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This thesis seeks to expose and discredit a perceived misconception that understood the Negritude movement as one, relatively uniform concept. An oversimplified, homogeneous view of Negritude at times appears to contradict itself, leading critics to dismiss the movement's relevance and/or standing in diasporic studies. The extensive intellectual relationship and personal friendship between Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor underscores many of the similarities that allowed for the collaboration that started the movement. A detailed analysis of Césaire and Senghor's relationships to Negritude, however, illustrates significant differences in each poet's perception of the movement.

I examine the conditions in early twentieth-century Paris that marked it as a cross-cultural center of diasporic literary production. Many critiques of Negritude do not take into account the importance of the historical and cultural contexts surrounding the birth of the movement, when in fact, context is the essence of Negritude's formation. I analyze the conceptions of Negritude found in Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* and Senghor's *Chants d'Ombre* and *Hosties noires* and discuss the reasons behind their intrinsic differences, which are also contextually centered.

I argue that Negritude not only bears a historical importance, but also continues to carry significance in present-day Francophone and diaspora studies. The movement led to a growing unrest over colonization and Western supremacy that eventually resulted in independence movements in Africa and departmentalization in the Antilles. It remained a

point of contention after decolonization and endures as a present force in the background of both spaces.

RE-ENVISIONING NEGRITUDE: HISTORICAL AND
CULTURAL CONTEXTS FOR AIMÉ
CÉSAIRE AND LÉOPOLD
SÉDAR SENGHOR

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to expose and discredit a perceived misconception that understood the Negritude¹ movement as one, relatively uniform concept. An oversimplified, homogeneous view of Negritude at times appears to contradict itself, leading critics to dismiss the movement's relevance and/or standing in diasporic studies. Léopold Sédar Senghor's essentialist characterization of the *nègre* presents a Negritude that is "outside" time, while Aimé Césaire asserts that Negritude is dependent on historical context and evolves according to changing times. While there have been critiques of both Césairean and Senghorian Negritude, Senghor's emphasis on the existence of an *âme noire*² has provoked a stronger backlash than Césaire's more open-ended conception because of its exclusionist implications. Césaire openly distanced himself from this uniquely Senghorian view:

Plus tard les choses ont un peu changé et il y a un point sur lequel je n'ai plus été du tout d'accord avec Senghor, parce que chacun a sa petite négritude à soi à l'heure actuelle : il m'a semblé que Senghor a fait de la négritude une sorte de métaphysique ; là nous avons divergé. Il a tendu un peu à bâtir la négritude en

¹ Scholars have employed various spellings of this term, including "Négritude" and "negritude" or "négritude." The original French term is "négritude," however, it seems appropriate here to comply with English capitalization standards and remove the accent, fully transforming it into an English word, instead of an amalgam of the two languages. In my citations, I will keep whichever version the cited author decides to use.

² The idea that there is a certain universal essence inherent in all members of the black race, consisting primarily of emotional and intuitive intelligence, in contrast to a white intelligence based on reasoning and logic. Senghor most succinctly summarizes the concept in this statement: "l'émotion est nègre, comme la raison est hellène" ("Ce que" 24).

essentialisme comme s'il y avait une essence nègre, une âme nègre, donc quelque chose de très métaphysique... mais je n'ai jamais accepté ce point de vue. (Attoun 111-2)

The extensive intellectual relationship and personal friendship between the two individuals underscores many of the similarities that ensured such a profound connection between them, allowing for the collaboration that started the movement. A detailed analysis of Césaire's and Senghor's relationships to Negritude, however, illustrates significant differences in each poet's perception of the movement. Separating Césairean and Senghorian Negritude clarifies misconceptions that develop from conflating the two perspectives. I support Jean Baptiste Popeau's definition of Senghor's Negritude as "objective," as Césaire's as "subjective" (117) as a foundation upon which we can understand their different versions of Negritude. I chose to focus specifically on Césaire and Senghor because of a quotation that brought about the beginnings of this research.¹ In an interview for a three-part biography, *Aimé Césaire, une voix pour l'histoire*, released in 1994, Césaire acknowledges Senghor's formative role to his own self-perception in saying: "Il m'a porté la clé de moi-même." Senghor, in turn, learned about the African diaspora in the Caribbean from Césaire, influencing his conception of this universal *âme noire*.

I devote my first chapter to examining the conditions that allowed for this type of intellectual exchange. Many critiques of Negritude do not take into account the importance of the historical and cultural contexts surrounding the birth of the movement,

¹ While it is outside the scope of this project to include an analysis of Negritude in the works of Léon Damas, it would be of interest for a future extension of this study.

when in fact, context is the essence of Negritude's formation. Paris played a crucial role in the development of a diasporic identity, as it drew together African-Americans, Antilleans and Africans in a space that was primed for the advancement of black intellectual production. Césaire and Senghor met in Paris, due only to the fact that they both received educational scholarships from their respective colonial governments of Martinique and Senegal. Grouping the most significant events that led up to Césaire and Senghor's first meeting in 1931 allows for a better understanding of why the founders of Negritude believed it necessary to first affirm and celebrate their difference in the face of Western supremacy and colonization.

The second and third chapters, respectively, focus on Césairean and Senghorian conceptions of Negritude, highlighting their overlapping similarities as well as their differences. In the second chapter, I analyze *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Césaire's first published work, in which the term *négritude* first appears in print. The third chapter examines Senghor's first two collections of poetry, *Chants d'Ombre* and *Hosties Noires*. Both Césaire and Senghor advocate a new vision of Africa as a motherland for the black diaspora, rich in historical and cultural significance; they also incorporate similar blood imagery in relation to this ancestral link to Africa. Because of their geographic locations, however, these basic similarities express themselves differently and hold different consequences. Césaire views his Antillean existence as fractured and disconnected, reflecting the trauma of a history built upon a slave trade economy, which carried over into colonial practices. Thus, blood not only serves as a bond to his African ancestry, but also as a reminder of the horrors of slavery that lay the foundation for his history. The

violence inherent in Césaire’s poetry finds no place in Senghor’s poetic vision, which is more concerned with emphasizing a pre-colonial “Golden Age” of Africa, free from capitalistic, colonial policies. Senghor’s strong essentialist view of a uniquely black soul (*l’âme noire*) in the poetic realm translates into a political stance of collaboration between Europe and Africa, like two pieces of a puzzle fitting together. Both Césaire and Senghor construct their identities from several sources, including European elements, but while Senghor tends to see the relationship as a Yin-Yang, with two distinct yet complementary parts, Césaire verges on the more complex understanding of a hybridity of identities—Caribbean, African and French—merging together. Due to his strong Christian faith and participation in the French army during World War II, Senghor expresses more of a conflicted, at times conciliatory, perspective in his criticism of France; while Césaire, aligning more with a surrealist opposition to the West, advocates building an entirely new society out of the ashes of the old system. One point on which the two poet-politicians² can agree is the continued role Negritude will play on future evolutions in Caribbean and African literature.

Understanding the contexts specific to each author explains the effects his version of Negritude produces on literary development in the Antilles and West Africa. The final chapter considers Negritude’s legacy in both spaces. Césaire’s Negritude has served as the platform upon which many new conceptions of Antillean identity have been built, including Antillanité, Américanité and Créolité. After much criticism, the essentialist aspect of Senghor’s Negritude that addresses the *âme noire* has proven itself outdated in a

² This dual nature as both poet and politician defines both men’s lives, as they struggle to balance the implications of what it means to live in both the literary and the political world.

postmodern reality, but his stance on valorizing tradition while propelling Africa onto the global stage has influenced a number of West African works that address Africa's straddling of tradition and modernity. I argue for a view of Negritude as a primarily modernist movement in order to effectively interpret the more contemporary, postmodern objections to its internal structuring.

I contend that Negritude not only bears a historical importance, but also continues to carry significance in present-day Francophone and diaspora studies. Negritude led to a growing unrest over colonization and Western supremacy that eventually resulted in independence movements in Africa and departmentalization in the Antilles. It remained a point of contention after decolonization and endures as a present force in the background of both spaces. In 2010, *Third Text* published a special issue devoted to Senghor. In an introductory article, Rasheed Araeen poses these questions:

What is wrong with the way Negritude has been generally understood [...] 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 fetishisation of some of its elements which were in the interest of African ruling classes? (170)

Clearly, questions over Negritude still go unanswered, further dispelling the notion that the movement no longer merits discussion or is no longer relevant. Even in postmodern or post-colonial studies, a detailed comprehension of Negritude, including the discrepancies between Césairean and Senghorian views, proves vital to effective contemporary criticism. Western values, Modernism, Romanticism, and assimilation all contributed the birth of Negritude, just as it has subsequently influenced twenty-first century notions of Post-colonialism, Postmodernism, hybridity, and deconstruction.

CHAPTER II

LAYING FOUNDATIONS: THE IMPORTANCE OF PARIS TO NEGRITUDE'S DEVELOPMENT

Since the term, *négritude*, has been used in a variety of contexts by a variety of authors and critics, it is difficult to pin down an clear-cut definition, but in essence, the Negritude movement sprung from exchanges between Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon-Gontran Damas and other black intellectuals in the 1930s. At its core, it is a reclaiming of the derogatory term, “nègre,” and a reappropriation of it in order to promote the value of African cultures. The goal of Negritude is neither to combat whites nor to render them inferior, as that would simply be imitating their actions towards blacks and practicing discrimination. Proponents of the Negritude movement want instead to combat the ignorant stereotypes of Africa perpetuated by the West. The movement is more concerned with raising the status of Africans and members of the black diaspora than denigrating another population. In fact, the elusiveness of its definition is actually one of the central components of its identity. Negritude has its foundation rooted in a valorization of Africa and a certain pan-africanist, diasporic spirit. If understood as a movement of cultural nationalism based in a historical context, it could be relegated to a specific past and thus only relevant today as an area of historical study. In a more abstract conception, we can view Negritude as more of an existence or way of living than a strict philosophical statement. Each “member” of the Negritude movement constructs a unique scaffolding built off the same foundation. In an interview, Césaire describes the nature of

the movement: “négritude is a point of departure. It is the affirmation that one is black and proud of it... that there is solidarity between all blacks... that we are suspended together in space” (Frutkin 15). This means the notion of Negritude and its implementation in literature or philosophy is free to evolve with changing political and social developments, an aspect of the movement that is initially not necessarily easy to perceive. I will examine how Césaire and Senghor both mold Negritude to their own needs in future chapters. First, I will trace how and why the Negritude movement came into existence in order to elucidate the extent to which the historical and cultural context surrounding these two authors influenced their conception and application of Negritude.

The Negritude movement was born from encounters, specifically between Antilleans, Africans and African-Americans, who were all drawn to Paris from World War I through the 1930s for various reasons. These encounters would also spark the recognition of Paris as an epicenter of cross-cultural exchange and provoke the emergence of a diasporic identity. The most important Parisian encounter for Negritude, however, was one between Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, who both came to the city in hopes of furthering their education through the *Écoles normales supérieures*. Other important events in the broader campaign advocating for the advancement of black populations across the globe also took place in Paris. W.E.B. DuBois, with president Clemenceau’s approval, initiated the first Pan-African conference in the city in 1919. In 1924, organizer of the *Ligue universelle de la défense de la race noire*, Kojo Tovalou, gave a speech entitled, “Paris, cœur de la race noire” in which he expressed his hope for Paris to develop into the Babel of the black world (Condé 30). With so much of this

development focused in one area, the question becomes, “Why Paris?” France’s centralized government and colonial policy of assimilation brought together black intellectuals from the colonies, who would later use the education they acquired due to colonization to rebel against it.

Césaire and Senghor may have met in 1931, but the conditions that allowed for their meeting and for the subsequent popularity of the movement they set into motion had been created by a series of historical and cultural events during the twenty years that preceded this meeting. The cultural effects of World War I, along with a growing popularity of Africanism and evolutions in black literary production propelled France, and Paris in particular, to the foreground of black re-valorization movements that were developing all across the globe. The city was the creative center of the world in the 1920s, and a cultural capital for exchanges among black intellectuals, writers, musicians and artists (Stovall 25). Paris, however, was a space of contradictions; on one hand, it was an arena that allowed for both the increased visibility of the black community and black intellectual production, on the other hand, this same popularity, often resembled France’s patriarchal *mission civilisatrice*, resulting in a further exoticism of blacks that spawned more prejudicial treatment and widened the gap between white Europeans and the colonial Other. It was this contradictory nature of race¹ in the post-war period that

¹ I agree with Shireen Lewis’s treatment of the word “race” within a Francophone intellectual framework, especially in a discourse on Negritude. She says: “It is important to point out that in the Francophone context, the word “race” does not have any of the ambiguity it has assumed in American literary theory and criticism. For Francophone intellectuals, it is not a question of putting a word in quotation marks to signal its dubious meaning or to flag it as merely social or political construct with no meaning in biology. African American intellectuals and others are using quotation marks to decenter or disempower the nation of race. However, not every black intellectual agrees with this new treatment of the word “race.” It has been convincingly argued that even if race may be difficult to pin down, given the history of race relations in

created a need for the Negritude movement. An examination of the years that ignited this kind of cross-cultural exchange in Paris will serve to clarify an understanding of the Negritude movement as a whole and, more importantly, its various forms and representations in the work of Césaire and Senghor.

The Great War

World War I played a major role in shaping the Paris “negrophilia” of the 1920s. Although the demand for manpower during the war years fell on Europe’s newly acquired African colonies, Europeans were wary of using African conscripts for combat on European soil, as they regarded these conscripts as savages and unintelligent brutes who would not understand tactical maneuvering or strategy (Lunn 125). At first, African conscripts were deployed to other continents or used as laborers on military bases and docks. With the prolonged war effort and dwindling numbers in the ranks, France moved these conscripts to the front lines. This was the first of many ways in which France would distinguish itself from other countries in its relationship to the black community, as Britain and Germany never made this same decisive shift. By the end of the war, over 140,000 West African soldiers had fought for the French army, 31,000 of whom had died (147). After the war, many did return to their home countries, but a sizable group remained in France: an official census from 1926 reported 2,580 black Africans living in

America, one cannot simply eliminate the notion of race if one is seriously committed to attaining social justice. [...] For the poets of Negritude, race is even less ambiguous. They conceptualize race in terms of a binary opposition... Generally, for Francophone intellectuals from Africa and the Caribbean in the early part of the twentieth century, it was clear that the colonizer was white and the colonized was black and this division dictated the thinking at that historical moment.” (xvi-ii)

France, but it seems more likely the number was around 5,000 (Berliner 2). Due to the country's longstanding policy to not identify the race of French citizens, it is impossible to ascertain the exact Antillean population in France at this time; however, Philippe Dewitte estimates the number at around 10,000 (2). The influx of African soldiers in France spurred not only a more direct, sustained contact between whites and blacks on the mainland, but also incited exchanges within the black community itself. These new interactions fostered a greater sense of understanding and debunked many stereotypes on both sides. Most white French had one fixed concept of a black person, regardless of origin: either the savage, animal-like cannibal commonly portrayed in stories from the colonies or the child-like, smiling African like the one in the Banania advertising campaign.² Thus, some were quite surprised to see black Americans or Africans that went against these accepted stereotypes (Lunn 157; Stovall 14). Blacks also had developed their own assumptions about whites from the limited contact they had with them; more prolonged association with whites in a difference context gave them a more nuanced view.

