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**NEGRITUDE FEMINISMS: FRANCOPHONE BLACK WOMEN WRITERS
AND ACTIVISTS IN FRANCE, MARTINIQUE, AND SENEGAL FROM THE
1920S TO THE 1980S**

A Dissertation Presented

by

KORKA SALL

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2021

College of Humanities and Fine Arts

Department of English

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Approved as to style and content by:

Rachel Mordecai, Chair

Emily Lordi, Member

Dawn Fulton, Member

Randall Knoper, Department Head
English Department

DEDICATION

To my late father Oumar Samba SALL
And my mother Fatou Bintou DIENG for her dedication to my education

To my patient and loving husband
To my daughters Maimouna Tobe, Coumba Tobe and Fatou Bintou Tobe

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A special thank you to my friends and family who supported me in this journey.

ABSTRACT

**NEGRITUDE FEMINISMS: FRANCOPHONE BLACK WOMEN WRITERS
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TO 1980S**

MAY 2021

KORKA SALL, B.A., CHEIKH ANTA DIOP UNIVERSITY DAKAR

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Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Rachel Mordecai

Negritude Feminisms: Francophone Black Women Writers and Activists in France, Martinique and Senegal from the 1920s to 1980s reframes debates about the participation and conversation of francophone women writers in the Negritude movement. I use the Negritude movement as a model to highlight its capacities and limits. Through an intergenerational analysis of the writings and personal experiences of Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire from Martinique, Annette Mbaye d’Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall from Senegal, my dissertation charts common themes of racial consciousness, gender issues and the colonial problem developed by these women. Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d’Erneville and Sow Fall played a crucial role in liberating the black community, especially the black woman, through their writings and activism. Chapter 1 focuses on Paulette Nardal’s Feminist Negritude in the journals *La revue de*

monde noir, *La Dépêche Africaine* (in Paris) and *La Femme Dans La Cité* (in Martinique). Chapter 2 examines the essays published by Suzanne Césaire in the journal *Les Tropiques* in Martinique. Chapter 3 explores Annette Mbaye d'Erneville's experience as a journalist, a writer and teacher. She wrote poetry and children's books to share her feminist vision of Negritude. Chapter 4 analyzes Aminata Sow Fall's role and experience of the importance of the African culture and how to preserve the tradition. In her novels, Sow Fall is interested in post-independence Senegal and the changes that occur in the society and offer a definition of feminism that fits the African woman's lived experiences. Ultimately, Negritude Feminisms reclaims black women's voices by unveiling their writings and experiences to reveal a consciousness about such pressing contemporary issues as the colonial problem, gender issues, women and education, women and politics and the place of francophone black women in the world.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The coloured women living alone in the metropolis, until the Colonial Exhibition¹, have certainly been less favoured than coloured men who are content with a certain easy success. Long before the latter, they have felt the need of a racial solidarity which would not to be merely material².

The 1920s was a watershed decade in black history due to the development of an international discourse and vehicle that focuses on a transnational solidarity and commonness of the African diaspora. In the Interwar period, France became a place for transnational interactions and cultural exchanges between black students, writers, soldiers, and activists from the United States, Africa and the Caribbean. Thus, there was a transnational solidarity geared toward a revolutionary and liberatory dimension that goes against the colonial and imperial function. The black community in Paris were able to use this shared metropolitan space to create anti-colonial movements which extended across the globe, such as the negritude movement. Among black students and activists present in Paris and active on liberating their home countries against colonization were Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), Paulette Nardal (Martinique), Suzanne Césaire (Martinique),

¹ The Colonial Exhibition took place in Paris in 1931 in Bois de Vincennes. It attracted thousands of visitors with its displays African culture, cuisine, and art to the French which were intended to show the greatness of colonialism is great. The 'primitiveness' of black people, which means their lack of civilization was celebrated in the exhibit. Black people, particularly black women were also highly sexualized. For more information about the Colonial Exhibition, you can see Tyler Edward Stovall's book. *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996. Print.

² Nardal, Paulette. "Eveil de la conscience de race." [« The Awakening of Race Consciousness »] *La Revue du monde noir* 6 (April 1932) : 29

Annette Mbaye d'Erneville (Senegal), W.E.B. Du Bois (United States of America), Langston Hughes (United States of America), to name but a few.

In the debates about the liberation of the black community and the fight that is still going on about racism and oppression that the black community is facing, the names of male artists, activists and students have generally received more attention than the women who were part of it. The negritude movement is an example of the problem of representation of women in the discussion of movements as most scholarly studies have been done on Senghor, Césaire and Damas as the “founding fathers³” of the movement. In this project I seek to re-examine the movement by focusing exclusively on the writings and personal experiences of Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire from Martinique and Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville from Senegal. In foregrounding the contributions of African Francophone women writers and students in Paris, I extend the work of some scholars including T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Shireen Lewis and Brent Edwards who have highlighted the participation of black women in the negritude movement. My work departs from Sharpley-Whiting and Edwards in its methodological approach to the work and personal experiences of Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire from Martinique along with Annette Mbaye d'Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall from Senegal. I demonstrate that Nardal, Césaire, Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville not only belong to the negritude movement but also, they advocate for black women's experiences in their works. Also, there is no significant scholarship that puts into conversation

³ I am using this term to challenge it because I believe that the Negritude movement was larger than Senghor, Césaire and Damas. It also includes the women who created the environment and have published works that also dealt with the Negritude.

Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire from Martinique along with Annette Mbaye d’Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall from Senegal, analyzing negritude and feminisms in their writings and personal trajectories responding to colonization and imperialism. I argue that these women are doing negritude⁴ and advocating for black women globally. So far, negritude is treated as a set of *ideas* rather than a set of *practices*. In this project, I am using “doing negritude” to frame it as a practice or set of practices; practices that elevate the focus of negritude to the concern of black women accompanied with concrete actions to improve their experiences. In their practice of negritude and their interests in the experience of the black woman, Sow Fall, Césaire, Mbaye d’Erneville and Nardal⁵ observe negritude but do not feel defined or limited by negritude. So, they incorporate negritude in their writings and activism to highlight the worlds of lives of black women. My focus begins in the 1920s, which covers the period prior to the birth of Negritude, because Paulette Nardal and other Caribbean women writers have published essays in journals created in the 1920s, I end in the 1980s because twenty years after the independence of most African and Caribbean French colonies,⁶ the negritude movement is still present and relevant in the works of Annette Mbaye d’Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall.

The interactions between black students and writers in Paris gave birth to a number of short-lived journals that express the richness of the black cultures. The journal *La revue du monde noir* (which can be translated as *Review of the Black World*) was

⁴ The term “doing negritude” has surfaced before in a footnote in the work of Ben Etherington

⁵ There is something that can be said about these women are teachers, two of them are also journalists and all four have used publications and their writings as the means to advocate for black women.

⁶ It is important to note that some Caribbean colonies like Martinique became a French territory in 1947

created in 1931-1932 and gathered a few young blacks from Martinique, including the Nardal sisters and Suzanne Césaire who celebrated their African heritage. It is a journal concerned with politics, culture, economy and social experiences of the black diaspora and published six issues. *Légitime Défense* followed in 1932; the title can be translated into ‘Rightful Vindication’ or ‘Legitimate Defense.’ With *Légitime Défense*, Black students shared their vision of the world. The journal was the principal voice of this bold generation of Black students present in Paris who convey in one point: the praise of their African heritage. *L’Etudiant Noir*, was created in 1935 as a forum of new ideas by Senghor, Césaire, and other Black thinkers and students. It gave them the opportunity to publicize their opinions about problems which preoccupied them. The ultimate goal of this journal was the unity of Blacks wherever they were located. Incorporating the political aspirations of *Légitime Défense*, *L’Etudiant Noir* (*the Black Student*), however emphasized the role of culture in the fight for black liberation. *L’Etudiant Noir*’s focus on cultural celebrations gave birth to the literary, cultural, aesthetic and philosophical movement: the negritude movement. As stated earlier, the movement had a goal of decolonization which was articulated around the freedom for black people, the promotion of education, black internationalism, and cultural celebration of black civilization.

This intergenerational, political and cultural project highlights how Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d’Erneville and Sow Fall share common interests in the intersectionality (which I am using as Kimberlé Crenshaw defines it as “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects). According to these women, race and gender intersect and power dynamics determine the experience of black

women. My project is intergenerational because Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire were in Paris around the same time period between 1920s and 1950s and then Annette Mbaye d'Erneville went to Paris in the 1940s and came back to Senegal in the 1960s. Aminata Sow Fall is the last point of my inter-generational trajectory as she has been in Paris in the 1960s and came back to Senegal in 1969. Even though they were not in Paris at the same time, the reason why I am putting them into conversation with each other is that each of these women engages negritude and feminism. They do so in their own particular ways. For example, while Suzanne Césaire explicitly uses the word 'negritude' in her texts, Nardal, Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall do not use the word negritude in their texts.

My project demonstrates that within their works all four women demonstrate their interests in negritude as shaping anticolonial and independence struggles and the post-independence period. I argue that, through centering the black woman at the heart of a global blackness discourse, these four women are part of the negritude movement even though they do not explicitly claim a connection with it. I seek to demonstrate that beyond negritude, their political agenda is framed around a woman-centered work and offers a gender critique to advocate for black women. My aim is to look at the role of black women in shaping and developing the movement, and particularly to trace this transnational and intergenerational project of negritude and feminism which I call *negritude feminisms* in the work of Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall.

The term negritude was first coined by Aimé Césaire in the journal *L'Etudiant Noir* and later in *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. The term was later developed

in the writings of francophone writers from Africa and the Caribbean. Negritude encapsulates the celebration of their African heritage and a call for solidarity in the black community regardless of their location. It comes from the French word “Nègre”⁷ which literally means “Negro” in English and connotes “savage” and “uncivilized.” In this project, I am focusing on negritude as a recognition and reclamation of the economic, cultural, political and historical participation of the black community in the development of the world. It is important to note that the term negritude is a problematic term as with its assertion of a global black collectivity with some history and interests in common, the negritude movement have obscured the differences and even division that exist within that global black collectivity and experience. Similar to the New Negro movement known as Harlem Renaissance, with the negritude⁸ movement, Africa and the black community became the main interests of black students, artists, writers, and activists who believed and demonstrated that black art was a means for racial uplift. It is possible to say that the Harlem Renaissance produced multi models of resistance movement across the globe. Together, through their publications and creative work beyond the text-based, black students, writers, artists, and activists put emphasis on ideological, intellectual, artistic, aesthetic, and spiritual spaces to revisit and re-write African history using new antiracist and anticolonial theories that put black cultural celebration as their priority. In doing so, through negritude, they reaffirmed their connection and conversations with the black

⁷ Edwards, Brent Hayes offers a detailed description of the word *nègre* and its different contexts and meaning in *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

⁸ It is important to note the mutability of the definition of negritude as it depends on the poet/author or theorist using it and also depends on the context in which it is used.

community in Harlem and across the globe. In my project, I am using negritude as a model necessary in my discussion even though I am aware of its contradictions and limitations. I use the capacities of this self-conscious movement to demonstrate the scope in which Sow Fall, Mbaye d'Erneville, Césaire and Nardal create their work having black women at the center of their concerns. The transnational blackness experience became central in the work of these women. Among the capacities of the negritude movement, these four women aligned more with the global awareness of the intellectual capacities of black people, of black cultures. In their writings, they also support the decolonial project of the movement and the necessity to build a global solidarity and connection among black people around the globe.

The critical landscape of the negritude movement presents different perspectives as it is true for every field of study. One of the most important books about the negritude movement was written by Lylian Kesteloot, titled *Les Écrivains Noirs de Langue Française: Naissance d'une Littérature* in 1963, which focused on the negritude movement, its genesis, goal and development. Kesteloot offers a history of the meeting between Césaire, Damas and Senghor to pinpoint the genesis and development of the term negritude. After Kesteloot, there has been an important trajectory to the development of negritude studies. As a result, in addition to specifically looking at the writings of Césaire, Senghor and Damas to better understand negritude, scholars like Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Reiland Rabaka, Isabelle Constant, Mamadou Badiane, Rasheed Araeen and Kahiudi Claver Mabana argue that there is a need to reevaluate the negritude movement in order to fully understand it. Constant and Mabana write in the

introduction of *Negritude: legacy and present relevance* “Negritude started in Paris as a unifying movement, freeing the blacks of the diaspora from isolation” (5). I support the claim of these scholars who articulate that what really matters is the influence and relevance of the negritude movement in the present days and not the evaluation of the movement as a “failure.” In this project, I seek to demonstrate that the works of Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d’Erneville and Sow Fall demonstrate the aspects of the movement that are still relevant in the present moment.

“Why beyond negritude?” published in 2016 by Rasheed Araeen, re-examines the way that negritude has been defined, evaluated and misunderstood for decades. Araeen asks key questions about the negritude movement “why has the true spirit of negritude not been understood, if not ignored? Is this failure of negritude inherent within its discourse, or it was the appropriation or fetishization of some of its elements which were in the interest of African ruling classes?” (170) He proposes that Senghor’s negritude was not only a celebration of the beauty and authenticity of the African culture but also the idea of universality and symbiosis with other cultures through the Civilization of the Universal. Araeen is responding to the limits of negritude, as some Anglophone African scholars including Wolé Soyinka have noted as a romanticized Africa, of the African culture and the black woman and the reinforcement of gender norms within the black community. Negritude also highlighted a masculine trajectory of the black identity. In Mamadou Badiane’s *The Changing Face of Afro-Caribbean Cultural Identity: Negrisimo and Negritude* (2009), he compares Negritude (Francophone Caribbean) and Negrisimo (Hispanic Caribbean) as “rethinking the Caribbean identity”

(1). I will argue in this dissertation that the search for a Caribbean identity that puts the black woman at the forefront is a major concern of Suzanne Césaire and Paulette Nardal. In the article, “In Praise of the Post-racial: Negritude beyond Negritude,” Souleymane Bachir Diagne discusses the negritude of Leopold Sedar Senghor and Aimé Césaire and argues that Césaire goes beyond Caribbeanness as he finds it too narrow and too old for the world civilization. Examining the effects of Jean Paul Sartre’s phrase in *Black Orpheus* “Negritude is a form of anti-racist racism” Diagne mentions that Jean Paul Sartre’s is a “kiss of death” because it both promoted Negritude but also undermined it. An evaluation that Isabelle Constant and Kahiudi Claver Mabana agreed upon in *Negritude: Legacy and Present Relevance*⁹, supporting that Jean Paul Sartre is one of the reasons that created misunderstandings regarding the Negritude movement.

The Negritude Movement: W.E.B. Du Bois, Leon Damas, Aime Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the evolution of an insurgent idea (2015) by Reiland Rabaka introduces a new way of evaluating the Negritude movement that looks at the movement from the perspective of earlier black writers. I agree with Rabaka that there is a need to get away from an Eurocentric point of view when analyzing the Negritude movement as it will reinforce the colonial ideas of the inferiority of black people that Europe developed. Rabaka’s strikethrough argument supports that the work of the negritude movement writers should be taken together and reevaluated because they are still having an impact on today's life; they could be the solution against the racism, oppression and

⁹ The book is bilingual French English, which was great for me. I read both the French and English versions. It does not specify if the contributors translated the chapters or if it is Isabelle Constant and Kahiudi Claver Mabana who did the translation.

imperialism that Black people are still experiencing. Even though he only focuses on the black men of the movement, he successfully demonstrates that the imperialism and racism that the Negritude movement and the Harlem renaissance were fighting against are still relevant.

T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's *Negritude Women*¹⁰ (2002), and Shireen Lewis's *Race, Culture and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean literature and theory from négritude to Créolité* (2006) reexamine the movement and do the work of documenting the importance of Suzanne Césaire and the Nardals to the movement, which had been previously overlooked. In the introduction of *Negritude Women*, Sharpley-Whiting writes,

The masculinist genealogy constructed by the founding poets and shored up by literary historians, critics, and African philosophers continues to elide and minimize the presence and contributions of French-speaking black women to Negritude's evolution.¹¹

Sharpley-Whiting analyzes the place of francophone women in Paris, going from the creation of the Clamart Salon by Paulette Nardal and her sisters who were active in the fight against racism in Paris to the writing of Suzanne Césaire, Suzanne Lacascade and Mayotte Capecia to highlight the important

¹⁰ My interest on the participation of women in the negritude movement has been influenced by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's book *Negritude Women*. I am adding to her work the examination of francophone African women writers present in Paris, specifically the textual-relationship that the work of Suzanne Césaire, Paulette Nardal, Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville have.

¹¹ T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, *Negritude Women*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. 14

participation of women in the negritude movement. She offers a new history of the movement by analyzing it through the black women's presence in Paris and focuses on journals, spaces and opportunities created by francophone students, especially black women from Martinique. Sharpley-Whiting¹² revolutionizes the history of Francophone Caribbean literature and the negritude movement by giving a detailed survey of gender and race within the black community in Paris. Her book also includes translations of some of the essays written by Paulette Nardal, Jane Nardal and Suzanne Césaire in journals created in Paris by black students.

Similar to Sharpley-Whiting's goal to reframe the negritude movement around black women, Shireen Lewis's book *Race, Culture and Identity* traces the Negritude movement from the 1930s to the Second World War, focusing on its formation, its development and its legacy to the present time, and on the créolité movement that took over to specifically address issues in the Caribbean. In order to revisit the importance of black women in the negritude movement, Lewis¹³ focuses one chapter on Paulette Nardal by tracing her evolution in Paris and her

¹² On page 144 of the book, Sharpley-Whiting notes that there are some previous work that briefly mention women in the negritude movement such as D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1994 ; Michel Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris : Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980*. Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1991 ; who refer to the women as « proto-negritude ».

¹³ Shireen Lewis focuses on Nardal's contribution to the movement but also her later engagement in the Rassemblement Féminin. In the notes on Chapter 3, Lewis claims that she is the first scholar to theorize Black francophone women's relationship with the negritude movement, specifically the work of the Nardal sisters. She also mentions that the Nardal sisters are black and not mulattos as stated in A. James Arnold's *Modernism and Negritude: The Poetry and Poetics* of Aimé Césaire and Michel Fabre's *From Harlem to Paris*.

participation in the negritude movement. She also demonstrates that Paulette Nardal was engaged with the discussion about the experience of black women in Paris as shown in the essays she published in the journals *La Dépêche Africaine* and *La revue du monde noir*.

Similar to Sharpley-Whiting and Lewis, I argue that the black women present in Paris from the 1920s onwards were active in the fight against oppression and paved the way for the creation of the negritude movement as they created journals, salons and the environment where the fate of the black race could be discussed. However, both Sharpley-Whiting's and Lewis's works discuss only black women from the Caribbean. Although they have opened a new path in regard to reclaiming the place of black women in the intellectual, literary, and philosophical movement, there is still work to be done to better position francophone black women in the debate about literary production and participation in the movement. I demonstrate in this project that Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall are doing negritude and go beyond negritude through *negritude feminisms*.

I seek to present a chronological and intergenerational conversation within the texts and personal experiences of these four women around racial consciousness, the intersection of gender and race, and the colonial problem. This project highlights the limits and capacities of the negritude movement by exploring the connections that the works of Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall present in relation to negritude and feminism. The limits of negritude, as some Anglophone African scholars

including Wolé Soyinka have noted are due to the fact that the movement tend to romanticize Africa and the black community ignoring the differences within the continent and the black community. Negritude also highlighted a masculinist trajectory of the black identity. Among the capacities of the negritude movement, these four women aligned more with the global awareness of the intellectual capacities of black people and the black culture. In their writings, they also support the decolonial project of the movement and the necessity to build a global solidarity and connection among black people. I examine their published texts through a critical analysis of the form, craft and meaning of their writings to demonstrate that there is an-intertextual relationship between their writings.

The key purpose of this dissertation is to be in direct contact with these authors' texts, looking for what they present, how it is performed and what each text means separately and in relation to the others. In other words, I expect to demonstrate that while Nardal's work in Paris concentrated mostly on racial and social awareness of the black community, the feeling of loneliness of black women, and homesickness, in Martinique she specially advocates for the political involvement of the Caribbean woman. Thus, her writings both in Paris and Martinique evolves around the experience of black women. She invites women to be more politically involved and build global solidarity and join unions. Césaire's work challenges notions such as civilization and eurocentrism; she invites black women to embrace their mixed identity and celebrate their African heritage. The voice in Césaire's texts is bold, present, and commanding. In Mbaye d'Erneville's experience through journalism, activism and writing, she also celebrates African cultures

and redefine masculinity in her children's book and poems. She is interested in identity questions like who am I? what is my responsibility in the world as a black person, specifically a black woman. Sow Fall's interests in post-independent society and cultural awareness make her challenge eurocentrism and celebrate African culture. Her moral voice in her novels punishes those who do not follow the tradition, both male and female characters. Thus, Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall advocate for black women in their texts and activism. Together, they all focus exclusively on making the voice of black women heard and acknowledged within the black community and around the globe.

I choose *negritude feminisms* to highlight the important place that negritude plays in the feminist project of Nardal, Césaire, d'Erneville and Sow Fall and to find a solution to the struggle of the discussion over feminism particular to these four black women. Among the feminisms that have sparked many debates especially for black women, I find transnational feminism, Pan-African feminism, and Third World feminism more accurate in the representation of the issues of women, women from the Global South. The dissertation also draws from transnational, Pan-African and Third World feminism as it focuses on Martinique, France and Senegal where francophone African and Caribbean women were actively involved in the discussions around race, gender and socio-economic issues (among others). Highlighting the feminisms of Césaire, Sow Fall, Nardal and d'Erneville in regard to the negritude movement is translated with *negritude feminisms* as it combines their woman-centered work along with

the celebration of their identity, activism and impact in the society as black women. Thus, they had a common goal of giving back to their community that they all accomplished in similar ways, demonstrating a transnational return of black women activists. Each of them has been a pioneer of change in France and in their home countries through writing and activism. I argue that there was an immediate discourse and practice developed by these women who believed in cross-border transactions, and in racial awareness particular to their countries, focusing on the experience of black women. I believe that by analyzing their writings and discussing their experiences, we will observe that they are negritudist in a feminist way and feminist in a negritudist way. For example, Paulette Nardal calls for a more dynamic involvement of the black woman, the Martinican woman, in politics while Mbaye d'Erneville creates a magazine for black women's voice and writes children's books to raise their awareness about the richness of the black cultures. Also, as we will discuss more specifically in the chapters, each of these women advocate for an engagement with the pressing issues that black women experience in Senegal, Martinique and worldwide.

When members of the Meridians editorial group interviewed five women from different geographical locations and different experiences in 2000, they were looking for answers about how each woman defines terms like *feminism*, *race* and *transnationalism*. In the resulting article, "Ama Ata Aidoo, Edna Acosta-Belèn, Amrita Basu, Maryse Condé, Nell Painter, and Nawal El Saawadi speak on Feminism, Race and Transnationalism," Ama Ata Aidoo, the Ghanaian novelist says "as far as feminism is

concerned, I've always taken it as a developmental ideology...I see feminism as the desire to see women get on." Maryse Condé, on the other hand argues "I don't know if I quite understand or agree with the word feminism, because I come from a part of the world, the Caribbean, where we have a sort of different approach to the problem of women. First of all, we don't dissociate men from women." I will demonstrate that Maryse Condé's approach or explanation of feminism is close to Aminata Sow Fall's vision since she sees both men and women as part of the society and supports their complementarity. In "Differentiating African and Western Feminisms through Room Symbolism," André Kaboré argues that Western feminism does not fit African feminism. Indeed, in *We Should all be Feminist* Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie supports the idea that feminism is "a man or a woman who says 'yes, there is a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it, we must do better'" (2, p.28). Kaboré supports that Adichie's feminism is "a self-conscious statement on gender" (412). I agree with Kaboré about the fact that there are some negative connotations associated with the term feminism by people invested in patriarchy. She gives the example of Mariama Ba who says that she is not a feminist "not in the general sense of the word." Aminata Sow Fall and Buchi Emecheta share similar views. These women writers go beyond feminism as they distance themselves from a version of feminism that does not address the complexity of their lives, circumstances, and identities.

The failure of accurate and fair representation of women's experiences around the globe is visible with the idea that sisterhood is global developed in Global and international feminisms. These forms of feminisms were developed from western

feminism or even white feminism which put the white woman as the perfect example of being a woman but also as the “savior” of “other” women around the world. Robin Morgan’s book *Sisterhood is Global* is key to that ideology or vision. However, with Postcolonial feminism, African feminisms, and Third World feminism that problem seems to be corrected with a more realistic approach to the experience and place of the black woman or women from the Global South. Given the transnational dimension of my project, transnational feminism is also important to look at. However, due to globalization and the institutionalization of transnational feminism, the base of transnational feminism is the US academy, therefore the problem of representation is still apparent in this form of feminism. With transnational feminism, my project seeks to demonstrate that the idea of shared experiences and the need to build solidarity between women transnationally is relevant in the works of Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d’Erneville and Sow Fall.

Postcolonial feminism, third world feminism, women of color feminism and Pan-African feminism challenge hegemony, western feminism and international feminism and acknowledge the multilayered forms of feminisms within women’s issues around the world. Some of the questions I am raising in this project are the following: Why has North America, especially the United States of America, always been the base for theory and knowledge around women’s issues? What happens to women from Africa, for example, who have not been to Western schools? This brings us to the question of power with the fact that the US is the headquarters of feminisms even when they emanate from elsewhere. Is my mother a feminist even though she has not been to a Western school? In

my project, *negritude feminisms* respond to the question about representation of local identities, traditions and knowledge as it combines the methodology of these feminisms along with the agenda of the negritude movement. Negritude feminisms work as a powerful umbrella to analyze the works of Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d’Erneville and Sow Fall. They reveal what became erased, ignored, and unacknowledged with feminism. We have to re-consider and unveil their contribution and as they can serve as a solution to the struggle of identity, inequality and oppression that black people go through, especially black women.

Through an emphasis on the contribution of francophone black women, my project expands the existing territory of the discussion on the participation of black women in the negritude movement focusing on the intersectionality of gender, race and culture in three different places: France, Martinique and Senegal. These three places are key to the discussion about Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d’Erneville and Sow Fall and their contribution to the transnational solidarity developed from the interwar years onwards. France is important as it was the place where students selected from the French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean went to study. Tyler Stovall’s *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (1996) along with Brent Hayes, Edwards’ *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (2003) state that Paris was seen as the place of transnational interactions from which come projects to fight against the domination of capitals, empires and colonial forms of subjectivity. Edwards says that “in Paris black was not just beautiful, but creative,

mysterious, seductive, and soulful” (31). However, one of the goals of this project is to show that according to Nardal’s characters in her essays, black in Paris was aligned with loneliness and exoticism, particularly for black women. In these international interactions, the black woman was often times put at the edge or ignored. Martinique is the homeland of Suzanne Césaire and Paulette Nardal and that is where they returned to extend their woman-centered activism after their studies in Paris. Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d’Erneville returned to Senegal after their studies to extend their woman-centered activism. Martinique and Senegal are the places where these women returned to serve their country and to develop a woman-centered project with their everyday activism.

As discussed earlier, my project re-orientates debates about the participation and response of black women in the negritude movement by exploring the connections and conversations developed between these four women writers and activists between 1920 and 1980. It is motivated by the lack of discussion around gender issues in the scholarly conversation about the negritude movement and around the participation of black women in the movement. Black women from francophone Caribbean and francophone Africa have not received much attention in the discussion about the transnational exchanges particular to negritude. My research will give voice to francophone women by putting them together to reveal a connection and a sense of solidarity between them as they were writing about issues around the woman. So, this dissertation’s contribution is to reclaim a women’s discourse that repositions francophone black women in the literature of negritude and beyond. It also reclaims black women’s voices by unveiling the writings

and experiences of Suzanne Césaire, Paulette Nardal, Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville, revealing their consciousness about such pressing contemporary issues as the colonial problem, gender issues, women and education, women and politics, and the place of francophone black women in the world.

Some of the questions I examine include the following. Do we need to call these women feminists? What does it mean to them? Why negritude feminisms? How did they navigate the masculinist patriarchy environment of the colonial years and after independence? From a negritude feminist lens, this research examines their writings and personal experiences revealing their race and gender consciousness and the solutions they provide for the fight for equality and liberation for black women within the black community and worldwide. I argue that there are inter-textual relationships in their work that need to be explored to emphasize the transnational conversations between these women. One of the things I will accomplish with this project is, to show that black women have always been political agents in the discussion about the future of the black race through their publications and their personal experiences. Because in our modern world, in the discussion of movements, revolutions, and discoveries, or history in general, the contribution of people of color tend to be ignored or overshadowed, my project intervenes and gives voice to black women in our current discussion about race and gender.

In this project, I will be referring to the African cultures as some coded moral behaviors that traditionally people from the African community were

expected to have. I am aware that the term African culture is general and does not necessarily include the specificity of the Wolof culture in Senegal, for example. If you take the Wolof culture, it is different compare to the Bambara culture in Mali. However, it is important to note that the sense of community is present in both cultures and that's what I am trying to capture when I use the term African cultures. Also, when I use the term black diasporic community, I am trying to capture the community of people of African descent who share heritages from the African continent. Their experiences are different, of course, but if we look closely at the work of Suzanne Césaire, Paulette Nardal, Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville, there is a common concern about the effects that imperialism has on the black community and the need to re-center the black women's concerns in order to achieve liberation for the black community worldwide.

My dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the experience and writings of Suzanne Césaire and Paulette Nardal in France and then in Martinique. "Chapter1) Paulette Nardal : A Visionary" analyzes Paulette Nardal's *negritude feminisms* in *La revue de monde noir*, *La Dépêche Africaine* and *La Femme Dans La Cité* and *La revue du monde noir*. In her essays, Nardal highlights the need for solidarity within the black community. Paulette Nardal occupies an important place in the negritude movement given her significant role both in France and Martinique. She is interested in the experience of black women in Paris and Martinique as she contributed to creating

spaces where black students could convey and share their experiences and respond to racism and discrimination. She dedicated her essays in Martinique and in Paris around the experience of black women. Her involvement with other black students and her role in connecting some of those students due to her ability to speak both English and French helped to develop solidarity within the black community. Through a close reading of the bilingual essays (French and English) published in the journal *La Revue du monde noir*, I argue that Paulette Nardal focuses on themes that deal with the experience of black women and the black race as a whole and also highlights the need for building solidarity within the black race. She uses different tropes including religion, the climate and gender to highlight the difficult situation in which the black woman is positioned in France. Most of her essays emphasized the feeling of isolation that the black woman goes through. In addition, she also demonstrates that black women have a voice and that they have an important role to play in the conversation about colonization, racism and imperialism. This goal was carried over to her homeland in Martinique.

After her successful years in Paris and travels around the world, Paulette Nardal returned to Martinique, her homeland, to continue the fight for equality for black women by creating the journal *La Femme dans la Cité*. This demonstrates Nardal's commitment to fight for women to gain a more important place in their society. *La Femme dans la Cité* gives voice to the Martinican woman because "a number of scholarly volumes, essays, and book chapters have been dedicated to exposing the complicated and seemingly intentionally marginalized relationship of black French-speaking women to Negritude" as Sharpley-Whiting writes in

Beyond Negritude, Essays from Woman in the City (1). This dissertation focuses on the essays translated by Sharpley-Whiting along with the French versions of the essays that have not been translated to provide a more complete analysis of Paulette Nardal's writing through negritude feminisms. As a scholar who speaks both English and French, I argue that my reading of the French version of these essays will add to the conversation as I can investigate the limitations and complexities of translation. I argue that by conducting a close reading of her essays on women and politics, women and social life, and gender issues in the journal, her ideas about the responsibility and commitment of francophone black women will be revealed. Although some essays have been translated by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, she did not provide much analysis of the content of these essays. I will go on to argue that the contents and goals of these essays are shared in the writings of Aminata Sow Fall, Annette Mbaye d'Erneville and Suzanne Césaire.

“Chapter 2) Suzanne Césaire and the Caribbean Self” examines Césaire's writings in *Les Tropiques*. *Les Tropiques* was a journal created by Suzanne Césaire and her husband, Aimé Césaire, in Martinique. Césaire returned home and continued the discussion of race and racial inequalities and also the search for identity for the Caribbean people. I am focusing on the book, *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)* which compiles the essays published by Suzanne Césaire in *Les Tropiques*. I examine those essays to trace the themes of racial awareness, call for solidarity and the answer to the colonial problem provided by Césaire. I also discuss her use of gender

issues and how it informs her writing style. Through a close reading of her essays, I show the complexities of Césaire's writing in the way it deals with gender issues, race and class. For example, her use of the masculine pronoun "he" when referring to the Martinican identity is compelling because she advocates for black women in her writings. She grapples with the ambiguity and consequences of slavery and colonization in the Caribbean islands. Indeed, the struggle for identity is significant in her community given the fact that they have both European and African heritage. I am also interested in analyzing her response to the masculinist idea of negritude, given that she was married to Aimé Césaire, one of the "founders" of negritude. Also, some of the questions I will explore are: 1) as a female writer, why was she referring to the Martinican using the pronoun "he"? Was she influenced by the time period where she was living? With her commanding tone, what did she achieve in her woman-centered project? 2) As a black woman, what was her experience both in Paris and in Martinique? 3) Is she reinforcing the masculine ideal of the Caribbean self in her writing and why?

The second part of my dissertation focuses on the writings and personal experiences of Annette Mbaye d'Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall, who have been dedicating their lives to racial consciousness, gender issues and self-determination. It is divided into two chapters, focusing on the writings and personal experiences of Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville in France and Senegal. In these chapters, "Chapter 3) Annette Mbaye d'Erneville: A Critical Thinker-Doer," and "Chapter 4) Aminata Sow Fall: The Blended Visionary," I analyze their writings and oral histories through interviews with them. Similar to Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire, Annette

Mbaye d'Erneville, and Aminata Sow Fall have studied in France and came back to their homeland, Senegal to advocate more for black women in their writings, teachings, and activism. Sénégal was the former capital of Afrique Occidentale Française, [French West Africa],¹⁴ was the place that connected the different French colonies with its ports, schools during colonial times. As a French colony, the educational system in Sénégal was similar to the one in Martinique. Students from these colonies were selected to study in Paris. Among those selected from Senegal, extensive work has been done on Léopold Sedar Senghor, one of the most cited “founders” of the negritude movement, but little has been devoted to Annette Mbaye d'Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall. Annette Mbaye d'Erneville attended Ecole des Jeunes Filles de Rufisque (EJR), a girls' school created in 1938. After her experience in EJR, Annette Mbaye d'Erneville then travelled to Paris to study journalism in 1947. She came back to Senegal and was active in Radio Senegal, focusing on women's issues, she wrote poetry and children's book to raise people's awareness about the importance to celebrate their culture and to be active in fighting for freedom. Aminata Sow Fall is a dedicated writer, conscious about social values and tradition and aware of the reality of Africans, particularly of black women. She has published novels that discuss the importance of the African culture and the role of the woman in preserving the tradition. She is interested in post-independence Senegal and the changes that occur in the society.

Given that both Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville come from the same country and are both teachers, writers and activists, it will be fruitful to decipher the kind of writing

¹⁴ In this project, I will use AOF which is the abbreviation for Afrique Occidentale Française

they are doing to shed light on their experience with the negritude movement. In their writings and personal experiences in France, these two women have been at the forefront in fighting against oppression. They are both still alive and have interviewed them to shed light to their writings but also their political and cultural agenda in conversation with the negritude movement. In addition to a close reading of their work looking for common topics such as decolonization, gender issues, racial politics, I asked them during the interviews if they have manuscripts, correspondences, and letters that could tell me more about their experience in France and Senegal. I use those interviews as a guide when analyzing their work. Some of the central questions this research raises include the following: how did they approach the transnational and global dimension of the negritude movement? Was the movement a success in the way it dealt with gender issues or were there some kind of fracture within the global mission of negritude? In their writings, do they mention negritude or any school of thoughts? Have they explicitly use the negritude movement in their work? If yes, why?

To analyze Sow Fall's and Mbaye d'Erneville's experience, exposure, writings and contribution to raising awareness within the black community, I asked them specifically about their response to the negritude movement, their relationship with Paulette Nardal, their experience as black women studying in France among others. The interviews with Annette Mbaye d'Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall and the analysis of their writings are critical in getting answers to the question of connection and transnational conversation of black women in France, Senegal and Martinique. Though they write frequently about gender

issues, racial consciousness and a call for solidarity within the black community, it seems like to try to avoid discussing the movement explicitly as they transcend it.

Some of the highlights of those interviews is their commitment to change the fate of the black women into a more positive one. Both Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville use their writings to focus on the society's practical needs to improve the experience of black women. Sow Fall, for example, demonstrates that colonization has affected the traditions in Senegal; traditions that she believes empowered black women. While Mbaye d'Erneville focuses on building a history of black people through children's books, poetry and journalism, Sow Fall emphasizes on the need to write about black experiences and realities necessary for the fight against eurocentrism and imperialism. I have asked them about how they position themselves in regard to the negritude movement and its global and masculinist dimension, the response I got from them was that negritude is still relevant and they have challenged the masculinist approach by producing literature for black women. They agreed that negritude movement sparked many discussions and responses from scholars, activists and artists from Africa and the Caribbean and constitutes of an important moment in the history of black people. This project aims to record and use their reaction and response to the negritude movement as a historical movement and their reflections on gender relations to serve as a guide to challenge, re-write and discuss black history.

I use oral history and interviews as it is an effective tool to collect information from these women about the negritude movement and about their writings. These oral histories are critical in getting answers to the question of connection and transnational conversation of black women in France, Senegal and Martinique. Conducting the interviews has been a critical phase of data preservation because I use the information I collect from them 1) to better understand their writings, 2) for the current scholarship on the negritude movement and also 3) for future research on francophone black women and their valuable contribution to the intellectual, cultural and socio-economic development of the world. I also conducted these interviews because story-telling and orality are a valuable cultural component of the African culture and the culture of people from the African Diaspora. Thus, the spoken words from Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall contribute to re-creating history and re-telling their stories that have not been heard or have been misinterpreted. These interviews have been an opportunity to Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville to share their experiences as writers, activists and scholars. I got access to valuable information including photographs, letters, diaries, records, correspondences that I compiled and stored on both oral and written forms.

In the case of Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville, the interviews and their texts reveal a struggle they go through as they navigate certain terms such as feminism, negritude, eurocentrism, imperialism and colonialism. So, it is important to evaluate their work through the way they use the woman's voice. As for Suzanne Césaire and Paulette

Nardal, the question of whether or not the woman needs to get involved in politics, in social and economic life of their country is answered with “yes.” Their alignments come from the fact that they go beyond the negritude movement and are able to offer the world a more practical vision of the role of black women in the development of the world and this needs to be acknowledged to provide the younger generation tools to fight injustice. Therefore, I look at these women’s writings across genres including fiction, poetry, essays, and journalism, approaching them through the lens of negritude feminisms.

These women developed an understanding of the colonial question and played a crucial role in liberating their communities through their writings and activism. I focus on articles, essays, short stories, and novels, they published in French and English in journals including *La Revue du monde noir*, (in Paris), *Les Tropiques*, and *La Femme Dans La Cité* (Martinique), and the contribution of Annette Mbaye d’Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall from Senegal in regard to the discussion of the connections and conversations they developed. Their projects turn around the woman within the society during colonization and after. Their personal trajectories show that they have been culturally and politically active to advocate for the black community, especially black women. Nardal, Césaire, Sow Fall and Mbaye d’Erneville re-invigorate and shift the notion of masculinity as they open up a space for fighting against the old European and patriarchal order through negritude feminisms. They question the “male gaze” and approached gender in their writings in a similar yet particular ways.

Ultimately *Negritude Feminisms* illustrates how these women played a crucial role in liberating the black community in their writings and activism through inter-textual

relationships in their work emphasizing their transnational conversations. These women share the goal of building solidarity within the black community using a Pan-African and global project through common themes of racial consciousness, gender issues and answers to the colonial problem. With their pan-African and Global project, I argue that Nardal, Césaire, Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville share a common goal of building a practical transnational solidarity that centers the women in the discussion of racism as women have been excluded in that discussion. Through their texts and activism, they reclaim that racism affects more the black woman because of their position in the patriarchal society and believe that women do have the necessary tools to fight against racism and colonization. Interacting with the writings of francophone black women and putting them into conversation with each other is instructive as it reveals their commitment to address racial politics, gender and class during colonization and afterwards. I argue that there was an immediate discourse, a corrective response to negritude developed by Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall who believed in cross-border conversations and transnational solidarity centered on black women's experiences.

CHAPTER II

PAULETTE NARDAL: A VISIONARY

Paulette Nardal (1896-1985) was a Martinican writer, journalist, and activist who after her studies at the Colonial College for Girls in Martinique¹⁵, dedicated her time in Paris in the mid-1920s as a student to the freedom of the black diasporic community. Paulette Nardal occupies an important place in francophone Caribbean literature given her important role in racial uplift both in France and Martinique. She was actively denouncing the consequences of slavery and colonization on the black race. Nardal understood that unity and solidarity and black internationalism are the powerful tools to fight for equality and justice. In fact, Nardal was active in building solidarity within the black community with the creation, along with her sisters, of the Clamart Salon¹⁶ which was a meeting place for black students in Paris. This literary salon was a welcoming place for the black diasporic community who would meet and discuss racism and colonization and brainstorm about their responsibility to advocate for liberation and end oppression of the black community.

Paulette Nardal's writing has a woman-centered purpose along with racial and political purposes. She has not only written about the consequences of colonization on the black race and the revalorization of the African culture¹⁷, but also the importance to center black women's concerns in the debate about liberation. Prior to the birth of the

¹⁵ Similar to Suzanne Césaire in Martinique, Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville in Senegal, Paulette Nardal attended an all-girls school for a training in teaching.

¹⁶ Sharpley-Whiting reports that the Nardal sisters and other black students in Paris were not welcome in Gertrude Stein's Salon, that's why the Nardal sisters created the Clamart Salon

¹⁷ I have discussed the term "African cultures" in the introduction. P. 15

Négritude movement, Nardal had already written about the necessity to celebrate their African heritage and the need to re-write black history to get it away from a Eurocentric perspective. Nardal combines the goal of negritude with her interests in the future of the black woman which I call negritude feminisms. Her negritude feminisms was influenced by her time period and she, similar to Aminata Sow Fall, Annette Mbaye d'Erneville and Suzanne Césaire, advocates for the freedom of the black woman in her own way. Chronologically, Nardal is the first writer in my trajectory and I argue that she influenced Suzanne Césaire, Annette Mbaye d'Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall to go back to their home country to further expand their woman-centered project. Out of the four women my dissertation looks at, Paulette Nardal is the one that gets more recognition with the negritude movement, the other women have often been overlooked by scholars.

Scholars such as T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting in her book *Negritude Women* (2002) and Shireen Lewis's *Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Negritude to Créolité* (2006) dedicate most part of their work on reclaiming her participation in the negritude movement. Thanks to their work, Nardal is one of the most cited francophone woman of the negritude. Sharpley-Whiting also discusses the international dimension of Nardal's fight as she travels the United States, Latin America, Europe and Africa « attending international summits and workshops to strategize globally about the condition of women » (7). Lewis claims to be the first scholar to write about Paulette Nardal's engagement in the negritude movement and to have access to her biographical information. She also claims that Nardal was black which challenges how some scholars define her as "mulato". Her political, literary and

feminist project has been recognized later on by Leopold Sedar Senghor who supports that the birth of negritude movement was influenced by Paulette Nardal and her sisters. In 2005, the documentary film *Paulette Nardal, la fierté d'être négresse [Paulette Nardal, Pride in Being a Black Woman]* was directed by Jil Servant to celebrate her life and contribution to the negritude movement in Martinique.

Both in Paris and in Martinique, Nardal published essays in black diasporic journals created by and about black students and artists and has been acclaimed for her political engagement. The short-lived transnational and diasporic journals in Paris include *La Dépêche Africaine*, created by the comité de defense des intérêts de la race noire (CDIRN) in 1928. The editorial Director was Maurice Satineau and among its contributors were Jane Nardal and Paulette Nardal. to pursue her mission of racial awareness with her writing, Paulette Nardal along with Dr Léo Sajous, created in 1931 *La Revue du monde noir [The Review of the Black World]*, a bilingual French-English journal. One of the goals of the journal was “to create among the Negroes of the entire world, regardless of nationality, an intellectual, and moral tie, which will permit them to better know each other to love one another, to defend more effectively their collective interests and to glorify their race.” This aim sums up the necessary ties that black people across the globe need to develop which will bring them together in order to fight imperialism and colonization. *La revue du monde noir* was able to identify the strong kinship that needs to be developed and nurtured within the black race throughout the world.

The essays published by Paulette Nardal in the journal *La revue du monde noir* and *La Dépêche Africaine* underscore her experience and answer to colonization and exploitation and a promotion of black internationalism¹⁸. Some of the essays include “L'Eveil de la Conscience de Race” [“The Awakening of Race Consciousness”], “Une Femme Noire Parle à Cambridge” [A Negro Woman Speaks at Cambridge] from *La revue du monde noir*, and “En Exil” [“In Exile”], *Action de Grace*¹⁹ [Acts of Grace], “Une Femme Sculpteur Noire” [“A Black Sculptress”], from *La Dépêche Africaine*. When she returned to Martinique after her studies, Nardal created the journal *La Femme dans la Cité* [Woman in the City]. Nardal’s essays in Paris evolved around the loneliness of black women in the metropolitan, power dynamics and race relations, the reclamation of some black feminine voices like Augusta Savage and her essays in Martinique in *La Femme dans la Cité* invite the Martinican woman to be more involved in politics, to have a seat at the table, and to voice their opinions through vote. As a representative of *Le Rassemblement Féminin Martiniquais* [The Martinican Women’s Assembly], Nardal focuses on women’s possible intervention in the social sphere as citizens through voting. She continues travelling internationally to advocate for women and connect with women’s organizations worldwide. In 1947, she was appointed representative for women from French Caribbean at the United Nations Organization’s Commission on the Status of Women in New York.

¹⁸ Paulette Nardal has also published in other journals in Paris such as *L'Etudiant Noir* and her essay “Guignol Ouolof” will be referenced in this chapter.

¹⁹ These essays were published in French in *La Depeche Africaine*. The translation is taken from the book *Negritude Women*. (edited and annotated translations by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Georges Van Den Abbeele)

This chapter examines Paulette Nardal engagement with issues that affect the black woman both in Paris and in Martinique. In fact, after her active years in Paris through the Salon and the journals *La Revue du monde noir*, *La Dépêche Africaine*, Nardal chose to return to Martinique to give back to her community and advocate for the woman with the journal *La Femme dans la Cite*. I seek to conduct a close reading of the essays written by Paulette Nardal in those journals and argue that those essays respond to the racial politics of colonization and gender issues. I demonstrate that those essays navigate some themes important in the negritude movement such as black consciousness, solidarity within the black community, the celebration of the African culture along with the empowerment of black women, and racial politics. In her writings, Nardal uses both the negritude movement and feminism as tools to advocate for the black woman. In doing so, she also demonstrates and shares her response to the masculinist dimension of the negritude movement and the often-imperialist aspect of feminism that may not work for the black community. Nardal is negritudist in her feminism and feminist in her negritude²⁰. I argue that these essays navigate black internationalism through themes of black consciousness and a call for solidarity in the black community worldwide, as Nardal traces the progress and evolution of the black community and raises gender issues.

²⁰ I have discussed the terms feminism and negritude and the possibilities and limits they offer to Nardal, Sow fall, Césaire and d’Erneville and how they create their woman-centered project within their writings.

Nardal's Negritude Feminism through Transnational Solidarity

Drawing mostly on post-modern, post-structural and post-colonial perspectives, this section discusses the social theorists' views on the rationale and relevance of Western education in the current

Paulette Nardal's life and writing has been centered on a call for solidarity within the black diasporic community through negritude feminism both in France and Martinique. Building transnational solidarity through negritude was Nardal's goal and she combines it with her woman-centered project, her feminism. In her essays in the journals, she demonstrates how art and aesthetics produced by black people worldwide could be used for building a transnational solidarity within the black community. Moreover, Nardal argues that "Negro Art" is a way of articulation that reclaims transnational blackness as it gives the black community power to come together and change their experiences into a more positive and engaging way. According to her, black art enables unity for transnational black community as they share the important work they do in their different locations which centers black life. Her writing techniques reveal a consciousness about racial politics and the need for a unity and transnational recognition of how imperialism tries to keep the diasporic black community separated and divided. In this section, I demonstrate that Paulette Nardal defines negritude as a praxis²¹, while reinforcing the core of the Negritude movement which had a goal of decolonization, freedom for black people, promotion of education, black internationalism, and cultural celebration of the black civilization. Similar to Suzanne Césaire, Aminata Sow Fall and

²¹ I have discussed negritude as a praxis or practice in the introduction

Annette Mbaye d'Erneville, Paulette Nardal understood the importance of a transnational unity with a focus on the experiences of the black woman. Thus, in doing negritude, Nardal develops a negritude that brings back the black woman's concerns at the center of the movement; a negritude that pinpoints the everyday experience of the black woman with a call for solidarity and a negritude that celebrates the black diasporic community's achievements.

In her call for unity and solidarity, Nardal re-invites the black community to focus on race, on the black race which reinforces the goals of the negritude movement. The essay "L'Eveil de la Conscience de Race" ["The Awakening of Race Consciousness"] published in *La Revue du monde noir* underscores Nardal's transnational call for solidarity by highlighting the major accomplishments of the black diasporic community, the issues with racial imperialism within the black community and the improvements that have been made within the Caribbean community. She also underlines how critical the black woman's voice is in the creation of a transnational solidarity and the cultivation/shaping/development of the diasporic relationship necessary for the black community. In this essay, Nardal sends out an invitation to the black race to have "sincere faith in the future of the race" and racial pride, and further to express that feeling in their writings. In addition, she invites the black community to critique things that did not work for the race in the past and advocates for a new orientation towards transnational solidarity. Thus, Nardal highlights the "attitude" of the American Negroes being "so different" from the Antillean Negroes because the former "were obliged, immediately after the abolition of slavery, to try to solve their difficult race problem"

whereas the Antillean Negro was given a choice to pass²² as white. With the word “obliged,” “try,” “concerns” and difficult,” Nardal underlines the fact that no matter how African Americans were controlled, they focused on writing about their everyday experiences in the United States focusing on race, “the race question became the key note to their concerns.” In this passage, Nardal acknowledges the difference in the experience of black people and calls for a transcendence and a challenge of the differences which was one of the goals of negritude.

According to Nardal, in order to pinpoint the possible solutions that her negritude offers, one of the important steps to be taken for a transnational unity is to acknowledge the key problems including oppression that wants to separate the black diasporic community. The quote below implies that the “liberal” white French attitude toward black people was better than the presumably illiberal attitude of white Americans.

The general attitude of the Antillean Negroes toward race problems, which is so different from that of the Afro-mericans, can be obviously explained by the liberal spirit which characterizes the politics of France toward colored people (26).

Paulette Nardal highlights the ways in which race relations has been developed and defined from a Eurocentric perspective by Antillean Negroes (using Nardal’s term). Indeed, Nardal’s essay is concerned with black internationalism as a tool for unity and solidarity. This internationalism could be obtained with a recognition and celebration of black people’s achievements worldwide and the newspapers could be a key platform to build that solidarity keeping in mind the *differences* between black communities in different locations. In this essay, Nardal brings the conversation about colonization,

²² Nella Larsen’s book *Passing* discusses the phenomenon of passing

imperialism, and the ways in which France develops its so-called politics of “equality, fraternity and liberty” which was supposed to give everyone the same human rights but instead was used to oppress black people. The French politics and policies within its colonies were based on the hierarchy of races²³. Although colonization has been justified as something the colonies need²⁴, I agree with Nardal and argue that it is hypocritical for France to advocate for equality while oppressing and invading people in Africa and the Caribbean.

Nardal’s focus on negritude as the vehicle for black internationalism is more evident when she gives the example of Claude McKay and Langston Hughes’s essays supporting that they have developed a “new attitude...rejecting all inferiority complex” (27). Thus, the themes of race awareness, celebration of the African heritage through a call for solidarity in the black community is an important focus in her writings. Her approach to building a practical transnational solidarity through negritude and feminism is significantly powerful when she questions the earlier literary production of the Antillean. She brings back the importance of having race and racial consciousness at the center of the black diasporic concern. She criticizes the past of the Antillean literary approach because “in none of them do we find the expression of a sincere faith in the future of the race and the necessity of creating a feeling of solidarity between the different groups of Negroes living throughout the globe” (29) as they were imitating the metropolis literary themes (28). I argue that Paulette Nardal was brave to point fingers to

²³ This – the psychological and ideological impact of colonialism on the colonized – is a complicated and much-discussed question, with lots of people weighing in. Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire leap to mind immediately, along with (of a somewhat different stripe) Homi Bhabha.

²⁴ Sharpley Whiting, *negritude women* lists some journals that were in favor of colonization

the problems that prevented the Antilleans to define themselves as part of a global community for so many years due to European influence. Nonetheless, the Antillean people became more aware of their lack of focus on the black race, and improvements happened “when the occasion came to select a subject for a memoir or a thesis, their choice went to the black race.” (30) Nardal applauds this choice and calls it an advancement of the Caribbean community to focus on race like African Americans do in their writings and artistic productions. She believes that this linear progress narrative in which only one outcome--global black solidarity--is a positive one.

Negritude identity through geography/landscape/weather

With her transnational solidarity-building project, Nardal recognizes the need for the black community, especially black women in France—because they often feel alone in the metropolis--to embrace their negritude identity which is related to their homelands and its beautiful geography²⁵. Through an emphasis on the weather in France, Nardal underlines the negritude identity of the black race related to geographies of the black diasporic community. The weather in France represents a colonial weather because French winters seems to embody colonial oppression. Nardal makes a connection between imperialism which creates a cold, non-welcoming environment for black people, especially for black women and the cold weather in France. The contrast between the warm weather in Martinique is put against the cold weather and oppression in France. Nardal underscores the need for the black diasporic community to reconnect with their

²⁵ It important to note that with the Mount Pelé, Martinique was an attractive place among the other French colonies of the Caribbean.

identity through a remembrance and celebration of their homelands in order to overcome the cold weather in France. Their often-powerless situation of being away from home could be translated into a powerful tool to reconnect with their negritude identity.

In the essay “En Exil” [“In Exile”]²⁶ Nardal highlights the loneliness faced by black women in Paris by writing about the experience of a female character and her feeling of isolation from the white mainstream society worsened by the weather. Nardal starts with the loneliness of “poor Elisa” in Paris, facing the cold and thinking internally “this land does not truly suit an old Negress already weighed down by age and sometimes enfeebled with rheumatism.” In this introductory paragraph, Nardal lays out important information in regard to Elisa and her life and experience in Paris. The reader knows that Elisa is not young, and she goes into a series of inner thoughts and regrets her presence in Paris remembering her hometown, her culture and the sweetness of Martinique. The word choice “poor Elisa” can be read as ironic as throughout the essay, Elisa challenges the society and is able to feel and see her ‘sweet home’ that is far away from her location. Thus, Elisa is not “poor,” she is powerful instead, at least internally, and this is more apparent in the following passage.

The icy wind cut right through her thin coat. All her flesh seemed to revolt against the sensation to which she had never been able to habituate herself. Her imagination had almost personified winter, which she thought of as a cruel and implacable enemy. It came to her to wonder what fault Europeans had committed that the good Lord had seen fit to punish them with such a scourge, for in her narrow smart, there could be no other explanation.

²⁶ This essay was published in French in *La Dépêche Africaine*. The translation is taken from the book *Negritude Women*.

The constant struggle of the colonized and exiled like Elisa to overcome the difficulties of being controlled by the colonizer is reflected in “had never been able to habituate herself.” There is some sort of challenges that Elisa or the colonized have been able to face trying to empower themselves in an environment that does not favor black people. Through her imagination, Elisa “almost personified winter” and thought of it as “a cruel and implacable enemy.” I argue that winter represents France being an “implacable enemy” and its “wicked” colonial project for Elisa and for the colonized. Internally, Elisa is able to overcome and fight colonization by pointing fingers to the exploitation she and the black community face due to France’s imperialist project. This act in itself is powerful as it helps her overcome her feeling of loneliness and melancholia. Therefore, Elisa cannot be defined as “poor” but as a powerful black woman who has divine skills to give life to things such as winter with her power of imagination. In this situation where she finds herself into exile—being in France as a black woman isolated from the mainstream—Elisa only finds liberation and peace in her inner thoughts. By expressing her most intimate thoughts about colonization, power dynamics, the role and place of black people, she transforms her loneliness to powerful statements and inverts power dynamics even though it is only inside her head.

Through Elisa’s experience, the reader can see the struggle she goes through trying to reconnect with her identity, her land, and her community. Her exile in France can be read as a distance between her and her identity, her negritude identity that makes her feel human and respected. Therefore, Elisa is longing for a “return to her homeland,

to that sweet Martinique that she should never have exchanged for the mirage of Paris²⁷” (117). According to Elisa, Paris is a blurb, unreal and disappointing and Martinique, her homeland, is what she needs to return to, it is her identity, the place where she does not feel rejected or oppressed. This passage illustrates the attractiveness of France for people from the colonies and the disappointments that black people often feel in France. Brent Edwards²⁸ discusses how in the 1920s, Paris *opened* its doors to exploited and oppressed black activists, scholars and students. In this essay, is Nardal challenging Edwards’s claim that “in Paris black was not just beautiful, but creative, mysterious, seductive, and soulful”? (45) Elisa’s experience tells a different story because France oppresses black people, mainly black women, as they became exotic puppets²⁹. In the middle of these struggles, Elisa is able to internally reconnect with Martinique, her homeland as it is beautiful, peaceful and sweet compared to the metropolis. The feeling of nostalgia is strong because according to Elisa Martinique is her identity. This feeling of longing for home, the reconnection with her past, and the urgency to return to Martinique is accentuated in her “interior monologue:”

No, she could not keep this up much longer. This life—which left no room for contented idling, for happy and animated conversations in the evening with her roommate and her other friends, exiled like her—just seemed too painful. She would get herself repatriated as soon as possible.

Even if the use of conditional tense may reveal Elisa’s inability to change her life, the use of “get herself repatriated as soon as possible” renders some power to Elisa to change her

²⁷ Ousmane Soce Diop has published a book titled *Mirage de Paris* in 1937

²⁸ In this book, Edwards discusses different black activists, writers and artists that were present in Paris in the interwar period

²⁹ Paulette Nardal’s essay “Exotic Puppets”

life. The idea of getting herself “repatriated” is a powerful demonstration of some sort of rebellion and revolution that she starts thinking about. Going back home is key to Elisa’s goal to reconnect with her past, her negritude identity and power which is Martinique. She misses home, remembers “the drums, the folk tales,” and the everyday life in Martinique and this beautiful moment is interrupted by the reality in Paris. So, the reader shares the anxiety and uncertainty of the life of exiled Elisa through the way Nardal highlights some of her most intimate thoughts. To point out the uncertainty of Elisa’s happiness, Elisa’s story does not really end because Paulette Nardal chooses not to finish it with a period but with ellipses. This points out to the difficulty of finding one’s identity when one is far away from home, when in this place, Paris, people like Elisa suffer from discrimination due to their heritage.

