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**Monsieur : meanings and practices of elegance,  
1920-1924**

Jilene Chua

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Université Paris I (Panthéon-Sorbonne)  
UFR09 – Master 2 Histoire des sociétés occidentales contemporaines  
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***Monsieur: Meanings and practices of elegance, 1920-1924***

Mémoire de master 2 d'Histoire  
Sous la direction de M. Pascal Ory  
June 2016

Jury:  
M. Pascal Ory  
M. Manuel Charpy



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## Summary of Project

As one of the first male fashion magazines in the early twentieth century, *Monsieur* is a window into a milieu of elite French men. The way this milieu defined and understood elegance during the interwar period can help us understand what Frederic Godart calls the current “oligarchic structure of fashion,”<sup>1</sup> making up London and New York during the interwar period, but would grow to include New-York after World War II. While non-Western cities have already become powerful key players in finance or international relations, the global fashion system still only has cities from Western civilization.<sup>2</sup> Why is that the case? And how does this link to how elegance is understood and practiced in relation to colonial West Africa or what was considered the “Orient” during the interwar period?

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<sup>1</sup> Godart selects these cities because their fashion weeks receive the most international press coverage. He also discusses why other cities, such as Tokyo, are not included as a fashion capital. See Frédéric Godart’s “The power structure of the fashion industry: Fashion capitals, globalization and creativity.” *International Journal of Fashion Studies*. 1: 1, pp. 39-55, 2014, doi: 10.1386/inf.1.1.39\_1

<sup>2</sup> Godart, 40

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## Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the most powerful men in the world all began to dress similarly. As opposed to the nineteenth century, when several of these men still wore Chinese mandarin robes or West African traditional dress, historian Christopher Bayly observes how “by 1914, a growing number of the most important men operating in public arenas wore Western-style clothes wherever they lived.”<sup>3</sup> The market for Westernized menswear was expanding outside of the West. For the rest of the twentieth century, the West would continue to have dominion over the fashion world—creating what sociologist Frédéric Godart calls an “oligarchic” structure of fashion.<sup>4</sup> While fashion is not the only sphere dominated by Western cities, why is it that non-Western cities have already become powerful key players in finance or international relations, yet the global fashion system still only has cities from Western civilization?<sup>5</sup>

Understanding the milieu of elite male fashion circles during the interwar period is one way to examine the origins of this oligarchic structure of fashion. As the two fashion capitals before World War I, London and Paris are key cities to study.<sup>6</sup> How did Paris view the rest of the world in relation to its own fashion and beauty ideals? Being an “elegant” man was the focus of most French male fashion publications before and after World War I. More commercial examples that appeared before the war include Abel Léger’s *L’élégance masculine* (1912) and Géo Harrison’s *L’homme élégant* (1912),<sup>7</sup> while those with more literary aspirations included *Nos Elégances, la mode masculine* (1911) and *L’homme Élégant*<sup>8</sup> (1912). Even in the 1930s, French advertisements for clothing and men’s beauty products also sold the idea of being an “homme élégant.” One example is the following

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Frédéric Godart. “The power structure of the fashion industry: Fashion capitals, globalization and creativity.” *International Journal of Fashion Studies*. 1: 1, pp. 39-55, 2014, doi: 10.1386/inf.1.1.39\_1

<sup>5</sup> Godart, 40

<sup>6</sup> London is more traditionally known as the capital for menswear, while Paris for women’s wear. London might have been a better choice for this study on menswear.

<sup>7</sup> Farid Chenoune, *Des Modes et Des Hommes : Deux siècles d’élégance masculine*. Flammarion : Paris, 1993,



advertisement for an extremely popular hair cosmetic called Bakerfix in an Algerian newspaper:



Figure 1 Bakerfix for “toute homme élégant,” *L’Echo d’Alger: Journal républicain du matin* 12 Sept 1931

But what did it mean to be an “homme élégant”? And how was it defined in elite circles—the circles that other elite men around the world would begin to dress like? At the intersection of both the intellectual and material understanding of elegance is the elite male lifestyle publication, *Monsieur: revue des élégances, des bonnes manières, et de tout ce qui intéresse Monsieur* (1919-1924). Founded by Abel Hermant (1862-1950), a French writer and playwright, and Jacques Hébertot (1886-1970), a French writer and theatre director,<sup>9</sup> *Monsieur* publication was one of the few publications devoted to male fashion at the beginning of the twentieth century. While other, more later male fashion publications, such as *Adam* (1925), were still considered more “commercial,”<sup>10</sup> *Monsieur* was perceived to be the more literary and elite. Contributors to *Monsieur* would include members of the Academie Française, revealing it’s higher aspirations of being an elegance manual similar to those

<sup>9</sup> *Monsieur* was re-launched in 1995 and is still distributed today by Montaigne Publications. While the website for this current edition of *Monsieur* claims that the famous French couturier Paul Poiret is one of the co-founders, Poiret’s only presence in the earliest editions of *Monsieur* are a few articles about his return in Paris and his style as a dandy (see *Monsieur* September 1920, no. 9, “Paul Poiret rest à Paris”)

<sup>10</sup> Philippe Thiébaud, the conseiller scientifique at the Institut National d’histoire de l’art. Interview by Jilene Chua. Interview over person. December 4, 2015.

written in the mid-nineteenth century. Despite its more literary characteristics, *Monsieur* also had advertisements. The merger between advertisements and articles means that we can enter into not only more intellectual understandings of elegance, but also its more material understandings, such as the types of clothes, perfumes, and accessories that were being used to define it.

### **Between conceptual history and histoire culturelle**

This tension between the abstract versus the material properties of elegance falls somewhat between the German historian Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual history.<sup>11</sup> Koselleck writes how conceptual history is the space between language and reality—a word and its lived practical experience. Traditionally, conceptual history has looked at large scale changes, like how the concept of history has been understood and practiced over several hundred years.<sup>12</sup> This has recently changed, however, to involve more topics and time spans,<sup>13</sup> like the topic of “elegance” between 1920-1924 (the period of *Monsieur's* circulation). However, for a word to qualify as a “concept,” it must *not* be interchangeable with other words. This last criterion somewhat eliminates the notion of “elegance” as a concept, because it was sometimes used interchangeable with the word “chic” throughout *Monsieur*. At the same time, the word “elegance” still has some similarities to a concept, because it “bundles up the variety of historical experience together with a collection of theoretical and practical references into a relation.”<sup>14</sup> In *Monsieur*, the “elegance” is understood reveals a variety of historical experiences. It is used as a way to re-enter the new landscape of social class after World War I, while also distinguishing between the civilized and the black African colonial “savage.” This means that this study will operate at a place between conceptual history and

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<sup>11</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, “Begriffsgeschichte and Social History,” *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Translated by Keith Tribe. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Historian Jan-Werner Müller believes that “it is also somewhat naïve or at least unimaginative to expect that a method, even with its ambitions of historical understanding somewhat scaled down, can somehow mechanically be applied to ever more topics, times, and geographical scales, until all regions and historical experiences have been covered with ‘their conceptual’ histories.” Jan-Werner Müller, “On Conceptual History,” in Eds. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn, *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 85

histoire culturelle, defined as a “histoire sociale des representations,”<sup>15</sup> which examines forms—like how a word like elegance was understood (Part 1 of my mémoire on how elegance was defined)—and how these forms are practiced (Part 2 of my mémoire on elegant consumption). This mémoire is not entirely within histoire culturelle or even “histoire culturelle de la presse,”<sup>16</sup> because it does not examine the production, distribution, or consumption of *Monsieur* and I do not look at how *Monsieur*’s vision of elegance contributed to the social construction of identities. This is because my goal is to understand the idea of elegance, and when an idea gets taken up within the larger circuit of culture, it rarely stays the same. It generally changes in shape and loses its conceptual substance to become something else. Because the initial meanings of words generally change in their dispersion, I am interested in how elegance was initially understood before its propagation to other social classes.<sup>17</sup>

I read my principal source, *Monsieur*, like an archive, as my isolated window into elite masculine Parisian society. But how would I “look” into this window, while still responding to my problematique seeking to understand the interwar origins and features of the oligarchic fashion system? My concern with this mémoire is upholding my historical obligation of “neutralité,”<sup>18</sup> and if *Monsieur*’s goal is defending and celebrating French elegance, what would it mean to still attempt to do a history of this magazine? The majority of these articles speak of “the art” of choosing a glove, jewelry, luggage, car, hat, perfume, jacket, or woman; fashion in the summer, summer, spring, or winter; the differences between beards, haircuts, canes, tailors, or top hats now versus before; or, how to dance in a dancehall, talk to an “ouvrier” who comes to your house, how to receive guests, how to dress up for a costume ball, have a good conversation, or wear a swimsuit. They cover dandies like Balzac, Baudelaire, or Stendhal; reviews for the latest plays and performances; and chic vacation spots, like winters in Chamonix or summers in Long Island.

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<sup>15</sup> Pascal Ory, *L’histoire culturelle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004, 13.

<sup>16</sup> See Dominique Kalifa, Alain Vaillant, “Pour une histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse Française au XIXe siècle”, *Le temps des médias*, 2004. No. 2, 197.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.* Bayly writes how “The trend towards uniform clothing was less evident among working-class, peasant, and subaltern men. The historian Richard Cobbe’s study of the poor dead of Paris at the time of the revolution showed that they dressed in bits and pieces of different styles and eras, cast-offs and elaborately patched garments. In 1900, most of the poor could still not afford much better,” 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.* Ory, 55

But cultural historian Robert Darnton argues for sifting through archives and selecting the ones that are the most striking: “when we cannot get a proverb, or a joke, or a ritual, or a poem, we know we are on to something. By picking at the document where it is most opaque, we may be able to unravel an alien system of meaning. The thread might even lead into a strange and wonderful world view.”<sup>19</sup> Within this spirit, in selecting what to write about for my memoir, I tried to balance between the ones that were representative to what I saw in *Monsieur* with the advertisements and articles that I found the most surprising. These articles were generally the ones that were extremely unsuspected—like a photo shoot of the Japanese-American celebrity, Sessue Hayakawa, or a series of articles about “L’élégance aux Pays Noires.” These more surprising sources that I eventually selected to focus on had the theme of being more “international” in nature, and were the articles on the people and objects that were not “French.” This focus on the “margins” of elegance as defined in *Monsieur*, I eventually chose to frame my project in terms of fashion capitals and fashion non-capitals within Godart’s study on the “oligarchic” structure of fashion.<sup>20</sup>

Within this problematique, my three axes of research are business history<sup>21</sup>, history of the body<sup>22</sup>, and transnational history<sup>23</sup>, are three key themes that will permeate through my different chapters. The first part of my memoir looks at how elegance was understood and defined in relation to Western civilization. Chapter 1 focuses on how elegance became a key

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat The Great Cat Massacre : And Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. Basic Books, 2009, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Frédéric Godart. “The power structure of the fashion industry: Fashion capitals, globalization and creativity.” *International Journal of Fashion Studies*. 1: 1, pp. 39-55, 2014, doi: 10.1386/inf.1.1.39\_1

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey Jones: *Globalization and beauty: A Historical and Firm Perspective* [http://www.ea.sinica.edu.tw/eu\\_file/132393925714.pdf](http://www.ea.sinica.edu.tw/eu_file/132393925714.pdf) and *Beauty imagined: A History of the Global Beauty Industry*. Oxford University Press, 2010 ; Marc Martin, *Histoire de la publicité en France*. Nanterre: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Alain Corbin. *Histoire du corps : Tome 3, Les mutations du regard, Le XXe siècle*. Univers historique edition. Paris: Seuil, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large : Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1998 ; Blanchard, Pascal, Sandrin, Lemaire. *Culture coloniale. La France conquise par son empire, 1871-1931*, Collection Mémoires, Paris, Autrement 2003 ; Victoria De Grazia. *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe*, Harvard University Press, 2005

part of French nationality and notions of civilization after the World War I, while in Chapter 2, we see how this idea of elegance is defined in contrast to dominant menswear capital of London and the rising fashion capital of New York, and Chapter 3 shows how elegance was used as a mode of distinction and exclusion in West African colonies. Finally, we move to the last two chapters, which focus on performances of elegance through the consumption of film (Chapter 4) and Eastern “oriental” commodities, like perfume, kimonos, and Mah-Jong (Chapter 5). Considering how my entryway into this project was my previous study on the popularity of African-American culture in Paris during the interwar period, a surprising discovery from this research is the presence of East Asian culture. Thus, the last chapter serves as a launching board for future work for future work on the role of Eastern-inspired commodities in interwar Paris.



# Chapter 1 : Defining Elegance

## INTRODUCTION

As opposed to more explicitly commercial fashion publications in the early twentieth century,<sup>24</sup> *Monsieur* was an elite lifestyle magazine that aspired to “celebrate and defend French elegance.”<sup>25</sup> Its readership would even include the illustrious King S. M. Alphonse XIII of Spain.<sup>26</sup> Various famed illustrators and literary figures would contribute to this magazine. The ways that elegance is understood in *Monsieur* reveals how it became a mode of preserving and advancing Western civilization after World War I. The word “elegant” or “elegance” is used to sell so many fashion commodities in the early twentieth century, so examining how elegance was understood and defined after World War I is one way to understand the structure of Godart’s “oligarchic structure of fashion,” while also adding to a broader history nineteenth century male elegance manuals.

## Writers and Illustrators

In presenting *Monsieur* to the public, co-founder, Abel Hermant imagines himself as a modern-day “Pétrone” (or Gaius Petronius Arbiter), an expert in “the science of luxurious living.”<sup>27</sup> Pétrone was the fashion advisor of ancient Roman Emperor Nero, and Hermant crowns himself—and by extension *Monsieur*—as an “arbiter of elegance.”<sup>28</sup> While perhaps exaggerated, Hermant’s comparison is somewhat fair. As a member of Nero’s court, Pétron was part of the powerful milieu that he advised, and Herbert was also well connected,

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<sup>24</sup> Some examples include Abel Léger’s *L’élégance masculine* (1912) and Géo Harrison’s *L’homme élégant* (1912). From Farid Chenoune, *Des modes et des hommes: deux siècles d’élégance masculine*. Paris, Flammarion, 1993, 163.

<sup>25</sup> “Les Tailleurs Français,” *Monsieur* no. 56-57, August-September 1924.

<sup>26</sup> In *Monsieur* no. 34, October 1922, there is an entire page dedicated to a letter that *Monsieur* director Jacques Hébertot receives from King S. M. Alphonse. : “le Roi d’Espagne et *Monsieur* sont de vieilles connaissances. Nous pouvons nous réjouir de savoir notre publication toujours en bonne place dans le fumoir de palais royal de Madrid. Le lettre reproduite icic est une preuve que depuis longtemps Sa Majesté nous connais. Mieux, Elle a daigné nous faire transmettre Ses félicitations pour l’ordonnance et le goût de notre publication. »

<sup>27</sup> Tacitus. *Annals* XVI.18

<sup>28</sup> *Monsieur* no. 1, January 1920

eventually becoming elected to the elite Académie française in June 1927.<sup>29</sup> Both men were also known for their sarcastic social commentary—Pétrone’s most well known work, *Satyricon*, is a social satire of ancient Roman lower classes, while Hermant’s *Monsieur Rabosson* (1884) is a semi-autobiographical satire of French society. While not a satire, *Monsieur* is also a social observation. It studies and advises the milieu of elite white French men—some of the most powerful people in the world—in their ways of elegance.

The metaphor between Hermant and Pétrone extends onto the broader community of well-known writers and illustrators who contributed to *Monsieur*, several of whom were also part of the elite Académie Française. Many of these men also ran in the same social circles and were friends. For instance, in 1917, before writing for *Monsieur*, Roger Boutet de Monvel<sup>30</sup> (1879-1951) published a small, illustrated collection of propaganda with future *Monsieur* illustrator Guy Arnaud (1886-1951). Some illustrators and writers would continuously work together throughout *Monsieur*’s distribution: Writer D. Lenief and illustrator André Foy covered a range of articles together including “Le Monde Olympique” and “de l’encoulure au poignet”<sup>31</sup>; Writer Eugène Marson and illustrator A. de Roux worked on a series of articles called “Le dernier usage de la civilité” that ranged in topics including “le costume”, “la campagne” and “sous le toit d’un ami”<sup>32</sup>; and writer Jules Bertaut and illustrator Georges Braun<sup>33</sup> covered famous dandies, such as Lord Byron.

Several illustrators for *Monsieur* worked for other fashion magazines and publications. Marc-Luc, for example illustrated almost all the clothing that would be advertised throughout *Monsieur*. Zyg Brunner (1878-1961) was also an illustrator for *Femina*, *la Gazette du Bon Ton*, and *Illustration des Modes*. The illustrator, painter and lithographer André Foy (1886-1953) began as an illustrator for the *Canard enchaîné* in 1916 and also illustrated for *Le Crapouillot* while working for *Monsieur*. The following table (Table 1) summarizes the illustrators who designed the covers for each edition of *Monsieur*:

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<sup>29</sup> In 1945, however, he was removed from the academy because he was a collaborationist with the Nazis when French was under occupation.

<sup>30</sup> De Monvel had his column called “La Maison,” which covered the different kinds of furniture and layouts within the office and the home.