A desire for citizenship drew many African-Americans and some Africans to the War. In the United States, African-American leaders, like W.E.B. Du Bois were actively calling for African-American soldiers to enlist in the army (Stovall 4). They believed this act of patriotism would serve to advance their fight for equality and freedom within the United States. Slavery was abolished in America only a little more than two generations

² A harmless, smiling *tirailleur sénégalais* has acted as the face for the popular breakfast drink, Banania, from 1914 to present day. Over the years, the more realistic depiction of the soldier has evolved into a stereotyped characterization.

before the war, and even though legally freed, African-Americans still faced extreme racism and isolation in their home country. Those few African-Americans who were living in France before the war had kept to themselves and thus no real expatriate community existed. Some stories of France's tolerance towards blacks did make it across the ocean, only bolstering the African-American drive to experience a "color-blind" country, while furthering their hopes for equality (4). In total, 200,000 black Americans crossed the Atlantic during wartime (7). In Senegal, Blais Diagne succeeded in securing French citizenship rights to all *originaires* (anyone residing inside the four main communes of Senegal) who fought for France, so the incentives were higher for this small population. Several Senegalese former combatants expressed the same reason for joining the army as African-American soldiers: "We were not fighting for the French; we were fighting for ourselves [to become] French citizens" (Lunn 137). These Africans saw an opportunity to gain rights for themselves and others through government channels. It should not be forgotten, however, that France made the decision to recruit soldiers from Africa, not the other way around. Many Africans, especially ones without this citizenship agreement, were reluctant to fight for the country that had just recently colonized them. Some African soldiers did sign up for a small stipend, while others were forced by means of high taxes, threats to their family, or even kidnapping (33-58).

Once in France, African conscripts had many of the same experiences as African-American soldiers. Eighty percent of African-Americans in France (160,000 men) served as workers, not soldiers, and were denied passes to leave the American base, due to concern they would fraternize with the French (7). This was also the case for many

African conscripts during the war (especially in the beginning), most of whom trained in blacks-only training camps and were housed in blacks-only barracks. The *originaires* fought alongside other conscripts from Martinique, Guadeloupe and Réunion in the Colonial Army, which also comprised of some North Africans and other French soldiers, while the lesser-privileged riflemen, or *tirailleurs*, were secluded to their own divisions (107).

Even though in reality, racism was still prevalent in France, it was a different experience for those Africans and African-Americans who visited through the Army. Despite fears about the overseas relocation and occasional abuse in the training camps, West African recruits felt freer and better treated in France than the army camps in Africa (109). They received better food, officers were less aggressive than those they had previously experienced and there seemed to be a prevailing fairness to the French camp structure. An African conscript could be promoted, even hold authority over white soldiers. Historian, Joe Lunn, notes a very perceivable shift in one African's mentality due to prolonged contact with the social system on mainland France. Former soldier, Doudou Ndao, says, "We were in the same army... so we were all equal; we were all the same" (111). Army culture and the lengthy cross-racial contact served to dramatically alter colonized peoples' view of their relationship to the colonizer and their place within the larger community.

African-Americans also saw an appreciation of their skills and talents in France unlike what they had seen at home. Divisions like the 369th Infantry Regiment of New York were prime examples of the type of recognition African-Americans received

abroad. This unit, also known as the “Harlem Hellfighters,” shipped to France in 1917 after their training in South Carolina was cut short due to the intense racism of the local white population there. Once in Europe, they were assigned to the French army for more training and ended up staying under French command, as was the case for many African-American units. Under this new leadership, however, they were recognized many times for their military endeavors fighting on the front lines (Stovall 12). Even though they were awarded a *croix de guerre* for their efforts, they, along with other African-American troops, were not permitted to march with their fellow white American soldiers in the armistice parade in Paris (Tournès 14).

The French also showed a distain for American racist practices, especially lynching, a sentiment clearly perceived and appreciated by African-Americans. Brett Berliner illuminates the reasoning behind France’s stance: “The French believed that blacks were deserving of the civilizing mission, and even if blacks were incapable of attaining a high level of civilization, it was incumbent upon whites not to denigrate themselves in their treatment of the inferior other” (46). The present reality of European colonization in the 1920s and 30s had different repercussions on the French mentality than the history of slavery in the United States. The French had recently colonized much of West Africa, and could only accept this kind of inhumane domination through “explanations” such as the one Berliner describes. The French saw blacks as inferior, but also as candidates for amelioration under French tutelage. Another theory as to why the French were so “outright” in their critique of American racism relates to the far-reaching psychological effects of the Great War. Even though America was recognized as a

powerful and important ally in the war effort, the French may have wanted to unearth a weakness in the country, in order to repair some feelings of their own superiority that had been weakened by the war (Berliner 46). They could prove their morality and civilized nature were still intact by condemning another country for its barbaric and inhumane lynchings.

The war brought together blacks from America, Africa and the Antilles in a unique kind of interaction. After having lived a different kind of life in the army and being exposed to other groups of people, Africans and African-Americans alike were hopeful the end of the war would bring about a shift in race relations at home. Black American veterans returned home to mixed reactions. The North was more amenable to treating black soldiers with respect, even with the occasional welcome home parade (Stovall 27). In the South, however, many Southerners did not see a causal relation between blacks serving in the army and subsequently gaining more rights and respect, as black leaders had hoped. If anything, Southerners were more fearful of blacks upon their return, as word had spread about the more lenient racial relations in Paris. After the war, Senator James Vardaman of Mississippi proposed even harsher terms for “handling” returning black veterans:

Every community in Mississippi ought to organize and the organization should be led by the bravest and best white men in the community. And they should pick out these suspicious characters—those military, French-women-ruined negro soldiers and let them understand that they are under surveillance and that when crimes similar to this are committed, take care of the individual who commits the crime.
(27)

The lack of change in race relations in the U.S. would drive many influential individuals of the Harlem Renaissance to relocate—usually only temporarily—to France, where they could write and converse with other black intellectuals in a more accommodating environment.

African conscripts were also returning home with a broader world view, especially on notions of social equality they had glimpsed abroad. Lunn received an account of a fight initiated by a black soldier on the boat back to Senegal because a white soldier had called him a “*sale nègre*.” The veteran recounting the story defends the soldier’s actions:

We were within our rights because discrimination between people [was no longer tolerated] at that time. [and] we were French citizens like anybody else. ... [But] if the same thing had happened before the war, [we] would not have done the same thing. Because we had less power than, and [we] were treated badly like this [by the French] all the time. (Lunn 189)

This statement displays a transformation in self-perception and a recognition of the injustices that had previously been accepted practices. Constructing this comparison between pre- and post-war mentalities shows the transformative impact the war had on this soldier and many others like him; it was also the cause of local French authorities’ concern over a potential upset of pre-war conditions in Senegal. In an effort to curtail this reformative attitude, *commandants* detained black soldiers upon their arrival to emphasize the type of conventional behavior expected from them once they left the army (189). Economically speaking, young veterans posed another kind of threat to the hierarchies traditionally sustained by their communities. These soldiers returning home had more money to spend than they would have normally had at their age. Most gave the

money over to elders, but some held on to it, allowing themselves the luxury of taking a wife without having to go through the normal channels of assistance. This new form of independence, coupled with their *Tubab*³ education received abroad, the younger veterans had the potential to disrupt the supremacy of the elders in the community (192). Some soldiers took positions within the French sector, as policemen or along rail lines, but others did not want to appear too “French” in their behavior and considered taking such a position as an offense to their community. Either way, in analyzing their reflections on the war experience, Lunn found that: “most soldiers were outraged by the racial injustice they had usually experienced at the hands of the French, which continued to be manifested in particularly flagrant ways even after many had shed their blood in behalf of *la patrie*” (214). Racial prejudice that continued after the war was even more damaging to these soldiers and the knowledge of this disrespect would continue to fester in the communal consciousness of the West African colonies.

Pan-African Congress of 1919 and Debates on French Colonial Policy

The Pan-African Congress played a major role in solidifying Paris as a center for cross-cultural communication across the diaspora and the dissension in the Congress over colonial policy sheds light on how the leaders of the Negritude movement could arrive at such a position. It was no coincidence that W.E.B DuBois chose the dates of the Pan-African Congress to coincide with the Paris Peace Conference at the end of World War I. One of the main goals of the first Congress, detailed by DuBois in a memorandum “to M.

³ General term to designate a foreigner; here connoting the negative effects of Western culture’s influence.

Diagne and others” was “the making of strong representations to the Peace Conference sitting in Paris in behalf of both voice in and protection for 250,000,000 Negroes and Negroids in the League of Nations” (DuBois 224). It was essential for the black community to be a visible and present force in the period of post-war peace talks in order to gain more recognition in the post-war world. This same memorandum clearly shows that DuBois saw Paris as central to the foundation of a black international community. His last suggestion for the goals of the conference consisted of creating a “permanent Secretariat with Headquarters in Paris,” in order to accomplish the following:

- Collating the history of the Negro race.
- Studying the present conditions of the race.
- Publishing articles, pamphlets and a report of this Congress.
- Encouraging Negro art and literature.
- Arranging for a second Pan-African Congress in 1920 (225).

DuBois had recently been sent to Paris to collect data on African-American participation in World War I, including their treatment while overseas, and saw the strong black presence in the city and the relative leniency accorded to blacks in Paris compared to the United States. One major goal of the Congress would also be to hear “statements on the condition of Negroes throughout the world” (225): an attempt at unifying the black diaspora and black Africans together through the bond of the wide-spread oppression of their race. It was because of this global oppression that the black race had to organize and gain political empowerment through solidarity and strength in numbers (Schmeisser 118).

The resolutions ultimately passed, but, did not accomplish much immediate change; the real success of the Congress, however, was in its assemblage of a black international

presence to foster a sense of community within the race. One of the factors of the Congress's limited success was a sizable incongruence between the anglophone and francophone participants on matters of colonial policy. This policy was especially germane to the Congress, as the Paris Peace Conference was soon to decide the fate of Germany's colonies. President Wilson had recently advocated for a spirit of self-determination and autonomy in colonial administration to achieve peace and proposed that a decision over colonial disputes be made with the interests of both the colonizer and the colonized in mind. Black Americans participating in the Pan-African Congress considered this a positive shift in European colonial policy. While Americans were condemning the current European policy, the French—white and black—were praising the positive effects they saw in the *mission civilisatrice*. Senegalese senator, Blaise Diagne opened the Congress with a speech that applauded French imperialism (Stovall 34) and French ethnographer, Maurice Delafosse, reported that the Congress saw nothing new in the proposed collaboration between colonizer and colonized (Hargreaves 233). While the term is never mentioned in his report, Delafosse's conviction that France had already implemented most of the suggestions proposed by the Pan-African Congress rested on his belief in a colonial policy of association, not assimilation. This *politique d'association*, as it was called, differed from the strict *doctrine de l'assimilation*, as this distinction in terminology implies, in that it was a more fluid relationship with the colonized, determined by a case-by-case assessment of each population's culture, education and industry (Betts 173). It was an acknowledgement of a certain existing culture prior to colonization and an attempted preservation of this culture as it fused with

the institutions brought by the colonizer.

Association became a more accepted way to view the relationship between France and its colonies once colonization expanded very rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century and included many regions whose cultures were contradictory to those of the West. This practice of cultural relevancy, however, could be criticized as much as, if not more than, assimilation. The proponents of association argued the impossibility of assimilating some colonies, especially those in West Africa, due to the perceived undeveloped intellectual capacity of the native. Also, with the extreme increase in colonized peoples, there was a growing fear among the white majority that assimilation would lead to voting power, which would eventually relegate them to a minority seat (Lewis 152). The explorer, Gustave Le Bon, was one of the first to openly denounce assimilation in Africa. Lewis notes that Le Bon's discourse is rich with descriptions of "inferior races," "savages," "half-civilized peoples," "barbarians." This ethnocentric approach to colonial policy measures other countries' cultures, economies and governing practices against a Western European scale; something that was previously "different," was now considered "inferior," because it didn't align with a Western standard of achievement. Some black intellectuals, especially the directors of *Ligue Universelle de Défense de la Race Noire* (LUDRN), René Maran and Kojo Tovalou, saw association as contrary to the French principle of equality. If the colonies could not be fully autonomous, then they were entitled to equal rights under French rule, regardless of race (Geneste 52). Maran and Tovalou followed the Republican ideals of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity created by the French to argue for their basic humanity to be recognized.

Tovalou also argued that applying a separate policy to the colonies was a method of controlling them and preventing them from acquiring French citizenship, confining them to a lower status within the colonial system. However, the debate was not drawn along strictly racial lines. Geneste outlines an important aspect of this argument between association and assimilation in saying, “it would be a mistake to imagine that the conflict emerged from the oppositional positions of universalist black intellectuals and white cultural relativists” (53). Believing to be advocates of equality, each side accused the other of destroying either the cultural (through assimilation) or the political (through association) rights of the colonized. Raymond Betts, who has devoted an entire book to the study of these two practices, asserts that: “even though association became the official colonial policy after [World War I], the ghost of assimilation lingered on and could still be seen flitting in and out of French colonial affairs” (165). France’s sense of moral obligation, their *mission civilisatrice*, allowed for assimilation to continue, albeit not in the fullest, most fair sense of the term, which would have taken a large-scale transformation. Lewis argues that: “Gallicization was permitted to stand as the ultimate goal, but in practice it was not to be pressed too hastily, nor too many natives permitted to attain it” (150). In essence, the combination of these two policies produced the worst of both situations for the colonized Africans, who were indoctrinated into French education and culture, but excluded from any real political rights.

This debate over colonial policy would have large implications for the Negritude movement. Césaire, Senghor, and most of the black intellectual francophone community that had formed in Paris during the interwar period, were products of this type of

combined colonial policy. Before the war, when association was first being proposed, the French attributed the efficiency and profitability of the Dutch and British colonies to their disinterest in assimilation. If France had adopted a true associative role in the colonies, a French education would not have been offered and the black intellectual community that was then eligible to receive French scholarships to study in Paris would not have formed. Granted, this education was offered for very few indigenous people, but some were able to gain entrance through passing rigorous examinations, while others who came from elite backgrounds were also allowed acceptance. The support for assimilation by the congress's francophone participants widened the divide between themselves and African-Americans. Schmeisser describes the overall feeling of the 1919 Congress as such: "The francophone representatives of African descent conceived of themselves as (assimilated) "Frenchmen" in the first place, whereas their American-anglophone collaborators preferred to emphasize their "Negro" identity" (119). Schmeisser goes on to quote DuBois referencing Diagne as "a Frenchman who is accidentally black," and other congress leader from Guadeloupe, Gratien Candace, to have "no conception of Negro uplift, as apart from French development" (119). These ideological clashes between anglophone and francophone blacks may have impeded the Congress's action in passing substantial resolutions, but it elucidates necessary differences within the African diaspora. It is much more common for scholars to highlight the similarities between various black communities, during a period that experienced the birth of "Pan-Africanism," but it is important to recognize inherent differences in the defining characteristics of the Harlem Renaissance and Negritude. The policy of assimilation, and

the debate over association, shaped francophone intellectuals in a unique way that would influence their relationship with France for decades to follow.

Africanism and Exoticism in Post-War France

Perhaps the growing popularity of association had a hand in the vogue of Africanism that surrounded the first third of the twentieth century. French interest in “primitive” art in the beginning of the twentieth century turned obsessive after the war, both as a means of coping with the violence of European society and redefining a national identity through distinction from the Other. The heightened visibility that the black community received because of this trend served, once again, to position Paris as a center for black intellectual development. However, as this interest in blacks was rooted in a hierarchical, racist context, the dichotomy between black and white became more solidified, branding blacks as exoticized Others, and not equal human beings.

One of the first igniters of this obsession came in the form of jazz music. The “Harlem Hellfighters,” like many other black divisions in the U.S. Army, had also brought with them a 44-piece jazz band—the first jazz music performed by its creators that the French would hear (Blake 62). Jazz within the regiments also won praise from a French audience hungry for more of the innovative rhythms and nontraditional dances that accompanied them. Many jazz bands formed in the U.S. Army found work after the war was over and opted to stay, settling primarily in Paris. Alongside their condemnation of American racism, the French were all the more eager to embrace jazz music. There were, of course, many other factors that led to the immense popularity of jazz in France

during this period. The end of the war was a period of intense confusion in all realms of French society. The country was struggling to find a way to process the carnage that had been a reality in their everyday lives for years. There was certainly a relief that the conflict was over, but there was also a growing fear over what the post-war future would hold. Uneasiness prevailed over the possibility of another unstoppable global disaster. At the dawn of the 20th century, the French saw no clear direction of where the world was heading, politically or culturally. Some saw in jazz a musical representation of the turbulence and uncertainty they faced during the war. Jazz was “a music perceived to be every bit as earsplitting as the mechanized battlefield and just as hair-raising as a savage sacrifice” (Blake 79) and could serve as a sort of outlet for war trauma. For many, the key to moving forward after the war lay in a return to the basics. The purist movement that spread across every facet of French culture in the late teens to early twenties, from architecture to art and music, gave order and unity to the post-war confusion. It was a movement of “traditionalism and patriotism” (138) that could set a path for the country to follow. This idea seems in direct opposition to the wild, free flowing connotations of jazz rhythms, but Jody Blake argues that these two movements worked in harmony with one another and shows how Africanism would prove to be a perfect fit for post-war France.

