This essay will examine texts from two moments of cultural transition wherein disenfranchised groups turn to a rhetorical and mythologized image of Paris in an attempt to subvert and even reorganize local social praxis. The modernistas, Spanish American writers at the turn of the twentieth century, faced a crisis of professionalization as regional modernization left increasingly fewer opportunities to receive patronage for socially disinterested writing. Without private or state funds to support them, many of these writers turned to journalism, authoring weekly columns, or crónicas, to make a living. Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century, as Walter Benjamin famously wrote, became one in a series of key topics for crónica writers: representative of everything elegant, sophisticated, and modern, Paris served as a vehicle of distance and refinement through which writers alienated by capitalism could at once elevate themselves as cultural experts and introduce local readerships to cosmopolitan modernity. Some decades later...
in the post-independence Congo, groups of lower-class, unemployed youth from Brazzaville and Kinshasa developed a cult of fashion and mannerisms based on the elite *sape* clubs of the 1960s. (The acronym *S.A.P.E.* stands for Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes.)\(^4\) The economic stagnation and political turmoil that afflicted both the Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) in the 1970s and 1980s greatly reduced the number of viable routes for legal employment, thus triggering the emergence of alternative regimes of value that, through clandestine migration to Paris and the display of luxury goods, hinged upon the image of Paris as both colonial and cultural capital.\(^5\) Practitioners of these regimes, called *sapeurs, Parisiens*, or *mikilistes*—terms that I use interchangeably throughout this essay—placed Paris at the pinnacle of a hierarchical structure in which the appearance of wealth—in the form of designer clothing, a knowledge of the latest trends, and, finally, a migration to and triumphant return from Paris—becomes a powerful substitute for real class mobility.\(^5\)

While the phenomenon of *sape* issues from a society marked by fairly recent processes of decolonization and is germane to some of the most popular topics of postcolonial studies, including migration and identity, *modernismo* emerges from the transitional struggles of a long-independent region (with the exception of Cuba and Puerto Rico) and has often been described as cloyingly imitative of European, especially French, style. Recent criticism, however, hints at a changing approach to this period of Spanish American literature. Although she focuses more on later Spanish American visions of Paris, Marcy Schwartz affirms that “Paris as narrativized zone of Euro-American confrontations . . . forms one of the battlegrounds of postcolonial critique” (3). Similarly, Gerard Aching outlines a

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\(^1\) See Gandoulou. However, other critics (Gondola, Thomas, Moudileno) have noted that *sape*’s precursors can be identified as early as the 1930s. Indeed, elegance played an important role in the mores of Brazzaville even during colonial times (see Martin).

\(^2\) MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga provide a detailed exposition of the social and economic conditions of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo during this period. In particular, they point to the volatility of national exports like oil and diamonds on the world market, the prevalence of autocratic governments like the dictatorship of Mobutu, and the heightened rigor of educational standards at universities as important factors in the rise of *sape* migration (28–49).

\(^3\) Mikiliste, a term that circulated in popular music during the 1980s, combines *mikili*—“worlds” in Lingala, and often used to refer to Europe—with the French suffix -iste, thereby denoting someone who has made the voyage to Europe (Gondola 28). *Sape* is of course deeply imbribated in discursive networks of imperialism and fashion in Africa. Recent studies such as Allman’s edited volume cite the need for a more nuanced focus on these networks, one that does not reduce them either to folkloric or ethnographic data or to instances of European imitation, but rather reads them as a site of power negotiation that contests dominant conceptions of modernity. All of the contributions to her collection, notes Allman, “underscore the notion that while Western-style dress may have been foreign in origin, its gendered, social, and political meanings were constructed locally, in local circumstances, in local fields of power” (6).
6 Although it is beyond the scope of this study, the mythological stature of Paris in the work of African American writers and artists of the twentieth century—particularly during the period of the Harlem Renaissance—shares many interesting similarities with the image of the city prevalent in modernismo and sape. While the storied popularity of Josephine Baker in the Revue nègre performances of the 1920s and the primitivist strains of the European avant-garde movements bear witness to the fact that—for Parisians, at least—the black arts and black literature carried the allure of the exotic, the attraction of France for African Americans was based primarily on its image as a nation of tolerance and equality. See Fabre and Stovall.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, Latin American poets such as Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera from Mexico, Julián del Casal from Cuba, Rubén Darío from Nicaragua, and Enrique Gómez Carrillo from Guatemala produced newspaper columns on modern life and were often sent abroad either by their governments...
or newspapers to report home from metropolitan capitals.7 For young authors who were sent to Paris this offered the chance to fulfill what was likely a lifelong dream. As Darío writes in a well-known passage of his autobiography: “Yo soñaba con París desde niño, a punto de que cuando hacía mis oraciones rogaba a Dios que no me dejase morir sin conocer París. París era para mí como un paraíso en donde se respirase la esencia de la felicidad sobre la tierra. Era la ciudad del Arte, de la Belleza y de la Gloria; y sobre todo, era la capital del Amor, el reino del ensueño” (69; “I dreamed of Paris since my childhood, to the point that when I said my prayers I begged God not to let me die without seeing Paris. Paris for me was like a paradise where one breathed the essence of happiness on Earth. It was the city of Art, of Beauty, of Glory; and above all, it was the capital of Love, the realm of dreams”).8 Once ensconced in the paradise of their childhood imaginations, describing the events, customs, architecture, and clothing of its population (down to the products for sale in store windows), the cronistas became for their readers a veritable guide to modernity: “La crónica surge como una vitrina de la vida moderna, producida para un lector ‘culto’ deseoso de la modernidad extranjera” (Ramos 90; “The crónica emerges as a store window of modern life, produced for a ‘cultured’ reader who desires foreign modernity”). Through his reference to the “store window” of modern life, however, Ramos also hints at the essential contradiction attending the crónica: the fact that writers influenced by French Parnassian and Symbolist poetry conveyed, even advertised, to their compatriots the increasingly consumerist and bourgeois scenes of Parisian life.