Paulette Nardal focuses on the weather in France to demonstrate the loneliness of black women. “Action de Grace”³⁰ [Acts of Grace] is another essay that discusses the weather using a lot of metaphors from the experience of black people in France. Similar to Elisa’s understanding and definition of the French weather, in this essay winter is the imperialist one and the other seasons that look more like the weather in Martinique, is related to the black people identity. Again, in this essay, Nardal starts with a rhetorical question to get her audience to think about the effects of the weather on black people in France. When starting with “do you realize what the return of spring, or rather summer, might be for an Antillean woman, having long lived in France?” Nardal engages with her

³⁰ “Action de Grace,” *la Depeche Africaine*, May 30, 1929, 3, edited and annotated translations by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Georges Van Den Abbeele from *Negritude Women*

readers who might overlook the experience of the Antillean woman, using Nardal's term in France. Unlike the essay "In Exile," where Nardal uses the third person pronoun to tell the story of Elisa, this essay "Act of Grace," uses the first-person pronoun "I," to keep an intimate and more focused interest between her and the reader. Her political activism is rendered through her sharing of her personal experience about the weather in France and its connection with colonization. Nardal writes

...It's first of all a feeling of relief. The heavy gray clouds, the persistent cold, the grim atmosphere of winter; it seemed to me that all that weighted on my chest, oppressed me. It was like an intolerable pain that I also by dint of habit came no longer to suffer.

Through the description of the weather, especially of winter, Nardal personifies winter as an awful enemy for black people. Both in this essay and in "In Exile," winter represents Europe or France and how it oppresses its colonies as "the heavy gray clouds, the persistent cold, the grim atmosphere of winter; ...oppressed" according to the narrator. However, unlike Elisa, the narrator in "Action de Grace" says that they do not suffer from winter anymore. We learn that the persona in this essay gets used to the weather, learns to endure it. In doing so, Nardal shares her ability to overcome the difficulties of winter as the black community always overcome the challenges of being oppressed through their negritude identity. Similar to Elisa, who defines Martinique as a communal identity, the narrator in "Action de Grace" remembers her homeland, Martinique where "it's perpetual summer." I argue that Paulette Nardal plays with the juxtaposition of summer representing happiness, great life, and implicitly the beauty and identity of the black community, or Martinique against winter representing difficult life, moments of

heaviness and unhappiness and implicitly the white race or the colonizers. This is significantly important as she empowers herself and reclaims the notion of control for black people through the reclamation of their identity.

The negritude identity of the Martinican through geography is also rendered in the following passage where the narrator asks

Is there not something passionate in the Antillean landscape, even in its most intimate and familiar sites far from the mountain, which the French landscape cannot give us except in the mountains?

This rhetorical question defines the “Antillean landscape” as an accessible and welcoming place against the “French landscape” which is not beautiful, non-welcoming “except” in the mountain. By using the pronoun “us” to refer to the black community, Nardal reinforces her focus on the black community as one, as powerful and puts herself as part of the community. Her focus on transnational solidarity is apparent with the use of the pronoun “us.” In addition, she maintains “another characteristic of the Antillean landscape is its force, while in France the harmony of the landscape always appears a little bit weak.” By contrasting the Antillean landscape using the word “force” with the French landscape as “weak,” Nardal further reverses the power dynamics between France and its colonies. She openly challenges colonization by celebrating her heritage, her beautiful Martinique, her homeland. She makes a critic of the many colonizing narratives about the colonies in Martinique that only mention the beauty of the Caribbean as something exotic. She reclaims the beauty of her island as part of her identity, of the identity of the black diasporic community. I argue that Nardal also offers a counter-narrative to Eurocentrism that emphasizes how the geography of the Caribbean is the

negritude identity of the Caribbean. However, there are downsides when Nardal maps identity into geography as it can be too romanticizing and excludes others from doing so.

There is a religious undertone in the essays Nardal published in France, which both helps Elisa to reconnect with her homeland, and Nardal to appreciate the great weather that Martinique has been blessed with. And this religious explanation is further developed in her writings in Martinique. “Action de Grace” ends with “thank God, summer’s back. What a pleasure it is to get rid of those heavy furs to dress up in light fabrics with hot colors that themselves also announce the return of good weather.” The colonial weather, winter, is *finally* being dominated by summer that represents Martinique and the colonies which makes the narrator to thank God for bringing summer back. Nardal discusses the weather in an engaging tone as the reader can almost feel the heaviness of the clouds, the air and when summer finally came, it becomes lighter. There is a feeling of relief that comes with summer and this is represented in the use of “Thank God.” There is a powerful transference of identity represented by the last sentence of the essay as it says: “this summer has come like an act of grace.” I argue that this could be read as the black community in France can use their presence to connect with one another, an “act of grace” because solidarity is one of the tools needed to fight against oppression. The black community brings light as summer does in France compared to winters associated with Europe that bring cold, unhappy, and unfamiliar weather. This could be read as Nardal saying that negritude will still be there because it is part of the black community’s identity.

Nardal implicitly acknowledges the perseverance of the black community that experiences hardships in France but always finds a way to survive those difficult days because of their spirituality from their negritude. Through Elisa's experience, she shifts the power dynamics through an emphasis of her spirituality when she writes "what fault Europeans had committed that the good Lord had seen fit to punish them with such a scourge." Elisa feels that God is punishing Europeans as they have to go through difficult seasons whereas people in Martinique, Africa and other warm places have a nicer, better and more manageable weather³¹. We can see that Elisa has faith and beliefs about God and his power to punish those "wicked Europeans" who destroy lands, conquer people and oppress them in the name of civilization. Finally, the reference to God in "Act of Grace" and the Lord in "In Exile" refer to Christianity as this connective as a means for self-awareness. The role of the divinity and religion puts emphasis on the perseverance and spirituality of the black community in France and around the globe. Nardal uses the weather to discuss colonization and to challenge the pre-set identity for the black community that France has developed and maintained. It is significant that she implies that there is a light at the end of the tunnel because the presence of the black community in France and in the world is a form of blessing.

³¹ The Romanization of the weather in Martinique and other places can be read as a strategy to make her negritude more visible and powerful as it denies the Eurocentric history of Africa and the Caribbean as being places of darkness where nothing good happen unless Europeans intervene.

Paulette Nardal's Negritude Feminism

How could feminism³² be defined by Paulette Nardal's negritude practice? What could it offer to her as a Martinican woman activist, writer and journalist? How does she approach the role of men and women in the society, in the black diasporic society and in Martinique in particular? How does she practice her negritude within her woman-centered project? Do we need to call her a feminist or not? What kind of feminist could she be characterized? Those questions are central to understand Paulette Nardal's focus on the woman, on the black woman in her writing and personal experiences in Paris and Martinique. As stated in the introduction of this dissertation, the term feminism does not seem to work or fit the writings and experiences of all black women. Thus, the term feminism has gone through many twisting and changes and gave birth to terms such as womanism, international feminism, transnational feminism, Pan-African feminism to fit the experiences of black women. Being from the Caribbean where the experience of black women is different from other parts of the world and yet driven by a call for solidarity and unity, Nardal navigates feminism by reclaiming the place of the woman in the social sphere in Martinique and globally. In her essays in France, Nardal started raising questions related to inequality between men and women and the isolation black women face in France whereas in Martinique, she was more open to discuss the difference between men and women and shared her stand in the discussion about feminism. I argue that the analysis of her writings should go beyond whether or not she fits within feminism and focus on the acknowledgment of the different layers and

³² I have discussed feminism's limitations and capacities for the four women my dissertation focuses on in the introduction. P.20

tensions of her feminism, which I call her negritude feminism. Nardal's important argument will be lost, if she is judged based on certain rules that could make her qualify to be a feminist or not.

In her negritude feminist practice, Nardal develops her woman-centered project by highlighting the major accomplishments of black women worldwide. Because she was aware of the masculinist environment of France and also the black diasporic community, Nardal prioritizes the experience of black women and advocates for their voices. In "The Awakening of the Black Race," Nardal celebrates black women who have centered their work on their own experiences and writes "the feeling of uprooting which they experienced which was so felicitously expressed by Roberte Horth, in "A Thing of No Importance", contributed to the 2nd number of "The Review of the Black World", was the starting point of their evolution" (30). Those women such as Roberte Horth and Jane Nardal use their writings to advocate for the black woman's full integration in the black community and in France. Nardal also notices

The coloured women living alone in the metropolis, until the Colonial Exhibition³³, have certainly been less favoured than coloured men who are content with a certain easy success. Long before the latter, they have felt the need of a racial solidarity which would not to be merely material³⁴

³³ The Colonial Exhibition took place in Paris in 1931 in Bois de Vincennes. It attracted thousands of visitors with its displaying African culture, cuisine, art to French and show how colonialism is great. The primitiveness of black people which means their lack of civilization was celebrated in the exhibit. Black people particularly Black women were highly sexualized. For more information about the Colonial Exhibition, you can see the book Stovall, Tyler Edward. *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996. Print.

³⁴ Nardal, Paulette. "Eveil de la conscience de race." ["« The Awakening of Race Consciousness""] *La Revue du monde noir* 6 (April 1932): 29

This statement contains key moments about Nardal's concerns about gender issues within the black community in Paris. By comparing the experience of black women to that of the black men, Nardal opens up a new window that critically exposes the inequality between black men and women in Paris in the 1930s. When discussing black women's experience in Paris as being "less favoured" compared to black men's, Nardal starts a bold and powerful conversation underlining the masculinist environment in Paris and within the black community. Sharpley-Whiting says Nardal's essay "The Awakening of the Black Race" provided insights into how critical women's voices were to the development of the primarily male-identified philosophical, literary, and cultural movement known as Negritude" (3). Indeed, the masculinist environment of France has affected the way some scholars focused only on the "founding fathers" of the negritude movement when in reality, black women including Paulette Nardal are the ones that created the environment in which the movement was born. So, bringing back the central arguments to black women's liberation was necessary in Nardal's negritude practice and writings.

Nardal's awareness of gender inequality and call for solidarity within the black community can be traced in the essay "A Negro Woman Speaks at Cambridge" where she writes about Miss Grave Walker's speech at Cambridge and Geneva. I demonstrate that Nardal honors Miss Grave Walker and highlights the achievements black women have done which is her way of saying, this is an example of a black woman's achievements, other black women have to learn from it. Nardal identifies Walker as being "the first Negro woman to have spoken at Cambridge" (37). The sense of solidarity has been developed in Miss Walker's reaction to the success of her speech. Miss Walker said

“I have never received such an ovation and probably will never again. I feel however that it was given to my people everywhere, not to me” (37). This statement not only shows that Walker's speech was an innovation but also that she was connected to black people everywhere. Walker believes that the black community is and should be one and united in this success.

Another essay in which Paulette Nardal engages with the acknowledgment and discussion about the achievements of black women in Paris is “Une Femme Sculpteur Noire” [“A Black Female Sculptor”].³⁵ The essay traces the experiences of Augusta Savage, an African-American sculptor and artist. Nardal states that Augusta Savage, as the first black woman sculptor, faced hardships because of her race but showed a determination to succeed. She starts with a rhetorical question, “Nos compatriotes savent-ils que depuis 1 an réside á Paris Miss Augusta Savage, la première femme sculpteur noire” [“do our brothers know that Miss Augusta Savage, the first African American woman sculptor, has been living in Paris for a year?”] Nardal presents us a strong and pragmatic Miss Savage, an artist who became a well-known artist in a system where racism is present. What does a title about a woman, a black woman artist, tells us about Paulette Nardal's gender consciousness? It is a significant attempt to start a conversation about gender issues and to present the work and achievement of a black woman in the journal, as she calls her a “self-made woman.” Thus, Nardal is underscoring Miss Savage’s achievements to give her voice by acknowledging her success in life and

³⁵ I could not find the translation of this essay, so I translated it myself.

without giving her a name on the title, Nardal shows that the possibility to fight against racism and persevere is possible for black people if they come together. Due to Savage's authenticity in her work, as she says "ses oeuvres sont exposées dans plusieurs grands établissements publics du Nouveau Monde" ["her work is shown in the best public spaces in the New World"]. Nardal's choice of Augusta Savage's work reveals two things. On the one hand, she demonstrates that the black woman similar to the sculptor has "divinity" powers to transform and create something new. Through leaving Savage's name out of the title, Nardal women's contributions need to be acknowledged and celebrated. This argument definitely challenges eurocentrism that represents black women as being weak, submissive and not independent. On the other hand, Nardal demonstrates how Miss Savage disrupts the negative definition and representation of the black community by re-creating a more positive self for the black community. Nardal invites the black community to celebrate her work and embrace solidarity.

When Nardal writes about the help that Miss Savage received from W.E.B. Du Bois in order to get the fellowship that was denied because of her race, I argue that this reveals two things. The first one is the community support and solidarity that exists in the black community where the older artists and scholars, mainly black men, support the younger ones. However, it also reveals that there is gender inequality within the black community where male writers and activists have more opportunities to succeed. This observation brings back her statement from "L'Eveil de la Conscience de Race" ["The Awakening of Race Consciousness"] about black women being "less favoured" than their male counterparts in France. While adding the experience of the black woman in her

essays, Nardal demonstrates her awareness of some of the easy success of being a black man compared to a black woman, let alone a black woman “living alone in the metropolis.” What she highlights is the patriarchal system in France that gave more opportunity to the black man.

Nardal’s negritude feminism is the combination of her cultural experiences and the social definition of the role of the woman in the society in France and Martinique. Her negritude feminism is influenced by her exposure to the experience of the black community in France combined with her cultural heritage from Martinique. Can we call her a feminist? In her feminist practice, Nardal focuses on the self-awareness that black women need to develop in the social sphere which goes along with the broader norm of feminism, but she also reminds them of the importance to embrace their womanhood, motherhood, their role in the household and their feminine vocation. While some of her essays in France navigate the woman’s voice by listing achievements by black women globally, highlighting some issues of inequality that the black woman faces, the essays in *La Femme dans la Cite [Woman in the City]* (1945-1957) focus particularly on the black women in Martinique and their role in politics. While the idea that men and women are different is not fully developed in her essays in France, Nardal becomes more specific and clear about her negritude feminism in Martinique.

What is particular about her feminism is that she reframes feminism through religion in Martinique. As stated before, Nardal’s writing has always been centered on the experience and voice of the black woman both in Paris and in Martinique. She is particularly optimistic in her writings in Martinique when she admits “all that is human is

ours” in the essay “Mise au Point” [Setting the Record Straight] of February 1945.

Nardal’s approach to the limitations and capacities of feminism became more apparent in her essays in *Woman in the City*. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting’s book *Beyond Negritude Essays from Woman in the City* consists of 14 never-translated before essays written by Paulette Nardal in the journal along with original French versions with summaries and commentaries. I examine the essays translated by Sharpley-Whiting along with the French version to provide a more complete analysis of Paulette Nardal’s writing and her reframing of feminism through religion. I argue that her essays on and about women and politics, women and social life, and gender issues in the journal, reveal Nardal’s negritude feminism. I have selected those that better represent her woman-centered project through negritude feminism out of the essays, letters and commentaries in the journal. Sharpley-Whiting comments on the journal and says “with its Christian humanistic undertones and feminist inclinations, *Woman in the City* represented in the French-speaking Caribbean the first theologically and philosophically woman-centered liberationist journal in print” (6). This demonstrates Nardal’s commitment to fight for women to gain a more important place in their society.

In her redefinition and reframing of feminism influenced by religion, Nardal develops a new form of humanism that is connected with her negritude. She sees in the Catholic religion, the importance of the moral obligation that every person has and wants to apply it in the Caribbean context. I argue that her unique approach helps show that the catholic religion can be mixed with traditional religions of Africa³⁶ where a community

³⁶ The references to Africa are occurring just in terms of Negritude as Negritude necessarily derives black cultural identity from African identity.

life is important and the moral responsibility of the members of the community is important too. In other words, Nardal's religious undertone is a blended version of negritude's spirituality with Christianity. She believes that the religious and cultural aspect of the society, of the Martinican heritage, should be added to feminism to obtain a more complete understanding of the role of man and woman. Because Martinique has both heritages from France and from Africa, there needs to be a blended approach to feminism to achieve women's liberation.

The first essay "la femme dans la cité" [Woman in the city] which has the same title as the journal situates and positions Paulette Nardal's approach to feminism and her team's vision about issues around the woman's role in society. This essay is where she declares the capacities of women to be as efficient as men or even to be more efficient than men. In the political sphere, Nardal recognizes the physical and psychological differences between men and women. However, she maintains that these differences do not necessarily lessen the worth of the woman in the political and social sphere. Rather, those differences underline how women have been blessed with qualities to rebuild a world which has been put in a shaky ground by some negative choices made by politicians who have been mostly men. Some catastrophes including the world wars have been caused by the fact that women have not been active in the social sphere. So, now is the time for women, for Martinican women to have a more active participation in the social sphere, now that they have been granted to right to vote YEAR, now that they are citizens. In her invitation for women to participate in the development of their country, she says

Mais ce service, du fait des différences d'ordre physique et psychologique qui existent entre l'homme et la femme, sera un service différent, mais pas nécessairement de moindres valeurs parce qu'il est différent. C'est en accomplissant qu'elle restera fidèle à sa vocation féminine.

[But this service, owing to the physical and psychological differences that exist between man and woman, will be of a different kind, though not necessarily of less value because of its difference. In fulfilling this social obligation, she remains true to her feminine vocation]. (21)

In this essay, Nardal makes her approach to feminism clear with the acknowledgement of the physical and psychological differences between men and women. Nardal's negritude feminism goes against some beliefs of feminism that advocates for equality and denies any difference between men and women and challenges social norms that recognizes their differences. Nardal's approach may sound absurd to feminist thinkers given her education and advocacy for women. Indeed, Nardal has been given the title of a feminist, of being part of the first black women to advocate for women in Paris in her writing by some scholars including Shireen Lewis in the chapter "Gendering Negritude: Paulette Nardal" whereas other scholars such as Jennifer Anne Boitti defend that Nardal's project was not specifically feminist but has the woman as the center. In the article "In Black and White: Gender, Race Relations, and The Nardal Sisters in Interwar Paris" says

Yet unlike other women's work for *la dépêche africaine*, Paulette Nardal's pastiches were neither particularly feminist nor particularly militant in nature, although the subjects of her work were for the most part women (122).

Although Boitti's statement focuses on the journal *La Dépêche Africaine*, it raises important questions about the evolution of Nardal's feminist vision which I call negritude feminism. One thing that can be traced in Nardal's writing is her advocacy for black

women. As Biotti says Paulette Nardal “became the first thread to successfully connect feminist, middle-class, and upper-class women with negritude thinkers and anti-imperialist workers” (120). I argue that Nardal’s writing has always been “militant” and feminist because of her advocacy for women’s liberation but she finds feminism not enough to render her advocacy for black women.

What is unique about Nardal’s approach is that it is aligned with Aminata Sow Fall’s³⁷ negritude feminism which recognizes the differences between men and women and believes that recognizing those differences will give the woman in the society more opportunity to establish her role and responsibility. According to Nardal, it is important to develop a critical look at the accomplishments of women in the social sphere in order to inspire other women to join. Women coming together is crucial because they are equal to men in the social sphere. She maintains that,

Or, le social est l’aspect de la vie qui intéresse la femme au premier chef. Devant le devoir social, elle est l’égale de l’homme. Elle est aussi en tant qu’être personnel, intelligent et libre. Mais en tant qu’être social, elle doit à la communauté humaine ses service. Comme l’homme, elle doit contribuer au progrès de l’humanité.

[Now, the social is the aspect of life that interests woman first and foremost. Regarding social duty, she is the man’s equal. As an individual, she is also intelligent and free. But as a social being, her services are bound to humankind. Like man, she must contribute to the progress of humanity] (21).

She openly defines the places in which the woman can make change in the society and that place is the social sphere. According to Nardal, in the “social duty” women are equal

³⁷ Chapter 4 of this dissertation discusses Aminata Sow Fall’s negritude feminism and I argue that Nardal and her share the idea of complementarity between men and women. This vision often times goes against the vision of white feminism, transnational feminism or other forms of feminisms which I discussed in the introduction of this dissertation.

to men, “elle est l’égale de l’homme.” Women are as intelligent and free as men are. So, in regard to the society, women have the same responsibility of responding, building and participating in the development of the society. Advocating for a more important presence of the woman in the public sphere, Nardal concludes the essay by saying that women have “entered the city of men.” Their entrance in the city of men has a purpose of correcting some of the choices that put Martinique and other places in a difficult situation.

Paulette Nardal also created the journal, *La Femme dans la Cité*, to give voice to the Martinican woman as its agenda is tailored to “support the interests of mother and child...” She clarifies that the journal has no political affiliation and that it is for all Martinican people. As an engaged activist, Paulette Nardal advocates for a more active participation of black women in politics, economics but also cultural development of their country in *La Femme dans la Cité* [Woman in the City]. Nardal created the journal to give voice to the Martinican woman. In her negritude feminism, she identifies the urgency to get something helpful for women and this can be achieved through “social education.”

However, given her class and her time period, Nardal may have been influenced by her bourgeois tendency to “save” and “educate the masse”, to educate women which is problematic. For example, her tone and language in some of her essays hints to a top down elitism. It seems like because she has been in France for her education, because she has more access compared to other Martinican women, she and her team had a goal to “Le but que nous poursuivons est l’éducation sociale des femmes appuyée sur des

oeuvres immédiates” [Our goal is the social education of women with a focus on pressing initiatives] (27) as she says in “Mise au Point,” where she clarifies the aim of the journal. This ambitious goal and activist attitude can be read as if the Martinican women have never been active within their society or have never been educated or have been passive all the time. She does not seem to discuss the system that has created exclusion for women from the social sphere.

As we have discussed in this chapter, Paulette Nardal has been a pioneer in writing about and for black women’s experiences both in Paris and in Martinique. She advocates for the woman and centers her at the heart of her writings. Her participation and mission in creating the environment for the black diasporic community to converse has been acknowledged thanks to the work of some scholars. This chapter focused on her negritude feminism and on her negritude practices that reclaim black women’s voices and dignity. In her essays, she cites and advocates for transnational solidarity and celebrates the writings and achievements of black women from the diaspora. What is unique about Paulette Nardal is, not only her advocacy for the black woman but also her redefinition of feminism to fit the experience of black women. This redefinition claims that in the social sphere man and woman have the same rights and responsibilities whereas in other spheres, the woman is different from the man. That difference needs to be acknowledged in order for the society to work well and develop. Paulette Nardal may have been influenced by her time period and her class.

Paulette Nardal’s activism through her writing and journalism is centered on bringing the black diasporic community together to fight against oppression and

colonization. She is an engaged black woman who published essays that advocate for black women, celebrate the contribution of the black community to the history of this world, and call for an active participation of Martinican women into politics. She also was engaged in bringing into the conversation the experience of black women in France. As we have seen, Paulette Nardal emphasizes the use of Christian religion to advocate for black women. However, her studies in France and her class have influenced the way she advocates for black women³⁸. This elitist attitude can also be traced in her essays in France. For example, her word choices in the essay “l’Eveil de la Conscience de Race,” brings up the discussion about her class and position in the French society. She acknowledges a big problem, the problem of loneliness of black women in France; the problem of gender inequality within the black community but it does not seem too *open* about it. Is this a bourgeois paternalism developed with class and access? Attitude? Nardal dives into the gender issues of being a black woman in Paris, supporting the idea that black women were already engaged in the call for racial solidarity and should be acknowledged and given voice and yet the way she discusses gender issues is latent as she often refers to the black community using the “he” pronoun or to the Martinican using the pronoun “he,” similar to Suzanne Césaire’s essays.

Thus, Paulette Nardal’s gender concerns are complex and oriented in a masculine vision which again shows the complexity or the tensions between the hegemony of feminism and the particularity of the experience of the black women. In the following passage where she writes “in Negro literature, one usually finds an emotional reaction

³⁸ I have discussed more in depth the limitations of Paulette Nardal’s writings in the epilogue of this dissertation.

which dates from the first inarticulate babblings by which he tried to express his failure, his sufferings, his humble joys and sometimes his revolt, to the magnificent flowering of modern Afro-american poetry” (37). It is interesting that Paulette Nardal uses the pronoun “he” to talk about the Negro artist. As a black woman, is she adopting the same masculine mindset that puts black women on the side in order to reach her audience? I argue that she does that on purpose to raise awareness about gender inequality and the complexity of the term feminism.

Nardal’s approach to gender issues as shown in her first essay is more apparent when she writes about Augusta Savage and says “c’est une jeune femme mince, à la voix extraordinairement douce, d’une simplicité qui la rend immédiatement sympathique” [“She is a young slim woman, with an extraordinary sweet voice, and a simplicity that renders her sympathetic!”]. This description of Miss Savage's voice as “sweet” “simplicity” may reinforce some gender stereotypes that represent women in a certain way. In the two essays, she applauds the progress and evolution of the black race and gives voice to black women who contributed to race consciousness. Paulette Nardal focuses on important themes that deal with the experience of black women and also highlights the need for solidarity and unity of the black race worldwide.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed how Paulette Nardal developed a consciousness in regard to racial politics, gender issues and the black experience. In her negritude feminism, Nardal develops her woman-centered project in Paris and in Martinique advocating for black women’s liberation and dignity. Understanding that politics is one

of the most important sphere that black women need to enter, she insists on making them active in the political sphere in Martinique. Nardal has been a pioneer in fighting for black women's liberation. As we will discuss more in the conclusion/epilogue of this dissertation, there are certain instances where her privilege position and proximity to France can be traced in her language. In the next chapter, we will discuss Suzanne Césaire's negritude feminism and how distinct and yet similar her approach is from Nardal.

CHAPTER III

SUZANNE CÉSAIRE AND THE CARIBBEAN SELF

It is now urgent
To dare to know oneself
To dare to confess to oneself what one is,
To dare to ask oneself what one wants to be.
-Suzanne Césaire-

Suzanne Roussi Césaire (1915-1966) was a Martinican writer, poet, activist, teacher, and surrealist. Martinique, her homeland, was a French colony and Suzanne Césaire, among other francophone students from the Caribbean and Africa, received scholarships to study in France³⁹. She studied Philosophy in the 1930s in Paris and was part of the black diasporic community that sparked debates about freedom and independence for the colonies. Connected to students like Paulette Nardal⁴⁰, Césaire used to go to the Clamart Salon to share her vision of independence for the black community globally. Driven by a strong need to fight for her homeland and the black community, she chose to return to Martinique in 1937 after finishing her studies. In Martinique, she, with a team of scholars including her husband Aimé Césaire and Rene Ménénil, created the journal *Les Tropiques* (1941-1945) to advance the fight against oppression, imperialism, and to give voice to black women. This group of rebels understood and were ready for

³⁹ As part of the assimilation project and colonisation, France used to fund some students to study in France. Many of them were male students, but some brilliant female students were part of the selection. Among them were Suzanne Césaire and Paulette Nardal from Martinique.

⁴⁰ For more information about the Clamart Salon, refer to Chapter 1 where I discuss Paulette Nardal's role in Paris and Martinique.

the fight against imperialism. Because of its commitment to a helpful and engaging content that challenge imperialism, racism, and Eurocentric history, the reviews' articles were sometimes censored by the Vichy Regime led by Admiral Robert⁴¹. Suzanne Césaire was interested in raising questions about gender, race, and class in relation to colonization and imperialism and she was the one “who brought the articles to Admiral Robert’s information services for authorization of their content and to request the necessary paper for printing.⁴²” They were authorized by the Admiral Robert to publish the journal but in 1943, the review received a letter of indictment denying them the rights to publish because the content of the journal was revolutionary. This courageous action tells us about her activism and dedication to give voice to Martinican people.

In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate that Césaire was an activist who recognizes the different heritages of the Antillean, a feminist whose main concern is to improve the lives of black women, a surrealist who is able to use the movement in the Caribbean context and a negritude writer who celebrates the African cultures. She goes beyond the definition of negritude, feminism and surrealism to offer a more dynamic use of these concepts through negritude feminism. I have discussed negritude feminisms in the introduction of this dissertation as the combination of negritude and feminism, however, what is unique about Suzanne Césaire is that in addition to feminism and negritude, she is interested in surrealism. Indeed, she argues that surrealism⁴³ is an important tool that

⁴¹ Admiral Robert, under Vichy regime was the French Governor for Martinique

⁴² Daniel Maximin, the editor of *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)* mentions (xxvii).

⁴³ Surrealism was an avant-garde movement that started in Paris in the 1920s promoting irrationality and the unconscious. They believe that the mind should be free of the rational limitations that the world, Europe specifically, creates. Andre Breton one of the surrealist writers was a friend of Suzanne Césaire and Aime Césaire. He visited Martinique and was impressed by its rich resources. Suzanne Césaire dedicated an essay to him--“Andre Breton, Poet” published in 1941 in *Les Tropiques*--which I will discuss later in this chapter.

could be applied to the Caribbean context, as it actually liberates the mind and gets away from rationality—rationality as defined according to the European context. She believes that the heritage that the Caribbean islands got from Africa celebrates the inner connections between the human being and the world, celebrates the creativity of the mind and those aspects sometimes go against the European world which wants to rationalize everything. Similar to Paulette Nardal, Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville, Césaire believes in everyday activism which was visible through her teaching and writing. She shares with these three women the belief that black women need and deserve a better place in the black diasporic community. In shaping the anticolonial project of negritude through a woman-centered project, she uses negritude feminism along with surrealism to challenge imperialism and colonialism. The uniqueness of Césaire's approach to negritude feminism compared to Nardal, Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall, is her incorporation of surrealism in advocating for black women's dignity and liberation. Her political agenda helped shape the success of the journal *Les Tropiques* and emphasized the problems of oppression, eurocentrism and identity struggle within the Caribbean community.

Suzanne Césaire's writing is foundational to analyze as it demonstrates the engagement of black women in the negritude movement. Indeed, Césaire has either been studied primarily as a surrealist or mistakenly defined as someone who takes Europe as a reference. Her writing and activism have been overshadowed by her husband's writing and political engagement. As a matter of fact, with the debate about the negritude movement, scholars have focused more on her husband's role in the movement.

