeur* to the New Orleans churchgoer or the Harlem poet, black peoples worldwide have a history of making iconic fashion statements through a polished appearance (Bazanquiza, 1992; Hanon, 2006; James, 2015; Hobdy, 2016). The salon customers I observed and interviewed adhered to this standard of fashionability. The fact that immigrant women contribute to this statement of blackness and this sense of the *fabulous* in such a direct manner is noteworthy. While I do not argue that blackness alone defines Baton Rouge, it is evidently one of its distinguishingly visible attributes. Thus, the braided hair care that helps shape the black cultural landscape is part of a new phase in African American cultural history. This phase is by far more internationalized than any other since slavery days. Indeed, for a few hours, customers and their foreign stylist form an intimate bond through the physical contact of the braider’s fingers with the clients’ scalp and hair. They have the options of consuming Africanness in a shop like PAHB, or Americanizing the African experience at AHS. Either way, they leave the shop *fabulous*, yet with a more global consciousness of their own blackness. This

consciousness will be re-ignited every time they are asked the question, “Who did your hair?” which has become such a quintessential part of the African American soundscape.

It could be tempting to view Jojo as yet another immigrant manual laborer and Andrea as an elitist. However, this chapter seeks to highlight their respective complexities. Jojo does not simply manufacture a service tailored to the client’s desire. She influences what they desire. She imports not only her skill, but also new hairstyles from West Africa that she flaunts on her own head. Her customers and surrounding community might not have been otherwise exposed to this African aesthetic. On the other hand, Andrea chooses to service natural hair styles historically associated with unrefined social class to “higher end” customers. By doing so, she is helping re-define social norms. She is contributing to remedying the stigma of hegemonically-defined appropriateness and straight hair as a function of status.

CHAPTER 6. “PARLEZ-VOUS FRENGLISH?”: THE COMMODIFICATION OF LANGUAGE AND AFRICANNESS IN AFRICAN HAIR BRAIDING SALONS

Introduction

Braiding salons, nail salons, and beauty salons in general are often multi-cultural and multi-linguistic spaces, characterized by mixed power differentials between the provider and the client. In numerous ways, language comes into play in defining roles in these spaces, including what gets said, what language(s) and varieties of those language the talk occurs in, who speaks what to whom, and how this language use is perceived by participating parties in African hair braiding salons (AHBS). While issues of language use are seldom overtly addressed and evaluated, differences are not exactly covert and either. Language uses are not taboos per se, yet foreign languages are shared only across the braiders, who employ language use as code. Indeed, language is used to articulate or display power and ridicule powerlessness. In the case of French-speaking hair braiders and their customers, however, contradicting language ideologies and attitudes or the participants, are displayed. This chapter seeks to reveals that braiders use the French language not only as a manifestation of their African consciousness, but also to justify and validate the appellation “African Hair Braiding Salon” that characterizes these transnational establishments.

A speech community can be defined as a group of people that share a sense of common identity and have adopted a common speech pattern. For these people, speech is performance of this common identity. Gumperz (1968) explained that although members of a speech community have different, individual idiolects, the act of speaking constitutes a manifestation of their sense of belonging. Morgan’s (1994) study of the African American speech community showed the complexity of defining a speech community solely by ethnic markers. Morgan also discussed the

prevalence of code-switching as common practice. Likewise, francophone African immigrants in the U.S. share a sense of linguistic belonging, but the group is also characterized by complex heteroglossic identity. Speech communities, along with speech within a community, are not static. Speech patterns change over time, as shown by the “Frenghish” speech spoken in AHBS, and among the francophone multinational African community in the U.S.

Bailey (1997) also studied the African American speech community as he compared its performance of respect with that of the Korean American community. He noted that the African American speech community tends to favor a positive interface where respect is manifested by voicing interest and solidarity for the interlocutor’s experience. Bailey showed that when two different speech communities meet, there are numerous opportunities for misunderstanding.

Boas (1911, 1940) noted the distinction of race, language, and culture; a study of speech community shows that ethnicity, language, and culture can sometimes be closely related. For instance, although Renan (1882) would argue that language alone cannot bind a people together, Von Humbolt defined language as the “spirit of a nation” (Brown 1967:82). If so, the salon functions as a transnational space where non-French speakers are the foreigners. Just as Morgan argued that African American English serves as a counter-language that defies linguistic hegemony through its own competence, braidors intentionally disobey the implied “English-only” rule prevalent in most North American workplaces (Adams, 1997; Jorgensen, 1995; Perea, 1989; Gibson, 2004). In my observations, I also noted that Africans would speak a form of French that was often in great conflict with standard French. I must admit to being often tempted to turn to covert prestige and use incorrect grammar on purpose in order to blend in. Covert prestige refers to the intentional use of non-standard accents and/or variety of language. This

phenomenon is often associated with the speaker's seeking approval from his/her peers, resulting in social prestige (Trudgill, 1972, 2003).

The language ideology prevalent in the AHBS is primarily focused on accomplishing the task (braiding). Speaking French demonstrates teamwork: it attests of the braider's willingness to embrace the *Africanness* advertised in the salon name, as well as her acknowledgment and support of her co-workers' decision not to speak English. French also serves as professional jargon. Yet, there is an implicit socialization process that occurs among the braiders, because despite originating from different countries, stylists use language and conversation in French as a bond that unites them in their womanhood and their *Africanness*.

Babou (2009:6), who focuses on issues of gender and class, traces the history of the growth of Senegalese braiding salons in the US. Her ethnography reports that the Senegalese seized the Black is Beautiful momentum and the hair revolution that ensued or characterized it in the 1970s and 1980s (Babou 2009; Shellnutt 2006). Indeed, as the black media started to promote natural hairstyles (Hill-Collins 2005), braids constituted a means to manage kinky hair without having to alter it chemically (Johnson 2011:148). Even nowadays, culturalists report that wearing braids is often perceived as an affirmation of blackness (Dixon 2005). As African women often learn how to braid hair proficiently from a young age, those who migrate to the US also import their skill. African braiding salons have grown to become an emblem of quality, yet affordable, haircare for African American women (Wingfield 2008:99) who refuse to straighten their hair – that is, who decide to embrace their African hair rather than conforming to the straight hair aesthetic that characterize the hegemony. With braid care products brands such as African Pride and Africa's Best, braids are now an emblem for black women who carry their

African kinky hair with pride. Salons bearing the name of “African Hair Braiding” are branding the image of Africa for material value (Cavanaugh and Shankar, 2014:1-14; Stoller, 2010).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (title VII) includes a ban on national origin-based discrimination in the workplace. Yet, it is common for US employers to implement “English-only” rules on the job (Cameron, 1997:1347). Law reviews are often concerned with the legal system’s silence regarding language-based denial or termination of employment (Cameron, 1997; Adams, 1997; Jorgensen, 1995; Chen 1994; Locke, 1996; Gibson, 2004; Ugalde, 1989; Mealey, 1989; Kirtner, 1994). English as second language educators and psychologists agree that language restrictions are not beneficial to the American linguistic make-up and prevents community enrichment. They blame “English only” regulators for their effort to control the American linguistic landscape. Yet, in a milieu where co-ethnicity is common and desired (it is especially common to hire kin) modern day immigrant-owned nail and hair braiding salons constitute spaces where U.S. hegemonic linguistic etiquette can be challenged and offer a different form of soundscape (Feld, 1994, Wingfield, 2008:118) that validates the foreign workers’ subjectivity.

This chapter reviews the literature that surrounds the use of French and English in AHBS. I raise the issue of the paradox between the African American customers’ claims to black authenticity through their hairstyle and their resentment of their stylists’ use of foreign language. Furthermore, through the presentation of two speech events I conclude by arguing that language is utilized to attest to the beauticians’ subjectivity and agency, and to create a microcosm where power roles (modern/western v. “backward,” paying customer’s authority v. servicing worker) are subverted, even if only temporarily and partially.

Africanization of the space: language as a vehicle of inclusion and exclusion

Arjun Appadurai's (1996) application of globalization and modernity into the field of anthropology is extremely relevant in the present context. I particularly credit his contribution to the anthropology of multicultural urban environments. Appadurai is renowned for his texts on the different dimensions of global flows, which he called –scapes. –Scapes have different speeds and scales. Ethnoscapes include tourists, immigrants, and other travelers, that is, actual people associated with particular ideas and cultures. The scholar referred to Benedict Anderson (1991) and the idea of the nation-state to explain that translocalities bear witness of a cultural and social geography that has become postnational. Using the alternative version of Feld's (1994) notion of soundscapes, it is clear that the sound of French, spoken with African tonalities, contributes to making the salon a cultural landscape of its own, in the midst of urban Queens.

In “Sovereignty without Territoriality” Appadurai (1995) examines translocalities as spaces where the “nation” is rebuilt. Even though AHBS workers have different nationalities, they create a space where combined continental, black, gender, and linguistic affiliations transcend national and religious affinities. The linguistic aspect of the AHBS membership requirement transforms a team united by profession into an actual speech community (Gumperz, 1968; Morgan, 1994).

A speech community can be defined as a group of people that share a sense of common identity and have adopted a common speech pattern. For these people, speech is performance of this common identity. Gumperz (2009) explained that although members of a speech community have different, unique idiolects, the act of speaking constitutes a manifestation of their sense of belonging.

Morgan's (1994) study on the African American speech community showed the complexity of defining a speech community solely by ethnic markers. In *Money Has no Smell*, Stoller (2010) makes this point as well as he documents West African immigrants' ethnic performance in multicultural New York City. The salon also defines the AHBS community through professional and gender markers as well, producing a peculiar space of *Africanness*. In this framework, space is produced under the ideology that one must be an African woman who can braid and who speaks French in order to belong. This is reminiscent of Lefebvre's (1972, 1991) narrative on the production of social and ideological space. The author criticized several prominent philosophers and linguists for not taking the notion of space into further consideration in their anatomies of language. In effect, according to Lefebvre, one cannot fully assess language ideology without the consideration of its assigned space (1991:17). Likewise, Lefebvre, who discussed Chomsky, wrote that the mental space of language is the social space where language is practical, and where language reaches through gaps – here, gaps of nationality, religion, and the outside Anglophone space. Instead of emphasizing gaps, the social space is culturally produced and constructed through “elaborate codes” (1991:19). Gottdiener (1993:132) who studied Lefebvre detailed the concrete and abstract natures of space: “space [is] both a material production of social relations (the concrete) and a manifestation of relations, a relation itself (the abstract).” These imply social practice and social performance. Speaking French in the salon space allowed women transposed from francophone Africa to display their relations with one another, to perform their sympathies and identities within the Anglophone enclave.

While working at Antou's and Nadia's AHBS, I often noticed that African American customers would become agitated, restless, when our French discussions became loud and animated. Remarks from Jojo's AHBS in Baton Rouge (Chapter 5) concur regarding the

discomfort customers feel when their stylists speak a foreign language in their presence. Kang and Kang (1997) who analyzed the same phenomenon in Korean-owned nail salons explains that ethnic differences and language are not the major source of frustration for customers per se. Her ethnography details that because the service rendered is so personal, customers tend to feel a certain instantiation of Koreanness that is imposed to them. The immigrant manicurists' use of Korean language equals dialectical exclusion of the customer from the conversation. Since in American customer service the client is addressed as the ultimate authority, Kang and Kang argues that the workers utilize language as a "site of imposition and contestation of status and power position" (1997:143).