<sup>31</sup> *Monsieur* no. 52 and *Monsieur* no. 54

<sup>32</sup> *Monsieur* no. 37, 52, 55, 56,

<sup>33</sup> *Monsieur* no. 52 and 54



**Table 1: Illustrators of each *Monsieur* cover from 1920 to 1924**

	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924
<b>January</b>	Maurice Taquoy	Andre Gab	Maurice Taquoy	Pierre Morgue	Girou
<b>February</b>	Pierre Brissaud	Pierre Morgue	A. de Roux	Ray Bret Koch	Yves Gueder
<b>March</b>	Guy Arnoux <sup>34</sup>	Maurice Taquoy	Benito	Maurice Taquoy	Ray Bret Koch
<b>April</b>		A. Dignimont	Dignimont	Dignimont	Girou
<b>May</b>	Bernard Boutet de Monvel	Maurice Taquoy	Ray Bret Koch	Bravn	Bouchaud
<b>June</b>	Herace Vernet	B. Boutet de Monvel	Guy Arnoux	Zyg Brunner	Ataguet
<b>July</b>	Pierre Morgue	A. de Roux	Peltier	D.B	Maurice van mommpès
<b>August</b>	Eric de Coulon	Maurice Taquoy	CAD	Gisuimont	Ray Bret Koch <sup>35</sup>
<b>September</b>	Jacques François	Maurice Taquoy	Maurice Taquoy	Georges Braun	
<b>October</b>	Pierre Morgue	Pierre Morgue	Jacques François	Giron	Yves Guede
<b>November</b>	Bénito	Pierre Brissaud	Monteiro	Ray Bret Koch	
<b>December</b>	Maurice Taquoy	A. de Roux	P. Peltier	Dignimont	

Some of these writers would design multiple covers, such as the renowned water colorist Maurice Taquoy (1878-1952), Pierre Morgue, or A. de Roux.

Similarly to the illustrators, many of the writers, including de Monvel and Pierre de Trévières, would also write for other fashion magazines, such as *Gazette du Bon Ton* and *Vogue*. Other famous French writers included French novelist and songwriter Pierre Mac Orlan (1882-1970) whose 1938 *Quai de Brumes* novel became the film; the essayist and critic Gérard Bauer (1888-1967) who was the grandson of Alexander Dumas and who also wrote for the *Figaro* and became a member of the Académie Goncourt in 1948; critic, writer,

<sup>34</sup> The issues for these months were combined into one issue because of a printer strike that occurred in April.

<sup>35</sup> The two issues were combined

and journalist Eugène Marsan (1882-1936) who regularly contributed to *La Plume* and founded *la Revue critique des idées et des livres* in 1908; and French novelist and fencer Marcel Boulenger (1873-1932) who won the bronze medal in the 1900 Summer Olympics in Paris. Julien Ochsé (1876-1936) would write the regular column “Le Miroir de Paris” which would pick certain themes of every month to discuss.

In terms of pseudonyms, there were various types within *Monsieur*—one that would contribute to the ruin of *Monsieur*. Generally, the regularly occurring columns that were probably advertisements to sell the newest gadgets and accessories would have pseudonyms names like “Quick.” A towering figure that would contribute to essentially every single issue to *Monsieur* was Comte de Guèrande. Little is known about this writer, but his column focused on how men dressed in theatres all over Paris. Theatres such as the Théâtre Michel, the Théâtre Antoin, and the Comédie-Caumartin were gathering grounds of the elites, and Comte de Guèrande claimed, “The Theatre is the temple of fashion and the Parisien stages should perform the most artistic presentations of traditional dress.”<sup>36</sup> A photograph of an actor accompanies each column from the play along with a thorough description of the various accessories, fabrics, cuts, and folds. In contrast to these more economic and fashion-focused use of the pseudonym, the famous writer Eugène Marsan, used the pseudonym “Philinte”<sup>37</sup> to violently insult various important Parisian tailors in August 1924.<sup>38</sup> The editor of *Monsieur*, Hébertot apologized this scandal and fired Marsan<sup>39</sup>. However, these insults, along with Hébertot’s growing financial difficulties led to *Monsieur* being sold at the end of 1924 to the Parisian editor André Filleul.<sup>40</sup>

As opposed to the later years of *Monsieur*, which seemed to have more advertisements masking as articles, the first year of *Monsieur* had the most reflections directly linked to elegance. This first year would also include many articles written by members of the prestigious Academie Française. In addition to Abel Hermant, there was also

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<sup>36</sup> *Monsieur* no. 1, p. 36: “Le Théâtres est le temple du bonton—si ce n’est de la vertue patentée—et les scènes parisiennes devraient réaliser la plus artistique présentation des traditions vestimentaires.”

<sup>37</sup> Marsan also uses his pseudonym in his own writings within *Monsieur*. In “Le dernier usage de la civilité: dans le costume,” *Monsieur* no. 52, April 1924: “Depuis le temps que le nommé Philinte, à cette meme place, étudiait les diverses pieces du costume masculine à leur degre de perfection, la mode a changé.”

<sup>38</sup> Gilles Lambert and François-Jean Daehn, “Monsieur: 100 ans dans 10 ans,” *Monsieur* December-January 2010, 49-54

<sup>39</sup> “Les Tailleurs Français,” *Monsieur* no. 56-57, August-September 1924.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

the writer and dramatist Marcel Prévost (elected in 1909), writer and literary critic René Boylesve (elected in 1918), poet and literary critic Fernand Gregh (who would be elected in 1953), and Abel Léger (who would be elected in 1937). These contributors to *Monsieur* were members of an elite intellectual class and as opposed to lesser-known contributors, or writers who would write with pseudonyms, their articles would focus on definitions and reflections of elegance.

### **Civilized and well-dressed: The new elegance after World War I**

More than a mere magazine, *Monsieur's* ambitions also make it a male elegance manual. *Monsieur* participates in an older nineteenth discourse about elegance by both continuing many of these ideas about elegance and also adding on new post-World War I concerns, particularly a new instability of social class and the idea of civilization. In her study of 1830s French male elegance manuals<sup>41</sup>, scholar Emilie Hammen writes how these manuals have generally had the goal of social distinction. This desire for distinction comes from vague, impossibly obtainable criteria for achieving elegance: “A ‘fashionable’ man does not necessarily need to have money, birth, talent, or glory. He just needs to have a “je ne sais quoi” of various elements. After all, if “a man becomes rich; he is born elegant,” claims Balzac.<sup>42</sup> By making it a quality that is linked neither to money nor birth, it hard to link it to a specific class. Neither the bourgeois nor the aristocrat can claim form of distinction that roots its power in its indeterminacy.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, one hundred years later, Abel Hermant claims this same vague « je ne sais quoi » aspect of elegance, *twice*:

[...] le chic n'est pas, comme parleraient les savants, 'fonction' du luxe et de la dépense, ni des vêtements. Ce n'est pas, proprement, quelque chose de matériel. C'est un je ne sais quoi. Tous ceux à qui cette définition ne paraîtra point suffisante, c'est qu'ils ne sont pas chic, et tous les autres me comprendront. Un je ne sais quoi à la vie dure.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Emilie Hammen, “Les préceptes de la différence: Manuels d'élégance masculine autour de 1830,” *Modes Pratiques: revue d'histoire du vêtement et de la mode* no. 1, November 2015.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* While I generally will try to maintain all documents in their original language, for stylistic purposes, I will also be doing some translations. Unless indicated, they will be my own.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 138

<sup>44</sup> Abel Hermant, « La Crise du Chic », *Monsieur* no. 5, May 1920

Here, Hermant is citing the “savants” (probably Balzac) for his idea of elegance. Being “chic” (a word that was used interchangeably with “elegant” throughout *Monsieur*) is not a function of luxury, nor spending, or clothing. It is something immaterial that cannot be described with words that also spreads into how one reacts to a hard life.

As opposed to the nineteenth century idea of elegance as something that someone is born with or is vague and “unattainable,” most of the writers in *Monsieur* (apart from Hermant) write about an elegance that is more attainable, at least on an external level. While there are similar arguments about elegance as a “je ne sais quoi” there are new arguments about the need to spend money to be elegant. Renowned writer Marcel Prévost defines an elegance that is external ways of dressing and exterior, changeable characteristics. In his article “Réflexions sur l’élégance masculine” he limits his reflection on elegance to its external characteristics—this excludes graceful gestures, a specific style, a way of with words, or worldly manners. Prévost’s elegance is the type that comes from something that is impersonal and exterior but with personal and intimate qualities. An elegant way of dressing, for example, is not only an exterior ornament, but also an impersonal ornament. It should be able to adorn, during the same season, many elegant bodies. This means that the preoccupation of being elegant—such as that of the beautiful images in the pages of *Monsieur*—is extremely time-consuming and takes a lot of effort. Unlike Hermant, Prévost believes that everyone through education can acquire elegant manners, speech, and self-possession and it is not limited to those who were born with it.

While writer and literary critic René Boylesve writes about how it is pointless to be elegance if one has an “aggressive soul,”<sup>45</sup> he later claims how it is necessary to spend money in order to be elegant—showing a new separation between an internal and an external elegance. In anticipating arguments about the cost of being externally elegant, he retorts “les vêtements sont hors de prix, sans doute : mais si l’on vous voit dans ce piteux état, où est-ce ?”<sup>46</sup> He points out that public places like the restaurants and theatres are even more expensive than dressing well. If money was the primary reason someone was not deciding to dress well, they should just stay at their home three times a week and read a book about public life and then, take the time to dress.<sup>47</sup> While somewhat harsh, Boylesve is criticizing the men who spend money on the wardrobes of their wives while neglecting their own

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<sup>45</sup> René Boylesve, “De l’élégance de l’esprit”, *Monsieur* no. 9, September 1920

<sup>46</sup> René Boylesve, “Sur l’élégance,” *Monsieur* no. 12, December 1920

<sup>47</sup> René Boylesve, “Sur l’élégance,” *Monsieur* no. 12, December 1920

grooming and overall personal appearance. If these men can spend money going to the restaurant or the theatre, they should be able to spend money on having an elegant appearance.

With money, an elegant wardrobe can be bought. This is even considered a financial “investment” that can pay off both socially and romantically. Being elegant is considered a tool to compensate for other qualities that are impossible to obtain, such as inheriting great wealth or being born with perfect features or intelligence. In “Réflexions sur l’élégance masculine”<sup>48</sup>, the well-known writer Marcel Prévost (1862-1941) explains how “ce léger renfort des mœurs” is more powerful than most believe: « Certains hommes bien habillés ont fait, grâce à leur élégance, un beau mariage : c’est l’échange économique. » While it is obviously better to have intelligence or beauty, those who were born with neither do not need to despair, because they can still be elegantly dressed, and it is only a matter of “application, information, étude [et] dépense.”<sup>49</sup>

Not only is being well dressed important for immediate social perceptions of the reader, but also foreign perceptions of France: Boylesve complains about how the way the Parisians dress compared to the villages:

Notre tenue, en France—je ne dis pas, cela va de soi, dans un certain monde, mais qui est si petit !—était comparable à celle de ces villages que nous traversons en automobile, où notre poil se hérissait si nous étions réduits à demander l’hospitalité, et que l’on croirait habités par des pauvres. L’étranger a dû s’y tromper bien souvent et s’imaginer que notre pays n’était que misère. Les misérables il est vrai allaient pieds nus mais possédaient bas de laine à la douzaine ; c’était les riches de l’Europe ; mais ils observaient une tenue rigoureuse, et non pas si ridicule, qui consistait à ne pas faire étalage de leur bien.<sup>50</sup>

These badly dressed men give a miserable impression of their city to foreigners visiting Paris. Even the miserable people went barefoot, but at least they have wool socks by the dozen and have a respectable wardrobe. In this reprimanding of badly dressed French people, Boylesve reveals to us how his understanding of elegance is one that is a duty. In other words, dressing elegantly is necessary for maintaining a specific international representation of France.

Elegance is so important to many of these writers because they see it as an emblem of civilization. Civilization is defined as “un certain étage de sagesse, de tranquillité et de

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<sup>48</sup> Monsieur, 1921, page 246

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> René Boylesve, “Sur l’élégance,” Monsieur no. 12, December 1920

confort, qui pouvait monter plus haut encore certes, mais qui ne pouvait plus baisser sensiblement.”<sup>51</sup> Before the war, the world seemed to always have this certain level of wisdom, tranquility, and comfort. After the war however, with the advent of new forms of violence and the destruction of the body, there was constant meditation about what made a human being: “Le grand problème, l’unique problème de notre époque, celui auquel tous les autres se ramènent, c’est la défense de la civilisation contre la barbarie.”<sup>52</sup> The war created a combat between the civilized and the barbarian--“a mille signes on connaît que nous redevenons des sauvages.”<sup>53</sup> With all of these signs indicating a descent into savagery, it was more important than ever to fight against this decline. This combat means that “[t]out ce qui sépare l’homme de la bête doit être propagé, loué, encouragé.”<sup>54</sup> One of distinctions between the home and the beast is elegance, which is “à façon une culture” because it involves “réflexion, volonté, affinement, presque moralité.”<sup>55</sup> After the war, it became important to promote and encourage everything that separated the man and the beast. Being elegant was about a culture of reflection, refinement, and even almost morality. It was important, more than ever, to follow “la plus sévère loi datant d’un temps très court de haute civilisations ; nous consentons à nous vêtir sobrement !”<sup>56</sup>

Vous en avez pour cinquante louis dans votre complet, et vous admettez que rien n’indique cette débauche somptuaire aux yeux du *vulgum pecus*, et que l’initié lui-même ne l’aperçoive qu’à un je ne sais quoi de caractère quasi hermétique ! c’est assez fin et voilà de l’élégance. Tant que cette loi terrible sera observée, je ne cesserai pas de croire à la persistance du goût français.<sup>57</sup>

Amidst the new signs of savagery taking place after the War, being elegant was one of the remaining ways to remain civilized. Dressing well was a way to fight against this descent into savagery. Other articles in *Monsieur* that would continue this theme was the regularly occurring series written by Eugène Marsan and A. de Roux called “Le dernier usage de la

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<sup>51</sup> Fernand Gregh, “L’élégance et la civilisation,” *Monsieur* no. 10, October 1920

<sup>52</sup> Fernand Gregh, “L’élégance et la civilisation,” *Monsieur* no. 10, October 1920

<sup>53</sup> René Boylesve, “Sur l’élégance,” *Monsieur* no. 12, December 1920

<sup>54</sup> Fernand Gregh, “L’élégance et la civilisation,” *Monsieur* no. 10, October 1920

<sup>55</sup> Fernand Gregh, “L’élégance et la civilisation,” *Monsieur* no. 10, October 1920

<sup>56</sup> René Boylesve, “Sur l’élégance,” *Monsieur* no. 12, December 1920

<sup>57</sup> René Boylesve, “Sur l’élégance,” *Monsieur* no. 12, December 1920

civilité” that ranged in topics including “le main et le chapeau,”<sup>58</sup> “le costume”<sup>59</sup>, “la campagne”<sup>60</sup> and “sous le toit d’un ami.”<sup>61</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As opposed to the twentieth century, being elegant and the notion of elegance became increasingly accessible (and clear) in the twentieth century. While elegance in the 1830s was a vague, indescribable quality that some people have and are born with, elegance after World War I becomes propagated as a form of civilization. Being elegant was broken down to both internal and external characteristics that could be achieved with education and money. This accessibility and desire to propagate a civilized culture, however, does not always have positive consequences (as we will see in the subsequent chapters). These more democratic changes in how elegance was understood, however, continued to evolve into the twenty-first century. Elegance would become increasingly accessible to the extent that it would become an ideal for the magazine to disseminate elegance to everyone. After *Monsieur* was sold to André Filleul in 1924, it became a more technical kind of magazine<sup>62</sup> with a different name. In 1994, it was bought by Montaigne Publications under the leadership of François-Jean Daehn and still publishes today. Unlike the older *Monsieur*, which targeted a more elite audience (in 1925, for example, the reader had servant to take care of his wardrobe<sup>63</sup>), this most recent *Monsieur* wanted to be read by everyone—the first cover even had a Donald Duck to symbolize this spirit of accessibility.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Eugène Marsan, “Le dernier usage de la civilité : le main et le chapeau,” *Monsieur* no. 37, January 1923

<sup>59</sup> Eugène Marsan, “Le dernier usage de la civilité dans le costume,” *Monsieur* no. 52, April 1924

<sup>60</sup> Eugène Marsan, “Le dernier usage de la civilité dans le costume,” *Monsieur* no. 55, June 1924

<sup>61</sup> Eugène Marsan, “Le dernier usage de la civilité sous le toit d’un ami,” *Monsieur* no. 56-57, August-September 1924.

<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, despite trying to contact Gilles Lambert and François-Jean Daehn (the current editor of *Monsieur*), I was unable to access these archives. This information I have about the later years of *Monsieur* comes from Lambert and Daehn’s article briefly covering this history. See Gilles Lambert and François-Jean Daehn, “*Monsieur*: 100 ans dans 10 ans,” *Monsieur* December-January 2010, 49-54

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* Its goal became to defend individual style, classic elegance, and a taste for beautiful materials and quality





## Chapter 2: The Elegant Western World

### INTRODUCTION

Godart's study of this "oligarchic structure of fashion" looks at the cities individually, in terms of their history, but another way of thinking of this "oligarchic structure of fashion" is through the relationships or networks between these cities that make up the oligarchic system. The oldest of these fashion capitals—Paris, London, and New York—were developing style networks among each other, and through their competition, helped each city form their own fashion identity while also forming an "oligarchic" fashion community. The dialogue about each city from the perspective of *Monsieur*, specifically, show that a key part of this oligarchic structure of fashion, was a sort of "dialogue" between each of the cities during the interwar period. In Paris's attempts to distinguish itself from London, for example, we see how it helps evolve each city's respective idea of elegance. Examining the different ways each city is described in *Monsieur* shows how part of the reason for this "oligarchic structure of fashion" is from already existing style networks and channels between each of the cities which formed the Western world in the interwar period.