Indeed, the disparity between Paris’s rhetorical place in the imaginary of Latin American intellectual circles—as the center of culture, elegance, artistic connaissance, in short everything reminiscent of pre-capitalist times—and the reality of the city led by the early twentieth century to a gradual disillusionment with Paris and a revalorization of “autochthonous” Latin American culture.9 Books like Ricardo Güiraldes’s Raucho and Alberto Blest Gana’s Los trasplantados illustrate through the revelations of their frenchified protagonists a rejection of the soulless nature of foreign culture and nostalgia for a return to national roots.10 In the same spirit Darío, himself an unapologetic francophile for most of his career, denounces the changes in Paris wrought by capitalism: “Hoy reina la pose y la farsa en todo . . . La mujer es una decoración y un sexo. El estudiante extranjero no encuentra el apoyo de otros días, y desde luego le está cortado el ejercicio

7 Rama traces the role of intellectuals in Latin American society in La ciudad letrada. For a more specific account of the crónica, see González, Ramos, and Rotker.
8 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
9 Pera demonstrates that the mythification of Paris through modernismo allows for the subsequent emergence of a regional identity. Although they focus primarily on later authors, Schwartz and Weiss both provide a summary of Paris’s centrality to Latin American letters from colonial times and construct an argument similar to the one presented here about Paris’s ideological, rather than geographic, importance for readers and writers of the region.
10 The protagonists of these novels belong to the group of infamous rastacueros, a class of migrants very different from the modernista intellectual. Members of rich ranching families from Argentina and Chile, rastacueros often settled in Paris for years or even lifetimes, leaving one male relative at home to manage the ranch and periodically send money. Among French and Latin Americans alike they were considered ostentatious, tasteless, and, as such, the antithesis of the Latin American migrant author.
A similar demythification of Paris is carried out in Sebastián Salazar Bondy’s 1965 *Pobre gente de París*, a parodic narrative that depicts the disillusionment and tribulations of young Spanish American residents in Paris whose dreams of the capital are countered by penury, artifice, and fraud. Despite its satirical tone, the novel attests to the continued importance of Paris as a meeting place for Latin American intellectuals and artists.

What Darío laments, perhaps more than the encroachment of consumerism on Parisian life, is the waning flexibility of the Parisian discourse through which young writers envision the futures of their burgeoning home nations. (Indeed, this may be why he mentions specifically among his complaints the lack of opportunities for foreign writers.) As a result, in the *crónica modernista* Paris is transformed from a destination and cultural capital to a semiotic place marker through which the peripheral reader, attaching local meaning to his knowledge of Paris, achieves distinction in his own society.

The place of Paris in *mikilistes*’ rituals of style bears remarkable resemblances to the semiotic transformation achieved by Latin American *crónica*. Despite the fact that the Democratic Republic of Congo was a colony of Belgium, not France, from the outset of French-Congolese contact, Paris represented the center of fashion, and therefore success, in local praxis—a function that led to hyperbolic perceptions of Paris much like Darío’s childhood fantasies: indeed, the *mikilistes* “envision Europe as an immaculate, immense city of light, where magical, mechanical passageways carry people along, where fortunes are easily made, and the climate is healthy. In short, a place where the living is easy” (Gondola 28). The city’s association with effortless wealth, combined with its relative inaccessibility, allows *sapeurs*, usually among the most destitute members of society, to derive a narrative of social triumph from the anticipated voyage to and return home from the metropolis. However, the narrative, like the transformation it describes, is purely cosmetic.

The *Mikilistes*’s activity revolves around the acquisition and display of European designer goods, usually highly attuned to local preferences. As Gandoulou explains, “[La sape] s’agit de capter les signes extérieurs de la réussite, de les répercuter pour sa propre satisfaction et pour l’approbation et le renforcement du groupe de référence; les sapeurs s’evertuent à imiter l’aspect extérieur des gens arrivés...”

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11 A similar demythification of Paris is carried out in Sebastián Salazar Bondy’s 1965 *Pobre gente de París*, a parodic narrative that depicts the disillusionment and tribulations of young Spanish American residents in Paris whose dreams of the capital are countered by penury, artifice, and fraud. Despite its satirical tone, the novel attests to the continued importance of Paris as a meeting place for Latin American intellectuals and artists.
au sommet de l’échelle sociale à Brazzaville, sans bien sûr detenir les instruments de la réussite objective” (19; “The sape deals with harnessing the exterior signs of success, echoing them for one’s own satisfaction and for the approval and reinforcement of the group of reference: sapeurs dedicate themselves to imitating the exterior appearance of those who attain the summit of social elevation in Brazzaville, without of course possessing the instruments of objective success”). This focus on outward appearances makes the mikiliste fundamentally different from other European migrants: first, because his goal is not to settle and assimilate in Paris but rather to return home adorned with the proper wardrobe in order to attain an enhanced social standing; and second, because this irregular motivation leads to an irregular experience of Paris itself, in which the mikiliste is driven to act by his own subculture.