Babou's (2009) study of African salons in New York reports the braiders' behavior manifests what could be referred to as Bourdieu's (1985) notion of habitus. This term denotes systemic embodied dispositions and tendencies. Habitus influences – or even determines – the manner in which individuals interpret and perceive their surrounding social reality. In response to this perception, they reproduce the social structure their habitus. Babou (2009:7-8) notes that conversations (the author emphasizes sharing gossip and discussing the American experience) among braiders help them "replicate the [social] atmosphere" from Africa, even though it is often at the expense of the customers. Similarly, the study of Duranti (1997) with the Samoan community in California indicated that migrants who instruct their children in Samoan "espouse one of the strongest commitments to the *fa`a-Sámoa* (Samoan way of life) as opposed to the *fa`apālangi* (Western way)" (Duranti 1997:353). My observations of the AHBS echo those of Kang (1997), according to whom socio-political matters pertaining to the Korean community and the customers being serviced are often the topic of the conversation among Korean manicurists.

In “The West African Paradox,” Sylviane Diouf (2004:277) examines the experience of West African immigrants in the United States. She describes the culture shock that braiders often face when they meet American customers: “young women come into contact with more savvy elders and with American clients who have different views of marriage, family life, gender roles, divorce, female independence, and male prerogatives.” Thus, Kang reports that together, the beauticians enjoy the ability to discuss the client’s flaws as an advantage over her, a form of daily resistance to counter the deference owed to the not-so-deserving customer. In addition, one could argue that it is common for multilingual people to practice each language in specific contexts, consciously so or not. The documentary *In and Out of Africa* (Barbash et al., 1992) vividly illustrates this phenomenon. The film depicts a West African masks salesman, Gabai Baaré. Throughout the documentary, the businessman would speak English when addressing his American buyer Wendy. Yet, when it was time to negotiate, Gabai looked to his associate and discussed prices in Hausa before making Wendy an offer. The scene I just described shows that for a commodity dealer like Gabai, Hausa was more than just the language of business; speaking Hausa enabled him to perform *Africanness*. It was a negotiation tool. First, it confirmed his authenticity as a West African, Hausa connoisseur (Bourdieu 1977:645²⁶, Lippi-Green 1997). Secondly, as Kang and Kang (1997) would argue, speaking Hausa secluded Wendy as the sole outsider, even though they were located in an Anglophone space. Furthermore, by exposing Wendy’s inability to understand, Gabai and his associate suggested their advanced knowledge

²⁶ Bourdieu mentions the relation between *langue* as competence and *parole* as performance. In the case of Gabai Baaré and the braiders, the salespeople are using language to encode their stance of power (knowledge and power of exclusion) over the client.

and wisdom, which, in Hausa cosmology, equals elevated stature and worth (Schildkrout, 2002; Abubakar, 2015).

Habermas' (1962) notion of the public sphere could help explain the socio-economic importance of the salon as a place of bonding and ethnic identity formation. Several anthropological studies (Collier, 2006; Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Majors, 2001; Majors, 2004) are related to the linguistic formation (formations of status or of relationships based on the language used or the stylist's accent) occurring in the salon. Nevertheless, most studies concur as they introduce the black beauty salon as a public space where "communal bonding" occurs and where "professional and personal identities are co-constructed for women." (Jacobs-Huey, 1996:45) While in American salons and barbershops, the bonding tends to develop between the customer and the stylist, in African salons, the same bonding agent that brings braiders closer (language and speech) is also an agent of exclusion for their American counterparts.

In this framework, stylists utilize French as counterlanguage (Morgan, 1993) which aims at exacerbating *Africanness*²⁷ at the expense of hegemonic conventions. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in instances of code-switching and during the insertion of "Frenglish" terms during conversations that I observed in my fieldwork. Braiders would usually switch to English when referring to negative events, or to indirectly criticize and mock non-francophone people in the audience. As Oshima and Streeck (2015:560) encourage, anthropologists should "investigate a coordination of the two streams of actions" – in my case switching between

²⁷ Morgan (1993) argued that African American vernacular is also an instrument of resistance against the hegemonic Standard English, whereby black Americans display their ancestral *Africanness* with pride. My argument is similar, at the exception that I am referring to a more direct and recent relation to continental Africa.

French and English – [which] “may be a resourceful way of understanding how people dramatize their everyday work, professionalize communication, and invoke relevant identities in social interaction.”

In Chapter 2, I explained that my admission into the braiding team was first contingent not upon my true ability to braid, but my francophone *Africanness* and my womanhood primarily. My *Africanness* was not a direct result of my Congolese background, but rather the fact that I was a French-speaking black woman who reached out to the team of braiders in French. African citizenship – or lack thereof – could be overlooked if the aforementioned criteria were met. For instance, on my first day at Nadia’s, the Cameroonian braiders who received me noted my European accent. Patron asked me, “You did not grow up in Africa, did you?” I confessed that I was born close to Paris, but this statement was met with glee. Almost all braiders had relatives living in France. As the icon movie *Black Mic-Mac* notes, “*Paris, c’est l’Afrique aussi!*” [Paris is Africa as well] (Gilou, 1986). I was one of them.

Code-switching: a Frenglish speech event

“Ethnicity cannot be understood if it is abstracted from concrete social practices,” wrote De Fina (2007:371). The author employed ethnographic observation to study talk in interaction, to investigate how ethnicity is “constructed as a central element in the collective identity” of an Italian locality in Washington D.C. Code-switching requires that all interlocutors be fluent in both languages (Gumperz, 1977,1982; Blom and Gumperz, 2000; Poplack, 2001; Molinsky, 2007).

Morgan (1994) also discussed the prevalence of code-switching as common practice. Code-switching between English and French in francophone locations is colloquially referred to as “franglais.” The alternative term I use, “Frenglish” indicates a similar translingual use of

English terms within a speech event in French, but the location of the locality is – broadly speaking – Anglophone. Francophone African immigrants in the U.S. share a sense of linguistic belonging, but the group is also characterized the complex heteroglossic identity. Speech communities, along with speech within a community, are not static (Morgan, 1994). Speech patterns change over time, as shown by the “Frenghish” speech spoken in AHBS, and among the francophone multinational African community in the U.S.

The following conversation reports instances of code-switching (“Frenghish”) that illustrates how African braiders rhetorically associate English with somewhat loose morals that contrast with traditional values of modesty that characterize their *Africanness*²⁸. In accordance with Molinsky (2007), it is implied that the rules of switching were internalized among interlocutors: they automatically resolved when to switch and what words to consistently speak in English. Indeed, Auer (1988) distinguishes between “transfer” as language alternation connected to a conversational structure (a word, a phrase, a sentence, or larger unit), and code-switching where a particular “point” in the conversation is spoken in a different language.

Shortly after I began working in Nadia AHBS, a young braider, who looked to be 19 or 20 years old entered. She was a braider and went by the name of Anya. Her outfit differed greatly from that of the other braiders: she was wearing *short* shorts, black sandals, and a tightly fitted shirt that read “DIVA.” Her hair was relaxed and adorned with a long ponytail hairpiece. There were three more braiders, Constance, who seemed to be in her late 20’s-early 30’s, the manager who went by the nickname Patron, and Rose who seemed to be in her 40’s. Constance

²⁸ This conversation was not taped; it is reported as accurately as I recollected and transcribed it in my field notes, which I wrote as soon as I left the shop.

was wearing shorts and a fashionable summer shirt. She had braids tied up in a bun and wore sandals. Rose was wearing a long green dress with red flowers. Her hair was plaited into cornrows that converged in the center of her head, forming a short ponytail. Out of all braiders, Anya seemed to be the youngest by far. As they were tending to their customers' heads, they were speaking in French, and something caught Patron's attention: she noticed that Anya had a tattoo with her date of birth and her mother's name (the exact location of her tattoo was not mentioned). The observation sparked a vivid discussion about tattoos, led for the most part by Rose and Patron. As discuss later on, my position is that the "tattoo," and other anglophone terms, have become metonyms for cultural perversion and corrupt morals. Moreover, code-switching allows braiders to rhetorically distance themselves from this perverted culture (words with a * were spoken in English):

Patron: You have some women who get their husband's name tattooed. Then what if they get a divorce? This guy's wife had a tattoo* of her ex-husband's picture. He said he felt like another man was watching them when they were in bed!²⁹

[Braiders laugh and cheer]

Rose: You know I was shocked when I saw on Jamaica Avenue* there was this man with the tattoo* of one man lying down and another one on top of him... They were making love!³⁰

[Braiders laugh and cheer]

²⁹ Y a des femmes qui se **tatouent** le nom de leur mari. Et si ils divorcent après? Ce gars-là, sa femme avait le **tattoo** de son ex-mari. Il a dit c'est comme si un autre homme le regardait quand ils étaient au lit!

³⁰ Tu sais j'étais choquée quand j'ai vu sur **Jamaica Avenue** y avait un homme avec le **tattoo** d'un homme couche sur lui... Ils faisaient l'amour!

Patron: And then there was this man with a tattoo* of a naked woman, with her legs spread out and you could see everything, even the genitals and everything!³¹

[Braidiers laugh and cheer]

Rose: Well your tattoo* looks very nice. But we are African, you have really become American, but you must not forget where you came from.³²

Braidiers, in unison: Uh-huh!

(Anya was smiling the whole time, quietly)

Anya: Often when people say tattoo* they think about indecent things, but you can also have messages that are really... meaningful*, you know. (putting her right hand on her chest and closing her eyes)³³

Rose: Still you have to be careful there are some jobs you won't able to get because of that.

Braidiers: Unh!

Anya: But it's hidden!³⁴

Rose: How is it hidden and I can see it?³⁵

Anya: No, it's hidden, and that's not the kind that can keep me from getting a job*.³⁶

³¹ Et puis y avait cet homme avec un **tattoo** d'une femme nue, avec les jambes écartées and tu pouvais tout voir, même le sexe et tout!

³² Bon, toi ton **tattoo** est vraiment joli. Mais on est africains, tu es vraiment devenue americaine, mais il faut pas oublier d'ou tu viens.

³³ Souvent quand les gens disent "**tattoo**" ils pensent à des choses indécentes, mais tu peux avoir des messages qui sont vraiment... **meaningful, you know**.

³⁴ "Mais c'est caché!"

³⁵ "Comment c'est caché et je peux voir ça?"

³⁶ "Non, c'est caché, c'est pas le genre de **tattoo** qui m'empêchera d'avoir un **job**."

Patron: There are jobs* where they look everywhere to see if you don't have tattoos*, they even get you naked to make sure you don't have tattoos*.³⁷

Rose: When she arrived to the United States she was all innocent. Look at you now, with long hair, tattoos*...³⁸

(Anya smiles)

Nilep (2006), who reviewed the literature on code-switching in linguistic anthropology explained that code-switching contextualizes talk in interaction. The author noted the existence of alternate grammatical systems and subsystems in the translingual event. Here, pronunciation of the word “tattoo” and “tattoos” was noteworthy. First, the term was phonetically “Frenchified.” Instead of pronouncing it /tə'tu:/, they pronounced it /tæ'tu:/. Then, in the plural, they omitted the pronunciation of the final -s. Patron also pronounced the word “jobs” with a silent -s. Meisil (1994:413) wrote that code-switching is limited by the “grammatical properties of the languages involved” and the “principles and mechanisms of language use.” Code-switching events have grammatical coherence, but speakers may have to sacrifice one set of grammar rules or the other. Thus, as an effort to actively vilify of Anglophone American culture through the use of English, they appropriated its terms – the tattoo – and subdued it with French syntax and phonetics.

Anya finds refuge in the English language (“meaningful, you know”) as she feels attacked by a culture that is no longer hers. Yet, this does not stop her from belonging to the

³⁷ Y a des **jobs** ou ils regardent partout pour voir si tu n'as pas des **tattoos**. Ils te déshabillent même pour être surs que n'as pas des **tattoos**.