The primitivism of the pre-war period, with Europe’s self-proclaimed “discovery” and promotion of African art, set the stage for the continued Africanism that was to follow the war. While the ethnocentric French misappropriated and misunderstood African art in all its complexities, they still valued it for their own reasons and consequently, furthered the negrophilia that was sweeping the nation. Racism still existed

in full force and the French did not make much, if any, distinction between Africans and African-Americans or other ethnicities, but they were highly curious, even obsessed, with everything “African.” The notion of a return to the primal, natural state appears at odds with the push for everything modern at the turn of the century, but as the Swiss-born poet, Blaise Cendrars, explained it, primitivism was not an escape into the past, but a true realization of the complexities in imagining the modern. Blake summarizes Cendrars argument: “the poet had no option but to use the ‘language of the savage’ to express a period so ‘modern’ that it actually seemed to be ‘primitive’” (37-38). Jean Cocteau expressed a similar idea when he described the pulsing rhythms of jazz in relation to the modernity. He saw jazz as a musical representation of the modern era, with its booming industry and machinery. In *Le Coq et l’Arlequin*, he says, “Ni le peintre ni le musicien ne doivent se servir du spectacle des machines pour mécaniser leur art, mais de l’exaltation mesurée que provoque en eux le spectacle des machines pour exprimer tout autre objet plus intime” (Tournès 53). Primitivism, purism, and jazz that followed the war, are all based on a concept of art at its simplest, most basic form. Jazz musicians were allowing their most primal emotions to pass through them in the form of music: “[The purists’ approach to African art] was guided by the conviction that ‘primitive’ sculpture and music, with their emphasis on geometry and rhythm, respectively, were the most rudimentary and abstract of art forms” (Blake 151). The French re-appropriated what characteristics they saw in this art to further their own concepts of the modern. Thus, while the African community gained more visibility through the popularity of primitivism, it was still being manipulated by a dominate white majority.

This obsession with the exotic Other should not be confused with an acceptance of blacks as equals. Berliner argues that the various representations of an exoticized *nègre* helped to define and stabilize French identity in the interwar years (Berliner 7). By characterizing the Other with inferior qualities, the French could establish their own identity through negation: they were everything the *nègre* was not. As the roaring twenties (*les années folles*) unfolded, jazz and the revues it influenced became less frequented by the smaller sub-set of posh clientele it had primarily attracted. The rise in its popularity drove club owners to target shows to a larger audience, which in club owner Jacques-Charles' case meant choosing American Josephine Baker to star in a new performance. In making this new endeavor more commercialized, he modified the set and put the exoticized, sexualized stereotypes of the *nègre* in the forefront of the show. Baker was a scandal, with her scantily dressed acts, ending with a single flamingo feather finale (Tournès 25). But she and her *Revue nègre* of 1925 were an immediate success. The immense popularity of the *Revue nègre* brought about two opposing effects. It accentuated the exotic and erotic in France's imagining of the *nègre*; but despite its perceived degrading aspects, the *Revue nègre* was the first entirely black revue to appear on the Paris circuit. In a way, it was an important step in the visibility and respectability of the black community in France. Contrary to accepted fact today, when jazz first made its debut in France, people were reluctant to acknowledge the connection between blacks and jazz. Despite obvious evidence, it was hard to accept that something created and produced by the *nègre* could reach such popularity for the highly civilized and intellectual European community. One French music critic went so far as to try to

establish France as the true origin of jazz. He argued that jazz was a derivative or ancient shepherd melodies that French slave owners taught their slaves in Louisiana (Stovall 69). Ludovic Tournès highlights just how important the *Revue nègre* was for the acculturation of jazz in France: “elle met en avant, pour la première fois de manière aussi nette, le lien entre le jazz et la négritude” (25). Josephine Baker may have been objectified to suit growing demand for an exotic black image, but in the process, she solidified jazz as an element of black culture, prohibiting whites from claiming it as their own. The Negritude movement would apply the growing potential for self-definition found through jazz to a broader goal of promoting black culture in the world.

The growing negrophilia, while paternalistic and denigrating at times, provided unique opportunities for blacks in France, as opposed to other parts of the Western world. Cross-cultural encounters provided a new way of envisioning the black diaspora and influenced the cultural identity of African-Americans as well as those from African and the Antilles. Jazz clubs sprang up all over Paris, especially in Montmartre, providing jobs for black musicians and entertainers. In the army, African-American musicians were introduced to the art and music of African and Antillean soldiers, just as African-American writers such as Langston Hughes or Countee Cullen encountered other black communities distinct from their own. Not only did African-American musicians benefit tremendously from their time as expatriates, they also helped the black community in Paris as a whole solidify its identity. Instead of following the traditional French model of cultural assimilation, African-Americans held on to their cultural identities and formed a new expatriate community abroad (Stovall 26). This paved the way for other minority

populations to make themselves seen and heard by the white French majority. The African-American expatriate community helped bring about a valorization of African heritage and culture in France, a goal that would be furthered pursued by the Negritude movement. Even though the writers and musicians that represented this African diasporic intellectual production represented a relatively small community and originated from outside France, Paris during the post-war period was probably the most influential center for this type of production. When an individual is transplanted into a new society, he has the opportunity to compare it to his own culture and subsequently draw conclusions about his own identity. Critic Tyler Stovall argues that: “The character of black Paris as a meeting place of cultures in exile encouraged the kind of reflection upon one’s own homeland and identity that seems to come easier when surrounded by unfamiliar places and peoples” (“Aimé” 45). It was essentially necessary for black individuals to travel outside of their original culture in order for bonds to be built across the diaspora and for a conception such a Negritude to be realized.

Along with the purist movement, Surrealism would be another stepping stone for the promotion of Africanism and the emergence of Negritude. The Surrealists, who may have used Africanism to validate their goals of achieving a certain primitivism of their own, were genuine proponents of the African arts and way of expression (Blake 119). Surrealists valued the “primitive” aspect of Africans, thus propelling a great deal of African artwork to Paris’s center stage. Lilyan Kesteloot states that, in fact, it was only through Surrealists in Paris that Senghor and Césaire were introduced to “l’art nègre” that was becoming so popular (*Histoire* 39). Surrealists were also the first white group to seek

out the majority black clubs of Montmartre, like Abbaye Thélème, Bricktop's, Chez Florence, the Grand Duc, the Perroquet, the Plantation and Zelli's (Blake 113). There was a very appealing pull for the Surrealists to witness "real jazz"—jazz played by black musicians for a black audience—in what they saw as a wild environment where almost anything was possible. When the clubs in Montmartre had become too whitewashed and too frequented by tourists, the Surrealists were the first to travel south to the Montparnasse neighborhood, where another hot spot for more "authentic" jazz clubs was starting to develop. Of course, long before these Montparnasse clubs were "discovered" by the Surrealists, they had been serving a mostly Antillean population living primarily in the 14th and 15th *arrondissements* of Paris (Berliner 206).⁴ Phillippe Soupault proposed that as long as African-Americans remained "despised" as outsiders to the Parisian white community, they would be able to retain their freedom from the constraints of European society (121). Even though Soupault asserted his support for the continued, unrestrained self-expression he saw in jazz and in its creators, he admitted he was still uncomfortable interacting with their Otherness, the exact quality he claimed to support. Surrealists longed to be outside of the same Western constraints, but in Soupault's descriptions of blacks, he perpetuated some of the stereotypes that restrained them to a superficial, exoticized status. He described the clubs and dancers as frenzied, in a sub-conscious state, which produced a sort of terrified anticipation in him. He admired what he perceived as mysterious trances that seemed to possess black performers. This kind of

⁴ Started as a way to win political support for the Martiniquais candidate, Jean Rézard des Vouves, the "Bal colonial," as it became known, was located in the back room of a bar and *tabac* on rue Blomet in the 15th. Unlike African-American jazz clubs, the Caribbean focus meant different music, costumes and the beguine, the national dance of Martinique (Blake 116).

view only reinforced the stereotype of sorcerous religious practices and mystification surrounding people of African decent at the time. Keeping this type of racist structure in place kept blacks as “outsiders,” but did nothing to make them “free” in the way he described.

Soupault was in fact one of the first whites to visit the *Bal colonial* in Montparnasse, witnessing what he described as blacks dancing “for their own pleasure” (Berliner 207). One must not forget that while there was a surge in black intellectual production and a diasporic cross-cultural space created in Paris, the spaces like the jazz clubs of Montmartre, and later Montparnasse, were frequented by a large white audience. The price of entry was one hindrance, in addition to the fact that a majority of the black performers were working at these clubs, not attending them. Performers, however, would convene after their gigs at the Grand Duc, or at the *Bal colonial*. Another popular spot was the Tempo Club in Montmartre, also known as the “unofficial headquarters of Paris’s African-American entertainers” (Blake 113). The inherent problem with the popularity of jazz and all things African was that the more mainstream they became, the more they were appropriated by the white majority, and the less black performers and artists were valued in their own right. The performers in clubs became spectacle for their white audience, who fixed them into stereotypical representations of the “noble savage” or the *grand enfant*. The purists advocated for African music and art, but they appropriated them for their own agenda. By making African arts conform to their own European ideals and standards, they legitimized and helped to define the French modern era (113). It was not the African’s artistic ingenuity that was valued, but more the “discovery” and re-

appropriation of African art into modern European society. France was still a colonizing empire and it was imperative to the country to keep this established hierarchy in place. In order to retain a moral superiority and surmount the shame after the violent massacres of WWI, the French had to define the Other as the cannibalistic savage to escape the same definition being placed on them (Berliner 127). And just as France legitimized its colonies by asserting colonization's benefits on the *indigènes* (helping the "big children" reach their full, albeit still inferior, potential), so too did the purists believe that African art in its own right was only the first step. It needed the guidance from whites to reach its full potential. Black sensuality was nothing without white intellect behind it (Blake 158).

After word was leaked about the *Bal colonial*, which was subsequently called the *Bal nègre*, it became yet another hot spot, frequented by a white clientele wanting to experience the exotic in a comfortable and safe setting. Even when the white presence was most felt, however, from 1928 to 1932, there was still a large black population in attendance, including not only Antilleans, but also some Africans and African-Americans (Berliner 208). They were not performing this time, but in the eyes of the white metropolitans there, they were still on stage. Poet, Georgette Camille's description of a chaotic, animalistic *Bal nègre* in 1928 included this passage: "C'est une prodigieuse surprise que ce spectacle gratuit, où deux cents nègres, pressés comme pour une mise en scène, dansent avec des cris" (78-9). The only way whites could comfortably imagine blacks was in a serving capacity, either as entertainers or as laborers. Blacks attending the *Bal nègre* still represented a spectacle for the white audience; it was simply a free show. The photographer, Brassai, snapped an image in 1932 that would capture the essence of

race relations at the *Bal nègre*. It depicts a fashionable white Parisian woman dancing with a Caribbean man. Their two bodies are touching and we see their hands clasped in the foreground. The woman is dressed in white and has an extremely serene look on her face, eyes closed as if she has immersed herself in the exotic sensuality she imagines in the black man. He is taller than her, but completely “harmless” in the European eye. Dressed in a suit and tie, he also wears an innocuous smile, signaling that it is his pleasure to give her this exotic moment. The *Bal nègre* was a meeting place for the black community, while simultaneously serving as a place where whites could push the boundaries of acceptable conduct with no real fear of unpleasant consequences.

The year 1931 marked what could be described as both the height of French negrophilia and the start of its decline. The *Exposition coloniale internationale* was held that year over a six-month period in Paris to highlight the French empire and its successes. This was exoticism at its best: a reproduction of what France deemed most representative of each colony’s culture, presented within an occidental framework. This way, one could visit the world without having to leave the comfort zone of one’s own city. The preparations for the Exposition came from years before its grand opening when jazz and *dancings* ruled the city. The 1930s, however, would see a dwindling novelty of negrophilia: the popularity of Africanism started to be replaced with a growing uncertainty about modern times, with the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and fascism beginning to spread across Europe. Berliner points out that no matter what may have partially veiled them, the racial stereotypes of the 1920s would be instrumental in spurring the racist attitudes of a future negrophobia (Berliner 233). On the other hand, by

the 1930s, blacks had succeeded in integrating themselves enough in Parisian society to step out of the spectacle role to which they were first confined. As jazz became a standard part of the city's culture, so did its African-American musicians (Stovall 94). One can see a progression of jazz's incorporation into the framework of French culture through the growing number of French jazz groups (such as the *Hot club de France*) and the amount of analysis and critiques it provoked. The 1930s saw a transformation of jazz from a simple entertainment to an area of study (Tournès 12). The world's first work solely dedicated to jazz analysis, *Le jazz hot*, by Hugues Panassié, debuted in 1934 and the review, *Jazz Hot*, was first published in 1935. In 1937 came *Swing*, a record label exclusively for jazz. This production solidified jazz as a staple of modern French culture.

Literary Stepping Stones

In addition to cultural history, literature helped pave the way for the Negritude movement. Critic Lilyan Kesteloot wrote much of the work pioneering black African literary history and analysis. She identifies the review *Légitime Défense* as a major turning point for Black African literature and the start of the *néo-nègre* movement (*Histoire* 12). In June of 1932, a group of students from Martinique in Paris proclaimed their difference from Europeans and strongly criticized the literature of their predecessors for trying to imitate Western standards. Members of the bourgeoisie elite themselves, they took a substantial risk in their harsh critique of the previous generation of bourgeois Antillean intellectuals. Their declaration of difference marked the first step in the valorization of their African roots, a connection the proponents of Negritude would also

soon claim. In Antillean literature before 1932, the goal was imitation of French style to the point where Antillean works would be indistinguishable from those of white authors (23). French was the only language of production in the Antilles; ninety percent of the population was illiterate and only spoke creole, a language that the remaining ten percent regarded with disdain. Kesteloot cites the analysis of René Ménénil about the impact of these former attempts at total assimilation by Antillean authors, what Ménénil terms “oppression culturelle.” By repressing one’s own cultural identity, history and customs, one becomes alienated from one’s own country. The “l’âme-de-l’autre-métropolitaine” exists when “je me vois étranger, je me vois exotique. Pourquoi? Je suis ‘exotique-pour-moi,’ parce que mon regard sur moi, c’est le regard du Blanc devenu mien après trois siècles de conditionnement colonial.”⁵ Ménénil put into philosophical terms what the authors of *Légitime Défense* were trying to reverse.

The Surrealist movement had just as much of an impact on the Parisian literary scene as its cultural one. The ideas and criticisms found in *Légitime Défense* paralleled many tenets of Surrealism. In a 1960 letter, Léopold Senghor writes that “pour les collaborateurs de *Légitime Défense*, le surréalisme était une école et un maître ; pour eux, le surréalisme avait une valeur universelle de découverte...” (Kesteloot *Histoire* 35). The motivation for such a strong liaison with Surrealism is not explicitly given in *Légitime Défense*, however it is easy to see how such an imaginative counter-majority movement would appeal to students fresh from Martinique who knew only of imitation styles and conventional ideas (36). Surrealism also helped legitimize some of the ideas proposed by

⁵ From René Ménénil, “Sur l’exotisme colonial,” in *La Nouvelle Critique*, mai 1959, p. 139.

the authors of *Légitime Défense* to a European society reluctant to accept a theory initiated solely by members of the black community. Based on a rejection of fixed Western standards and ideals, Surrealism was the perfect complement to the growing negrophilia of the 1920s and 30s. The fact that Surrealists succeeded in reversing standard notions of acceptability, even just by questioning normal societal structures, paved the way for the Negritude movement to reappropriate negative stereotypes to its advantage. Senghor could now speak of the *nègre* remaining in a *Royaume d'enfance*⁶ to praise his race for their primitivism and purity (36). What had been a pejorative connotation just years before (when Europe was the superior mentor colonizing the “less developed” nations of Africa) was turned on its head, in part, thanks to a surrealist way of thinking. But as Kesteloot points out, it is important to realize that Surrealism had a different framework for whites as opposed to blacks. White French Surrealists were combating their own cultural structures, while black writers were still fighting a conqueror/conquered hierarchy and social structure that were imposed on them through colonization. Both groups, thus, had their own unique relationship to surrealist principles. Kesteloot argues that: “il serait erroné de ne retenir que cet aspect destructeur du surréalisme et qu’il fut utilisé aussi, de manière très positive, par les intellectuels antillais, comme un instrument de reconquête de leur personnalité, de leur identité profonde” (40). White Surrealists were solely interested in destruction and deconstruction, while Surrealism from a black perspective could be used to deconstruct in order to rebuild.