Godart points out several key moments in Paris's history that explain its reign as a fashion capital: the invention of the fashion show within Paris; the reign of Louis XIV; France's political power in Versailles; Queen Marie Antoinette's relationship with her personal dress maker; the political support of Parisian textile industries; and, the preeminence of haut couture in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>65</sup> Paris, in this situation, is a positive example of how a city develops cultural and symbolic capital on the global arena. The city itself is a brand that gives credibility to the fashion commodities produced inside it. Godart uses the premise that "any city is located in a multi-level imaginary and symbolic socio-economic space."<sup>66</sup> This premise is extremely useful because it helps us understand how perceptions of certain cultures lead to positive and negative views about their creative potential.

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<sup>65</sup> Godart, p. 41

<sup>66</sup> Godart, 40. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French into English of primary and secondary sources are mine.

## London

As the birthplace of the modern suit, London is the capital of men's fashion. French historian Farid Chenoune writes how the French tried to distinguish themselves from the English while still participating in these dominant definitions of elegance. Men's fashion publications, like *Monsieur*, kept up with the latest English trends, while still defending French style and businesses.<sup>67</sup> Initially, the distinction was that the British were more athletic and rigid, while the French were thinner and more "souple."<sup>68</sup> With the new beauty ideals of being muscular and fit, however, at the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>69</sup>, these distinctions began to change. Even from the onset, though, in Abel Hermant's presentation of *Monsieur*, London already appears as competition to Paris in the realm of elegance:

[...] l'élégance française, comme toute puissance qui se respecte, a deux ennemis, l'un hors frontières et l'autre à l'intérieur. Le premier est la concurrence. A vrai dire, elle ne m'effraie guère. Londres seul est à craindre et les experts qui, après être demeurés cinq ans sans y aller voir, y sont retournés pour la saison de 1919, ont bien cru remarquer que l'élégance anglaise avait aussi son ennemi intérieur. C'est la même que chez nous, c'est le négligé. Les Anglais le combattront comme d'unité de commandement. *Monsieur* combattra pour son compte, à ses risques et périls, le négligé qui est le père de toutes les inélégances, comme la paresse est la mère de tous les vices.<sup>70</sup>

French elegance is understood as a power, which has both an internal enemy—negligence—and an external enemy—London. The only

Pierre de Trévières's London article in *Monsieur* illustrates some of the sartorial distinctions that the French tried to make from the English.<sup>71</sup> He has discovered that that "l'élégance nationale d'un peuple" is from "l'influence d'une race et d'un climat."<sup>72</sup> Due to these differences, France's "national elegance" is "infinitely more nuanced." The English climate is homogenous and unchanging all year long. Similarly, the "individualistic" English

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<sup>67</sup> There seemed to be less articles about London in 1921 and 1922.

<sup>68</sup> Farid Chenoune, *Des Modes et Des Hommes : Deux siècles d'élégance masculine*. Flammarion : Paris, 1993, 163 : "Pertinente quand les Français répugnaient aux exercices, cette distinction l'est beaucoup moins maintenant qu'une nouvelle vague sportive uniformise, sinon les morphologies, du moins les canons de la beauté et ses modes vestimentaires."

<sup>69</sup> Georges Vigarello, *Histoire de la beauté: Le corps et l'art d'embellir de la Renaissance à nos jours*. Paris: Seuil, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Abel Hermant, *Monsieur* no. 1, January 1920

<sup>71</sup> Pierre de Trévières, "Le Chic Anglais," *Monsieur* no. 49, January 1924

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

people have their “solid morals, open faces, and pure youth,” as exemplified by always speaking of their “heroic” British. The English are “virtuous and certainly, a rare beauty” with its “rigid, impeccable outfits.” Because the French had to define themselves in relation to the English shows how elegance was also understood as a national value. Ways of dressing and traveling was connected to the environment and how each country designed their neighborhoods and buildings, showing how elegance was an indication of international reputation.

According to Trévières, some parts of English elegance are worth imitating, particularly, “the English aristocracy’s strict, clean outfits.” At the same time, he still upholds and encourages the “national elegance” of France. He even admits « Avouons-le entre nous : dans notre amour du chic anglais entre beaucoup de snobisme, c’est-à-dire beaucoup de fatuité et d’ignorance ». While it may be tempting to want to mimic English elegance, it is inevitably meaningless and just a status symbol in comparison to the more creative and meaningful French elegance. In contrast to the English climate, the French climate is better with their “changing, spirited, skies. In terms of architecture, the “Boulevard, the avenue, the street, are infinitely more pleasant, more shimmering, most picturesque in France than on the other side of Chanel.” The French people have their “manners, softness, flexibility” and these traits are apparent in their outfits which are “less dogmatic, perhaps less correct but livelier, more alert, more colorful. " Thus, there is “the imperative corollary that a French will dress with more originality."

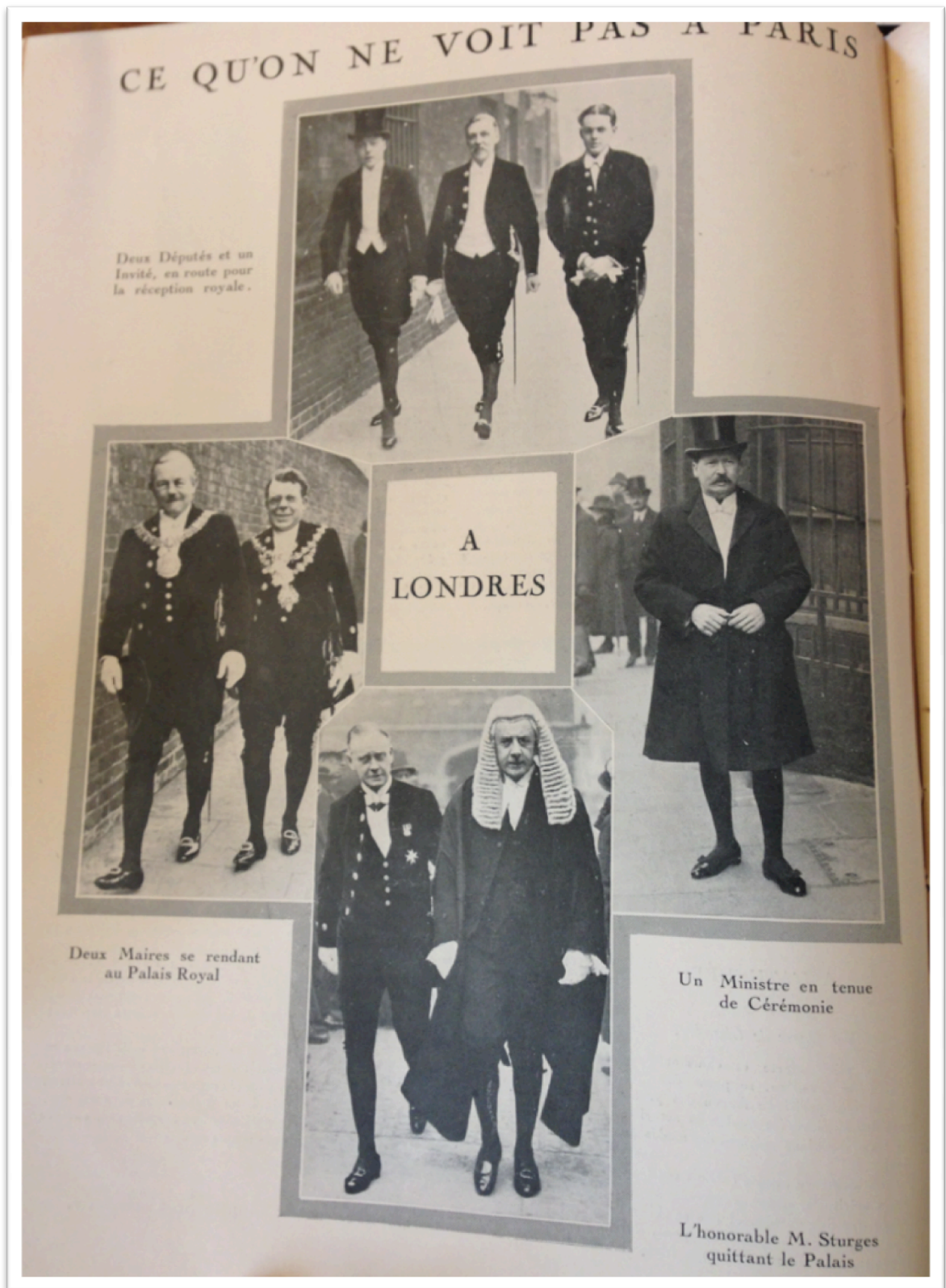


Figure 2 Outfits in London that would not appear in Paris. From *Monsieur* no. 55, June 1924

Trévières defines France's elegance in contrast to English elegance by focusing on what the young people in the streets have been wearing: "But let us encourage this common style on the street, these charming achievements of our young people who dress well, who have been better dressed, especially in recent years." Yet, French elegance does not mean all French people: only certain neighborhoods fit within Trévières's geographic criteria of "elegance." Acceptable "elegant" areas that are filled with men wearing tailored suits and they include Bourse, Auteuil, Passy, Champs-Élysées (but only the parts with the aristocrats), the Boulevards (the central part of), Sentier, and the Marais.<sup>73</sup> Unacceptable areas include Faubourg Montmartre, which is even considered as the "fatherland of the 'gigolos' with its style "un peu spéciale."

## New York

New York was the second city that was regularly profiled in Paris. Slow, but surely, American men's fashion was becoming a possibility for the French to liberate themselves from the influence of English style. Harding Upton, in the first of his many columns about American style, proposes, "il est d'ailleurs possible que l'Américain concentrant toute son attention et toute son énergie sur les questions vestimentaires soit capable d'indiquer bientôt les styles à Paris et à Londres."<sup>74</sup> According to Upton, this attention will certainly lead to a particular American "dandysme," with its center being in New York—the city with the most elegant Americans. New York, particularly, Long Island, offered "l'idéal spectacle de la vie élégante à la campagne."<sup>75</sup> The war had brought Paris and New York together, and the various exchanges between the American soldiers living in Paris had begun to awaken their sartorial senses<sup>76</sup>. From diplomats, to acrobats, and to businessmen, Upton describes the different cuts and styles of the Americans and their burgeoning codes of elegance<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Harding Upton, "L'élégance à New York ou L'influence des Restrictions," *Monsieur* no. 1, January 1920

<sup>75</sup> Jack Simson. *Lettre d'Amérique: La Saison d'été à New York*. *Monsieur* 1920, 231.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. : « Les Américains n'avaient jamais considéré sérieusement l'art de s'habiller. Mais la guerre et le séjour en France ont stimulé les aspirations masculines. Nombreux étaient les jeunes officiers américains qui arpentaient les boulevards d'un air crâne, habillés à la dernière mode militaire, dandies improvisés qui, dans la vie civile, étaient incapable de s'occuper leurs vêtue [...] Les relations plus intimes que la guerre a apportées entre Paris et New-York ont certainement amenée

But New York would also begin to influence the Parisian fashion scene. While Upton primarily emphasizes the French influence in how Americans have begun to dress, he also ends his observations with a curious trend in Paris: “à Paris aujourd’hui, on peut voir à beaucoup de devantures des meilleurs chapeliers un chapeau haut de forme portant cette étiquette « Dernier cri de New-York. ”<sup>78</sup>

American style would become an alternative form of inspiration to the English, despite American “misinterpretations” of certain trends. Jack Simson writes how the English were responsible for an ongoing “untailored” look (“pas ajusté”) with their coats that hang from their shoulders. This look has spread into Paris from the English photographs, but has not been adopted by the tailors. Apparently the Americans, after seeing these images, have begun to believe that outfits do not have to be well tailored or well fit. From the French perspective, these Americans have misunderstood this English style of “négligence calculée” and they perceive that the Americans are actually being neglectful, without any artfulness. Surprisingly, Simson defends this American “misinterpretation” (as predominantly understood by the French), and would even admit that sometimes the French are a little too judgmental.

Simson even defends the Americans as a new source of inspiration for elegant French men : “Il est certain qu’on peut actuellement constater un mouvement très net de la mode masculine américaine pour se libérer de l’influence Londres. Je crois bien qu’il en est de même en France, où l’élégance de l’homme cherchera maintenant ses inspirations.”<sup>79</sup> For instance, French men are too attached to their canes that carry secret compartments for alcohol, and could learn from the recent innovations of the Americans:

[...] la plus en vogue est la canne droite en bois verni, au pommeau d’or. Elle semble innocente, mais si vous enlevez le dessus, vous avez un gobelet et une bouteille qui contient douze petits verres d’alcool. Chacun a sa canne-bouteille qui ne le quitte pas. On ne l’abandonne pas au vestiaire.

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un échange constant de sympathies et...C’est un des bien-faits insoupçonnés de l’alliance franco-Américaine. »

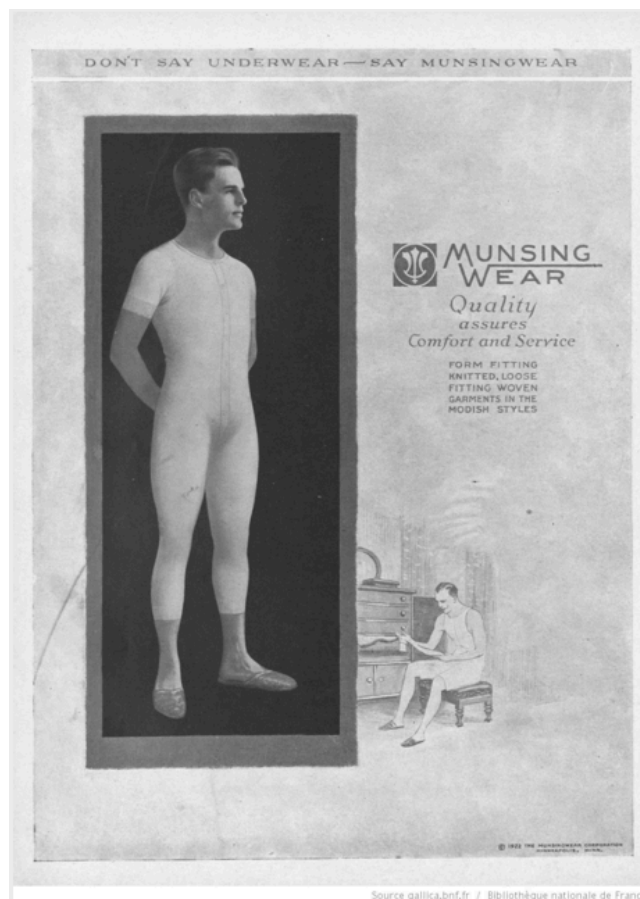
<sup>77</sup> One interesting general difference between the two nations that Upton notes is that “l’Américain pense toujours aux femmes en choisissant son vêtement. Sa règle, très simple, est de guider son choix, en toute occasion, sur la toilette féminine. ”

<sup>78</sup> Ibid .

<sup>79</sup> Jack Simson, “La Mode en Amérique.” *Monsieur* no. 8, August 1920.

Mais il n'y a pas que les cannes-bouteilles, combien d'autres expédients pour pouvoir emporter toujours avec soi le précieux liquide ! Dans les restaurants à la mode, nous pouvons remarquer que les consommateurs sortent de leurs poches des objets qui semblent quel-conques mais qui ont tous la destination que vous savez. En ce moment, l'imagination américaine est très intéressée par toutes ces petites combinaisons qui ont l'attrait incomparable du fruit défendu.

Discreet alcohol-bearing accessories made by the Americans were not the only elegant items of discussion. Elegance is even defined in relation to underwear: "Les élégants aux Etats-Unis recherchent les caleçons, les tricots, taillées tout d'une pièce, amalgamés l'un à l'autres. En France, nous préférons les pièces détachées, les spectacles coupés."<sup>80</sup> This particular attention to even underwear shows how elegance was understood as a lifestyle. The following advertisement in *Monsieur* shows an example of the type of underwear that elegant Americans wore:



**Figure 3: Advertisement for American thermal wear, from *Monsieur* no. 37, January 1923**

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<sup>80</sup> Pierre de Trévières, "Nos dessous," *Monsieur* no. 51, March 1924

With a few exceptions,<sup>81</sup> most articles about the United States are about New York. New York's primary contribution would be in the realm of sportswear. Numerous articles in *Monsieur* discuss the latest trends that go on in the realm of golf, tennis, and swimming and what the Americans are wearing in these various sports. French tennis apparel, for instance, used to be tighter and more uncomfortable, until the Americans inspired the idea of having looser, more comfortable tennis outfits: "Les jolies modeless, aux Etats-Unis, comportent un pantalon de flanelle blanches coupé très large et laissant aux mouvements toute liberté, surtout aux genoux."<sup>82</sup> It was not just tennis wear that was characterized by looser clothing. American elegance in general, would be known for its more casual, athletic style in comparison to the French.

London and New York were the two major cities that *Monsieur* regularly reported on, but occasionally, there would be profiles on fashion in other cities, like Berlin, Milan and Vienna. Most of these cities were elegant either European or American. The colonial world, for instance, which spanned Asia and Africa, was completely absent. The following article entitled "Men's Fashion around the World" briefly summarizes these "variants" of elegance:



Figure 4: La Mode Masculine à Travers le Monde. From *Monsieur* no. 30, June 1922

<sup>81</sup> J. Hamman, "La Mode au Far-West," *Monsieur* no. 11, November 1920.

