The Development of African Luxury Brands
Explorative study on Awareness of South African Luxury Brands among Congolese Sapeurs from Brussels

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I. Introduction

As a continent, Africa brims of resources. Its cultural inheritance is exposed across the globe such are the examples of the Congolese and the Bambara masks now present around the world. The Coptic crosses of Ethiopia, the masks of the Egyptian pharaohs, the necklaces of Tuaregs or adornments of the Ashantis epitomized the talent of its craftsmen (Martin-Leke and Ellis, 2014: 177). For instance, West Africa’s ancient urban tradition is enriched with specialized craft production (Iliffe, 2007:87). Inside Iliffe’s book (2007) on the History of African continent, the author reports that, in West Africa, “Nupe was famous for glasswork, one of many specialties […]. Within Yorubaland, Ijebu Ode became renowned for work in precious metals, Ilorin for pottery, and Oyo for leatherwork[…]. Specialization was most advanced in the textile industry.” (2007: 86-87). The quality of cloth produce in Wolof and Mande country is recognized to be of high quality (Iliffe, 2007:87).

On March 2008, Victoria Rovine’s article titled: “Couturiers: L’Afrique est une muse.” (Literally translate it to “Couturier: Africa is a muse”) gives an oversight of the influence of Africa on the European fashion designers from the twentieth onward. French Paul Poiret (1879-1944), well known for the exoticism of his creation (Africanism), and manufacturer Rodier represent this first generation of French dressmakers inspired by African patterns, colors or textiles. More contemporary designers such as Yves Saint Laurent and Christian Dior presented in 1967 collections with “art nègre” inspiration. Other examples are Todd Oldham who got his inspiration from the Ndebele during the nineties (Missoni, 1990); or Issey Miyake with his West African bogolan patterns. The first collection of the British stylist John Galliano for his haute couture collection for Christian Dior in 1997 included Masai-inspired clothing designs and accessories (Mbow, 1998: 135). African inspiration grew stronger in the twenty-first century. In 2003 Donna Karan presented a described as “ode to Africa” by Suzy Menkes (renowned mode journalist for the International Herald Tribune and New York Times ) ; Jean-Paul Gaultier named his dresses after Kilimandjaro or Bambara in 2004. In 2008 Oscar de la Renta and Comme des Garçons also used African textiles for their Spring/summer collection. Austrian designer, Lena Hoschek have celebrated African print with her spring/summer 2015’s collection Hot mama Africa. So the
African richness and beautiful crafts are still inspiring international artists elsewhere. Actually, some native artists try to break into the high-end fashion industry such as Alphadi (Niger), Oumou Sy (Senegal), Pathé O (Ivory Coast) that started in the nineties to give an African voice to global catwalk. And Africa is currently still bursting of luxurious “Made in Africa” brands such as David Tlale (South Africa), Marianne Fassler (South Africa), Gavin Rajah (South Africa), Lisa Folawiyo for Jewel of Lisa (Nigeria), Lanre Da Silva Ajayi (Nigeria), Christie Brown (Ghana), Ituen Basi (Nigeria) to name only a few. They all have started to build a name for themselves locally and internationally. Of course, the high-end quality and aesthetic of their designs are inner components of their success. “Made in Africa” as luxurious label is not only a trend. Its players want to perpetuate traditional craft and offer a modern interpretation of it into a unique and cosmopolite style. In Farber’s article (2010) terms like “Afropolitan aesthetic”, “African modern”, “African fusion” or “African hybridity” are used to qualify this idea that African designers have to “engage with local and global material and stylistic forces committed to multiculturalism, and which are rearticulated through global understandings of African fashion today” (Farber, 2010:130). Those designers take part into the reinterpretation of African design by delivering something else than the five big fashion clichés related to Africa: Mandela shirts, animal skins, Ghanaian fabrics, Ndebele beadwork, and the red plaid and beaded collars of the Maasai (Baker, 2014). Inside this thesis, only brands coming from Africa and creating by designers originate from Africa are considered as “Made in Africa”. This precision is capital since there is yet no official definition about what “made in Africa” means. However, we have to think over the sense of this term. Indeed, many designers coming from the African diaspora (as Duru Olowu – from Nigerian backgrounds, Oswald Boateng – with Ghanaian backgrounds) but manufacturing in Europe or elsewhere than the continent are targeted as “made in Africa” sometimes. Ultimately, does the place of production or the origin of the designer needs to be taken into account in order to appreciate a brand as ‘Made in Africa’? Those unresolved questions lead me to establishing my own definition of this term. Inside this thesis, those two conditions (African origin and continental production) have to be met to be “Made in Africa”.

African clothing has been subject to many scholarly studies. Mary Carol Hopkins and Victoria L. Rovine sketch it inside their respective articles “The cultural construction of the self: cloth, fashion, and agency in Africa” (2006) and “African fashion design: Global networks and local
styles” (2006). Since the sixties, African textiles have been recognized by arts scholars (see Joanne Eicher’s *African Dress: A select and annotated bibliography of Sub-Saharan countries*, 1969; Kate Peck Kent’s *Introducing West African Cloth*, 1971; Roy Sieber in *African textiles and decorative arts*, 1972). From the late seventies and through the eighties and nineties, other more specific pieces on African textiles (focused on a region or a technique in particular) were published such as Lamb & Lamb, 1982, 1984; or Lamb & Holmes on West African countries in 1980. These studies view “dress as a practical consumer good, an aesthetic product, and also as a projection of the self” (M.C. Hopkins, 2006: 82). Other works also analyze the local design practices such as Rabine (2002), Bastian (2006), Gondola (1999), Hansen (2000), Picton (1995), Renne (1995), Rovine (2001), Perani and Wolff (1999). While Perani & Wolff’s book *Cloth, Dress and Art patronage in Africa* deals with traditional clothing, Hansen’s book on the other side focuses more on the trade of secondhand clothing. But both enlighten the social dynamism of African clothing according to Hopkins because they show the micro-historical changes and more importantly, they highlight the importance of clothing in self-identity, self-projection and self-protection (Hopkins, 2005: 80). Rovine’s article also points at a growing literature addressing the work of African haute couture designers such as Van der Plas and Willemsen (1998), *Revue noire* (1997), Mendy-Ongoundou (2002), Mustafa (2002) and Rovine (2004). Since many cities on the continent have experienced some development in fashion to become ‘fashion cities’ (such as Johannesburg, Accra, Lagos, Dar As Salam), recent studies have been paying attention to this redefinition of Africa within the industry of fashion in regards to a specific region. For example, Leora Farber embraces this new afropolitan aesthetic inside her article over the contemporary South African fashion design (2010). Through the analysis of three south African fashion brands, the author seeks to understand the new embodiments of the African modernism. This shows that each country can offer its own reinterpretation of fashion according to their local, social-cultural life and traditional craft. In the same way, Michaela Alejandra Oberhofer (2012) examines the relationship between fashion and cities as cultural practices. By the comparison of three case studies (fashion designers of Johannesburg, Lagos and Douala), she puts into perspective this representation of African fashion as being a uniform and monolithic fashion. Inside this thesis, I will make reference to African fashion or “Made in Africa” as an englobed model but I do not forget that there is a more versatility range of style in Africa (for instance, Made in Tanzania or Nigerian Fashion).
My wish to study “Made in Africa” brands inside the luxury fashion industry started in 2014 from a simple question: Which African luxury fashion brands do I know? The answer was clear: none. And the fact that my peers were totally unaware that African brands actually exist led to a deeper concern about this matter. This thesis will therefore aim at examining the relationship that people from the African diaspora have with African luxury brands. Indeed, are there any cultural impediments to this unawareness?

First of all, the latter question actually takes into consideration the brand awareness of a potential customer. In marketing, regarding the DAGMAR Model\(^1\), brand awareness is needed in order to achieve a brand purchase intention from consumers (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013:156). In fact, brands help designers to differentiate their creations from the competitors’ which makes them unique and special. Following the DAGMAR model, this awareness constitutes the first step throughout the buying process (which is at the end, the most important step for any brand, even more in the luxury sector.) Thus shaping of awareness is fundamental in a development strategy.

Secondly, I want to focus on Africa as a producer of high-end fashion brands because this perspective is still relatively new inside academic research. The development of African luxury brands began in the late twentieth century with designer such as Chris Seydou (1949-1994 -Mali) (Mbow, 1998) but it is recently that it makes itself more noticeable. According to Kayode, there is a lack of brand building strategies from African business owners (2011:119). Tom Sitati states in his interview (Mail & Gardian, 2011) that the economy of the continent mostly relies on raw materials. For instance, in the textile manufacturing area, cotton is epitomized as a supplier (Centre du commerce international; Berti, F and al., 2006). According to the International Trade Centre website, thirty-seven African countries produce cotton and thirty of them export their production. The Ecobank’s research published in 2013 reveals that Africa exported 70% of raw cotton (mostly to China) in 2011 while it has been importing mainly finished cotton fabric and material from China and the European Union (Ecobank Research, 2013). As a reminder, cotton has been playing

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\(^1\) DAGMAR for Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results. It was published in 1961 by Russel Colley which states that a person or organization goes through different phases before buying a product.
a great part in the rise of the textile industry with a huge impact on the economic development. All of this shows that the continent has still some work to do before it can deliver finished products.

Moreover, the plagues Africa has been suffering from (political instability, wars, poverty and inequality) cannot be disregarded. And because of this sad reality, talking about luxury may appear to be inappropriate. Indeed, key findings from the report of the World Bank show that the 10 most unequal countries in the world are actually located in the Dark Continent, most of them in southern Africa (World Bank, 2016). However, it also underlines that “inequality is not higher in Africa than elsewhere in the world”. So addressing African luxury might not be that inappropriate after all.

The African consumption of luxury goods has brought a lot of attention too and articles and reports about it keep flourishing: in 2015 KPMG published the “Luxury goods in Africa” report; Deborah Aitken, Maja Rakic, and Sonia Baldeira’s analysis for Bloomberg was entitled “Africa luxury goods market: full of untapped promise” (2015); Johanna Collins-Wood comments that “Luxury brands are wrong to ignore Africa” (2014); CNBC Africa writes “Africa’s appetite for luxury goods to be sated” (2014) and many more. These articles pointed out the growing potential for that industry. Furthermore, several countries count thousands of millionaires and there is a significant growth of the middle class. According to the Wealth Report, the continent’s ultra-wealthy population is forecast to expand by 59% over the next decade (KMPG Reports, 2015:8). Those assets haven’t been ignored by prestigious luxurious labels that opened flagship stores as Burberry in Johannesburg back in 2011.

Notwithstanding these emerging market opportunities, African designers should be penalized by a preference of choice. According to some African professionals and authors, ‘Africans prefer Western products over African ones’ referring to Otas’ article on Africa Luxury (2013) and a panelists’ speech during the London fashion conference (April 24, 2015). This statement has been proven right by the success of salaula.² Besides, in her article, Belinda Otas depicts and establishes the various challenges that emerging African luxury brands have to face when it comes to increase their visibility. According to her, the “ingrained attitude of Africans desiring Western brands over

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² Salaula is the name of a secondhand clothing market in Zambia. See Karen Hansen Tranberg, *Salaula: the world of secondhand clothing and Zambia*. (University of Chicago Press, 2000).
locally produced ones” contributes to the hindering of the African luxury growth. Well-off consumers sometimes question the price of such high branded products while they will not contest that of the foreign brands they willingly buy into” (Otas,2013: 51-52). As we can see, all these statements question Africans’ perception of their own luxury products.

This work aims at looking into the perspective of high-end African fashion brands among Congolese Sapeurs. In order to understand the implications of the African luxury brands inside the African cultural context, I need to expand on many aspects. This study obviously bridges marketing and social-cultural perspectives through the linkage of production and perception of luxury goods. Having a background in communications, I have always been interested on how cultural elements impact communication strategies and how it could help to improve it.

My position embraces this current rebranding of Africa as a place of production of high-end goods, due to this new crop of African designers. Three dimensions will be studied in order to understand how this redefinition of African fashion is received.

1- The first one is the establishment and acknowledgment of luxury African fashion among African diaspora in Belgium (especially among Congolese Sapeurs). The aim is to identify if the association between African fashion and luxury is effective among them when it comes to fashion. For a long time, luxury fashion has been equivalent to western production and western brands. But does Africa manage to show itself as a place of quality production of fashion among those Africans? The first hypothesis is that there is not yet any link in Africans’ minds between luxury production and Africa, especially when it comes to luxury fashion.

2- The second one is the awareness of luxury African brands among my study groups. As the selected brands are considered to be luxury ones, the study is about seeing whether respondents can acknowledge the selected brands as a luxury brand, especially knowing that their origin is from Africa. Because of the absence of a link between Africa and luxury production, the second hypothesis is that there is no awareness of any luxury African brands among diasporic Sapeurs and that the brands will not be perceived as a luxury brand because of their place of production.

3- And finally, South Africa is famously known as an advanced country in the continent, which makes it an eligible producer of luxury brands and goods. We could thus say that
the hypothesis for this one would be that the special status of South Africa, considered as the “little Europe of Africa”, is beneficial to luxury South African brands because it increases the appreciation for those brands as real African luxury products.

In summary, our objective here is to depict the embracing of luxury African brands among a certain group of people keen on high-end fashion products. Research on international marketing leads automatically to take into account cultural aspects of a country. Therefore, I think that the mixing of marketing and cultural concepts is not necessarily pioneering. But due to my focus on perception of luxurious character of the selected African fashion brands regarding to a diasporic African view, I hope to bring something new in this research field. Finally, the choice of this topic is meaningful since luxury goods are a challenging area for anyone stepping into it. The acknowledgment of a brand by its users as luxurious is required in order to create a brand intention on their side. And this marketing effort coming from the continent itself needs to be evaluated.

This study lays on important concepts that will be developed on a theoretical framework. First of all, I will review the concept of luxury through a managerial perspective. Indeed, this word is frequently used but complex to define. The different ways to define it will be explained in the first part, that is more general. I will also develop on luxury as industry (parts 3 & 4). On the other hand, I will tackle luxury on an African perspective (parts 5 & 6). This point is aimed at bringing some light on how luxury can be understood in an African context, with a small focus on South Africa. The second important concept is dressing. The third theoretical part develops Africa and dressing. This chapter identifies the different functions that dressing presents as well as the stereotypes that emerge around it in regard to African production, and it also points out some reasons behind the spreading of Western clothing. Finally, since this study wants to target Congolese diaspora as the most keen on opting for fashion and luxury brands, the last concept will deal with the sapeurs.

Next I will develop my methodology. This step will mainly consider the strategies I will develop all along this dissertation in order to make sure that the objectives assigned are clearly achieved. The following chapter will analyze the results reached all along the research, Finally, there will be a short conclusion that will give a final word to the word, and shall consider possibilities for further research.
II. Theoretical framework

Part 1 - What is luxury?

1. Definition of luxury

Academic literature is consensual about the complexity of defining ‘luxury’ (Heine, 2011; Shamina, 2011; Atwal and Williams, 2009, Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015). The problem of this notion is its high relativity and its subjectivity.

According to Heine (2011: 34) the general view states that “luxury is anything that is desirable and which exceeds necessity and ordinariness”.

Inside his work on this concept, Heine identifies factors influencing the perception of what luxury can be. According to him:

- The rarity of a good in a certain environment bestows a luxury status to it.
- Social trends and technological progress change the perception of luxuriousness. Thus, last technological innovation can be seen as a luxury to acquire.
- The frequency of access to resources of people or the difference in economic development among states brings about variations in the perception of luxury goods too. “While most people consider a watch costing €50 as ordinary, there are some who see it as a luxury, and still others who would not even regard a watch costing €5000 as a luxury.” (Heine, 2011: 31)
- Moreover, this concept is time sensitive. Indeed, what was tagged as ‘luxury’ is no longer the same a decade after. For instance, having a computer or television in a household is nowadays really common. This element or relativity renders the evaluation of this concept difficult.
The situational relativity refers to the situations in which a person may regard/classify a product as being a luxury item. Indeed, the same product could be differently classified (necessary, ordinary or luxurious) depending on the circumstances.

Finally, the cultural relativity of luxury refers to the “desirability to people” of a good regarding their culture. Heine (2011:32) explains “the preferences of luxury are rooted to a great extent in cultural values which differ by demographic variables such as gender, age, and education.” (Heine, 2011:21). Moreover, the perception of luxury depends on each individual because “what might be luxury to one person will be commonplace, or perhaps even irrelevant and valueless to another.” It is also culturally “determined by the elite of any cultural group or subculture”. In that case, the cultural-specific symbols are used for social distinction. And because “culture-specific symbols of luxury are a result of social learning, it must also be possible to influence people’s ideas of luxury using marketing measures” (Heine, 2011:21).

The high relativity of this term leads to research on a more operational definition of it. Three ways can be adopted in order to understand the concept. The first one is the definition of the six main characteristics of luxury (Heine, 2011; Kapferer, March-April 2012; Bruce and Kratz, 2007:131). Therefore, price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, extraordinariness and symbolism are generally agreed on as core characteristics of luxury (Heine, 2011; Kapferer, March-April 2012). Those attributes are not independent from each other. “For instance, their relatively small production volumes (high rarity), their superior level of quality and the relatively high effort made for aesthetics, extraordinariness and a good story behind the product inevitably lead to a relatively high price.” (Heine, 2011:42).

Whereas Heine and Kapferer are consensual about general characteristics, they both propose two other ways for defining luxury. The second way is in a more managerial perspective. Heine scopes two perspectives: The consumer perspective and the product and brand perspective (Bruce and Kratz, 2007:131, Heine, 2011) which will be developed later on.

According to Kapferer (March-April 2012), the concept of luxury refers also to the economic sector and a business model. As he explains, the luxury market can be valued by analyzing revenues of luxury companies designed as such by specific organization as the Comité Colbert in
France which regroups luxury brands, like a club. As a sector, luxury is undergoing some changes. Okonkwo (2007: 225-226) itemizes few causes. The centurial high entry barrier has been lowered because of the new practices in management and business driven by globalization and internet. Furthermore, the increase of investments in the luxury sector through acquisitions, capital investments and brand portfolio development leads to the ambiguity of what is a true luxury brand. Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2015:15) speak about ‘real luxury’ (the one accessible to only few people) to an ‘intermediary luxury’ which is a strategy in order to democratize luxury, in order to make it more accessible to the middle class. In that sense, they suggest that luxury also refers to a market. The development of brands has led to the creation of different categories of luxury in order to adapt to these consumers.

Luxury has also the meaning of a business model with a specific strategy (Kapferer, 2012). This strategy is no longer exclusive to luxury brands and can be applied to mass fashion brands for instance. This indistinguishable strategy blurs the line between the two sectors. (Okonkwo, 2007; Kapferer, 2012).

The confusion of the concept of luxury is that it can reach all those meanings. So the main idea to remember is that luxury goods are different from normal goods.

The next section will discuss the meaning of luxury on consumer and brands perspectives which are popular inside marketing literature.

1.1. Definition of luxury on consumer behavior perspective.

Luxury is associated to certain characteristics. The previous characteristics form the framework with which to decide if a product or service is luxurious. But it is the consumer’s subjective perception that counts more than the existing product attributes (Heine, 2011:42, Okonkwo, 2007, Kayode, 2011:85). Therefore, having the best perception among the target group is a real competition for all luxury products. Indeed, a luxury product conveys an image. People consume luxury goods for the emotion and the symbolism of it (Atwal and Williams, 2008; Shamina, 2011). Thus, the use of good marketing and communication tools are essential in order to obtain an adequate image on consumers’ minds.
Historically, the main target groups for luxury products have been affluent customers. Luxury goods were the privilege of the elite classes for centuries (Shamina, 2011; Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015; Okonkwo, 2007). It was used to define borders of different social classes. Nowadays, this concept is outdated. For instance, consumer credit and various payment facilities give access to luxury to other social groups. Furthermore, because of the growth of wealth in emergent countries, the *nouveaux riches* social groups comprise an increasing new market. This category is composed of young and urban people, representing 46% of customers of luxury items (Bruce and Kratz, 2007:134, Okonkwo, 2007:65-70, Atwal and Bryson, 2013: 20-22). In other words, profile and lifestyle of luxury consumers are changing. Traditional aristocrats are not the only consumers of luxury anymore since the current middle class is a new and growing target now. This situation causes “democratization of luxury” and gives rise to “massive luxuries” or accessible luxuries, luxuries for the masses (Shamina, 2011). For instance, heavy fashion brands like Zara, H&M and Top Shop have adapted their strategy in order to give their consumers a certain feeling of added-value. They collaborate with luxury fashion designers such as Karl Lagerfeld for H&M or celebrities. For instance, Madonna co-branded a collection with H&M in 2007. Another example is the use of celebrity endorsement like GAP advertising with Sara Jessica Parker in their 2005 advertising campaigns (Okonkwo, 2007:228).