³⁸ Quand elle est arrivée aux Etats-Unis elle était toute innocente. Regarde-la maintenant. Les cheveux longs, les **tattoos**...

AHBS locality at large. Instead, I consider this speech event as a negotiation between “ritual maintenance” Appadurai, 1995:209) to preserve the locality, and hybridization that characterizes Anya’s consciousness as a locality member. The older braiders’ goal was cultural reproduction. Protective of the locality of the salon, they sought to instill in Anya a sense of uncompromising *Africanness*. Nevertheless, since the tattoo could not be undone, they elected to gossip and laugh about other tattoos, tattoos that were worse (as in even less African) than Anya’s. In this manner, the young braider was made to feel less guilty and inappropriate about her lack of *Africanness*. Humor allowed for Anya to save face: they were laughing with her, not about her (Zajdman, 1995, Xueliang, 2003; Yip and Martin, 2006). She was still part of the team.

In this instance, code-switching is not the mere alternation of language. The translinguistic event bears witness of more than a switch of codes. Instead, I argue that the switching itself constitutes the code. Through the very act of switching, braiders treated the code languages as social actors (Bailey, 2007), the use of which can condemn an entire culture, while exalting another.

Anya used English words to distance herself from AHBS *Africanness*, but not for denigration purposes, as opposed to the older braiders. For her, the ability to incorporate the English lexicon was not an attack, but rather a manifestation of cultural intelligence, which Molinsky (2007) claimed to be critical for expatriates to be successful in a foreign culture. Instead, Woolard’s (1998) notion of bivalency can be used to describe Anya’s manifestations of hybridity. Effectively, she defined bivalency as the “speakers’ simultaneous claims to more than one social identities” in a speech event (Woolard, 1998:6). Unlike the other braiders, Anya used code-switching and the English lexicon to express concepts to which she was favorable, but which benefits could not be vocalized within the salon’s French lexicon of *Africanness*. This

lexicon did not possess the vocabulary she needed to express her values. Thus, she consulted an external lexicon (English) in order to address rewarding employment (“job”), the depth of body art (“meaningful”), and the art itself (“tattoo,” which she pronounced with an American accent, /tæ'tu:/). Moreover, her attire, her hairstyle, and other body language (closing her eyes and putting her hand over her chest when saying “meaningful”) indicate that her instance of cultural code-switching (Molinsky, 2007) was a more holistic transposition.

Patron’s mention of the workplace concurred with Anya in that a “job” was something to be desired. Her comment implied that she had accepted the braider’s professional mobility, and that braiding was not a career for Anya. Yet, the “jobs” she mentioned are exaggeratedly invasive environments. They possibly require that Anya expose her nudity, which equates to compromising her *Africanness*.

According to Appadurai (1996), migration has created a diasporic public sphere for African women. Transnational, gendered ethnoscapas are characterized by spaces where “diacritic identities are constantly mobilized to reflect shifting and negotiated identities” (48).

In “The Production of Locality,” Appadurai (1995) considers Gottdiener’s (1993) concept of the produced social space. Appadurai (1995:208) refers to this aspect as locality: “locality as primarily relational and contextual rather than [...] scalar or spatial [is of] complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts. This phenomenological quality, which expresses itself in certain kinds of agency, sociality, and reproducibility.” Because of hybridity, where co-existing cultures produce a new, distinct culture, Appadurai argues that localities are prey to annihilation. These spaces therefore require “special ritual maintenance” (209), especially when it comes to social relations. Local subjects

who initially formed the locality (here, AHBS immigrant salon owners and veteran braiders like Patron) assembled its population and outcasts from a “situated community of kin, neighbors, friends and enemies” (209). Founders had to validate the locality as a space through several strategies, including language code. In this respect, the social space of relationships and inclusion/exclusion is indeed abstract, but it is produced materially in a visible and audible fashion.

Tensions, contradictions, and resistance: the tirade

In her ethnography of Korean nail salons, Kang (1997) noted the customers’ disapproval of the manicurists speaking among themselves in Korean. She added that the site generates a certain puzzlement about their level of English proficiency that makes the clients somewhat uneasy. Because they are unsure whether the workers are fluent in English, they are hesitant and nervous when addressing them, not knowing if they will be understood nor if they will be able to understand the workers’ accent. Similarly, Abdullah (2009) reports braiding salon customers’ complaints regarding the stylists’ refusal to learn (or use?) English and the long conversations they hold among themselves in an unknown language.

In New York City, black hair care services are commonly divided by specialty among stylists of different ethnicities. Africans (mostly from francophone countries such as Cameroon, Republic of Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Senegal) specialize in hair braiding, while Jamaican stylists typically specialize in weaves, dreadlocks, and other natural hair care. The following section focuses on a storytelling speech event whereby the braiding salon owner gossips about and mocks the loose morals of a Jamaican beautician from “around the corner.” Tensions, competitiveness, and culture clash between the West African and Jamaican communities are reified in the speech event. The loudness and poise of her speech, her use of the English

language (code-switching) with a francophone African audience, as well as the intent to make them laugh, are pragmatically utilized to communicate her discontent with her Jamaican suite-mate.

During my fieldwork in African salons in Baton Rouge and New York City, as well as while I was working as a braider in Baton Rouge, African American customers have often confessed that the only braiders they trust are African (or sometimes Caribbean). Africans have succeeded in branding their skill and commercializing it, making millions of dollars in profit (Bronstein et al., 2010; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009:87-117). Babou (2009) compares African American women's fascination for West African braids with that of white American women with French fashion: "just as French women are often seen as epitome of fashion by white Americans, black Americans seem to embrace Senegalese hairstyles as the archetype of beauty" (Babou 2008:5)

Nevertheless, one question remains. While white fashion consumers view the French language of their fashion icons as glamorous even if they do not understand it, why is it that black salon customers loathe the use of African braiders' language, even if the language is French (which is spoken by numerous Senegalese and West African braiders)? I argue that it all relates to issues of whiteness - not as a racial designation, but rather as a value system, an ideology, a construct, that informally reproduces patterns of African inferiority. Indeed, white American women tend to view their French-speaking Caucasian counterparts as chic and stylish (DeJean, 2005:3), Abdullah (2009:50) explains that any language other than English spoken by African braiders tends to create an environment of distrust, to where "even services provided by African hair braiders are held in contempt." Eventually, too many African American women

enjoy the product with the African brand, but resent the process of acquisition of the product, as well as its provider.

In this framework, one could argue that African American customers seem to perceive their stylists in terms of their materiality. DiLeonardo (1998:346-347,349) explains that the “exotic” that lives here in America, the “good others,” are being used by the American citizen who “consumes [them] therapeutically whether as political or lifestyle model or as actual commodity [...] to consume their otherness.” Salon customers purchase the certified labeled exotic braids, the “good” otherness, but reject the language that comes with the package. In his discussion of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) terminology, Hoffman (2011) explains that it is common for young West African men to undergo deterritorialization, where laborers as a supplied commodity, as a disposable workforce called from the barracks to perform an –often illicit – labor in the war economy, as well as reterritorialization, whereby workers are brought back to the barracks when no longer needed (Hoffman 2011:11,173,193). This phenomenon is common in most, if not all, Third World translocalities that rely on the informal sector. African American female customers appreciate the commodity of braids, yet Abdullah (2009) seems to argue that the African American community at large would rather sever ties with their African counterparts once the service is rendered. My fieldwork findings indicate that virtually all African salon braiders started to commercialize their skills informally at first in someone’s living room. Thus, their visible presence in the black enclave’s landscape and their audible presence in the linguistic landscape (and soundscape) of the salon constitutes an act of resistance in and of itself. It counters the claims of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that would pretend to limiting their language choice or restricting the space in which they can exercise this language choice.

As I chronicled in Chapter 2, the popularity of afros and natural hairstyles since the 1960s bear witness of the black effort to counter the imitation of European hair structure that seemed to affirm the superiority of Eurocentric standards of beauty, cleanliness, and appropriateness (White and White, 1995; Robinson, 2011; Peterson-Lewis and Bratton, 2004). Effectively, afros, braids, and other natural hairstyles can be seen as complete detachment from Eurocentric aesthetic standards. Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) conducted an experiment in which they surveyed African American public school students of northeastern city, asking them what “acting black” meant to them in several categories (academic, artistic, aesthetic, etc.). This testimony from black teenagers illustrates the strong cultural attachment manifested through one’s hairstyle. In this chapter, I have claimed that for a large part of the African American community, blackness is not simply referring to color, but rather to a form of exotic-yet-western form of being (Heidegger, 1962).

The African American customers’ resentment of African braiders speaking languages other than English echoes existing conflicts between Africans and African Americans. Other ethnographies – from Richard Wright’s *Black Power!* (1954) to Abdullah (2009) – have reported profound cultural clashes and misunderstandings between the two groups. This hostility resonates with the slavery era’s practice of separating slaves who spoke the same African languages to eradicate ethnic affiliations (Alleyne, 1989; Winkler, 2015; DeBose, 2005). Instead, African Americans have historically been taught English and monolingualism as a standard of Americanness (Baugh, 1999:4). Clarke (2005:77-78) narrated an encounter between an Afrocentric African American community and a team of Nigerian airport employees. Initially, it seems like the Americans hoped to establish a connection based on their own African attires – that is, their appearance – but Clarke goes on to describe that the Nigerians embraced (or

appeared to embrace) their American counterparts based on another factor: their ability to understand and speak the Yoruba language.

Inversely, almost all African braiders under the age of 35 that I have observed in my fieldwork would, at some point, wear western attires; the youngest braiders would wear items usually associated with African American fashion (bold hoops earrings, bold make-up, shorts over 6” above the knee, tattoos, sandal boots, etc.). Despite speaking French with their co-stylists, these younger braiders would usually make an effort to communicate in English, with an American accent, with their customers. This observation validates images prevalent in media and popular culture characters that show that, over the past decades, the sub-Saharan youth in general have also embraced the musical aspect of the black American aesthetic, as well as the black American taste for appearance (hip-hop fashion, hairstyle, and a *ghetto fabulous* attitude). This aspect of modern African youth is depicted in, among others, the Senegalese film *Ça Twiste à Popenguine* (Absa, 1994) and, more recently, Sasha Newell’s (2012) Cote d’Ivoire ethnography (*The Modernity Bluff*) and Hoffman’s fieldwork in Liberia (Hoffman, 2011:68).

Unlike the consumption of braiding services that is often interpreted as embracing blackness, I argue that the African youth’s manifestation of consumption of hip hop fashion items is a consequence of encounters beyond the colonial past, and instead a combination of the postcolonial past, the current globalization phenomenon, and to a certain extent the neo-colonization phenomenon³⁹. For the young braiders in immigrant enclaves as well as in Africa,

³⁹ This is a locale where former metropolises and new patrons – mainly the U.S. – contribute to the exploitation of former colonies and openly or hegemonically impose cultural and ideological values that favor modernity over tradition

the consumption of Western products has been incorporated into the African culture as an expression of their *Africanness*.

The practice of foreign language does not align with the norms of customer service taught in the beauty school programs braiders complete for alternative stylist licensing. In Louisiana for example, aspiring licensees are taught that the customers should be made comfortable at all times, and that the service outcome should be communicated clearly. Speaking a language other than the customer's is considered to be out of place and unprofessional. Wingfield (2008) conducted ethnographic research with braiding salon customers, owners, and workers and noted that these tensions between African American customers and the black ethnic (African or Caribbean) women were due to three major reasons: 1) the language barrier; 2) customer service that clients consider not to be up to American standards, leading to mutual disrespect; and 3) African American customers often trying to get more service for less money (2008:99).