<sup>82</sup> "Les Costumes de Sport aux Etats-Unis," *Monsieur* 1920, 85



The six men in this image are French, English, Italian, American, Argentinean, and German. The French are known to have well-tailored clothing with simple colors; the English have their striped pants and prefer the structured jacket; the smaller Italians prefer tighter clothing with brightly colored and striped ties; the powerful, large cigar-smoking Americans wear practical and athletic clothing with pens in their pockets instead of handkerchiefs; the very chic Argentineans wear somber, respectable, tailored clothing; while the military-like Germans maintain the air of an officer with large, powerful shoulders and love showing their muscles underneath their clothing. These men from around the world are from either from Europe, North America, or South America. While the tightness of their jackets, the hardness of their hats, or the type of cane or cigarette that they smoke may vary, they all fit within the image of elegance.

## CONCLUSION

These writings about elegance in London and New York reveal a constant interaction between French, American, and English masculine style. Each of these cities are key players in Godart's "oligarchic structure of fashion." This structure relies *not* just on each fashion capital's individual, internal history of cultivating an atmosphere conducive to sartorial creativity, like what Godart's suggests, but also the external history of each city, in terms of its transnational networks with each other—what I have attempted to show in this chapter. As the most powerful countries during this time period, their definitions of elegance—an elegance that was inseparably entwined with nationalistic ideas of civilization—would be used to further distinguish themselves from the non-Western, "inelegant other."



## Chapter 3: The Inelegant Colonial World

### INTRODUCTION

The underlying power structure of the fashion industry involves not just networks between fashion capitals, like Paris and London, but also the exclusion of non-fashion capitals, like Dakar and Khartoum. The legacy of French colonization in former French African colonies, for instance, largely factors into why these colonies are not major players in the global fashion industry. While the earlier section examined the interwar history of the most competitive Fashion capitals, this section will look at the history of non-competitive capitals—the cities outside of the “fashion oligarchy.” How did definitions of male elegance—an aesthetic driving the consumption and production of fashion goods—rely on existing boundaries between France and its colonies in French West Africa? The legacy of black colonial stereotypes used to motivate and justify colonization is an especially strong theme in this section, which examines this question through a series of articles within *Monsieur* written by a colonial civil servant, Pierre Bonardi (1887-1964). In these articles, we see how ideas of elegance were racialized and used as a civilized mode of distinction in contrast to the “uncivilized” colonial subject. Examining the ways in which Bonardi writes about black Africans reveals how the rise of Paris’s fashion industry is also linked to notions of “non-elegance” in French colonial Africa. Such a study will bring greater understanding to the political nature of the French fashion industry, particularly how its commodities have been used as tools for establishing a superior cultural difference and modernity, and adds to ongoing work on images of the French colonies produced in mainland France in the context of French imperialism.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Understanding the cultural development of French colonization is the goal of French scholars Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, and Nicolas Bancel in their collection, *Culture coloniale en France: De la Révolution française à nos jours*. Paris, Autrement, 2008.. In turning to cultural history for answers about France’s colonial history, they ask: “Comment les Française sont devenus coloniaux sans même le vouloir, sans même le savoir... Non pas coloniaux, donc, au sens d’acteurs de la colonisation, ou de soutiens conscients du colonialisme ; mais coloniaux par l’incorporation—souterraine le plus souvent—de discours, de normes, d’attitudes, d’un habitus nfin qui permet d’esquisser la conformation lente des mentalités et des psychismes collectifs à l’objectif impérial, sans laquelle la configuration historique coloniale n’eût pu durer, ni, sans doute, exister. »

The earliest racist texts about colonial African dressing style come from the mid-nineteenth century. In his history of La SAPE—an abbreviation of the phrase Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes (The Society of Ambiance-Makers and Elegant People), historian Manuel Charpy talks about a double mission of business and civilization in the ways that European clothing was sold to the African colonies.<sup>84</sup> The SAPE is a social and politically driven style movement from Brazzaville in the Republic of Congo. Traces of this movement go back to the nineteenth century before French colonization in Africa, where there were already flea shops in West Africa in the 1860s (he notes a common observation of “commerce avant colonisation.” European explorers in this region would write about their observations. In his voyages to Congo, the Englishman Morton Stanley, for instance, would describe how the black servants did not understand how to wear European clothing. According to Charpy, these racist texts about black colonial sartorial style became increasingly racist. While they started out as playful and amused observations at how European clothing was interpreted, in the 1900s, they became to be more nervous and irritated tones. By the 1920s, European police would survey and try to understand the meaning behind how the Congolese dressed. All the racist discourse during this time period became extremely sensitive to the ways in which the blacks dressed elegantly.<sup>85</sup> This history of colonization and racist anxiety would eventually lead to the SAPE, which was a form of colonial resistance. According to the influential SAPE icon, musician Papa Wemba, “L’Homme blanc a inventé les habits mais c’est nous les Congolais qui en avons fait un art.”<sup>86</sup>

Within this brief history of the SAPE, this chapter will focus on the moment when early twentieth racist European discourse about black colonial dressing was straddling both amusement and irritation. A series of articles in *Monsieur* called “L’élégance aux pays noires” written by Pierre Bonardi provides a window into the fashion choices of colonial subjects from the eyes of a colonizer. Bonardi, a French writer from the island of Corsica, was a civil servant in the colonies from 1911 to 1914 before becoming a writer. Bonardi’s role as a civil servant largely shaped what he observed and wrote in these articles. As a civil

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<sup>84</sup> Manuel Charpy. “Une Histoire de la Sapologie Africaine.” Lecture, Institut Français de la Mode. Paris, France. 2015. <http://plus.franceculture.fr/une-histoire-de-la-sapologie-africaine>. Also see Justin-Daniel Gandoulou’s *Entre Paris et Bacongo* for a sociological study of Sapeurs from

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Yérim Sar, Interview with Papa Wemba. 2015. <http://noisey.vice.com/fr/blog/papa-wemba-interview-rbma-paris-2015>

servant in French colonial Africa, he was part of a larger system of France's official ideology of *mission civilisatrice*, which was adopted in 1895, where the conquest of West Africa transformed into a "constructive exploitation."<sup>87</sup> According to historian Alice Conklin, this official ideology can be thought of as a notion of "mastery" of the human body and social behavior.<sup>88</sup> Mastery was key to France's self-perception, and because those who lived in the non-European world had not yet achieved France's mastery of public health, sanitation or education, they were "barbarians, in need of civilizing."<sup>89</sup> These divisions between savage and barbarian within *mission civilisatrice* brings to mind the earlier definitions of elegance covered in the previous chapter. In addition to public health, sanitation, and education, modes of dressing was also part of how the uncivilized could evolve.

### ***La mission civilisatrice* in French colonial Africa**

The French ruling elite disseminated notions of *mission civilisatrice* through primary school textbooks and images of uncivilized African (and Asians) in the popular press. To implement this ideology, colonial governments were created in their colonial territories. In 1895, the Colonial Ministry in Paris established the Government General of West Africa. In charge of this government was a single colonial administrator in Dakar, Senegal who ruled over a territory encompassing modern-day Mauritania, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Benin. Between 1891 and 1893, this vast territory was divided up into five colonies and one territory (Mauritania): Guinea, Ivory Coast, Dahomy—the southern colonies; Senegal; and Western Sudan—the largest colony.<sup>90</sup> Each of the five colonies had a civilian governor responsible for all policy-making, customs tariffs, and for making a budget. But even with this structure, there was very little control over the colonies, due to conflict and confusion among the governors, and conflict with the colonial army. This started changing however, between 1902 and 1904 after Ernest Roume (1841-1858) is appointed

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<sup>87</sup> Conklin analyzes thirty-five years of official rhetoric and decision-making in French West Africa to examine what colonial administrators believed about themselves in relation to their colonial subjects. See Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1850-1930*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 11

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 6

<sup>90</sup> Conklin, 35

governor general, and practices of civilization primarily focused on building railroads and hospitals.<sup>91</sup>

Roume was replaced by Amédée William Merlaud-Ponty (1866-1915), who was the Governor General of from 1908 until 1915,<sup>92</sup> which would include the time that Bonardi was working as a colonial administrator. Ponty was part of the conquest of Western Sudan and devoted his professional life to the French African empire until his death. As opposed to Roume, who was more interested in the finance of building the railroad, Ponty focused his energy on the every day problems of ruling Africans.<sup>93</sup> Ponty restructured the legal system to give himself more direct access to the African chiefs and spread French education (as opposed to health care) during his rule. Under Ponty, the French colonial government in Dakar transitioned from having a more material notion of civilization to a more moral concept of civilization. Out of all the Governor Generals of French West Africa, Ponty would be the one to most strongly carry out “the notion that democratic France had to liberate Africans from oppression and barbaric custom, and teach them French.”<sup>94</sup> Until the start of World War I, the colonial government under Ponty prioritized improving education, public health, and spreading the French language.<sup>95</sup> In 1912, for example, the training for African teachers was created when the Ecole William Ponty was opened, and the education for the masses inaugurated. Under Ponty, the French West African government promoted literacy and education (this would drastically change, however, at the start of World War I, when Ponty’s focus shifted towards recruiting massive amounts of French Africans into the colonial troops).

As soon as he became governor general, Ponty began to reformat the colonial administrative system of government. In 1909, for example, he drafted his famous circular, *politique de races*, which declared there African chiefs could be on the French administrative

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<sup>91</sup> Conklin, 40

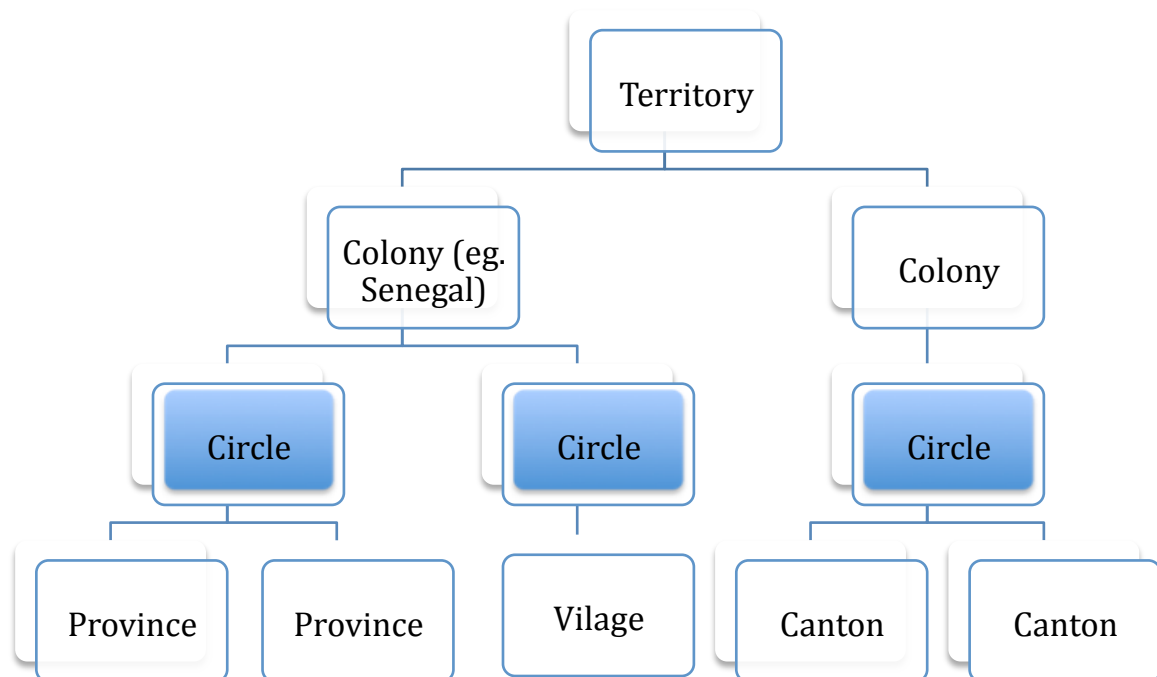
<sup>92</sup> Soungalo Ouattara, *Gouvernance et libertés locales : pour une renaissance de l'Afrique*, Karthala, 2007, 76

<sup>93</sup> Conklin, 108

<sup>94</sup> Conklin, 108-109

<sup>95</sup> While there has been debate about whether or not liberal values were at its height before World War I, one of Conklin’s discoveries has been that “republican sentiment was stronger in Dakar before the Great War . . . Dakar’s native, educational, and judicial policies and discourse confirm that being a liberating force outre-mer constitution an integral part of what it meant to be civilized, French, and republican in the prewar period.” Conklin, 249-250

hierarchy. French territories were divided into colonies, which were divided into administrative units, or circles. Within each circle were subdivisions, provinces, cantons, and villages. In charge of each circle was a French administrator—such as someone like Pierre Bonardi—and eventually there would also be French administrators in charge of subdivisions, however African chiefs were in charge of the rest of the administrative hierarchy. If there were provinces, cantons, and/or villages, they were administered by their respective African chief.<sup>96</sup> While the French military tried to expand their territory westward in Sudan, however, they encountered a lot of resistance. The territory they were invading, such as Islamic empires like the Umarian state of the Middle Niger valley, already had their own systems of government. These forms of African oppositions, particularly from leaders such as Samori, Umar, and Amadu, destroyed many political entities in Western Sudan.<sup>97</sup> Ponty was part of the French military expansion into Western Sudan before he was appointed governor. Because he fought against military aristocracy and militant Islamic movements, he strongly believed that France was saving French African from African village chiefs and royal families.<sup>98</sup>



**Figure 5: Example of possible French colonial system of administration. Source: Alice Conklin. Blue = French administrator.**

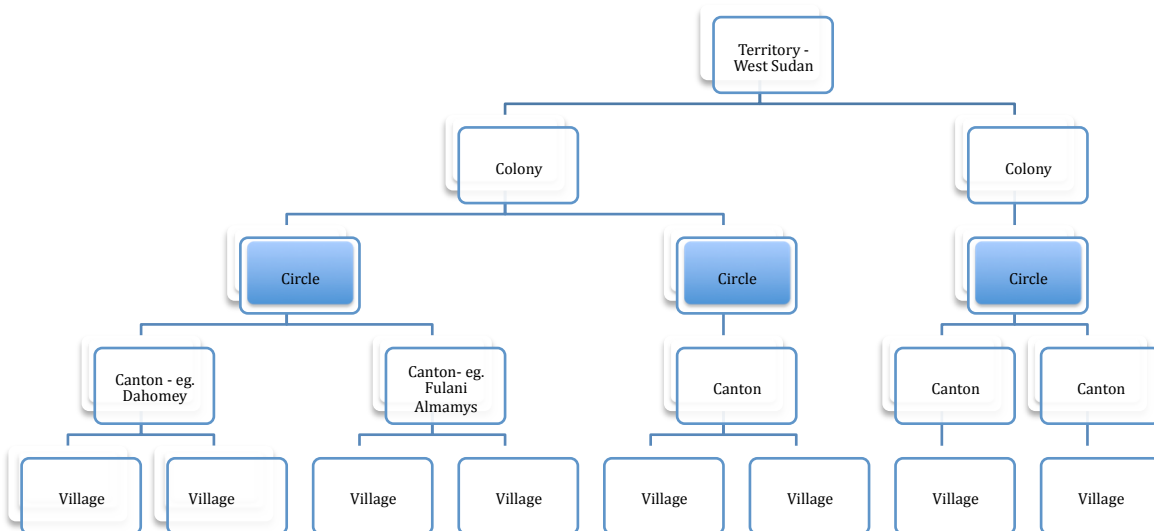
<sup>96</sup> Conklin, 110

<sup>97</sup> Conklin, 111

<sup>98</sup> Conklin, 113-114

To simplify ruling these parts of Western Sudan—the part of French colonial Africa that Bonardi was writing about—the French decided to divide the administrative circles into similarly sized cantons. These cantons would be ruled by African administrators, which were not allowed to collaborate with French commanders. Ponty also removed African chiefs from power and the French chose the African men that replaced these African chiefs. Many of these African men chosen by the French were not from royal families and were chosen as canton chiefs that did many of the French administrative duties. Because of Ponty’s mistrust for the former elite African rulers, whom he saw as corrupt, he issues a circular in 1911 directed French colonial administrators, like Bonardi, to make as many visits as possible to their circle.<sup>99</sup> These visits would happen at least once a year, and were aimed to prevent traditional African elites from regaining power. The second circular that Ponty issued shortly before his death in 1914 was another move to take power away from African leaders.

During the time that Bonardi worked as a colonial administrator, from 1911-1914, the French idea of empire was at its most progressive period under governor general William Ponty. This meant that he had very close contact with many of the native black Africans and could observe their ways of dressing enough to be able to write these articles about them.



**Figure 6: New more direct French colonial administration in Western Sudan**

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<sup>99</sup> Conklin, 116



## L'élégance masculine aux Pays Noirs

Because these articles were published in 1921, after Bonardi finishes his service in 1914, they were either written while he was doing his civil service and then later submitted to *Monsieur* or he wrote them after his experience from memory. In the first of these articles, published in March, Bonardi begins with a justification for studying those who live in “les pays noirs” (the black countries): “Those who ignore these places are mistakenly disposed into considering that the language of the little black is like an amusing fantasy of voyageurs and of colonies; however, these same people are ready to admit that beliefs come from the work of caricatures of blacks, representations, in fact, among the most controlled of truths.”<sup>100</sup> He also divides the black race into three categories--(1) those who have never had any contact with Europeans, (2) the blacks who live in the same neighborhoods as “les blancs,” and (3) those who live with “les blancs.”