But what do people look for when it comes to luxury goods? According to Shamina (2011: 124-129), consumers seek luxury for personal or interpersonal reasons. She basically distinguishes two types of consumption: the conspicuous and the discreet one. The latter is described as the way of consumption found in high social classes to “separate from wealthy low-status agents by consuming discreetly. […] This type of consumption can only be seen by observers within the social circle of the consumer” (Shamina, 2011: 129). The conspicuous consumption notion was first introduced by Thorstein Veblen in his work *The Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899. It can be defined as “the behavior to show power and wealth by the new rich as a new society class” (Shamina, 2011: 124-125). According to Shamina, this type of consumption is mostly common in emerging markets. Another aspect characterizing conspicuous consumers is the conformism showed by the consumers (Shamina, 2011: 130). Conformist attitudes are due to the social mimicking of identification models. As Tcheuyap explains:
“Les processus de socialisation incitent l’individu à être comme tout le monde, à choisir les mêmes modèles que tout le monde.” (Tcheuyap, 1999).

Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2015:24-27) have identified four important values playing a role on the perception of what a luxury good is for its consumers. First of all, luxury good needs to inform about someone’s social success (elitist dimension). Secondly, consumers also look for characteristics such as high price and quality to determine the luxuriousness of the product they buy. Thirdly, consumption has to generate feelings and/or pleasure, which refers to the hedonistic dimension of luxury. And finally, consumers consider that the reputation and the power of a brand are significant in luxury too. Nevertheless, according to both authors the most predominant values in luxury consumption are the hedonistic and elitist values.

Nowadays, brands provide values to consumers – feelings, perceptions and experiences (Okonkwo, 2007:102-103). Chevalier and Mazzalovo state that brands are actually the main conveyor of luxury (2015: 24) since they transmit the social perceptions we have of it and all its positive images. Marketing strategy has powerful instruments (Okonkwo, 2007, De Pelsmacker and al., 2013) aimed at identifying competitors and differentiating one from another. They have transformed luxury market (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015).

This leads us to consider the perception of luxury according to the following perspective.

1.2. Definition of luxury products and brands perspective

1.2.1. Definition of luxury in products perspective

Apparel\(^3\) products are ideal agents for luxury especially for the conspicuous consumer. Indeed, those consumers use clothes to manage their self-image. The personal connection with apparel products is higher than impersonal products as kitchen or garden furnishing. There are mostly publicly displayed because social motives are underneath the purchasing process. That is why clothing is an attribute of power (Adam,1984:862).

Heine categorizes luxury products in regards of their exclusivity and their production volume

\(^3\) Apparel is the US term used to refer to clothing (Oxford Dictionaries). These terms may be used interchangeably inside this paper.
The latter category is important to mention because of its relevance in the fashion design segment. The following four segments come from this categorization.

- Unique pieces. Those products are unique masterpiece, otherwise known as oeuvre d’art. Haute couture clothing exemplifies this category.
- Limited editions products. These products are close to the first category but their production is highly limited.
- Limited-diffusion products. They are referred to as prêt-à-porter [ready-to-wear] in the fashion world. Their rarity is due to their “manufacturing complexity”.
- Expanded-diffusion products. They still are luxury products whose “production resembles mass-market serial production”.

1.2.2. Definition of luxury in brands perspective.

A brand can be defined as “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers, and to differentiate them from those of a competitor” (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013 :39). Put it simply, brands are “images in the minds of consumers and other target groups” (Heine, 2011: 46). Two major elements are pointed out here, namely the importance of consumers and the images they associate to the brand. The success of a brand is evaluated according to this association (Okonkwo 2007, Heine 2011, Kayode, 2011), and especially in the luxury sector. Indeed, the success of a brand (qualifies as luxurious or not) depends on the evaluation by the consumers of its identity characteristics (name, term, sign, symbol or design) as luxuriousness (Heine, 2011: 47).

While Heine identifies six core attributes that demonstrate a true luxury brand, Okonkwo (2007:105) puts ten others in detail:

- Innovative, creative, unique and appealing products;
- Consistent delivery of premium quality;
- Exclusivity in goods production;
- Tightly controlled distribution;
- A heritage of craftsmanship;
- A distinct brand identity;
- A global reputation;
- Emotional appeal;
- Premium pricing;
- High visibility.

These characteristics determine and constitute a luxury brand as well as its identity (Heine, 2011:46).

There are three ways to define luxury according to brands (by using the luxury level, the awareness of brand or the business volume) (Heine, 2011:46-51) but the most relevant for this study is awareness. By differentiated luxury brand by their awareness, Heine distinguishes two groups: **connoisseur brands** and **star brands**.

- **Connoisseur brands** are “made by and for connoisseurs, and do not even strive for high awareness beyond their relatively narrow target group of select insiders. Connoisseur brands are often also network brands, which are recommended by word-of-mouth between friends” (Heine, 2011:50).

- **Star brands** “are bought only by relatively few people, they preferably should be known by everyone. One of their consumers’ major purchasing motives is to demonstrate their wealth to other people, who often cannot afford these luxury products” (Heine, 2011:51).

According to the author, there are three level of awareness:

- Little stars: strive for high awareness, but are (still) relatively little-known;
- Big star: have already achieved a high level of awareness;
- Global stars: are globally well-known flagship brands as Louis Vuitton.

Furthermore, Hein (2011) highlights that even if the definitions are similar to one another, luxury brands and luxury products differ. Luxury brands are not always equivalent to luxury products and the other way around is also true. A luxury brand can make non-luxury products such as Mercedes offer construction vehicles or garbage trucks. And non-luxury brands can deliver luxury product such as private jets by Bombardier. Nevertheless, luxury brands manufacture luxury products most of the time per definition.
Moreover, another important distinction has to be affirmed. Brands that produce luxury and beauty products at a reasonable price differ from luxury brands. It is just a marketing strategy. Indeed, producing “masstige products” (or luxury for the masses) is also a type of strategy adopted by luxury brands in order to be more accessible to middle class consumers. In that case, the challenge for luxury brands is to preserve their image of exclusiveness (Heine, 2011) because emotion and symbolism are crucial for luxury consumers.

And finally, a quick clarification should be made between luxury and prestige brands. Dubois and Czellar (2002) differentiated both terms. According to them, prestige refers to the subjective evaluative judgment where a unique accomplishment is perceived. Prestige is a long and positive judgment evaluation to acquire. It has to be merited while luxury is not by definition merited and can emerge (but not necessarily) as a type of prestige symbolism. It is linked to comfort, beauty and sumptuous lifestyle. So “a brand can be prestigious without being luxurious”. (Dubois and Czellar, 2002:7) Even if a differentiation is made, marketers often use the concepts interchangeably. It will be also the case inside this paper.

2. Function of luxury goods.

People do not need luxury goods to survive. It fulfills other needs, namely emotional and social needs (Shamina, 2011: 129, Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015). Therefore, luxury goods are seen as a way of expression and as a social marker (Heine, 2011). It is the historical function of luxury. As a social marker, luxury unites its consumers under a brand (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015: 39-40). They share the same purchasing power, the same codes and ambitions and differentiate themselves from the common people.

Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2015:40) add that luxury fulfills desire (it must make people dream) and bring emotional or sensual satisfactions (through extraordinary experiences for instance); it is the evidence of comfort.

Furthermore, luxury operates as an ambassador of its country of origin according to Kapferer (March-April 2012). He names for instance brands such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel or Dior which represent France around the world and give an added value to the goods. Since the meaning of
luxury is culturally and geographically bonded, it is interesting to see how this concept could be interpreted inside the African context. According to Kotabe and Helsen (2011: 382-386), the country-of-origin (COO) is often used by the consumers to assess the quality of a product. As they put it, “consumers hold cultural stereotypes about countries that will influence their product assessments” (Kotabe and Helsen, 2011: 383), which can have an impact on the consumer decision-making process. The authors explore the effects of this complex phenomenon. They depict some key findings coming from different academic studies.

- First of all, they notice that the COO effects are not stable in the long run. “Country images will change when consumer becomes more familiar with the country, the marketing practices behind the product improve over time, or when the product’s actual quality improves” (op.cit.: 383).
- Secondly, the country of design and the country of manufacturing both play a role. Foreign companies can capitalize on the first or the second to attract their consumers, like Toyota who pitched for its Camry model as “the best car built in America” (idem).
- The COO impacts differently on consumer demographics. While its effects are particularly strong among “the elderly, less educated, and politically conservative consumers”, among the novice consumers COO will be used as “a cue in evaluating a product under any circumstances” and among the experts the COO stereotypes help “when product attribute information are ambiguous” (idem).
- The emotions consumers may experience are also relevant here. Indeed, “angry consumers are more likely to use COO information in their product evaluations than sad consumers.” (Maheswaran D. and Chen C., in Kotabe and Helsen, 2011: 383).
- Collectivist countries tend to favorably evaluate their home country production while individualist ones only base the superiority of a product on the competition it generates. So cultural orientations are meaningful.
- Furthermore, “consumers are likely to use the origin of a product as a cue when they are unfamiliar with the brand named carried by the product” (Cordell, V., 1992, in Kotabe and Helsen, 2011:384).
- And finally, the COO effects depend on the product category. For instance, Japanese technologies score higher than cosmetics or food.
So, according to Kotabe and Helsen, 2011, country-related clichés can either do good or harm a certain product. The authors propose some strategies based on the four marketing mix that can help to counter negative COO stereotypes.

- The company can select a brand name that distinguishes the country-of-origin or even invokes a favorable COO; such as the luxurious Japanese brand Comme des Garçons which strategically adopted a French name in order to benefit from the French glamour. The brand name is important since it is the first point of contact between the consumer and the product (Okonkwo, 2007:108). They propose other options such as the use of private-label branding or brand equity (which can be defined as the marketing value of a brand attributed by consumers or companies (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013; Okonkwo, 2007:121). And the last solution proposed is the improvement of the quality in order to fix the brand image. All these strategies rest upon the product policy.

- The company can play on pricing by setting a premium price to fight the COO biases. The authors underline that this practice is relevant for product categories in which prices send a signal of quality (e.g. wines, cosmetics, clothes).

- Furthermore, the mere distribution of their products through highly respected channels make companies very influent on the consumer’s behavior.

- And finally, brands can use communication and therefore pursue two main objectives. On one hand, their communication strategy helps to improve the country image. These efforts are mostly used by industry associations or government agencies. On the other hand, they can strengthen their brand image.

In conclusion, brands are really powerful in the luxury sector. They make distinction possible and convey different messages within a social realm, which will bring us to our next topic.
3. Luxury industry

The demand for luxury goods has risen threefold in the two last decades, achieving 223 billion euros in 2014 according to Bain & Company’s report on luxury market (Enskog, Milozavljevic and Tillson, 2015). But as explained earlier, luxury also refers to an industry which includes different areas. The following brief section will present these sectors, their particularities and their main actors. A special focus will be put on apparel. The following section is mainly based on Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2015).

3.1. Luxury industry and its main characteristics and actors

The luxury industry is generally divided into five major traditional sectors. These include apparel (or ready-to-wear), leather goods, perfumes and cosmetics, watches and jewellery. While Okonkwo (2007) identifies eyewear as a fifth sector, Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2015) choose wines and spirits and also add hospitality (e.g. bars, restaurants, hotels, and luxury cruises, travel or tourism agencies) into this industry. Nevertheless, this categorization doesn’t take into account new divisions such as luxury cars. The extension to new categories demonstrates the diversity of luxury. The following table from Okonkwo (2007: 131) illustrates the major luxury fashion product divisions.
Luxury is a particular industry because of the size of businesses that it includes, its financial characteristics and its temporality (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015: 41-70).

- In order to explain the first points, Chevalier and Mazzalovo compare Dior Couture’s annual revenues for 2013 (more or less 1.5 billion euros) to PSA Peugeot, Citröen group (which generated 54 billion euros for the same year). As the numbers show, PSA group realized a bigger turnover than Dior Couture, though Dior brand is more known around the world than Peugeot. So the first particularity in the luxury industry is that brands may be small (in terms of size -they have generally less staff members since a lot of activities are outsourced- and sales revenues) but they still enjoy higher awareness.

- The second point developed by the authors is related to financial characteristics. Most of the businesses in luxury are in shortfall, but when these are profitable, they can produce high margins. So even if a brand is in deficit, it can still create profits because of its attractiveness among consumers. Things get harder for the new players though.

- And finally, launching a new brand in this industry needs a lot of financial investments (in advertisement and promotion) before any profitable returns, which can take years.
When reading about luxury industry, it is very frequent to come across LVMH, Richemont, Kering, Estée Lauder or Pernod Ricard. The latter represents the biggest group of the industry. These have the most prestigious brands in their portfolio. LVMH (Möet Hennessy Louis Vuitton – owning brands such as Veuve Clicquot et Hennessy, Givenchy,Fendi, Loewe) and Richemont (owns brands such as Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels) are the two biggest. And to conclude, it is good to remember that Italy and France are the two leaders in the industry.

4. Focus on apparel industry

Ready-to-wear (male and female) and haute-couture are the most visible part of this luxury industry. These are important in terms of images (in particular feminine ready-to-wear). These are good conveyors of luxury throughout the media and the artistic world (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015: 73).

From Chevalier and Mazzalovo’s description (2015: 72-84) of apparel industry, one has to remember a few points:

- This market is estimated at 35 billion euros per volume.
- It is mostly perfumes and cosmetics or wines and spirits that produce the highest turnover and reports.
- Profitability is difficult to assess in apparel activities. Many brands are in deficit and do not make any profits.
- Fashion brands generating a turnover above 750 billion euros (such as Chanel, Dior, Lacoste, Ermenegildo Zegna, Fendi, Gucci, Max Mara) can be found all around the world. Their investment in advertisement is big. Fashion brands reaching 100 billion euros can possess profitable flagship stores in the 10 or 20 luxury capitals around the world (such as Balenciaga, Lanvin, Lonchamp, Furla, Les Copains, Missoni, Versace, Valentino). Below these sales revenues it is difficult for brands to open a flagship store in important capitals. But they can reach national presence or in two or three countries.
- The production is generally outsourced. The authors estimate that luxury apparel sector creates less than 20% of the workload in this industry.

- The two biggest countries in this sector are Italy and France. Italian brands came up around 1970 and 1980. There globally generate the highest revenues (more or less 20 billion euros). Their force lies on feminine ready-to-wear sales. French businesses are more traditional and have a long history in luxury. They are unique in haute-couture. Their revenues come more from sales of perfume or leather goods. Italian fashion brands overtake French ones due to their variety, size and power. But other countries such as the United States, Great-Britain, Germany, Spain, Belgium or Switzerland also belong to the luxury apparel industry. The authors have unfortunately forgotten to mention Japan (with brands such as Kenzo, Issey Miyake, Junya Watanabe or Yoji Yamamoto).

- And finally, creativity process and international presence are keys factor for success.

Although not mentioned, Africa is entering this industry slowly. But also the continent is trying to break into the apparel luxury by producing its own luxury brands. The following point will tackle this matter.

5. Africa and luxury

The following point aims at explaining why Africa is interesting in terms of luxury industry. Indeed, in the past few years the continent drawn a lot of attention. Its economic potential has been attractive for many investors and global luxury brands. Certain countries have been more profitable and attractive than others when it comes to fashion apparel, especially South-Africa. Furthermore, it has also created new African businesses. Indeed, Africa may be actually developing its own definition of luxury, or luxury Ubuntu.
Since Africa draws attention due to its recent economic boom, a growing number of articles talks about luxury goods and its consumption on the continent. For instance: “Africa the new Mecca for luxury brands” (African Business magazine, September 2013), “Africa’s elite reaches for the finer things in life”, (Financial times, 20-21 September 2014), “African emerging creator and consumer of luxury goods & fashion” (spherelife.com), “More African shoppers aspiring to luxury consumption” (The African Business Review, December 2013) or “The luxury market in Africa-emerging consumer empowerment is creating a luxurious future” (The African Business Review, December 2013), etc. The common points between those articles are the following:

- The acknowledgment that the continent is an enormous market for luxury goods;
- The acknowledgment that Africans are consumers of luxury goods.

What they show is that Africans participate in this economy of luxury mainly as consumers. Its attractiveness for any investors lies on its growing numbers of consumers and its fast economic growth as Thebe Ikalafeng (Africa foremost brand authorities and founder of the Brand Leadership Group and Brand Leadership Academy, South Africa) reminds it during an interview in February 2015 (see Appendix 9). “Consumer in Africa is going to rise exponentially” he said. McKinsey reports in 2012 that the continent has the fastest growing population, with over 40 percent of global population growth up to 2030. Its population is the youngest in the world. They found that the 16 to 34-years old group already accounts for 53 percent of income (McKinsey, 2012: 2). Furthermore, the economic performance has improved greatly as noted in KPMG’s report (2014). The number of households having a discretionary income is expected to rise from 85 million today up to 130 million in 2020 (McKinsey, 2012: 2) leading to potential growing consuming class. The middle class with desire for luxury is rising as well (Louw, 2013). Moreover, Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco and Nigeria record high growth in dollar millionaires, for that reason those countries are expected to have “the most potential for luxury goods demand expansion” (KPMG, 2014:2). In their 2015 report, they also add that the growth of ultra-wealthy population remains robust and is forecasted to expand by 59% over the next decade (KPMG, 2015:8). And they report the Standard Bank which states that the African continent “has the highest potential for growth at the moment” (KPMG, 2015:8). The following table (figure 1) shows that even if the continent counts less millionaires than in other continents, the expected growth remains
the most important. But it is from Nigeria and Egypt that a significant part of Africa’s demand for luxury goods emanate (KPMG, 2015 :6).

All these reports demonstrate that Africa is a real consumption market. “Africa is evolving as a new luxury market destination” as reported by Atwal and Bryson (2013).

These authors also indicate that “consumers are spending accounts for more than 60 per cent of Sub-Saharan Africa’s GDP” (Atwal and Bryson, 2013: 21).

However, there is still a scarcity in scholarship research around the consumption of luxury goods (Darbon, 2009). To explain this assessment, Darbon (2009) exposes Colin Campbell’s distinction between the want and the need. While western societies have consuming priorities (the want) as constitutive element of their culture, underdeveloped countries are built on the need model. The African continent has been stereotyped as a needy one where desires of non-necessity goods are simply underestimated.

In conclusion, due to its recent economic boost, African desire for luxury goods was brought under the light of mainstream media.

*Figure 2: Global wealth distribution. Source: KPMG report. Luxury goods sector in Africa. 2015, page 8.*
5.2. African countries on apparel industry

Even if Africa is at its early age of development, the potential for luxury brands is there. For that reason, Africa is named as the new Mecca for luxury brands as titled in *African Business Magazine (September 2013)*. The following table has been established according to the data found in Robb Young’s article (2015). It estimates the profitability of the apparel and footwear industry in different Sub-Saharan African fashion capitals which are also industry hubs and centers of lifestyle.

This table (table 1) shows that business opportunities in the African apparel and footwear industry are huge. Some countries are more busy than others. South Africa, Nigeria and Angola form the current top 3 markets of fashion and the top growing economies in Africa.

*Table 1: African apparel and footwear industry.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>National apparel and footwear market worth</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Resident millionaires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannesburg, South Africa</td>
<td>$14.4 billion</td>
<td>9.4 million</td>
<td>23,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/ Cape Town, South Africa</td>
<td>$14.4 billion</td>
<td>9.4 million</td>
<td>23,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lagos, Nigeria</td>
<td>$4.7 billion</td>
<td>13 million (21 million metro area)</td>
<td>9,500</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Luanda, Angola</td>
<td>$1.5 billion</td>
<td>5.5 million</td>
<td>5,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania</td>
<td>$1.1 billion</td>
<td>5.1 million</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nairobi, Kenya</td>
<td>$1 billion</td>
<td>3.9 million</td>
<td>6,200</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinshasa, Congo DRC</td>
<td>$620 million</td>
<td>11.6 million</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abidjan, Ivory Coast</td>
<td>$549 million</td>
<td>4.8 million</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addis Ababa, Ethiopia</td>
<td>$440 million</td>
<td>3.2 million</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dakar, Senegal</td>
<td>$215 million</td>
<td>5 million</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Accra, Ghana</td>
<td>$167 million</td>
<td>2.3 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to underline that Africa is neither a country nor a single market. The potential markets are multiple. Each country presents some features that enable (or not) a rapid grow of the sector. Not every Sub-Saharan country has been able to welcome international brand flagship stores. One country draws lot of attention when it comes to luxury goods though: South Africa.

5.3. South Africa and luxury fashion industry

With a population of 54 million, 30 million of which being under the age of 15 (OECD report, 2016), South Africa is the second productive African country. It ranks 49 out of 144 economies in the global competitiveness for 2015-2016 (World Economic Forum, 2015-2016). The country counts at least 32,000 millionaires (Young, 2015).

In 2011, the country joined the club of emerging countries with Brazil, Russia, India, China, known as BRICS. According to the OECD report (2016), the national GDP is estimated at 350.1 billion USDs, with an average growth of 0.8% for the five last years.