Yet, when one brands a salon to be African, foreign, exotic, the practice of foreign language (French or African languages) helps re-create native "soundscapes." The workers escape the constraints of the typical "English only" American workplace. Language allows a certain ethnicization of the work environment. Thus, although some consider the phenomenon out of place, it is not out of space. Gupta (2012: 321) stated that "the nation is so deeply implicated in the texture of everyday life," the daily expression of *Africanness* through language is what enables these immigrant women to display their ethnic identity⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ Even if one does not speak their original ethnic group's language, the simple fact that they would refuse to speak the dominant English language bears witness of their claim not to belong, their resistance to the hegemony. For braiders in the US, speaking French is performing *Africanness* because while being black and speaking a language other than English, they associate with the other blacks who do not-belong by default.

The modern-day hair braiding industry has recently been under much media scrutiny after the 2007 human trafficking scandal. The media reported that thousands of women were braiding hair while being detained as captives (Bales and Cornell, 2008; Osland, 2011). The public was exposed to some aspect of the transnational implications behind the adornment that characterizes beauty for many African American women. The story of Nicole, the Togolese girl who was forced to work as a braider (Bronstein et al., 2010) indicates that the work load itself was not the worst aspect of enslavement, since braiding is an activity she and her fellow braiders were skilled to perform but the house where they were held captives was the site of the brutal beatings and rapes. Nicole's ability to communicate at the salon with other braiders and with customers granted her instantiation of her humanness – although it was taken back as soon as the customers left the shop. Similar observations have been made regarding plantation slavery in America, where the slaves' ability to sing and communicate during labor constituted not only mutual support, but also an affirmation of their humanity and subjectivity (Bauer and Bauer 1942:391).

Queens, NY is an immigrant enclave and its demographic data include the presence of a large African American population. As demonstrated in the previous speech event, African francophone localities are protective of cultural reproduction. However, young and second-generation immigrants are attracted to the African American – and by association Jamaican – lifestyle (fashion, music, speech) as a way to conciliate blackness with modernity (as opposed to African blackness). Consequently, tensions between African and Caribbean immigrants also manifest in hair salons.

Antou's salon was part of a two-suite floor. In order to enter, one had to pass by another hair salon first, whose owner was Jamaican. She specialized in other natural hairstyles, such as dreadlocks and sew-in weaves. At first sight, the two salons seemed to operate complementarily.

Yet, the two owners never addressed each other. Despite the proximity, they seemed to ignore each other intentionally, even though we had to actually go through the Jamaican-owned salon in order to use the restroom.

I observed the following tirade one afternoon at Antou's AHBS. Antou had left the door wide open for better ventilation because the salon was full: full of braiders, and full of Anglophone, African American customers, except for one francophone African woman. Apparently, she had been a regular customer, and she explained that she arrived late because she was trying to get her eyelashes done. When discussing different salons that provide such services, Antou mentioned a Jamaican beautician who specialized in eyelashes on Jamaica Avenue. Antou was speaking loudly in English, so that everyone, including her Jamaican neighbor and her customers, could hear the gossip. In this event, Antou positioned the Jamaican stylist and all of this stylist's customers as unaddressed ratified participants (Goffman, 1981; Goodwin and Goodwin, 2004). In effect, although she, in the dyadic model, only addressed the AHBS crowd, she spoke disproportionately loudly. The Jamaican salon's proximity and her (at first sight unnecessary) use of English confirmed that her target audience also included the suite next door.

“Yes, the one who does eyelashes, the Jamaican. She had surgery. She used to be faaaaaat! Now all she has big is her buttocks. She does porno at night and works at a beauty salon where she do eyelashes. I don't know but for me, make sure you don't touch my eyelashes! I don't know what you did last night!”
*[Everybody laughs]*⁴¹

⁴¹ Again, this conversation was not taped, but rather documented in writing as soon as I left the salon this day.

As I stated in Chapter 4, casual conversations in general are quite scarce between braiders and their customers. Instead, the francophone soundscape defines the AHBS locality. Here, Antou made intentional use of English in a space where French was the default language. She wanted her neighbors to overhear and receive the insult. To use Culpeper's (1996) analysis, Antou was seeking to cause her neighbor to lose face through her delivery of this rhetorical anecdote in English.

In the conversation first reported in this chapter, I argued that English constitutes a pejorative lexical field when used in code-switching. Here, Antou's actions differed from simple code-switching. Gossip was traditionally confined to French conversations among braiders. Furthermore, the customer whose experiences initiated the tirade was francophone. There was no locally apparent reason for Antou to switch languages.

A few days later, I arrived in the morning and found no one except for Antou and her friend Bintou who were watching a bootleg movie. Both were wearing an African attire, but Antou's hair was uncovered; her hair was still plaited in a spiral cornrow, which I later understood to be a sign of modesty for Ramadan. Antou's 8-year old son was there also, as always. The absence of clients gave us a chance to chat – in French of course. The women asked me about my family and my pregnancy. They had seen my husband pick me up and check on me several times, but they had never spoken to him yet (my husband is not the most loquacious person). So far, they had assumed that he was American, since they heard me interact with him in English. When I explained he was Jamaican, they kept silent for a few seconds, and looked at each other. Then they resumed their questions about my unborn child:

Bintou: Is this your first?

Sylviane: No! The fourth!

Antou: Are all three here?

Sylviane: Yes.

Antou: You have all your three with your husband?

Sylviane: Yes! (I answered with a frown, surprised. Didn't they know I was one of them? Didn't they know by now that I was not "out there"? Didn't they know that I had no tattoos?)

Bintou: Ah, now that's good.

Antou: Your husband looks calm.

Sylviane: Yes, he is very, very calm.

(They looked at each other again.)

Antou: Well that's good then, you found yourself a *good* Jamaican.

(I smiled.)

I understood that Jamaicans in Queens were known for not being "calm" and "good" among Africans. Braiders in both salons would usually use the English term "Jamaican" in their conversations in French. As discussed in the previous section, these instances of code-switching indicated disapproval of their fellow immigrants' mores. This time, however, Antou used the French term "Jamaïquain," which echoed my husband's distinction from the other Jamaicans "out there" ("*tu t'es trouvé un bon Jamaïquain*").

The conflict between Africans and Caribbean migrants – especially Jamaicans – is a typical trait of pluralism. I had noticed it on several occasions among the African and Jamaican student population in Baton Rouge. However, most conflicts I have witnessed there were among male students. Although African and Caribbean female students usually do not mix, I cannot remember any conversation or conflict displaying animosity between women. The situation

seemed to be different in Queens. The aforementioned discussion constituted the second time Antou brought up Jamaicans' "restless" behavior. When I mentioned the topic to a fellow braider at Nadia's AHBS, she denied that such conflict existed, and argued that most people in New York live in their national enclaves, or at least among people who speak the same language, which is why Caribbean Creole speakers, francophone Africans, and Anglophone Africans would usually gather into separate groups. Since they have so little contact and communication with one another, it is easy to assume that another group is violent, arrogant, hypersexual, or ignorant.

Synthesis

Bourdieu's habitus (2005) is a system of dispositions and expectations; it is a system of practices or habitual actions, dispositions that we acquire, reflective and constitutive of social structure. In Bourdieu's view, taste and aesthetics are part of our habitus and are related to our positioning in social structure. The habitus assumes that humans spend their days trying to lower their anxieties and fears through routine. Babou's (2008:7-8) study of African salons in New York reports the braiders' behavior manifests what could be referred to as Bourdieu's notion of habitus. The author notes that conversations (the author emphasizes sharing gossip and discussing the American experience) among braiders help them "replicate the atmosphere" from Africa, even though it is often at the expense of the customers.

Bourdieu also mentions the relation between *langue* as competence and *parole* as performance. In the case of foreign businesspeople, using a foreign language is often a way to encode and perform their stance of power (knowledge and power of exclusion) over the client. In the case of braiders in the AHBS, French is more than just the language of business; it enables

them to perform his *Africanness*. It is a negotiation tool in that it confirms their claim to expertise as authentic African hair braiders: it proves that they are part of the AHBS team and authentic connoisseurs (Heller 2010, Woolard 1985:739, Bourdieu 1977:645⁴², Lippi-Green 1997).

Furthermore, speaking French secludes American customers as outsiders, and maybe suggests that braiders have knowledge that the customers do not have. There is also a (justified) fear that the braiders could be talking about customers. The clients, fearing that the talk they cannot understand is criticizing them, feel powerless and attacked, and often become defensive.

Bourdieu describes discourses as ways of seeing the world in terms of the micro linguistic units and macro discourses. In “The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges” (2005), he explains that a person speaks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished. Hence, the authorized language is also the language of authority. I do not ignore the fact that Bourdieu’s work has been criticized for exaggerating the symbolism or for excessive symbolism and determinism at the expense of the literal meaning/use of things, and my study of the salon is not an analysis of the symbolism of the AHBS. Nevertheless, Bourdieu must be credited for much of my interpretative analysis. In effect, he invites anthropologists to perceive language as “symbolic capital, which is inseparable from the speaker’s position in the social structure” (2005:646).

If language represents and negotiates social reality, code-switching between French and English exposed a pluralized social reality. If locality is a social space, then Anya exposed her additional membership to localities other than the AHBS. She reminded us that the AHBS is

⁴² Bourdieu mentions the relation between *langue* as competence and *parole* as performance. In the case of Gabai Baaré and the braiders, the service providers and salespeople use language to encode their stance of power (knowledge and power of exclusion) over the client.

not a finite cosmos. While monolingual speakers utilize registers, sociolects, lexicons, etc., I argue that the braiders' speech ideology against English classifies English as a repertoire of pejorative lexicon. I have observed them exploit this lexical field translingually to express disapproval of the non-African locality and criticize its mores ("out there," "les Jamaicans," "les African Americans," "les tattoos").

CHAPTER 7. BOSSES AND HONEYBUNS: UNDERSTANDING HIERARCHICAL ORDER AND AFRICANNESS IN AFRICAN HAIR BRAIDING SALONS THROUGH THE USE OF NICKNAMES

Introduction

Africaness in the African Hair Braiding Salon (AHBS)

The hair braiding industry constitutes a fast growing market and business opportunity in the U.S. Babou (2008) chronicled the ascension of Senegalese braiders in this industry and more profoundly so in New York City, one of the largest African immigrant enclaves in the country. By extension, other African francophone immigrants skilled in the art of braiding hair have increasingly taken part in the American microbraid revolution and work alongside Senegalese braiders. As braided hair is often perceived as both fashionably iconic and authentic folk art, fashionable African American women favor African-owned salons, most of which bear the appellation “African Hair Braiding Salon” (ABHS) in their names. In addition to adopting the formal AHBS label, braiders display (consciously and unconsciously, willfully and unwillfully) a certain degree of Africaness, which is to be understood as a set of pan-African (albeit limited to francophone, sub-Saharan Africa) attitudes, behaviors, and affections that mark cultural solidarity among this group of women.