As he intends to be more respectful as opposed to mocking,<sup>101</sup> Bonardi gives these categories to specify that he is writing about blacks in first category. Blacks who have had the enlightened experience of encountering the European whites have began their pathway to an elegant existence. One example of this is a report of the 35th salon des Indépendants—a gathering of artists from all over the world in. Each artist is a representative Dandy from their respective civilization, which even includes countries like Azerbaijan. The writer, Quick, is pleased with the artists coming from the black countries (“les pays nègres”).<sup>102</sup> Despite their tanned faces or impossibly frizzy hair, the blacks dressed very well. The French Guyanese poet and novelist, René Maran (1887-1960) is among the men mentioned. A portrait of him is

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<sup>100</sup> “le langage petit nègre comme une amusante fantaisie des voyageurs et des colonies; par contre, ils sont tout prêts à admettre que les charges des caricaturistes représentant des noirs, les représentent en effet, selon la plus contrôlée des vérités.” » *Monsieur* no. 15, March 1921.

<sup>101</sup> “Tout cela est en somme plus respectable que ridicule et semble peu propre à exciter la verve des humoristes. Ces nègres appartiennent plus à l’ethnographie qu’à la blague montmartroise d’autant qu’ils donnent généralement une valeur de gri-gri à leurs petits singes en peluche, à la frange d’épaulette où une effigie réclame. »

<sup>102</sup> Quick, “La Mode aux Indépendants ou l’indépendance des Modes,” *Monsieur* no. 51, April 1924: “Mais les pays nègres m’ont ravi: Que d’élégants à la face bronzée, que de lions impétueux aux cheveux crépus—le Noir habille si bien. Voici, par M. Marcel-Gaillard, le portrait de M. René Maran sobrement vêtu d’un binocle et d’un complet gris-lilas. Voici la jeune Créole de M. Sermain-Pétillant. Voici, par M. Carnet, le beau portrait de S.H. feu Saïd-Ali, Sultan des Iles Comores—célébrité parisienne qui défraya longtemps les chroniques du boulevard—comme on disait naguère avant la guerre. Et c’est encore ce jeune don Juan nègre de M. Quenneville: ‘Au Sud-Afrique’, parmi tant de vestons rayés, de pagnes coruscants recouvrant les académies ténébreuses des séducteurs de L’A.O.F »

even included in this article (see figure 6). This article was written just before Maran would go onto become the first black writer to win the Prix Goncourt a few months later in December 1921. These more civilized blacks, despite their immutable physical features, are not the subject of Bonardi's analysis. His focus is elucidating the French mentality about the blacks living in the colonies or regions that the French is "civilizing."



**Figure 7: Portrait of writer René Maran**

Bonardi seems to be most fascinated by the way that the native black Africans style themselves. Even though these blacks are basically "nude," their ways of attracting a mate is, shockingly to Bonardi, "on their body. And do not have fabrics or precious stones. They work on their hair, teeth, and skin." While whites only know two or three ways to style their hair—with the comb, brush or baldness. The black, however, has thousands of ways of ornamenting his head and in multiple types of geometric shapes. Bonardi writes about how for blacks of all tribes, men and women, the principle focus of their bodily care is the head. The beard, which is all however, is the slave of the improvisation of good blacks. They carefully razor their beards with a piece of glass, a shard of a bottle, an end of forced iron or a knife. While this deed is not too complicated, it's done very gravely. Their skin is very soft to the touch. They always have a beard which is necessary to affirm their quality as free men or as bosses. A tuft there or a mesh of there, a small necklace, a point, a line of a mustache, a size like our hairstyles, which is the size that they like at the moment that they razor. After these descriptions about beard and hair styling, Bonardi moves on to descriptions about facial

ornamentation and the skin. The teeth are filed, sometimes rounded and sometimes pointed in beautiful isosceles triangles, which creates a ferocious smile. Finally, the skin of children are carefully sculpted at the price of the most atrocious suffering and the risk of the gravest infections.

In the second article, published a few months later in June, Bonardi brings his readers into a village municipal ball, and introduces them to two black men he calls “Chocolat.” From deconstructing the ways in which both of these men wear and move in their “almost impeccable” tuxedos, Bonardi highlights a distinct pathetic, black African attempt for elegance. The last article focuses on a twenty-year-old man named Mamadou, who is the son of a Sudanese administrator<sup>103</sup>. To Bonardi, Mamadou is “all the boys in the African colonies”—childish, unable to control his impulses to buy beautiful clothing, and brute-like. In highlighting the main themes of these three articles, it is helpful to keep in mind that the goal is to examine how Bonardi’s construction of elegance depends upon a difference between he/his readers and the black French colonial subjects. In other words, how did Bonardi use his notions of elegance to distinguish himself?

Bonardi tries to correct his readers’s stereotypes of black colonial subjects with a tone of authority over his colonial subjects—he is the master of elegance among these blacks. A constant theme is how he positions these blacks as children in need of guidance. This authoritative tone is clear in the types of adjectives and words he uses to call each of the colonial subjects. By positioning himself as the protector and master of the black Africans, Bonardi positions himself as a “master” of elegance. According to him, for the black African, “elegance is an ostentation.”<sup>104</sup> To Bonardi, “the black is a child,”<sup>105</sup> bringing to mind a predominant French mindset of his time period. In his preface to *Cultural Coloniale en France*, French anthropologist Gilles Boëtsch writes how the colonies were described and constructed like a child, and he opens this preface with the French doctor August Bordier’s

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<sup>103</sup> This article also reveals some fascinating beliefs about blacks living in colonial Africa. For instance, Bonardi corrects French beliefs about bodily discharges: “contrairement à ce qu’on pourrait croire en France, la sueur de nègre n’est pas noire.”

<sup>104</sup> “”Le principe de Brummell qu’on peut tirer de la déformation célèbre d’une phrase de Pascal: ‘la véritable élégance se moque de l’élégance,’ ce principe là est universellement violé chez les nègres. Pour eux l’élégance est une ostentation. C’est là une vérité de là-bas qu’on peut désormais imaginer chez nous. » *Monsieur* no. 15, March 1921

<sup>105</sup> Pierre Bonardi, “L’élégance Aux Pays Noirs”, *Monsieur: Revue des élégances, des bonnes manières, et de tout ce qui intéresse Monsieur*. 2, no. 3 (1921).

work *La Colonisation scientifique et les colonies françaises* (1884) to illustrate his point.<sup>106</sup> Bonardi's descriptions fall in line with Bordier's work, which compare the colony to an unformed embryo and a child that needs protection, instruction, and would be lost if abandoned.<sup>107</sup> Along a similar spirit as Bordier, Bonardi uses the label "boy" to categorize a twenty-year old black young man, instead of the phrase "jeune homme" (young man) typically used to describe that age group. He also calls two black men "Chocolat" in reference to a famous black clown to entertained Parisians during this time period; Chocolat symbolized stereotypes of black people as silly, childish and friendly. The first Chocolat he describes like "a baby inside an overfilled bathtub"<sup>108</sup>

Bonardi's articles reveal two things: the mission civilisatrice mindset of a colonial administrator in French colonial Africa and the transmission of these ideas back into the French public through the publication *Monsieur*. Though intended to correct mainland French views about their black colonial subjects, these articles also help us understand the anxiety of these African subjects immigrating into Paris. A few years later, in May 1923, within the regularly occurring column *Le Miroir de Paris*,<sup>109</sup> is a section called "Nègres 'uber allés.'" In the article, written by a wealthy French writer Julien Ochsé (1876-1936),<sup>109</sup> René Maran is discussed again. However, this time, it seems that there are *too many* "civilized" blacks starting to "invade" Paris. There are no more "respectable" places for dance, because these "nègres" are everywhere. Indeed, this period in Paris is also known for the Black Paris phenomenon, where the French avant-garde would be inspired by primitivist design and native African culture.<sup>110</sup> Not only were black jazz musicians extremely popular, there was

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<sup>106</sup> Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel dir., *Culturel coloniale en France. De la Révolution Française à nos jours*. Paris, Autrement, 2008, p. 7

<sup>107</sup> "A peine formé, l'embryon, l'enfant, je veux dire la colonie, a besoin de protection de tutelle; elle ne saurait être abandonnée à elle-même." August Bordier. *La Colonisation scientifique et les colonies françaises*. Gallica. 1884, p. 15

<sup>108</sup> "En voici un qui s'avance perdu dans son habit comme un baby dans une baignoire trop pleine."

<sup>109</sup> Claude-Pierre Pérez. "Préface-Vers et Prose". *Littératures Françaises des XXe et XXIe siècles*. Source: <http://litterature20.paris-sorbonne.fr/preface-vers-et-prose-page-1-perez-105.html>

<sup>110</sup> Symbolized by the huge influx of African-American expats and travelers living in Paris—artists and writers, but also African-American soldiers who stayed in France after fighting there in World War I—and migrants from the Caribbean and West Africa French colonies as well. Pascal Blanchard, Eric Deroo, Gilles Manceron (eds). *Le Paris Noir*. Hazan, 2011. Other scholars such as Paul Gilroy, Michel Fabre, Tyler Stovall, Brent Edwards, and Tracy Denean Sharpelly-Whiting have done extensive work on this "phenomenon". See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Harvard University Press, 1993; Michel Fabre. *From Harlem to Paris*. University of Illinois Press, 1991; Tyler Stovall. *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012; Brent Edwards. *The Practice of Diaspora:*

also the new Parisian “public idol”: Siki, a Senegal-born boxer named Louis Mbarick Fall, or “Battling Siki” (1897-1925) who moved to France when he was fifteen (and died in the United States, after being shot twice in the back at close range). Ochsé rallies his readers to defy this “infatuation”: “Défions-nous un peu de cet engouement ; nous civilisons ceux que nous avons opprimés et ils apprennent à nous vaincre avec nos propres armes.” After “civilizing” the oppressed colonial blacks, they have begun to use these tools against the Europeans. If the French continue this good treatment, it will end in ruin: “Si l’on continue à les accueillir si bien, ils finiront par venir en mass s’installer chez nous et nous conseilleront de résoudre la crise du logement en nous envoyant les remplacer au Congo. Gare au « Nègre uber alles ! ”<sup>111</sup> Ochsé is anxious about these newly “civilized” blacks taking over Paris. If they keep coming to his city and it will displace the French, who would have to leave for more spacious areas like in the Congo.<sup>112</sup>

As argued by French scholars Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, and Nicolas Bancel in their collection, *Culture coloniale en France: De la Révolution française à nos jours*, at the heart of France’s national history, is its “*culture coloniale*,” One of the arguments purported in this project<sup>113</sup> is the notion of “the Other” as the major anthropological constant, because through “the Other,” boundaries and social groups can be

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*Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Nationalism*. Harvard University Press, 2003; Tracy Whiting. *Bricktop’s Paris: African American Women in Paris Between the Two World Wars*. State University of New York Press, 2015.

<sup>111</sup> Julien Ochsé, "Le miroir de Paris", *Monsieur* no. 41, May 1923: [...] les temps sont changes et les nègres triomphent partout. Il y a les nègres des jazz-bands, dont aucun dancing respectable ne saurait se passer; il y a les nègres danseurs, dont les souplesses animales remportent de véritables triomphes; il y a un ténor nègre ; que dis-je il y a M. Maran le prix Goncourt nègre ; enfin, dans certains magasins de décoration moderne, il y a l’art nègre, la peinture nègre, la sculpture nègre ; enfin, bientôt, si Siki est vainqueur, il y aura Siki, idole du public parisien !

<sup>112</sup> An ironic moment indeed. This desire for “containment” of the African colonies is even present in French designers who were influenced by African styles. In her analysis of African-inspired French clothing, historian Victoria Rovine argues “This analysis of the deployment of fashion in French representation of the cultures of its African colonies reveals the struggle to absorb yet maintain distance from these cultures. More recently, the long history of clothing as a key signifier of a stereotyped African ‘other’ has provided fodder for African fashion designers, who use the same medium to offer a counter-discourse. The apparent ingenuousness of fashion, which is widely perceived to be aimed at nothing more than a season of in the realm of chic, is arguably an important source of its power to make profound yet subtle cultural statements.” See Victoria L. Rovine, “Colonialism’s Clothing: Africa, France and the Deployment of Fashion.” Boston: MIT Press. Design Issues. Volume 25, No. 3 Summer 2009

<sup>113</sup> Which seems to be the French offshoot of post-colonial studies

created.<sup>114</sup> This chapter adds to this project by showing how a colonial civil servant and his readers participate in this colonizer mentality, which is transmitted and consumed through a male fashion magazine.

## CONCLUSION

It is important to emphasize that elegance in the early twentieth century is framed in opposition to the native black African colonial subject. This is key to understanding how former colonies are perceived in the global marketplace of fashion. The way that different regions and cities are perceived within the global imaginary in this moment has a huge role in the competitiveness of various locations in the realm of the fashion industry. By examining the distinctions made between the black African man and the white French men, in terms of patterns of speech, ways of dressing and accessorizing, we see how certain colonial norms, attitudes, and speech become transmitted and valued within frame of Western civilization. With the advent of open markets and international trade, the global market is a competition between different cities and spaces vying for the attention of consumers, investors, and various other stakeholders. Not only does this chapter reveal the early of how the image of the African colonial world is placed in opposition to elegant style, it also sheds light on the limits of the elegance as an aesthetic western construction embedded within the power structure of the fashion industry.

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<sup>114</sup> « Dans toute formation sociale, l'Autre est une constante anthropologique majeure. D'une part, parce que les figures de l'extériorité sont les miroirs par lesquels se fondent, se transforment, s'affermissent ou se réaffirment la substance et les frontières et des identités collectives...D'autre part, les figures de l'Autre sont des éléments indispensables et moteurs de toutes formes de mobilisations sociales...elles inaugurent ou consolident des réseaux de sociabilité, structurent ou restructurent de groupes, mettent en relation (relation d'opposition ou d'unité) des fractions sociales. » Bancel and Blanchard, "Civiliser: l'invention de l'indigène" in *Culturel coloniale en France. De la Révolution Française à nos jours*, 207

## Chapter 4: Hollywood and elegant moving bodies

### INTRODUCTION

Hollywood catalyzed the United States of America's rise to power in the global fashion arena. As is argued by historian Pascal Ory, the United States film industry would become a prime example of the post-World War I culture and economy of Americanization upon entering the European cinema market.<sup>115</sup> Because American films were sold much more cheaply and became so popular, France enforced a quota of one French film production and screening in French cinemas per every seven foreign films imported. Historian Victoria de Grazia writes how "economically, motion pictures were far and away the most remunerative cultural export. By the 1930s they ranked fourth in value among all goods sold abroad. And geographically, American film was the United States' most widely circulated commodity, second only to Gillette razor blades and Ford cars."<sup>116</sup> *Monsieur* reveals how films were also used for non-entertainment purposes. The majority of scholarly work on this early international influence of American film has focused on white American celebrities,<sup>117</sup> and recently, scholars have begun focusing on international black American celebrities<sup>118</sup>; even more recently, on international Asian-American celebrities.<sup>119</sup> The context of racist anti-Asian laws that discriminated against Japanese immigrants in the United States makes it especially interesting to study the success of Japanese-American celebrities. While most images of celebrities within *Monsieur* were white Americans, we will focus on the exceptional case of a Japanese-American celebrity named Sessue Hayakawa (1889-1973) and how one of his most famous films, *The Cheat* (1915) (or *Forfaiture* in France), was used in

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<sup>115</sup> Ory, Pascal "Americanisation: Le Mot, le chose, et leurs spectres." Marcowitz, Reiner. *Nationale Identität und transnationale Einflüsse: Amerikanisierung, Europäisierung und Globalisierung in Frankreich nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Walter de Gruyter, 2007.

<sup>116</sup> Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006, 288.

<sup>117</sup> See Vanessa R. Schwartz's work, for instance, which includes *It's so French! Hollywood, Paris and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007 who looks at films including *An American in Paris*, *Gigi*, and *Funny Face*.

<sup>118</sup> Louis Chude Sokei, *The Last "Darkie": Bert Williams, Black-on-Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora*. Duke University Press, 2006

<sup>119</sup> See Anne Anlin Cheng's article on the films of Chinese-American Anna May Wong, "Shine: On Race, Glamour, and the Modern." *PMLA*, Vol. 126, no. 4, October 2011, 1022-1021 (20).

*Monsieur* to portray elegant ways of moving and carrying the body. But Hayakawa's fame not only reveals the new role of Hollywood in defining elegance, but also how his films were utilized to embody elegance.

## The muscular body

Within the growing field of French masculinity,<sup>120</sup> the body has become an important site to study performances of masculinity during the interwar.<sup>121</sup> This work has often focused on the physical culture of exercising and sports as a way to deal with the after-effects of World War I on male identity. And indeed, there is a very strong presence of physical culture throughout *Monsieur*—numerous advertisements for male corset-like contraptions, athletes<sup>122</sup>, exercise classes<sup>123</sup>, and articles about muscles,<sup>124</sup> exercising,<sup>125</sup> and the influence of sportswear.<sup>126</sup> One article, for instance, claims, “Les virtuoses du gros muscle nous

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<sup>120</sup> Georges Falconnet et Nadine Lefaucheur, *La Fabrication des males*, Le Seuil, 1975. looks at the history of masculinity after the 1970s; Elisabeth Badinter, *XY. De l'identité masculine* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992) looks at male identity at work and at the home, particularly in terms of sexual preference. Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe (eds.), *France Masculinities: History, Politics and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Robert Nye, ‘Degeneration, neurasthenia and the culture of sport in belle époque France’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 17 (1982), 1; Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*. New York and Oxford, 1993.; Amy Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender Anxiety and the Aesthetics of Post-World War I Reconstruction in France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2007); and Judith Surkis, *Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Cornell University Press, 2006) focus on white French masculinity, while Jennifer Boittin's *Colonial Metropolis, The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (University of Nebraska, 2010) has a chapter entitled “Reverse Exoticism & Masculinity: The Cultural Polics of Race Relations,” on 112-133 dealing with how black men living in Paris negotiated their masculinities among white women.