The employment rate is still low especially among Black South-Africans since the Apartheid regime (OEDC, 2014; Page, 2011). In order to stimulate the growth, OEDC points out the essential role of small and medium enterprises (SME’s). According to their report, SME’s created an average of 42% of new jobs from 2001 to 2011. They are likely to employ unskilled and young workers in comparison with big companies, what will help to reduce existing inequalities (Edwards and Rankin, 2015; SBP, 2013 in OEDC, 2014: 77). However, the report states that enormous progress regarding poverty has been done. The well-being has increased significantly, and with healthy macroeconomic framework, stability in budgetary situation, capital flow circulating freely, they have gained the confidence of financial markets (OEDC, 2014).

South Africa’s main sectors are industrial production and mining minerals exploitation (Page, 2011). Its transport infrastructure is efficient (the 29th according to the World Economic Forum, 2015-2016) as well as its financial, legal, communication system (Page, 2011). According to Page (2011), 75% of the big companies in the continent are located in South Africa.

In regard to its luxury industry, Euromonitor report (2016) notes a steady growth for South Africa in 2015. Indeed, even if the national GDP rate increases slowly compared to other African countries, South Africa still has the most advanced economy (Young, 2014). Young (2015) also states that the profitability of the apparel and footwear industry in South Africa is estimated at billions of dollars. So South Africa gathers at the same time a flourishing fashion industry and potential customers for the luxury market. Indeed, Cape Town and Johannesburg host the most important number of millionaires compared to other cities (Young, 2015). Those numbers position the country as the economic leader on the continent with attractive figures for investors in luxury goods.

In terms of volume sales, luxury market remains a niche (Euromonitor, 2016). Nevertheless, consumption of luxury goods rose from $628.5 million in 2007 to $1 billion in 2012 (Atwal and
Bryson, 2013: 21). The country offers good infrastructure, quality shopping centers, and an already established luxury market (Euromonitor, 2016). South Africa hosts big international names as Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Burberry which have opened flagship stores in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Sandton City and V&A Waterfront continue to house the world’s leading luxury retailers (Euromonitor, 2016). The country offers other luxury malls as Cavendish Square or multi-brand stores in Johannesburg such as Luminance, Callaghan Collezioni, and Grays where affluent people can find designer garments and high brands. There are also fashion and design districts as Braamfontein, and Maboneng (Johannesburg). Hanneli Rupert, founder of Okapi – a luxury South African brand for accessories -, says that « Nous sommes déjà un rouage primordial pour toute l’Afrique sub-saharienne, et nous allons encore nous renforcer. Un nombre croissant de clients venus des pays voisins viennent faire leurs emplettes chez nous, ». (Young, 2014).

In other words, the country already appeals to neighboring Africans who come to shop there. Indeed, Euromonitor reports that foreign visitors play an important role in the demand for luxury goods (2016).

Yet, “South African fashion retailers only buy 25% of their product locally” said Anita Stanbury (of the South Africa Fashion council) in Baker’s article (2014). She explains that in the past, textile industry was an important economic driver in South Africa. Before Chinese importations in the 2000’s, the clothing manufacturing sector was one of the biggest employers in the country (Baker, 2014). In spite of the decrease in this sector, designers are still active and flourishing inside the country. And their creativity is supported by fashion shows. Those events are a marvelous window for new talents. This communication tools will be approached in a further point.

Finally, to quote Precious Moloi-Motsepe, founder of African Fashion International (AFI), South Africans see themselves as “global fashion players” (Baker, 2014). And all those initiatives reinforce the image of South Africa as a key player in the African fashion industry.
Figure 4: Sandton Shopping City centre, Johannesburg. Source: Greg Balfour Evans / Alamy. (http://www.alamy.com)

Figure 5: Inside of Luminance - Luxury shop in Hyde Park Corner, Johannesburg, South Africa. Source: Destiny Man. (www.destinyman.com)
Before concluding this section on South Africa and luxury, I want to make a focus on the taxonomy of its luxury consumers. Whilst designated as leader in Africa, the country still presents social inequalities. Poverty remains high among certain social groups. So who are those consumers of luxury?

5.3.1. South African consumers of luxury: taxonomy

To quote Inka Crosswaite, “[...] the meaning of luxury diverges from counterparts in Europe and North America” (2014:188). She proposes a specific classification of South African luxury consumers. As explained earlier, a great deal of the literature about luxury on the continent underscores the growing and untapped market of African consumers. If factual elements are exposed, no theoretical frame is given though about the taxonomy of its consumers. For that reason, her description of luxury consumers within the South African context is valuable.

While Hudita N. Mustafa generalizes conspicuous consumption to the different racial and incomes groups in South Africa (1998: 41), Crosswaite proposes a typology of luxury consumers in four groups (2014: 192).

- The ‘money aristocracy’. This group are familiar with luxury. They come from a family imbedded traditionally in it. Their interest is more on classical brands. They are not ostentatious in their consumption.
- The ‘established business magnate’. They value uniqueness and limited-edition objects. Money is a symbol of power. They are status conscious which they display through their connoisseurship and distinction.
- The ‘self-made’ or ‘new money’. For this group, luxury goods represent a desirable lifestyle. They educate themselves to this concept which is used as self-reward. Luxury goods deliver a feeling of success and specialness. “Brands help them to attain the desired sense of self, as well as accomplishment. Their status, therefore, is displayed outwardly via luxury goods and services”.
- The ‘deluxe aspirer’. This last group has a high need for distinction. They have a limited education but a go-getter mentality. “They buy luxury and premium goods to show their success.” It’s all about show-time, status is less important.
The two last groups are the most important clusters of luxury consumers in South Africa according to Crosswaite. To understand this taxonomy and the prominence of the ‘new-money’ and ‘deluxe aspirer’ clusters, a small historical digression will be needed.

South Africa population is composed of a majority of Black people. For many decades, the disempowering system in place called Apartheid prevented a part of the population from getting skills, capital or even socio-economic opportunities, which marginalized them at the lowest social stratum. In 1994 the political system changed with Nelson Mandela’s release and his successful ANC party (African National Congress). At that time, 10% of South African population possessed 90% of the country wealth (Pompey, 2007). During the nineties, new policies were put in place in order to turn the former discriminated system down. For instance, the BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) was established at the end of the nineties. It can be simply defined as a positive discrimination strategy which enabled the entrance of black capitals inside the economy. During 1995 and 2005, over 285 billion Rands (27 billion Euro equivalent) came from white to black hands (Pompey, 2007). Post-apartheid policies encouraged a new wealthy black elite category.

According to Crosswaite, the “bling lifestyle”, observed among the majority of black South Africans, can be perceived as “a way to demonstrate freedom from the oppression of the apartheid system which had resulted in years of domination and racial prejudice.” (Chevalier 2011, in Crosswaite, 2014: 190). Moreover, it is also a way to inspire the youth since “they have gone from zero to hero” (Crosswaite, 2014:191). So according to the author, their consumption aims at satisfying their need for display on one side, and to share their accomplishments on the other side. She also notes two other reasons to this conspicuous consumption (Crosswaite, 2014: 190-192).

- Firstly, according to some studies on Southern African elites or African bourgeoisie (Kuper 1965, Brandel-Syrier, 1971, Nyquist 1983), this type of consumption among black elites had existed before the Apartheid. In the townships of the sixties, status “meant a combination of education, sophistication, and propriety, it also meant a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption. Living in the right area, owning a car, good furniture, clothing, and physical appearance […] were the signifiers of a prestigious life” (Crosswaite, 2014: 190).

- And secondly, traditionally South African society was itself emblematic as many African countries. Authority of aristocratic chiefs were signaled by symbols like special animal-
skin, ornaments or other power-related paraphernalia. With colonial capitalism, “luxury goods and high-status manufactured items became symbols of social status” (Crosswaite, 2014:191).

Therefore, the display of luxury brands is more a “way of expression of South African pride and tradition” (Crosswaite, 2014:191) instead of a mark of excessiveness as many may think.


The discovering of differences between African and Western conceptions of luxury can be explained by culture. Unfortunately, finding literature about luxury was not easy job due to crucial lack of African research on the matter which might be linked either to the newness of this topic on the continent or the non-access to research in general. Regarding Mbembe and Nuttal, authors of “Writing the World from an African metropolis” (2004), striving to find absolute differences in the perception of luxury with the rest of the world should not be important, because it could lead to a positioning of Africa as an object of absolute otherness (Mbembe and Nuttal, 2004:348). In their article, the authors deplore this perpetual picturing of Africa as an object of otherness when subject to the academic research. “The obstinacy with which scholars in particular (including African scholars) continue to describe Africa as an object apart from the world, or as a failed and incomplete example of something else, perpetually underplays the embeddedness in multiple elsewheres of which the continent actually speaks.” (Mbembe and Nuttal, 2004:348). They report three causes that may explain this situation (Mbembe and Nuttal, 2004:348-351).

- Firstly, they underline a poor theoretical information caused by rapid life changes inside human sciences.
- Secondly, there is an unconscious but fundamental belief in anthropology and development studies according to which there is an appropriate mode of describing for modern societies on one hand, and another one for underdeveloped on the other hand.
- And finally, authors regret the scarcity of archives on which scholars tend to rely when representing the continent. To overturn this predominant conception of Africa, they propose hand to rely less on differences or originality and to focus more on the connection
that Africa has with the rest of the world. Moreover, and since “it [Africa] is fundamentally in contact with an elsewhere” (Mbembe and Nuttal, 2004:348-351). They also invite us to take the inter-connectivity that the continent has with its multiple social forms and interlaced boundaries into account.

This second proposition echoes Arjun Appadurai theory over the consequences of globalization. According to Appadurai (see Fabien Granjon, 2002), there is no longer a center and periphery order. Technological advancement and migratory flow have brought about evolution in social representation. Appadurai develops a set of notions called *scapes* (*ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape, mediascape, ideoscape*) in order to encapsulate and explain these global cultural flows which derive from globalization. Succinctly, and according to Appadurai, globalization does not lead to an overall cultural sameness. Because of the consumption of images, products and stories from everywhere, modern ethnicity has been creating groups which can be from different areas but still sharing the same identity. In other words, building one’s identity is not linked to the nation-state anymore and has no territoriality. At the same time, there is no cultural standardization neither due to a local appropriation of those flows of images, products or stories, which is called cultural *creolization*. Thus, there is both sameness and differentiation involved in the creation of social imaginaries inside a global world.

This theory correctly describes the current move for a redefinition of the continent. Indeed, Africa is also interconnected to the rest of the world and it takes part in the flux of those different scapes defined by Appadurai. For that reason, our intention is not to study Africa as an object apart from the world, but as an emerging market integrated in the global economy. As it is crucial to contrast Africa’s sameness and difference with the rest of the world, my challenge is therefore to study luxury within the continent and through the lens of a general acceptation of the concept. As Zingoula wrote (2014), Africa needs to expand while respecting the general standards of luxury. Reni Folawiyo (founder of a Alara – concept store in Victoria Island,Lagos, Nigeria) explains it clearly: “African luxury does not differ from luxury anywhere else today save its unique location and its peculiar history.” (Martin-Leke and Ellis, 2014: 181). So even in an African perspective, luxury still refers to a non-necessity to basic needs (Hein, 2011). And of course, luxury goods
answering specific characteristics such as quality, rarity, high aesthetic, high price (Okwonko, 2007:105; Hein, 2011) as exposed earlier.

After this small clarification, I will talk about its distinctness. I will start with a brief history on luxury in Africa. Then, I will deal with how African luxury stands out from the rest of the world by using the concept of *Ubuntu*. I will also identify a few difficulties encountered by this sector in its growth. And finally, I will present the south African brand Maxhosa by Laduma which epitomizes African luxury.

6.1. Historic perspective of luxury in sub-Saharan Africa

Luxury is not something new on the continent. To begin with, Sub-Saharan natural resources mainly lay on minerals. Copper and gold were once symbols of opulence and they were used for display purposes since ancient times (Iliffe, 2007:33). Gold and silver were aimed at creating prestigious objects and jewellery such as the Coptic crosses in Ethiopia, the Tuareg geometric necklaces or the Ashantis’ adornments (Martin-Leke and Ellis, 2014:177). Martin-Leke and Ellis remind us that under the royal courts, craftsmanship was highly sophisticated with complex techniques and African luxury already knew its skilled craftsmen (2014:177). The art of weaving showcased by *kente* or *bogolan* clothes demonstrates this high skill for instance. On the Swahili coast, ivory-made objects and accessories as well as tortoiseshells and amber were discovered. Finally, the Nok culture (in the southern Lake Chad) between the fifth and the sixteenth century developed ceramic art (Martin-Leke and Ellis, 2014:178).

To explain the decreasing importance of luxury over time, Martin-Leke and Ellis have underlined four main reasons (see Martin-Leke and Ellis, 2014:178-180).

- Firstly, the geographical barriers such as the Sahara Desert, the Sahel or the mountains of the Ethiopian Highlands, have hindered further development of luxury on the continent. Those barriers made the exchange of skills and resources a more lengthy and complex process.
- Secondly, the “tribal strife and societal disruptions also led to the disappearance of entire peoples and their techniques” (Martin-Leke and Ellis, 2014:178).
- Thirdly, they describe the misdeeds of colonialism and slavery as agent of suffocation of luxury in Africa. Indeed, for a long period of time the African resources were held by foreigners and exported abroad for transformation, which led to this paradoxical situation where Africa needed to buy finished products; it marks the mercantilist period of Africa.

- Finally, the lack of policies decided after the Independence movements in Africa did not encourage the production of luxury goods.

According to Samir Amin (1972: 505-506), Africa has not always been so economically dependent on the rest of the world. He distinguishes four periods in African History.

- During the pre-mercantilist period (from the earliest days until the seventeenth century), Africa did not appear as inferior or weaker than the rest of the Old World.
- The first backwards step dates back to the mercantilist period which is characterized by the slave trade (from the seventeenth century to 1800). During that period, the productive forces declined throughout the continent.
- From 1800 to 1880-90, this third period is characterized by attempts to establish a new form of dependence. “The increasing dependency on European goods in general from the 17th century also led to the disappearance or deterioration of such […] industries as the manufacture of beads, cloth, and crafts in gold and bronze” (Ohaegbulam 1990, in Martin-Leke and Ellis, 2014: 178).
- The last period identified by Amin is the colonization period. It is marked by the western imperialism. During that period, Africa only appeared as the periphery of the world capitalist system.

Therefore, despite a high potential due to its rich soil and some skilled craftsmen, Africa didn’t enhance itself to a knowledgeable and recognized luxury place in the world. It is only recently that the continent has been gaining some noticeable presence in different luxury fields such as hospitality (with nine of the top 50 hotels of the world, such as Relais & Châteaux; Starwood Hotels & Resorts in Mauritius and Ethiopia), design (Cape Town was named ‘World Design Capital 2014’) and luxury wines and spirits market (with renowned wines from the Western Cape
Province of South Africa) (Martin-Leke and Ellis, 2014:179). Regarding personal goods, many luxury brands have flourished in the last decades.

The following point proposes a view of luxury embedded in an African perspective. Indeed, I will approach how Africa brings a new idea of luxury to the international world.

6.2. Afro Luxe and Luxury Ubuntu

Some authors such as Swaady Martin-Leke, Elizabeth Ellis and Inka Crosswaite propose another way to look at luxury in Africa, specifically through the philosophy of Ubuntu. Both propose a new denomination that suits the African approach of luxury: Luxe Ubuntu (luxury Ubuntu) or Afro luxe. Before approaching this African luxury, it is relevant to first understand the philosophy behind Ubuntu. This topic will mainly be discussed in regard to writings of Swaady Martin-Leke⁴ and Elizabeth Ellis “Towards a definition of Authentic African luxury: luxe Ubuntu” (2014) and Inka Crosswaite⁵ “Afro Luxe: The Meaning of Luxury in South Africa” (2014).

6.2.1. Ubuntu

Ubuntu derives from Nguni and Bantu languages (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013: 85-87; New World Encyclopia).

- In Zulu, this word means “being human”. According to the New World Encyclopia, it can be roughly translated as “Humanity towards others” and “the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity”.
- In Shona (language spoken in Zimbabwe), Ubuntu has the same meaning as unhu. It connotes being human or humaneness. Sayings like hapana nezvemunhu (there is no person in you) or uri mhuka yemunhu (you are an animal of a person) expressed a lack of humanity in behavior.
- In Ndebele (also spoken in Zimbabwe), the word ubuthosi can be used.

⁴ Founder of YSWAARA, a luxury brand specialized in exquisite tea sourced in Africa. The brand is already present in four countries: South Africa, Nigeria, France and Ivory Cost.
⁵ Docteur. in the semiotics analyst. She was lecturer at UCTand at the University of Stellenbosch, specializing in research methodology, semiotics and cultural studies.
In Kinyarwanda (spoken in Rwanda) and in Kirundi (spoken in Burundi), *ubuntu* means “human generosity”, “humanity”. Appealing or exhorting others to *gira ubuntu* means to “have consideration and be humane”.

Other examples from Bantu languages may be given. *Bumuntu* (Tanzania), *bomoto* (Congo), *gimuntu* (Angola), *umunthu* (Malawi), *vumuntu* (Mozambique), *ununtu* (Uganda), *botho* (Botswana) reflect the same thing. We can see that this concept is deeply embedded into the African culture and can be found in most African countries (Nussbaum, 2003; Kartsen and Illa, 2005; Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013; Suze Manda, 2009; New World Encyclopia). For instance, Western African concept of *terenga* is considered to reflect *Ubuntu* since it refers to a similar spirit of collective hospitality between people (Kartsen and Illa, 2005).

Generally, the values embedded in *Ubuntu* prize life, dignity, compassion, humanness, harmony, and reconciliation (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). And the interest of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual caring is essential (Nussbaum, 2003).

The notion of humanity, humanism, is central and commonly accepted as inherent to *Ubuntu*. Indeed, this social philosophy expresses the bonding with others (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013; Suze Manda, 2009; New World Encyclopia). The tenet which highlights this philosophy the most is popular Zulu saying *Ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (“I am because we are and I am human because I belong”).

Samkange (a Zimbabwean historiographer) underlines three maxims which shape the philosophy of *hunhuism* or ubuntuism (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013:84; New World Encyclopia):

- The first maxim says that “to be human is to affirm one’s humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish respectful human relations with them”.
- The second says “if and when one is faced with a decisive choice between wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being, then one should opt for the preservation of life”.
- The last maxim says that “the king owed his status, including all the powers associated with it, to the will of the people under him”. This last maxim is a principle deeply embedded in the traditional African political philosophy according to Samkange.
In *Ubuntu* philosophy, the community or the larger societal identity of an individual is really important. “Every individual represents a family, village, district, province and region” (New World Encyclopia). This view differs from the “I think, therefore I am” western proposition (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013) where the individual is central.

This concept was embraced in different ways and its application is worldwide. Its spiritual dimension was emphasized by the South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu and first president of post-apartheid South Africa Nelson Mandela. They underscored the qualities of resilience embedded in *Ubuntu* “enabling people to survive and emerge despite all the efforts to dehumanize them” (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013: 88), which stands at the heart of the new republic of South Africa post-apartheid (based on harmony, unity and cooperation). Other statements used this concept in a political dimension such as Julius Nyerere (Tanzania) with *Ujaama*, a community building based on villagisation; former president Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia) who talked about a humanism based on mutual aid, trust and loyalty to the community; or Maamar Khadafi (Libya) who insisted on African collectivity (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). The *Ubuntu* was also introduced in computers (with the Linux software called Ubuntu) and in management too with studies such as of Pr. Lovemore Mbigi (see the book: The African dream management) who argued that “the service quality is not only determined by what we do for the client but also by the spirit in which we render the service” (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013: 90). And Mbigi and Maree (1997) identify the values prized in *Ubuntu* management like collectivity, solidarity, acceptance, dignity and hospitality.

Other applications of *Ubuntu* can be found but we will only focus on the luxury field.

6.2.2. Ubuntu in luxury

Swaady Martin-Leke and Elizabeth Ellis (2014) explain that *Ubuntu* can be used as the way to define concept of luxury in Africa. They refer to it as *Luxe Ubuntu*. Swaad Martin-Leke defines it as following:
“The Luxe Ubuntu creates economic value in a way that also creates value for the African society at large by addressing its prosperity needs and challenges. It aims to expand the meaningful income of all stakeholders contributing to the creation of our products at the various levels of supply chain – whether it be farmers and artisans, artists, manufacturers and so on – by essentially providing routes to market for their products and keeping the added-value in Africa.” (Swaady Martin-Leke in Mfonobong, 2014)

The introduction of *Ubuntu* is an added feature to the existing concept of luxury. Swaady Martin-Leke and Elizabeth Ellis (2014) explain that this definition of African luxury adds the community as a core element. Indeed, the wellbeing and the overall creation of wealth for the community is to take into account. So the contribution to the community gives uniqueness to the African luxury. Moreover, the community does include the consumer too. Indeed “an African luxury brand is the first warrantor of its goods and services, as it must take into account both the consumer’s satisfaction and its reflection upon himself and his community (Swaady Martin-Leke and Elizabeth Ellis, 2014: 182).