The process of becoming a “Parisian” or “Adventurer,” the highest status a sapeur can attain, begins with a connection to a local sape club, where sapeurs gather to show off whatever brand-name items they may have, to become familiar to prominent members of the group, and—at certain times of year—to applaud experienced migrants returning home for vacation. Advancement depends on both the sapeur’s overall elegance and his knowledge of Paris—from its topography, landmarks, and metro system to the latest styles being worn. The most fortunate sapeurs migrate to Paris with the aid of already-established acquaintances. As illegal migrants, they usually work in an underground trade and cohabit with several compatriots in cramped apartments in abandoned or condemned buildings. The marginal existence of the sapeur in Paris is purposeful: he forgoes the amenities and comforts associated with metropolitan life in order to afford the extravagant goods that will clinch his good reputation and social elevation back home. In this sense, Paris as place and Paris as topos become mutually exclusive in the imaginary of the sapeur, and this in turn ensures a real change in his lifestyle in the Congo: “Lors du retour . . . l’Aventurier possède tout ce qu’il faut pour se faire remarquer. . . . Il ne fréquente plus les membres de la couche sociale dont il est issu (les ‘peasants’ comme il les appelle) . . . On l’appelle aussi ‘le Parisien’, et il obtient autant de considération que la personne ou le fonctionnaire de la société dominante. C’est à cela que le jeune sapeur aspire, à cette empyrée de ‘réussite sociale’, à ce mode d’existence somptueux” (Gandoulou 93 ; “After his return . . . the Adventurer possesses everything necessary to draw attention to himself . . . He no longer frequents the members of the social class he comes from (‘peasants,’ as he calls them) . . . he is also called ‘the Parisian,’ and he acquires as much consideration as any official of dominant society. This is what the young sapeur aspires to, to this empyrean of ‘social success,’ to this mode of sumptuous existence”). The sapeur thus realizes social success through a hierarchy that, in its internal composition, is completely independent from official class discourse: “In the case of the sapeurs, a concerted effort is made in order to distance themselves from African immigrants but simultaneously from dominant fashion norms . . . Their fashion choices render them immediately recognizable, but in adhering to codes they have delineated for themselves they create a space outside of the standard Parisian matrix, thereby reclaiming their own form of Parisianism according to autonomous aesthetic codes” (Thomas 960). I would extend this comment on sape fashion to the entire narrative of their migration: every aspect of the mikiliste’s life is determined
by the specific parameters of success in the local society, a determination that differentiates him from other inhabitants of the metropolis. Customs of fashion are the most visible, but not the only, practices of mikiliste life.12

Alain Mabanckou’s 1998 novel Bleu blanc rouge traces the path of migration and return outlined above. Massala-Massala, an unemployed youth from a town near the Congolese coast, has grown up dreaming that Paris is a conduit to success and elegance. He participates in the community’s ritual fawning over Moki, the most prominent neighborhood Parisien, who returns each dry season to administer an “annual mass” of his own legacy to local believers. Inspired by Moki, Massala-Massala eventually voyages to Paris, convinced he is embarking upon a path that will lead to personal achievement and family honor. Crushed by the discovery of the squalid and furtive lifestyle that awaits him in the metropolis, he nevertheless agrees to join the illicit business of a fellow mikiliste as part of his indenture to the network of compatriots who sponsored him. However, his very first sale of stolen metro cards ends in detainment, and after eighteen months of imprisonment he is forcibly repatriated.

Mabanckou thus offers a demythification of the pilgrimage to Paris. His novel foregrounds the gaping difference between the dream and the reality of migration, a difference vividly rendered in the protagonist’s disillusionment and humiliation. In the painful solitude of his imprisonment, Massala-Massala reflects on an impending return home as a “Parisien refoulé,” or failed Parisian, noting that those who will ridicule him “ne savent pas que notre monde à nous est un autre monde” (215; “do not know that our world is another [or ‘an other’] world”). Because this comment signals, on one hand, the incompatibility of the mikiliste’s dream with the true experience of Paris and, on the other, the self-containment of his social imaginary, it highlights the duplicitous nature of postcolonial phenomena like sape. That is to say, the mikiliste’s world is a different world, but it is also an autonomous world. The ambivalent tone of Massala-Massala’s remarks is redoubled when, as he boards the charter flight home, he considers a second effort at migration. After carefully deconstructing Massala-Massala’s fantasy of Paris, Mabanckou just as carefully leaves it intact.

The Paris of Bleu blanc rouge, beginning with the mythical status the city holds in the imagination of its characters, draws upon an established tradition of literary representation in francophone African novels. Indeed, the itinerary traced by Massala-Massala is in many ways a trajectory already explored in such earlier works as Ousmane Socé’s Mirages de Paris (Senegal, 1937), Bernard Dadié’s Un Nègre à Paris (Ivory Coast, 1959), Laye Camara’s L’Enfant noir (Guinea, 1953), and Cheikh

12 MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga offer a comprehensive analysis of the economic and cultural practices of Congolese migrants to Paris as examples of alternative, independent spheres of value within migrant communities. The autonomy of these cultural codes, affirm the authors, serves as a remedy for the marginalization of migrants within the dominant economic and social systems: “For the young Congolese who are sapeurs and those who take part . . . in nganda [unlicensed bars], this is the only way they can shine out from an existence in which other options are frustrating, dreary or simply not viable. They have created their own world with its own status and value system and its own scale of achievement and satisfaction, and they have rejected the values of a system that has excluded and marginalized them” (157).
Hamidou Kane’s *L’Aventure ambiguë* (Senegal, 1961). Dadié’s novel, for instance, opens with the protagonist’s elation at his good fortune in obtaining an airplane ticket to Paris: “un billet pour Paris, on ne l’a pas toujours, tu le sais, il faut être ‘quelqu’un’ pour aller à Paris” (7; “a ticket to Paris, one cannot always get it, you know, you have to be ‘someone’ to go to Paris”). Similarly, Fara, the protagonist of *Mirages de Paris*, travels to the capital for the colonial exposition only to be struck by “le mal de Paris,” an infatuation with the city occasioned by “son tempérament, son imagination vive, son enthousiasme qui avait trouvé nourriture dans ses lectures” (73; “his temperament, his vivid imagination, his enthusiasm which had been fostered by his reading”). As these examples suggest, the multivalent meanings of Paris scripted in the foundational narratives of francophone African fiction constitute an archive whose precedence is essential to understanding the mythical position of Paris in Mabanckou’s novel. In this sense, Dominic Thomas is right to urge a rereading of colonial fiction in conjunction with the works of more contemporary francophone writers, asking “how can one possibly begin to understand the works of Alain Mabanckou [and others] without considering the ways in which Ousmane Sembène, Laye Camara, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Ousmane Socé, and Bernard Dadié were always already ‘immigrant’ writers?” (*Black France* 22).