Arjun Appadurai is renowned for his texts on the different dimensions of global flows, which he called –scapes. –Scapes have different speeds and scales. Ethnoscapes include tourists, immigrants, and other travelers, that is, actual people associated with particular ideas and cultures. The scholar referred to Benedict Anderson and the idea of the nation-state to explain that translocalities bear witness of a cultural and social geography that has become postnational (2012). Yet, this paper argues that nicknames help reproduce or re-create some –scapes as part of an effort to Africanize the space, albeit located in Jamaica-Queens, NY. Effectively, as a

reflection of the braiders' cultures of origin, the salon space is gendered (designed for female braiders and customers), and highly heteronormative. Braiders enforce the African notion of reverence for elders, even though the semi-gerontocratic ideal is challenged or overshadowed by the hierarchy of professional status. Eventually, the salon operates with a dynamic that is highly pragmatic (it is about "getting the job done") and collectivist (one braider's personal comfort and opinion may not supersede the financial interests of the salon as a business, and it cannot hinder the well-functioning of the teamwork operation). To that end, braiders call one another by nicknames that bear all these attributes of femininity, motherhood, age status, and professional status. One's real name is almost never uttered.

Nicknaming and name calling in sub-saharan African cultures

Individualizing the person

Name avoidance is a common form of respect in various parts of the world, and particularly so in Bantu cultures (Fleming 2011; Stasch 2002; Drucker-Brown 1986; Applegate 1975; Irvine and Gal 2009; Herbert 1990). In francophone sub-Saharan Africa, nicknames are commonly used as honorifics to praise a woman's maternity through teknonymy, in which case a woman would be called by the name of her child (e.g., a woman with a son named Johnny would be called Maman Johnny). In praise of her wifeness, a woman whose husband has a particular title would be given that same title. (e.g., calling a pastor's wife "Maman Pasteur" or a doctor's wife "Maman Docteur"). Even her large, shapely figure can be a praiseworthy cause for a

nominal title. For example, “Maman Kilos” is a common nickname used in referent speech to refer to a large woman⁴³.

Defining the collectivity

Africanness: Transcending nationalities linguistically and rhetorically

Batoma stated (2006:1) that in African studies, one of the major trends is to use “traces of African culture embedded in African names and naming practices to recover or reconstruct African heritage.” In this context, AHBS workers have names that are either French or proper to their ethnic group. Thus, I argue that the act of re-naming through nickname use allows them to practice *Africanness* as nicknames unifies them linguistically. The use of French nicknames or, better yet, the use of nicknames in the French language, allows braiders to transcend their ethnic or national differences by way of the French language to celebrate their continental commonalities – as linguistically limited as it may be. Nicknames open a window to how the braiding team’s linguistic behavior substantiates these stylists’ identities as African women. Nicknames are an integral part of the performance of *Africanness* that is commodified through the business name “African Hair Braiding” so common to these salons.

It is thus important to understand the use of nicknames in the salon using the salon as a microcosm of francophone pan-Africanism. Therefore, using McDowell’s view that nicknames should be studied within their systemic contexts (1981:2), I draw on two major elements. Firstly, I apply the pre-established framework of undeniable cultural commonalities between the

⁴³ This appellation may appear shocking or disrespectful for westerners, but the term “Kilos” evokes imposing authority, and the title “Maman” denotes positive acknowledgment of weight gain from childbearing experience – and occasionally acknowledgment of wealth-associated weight gain (Simmons, 2014; Kulick and Meneley, 2005).

braiders' different countries of origin – mainly Ivory Coast, Benin, D.R. Congo, Guinea, Cameroon, and Senegal (Harrison and Huntington, 2000). Secondly, I analyze the salon as a system. The braiding teams are made-up of members with specific roles and functions. Members are inter-dependent. Some members' sense of purpose within the team would not be valid without the presence of other teammates (e.g., there would be no “boss” without subaltern employees).

The salon collectivity as an operational system

In the braiding salon, nicknames mark one's status in this microcosm of Africanness both for the bearer and the hearers, as the appellations are accepted by both parties. De Klerk and Bosh (1996:527) suggested that modern African nicknames often embody and reinforce images and identities linked to gender roles. They are indeed usually semantically transparent, as “their usage reveals insights into the characteristics (personal and physical) of their bearers, as well as into their role in [...] and in the subculture which devised and uses them.” Phillips (1990:281) concurred, arguing that the use of nicknames “reflects current attitudes toward the sexes or older attitudes ‘trapped’ in the lexicon.”

Adams (2009) turned his attention to the political aspect of nickname use. He claimed that the nominal process helps “distribute power within a social group” (Adams, 2009:81). The superior position of the members at the higher level of the hierarchy is sustained only because the members of the lower level possess the true power of validation. In Adams' perspective, the lower level members exercise authority over the higher level members through the use of nicknames, which constitutes performative utterance: the higher status is declared and valid once the lower class calls higher class members by reverential nicknames.

Studying the manner in which braiding women in the salon address one another helps understand women's gender status and roles in their African cultures of origin as well as in their newly found home. It sheds light on their assigned roles in opposition to the roles of men in their culture of origin as well as their assigned roles as non-white, immigrant women who now live in the U.S. Furthermore, their assigned roles and statuses as women differ from one braider to another, mostly based on their place within their own families, their ages, and their professional position in the salon.

The research project

This chapter reports findings from qualitative data collected mainly in two salons in Jamaica, Queens, New York: Antou AHBS (owned by an Ivorian woman), and Nadia AHBS (owned by a Cameroonian woman)⁴⁴. I conducted visits over the course of three years, during which I also proceeded to participant observation. Braiding alongside my participants allowed me to interact with the braiding team on an academic, professional, and social level. Although I was raised in France, my family is from the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country with which I identify culturally. My status as a wife and mother also increased the favor I had found among the braiding team. Indeed, it fit into the braiders' (broadly speaking) family and social default standard and structure. My blackness, gender, and my fluency in French facilitated my acceptance into the groups in both salons. Thus, the element that was the most compelling was my proven African background, my Africanness.

⁴⁴ Both names are pseudonyms.

Acknowledging the boss

A salon owner never introduces herself. For all AHBS I visited, I had to learn the owners' names from the salon's name and I could not identify them until I heard the nickname with which braiders addressed them: "Boss." There is a noteworthy difference of skills between the braiders and the manager (the boss) in the AHBS. While braiding comes easily for stylists who have been practicing this art all their lives, managers must know how to speak English and relate to the US population. Additionally, unless their husband supports them in the management tasks, managers must be versed in literacy; Spring (2016) noted the essential contribution of male partners for the success of African female entrepreneurship. Furthermore, bosses must also have an understanding of administrative and fiscal responsibilities (Miller 2007:3).

What is a "boss" (*patron*)?

The African use of the French term "patron" can be traced to the colonial era. Deniel's (1994) account, *Oui, Patron (Yes, Boss)*, is an ethnographic account in the format of personal narratives from several "boys" (the term used to designate helpers – butlers, cooks, drivers, errand-runners – in francophone Africa). Boys were typically indigenous (black) boys or young men employed by rich white settlers or temporary residents in sub-Saharan Africa during colonial and post-colonial times. It is thus implied that the *boy's "Patron"* is a white male. The author claims that those who say "*oui, Patron*" are "aware of the fact that they belong with the voiceless, the little people, which for example places them at the mercy of worrisome administrative matters, the police, and joblessness as well" (Deniel, 1994:170) (my translation). In a chapter section titled "I left fear and shame behind" ("*J'ai laissé la peur et la honte*;" my translation) Deniel tells the story of Jean, a Burkinabe kitchen boy who worked in Cote d'ivoire. The title of his narrative indicates that calling the employer boss requires self-denial and

humility. The worker accepts being subordinate or otherwise inferior. It is an acknowledgement that the worker's subsistence depends on the Patron's willingness to keep him as an employee.

Ngandu (2016) also explained that the term "*Patron*" has, since the colonial era, come to designate any man who exercises some form of authority acknowledged in any context, even the religious context: a Bishop, a self-proclaimed prophet, a pastor, a priest, or even God himself. In some instances, a woman can even use the term to address or refer to her husband, or any man who has authority over her. Most times, it is a mere gerontocratic acknowledgment. By extension, the term "*Patron*" has come to designate anyone with power who is willing to help or assist in any way – even if the Patron has nothing to offer but his friendship. Eventually, in referent speech, the term has come to designate any man who has money, pride, authority, and who believes he can give orders and be obeyed because of that, as sung in a popular Congolese chant: "*ba Patrons na ba bongo, ba jeunes mitinga*" (author and year unknown): The Patrons seduce the young women with money, but the young men only get to chitchat with them. Some even claim that the term Patron has come to represent the ills of corrupt local governance and clientelism in post-colonial francophone Africa (Meunier 1978; Cissé et al. 1981; Bouju 2000).

The African patron is not to be mistaken with the other common honorific term "*Chef*" ("Chief"), also employed in francophone Africa to address an employer. As illustrated in Teno's (1999) film, the term "*Chef*" is more authoritarian. It implies that there exists no other contesting power, the "*Chef*'s" authority is absolute and irrevocable. In Deniel's (1994:24-28) account, Jean and his fellow-boy Fred explain that "*Chef*" is an older term that the previous generation used during the colonial era forced labor (the institutionalized forced labor in colonial Africa was comparable to slavery in the Americas). The "*patron*," however, "treated [Jean] like a person" (my translation), he was on the field with him, despite his higher rank. He entertained casual

conversation and treated him well and did not overwork him. In this case, the patron is a teammate. Likewise, the Democratic Republic of Congo's national soccer team, for example, commonly calls the team captain "Patron."

Salon bosses

At Antou's AHBS, braiders used the term "*patronne*" to address the shop owner – who was also the manager. Antou is young woman who appears to be in her late 20's-early 30's. She opens and closes the salon everyday, bringing her now 11-year-old son to work when school is out. Antou makes all appointments, and sweeps the floor early in the morning and throughout the day. She pays her workers in cash directly from her pocket – or her bra – and reserves the right to refuse service to customers whom she deems inappropriate for business. Although she seldom utters her braiders' names, she stores each of their phone numbers and calls them throughout the day, requesting their help or letting them know that business is slow.

At Nadia AHBS however, leadership is divided. The manager, whom everyone called "*Patron*," was a woman in her mid or late 40's. She is responsible for booking appointments and paying the braiders. She opens and closes the store everyday, but she delegated the task of sweeping to the younger braiders. Nadia, the owner was in her mid-30's. She would come to the salon every other day, and she would usually balance the checkbooks, sit and chat with the braiders, or take a nap on the waiting area's couch. I only saw her braid once. I came to understand that as her business started to grow, she started to delegate administrative duties to Patron, her most faithful – and fellow Cameroonian – braider. Although Patron would call Nadia by her first name, other braiders would call her Patronne.

One of my Cameroonian co-braiders, whom I will call Rose, was close to Patron in age. She would often be quite confrontational with Patron, even though her rants would usually end in

some acknowledgements of Patron's authority. For example, Rose once got into an argument with Patron because since she arrived late, Patron and Tantine had started tending to a customer that was supposed to be hers. After Rose expressed her displeasure, Patron proposed that she finished and still get paid for the entire job, but instead Rose went to lie down on the waiting area's bench and refused to braid⁴⁵:

Rose: You don't treat people like that. Telling people to come and work after you already start on their client. I don't care what you say, you can't treat people like that. That's disrespect.

Patron: Just go to sleep, I offered you the money and we got started so she wouldn't have to wait. You're just looking for something to complain about. Just lie down and sleep instead of opening your mouth and speak nonsense.

Rose: I speak nonsense! You see you don't even treat me with respect. This doesn't make sense, I know you're Patron, but you can't treat people like that. That's disrespect.

Patron: Just sleep and stop the noise.