They add that the development of African luxury brands is conceptualized as a way to contribute to the development of the African society by the creation of jobs, to the upkeep of added-value in Africa, and in extensor to address prosperity challenges. And at the same time, African traditionally and innovative craft is revisited, perpetuated and celebrated too. In conceptualizing and producing high-end quality products in Africa, the redefinition of the continent worldwide is occurring.

Inka Crosswaite proposes the term of *Afro luxe*. She emphases more on the celebration of cultural heritage, traditions, and traditional lifestyles on one side and on the performative acts of (South) Africans to “do things their way” and “to express who they are in their lifestyles choices” on the other side (2014:193). Here, she underscores too the reappropriation and redefinition of African luxury by Africans themselves.

Some luxury African brands have already incorporated those values imbedded in *Ubuntu*. So sustainability, empowerment, environment will be taken into consideration in this strategy. The
following brand, Maxhosa by Laduma, epitomizes the African luxury.

6.2.3. A luxury African brand: Maxhosa by Laduma

Maxhosa by Laduma is a brand specialized in knitwear. Its designer, Laduma Ngxokolo, gets his inspiration from his Xhosa heritage, especially Xhosa beadwork from which he copies the geometrical design.

He tells inside an interview for DesignBoom (2014) that his adventure started when he decided to craft a line of clothing for boys between the age of eighteen and twenty-three from his community in the Eastern Cape, who are going through the manhood initiation ritual. Traditionally, the *amakrwala* – as they are called- have to give away their old clothes, which means the end of their childhood, and their parents are asked to buy them a new clothes which are meant to include high quality men knitwear (Design Boom, 2014). Instead that parents buy standard brands like Pringle and Lyle & Scott, Laduma says in Design Boom article that he launched his brand in order to propose knitwear that would remind of Xhosa roots and this important heritage. As he proudly claims it: “my heritage, my inheritance” (Maxhosa.com). His 2012 initial collection – a pattern named *umngqusho* was nominated for the Design Indaba Most Beautiful Object in South Africa.

Maxhosa simply means the Xhosa people. The designer wants to showcase the beauty of this culture, which is often undervalued by African according to him (Design Boom,2014). He says in the same article that the African fashion industry is facing an identical issue but “we are trying to redefine ourselves basically”. In Gambade’s articles (2014), he also explains that many other African indigenous cultures are underestimated. To him, his brand is a «philosophy of black consciousness." (Gambade,2014).

The designer likes to keep things local and buys textiles from farmers in the Eastern Cape. For this young brand, producing in Africa is a real challenge. Moreover, he makes use of mohair from his hometown, since Port Elisabeth has “the biggest industry in the world and has the biggest wool industry in Africa” as he explains in the Lisa Wang interview (2014). Since he buys his raw materials locally, local people benefit from the finishing process of wool and mohair, which generates local revenues as well. In order words, the designer takes advantage of the local material
and at the same time supports, in his way, local production. His brand includes both men and women wear collections.

Label MaXhosa by Laduma was put on display at the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week Johannesburg in 2014.

Figure 6 Mashosa by Laduma at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Africa 2014. Source: Simon Deiner/ SDR
Part 2 - What is branding?

During the South African Luxury Association’s Weath Conference held in Johannesburg, Inka Crosswaite advised marketers to suit their strategies to the local market and not copy what are developed for European and American markets (Added Value, 2012). She argued that “brand must retain its cultural relevance” (Added Value, 2012). In order words, the branding needs to be adapted to its target market.

In this chapter, I will elaborate on what is a brand and its awareness. I will try to understand why branding is important inside the current economic and global context.

1. Brands and brand awareness

Brands are precious for any company, organization (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013:39).

A brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers, and to differentiate them from those of a competitor” (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013:39).

It is important to clarify that a brand is not a product but the uniqueness and timeless element that makes a product impossible to be imitated (Okonkwo, 2007). The author adds that a brand provides value to consumers. To make it simple, a brand helps to identify the goods or services; to make the difference between competition and add value (due to the performance of the product or to what the brand represents – emotions, symbols) (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013; Okonkwo, 2007; Kayode, 2011; Aaker, 1994).

On a marketing perspective, all strategic decisions are made around a brand concept (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013; Okonkwo, 2007; Aaker, 1994). Brands then have strategic reasons but also economic ones (Lendrevie’s introduction in Aaker, 1994). Indeed, Aaker (1994) gets straight to the point in his introduction by underlining the importance of a brand. According to him, a
strong brand is essential to win and defend market shares. Its importance is even accentuated by the current fierce competition, internationalization, and economic crisis.

Brands influence all the consumers during their purchase process (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013, Ukonkwo, 2007). For that reason, a great marketing strategy is highly needed to meet a product’s characteristics and to transfer them into the consumer’s minds (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013, Ukonkwo, 2007). According to Ukonkwo (2007), this is even more important in luxury goods where it is essential to sustain the appeal as well as to influence the consumers’ choice (Okonkwo, 2007). As developed earlier, luxury goods are different from ordinary goods since customers are more involved in their purchases than they would be when buying a dish soap. Indeed, luxury products are not primarily bought for their practicality. Their quality, be it for aesthetical purposes or for the lifestyle they symbolize, is taken into account (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013:172).

And one advantage of luxury brands is that they generally attain a higher level of global brand awareness than mass fashion brands (Okonkwo, 2007:114).

The notion of brand awareness will be omnipresent throughout this thesis. It can be explained as “the association of some physical characteristics such as a brand name, logo, package, style, etc. with a category need” (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013: 594). For Okonkwo, this notion answers to the question of “who knows you?”, which is important when a brand goes public because it enhances the perceived quality and helps during the process of buying (2007:113). According to this author, awareness works like an anchor onto which different images and representations can be added. So, if an association can be established, it means that the brand lies in the consumers’ subconscious. For that reason, it is referred to as one of the most important objectives in marketing communication in regards the DAGMAR model (De Pelsmacker and al., 2013; Aaker, 1994). Macdonald and Sharp (1996) simply say that without any brand awareness, no other communicative effects can occur. For these reasons, the establishing of awareness is the first step within a communication strategy (Aaker, 1999:76). Aaker adds that by developing a brand image, its characteristics and competitive advantages, without establishing a strong name on the consumers’ mind could be a waste.
Brand awareness comprises **brand recognition** and **brand recalling** (De Pelsmacker and *al.*, 2013; Okonkwo, 2007; Aaker, 1994; Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015).

- **Brand recalling** refers to the first brands that come spontaneously into one’s mind in an unaided context (Okonkwo, 2007:113); in other words, without “prior exposure to or direct interaction with the brand” (De Pelsmacker and *al.*, 2013:158). Time and repetition of associations between the category and the brand are required in order to build a high level of recalling (Okonkwo, 2007:114-115). The highest level of this type of awareness is called **Top-of-mind awareness**.

- **Brand recognition (or aided awareness)** is when people recognize a brand by its package, color, logo, etc. Here, “recognizing a brand involves remembering the brand and its associations when exposed to that brand or a similar brand” (Okonkwo, 2007:113).

To summarize Aaker (1994), in brand recognition the awareness is on the lowest level. It only shows that people are aware that the brand exists. While in brand recalling the awareness is higher. It is the sign that consumers have a strong brand, which is a valuable competitive advantage.

The development of brand awareness requires a few elements:

- According to Aaker (1994), brands need to have both **a strong identity and an accurate positioning**. Brand identity is “how the brand truly is [its attributes and identifiable elements] and how consumers perceive the brand” (Okonkwo, 2007:110). In order to know how consumers perceive the brand, we need to focus on the brand image, which is simply “the way the brand is seen by the people that it is exposed to” (Okonkwo, 2007:110).

So in order to develop the awareness, a brand needs to be distinguishable and memorable in order to be the top recallable one of its category product. (De Pelsmacker and *al.*, 2013; Okonkwo, 2007; Aaker, 1994).

- And having a **unique, original and symbolic brand name is always good** in that sense it is more attractive (Okonkwo, 2007:115). The first recognizable sign of a brand is its name (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015; Okonkwo, 2007:108).

- Okonkwo (2007:114) features **the creation of visibility** by the use of different communication
tools which are effective to achieve brand awareness for luxury fashion products. She recommends **visuals symbols** because they are easier to retain and then, to maintain awareness. Among other communication tactics there are **advertising, sales promotions** and **sponsorships** that can help to increase the familiarity with the brand and to achieve a higher brand awareness. Nowadays, the leadership in fashion is given by **celebrities** (from music, cinema or entertainment), fashion buyers and of course international media (Moeran, 2006: 728). Celebrity connections help to attain rapid global awareness. The advantage of this tactic is that it helps to create a link between the brand and the luxury goods category (Okonkwo, 2007:115). Okonkwo (2007:115) also identified another tool which is **word-of-mouthing**. As she recognizes, this technique is often underestimated but it is really effective in the luxury field and the fashion world in implementing a brand through opinion leaders and experts. For instance, **magazines** feature or endorse experts’ views on the luxury sector.

- Increasing familiarity requires the brand to **repeat its efforts of communication** (Aaker, 1994:88). But the particularity with luxury goods is that the awareness should be attained without over-exposure as explained by Okonkwo (2007:115). According to the author, the exclusivity character of any luxury good has to be retained. Therefore, the brand should benefit from appropriate communicative tools in order to enhance the ‘luxury’ quality of the brand on one hand. On the other hand, the brand should be seen and heard by the right people.

While its importance is underlined in all academic papers, the evaluation of brand awareness is not always taken into consideration by professionals because they most of the time focus on sales (Aaker, 1994). Nevertheless, as sais previously, awareness is capital for a brand. (De Pelsmacker and *al.*, 2013; Okonkwo, 2007; Aaker, 1994; Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015). In the following point, I will focus on its importance for Africa.

### 2. Brands in Africa

As discussed earlier, awareness plays an important role for brands. Let me remind four points:

- Firstly, it is part of a long term vision, and therefore awareness needs to be integrated in the global strategy of the brand in order to achieve an easy deciphering of all its connotations and
associations. (Okonkwo, 2007; Aaker, 1994; Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015).

- Secondly, awareness develops preferences (Aaker, 1994; Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015; Okonkwo, 2007).

- Thirdly, as Aaker explains it: a brand is well-known for some valid reasons (Aaker, 1994:79). So its awareness guarantees an added-value to its consumers.

- And last but not least, awareness is used as a selection criteria during the buying process.

The creation of competitive brands which can go global is a big concern for Africa. According to Kayode (2011), it is the greatest wealth creator in the world today and for that reason, it could create wealth in Africa. According to the author, the poverty in Africa is also due to a lack of competitive brands inside this global context. He explains that “the rich nations are rich because they have created and built global brands which they have successfully sold to the rest of the world (Kayode, 2011: 119). For instance, Louis Vuitton, Cartier, Chanel, Hermès, Dior and Saint Laurent yield to France a profit above 700 million euros respectively with the same amount of money for Italy thanks to its top brands: Gucci, Ermenegildo Zegna, Prada, Armani, MaxMara, Salvatore Ferragamo, Bulgari, Dolce&Gabbana, Loro Piana and Fendi) (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015:63).

The same statement is made by Tom Sitati, at Executive Director Interbrand Sampson East Africa, who argues that African business owners have long been acting as traders and peddlers and should now become brand builders (Mail & Guardian, 2011). He agrees on the fact that not building brands means missing business opportunities for Africa. “Brand building is about reaping optimal value for the long term and this is a game Africa has been missing out on, resulting in diminished economic growth and underdevelopment” (Mail & Guardian, 2011: 6).
The following pyramid of value added chain (figure 7) demonstrates that the element creating the most economic value is brands (Mail & Guardian, 2011:8). Indeed, raw materials are at the bottom while branding is on the top.

![Branding and the Global Economy](image)

*Figure 7 Branding and the Global economy. Source: Mail & Guardian,’” Brands in Africa”’. September 20 to October 6, 2011:8.*

Africa is currently investing in its brands according my interview with Thebe Ikalafeng (see Appendix 10), Founder and Chairman of Brand Africa, he shows his confidence in African brands. According to the results of the Brand Africa 100 – an evaluation research over the most valued brands in Africa, “what is clear today is that 66% of the value of brands in the top 100 are global brands in Africa and 34% of them are African brands” (quotation from Thebe Ikalafeng, in Brand
This means then that African consumers also get African brands that can meet their needs. Those brands are present in sectors like telecom services (e.g. MTN), banks (e.g. Standard Bank, Zenith Bank, Absa, Nedbank group), and retail (Shoprite, Pick n Pay). Looking at the 2014 Ranking of the Most Admired Brands in the African apparel industry, conducted by the Brand Africa (figure 8), the top 10 is held by foreign brands such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton or Lacoste which triggered success of the United States, France in Africa.

As mentioned earlier, luxury brands not only bring economic value but they also sell their home-countries beyond the national boundaries (Mail & Guardian, 2011). As stated by the Mail & Guardian report on brands in Africa (2011), building brands participate in return to the nation’s economic empowerment and help to reposition the continent in the business global map. “[…] Individual brands help to change the way people think about our continent. It’s when we have the successes of businesses and individuals that we can actually begin to change the perceptions of the continent” (quote from Tumi Makgabo, in Brand Africa, 2011:30).
In order to support the local economy, it is important for local consumers to embrace it too. For instance, “Italy imports only five per cent of its clothes. In spending more but importing less, Italians support their domestic economy by wearing, as well as making, Italian fashion” (Corner, 2014:32). As reminded Anitha Soni, Chairman of Brand South Africa, the transformation of a nation is a State affair but also of the different (luxury) trades and citizens (Brand Africa, 2011: 13). As revealed by Joan DeJean (2007), the redefinition of France as a place of sophistication has required helping hands. Sun King had been the greatest ambassador of his country by embracing local production (Joan DeJean, 2007). He was only working with the best artisans; and by doing so, he fostered local craftsmanship in-and-out-side of the country (Joan DeJean, 2007).

So how is doing the current generation of African designers to develop African luxury brands? How do they manage to build their brand locally and globally? The following point will help us understand that.

### 3. Luxury fashion African brands

Thebe Ikalafeng pins limited awareness of African brands on the lack of channels of communication at their disposal (Otas, 2013). He remarks that since Africans are getting their own media like Fashion weeks, the showcasing of “made in Africa” is possible. Fortunately, the democratization of the Internet and platforms as blogs, e-magazines, and other social media help to diffuse information globally.

Marketing tools are going to help brands to be more competitive inside this tough luxury market. This could be a real advantage inside this competitive but profitable market because the average African consumer is loyal to brands (KPMG, 2014: 11).

Because of globalization, new frontiers of fashion have appeared (Corner, 2014). In other words, the West has ‘lost’ monopole of definition of what fashion is. Africa, defined as the “fashion’s new frontier (Jennings 2011, in Oberhohofer, 2012), can also step into this industry and be successful. A growing number of African designers and labels are already succeeding in the global
fashion world such as Alphadi (Niger), Maki Oh (Nigeria), Duro Olowu (Nigerian-born), Tiffany Amber (Nigeria), Deola Sagoe (Nigeria), David Tlale (South Africa) and few more. They all epitomize the fact that “African designers can compete on the world stage” (Aderibigbe, 2014).

All those contemporary African designers take part, indirectly, at the current redefinition of African fashion for the rest of the world (Farber, 2010). Indeed, as the South African designer Sindiso Khumalo said “ nous sommes certes Africains, mais nous sommes avant tout des stylistes “ (translated as “Of course, we are African but we are designer before”) (Mackinnon, 2016).

Nevertheless, they also have to deal with many challenges, three especially. In Brown’s article Ally Rehmtullah, a Tanzanian designer, points out the lack of exposure and the lack of an international presence (Brown, n.d.). And Belinda Otas (2013) writes that there is an “ingrained attitude of Africans desiring Western brands”.

In the following part, the focus will be brand awareness challenges for those brands.

3.1. Brand awareness challenges for African brands

According to Akerele Omoyemi, Creative Director and Founder of Style House Files -a creative fashion development agency in Nigeria-, people do not understand yet the importance of building a luxury industry in the continent (Otas, 2013). Inside Otas’ article (2013) she recognizes the necessity of Africans to support its growth, which doesn’t mean that they have to refuse foreign brands. For Akerele, it is essential to build confidence and awareness “for people to know that these brands exist” (Otas, 2013).

Furthermore, Thebe Ikalafeng underlines the need for an authentic brand concept and of course, the importance of having the media by your side (Otas, 2013). He says: “most important thing we need is media. You need to own your own channels of communication, and many of those channels have not been African-owned media. Now, we are getting African-owned media and we have fashion weeks in Nigeria and South Africa showcasing ‘Made in Africa’. We can only tell our story if we are in control or can afford the channels” (Otas, 2013).
Fashion Weeks are growing across Africa, for example with the Zimbabwe -, Kinshasa -, Mozambique -, Nigeria -, or Swahili - Fashion Weeks, etc.

On the following part, I will focus on the South African answers to increase the awareness of their fashion brands.

3.2. South African brands

South Africa alone hosts at least four big fashion shows featuring African designers: South African Fashion Week (SAFW), Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week (MBFW) in Cape Town and Johannesburg, and Design Indaba. These events are mostly reported by the press. Indeed, images coming from those events mostly feed magazine pages. It is not unusual to see some African designers’s face in magazines such as ELLE magazine (South Africa edition). Furthermore, the magazine also organizes its fashion show called ELLE Rising Star (see Appendix 5). I have made a small analysis of different issues from local magazines ELLE magazine\(^6\) and Destiny\(^7\) magazine (see Appendix 9). It shows that South African magazines totally support

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\(^6\) ELLE magazine is a worldwide magazine dedicated to fashion and women. Established by Hélène Lazareff, in Paris in 1945, it is now the largest fashion magazine in the world, with 39 editions across five continents. The magazine is published by the Times Media (PTY) LTD. The South African version is currently edited by Emilie Gambade. Before July 2014, this function was ensured by Jackie Burger, who is also an official curator of the Design Indaba Expo. She is acknowledged for her accuracy to predict trends and interpret them for consumers. She is involved in challenges of the homegrown fashion industry in South Africa.

ELLE South Africa is also a monthly publication, launched in 1996. It targets modern and independent women. Its main editorial content is fashion and style. Edited in English, the magazine has a national coverage.

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\(^7\) Destiny is a monthly magazine edited by Ndalo Media and founded by the South African Khanyi Dhlomo. The magazine was launched in 2007. The publication targets existing and aspiring
African fashion designers, especially local ones. There is an obvious position statement from both magazines. For instance, we can read the following from ELLE October 2014 issue:

“The African continent has forever been, and still is, the source of endless inspiration for fashion designers all around the world. But we ourselves don’t lack talent or incredible aesthetics; we don’t lack heritage or savoir-faire, nor do we need to dive into the Western world to offer collections that are attractive and marketable. We have plenty inspiration, energy and vision, right here, in Africa.” (p. 77)

Or from Destiny July 2014 issue:

“South African designers and manufacturers are completely on par with the rest of the world. Be a proud, patriotic fashionista!” (p. 93)

By doing so, they fulfill their role as influencer (Kopnina, 2007). Their statements aim at positively impacting on the attitude of their audience towards African brands. And at the same time, they play a role of transmitter by publishing editorial contents on local designers’ creations (see Appendix’s 1-4). For instance, the pages reporting over the ELLE Rising star winners and especially Nicholas Coutts (ELLE July and October), or fashion editorials proposing clothes of African designers as fashion solutions (Destiny September), or their fashion dossiers like the ELLE issue January/February which spotlights Fashion from Africa.

There two types of adverts paid- and no paid advertisements. The difference between those two communication ways (paid VS no paid advertisements) is that in the first, the brand is clearly announced which helps to increase the awareness of it. But for instance, back covers of both businesswomen between 25 and 55 years old. But not only, it also counts students, female entrepreneurs, corporate leaders and economically active woman. It combines business news on a local and international level, fashion, beauty, lifestyle, health, travel and inspirational content.

The alternate version for men, called Destiny Man, was launched in 2009 by the Ndalo media group, with an online extension.
magazines are displaying advertisement on famous brands (such as Cartier, Gucci, Guess, etc.) or investment brands. African brands are displayed but the brand mostly not clearly announced.

The interview with magazine professional Helen Jennings, during the African Fashion Conference in London 2015, confirmed that the presence of African luxury brands in those magazines, as advertisers, is limited due to the amount of money that this requires. Indeed, a publisher stays in business and makes profit thanks to advertising income (Moeran, 2006: 728). So it is inevitable that those little brands could not compete with global brands that have more capital.

Another tool used by luxury African brands is television. For instance, South Africa hosted in 2013 a reality TV show called African Next Top Model (cycle 1). The show, presented by Oluchi Onweagba Orlandi (international top model), aimed at finding the next top model from Africa. This African adaptation of a famous American TV show enabled designers to expose themselves to public too. At the same time, the brands keep their luxury appealing since the show is a way to “make dreams come true”. By this way, viewers (local and across Africa via the Internet) of this first edition have discovered established South African designers as Marianne Fassler, Craig Port, Thula Sindi or David Tlale. And another popular TV show, Top Billing, broadcast in SABC3 channel, invites local entrepreneurs.