To be sure, the importance of these predecessors to a thorough grasp of current discursive constructions of Paris should not be understated, and their seminal confrontation of issues common to “peripheral” cultural production—most prominently, the ambivalent reconciliation of European and autochthonous modes of expression—makes them a useful point of comparison. However, much like the fantasies of modernista writers, *Bleu blanc rouge* enacts what is primarily a discursive migration to Paris. Unlike Dadié or Socé, Mabanckou does not narrate a voyage to Paris so much as a fictional elaboration of such a voyage, culled from previous tales of migration—among them, of course, those of Dadié and Socé themselves—and carefully fashioned by his characters into the story of their own success. Lydie Moudileno links this form of paranarrative, what she terms the “fiction of migration,” to the accumulation by the 1990s of several decades of literary and popular discourses of Paris: “Le ‘chemin d’Europe’, encore extraordinaire du temps de [Ferdinand] Oyono et Ake Loba, est désormais un chemin pavé des traces de quantité de prédécesseurs. Et ces prédécesseurs . . . ont produit des récits fondateurs de la migration, destinés à ‘ceux qui sont restés aux pays’, et auxquels va s’opposer, évidemment, la réalité de l’expérience vécue” (“La fiction” 184; “The ‘path of Europe,’ still uncommon in the time of [Ferdinand] Oyono and Ake Loba, is from now on a path paved by the tracks of a good number of predecessors. And those predecessors . . . have produced founding tales of migration, destined to ‘those who stayed at home,’ and which will be contrasted, of course, by the reality of lived experience”). It is the Paris of “those who stayed at home”—that is, the Paris created by the tales of those who went before—that orients the textual and bodily practices of both mikilistes and modernistas. The affinities between their respective instrumentalizations of Paris as topos are necessarily mitigated by important historical and cultural disparities, of course, but it is precisely these disparities that offer us a chance to reevaluate conventional academic approaches to issues of coloniality and power in different moments and places. Primary among these is the use of the term postcolonial in literary and cultural studies.
My analysis of *sape* and *modernista* literature, while it does not pretend to elide the important gaps between their historic and social contexts, is meant to serve as an example of the ways in which comparative practice can facilitate a revision of the uses of *postcolonial* as a critical term. The institutional development of postcolonial studies around twentieth-century paradigms of decolonization inaugurated a model of inquiry informed, to a greater or lesser degree, by a principle of identity. Postcolonial criticism, responding in part to the disciplinary requisite of a well-defined field, has tended to approach its object of study with an eye to demonstrating that object’s adherence to a set of characteristics understood to constitute postcolonialism: in this sense, one of its primary tasks has been the establishment and maintenance of “postcolonial” as a category of discourse. However, an identitarian reading of the texts examined here—that is, a reading which seeks to include or exclude them from a preordained category of postcolonialism based upon historical or political criteria or anti-imperial “resistance”—denies the richness of the semiotic negotiations they enact. Indeed, such a reading would exclude *modernista* writing from the category. Broadly speaking, the historic contexts in which imperialism—Spanish, North American, and even French—plays out in Spanish America have often made it somehow incomprehensible or simply negligible to the wider debates of postcolonial studies. Even within the purview of regional history, the *crónicas* of Darío cannot properly be said to constitute a discourse of resistance: although his late works (most notably *Cantos de vida y esperanza*) adopt an overtly anti-imperial stance against the incipient hegemony of North America, criticism has commonly associated his francophilia with the cultural snobbery of early *modernismo*—as, in short, more neocolonial than postcolonial. One might also observe that *mikilistes* and *modernistas* alike upend the reifications implicit in the myth of Paris only to reinstate them as an instrument of local class distinction: in this sense, certainly, their ideologies bear little resemblance to the democratic ideal championed by the political agendas of postcolonialism.

From an identitarian standpoint, then, *sape* and *modernista* literature hold scant relevance for critical projects that aim to define the postcolonial. Yet their practices offer important clues to the ways in which difference is relayed and extended under the vicissitudes of imperial discourse. The cultural instruction of Darío, like the narrative of *sape* Mabanckou provides in *Bleu blanc rouge*, stands as proof that the articulation of difference, an articulation which we might strategically denote by the name “postcolonial,” assumes a continuum of expression. Inhabited here by the evolving structures of Paris as place, this continuum belies the oppositional logic which subtends critical approaches to “marginal” discourse: it implies, like Schwarz’s original conception of ideologies of the second degree, 

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13 While the strong French influence in most Latin American nations throughout the nineteenth century was due both to the spread of “liberal” ideas after the French Revolution and to extensive French economic intervention in the region, it should not be forgotten that a French military force did occupy Mexico from 1863–67, placing in power Emperor Maximilian I.

14 Although MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga acknowledge that practices of *sape* do not constitute an organized and political “resistance,” they also recognize that *sapeurs* employ the kind of passive, ephemeral resistance that James Scott terms “weapons of the weak” or, as they put it, “a silent, hidden, non-violent revolution taking place through everyday forms of resistance by the powerless” (157).
that the trajectory of modernity emerges as much from the periphery as from the center. The construction of a secondary and purely local Paris by both modernistas and mikilistes exemplifies the kinds of practices which, although not originating in properly "postcolonial" contexts, nonetheless contribute to the critical project at the heart of postcolonial studies.  

Critics often characterize the image of Paris in peripheral discourse as myth, dream, or fantasy: Gondola and Thomas both stress the oneiric quality of sape, and Pera theorizes the "myth" of Paris in modernismo. Darío himself consistently associates his desire for Paris with dreams (ensueno) and paradise. In an attempt to decipher the semiotic operations implicit in these terms, I turn to Roland Barthes' Mythologies. Myth occurs, he explains, when a sign, the autonomous site of meaning in language, becomes a signifier in an overlying and malleable system of signification (a "metalanguage") to which it can contribute but which it cannot control. In an elaboration on the processes of territorialization in Mille plateaux, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari make a similar point: "A matter of expression is never a vestige or a symbol . . . It is an operator, a vector. It is an assemblage converter" (324–25). In its rhizomatic parlance, then, Deleuze and Guattari's theory serves to complete the scenario put forth in Mythologies. Derivative meaning is not merely the vehicle for territorialized concepts through whose exertion it is created; rather, it effects through its creation a reterritorialization of those concepts: "A territory is always en route to an at least partial deterritorialization, even though the new assemblage may operate a reterritorialization" (326). Myth, understood in Barthes' articulation as established discourse reappropriated to new contexts, does not evolve in a given direction; indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari postulate, meaning (like any other type of rhizome) tends through its very establishment to disperse and annul itself, finding new life in the force (agencement) of its residues. In this way, myth becomes an adequate term for describing modernista and mikiliste visions of Paris. Subscribers to the fantasy of its attributes do not, as it were, submit their imaginaries to its meaning; rather, they fasten its effects, its reputation, to locally determined circuits of discourse. All transactions here operate on a field of metalepsy; therefore, the question is not one of original and copy, but of agency.