⁶ A construction of Senghor, which will be discussed later in detail, connoting an idyllic construction of Africa with a pastoral simplicity.

The Antillean author, René Maran, was the first black person in France to speak out about some of the unacceptable practices within France's African colonies and present a more adequate description of an African mentality, by including the colonized's uncensored thoughts. Acting, like many upper-class French Caribbeans,⁷ as a colonial administrator in Oubangui-Chari (present day Central African Republic), Maran was the first to admit that he was too Westernized to truly understand the indigenous people, but he did make a concerted effort to learn everything he could about their language, culture and traditions and report back to Europe in the form of a novel entitled, *Batouala : véritable roman nègre*. Even though Maran insisted his novel was an objective view of the daily life under colonial rule in Africa, the politically engaged preface and some particularly violent scenes in the book imply otherwise. Maran was still a supporter of colonialism in premise; he was simply pointing out the misuse of power and unfair treatment of the colonized so that the abuses could be addressed. However, *Batouala* was an important precursor to the Negritude movement because Maran was trying to give an objective view of Africa as it was, not what it had been portrayed to be from past colonial expeditions or reports back from Europeans on safari. He was also taking a stand against abuses of African peoples that had previously been ignored. With the metropole's interest in Africa on the rise, Maran's novel, which was also eloquently composed, won instant popularity and a Prix Goncourt, the most prestigious literary award in France.⁸ Senghor has praised Maran as an essential step in the progression toward Negritude, due to his

⁷ See Hélénom, Véronique. *French Caribbeans in Africa*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.

⁸ Maran's novel won the Prix Goncourt in 1922, a year after Marcel Proust won for *A la recherche du temps perdu*. In *Le Tumulte noir*, Blake argues that this juxtaposition implied that the Martiniquais with his account of inferior nègres had just as much literary merit as Proust, widely recognized as one of most prominent French authors.

controversial treatment of African languages. Instead of employing *petit-nègre*⁹ to distinguish the African speakers from the French, Maran wrote each character with the same eloquent level of French, regardless of their race (Berliner 78). Senghor said Maran was the first to communicate “l’âme noire’ with a *style nègre* in French” (78). Maran established an equality through his linguistic choices and showed how literature could serve the burgeoning Negritude movement.

Just one year before the appearance of *Légitime Défense*, another literary review proposed uniting the entire black race under a common bond. The *Revue du Monde Noir*, started by a Haitian, Dr. Sajous and sisters Jane, Andrée and Paulette Nardal, drew on the founders’ weekly literary salons as inspiration for its content. Paulette Nardal identified Paris as the spark that ignited an “éveil chez les Noirs Antillais” (Schmeisser 139) of a certain black consciousness because of the city’s propensity for cross-cultural interaction across the diaspora and Africa (139), but she also helped in stimulating this awakening. The Nardal sisters, originally from Martinique, were well connected in Parisian society and sought to bring together black intellectuals from Africa, the Antilles and America through their salons to exchange ideas about the state of the black race around the world. Paulette Nardal and her cousin, Louis Achille were both fluent in English and thus were invaluable to this cause, as they facilitated meetings between francophones and African-American writers and allowed for a bilingual publication (Berliner 78; Schmeisser 122). Their objectives were clearly described in the first issue of the revue:

⁹ *Petit-nègre* was a simplified form of French with very few grammatical structures that the African conscripts in the French army were taught in WWI. Despite the fact that this was yet another way of belittling the colonized conscripts, using *petit-nègre* allowed conscripts to be understood by their superiors, but prohibited them from mingling with the French civilian population.

Donner à l'élite intellectuelle de la race noire et aux amis des noirs un organe où publier leurs œuvres artistiques, littéraires et scientifiques. Étudier et faire connaître ... tout ce qui concerne la civilisation nègre et les richesses naturelles de l'Afrique, patrie trois fois sacrée de la Race noire. Créer entre les noirs du monde entier un lien intellectuel et moral (...) qui leur permette de défendre plus efficacement leurs intérêts collectifs et d'illustrer leur race. (Kesteloot *Histoire* 61)

Promoting a Pan-Africanism and a sharing of ideas across the globe were central to the goals of the *Revue du Monde Noir*, especially considering its internationally focused title. While the salons were quite elitist and some important topics were never addressed by the review (the social and racial situation in the Antilles, and Europe's "right to colonization," for example), founders of the Negritude movement acknowledged that it was because of the *Revue de Monde Noir* and *Légitime Défense* that they were able to make so many of the connections that would prove beneficial to the development and implementation of their ideas (62).

While African-Americans and jazz impacted the growth of black visibility in France, creating a more favorable space for the reception of the Negritude movement, African-American writers of the Harlem Renaissance greatly contributed to the literary development of the movement. Césaire acknowledged the extent of this American influence during the Cultural Festival in Fort-de-France in 1979: "Ce n'est pas nous qui avons inventé la négritude, elle a été inventée par tous ces écrivains de la Negro Renaissance que nous lisons en France dans les années 30" (66). In the same vein as the *Revue du Monde Noir*, but on a much larger scale, the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance were the first to establish the importance of Pan-Africanism to assuring a recognition of the value of the black community all over the world. Author Claude McKay, one of

Césaire's principal influences, and Langston Hughes were able to analyze relations between Africans and Antilleans from an outside perspective, signaling prejudices within the black francophone community that would hinder this type of cohesion. In McKay's novel, *Banjo*, which focused on race relations on the docks of Marseille, he writes:

At the African Bar the conversation turned on the hostile feeling that existed between the French West Indians and the native Africans. The *patron* said that the West Indians felt superior because many of them were appointed as petty officials in the African colonies and were often harder on the natives than the whites. "*Fils d'esclaves! Fils d'esclaves!*" cried a Senegalese sergeant. "Because they have a change to be better instructed than we, they think we are the savages and that they are 'white' negroes. Why, they are only the descendants of the slaves that our forefathers sold. (203)

While the Harlem Renaissance promoted a Pan-African mindset to reassert Africa's value as the homeland and advocate for a solidarity between different ethnicities for social advancement, Césaire, in his conception of Negritude, would see this as only a first step in addressing the relations within the black community. He would later propose first a pan-African spirit coupled with an acknowledgement of each group within the black community's specificity of identity.

Literary parallels can also be found between Harlem Renaissance authors and the work of Césaire and Senghor, suggesting an intellectual exchange of ideas across the diaspora at this time. Countee Cullen's poem, "Heritage," evokes nostalgic images of African countryside and the beat of the tom-tom, a rhythm that will characterize much of black authors' work at this time (Kesteloot *Histoire* 78). McKay argues that whatever allowed the black man to stay rooted in the rhythm of a primitive life, causing "son échec apparent dans l'organisation du monde moderne," was in fact "la vraie force qui

l'empêchait de devenir cette chose misérable qu'était le commun des blancs" (76). This reversal of what should be deemed "good" or "bad" exemplifies one of the central tenets of Negritude: an inversion of negative/positive connotations surrounding race. The term *négritude* itself, derived from *nègre*, is the example par excellence of this practice; Senghor and Césaire will use this rhetorical strategy many times in their poetry and philosophical work.

In addition, historical publications and ethnological studies, spurred on by the negrophilia of the 20s and 30s, helped support the re-visioning of Africa that Negritude would strive to create. Before this time period, Africa had no important history so far as the West was concerned. Works like *Les Nègres* by Maurice Delafosse (1927) and *Histoire de la civilisation africaine* by Leo Frobenius (1936) cast a new light on a subject that was previously of no interest. To make Africa and its history more acceptable to European minds, these authors established connections between sub-Saharan Africa and pre-Islamic Egypt (83).¹⁰ Both Césaire and Senghor admit their admiration of Frobenius and passion for his work that argued not only for the existence of African civilization, but one of high social and artistic value (87).¹¹ The acceptance of African civilization as a subject for academic study was essential to the success of the Negritude movement. In order to conceive of Africans as a less-evolved species, Europe had to imagine them as having no culture or past of value. If they did have a significant past, they would resemble whites in a way that would make it more difficult to assign them a lower status.

¹⁰ Egypt had already been established as a historically and culturally important site. The fact that the country is home to Africans of lighter skin color made it more acceptable to value its contributions to the world's development.

¹¹ Césaire mentions Frobenius in *Discours sur le colonialisme* and Senghor named the street he lived on in Dakar after the author.

Africanist Théodore Monod, founder of the *Institut français d'Afrique noire*, strongly disputed this prevailing assumption:

Le noir n'est pas un homme sans passé, il n'est pas tombé d'un arbre avant-hier. L'Afrique est littéralement pourrie de vestiges préhistoriques, et certains se demandent même depuis peu si elle n'aurait pas, contrairement à l'opinion courante, vu naître l'homme proprement dit. (qtd. in Kesteloot *Histoire* 90)

Even French philosopher, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who focused his studies on primitive mentalities, felt compelled to correct his previous assumptions. Kesteloot outlines this transformation found in one of his notebooks from 1938: “[Lévy-Bruhl] se voyait contraint de revenir sur ses affirmations antérieures et qu’il n’y avait pas de différences qualitatives entre la mentalité dite primitive et celle des peuples évolués” (Kesteloot 92). Acknowledging Africa’s historical merit lay the foundation for Césaire, Senghor and Damas to call for a re-valorization of African culture, not only by the West, but by peoples of African descent as well, who may have buried their connection to their roots. In 1932, a small journal called *L'Étudiant martiniquais* published articles centering mainly on the problems Martinican students faced with the scholarship funds they received to study in France. Three years later, it had changed its name to *L'Étudiant Noir* and as the name implies, opted for a more global approach to problems affecting the black community in general. Both Césaire and Senghor collaborated on the publication and it would serve as an important preparation for Césaire’s first work, *Cahier d'un*

retour au pays natal. Léon Damas explains the new unifying goals of this journal that would launch the Negritude movement into the scholarly community:¹²

L'étudiant noir, journal corporatif et de combat avec pour objectif la fin de la tribalisation, du système clanique en vigueur au Quartier Latin. On cessait d'être un étudiant essentiellement martiniquais, guadeloupéen, guyanais, africain, malgache, pour n'être plus qu'un seul et même étudiant noir. Terminée la vie en vase clos. (95)¹³

While the Harlem Renaissance, with its calls for Pan-Africanism, did influence initiatives like *L'Étudiant noir* and *La Revue du monde noir*, Paris itself should also be recognized, since the capital drew together communities that would have not met otherwise. The First World War brought African-American soldiers to France, many of whom would not have had the opportunity to travel there otherwise. And the popularity of “authentic” jazz allowed many to stay after the war was over. While France was one of the largest colonial empires exploiting their colonies for resources and labor, this role also meant that many Antilleans and Africans received government scholarships to study or work in Paris (Stovall 99), Césaire and Senghor included. This time abroad, in this particular environment, would allow them access to a variety of new ideas and new interactions with the black diaspora. When a small minority is thrust into an unfamiliar setting, it latches onto communities that it sees as similar to itself, even if these communities would not have previously seemed analogous. *L'Étudiant noir* would only see six issues published, but as Kesteloot argues, “le grain était semé et des réactions allaient naître”

¹² Even though the word *négritude* itself was not printed into 1939, Kesteloot's research argues that Césaire first used the term while he was writing the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* in 1935.

¹³ Kesteloot could not find a copy of the journal. She states she could only read several excerpts, in particular in an unedited text by Léon Damas (*Notre génération*) who had a collection that was destroyed in an accidental fire.

(96). After formulating a starting point for Negritude in this unique space of Paris, Césaire and Senghor would continue to develop the movement relative to their own experiences. Soon after *L'Étudiant noir*, their paths were already beginning to diverge. While Senghor remained in France and fought for France in World War II, Césaire returned to Martinique in 1939, the same year he published seminal work, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Once back in Martinique, he also began to espouse more Communist thinking and published *Tropiques*, a literary review dedicated to an intellectual awakening on the island.

CHAPTER III

“ILES CICATRICES DES EAUX:”

AIMÉ CÉSAIRE’S NEGRITUDE IN *CAHIER D’UN RETOUR AU PAYS NATAL*

The trajectory of Aimé Césaire’s intellectual life was directly influenced by the historical and social context in which he lived; assimilationist colonial rule in Martinique ironically gave him the opportunity to study in Paris, form alliances with other intellectuals from the black diaspora, and ultimately fight to overturn the colonial system. Shortly after his arrival in Paris, he met Léopold Sédar Senghor, a Senegalese student also in Paris due to a colonial scholarship. Senghor would have a profound impact on Césaire’s perception of his Antillean identity and serve as a continual influence on Césaire’s literary production. Begun before his physical return to Martinique, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* was first published in 1939 (the year Césaire left France for the island) and includes the first published reference to the term, *négritude*. This chapter will explore Césaire’s conception of Negritude and the way it is expressed in *Cahier*.¹ There exist numerous overviews of the whole of Césaire’s oeuvre in relation to the Negritude movement, as well as many detailed literary close readings of *Cahier*. This study attempts to fuse these two categories by elucidating the particular aspects of Césairean Negritude as they appear in this one seminal work.

Cahier stands as a cornerstone of the Negritude movement and by analyzing the ways in which it addresses the basic tenets of Negritude, I will demonstrate how

¹ This is the abbreviation I will use for *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*.

Césaire's version of Negritude differs from other Negritude writers. While Césaire, Senghor and Damas are considered the founders of the movement, they never collaborated on any kind of manifesto that would clearly define its central tenets, as is common with other ideologies. That is to say that Negritude was never conceived as a rigid philosophy that would apply in the same way to everyone who adopted it. Césaire repeatedly attempts to clarify this point during interviews on the subject: "There was never, on my part, the intention of writing a treatise on Négritude; Négritude has never been a real philosophical concept for me." (Rowell 992)¹ In addressing Negritude's applications from one side of the Atlantic to another, he says, "La négritude d'un Antillais à la rencontre de son être ne peut pas être exactement la négritude d'un africain enraciné dans son être" (Palcy). He speaks of "deux tempéraments, deux conditionnements différents" between the African and the Antillean, mainly due to their different historical backgrounds. The progression of a historical awareness of the Antillean's past leading to a feeling of fractured identity and resulting in an irruption of emotion with violent overtones is one of the main attributes of Césairean Negritude. We can see this progression taking place throughout *Cahier* as it affects other characteristically Césairean views on Negritude: a recognition, acceptance and repossession of black identity, a surrealist reversal of culturally accepted Western norms and a drive to attain a universal view of humanity through the particular situation of the colonized black.

¹ Rowell's interview is only available in its English translation.

Recognition, Acceptance and Repossession of Black Identity

Césaire's most definitive stance on his view of the negritude movement comes from an interview in 1959, where he describes it as: "Conscience d'être noir, simple reconnaissance d'un fait, qui implique acceptation, prise en charge de son destin de noir, de son histoire et de sa culture" (Kesteloot, *Histoire* 109). This succinct declaration describes a long and often difficult transformative process of recognizing, accepting and taking charge of one's identity; *Cahier* is this quest for an Antillean identity. Césaire's thirst to reunite a fractured and dismembered self-perception imbues his poetry with a certain violence that does not appear in Senghorian Negritude. This aggressivity derives primarily from geographical and historical sources; Césaire underscores the inherent violence present in the Antillean collective memory of the slave trade and middle passage. While Senghor draws from a calming longevity of African civilization, hoping to revive a harmonious unity within the black diaspora and ultimately with the Western world, Césaire's memory revolves around carnage and destruction, provoking his quest to fill a certain essential void.