However, Césaire has received some attention within the context of negritude by Maryse Condé, who has worked significantly to reclaim her important work in the Caribbean publishing in 1998 the article, “Suzanne Césaire and the Construct of a Caribbean Identity⁴⁴.” Another scholar, Marie-Agnes Sourieau has also examined Césaire’s work and focused on her definition of blackness and its place in the Caribbean context. Even though she has been mentioned as part of the negritude women writers in 2002 by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, for example, Césaire still has not received enough attention. Her work is so important that the volume of attention she has received is insufficient.

The aim of this chapter is to give her work more attention, especially to how she operates at the intersection of negritude, surrealism and feminism. This chapter engages directly with Césaire’s seven essays in the journal *Les Tropiques*⁴⁵, “Alain and Esthetics,” “Andre Breton, Poet,” “Poetic Destitution,” “1943 Surrealism and Us,” “The Great Camouflage,” “Malaise of a Civilization” and “Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilization.” I demonstrate that the essays such as “Alain and Esthetics,” “Andre Breton, Poet,” and “Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilization” rewrite the history of Africa and challenge some terms such as civilization, history, identity and imperialism. Whereas the essay “Surrealism and Us”, redefines the movement created in Paris and advocates for its practical use in the Caribbean context. The purpose of the essays “Malaise of a Civilization” and “The Great Camouflage,” is for Césaire to demonstrate how it is possible for Martinique and the Caribbean to create a new consciousness that

⁴⁴ This article was published in the book edited by A.S. Newton and L. Strong-Leek, *Winds of Change: The Transforming voice of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars*. New York: P. Lang

⁴⁵ Those essays were made accessible to a wider audience in 2012 with the book, *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)* by Daniel Maximin and Keith L. Walker

will put them into new perspectives that recognize the history of the islands. Césaire invites Antilleans to redefine and redirect some negative practices and beliefs that separate them from other black communities. Through a close reading of her essays, I argue that, Césaire's writing is unique because it combines negritude, feminism and surrealism to fit the experience of the black diasporic community. Her uniqueness is also visible within her texts in the way she looks for a real-world impact. She reflects on the political, social and cultural problems that the Caribbean is facing and proposes solutions to those problems; solutions that go against eurocentrism, imperialism, and colonialism.

I look at Suzanne Césaire's essays *not* in the chronological order they were published, rather, I examine them thematically in relation to negritude, surrealism and feminism. Césaire highlights a practical transnational solidarity within the black community with her Pan-African and global project by unthinking identity, gender issues and freedom. In other words, she uses terms like surrealism available to her and re-directs them using the reality of the Caribbean. I demonstrate that she grapples with the ambiguity and consequences of slavery and colonization in the Caribbean islands and the Caribbean self. She mentions some European thinkers/scholars like Frobenius and Breton and tries to use their ideologies in the Caribbean context. She invites the Antilleans to embrace their mixed identity and celebrate their African heritage. The voice in the texts is bold, present, and commanding. Her essays had a potential political impact in Martinique as they pragmatically propose solutions to the issues faced by Martinican people. Thus, this chapter highlights Césaire's 1) approach to the identity struggles that Martinicans go through due to their double or multiple heritages, 2) her use of negritude and feminism to

challenge imperialism through a focus on the everyday lived experience of the black woman, of the Martinican, 3) her redefinition of terms that were imperialist and racist, and 4) her commanding voice that invites Caribbean to rewrite and rethink the history of the black diasporic community.

Negritude Identity of the Caribbean Self

Suzanne Césaire engages with the question of identity within her writings. She constantly discusses the importance of knowing oneself and defining oneself in their own terms and this exercise is “urgent” according to Césaire. In the essay “Malaise of a Civilization,” she writes

It is now urgent
To dare to know oneself
To dare to confess to oneself what one is,
To dare to ask oneself
what one wants to be

Indeed, Césaire gets to the heart of the problem of imperialism and Eurocentrism which centers Europe as the “model” for civilization. I argue that Césaire highlights the fact that the black diasporic community needs to be able to define themselves through negritude. As I discussed in the introduction, the negritude movement started in the 1930s in Paris as a unifying movement that celebrates the African cultures which were represented in Europe as “ugly,” primitive, and “savage.” When the word *nègre* was used in the colonial context, it referred to an insult; so, the negritude writers took the word which had negative connotations and changed the meaning into a more positive representation of the black diasporic community. As René Ménéil states in *Les Topiques*, “we gathered the insults to make diamonds of them... We were the children of derision. No one could

believe in our rule.” Suzanne Césaire uses negritude to redefine the Caribbean self and identity in her writing as she acknowledges and embraces the multiple identities of the Antilleans. Césaire has reworked negritude and invites Caribbean people to embrace not only their African heritage but also recognize their multiple heritages. According to Césaire, negritude brings the Antillean beyond the mere celebration of their African heritage and gets them into the recognition of their past and the fight for a better future. Her approach to negritude is particular in the way it accepts the hybridity of her culture which makes the experience of the Caribbean more complete.

Suzanne Césaire is invested in the search for the Caribbean self, the Caribbean identity which she thinks is connected to the geography of the islands. She opens the essay “The Great Camouflage” with “there is the purity of sea salt all around the Caribbean...There is my island, Martinique, and its fresh necklace of clouds buffeted by Mount Pele. There are the highest plateaus of Haiti, where a horse dies, lighting-struck by the age-old killer storm at Hinche” (39). The repetition of “there is”, there are, demonstrates that Césaire is a witness to the beauty of the islands and its beauty is related to their identity. It seems like she is describing its beauty as she is looking at the “clouds,” the plateaus along with darker events like “storm” and “death”. The imagery is powerful and demonstrates the celebration of the beauty of Martinique. According to Césaire, the island represents the identity for Martinican people. She highlights the complexity of the islands caused by “desasters” including earthquakes, cyclones, and storms. Her description highlights four places, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Florida and Martinique. This move demonstrates her interest in erasing borders, colonial borders to

bring these places together underscoring her resistance to imperialism and its consequences. In these islands, nature is part of the everyday experience of its people. The powerful devastation of the hurricanes is part of the experience of people from the islands who says “Do not move. Let it pass” (39). The line “After the rain. The sun” is separated from the text to underline the power of the beautiful things that come after these “desasters.” There is an Insistence of the beauty of the island, she uses “here” to insist on the reality of it, on the immediacy of the island that she is contemplating with admiration.

Additionally, Césaire celebrates the Caribbean identity and connects it to the landscape of the island “contemplates the enigmatic beauty of the tropical forest.” Through the motivation to advocate for an identity that recognizes their negritude, Césaire focuses on the geography of the islands in her writings. I argue that the negritude identity of the “*metis*”⁴⁶—people with multiple identities—is essential to explore in order to fully define the Martinican; the “metis” being a person of mixed heritages according to Césaire. The complexity and difficulty to define the Antillean emanates from the complex relationship between France and the Antilles, of the multiple identities of the Antillean. In the essay “The Great Camouflage,” Césaire tries to define the Antillean by saying

Here is an Antillean, great-grandson of a White colonizer and a slave Negress...Here he is with his double strength and double ferocity, in a dangerously threatened equilibrium: he cannot accept his negritude; he cannot whiten himself. Spinelessness takes hold of this divided heart (43).

⁴⁶ In the Francophone context, the word “metis” appears and is used to describe a person with multiple heritages. Many francophone writers have written about metissage or metis; example Ousmane Socé’s *Mirage de Paris*

It is in this essay that Césaire uses the word *negritude* and in this context “*negritude*” represents her African heritage. Going back to history and the pain that the “slave Negress” went through with rape, Césaire brings back the reality of how the Antillean came to be in this world. He was conceived through pain and will have to embrace that pain by recognizing both of their heritages. The idea of “Divided heart” could be read as an attempt to put W.E.B. Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness into a Caribbean perspective. Due to the oppressive Vichy Regime (and an established eurocentrism in the Caribbean Islands) that try to deny Martinican people their full identity—which includes their African heritages, the Martinican has a divided heart and does not seem to be able to reconcile them or recognize each of them as equally important part in their identity. When inviting her community to acknowledge and embrace their identity through *negritude*, she makes it clear in the essay “*Malaise of a Civilization*,” that

is not about a backwards return, a resurrection of an African past that we have learned to know and respect. On the contrary, it is about the mobilization of every living strength brought together upon this earth where race is the result of the most unremitting intermixing; it is about becoming conscious of the incredible store of varied energies until now locked up within us (33).

Césaire believes that *negritude* already contains the capaciousness of the celebration of African traditions but needs a more impactful use within the Caribbean. In this statement, she sums up the history of slavery and its impact on Martinican people to make visible “the incredible store of varied energies until now locked up within us.” She reminds the reader of the origin of her community through an overview of slavery and points out that slaves tried to adapt to a new place and its realities. Besides, the key fact

that all the laws during and after slavery were meant to separate black people from white people but what happened is that Caribbean people have multiple heritages. The opening of Césaire's text ask the rhetorical question that will be addressed "why in the past have we been so unconcerned about expressing our ancestry anxiety in a direct manner?" (28). This question signals the reason why she is dealing with the problem of "ancestral anxiety" which may be related to the denial or avoidance of the Martinican about their mixed heritage and which negritude can help solve.

In the essay "The Great Camouflage," she writes

Since many among the French seem determined to tolerate not even the slightest shadow being cast upon that visage, one must dare show, on the face of France, illuminated with the implacable light of events, the Antillean stain (42).

Indeed, the tone of this passage is not just bold and daring but it also inviting for the Martinican to recognize the effects of slavery and colonization on their history. So, the reference to the "Antillean stain" that have been covered by France is significant to highlight according to Césaire. These islands are also controlled by the Americans because when everybody should enjoy the beautiful view after the rain, those in military zone cannot because "the windows are closed" (40). The imagery of a prison is so profoundly described in this passage because having one's windows close, not by choice but by force is a representation of a lack of freedom. She blames France for being "responsible for human deprivation of the Antilles." In being so frank and sharp about her analysis of colonization, Césaire makes her call for action more powerful, important and urgent. By calling France "their", she distances herself from France and aligns more

with the Antilles. The sarcasm used by Césaire in this passage is trenchant. “In the meantime, the Antillean serf lives miserably, abjectly on the lands of “the factory” and the mediocrity of our town ship is a nauseating spectacle” (42). So, her negritude feminism brings the community together while giving the woman the example of using their voice; the example of being an active member of their community and the example of getting away from the “old” patriarchal ways of defining themselves.

As Keith A. Walker reports in *The Great Camouflage*, Suzanne Césaire and her friends of *Les Tropiques* redefine negritude as a weapon necessary in the reclamation of their identity. *Les Tropiques* team writes,

Negritude was the ambition to reorient Black people, to put them back into the struggle for recognition and dignity.....It is the re-appropriation of ourselves by ourselves....Assimilation, that is the enemy. Alienation, that is the enemy. Consequently, one must re-become, retake possession of ones welfare, of ones values. This extension through time and projection into eternity, ...that is negritude...⁴⁷.” (xiii)

This statement underscores the dedication of these group of people to recognize the struggle they have been through for centuries and fight against oppression and racism. They argue that some practices from the past such as “assimilation” did not work and will not work for black people. So, they made a call for action; an action that re-writes history and that reclaims their voice through negritude. Nonetheless, it is necessary to underline the fact that Césaire and her team were aware of the difference in experience the Africans may have compared to them. The Africans who were taken from the continent and forced

⁴⁷ In the book *The great Camouflage*, Walker reports that the group of scholars that constituted of *Les Tropiques* understood that their experiences with negritude might be a little bit different from those who lived in the African continent.

to survive and adjust in the Americas, do not have the same experience as those who stayed in the continent. In later years, the negritude writers understood those differences, embraced them and used them to get more connected to one another regardless of where they were located⁴⁸. Keith L. Walker reports that to the discussion of negritude, of their negritude, *Les Tropiques* friends add

It is quite obvious however that the negritude of a West Indian seeking the recovery of his being cannot be exactly the negritude of an African rooted in his sense of being, who never doubted his identity. These are two different things. They are two temperaments, two different forms of conditioning...Our negritude is humanistic. Our negritude is grounded into history. Our negritude is a blossoming-rooting of possibilities.” (xiii)

In this declaration, one can sense the fact that the differences should be underlined but should not at the center of their concerns. Rather, the fight for recognition for the whole black community is what drives them in their revolutionary mission. The answer to the colonial problem is negritude and the revolutionary method of surrealism fits in the movement.

Césaire argues that in the eye of the French landing in the Antilles, the metis sparkles a lot of interests as the witness to the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. She claims,

they know that the metis have a part of their blood, that they are, like them, of Western civilization...But colored descendants fill them with fear, in spite of the smiles exchanged. They were not expecting this strange bourgeoning of their blood. Perhaps they would like not to respond to the Antillean heir who shouts but does not shout out “my father.” However, one will have to deal with unanticipated boys and charming girls (43).

⁴⁸ Many scholars have written about the difference between Senghor and Aime Cesaire’s negritude for example. They state that Senghor’s negritude is softer, more ...than Aime Cesaire’s negritude.

Power dynamics of race relations is demonstrated in this passage with the relationship the French have with the Antilleans. The dominance of France through the control that has upon the Martinican due to slavery and colonization is still relevant even when the island became a “French territory.” The problem is that in the mind of the French, “One must govern these unruly people,” referring to the Antillean. However, according to Césaire, the Martinican are aware of their power and “the impatient fruits of revolution will spring up from it, inevitable” (44) because these “unruly people” will defend themselves, will rebel and take control of their future through negritude and surrealism. So, “their cry exclaims in a hustly and full voice that Africa is still there, present, that she waits, undulating, devouring of Whites, immensely virgin in spite of colonization. The impossibility of erasing their negritude, their African heritage.” He will take over “his land that does not belong to him yet is however his land” (44). Thus, the identity and relationship between African and the Antilles cannot be erased although Europe has attempted to control how the Antilleans define themselves. Césaire writes

Antilles-Africa, thanks to the drums, the nostalgia for earthly spaces lives on in the hearts of these islanders. Who will overcome this nostalgia?

By connecting Antilles to Africa, Césaire re-writes the history written by Europeans where Africa is missing. The Caribbean people were taught to only recognize their white heritage and yet were not accepted in the white community. Césaire critiques the unconscious imitation that the Antillean is suffering from. So, as an activist, she says that

the “artificial peace” (28) needs to be disturbed in order for Martinicans to find their true selves.

Addressing her audience in a conversation with questions and answers, she uses a simple and sophisticated language in this essay. Indeed, as the writer, she is not detached from the history and story of Martinique as she uses words like “we,” “us,” “let us.” Césaire finds a direct way to engage with current issues in Martinique. Because of the urgency of the situation, she is calling for change for a better life. She commands her community to re-write history with all their heritages at its heart through negritude. She supports that despite a so-called citizenship for French Antilleans, the consequences of their exploitations still remain visible. Written like poetry, the voice in the essay moves the reader from history to personal opinions of the author. The last paragraph is one sentence that leaves the reader breathless because of the energy it requires to read it. This also shows the ambiguity and consequences of slavery and colonization and ties back to the beginning of the essay that beautifully describes the Caribbean islands. Césaire is aware of the problematic construction of race and how it affects the black community. Calling for solidarity and unity within the black community, she challenges the competition between the Antillean and other black people because the Antillean believe that they are superior to other black people and use that idea “to better beat them down” (41). Césaire not only critiques that mindset but also provide historical facts about the reason why it is harmful for black people. In this regard, she follows Paulette Nardal’s call for solidarity in the essay “L’Eveil de la Conscience de Race” [The Awakening of Race Consciousness] *La revue du monde noir*, 1932. Similar to Nardal, Suzanne Césaire

is aware of the suffering that blacks go through in the Americas, in Africa and globally. She writes “of course, it the Blacks of the Americas who suffer the most, in a daily humiliation, from the degradations, the injustices, and the pettiness of colonial society.”

According to Césaire, in order for the Martinican to define themselves and “to dare to know oneself,” they need to go back to Ethiopia and understand the relationship between Martinique and Ethiopia, the connection between life and death, in order to discover their true identity. Metaphorically, her suggestion is to go back to Ethiopia standing in synecdochically for Africa, try to understand their connection with this particular place, where dead people can still communicate with those who are living. Her voice is strong and present in the essay as it reveals dedication and engagement to change the current situation. She believes that questions such as “Who is the Martinican?” “To which god should it be entrusted?” are fundamental to answer for the Martinican to move forward to a better future; a future in which their negritude identity recognizes their multiple heritages. Giving orders to her community with “open your eyes”, “open your ears” (30), is a way of denouncing the silencing that Martinicans have been facing; she wants them to speak and take action, re-write their history and redefine themselves with negritude. According to Césaire, the Antilleans have to recognize their negritude and reconcile their multiple heritages as the first steps into fighting for liberation.

Negritude Surrealism

In the book *The Great Camouflage*, Keith L. Walker points out that “negritude and surrealism as art, poetry, and the struggle for total liberation and uncompromising freedom are the access roads away from the sordid reality of inhumanity, inequality,

injustice, and war toward an “elsewhere” of reality transformed in a humanistic, egalitarian, all-inclusive sur-reality of peace and love re-discovered and re-invented” (xiv). Surrealism is an avant-garde movement that promotes the irrational juxtaposition of images, the exploration of the unconsciousness and the mind; some negritude writers including Suzanne Césaire and Aimé Césaire found it helpful in the Caribbean context. However, the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, for example, rejects surrealism precisely because it is too centrally located in the European cultural and intellectual context. Suzanne Césaire was particular in the way she uses surrealism. She not only sees it as an essential part of African heritages because it celebrates the mind and gets away from rationality but also centers its importance in the lives of black women. Césaire advocates for the idea of limitless of the mind in regard to arts that negritude and surrealism offer. This very idea goes against what Europe has developed in its colonies. I argue that the rediscovery and re-invention of their identity is necessary for the black diasporic community in the fight against colonization and imperialism. Césaire writes right at the beginning of the essay “Surrealism and Us,” “many have believed that surrealism was dead. Many wrote so. Childish nonsense: its activity extends today to the entire world and surrealism remains livelier, more audacious than ever” (34). She adds “...in 1943, surrealism remains what it has always been, an activity which assigns itself the goal of exploring and expressing systematically the forbidden zones of the human mind...” From the statement, it is clear that she advocates for the freedom of the mind and invites the black diasporic community to consider surrealism as a weapon to fight against imperialism.

Césaire revalidates the existence and relevance of surrealism in the fight against imperialism in the Caribbean. She discusses how the goal of surrealism is to free the mind from any limitations for a creation of a beautiful and free self. One of the main goals of surrealism according to Césaire is the achievement of human freedom. She argues that when surrealism was created, “the most urgent task was to free the mind from the shackles of absurd logic and so-called Western reason.” So, surrealism gets away from western conventions of writing, offers the mind lots of freedom of explorations and expression and creates possibilities for imagining or re-imagining human freedom. These roles and goals of surrealism align with the negritude movement’s aim to celebrate the inner self essential in the black cultures and civilizations. This reading of surrealism can be translated into one of the goals of negritude which is the celebrations of African cultures; cultures within which spirituality is at the center; cultures that differ from “Western reason.” *Les Tropiques* writers, especially Suzanne Césaire, understood and claimed that the revolutionary dimension of the surrealist movement which wanted to get away from “reason” by freeing the mind is aligned with the goals of negritude which celebrates the inner self and values that are not always possible to explain in a “rational way.” Césaire and her friends agree that it is not always possible to explain things/events using “reason” because the imagination and the mind are essential to unfold the potentials of human nature. Is this what Senghor tried to explain with his famous statement “L’emotion est Negre, la Raison est Helene?” In fact, this sentence has been the most cited and critiqued in Senghor’s work, but it is important to understand the idea behind it. It is not necessarily undermining black cultures, on the contrary, I read this as a

recognition of the spirituality of African cultures that needs to be an integral part of negritude. In the same vein, Suzanne Césaire advocates for both negritude and surrealism that she finds interconnected with their focus on the mind.

Césaire supports that surrealism extends to the “entire world” but that its practical goal for freedom is more than ever needed in the Caribbean. She names specific places including Argentina, Cuba, Canada and Mexico where surrealism is being used as a “young, ardent and revolutionary’ weapon to free the people. According to Césaire, Breton should be “proud” of on how this movement has been translated into an activity, as “the cause itself for freedom,” and “the sign itself of vitality.” Thus, surrealism means no compromise, no limitation to the creation of arts. Césaire believes in the revolutionary aspect of surrealism and how it is necessary for her people to use, if they are ready to be free. The practical use of the movement in Martinique, which is the liberation of the mind and the acceptance of their multiple heritages, is mandatory for their freedom from the Vichy domination and from Europe and the Americas. In “Malaise of a Civilization” Césaire maintains that “here we are called upon to know ourselves finally by ourselves...surrealism has given us some of our possibilities. It is up to us to find others with its guiding lights” (33). Again, she supports a use of surrealism that takes into account Martinican realities to solve their problems. Therefore, Surrealism can be and should be used in the Caribbean to advance the fight for independence and unity.

Negritude: Challenging the “Single Story”

Critiquing and challenging the “narrow and classical conceptions of official critics” as she says in the essay “Surrealism and Us,” is the goal of Césaire’s writings. She refers to “official critics” to mean the established European writers who consider places other than Europe as “unvivilized.” Indeed, Suzanne Césaire believes that Art brings the artist into a “new consciousness of the world, a new consciousness of the human.” She dedicates three essays to European thinkers who challenge eurocentrism and shows how their work could be used in the Caribbean context. Those three European artists and thinkers are: Emile-Auguste Chartier (1868–1951), a French journalist and philosopher known as Alain, Andre Breton (1896-1966), one of the founders of Surrealism and Leo Frobenius (1873-1938), a German Ethnologist who re-wrote the history of Africa reclaiming its voice in the development of the world. Alain questions esthetics that is based on European definition and Breton brings a practical use of surrealism, the importance of the unconscious and dreams suitable to the Caribbean context and history. Leo Frobenius brings back the history to Africa and denies the single story that has been written about Africa.

As Kara M. Rabbit argues in the article “Suzanne Césaire’s significance for the forging of a new Caribbean Literature,” “Césaire does not promote imitation of them but uses their strengths to her own ends” (541). So, contrary to some scholars reading of Césaire as a fan of Europe, I agree with Rabbit when she says that Césaire is not taking the examples randomly or out of love of European scholars but as a practical solution for the problem of identity which means the Caribbean’s multiple heritages. She appropriates

some useful tools that the scholars developed and offers a practical use of them to solve the problems that the Caribbean islands face.

In the essay “Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilizations” (1941), Suzanne Césaire expresses her admiration for Leo Frobenius’s book *History of African Civilization*. In fact, the book demonstrates that, unlike the history of Africa written by Europeans which often describes the place as “empty,” “uncivilized” and a place of darkness, Africa has had great civilizations and cultures before its contact with Europeans. In the search for re-writing the history of Africa from a new perspective that brings back civilization and humanity to Africa, Césaire goes beyond the debate about whether or not Frobenius’ approach is controversial or outmoded today and discusses his explanation about how modernity and technology created the world’s catastrophes. In the essay, Césaire quotes directly Frobenius’ book. Similar to most openings of her essays, she starts with an observation and a rhetorical question to get the reader engaged in these issues. She writes: “a fundamental problem is that of civilization. We live it. We celebrate its progress or deplore its decadence. However, what is it in its essence?” This statement and the rhetorical question are fundamental according to Césaire, as she tries to examine the essence of civilization. She invites the readers to pay attention to the problem caused by the Eurocentric perspective of civilization. She takes the lead in analyzing the consequences of defining a term that excludes any important parts of the world. Supporting Frobenius’s argument about the existence of African history that was ignored by Europeans, Césaire writes

Frobenius’s history of African Civilization is a vast effort of synthesis toward the understanding of all these forms very ancient forms of civilization that today

appear primitive and frozen in time, whereas in reality, they are often symbols of an astonishing richness and complexity of spectacular cultures of which we know nothing. (6)

She, agreeing with Leo Frobenius, offer a counter history of Africa—a history that goes against what European thinkers have written about the civilization of Africa. Césaire’s statement goes against the propaganda used by European countries to colonize African and Caribbean territories. In the justification of colonization, it is often emphasized that black people do not have any culture and need to be “civilized”. Therefore, the “richness” and “spectacular” cultures are ignored, erased and denied by the colonizers. The meaning of civilization, the common use of the word to define progress of humankind is challenged by both Frobenius and Césaire. According to Frobenius, “the Ethiopian feeling of life defines itself as a sense of the real and as primitive mysticism. The Hamitic civilization, on the contrary, is tied to the animal, to the conquest of the right to live through violent struggle and conquest.” (5) The Ethiopian referring to Africa and its ancient cultures which were peaceful compare to the Hamitic civilization that Europe has developed through violence and catastrophes. According to Frobenius

It seems that Euro-American man in the nineteenth century has been seized with a veritable madness for science, technology, machines, the results of which has been the creative imperialist thought of the world economy and its encircling of the globe.

This statement reiterates Frobenius’s vision about how the “madness” for progress and innovation has caused colonization, the over exploitation of the world’s resources and the oppression of the black community through imperialism. The two wars could be a good example of the disasters created by the fixation of the “West” to conquer the world and

nature. Césaire quotes directly Frobenius and combines it with her own reading of his work. Césaire agrees with Frobenius about the fact that civilization needs to be redefined and its negative consequences need to be acknowledged in order to learn from it. She concludes the essay saying that that Frobenius's ideas "gave life and power to sociology" (9). The tool of questioning and challenging Eurocentrism is necessary as Césaire makes the ultimate call "It is now vital to dare to know oneself, to dare to confess to oneself what one is, to dare to ask oneself what one wants to be." So, according to Césaire, it is important to be able to define oneself and be engaged in the future of one's community. This statement correlates with Césaire's believe that "it is time to gird one's loins like a valiant man" (10), permanently calling for action. In the call for action, Césaire's use of gendered language is interesting as she says, "valiant man." Some questions worth asking are: why is she using a gendered language in this essay? Is she influenced by her time period, the masculinist environment of the negritude movement? What is the implication of her use of this language in regard to negritude feminism?

Similarly, in the essay "Alain and Esthetics" (1941), Césaire challenges Eurocentrism and celebrates artists and scholars who have succeeded in transcending rationality. Césaire highlights the work of Alain who is interested in Art including painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, poetry and music. She believes that Alain's work is essential to analyze "in a world in which the most dismal of games is being played: the hide-and-seek of human kind with itself." Césaire focuses more on poetry⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The most cited negritude movement writers write poetry. See *Voices of Negritude In Modernist Print: Aesthetic Subjectivity, Diaspora, and the Lyric Regime* by Carrie Noland Columbia University Press 2015.

and its essential role in the world because, according to her, the poet goes beyond the world itself to provide answers to some critical questions. In Césaire's writing, although it is in the form of an essay, she writes in a poetic form supporting Alain's statement "poetry delivers man from himself and from the excess of his passions." Her voice in this essay is more philosophical than in the essay about Leo Frobenius which was more celebratory.

In the essay "Andre Breton, Poet," Suzanne Césaire celebrates Breton and his ideas about surrealism. In rendering the practical usage of surrealism in the Caribbean context, Césaire supports that it is imperative to use the revolutionary dimension of surrealism. Césaire says "the poetry of Breton is decidedly one of happiness," and Breton was a "revolutionary writer" and that if one is looking for an example of "authentic poet," Breton should be the one to be listed. Andre Breton, a French poet and friend of Suzanne Césaire and Aime Césaire was one of the founders of surrealism. Breton believed that surrealism was the weapon needed to transcend the rationality of European thinking and explore the mind and soul. Breton's book *Mad Love* contains the significance of revolution through everyday action and artistic creation. Breton has also been influenced by the Césaires with his visit to Martinique and wrote a poem dedicated to Suzanne Césaire called "For Madame Suzanne Césaire." In the essay, Césaire shares her passion and the passion of negritude writers to celebrate nature; to celebrate African cultures that understand the importance of nature in human life. Césaire uses Breton's vision with surrealism to demonstrate her way of "doing negritude" which means to challenge European established norms that oppress the black community. By doing negritude,

Césaire recognizes that because poetry is an expressive tool that helps people connect with their mind's endless capacities, it can be used to reach out to the black diasporic community and to advocate for liberation and equality. Furthermore, poetry, especially the poetry that does not follow the European norms of writing, was already established within the African cultures and connects the human being with nature. So Césaire is doing negritude with her engagement with each of these European thinkers who challenged Eurocentrism, her call for a practical use of surrealism within the Caribbean context and her celebration of African cultures.

Césaire's Negritude Feminism

As I have discussed in the introduction, feminism has been evaluated, understood and studied from different dimensions and still raises some questions including the complexity of the term in regard to the reality of women, the similarities and differences in women's experiences around the world. Moreover, the approach to feminism and the relationship between men and women is different in the Caribbean compare to other parts of the world according to Maryse Conde. Similar to Paulette Nardal, Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville, Suzanne Césaire's approach to feminism was informed by her context and her culture. Suzanne Césaire came back to Martinique to give back to her community and her woman-centered project revolves around her activism through teaching and writing. The complementarity between men and women, the collaboration that could exist between them--and not necessarily a competition, -- can be traced in Césaire's relation with her team of *Les Tropicques*. She collaborates with men to highlight the problem of slavery and colonization in the Antilles and writes about black women's

everyday experiences. It is important to note that, Césaire's political agenda incorporates and prioritizes black women's experiences whereas her male collaborators including her husband, Aimé Césaire, prioritize debates about freedom of Caribbean island, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. I argue that their collaboration was not total as Césaire added her woman-centered project in the revolutionary project of *Les Tropiques*.