Arriving at the same conclusions from within a more political realm, Roberto Schwarz dissects another myth of sorts in Brazil's imitative national culture. In "Misplaced Ideas: Literature and Society in Late-Nineteenth-Century Brazil," Schwarz examines the Brazilian legacy of adopting, somewhat awkwardly, the trends and ideas of Europe. Thus, although the liberal terminology of the Enlightenment gained feverish currency among the Brazilian bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, it was in fact totally out of keeping with Brazil's social hierarchies, which were based on slavery and favor: "In sum, an ideological comedy is set up, 

15 Thomas's "Fashion Matters: La sape and Vestimentary Codes in Transnational Contexts and Urban Diasporas," although focused specifically on the role of fashion in the migration of sapeurs, has many points of contact with this study. Thomas identifies an affinity between sapeurs, the dandies of early modernity, and pachucos, the alienated Chicano youth of 1940s Los Angeles who made popular the extravagant zoot suit (952). While pachucos were American-born children of Mexican immigrants and therefore do not develop as part of their culture a narrative of migration and return, their practices regarding dress closely resemble those of sapeurs. Thomas thus demonstrates how "postcolonial" phenomena can be linked across regions and epochs.
While *créole*, as Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau define it, refers to a transcultural production of African and French elements, usually associated with the subaltern cultural spheres of Caribbean society, *criollo* is a name historically given to Latin Americans descended from Spanish colonizers and immigrants. It therefore nominally identifies the region’s dominant classes. Of course, free labour, equality before the law and, more generally, universalism were also an ideology in Europe; but there they corresponded to appearances and hid the essential—the exploitation of labour. Among us [the Brazilian bourgeoisie], the same ideas would be false in a different sense, so to speak, in an original way” (Schwarz 20). Schwarz calls this disparity between Brazilian discourse and Brazilian reality “ideologies of the second degree”: “In this context, ideologies do not describe reality, not even falsely . . . ; we shall therefore call them ‘ideologies of the second degree.’ Their law of movement is a different one, not the one they name; it honours prestige, rather than a desire for system and objectivity” (23).

The representations of Paris by both *mikilistes* and *modernistas* seem to me important instances of the construction of an ideology of the second degree, based in this case on a series of semiotic transmutations—from physical journey to discursive relay, from place to space, and from experience to knowledge. Thus, for example, among Argentine *criollo* youth the ritualized voyage to Europe evolved by the late nineteenth century from an elite tour of luxurious consumption through which the uppermost social echelons established their distance from regular citizens to a rite of passage designed primarily to ensure standing at home: “Con la solidificación del grupo social que dirige al país luego de 1880, el viaje europeo se institucionaliza: ni pioneros, ni precursors, ni aventureros, quienes lo celebran adoptan cada vez más el aire de oficiales y el itinerario se convierte en rito. Se viaja a Europa para santificarse allá y regresar consagrado . . . En realidad, se inaugura la etapa del *viaje bumerang*; no interesa tanto ir porque se va para volver. El cielo reside allá, pero la verificación de la sacralidad se da aquí” (Viñas 39; “With the consolidation of the social group that runs the country after 1880, the European voyage becomes institutionalized: neither pioneers, nor precursors, nor adventurers, those who celebrate it adopt more and more the air of officiants and the itinerary becomes a rite. One travels to Europe in order to be sanctified there and return consecrated . . . In reality, the stage of the *boomerang voyage* is inaugurated: going is not as interesting because one goes in order to return. Heaven resides there, but the verification of one’s sanctity is given here”).

16 While *criole*, as Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau define it, refers to a transcultural production of African and French elements, usually associated with the subaltern cultural spheres of Caribbean society, *criollo* is a name historically given to Latin Americans descended from Spanish colonizers and immigrants. It therefore nominally identifies the region’s dominant classes.
awaits lazily the hour of the cabaret, in America he is remembered with respect and news items are prepared about him”). The static, ironically unspectacular image of the diputado awaiting the cabaret while his absence establishes his glory at home renders Paris as place (in Michel de Certeau’s sense of the word) insignificant, almost anonymous next to the highly specialized discourse surrounding the return from abroad. Like the young pilgrims Viñas describes, the diputado does not travel because he desires to reach a particular destination; he travels in order to create the network of images that his departure and absence creates in the minds of his contemporaries.

This preference for the mythic over the real may be what spurs Gondola to identify sape as “un territoire imaginaire” which is also “le Paris de la griffe” (15). Sapeurs, he suggests, do not migrate to Paris; they migrate to sape. The mikilistes of Bleu blanc rouge are aware of the importance of this imaginary voyage. Moki explains to Massala-Massala, homesick after his arrival in Paris, that contacting his family will destroy the image of the “Parisien”: “ Là-bas ils doivent se demander ce que tu es devenu. Le mystère doit t’auréoler. C’est comme ça qu’on se façonne une image. Une bonne image. Une image de battant. Une image de Parisien” (132; “Back home they must ask themselves what has become of you. Mystery must surround you. That is how we facilitate an image for ourselves. A good image. The image of a fighter. The image of a Parisian”). The mystery of Paris invites the unfettered development of a myth that facilitates the desired image of the mikiliste.