This was the end of the argument. Although the moment felt uneasy and awkward for everyone, the fact that Rose remained in the salon showed that Patron's decision was not unforgivable to the point of making her resign. Furthermore, Rose used the plural and/or subject pronoun "*vous*," to refer to Patron's actions. Otherwise, she would commonly address Patron with the informal, singular pronoun "*tu*." Here, Rose's complaint started in the plural because although she was clearly discontent with Patron's decision, addressing both Patron and Tantine helped her avoid one on one confrontation with the boss. Patron alone responded, which showed

⁴⁵ The following scenario was not taped. It is, however, virtually identical to the actual event. I reported the speech event in my field notes as soon as I was dismissed from work this day.

that she acknowledged being the target of Rose's accusations. Then, in the statement "I know you're Patron," the formal "*vous*" testified of Rose's reticent acknowledgment of due deference in the midst of conflict. Formality was an effort to counter what Brown and Levinson (1987) called a face-threatening act against the boss by elevating her syntactically and semantically distancing herself. On the other hand, Patron utilized the informal "*tu*" during the entire conversation, not as a manifestation of her elevated status, but rather as a denial of the semantic distance: she was familiar with Rose's nagging, and their relationship would remain unaffected.

Likewise, Patron's comment, "You're just looking for something to complain about," indicates that it probably was not the first time that Rose had thrown such a tantrum, and that it would be of little consequence afterwards. The fact that the customer was not francophone and could not see the braiders' facial expressions during the argument also gave them the freedom to argue openly, since the outsider did not understand the words and body language exchanged.

Gender and morphosyntactic differences

Patron v. Patronne

The semantic use of the masculine form "Patron" to address and refer to a female manager bear witness of the African braiders' appropriation of the French language and their use of this European tongue to manifest Africanness. Batoma (2006:2) explains that in sub-Saharan naming practices, there is a linguistic medium which "constitutes the repository of ethnonyms and toponyms." The names' morphology, syntax and semantics provide information regarding the socio-cultural conditions in which the name bearer is expected to behave. On my first day at Nadia's, a French-speaking customer expressed her amazement at the appellation "Patron." Rose proceeded to explain – quite insistently – her motivations for calling her with this nickname: Customer: *Patron? C'est comme ça que tu l'appelles?* [Patron ? That's how you call her ?]

Rose : *Oui. Je sais que c'est pas correct parce qu'elle est femme, mais moi je m'en fous. Je l'appelle Patron quand même. C'est toi le chef, c'est toi qui décides. C'est même toi qui me payes. Alors moi je t'appelle Patron. Même si vous me dites 'arrête,' moi je t'appellerai quand même Patron. Voilà.* [Yes. I know it's not correct because she's woman, but I don't care. I still call her Patron. You're the chief, you're the one who makes the decisions. Actually you're the one who pays me. So I will call you Patron. Even if you tell 'stop,' I will still call you Patron. There.]

The whole time, Patron was braiding quietly. She did not intervene, contest, nor respond. She had accepted the name and what it entailed. Rose implied that Patron's executive power equated that of a man in the traditional sub-Saharan social norm. Her authority over other women in the salon provided her with masculine attributes that could be reified in the name "Patron." This situation supports De Klerk and Bosch's (1996) claims that nicknames are commonly linked to gender-related differences in social power.

One could note that both Nadia and Antou had comparable power and authority. What then, could validate the use of their feminine nickname, "Patronne"? The answer resides essentially in Patron's elevated position not only in the professional hierarchy, but also in terms of age. Nadia and Antou were relatively young businesswomen. Their youth was visible not only on their faces, but also through the manner in which they incorporated local fashion and habits into their Africanness. They would dress in modern, western clothes (jeans and t-shirts) everyday except Fridays, due to their observance of the Muslim Sabbath. They drank mocha lattes and ate Subway sandwiches. Contrastingly, Patron would always wear elegant, long skirts and blouses. She would cook her own lunches, which consisted of hearty African foods (beef stewed in palm moambe, boiled cassava, and seasoned rice). Despite being financially perceptive and

responsible for the braiders' subsistence, Antou and Nadia did not convey the gerontocratic respect that was attributed to Patron. In addition, they would often consult their husbands before making major decisions (including my presence!), which confirmed their feminine status reified in the gendered term "Patronne."

Thus, the rigidity of French grammar rules is transcended with the masculine noun "Patron." De Klerk and Bosch (1996:526) explained that nicknames offer a lexical space that has flexibility, while (French) grammar rules exemplify the structural superiority of male dominance, which quite resistant to change. In other words, this hierarchical order in the social norms is manifested linguistically. Male and masculine superior status is both socially and linguistically quite resistant to change, but nicknames in the salon offer a space where the lexicon is redefined to suit the internal (salon-specific) social, professional – and therefore toponymic – hierarchy.

Addressee v. referent speech

Beside the gender difference for the term "boss," the form of speech also determined the manner in which bosses were called. Indeed, while "Patronne" ("Boss") was commonly used as a proper noun in addressee speech to address Antou and Nadia, in referent speech braiders would refer to them either by their first names or by the common noun "*la patronne*" ("the boss"). The use of first names indicates that referent speech semantically acknowledged the owners as humans with individuality, beyond their professional status. It suspended their elevated status for the time of the utterance. The reduction from the proper noun "Patronne" to the article/common noun combination highlighted Antou and Nadia's functional significance, but somewhat belittled their individualities. "Patron," however, would be the nickname of use in both addressee and referent speech concerning the older manager. If the use of first names as proper nouns in referent speech showed the braiders' consideration for Antou and Nadia's humanity and

individuality, then one could argue that making “Patron” the manager’s proper noun of reference – equating her positional name to a first name – not only personified the status itself, but it pronounced her elevated status constant.

Use of the formal and informal “you”

In French, *vouvoiement* can be defined as process by which a speaker addresses his/her interlocutor in the second person-singular with a formal “you” term (with corresponding conjugation, possessive adjectives, etc.). Its opposite, *tutoiement*, means that the speaker uses the informal “you” and its associated forms. While *vouvoiement* would characterize addressee speech addressed to Patron, braiders would address Nadia and Antou using the informal “you” lexicon.

Brown and Levinson (1978) explained that polite speech establishes social distance between interlocutors. It also acknowledges some power the hearer has over the speaker as the speech itself poses a potential threat to the hearer’s power stance. Here, the braiders of Nadia AHBS clearly expressed deference for their manager. Rose's tirades showed that she conceded to willfully verbalize and publicize Paton’s elevated status through performative utterance. In the second vignette, she criticized Patron boldly, loudly, and publically. Yet, she never crossed the morphosyntactic boundaries of formality and deference, because at the end of the day – at paytime – everyone wanted to get along with the boss.

Endearment nicknames

Nicknames help represent the salon’s social space, as they illustrate, attenuate, or idealize the social relationships that the members have with one another. In effect, while braiders related to their colleagues’ Africanness and to African womanhood, their attachment to one another would not extend beyond the salon. The shop is not a place in which to form lasting friendships.

Harré (1984) discussed social space and social representations (“*la représentation sociale*”) and wrote that the concept of “social” representations and its manifestation in the form of speech acts do not necessarily depend on individual cognition (927-930). I argue that the speech act of nickname-calling allows for giving the braider recognition and praise as a functional member of the team (social representation) without having to be tied to that person as an individual. In addition, as McIntosh (1994:73) explained, nicknames serve as “in-group identity markers.” This means that they do not just identify the referent’s status, but also reciprocally denote the speaker’s position within the braiding team. These teammates verbalized their solidarity, affection, and benevolence toward customers or toward one another through four major nicknames: “my friend,” “*ma sœur*” (“my sister”), “*ma chérie*” (honeybun), and “*la nouvelle*” (the new girl).

Braiders employed the English term “my friend” to address and refer to frequent customers or customers with whom they had – or sought – a good rapport, regardless of age. “Friends” were potential returning customers. This was one of the few nicknames uttered in the English language. Although braiders spoke to one another in French, the appellation “my friend” showed that, even if only for a moment, they desired to establish a certain level of complicity with their Anglophone customers. Younger American customers were initially called “my friend,” but those who were particularly well-behaved or needed extra attention or care were also called “sweetie” or “baby.” For example, if a little girl’s scalp hurt because the braids were tight or if her hair was painful to comb, these terms of endearment were effectively soothing and calming. When I brought my daughter at Nadia’s, they initially called her “my friend,” “sweetie,” or “baby” because they assumed she only spoke English.

Young braiders who had been employed for a longer period of time addressed their fellow braiders (new and old) with the term, “*ma sœur*.” In referent speech, however, fellow braiders were called by their first names. This term contains connotations of equality and sympathy. It highlights commonalities due to professional rank. Effectively, the notion of sisterhood implies that the braiders have a common parent – the boss – and therefore whatever favor asked or comment made before or after the interpellation “*ma sœur*” is not uttered out of spite, disdain, or adulation. The allusion to the bond of sisterhood is also referring to the gender, racial, and ethnic commonalities. In addition to professional sisterhood, braiders are bonded by the fact they are all black, African, immigrant women. Thus, calling a co-worker “*ma sœur*” was a direct affirmation of their Africanness, it was confirmation that they were worthy of being part of an authentic AHBS team.

In Nadia AHBS, there was an older Guinean braider whom everyone called “*Tantie*” or “*Tantine*” (“Auntie”). She appeared to be in her 50’s. Although she seemed to be just a decade older than Rose and Patron, she invited a different form of respect because she would always wear an African attire. Her Africanness was somewhat more authoritative, more whole (and therefore somewhat holier) than that of the younger women.

Currently, in the francophone African community, it is the norm that children and people up to their early 40’s call any adult old enough to be their parent “*Tonton*” (“Uncle”) or “*Tantine*”/“*Tantie*” (“Auntie”). Deniel (1994:28) reported that the boss of his participant, Jean, did not want to be called “*Patron*” because this title sounded too formal and distant. Subsequently, Jean called his boss “*Tonton*” and his boss’ wife “*Tantine*.” By doing so, he praised them as a function of their older age, rather than as a function of their elevated professional rank. He also Africanized his bosses in the sense that he used francophone African

rhetoric to verbalize his respect through naming. Jean further explained that his boss would often work side by side with him, behaving more as a co-worker than a boss. “*Tantine*” once even told Jean that he should eat the same food as her and *Tonton*, and that if they did not have enough money to give Jean steak for dinner, then they wouldn’t eat steak either. Similarly, calling our co-braider “*Tantine*” was an acknowledgment of her status as an elder and of her superior Africanness. It was also a sign that we would welcome any maternal nourishment she had to offer.

Tantine was an assiduous stylist with almost aggressive dexterity. We would always tease her about how serious she looked whenever she started a new braid. Yet, she was soft-spoken and very affectionate. While most braiders would discuss the latest gossip, Tantine offered us motherly advice. She was concerned about our homes’ well-being. Every time I entered the shop, we had the same exchange:

Sylviane: Good afternoon, Tantine⁴⁶.

Tantine: Good afternoon, *ma chérie* [sweetheart]. How are you today?

Sylviane: I am well, Tantine.

Tantine: And your husband?

Sylviane: He is well too.

Tantine: And your children, are they well?

Sylviane: Yes, Tantine.

Tantine: And this one right there? (pointing to my stomach and unborn child)

Sylviane: Yes, Tantine.

⁴⁶ In sub-Saharan culture, it is polite that the young greet the elders first.

Tantine: And how are your parents?

Sylviane: They are fine as well, Tantine.

Tantine: Ah, that's great. Thank you for coming to see us today.

Sylviane: Thank you, Tantine.