In this progression, the first step of recognition was perhaps spurred on in Césaire's personal life by his stint in the French capital. Scholars have widely acknowledged *Cahier* as a reflection, though by no means a completely accurate reproduction, of Césaire's personal struggle with his black identity. While he had spent his childhood in an assimilationist, colonized Martinique, in Paris, Césaire was thrust into a new environment, where students like him were deemed "boursiers conquérants" or

“héritiers-boursiers”² (Fonkoua 43). If the hierarchical racial structures did not substantially change from his life in Martinique, in Paris he was now in the demographic as well as the social minority. Césaire turned to the black diasporic community in Paris for support and helped to solidify the presence of this community by founding the journal *L'Étudiant noir*. Referencing the mid-30s, he said, “il y a toute une génération à l’heure actuelle qui se trouvait en France, qui se trouvait à Paris, et Paris était un lieu assez singulier en ce temps-là puisque c’est là que j’ai rencontré des Noirs venant de tous les coins du monde...” (Kesteloot, *Un pont* 64). These encounters, reminders of his connection to the black world, would prove invaluable to his intellectual trajectory. With this community in Paris, he felt protected from an oversaturation of white European culture: “Ce qui m’a en grande partie préservé culturellement [à Paris], c’est la fréquentation assidue des Africains. Ce contact m’a servi de contrepoids à l’influence de la culture européenne” (Fonkoua 52). Arguably the most important encounter during his time in Paris, from 1931 to 1939, was one with Senghor. Often citing the Senegalese student as a main influence in his development and conception of Negritude, Césaire once stated, “Il m’a porté la clé de moi même” (Palcy). This idea of Africa as the gateway to Antillean identity exemplifies this first step of recognition. Through his new encounters with Africa in Paris, Césaire fostered an understanding of his African heritage that did not stem from a white Western source. He was brought to a new self-awareness of his blackness and of the implications held in this awareness, most notably the

² Terms by Jean-François Sirinelli in *Une génération intellectuelle. Khâgneux et normaliens dans l’entre-deux-guerres*. Paris: PUF, 1994.

acceptance of a traumatic past and the will to take responsibility for his future trajectory as an individual and as a member of the global black community.

In *Cahier*, this struggle to awaken a recognition of Antillean identity is best demonstrated by the descriptions of Martinique at the beginning of the poem and the prose-structured depiction of the *nègre* on the tramway. The beginning stanzas immerse the reader in the world of Martinique through pages upon pages of description. But, it is not the picturesque, exoticized image of a tranquil tropical island, as many Antillean poets (referred to as *doudouistes*) imitating European style had previously represented it. It is “les Antilles qui ont faim, les Antilles grêlées de petite vérole, les Antilles dynamitées d’alcool, échouées dans la boue de cette baie, dans la poussière de cette ville sinistrement échouées” (8). The repetition in this first section of “Au bout du petit matin,” “les Antilles”, and “cette ville plate/inerte” serves to enhance the never-ending, hopeless disparity represented in the descriptions themselves. The attempts at masking the real-life struggles of the Antillean people in earlier poetry were also refusals to accept and portray the true nature of the island and its inhabitants. Césaire portrays the Martinicans as a “foule qui ne sait pas faire foule (9),” that “ne participant à rien de ce qui s’exprime, s’affirme, se libère au grand jour de cette terre sienne” (10). There may be many people, but they do not know how to form together to create a community; they are as inert, broken and lifeless as the rundown city. Dominique Combé also sees the Antilles and the Martinicans characterized by a lexical negativity and by a “manque d’être” as represented by frequent use of negative lexical prefixes of “-in” and the repeated preposition “sans” in their descriptions (Combé 58-9). It is because of this lack of identity, moreover, a lack

of consciousness of their black Antillean identity that the Martinicans receive such a negative depiction here. The island is a “désolée eschare³ sur les blessures des eaux,” geographically, but as *Cahier* argues, not historically isolated, much like the people who feel alone presumably because they are “si étrangement bavarde et muette.” As they cry out about their hunger and misery, they keep silent about their past of slavery, the past, albeit a violent one, that would link the isolated island to a much larger African continent, which holds the key to their identity as Martinicans. The persona⁴ has often been referred to as a kind of prophet or teacher, as he seems to be of this world (he inserts first person possessive adjectives into these descriptions), but to have transcended it in order to be able to comment on its blindness. These disturbingly graphic descriptions, by way of their shock value, attempt to ignite an awareness of a present-day reality and of a forgotten history: of the true despair that comes from domination, instead of the bettering the *mission colonisatrice* propagandized by the colonizers.

Another highlighted moment of a racially conscious identity comes in the middle of *Cahier* with the prose-like description of the weathered black man sitting on the tramway. Several times throughout *Cahier*, Césaire intersperses moments of racist stereotypes, like this one, visually separated by hyphenated sentences: “(les-nègres-sont-tous-les-mêmes, ... l’odeur-du-nègre, ça-fait-pousser-la-canne rappelez-vous-le-vieux-diction : battre-un-nègre, c’est le nourrir)” (35). Not only showing the realities of a poor and miserable

³ Medical term. A variant of “escarre,” which *le Robert* defines as “Croûte noirâtre qui se forme sur la peau morte, après une brûlure, un frottement prolongé, etc.”

⁴ Even though Negritude writers clearly compose from their personal lived experience, it is still important to distinguish the “je” as the narrator in their literary works from the writer behind the work, as both Césaire and Senghor take literary freedoms, at times embellishing their experiences, to best express their ideas.

colony from the interior, Césaire also includes the outside gaze of the West in order to ultimately negate these stereotypes with a repossession of black identity by the black people. The scene on the tramway is the most interesting of these types of passages in terms of self-recognition and exploring the complexities of a cultural assimilation and hybridity. The depiction of the *nègre* is one of grossly exaggerated features, reminiscent of caricatured drawings of blacks in popular Western culture: “le pouce industriel et malveillant avait modelé le front en bosse, percé le nez de deux tunnels parallèles et inquiétants, allongé la démesure de la lippe...” (40).⁵ The persona’s gaze shifts from this “*nègre hideux*” to the women behind him sniggering at the sight of this man. And surprisingly, the persona agrees:

Il était COMIQUE ET LAID,
COMIQUE ET LAID pour sûr.
J’arborai un grand sourire complice...
Ma lâcheté retrouvée !
Je salue les trois siècles qui soutiennent mes droits civiques et mon sang minimisé
(41)⁶

The exclamation, repetition and use of capitalization reinforce this sudden realization of conflicting emotions that will significantly impact the persona’s comprehension of his own identity. Historical context, again, plays a major role in deciphering why the persona feels so conflicted, since three centuries of cultural instruction have led to a denial or refusal of black identification.⁷

⁵ Abiola Irele comments that the use of *la lippe* instead of *les lèvres* was a common a French pejorative switch implying a thick, protruding lower lip. (*Cahier* 105)

⁶ Here and throughout, I will use the exact formatting of Césaire’s poetry, as it appears in print.

⁷ Césaire’s student Frantz Fanon describes a very similar scene to this one in *Peau noire, masques blancs*. A white French child’s frightened view of him, unhindered by any social restraints, forces him to realize

In a comprehensive analysis of *Cahier*, Abiola Irele describes the importance of this “troubling component of the alienated consciousness”:

In its confessional tone, the passage provides another instance of the poet’s mood of introspection; his dwelling on the incident he reports thus gives it significance as an acid test of his moral disposition and as the catalyst that impels him toward the expression of an affirmative consciousness. (*Cahier* 104-5)

It is the expression of and reflection on this event that allow the persona to become conscious of his blackness and subsequently, accept a black identity that encapsulates all aspects of this consciousness, including the effects of slavery and colonization. This struggle with self-denial and self-awareness is at the heart of much of the conflicted, aggressive mood in *Cahier*. Irele argues:

The mood of dissidence that runs through the poem issues out of the disaffection of the assimilated subject toward a framework of references to which he has been conditioned and which he has come to recognize as an insidious but forceful mode of his co-optation into the colonial system. (*Cahier* lii)

Ultimately, while Negritude is a re-valorization of African culture and a refusal of a world solely determined by Western values, the influences of assimilationist practices can never be completely erased from the construction of a black identity.

For the Antillean, the conflicted identity is all the more complicated due to a historical consciousness of displacement from being violently forced from the African continent. It is here, in terms of geographical and historical context, that the differences

the extent to which the white gaze (the Other) determines his own existence, subsequently manipulating how he sees himself. He analyzes the feelings this racism provokes in him: “La honte. La honte et le mépris de moi-même. La nausée. Quand on m’aime, on me dit que c’est malgré ma couleur. Quand on me déteste, on ajoute que ce n’est pas à cause de ma couleur... Ici ou là, je suis prisonnier du cercle infernal” (94). The color of his skin determines how he is perceived because the Other has designated it as such.

between Senghorian and Césairean Negritude are most apparent: a recognition and acceptance of an Antillean identity differs from that of an African identity. In an interview, Césaire explains that it is only natural, therefore, for Negritude to exist in variations, that “chacun a sa négritude à soi.” He explains:

La négritude senghorienne est caractérisée, je crois, essentiellement par une volonté de restauration. Je crois qu’il l’a dit lui-même : “c’est la défense et illustration des valeurs africaines.”⁸ C’est alors très important. Il est clair que ma négritude ne pouvait pas être très exactement celle-là, simplement parce que nous sommes différents. Senghor est africain, il a derrière lui un continent, une histoire, cette sagesse millénaire aussi; et je suis antillais, donc un homme de déracinement, un homme de l’écartèlement. Par conséquent, j’ai été appelé à mettre davantage l’accent sur *la quête dramatique de l’identité*. Je vois que cette quête est superflue pour Senghor parce qu’il est dans son être et ne peut que l’illustrer. Chez moi il y a une recherche, il y a une démarche, il y a une soif, il y a une faim et c’est cela qui donne à cette démarche un certain pathos, si vous voulez. (Kesteloot, *Un Pont* 66)

The history of the Antilles barely compares to the longevity of African civilizations evoked in the poetry of Senghor. Instead of a restoration of an already established existence, Césaire actively searches for an unknown existence. The fractured nature of the island and its geographic distance from Africa mirror Césaire’s self-construction as a fractured, uprooted being.

This symbiotic relationship between the volatile geography of the island and the Antillean identity expressed through much of *Cahier*’s imagery strengthens the profound bond between man and the earth that is central to Césaire’s Negritude. In *Cahier*, the Antilles are described as:

⁸ This wording suggests a reference to the *Défense et illustration de la langue française* by Joachim du Bellay, representing the view of the Pléiade.

Iles cicatrices des eaux
Iles évidence de blessures
Iles miettes
Iles informes
Iles mauvais papier déchiré sur les eaux
Iles tronçons côte à côte fichés sur l'épée flambée du Soleil (54-5)

The geographical location of the Antilles, highlighted by an emphasis on their proximity to the equator and on their minuscule scale in relation to the rest of the world, links their placement in the Atlantic into the violent historical context of which Césaire is ever conscious. They are a mistake (“mauvais papier”), a reminder of the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade (“cicatrices,” “évidence de blessures”). Central to Césaire’s conception of Negritude, Martinican geography plays a vital role in *Cahier*. Césaire employs specific geological vocabulary in his depictions of the island: “le suc” (sap, in reference to sugar cane/rum production), “les fumerolles” (a hole in or near a volcano, from which vapor rises), “le morne” (little hill characteristic of Martinican geography), “les manguiers” (mango trees), “les tamariniers” (tamarind trees), “une sapotille” (plum-like fruit), “une touffe de cécropies” (the milky sap of cecropia tree that grows in the West Indies), “le lait jiculi” (juice of a tropical plant that produces a hallucinatory effect), “le madrépore” (madrepore, like a coral, forming in topical locations). The volcano, a reminder of Martinique’s Mt. Pelée, is a prevalent image throughout *Cahier* and reflects all the passion and violence of Césaire’s Negritude, including the volatile nature of a fractured identity. His insistence on Martinican geography underscores his call for a historical awareness and helps to understand the relationship between violence and creation as it applies to the people of Martinique. He states in an interview:

Imaginez ce spectacle extraordinaire : dix volcans à la fois crachant leurs laves pour faire la Martinique. [...] C'est des terres de colère, des terres exaspérées, des terres qui [...] vomissent la vie... C'est de cela que nous devons être dignes. Cette parcelle créatrice, il faut la recueillir et continuer l'oeuvre première. Il faut la continuer, et non pas s'endormir dans une sorte d'acceptation et de résignation. (Palcy)

Césaire hopes to parallel the unrestrained power that forged the islands of Martinique and the forceful will of the Martinican people, both of which have generally been overlooked. While both the island and its population began from traumatic acts, they should not construct a self-image that is solely based upon that brutality, but also on a determined conviction to bring creation from catastrophe.

Martinique's traumatic past acts as a catalyzing agent in *Cahier*, as its expression in literary form ignites the anger and passion of the persona, but also serves as a reminder that Antilleans who came from slavery also came from Africa, a continent which holds the first step to dignity and restoration for the Antillean's fractured past. Ultimately, unearthing his traumatic history allows the persona to accept it as integral to his identity. The slavery imagery that interspersedly surfaces throughout the work is more than a reference to a far-removed past. Irele asserts that: “[*Cahier*] posits an operative relation between the expression it elaborates and a history that is mirrored in that expression; it is intended to function more as a substantive reconstitution of and reflection upon experience than as a metaphor of that experience” (*Cahier* xlix). The act of writing actually brings these traumatic scenes into the present so they can become integral to the persona's conception of identity. The persona describes an intensely disturbing scene:

J'entends de la cale monter les malédictions enchaînées, les hoquettements des mourants, le bruit d'un qu'on jette à la mer... les abois d'une femme en gésine... des raclements d'ongles cherchant des gorges... des ricanements de fouet... des farfouillis de vermine parmi des lassitudes... (39)

From the present tense of the first words and the strong evocations of audition, it is clear that these images are no longer a representation, but a reconstruction of the middle passage itself. The change in style, marked by the many ellipses, suggests a sort of traumatic flashback or reliving of events. Césaire confronts the most alarming images of slavery, often referencing whips, branding and lynchings. Through this process of writing, especially in expressing the most unspeakable of violent acts, he gains possession of a past that had been inflicted upon him. This new agency allows him to transcend his personal memory to access a collective one, not only linking his identity to his ancestors enslaved in the Antilles, but also to those in Africa.

Blood is a unifying element in *Cahier*, whether it is related to an African lineage or a traumatic past in the slave trade. The repeated references to blood serve two purposes: recalling the suffering of slavery, but also highlighting the genealogical connection to Africa. “Que de sang dans ma mémoire ! Dans ma mémoire sont des lagunes. Elles sont couvertes de têtes de morts... Ma mémoire est entourée de sang. Ma mémoire a sa ceinture de cadavres !” (Césaire 35). The lagoon is suggestive of the unimaginable toll of slavery, but also of the profundity to the collective memory that links the persona to Africa. *Cahier* extols the powerful nature of blood in connection with the virtues of the black race: “Tiède petit matin de vertus ancestrales/ Sang ! Sang ! tout notre sang ému par le cœur mâle du soleil” (Césaire 48). In connection with the images of vitality and

reproduction, this passage uplifts African blood as a positive and life-giving force.