And finally, South African brands can count on their public personalities. African leader, Nelson Mandela had been the greater promoter of African fashion by wearing African shirt as well as official clothes (Hudita N. Mustafa, 1998:41). And nowadays, celebrities such as Bonang Matheba (South African media personality), ProVerb (South African rapper) are used as endorsement by South African brands.

**Figures:**

Figure 9: South African Designer Gertz-Johan Coetzee with Bonang Matheba in Coetzee’s design.
Source: The September Standard.com

Figure 10: Aamito Lagum (winner of the contest) wearing a Craig Port’s suit. (Episode 7). Source: Google Images.

Figure 11: *ELLE* Magazine’s cover (South Africa – Issue of February 2015) with models wearing Maxhosa by Laduma. Source: Google Image.
WHO? WHAT? WHY? FIND OUT EVERYTHING ABOUT OUR LOCALLY SHOT COVER INSIDE

WIN A LUXURY STAY FOR TWO IN THE SEYCHELLES

ELLE MAN EXCLUSIVE
FACE TO FACE WITH DEEP-HOUSE GENIUS BLACK COFFEE

FEELING THE BLUES?
DATING IN THE AGE OF WHATSAPP

Come inside ELLE’s most desirable spaces
#ELLEFASHIONCUPBOARD #ELLEBEAUTYCLOSET

the sisterhood issue

CONFIDENT POWERFUL IRRESISTIBLE TOGETHER!

FASHION AND BEAUTY MAKE PERFECT PAIRS

Figure 11
Part 3 - Africa and dress

In this section, I will address dressing.

According to Hansen (2004: 370-387), clothing matters differently across the world’s major regions and can be studied in many ways. The author classifies the different approaches on dressing into four groups:

- The study of dressing in building one’s body and its presentation;
- The historical questions about changes in dressing practices, with phenomena such as colonialism and Westernization;
- The study on globalization and;
- The consumption of clothes, with a link between production and consumption.

Actually, this work fits into the last category because it addresses the questions of production and consumption of high-end African fashion by Africans. Here, the continent is highlighted as a performer of both consumption and production of fashion.

First of all, I will present the functions of dressing. The second point will approach dressing (and brands) used as distinctive symbols in an African context. And next, I will try to explore the reasons behind the spreading of western dressing style across the continent and their valorization compared to the African production.
1. Functions of dress

Four major functions are attributed to dressing\(^8\) (Ross, 2008; Mustafa, 1998):

- The protection of the body,
- The definition of identity,
- The link between dressing and defining genres,
- The use of clothes as a medium of exchange, for instance when Europeans used to buy slaves.

Throughout History, those different roles were interpreted in different ways by societies. When we consider dressing through the perspective of identity construction, four other functions can be highlighted (Hansen and Soyini Madison, 2013; Ross, 2008; Mustafa, 1998; Rovine, 2009; and Tcheuyap, 1999):

- Dressing serves as a basis for **distinction between the West and the rest of the world.** Rovine (2009: 45) explains that since the early twentieth century, dress is interpreted as a measure of cultural advancement in an evolutionary progression from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilized’ status. For example, class and status divisions of the Old Continent were replicated or reconstructed during the colonial history of North America (Ross, 2008: 47).
- Secondly, **dress denotes a particular status.** For instance, in early American life only rich people were able to wear fine or smooth fabrics (Ross, 2008). Likewise, the author states that the use of leopard print is traditionally exclusive to achieve status in most African countries.
- **Dress marks an affiliation.**
- And finally, it can be **used to make a political claim.** The imposition of a uniform clearly illustrates the two last functions. A uniform is used as a distinction mark (“us” versus

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\(^8\) Dressing, clothing and clothes are used interchangeably in this paper. It refers to the “assemblage of body modifications and /or supplements” (Eicher & Roach –Higgings definition (1992) In Hansen, 2014: 371.)
“them” in a football game for instance); it also denotes a particular status or occupation (ex: the wearing of the veil denotes the belonging to a particular religion; the dress of a priest differs from the Pope, or the dress of a stewardess gives information on her function and over the firm she is representing) (Ross, 2008; Tcheuyap, 1999). The illustrations can be numerous. For political claim, the wearing of abacost in Zaïre is an example.

What is specific to South Africa is that dress is deeply connected to identity too. For that reason, the transition of 1994 has also fostered a debate on culture and identity (Mustafa, 1998: 40). Mustafa addresses this topic of fashion and the post-apartheid South African cultural politics (1998: 40-44). She reports that Thabo Mbeki (former President of Republic of South Africa 1997-2007) declared 1994 the “era of African Renaissance”. This renaissance refers to the idea of reconstruction of the African identity. She explains that during this post-apartheid period, the country was called to a national reconstruction and individual revival. And “the search for an affirmation of Africanness has long been mediated by the appropriation of other African cultures” (Mustafa, 1998:41) such as African American culture which inspiration can be noticed through hip-hop culture for instance or the adoption of more West African fashion referred to as a ‘ethnic’ or ‘traditional dress’. But for some designers, it was more appropriate to seek internal inspiration (Mustafa, 1998:41).

2. Dress as symbols of prestige and social success in Africa

In their work on figures regarding success and power in Africa, Banegas and Warnier (2001) identify three ways of owning or displaying social success:

- Having intellectual capital from Europe,
- Having an urban and westernized lifestyle,
- Having material comfort (luxurious car, three-piece suit, sumptuous furniture, etc...).

So the social success refers here to a Western acquisition or/and lifestyle and a conspicuous consumption of goods. As Banegas and Warnier (2001) report it, this characterization of success by materials is not especially a western vision of Africa. Materiality is also related to the conception of success inside Mauritian vocabulary for instance.
Michel Adam (1984:860-862) identified three symbols of prestige in tropical Africa, which are menswear clothing; travelling by flight; and luxurious cars with driver. Regarding clothing, he noticed that the three-pieces suit indicates wealth for a man, while the social value of a woman is measured by the weight of her loinclothes. For this reason, Congolese popular ideology talks about “mwasi na kilo” (which means woman of social weight) or “motu na kilo” (which means important person) (Adam, 1984:860). Indeed, “because dress as a sign has a specific purpose, function, or role within a particular context, it does something and therefore creates certain effects” (Hansen and Soyini Madison, 2013: 218). So, dress is a good conspicuous symbol because it is easy to detect, to understand and it implies certain attitudes. It is considered as a conspicuous symbol because dressing up reflects both personal and high interpersonal aspects, which are fundamental in conspicuous consumption (Shamina, 2011). For that reason, we could say that conspicuous consumption characterizes best the African way of displaying wealth and prestige. I quote Deinaba Ba (Senior civil servant in Dakar, Senegal):

“When you’re well-dressed, full of perfume, à la mode, you feel good in your skin, you feel good about yourself, you can go anywhere.” (Mustafa, 1998:14)

Without any doubt, being well-dressed is important in Africa (Mustafa, 1998; Hansen and Soyini Madison, 2013; Hopkins, 2006). And in point of fact, the conspicuous consumption exactly refers to “matter of image and appearance” (Shamina, 2011: 128). However, this concept is not exclusive to the continent but it is well found in any emerging countries as a way of showing success (Shamina, 2011).

Hansen (2000:4) introduces clothing as a special commodity that “mediates between self and society”. This means that the “detection” of a certain social status is expressed through the way of dressing up. There is a social statement in the choice of clothing (Corner, 2014:45). Alexie Tcheuyap (1999) reminds us, for instance, that in traditional contexts, the use of batik material stands for a specific social status among the Bamiléké tribe in Cameroon.

Taking into account the actual modern context, it is specifically brands that form the new refinement criteria to determine social class and distinction (Tcheuyap, 1999). The following
quotations are from interviews conducted by Coulibaly and al. (2011: 9-10) among Sapeurs\(^9\). They show the importance of brands in their definition of luxury.

«(…) moi, je ne peux pas parler de luxe en allant voir un concert de classique… pourtant pour le blanc, c’est du luxe. Moi, je vois le luxe comme les grandes marques et griffes sur mon corps. Je ne vis que de cela ». Un autre, dans le même sens, explique :

« (…) Il y a une scission entre ces deux mondes. Le blanc voit le luxe comme les palaces, les monuments, les croisières en bateau, les tableaux d’art, les châteaux… alors que nous africains, c’est l’habillement, je vais dire même la science de l’habillement. Voilà comment on définit le luxe chez les africains. Il faut voir dans le luxe l’habillement, les parfums, les chaussures et autres habits de marques ».

In the previous quotations, informants explain their definition of luxury in comparison with what it could be for a white person. They state that goods as well-known perfumes, shoes and clothing are essential elements of luxury for them.

What also emerges from the study by Coulibaly and al. (2011) is the following: French brands are pure luxury; Italian brands represent elegance, sophistication and beauty; English brands are synonymous of masculine “gentleman” elegance.

The Sapeurs suggest that goods manufactured in Europe have a prestigious character. The question, in the current context, is more: what about African brands? I will try to answer this in the following section.

3. Stereotypes on African production

Belinda Otas (2013) speaks about a “lack of understanding” of African brands. She has identified the Africans’ preference for Western brands over local products as an obstacle to growth of African luxury. Indeed, “the consumers with the ability to pay for such brands sometimes question the price of such products, yet they will not question that of the foreign brands they willingly buy into”

\(^9\) This concept is going be developed on the following chapter.
while “appreciation by local consumer market is vital to the success of luxury brands” (Otas, 2013: 52). Omoyemi Akerele (Creative Director and Founder of Style House Files in Nigeria) acknowledges that “Africans […] haven’t always appreciated Made in Africa.” “‘Made in Africa’ to us has always meant poor quality and something that’s undesirable. We need to reimagine the whole concept” (Otas, 2013).

Obviously, confidence has to be gained regarding the quality of Made in Africa. For that reason, Thebe Ikalafeng (brand authority in Africa and founder of the Brand Leadership Group and Brand Leadership Academy based in South Africa) recommends luxury African brands to work on consistency in delivery, on quality, and on how the brand delivers what it stands (Otas, 2013). It is important to maintain satisfaction and integrity over the years (regarding the product, the service and what the brand promises) according to Africans experts (John Obayuwana – managing Director of Nigeria’s leading luxury goods company; Adiat Disu – Director of African Fashion Week New York and president of a communications and branding firm focused on fashion; Omoyemi Akerele, and Thebe Ikalafeng) (Otas, 2013).

The fact that those experts agree and point out the same elements is meaningful and unveils a certain reality. For Thebe Ikalafeng, “We have to find somehow balance quality VS how much we can do with very little with economy. But it doesn’t mean that is cheap or poor quality. It should not mean that. Of course we get a disadvantages in terms of we cannot compete with them because they have economies of scale, they’ve got experiences” (see Appendix 10).

And about the production systems, most of Sub-Saharan countries still have to cope with standardization and uniformity challenges. Hansen reports from Rabine’s analysis on African fashion that “African artisans are more interested in creativity and aesthetics than standardization and uniformity”, which prevents African artisans to enter the production system easily (Hansen 2004:377). According to her, there is a “subordinate position of artisanal production in a global economic system” (Hansen, 2004:377). This reinforces the idea of consistency issues. Rogerson (2006) writes that “until 1994- the year of democratic transition- South Africa’s fashion industry was limited in scope and mediocre quality. The design sector was whiteled, dominated by the demands of the retail chain stores and, to a larger extent, by American youth culture. […] Typically the chain stores would send scouts out to London, Paris and New York in search of the latest fashions, returning to South Africa to design imitative fashion clothing” (Rogerson, 2006:215).
Furthermore, it is expected that creative and desirable brands from Africa and the rest of the world will help to operate a repositioning of Africa (Brand Africa, 2011; Otas, 2013). But during an informal conversation about luxury African fashion brands with an interviewee from Congolese origin, the latter stated that “Africa has no fashion brands but has quality fabrics”. This statement brings into light another misconception about sartorial area.

It is well-known that western Africa textile industry was the most advanced specialization (Iliffe, 2007:86). Africa is rich of versatile textiles. “Most textiles in Sub-Saharan Africa are made from plant fibres (bark, bast fibre, raffia, jute, linen and cotton); animal fibres such as wool and silk are seldom used. Synthetic yarns (lurex, rayon, and polyester) are increasingly used for their shiny effect” (Mbow, 1998: 146). There are various techniques used across the continent (Mbow, 1998: 146-156):

- Dyeing techniques (known as plangi – practiced among bamum in Cameroon, or kuba from Congo, tritik and batik- such as Bogolan practiced by the Bamana women in Mali);
- Drawing and painting (even if it is seldom practiced in Sub-Saharan Africa. Bark-painting is practiced in Central Africa by Mangbetu and the Bambuti of Congo);
- Embroidery (highly developed in Islamicised areas, in Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal and Guinea);

Another highly valued fabric in Central Africa is Vlisco Super Wax. This Dutsch brand is known for its quality wax fabric, print and figures among high-end materials. 10 Founded in 1846, Vlisco produces fabric known as wax hollandais in reference of is Dutch origin. For almost 170 years, Vlisco has distributed its fabric in Western and Central African markets (and of course in global

10 See https://www.vlisco.com/
metropolitan cities with African diaspora). Their fabrics have become an essential part of the African culture. As an African, I have seen my own mother and aunts receiving Vlisco super wax as wedding gifts from their son-in-law or husband. In general, one of the highest present that someone can give to an African woman is a Vlisco super wax.

Some fabrics are highly reputed and their value depend on the African context. Fabrics and clothing styles have their meanings (Hopkins, 2006). If Kente is highly valued in Ghana, bazin riche is on the rise in Senegal (Hansen and Soyini Madison, 2013).

Another element that needs to be highlighted in regard to African consumption of clothes is the difference between tailoring and label. Mustafa (1998) points out that local talent and production in tailoring are highly valued in Senegal for instance. According to the author, “the designer label is not crucial to the desirability of a garment” unlike capitals such as Abidjan or Johannesburg (Mustafa, 1998:27). She reports there is officially about 3,300 tailoring ateliers located along Dakar main commercial roads versus at least 7,000 tailors in her own estimation. This high number can be explained by the fact that “most people take their cloth to tailors since only the wealthy can afford couturier prices” in order to buy clothes made with bazin riche (Hansen and Soyini Madison, 2013: 68). Generally, people purchase their textile and ask a couturier or tailor to make their garments (Hansen and Soyini Madison, 2013: 68). And the same practicing is encountered among many Sub-Saharan populations, even in Matongé community, Brussels. And of course, your tailor and a luxury brand may not have the same requirement about perfection, quality in the manufacturing.

Furthemore, while I was observing the African surroundings of Brussels, two trends struck me. Either people there celebrate their African background by wearing colorful wax prints, boubous, and head ties; or they dress in a ‘modern way’, which is the most common practice, by wearing more ‘mainstream’ clothes. Ross (2008) reports those two ways of dressing as the two kinds of reactions towards the globalization. He then underlines that the measurement of your own modernity is evaluated when comparing behaviors from international society. In other words, “dress has long been a vehicle through which people on the periphery constitute themselves as modern cosmopolitans” (Hansen and Soyini Madison, 2013: 140). And the use of western brands
is used to achieve this cosmopolitan desire. According to the *Time* magazine, Africa is dependent on imported fashion: only 25% of local fashion design goes to fashion retailers in South Africa (Baker, 2014). Hansens reveals that Zambians “also often choose *salaula* – second hand market clothes in Zambia - because they find better quality and more varieties than what is locally produced” (2000: 95). Looking into South African dress practices, Hudita N. Mustafa (1998:41-44) also notes a distinction in consumption behaviors between social categories. The author reports that still in 1994, “design seems segregated by race, clientele, and style of production” (1998:40). According to her, the large group of wealthy white South African elite and the small black one favored European design labels since they were able to travel while the black middle classes showed preferences for projects linked to larger national transformation and “a rejection of white supremacy” (1998:44). In terms of production, she asserts that white designers follow European standards and black designers produce ‘ethnic’ for blacks (1998:40). Even if “dress practices always differ by context” such as Hansen and Soyini Madison state (2013:2), western clothing is a sign of cosmopolitanism and expresses a social status.

To summarize this section, I can say that there are actually some misconceptions around African clothing production. The idea that African brands don’t exist can be explained by the common practice which is to go to tailors or couturiers with your piece of fabrics to create your own garments. Moreover, some African fabrics are already signs of social distinction in themselves. However, production and consumption are not the same across the continent, there is a search of cosmopolitanism among people. And western dress fulfills this desire. These are also favored because of their quality.

The following point will bring cues about the expansion and preferences of western clothing in Africa.
4. Diffusion and appreciation of Western dress

First of all, African History is marked by cross-cultural exchanges such as in Senegambia which involve European, Islamic and African societies (Mustafa, 1998:22), when the traded items were food, salt, cloth and gold (Mustafa, 1998:22; Iliffe, 2007). Europeans began trading in Senegambia in the tenth century and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were periods of heightened trade (Mustafa, 1998:22).

During the Atlantic slave trade (began in 1441), the Portuguese used cloth (mainly from elsewhere in Africa) as trade item to buy slaves (Iliffe, 2007; Mustafa, 1998:22). During the 1800’s, the French introduced the guinée, an indigo produced in the French Indian colony of Pondichery, as another form of cloth currency to buy food during their military conquest interior of Sahelian Africa (Mustafa, 1998:22). The following became “a preferred cloth because of its quality” (Mustafa, 1998:22). And still in the nineteenth century, British and Dutch industries entered the African market by designing printed and cheaper cloth especially for this market, which undermined local hand woven production (Mustafa, 1998:22).

As developed inside Robert Ross’s book (2008), the spreading of Western style revolves around colonization. In the following section, the main relevant features according to the author.

Firstly, according to Ross, Europeans had a technical advance to conduct the spreading of western dress during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “The power Europeans had to impose their own dress and the prestige which made it attractive for such dress to be worn, even if it was not as such imposed, […] was made possible only because of the developments in the techniques of production and distribution of clothing” (Ross, 2008:53).

Secondly, religious missionaries of the colonial period played a tremendous role in the success of the implementation of European style in Africa. Religious missions were important factors and tools for the European cultural imperialism across the world since the end of the eighteenth century. Missionaries came to reform but also to dress the naked natives. Nakedness was a sign of
savagery. The acceptance of Christianity was associated with the adoption of European style clothing which entailed and demonstrated a level of civilization. In Robert Ross’s book, we can read a description of a scene related by Behrens, a missionary of the German Hermannsburg Society, on duty at Bethanie in the northwest of Pretoria in 1865:

These baptized people want to wear clothes but do not know how to get them. They gather patches and all kinds of material, and it is a lot of work to sell clothes to them or get them for them otherwise. […] If I possessed worn clothes which people give away in Germany, especially in the higher ranks, I could really make my congregation look nice and cover their nakedness. […] Most of the people have succeeded in appearing for church quite decently. The men started to sew dresses for their wives, which they can wear during the week, and they really do a good job. In short, baptized people and baptismal candidates urgently desire clothes, they all want to get their naked condition, their old stupid hides and whatever they might drape around their hips.” (Ross, 2008: 95-96).

Missionaries had a certain control on the access of clothing by Africans. They had contributed to the clothing of half of the continent between 1880’s and 1950 as stated by Ross. Nevertheless, the agency of those populations cannot be denied. There has been adaptation of European clothing by the local population, who ended up giving a new meaning to the cloth. For instance, “Sechele, ruler of the Bakwena in what is now southern Botswana, had a suit, in European style, made of leopard skin, the ancient symbol of power through much of Africa” (Ross, 2008:95). And Luo men refused to adapt western dress style (Ross, 2008:95). Nevertheless, European clothes were popular and prestigious goods that precede the arrival of missionaries (Hansen, 2004: 375).

Then the western clothes had served on a political level during the nationalism period in colonized countries. The outbreak of new elites and African intellectuals impacted the sartorial domain in the continent by using dress as a medium for social distinction and political claims. Dress was used for equality and modernity claims regarding against the dominant system in place.

During the late nineteenth century, it was frequent to encounter Blacks dressed up as English ladies
and gentlemen in West Africa.

“In Freetown, from the 1860’s, if not earlier, women were wearing crinolines and high-heeled boots and men were ordering their suits from London tailors who were advertising in the African Times. […] In a study of what seems to have been an elite, educates, Christian Logos family, with jobs in the colonial service or elsewhere in the formal sector, Betty M. Wass has shown that by 1900 European dress was very general and was kept at least until World War II. Indeed, one of the ways by which the elite set themselves apart from the rest of the African population was through their “consumption of ideal and material goods such as European clothing and furniture”. The display of clothing at fashionable weddings was particularly extravagant. The social argument was that because the English culture was thought to be superior, it was necessary for ‘easy and free native cloth, toga and sandals’ to give way to ‘costly and inconvenient dress, boots, shoes and hats”. (Ross, 2008: 125).