<sup>121</sup> Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France*, (Oxford University Press, 2012). Georges Vigarello, “Virilités sportives” in Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, Georges Vigarello (ed), *Histoire de la virilité (tomes 1-3)*. Le Seuil 2011.

<sup>122</sup> “Les Athlètes Suédois à Anvers,” *Monsieur* no. 7, July 1920

<sup>123</sup> “L’homme complet et l’école de Joinville” *Monsieur* no. 15, March 1921

<sup>124</sup> J. Péladan “L’esthétique du muscle,” *Monsieur* no. 35, December 1923; D. Strohl, “l’elegance et le muscle,” *Monsieur* no. 21, September 1921; “Polémiques sur la beauté masculine,” *Monsieur* no. 32, August 1922

<sup>125</sup> Georges Lerousseau “La culture Physique,” *Monsieur* no. 3, February 1920

<sup>126</sup> “Chemises de Soie pour la Mer et les Sports” and “Idées nouvelles pour des Costumes de Sports” *Monsieur* no. 6, June 1920; André de Fouquières, “Le Sport a transformé le Dandysme,” *Monsieur* no. 11, November 1920



apparaissent comme des phénomènes plus ou moins sympathiques, mais dépourvus de toute influence quand à l'établissement d'une moyenne physique avantageuse pour la race."<sup>127</sup> Large muscles were both beautiful and advantageous for the French race, and even hands were subject to scrutiny: "Vous devez prendre un soin très grand et de vos ongles et de vos mains car celles-ci jouent un rôle aussi important que la figure... Enfin on lit dans les mains comme on lit dans les yeux, et ce sera déjà quelque chose si nous y voyons le souci de l'hygiène et de l'élégance."<sup>128</sup> Having beautiful hands was just as important as having a slender silhouette—similarly to the eyes, the hands are also windows to the soul.

Figure 8: Advertisement for exercise classes and a stomach slenderizing belt from *Monsieur* 1920

<sup>127</sup> J. Péladan, "L'esthétique du muscle," *Monsieur* no. 36, December 1923

<sup>128</sup> F. d'Hautreliu, "La tête et la main," *Monsieur* no. 53, May 1924



**Figure 9 Men exercising at a fitness camp. From “L’homme complet et l’école de Joinville”  
*Monsieur* no. 15, March 1921**

Many of these new beauty ideals began to be propagated through film. American celebrities often profiled within *Monsieur* like Gareth Hughes<sup>129</sup> (1894-1965) and Charles Ray<sup>130</sup> (1891-1943), helped define masculinity and male beauty ideals with their bodies and faces.<sup>131</sup> But the most famous among these American actors is Sessue Hayakawa. Born in Japan, Hayakawa is known for many “firsts”: one of the first American celebrities, the first sex symbol of Hollywood,<sup>132</sup> and the first international Asian-American celebrity. While he was just as famous as the comic Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977) and actor Douglas Fairbanks (1883-1939), he has been essentially forgotten in the history of early American cinema most likely due to America’s history of racial discrimination against the Japanese.<sup>133</sup> In this photo shoot of Hayakawa (figure 4), we see how he embodies these ideals of being slim and muscular. The photos of Hayakawa are all outside, either playing catch or in swimsuit. He is

<sup>129</sup> “M. Gareth Hughes: un de plus élégants protagonistes du cinema américain,” *Monsieur* no. 37. January 1922

<sup>130</sup> “M. Charles Ray: Un de plus populaires acteurs de films américains,” *Monsieur* no. 24, December 1922.

<sup>131</sup> “Les deux plus beaux garçons des Etats-Unis,” *Monsieur* no. 34, October 1922:

<sup>132</sup> Daisuke Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent cinema and transnational stardom*. Duke University Press, 2007.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* Also see 1924 Immigration Act which excluded all Asian immigrants from entering the United States and Roger Daniels’s *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962. 2nd edition. 1977.

carrying a bucket, catching a baseball in the air, winding up for a pitch, or standing on top of a wooden pillar of a boat.



Figure 4: Article about Sessue Hayakawa from *Monsieur* no. 44, August 1924. Source: Bibliothèque des arts décoratifs.

But it was also important to know how to move and carry this muscular, though lean body. Physical comportment was an important topic in *Monsieur*: “A vos gestes, à votre pas,

à vos mains, jusqu'en vos cils, l'on reconnaît si vous êtes bien élevé et si vous avez l'air du monde.”<sup>134</sup> The image of being well bred and worldly relied on gestures and facial expression. This presence relied on ancient models and looked to royalty like Louis XIV for guidance. But these older models had to adapt to the novel context of post-World War I: “Le difficile est de concilier l'ancien style avec la facilité et la bonhomie de nos jours. L'âge des ronds de jambe est passé, et celui de la tête penchée. Vous mêlez à tous vos raffinements la simplicité résolue d'un jouer de ballon.”<sup>135</sup> Times were different and the ways that Louis XIV moved his body—saluting his maids and greeting his servants—were somewhat outdated. Many families had experienced extreme economic instability during and after the war,<sup>136</sup> and it had ruined much of the former aristocratic milieu. At the same time, it also led to new and better job opportunities to the working classes and blossoming socioeconomic characters such as “the businessmen, the revered athletes, the movie stars, the new rich cosmopolitans, the worldly dancers, the speed-long young bourgeois, the son of decadent families, and the avant-garde artists.”<sup>137</sup> The key to adapting to this new social context is reconciling older, more traditional styles with the newer “bonhomie.” But where would the inspiration for these compromises come from?

## Sessue Hayakawa

Sessue Hayakawa became a “full-fledged star” after the release of the 1915 *Forfaiture*, which was produced by Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company, directed by Cecil B. DeMille, and starred renowned stage actress Fannie Ward.<sup>138</sup> In *The Cheat*, Hayakawa plays a rich Japanese art dealer on Long Island who offers money to a cash-strapped white middleclass woman in exchange for her body. When the white woman tries to return the money, the Japanese art collector brands his mark on her shoulder and the woman shoots him in the shoulder. The movie ends in court with the audience attacking the rich Japanese art dealer. While the star of *The Cheat* was Fannie Ward, most reviewers and audiences were

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<sup>134</sup> Philinte, “Le bon choix des mouvements” *Monsieur* no. 25, January 1922

<sup>135</sup> Philinte, “Le bon choix des mouvements” *Monsieur* no. 25, January 1922

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* 143

<sup>137</sup> *Op. cit.* Chenoune, p. 143: « ...de nouveaux personnages masculins entrent en piste : l'homme d'affaires, le sportif adulé, la vedette de l'écran, le nouveau riche cosmopolite, le danseur mondain, le jeune bourgeois épris de vitesse, le fils de famille décadent et l'artiste d'avant-garde. »

<sup>138</sup> Daisuke, kindle location 481

actually more impressed by Hayakawa's performance. After *The Cheat*, he became an overnight sensation not just in the United States, but also in Europe and in Japan.<sup>139</sup> The following review of *Forfaiture* in *Monsieur* reveals how Hayakawa was the central focus of this early Hollywood film and was still discussed in 1924, which was eight years after its first screening in France:

*Forfaiture* révéla au monde le talent unique de Sessue Hayakawa. C'est, de tous les acteurs d'écran, celui [Hayakawa] qui a porté au plus haut point les perfections du jeu sobre et des expressions résumées et un froncement de sourcils, et une moue à peine esquissée.<sup>140</sup>

*Forfaiture* was Hayakawa's entrance into the international scene. Among all the actors on screen, he had the most perfect performance, because of how he moved his face to express himself.

In France, *The Cheat* premiered at the Omnia Pathé Cinema in 1916 as *Forfaiture* and was immediately a huge success. Hayakawa's performances were so inspiring that they were even considered "a new form of acting." It led to the concept *photogenie*, which describe "the unique aesthetic qualities that motion picture photography brings to the subject it films," and would become an important part of the French impressionist film movement.<sup>141</sup> Film scholar Emmanuel Plasseraud writes how *Forfaiture*'s popularity was exemplary of many other American films during this time period. But this film was especially special, because for a wide range of influential French figures such as "Colette, Moussinac, L'Herbier, Jules Romain, Georges Charensol ou Cocteau, ce film de Cecil B. de Mille [*Forfaiture*] fut l'événement qui déclencha la naissance de leur intérêt pour le cinéma."<sup>142</sup> Among these figures, Colette was the first to become interested in this film due to Sessue Hayakawa's performance,<sup>143</sup> and would excitedly exclaim :

This Asiatic artist whose powerful immobility is eloquence itself. Let our aspiring ciné-actors go to see how, when his face is mute, his hand carries on the flow of his thought. Let them take to heart the menace and disdain in a motion of his eyebrow and how, in that his life is running out with his blood, without shuddering, without convulsively grimacing, with merely

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<sup>139</sup> Daisuke, kindle location 520

<sup>140</sup> *Monsieur* no. 44, August 1924.

<sup>141</sup> Daisuke, kindle location 549

<sup>142</sup> Emmanuel Plasseraud. *L'Art des foules: Théories de la réception filmique comme phénomène collectif en France (1908-1930)*. Presses Université Septentrion, 2011.

<sup>143</sup> See *Colette et la cinema*, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2005, 289-292

the progressive petrification of his Buddha's mask and the ecstatic darkening of his eyes.<sup>144</sup>

The way Hayakwa moved his hands, eyebrows, eyes, and even in the moments where he did not move, were educational images for aspiring French film actors. The ways that he moved his hands and his face were especially effective communicators in this era of silent of film. Even the movements of his eyebrows expressed his “menace and disdain.” The darkening of his eyes and his downward spiral into violence all showed in his facial expressions.



**Figure 10: Sessue Hayakwa in *The Cheat* (1915), from Classic Movie Hub**

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<sup>144</sup> Colette, *Colette at the Movies*, 19-20 quoted in Daisuke. Kindle Locations 538-541

In addition to aspiring film actors, the movie screen would also become a textbook for how people dressed in daily life: “C’est d’Amérique ou d’Angleterre que nous viennent les meilleures leçons. L’écran est un merveilleux journal de modes.”<sup>145</sup> Considering how New York and London were already major fashion capitals during this time, it is not surprising that American and English films would also be major sources of inspiration for French elegance. The advent of film in the early twentieth century meant that images of elegance would not just mean still-like photographs, but also moving images. The theatre was certainly still an important site for studying ongoing fashion trends at the time. But these reviews were generally limited to what the actors wore. Film, on the other hand, allowed viewers to see facial features and gestures.

Considering the wide-range influence of *Forfaiture* in the French world, it would also be discussed in *Monsieur*, particularly, in terms of elegant comportment. In “Théorie de la lenteur,” French critic and essayist Gérard Bauer<sup>146</sup> (1888-1967) proposes that moving slowly is the key to an elegant presence. “Lenteur” is the secret to the majestic presence kings and reveals how life is “une richesse limitée.”<sup>147</sup> But what did that look like? “C’est qui convient c’est une très légère affectation de nonchalance, un regard lent sur les êtres mais qui ne s’arrête pas, un regard qui n’a pas l’air de voir, un flegme qui ne semble pas étudié.” It was a certain mood of nonchalance, a certain look, and a specific “flegme” that had to appear natural and unstudied. But words are limited in describing the style of how a body moves, so he turns to film as a common visual language. He advises his readers to “Observez à la scène ou sur l’écran les interprètes qui ‘tiennent le public’ comme on dit, ce sont des artistes lents.” The movie screen even reveals how even the most captivating characters are the ones that move slowly with “lenteur.” Bauer uses Hayakawa’s performance in *Forfaiture* to illustrate his point and even goes as far as suggesting that Hayakawa’s main attraction is, in fact, his “lenteur”:

Admirez comme longue tirade semble moins longue dès lors qu’on ne la précipite pas et cherchez un peu avec moi quel a été le premier attrait de Sessue Hayakawa dans *Forfaiture* : une lenteur d’expression dans les regards et dans les gestes, un calme dans l’attitude qui mettait tout de suite en valeur le moindre empressement et le plus mince sursaut de l’être.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> René Bizet, “L’élégance masculine au cinéma,” *Monsieur* no. 13, January 1920

<sup>146</sup> He was apparently the grandson of Alexander Dumas

<sup>147</sup> Gérard Bauer, “Théorie de la lenteur,” *Monsieur* no. 15, March 1921.

<sup>148</sup> Gérard Bauer, “Théorie de la lenteur,” *Monsieur* no. 15, March 1921.

For Bauer, Hayakawa's performance in *Forfaiture* was the ideal model for this majestic, kingly style of "lenteur." In this film he has a specific way of looking and moving that Bauer thinks his readers should imitate. The indescribable calm in Hayakawa's attitude reveals no "empressement." Hayakawa's majestic presence also fit his character as a wealthy Japanese antique art dealing from Long Island (a place that has already received special consideration for being a magnet of elegant people),<sup>149</sup> which is also at the intersection of "l'ancien style" and "la facilité et la bonhomie"<sup>150</sup> that was key to elegantly adapting to this new moment after World War I.

## CONCLUSION

From examining Hayakawa's presence in *Monsieur*, we have seen how early Hollywood films were used not only for entertainment, but also for sources of inspiration for an elegant lifestyle. Sessue Hayakawa's movements on screen inspired the cinematic concept of *photogenie* and essentially became a textbook for aspiring French actors. The new technology of cinema allowed closer viewing access to gestures and facial expressions on screen. While the theatre was also a source of inspiration for fashionable outfits, the screen of the cinema meant that viewers could see small movements, like how Hayakawa moved his eyebrows and mouth in *Forfaiture*. Film was a public observational space during this moment that was used to communicate bodily styles of movement. Consuming film also meant imitating certain gestures, movements, and expressions whether in the realm of film acting or the aspiring elegant man. But while Hollywood helped cement the United State's powerful presence in the global imaginary, the propagation of cultural commodities is not enough to become a fashion capital. The popularity of commodities from "The East" (explored in the next chapter), attests to this.

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<sup>149</sup> "C'est surtout Long Island qui attire les gens élégants en ce moment et qui vide la métropole de son élite à chaque fin de semaine principalement. C'est que Long Island offre l'idéal spectacle de la vie élégante à la campagne." from Jack Simson. Lettre d'Amérique: La Saison d'été à New York. *Monsieur* 1920, 231.

<sup>150</sup> Philinte, "Le bon choix des mouvements" *Monsieur* no. 25, January 1922



## Chapter 5: Elegant Eastern Commodities

Hayakawa's fame in Paris was connected to his wife's aunt—Madame Sadayakko (1892-1946), a Japanese actress who was also extremely popular in Paris.<sup>151</sup> Without Sadayakko and his wife, Tsuru Aoki, Hayakawa would have never started acting or eventually create his production company. Sadayakko performed a more modernized Japanese theatre in the 1900 Exposition in Paris with her husband Kawakami. Her performances were extremely popular—the sculptor August Rodin was a huge fan and Guerlain created a perfume called “Yacco.” Sadayakko's fame was part of a longstanding history of French fascination with “The Orient” or the East. Historian Valerie Steele writes how the West blithely combined various Non-European, like that of China and Japan, to produce “a fantastic exoticism”<sup>152</sup> that made up the Orient. While it began as a form of admiration for the East, this exoticism began to change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With the advent of European imperialism and colonialism the Orient was “increasingly demonized.” China, for instance, “was re-imagined as a decadent and vicious country.”<sup>153</sup> (The devious, calculating Japanese art collector that Sessue Hayakawa plays in his famous film is another example of this vicious stereotype). Despite these more negative views of the Orient, the West was still very influenced by Eastern sartorial style. The great French couturier Paul Poiret, for example, was extremely inspired by Japanese kimonos, Chinese embroidery, and Middle Eastern dress. He would become a symbol of this “orientalist aesthetic,” which could mean the “eighteenth century *chinoiserie*, or the post-Napoleonic interest in things Islamic, or the late-nineteenth-century *japonisme*.”<sup>154</sup> This “orientalist aesthetic” would also appear in the pages of *Monsieur*. These commodities from the East—perfumes, kimonos, and Mah-Jong—were extremely popular in cultivating an elegant lifestyle, and reveal how these commodities entered into the marketplace.