The Antillean's ties to the slave trade and to Africa, including the subsequent fractured self-perception that this collective experience produced, must be properly remembered and accepted in the collective consciousness in order for a repossession of a black identity to take place. The following passage represents this repossession, with which comes the ability of identification:

ma négritude n'est pas une pierre, sa surdité ruée contre la clameur du jour
ma négritude n'est pas une taie d'eau morte sur l'oeil mort de la terre
ma négritude n'est ni une tour ni une cathédrale

elle plonge dans la chair rouge du soleil
elle plonge dans la chair ardente du ciel
elle trouve l'accablement opaque de sa droite patience. (47)

The possessive adjective is especially important to this declaration, as it acts on two levels. It gives the persona, as opposed to the colonizer, agency as the possessor of his identity, while highlighting the nature of specificity present in Negritude. With the same underlying scaffolding, each person will have his or her own Negritude, since *my* Negritude may not be your Negritude. Written with an article in place of the possessive adjective, this passage would stand as a rigid definition to be universally imposed, contradicting every other image of fluidity found within it. It is not a fixed, stagnant object like a rock or a tower; in fact, it is not an object at all. In the first stanza, the negation centers on nouns, but the next lines that actually define Negritude in positive terms are constructed with action verbs. Negritude is not a person, place or thing; it acts, implying a continual state of motion and transformation. As with the specific references

to Martinican geography, in this defining moment of his Negritude we again see this insistence on the persona's symbiotic relationship to the island. The juxtaposition of flesh, sun and sky and the action of the verb *plonger* solidifies the importance of this relationship. Irele notes that this definition of Césairean Negritude has its roots in Africa: "Césaire's celebrated poetic formulation of Negritude is in fact taken from a Bambara symbol of man in a telluric union with the universe" (*Negritude Moment* 51). While Césaire has a uniquely Martinican view of Negritude, Africa, as the source of this tradition, again stands as the ever-present backdrop of its representations.

This repossession of black identity also implies a certain responsibility that rests on the Antillean individually and on the black race collectively to be in charge of their own destiny, one previously contingent on slavery and colonization. The persona acknowledges the psychological effects of centuries of abuse, of less-than human status, and he accepts these consequences:

et le nègre chaque jour plus bas, plus lâche, plus stérile, moins profond, plus répandu au dehors, plus séparé de soi-même, plus rusé avec soi-même, moins immédiat avec soi-même,

j'accepte, j'accepte tout cela (56)

While on one hand, *Cahier*, is a quest for identity, it is also a call for others to progress in that quest as well. In accepting its history, the black race can move to correct the problems this history has caused in its community. Césaire shows the possibility of this progression in this same passage; after his acceptance, we see this sudden forceful surge of determination and new life:

Et voici soudain que force et vie m'assaillent comme un taureau et l'onde de vie circonvient la papille du morne, et voilà toutes les veines et veinules qui s'affairent au sang neuf et l'énorme poumon des cyclones qui respire et le feu thésaurise des volcans et le gigantesque pouls sismique qui bat maintenant la mesure d'un corps vivant en mon ferme embrasement. (56-7)

The mere style of this stanza, with its heightened pace and number of connecting clauses, reflects the transformation of spirit that can come with acceptance. The intermingling of anatomical and telluric imagery, again indicative of much of *Cahier's* overall style, reflects Césaire's intense personal attachment to the specific landscape of Martinique. The climax of this intense energy and anticipation comes in the next stanza with a statement of pride: "Et nous sommes debout maintenant, mon pays et moi" (57). The word "debout" repeats multiple times in the later parts of the poem to highlight the transformation that takes place in the people who were once described as "inerte, plate, étalée." This reversal played out in the physical state of lying down versus standing up is symbolic of the shift from shame or cowardice into pride in black identity and African heritage. The responsibility of this standing up comes next in the passage: "mais l'oeuvre de l'homme vient seulement de commencer / et il reste à l'homme à conquérir toute interdiction immobilisée aux coins de sa ferveur" (57). It is not enough to accept a history of slavery and take pride in black identity, it is also necessary to stand up and fight against inequality.

Surrealist Reversal of Culturally Accepted Western Norms

The shift from a horizontal to a vertical positioning in *Cahier* is only one of many reversals of diametrically opposed images. Many of these reversals hint at a surrealist underpinning, also considering that the movement was gaining momentum during the same period as Negritude and André Breton wrote a preface to *Cahier* entitled “Un grand poète noir.” In essence, Surrealism proposes a tearing apart of the fabric of culturally accepted norms by positing a counter argument of sorts. The Western taboos of sexuality are openly explored in surrealist work. The West’s belief in logic is attacked with a surrealist glorification on the dream state and the subconscious. Romuald-Blaise Fonkoua describes how Bréton’s analysis impacted Césaire’s work: “Oeuvre de liberté totale, d’insurrection primitive, le *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* apparaît ainsi, dans toute sa splendeur, sous la plume du père du surréalisme. Elle va en acquérir aussitôt le statut” (88). While it is true that *Cahier* espouses a surrealist point of view, in the sense of undermining the Western status quo, the work also differs from a strictly surrealist text in its composition and its end goals. It is also interesting here to analyze the amount of overall French influence found in *Cahier* and how this influence works into a Césairean vision of Negritude.

In an effort to awaken a recognition and pride in black identity, *Cahier* works to negate all that the West has created in order to shame and defile this identity. There are many instances in which seemingly nonsensical surrealist-like statements in *Cahier* fit into a logical framework of the goals of Negritude.

Qu'y puis-je ?

Il faut bien commencer.

Commencer quoi ?

La seule chose au monde qu'il vaille la peine de commencer:

La Fin du monde parbleu. (32)

The juxtaposition of beginning the end of the world only makes sense in the context of beginning the end of the rule of the Western world. Another more explicit example of this surrealist reversal comes in this passage that also carries the violent overtones characteristic of Césairean Negritude:

Parce que nous vous haïssons vous et votre raison, nous nous réclamons de la
démence précoce de la folie flambante du cannibalisme tenace

Trésor, comptons :
la folie qui se souvient
la folie qui hurle
la folie qui voit
la folie qui se déchaîne

Et vous savez le reste
Que 2 et 2 font 5
que la forêt miaule
que l'arbre tire les marrons du feu
que le ciel se lisse la barbe
et caetera et caetera (27)

It is in the surrealist tradition to extol a state of madness, because it opposes Western reliance on logic. Madness is now the key to expose western practices for the nonsense that they are. "Et vous savez le reste" seems to indicate a very logical succession of facts, but what follows are expressions of this illogical insanity. While first, this may appear to

be yet another contradiction of accepted fact in praise of nonlinear thought, Irele has delineated how these lines serve a more meaningful function for *Cahier's* purposes. Runaway slaves would often communicate in the forests by making different animal noises. These runaways, commonly referred to as *marrons*, would hide in the trees to avoid capture. This line (“que l’arbre tire les marrons du feu”) is also a reference to a French expression: “pulling chestnuts out of the fire,” or “snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.” If we take “le ciel” as a metaphorical image of the Catholic Church, the last line can be read as a nod to the indifference of the Church to the injustices of slavery (Irele, *Cahier* 79). Césaire uses surrealist thought as a springboard to pilot his own view of Negritude, infusing a historical consciousness into the surrealist framework.

He similarly negates Western supremacy in the following passage:

Pitié pour nos vainqueurs omniscients et naïfs !

Eia pour ceux qui n’ont jamais rien inventé
pour ceux qui n’ont jamais rien exploré
pour ceux qui n’ont jamais rien dompté (48)

The juxtaposition of descriptive adjectives in relation to the conquerors is explained in the subsequent lines of the poem. It would seem counterintuitive to praise a people who neither explored nor invented anything, or pity an omniscient conqueror, but linking these lines with “ceux qui n’ont jamais rien dompté” shows the negative aspects of exploration, that is to say colonization. Invention, normally shown in a positive light, is also linked to these destructive associations with the line, “Ceux qui n’ont inventé ni la poudre ni la boussole” a few pages previous. Thus, it makes sense to pity the naive conquerors, who

falsely perceived themselves as omniscient. Again, these surrealist-influenced reversals in *Cahier* serve to highlight Negritude in historical consciousness and revaluation of the black race. Irele posits this attitude of reversal as essential to black self-identification:

The quest for new values thus leads the Black writer to self-definition in terms that are non-Western, and the association between the Black race and Africa acquires a new meaning: instead of being a source of shame, it becomes a source of pride. This is the ultimate end of Negritude... (*Negritude Moment* 49)

Though similar approaches, the surrealist angle employed by the Martinican Césaire is fundamentally different from the white French Surrealists simply from the two groups' backgrounds and end goals. In addition, although its mélange of prose and poetry suggests a sub-conscious free writing and its title marks it as a compilation of thoughts instead of a defined genre, *Cahier* was meticulously refined and revisited by Césaire for almost two decades, from the first version in *Volontés* in 1939, to the final in 1956. Despite some surrealist qualities, *Cahier* is not a truly surrealist text.

Césaire addresses his relationship with Surrealism more as coincidence of circumstance than a direct influence:

Tiens, je fais du surréalisme sans le savoir, parce que, en réalité, l'intérêt du surréalisme, c'est de foutre en l'air tout le conventionnel. Mais qu'est-ce que les Martiniquais ont de conventionnel? Alors je me suis dit: "Foutons en l'air tout ce conventionnel, ce français de salon, les imitations martiniquaises de la littérature française, tout ce côté placardé... Foutons tout ça en l'air! Fouille en toi! Allez fouille encore et encore! Et quand tu auras bien fouillé, tu trouveras quelque chose. Tu trouveras le Nègre fondamental!" (Louis 45)

Whatever his relation to the surrealist movement, this trend of Western criticism was well-timed for both Negritude and Surrealism. Europe was just beginning to overcome a

post-World War I mistrust of twentieth-century modernization that had contributed to the horrors of the Great War. By the mid to late 1930s, there was a growing discontent with Europe's evolution, and with fascism on the rise, criticisms of the West proposed into this atmosphere were far from unwelcome. This not only opened the door to Surrealists, but also allowed outside ones, like Césaire and Senghor more likelihood of being heard. The founders of Negritude expounded upon the idea propagated in post-war Africanism of the African's 'primitive' and 'pure' connection to nature, unimpeded by distancing forms of technology and invention. Combé describes the sentiment in the work of Césaire and Leo Frobenius (German ethnographer of Africa that greatly influenced Césaire and Senghor) on the terminal nature of modern Europe: "La rationalité moderne signe le 'déclin de l'Occident,' consacré par la domination des intérêts économiques et matériels sur l'esprit. De là cette idée que la civilisation africaine est plus proche de l'origine, de l'essence des choses parce que fondée sur l'émotion' et non sur la raison" (34). The reliance on emotion in the form of an "âme nègre" will be explored further by Senghor, but it is clear that passionate emotion dominates *Cahier's* structure and imagery, especially in its attack on Western reason and linear argument. A primal connection to nature, as we have seen, is also at work in arguing against Western supremacy. Irele compares Negritude to a form of romanticism, in that it proposes a "dichotomy between nature and artifice," implying that the modernist European society has fallen away from a connection to the universe. Irele argues that: "In this light, négritude appears as a vision of restitution to wholeness of experience promised by a reconnection to the life-enhancing values of an ideal Africa, the peasant continent par excellence" (*Cahier* lv). The historical moment in which Negritude

was conceived was the opportune environment for the movement to gain acceptance and recognition. It is important to note, however, that it was not until André Breton and Jean-Paul Sartre brought Césaire and Senghor, respectively, into European discourse that the two Negritude authors and their work were widely circulated and analyzed. When *Cahier* first appeared on its own in 1939, it received very little attention from the European community (Combé 99). The Western notoriety held by Breton and Sartre coded Negritude as a valid concept worthy of attention and debate from the white European intellectual community. One could also argue that by framing Negritude in a pre-established Western discourse Breton and Sartre allowed it to feel accessible to a wider European audience.

While the extent to which Surrealism influenced Césaire's work is debatable, it is clear that Western influences, especially from mainland France do play a role in *Cahier*. France is a part of Césaire's identity, just as Africa constitutes another part. In *Cahier*, the Caribbean is referred to as "le Caraïbe aux trois âmes" (23), indicating the hybrid nature of a Caribbean soul, with three identities: Caribbean, French, and African. The most visible French influence on Césaire's work is the use of the French language itself and how that language is employed or manipulated by Césaire. A common debate arises when minority literature uses "the language of the colonizer" instead of an indigenous language. Upon deeper reflection, however, this conflict does not seem to accurately apply to *Cahier*. Césaire was a product of assimilationist colonial rule; while Créole was a common spoken language, French was his only language of instruction. He possessed it just as much as the people on the mainland, so it was obvious to write his poetry in

French. “[French] is both the determining medium of his historicity and the channel of his effort to unravel the implications of this historicity,” Irele explains (*Cahier* lviii).

Writing in French also enters *Cahier*, metaphorically and practically, into a dialogue with the Francophone world, including mainland France, which would not have happened using Créole.

Césaire’s use of French, however, is unique in its highly intelligent register, use of medical terminology and creation of new words. This innovative use of the language can be seen, instead of a combative attack, as a reclaiming and reappropriation of the language to better serve his needs as a colonized Martinican and descendant of slaves. On Césaire’s creative use of the French language, Kesteloot argues that: “Les libertés que Césaire se permet n’ont pas pour but - comme le pensa Sartre, et plus tard Maryse Condé - de “détruire” la langue du colonisateur; mais de la retailler, [...] pour le mouler exactement à son exigence” (*Histoire* 149). Césaire is furthering, by way of this subset of French, an immersion into an unknown Martinique—its social and geographical specificity—that is just as unknown to the majority of French speakers. Irele posits: “His poetry represents a purposive alienation of French from its native speakers and from its normal context of reference, and its transformation into the antagonistic language of the ‘Other’” (*Cahier* lvi). Due to the complexities of his vocabulary, thorough analyses of Césaire’s work include a glossary of terms and their definitions for the French reader.

In *Cahier* itself, we see a deliberate emphasis on language and the power of the word, mirroring a traditionally African reverence of orality. The middle passage of the

poem, which includes the most direct surrealist language, centers on words and the action of speaking. These lines:

Nous dirions. Chanterions. Hurlerions.
Voix pleine, voix large, tu serais notre bien, notre pointe en avant (27)

set the stage for this section that extols the commanding power of voice, or more precisely, the potential of that power as implied by the conditional tense. The following stanzas introduce a mystical repeating chant of “vooom rooh oh” that resembles an incantation or invocation for a sort of spiritual awakening (“que mes cieux à moi s’ouvrent”) and a return of pride in a black identity (“pour que revienne le temps de promission”⁹). In a passionate declaration that the black race will no longer be “des *marmonneurs* des mots” (33, my emphasis), Césaire demonstrates the potential of a calculated use of words:

Des mots ? quand nous manions des quartiers de monde, quand nous épousons des continents en délire, quand nous forçons de fumantes portes, des mots, ah oui, des mots ! mais des mots de sang frais, des mots qui sont les raz-de-marée des érysipeles et des plaudismes et des laves et des feux de brousse, et des flambées de chair, et des flambées de villes... (33)

The aggressive character of Césaire’s Negritude is still present here in the imagery of the passage, however, the passage itself is calling for a tidal-wave sized erasure of that violence: a redemption through words. This passage exemplifies Césaire’s seamless insertion of rare words, like *érysipeles* and *plaudismes*; the specificity to his linguistic intelligence acts as a sort of weapon to work against the disproportionate colonized-

⁹ Word of Césaire’s invention, from the Latin *promitto*, meaning “covenant” (Irele *Cahier* 85).

colonizer power dynamic.¹⁰ One of Negritude's aims, as we have seen proposed by *Cahier*, is a call to action, to overcome centuries of silent servitude to stand up and declare one's black identity with pride. Césaire writes:

Et il y a le maquereau nègre, l'askari nègre, et tous les zèbres se secouent à leur manière pour faire tomber leurs zébrures en une rosée de lait frais.

Et au milieu de tout cela je dis hurrah ! mon grand-père meurt, je dis hurrah ! la vieille négritude progressivement se cadavérise. Il n'y a pas à dire : c'était un bon nègre. (59)

Cahier posits that the old Negritude of servitude, imitation and disgrace is dying off and a new era of pride in blackness can be called forth. The action of utterance and the feeling of pride are closely linked in *Cahier*, especially in the repetition of "je dis hurrah !" in this passage. Even though France is a continual influence to Césaire's identity, his manipulation of the French language furthers his attempts through *Cahier* to take pride in the African influence on his identity as well.