The western superiority, which was also materialized through clothing, generated a mimicry behavior from African colonial elites who “saw themselves as, and hoped to be seen as, British” (Ross, 2008: 125). The Europeans were “models” to be copycatted. In this way, the word in Lingala ‘mundele’ for the translation of “White man/women” originated from the deformation of the French word “modèle” which referred to the example of Whites among Congolese population according to one interlocutor.

And finally, Ross states that the type of system of governance set in place in order to control the colonies impacted the sartorial domain (Ross, 2008: 119 -138). Frederick Lord Lugard, main architect of the Indirect Rule - the British system of governance that used to rule their colonies developed from around 1900 -, was against the idea of adopting the European dress style. British colonies did not consider Africans as British, because they were not equal from their perspective. Among African elites in the British colonies, this decision was perceived as to be against equality and it provoked two different reactions. Countries as Zimbabwe and South Africa, which had less indigenous tradition in regard to dressing, stood for equality. Their dress became less formal during
big events. In West Africa, especially in Accra and Lagos, the political claim was expressed through the proud comeback of African forms of dress (like the use of kente prints or the costume from Yoruba roots). On the other side, French colonial authorities (and also in the former Belgian Congo) had pursued a policy of assimilation of their indigenous populations. So, they generally accepted that the évolutés, those African elites, adopted the French style and language. For that reason, this minority of lettered Africans took on a more westernized lifestyle, closer to the colonizer, and were then able to stand out of the rest of the population. By acting this way, they underlined their special status and privileges.

In Central Africa, in the capitals of the two Congos - Leopoldville (Kinshasa) and Brazzaville, the Sape (La société des ambianceurs et des personnes élégantes) can be seen as a protest movement during the sixties. Indeed, in Zaïre (former DRC) the president of that time, Mobutu Sese Seko, launched a policy of Authenticity that promoted the wearing of abacost (“a bas le costume” – which is based on the Nehru jacket) for men and the pagne, for women, instead of Western clothing. The Sapeurs continued to show them off with Western brands which was interpreted as an anti-regime provocation (Ross, 2008: 136-138). I will dwell on this in the following section.
1. The Sapeurs

Among Congolese urban citizens, the word ‘Sapeur’ is linked to a certain imaginary. It refers to some kind of expert on the combination of colors and materials when it comes to style. In other words, Sapeurs are the masters of elegance, though most of the time extravagant.

The word is derived from the French slang saper which means “to dress with class” (Porter, 2010). But it goes beyond that definition. Indeed, it has its roots in an African subculture primarily men-dominated society with its own codes, vocabulary and even religion (for example, kitendi or religion of cloth). Sometimes criticized, its attractive power enthralls the media, stylists and way more since it makes dressing a performative act, a show on its own. In the following section, we will give an overall description of the Sapeurs and their motivations.

I will focus on describing this movement.

2. Origin of the Sape

Presently inside the urban centers of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo, the Sape (which stands for “Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Elégantes” – or literally Society of Makers of Atmosphere and Elegant people (Mbow,1998:138) is a popular and cultural clothing movement.

It is known to have originated in Brazzaville. Authors (see Porter, 2010; Gondola ,1999) identified a few elements presaging this movement. First of all, there is a tendency to copy houseboys from the 1910’s in Brazzaville who were themselves copying their masters’ style (with the encouragements of the latter), when the act of dressing was particularly used as a sign of social distinction from the other citizens (Gondola 1999:21-22). The second influence was from the coastmen arriving in Brazzaville during the 1930’s from Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria or Sierra Leone.
and dressed up like their European masters. So those Blacks captivated local houseboys by their
elegance and allowed them to dress like White people without trying to be like the “Blancs à peau
noire” (Gondola 1999:22). Afterwards they developed their sense of style and also became
consumers while doing even better in fashion than their masters. The third and fourth elements
dates back to the years of war, around 1949-1950 when veterans returning home brought back with
them or luxurious cloths or shoes from Europe. In the 1950’s, la sape had been exported to
Kinshasa (in actual DRC) where black middle class took on and adopted the colonizer’s dress and
lifestyle (Jorgensen, 2014: 16). According to Gondola (1999: 21), the fourth and last element is
the most meaningful in the appearance of what we currently know as sape. For the latter, the
opening of dancing-bars in Brazzaville and Kinshasa during the years of war have played a major
role because those places of encounter, called nganda’s in Lingala, were (and still are) like stage
platform for Sapeurs.

La Sape became really popular in the 1970’s through the musical movement of Rumba with
Niarkos and Papa Wemba recognized as the fathers of this movement. Those musicians enhanced
the performative aspect of dress (Jorgensen, 2014: 17). Other major names of this movement are
Joe Ballard, Aurlus Mabele, Ricley Loubaky or Nono Ngando (Coulibaly and al., 2011). Even
though Sapeurs are mostly men, we can find a few women following the trend.
3. The *sape*

The *sape* can be seen as an art, a science, a protest movement and even a religion.

The real *Sapeur* represents the African dandy and masters the (science of) the perfect combination between colors and elegance called *sapologie*. The creation of this neologism is attributed to Ben Mukasha, known as ‘the king of sapologie’. According to him, this science studies the art of being dressed properly and develops the doctrine of elegance and originality (see video of Moussiron Judicael on YouTube). The person mastering this science, and bringing to perfection this art of *sape* is called a *sapologue*.

Gondola defines la *sape* as the way to use the body and show signs of success throughout fashion (Gondola, 1999:25-26). In the same perspective, Mbow describes it as a way for the members of the *sape* to “assert themselves” and to “acquire the external trappings of wealth and success in societies where appearance is all” (Mbow, 1998:238). Gondola qualified them as ‘illusionist’ because *they* cover themselves with signs of success despite their poor social condition (1999:23). The *sape* expresses le *paraître vestimentaire* (Gondola, 1999: 25). There is a real matter of social appearance and research of social acknowledgment, therefore clothes need to be conspicuous. The purchasing of luxurious labels gives the *Sapeur* a social recognition and lies at the center of his identity. I can quote Klapp who writes “je sape, donc je suis” (translated to “I am dressed up therefore I am”) (in Gondola, 1999:24) to express the idea that for the *Sapeur*, being is to be elegant and wearing external symbols of social success (Zingoula, 2014:27).

Furthermore, the acquisition of luxurious European labels is important. Zingoula (2014) speaks about obsession of brands. There is a real attachment to famous labels because they provide uniqueness and legitimacy to the *Sapeur* (Coulibaly and *et al.*, 2010: 13). Indeed, expensive clothes coming from the well-known brands present inherent characteristics (such as the symbolic status behind the brand, the quality, the exclusivity and the sentiment of uniqueness given by a product) that drive its purchasing (Zingoula, 2014). Brands are therefore really important, especially designer labels to which they show loyalty (Gondola, 1999:24).
The *Sapeur* has a certain knowledge of brands and fashion new trends. Nevertheless, the African dandy does not imitate, but creates his own identity through his clothes. He doesn’t dress ‘like’ but ‘as if’ (Gondola, 1999:25-26). As Gondola further explains, the *sapeur’s dress* embodies his identity. French fashion designer Jean-Charles de Castelbaljac acknowledges their creativity too (See figures 15 & 16). In his interview with Paris Match (French magazine), he declares that *Sapeurs* don’t only wear clothes but also give them a new interpretation (Léouffre, 2015). He sees them as true artists. Furthermore, Zingoula (2014) explains that according to Sapeurs, the mimicking and the democratization of a product diminish the value of a brand undermining both innovation and exclusivity.

In this way, there are also variants inside this subculture. Coulibaly and al. (2011) have identified two groups: the *Sapeur complet* (see figure 17) and the *Sapeur drakkar* (see figures 15&16) (Coulibaly and al., 2011:15). The first dresses in a more western style with suit and tie while the second considers himself as an artist who looks for distinction through a unique styles based upon as many luxurious brands as possible.

For others, la *Sape* is a religion named *religion kitendi* (“religion of clothes”) with its own commandments such as dignity, ferocity and elegance in every circumstance. Following an extract of its prayer:

> «Ô Dieu de la S.A.P.E. […], Pardonne à tous ceux qui ne savent pas s’habiller […], tous ceux qui ne savent pas distinguer les couleurs […].» (Palais de Tokyo, exposition) (Oh God of the Sape, forgive all of those who don’t know how to dress well, those who can’t distinguish colors […])

As Didier Gondola explains, this extreme love for fashion can be seen as "the fetishization of fashion—they are worshippers of fashion, it's their god, it's powerful," (Gondola, 1999). For that reason, *Sapeurs* also have detractors for whom this superficiality and excessive consumption make them irrational people (Zingoula, 2014). Common people also tend to criticize *Sapeurs* because of the huge amount of money they can spend on clothes or luxury accessories (Badibanga, 2012). For instance Armel Landry Mopao (*Sapeur* from France) admits spending 1400euros on cloth out of his 1800 euros per month; “d’abord les habits, les courses après” (“cloth first, and then

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11 http://www.palaisdetokyo.com/fr/exposition/sapeurs
shopping”) (Badibanga, 2012). Fashion is their assumed addiction and they are ready to make any necessary sacrifice to get their pieces of clothes. They are even parodies on youtube\textsuperscript{12}.

Moreover, saper also refers to a lifestyle (Zingoula), a philosophy. It shows a way to fight against the hardships in life (Zingoula, 2014) while looking for glamour (see Figure 18). If it can be learned, for others the sape is a legacy inherited from their elders. Words “sapeur” and “saper” are part of any Congolese’s everyday vocabulary. Those words refer to people who know how to be well dressed, who have style in reference to their subcultural group of Sapeurs. It can be used as a way to congratulate someone style or on the other hand to criticize one’s eccentricity.

Finally, the sape has been a protest movement too, especially in Zaire (former Democratic Republic of the Congo). During the 1970’s, Mobutu Sese Seko (president at that time) banned European dressing and replaced the suit by the abacost for men and the dress by the pagne for women. Sapeurs contested by wearing and popularizing western style (Djungu, 2013).

4. Large influence of the sape

Studying the awareness of luxury brands among this subculture has revealed to be really relevant since their aura crosses central African borders and spreads across Africa and beyond (Zingoula, 2014). Indeed, another important fact is that sapeurs have the ability to attract the attention wherever they go. Every occasion is a good excuse for being well-dressed (wedding, party, mass, etc.) (Zingoula, 2014).

Those living outside the continent influence and attract the African youth who dream to go to Paris, capital of fashion. Jocelyn Armel, alias the Bachelor (renowned Sapeur and shop owner of

\textsuperscript{12} See on DycoshTv channel on Youtube. Their videos on sapologie « sapologie#1 : Il garde ses chaussures dans le frigo” and « sapologie#2 : quand deux equipes de sapologue se rencontrent. » have attracted respectively 1194855 and 1134058 views on Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwvB5EDq9y4 , https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtF-XKL9pgs&ecb=ANyPxKo18zRd3o7DzUwA39wBw6wbw4J2P5ZKxtLgu0Ucy7Sq4RPpQVO68MPA3UA_iEUS1VgBwV1RbdJm8UKBWcwINWLCX0q1g
Connivences, Paris), explains in another article that most of people leave Africa to acquire fabrics and brands (Mediacongo, 2015).

On the other hand Zingoula (2014) states that music and sape go together. Musicians such as Niarkos and Papa Wemba who had popularized it. But those artists did more than that, they have offered free publicity and promotion to famous brands such as Yves Saint Laurent, Dior, Yoji Yamamoto, Versace, J-M. Weston.

Since the last decade the sape has gained the attention of the West, especially of many artists, which has contributed to increase their popular visibility. The Italian photographer Daniele Tamagni profiles them in his book "Gentlemen of Bacongo," (see Figure 14); the Wall Street Journal calls them "the most unlikely fashionistas." (Barnett, E. 2015); The Irish beer Guinness launched in 2014 an ad campaign “Made of more” featuring Sapeurs from Brazzaville (see figure12). American pop singer Solange Knowles surrounds herself with Sapeurs for her music video clip “Losing you” in 2012 (see Figure 13). This stylish subculture has even inspired designers like Paul Smith for his 2010 Spring/Summer collection (see Figure 14). Jean-Charles de Castelbaljac, French stylist, acknowledges their creativity too. In his interview with Paris Match, he declares that the Sapeur doesn’t wear his pieces but give them also a new interpretation (Léouffre, 2015). He sees them as real artists. An exhibition held in their honor took place in Paris, inside the Palais of Tokyo, from 18th February to 17th May 2015 (see Figure 15 &16). The popular Congolese singer Maitre Gims released in 2015 a tube “ Sapés comme jamais” which popularizes the African dandy even more.
Figure 12 Guinness ad campaign in 2014 “Made of more”. Source: google image.

Figure 15 Jean-Charles de Castelbajac surrounded by Sapeurs at the exhibition held in Palais de Tokyo, Paris. Source: http://www.troispointzeromagazine.com
Figure 16 French fashion designer Jean-Charles de Castelbajac (C) surrounded by two of the 'kings' of SAPE, the Societe des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Elegantes (Society of Entertainers and Elegant People) from Brazzaville and Kinshasa, wearing his creation during the exhibition “La Sape”, in Palais de Tokyo, Paris. Source: Loic Venance. http://www.gettyimages.com.au/
Figure 17 Popular French TV presenter Antoine De Caunes walking in the streets of Château Rouge, Paris, with The Bachelor (second on the right) and other sapeurs. Source: Google image.
The *sape* movement is on the rise and makes itself known around the world. To quote Jorgensen (2014: 30-31) “the sape is becoming one of the most successful cultural exports from DRC”. It is a cultural export from Africa since it is spread across Africa.

More than just a trend, *the sape* reflects empowerment and personal accomplishment. Being well dressed reflects self-love (Djungu, 2013). *The sape* has a core influence from western culture. But speaking about imitation of western style is not totally true since there is in fact culturally authentic and entirely African adaptation (Ferguson, 2002). However, the question is whether this popular subculture could display luxury African clothes with the same pride as a Yohji Yamamoto, Versace, or Dior? Indeed, Jocelyn Armel explains in an interview for Judicael Moussiron that more than 60% of his clients are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo. Originated from Brazzaville, the Bachelor expresses his desire to also see *Sapeurs*

*Figure 18 Sapeurs walking in the streets of the Congo. This image illustrates the contrast between the social context of a sapeur and the art he is achieving. Source: http://marchioness.fr/fr/2015/02/16/les-sapeurs-a-la-conquete-du-monde/*
exhibiting African brands, especially Congolese ones. The only way to answer this question is to first know whether *Sapeurs* are at least aware of the existence of African luxury brands.

A long but subjective reputation carried by Congolese as “*sapeur*” motivated our choice to carry this study.
III. Methodology and case study

Part 1 - Methodology

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to investigate the connection between how we perceive a Sub-Saharan fashion brand and its actual luxurious identity. The success encountered by only a few African fashion designers proves that quality, which is an important characteristic in luxury goods, isn’t an inherent attribute to the West and could well be met by some Africans too who are trying to redefine Africa in the international fashion industry. The current unknown variable is to know whether this redefinition is also perceived among Africans. So based on the literature review, we propose three hypotheses.

The first one is that there is not yet any link in Africans’ minds between luxury production and Africa, especially when it comes to fashion.

Because of this first assumption, my second hypothesis is that there is no awareness of any African luxury brands among natives (especially among Congolese Sapeurs from Brussels) and that the brands will not be perceived as a luxury brand because of their geographical origin.

But since South Africa is considered as an advanced country in Sub-Saharan Africa, our last hypothesis is that the special status of South Africa, considered as the “little Europe of Africa”, is beneficial for South African luxury brands because it increases the appreciation for those brands as real African luxury products, especially among our study group.
1. Choice of methodology

The methodology to carry this study changed a few times during the research. At the beginning, I started this thesis with a personal thought about African luxury brands. The willingness to investigate on luxury fashion brands came along while I realized that I was actually unable to recognize or name any of those a few months ago.

My first step was to analyze fashion magazines (by measuring the presence of African brands in such influent media, with the number of advertisements for example) having mainly an African audience. My ambition was to combine it with a questionnaire among South African university students, in order to discover their effective awareness.

I chose magazines as a research object simply because they are really relevant when it comes to the world of fashion. There are opinion leaders like celebrities (from music, film or entertainment industry) and fashion buyers (Moeran, 2003: 728-729, Vernette, 2004). They can support designers by featuring their products. As a reminder, an opinion leader is in marketing “someone who ‘informally’ influences the attitude of other individuals in an intended direction” (Vernette, 2004: 90). So, these media provide a primary “word-of-mouth” source of information. Indeed, they review and comment on each seasonal collection and bring new trends to the general public attention (Moeran, 2003: 728). The opinion leaders have a dual role in interpersonal communication: they transmit information on one hand and they influence on the other hand (because of the visibility they offer to the products) (Vernette, 2004:90). According to Vernette’s research, “women’s clothing fashion opinion leaders have a more favorable attitude toward media advertising than non-opinion leaders” (Vernette, 2004: 96). For a greater awareness, brands should be visible in magazines. Therefore, analyzing and featuring African designers in this influent medium appeared to be a good option.

My expectation was to observe displaying of African designers, and especially inside simple or double advertisement pages. This presence would suggest that African luxury brands have begun to compete at the same level with other international brands. *ELLE magazine*¹³ (South Africa) and
Ndalo media group (from Destiny and Destiny Man magazines) have generously given some hard copies from their 2014 magazines.

Nevertheless, a deep comparison wasn’t possible due to missing editions in both magazines. However, I spotted a few trends. My second project was to study awareness of South African brands among South Africans in order to have a local population. It was impossible to convey a relevant survey since my stay was too short. And unfortunately, there is not a big South African community in Belgium.

That is why I needed to introduce a few changes into this research both for practical and feasible reasons. Therefore, I opted for the sapeur community in Brussels. The idea was to investigate and compare the results of different interviews with Congolese sapeurs living in Brussels, but also Paris and London which are ones of the most influential capitals in fashion. For practical reasons, I eventually decided to focus my interviews on Brussels sapeurs. But once again, finding participants in Brussels wasn’t a piece of cake.

I have chosen to collect data among sapeurs because this subculture has a strong relationship with luxury brands and fashion. Furthermore, their approach of fashion is intertwined with an African way of consumption of luxury fashion goods, which gives it a cultural aspect too. And finally, they represent a good audience (and market); as they are keen on luxury fashion brands. Thus I can expect a certain knowledge of this matter from them.

2. Interviews and limits.

For this study, I opted for a qualitative approach in order to check whether there is a lack of awareness about luxury African brands. I presume that the latter hampers development and the embracement of those brands among Sub-Saharan diasporic populations, especially among Congolese sapeurs living in Europe, mainly because of the ‘africanity’ of the brand. My approach is based on subjectivity. In other words, I refer to the way one build his environment up according to how he interprets events (Pellemans, 1999:18). Indeed, someone’s reality is based on symbols influenced by individual experiences and context. Moreover, everyone is expected to grow or to

15 The results were reported previously on part 2 – Luxury fashion brands. Industry, consumption and visibility in Africa (Theoretical framework).
accomplish a social mutation. So I have to consider that variation regarding tastes, preferences, knowledge of a person may change over time. Therefore, I also have to take into account the variations in interviewees’ responses since subjectivity is unavoidable and central in this work. This is the reason why the results from those interviews cannot be generalized (Pellemans, 1999:19) nor reproduced. This point is a first limit to this work paper.

Regarding the data collection, it was based on a verbal approach. Each interview was minimum one hour long and took place in a different open area, in an informal context and most of the time around a drink. The interview was based on a structured questionnaire to help me better understanding the interviewees’ motivations, opinions and attitudes (Pellemans, 1999:86). The questionnaire was composed of multiple-choice and open-ended questions and addressed several topics. The questions can be divided into different sections looking at:

- the importance of prestige for the respondents,
- their awareness (recalled and recognition) of luxury fashion brands,
- the relevance of country-of-origin as a factor for consumption,
- the evaluation of Africa as a place of luxury production,
- and the evaluation of luxury through South African fashion brands.

I will discuss about this questionnaire later on. During each interview, I followed most of the time the order of the questions. During each discussion, the respondents were invited to explain or to argue their response in an open and sincere way.

All the interviews took place in French because of the poor knowledge in Lingala (vernacular language in both Congo’s) from my side, despite a good understanding of the language though. But unfortunately the use of French has also limited my interaction with the interviewees. I have felt that some of them haven’t gone as deep as they could in their responses. Furthermore, I think that I would have get more interviews if the participants would have known that they could express themselves in Lingala or to switch from a language to another, which would also have helped me also to build a stronger feeling of trust.
For this research to be relevant, certain conditions needed to be met. Nevertheless, I failed on some of them. First of all, the number of participants wasn’t enough. Pellemans recommends between 10 to 70 interviews (1999:33,132) in order to keep enough workable data. In my case, among my 9 interviews, some questionnaires were incomplete, with questions left blank. The attempt to conduct more interviews was not achieved for two main reasons. Firstly, because it was hard to find willing participants and secondly, because I had to face agenda issues. This explains why my research sample may not be very representative. However, my analysis is based on ten subjects. The tenth questionnaire is simply a questionnaire that haven been filled via internet. I have kept this data’s to reach at least ten workable data’s.