This imaginary appropriation of Paris also can be theorized by recalling de Certeau’s ideas of place and space. Focusing on the modern urban context, de Certeau examines the struggles played out between the city as place (“an instantaneous configuration of positions” which “implies an indication of stability” [117]) and the quotidian experience of it as space (“a practiced place”). The order of a city as plotted by architects and planners becomes invisible and even inconceivable as it is navigated spatially. In this way, the inhabitants of the city create meanings that are fleeting and so threaten the stability of the city as place. This tension between order and dispersion, Certeau claims, can be traced in dreams, in discourse, and in the act of walking, all of which involve movement into the unknown: “If there is a parallelism [between dreams and discourse and walking], it is not only because enunciation is dominant in these three areas, but also because its discursive (verbalized, dreamed, or walked) development is organized as a relation between the place from which it proceeds (an origin) and the nowhere it produces” (103). This is precisely how Paris is reproduced as “ideology of the second degree”: mikilistes and modernistas build myth and discourse to supplement and simultaneously alter the city itself, which they have never seen. They strive to possess Paris by “walking” through its streets, but unlike local residents only experience the city from afar. Even if they do arrive in Paris, the meaning of their achievement is ultimately produced through peripheral imaginaries. Thus, the blind, ephemeral transformation of the city through walking that de Certeau describes is always replaced or supplemented by discourse and myth and is always unnaturally informed by those “place” referents—streets, monuments, and panoramic views—eroded by the act of walking. The relation between “origin” and “nowhere” that shapes the spatial identity of the
city determines the experience of the imaginary pedestrian as much as it does that of a real one; however, the added dimension of postcolonial movement shifts its articulation to a second level of abstraction. Mikilistes and modernistas challenge the structure of place not by walking around Paris, but by writing and talking about walking around it. That is why discourse becomes the primary and requisite vehicle for their appropriation of the city.

For both groups the possession of Paris takes the form of a discursive circle that begins with its study at home and is perpetuated by transmitted affirmation from abroad. This circle effectively eliminates Paris as informant or referent of its own myth, replacing as social catalyst the experience of Paris with knowledge of Paris. As Massala-Massala asks, “Qui de ma génération n’avait pas visité la France par la bouche, comme on dit au pays? Un seul mot, Paris, suffisait pour que nous nous retrouvions comme par enchantement devant la tour Eiffel, l’Arc de Triomphe ou l’avenue des Champs-Elysées” (36; “Who of my generation had not visited France by mouth, as we say at home? One single word, Paris, sufficed for us to find ourselves as if by enchantment before the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, or the avenue of Champs-Elysées”). It is this anticipatory knowledge of the city that, once the pilgrim has reached his destination, fuels his triumphant letters home. “Todos hemos sentido, al llegar a París,” explains Roberto Gache, “esta necesidad previa de escribir. Todos hemos escrito, apenas llegados, la carta de descubrimiento. Es la posesión literaria de París: la posesión con que, desde el cuarto del hotel, postal tras postal, hacemos por el mundo el reparto de París” (68; “We all have felt, upon arriving in Paris, this preliminary necessity of writing. We all have written, just after arriving, the letter of discovery. It is the literary possession of Paris: the possession with which, from the hotel room, postcard after postcard, we distribute Paris through the world”). Indeed, Gache’s character possesses and distributes Paris without really being in Paris: his arrival in a Parisian hotel suffices to generate triumphant reports because his is the story of his own glory.

Paris’s rather mercenary role in the social mobility of Latin American society makes it subject to local desires and ambitions, something that Amado Nervo also recognizes as implicit within the modernista’s study of Paris: “aunque la realidad siempre tiene fisonomías inesperadas, al escribirla y describirla la fisonizamos poco más o menos como los que han predicado” (168; “although the reality always has unexpected physiognomies, in writing and describing it we describe it more or less like those who came before”). The myth of Paris, then, if we understand it in de Certeau’s sense of moving from a concrete place to a “nowhere” space, depends upon an intransitive vision anchored in local knowledge: the future possibilities of Latin American and Congolese individuals, if they are to be believed, must be sketched into an established scene of the desired city. This imperative uniformity is reiterated in Bleu blanc rouge by the requisite form letter the mikilistes send home to their girlfriends, a template of which is taped to Massala-Massala’s apartment wall for general use. It begins: “Ma chère Marie-Josée, J’écris en face de la tour Montparnasse que je contemple chaque matin depuis la salle de bains de notre magnifique appartement du quatorzième arrondissement” (133; “My dear Marie-Josée, I am writing across from the tower of Montparnasse, which I contemplate every morning from the bathroom of our magnificent apartment in the fourteenth arrondissement”). The mikiliste, who is to replace “Marie-Josée” with the name of
a real addressee, professes his success through the juxtaposition of what is a specific sign of luxury in his hometown—a bathroom—to well-known Parisian locations like the tower of Montparnasse and the fourteenth arrondissement. The inscription of the former in the latter—that is, the description of the Parisian landscape as seen from affluent surroundings—serves as testimony both to the writer’s conquest of the metropolis and to the mythic discourse of local mikiistes.

This insistent recurrence to place names as an integral part of the cult of Paris returns us to de Certeau’s ideas of place and space. I have already suggested that the migrant’s inhabitation of the city from afar distends the original meaning of Paris as place at a second level of removal—through discourse rather than through walking. It stands to follow, then, that whereas the metropolitan resident’s partial and transitory view of the city obscures the placement and organization of its structures, as imaginary flâneur the mikiiste or modernista begins his tour as if inside a map, marking his location within a complete and magnified view of the city. His navigations thus enter into a different sort of tension with place because, in a sense, they never leave it. Indeed, the imaginary flâneur manages to turn place itself into a nowhere—like the nowhere of the mikiiste’s apartment in the fourteenth arrondissement—to the extent that he alters Paris through his own imagination. Much as it is for the pedestrian, Paris is for the reader of the mikiiste’s or modernista’s text multiple:

Yes que París es un mundo, es que en París hay cien ciudades y cien aldeas, es que París tiene todos los cielos, todos los climas, todas las bellezas, todos los contrastes . . . Subid hacia Montmartre una tarde de otoño y experimentaréis las más dulces impresiones provincianas con un intenso deseo de vivir dulcemente, ni envidiados, ni envidiosos . . . Id hacia los jardines de Luxemburgo un día de primavera, y toda vuestra adolescencia subirá a la cabeza cual un vino embebiador . . . Perdeos por entre las callejuelas vencibles de la isla San Luis a la sombra de las torres de Nuestra Señora, en un crepúsculo invernal, y sentiréis revivir a vuestro derredor la existencia de tiempos que hemos soñado con nostalgia. (Gómez Carrillo 13)