Tantine's authority was limited in two respects. First, her professional rank was below that of Nadia and Patron. Although the latter also called and referred to her with the title "Auntie," she still had to follow their orders and depend on them for her salary. Second, despite the fact that Tantine's clothes and adornments fully validated the salon's AHBS label, her abundance of Africanness contrasted with the salon's vision. Nadia AHBS was strategically located at the corner of two popular avenues of Jamaica-Queens, with the purpose of attracting a young, fashionable, African American clientele. As I have discussed elsewhere, all AHBS face the challenge of ambivalence between African authenticity and promotional appeal to the modern African American women's lifestyle. Therefore, Tantine's presence functioned like an icon that illustrated the salon's authenticity, but when it came to seeking advice on fashionable – and lucrative – hairstyles, both customers and braiders would consult Nadia or one of the younger braiders.

Tantine was not the only one to call me "*ma chérie*." This appellation was used by managers, owners, and older (more advanced in age) braiders to address new braiders. Interestingly, this nickname was only used in addressee speech. The new, young braider interpreted "*ma chérie*" as display of affection. It was an attempt to make the newcomer comfortable, reassured, and welcome. In referent speech, however, a new braider was referred to as "*la nouvelle*" ("the new girl"), even in the new stylist's presence. The term "*la nouvelle*" had a connotation "rookie." It suggested that the braider was somewhat inexperienced and therefore

should not be trusted with heavy responsibilities. In the best case scenarios, it implied that she should be excused or forgiven for not completing a task perfectly.

While I was the only *nouvelle* at Nadia's, there were two of us in Antou AHBS. Both of us were addressed and referred to with the same appellations. Since our true names were irrelevant at the best and ignored at worst, only context clues would let people know which "*ma chérie*" or "*la nouvelle*" was concerned, on any particular occasion. Even though our youth was seen as endearing, our lack of experience was verbalized every time our co-workers would call us. This situation echoes what Wierzbicka (1992:304) wrote concerning naming practices: "a rigorous analysis of the semantics of names reveals to what extent different attitudes are linked in a given culture [...] to different age statuses, for example, to what extent overt displays of affection and similar feelings depend on the addressee's being seen as a woman, child, or a girl."

Sub-Saharan African cultures in general tend to discourage public displays of affection (Oduyoye 1993:346; Jabar 2014; Mazrui 1968). Thus, affection is often morphed into a manifestation of respect presented through alternative channels – linguistically, for example, rather than physically. My findings from the salon concur with De Klerk and Bosch, who detailed that while male nicknames – which are more prevalent – are often critical and humorous, sub-Saharan female nicknames function as indicators of affection. Their research also suggested that these female nicknames "could be linked to the nurturing and nurtured role of females" in numerous sub-Saharan societies (1996:525).

Response from the nickname bearer

Although this paper focuses on the act of naming and name-calling, it is important to report that the use of nicknames in the AHBS would not function so efficiently without the nicknamed's compliance. The study of De Klerk and Bosch (1996:532) suggested that Africans

strongly approve of the use of their own nicknames “as a social device for underlining popularity of solidarity” and sometimes feel the “need to have a nickname of some kind as a signal of acceptance.” In the AHBS, workers accepted and responded to both the nickname and the social role that the nickname entailed, because having an assigned social role confirmed their belonging to the team. It implied that they were African enough, they were women enough, and that they were capable and worthy enough to be part of this subculture of Africanness (De Klerk and Bosh 1996:541). Furthermore, Adams (2009:81) wrote that people agreeing to the nickname imposed on them is political. A nickname is a token that attests to a certain social negotiation: “agreement is a matter of pragmatics and politeness, so a theory of nicknames and nicknaming depends on the pragmatics of nicknames and the politeness structures implicated in them, rather than conventional logico-semantic accounts of names.”

Braiders did not invent their own nicknames and seldom used them to refer to themselves. Bosses (Antou, Nadia, and Patron) never introduced themselves. They never announced that they were the boss. I had to figure it out as I heard other braiders call them. Contrastingly, all employed braiders introduced themselves to me or introduced fellow braiders to me using their first names, at the exception of Tantine. Tantine was introduced to me under this name, and she also referred to herself as Tantine when she formally introduced herself to me: “*Moi c’est Tantine, d’accord?*” [Me, I’m Tantine, you hear?]. Although this nickname was somewhat imposed to her by her sub-Saharan francophone culture, and by the AHBS as a sub-culture, Tantine took pride in her rank and in the politeness she was due.

Pragmatic use of nicknames: time-efficiency and other practicality

My field observations reveal a pattern of word order in all AHBS I visited. In addressee speech, nicknames were almost always placed at the beginning of the statement or question,

especially if braiders were speaking during the act of braiding (i.e., not during their break nor at the end of the day). I perceived this manner of speaking to function as a time-efficient alternative for other politeness expressions (“*Ma chérie, donne-moi amène-moi le peigne là-bas.*” Sweetheart, bring me the comb over there). In effect, while scholars such as Grimshaw (1980) argued that politeness can be flattering and manipulative, the expedited tone with which managers give requests to braiders was significantly softened when accompanied by a nickname such as “honeybun” or “sweetheart.” In this fast-paced environment, braiders had to execute tasks in a timely manner, and nicknames allowed for brevity without the fear of offending. Similarly, Brown and Levinson’s (1978:108) classic analysis of politeness reports that endearments are commonly used to soften face threatening acts, that is, situations in which the addressee or hearer risks embarrassment due to the tone or nature of what is being said (Brown and Levinson 1978:61). The authors provide the example of the extent to which commands given in the imperative are buffered when followed by an appellation such as “brother,” “girl,” or any other endearment. In these instances, the use of nicknames shows that the speaker considers that the status and power difference between himself or herself and the addressee is relatively small. Therefore, the endearment balances the self-given authority intrinsic to the otherwise authoritative tone with affection and affinity. The nickname not only conveys emotional agreement, sympathy, and solidarity (“*ma sœur*” positions the speaker and hearer as equals), but it also restores politeness in the conversation (Brown and Levinson 1978:109).

In Western sociolinguistics, it is common to use the formula “please” + “can you...?” (humiliative speech), or imperative + “please” (exaltive speech) to address a request politely and avoid face-threat. However, studies of politeness in Bantu languages and cultures seem to concur in that such formulas are rather rare in sub-Saharan Africa. Instead, polite requests to peers and

higher-status interlocutors are addressed via honorifics, tense modification (conditional mode), subject modification (using 3rd person singular or 2nd person plural instead of 2nd person plural), asking an intermediate person (most often a child) to communicate the request, and other non-verbal and performative acts (Irvine, 1992; Bailey, 1995; Gough, 1995; De Kadt, 1998; Malela, 2004; Kasanga and Lwanga-Lumu, 2007; Botne and Kershner, 2008). Thus, the formulas “please” + “can you...?” and imperative + “please” that characterize the West have little significance in a locality that fights to maintain and perform *Africanness*. Braiders aim at getting the job done well, but fast, while performing their ethnicity, as Appadurai (1995:2019) noted: “commitments and attachments [...] that characterize local subjectivities are more pressing, more continuous, and sometimes more distracting [than local norms] can afford.”

In the preliminary steps of this project, visiting dozens of AHBS and introducing myself as a graduate student made it very clear to me that managers have little to no interest in their braiders’ personal stories. The first day Antou asked me to work for her, she explained to me: “Look, your school stories and your blah-blah will not get you anywhere. What you need to do is come and braid, that way you’ll earn some money.” I had introduced myself, I had showed her my credentials. Yet my name and my Master’s degree were irrelevant when I reported to work. I was the newbie, I was a sister, I was a beloved sweetheart, and she was the boss. A few days later, I called her to see if she needed my assistance: “Good morning Antou, it’s Sylviane.” She did not know who I was. When she asked who went by the name of Sylviane, I responded that I was “the new girl” and I was willing to help if the team needed an extra braider for the day. She finally recognized me. This incident illustrated the manner in which the collectivist AHBS focused on how we contributed to the salon’s functioning, rather than our individualities. Although Patron and Nadia were not as dismissive as Antou was when I initially explained my

research project, they also demonstrated little to no interest as to what my name was. I understood that nicknames also functioned as a simple alternative for remembering names.

In all AHBS I visited, hiring, compensation, and firing were done informally. Owners paid taxes based on general revenue, so they did not record salaries or consider withholdings from our pay. In addition, the immigration status of some braiders was quite uncertain. I was never asked for a work permit. No paperwork was ever filled out. It could therefore be assumed that omitting first and last names allowed employers not to account for these informal employees, especially in the event of possible investigations and audits. It gave them a sense of freedom from administrative – and fiscal – accountability and responsibility. Furthermore, braiders were often temporary employees in need of fast cash. The use of nicknames allowed the longer-term employees to cope with the constant inflow and outflow of new, young, and presumably short-term, braiders. Again, Appadurai (1995:225-226) documented the mobility of the locality members in Western, urban spaces: “The problems of cultural reproduction in a globalized world are only partly describable in terms of problems of race and class, gender and power, although these are surely crucially involved. An even more fundamental fact is that the production of locality – already, as I have argued, a fragile and difficult achievement – is more that ever shot through with contradictions [and] destabilized by human motion.” Here, human motion also include the inflow of customers, which is not always predictable in the AHBS. Whether in New York, Jamaica, or Baton Rouge, there are days with too many braiders in the salon, and not enough clients. Yet, the most threatening situation was a shortage of braiders. Given the abundance of salons, customers have the option to get their hair done elsewhere and ask for lower prices if they are not attended to fast enough. On the other hand, if braiders rush the task because there are too many clients, they risk not completing it properly. This can be

damaging for their reputation and future business. Since I started this study, at least three salons in the area have now closed. While owners have coped with the outflow of braiders by using nicknames, human motion makes locality even more fragile, and its future uncertain, which is why it is so crucial that anthropologists pursue the ethnography of these localities.

Discussion and conclusion

This study used nicknames as oral records of the salon interactions to analyze the AHBS as a locality of *Africanness*. Appadurai (1995:209) explained that hybridity in the globalized world, and especially in transcultural spaces, threatens the original fabric of localities. The fear of annihilation generates a need for “special ritual maintenance” to validate the cultural space. This is effected through “complex social techniques for the inscription of locality.” Among others, the author explains that “ceremonies of naming” are material strategies to help produce and maintain the locality. Phillips (1990) argued that the evolution of nicknames is one of the most effective linguistic tools to examine cultural and social trends. Given the fact that the AHBS team is multi-ethnic but transcontinental, nicknames attest of the hybridization – or some might say evolution – of the face of what it means to be African in a western society. In compliance with sub-Saharan practices, using nicknames is a way to “act African”; honorifics (titles and syntax) function to denote respect by name-avoidance. Then, a nickname like *Patron* exemplified how to defy and transcend the linguistic manifestation of the rigid gender social hierarchy reified in the rigid laws of French grammar. Terms of endearments, however (“my sister,” “honeybun,” “Auntie”) celebrated our African femininity.