Césaire's negritude feminism could be traced through her teaching and writing, her life with her family, and her commitment to improve the lives of the Martinican. Her immediate circle including her daughter, Ina Césaire, as well as the black community were aware of Césaire's engagement with raising awareness. In 2009, Ina Césaire wrote a poem about her engagement with political, social, cultural and gender issues. So, I analyze her approach to feminism as a Caribbean writer and her response to the masculinist idea of negritude, given that she was married to Aimé Césaire, one of the "founders" of Negritude. Also, some of the questions I will explore are: 1) does she reinforce the masculine ideal of the Caribbean self in her writing by using the pronoun "he" when referring to the Martinican and why? 2) as a female writer, what were the different writing devices she used in her essays to convey her message and what does that tell us about her time period and its influence on her?

Suzanne Césaire's approach to feminism challenges the confrontation that may be caused by a competition between men and women—mainly from the "Western" view and definition of feminism-- and embraces the complementarity of men and women. She does not consider men as the other but as the collaborator of women. In "Malaise of a Civilization," she writes "...one cannot deny that on Martinican soil the colored race

produces strong, robust, adaptable men and women of natural elegance and beauty” (28). According to Césaire, both men and women are the “products” of the mixture of many heritages. She finds it important to cite both men and women and focus on their “natural elegance and beauty.” Using some traits that are usually associated with femininity “elegance” and “beauty” to both men and women, I argue that Césaire goes beyond the implemented gender norms in the society to show that men and women complement each other, therefore gender barriers should not exist anymore.⁵⁰

Césaire’s essays take onto her goal of writing about the experiences of black women. She focuses on the complementarity between men and women, similar to Paulette Nardal. Césaire demonstrates that the Martinican community is a combination of men and women and each of them are important in the society. However, aware that her audience may be mostly men, she follows the masculinist way to define the Martinican by using the pronoun “he” to answer the question “who is the Martinican.”⁵¹ She has been influenced by her time period but wants to use it as a way to start the conversation about the Martinican identity and does not necessarily leave out women. In “The Great Camouflage,” Césaire cites specifically women of the Caribbean islands as being present and powerful just as the hummingbirds. She says

And as for the hummingbird-women, tropical flower-women, the women of four races and dozens of bloodiness, they are there no longer..., not the sunsets unlike any other in the world...
Yet they are there (40).

⁵⁰ In the epilogue/conclusion of this dissertation, I discuss the complex relationship to Europe that Césaire may have developed due to her class, and an influence from her time period. For example, she uses the pronoun “he” to refer to the Martinican. Also, there are other instances where she grapples with the masculinist environment in which she was living. However, it is interesting that she uses “strong, robust, adaptable” as applying to the men, and natural elegance and beauty” as applying to the women.

⁵¹ I will discuss this more in the epilogue

The hummingbird is known for its tininess and yet powerful and resistant heartbeats. By referring to the Caribbean women as “hummingbirds,” as “tropical flowers” and “of four races and dozens of bloodiness,” Césaire recognizes the beauty, the strength and the fact that women are at the center of the history of the Antilles. They may have been erased with the history written by the imperialists—Europe and the Americas—but they are still there and are powerful. It is impossible to erase the women’s presence because they are so strong. Keith L. Walker commented on this passage saying “it should be observed that the recognition of the interpretation of indigenous and neo-indigenous bloodiness of cultures—hybridity, metissage, or creoleness—is for Suzanne Césaire neither a new essentialism nor a flight from the fundamental fact and immanent lived condition of blackness in the Antilles and in the world.” We can read Césaire’s reference to women as the redefinition of the importance of women, of black women who have a rich heritage which is a mixture of different identities. Similar to Paulette Nardal, Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d’Erneville, Césaire’s life is centered toward the improvement of the lives of her people, the struggle for a voice, the practical use of negritude and feminism to help improve the lives of black women around the globe.

Discussing and reflecting on her mother’s feminism, Ina Césaire wrote a poem about her mother “Suzanne Cesaire, My Mother” in 2009. In this poem—translated by Keith L. Walker, Ina Césaire emphasizes the combination of the different layers of her mother’s life through her dedication to black women’s voice, to her country and to the black community worldwide. She remembers her mother as a teacher, a mother, an activist and a writer who put women at the center of her concerns. Ina Césaire writes “the

blue smoke from her banned English cigarette. At the time no other mother smoked and no other mother read Chekhov with her morning coffee...” Suzanne Césaire’s boldness and advocacy for the eradication of gender norms and her transcendence of borders is transparent with her choice to smoke “when no other mother smoked” in addition to her reading choices. With Ina Césaire’s description of her mother, it is apparent that Suzanne Césaire fully embraces her life choices to show other women that they can do so too. She was a role model to her children as she taught them to use their voice and make a positive impact in their lives. Ina Césaire says that her mother was nicknamed “the Black Panther⁵²” by her students and defines her mother by saying “my mother active feminist *avant la lettre*, alert to every stage of women’s liberation, “yours will be the generation of women with choices” she said...” Thus, Suzanne Césaire’s feminism is tied to her everyday action and vision of a better future for black women as they “will be the generation of women with choices.” She defines feminism as a cultural, social, and political behavior that will help women identify obstacles for liberation and gather the strength to fight it through their everyday actions.

When Ina Césaire says “my mother who believed more in struggles than in tears...with fragile health, but indefatigable tenacity...who was not able to grow old,” we can get her sense of strength and “tenacity” that goes against the patriarchal vision or definition of femininity. Suzanne Césaire’s approach to negritude feminism is also connected to the fight for freedom as Ina Césaire writes

My militant mother hungry for freedom
Sensitive to the sufferings of the oppressed
Unwilling to accept any injustices

⁵² The film *Black Panther* features strong female soldiers to retell the story of black women

Enamored of literature and passionate about history,
Making us be quiet when our father was working,
writing tirelessly, with her mysterious script,
on white sheets with the letterhead of the National Assembly.

It is important to highlight that Césaire was a “militant mother” devoted to women’s liberation and to the liberation of her people. There is a tension to be noted here as she was a “militant mother,” she played the role of the good wife taking care of the children so that Césaire could write. In order to be an activist, a writer and teacher, she had to combine her role of being a wife with all the other responsibilities of a woman. Thus, she uses all necessary tools to achieve that goals; those tools include negritude, feminism and surrealism. Being part of a group of bold scholars who want to challenge the system that put the Caribbean into a precarious place, Suzanne Césaire played a major role in the cultural journal *Les Tropiques*. She and her team wrote the opening announcement of *Tropiques* which declares in 1941

It is no longer time to be a parasite upon the world. It is a matter of saving it. It is time to gird one’s loins like a valiant man. Wherever we look the shadow is advancing. One after the other the hime-fires are going out. The circle of darkness is closing in, among the cries of men and the howling of wild beasts. Yet we are among those who say no to the darkness. We know that the salvation of the world depends upon us also. That the earth needs each and every of its sons. Even the humblest.

This group does not want to be “parasite” but active members of their community having a common goal of “saving” the world. The engagement of the group and their readiness to fight for consciousness is underlined with “say no to the darkness⁵³.” The darkness

⁵³ Given the historical moment (two years into WWII) it seems likely that “the darkness” refers even in part of the threat of globalized fascism and ethno-nationalism

being the inability to redefine themselves using the Caribbean context. They do not stop specifically in the Caribbean, they open up to the world, saving the “earth” from darkness. Their call for a collaboration is significant and powerful as they recognize that everyone has a role to play in this project. Césaire and her team felt the urge to participate in the improvement of the lives of the Antillean by promoting a “new consciousness.” As Kara M. Rabbit writes in the article “Suzanne Césaire’s Significance for the Forging of a New Caribbean Literature”

For the first time a collective Martinican writers viewed the island not as a far-flung bit of the French Empire, but as the living crossroads of diverse cultural currents flowing among the Americas, Europe and Africa, appropriating and redefining the routes of the slave trade (538).

As part of her activism through negritude feminism, Césaire is the one that volunteered to write a response letter about the indictment of *Tropiques* by the Vichy Regime, saying “expect from us neither a plea, nor vain recriminations, not even debate. We do not speak the same language⁵⁴.” Volunteering to write a message as profound and provocative as this demonstrates Césaire’s engagement and commitment to respond to racism. It emanates from the fact that Suzanne Césaire is so attentive to the camouflage that is being played in Martinique vis-à-vis the French Empire. Revealing the camouflage which means blindness, or the refusal to see is at the heart of her concern as she strives to make Antilleans “wake up” or try a different approach in their way of viewing France. In this call, she re-centers the role of black women as essential participants to fight inequality and oppression.

⁵⁴ You can find the letter from Admiral Roberts and the complete answer from Césaire and the editorial team in *The Great Camouflage*.

Suzanne Césaire, similar to Paulette Nardal, Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville has a goal of reclaiming the voice of black women and challenging eurocentrism and any other forms of oppression used against the black community. Similar to these women, she focuses on teaching, writing and her everyday actions to give back to her community and to help build a better future for them. She is part of the negritude movement as she participated in building the environment in which the movement was created and carried the movement's goal of liberation to her homeland, Martinique. Césaire's contribution to the movement and to the definition of the Caribbean can be traced in her essays in *Les Tropiques*, in her teaching experiences and her political agenda. Her specific use of negritude, surrealism and feminism to advance the cause of Caribbean women is powerful and makes her contribution to the negritude movement singular and powerful.

Conclusion

Suzanne Césaire was active both when she was a student in France and when she came back to Martinique to start the journal *Les Tropiques* (1941-1945). She publishes essays in the journals to develop her advocacy for black women's experiences and to propose solutions that Martinican people were facing in the 1940s. She actively engaged with issues about gender inequality, racism and eurocentrism through her negritude feminism. Her unique approach comes from the fact that she adds surrealism to negritude feminism. In her essays, Césaire calls for unity and solidarity and a redefinition of the identity of Caribbean people as she escorts them to recognize their multiple heritages. As we have discussed in this chapter, Césaire's woman-centered project is developed around

her teaching, activism and writing. Compared to Paulette Nardal who advocates for Catholicism, Césaire advocates for a use of surrealism to fit the Caribbean realities within her negritude feminism. Although she was involved with the political and historical environment of Martinique through the journal, it seems like she focuses more on the social and cultural sphere for women's voices and dignity. In the next two chapters, we are moving from Martinique to Senegal to highlight the negritude feminisms of Annette Mbaye d'Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall.

CHAPTER IV

ANNETTE MBAYE D'ERNEVILLE : THE CRITICAL THINKER-DOER

Annette Mbaye d'Erneville (1926-) is a journalist, writer, and activist dedicated to women's issues in Senegal and around the world. She is the first female journalist from Senegal and is famous for her activism through journalism and writing. She was trained as a teacher in Senegal, then travelled to France for her studies in journalism in 1947. Mbaye d'Erneville's dedication to the promotion of the African woman and her determination to show that women have so much to offer to the world, made her come back to Senegal after her studies in France. Similar to Paulette Nardal, Suzanne Césaire and Aminata Sow Fall, Mbaye d'Erneville believes in her duty to make a difference in the lives of women. She engages in that mission through her journalism and writing children's books to fight against eurocentrism and imperialism. She is a close friend to Leopold Sedar Senghor and strongly supports the negritude movement as she mentions in the film "Mère-Bi, la mère" directed by her son Ousmane William Mbaye.⁵⁵ She demonstrates her negritude feminism through her every day activism with writing and journalism. She has travelled all over the country and around the world and has been involved in the creation of many organizations and associations for the empowerment of women in Senegal and West Africa.

Annette Mbaye d'Erneville was born in Sokone, a rural village in Senegal. She grew up in a traditional village life with her mother, Marie Turpin, who was Serer and her

⁵⁵ Most of the quotations from Annette Mbaye d'Erneville in this chapter are taken from the film. I discuss the film more in detail later in this chapter.

father, who had a French heritage, and was known as “Papa-Hyppo”.⁵⁶ Mbaye d’Erneville describes her mother as being welcoming to her community, strict in her beliefs on African values of sharing, strong human relations, the sense of community and some gender inequalities which she made sure her children understood and fought against. Marie Turpin also had a strong personality. Thus, Mbaye d’Erneville grew up conscious about her African heritage and the importance of African cultures which is reflected in her negritude feminism. After her mother passed away, she moved to Saint Louis to live with her twin Aunts. In Saint Louis, she, at the age of 9 started learning to read and write with the supervision of her twin aunts⁵⁷. She later on attended École des Jeunes Filles de Rufisque (EJR), a girls’ school created in 1938,⁵⁸ where she often skipped grades with the recommendation of the colonial administration due to the fact she was advanced compared to her classmates. The Director of EJR, Madame Germaine Le Goff, influenced Mbaye d’Erneville’s interests in avant-garde discourses. Mbaye d’Erneville calls her “ma mère spirituelle et formatrice” [my spiritual mother and trainer].

Mbaye d’Erneville’s son, Ousmane William Mbaye, directed a documentary film “Mère-bi, la-mère⁵⁹” in 2008. The film is about his mother’s life and experiences both in France and Senegal. In the description of the film, Ousmane William Mbaye says:

⁵⁶ Mbaye d’Erneville’s father was a well-known hunter in Sokone and his French great-grand-father settled in Sokone.

⁵⁷ In Sokone, Mbaye d’Erneville did not attend school. She started at the age of 9 when she moved to Saint Louis to live with her aunts. In fact, Saint Louis was the capital of AOF (French West Africa), therefore the establishment of French schools was strong

⁵⁸ Ecole William Ponty, a boys’ school was created first and then the girls’ school EJR

⁵⁹ Interviewed by her son, Mbaye d’Erneville discusses some of her life choices, her opinions about important topics and other personal experiences. Some of the quotes I use in this chapter are taken from the film.

Annette Mbaye d'Erneville s'est très tôt sentie concernée par le développement de son pays. Militante de la première heure pour la cause de l'émancipation des femmes, elle est à la fois une pionnière et une anti-conformiste.

[Annette Mbaye d'Erneville has long been engaged in the development of Senegal. She is an activist concerned with women empowerment and is both a pioneer and an anti-conformist.]

Indeed, the film highlights Mbaye d'Erneville's experience in Paris as a journalist and activist and her active years in Radio Senegal, the creation of many organizations for and about women under her direction, the foundation of the Musée de la Femme Henriette Bathily, the first museum in Senegal about African women established in 1994. Her contribution to the liberation of black women continues with the creation of the Fédération des Associations Féminines du Senegal in 1977, and her role as a journalist and teacher in promoting liberation and awareness about gender issues are also highlighted in the film. Mbaye d'Erneville advocates for the celebration of African cultures, the redefinition of black identity, and the promotion of global blackness through her negritude feminism.

Mbaye d'Erneville is mostly cited as a journalist, but she is also a creative writer. She writes poems and children's books which not only reveal her interest in cultural awareness but also her commitment to negritude feminism. I also focus on her writing—her poetry and children's book—to highlight her determination and engagement in redefining African culture, celebrating blackness and promoting her feminist commitments. Mbaye d'Erneville has published stories about African children, family dynamics and the importance of black values. These stories include “La Ballade en mer du lièvre et de ses compagnes,” “Le Noël du Vieux Chasseur,” “Ali et les Beignets,” “La

chanson de Lat Dior,” La Bague de Cuivre et d’Argent,” “Kassak⁶⁰,” and “Chanson pour Leyti.” I argue that her work aligns with Sow Fall, Nardal and Césaire with the concern around women’s issues even though scholars have not connected her work with theirs or with other black women writers. I demonstrate that similar to Nardal, Sow Fall, and Césaire, she travelled to Paris to study and decided to come back to her home country to advocate for women. Mbaye d’Erneville is mostly cited as a feminist. I argue that similar to all the other women I study in the dissertation, she goes through a similar journey of redefining feminism and negritude through negritude feminism by offering a response to the masculinist approach of negritude.

This chapter discusses Mbaye d’Erneville’s negritude feminism through her writing and personal experiences in France and in Senegal. Through a close reading of her children’s books, and other projects including *Femmes Africaines* and the magazine *AWA*, I reveal that she is a revolutionary negritude writer who challenges eurocentrism and colonization with her woman-centered project. This chapter discusses 1) her role and contribution as a francophone African woman concerned with gender issues and 2) her experience as a journalist and teacher through negritude feminism. I examine her negritude feminism through the liberation of African women and the contribution of black women in the development of the world.

Mbaye d’Erneville’s Negritude Feminism through Solidarity Building

⁶⁰ Kassak is a Wolof word and is the celebration of the circumcision ceremony for the passage from boyhood to manhood.

As I mentioned in the introduction, negritude started as a movement that brought together the black community in France to fight against segregation and redefine black identities; a redefinition that is more positive. Negritude was a term used by black francophone students to celebrate their cultural heritages, to redefine blackness and to respond to colonization. Indeed, as a young and brilliant student in EJR, Mbaye d'Erneville received a scholarship to travel to Paris for her studies in journalism in 1947. Black students in France were connected and built a strong bond in the metropolis as Mbaye d'Erneville recalls in the film "Mère-Bi, la Mère," "C'était un peu l'Afrique en France" [It was like Africa in France]. As I mentioned previously, many associations, journals, salons were created by black students from Africa and the Caribbean to stay connected to one another and build the future of their countries. Those associations included La Fédération des Étudiants d'Afrique Noir, l'Association des Étudiants Martiniquais which made Paris, as Mbaye d'Erneville recalls, a place of exchange between black students from the diaspora. She was part of that community of some revolutionary students such as Cheikh Anta Diop, Mamadou Dia and some more moderate students such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, who reclaimed their African heritage. According to her, as she states it in the film "Mère-Bi, la Mère," she is more aligned with the moderate students.

Building a sense of community required meeting regularly in a safe space to discuss politics, economy, culture, and social life. Not many places in France offered a welcoming space for black students. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the Nardal sisters, for example, created the Clamart Salon because they were not welcome in the salons created

by white women⁶¹. In the same vein, Mbaye d'Erneville's friend Simone Signoret and her husband Yves Montant turned their house into a salon called "La Roulotte" to host black students' meetings, get-together events and other occasions. Thus, similar to the Nardal sisters' Clamart Salon, La Roulotte was also a gathering place; a place for connection and unity for black students in France. Mbaye d'Erneville also worked at the Ministère de la France d'Outres Mer [Ministry of France Overseas], in charge of helping new black students transition smoothly in France. Married with two children, she was working to make ends meet as her husband was still a student. As Mbaye d'Erneville says in the film *Mère-Bi*, some of her activities included broadcasting shows in Wolof and French to be played in francophone Africa. She recalls writing the script and presenting it in Wolof as a way to reach out to Senegalese women.

According to Mbaye d'Erneville, her role as the leader of her family, the leader of many associations contributed to her "sévérité" [strictness] and strong character which is not expected from a woman due to the patriarchal system in Senegal. Instead, the patriarchal society in which she lived both in Senegal and France expected her and all women to be soft, submissive, passive and weak. Transferring her beliefs in building a strong community in France, upon her return to Senegal in 1962, she turned her house into a small "La Roulotte," to a small Clamart Salon. The house was a welcoming place for the bohemians, the artists, and people who needed a place to perform their creativity, arts, and talents. The artists, filmmakers, and singers who used to go to her house call the place "Club Africa" or "grand-place" [the gathering place] referring to the welcoming

⁶¹ For more information about the salon, refer to chapter 1

space Mbaye d'Erneville created in her house. In the film "Mère-bi, la Mère" one of her friends said, Mbaye d'Erneville "...est la mère de tout le monde" [she was everybody's mother] just like her mother was in Sokone. She also hosted events like "Les Nuits d'Afrique" [Africa nights] during which Leopold Sedar Senghor, Lamine Gueye, Mamadou Dia among other Senegalese elites and intellectuals would attend.

Mbaye d'Erneville has shared her strong connection with the negritude movement in the film "Mère-Bi, la-Mère." She says that she identifies with the movement's goal of celebration of African cultures. However, in her writings, she responds to the masculinist dimension of the movement. In fact, her relationship to Senghor, one of the most cited founders of the negritude movement, is very strong, as they share the belief in culture, in the importance of reclaiming one's history and identity. Mbaye d'Erneville was also able to go to Paris in 1947 with the help of Leopold Sedar Senghor who sponsored her as she was few days under age to travel by herself. In fact, Senghor's negritude celebrates the uniqueness and authenticity of the African cultures and he promotes the idea of universality and symbiosis with other cultures through the Civilization of the Universal. Adding to Senghor's approach to culture as a bridge between people, Mbaye d'Erneville also allows herself to embrace her double heritage; France and Senegal. In the film, she says

I like the Senegalese singers, Youssou Ndour and Samba Diabarré Samb, but I also like Yves Montant, a French musician.

Mbaye d'Erneville's negritude is similar to Senghor's as she defines herself as a "symbiose" [symbiosis]. In the film and during my interview with her, she discusses how

she supports the negritude movement and she has been influenced by the main goal of the movement which was a more positive redefinition of black identity and black history. What she adds to negritude is her woman-centered project, her engagements with the reality of black women, her negritude feminism.

Negritude Feminism through *Femmes Africaines*

Annette Mbaye d'Erneville has been given many titles including “a feminist.” Throughout her writing, teaching and journalism, she advocates for women and believes that they are active participants in the community. Similar to Paulette Nardal, Suzanne Césaire, and Aminata Sow Fall, Mbaye d'Erneville's feminism is based on the depiction of the everyday experiences of black women. She does not support the idea that all women have the same experience instead, Mbaye d'Erneville's feminism is attuned to the specific experiences of African women. In her activities and engagements, she powerfully demonstrates that African women are witness to Africa's history and should contribute their opinions on the economy, culture, social life and political sphere. Both in France and Senegal, she created many radio shows for and about women including “cinema d'aujourd'hui,” [...], “Rencontre Avec...” [...], Jigeen ñi deglu leen” [Women, listen!] to impact the masse, particularly women. She is aware that creating spaces for women to develop their potential is necessary and that led her to the project *Femmes Africaines* in 1981. This book is a collection of interviews⁶² she conducted with nine African women writers, leaders, artists and activists. It is part of a broader project,

⁶² The interviews were conducted in French

Femmes et Société [Women and Society] published by Éditions Martinsart, composed of six volumes.

According to Annette Mbaye d'Erneville, there is an urgent need to

“donner la parole à des femmes témoins de leurs temps qui, tout en se présentant et à travers leur propre vie, font percevoir une certaine Afrique et, mieux qu'un manifeste, éveillent l'intérêt pour cette évolution du rôle de la femme qui est le thème principal de cette série”

[give voice to women who bear witness for their time, and who with their own way of living, reflect a specific image of Africa and, better than a manifesto, reclaim the necessity of that evolution of the role of the woman which is the principal theme of this series].⁶³

Mbaye d'Erneville's feminism is apparent in her approach to « donner la parole à des femmes » [give voice to women], as she believes that women have a voice that needs to be heard in society. *Femmes Africaines* make these women's voices more vivid and independent with a focus on lived experiences as women, as African women. According to the editor, Annette Mbaye d'Erneville « est une militante féministe » [is a militant feminist] and « une des pionnières de la promotion de la femme » [one of the pioneers of the promotion of women]. The interview themes include « Femmes et—Littérature, Histoire, Arts, Féminisme, Action, et Travail » [Women and –Literature, History, Arts, Feminism, Action and Work], and the book features beautiful pictures of these nine women at work, with their families, on the streets and in their activist jobs.

The women selected in *Femmes Africaines* include Aminata Sow Fall, and they are given the opportunity to voice their opinion, to trace their experience to teach other women and

⁶³ *Femmes Africaines*, Avant-Propos

men about the importance of their contribution to post-independent Africa⁶⁴. According to Mbaye d'Erneville

Elles sont neuf ! Elles auraient pu être vingt, cent, des milliers d'Africaines à porter témoignages de cette série de volumes consacrée à « Femmes et Société ». Elles sont nombreuses, à travers le Continent, toutes celles qui ont participé, depuis deux siècles, au maintien de nos valeurs traditionnelles tout en permettant aux « souffles nouveaux » de transformer, sans la détruire, l'Afrique de nos pères »

[They are nine ! They could have been twenty, hundreds, thousands of African women that could have been interviewed for this volume on « Women and Society ». They are many, throughout the Continent, all of them who participated, for two centuries, to the promotion/conservation of our traditional values while allowing the « new winds » of modernity to transform, without destroying, the Africa of our fathers].

These interviews underscore and examine, « les problèmes essentiels de la femme africaine, dans un monde en permanente mutation » [the essential problems of the african woman, in a world of constant change]. Covering themes from the obstacles and stereotypes that African women face when trying to get involved in politics, writing, arts, and work to their power to overcome those obstacles and their fight for a generation that allows women to be more active, Mbaye d'Erneville reclaims the active participation of women in the society. In other words, she supports that there must be no limit for women who wants to get away from the established gender rules of the society. We can say that Mbaye d'Erneville's understanding of feminism is not putting the man against the woman but correcting gender norms that usually put many obstacles for women. Her sense of

⁶⁴ Mbaye d'Erneville shares her interests in post-independent Africa with Aminata Sow Fall.

feminism is influenced by her mother, her aunts and Madame Germaine Le Goff⁶⁵. She calls them “mes mères educatrice” [my teaching mothers].

Mbaye d’Erneville’s strong personality and negritude feminism has been influenced and built around strong women. Recalling her relationship with Madame Le Goff, a feminist, activist and director of the EJR, in the film “Mère-bi, la Mère,” Mbaye d’Erneville remembers her as a strong woman who influenced her in many ways including her activism, feminism and negritude. It is important to note an inherent irony of Mbaye d’Erneville learning about her African identity through a white French feminist woman⁶⁶. According to Mbaye d’Erneville, Madame Le Goff used to tell her students “faut pas accepter d’être une femme qui tend la main” [You should not accept to be a woman that depends on men]. She also reflects on her mission in Senegal as the Director of the only girls’ school and says

“Je suis fière de mes filles, de mes élèves jeunes filles. Mon but n’était pas de faire des femmes savantes mais des femmes plus évoluées qui eduqueraient la masse et par leur rayonnement personel et par l’école. Mission accomplie.”

[I am proud of my girls, of my young girl students. My aim was not to train intellectual women but modern women who would raise the people’s awareness by their personal talents and with the school. Mission accomplished].

Remembering Madame Le Goff and her role in the school, Mbaye d’Erneville reveals in the film Mère-Bi, that Madame Le Goff was treated both by France and by people in Senegal as an “effronté”⁶⁷ because the French could not understand why she would

⁶⁵ Director of the EJF, Le Goff was sent to Africa to educate the girls at EJF and instead of reinforcing the idea that Africans are “uncivilized,” she helped the girls in her school to celebrate their black heritage, to fight gender norms and racism.

⁶⁶ I will discuss this more in the conclusion/epilogue.

⁶⁷ A bold, an outcast

accept to go to Africa to educate these people. On the other hand, because the idea of assimilation into French culture was so important for some people in Senegal, especially those who were among the intellectual elites, the latter were not happy about Le Goff's approach. Who was she to tell them to go back to their culture? This signals the complex relationship that some people in the intellectual milieu had with France because France colonized their country and yet they love France and want to be French⁶⁸.

Remembering her experience in EJF, Mbaye d'Erneville says that they were so happy to be trained by Madame Le Goff and to proudly learn French songs, about French realities; like French children while embracing their African heritage. During the celebration of the centenary anniversary of the creation of Ecole William Ponty⁶⁹, the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noir created 'un Livre Album' [A Picture Book] with a section dedicated to the celebration the creation of Ecole des Jeunes Filles de Rufisque (EJF). The book was composed of pictures and short essays and poems written by former students from EJF including Annette Mbaye d'Erneville. In a poem dedicated to Madame Le Goff, Mbaye d'Erneville writes

"A Germaine Le Goff
Tu vois le soleil est au Zénith!
Loin est le temps des jeux et des chants.
Le moment de se faire face.
La vérité toute nue doit être notre arbitre.
Mon Cœur se souvient.
Tu m'as appris l'Afrique.
Tu m'as appris moi-même".

[To Germaine Le Goff

⁶⁸ The example of Leopold Sedar Senghor is significant to highlight as he was using the French language even after independence.

⁶⁹ École William Ponty was a boy's school created in 1931 before the creation of the girls' school in Rufisque

Can you see the sun is shining!
Far away are the times of games and songs.
The moment to face each other.
The naked truth should be our referee.
My heart remembers.
You taught me Africa.
You taught me myself].

The tone of this passage underlines some bitterness and nostalgia because of the fact that Mbaye d'Erneville is now remembering her childhood and teenage years. This feeling of nostalgia "far away are the times of games and songs," is mixed with a pleasant feeling of pride about the support she received from Madame Le Goff. With her "heart" remembering, she underscores the fact that no one can take that feeling away from her. The post-colonial landscape has created a complicated relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. This is visible in the way in which Mbaye d'Erneville credits a French woman, a white woman with teaching her Africa, herself, and her identity⁷⁰. It is compelling that Mbaye d'Erneville has been surrounded by strong women who taught her self-determination, the sense of independence and reinforced her beliefs in community life, in the African culture, in a new way of defining feminism and negritude.

Negritude Feminism in the Magazine *AWA*

Unlike the many other ethnic groups in Senegal, the Serrer *Noons* have kept most of their cultural and traditional heritage. Finding a practical use of feminism that celebrates the negritude of black women was Annette Mbaye d'Erneville's main goal

⁷⁰ More discussion about Mbaye d'Erneville's experience/relationship with France within her writing in the Epilogue of this dissertation.

through her journalism, writing and activism. Indeed, her advocacy for black women became more apparent when she launched with some friends the magazine “Femmes de Soleils” which was renamed *Awa: la revue de la femme noire* (1964-1973). AWA was a francophone magazine for African women and is now digitized by the Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noir (IFAN)⁷¹. The magazine was created by a network of African women determined to highlight the different spheres where women evolve and the struggles they face due to gender inequalities. This below statement is from the editorial page of the first issue of AWA in 1964 under Annette Mbaye d’Erneville’s direction as the Editor-In-Chief.