Paris is a world, in Paris there are a hundred cities and a hundred towns, Paris has all the heavens, all climates, all the beauties, all the contrasts . . . Climb towards Montmartre on an autumn afternoon and you will experience the sweetest provincial impressions with an intense desire to live sweetly, neither envied nor envious . . . Go towards the Luxembourg gardens on a spring day, and all of your adolescence will rise to your head like an intoxicating wine . . . Lose yourself among the narrow streets of the island of Saint Louis in the shadow of the towers of Notre Dame, on a winter evening, and you will feel revive all around you the existence of times that we have dreamed of with nostalgia.17

The city Gómez Carrillo sells has the magic ability to become whatever he wants. Here, as de Certeau’s asserts, “[Place names] operate in the name of an emptying-out and wearing away of their primary role. They become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, by means of a semantic rarification, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning” (105).18 It is in part through this poetic geography, a repetitive and systematic series of places turned

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17 Cf. De Certeau: “What does travel ultimately produce if it is not, by a sort of reversal, an exploitation of the deserted places of my memory” (107).

18 In his classic work The Tourist, Dean McCannell suggests a similar extension and return of meaning in the modern rise of tourism, reversing Walter Benjamin’s ideas on the aura of mechanically reproduced art: “The work becomes authentic only after the first copy of it is produced. The reproductions are the aura, and the ritual, far from being a point of origin, derives from the relationship between the original object and its socially constituted importance” (48).
topoi, that mikilistes and modernistas carry out the rhetorical transmutations of Paris I have been describing: by submitting its cultural valence to a set of locally determined social codes, these transmutations ultimately eclipse and even obviate a real trip to the city.

One can trace such a substitution in Rubén Darío’s crónicas of Paris. Although his columns clearly intend to cultivate refinement in his readers, modeling them as cosmopolitan subjects through a sort of armchair tour of Paris’s monuments and happenings, his instruction does not necessarily promote a reader’s eventual pilgrimage to Paris: indeed, clues from his later texts indicate a distancing from the city of his dreams, but without a subsequent relinquishment of his dreams of the city. The young writer eager to try his luck abroad in “El deseo de París,” for example, gets a disheartening response from Darío’s narrator: “Luchar en París para vivir en París de la literatura . . . ¡Pero ese es un sueño de los sueños! . . . ¿Qué se ha imaginado usted que es París?” (Struggle in Paris to live in Paris on literature . . . But that is a dream of dreams! . . . What have you imagined Paris to be?”). After a long verbal reflection on the poverty of foreign immigrants in the capital, however, he succumbs to the writer’s idealism: “Pero veo que usted está resuelto, ¿no es verdad? . . . Y después de todo, nada se puede asegurar en este mundo . . . ¿Quién sabe si es usted un genio colossal, a quien le está destinado, en un triunfo seguro, el reino de París!” (Escritos dispersos 265–66; “But I see that you are resolved, isn’t that true? . . . And in the end, nothing is certain in this world . . . Who knows if you are a colossal genius, to whom is destined, in certain triumph, the kingdom of Paris!”). Elsewhere, he muses, “he escrito cosas más ‘parisienses’ antes de venir a París que durante el tiempo que he permanecido en París” (ctd. in Noguerol 170; “I have written more ‘Parisian’ things before coming to Paris than during the time I have stayed in Paris”). In both of these examples, the derivative qualities of Paris—a certain style or prestige—surge to the fore of Darío’s imaginary, allowing the city’s existence as lived space to recede into circumstance. That is to say, Paris in his discourse comes to signify a way of writing, a verification of success, and an aesthetic erudition which, although they may visit and build upon its place names, do not correspond to life in the city itself.

Darío’s recurring ambivalence on this point is shaped by an intended marriage of two somewhat incompatible ideals: the development of Latin American culture, and social betterment through association with France’s aesthetic tradition. Perhaps the strangest, yet most illustrative, product of this marriage is Mundial Magazine, a periodical Darío edited from 1911 to 1914. Published in Paris, written in Spanish, composed almost without exception by Latin American and Spanish contributors, and exported to its intended audience, Mundial Magazine aimed to conceive of a regional identity through Paris. Each issue juxtaposes expository descriptions and photos of life in the metropolis with quasi-encyclopedic articles on each month’s featured Latin American country. Its format reflects a two-pronged effort to communicate an ideal cultural identity: Latin America is the content, but Paris is the medium. Readers of Darío’s crónicas can thus borrow the vestigial eminence handed down from the epoch of the ritual criollo voyage to Paris and infuse it with regional pride. Familiarity with the capital’s monuments and works of art affords social distinction, as always; yet by enabling the emer-
gence of Latin America as the new site of readerly desire, this familiarity ironically diminishes the centrality of Paris as destination. In Darío’s crónicas, travel to the metropolis as indispensable proof of cosmopolitanism comes to be supplanted by knowledge of the metropolis as prosthetic support of Latin American cultural autonomy.