A Universal View of Humanity by Way of the Particular

The main critics of Negritude contest its call to assert the value of black cultures along side a reversal of Western norms. Reading *Cahier* as a simple inversion of the black/white dichotomy created by the West implies that Negritude is rooted within this flawed racist dichotomy and thus has no merit. I posit that this criticism stems from misunderstandings over the complex relationship Césaire intends to create between the

¹⁰ Césaire's later collection of poetry, *Les Armes miraculeuses* suggests the power of fighting with words, and more broadly, poetry.

particular state of the colonized black and a universal outlook that applauds humanity in all its forms. Césaire says in an interview:

I know this can appear contradictory, but I once found a formula and I showed it to Senghor. Hegel says: ‘One should not oppose universal to particular. It is not by negating the particular that one reaches the universal, but by exploration and clear recognition of the particular.’ So we told ourselves: the blacker we are going to be, the more *universal* we’ll become. (Rowell 1997)

Césaire’s interweaving of the particular and the universal in *Cahier* prevents an interpretation of his work as a version of reverse racism. He accesses a universal outcry to recognize the sufferings of humanity by emphasizing the particular situation of the black race.

Both Frantz Fanon and Maryse Condé have similar critiques of Negritude. Condé extends Fanon’s argument that the *Nègre* does not exist; it is merely a categorical invention from the West, and therefore, any attempt to reclaim this as an identity is a flawed, and even dangerous method. Condé would argue that trying to connect people through a shared history of slavery and colonization is a doomed attempt to achieve liberation from inside the same oppressive schema. Condé argues that: “Notre libération passe par la connaissance qu’il n’y a jamais eu de Nègres. Il n’y a jamais eu que des hommes exploités” (*Négritude* 419). Upon a close reading of *Cahier*, we can see that Condé’s views are, in fact, not profoundly different from those of Césaire. Césaire would agree with the second part of Condé’s statement, but would argue that the path to universality is through the *insistence* on a certain shared historical situation, the acceptance of which leads to the breaking away from the Western dichotomy to a more

universal view of humanity. For Césaire, Negritude accesses universality through a remembrance and affirmation of history (including the Western-created myth of the *nègre*) rather than an avoidance or disregard of it. Doris Garraway explains why an emphasis on a particular history is vital to a universal consciousness:

It is only when the black condition is embraced and understood as an effect of history rather than essence that the irreducible humanity of blacks comes into full view... Only a racial consciousness that is attuned to the historical construction of any and all blackness will enable to black man to imagine himself as human, this demonstrating even more profoundly that Negritude is a humanism. (79)

This idea is more clearly expounded upon in Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme*, in which he delineates the effects of colonization on the African consciousness and the ways in which the colonizer attempted to excuse his actions by defining blacks as essentially inferior or sub-human. An understanding of how history has operated on the black consciousness is the key to an assurance of the black man's essential humanity. In *Cahier*, the essence of this argument comes in lyrical form:

-- moi sur une route, enfant, mâchant une racine de canne à sucre
-- traîné homme sur une route sanglante une corde au cou
-- debout au milieu d'un cirque immense, sur mon front noir une couronne de daturas (30)

The dashes in these three lines do not allow them to be perceived as an unconnected gathering of images. The beginning mundane childhood image, which we can assume to be closely autobiographical, is followed by two extremely violent depictions of torture. Most likely the memory of the *canne à sucre*, benign to a child's eye, but representative of slave plantations and rum distilleries, acts as a trigger to a collective historical memory

of lynchings. The violence of the history is reflected in the overall aggression that is characteristic of Césaire's Negritude in *Cahier*. The point of view shifts from "moi" and "enfant" to "homme," suggesting history's effects on the relationship between the particular and the universal. The child's memories are forever linked to his African ancestry of slavery. Thus, in the last line, the point of view shifts back to "*mon front*;" this is not entirely a personal experience, rather a communal suffering with the oppressed through a particular situation. He possesses the collective history as both a particular and universal experience.

The above lines serve to emphasize the connection the persona has to the black race as a whole. Some analyses have criticized Césaire's Negritude as displayed in these types of passages as a cultural nationalism, consequently excluding other races and ethnicities. This superficial analysis does not take into account the following passages, which explicitly show this drive for universality that exceeds any cultural nationalism. Understanding of a particular historical situation, like the effects of slavery or colonization, allows for a broadened understanding of similar historical situations, eventually leading to an encompassing of all of humanity's suffering. The persona avows:

Comme il y a des hommes-hyènes et des hommes-panthères, je serais un homme-juif
un homme-cafre
un homme-hindou-de-Calcutta
un homme-de-Harlem-qui-ne-vote-pas

l'homme-famine, l'homme-insulte, l'homme-torture
on pouvait à n'importe quel moment le saisir le rouer de coups, le tuer --
parfaitement le tuer -- sans avoir de compte à rendre à personne sans avoir

d'excuses à présenter à personne
un homme-juif
un homme-pogrom

un chiot
un mendigot (20)

The passage begins by comparing the persona to peoples oppressed due to race or ethnicity, but continues to expand this connection to all oppressed peoples. The image that sparks this connection of the homme-hyène or homme-panthère comes from African totemism, which designates a relation between humans and other living beings (often animals) (Irele *Cahier* 60). Césaire highlights a particular African cultural value to establish his empathic identification with this much larger community, while also representing the Western analogy between animals and these groups of oppressed peoples, also perceived as savage or sub-human.

Césaire broke with the Communist Party in 1956, in part, because of differing views on the Universal. He cites his disapproval of the Party position that the particular should dissolve into a larger, universal collective in his resignation letter to the Party's Secretary General, Maurice Thorez: "Il y a deux manières de se perdre : par ségrégation murée dans le particulier ou par dilution dans 'l'universel.' Ma conception de l'universel est celle d'un universel riche de tout le particulier, riche de tous les particuliers, approfondissement et coexistence de tous les particuliers" (15). Césaire protests the homogeneity he sees in some conceptions of the universal, opting to complicate his conception to include the benefits of both the particular and the universal. Garraway sees phrases in *Cahier*, like "mon île non-clôture" (24) and a description of black collectivity

as “poreux à tous les souffles du monde/ aire fraternelle de tous les souffles du monde/... chair de la chair du monde palpitant du mouvement même du monde” (47) as further examples of Césairean Negritude, despite its aggressivity in denouncing domination, as “predicated on an attitude of continuous solidarity, openness, and engagement with all others as its condition of possibility” (83). The following passage supports Garraway’s claim as well:

Mais les faisant, mon coeur, préservez-moi de toute haine
ne faites point de moi cet homme de haine pour qui je n’ai que haine
car pour me cantonner en cette unique race
vous savez pourtant mon amour tyrannique
vous savez que ce n’est point par haine des autres races
que je m’exige bêcheur de cette unique race
que ce que je veux
c’est pour la faim universelle
pour la soif universelle (50)

It is clear that however great the value accorded to black culture, it does not negate or refuse the value of other cultures. The repetition of “unique,” along with the words “cantonner” and “bêcheur” highlight the persona’s rootedness in his particular situation. None of this, however, hinders him from simultaneously being rooted in universal suffering, since what he wants for one applies to all: a recognition of basic humanity.

A theme that runs throughout the *Cahier*, enhancing the passionate tone of the work, is that of the *Cri*: a universal, primal cry for the suffering of humanity. It runs deeper than individual passages that focus on the power of the word and utterance, as previously described. As an overarching mood to the work as a whole, the *Cri* includes *Cahier*’s numerous exclamations, of despair or exaltation. The repetitions of “Je dis

hurrah !” or “Eia !,” or even “J’accepte !” weave the poet’s demand for recognition of all humanity throughout the work. Renée Larrier’s focus is on later expressions of the relationship between *écrire* and *crier* in Antillean literature, but he gives a small mention to Césaire’s founding contribution to this phenomenon. In *Cahier* the persona expresses a desire at one point to act as the mouthpiece for this “foule criarde si étonnamment passée à côté de son cri comme cette ville à côté de son mouvement, de son sens, sans inquiétude, à côté de son vrai cri, le seul qu’on eût voulu entendre parce qu’on le sent sien lui seul” (9). The persona would say to his country: “Ma bouche sera la bouche des malheurs qui n’ont point de bouche, ma voix, la liberté de celles qui s’affaissent au cachot du désespoir” (22). Larrier sees *Cahier* as “the site of testimony and inscription, bringing together the notions [of collective Caribbean spoken voice] manifested in the anagram ‘crier/écrire,’ which in addition, is an approximate anagram of ‘cahier’” (277). *Cahier* attempts to act as this “vrai cri,” a collective cry not only of a impassioned revolt that has been repressed for centuries, but also a awakening exclamation of a restored pride in black identity. Taking into account Césaire’s views on the particular and universal and their expression in *Cahier* raises the analysis of the *Cri* to an even more profound and encompassing level: a concurrent particular and universal outcry.

There is a plethora of thematic currents that run through Césaire’s *Cahier*, but the essential themes that are key to understanding Césairean Negritude lie in a recognition, acceptance, and repossession of black identity through history, a surrealist upheaval of Western norms that at the same time does not negate the existence of Western influence

to black identity, and an attempt to access a universal humanism through the particular black experience. Césaire says:

La négritude à mes yeux, c'est une chose qui est très simple, qui me paraît aller de soi, c'est *l'affirmation d'une identité*. [...] Je suis d'abord l'homme d'une communauté historiquement située, je suis un nègre et cela est fondamental. [...] C'est l'affirmation *d'une fidélité*, c'est le deuxième point, autrement dit, dans mon esprit, il n'y a pas de place pour le reniement, il s'agit de rester fidèle à un certain nombre de choses, à un certain nombre de valeurs, à un certain nombre de cultures, par conséquent c'est le refus de l'assimilation bêtifiante. Troisièmement, c'est l'affirmation *d'une solidarité*. [...] je me sens solidaire de tous les hommes qui luttent pour la liberté et d'abord de ceux qui ont le plus souffert et qu'on a trop souvent oubliés, je veux parler des Noirs. (Kesteloot, *Un Pont* 66-7)

All these categories are addressed in *Cahier* with a aggressive passion that is not prevalent in Senghorian Negritude, due to Césaire's perception of a fractured Antillean identity. For Césaire, his "iles cicatrices des eaux" necessitate a more traumatic upheaval in their quest for identity than Senghor's already deeply rooted African heritage. Senghor's idealized vision of Africa, however, is inherently problematic itself. His romanticized portrayals of pre-colonial African civilization fed Césaire's already heightened longing for the continent, as well as strengthened the divide between Césaire's idyllic vision of a African past and his fractured islands, built not from grand civilizations, but from trauma and bloodshed. Maryse Condé, also native to the Antilles, finds the difference between the two intellectuals rooted in their geography:

Césaire est le fils d'une terre, artificiellement créée en quelque sorte pour l'exploitation économique et par elle. Senghor est l'héritier d'une autre qui, certes souffrante et meurtrie, parvint à conserver des éléments de sa réalité passée à partir desquels la poétisation et la schématisation sont possibles. (*Cahier* 51)

This opposition is played out in *Cahier* in its direct references to Africa's pre-colonial history:

Non, nous n'avons jamais été amazones du roi du Dahomey, ni princes de Ghana avec huit cents chameaux, ni docteurs à Tombouctou Askia le Grand étant roi, ni architectes de Djenné, ni Mahdis, ni guerriers (Césaire 38).

In this passage Césaire simultaneously extols the pre-colonial African cultures and avows that as an Antillean, while he is connected, he is not fully a part of that history, as his forbears were violently removed from it. Having Senghor as his gateway to African culture created a “continent imaginaire” (Kesteloot, *Comprendre* 93) that in reality would never hold as much appeal to Césaire as his home of Martinique. Kesteloot sees this constructed vision of Africa as the reason Césaire never called for a return to Africa, like many of his contemporaries (*Comprendre* 92). The next chapter will expound upon this rose-colored image of Africa in Senghorian Negritude.

Césaire has written much less on the specific topic of Negritude than Senghor, as he views it as a movement both historically based in the context in which it was born and as a way of addressing humanity, which is continuously in flux. He speaks about the extent and effects of assimilation leading up to the conception of Negritude:

So if Senghor and I spoke of Négritude, it was because we were in a century of exacerbated Eurocentrism [...] that enjoyed a guiltless conscious. [...] the colonized readily accepted this vision of the world; they had interiorized the colonizer's vision of themselves. [...] So Négritude was for us a way of asserting ourselves. (Rowell 992)

Négritude, as revealed in *Cahier*, was a first step in unmasking an unjust Western white supremacy, but at its conception, it was more a way of existing in the world than a political treatise, more a literary expression of black identity than an outline for a practical application of this racial consciousness. Césaire explains: “So, of course, you must not look for a political creed in it. But, perhaps you can look for the essential man: a cry, the fundamental cry. Now some sort of rationalization was made out of it later” (Rowell 992). Placing it in its appropriate historical context does not diminish Negritude’s relevance. In fact, it only serves to enhance our understanding of Césairean Negritude, as well as how it has been misappropriated or misconstrued by subsequent generations. For Césaire, “as long as you will have Negroes a little everywhere, Négritude will be there as a matter of course” (Rowell 992). The constantly evolving nature of Negritude allows it to always be present in discourse surrounding the black diaspora, if not as a central thematic, as scaffolding upon which subsequent themes rely.

By its nature, Senghor’s construction of Negritude does not permit as much rooting in contextuality; the essentialist notion of the *âme noire* creates a feeling of an unchanging standard, regardless of time period or cultural context. An analysis of his Negritude, however, must take a certain context into consideration to understand why he framed his argument in these terms. To put a stop to outside Western attempts at defining Africa, Senghor set out to define Africa from within, using the West’s own methodology and therefore allowing Negritude access into Western intellectual discourse. In this way, he hoped to present Africa as the missing piece of the puzzle to compensate for aspects of

Europe's weaknesses and create a union—a *Eurafrique*—stronger than the sum of its parts.

CHAPTER IV

“MON SANG IRRÉDUCTIBLE:” SENGHOR’S NEGRITUDE IN *CHANTS D’OMBRE* AND *HOSTIES NOIRES*

Despite the many similarities between Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor that solidified their long-lasting relationship—a shared African ancestry, assimilationist education bringing them to a 1930’s Paris to collaborate on the Negritude movement, and representing France’s colonies in the French National Assembly as well as serving office in their respective homelands—a study of their intellectual development particular to their treatment of Negritude reveals striking differences between the two authors. To date, most critical discussion has acknowledged that Senghor’s conception and expression of Negritude in the poetic and political realm distances itself from the views of Césaire. The quantity of their œuvre specifically dedicated to Negritude is an initial important disparity; Senghor has written substantially more on the subject than his Antillean counterpart. The extensive nature of his essays would initially seem to have clarified the tenets and goals of the Negritude movement, while in reality they have paradoxically elicited more negative critiques of Senghorian Negritude as opposed to Césairean. By expounding upon the characteristic themes of Negritude in his prose, Senghor’s expression of Negritude develops the makings of a philosophical theory: the exact notion Césaire was trying to combat. Senghor has also been more explicit in relating his poetic expression of Negritude to its employment in the political sphere, a point of contention by critics who believe Negritude should be limited to the literary realm.

Under this established framework, a side-by-side comparison of the two authors' most widely accepted definitions of Negritude underscores their inherent differences. Césaire defines it as: "Conscience d'être noir, simple reconnaissance d'un fait, qui implique acceptation, prise en charge de son destin de noir, de son histoire et de sa culture" (Kestleloot, *Histoire* 109), while Senghor specifies it as: "l'ensemble des valeurs culturelles du monde noir, telles qu'elles s'expriment dans la vie, les institutions et les œuvres des Noirs" (*Liberté* 19). Césaire's definition implies a quest for self-construction that is based upon simple realization and acceptance of one's own blackness. The fact that Senghor's definition is based on black cultural values implies that there exists a set of distinctive markers that designate black culture and oppose it to other cultures. Senghor's insistence on defining the factors that distinguish black men from white, including the existence of an *âme noire*—an inherent and uniquely black rhythm, and a heightened spiritual connection to the divine—has allowed his version of Negritude to be more readily attacked as a racist ideology, despite his repeated attempts to refute any underpinnings of racism in his work. On the other end of the spectrum, Senghorian Negritude has also been criticized as too conciliatory with regards to his treatment of France and his almost obsessive call for a cultural *métissage* to benefit both France and Senegal, and more broadly, Europe and Africa. I will argue that these two seemingly contradictory readings of Senghorian Negritude are responsible for much of its critique. I have chosen to focus on the first two collections of Senghor's poetry, *Chants d'Ombre* (1945) and *Hosties Noires* (1948), due to their relative proximity to the 1939 publication of *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* and to the original conception of Negritude. Critics

have agreed that Senghor's later work strays further and further from a Césairean view of Negritude, thus a study of their most similar work will serve to elicit subtle differences that may have been overlooked in other analyses that span the whole of Senghor's œuvre. A study of the expression of Negritude found in *Chants d'Ombre* and *Hosties Noires*¹ will clarify the asymmetry between Césairean and Senghorian Negritude and show how Senghor's rootedness in African traditions, in addition to his assimilationist upbringing, led him to simultaneously define the *nègre* by opposition to a white European colonizer and at the same time solicit a profoundly cooperative relationship between the two.