When comparing nicknames by gender, Phillips (1990:281) added that male nicknames connote “strength, largeness, hardness, and maturity.” He also wrote that male nicknames are also often linked to their occupation or activity. At the AHBS, the only females whose

nicknames' characteristics matched Phillips' (1990) findings usually reserved for men were for braiders with administrative or gerontocratic power. Indeed, the appellations "Patron" and "(la) patronne" referred to the braiders' position as owners and/or managers. The appellation "Tantine" referred to the braider's age and subsequent deference. Figure 21 summarizes the hierarchical organization of nicknames in the AHBS, where

1. Addressee and referent speech; has the authority of a masculine figure in and outside the workplace
2. Addressee speech only; has the authority of a masculine figure in the workplace only
3. Referent speech; authority is solely based on job duties
4. Addressee and referent speech; deference is attitudinal, not functional
5. Addressee speech; denotes maternal affection
6. Addressee speech; denotes sympathy due to equal professional ranks
7. Occasionally used in addressee and referent speech; absence of nickname indicates friendship outside the workplace
8. Referent speech only; indicates immaturity

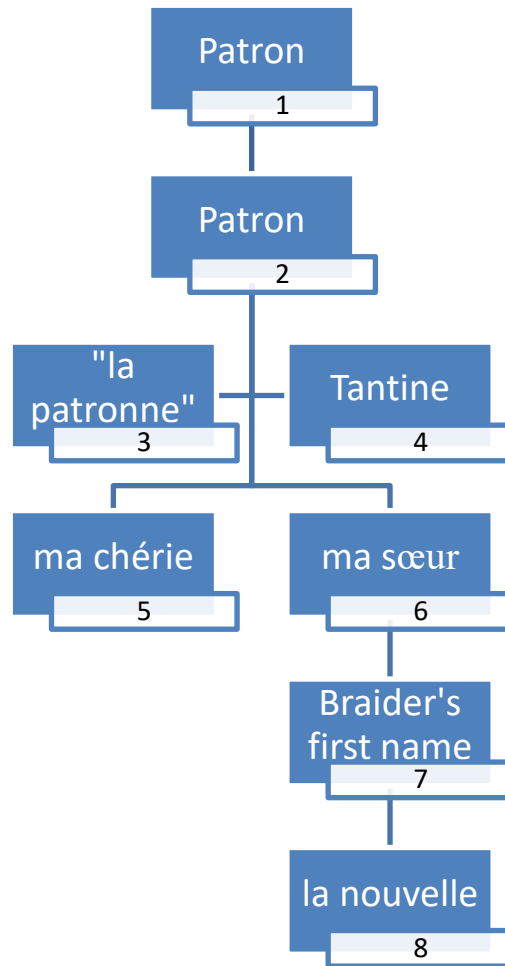


Figure 21: Hierarchies of nicknames among braiders in the AHBS

I have argued that while the name giver initiates the transformative process through performative utterance, the name bearer's compliance is essential for the efficiency of name-calling. McDowell (1981:17) added that oral tradition is also needed in order to confer this seal of acceptance. Aesthetic appeal ensures the survival of the nickname⁴⁷. Here, these nicknames

⁴⁷ One could also note that salon nicknames are tri- or by-syllabic: Patron, patronne, la patronne, ma sœur, Tantine, sweetie, baby, etc. This element, some have argued, makes them phonetically more affectionate than the masculine nicknames which are typically phonetically shorter in their

survive because of their African appeal. They function as a soundscape that denotes Africanness in the salon space (Feld and Brenneis 2004). The AHBS works as a translocality of francophone, sub-Saharan Africa. The braiders' skin color (and occasionally their outfits) already created an ethnoscape in the form of a 450 sq. ft. salon (Appadurai 1996). The nicknames confirmed Africanness of this ethnoscape, they Africanized the braiders' blackness. In "Sovereignty and territoriality," Appadurai (2003) explains that translocalities are spaces where the "nation" is rebuilt. Nicknames give these women linguistic tools to redefine their Africanness under new terms that spread wider than their ethnic groups or countries or origin. Nicknames allow them to use language to transcend this and create a new, adapted form of being African. Thus, observing the verbal pattern of nickname attribution and use offers insight as to how these women reproduce, perform, and adapt African hierarchical ideals in a modern, fast-paced environment in New York City.

CVC structure (Mike, Don, Chief, etc.) which is said to heighten masculinity (Wierzbicka 1992:228)

CHAPTER 8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Hair braiders play a unique role in the hair care system, in that they specialize in a unique type of skill for a unique population need. African hair's structure differs from the textures of any other ethnic group. For example, its need for oil and moisture contrasts with the negative idea other ethnic groups may have regarding oily, greasy hair. Consequently, black hair treatment is best addressed by specialists with personal experience in this area. After centuries spent in the shadows, black cosmetology is – slowly but surely – increasingly addressed in the media.

In the historical geography of black hair care, Jamaica stands out as one of the pioneer in some of the most fashionable (*fabulous*) natural hairstyles. The fact that learning how to braid is part of the upbringing of so many Jamaican girls this form of hair care is highly gender-based. Even if men occasionally get their hair braided, the Jamaican salon is a gendered space (Bourdieu, 2003). It ruled and operated by women, and it mostly services women. Andrea's Hair Studio does not bear the label "Jamaican" in its name. Yet, Andrea and her braiders perform salon *Jamaicanness* in this gendered space and in the service they provide: they speak Creole, they commodify the culturally acquired skill of braiding, and they produce *fabulous*.

Castree (2003:163) advocates hermeneutic cultural geography that links place with the "the formation of personal and group *identities*." The geographer also claims that "while identities are still formed in places (they are place-based) they are not place-bound – that is, the result of purely local experiences. Rather, locally variable identities partially arise from 'outside' influences, paradoxical though this may seem" (Castree, 2003:164) This project investigated the local. Its contribution to the previous literature is that it establishes a framework that deepens the discourse about hair that has been at the core of so many socio-political movements that have

shaped contemporary cultures. Let it be noted that culture here is used in the Boasian sense, that is, as Stocking (1966) worded, “behavior determined by a traditional body of habitual behavior patterns passed on through which we would now call enculturative processes and buttressed by ethically tainted secondary rationalization.” Andrea and her helpers showed that even in translocal Jamaica, the Jamaican culture of the *fabulous* finds its place. As such, Andrea flaunts this *fabulous*-ness on social media, her major avenue of name-recognition, publicity, and promotion. Future considerations should explore the ubiquitous virtual social space as a locality as well.

In New York, participant observation was very rewarding as well. Spradley (2016) detailed that the participant observer must developed heightened awareness of her affections and emotions. Likewise, I watched my own actions. Working side by side with other braiders made me – and hopefully my readers – more aware of things I had taken for granted or to which I was oblivious in my past braiding days. For instance, the language ideology prevalent in the AHBS is primarily focused on accomplishing the task (braiding). Speaking French demonstrates teamwork, and it serves as professional jargon. Yet, there is an implicit socialization process that occurs among the braiders, because despite originating from different countries, stylists use language and conversation as a bond that unites them in their womanhood and their *Africanness*.

In the framework of globalization (Cox, 1997; Robertson and White, 2007), I interpret modern African diasporic loci as fluid and interconnected. This complicates the definitions of blackness and black identity in any given locus, as intersectionality theory states that blackness and social identity are intertwined with class, nationality, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age, economics, and political consciousness (Gilroy, 1993:3; King, 1988; Collins, 2004). The modern-day immigrant-owned salon is thus a translocality, product and agent of globalization.

The linguistic manifestations of cultural, ethnic, and gender identity has valuable anthropological significance. Madison (2012:53) explained, “globalization is a critical factor for ethnographers because it has transformed geographical boundaries, capitalist production, national sovereignty, and social structures in a way that deeply affects the rights and well-being of humankind across the planet.” In his documentary *Good Hair*, Chris Rock (2009) went as far as tracing the origin of the human hair extensions sold in beauty supply stores that black (and increasingly so white) women utilize for weaves, wigs, and micro-braids. He traveled to India and filmed portions of the ritual where Indian girls offer their long hair to Kali. Priests sweep the hair and traders disinfect it and sell it. For weaves, Indian female workers (as well as workers from other – mostly Asian – countries) sew the hair along a hem and it is manufactured to be shipped, the U.S. being the major importer. Thus, the contemporary braiding industry is a by-product (and facilitator) of globalization and, as demonstrated in this dissertation, glocalization. The language and culture shock that occurs in the salon is simply one of the numerous manifestations of this phenomenon.

Aspects of AHBS operation adhere to what some scholars classify as modernity and what others, such as Gilroy (1993), classify as countermodernity. This latter term refers to the deliberate effort to divorce from modern amalgams in order to favor ethnic or nationalistic representations. Paolini et al. (1999) explained that commodifying and exploiting one’s own otherness is intrinsic to cultural survival in this modern, postcolonial age. Notions of modernity and progress are inextricably tied to the West, while *Africanness* can be commodified because, in the salon, it is evaluated in terms of its profitability or its economic hindrances (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009). Yet, a preliminary study of the metapragmatic discourse among stylists in both New York and Baton Rouge seems favorable to African identity overall. Salon workers exploit

their otherness by stressing *Africanness* in their businesses' names. They advertise their distinction from modern American salons. They resist the amalgamation that globalization engenders. AHBS heavily rely on social media, cell phones, tablets, and other devices. Their *Africanness* is not a rejection of the technologically modern. Rather, *Africanness* counters the modern by negating its exclusive association with the Western.

While several sociological studies investigated salons as sites of social identity formation, I approached this research under the umbrella of cultural anthropology. Nevertheless, due to the inherent interconnectedness of the social issues at hand, my theoretical engagement linked race and gender studies, linguistics, as well as cultural geography. The theoretical framework of cultural Marxism helps look at ethnicity as produced, marketed, commodified, and consumed. Numerous scholars have noted the objectification of culture. Stoller (1996, 2010) and Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), among others, reported the profitability of material culture. I referred to Bourdieu (1991, 2003) who looked at culture, ethnicity, and performance, and I position the salon as a site of production. More particularly, Appadurai (1995, 1996, 1997, 2003) is to be credited for his theoretical work on spaces that are culturally produced. This dissertation thus enters this discussion on commodifying the ethnic and the cultural within a geographical context of displacement. To that end, postmodernism and postcolonialism provided me with theoretical tools to look at *Africanness* through the lens of adaptive (place-bound) hybridity, globalization, and resistance (language, counterlanguage, and other ethnic markers).

When defining the “ethnoscape,” Appadurai (1995:212) explained that he used this term to “get away from the idea that group identities necessarily imply that ‘cultures’ need to be seen as spatially bounded [...] or ethnically homogenous forms.” My presentation of the AHBS multinational make-up was by no means an attempt to amalgamate all francophone sub-Saharan

gender identities. Instead, I was concerned with the manner in which the art and business of hair braiding brings all these Muslim and Christian women from various ethnic groups, from a wide and diverse region – francophone sub-Saharan Africa – to constitute a common locality intentionally defined by gender, profession, skill, language, and *Africanness*.

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EPILOGUE

October 5, 2017

In great need of a break after spending hours reading and typing, I left the library to get a mocha and a pistachio muffin from the local coffee shop. “Gastrono-scape of elitist, millennial whiteness,” I thought, sarcastically. I intercepted the conversation of the three black female baristas. All were wearing a cap with the shop’s logo. One could barely see their hair. In this establishment, baristas do not always wear their caps. I guess they had something to hide.

Barista 1: “Huh, huh, I’m mad, I’m still gonna get my hair done.

Barista 2: “Yeah, girl, you’re right.”

I passed my order. Was she getting her hair done to get back at someone? At something? Or was she getting her hair done as an act of resilience because she had been wronged?

I walked to the other side of the counter to collect my mocha. The third barista had on a purple bandana under her cap. She looked like so many customers do when they enter the salon, so that no one would know how bad their undone hair looks. “She must be trying hard to contain her kinky hair, because the purple bandana looks really cute,” I thought.

Barista 3: “That’s some mess right there,” she whispered to Barista 2, shaking her head. Her

voice was so dim, the only reason I caught what she said was because I had anticipated it.

Barista 2: “You can always wear it in a part.”

Barista 3: “What I need is to get my hair braided!” she replied.

I guess there’s no way around it. For any black woman, hair is... *la condition humaine*.

VITA

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