As mentioned earlier, I have failed to establish trust with the interviewees, therefore my first experience in Matonge barbershops was not fruitful. The perspective of an interview was received with distrust and especially when the qualitative of “Sapeur” was being used, which seems to have bad connotation. I decided then to replace it by “personne ayant du style, ayant du gout en matière de vêtements” ou “personnes qui savent comment s’habiller”, “personnes bien habillées” (It can literally be translated as” people with style” “ people who have good taste in clothing”, “ people who know how to dress” , “people well dressed”. ) during my first contact. And finally, the mere fact of being a woman entering a men’s world has certainly impacted my work too.

The interviews were carried over a time scale of two months (June and July 2015). The month before was used as an upstream preparation when I pretested the questionnaire in order to gauge its efficiency. And I didn’t diffuse my questionnaire on Internet after an unfruitful test. I think that the length of the questionnaire restricts the will of the respondent to carry particular attention to every questions.

In conclusion, this study is mainly descriptive and has to be considered as a preliminary research to a deeper survey. Its aim is to find variation of opinions, attitudes or images about African fashion brands through an African perspective (Pellemans, 1999: 32). Since the fashion industry is changing as Africa becomes a new player in the market, it also needs to be scholarly explored. As underlined in Pellemans’ book (1999, 18-23) qualitative research is not necessarily to be undervalued. Several of its advantages can be mentioned in marketing (Pellemans 1999, 23-24). Indeed, it is a flexible, adaptable and cheap approach that might enable us to collect data on this topic.
3. Questionnaire.

In this section I will succinctly present how I have composed the questionnaire on the basis of this study. It can be divided in five sections. Most of the questions are based on the Marketing scales Handbook (see Appendix 6).

The first set of questions focuses on identifying the participants and its objectives is double-aimed: It identifies respondents and help to determine if the interlocutors attribute any characteristics to the sapeurs. Since I needed to make circumlocution to get some volunteers for my questionnaire, I couldn’t select them directly on basis of this description. For that reason, I have also included relevant questions about the importance of prestige, social values and quality consciousness in order to measure the participants’ social recognition as well as their will to consume luxury goods. In this set of questions, interviewees had to mark for each affirmation their agreement between 1 to 5 (1 for disapproval, 5 for approval). There was also a question about their frequency in contacts with Africa which aimed at knowing if the interviewees could potentially influence their entourage or not. But the answer was unclear. Indeed, there was no precision whether it was about frequency of calls to Africa or visits in the continent. And finally, at the end of my questionnaire, I decided to ask directly whether the respondents consider themselves as sapeurs or not, in order to confirm or disconfirm my previous findings.

The second set of questions was dedicated to study the brand awareness and was subdivided into two categories regarding brand recalling on one hand and brand recognition on the other hand.

Brand recalling questions helped to distinguish which brands are better memorized by the respondents but also to identify which one comes first place in their mind. In order to achieve that, I used situational questions aimed at targeting their favorite brand and the reasons of their choice. Since my study compares awareness with African brands, I added a question to evaluate their knowledge about African brands asking them to name one African brand of the same standard as their favorite one.

To assess brand recognition, I also used situational questions such as the following:
Vous disposez d'un budget de 3 000 euros pour faire les boutiques. Dans quelle marque préférez-vous dépenser votre argent ? Classez les groupes de marques suivantes par ordre de préférence. (To translate to: you have 3000 euros at your disposal for shopping. For which brand do you go to spend your money? Rank these different family brands according to your preference).

Brand names and logos were tested too in this questionnaire. By mixing famous brands and rising African brands which opt for a luxurious position, I wanted to evaluate whether the logo brings to mind a luxury emotion. An open question was added to bring more explanation about the participants’ responses.

About my choice of brands for those questions, I mostly went for South-African brands and chose the other ones according to my knowledge of them. It is of course totally subjective. My main requirement was the luxury status of the brand, be it actual or past.

For both brand recognition and brand recall sets, I have also added questions at the end of the form to test if the questionnaire had triggered some changes in their knowledge of the brands.

Next, I have evaluated the importance of the country-of-origin factor since my hypothesis maintains that the origin of a good plays a role in its appreciation. For that reason, I wanted to see if the country-of-origin (or place of production) has an importance in the buying process. I wanted to determine which origin helps them to enhance their social approval. And of course, I used statements to measure the person’s willingness to buy a product made in a particular country. In order to do so, I selected a few Africans brand names to check whether they were indicators of their africanness.

The second set relates to the evaluation of Africa as a place of production. I have mixed open and rated questions because I wanted to discover if there was any interest in African fashion and in which way participants might have established a link between Africa and luxury. The aim was also to see if, according to them, African quality might already compete with the Western one. Based on their perception, interviewees were then asked to rate some Sub-Saharan countries in regard to their ability to produce high quality clothing. One tricky question about their choice between two similar products (in quality) but from different origin was asked only to see whether they were ready to buoy up African brands. Then I asked them to compare and evaluate two series of high brands specialized in knitwear on basis of four statements. The objective was to see if African
brands which take their cultural inheritance as main particularity have succeeded to show this quality through their pieces of clothes.

And finally, my last set of questions specifically dealt with the South African production. Based on a set of photos, it aims at rating the perception of South African brands to produce luxurious fashion goods.

Of course, I couldn’t finish my interview without asking my respondents if they had found it interesting or not.

Since everyone has his own personality, it was easier to get extra explanations and comments from certain interviewees than from others. Therefore, I realized that I should have asked more questions that could have enabled them to go deeper in their explanation. Most of the time, the interviewee had to select a suggested answer or to give an evaluation (between one to five), which limited the collection of extra information.

In the following part, I will proceed to the analysis and results of my interviews.

For clarity purposes, the results from my interviews will be presented section by section regarding to the sections identified earlier. (See Appendix 7 for the interviews).

1. **Identification questions**

My interviewees, all males aged between 32 and 51, mostly come from DRC\(^{16}\). The majority of them (7 out of 10) have regular contacts with Africa. They call the continent at least once a month, or some of them even go back and forth to Congo, mainly for business. None of them defines himself as a *sapeur*. Nevertheless, as reflected the results of the set of questions about the importance of prestige, social values and quality consciousness\(^{17}\), I have encountered four participants which may be considered as *sapeurs*. To determine whether a participant can be reckoned as *sapeur*, I have picked only participants who highly scaled the statements (above 4 on a scale between 1 to 5). The participants 2, 3, 6 and 8 totalized more than

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\(^{16}\) One interviewee has Cameroonian mother and is strongly linked to this country.

\(^{17}\) (a) It's important for me to own beautiful things. (b) I'd like to be rich enough to buy everything I want. (c) I am aware of luxury brands and want to be the first to try them. (d) It is important for me to be a leader in luxury. (e) For me, fashion apparel are important. (f) Luxury brands are good brands. (g) I support luxury brands. (h) It is important for me to have excellent quality products. (i) Only well-known brands enable me to make great impression on others. (j) Only well-known brands allow me to have a social value. (In the sense of being approved by others).
Among those four potential Sapeurs, only one has given high marks to the statements (8 out of 10). But as he has explained later on, he cannot identify himself as a Sapeur because of its negative connotation. I quote:

« Dans la façon dont les Congolais l’ont défini, je ne me considère pas comme un sapeur. Je suis un homme d’affaires, un businessman qui aime s’habiller. Mais j’ai beaucoup de notions de la sape. […] je ne mettrais pas mon argent n’importe où. » (In the way Congolese define it, I cannot consider myself as a sapeur. I am a businessman who likes to dress up. But I know a great deal about the sape. […] and it’s worth my money).

But he then added that others used to call him as such because they simply go to the same parties, the same areas and he wears lots of seasonal and expensive clothes.

2. **Brand recalling**

In order to measure the interviewees’ knowledge, I simply asked them to name all the luxury brands they knew. Famous Gucci, Armani and Versace were frequently named.
Marques fréquemment citées
(Frequency of the brands named)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gucci</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Armani</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Versace</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Vuitton</td>
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<td>Weston</td>
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<td>Kors</td>
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<td>Cerrutti</td>
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Nevertheless, the brand that most easily comes to the interviewees’ mind in association to luxury fashion is Versace. It has been spontaneously named four times as a luxury brand. Gucci comes second. This has been confirmed by the answers to my question: which is the most prestigious brand to you? But a distinction can be made between their knowledge of this brand and their appreciation of it. Indeed, Versace may enjoy a big recalling among the participants but that doesn’t mean that they are keen on wearing it. Only one still chose Versace as a fashion brand when he has to dress for a prestigious and glamorous event. This difference can be explained by the simple fact that people choose how they dress depending on how clothes fit them, and not especially on the brand image or what it evokes.

To understand how a brand has penetrated their consideration, it was important to know how they came aware of the brand. Results show that celebrity connection is highly effective, especially from the musical world. For instance, Papa Wemba, a Congolese musician also known as the father of Congolose sape, has been a good vector for popularizing brands. Magazines come only in second position. I also have to highlight two points. Firstly, the appreciation of a brand can lead to a deeper knowledge of it. For instance, two interviewees were able to explain a historical aspect of their favorite brand. They know what the brand stands for, its history, its quality and symbolic
characteristics. And secondly, the power of relatives shouldn’t be underestimated. Indeed, some of my respondents remembered a brand because of the memories they have gained from their childhood by seeing their family members talking or wearing a specific brand. So family members can be the first step or contact with a brand.

Regarding the knowledge of African brands, most of them were aware. The majority (7 out of 10) was able to give at least one brand. Names such as Alphadi, PathéO, Boateng (Oswald) or Gilles Touré were mentioned. Someone answered: “Je connais… mais j’ai oublié le nom” (I know this… but I have forgotten the name). Even if those brands enjoy a really good reputation locally, the participants who were able to name African brands do not consider them to have the same level than the one they have chosen earlier for a prestigious event. According to their responses, they know no African brands from such high-level.

A comment needs to be added in regards Oswald Boateng. The designer, from Ghanaian origin, debuted in London. He was chosen by an interviewee as to be a suitable African brand for prestigious events. Nevertheless, the same participant hasn’t been able to name any other African brand from the same level.
3. Brand recognition

When brand names or logos were presented to the interviewees, the results showed that European brands win the pot. Indeed, if their shopping budget is comfortable enough, they admit they would spend it in Europe-labeled shops. African brands then seem to lose value because, as someone put it, people just don’t know them. I obtained the same analysis when it came to logos; it is principally African brands that are unknown or not identifiable.

Moreover, I have tested the luxurious/prestigious feeling generated by a logo. Following question “parmi les marques suivantes, lesquelles vous évoquent davantage le luxe ou le prestige?” (Among the following brands, which ones remind you the most of luxury or prestige?) was answered by top-three brands were from Italy, Britain and France. And the opposite question (“parmi les marques suivantes, lesquelles vous évoquent davantage le moins ou le prestige?” (Among the following brands, which ones remind you the least of luxury or prestige?) shows more varieties. There is less uniformity in the answers which can be explained by the definition of what luxury is to the interviewees. For instance, someone has designated Yoji Yamamoto as a non-prestigious brand because according to him, “Yamamoto is not luxurious. He is a couture brand; he does not fit in luxury”. This interlocutor defines luxury by extravagancy. Beauty and pieces that strike an eye are elements that are taken into account in his definition; and those features are more valued
that high prices. For him, the acme of luxury is Versace. But for another participant, Versace is absolutely not a prestigious brand because of its popularity. I quote:

« Tellement que c’est bradé, tant bien même que Versace se bat ; le luxe n’est pas au niveau du peuple et Versace est très populaire. Quand vous descendez à Kin [Kinshasa], tu vois le pousse-pousseur avec sa chemise Versace. C’est ça le problème. Il y a des marques qui sont moins contrefaite ; et Hugo Boss encore moins. […] Maintenant je ne considère pas comme grande marque, vu ce qu’on en a fait. Je ne dis pas que ça vaut rien. Mais c’est juste par rapport aux personnes qui portent la marque et qui ne lui ont pas rendu service, je ne considère pas Versace. » (i is so sold off, even if Versace fights, luxury is not at the level of people and Versace is very popular. When you get in Kinshasa, you see the pusher with his Versace shirt. That is the problem. There are brands that have less fakes; Hugo Boss for example. […] Now I do not consider it as a great brand [Versace], given what has been done with it. I'm not saying it's worthless but when I see who’s wearing it and they’ve done to it, I do not look upon Versace.)

Indeed, the latter defines luxury as a combination of beauty, inaccessibility and sophistication. And last example comes from my fourth interviewee. According to him, luxury in fashion is more related to a brand name and its reputation. He has chosen Pierre Cardin only because he knows the brand and his past luxuriousness appeal. It didn’t pick Maxhosa simply because he didn’t know it.
4. Country of origin

Regarding the importance of country-of-origin in the buying process, results show that this aspect of the brand isn’t relevant compared to price, aesthetic and quality. To get this observation, I sum up rank of importance (between 1 and 8 – from the most important to the least) attributed to each item (price, quality, aesthetic, rarity, brand image, visibility of the brand, country of origin, and originality). The lowest scores have been defined as significant for the interviewees. In order of importance, they highly rate respectively quality, aesthetic and price.

The second goal was to get information about whether a specific country-of-origin brings more social approval or not. Here, I categorized brands in terms of continent (thus Western- African - Asian - Latin American or American brands)\(^\text{18}\). And for all the statements ((a) brands that help me to feel acceptable, (b) brands that improve the way I am perceived, (c) brands that give great impression among others, (d) brands that give social recognition) western brands were selected. Nevertheless, some important comments can be added.

\(^\text{18}\) Austral brands weren’t mentioned by mistake but this has certainly not distorted the results.
First of all, European brands are dominant because of their long history in fashion, according to some participants. One of them even argued that some countries don’t have a history of fashion, such as Cameroon for instance. For that reason, he will doubt product made in this country.

Secondly, the acknowledgement of European quality product is undeniable. I quote:

“L’Europe a marqué sur tous les plans. Ils sont premiers […] côté qualité, rapport prix qualité, sur l’esthétique ; ils sont tellement premiers dans tout, c’est pour ça que j’ai dit européenne. Ce n’est pas par fanatisme.” (Europe scored on all aspects. They are the first in quality, quality-price ration, aesthetics; they are the first in everything, that’s why I say European. I’m not a fanatic.)

Another observation is the existence of a certain reputation associated to each part of the world. Some continents have been linked to a certain imagery, especially Africa and Asia. These images are based on personal experiences or widespread belief. A negative experience with an African or Asian product has led to serious dubious expectations on African quality. I quote:

« [je choisis l’Europe] par élimination… […] parce que vu l’expérience que j’ai eue, où les finitions n’étaient pas très bien faites, ce n’était pas ce que je voulais et donc j’élimine l’Afrique pour ces raisons-là. […] Je ne dis pas qu’il n’y a pas de grande marque mais je ne reconnais pas aux Américains un sens aigu dans l’habillement, dans la recherche du tissu, donc je supprime l’Amérique. Donc, ils resteraient donc l’Europe et l’Asie. Mais l’Asie, bien que reprit par quelques grandes marques, il est aussi le repère de la contrefaçon dont j’ai horreur. […] Bien que l’Argentine, Buenos Aires, a quelques défilés assez importants, je remettrai encore l’Europe. »

("[I chose Europe] by process of elimination ... […] because of the experience I had, where the finishing touches were not very well done, it was not what I wanted, and for that reason I dismiss Africa. […] I'm not saying there are no major brands but I do not see in Americans a fine sense of clothing, or a research on the fabric, therefore I suppress America. So there’s Europe and Asia left. But although they bought some huge brands, Asians is also into counterfeiting, which I hate. […] Eventually, although
Argentina, Buenos Aires, has some pretty important shows, I still go for Europe.

Some regions such as Latin America haven’t got any specific association because of the lack of knowledge or experience in its fashion industry.

Nevertheless, different comments made us think that any qualitative and positive experience with African production could change minds. On one side, someone explained that since he went in Africa and discovered Woodin and Vlisco, he had been interested in buying a product made there because he noticed the quality of it. On the other side, another one regretted the lack of visibility of other Africa brands that, according to him, would help him to feel acceptable and to improve the way he is perceived from the outside. That is the reason why he decided to for American brands. The continent has indeed to improve its reputation on the quality aspect. To illustrate this, I quote:

« Maintenant, il se peut que vous preniez quelque chose qui viennent d’Afrique ou de l’Asie et avoir quelqu’un qui se donne le souci de la qualité, mais il y en a encore peu. On doit encore rechercher. Je douterais si on m’amène quelque chose qu’on me dit c’est made in Africa ; si mes compatriotes ne font pas encore quelques choses, qui ne sont pas à la hauteur [sur la qualité].... » (“Now it may be that you take something from Africa or Asia and that someone would care about its quality, but these people are scarce. There is still work to be done. I would be doubtful if someone would bring me something supposed to be made in Africa; if my compatriots do not already do some things to improve their quality .... ”)

However, most of the respondents rather avoid Asian products if they need to choose one.

The following remark is about the statement that relates clothing to social validation. It brought some disagreement. Someone highlighted the fact that dress is not the only tool for social validation. According to him, an appealing body helps more in that sense. I quote:

« je ne pense pas que le vêtement donne une valorisation sociale. Je pense que c’est plutôt comment on le porte. […] je pense que la personne qui a la chance d’avoir un physique avantageux aura plus de chance d’avoir une reconnaissance
sociale s’il faut avoir une reconnaissance sociale. La reconnaissance sociale par le vêtement je ne crois pas trop. C’est sûr, il faut être bien habillé, être propre mais ça n’induit pas nécessairement une reconnaissance sociale. Donc répondre à la question va être assez difficile pour moi ; vraiment difficile.» ("I do not think that clothes give a social validation. I think it is rather how you wear it. [...] I think the person who has the chance to have an appealing physique is more likely to have a social recognition, if there must be a social recognition. I do not really believe in social recognition through clothing... Sure, you have to be well dressed and clean but it does not necessarily mean social recognition. So, it will be very hard for me to answer that question. ")

To conclude, I have observed among my participants that the brand name isn’t a reliable indicator of the country of origin. It can be misguided. And the origin it evokes can be obvious on one hand, or giving muddled feelings about it on another hand. The following table illustrates my point. It shows a sample of the collected answers in regard to different South-African brands when respondents were asked “in your opinion, what is the country of origin of the following brands?”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUJET</th>
<th>MaXhosa by Laduma:</th>
<th>David Tlale:</th>
<th>Skorzch:</th>
<th>Craig Port :</th>
<th>Fabiani:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUJET 1</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Angleterre</td>
<td>Tchéquie</td>
<td>Angleterre</td>
<td>Italie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUJET 2</td>
<td>Europe de l'Est</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Tchéquie</td>
<td>Britannique</td>
<td>Italie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUJET 3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Britannique</td>
<td>Europe de l'Est</td>
<td>Britannique</td>
<td>Italie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUJET 4</td>
<td>Japon</td>
<td>Britannique</td>
<td>Danemark</td>
<td>Britannique</td>
<td>Italie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUJET 5</td>
<td>Afrique</td>
<td>Afrique</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Italie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUJET 6</td>
<td>Inde</td>
<td>Afrique</td>
<td>Britannique ou scandinave</td>
<td>Britannique</td>
<td>Italie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUJET 7</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Britannique</td>
<td>Britannique</td>
<td>Italie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUJET 8</td>
<td>Inde</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Britannique</td>
<td>Italie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUJET 9</td>
<td>Afrique du sud</td>
<td>Afrique de L'Est</td>
<td>Ecosse</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Italie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUJET 10</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Suede</td>
<td>Britannique</td>
<td>Italie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Evaluation of Africa as a luxury place of production

Regarding the evaluation of Africa as a luxury place of production, I first wanted to discover the interest of my interviewees for fashion coming from Africa. They had to scale their interest between 1 (no interest) to 5 (interest). The majority of them opted for a neutral position (3). Among those who chose this position, there was one who had seen interest. Two participants admitted to not being interested in African fashion. For one of them, it only refers to wax print (maputas) and he simply didn’t know this industry even existed in to continent. And three candidates attributed themselves the highest score which means that they are really interested in African fashion. But a doubt emerged for one of the respondents since he was unable to name any African brand.