“AWA” se propose d’être simplement une raison de nous rencontrer, de nous renouveler pour mieux nous connaître, nous apprécier, nous femmes d’Afrique, femmes du monde entier”

[“AWA” wants to simply be a reason for us to meet, to renew ourselves to know each other better, to appreciate one another, us African women, women from all over the world]⁷².

As the Editor-in-Chief overseeing everything that will be published in the magazine, Mbaye d’Erneville’s advocacy for the improvement of black women’s lives is powerful. The magazine highlights black women’s everyday experiences from pictures, to cooking recipes, to their responsibility for their children, and their political engagement. Some of headlines included “la maison” [the house], “la mode” [fashion], “hygiène et alimentation” [cleanliness and food], and “Ndeye Tall, Chef d’Entreprise” [Ndeye Tall, CEO]. Her vision for the magazine is to reach women and celebrate their

⁷¹ The digitization of AWA was achieved through the Global Challenges project by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) with the valuable contribution and work of Dr. Ruth Bush (University of Bristol UK) and Dr. Claire Ducournau from Université Paul-Valérie Montpellier). Dr. Bush published *‘Small Readers’ and big magazines: reading publics in Bingo, La Vie Africaine and Awa: la revue de la femme noire* (March 2018).

⁷² January 1964 editorial page. The magazine was published monthly

achievements as well as their contributions in the society which the masculinist environment tended to overlook. Her team in the magazine also included men which reflects her vision about bringing together all the voice in the society to address women's issues. Mbaye d'Erneville's commitment to highlight the experiences of black women, she wrote the introductions to each issue highlighting the mission of the magazine. According to Mbaye d'Erneville, it is crucial for black women to get their voices heard and share their experiences in order to fully express their negritude feminism; in this way, their identity and agency will become stronger and more impactful in their societies. However, as I discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, feminism needs to be crafted to meet the needs of black women. Similar to Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire, Mbaye d'Erneville advocates for a feminism that is more useful for black women, a negritude feminism.

In its editorial page in the first issue, Mbaye d'Erneville adds

“il ne s'agit pas —comme d'aucun pourraient le penser—de forger une arme pour un féminisme insensé, mais plutôt de ciseler un instrument qui puisse mettre en valeur nos possibilités, notre féminité.

[It does not mean—as many could be thinking—to create a weapon for a useless feminism, but rather to create a tool that can promote our talents/possibilities, our femininity.

So, this magazine, similar to Nardal's *La Femme dans la Cité*, wants to represent women, black women through a call for solidarity among women. However, it is important for the magazine to clarify its purpose. Yes, it is for women's issues and their everyday activities and experiences, but it is not for “a useless feminism.” I argue that Mbaye d'Erneville's vision is for negritude feminism that advocates for the improvement of the lives of women and the recognition of their contribution in society and a celebration of their

African identity. According to Mbaye d'Erneville, it is important for women to keep their femininity. This idea of the importance to keep their womanhood, femininity is also addressed by Paulette Nardal and Aminata Sow Fall. Similar to Sow Fall, Césaire and Nardal, the negritude feminism Mbaye d'Erneville advocates for is a feminism that is not “insensé” [useless] but a feminism that highlights the problems that women face and finds solutions for those problems within the specific context of blackness and/or African society. So, AWA should be the instrument/tool that will help discuss gender issues that will help bring black women together. In the same first issue, she further says

“nous dirons a toutes nos soeurs d’Afrique et du monde: voici notre fille! Qu’en ferons-nous? “AWA” deviendra ce que toutes nous deciderons qu’elle soit”
[we will say to our sisters from Africa and the world: this is our daughter! What will we do with it? “AWA” will become what we all want it to be”

The use of the pronoun “we” in this statement underscores Mbaye d'Erneville’s invitation to all black women to get involved in the development of the magazine. She advocates for black women’s agency and uses the magazine to highlight their achievements, their everyday experiences and raise their voices in every aspect of their communities socio-cultural, political and economic future. Many articles, songs, poems and other aspects of black women’s life were published between 1964 and 1973 showing women as mothers, sisters, wives, workers, and activists. In other words, the lived experience of black women is highlighted in the magazine. The beautiful pictures of black women, pictures of landscape where black women evolve are the first thing that attract the readers. Those images go along with beautiful and dense texts that reflect the lives and experiences of women and Africans under the supervision of Annette Mbaye d'Erneville. Some of the

headlines include “Oumar et la calebasse” [Oumar and the calabash], “Petits Problemes Scolaires” [Small Issues with Schools], “Les Femmes et l’esperience de la journée continue au Sénégal” [Women and their experiences with all-day school in Senegal].

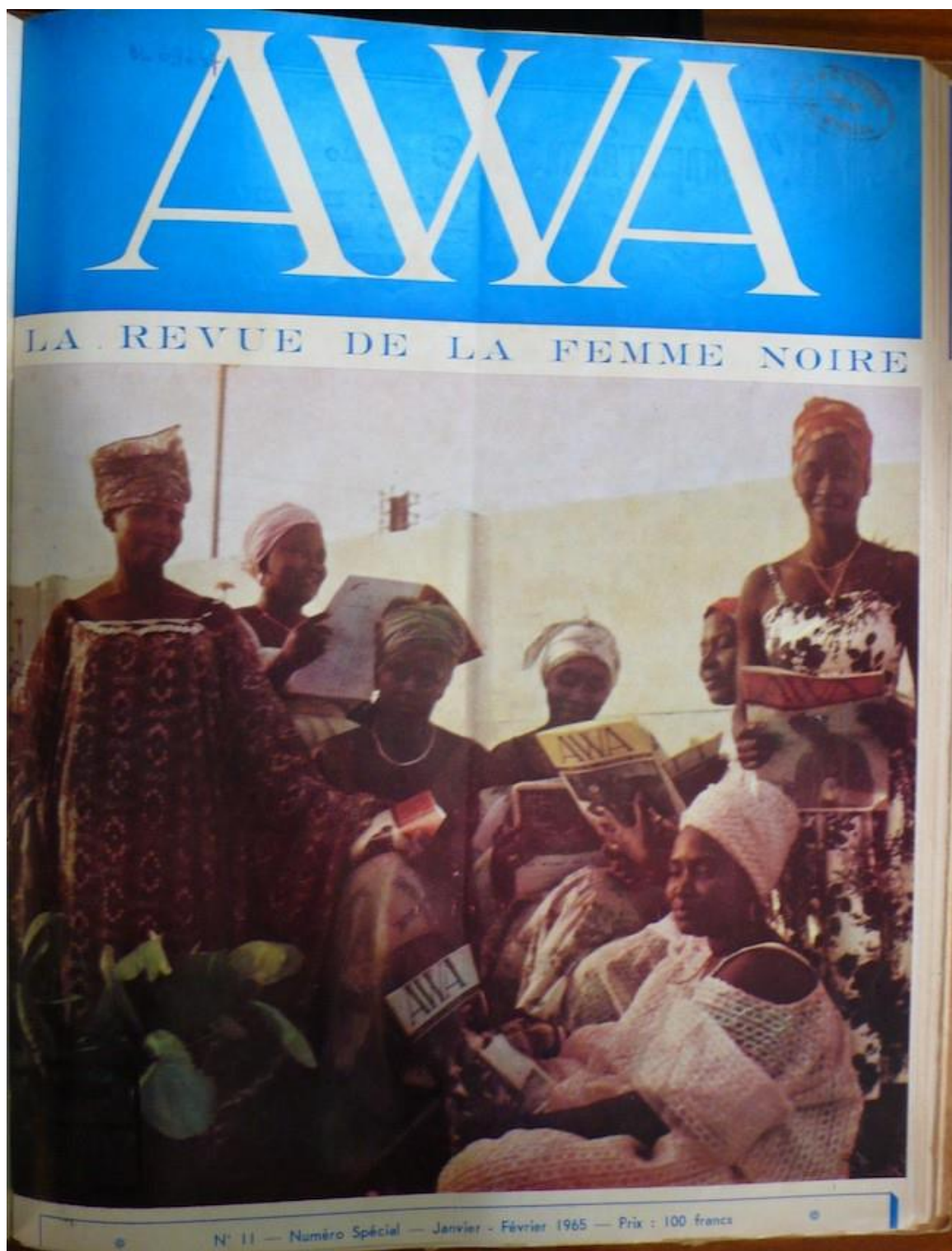


Figure 1. AWA: Le Magazine de la Femme Noire

When it started in 1964, the magazine used to publish editions every month and in 1965 the publications were reduced to 4, then 1966 they only issued 1 edition. After that there was a silence/pause/gap until 1973 with 2 editions and then 2 editions in 1973. *Awa* was not just a reflection on the lives and experiences of African women, but it was also a platform for a call for solidarity for black women around the world. The name *Awa* derives from the mother Eve, Awa in Wolof. Under “la lettre du mois” of *Awa* no 8 of October 1964, the letter titled “Awa : est-elle nationaliste ?” says « Awa est un journal féminin qui s’adresse à toutes les femmes noires, de tous les milieux (en fait actuellement son publique doit être très intellectuel). [Awa is a feminist magazine dedicated to all black women, from all classes (indeed, its audience today must be very well educated)]. This statement reinforces the commitment of the magazine to represent the everyday life and experience of black women, not just African women. We can see that the magazine deftly reorients the negative perception usually associated with feminism by claiming to be feminist. This move underlines the fact that Mbaye d’Erneville and her team of men and women believe in the complementarity of men and women of the black community.

Negritude feminism: a challenge to Eurocentrism and masculinity

Despite the historic resistance to invaders In her children’s stories, Mbaye d’Erneville focuses on the importance of community life and solidarity, challenges the form of feminism that does not fit African experiences, questions and redefines the established norms of masculinity and femininity through her negritude feminism. She targets children in these stories and teaches them about the importance of African values

through captivating narratives and images. Aware of children's innocence and how they tend to copy what they learn, she wants to offer a message that invites them to celebrate their identities and embrace their heritages. By doing so, she challenges the Eurocentric children's literature canon that take Europe as the reference for children's education and training. In fact, Senegalese or African children are also exposed to television programs and the colonial school curriculum that focus on France. Thus, through these children's stories, Mbaye d'Erneville transforms the orality of these stories—which was the commonly known form of transmitting knowledge to a written form; a written form that combines words with images that the children are familiar with. This move from orality to scribality is important because it fits the modern and changing environment of post-independence years. Because the stories are written in French, it also can be taught at school. Mbaye d'Erneville's writing choices with cover images and images within the text, has a goal of challenging and questioning eurocentrism.

Challenging eurocentrism through imagery, language, and themes, is the first step to celebrate her negritude and is an act of activism. The children's stories "La Bague de Cuivre et d'Argent" and "Le Noël du Vieux Chasseur,"⁷³ were published in 1983 with the text by Annette Mbaye d'Erneville and the illustrations by Josué Daïkou. These two stories were published at the same time by Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines⁷⁴ created in

⁷³ Out of the children's stories written by Annette Mbaye d'Erneville, I am only able to get the copies of these two stories from Mount Holyoke College library. I could not find any copy from Senegal. This is an issue of availability and accessibility that many African stories suffer from. My dissertation's goal is to focus on Mbaye d'Erneville's published work and hopefully get some of those stories republished and available within the Senegalese educational system.

⁷⁴ The Nouvelles Editions Africaines (NEA) existed between 1972 until 1988 when the collaboration ended. Mbaye d'Erneville's choice of getting published by NEA demonstrates her engagement with challenging Eurocentrism.

1972 as a collaboration of the Senegalese Government with the government of Togo and Cote d'Ivoire. This edition existed in order to promote and advocate for stories written by Africans for the black community. Annette Mbaye d'Erneville supports the negritude movement as she mentions in the film "Mère-bi, la Mère"⁷⁵. She wrote these children's narratives that could be integrated into the Senegalese educational system as they capture important parts of the experiences of the black community. Both stories are written in verse rather than prose and this is because of the importance of poetry in the negritude movement and it also pinpoints that verse aurally attractive to children.

The negritude movement reclaims the spiritual aspect of African cultures and Mbaye d'Erneville uses it in the children's stories. She believes that life is a cycle and that death is not final these spiritual beliefs make everything in the world connect.

"La Bague de Cuivre et d'Argent"

"La Bague de Cuivre et d'Argent" starts with a fascinating cover page where we can see the portrait of a little girl, an African little girl with her kinky hair, earrings, necklace and outfit that look exactly like many African girls' appearance. It is not about a white girl with blond hair and blue eyes which is typically what the European publishers would expect. So, with this choice, Mbaye d'Erneville breaks the established norms that Senegalese audiences have been made to expect through their exposure to European representations of Africans. Next to her is the image of an elderly African man which hints to a family life with a woman in the back ground.

⁷⁵ She also said during my interview with her that she considers herself as a negritude writer, she just add the feminist component to it to make it more complete for black women.

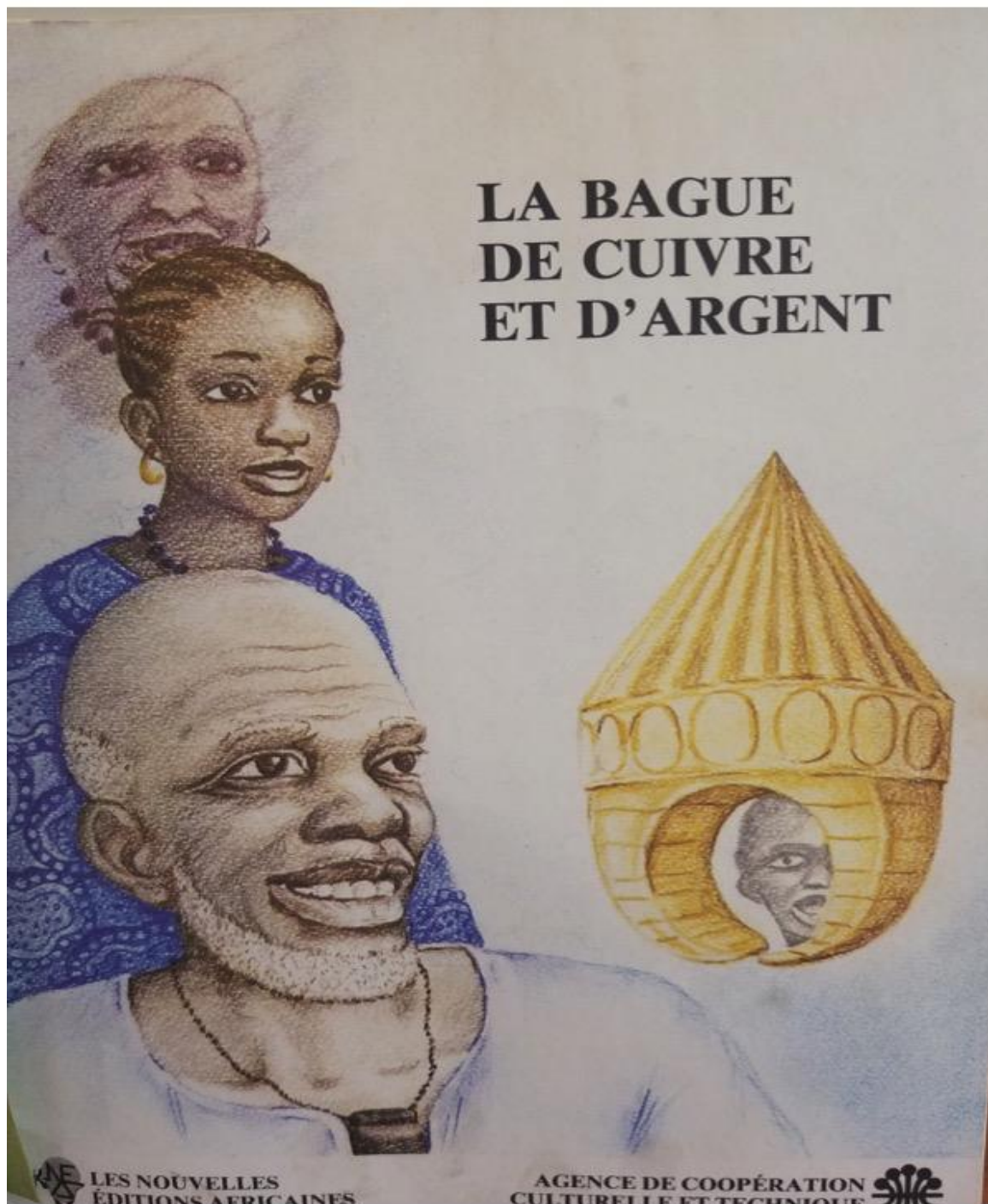


Figure 2. La Bague de Cuivre et d'Argent

With this choice of images and representation, Mbaye d'Erneville and Daïkou challenge that idea of standard beauty usually attached to Europe and whiteness. This is a powerful move, as it offers the children something they can identify with. Indeed, these children's stories could have been useful to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie⁷⁶ when she was young. She said that growing up and in her early years of writing in Nigeria, she would write about the snow, cold weather, changing season and any of these climate features do not exist in Nigeria. The weather in Nigeria is almost always the same throughout the year, a rainy and a dry season. However, the literature produced at that time—mainly from Britain--and that was available to her was all about Europeans and their beautiful mountains, white skin color and the changing weather. She started discovering African literature with the writings of Camara Laye, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka who helped her realized that African literature does exist and should cover African realities. Mbaye d'Erneville's writing offers the children, African children a visual reference to their heritage.

Mbaye d'Erneville's challenge to Eurocentrism is also manifested in her use of non-translation of certain words and concepts in her work. Similar to Aminata Sow Fall, Mbaye d'Erneville does not conform to the writing rules--including having European names, experiences and descriptions that do not apply in Africa--established by the European audience and European publishers. The writing style she creates, which is the expression of her identity is evidence of her negritude. In these stories, Mbaye d'Erneville chooses African names, characters, images and places. In "La Bague de

⁷⁶ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story"

Cuivre et d'Argent," the opening passage, Mbaye d'Erneville informs the reader that Père has lost his wife and he is determined to find his "navétane⁷⁷" who stole the box of jewelry that belonged to his late wife. When Mbaye d'Erneville uses the Wolof word "Navetane" without providing a translation for the reader, she invites the readers into the Senegalese culture and forces them to do some research to understand the meaning of the word. Although the story is written in French, she deliberately incorporates some Wolof words to reclaim her control of the story and of the language she wants to use in the story.

Similar to *Sow Fall*, Mbaye d'Erneville believes that the Wolof language deserves a space in literary discourses. In the film "Mère-Bi," she says "le Wolof est une langue très importante pour moi, ça fait partie de mon identité" [Wolof is very important for me, it is part of my identity]. Mbaye d'Erneville's use of the words Père or Pa demonstrates the way in which some French words get blended into the Wolof language. Père being a French word meaning, "Father" and Pa which is a Wolof word meaning "Father" as well—but it is a short cut to the French word "Papa." Later on, in the story, Rouguyatou uses the Wolof word Baye instead of Père, to refer to her father to highlight the importance of community as this man could be any body's father. The term Baye also underlines some affection that he gets from the community where he is considered as the father of everybody. The terms Baye or Pa have exactly the same resonances (in terms of signaling community relationships) no matter which version is used. That choice

⁷⁷ There is something to be said about Mbaye d'erneville's choice of the "navetane" as the robbers because the people who work as navetane are usually from rural places in Senegal or other parts of West Africa. They help farmers during the rainy season and stay in their houses and get paid after the harvest with fruits and vegetables. How is Mbaye d'Erneville influenced by her class with this choice?

underscores the attempt to bring it back to the Wolof language. We can say that Mbaye d'Erneville does not believe in "the imperialism of languages"⁷⁸; she uses the French language as a tool and nothing else. So Mbaye d'Erneville aligns more with Achebe's approach to using European languages as a tool to tell their stories.

The story, "La Bague de Cuivre et d'Argent" starts with a summary of the enigma of what could have happened to Père, the main character who is so dedicated to honor his late wife's wish. This opening already makes the reader wonder what happened to Père when he went after the robber who stole his wife's jewelry box. She says:

C'est par un après-midi d'hivernage,
un après-midi tout gris, triste, que le
Père s'en est allé laissant Rouguyatou
seule avec les petits. Est-il mort en che-
min? Est-il demeuré au Pays Étran-
ger? Personne n'a plus rien su de lui
depuis ce jour où il quitta la maison à
la poursuite de son "navetane"
qui lui avait dérobé la boîte à bijoux de
sa défunte femme.

[It was a rainy season afternoon,
a grey and sad afternoon, that
Pere left leaving Rouguyatou
alone with the children. Was he dead on the way?
Did he stay somewhere else? Nobody
had heard anything about him
since the day he left home
running after his "Navetane"
who robbed the box of jewelry
that belonged to his late wife.]

⁷⁸ Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses imperialism of languages to describe the fact that European languages have been given a higher ranking compared to African languages. In the debate about what language African writers should write in, Ngugi wa Thiong'o believes that the African writer should write in their native language first and then they can translate it in other languages. Whereas some writers including Chinua Achebe says that European languages should be used as a tool because what is important is to include their native languages within their story in a way that dismantle the original language.

Père's determination to find the jewelry box underscores his love, faithfulness and respect of his late wife, Rouguyatou's mother. Pere lives with his young and courageous daughter Rouguy after his wife passed away. Even though his wife has passed, the promise he made to her to take care of the family, the jewelry box and not to remarry is fulfilled by Père. He says "il pouvait tout prendre dans la maison, tout emporter sauf cette boîte. Et même il pouvait prendre tout ce que contenait la "boîte d'or," tout, sauf la bague de Cuivre et d'Argent de ta mère!" [he could have taken anything from the house, everything except that jewelry box. He could have even taken everything that was in the box, except for the copper and silver ring]. He then adds, "Fut-il au bout de la terre, je suivrai la trace de ses "pieds" [has he been at the end of the earth, I will follow his "feet"]. The ring is very important for Rouguy's mother as she received it from her grand-mother Ouleye. Later on, we learn that Père made a promise to his wife not to remarry in order to avoid putting his children into a difficult situation of having a new mother who may not be "good" to the children, according to Annette Mbaye d'Erneville. Père reveals to Rouguy that her mother made him promise not to marry again because she does not want Rouguy and her siblings to go through the same experience she went through growing up with a stepmother.

Mbaye d'Erneville's negritude feminism is apparent through her choice of a strong female character, Rouguy. Indeed, her interest in feminism is further developed with the choice of Rouguy as the daughter of Père who understood very early her role as the eldest in the family. She takes over to care for her siblings including the new born

baby who “qui n’avait tété que deux jours le sein de sa mère” [who only breastfed for two days]. Rouguy is courageous and determined to look after the family even at a very young age. Mbaye d’Erneville brings to the children a strong and courageous female character who is independent girl who has the sense of responsibility.

Rouguy ne parvenait pas à dormir, à trouver le sommeil.
La nuit, le corps brisé par les travaux
de la maison, la jeune fille cherchait en
vain le repos sur sa méchante paillasse.
Son esprit vagabondait. Contre son
flanc, elle sentait la douce chaleur du
petit corps d’Ali, le bébé qui n’avait
tété que deux jours le sein de sa mère.

[Rouguy could not sleep, to fall asleep.
At night, the body worn up with household
Job, the young girl was in vain
Looking for some rest in her uncomfortable mattress.
Her mind was wondering. On her back,
She could feel the soft warm body
Of little Ali, the baby Breastfeed
only for two days].

At a young age, Rouguy is stepping into the role of her mother taking care of the baby and her younger siblings. This passage also depicts the expectations of women who work from dusk to dawn taking care of the domestic labour including cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. The above passage shows that Rouguy, after doing all the work that her mother use to do, cannot even sleep well because of how exhausted she is. Through Rouguy’s experience, Mbaye d’Erneville makes a critique of the cost of gender expectations for women and girls. She invites her readers to acknowledge the weight of responsibility that women have to put up with because of a patriarchal society and call for a change. The story ends with Rouguy going to look for her father who was able to find

the ring but died after giving her the ring. Rouguy, who now has lost both of her parents, is fully in charge of the household and the family even though her neighbors like Demba Sabaly will be able to help her. Pere is able to get the ring back to her daughter as he promised his late wife but Rouguy finds herself alone and with many responsibilities. This could be read as Mbaye d'Erneville recapturing the often too many responsibilities that fall under women's lives where they find themselves taking care of the household and also of the society. This is a way for Mbaye d'Erneville to invite her readers, the children, to pay attention to how much women are asked to perform in the society. Like Rouguy women do not have any break at all because it is expected of her to take care of the household to be a "good" woman.

Mbaye d'Erneville also highlights her negritude in her representation of African values and culture. With Père's faith in God about finding his wife's jewelry box when he said "Allah, notre Maître à tous, ne m'abandonnera pas" [God, the Master of all of us, will not abandon me]. He is aware that this journey can be dangerous but because he believes that his wife is "listening," he goes for it praying for God to protect him. He says "je ne veux pas que les ossements de ta mère tressaillent dans son tombeau. Je retrouverai sa bague de Cuivre et d'Argent" [I do not want your mother's remains get upset in her grave. I will find her copper and silver ring]. This determination signals not only his commitment to find the jewelry box but it also shows his spirituality and loyalty. Why would Père feel compelled to be loyal? It is because he believes in some superior powers of death that can affect his life. Besides, something important about the ring is that "le Cuivre poli attire la lumière, l'argent pur ne s'altère" [the real copper brings light, and

silver does not get destroyed ever]. The underlying meaning of the choice of the silver could be associated with the African values that cannot be destroyed entirely even with colonization. We can say that the copper is like the story that Mbaye d'Erneville is writing about as the story brings light to the life of the children. In fact, in some African cultures, unlike gold that is associated with the devil or bad luck, silver brings fertility and protection as Lucille Camera writes in "The History and Aesthetics of African Jewelry"⁷⁹.

Another example from "La Bague de Cuivre et d'Argent" where the essence of negritude can be found is when Mbaye d'Erneville personifies the day and night and the sun. She discusses the passage from night to day to reflect the importance of nature in the African cultures. She writes "c'était l'heure où la nuit et le jour se disputent le ciel, celle où le soleil impatient signale sa prochaine arrivée par un jet de couleurs tendres, premier cadeau au levant" [It was the moment when the night and the day are fighting over the sky, the moment when the impatient sun announces its presence with tender colors, the gift to the first people who wake up]. Indeed, nature is celebrating those who wake up early as the day starts. There is a vivid imagery of the beginning of the day through this description and renders the spiritual component of negritude.

The sense of community and the strong bond that neighbors have, that families have and that everybody in the community respect, made Birame Diouf, Père's friend and neighbor go to look for him after several without any news from him. Indeed, Birame Diouf went to wake Rouguy early in the morning so they could go to look for Père.

⁷⁹ More information about African jewelry and their meanings can be found in "Africa Adorned" by Angela Fisher. New York: Harry N. Abrams 1984.

Birame's wife took care of Rouguy's siblings while they were gone. The end of the story is sad as Birame Diouf and Rouguy found him nearly dead and he passed after telling them what happened. Rouguy is sad because Père "est mort loin de sa demeure, enterré dans ce village qui n'est pas le sien..." [Père passed away from his home, was buried in this village that is not his...]. However, she is happy that Père succeeded in getting the ring from the "navetane" and gave it back to her. He also told to Rouguy more about the story of the ring and the importance of it for her mother. "C'est pour toi, uniquement pour toi, sa fille aînée qu'elle avait gardé ce trésor, pour t'éviter la honte qu'elle a eu le jour de son mariage" [it is for you, exclusively for you, my daughter that she kept this ring, this treasure, for you not to get the same shame she went through during her marriage].

Because her step mother took all her belongings, Rouguy's mother did not have any jewelry to wear during her marriage. Her mother had to borrow rings, earrings, necklaces from everywhere to avoid humiliation. This story highlights Mbaye d'Erneville's negritude feminism as it describes the experience of a young girl who found herself alone with many responsibilities but is courageous to take on the tasks of being in charge of her family. Through the depiction of Rouguy as a strong person, the description of some of the realities in her village, and Mbaye d'Erneville's choice of some imagery that renders a vivid life in a village, she reclaims her negritude within her woman-centered project of writing children's books.

"Le Noël du Vieux Chasseur"

Mbaye d'Erneville's engagement with negritude feminism as a way to fight eurocentrism and masculinity is more apparent in the story "Le Noel du Vieux Chasseur." Similar to "La Bague de Cuivre et d'Argent," this story also starts with an image of an elderly African man. In this story again, we have a main character called Pa which means father, underlining the sense of community in Mbaye d'Erneville's approach because he is implicitly father of everyone, not just his immediate family. The reader learns that Pa is a hunter, an excellent hunter that "ne ratait jamais sa cible" [never misses his target]. The determination of Pa, his respect for motherhood and maternal values is similar to the determination of Père for finding the stolen jewelry box. This feature of caring is against the masculinist patriarchal society's expectations of masculinity. The determination of Pa is a key focus in this story "Le vieux, son fusil à travers les épaules, poses comme un baton de berger Peulh,...cherchait le gros gibier...pour étonner les parents de Ndar à qui, traditionnellement, il faisait chaque année, ce cadeau de Noël" [The elderly, with his gun across his shoulders like a Peulh shepherd, was looking for a deer...to please the villagers of Ndar to whom, he traditionally, gives this Christmas gift every year]. Pa is not scared-which is a "normal" behavior expected of men, they cannot be scared of anything--and is determined to find the deer that will make the feast memorable like every year. After walking for a while without locating any deer, he suddenly heard a noise, looked up and saw a deer laying down on the grass. He wondered "Mais que se passe-t-il?" [What is happening?] because the animal did not move. He realized that the deer was pregnant and about to give birth, "elle est en gésine" [she is giving birth]. Frozen in this moment by his respect for motherhood, Pa did not shoot. Instead, he was determined to help the deer get

the baby out. Pa “*delicatement aide le faon à sortir du ventre de sa mère!...*” [with delicacy Pa helped the fawn to get out of her mother’s belly]. By creating a male character who expresses feelings, that gets attached to the importance of motherhood, that respect maternal values through Pa and Pere, Mbaye d’Erneville powerfully teaches children to go beyond the establish gender norms and be kind to each other.