A similar displacement of Paris occurs in Bleu blanc rouge through the mikilistes’ construction of Parisian-ness as a rigorous set of attitudes and behaviors. As demonstrated by the illustrious return of Moki, the mark of a true Parisien is not the fact of his travels but his adoption of the customs and airs befitting a man of the world. Just as the Parisien must disseminate the proper image of himself through postcards, snapshots, and sartorial self-promotion, so he must upon his return home provide evidence of physical and social transformation. To that end, mikilistes often conjure an illusion of metamorphosis through bodily manipulation: they deliberately overeat to grow extra paunch, use skin-lightening creams, and cut their hair to accentuate receding hairlines, all in order to produce an appearance suggestive of the sumptuous, sedentary lifestyle they are supposed to enjoy in Europe. This semblance of change is authenticated by the Parisien’s customs: he eschews the local cuisine, drinks red wine, is chauffeured around town in a luxury car, and entertains a constant entourage of admirers. The absence of these marks of distinction, explains Massala-Massala, is more than sufficient to separate Paysans (simple migrants who usually settle in provincial areas of France) from Parisiens: “Il n’est pas élégant. Il ne sait pas ce que c’est que l’élégance . . . Le Paysan se déplace à pied et pousse le culot jusqu’à prendre les transports en commun avec les autochtones . . . Le Paysan mange du manioc et du foufou. Il mange par terre avec ses frères” (89–90; “He is not elegant. He doesn’t know what elegance is . . . The Paysan gets around on foot and even has the nerve to take public transport with the natives . . . The Paysan eats manioc and foufou. He eats sitting on the ground with his brothers”). However, the egregiousness of the Paysan’s failure lies not in his lack of etiquette, but in his refusal to partake of the myth of Paris. His unsavory comportment offends because it detracts from the dream that mikilistes work meticulously to maintain:


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10 These illusions of metamorphosis, as Gondola maintains, are a key way in which mikilistes transform their bodies into “social metaphors”: “The sapeur is an illusionist. The sape is there to conceal his social failure and to transform it into apparent victory” (31). Moudileno also notes that the cult of sape migration as illustrated in Bleu blanc rouge depends upon the migrant’s successful physical transformation into an affluent Parisian, making the return home a bodily “parade”: “Le corps est exhibé dans Bleu blanc rouge comme site d’un langage destiné à confirmer le mythe par des transfigurations visibles, renvoyant à un statut social supérieur . . . En France comme au pays natal, la preuve de la singularité est donnée d’abord par le spectacle d’un corps transfiguré” (117; “The body is exhibited in Bleu blanc rouge as the site of a language meant to confirms the myth through visible transformations, leading to a higher social status . . . In France as in the home country, the proof of distinction is first given through the spectacle of a transfigured body”).
The Paysan lies. He is a big liar... He is always complaining. Advising hopefuls to think twice before going to France if they don’t have anything to do there. Be careful, you will wander through the city of Paris like lost balls. I know what I’m talking about, don’t go there if you don’t have anything to do there. It’s an outdated discourse. A discourse we do not pay attention to. Luckily the Parisien is there to tell us the opposite. To bring us light. To tell us about the City of Light. The Paris we love.

In his repudiation of the Paysan, Massala-Massala uncovers the contours of Paris as a flexible signifier of sape. Much as it functions for Darío as a formal vehicle of aesthetic and cultural sensibility, Paris represents for the mikilistes a way of being and a set of beliefs about their own place in the world, a touchstone which is supported but not determined by the space of the city. For that reason a Paysan can never be a Parisien, despite having visited or lived in Paris, while a mikiliste like Moki is Parisien even before his arrival: “Je connaissais Paris avant même de prendre l’avion pour la première fois à Luanda... Dès que je suis sorti de l’avion, j’ai pris avec assurance un taxi et j’ai indiqué au chauffeur l’itinéraire à suivre... Pour lui, je n’étais pas un étranger. J’étais chez moi” (85; “I knew Paris even before taking the plane for the first time in Luanda... As soon as I got off the plane, I confidently took a taxi and I indicated to the driver the route to take... To him, I was not a foreigner. I was at home”). For Moki, Paris is a source of social prestige only insofar as it stages the mannerisms and knowledge he has already acquired. The true test of success, which he flaunts before his protégés, is his convincing performance as a native of the capital: the spatial coordinates of Paris (the taxi, the streets, the itinerary itself) are included in Moki’s anecdote as a means of verifying his conquest of the city through the expert interpretation of Parisian-ness. In this sense, Paris acts as a mere backdrop for a narrative that both begins and ends—much like the “boomerang voyage” of Latin America’s criollo elite—in the cafes and bars of the Congo’s urban neighborhoods. The ideologies of the second degree mobilized by practices of sape reinscribe Paris within local fields of social meaning, effectively “moving” the capital to the periphery. It is precisely this movement to which Gondola refers when he affirms that “the mikiliste is an individual who first experiences Europe, his Europe, in Africa” (28).

Darío and the mikilistes of Bleu blanc rouge seek in the mythic appropriation of Paris a narrative of success which, as though through some secret transformation, can deliver them from the real circumstances of their own societies. Although their ideologies of the second degree may borrow from Paris as the capital of modernity, they do not aim simply to reproduce it. Rather, Paris becomes an atopic place-marker for local discourse (or as Fombona notes, citing Foucault, a heterotopia), through which participants in its common myth work to erect a local system of social ascension. In the propagation of these myths, the spatial existence of the city comes increasingly into question: those who dream of Paris, even those who eventually go there, derive their discourses of success from an established structure of its place referents already in circulation at home, a structure that often clashes with the lived experience of the city. Paris, then, becomes a semiotic label, controlled as much by distant dreamers as by its own residents. Indeed, Gache seems to recognize this dual construction of place when he praises the “heroic” Argentine nationals who stay at home to verify the escapades of their traveling friends: “Si ellos no se quedaran, nosotros no sabríamos que nos vamos... Tan poco sería válida para nadie la orgía de París si, a la misma hora, estos hombres...
heroicos no tomasen naranjada en los bares de la Avenida” (9–10; “If they didn’t stay, we wouldn’t know that we have left . . . Neither would the orgy of Paris matter to anyone if, at the same time, these heroic men did not drink their orange-ade in the bars of the Avenue”). Certainly Gache suggests, as I have demonstrated above, that the space of destinations abroad can only be given meaning by the validating discourses of home. His comments, however, also contain a more radical component: dare we infer that Paris wouldn’t exist at all without the myths provided by its cultural satellites? Certainly, the mikilistes and modernistas lead us to reconsider how, in very different moments and places, discourses of dominance travel and evolve across lines of power. In reading their version of Paris, we might conclude along with them that the metropolis indeed resides in Brazzaville, Kinshasa, or Buenos Aires.

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