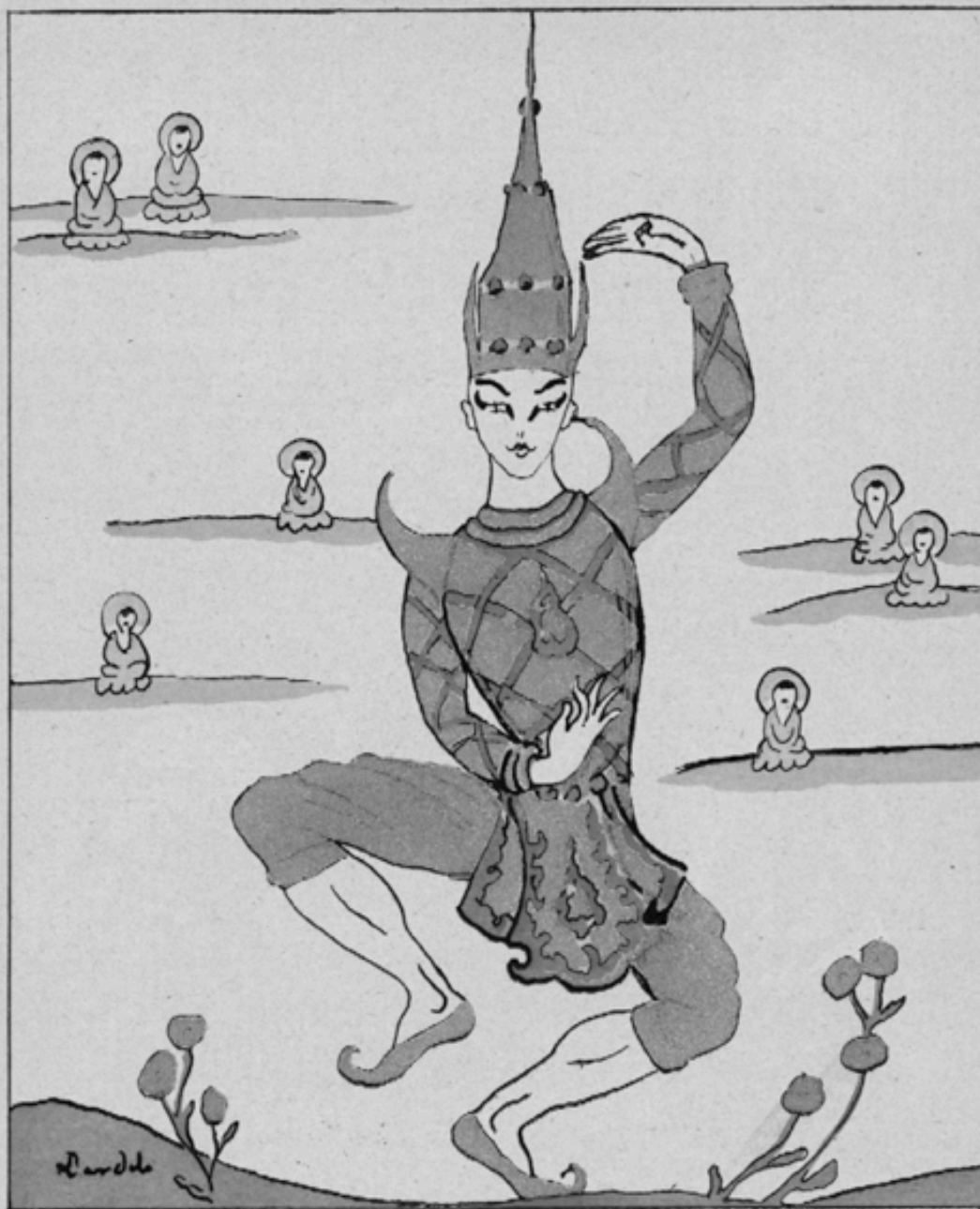
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<sup>151</sup> Daisuke Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent cinema and transnational stardom*. Duke University Press, 2007, 24-25.

<sup>152</sup> Valerie Steele and Johns S. Major, *China Chic: East meets West*, Yale University Press, 1997

<sup>153</sup> Steele and Major, 72

<sup>154</sup> Kenneth E. Silver, “Forbidden Fruits: The Perfumes of Rosine,” in Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton, *Poiret*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007,



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est un danseur des plus réputés de Stockholm et de Copenhague. Paris aura bientôt l'occasion d'apprécier son talent et ce début ne sera pas l'un des moindres attraits de la saison qui sera, plus qu'aucune autre ne le fut jamais, la saison de la danse.

*(Composition de Nilu de Dardel.)*

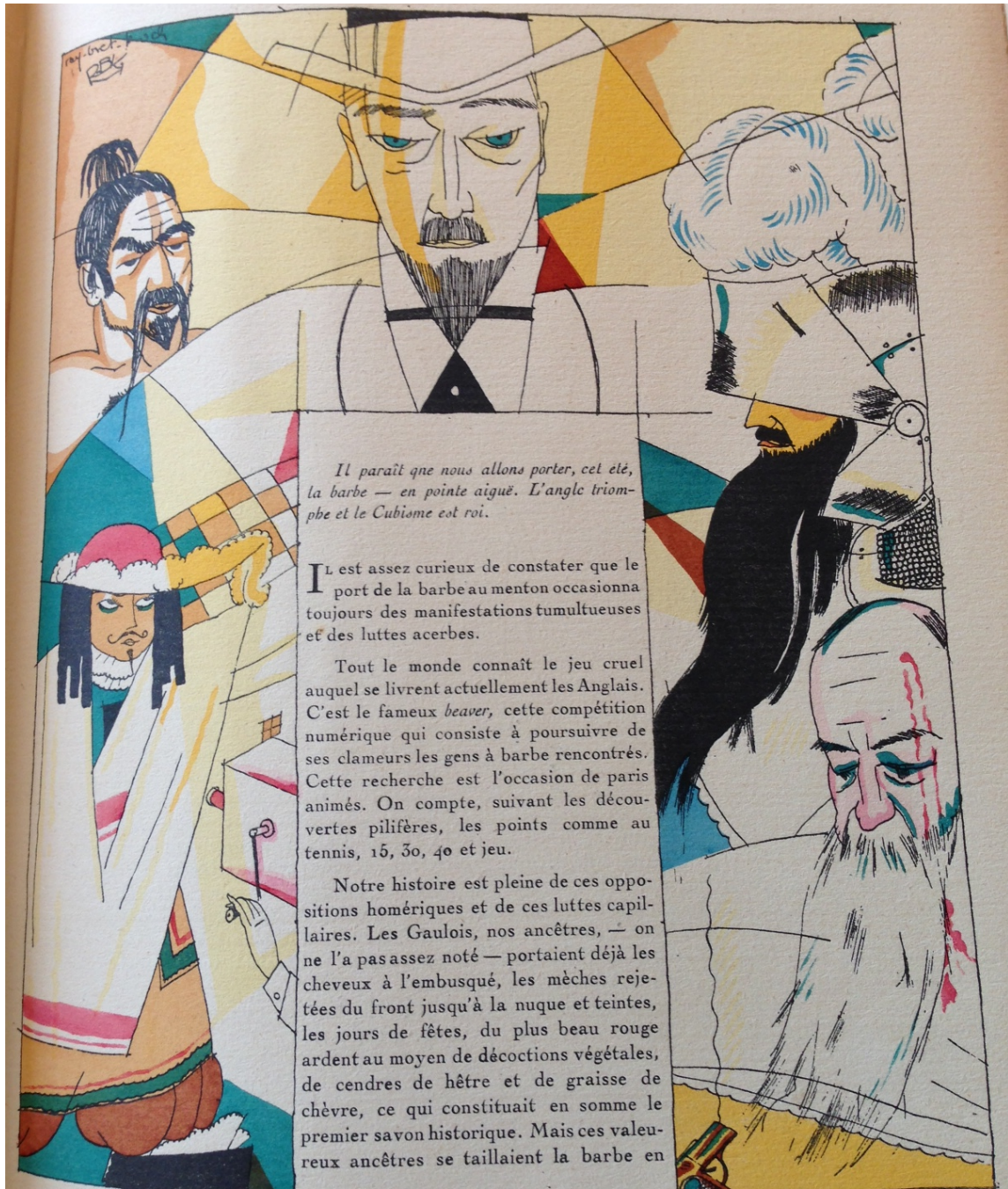


Figure 12 Beards from the orient being sources of inspiration. From "La Barbe," *Monsieur* no. 56-57, August-September 1924

## Kimonos

After Sadayakko left Paris, Japanese-style dresses became extremely fashionable in Paris.”<sup>155</sup> Sadayakko always wore a kimono at the parties that she attended, and this would make Japanese-style dresses extremely fashionable in Paris: “Des peintres affectionnent le kimono japonais quand ils sont at home, même s'ils ne son pas du Japon comme Foujita.”<sup>156</sup> While artists would wear these Japanese kimonos as loungewear, parts of the kimono would become integrated into French loungewear advertised in *Monsieur*. The earliest places to sell these *robes japonaises* was the House of Babani,<sup>157</sup> a business founded in 1894 by a Middle Eastern merchant-turned-couturier Vitaldi Babani.<sup>158</sup> Babani had an extremely popular fashion house on the Boulevard Haussmann, which sold not just *robes japonaises*, but also arts, crafts, and other clothing from China, Japan, India, and Turkey.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> “Le Peintre dans son atelier” *Monsieur* no. 52, April 1924

<sup>157</sup> Akiko Fukai, “Japonism in Fashion,,” *Japonism in Fashion*, Tokyo: Kyoto Costume Institute. Link: [http://www.kci.or.jp/research/dresstudy/pdf/e\\_Fukai\\_Japonism\\_in\\_Fashion.pdf](http://www.kci.or.jp/research/dresstudy/pdf/e_Fukai_Japonism_in_Fashion.pdf)

<sup>158</sup> González Asenjo, Elvira. *Fortuny vistiendo a Clotilde*. Spain: Museo Sorolla. p 21-22.

<sup>159</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hummel. See "Babani Perfumes", Blog, *Elizabeth Arden Perfumes*, 2013, accessed May 11, 2016, <http://ardenperfumes.blogspot.fr/p/babani-perfumes.html>.

# POUR CHEZ SOI



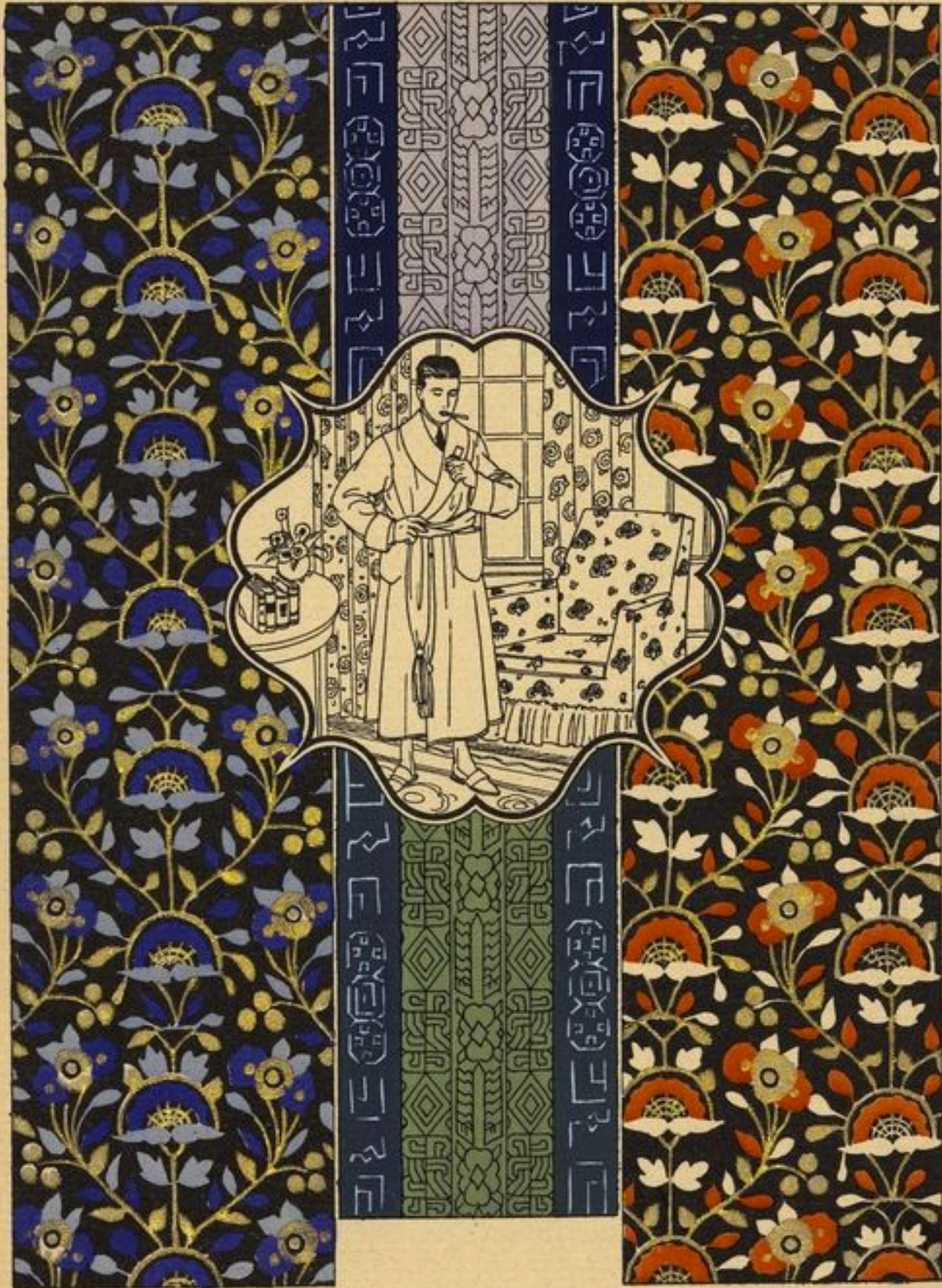
Vêtement d'intérieur en per laine gris souris.  
Veste à forme croisée avec col châle et parements satin gris violacé, boutons et passe-poil au pantalon en satin même couleur.

Vêtement d'intérieur forme pyjama en tissu flanelle très souple gris foncé. Manches légèrement kimono. L'ensemble de la vareuse est très ample et blouse sur une ceinture de tresse de soie noire terminée par des glands. Poches larges et appliquées. Le col est échancré sans revers et bordé, ainsi que les parements, d'une bande de velours noir.

(Dessin de Marc-Luc.)

Figure 13: Advertisement of man wearing kimono-like sleeves from *Monsieur* no. 30, June 1922

DES TISSUS NOUVEAUX



MODELES DE M. RODIER.

Figure 14: Advertisement for fabrics with this Orientalist aesthetic. From *Monsieur* 1924.

## Perfumes

In 1919, Babani would also enter into the perfume business through his son, a couturier Maurice Babani,<sup>160</sup> Perfume is perhaps the perfect entry into exploring how this “orientalist aesthetic” became intertwined with daily practices of elegance. The way perfume has been sold, according to historian Eugénie Briot, has increasingly relied on the fantasy or the marketing of the bottle. Much inspiration for these perfume bottles came from this orientalist aesthetic, such as in the shape and the designs of the bottles. The elegant fragrances of Guerlain for example, were often bottled in Japanese porcelain. The packaging of these bottles would often add to the allure of these perfumes, which were more expensive the more exotic and rare it was. At the end of the nineteenth century, Briot writes how “Le recours à une matière première prétendument fort rare ou d’origine exotique, dont les vertus pourront être illustrées et expliquées à plaisir, constitue l’un des artifices les plus prisés.”<sup>161</sup> Constructing this aura of the exotic or the rare was one of the most popular tricks that perfumeries used to increase the price of their products.

While many of these perfumeries would evoke images ranging from the antiquity to the eighteenth century, the most popular form of inspiration was “les orientalismes sous toutes leurs formes.”<sup>162</sup> For instance, at the end of the nineteenth century, the perfumery Ringaud established his reputation on the exotic ingredients that he used in his perfumes.<sup>163</sup> While he had more traditional scents, like Lily and white heliotrope, for the more classic clients, his most prized ingredients came from a potpourri of places all over Asia, like “ylang-ylang de Manille, kanaga du Japon, champacca de Lahore, melati de Chine, céfiro de Perse”<sup>164</sup> Ringaud also created lines for his products that included oils, lotions, soap, and cold creams for each of these exotic scents.<sup>165</sup> Vitaldi Babani would do something similar with his perfumery. Its name—Babani: Parfums d’Orient et d’Extrême-Orient—evoked the Orientalist

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<sup>160</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hummel. See “Babani Perfumes”, Blog, *Elizabeth Arden Perfumes*, 2013, accessed May 11, 2016, <http://ardenperfumes.blogspot.fr/p/babani-perfumes.html>.

<sup>161</sup> Eugénie Briot. *La Fabrique des parfums: Naissance d’une industrie de luxe*, Paris, Vendémiaire 266-267, and she also cites R. Lheureux-Icard’s *Les Parfumeurs entre 1860 et 1910 d’après les marques, dessins et modèles déposés à Paris* for more information about « des étiquettes de parfumerie »

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 267

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 205, 261-262.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 205, 261-262.

aesthetic he sold in his fashion house. These perfumes were especially popular with the Canadian-born American businesswoman Elizabeth Arden (1878-1966), who bought these perfumes from Babani and sold them throughout her salons, introducing them to Americans.

Advertisements for Babani's perfumery that appeared all throughout *Monsieur* read like travel guides into the "mysterious" Asian cities that included of Delhi, Manila, and Vietnam:

Dans votre home et sur vous-mêmes, créez cette personnalité qui caractérise la femme de goût. L'*Ambre de Delhi* est une senteur exquise de fumoir discret et de fourrures chaudes. Le *Yasmak* est d'une fraîcheur sans égale, c'est un véritable secret de Harems...Le *Ligéia* qui vient de Manille, dans son flacon de laque poudré d'or, est mystérieux comme celle dont il évoque le souvenir... Le *Daimo* est léger et subtil, mais sa ténacité est incomparable... *Fleurs d'Annam* est un mélange savant concentré de mille fleurs d'Annam... On les sent toutes on n'en définit aucune... Le *Ming* est très frais.<sup>166</sup>

Whether inside the home or directly on the self, these perfumes helped construct the personality of taste. These scents were warm, mysterious, and subtle, and these features would reflect upon the person or home wearing them. One could buy twelve different perfumes in a "coffret chinois rouge et or" for ninety francs, or for sixty-five francs, his most expensive perfume--"Ligéia," was a perfume that came from Manila. The packaging and material of these perfumes all reflect an orientalist aesthetic that he was so known for. The French artist and business owner, Maurice Dépinoix, famous for using black glass in his creations, most likely produced some of these bottles on this Babani advertisement frequently printed in the pages of *Monsieur*.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> *Monsieur* no. 37, January 1923

<sup>167</sup> "Consultation | Museu Del Perfum", *Museudelperfum.Net*, last modified 2016, accessed May 11, 2016, <http://www.museudelperfum.net/?q=fr/consultation/createurs/consultation&id=90156>.