As mentioned earlier, we know that Mbaye d’Erneville’s father was called Papa Hyppo and he was a sharp hunter who had all sorts of animals in his house in Sokone. Sharing this personal story with her audience is a way to captivate the children’s attention to the moral of the story. Mbaye d’Erneville starts the story by saying “*c’est lui-même qui m’a raconté sa plus belle histoire de Noël...*” [He himself told me about his most beautiful Christmas story]. This introduction sentence signals two things in the mind of the reader. First, the reader gets curious about the story itself and what makes it beautiful and unique. Second, the narrator, implicitly insists that the story is true and is part of her heritage.

Mbaye d’Erneville’s feminist project is highlighted in the way she disrupts conventional narratives of masculinity through her creations of male characters who respect motherhood and honor the promises they have made to women. Creating these positive male characters who resist dangerous, toxic, outdated, and unproductive ideas of masculinity is a feminist gesture on the part of Mbaye d’Erneville and an invitation for her readers to start paying attention to the constructions of gender and start conversations about the contributions of women in the society. The imagery of the exhausted deer with her baby plays a powerful role in demonstrating that human beings have feelings

regardless of their gender. In both stories, the feminism of the male characters is emphasized to serve as a lesson to the young African audience reading them. Giving birth is a delicate moment for the mother and the baby human or animal. In this moment, the mother is vulnerable, but this moment is needed for the world to keep functioning. Pa understood that the deer is vulnerable but brave and just needed a small help to give birth. Motherhood is unique and amazing; and Pa wanted to show his support to this deer. This goes against gender norms that do not allow men to feel any emotions other than anger.

Mbaye d'Erneville's negritude feminism advocates for the liberation of African women starting with writing stories for children disrupting inviting them to disrupt rigid gender expectations. She understands that children are the future of the society and it is important to guide them about their identity and teach them to break away from Eurocentrism by reclaiming their negritude identities. By painting a man, a husband, a caring person of his family through Père in "La Bague de Cuivre et d'Argent" and in "Le Noël du vieux Chasseur," Mbaye d'Erneville seeks to highlight the importance of feminism in her project. She challenges the idea that a man is not supposed to be emotional, to show some feminine traits of caring and attachment that her male characters develop. This could be read as her response to the masculinist dimension of the negritude movement.

Mbaye d'Erneville's celebration of negritude through spirituality can be traced in these stories as she includes two main components of African cultures. First, the beliefs that death is not the final stage of the soul; dead people are everywhere. In fact, Père's insistence to fight against the robber can also be determined by his belief that his wife is

watching him even though she passed away. Many African writers including Leopold Sedar Senghor and Birago Diop discussed this belief in their writings. Senghor's poem "Black Woman" published in *Chants d'ombres* in 1945⁸⁰ celebrates the black woman's beauty that even death cannot erase.

I sing your beauty that passes, the form that I fix in the
Eternal
Before jealous Fate turn you to ashes to feed the roots
Of life.

The attachment that Père has for his late wife is powerful because even though she passed, he still holds on to the promises he made to her. The idea that "Les morts ne sont pas morts" [the deads are not dead] by Birago Diop is developed here. The ancestors are everywhere watching and intervening in the lives of their communities.

Personification is another aspect of the spiritual beliefs in African cultures that Mbaye d'Erneville includes in these stories. In "Le Noël du Vieux Chasseur," the deer is described as a human being looking at Pa with human eyes "le regarde avec des yeux humains." In that moment, Pa goes through a similar feeling as Père because he thinks the animal is like a human being with feeling and reasoning skills. This is further emphasized when we learn that the animal "regrette d'avoir fait confiance à l'Homme!...[regrets the fact of trusting human beings!...]. However, Mbaye d'Erneville reveals that good intention of Pa who was making sure to protect the animal by bringing her home.

⁸⁰ Leopold Sedar Senghor, "Femme Noire," *Chants d'ombre* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1945), pp. 19-20 "Black Woman," *Selected Poems* by Leopold Sedar Senghor. Translated and introduced by John Reed and Clive Wake, p.6. Oxford University Press 1964.

The sense of solidarity and community life is also highlighted when Pa returned to the village to get help bringing the deer home. “Le petit faon dans les bras, le Vieux est revenue au village chercher de l’aide pour transporter la mère...” With the help of some neighbors, Pa brings home the fawn and the mother deer alive. “Biche qu’on a eu du mal à apprivoiser tandis que Bichette, elle, bébé parmi nous, avait pris des habitudes quasiment domestiques jusqu’au point de dormir, parfois, dans le lit des enfants...” [it was a little bit difficult to take care of the deer. The fawn instead was like a baby in our family, like a pet. She felt so welcomed in our home that she sometimes sleeps in the kids’ room...]. The openness of Pa and his family that took care of both the deer and her baby is fascinating. Pa, described as a sharp hunter in the beginning, is turned into a caring veterinarian at the end of the story. We can say that the deer represent women and when Pa offers to help the deer by bringing her in his home he shows his respect to motherhood. He was able to do so with the help of his family and community. The story encapsulates African family and community values about caring for others. Mbaye d’Erneville ends the story with a question that ties the story back to the beginning. She writes “N’est-ce pas là une belle histoire de Noël?” [Isn’t that a beautiful Christmas story?] Unlike the sad end of the story “La Bague de Cuivre et D’argent” with Père’s death, “Le Noël du Vieux Chasseur” ends with joy, happiness and hope for Pa, the deer and the fawn. Both stories underline Mbaye d’Erneville’s negritude feminism.

Conclusion

Annette Mbaye d’Erneville is an activist that advocates for the liberation of black women; a writer and teacher that participates in the education of African children by

teaching them about their culture; a negritude feminist that advocates for a practical use of both negritude and feminism that will impact the lives of black women. She is a negritudinist feminist and even more specific, she is negritudinist in a specifically feminist way and feminist in a specifically negritudinist way. As we have demonstrated in this chapter the kind of feminist points Mbaye d'Erneville is making in these stories are not just broadly feminist, but a kind of feminism that responds to – and corrects negritude, that is why negritude feminism fits in her work. Because she corrects and challenges both the terms negritude and feminism, Mbaye d'Erneville's negritude feminism brings more connections to both ideologies and offers more action and fit for the black diasporic community.

Mbaye d'Erneville challenges eurocentrism and gender norms because they prevent the black community to preserve some of their most important parts of their cultures in including community life, the sense of sharing, identity and negritude. The children's stories we examined in this chapter are powerful as they describe important facets of African cultures with negritude and feminism. Mbaye d'Erneville's negritude feminism is revealed in her journalism, writings and personal experiences in France and Senegal. She advocates for black women and pass a message to the youth and children helping train the future generation. These stories are powerful as they describe important facets of African culture with negritude feminism. Mbaye d'Erneville's negritude feminism is revealed in her use of feminism, and negritude to pass a message to the youth and children. She valorizes African cultures and advocates for women's freedom and dignity within her negritude feminism project, writes in French and includes Wolof

words, expressions and songs to reach out to her audiences similar Aminata Sow Fall who we will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

AMINATA SOW FALL: THE BLENDED VISIONARY

Aminata Sow Fall is a canonical francophone African woman writer concerned with human and gender issues in society. She was born in Saint Louis, Senegal in 1941 and is the first African woman to publish a novel in 1976. Driven by a strong sense of community and family, in 1958, Sow Fall moved to Dakar to stay with her sister and pursue her studies. Her determinism of becoming an important member of her community led to her success at school during which she attained scholarship to travel to France. In 1976 Sow Fall published *Le Revenant*, which I will analyze more into depth since it is her first novel and I believe her strong commitment to community and African culture is powerful. Her second novel, *La Grève Des Battu* (1979) was translated into English by Dorothy Blair in 1986 as [*The Beggar's Strike*]. The book won the *Grand Prix Littéraire d'Afrique Noire* in 1980. She then published *l'Appel des arènes* (1982) followed by *l'Ex-père de la Nation* (1987). Those books were published in French and only *La Grève des Battu* has been translated into English. For the purpose of this chapter, I am using both English and French version of the books⁸¹ and I chose her first four books as the time period that my dissertation is covering is from 1920s to 1980s.

Aminata Sow Fall's activism is apparent in her teaching and writing, as she promotes education and self-determination for the youth and the black community. She had been in Paris for her studies and chose to return in Senegal in 1969 to dedicate her

⁸¹ Aminata Sow Fall publishes in French. It is important to note that Sow Fall continues publishing novels and more recently, she published *L'Empire du Mensonge* (2017).

life to writing with a consciousness about social values and tradition for the black community. Sow Fall was a member of the Commission for *Educational Reform* that added African literature in Senegal's educational system, Director of the Centre d'Animation et d'Échange Culturels de Dakar and her own Éditions Khoudia created in 1990. In 2000, she was awarded Honorary Doctorate from Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

In addition to an analysis on her writings, I use the interview I conducted with her on June 23rd, 2018 to shed light on some of her writing choices and her activism. I conducted the interview with her because story-telling and orality are a valuable cultural component of the African culture and the culture of people from the African Diaspora. Thus, the spoken words from Sow Fall will contribute to re-creating history and re-telling her story that have not been heard or have been misinterpreted. The interview was an opportunity for Sow Fall to share her experience as a writer, activist and scholar.

In this chapter, I focus on Sow Fall's relation to negritude⁸² as she sees it as a response to anti-blackness that a group of francophone students had to develop in a hostile Europe. Sow Fall's writing has not been analyzed through the lenses of negritude and I believe that doing so will permit us to read her more completely. I seek to demonstrate that negritude is not over and that in Sow Fall's writing, many themes, and motifs from the negritude movement could be traced. I argue that she values African culture in a way that aligns with the negritude movement and she even extends negritude by underlining the importance of racial awareness along with the need to reconsider

⁸² I have discussed the negritude movement in the introduction

gender issues. I discuss her way of doing negritude, therefore using negritude as a praxis within her negritude feminism. As the youngest of the four women I focus on in this dissertation, how different or similar does she approach negritude? Given her engagement with central ideas of negritude, how does her writing intersect with negritude? In addition to those questions, this chapter aims to examine why and how Sow Fall grapples with feminism and negritude. Her writing has raised a significant debate about feminism and, at times, she has been compared to Mariama Ba's feminism. Thus, some important questions about her feminism include: why is she, most of the time, characterized as an anti-feminist writer by a certain group of critics who mostly are non-Africans, writing in English and not others who are Africans writing in French? Does the term feminism fit Sow Fall's agenda? How does she articulate the matrix of feminism? What does it mean to identify her with these theoretical "camps," of negritude and feminism? In other words, what do we get from reading her in these theoretical frames of feminism and negritude?

I argue that she is doing negritude but goes beyond negritude because of its masculinist trajectory and feminism's limitations to represent the realities of black women: Sow Fall should be read through negritude feminism⁸³. The everyday experience of the black woman that Paulette Nardal tries to portray in her essays and that Suzanne Césaire and Mbaye d'Erneville are deeply attached to, is at the forefront of Sow Fall's writing. Sow Fall's particular connection to Annette Mbaye d'Erneville is powerful as they have met and become familiar to each other's work. They connected to each other in

⁸³ I have discussed negritude feminism in the introduction of my dissertation

a congress in California. They are both interested in fighting oppression, celebrating the African culture and promoting their negritude feminism. Indeed, the first interview Sow Fall had about the book *Le Revenant* was conducted by Annette Mbaye d'Erneville in 1981. Sow Fall was also interviewed by Annette Mbaye d'Erneville on the theme "Femmes et Literature" through the project *Femmes Africaines* of the collection "Femmes et Société." Sow Fall's engagement with women's issues, and with feminism as an ideology is combined with her engagement with negritude. Thus, negritude feminism helps us better reflect Sow Fall's interests in the negritude movement and in women's issues.

Negritude in Sow Fall's Writings

As mentioned in the introduction, in Paris, a group of African and Caribbean students invited the black community to celebrate the African culture. They developed a global call for solidarity among black people with the Negritude movement. Senghor defines negritude in *Liberte I*⁸⁴ as "the sum of the values of the civilization of the black world" (Introduction, p.9). In the book *The Negritude Moment Explorations in Francophone African and Caribbean Literature and Thoughts* F. Abiola Irele says "The only really significant expression of cultural nationalism associated with Africa—apart from small-scale local movement—is the concept of Negritude, which was developed by French-speaking Negro intellectuals" and he defines Negritude as "a historical phenomenon, a social and cultural movement closely related to African nationalism."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ In 1964, Senghor has developed a meaning of negritude in *Liberte I*, Introduction, p.9

⁸⁵ F. Abiola Irele, *The Negritude moment Explorations in Francophone African and Caribbean Literature and Thoughts*, Africa World Press, 2011

Most of the critics of Negritude, especially from Anglophone Africa says “founding fathers” did not open up to black women, but rather they feminized, romanticized and idealized black women according to some critics from Anglophone Africa.⁸⁶

As Renee Edwige Dro writes in “Forgotten Traiblazers: The “Meres” of the Negritude movement,” “it is time to remember the “mères” of the movement and resurrect them from obscurity”⁸⁷ I argue that the “mères” of negritude include Aminata Sow Fall. I suggest that Sow Fall is doing negritude as she believes in actions and does not need to romanticize her heritage but embraces it in her writing, her daily activities and actions. Her negritude is significant in her approach to human relations in the African culture and how that important value has been affected by modernity. She says “je sais qui je suis. Je sais que je peux contribuer à la preservation de ma culture, de la culture noire à travers l’écriture” [I know who I am. I know that I can contribute to the preservation of my culture, of black cultures through writing and activism]. The key question I am interested in is: how is she doing it differently from Césaire, Senghor, Nardal, and al? Sow Fall’s mission is to defend and celebrate African culture and therefore could be aligned with Senghor’s definition of culture as “the spirit and dynamic force that expresses itself in a given civilization.”⁸⁸ If we analyze Sharpley-Whiting’s definition of negritude as “a race conscious cultural movement,” we can then argue that Sow Fall’s mission is aligned with negritude and is relevant within her writing but she

⁸⁶ For more information about this critic, please read Wole Soyinka

⁸⁷ Renee Edwige Dro, “Forgotten Traiblazers: The “Meres” of the Negritude movement,”

⁸⁸ Sylvia Washington Ba’s *The concept of negritude in the poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor*, Chapter III, “The Basis of Negritude” (44). Ba highlights Senghor’s ideas of Negritude in *Nocturnes*, *Song of Darkness*, *Liberty I*, *Black hosts*, and *Ethiopiennes* and explores his experience from Sine (Senegal) to the Seine (France), to the creation and development of Negritude into the “civilization of the Universal.”

adds to that definition a new approach which is gender specific to her cultural background.

Le Revenant

In the novel *Le Revenant*, Sow Fall challenges the expectations of the western audience by focusing exclusively on the African community's experience. Bakar, the protagonist, was considered part of the family and the community when he had a job, a wife and money to take care of his family. However, as soon as he lost everything and went to jail for stealing money from his employer, his life turned upside down. Sow Fall's reclamation of the negritude movement as a celebration of the African culture and her focus on portraying experiences of some female characters including Yama Diop, Mame Aisse, Bakar's wife, and Tante Ngoné, Bakar's mother in *Le Revenant*, reflect her negritude feminism. Bakar's sister, Yama, who used to be close to him, abandoned him when he lost everything and treated him as if he was not a human being. Mame Aissa, Bakar's wife, convinced by her family that she does not have a good future with Bakar, asked for divorce. The only people Bakar has left is his mother, Tante Ngoné and his best friend Sada. He goes at Sada's house every Sunday to have fun and play cards. The opening of the book highlights Bakar's monotone life "Et chez tante Ngoné, Bakar s'étire sans cesse dans son lit et redécouvre que vraiment rien ne change, même pas le dimanche" [And at Tata Ngone's house, Bakar stretches in his bed and realizes again that nothing has changed, even on a Sunday.] She is telling the story of Bakar's community using their real experiences. From this scene, we know that Bakar lives with his parents and in this passage the reader can sense the fact that he just woke up and does not seem to

have a plan for the day. This first scene foreshadows Bakar's story of monotony and sadness.

Defining writing as an act of creation, a moment of "partage" [sharing], a way for Africans to participate in a conversation and to bring their input in that conversation, Sow Fall supports the need to celebrate the African culture. She says that one of her motivations to write the novel *Le Revenant* was that when she came back from France, she was disappointed and shocked by the change in mentalities within African communities. Sow Fall's negritude feminism is highlighted in her statement about the fact that the process of cultural erasure should be fought by Africans. She firmly believes in the power of community life, of group mentality in which she grew up.

In *Le Revenant*, when Bakar met Mame Aissa, he paid her visits every Saturday and Mame Aissa's father calls him one day and says "je t'ai fait appeller, commenca El Hadji Welle Gueye, parce que depuis un certain temps je te vois dans la maison. "Adduna Neexul," (la vie reserve des surprises) c'est Pourquoi je te demande l'objet de tes visites."⁸⁹ (32). This passage translates an important aspect of African traditions in which parents seek to take care of the family and protect their children. Sow Fall also uses some Wolof words in this passage to support the idea that her language, the Wolof language, is part of her identity as a Senegalese writer and is a language that deserves a place in literary texts. From El Hadji Welle Gueye's language, we can feel some of the respect he devotes to Bakar as a human being. From that discussion, the marriage between Bakar and Mame Aissa was celebrated. Sow Fall supports the idea that marriage is an important

⁸⁹ My translation: "I wanted to talk to you, because I have been seeing you in my house for some time now. Life is full of surprise, that's why I wanted to know what you are doing in my house".

part of the African tradition. Through Bakar's experience, she is able to highlight great African traditions that, unfortunately, were affected by modernity. She supports that modernity should have happened, culture should evolve, however, the change or progress should happen in harmony, it should not cause a denial of one's identity and heritage as she says "La culture doit se renouveler, mais pas n'importe comment." Again, Sow Fall believes that when the culture progresses, it still needs to put emphasis on the past, on the history of the community. Modernity does not mean denying one's culture and copying or imitating the West, it should involve analyzing what is going on in the society and getting rid of those practices that marginalize certain members of the community based on their gender, physical appearance or the amount of money they possess. In her writings, Aminata Sow Fall participates in educating the youth to be self-reliant and protect their identity and culture.

La Grève des Battu [The Beggar's Strike]

Aminata Sow Fall's dedication to the post-independent society becomes more apparent when she focuses on the meaning and significance of giving and receiving, of disabilities, and of spirituality within the Senegalese society in her second novel *La Grève des Battu* (1979). This second novel made Sow Fall more well known in the African and international writing scene. This novel continues that battle for language validation and it also elucidates the entire context and reality of Senegalese people as being "worthy" of literary representation. The title *La Grève des Battu* contains the Wolof word "battu" which means container. The container that beggars carry to ask for

money, food and other “sarakh” [offrandes].⁹⁰ Although the book is published in French, the names, places, and a part of the title demonstrates African/ Senegalese scenery, people and everyday experiences. So, through that choice, she reclaims her African heritage and her power to challenge European expectations.

Sow Fall focuses on power dynamics when presenting beggars—who are physically or mentally disabled and yet powerful because of their culturally-determined role as liaisons between God and other human beings. However, Sow Fall describes a new developed city, Dakar, that needs to be “cleared of these people—parodies of human beings rather—these dregs of society who beset you everywhere and attack you without provocation at all times” (1). Challenging the cultural beliefs that marginalize the beggars, Sow Fall creates a novel in which those “dregs of society” successfully shift the power dynamic by going on a strike. They reclaim their place in the society by rejecting the “sarakh” that the society was giving them because they know that people give them those “sarakh” not because they want to share with them but because they have wanted God to help them achieve their goals; which is usually material acquisition. Sow Fall claims that “la société est composé de personnes nantis, de pauvres et tout le monde mérite d’être traité comme un être humain” [The society is composed of rich people, poor people, and everybody deserves to be treated with dignity]. It is interesting that gender does not play much in the lives and experiences of these people who are physically or mentally disabled. They are composed of both men and women. Sow Fall demonstrates that her society is not perfect, as some member of the community are marginalized,

⁹⁰ I could not find a word for “sarakh” which means the things that people give them, like the donations.

depreciated, treated as outcast or less-than humans. Through the depiction of the strike, she shares her vision about why each member of the society matters. In this modern, post independent Senegal, it seems like the strongest tradition of support and solidarity between people has been shaken up. In this novel, she brings again the importance of human relations and the need to recognize and respect everybody in the society.

L'Appel des Arènes

The focus on modernity and its consequences on people's experience is more relevant in the novel *L'Appel des Arènes*, where Sow Fall portrays the history of some cultures and places that are lost because of modernity. This book won the *Prix International Alioune Diop* and was short-listed for *Goncourt*. Nalla, the protagonist is torn between his parents' progressive ideas about the modern world and his grandmother's lovely and attractive past life. More than just a sport, the wrestling match is a purely cultural event that brings the community together along with food, music, songs, and dance. Malaw Lo, the great wrestler of the village that disappears, resuscitate the history and tradition through poems and songs. Sow Fall's negritudism is apparent in the way she depicts those who promote city life, modernity and assimilation, as the enemy of African culture. Through this novel, she reinforces even more so her interests on the celebration of the African culture. Because assimilation often goes with the denial of one's past, the author poignantly makes Nala resist assimilation and rather he is attracted to his past. Diattou believes that wrestling is not appropriate for her son because this sport is for people "qui n'ont aucune civilisation" [who do not have any civilization] (65).

Similar to Sow Fall's interests in wrestling as part of the African culture, Leopold Sedar Senghor in the poem "Joal," remembers those joyful nights in his native village full of cultural celebrations. Senghor's description of the sound of the tam-tam, the happy songs of the women, the strong wrestlers and the unity of the community constitute of the most important components of the African culture. Nalla automatically connects with the songs, the sounds and the harmony that prevails during the wrestling.

L'Ex-Père de la Nation

In this book, Sow Fall illustrates the notion of power and control using the sun as an instrument of oppression. It is compelling that Sow Fall does not give a specific name to this nation. Madiama, the main character is reflecting on the use of the sun as an illusion for his people. As an activist, he was thrown to prison because he was courageous enough to denounce a problem with medications. After coming from prison, he was elected as the president of this new nation. This could bring back the idea that independence is not actually a real and great thing for African people since the colonizer has never left the country, as they are playing the role of "foreign advisors." Ousmane Sembene's film *Xala* portrays that idea that independence was not actually fully achieved since the colonizers are still present in the country. The beginning of *Xala* shows the new African leaders united with the people to lead their country by themselves. However, the second scene of the film shows the police along with some French "advisors" with big suitcases filled with money, changing that positive and hopeful dynamic of the future of Africa into a physical violence and chaos. In *L'Ex-Père de la Nation*, Bara, Madiama's

brother is able to live and stay into the spiritual and traditional life of the past and escape modernity.

Is Feminism Enough?

I previously mentioned in the introduction, the issue of categorizing black women writers as feminists or not highlights the limitations of feminisms. It does not then open up to specific realities and writing styles of women writers from the Global south. It is important to address the questions such as what is feminism? What is African feminism? What are the limitations of writing that the African women face when writing about African realities and reaching out to a wide audience that does not share their beliefs, values, and cultures? Is it necessary and mandatory to have strong female characters in one's writing to be considered a feminist? The evaluation of African women writers from the lens of international feminism or western feminism erases some of the most significant concerns of African women writers which is the African articulation of women's experience. It is difficult to label Aminata Sow Fall or any other African woman writer as a feminist, as they often have a different approach to gender that sees the man and the woman as complementarities. I seek to demonstrate that, similar to Nardal, Césaire and d'Erneville, Sow Fall is a feminist that goes beyond feminism by exposing the realities that the African woman experience. What differentiates her from the three other women of this project is that, she exposes both men and women who do not honor the humanity in each person. During our interview, she mentions being a writer and not a sociologist or a journalist. She says "le féminisme voudrait qu'on ressemble

aux hommes mais la femme et l'homme sont différents et doivent se compléter”

[feminism wants us to be like men but women and men are different and should complete each other]. This understanding of gender in relation to culture is similar to Maryse Condé⁹¹'s statement about the fact that in the Caribbean gender has a specific definition and role in the culture. She says “je ne suis pas femme écrivain, je suis écrivain tout court” [I am not just a woman writer, I am a writer]. Sow Fall supports the idea that the woman is a human being that can occupy the same professional jobs as a man and that she even has more intellectual qualities as she can navigate the professional world and the household.

The environment of post-independence is the main focus of Aminata Sow Fall and as I mentioned earlier, her approach to feminism has, most of the time, been compared to Mariama Ba's approach to feminism. Mariama Ba, has been applauded for her explicit focus on the condition of the woman in Africa and her significant analysis of polygamy and its effects on the woman's life in *So Long A Letter*. In this book, Ba describes many cultural celebrations within the Senegalese society, celebrates the woman and her courage and determination but also the importance of marriage and family life. In the article Aminata Sow Fall: A New Generation Female Writer,” I.T.K Egonu states that evaluating African women writers as “feminist” or “anti-feminist,” reduces their potential goal of their writings. In this article, Egonu claims that Aminata Sow or Mariama Ba go beyond this binary and offer their readers a more complex understanding of the society and the role of men and women in it. He writes: “En vérité A. Sow Fall dépeint dans ses

⁹¹ As mentioned in the introduction, Maryse Condé discusses how her understanding of gender is not necessarily the fight against men by women by the celebration of their collaboration.

romans des personnages qui incarnent un féminisme progressiste. Son oeuvre s'intéresse aux mêmes problèmes qui ont valu à Mariama l'épithète de féministe" (313) [In reality, A. Sow Fall depicts in her novels characters that embrace a progressive feminism. Her novels focus on the same social issues that earned Mariama Ba her title of feminist].

Indeed, Sow Fall operates as an observer of the society depicting conditions of the woman depicting both successful and powerful women along with women, like Bakar's mother, who has been suffering from mistreatments from her husband. Egonu writes

A. Sow Fall a choisi donc d'exposer dans l'actions de ses romans les méfaits de l'exploitation des femmes, mais, en meme temps, elle dépeint d'autres figures féminines qui, par leur experience, et leur comportement peuvent ouvrir les yeux a leur consoeurs croyant toujours que leur vie doit être une réplique de celle de la femme traditionnelle.

[A. Sow Fall chooses in her novel's action to expose the consequences of the exploitation of women, but, at the same time, she depicts other female characters, who, with their experiences and their behavior can serve as an exemple for their sisters who believe that they have to only follow the traditional role of the woman].⁹²

In *Ngambika*, Carol Boyce Davies says that African feminism "acknowledges its affinities with international feminism, but delineates a specific African feminism with certain specific needs and goals arising out of the concrete realities of women's life in African societies" (p.9). African feminism is necessarily different as Africans have a different life experience than other people from the world. I agree with scholars such as Davies who say that African feminism is more complex than it looks. It is problematic to define a term outside of Africa and apply it to the writing of women, therefore Sow Fall demonstrates that feminism as it is defined and understood outside of Africa is not

⁹² Translation is mine

enough and that both men and women are part of the African community. They do not necessarily oppose each other, and what is practical is to expose the problems and issues within the society that marginalize certain people.

I argue that there are problems with the status of the African woman, just as anywhere in the world, but the problem should be solved using African realities. The book, *Women Writing Africa*, is an example of this attempt to give voice to the oral and written productions by African women writers and artists. Pamela Ryan's review of the series *Women Writing Africa*⁹³ supports that it could be dangerous to evaluate African women writers through a purely feminist reading because African women writers go through an "ambivalent hesitation between conservation and liberalism, between nostalgia for the old and longing for the new form of self-realization" (178). This is one of the key challenges that Sow Fall faces when writing about African realities. *Women Writing Africa* is "a project of cultural restoration" of the "African woman's voice to the public sphere" according to its editors. This two-decade project brought together African women writers and artists highlighting the important role of African women writers and activists in the history of the continent. It has several series that looks at African Women throughout the continent by grouping them geographically. For the purpose of this chapter, I am focusing on the issue on "Women Writing Africa: West Africa and the Sahel" as it discusses the importance of orality as well as published work by women in Africa. The African woman use literature to build the history of Africa and challenge the

⁹³ Pamela Ryan also discusses the importance of thinking about the lived experiences of black women when analyzing their work

history established by their male counterparts that most of the time define them as simple objects of study and as passive human beings.

Indeed, Sow Fall's approach to feminism does not align with the "western" definition of what a feminist writer should look like. Among scholars who read Sow Fall as an anti-feminist is Athleen Ellington who, in the article "Aminata Sow Fall's "Demon" Women: An Anti-Feminist Social Vision" says "Because Aminata Sow Fall is so absolute in her condemnation of these "demon" women, all of whom are harshly punished with either social ostracism, imprisonment or death, the dominant discourse is anti-feminist as is the author's social vision" (133). Ellington believes that Sow Fall is anti-feminist as she often characterizes the women who go beyond the traditional role as "demons" and often punishes them for not "staying in their places." Ellington writes " Sow Fall's anti-feminist social vision relates to her depiction of the "demon" women who have sought their own development as professionals and individuals outside the role of wife and mother. they are the women who have dared to leave the patriarchal compound" (133). She gives the example of Yama.