Secondly, it was essential to have an idea about their mental association of Africa and luxury. The following table shows their answers.

| SUJET 1 | « Le luxe représente l'Europe; l'Afrique est elle en retard. » |
| SUJET 2 | ressources naturelles, minerais |
| SUJET 3 | ressources naturelles, minerais (or, diamant) |
| SUJET 4 | sobriété |
| SUJET 5 | simplicité, naturel |
| SUJET 6 | Voiture |
| SUJET 7 | Rien |
| SUJET 8 | diaspora africaine |
| SUJET 9 | wax, bogolan |
| SUJET 10 | Exotisme |
Some answers are more obvious and simplistic. For instance, the reference to natural resources (like ore), the simplicity or the natural beauty of the continent. Some others need more interpretation. The fourth candidate chose sobriety to qualify an important attribute of luxury according his perception of luxury. In his answer, he decided to point at the fact that Africa is currently missing. For my sixth participant, luxury needed to be extravagant. Even if I have got no further explanation, I suppose that luxury cars are symbols of social success for him too. Indeed, during his interview he mentioned on several occasions that he knew people who collected luxurious cars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Unexpected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ressources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naturelles, minerais</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simplicité, naturel</td>
<td>sobriété</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wax, bogolan clothes</td>
<td>Voiture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exotisme</td>
<td>diaspora africaine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>« Le luxe représente l'Europe; l'Afrique est elle en retard. »</td>
<td>Rien</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is not easy a job to summarize those different ideas since I haven’t given any precise instruction upfront about the lexical field to use. Therefore, I have got no specific reading grill for my analysis. Nevertheless, I would like to propose the following table. In order to categorize the responses, I have chosen Unexpeceted (what may be unusual, original, surprising to hear about luxury and Africa) and Expected (what can be predictable) as categories.

When it comes to compare African and Western quality in clothing in a scale between 1 and 5 (assuming that Africa has reached the same quality level than European product - 5 shows their agreement with the statement), participants gave a neutral score (3) or they came to the conclusion that Africa hadn’t met western quality standards yet. However, South-Africa is spontaneously and predominantly named as an African country able to deliver luxury fashion clothing. This observation is confirmed by the score obtained when participants have been asked to scale selected
Sub-Saharan countries regarding their potential to produce high-end and aesthetics fashion pieces. South-Africa and closely-following Nigeria are the two countries designated as competent to reach high quality standards and aesthetic. They are among the main contenders.

If African countries meet the same quality standards than in the West since the majority said to be ready to spend 10% more to acquire their products. But the products should only be available on one side or another from the globe for instance. However, the will to encourage African production is their true leitmotiv. And this act also implies a sentimental and ‘patriotic’ feeling. Nearly everyone will be proud to wear a good quality African product. Someone recognized that for a long time he had had prejudice about African things. So wearing them will be a way to show others
the good level of Africa too. But as underlined by an other, this kind of attitude won’t do good to the African designers in the long run. I quote:

« le but est que ces marques aient pignon sur rue, mais ce n’est pas comme ça qu’ils vont y arriver. Il faut que les marques africaines soient compétitives en termes de qualité et de prix. Ils devraient arriver à concurrencer les produits européens et soient considérés comme n’importe quels produits ». ("The aim is that these brands are well established but that’s not how they will get there. African brands have to be competitive in terms of quality and price. They should be able to compete with European ones and to be regarded as any other brands. ")

6. Perception of South -African luxury brands. Focus on Maxhosa by Laduma brand

Toutes les images présentées à la question 26 sont toutes des marques sud-africaines. Cela vous étonne-t-il? Donnez votre avis.
(All images submitted in the question 26 are all South African brands. Are you surprised? Share your opinion.)

SUJET 1 " Ravi, étonné…; Afrique est en marche“
SUJET 2 “pas surpris, "ça fait plaisir à voir" ; fier“
SUJET 3 –
SUJET 4 “pas surprise“
For the interview, many pictures have been used, most of them from South-African designers (Craig Port, Laduma by Maxhosa, Fabiani, Skorzh, David Tlale, Thula Sindi, Black Coffee, Gertz-Johan Coetzee).

I collected my interviewees’ reactions after I had announced the origin. According to the results, two reactions can be identified. On one side, people were quite happy with that announcement. And on the other side, they were not really surprised. This second reaction can be explained by the acknowledgment of the South-African ability to produce high-end quality standards goods.

South Africa enjoys a special status. It is presented as the good scholar of Africa. The positive point about it is that its success can benefit the rest of the continent. I quote: « Il donne un peu d’honneur à l’Afrique sur ce niveau-là » ( “it gives a little bit of honor to Africa on that level ”).

Nevertheless, even if they all recognized South-African quality level and aesthetic in the production, they are still less enthusiastic about the uniqueness. Through several statements aiming at valuing South-African production (between 1 and 5 – the highest score for a statement), the results revealed a significant difference between the statement about uniqueness and those about perception on aesthetics, quality and national luxury production. For many, the fashion pieces showed were not different from what they had already seen in the past, not different from western production.
For this study, a special attention was put on South-African brand Maxhosa by Laduma. When I showed them some pictures from the brand, I collected their opinions. They all highlighted the originality of Maxhosa by Laduma’s pieces. They noticed his use of bold and joyful colors. According to them, his clothes are simple but still remain elegant. But the African character, from which he gets his inspiration, did not especially struck them.

| SUJET 1     | originalité, naturel |
| SUJET 2     | beau, portable; classe; original |
| SUJET 3     | original, coloré, exotique |
| SUJET 4     | original, osé, |
| SUJET 5     | coloré; chic; |
| SUJET 6     | original, osé; beau |
| SUJET 7     | simple classique beau |
| SUJET 8     | gaieté; couleur joyeuse; pour l'hiver; chaud; africain |
| SUJET 9     | coloré, spirituel, traditionel ancré |
| SUJET 10    | coloré; structuré; hivernal |
The brand performs relatively good when compared to Missoni\(^\text{19}\). The interviewees were asked to score (between 1 the lowest to 5 the highest) Maxhosa by Laduma and Missoni’s clothing pieces in regard to four statements: (a) The articles must be of high quality. (b) The clothes are original; unique. (c) The clothes presented are part of a collection of luxury brand. (d) I like the clothes presented. The exercise wasn’t easy since it is only based on images. For a more objective evaluation, it should have been better to let them touch the products. The results show that Maxhosa by Laduma’s pieces appealed as much as the other brand. The participants thought that it could be part of a collection of a luxury brand. But when it came to evaluate the quality, Missoni was apparently more convincing. Moreover, according to the interviewees, Missoni is the brand showing the most African influences.

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\(^{19}\) Famous and luxurious Italian brand founded in 1953 which specializes in knitwear. It is known for its use of colors and prints.
About the evaluation of its brand name, it doesn’t refer to a specific region. Maxhosa by Laduma sounds African (South-Africa and Nigeria were named), Indian, Japanese, or even Israeli. I have spoken earlier about the luxurious feeling they got from its logo (see brand recognition part). Unfortunately, Maxhosa by Laduma was often named as a logo that expresses that feeling the least. Someone even declared the logo wasn’t appealing to him.

The interviewees were also tested on their ability to remember the brand. During the interview, the name and the logo of the brand came several times. I tested the recognition of the brand name by asking them to find missing letters of the brand name. I have chosen three brand names, all coming from South-Africa, and Maxhosa was not the easiest to recognize.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand Name</th>
<th>No recognition</th>
<th>Partial recognition</th>
<th>Total recognition</th>
<th>No answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MA_HO_A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID T__LE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH_LA S_ND__</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nevertheless, their logo was better remembered and recognized in most cases. And finally, the brand was often named when I asked which brand they remembered from my interview.
Post-effect test - Recognition of the logo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Logo 2 Maxhosa by Laduma</th>
<th>Logo 1 David Tlale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO ANSWER</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRONG ANSWER</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO IDEA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOGNITION</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First of all, I conducted my research in order to get an idea of the awareness of luxury African brands among the Congolese subculture of the Sapeurs from Brussels. The ten people that I got in touch with cannot really be qualified as sapeurs since none of them calls himself as such. Nevertheless, the results suggest that four of them could potentially be with at least one true one. On a purely cultural consideration, it is important to underline that this descriptive (sapeur) in the first place refers to negative imagery within the Congolese (RDC) diaspora. However, all the interviewees were interested in fashion and had some knowledge about luxury fashion brands. But it would have been better to find the right people to interview.

Our first hypothesis dealt with the absence of any link between luxury production and Africa, especially when it came to luxury fashion. (Hypothesis: there is not yet any link in Africans’ minds between luxury production and Africa, especially when it comes to luxury fashion.)

Two different elements are evaluated here: the connection between Africa and luxury; and the link between African fashion production and luxury. Currently, the association between Africa and luxury seems to be a hard job so far. Some interviewees struggled to bring an answer to this, which proves that there is still a lot to be done in order to create and also popularize some imagery of luxury in the continent. For instance, someone replied that “luxury was Europe, Africa is late”. Indeed, there still is people that cannot find a connection between the continent and luxury. In regard to the production, quality revealed to be an important feature for luxury fashion, and this item is highly evaluated and taken into account, especially during the purchasing process. Yet, the continent hasn’t convinced on its ability to deliver qualitative goods that would satisfy the international requirements. Therefore, I can assume that the underestimation of this ability probably prevent Africans to even imagine the existence of any luxury African fashion industry. Indeed, the interviewees were surprised (and glad) to discover that such products were already present in Africa.
So the results confirmed that there is not yet any link in Africans’ mind between luxury production and Africa, especially when it comes to luxury fashion.

The second hypothesis concerns the awareness of luxury African brands. (Hypothesis: there is no awareness of any luxury African brands among diasporic Sapeurs and the brands will not be perceived as a luxury brand because of their place of production.)

Since the previous hypothesis was confirmed, it could be tempting to agree on the absence of awareness of African luxury. However, results gave a few interesting findings. First of all, people are aware of African fashion couturiers/designers. They can all even name at least one brand. But those brands, such as Alphadi, PathéO, Oswald Boateng, or Gilles Touré, are not recognized as luxurious ones. So the problem lies more on the alignment of those fashion brands with the well-known luxury ones. It is not the place of production that led to such categorization. Indeed, the country-of-origin or the place of production revealed to be an insignificant factor which is not taken into account in the purchasing process regarding clothing. But the question (“A quoi faites-vous attention en premier lieu lorsque vous devez faire l’achat d’un vêtement” /”To what do you pay attention in the first place when you need to purchase clothing) in my questionnaire wasn’t clear because I didn’t evaluate if it was the same for luxury fashion products and the distinction between those two types of products hasn’t been made. However, the results show that European brands brought more social approval because they distinguish more than other country-of-origins. Furthermore, the African origin of the presented brands was detected with difficulty for the majority of them. The brand name wasn’t a cue. But if a choice had to be made between two products with the same characteristics, the African one was going to be preferred to the others, because of its origin (in most of the cases). Indeed, the mere fact that Africa could produce high-end goods was sort of flattering and make the interviewees proud.

So the second hypothesis can be partially confirmed. There is indeed no awareness of any African luxury brands (even the South African ones). But if an African brand positions itself and communicates as well as a luxury one, its luxuriousness won’t probably be judged negative because of its country-of-origin.
The last hypothesis was related to South Africa. (Hypothesis: the special status of South Africa, considered as the “little Europe of Africa”, is good for luxury South African brands because it increases the appreciation for those brands as real African luxury products.)

Here, I suggested that South Africa had an advantage regarding the appreciation of its production. My opinion was that a “Made in South Africa” brand increases the luxurious character of its products. Moreover, the African character of its production will be more appreciated.

The results show that South Africa was generally acknowledged as a country able to produce high-end goods such as luxury fashion clothing. For that reason, the interviewees weren’t surprised to discover the South African origin of the brands selected for the questionnaire. And the country was well scored regarding the perception of quality of its brands. But their products look like western ones. According to some interviewees, the presented South African brands are too westernized. By comparing Missoni (Italian luxury brand) and Maxhosa by Laduma (South African luxury brand), both specialized in knitwear, it is Missoni that delivered this African feeling the most.

This hypothesis could only be partially confirmed. South African gave insurance in regard to qualitative aspect when it came to luxury. Unfortunately, the results aren’t enough to conclude that the South African origin increases the luxurious character. It hasn’t been evaluated. In order to prove it, we needed to compare it with other luxury African brands (such as from Nigeria, Mali, Mozambique, etc.) And the appreciation of South African luxury brands as a real African luxury products was criticized and could not be confirmed either. Nevertheless, this conclusion has to be taken with precaution. Indeed, the results are based on a subjective selection of pictures. I was careful to select the most neutral pieces of clothing from both brands.
IV. Conclusion

This dissertation about the development of luxury African brands is an explorative one. It links African consumption and African luxury fashion. Indeed, Africa and luxury seem to have a strange connection which is even more striking when it comes to production. It is only recently that the continent has captured the attention of foreign media on its potentiality. As a market, the continent offers enormous opportunities for any investments because of its youthful market, the growth of its consuming class and very-wealth population. Africans consumers demand quality products and modern shopping experiences (McKinsey&Co., 2012). Another assessment is that Africans are brand conscious (McKinsey&Co., 2012). At the same time, the last decades have seen a growing number of Made in Africa brands, in particular in the luxury fashion sector which is at an early age in the continent. And the number of luxury African brands is on the rise.

The newness of this work comes from the exploration of African consumption of African luxury goods, which is original in scholarly research on Africa. Indeed, there are numerous pieces of research on luxury (as a concept, as an industry, on its consumption, etc.). There is also a growing literature addressing the African haute couture (see Rovine, 2006) and African consumption of luxury goods (especially on Sapeurs). But rarely any study on the link between African consumption and what can be called luxury Ubuntu, a luxury inscribed with African philosophy. Therefore, this paper tends to offer an insight about it and to study the reception of this current redefinition of Africa as a player on the luxury market. The results on which this conclusion is based cannot be generalized because of their subjective character. But I hope it is going to be an open door for research around this theme. Here, the focus is only on African awareness of luxury Ubuntu brands.

Brand awareness is a central concept in marketing strategy. It is the first condition for any brand expecting to maintain itself and to survive in this sector, especially in fashion luxury since it is a niche market. Therefore, it is capital for a brand to have a high brand awareness. Awareness is more than knowledge of a brand. It also refers to the consciousness of a brand in its market among consumers (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015; Okonkwo, 2007; Kayode, 2011; De Pelsmacker and al.,2013). For a brand, being able to be recollected or recognized among consumers is the evidence
of a certain visibility in a specific category. I started this study thinking that Africans did not appreciate their production; that they would only value Western fashion products since there is a common stereotype on African quality.

This study shows that the unawareness of luxury African fashion brands is real. They are unknown, or even nonexistent among my Congolese sample, amateurs of this type of products (if not *sapeurs*). Indeed, this sector of luxury fashion is not known and spread yet among this community. Currently, talking about luxury refers to ore in the best case or to nothing in the worst. The predominance of Western in luxury fashion is not to discuss here. It enjoys high reputation and is well-known globally. In regard to African fashion luxury, the question is to know whether those brands are doing enough to be recognized by this public in particular. Maybe African luxury brands simply don’t have the African diasporic consumers on their side yet. I think that developing a taxonomy of Congolese luxury consumers can also be an added value for these brands, so we could be able to distinguish the different types of consumers and understand their motivations. Furthermore, we can study what types of African goods are mainly consumed by African diaspora.

Apart from the ignorance about the existence of a luxury fashion industry, the major problem for any African brand is quality. This aspect is highly valued according to my results. However, it is also the feature that brings the most incertitude when it comes to Africa. African designers primarily need to build trust and to convince that they are able to produce innovative, creative, unique and appealing products of consistent premium quality. Indeed, they will be evaluated and compared to European standards. Therefore, premium pricing won’t be an impediment. Indeed, most of my respondents underlined that western brands had an excellent quality–price ratio for the goods and services provided. Which means that playing on a premium pricing is not enough for those brands since the quality criteria remains questioned. Consumers need to understand and acknowledge that their brands offer the best value of money. In my interview with Thebe Ikalafeng, the latter says that:

“you cannot build a brand overnight. It takes time to build a great brand. It has to be change in sections. What we need to do is to build confidence in Africa. When people have confidence in Africa then, they can buy confidence in made in Africa. Made in Africa doesn’t mean especially that it is going to be on quality.”
About awareness of luxury African brands, the study concludes that in order to create a (favorable) attitude for those brands, they also need to improve their visibility and their position as luxury brands. People do not know them, which makes any recognition or recalling difficult. But after being exposed to them several times, my interviewees were able to remember some of them. That shows that the name and the logo are two important features because they translate the concept of a brand, its identity. The name is “the most visible aspect of a luxury fashion brand” (Okonkwo, 2007:107). Designers can definitely play with this attribute.

A strategy around the name is to reinforce the link with the continent (Okonkwo, 2007; Kotabe and Helsen, 2011) in order to be easily labeled African. Indeed, the study demonstrates that people will be supportive and proud of an African brand (only if the quality requirements are met, of course). And McKinsey’s report (2011) already stated that African consumers were loyal to a brand. But this strategy is risky because the brand name will be the ambassador of its country too. Some countries have better connotations than others. For instance, French or Italian origin are highly valued. So which strategy is better to adopt: the adoption of a brand name evoking African origin or the recalling of a specific African country or other foreign places? Currently, only South African and Nigerian are thought to have enough abilities to produce high standard goods. That is why any connotations with those two countries can do good to the brand and at the same time reinforce the image of its country as a luxury one. On the other side, the continent still has to cope with a general bad image regarding its quality production. Therefore, linking a brand to Africa without any reference to a specific country (preferably with high potential for luxury) can hinder its development too. In other words, playing on the country-of-origin can support or harm a luxury brand. But South Africa has still the advantage to be quality stamped among my interviewees. However, most of luxury brands adopted are those of their founders or major designers (e.g. Thula Sindi, Gertz-Johan Coetzee, David Tlale).

A research comparing different countries of origin among Congolese population can be conducted in order to evaluate their attractiveness. Indeed, is there among Congolese any preference for a ‘Made in Nigeria’ or a ‘Made in South Africa’ for instance? How do those countries perform in the imagery of Congolese? Are there any cultural elements that will lead to a preference for one or another?
To continue with the country-of-origin factor, the study brings out the question about authenticity in the sartorial domain. Without any doubt, there is a hybridity in African fashion domain because of the globalization. Influences and inspiration come from everywhere. Nevertheless, my South African selected brands seem to be too westernized. There is an expectation for something typically African. So what is ‘typically African’? According to my research, using bold colors may not be distinctive enough. Indeed, many foreign designers have already played with bold colors in their collection. My participants (coming from Central Africa) are expecting a dress or style that will be authentically African (but other than the boubou which is highly connected to the Islamic religion). Therefore, apart from colors, is there any unifying element? If any specific style cannot be found, maybe the African luxury industry and its agents can still communicate around Luxury Ubuntu.

For instance, Maxhosa by Laduma, a south African brand specialized in knitwear, possesses characteristics to be identified as luxury Ubuntu. The brand is anchored in a cultural heritage which gives it a strong and distinctive identity. The fact that the designer uses local materials and produces in the continent is part of the Ubuntu philosophy. His work also contributes to the community. By taking his Xhosa culture as a source of inspiration, the designer increases the emotional appeal of his brand. Creative and innovative, the brand is. By being displayed on magazine covers, by presenting its collection around the world (Paris, Berlin, Milan), this premium brand slowly (but surely) increases its visibility in the global market. It has the support of its community too. But to captivate the attention of Congolese luxury consumers for instance, what strategy does the brand need? Could the designer communicate around being part of Ubuntu and reaching an audience?

My analysis of some South African magazines (issues from Elle Magazine and Destiny) shows that African brands are inserted in editorial contents, which is a good strategy for achieving awareness. But if a brand wishes to enter the Congolese market, the best way to increase its awareness will certainly be celebrity endorsement, especially with music or politic personalities. Indeed, Congolese musicians have offered high visibility to brands such as Versace or Yohi Yamamoto by using their brand names in their lyrics or simply by wearing them. It could be interesting to look at the impact generated by the Congolese music industry as a marketing tool for luxury brands. Congolese singers usually introduce inside their lyrics people names (of who can
afford it), a sort of “name placement” (instead of product placement). This strategy largely increases awareness of those names. Could African luxury brands do the same? And how could they use Congolese music? Or will it damage their image?

Another way to reposition luxury African brands in people’s mind is to choose specific places of distribution just as Omoyemi Akerele (Founder and director of Stylehouse Files) does it with the Ndani project at Selfridges, London. Those projects certainly need to be multiplied. Brand experience is still important despite the rise of the Internet. Internet and its impact for African luxury brands hasn’t been approached here unfortunately. But it would definitely be another interesting study case.

In conclusion, we can say that Africans from the Congolese diaspora who are keen on buying luxury fashion brands, are willing to embrace luxury African brands too. This explorative study hasn’t demonstrated any cultural impediment to the embracement of African brands. It is to remember that luxury fashion industry demands enormous investment in order to build awareness. It can be money sink, especially for new and little brands. Time is needed to achieve an awareness among consumers. Therefore, African community needs to be patient and supportive. Furthermore, since awareness is essential for being a successful industry, African luxury brands are penalized in comparison with other regions of the world. Firstly, because we still ignore its existence and its fashion contributions. Efforts from brands and local officials are essential to increase the existence and visibility of this industry (which differs from common tailoring activities) and to reposition quality issues among Africans. Awareness needs to be studied regularly. So for further research, it could be interesting to work on the same subject but with a reworked questionnaire, that is with precise questions and with a larger audience of real Congolese Sapeurs.
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Videos


VI. Appendix