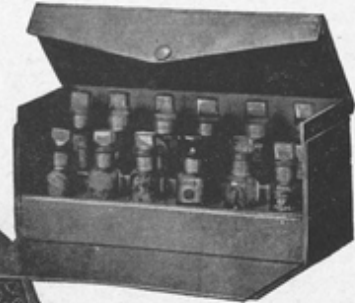


# BABANI

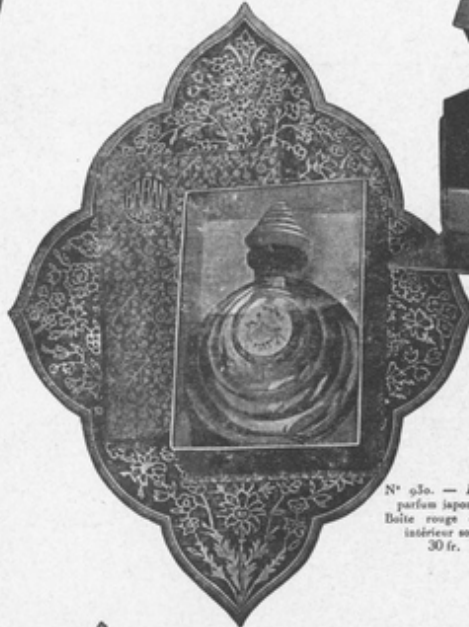
PARFUMS D'ORIENT ET  
D'EXTREME ORIENT



Série 30.  
N° 210 Saïgon. — N° 120 Ambre de Delhi. — N° 150 Afghani.  
Flacon plat boîte or. 35 fr.



N° 1003. — Ambre de Delhi, Saïgon, Afghani, Rose Gallienne, Lipia, Sïgoun, Oeillet de Japon, Yamak, Ming, Jasmie de Corée, Daimo et Fleurs d'Annam. Nos 12 parfums ci-dessous dans un coffret chinois rouge et or. 90 fr.



Série 31  
N° 151. — Ambre de Delhi, parfum hindou.  
N° 231. — Saïgon.  
N° 531. — Afghani.  
Flacon forme boule, boîte or. 55 fr.

N° 930. — Daimo, parfum japonais.  
Boîte rouge et or, intérieur soie.  
30 fr.



N° 631  
Fleurs d'Annam, mille fleurs d'Orient. Ecrin argent, intérieur satin mauve. 55 fr.



DANS votre home et sur vous-mêmes, créez cette personnalité qui caractérise la femme de goût. Le "Ambre de Delhi" est une senteur exquise de fumoir discret et de fourrures chaudes. Le "Yamak" est d'une fraîcheur sans égale, c'est un véritable secret des Harems... Le "Lipia" qui vient de Manille, dans son flacon de laque poudré d'or, est mystérieux comme celle dont il évoque le souvenir... Le "Daimo" est léger et subtil, mais sa ténacité est incomparable... "Fleurs d'Annam" est un mélange savant concentré de mille fleurs d'Annam... On les sent toutes on n'en définit aucune... Le "Ming" est très frais.



N° 1020. — Lipia, parfum de Manille.  
Flacon d'origine laqué or. Ecrin or, intérieur jade. 60 fr.



N° 80 Boîte de poudre. Poudre parfumée à l'Ambre de Delhi. Au choix les six teintes suivantes: rose, écru clair, naturelle, blanche et rachel. 9 fr.



Série 1509  
N° 109 Lipia. — N° 631 Fleurs d'Annam. — N° 63 Daimo. — N° 1509 Jasmie de Corée. — N° 179 Oeillet de Japon. — N° 350 Rose Gallienne. — N° 180 Narcisse d'Or. — N° 107 Ming. — N° 160 Souassli. \* Flacon chinois, boîte or et argent. 35 fr.

NOS PARFUMS sont en vente dans tous les GRANDS MAGASINS et PARFUMEURS

MAURICE BABANI

Vente en Gros : 65, Rue d'Anjou - PARIS

Téléphone : Cent. 45-12 — R. C. Seine 165-064

Agent Exclusif pour les Etats-Unis : DE CAMERON, 681, Fifth Avenue, NEW-YORK

Figure 15: Advertisement for Babani Perfume. Source: *Monsieur* no. 54-57, etc.

Another perfumery that was also frequently advertised in *Monsieur* is Les Perfumes Bichara. This perfumery was founded in 1896 by Beirut-born Syrian chemist Bichara Malhame, who came to Paris in 1895<sup>168</sup>. Bichara marketed himself as “The Syrian Perfumer”<sup>169</sup> and his advertisements would often claim “Allah est grand et Bichara est son parfumeur.”<sup>170</sup> Before being famous his “parfums enivrants” and “parfums troublants,” Bichara was first known for his successful hair dye called “Extrait de Henne Bichara.” The commercial success of this hair dye allowed him to expand his business into luxury perfumes. This success explains why in his advertisements, there are often images of a man pulling the long hair of a woman with the phrase “Comment Bichara saisit la fortune.”

Bichara became even more successful after the famous French stage and film actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) became his muse and endorsed his perfumes, specifying them to be her favorite perfumes. In addition to Bernhardt, Bichara’s clients also included poet and dramatist Edmond Rostand (1868-1918), who called Bichara “the poet of perfume”; musician Gabriel Faure (1845-1924); style icon, writer, and performer Colette (1873-1954), who called Bichara her “kind alchemist friend”<sup>171</sup>; and actor Edouard de Max (1869-1924). Bichara’s success would grow to an international level—he would supply the Royal Egyptian Court and would open a branch in London. Bichara was also known for personalizing the scents for various celebrities. He used the character and personality of these clients to inspire his personalized blend of ingredients.

In addition to perfumes and hair dye, Bichara also sold eye cosmetics, which included one called Cillanta, which helped with “charme, beauté, santé des yeux” and Mokoheul, a kohl eye makeup that was very popular in the 1920s. Eau des Roses de Syrie was a skin brightener, which freshened the skin. According to Bichara’s daughter, Rose Malhame, the names that Bichara chose for his perfumes, like *Nirvana*, show how perfume was “meant to give a sense of well-being and self-abandon” Among the various perfumes listed on this advertisement, Myrbhana (1913); Syriana (1913); Yahvahna (1913); Nirvana (1913 and was still sold in 1939); Ambre (1913-post 1939); Chypre (1922 still sold in 1939); Liliana (1921); and Cabiria (1921), *Myrbaha* (1913) was especially known for its beautiful bottle.

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<sup>168</sup> The Lowell Sun, 1971 as cited by Grace Elizabeth Hummel in her blog

<sup>169</sup> Most of this information about the Babani company comes from vintage perfume specialist, Grace Elizabeth Hummel. See “Babani Perfumes”, Blog, *Elizabeth Arden Perfumes*, 2013, accessed June 9, 2016, <http://cleopatrasboudoir.blogspot.fr/2013/06/in-this-guide-i-have-listed-various.html>

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

LES PARFUMS  
**BICHARA**  
PARIS -- 10, Chaussée d'Antin -- PARIS  
FOURNISSEUR DE LA COUR ROYALE D'ESPAGNE

Téléphone :  
Louvre 27-95

LONDRES  
14, Grafton Street


**PARFUMS ENIVRANTS**

---

:: NIRVANA ::  
:: YAVAHNA ::  
:: MYRBAHA ::  
SAKOUNTALA  
ROSE DE SYRIE

---

*Charme du regard -- Beauté des yeux*  
**MOKOHEUL ET CILLANA**



**PARFUMS TROUBLANTS**

---

:: SYRIANA ::  
:: LILIANA ::  
:: CABIRIA ::  
:: AMBRE ::  
:: CHYPRE ::

---

*Santé des yeux -- Trésor de la peau*  
**EAU DE ROSES DE SYRIE**

Compagnons, familiers de mes jours, Biche, Ara.  
Jardins clos, embaumé comme le cœur d'un temple.  
Vous évoquez les cieux que mon regret contemple  
Moins que les doux parfums qu'invente Bichara.  
MARTHE FERRARE, de l'Opéra-Comique.

Figure 16 Advertisement for Bichara Perfumes from *Monsieur* no. 24, December 1922



Figure 17: A photograph of Bichara Mallhame and the bottle that was used for *Nirvana*, *Ambre*, *Yahvahna* and *Chypre*. Both photos from Grace Elizabeth Hummel's collection

## Mahjong

This belief about an “oriental scent” was so strong that sometimes it would also be used to describe all “mysterious” Chinese traditions and cultures, including an extremely popular Chinese board game called Mahjong.<sup>172</sup> In 1924, Mah-Jong was the activity of the year in elite Parisian circles.<sup>173</sup> Playing this game was expensive (between 65 and 2,000 francs), because the Mah-Jong tiles were usually made of ivory or bone,<sup>174</sup> so it probably also operated somewhat like a status symbol for the many households in Paris who carried this game. Another elite publication, *Vogue*, writes how this game came to Paris from an American:

Il n'est pas en effet une Américaine débarquant en France qui n'apporte avec elle un jeu de Mah-Jong. Une de nos amies arrivant d'Amérique nous recevait l'autre jour dans son appartement où elle était en train de défaire ses malles. Elle le prit dans ses bras, le débarrassa précautionneusement des papiers de soie qu'il l'entouraient, dégrafa une sorte de housse de cuir et exhiba, avec l'orgueil d'un collectionneur qui découvre un Rembrandt inconnu, un merveilleux jeu de Mah-Jong en ivoire. 'J'en ai rapporté plusieurs, nous dit-elle, celui-là est pour vous. Sur le paquebot nous avions toutes des Mah-Jong et nous jouions toute la journée au Mah-Jong ; on ne peut pas vivre sans le Mah-Jong. Vous savez, même avec le mal de mer, je jouais au Mah-Jong de mon lit. L'auction bridge', c'est fini ; il n'y a plus que les gens fatiguées qui s'y plaisent ; c'est si simple, si peu imprévu, tandis que le Mah-Jong ah, le Mah-Jong !'

Mah-Jong had entered into the Parisian scene through an American visiting Paris. She had been traveling in China and brought several sets of Mah-Jong with her to give to her friends. On the ships, she would play this game with other travelers, even when seasick. This game had replaced the card game, Auction bridge (developed in 1904), which was much too simple in comparison to the more complex and interesting Mah-Jong.

While strong, the Mah-Jong craze was short-lived. Julien Ochsé writes how Mah-Jong has been somewhat replaced in the summer by “La soirée pique-nique.”<sup>175</sup> Yet another example of this fascination with Chinese culture is this wall piece decorating the wall of artist Sacha Guitry's office. The characters on this wall mean that they are hanging in a household

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<sup>172</sup> “Le Mahjong: Une jeu Passionnant qui vient de Chine par l'Amérique,” *Vogue* Vol. 5, no. 1, January 1924, 44-45: “L'effondrement de l'ancien régime [China] et des multiples et subtiles traditions chinoises ont entraîné la vulgarisation de ces mystères nombreuse et charmants qui répandent un parfum d'Orient indéfinissable et suggestif.”

<sup>173</sup> Julien Ochsé, “Le Miroir de Paris,” *Monsieur* no. 53, May 1924

<sup>174</sup> op. cit. “Le Mahjong”

<sup>175</sup> Julien Ochsé, “Le Miroir de Paris,” *Monsieur* no. 53, May 1924

that deserves honor for the service he's given to his community<sup>176</sup>. It is an extremely big honor to receive such a sign, which was generally made from very expensive materials<sup>177</sup>



**Figure 18. Writer Sacha Guitry's office decorated with a valuable Chinese plaque of honor. From *Monsieur* 1924.**

<sup>176</sup> David Wang. Interview by Jilene Chua. Interview over email. June 11, 2015

<sup>177</sup> Hong Peter Lu and Susannah Lu. Interview by Jilene Chua. Interview over phone. June 10, 2015

## CONCLUSION:

In this chapter, we see how commodities representing cultures of “The Orient” permeated the French marketplace and leisure space during the interwar period. This fascination with “the other” is part of a longstanding history that began far before the interwar period. However, with new forms of travel and movement, we see how a Japanese actress, a Middle Eastern merchant, Syrian chemist, and even an American tourist bring Eastern commodities into elite Parisian social circles. These commodities, ranging from kimonos, to perfumes, to a Chinese board game, would be used in performances of elegance whether in the home or outside of it. Despite the popularity of these Eastern commodities and styles, there would be no articles in *Monsieur* about elegance in Tokyo or Shanghai. Within Godart’s “oligarchic structure of fashion,”<sup>178</sup> no cities from the East would be listed. While Asian cities like Shanghai or Mumbai have already become powerful key players in finance or international relations, the global fashion system still only has cities from Western civilization.<sup>179</sup> From the evidence in this chapter, the answer to this question does not seem to lie in the realm of style, as we see how prints, patterns, and cuts were integrated into the French marketplace. Tokyo, for instance, has had a formidable influence throughout the twentieth century, but most of the Japanese talent has been drained out of Japan into Paris.<sup>180</sup> Future work, then, can explore how and why this brain drain happens to better understand the roots of this oligarchic structure of fashion.

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<sup>178</sup> Godart selects these four cities because the fashion weeks of each of these four cities receive the most international press coverage. He also discusses why other cities, such as Tokyo, are not included as a fashion capital. See Frédéric Godart’s “The power structure of the fashion industry: Fashion capitals, globalization and creativity.” *International Journal of Fashion Studies*. 1: 1, pp. 39-55, 2014, doi: 10.1386/inf.1.1.39\_1

<sup>179</sup> Godart, 40

<sup>180</sup> Godart, 47.



## Conclusion

After World War I, civilization and nationality became stronger undercurrents of elegance. As opposed to older, more vague nineteenth century notions of elegance, in the early twentieth century, elegance was both an internal and an external trait. One could easily become more attractive to the opposite sex, for instance, by buying an elegant wardrobe and enter into a good marriage. Elegance in *Monsieur* also meant being French. London was still the capital of menswear and a concern for many of these writers was distinguishing from the English—there was a national French elegance and then there was a national English elegance. But the United States was becoming another source of sartorial inspiration during this time. The war meant that many American soldiers lived in Paris and brought back many of the styles they observed. But the United States was also becoming known as a center of innovation (in the realm of discrete alcohol carrying accessories, at least) in addition to its sportswear. The constant borrowing and comparing between London, Paris, and New-York reveal a network that helped to cultivate New York's rise as a fashion capital after World War II. But while New York was starting to integrate into the oligarchic fashion system, the opposite was happening for colonial West Africa. Elegance was also used as a mode of exclusion, especially in distinguishing who was civilized and who was not. From the observations of a colonial administrator in West Africa, it is clear that the French saw their role as masters over the colonial blacks not only in the realm of sanitation or the French language, but also in ways of dressing and carrying the body.

With these understandings of elegance in mind, what did it look like to behave elegantly? Films were one source of inspiration. The rise of Hollywood after World War I and the popularity of its films propelled the popularity of Japanese-American Sessue Hayakawa—a model for elegant expression and movement in his film, *Forfaiture*. Hayakawa's popularity straddled Hollywood and an ongoing French fascination for the "Orient." While Western commodities like canes, hats, and yachts were certainly more common for the readers of *Monsieur*, the advertisements for Oriental perfumes and kimono-inspired bathrobes show how being elegant also meant consuming Orientalist-inspired commodities. While a Japanese actress led to the popularity of the kimono, an American traveler in Paris introduced the Chinese board game, Mah-Jong to the French elite.

These findings have broad contributions, ranging from recent research on French masculine elegance manuals, the contemporary puzzle of the global oligarchic fashion



system, and the early history of the SAPE, early Hollywood films, and French colonial culture. More broadly, they contribute to ongoing work on interwar business culture in Paris, particularly how commerce was spread to colonial Africa; histories of French masculinity and the body in showing how the body learned to move through the medium of film; and the transnational relationship between the United States and France, particularly, how a Japanese-American celebrity and an American traveler played a role in transporting an “Orientalist aesthetic” into Paris. It has also opened up new directions for interwar inquiry within representations commodities of the East in the French imaginary.

Becoming a fashion capital meant more than having an inspiring elegant style. Despite that presence of Eastern commodities in the French market, the only elegant cities that were profiled in *Monsieur* were either European or American. Why is that the case? The case of New York shows how the relationship between New York and Paris after the war helped cement the rise of New York. But other factors need to be explored, such as how these networks were sustained and developed, not just within the realm of fashion reporters, but also economically, through trade for instance. Continuing with this notion of trade, was trade also how these “exotic” Oriental fragrances entered Paris? Further background into the history of French Indochina would certainly help me understand why images of the East started to be demonized during European imperialism. Considering how France’s colonization of West Africa contributed to the consumption of French clothing, did a similar pattern play out during America’s colonization of the Philippines? Can aftereffects of these two forms of colonization in the respective “colonizer territories” be compared by examining similarities and differences between the SAPE movement in Paris and the Zoot Suit Riots style that was popular among Filipno-Americans?<sup>181</sup>

All of these questions lay outside the scope of this mémoire, which I limited to understanding the meanings and practice of elegance through an elite, interwar French men’s fashion publication at the start of this project (September 2015). Through this archive, I have come out with more questions than I have started with, questions which I will explore in my future work. While I hope to enrich my continue expertise in the cultural flows between interwar France and the United States, my findings are also pointing me to research on interwar Asia, particularly French Indochina and the Philippines under American occupation.

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<sup>181</sup> Two politically motivated style movements that Manuel Charpy parallels in his history of the SAPE



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