I disagree with Ellington's conclusion because the issue of feminism is more complex than just creating and punishing female characters for "not staying in their places." Sow Fall accounts for African women by exposing their experiences. For example, in Sada's house in *Le Revenant* or when Bakar witnesses her father beating and mistreating her mother are few moments from the book that highlights her moral voice in the book; a moral voice that punishes Yama for being arrogant, individualistic, and horrible to Bakar who needed support from her. Those behaviors are against the value of

the African culture and I believe that the person acting this way should be corrected to get back on track to behaviors that reflect the African culture. So, Sow Fall does not punish Yama because she is a woman but as a person part of the society. In *La Douceur du Bercaïl*, for example, the main character, Asta Diop, is a strong woman who is “déterminé, visionnaire et battante” [focused, visionary and a fighter] who, according to Sow Fall “ne pouvait être qu’une femme” [could only be a woman]. Sow Fall’s literary and political project is to underline the African society’s realities around the experiences of its people as she believes that writing should be “artistique et libre” [artistic and free]. In a question about the representation of women in her novel, Sow Fall claims that her writing is about the community, about the people who constitute the community and their different behaviors that can protect or harm the community.

Médoune Gueye analyzes Sow Fall’s feminism in “La Question du féminisme chez Mariama Ba et Aminata Sow Fall”

Certes le féminisme se manifeste par une prise de conscience et par une remise en question des déterminismes socioculturels qui entravent l’émancipation de la femme et la maintiennent dans un status subalterne. Toutefois, à force de juger le féminisme des uns et des autres sans tenir compte de leur cadre culturel, et de favoriser certains modèles au détriment d’autres, on retombe inéluctablement dans une autre forme de logocentrisme dont le repère serait, encore une fois, le seul monde occidental. (308)

[Certainly, feminism is the manifestation of the awareness and a questioning of the sociocultural environments that prevent the emancipation of woman and the woman in a subaltern position. However, by continuously judging the feminism of people without considering their cultural environment and promoting only certain types of feminisms, makes us inevitably support another kind of logocentrisme which base would again be the European world].

The following passage from *Le Revenant*, Sow Fall discusses Sada's wife's hardship that she has to put up with because she is a woman, and a wife. Through a rhetorical question, Sow Fall observes "en effet, elle est femme et son rôle, en tant qu'épouse, n'est-il pas de tout supporter et de ne jamais se plaindre surtout lorsque l'on reçoit du monde ? (17) [in fact, she is a woman and her role, as a wife, isn't it to take everything and never complain especially when receiving people in her house]. Sow Fall critiques the society that limits the rights for the woman and that forces her not to complain about things that bothers her. Mounas, Sada's wife has to put up with these men who left their families to play cards on weekends at her house. She has to prepare food for them and smile to them even though she does not approve of their presence in her house. The author analyzes the society and the way it treats the woman as something to be owned and controlled by men.

In her writings, Sow Fall depicts men who are controlling and "hyper masculine" along with men who understand the important role of the woman in the Senegalese society. She does not defend the men who beat their wives, she realistically discusses the society and how both men and women interact with their humanities not their gender. The following passage from *Le Revenant* is a good example.

C'est la que les maris respectueux de leur épouse étaient persuadés qu'il "avaient peur", qu'on les tenait et qu'il fallait montrer que malgré tout c'est l'homme qui commande.

Les faibles du sexe fort quittaient alors la compagnie bien armés de conseils, bien endroctinés, et, à la moindre observation de la femme, les liens tissés des années durant s'écroulaient bêtement. Et puis les plus inconscients accueillaient triomphalement l'événement, le commentaient, félicitaient presque un mari qui avait su remettre les choses en ordre et offraient volontiers leur service pour remplacer la femme repudiée." (pg. 17)

[that is where the respectful husbands were convinced that they “were afraid,” they were being controlled and they need to show that after all it is the man that is the boss. The weak men would leave their friends armed and brainwashed with those strong beliefs, and, at the smallest observation of the woman, the strong relationships built for so many years get foolishly broken. And then the most unconscious of them received the news with great happiness, commented on it, almost congratulated a husband that knew how to put things in order and voluntarily offered to help replace the repudiated woman].

In this passage, we can almost feel that the woman is considered as an object, a machine that needs to follow the rules and a machine that can be replaced anytime. This situation affects the woman as she feels that her position is so vulnerable and that she can get replaced anytime she does not fulfill her duty. The underlying sarcastic tone of the phrase “les faibles du sex fort” signals the problematic situation and beliefs that support the idea that according to the society, a man should not be “faible” [weak]. He should show and perform his masculinity to get respected in the family and society by acting violently towards the woman. Sow Fall also demonstrates that not all men perform their masculinity. The voice in this passage is filled with anger, with “pitié” to those “good” men who follow the beliefs about being the ruler of the house. With words such as “bêtement,” [foolishly] and “inconscients,” [unconscious or naive], Sow Fall invites the reader to some of the most problematic behaviors that some men go through because they are blindly guided by patriarchy. When she uses the word “repudiated” instead of “divorce,” she poignantly underscores the lack of rights of the woman, the vulnerability of the woman and the ultimate rights that the husband has in the marriage because he is “the man.” Mounas and Tante Ngoné are the key examples of these types of women.

Sow Fall powerfully focuses on how the society puts together regulations that put the woman in such a vulnerable position, a position where she does not have any rights. Le châtement le plus terrible pour une épouse est d'être cataloguée "siiskat." L'égoïsme ne se pardonne pas, mais il est encore plus grave chez la femme qui doit être mère, épouse et sœur de tout le monde (17) [The worse punishment for a wife is to be defined as "siiskat" [a person that does not like to receive people in her house]. Selfishness is not tolerated, but it is worse for a woman who is expected to be a mother, a wife and a sister to everybody]. The weight that goes with being a woman in this society is unbearable but women like Tante Ngoné and Mounas blindly go with it. She says "Les femmes ont une force extraordinaire, une force de maîtrise mais malheureusement on nous formé à l'école occidentale de ne voir que la soumission des femmes Africaines" [women have an extraordinary force, a power of control but unfortunately, we were trained by Western schools to only see the African woman as submissive]. The moral voice in her writing invites both male and female characters to avoid certain behaviors that do not align with the African culture. Her characterization of women pushes the boundaries of female characters providing examples of the typical African behaviors.

Negritude feminism through "writing local"

Through her writing, Sow Fall reclaims the African woman and man calling for a resistance in using and following "the Western thinkers" because the African reality is far different from the European one. Thus, Sow Fall makes a transnational call for unity and solidarity, challenges colonization, oppression and promotes cultural awareness. Sow Fall

is a firm believer in the negritude movement, but she says that in her writings she responds to the movement's masculinist trajectory.

Similar to Nardal, Césaire, and d'Erneville, her engagement and dedication to serve her community pushed her to come back to her home country after obtaining her Bachelor's Degree in Lettres Modernes.

J'ai toujours été collé à mon univers familial à ma communauté. J'ai choisi de rentrer au Sénégal après avoir eu mon diplôme de Licence en Lettres Modernes. Personne ne m'a demandé de rentrer mais je voulais travailler pour ma communauté à travers l'enseignement et l'écriture.

[I have always been connected to my family and my community. I chose to go back to Senegal after obtaining my BA in Lettres Modernes. Nobody asked me to come back to Senegal. I did it because I wanted to impact my community through teaching and writing"].

Given Sow Fall's engagement in African literature, it is worth getting back to the meaning and the purpose of African literature especially after independence of the African colonies. What is African literature? What defines it? Should it depict the reality of Africans or not? In what language should it be written? Given the illiteracy rate in European languages in Africa, what would be the best option in African literature? These questions about African literature have been raised during the 1962 conference at Makerere in Uganda and some writers support the idea that the language in which one writes does matter but the content of the writing matters more. Years later, in 1976 with her first novel *Le Revenant*, Aminata Sow Fall supports that the content of African literature should depict the lives and experiences of Africans. She says "J'écris pour ma communauté, pour éduquer les gens and montrer que ma communauté noire a sa culture and son histoire que l'on doit préserver" [I write for my community, to educate people

and show that my black community has its own culture and history that need to be protected]. The choice to focus on African culture and tradition is not fully supported by a Eurocentric discourse spread all around the world. When Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie⁹⁴ included in her novels an African middle-class family that does not go through hardship, that was educated and powerful, her editor told her that her writing was not authentic. According to her editor, it was not authentic because she did not depict the stereotypical African character that struggles to get food, that is “lazy” and ignorant. The issue of clichés and stereotypes expected in African literature is further discussed by Binyawanga Wainaina in the essay “How to write about Africa.” An essay that successfully uses irony to question writers who try to fit a certain way to portray Africa, a way that ignores the resources, traditions and humanity of Africans. He says

Avoid having the African characters laugh, or struggle to educate their kids, or just make do mundane circumstances. Have them illuminate something about Europe and America in Africa. African character should be colorful, exotic, larger than life—but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause. ⁹⁵

Sow Fall presents a community in *Le Revenant* by using the everyday reality of that community. She does not follow the standards expected by European readers. Because most of the publishing houses were owned by France, the content needed to be understood by Europeans and follow Europeans’ standards. She powerfully goes against that standard and publish her work that depicts the everyday person in Senegal and Africa. Her vision and activism also made her create the *Editions Khoudia* in 1990 which

⁹⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave that example in her TED TALK, “The danger of a Single Story,”

⁹⁵ Wainaina, “How to write about Africa”

promotes writers from Africa who are invested in writing and sharing their vision of the world. She says

Moi je n'écris pas pour les occidentaux. Si je veux mettre en priorité les occidentaux, je ferai fausse route !

[Me, I am not writing for the West. If I prioritize the western audience, I would fail my mission].⁹⁶

During her interview with me, Aminata Sow Fall also discussed the process she went through to publish her first novel, *Le Revenant*. The manuscript was rejected at first and remained in a drawer for three years before getting published. She struggled to get *Le Revenant* published because the French editor said that the novel was *too local!* and that “les occidentaux ne vont rien comprendre” [the Western audience would not understand anything]. The novel was too local because Sow Fall depicts the reality of her people--too local because she does not follow the French established norms of writing--too local because she uses Senegalese names and realities and not French scenery, events, names and experiences. Sow Fall's response to the French editor, “Je n'écris pas pour les occidentaux” [I do not write for a western audience], demonstrates a dedicated black woman who wants to write about her people's everyday experience.

The following passage from *Le Revenant*, describes one of the female characters, Yama. She is the sister of Bakar, the main character. What is interesting in this passage is that Sow Fall chooses to write an entire paragraph in Wolof in the book. In addition, there are other scenes where she also uses Wolof words in the book. Yama, Bakar's sister, has

⁹⁶ This was said during the interview I conducted with her in June 2018. The interview was conducted in French and she sometimes use some Wolof words, which I tried to render as it was, and I translated the interview in English for this chapter.

a strong personality and is part of the elite community. She gracefully dances to show her power and beauty. The author writes

Yama, Yama Joop, yaa ma neex.

Yama, ku la ban, yalla na dee.

Taaru nga, le woy u jigeen, taar.

Ku xamul woon luy taar, kaay seet Yama

*Naalo gaynaako ci bile xaleel*⁹⁷

The repetition of Yama makes this song stands exclusively for her. She made the crowd happy with her dance. Sow Fall finds important to describe the scenery in which the event is happening in Wolof. She uses Wolof words in italics to make the song stand out; and she translated it in French as a footnote, explaining what it means for the reader that is not familiar with the context. Similarly, in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe uses Igbo words, proverbs and songs. Achebe believes that the language of the colonizers that can be used as a tool to reach wide audiences while incorporating African languages. It can be said that Aminata Sow Fall supports that idea as she writes in French about African realities and add some Wolof words and cultural items that an outside audience might find difficult to understand.

⁹⁷ Aminata Sow Fall has translated it as a footnote in French (page 28) as *Yama, Yama Diop, tu me plais/ Yama, Malheur a tes ennemis/ Tu es belle, et l'honneur d'une femme est d'etre belle/ Tu es l'incarnation de la beaute/ Gloire a cette jeune fille.*

I have translated it into English as follows [*Yama, Yama Diop, I like you/ Yama, your enemies will perish, You are beautiful, and the honor of the woman is beauty, you are beauty in itself, Glory to you.*]

Aminata Sow Fall is also interested in the theme of African human relations defining that as one of the strongest foundations of the African culture. What happened to human relations in post-independence Senegal? Was it the result of evolution of mentalities that created a downgrade of human relations? Discussing her motivation in writing *Le Revenant*, Sow Fall says

Une bourgeoisie politico-financière avait pris place après l'indépendance. En 1973, en congé de maternité, je me suis dis *est ce qu'un être humain doit être traité comme un animal juste parce qu'il n'a pas d'argent?* Je me suis penché, j'ai imaginé un être humain qui est méprisé par sa famille parce qu'il n'a plus d'argent.

[A politico-financial bourgeoisie had taken place in post-independence Senegal. In 1973, during my maternity leave, I reflected on questions like *how can a human being be treated like an animal just because he does not have money?* I imagined, and I created a character who is mistreated by his family just because he does not have money anymore].

In fact, in post-independence Senegal, Bakar experiences a change in his own community. Traditions and values have been replaced by power and money as the following passage from the novel demonstrates: “Les traditions avaient reçu un coup de poignard... La honte ne tuait plus” [Traditions have suffered from a sudden change ...Shame did not kill anymore]. His mother, tante Ngoné, is the one that still respects and supports Bakar, she used to sing a short lyric about the importance of resilience and dignity, as Bakar remembers it saying, “*Bañ gatia nangoo dee*” (*Pas la honte, plutôt la mort*) [*Rather die than bringing shame*] (31). Shame used to not only affect the person responsible but touched the entire family and community. Because of the importance of human relations, a person's actions and choices used to weigh on their entire community.

According to Bakar, that sense of community is being erased by the importance of the individual's material possessions.

In the article "Kinship and Friendship in Hardship: A Comparative Analysis of Aminata Sow Fall's *Le Revenant* and John Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The great Gatsby*," Mamadou Dieng discusses the two novels that focuses on the consequences of the pursue of happiness and success which often went with a development of self-interests, braking human relations and the idea of community and friendship. As Dieng says that Sow Fall is invested in understanding and highlighting the "profound sociological orientation in human relations and their rage of potential impacts on human conditions." For instance, using her power and position in the society, Yama, "a drianké" [a VIP lady], ignores, mistreats her parents and family and focuses on material possessions. The society does not care about her culture, family, and heritage anymore, all they focus on is the money and power she has. People ignore her parents because they are poor.

Personne n'avait jamais cherché à connaître l'ascendance de ses parents, car aux yeux de cette société où elle vivait, les pauvres ne méritent aucun intérêt, fussent-ils nantis des meilleures qualités humaines (39).

[Nobody has ever tried to know about her parents, because in this society where she was living, the poor do not deserve any interests regardless of their greatest human qualities].

The great human qualities that Bakar knew and grew up with were replaced by the power of money. The post-independent society focuses on how much power an individual has and not about their dignity and human values. Bakar truly misses those moments of frank human relations because they have been erased in this society and replaced with power.

Conclusion

Aminata Sow Fall is an activist who centers the concerns of black women in her writing. She believes that it is important to write about the reality of the black community in order to make an impact in their lives. If we analyze Sharpley-Whiting's definition of negritude as "a race conscious cultural movement," we can then argue that Sow Fall's mission is aligned with negritude and is relevant within her writing, but she adds to that definition a new approach to gender specific to her cultural background. She firmly believes in the power of community life, of group mentality in which she grew up. Her negritude feminism is present in all her activism with her teaching, writing and as the creator of the Editions Khoudia. Similar to Annette Mbaye d'Erneville, Sow Fall came back to Senegal to give back to her community and have an impact on the Senegalese community to improve the lives of women and girls. What she looks to accomplish is a practical use of the negritude movement and of feminism to impact positively the lives of her community. Stories including *Le Revenant* are poignant in the way they describe the everyday life and experience of Senegalese and also how it contains important messages about African cultures. As she says in our interview she writes for Africans for the black community.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION / EPILOGUE

Re-centering the contributions of Annette Mbaye d'Erneville (1926-) and Aminata Sow Fall (1941-) from Senegal, along with Paulette Nardal (1896-1985) and Suzanne Césaire (1915-1966) from Martinique to the negritude movement is the foundation of this dissertation. Throughout the years, I have been studying the negritude movement and the gender issues which inform so much of this study. I was first exposed to the masculinist environment of the negritude movement when I was writing my master's thesis on Leopold Sedar Senghor's poetry. During field work in Senegal, I was intrigued by the fact that women's contributions were rarely mentioned in the negritude movement; always only Leopold Sedar Senghor, Leon G. Damas and Aimé Césaire. Was there any woman who studied in France during this time? Why do we repeat the same narrative that overlooks the contribution of female writers, artists, activists? Where and how do we place women's contributions to the transnational connections of the black diasporic community? As outlined in my introduction, Shireen Lewis and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting have begun this work by connecting the negritude movement with francophone Caribbean women such as Suzanne Césaire and Paulette Nardal. My work adds the names of Aminata Sow Fall and Annette Mbaye d'Erneville from Senegal and argues for their relevance within negritude.

I maintain that the writings and personal trajectories of Mbaye d'Erneville, Sow Fall, Nardal, and Césaire evolve around a woman-centered project both in France and in

their home countries. Aware of the limitations and the masculinist component of the negritude movement, they advocate for the redefinition of black identities—a redefinition that goes against eurocentrism, patriarchy and racism through negritude feminism. As I discussed in this dissertation, Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire were part of those who created the environment in which negritude was created. Their essays deal with issues of gender, oppression, racism and imperialism. In regard to Annette Mbaye d’Erneville and Aminata Sow, as I demonstrated in each of their respective chapters, they have a conscious engagement with the negritude movement. However, the new dimension all four women add to the negritude movement is their Pan-African woman-centered project, their negritude feminisms. In their recognition and celebration of their black identities, they identify solidarity and unity as key components to fighting against imperialism. They are unconventional doers who redefine negritude as sets of practices that will allow black women to celebrate their contribution to society and to advocate for freedom and recognition within the black community across the globe. When I put these four women into conversation with each other, their intentions and goals in advocating for black women, calling for solidarity and black internationalism, and fighting against colonization and imperialism are similar and connected. They use their voices and privileges to raise awareness through their writings, teaching and activism.

As discussed in this dissertation, Paulette Nardal was a pioneer for change both in France and Martinique. She and her sisters created the Clamart Salon, literary and cultural journals among other opportunities that brought the black community together in France as they faced racism, segregation and oppression. Nardal was able to identify

problems that black women were facing in France and wrote about those issues in her essays. In many of her essays in *La revue du monde noire* and *La Dépêche Africaine*, she creates female characters, she celebrates black women's achievements across the globe and advocates for negritude feminism that brings concrete answers to the everyday experiences of black women in France and later in Martinique. Nardal became even more active in Martinique as she identified the political sphere as a key place that women need to enter.

Suzanne Césaire did not wait for other people to find solutions to the problems of racism, oppression and segregation that the black diasporic community faced. After her studies in France, Césaire went back to Martinique to advocate for black women and for her community. She used her voice and writing to denounce racism and advocate for black women in her essays in *Les Tropiques*. She invites Caribbean people to embrace their multiple heritages including their African heritages. Césaire's negritude feminism underscores a return to and focus on the realities faced by black women in Martinique and in other parts of the world. As her daughter Ina Césaire says in the poem "Suzanne Césaire my mother," she was an advocate for feminism and activism. Indeed, when the Vichy regime decided to ban the journal *Les Tropiques* after being offended by its revolutionary content saying, "I do have, on the contrary, very formal objections to a revolutionary, racial and sectarian review...", Césaire responded "..., expect from us neither a plea, nor vain recriminations, we do not speak the same language⁹⁸." Her brave decisions to join the team of *Les Tropiques*, to volunteer to write the letter to ask for

⁹⁸ The complete letter that Admiral Roberts sent to *Les Tropiques* and the response from Suzanne Césaire is available in the book *The Great Camouflage...*

permission for the journal to start publishing, and her courage to write a response to the Vichy regime when they decided to suspend the journal are instances where Césaire shows the necessity for black women to represent themselves and fight for their rights.

After discussing Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire's negritude feminisms in France and Martinique mostly during the 1920s to 1950s, I focused on Annette Mbaye d'Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall who are from Senegal and have also travelled to Paris to study and decided to come back to their home country to advocate for women in the 1940s to 1980s. In addition to focusing on Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville's writings, I had the privilege of interviewing them in June 2018.

Annette Mbaye d'Erneville follows the steps of Nardal and Césaire as she also believes in the necessity to fight eurocentrism and the importance of writing about the everyday experiences of black women. As a journalist, teacher, activist, and writer, her life is dedicated to black women, to the African youth and to the black diasporic community. She indeed was actively involved in projects that enhance and improve the experience of black women students in France. She carries out that ambition to Senegal after her studies and helped create many associations, activities and opportunities for black women to get involve in the development of their countries. Therefore, her focus and target were women in the black diasporic community. As she says in the film "Mère-Bi, la Mère," she considers herself as an advocate of the negritude movement as she was a close friend to Leopold Sedar Senghor, who asked her and her husband to come back to Senegal and help build the country after their studies in France. She carries out that mission of building her country with a new orientation of the negritude movement that re-

centers black women's experiences in the discussions of identity, liberation, anti-imperialism, and racism. Her negritude feminism is central to her writing, journalism and activism.

When Aminata Sow Fall says, "I write for the black community, for black women," she demonstrates she is doing negritude by using her pen to highlight the everyday experiences of black women. As an engaged writer, she believes that it is necessary to move away from Eurocentrism and get back to the black community's experience. She published novels, got engaged with many associations and created the Editions Khoudia to support younger writers, to educate Senegalese women and raise awareness among African youth and the black diasporic community. Similar to Mbaye d'Erneville, Sow Fall centers African cultures within her novels. As we have seen in this dissertation, Sow Fall is younger than Nardal, Césaire and Mbaye d'Erneville and she follows their path by advocating for black women. She is the proof that negritude is still relevant, and that negritude feminism is the answer to the creation of a dynamic future for the black community worldwide. Mount Holyoke College made a right choice to honor her with the title of Doctor Honoris Causa in 2000.

When I put into conversation these women together there are many overlapping themes, but they are developed in their writings through different approaches. Their practices of negritude feminism are different. When Nardal puts Catholicism into action, applying her European and Martinican experience to advocate for black women, Césaire on the other hand, uses surrealism which goes against any "rationality" and aligns with more radical thinkers of *les Tropiques* such as René Ménil and Aimé Césaire. As we have

seen in this dissertation, Césaire believes that surrealism can be blended with negritude feminism to obtain liberation for the black diasporic community. According to her, surrealism offers the freedom of the mind challenging rationality as defined by Europeans and it can be used in the Martinican context. Césaire calls for a shift of surrealism to fit the Martinican context as she is aware of the different realities between Europe and Martinique. She knows that for surrealism to work on the Martinican context, the revolutionary aspect of surrealism is what is needed to fight eurocentrism. Some key questions I am left with in regard to their approaches include the following: Why do Nardal and Césaire refer to European ideologies like surrealism and Catholicism to implement them into the Caribbean context? Do these two Martinican writers and activists go beyond eurocentrism by taking and personalizing ideologies to propose solutions to liberate their nations? Are they influenced by their European education or are they just reclaiming their multiple identities which include European and African heritages? Is it possible to define negritude feminism with religion, with Christianity or surrealism?

When Nardal demonstrates some conflicts with her engagement with Catholicism as she advocates for Martinican people, for the black diasporic community, Suzanne Césaire also goes through a similar experience by using gendered language using the pronoun “he” when referring to the Martinican. Her work mainly evolves around answering the key question, who is the Martinican? Although she was involved with the political and historical environment of Martinique through *Les Tropiques*, Césaire focuses more on the social and cultural sphere for women’s voices compared to Nardal

who invited Martinican women to be more involved in the political sphere. Similar to Nardal, Césaire is also influenced by her time period in the use of the gendered pronoun “he” to refer to an entire community, that of Martinican people. So, negritude feminisms is a necessary term that helps us understand the historical context that influences Césaire’s language as it underlines their multilayered-approach to fighting colonialism and advocating for black women.

In their negritude feminisms, Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d’Erneville and Sow Fall also demonstrate their complicated relationships with France. As part of those who had the privilege of studying in France, in the writings and personal experiences of these four women, there are some elitists gestures and a struggle with the French language created by their privileges and positions. After taking a close look at the writings and experiences of these four women, I argue that they all have a complex relationship with France but out of the four, Paulette Nardal’s elitist gestures are more apparent. Is Paulette Nardal influenced by her studies in France and her class in the way she advocates for black women? How was she influenced by her time period? How was she influenced by the masculinist environment of France and Martinique?

Some examples of Nardal’s gendered pronoun-use—which is a result of her proximity to France and the time period during which she was writing these essays--can be traced in her essays in France and in Martinique. For example, her word choices in the essay “l’Eveil de la Conscience de Race,” brings up the discussion about her class and position in the French society. Nardal dives into gender issues of being a black woman in Paris, supporting the idea that black women were already engaged in the call for racial

solidarity and should be acknowledged and given voice and yet the way she discusses gender issues is latent as she often refers to the black community using the “he” pronoun or to the Martinican using the pronoun “he,” similar to Suzanne Césaire’s essays. Thus, Paulette Nardal’s gender concerns are complex and oriented in a masculine vision which again shows the complexity or the tensions between the hegemony of feminism and the particularity of the experience of the black women.

Questions of elitism resulting from their complex relationship with France is particularly present in the works of Paulette Nardal and Annette Mbaye d’Erneville. Paulette Nardal, in the following passage writes “in Negro literature, one usually finds an emotional reaction which dates from the first inarticulate babblings by which he tried to express his failure, his sufferings, his humble joys and sometimes his revolt, to the magnificent flowering of modern Afro-american poetry” (37). It is interesting that Nardal reduces literature produced by Black writers to “an emotional reaction. Other instances where Nardal uses her elitist gestures are in her essays in *La Femme Dans la Cité*. In “Mise au point” [Setting the Record Straight], she writes “on conduira toutes ces femmes à l’urne, tells des moutons de Panurge” [they will drive all the women to the ballot box, like Panurge’s sheep following each other off a cliff]. By referencing Martinican women as “mouton” [sheep], we can read a gesture that is informed by her class and privilege. In “Optique Electoral” [From an Electoral Point of View], Nardal describes her mission and says “nos devoirs resteront les mêmes vis-à-vis des masses desherités” [our work will remain the same vis-à-vis the dispossessed masses]. In this instance, the “masse desherités” [the dispossessed masses] refer to Martinican women who do need help from

Nardal. I argue that this demonstrates some gestures in which Nardal is the savior of Martinican women. Her position in the society influences some of her word choices in the journal.

An instance where Annette Mbaye d'Erneville also features some elitist gestures within her advocacy for the black diasporic community is in her children's books. As I mentioned in 'La Bague de Cuivre et d'Argent,' Mbaye d'Erneville creates characters that reinforce some of the stereotypes that define poor people as being robbers. What does it mean to create a character, the "navetane" as a robber? Is she influenced by her privileged position, by her class? The navetane are people from rural areas who stay with farmers to help them during the rainy season and get paid with some of the harvest after the rainy season. Creating a character that comes from the underprivileged position in the Senegalese society and giving him the role of the "evil" demonstrates the complexity and influence of her class and position in the society. Also, when Mbaye d'Erneville says "j'ai découvert l'Afrique et mon identité à travers Madame Germaine Le Goff" [I have discovered Africa and my identity thanks to Madame Germaine Le Goff], it demonstrates her complicated relationship with France because Madame Le Goff is French and was sent to educate the girls in École des Jeunes Filles de Rufisque.

Aminata Sow Fall who starts publishing in the 1970s also features this struggle with France, with the French language. Her novels are published in French and she uses some Wolof words, proverbs and songs within her writing. Why is she using the French language? Is she confirming the necessity of French for African writers? The 1970s is ten years after the independence of Senegal and francophone countries and it is a period

when Ousmane Sembene created the journal *Kaddu* which was published entirely in Wolof. So, the Wolof language can be a language in which Aminata Sow Fall publishes. She can adopt Ngugi wa Thiong'o's strategy of writing in African native languages and then translating it in French. Does she develop an elitist gesture within her writing and teaching? Does she struggle with similar issues that Mbaye d'Erneville goes through?

Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville feature specific choices that redefine feminism and the negritude movement to reflect on the realities that black women go through. Because their writings and experiences in France started around the 1940s, they have been more equipped with terms to describe the experience of black women than Nardal and Césaire had. Both Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville did not present a gendered language in their work. Both of them are negritudist in a feminist way and feminist in a negritudist way. In other words, both Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville interact and redefine negritude and feminism in their own way. They offer a feminist corrective to negritude. They offer to the youth today, materials they need to position themselves in this complex world where the main question of Who am I? need to be answered in order to fight against oppression. I see Aminata Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville as those who demonstrate that we cannot find solutions to today's world without knowing who we are and without recognizing gender inequalities and fighting them.

Close investigation of the 1920s to the 1980s reveals that Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall were actively thinking and engaged with building a future for their countries, particularly for black women. across space and across time, these four women use their personal experiences in their countries and their presence in France to

find a way to use the negritude movement more practically. They are aware of their crucial role in building a strong black diasporic community able to respond to racism and colonization. I would argue that all the writings by Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall investigated in this dissertation communicate a strong advocacy for black women. Their transnational connections in regard to black women's concerns is remarkable and offer a better understanding of negritude feminism as it is present in their writings. As I demonstrate in this project, Aminata Sow Fall in particular, who is still writing novels, carries out the goals of negritude feminisms in our world today.

Embarking in this project, my goal was to demonstrate the practical use of the negritude movement by Nardal, Césaire, Mbaye d'Erneville and Sow Fall through negritude feminisms. I sought to provide a complete analysis of the purpose of their writings and activism in regard to negritude feminisms. I can confirm that although Nardal, Césaire, Sow Fall and Mbaye d'Erneville have different approaches to finding solutions to the problem of racism, they all had black women at the center of their concerns. This intergenerational project put together their engagement with their communities, their advocacy for black women and their solutions to the everyday experiences of black women.

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