Rooted in Tradition

"Je me suis nommé : 'Afrika !'"

Expressing the lived experience of blackness² and explaining its historical significance comprise central tenets of the Negritude movement. The importance of ancestors to Senghor's identification as *nègre* also serves in his effort to valorize African society to a Western world that saw a backwards, sub-human, "dark continent" with no significant culture or history. Infusing moments of collective memory and direct connection to centuries-long ancestry works to discredit this Western stereotype. While Césaire also employs this method, he has on many occasions, alluded to a large geographically-based division between his Negritude and that of Senghor. Césairean Negritude reflects a longing for a distant, unknown homeland in Africa, projecting an incomplete or ruptured self-image onto his poetry. Conversely, he sees Senghor as a

¹ From now on (*CO*) and (*HN*) in my citations. Both come from a compilation called *Œuvre Poétique*, abbreviated as *OP*.

² "Blackness" here referring to the fact of being black in a racially constructed society.

grounded and whole individual, whose genealogical history roots him in his geography. The Antillean history Césaire can draw upon reaches its ultimate end at the slave trade, causing the violently traumatic mood that defines *Cahier*; Senghor however has a history that spans centuries, dating back to the beginning of civilization, to which he can make reference. This in turn helps to create the more peacefully profound, centered cadence of Senghor's poetry. As opposed to *Cahier*'s turbulent tone set by its oscillation between poetic and prosaic syntax, Senghor's verses are in accordance with French *vers libre* style, which incorporates different verse forms found in a classic alexandrine verse (Irele 29). Stylistically, Senghor's work also reflects this more composed feeling.

Although Senghor employs a French verse, the thematic currents that run through his poetry are deeply African in nature and serve to highlight his Africanness, his Negritude, as the driving source of his being. The predominant features of his poetry that embed him in Africa are first, a time-defying, mystical exchange between man and his ancestor, secondly, a unification of African peoples through blood, implying a shared African identity, lineage, innate rhythm, and a communion with nature, and lastly, an exaltation of his childhood memories.

"Ancêtres présents"

Arguably most prevalent are Senghor's references to his ancestors: spiritual guides that span the divide between the living and the dead. Whereas Césaire evokes painful historical memories of his predecessors' sufferings during the slave trade, Senghor focuses on the wisdom and power that can be gained through maintaining ties to one's ancestry. Throughout his poetry Senghor intersperses references to historical African

kingdoms (Sine or Gabou/Kaabu), rulers (Koumba N'Dofène, last king of Sine and relative of Senghor's father) and traditional folktales (Koumba l'Orpheline, a Serer female character) to reinforce his argument that not only did African civilizations and cultures exist, Africans should be proud of the depth held in these civilizations.

“L'orgueil” is a term that appears again and again, as it is a predominant factor in Negritude's celebration of blackness. Senghor's poem, “Ndessé,” speaks to the destruction of self-worth in the face of war. He was drafted by the French army in 1939 and subsequently imprisoned in a German war camp from 1940-42. In “Ndessé,” the persona, in a similar situation, asks his mother to help him regain some of his ancestral pride:

Redis-moi les vieux contes des veillées noires, que je me perde par les routes sans
mémoire.

Mère, je suis un soldat humilié qu'on nourrit de gros mil.

Dis-moi donc l'orgueil de mes pères ! (*OP/HN* 86).

Oral histories, evoked by the terms “vieux contes” and “veillées noires,” hold the key to harnessing pride in tradition and family lineage: “pères” in the plural form. Senghor conveys a sense of both pride and humility in the face of one's ancestry:

Je m'allonge à terre à vos pieds, dans la poussière de mes respects
À vos pieds, Ancêtres présents, qui dominez fiers la grand-salle de tous vos
masques qui défient le Temps. (*OP/CO* 50)

The phrase “Ancêtres présents” confronts a Western paradox that an ancestor is, by definition, a family member that lived in the past and can no longer be present. Senghor

defies this Western convention and with it, the broader notion of time as well. This non-linear construction of the world characterizes a component of Senghor's Negritude in its definition of the *âme noire*.

These references to his ancestors remove his poetry from the confines of calendrical time, while rooting it even more in the space of Africa. Marcel Mahawa Diouf has researched popular African oral histories in connection to Senghor's poetry. One such story explains the mystical fluidity of life in reincarnation that is a present force in many African cultures. An ancestor that had lived prosperously with a herd of camels, but was forced to flee from an overzealous king, was reborn into the body of his grandson and it was to this grandson that the family spirit, Fatma-Nar-la-Mauresque, appeared for the first time. She told him: "Ton ancêtre, c'est encore toi. Tu avais des troupeaux de chameaux là-bas, mais ici, les biens ne sont pas les mêmes : je te donnerai plutôt des vaches" (25). Diouf links this family history to a passage in Senghor's "À l'appel de la race de Saba:" "Mais je n'efface les pas de mes pères ni des pères de mes pères dans ma tête ouverte à vents et pillards du Nord" (*OP/HN* 58). While that statement implies remembrance, I posit that Senghor's persona goes even further in "Que m'accompagnent Kôras et Balafong" to achieve a true amalgamation of ancestral spirits and his own:

J'étais moi-même le grand-père de mon grand-père
J'étais son âme et son ascendance, le chef de la maison d'Élissa du Gâbou
(*OP/CO* 34).

Senghor creates an interconnection between generations that only serves to strengthen the sentiment of unity he strives to proliferate within the African community.

Senghor presents an equally complex treatment of memory in connection with time. In “Que m’accompagnent...” the persona repeats the line, “Quels mois ? quelle année ?” in the first and fifth stanzas to underscore the indeterminate nature of time in correlation to his memory. As time no longer represents a strictly chronological progression, his personal memories become intertwined with ancestral or even collective memory. Geneviève Lebaud sees a corollary between the functions of memory in Senghor and Proust. She says: “Se souvenir pour Proust, mais surtout pour Senghor, n’est pas un acte intellectuel, mais plutôt l’abandon d’un homme qui se laisserait glisser tel le plongeur dans l’abîme des hautes profondeurs, à la recherche d’une vérité intérieure, fugitive et difficilement saisissable” (9). Her reference to *hautes profondeurs* comes from Senghor’s “Nuit de Sine,” a poem that signals a deep nostalgia for a childhood lost:

Que je respire l’odeur de nos Morts, que je recueille et redise leur voix vivante, que
j’apprenne à
Vivre avant de descendre, au-delà du plongeur, dans les hautes profondeurs du
sommeil. (*OP/CO* 17)

In proustien fashion, these lines connect the persona’s physical senses to an otherworldly experience. For him, the memories to which he has access are not only ones he has personally experienced, as in the first stanzas where he remembers the sights and sounds of his childhood, but also ones that form a collective African consciousness:

Écoutons la voix des Anciens d’Élissa. Comme nous exilés
Ils n’ont pas voulu mourir, que se perdît par les sables leur torrent séminal.
Que j’écoute, dans la case enfumée que visite un reflet d’âmes propices (*OP/CO*
17)

This “*mémoire ancienne*” (*OP/CO* 43) in Senghor is reminiscent of the oral histories that sustain the vitality of African culture and the important role held by griots in passing down historical knowledge from generation to generation. Senghor’s poetry, and Negritude as he and Césaire understand it, relies on the belief that it is necessary to understand the past in order to adequately describe the present; it is the particular mode of history they feel compelled to evoke that differentiates the mood of their two *œuvres*.

“*Le chant de ton sang*”

In connection with Senghor’s insistence on lineage and ancestry, images related to blood appear in a number of poems in his two first works. As in Césaire’s *Cahier*, repeated allusions to blood in *Chants d’Ombre* and *Hosties Noires* reinforce a genealogical bond between all African peoples. Blood as the product of violence and the cause of lasting “*cicatrices*” from the slave trade is not, however, present in Senghor’s text. Senghor’s Negritude strives to project a strong, proud and unified vision of Africa, leaving little place for the debilitating trauma of slavery. Blood is the link that connects many African themes Senghor expresses: a recognition and pride in ancestry, a certain African rhythm, and a spiritual connection to nature. Senghor’s use of the word *sang* is so prevalent in these two collections that the reader may begin to interpret it as a racist exclusionary tactic: an over-insistence on African blood suggesting an over-valuing of the importance of race. Some uses of the word *sang*, seem gratuitous, leading the reader to question the reasoning behind its widespread use, as in “*l’Ouragan*” for example: “*Embrase mes lèvres de sang, Esprit, souffle sur les cordes de ma kôra*” (*OP/CO* 13). In other references, Senghor alerts the reader, by use of capitalization, that this blood is of a

higher importance: “Ma tâche est de reconquérir le lointain des terres qui bornaient l’Empire du Sang” (*OP/CO* 47). Other poems also speak of “Voix du Sang” (*OP/CO* 22) and the “Gardien du Sang” (*OP/CO* 19). Sylvia Washington Bâ argues that a reading of these numerous references to blood as racism would be superficial:

Though certainly a justifiable and understandable sentiment, racial pride is not the primary meaning of these references. For the black African, blood bonds are of great significance, not because of race per se, but because of the vital realities bound by these blood ties. (48)

Bâ goes on to explain that blood is an effective symbol in expressing the permanent community of extended family and the strength this clan provides. Blood is the sign of a life force, of ancestry and family lineage. One could argue that only when analyzed in the global context of colonization, exoticism and exploitation do these insistences on blood lineage appear as a backlash against the white racism of the time. It would be naïve, however, to read the Negritude poets in a vacuum, primarily because they were immersed in the Western world when the movement arose, but also because, being raised under assimilationist rule, they are constantly struggling in their poetry to achieve the right balance of Western and African (and Caribbean as the case may be) influence. It is essential to study them with knowledge of both Western and African traditions and symbols.

Repeatedly referencing blood imagery allows Senghor to establish a connection that can run through all levels and groupings of Senegalese society. Senghor addresses his fellow *tirailleurs sénégalais*, not only as their “frères d’armes,” but also as their “frère de sang” (*OP/HN* 59); in another poem dedicated to “une jeune fille noire au talon rose,” he

directs her to remember her sanguine ties to the black race: “Écoute le message de l’Afrique lointaine et le chant de ton sang” (*OP/HN* 89)! This verse, equating the grandeur of Africa with one individual’s blood, highlights the relationship between biological ties and the breadth of civilization they imply. The following passage reveals another instance of pride in African heritage, specifically Senghor’s:

Je repose la tête sur les genoux de ma nourrice Ngâ, de Ngâ la poétesse
Ma tête bourdonnant au galop guerrier des dyong-dyongs, au grand galop de mon
sang de pur sang (*OP/HN* 61)

Senghor’s paternal lineage claims to stem from the *Guelwars* that left in exodus from Gabou (Kaabu) to settle in Serer territory. While Senghor feels more attachment to his mother’s Serer heritage—maternal lineage is significant in many African societies—much of his poetry gives priority his father’s royal *Guelwar*³ background (Diouf 68). At the same time Senghor references his noble warrior predecessors and emphasizes the pure blood they carry, he also alludes to the specific rhythms of Africa through the onomatopoeic words “bourdonnant,” “dyong-dyongs⁴,” and “galop.” Even though he highlights his personal *guerrier* lineage, the rhythm of the words and in the construction of the verse itself applies to a more general audience, one that Senghor believes to carry the same underlying rhythm. The alliteration and repetition of the verse intensify the connotations of the rhythmic diction he employs.

The idea of a unique rhythm to the blood pumping through African veins (“grand galop de mon sang”) extends to Senghor’s notions of innate African rhythms and

³ A centuries-old noble dynasty originating in the Senegambian region.

⁴ The royal drum of the Sine kings.

rhythmic dialogues. Listening to Senghor recite his poetry gives the clearest understanding of a powerfully composed continuity that is anything but monotonous, even though his cadence and pitch never drastically vary.⁵ To disrupt the symmetry, Senghor inserts shorter verses: “syncopations” as he calls them (Kesteloot *Comprendre* 73). The rhythm of the poem and the way it is read aloud are central to the essence of Negritude: “Mais la monotonie du ton, c’est ce qui distingue la poésie de la prose, c’est le sceau de la Négritude, l’incantation qui fait accéder à la vérité des choses essentielles : les Forces du Cosmos” (*Postface* 171). Kesteloot describes his poetic rhythm in this way: “Plus que vers les chants, les poèmes de Senghor tendent donc vers le mètre d’une certaine parole clamée que les griots empruntent pour dérouler l’épopée” (73). The oral tradition of the *griot*⁶ manifests itself in the structural rhythm of Senghor’s poems, which read more as dialogues, drawing the reader into a participatory role that is so characteristic of African oral tradition. Most of the poems are addressed to a person (often a woman or friend), or a personification (a town, a totem, Death, or God). Some poems, as in the case of “Chant de printemps” or “Méditerranée,” even have a two-sided dialogue: “Et je redis ton nom : Dyallo ! / Et tu redis mon nom : Senghor” (*OP/HN* 67)! The poems’ innate orality roots Senghor further in African tradition. Orality also translates as music in many of Senghor’s poems. The most explicit, “Que m’accompagnent kôras et balafong⁷,” along with several others in these two compilations have a parenthetical directive as to the suggested accompaniment: “(guimm

⁵ Senghor reads a select number of poems during a two-disc interview, recorded in 1977, with Patrice Galbeau. See Works Cited.

⁶ A very important role in West African culture: a storyteller and poet, who also sings the praises of various family lineages and keeps oral histories alive.

⁷ Kora and Balafon are instruments associated with oral tradition performance.

pour trois kôras et un balafong)”, “(pour un tama),” for example. The musical rhythm should engage with the meter of the spoken word.

A ready acceptance to incorporate knowledge and influence from many different sources allows Senghor to stake a claim to both European and African traditions. While he claimed in an interview: “Nous [les Africains] avons notre propre rythme que nous sommes en train d’imposer au monde” (*Léopold*), he will also readily acknowledge similarities between African rhythm of the griot and the troubadour’s rhythm in epic poetry or in classic Alexandrine verse. Much of Senghor’s earliest work in poetry consisted of translating African poets into French. During the course of this endeavor, he noticed that the translated verse verged upon Alexandrine verse (Kesteloot *Pont* 140).

This discovery led him to make a drastic change in his own poetry:

C’est alors que j’ai détruit tous mes poèmes et, repartant de zéro, que je me suis mis à la recherche d’un vers nouveau, que j’ai fini par trouver dans le verset de Paul Claudel comme de Charles Péguy et de Saint John Perse. C’est pourquoi je n’ai gardé que les poèmes écrits après 1935. (quoted in Kesteloot *Pont* 140)

Realizing the similarities between the Alexandrine and African verse allowed Senghor to accept this influence from both sides of the Mediterranean.

Unlike Césaire, Senghor was a practicing Catholic for most of his life; this dimension only enhanced his internal duality and his external expression of this duality. An analysis of blood’s role in Senghor’s poetry must not overlook its significance in Christian imagery. In “Que m’accompagne...” we see both this metaphor for blood: “Ma sève païenne est un vin vieux qui ne s’aigrit, pas le vin de palme d’un jour.” (*OP/CO* 34) The verse evokes a Christian transubstantiation, as it equates blood with wine; the

substitution of the word “sève” for “sang,” however, adds another layer that complicates a purely Christian interpretation. The substitution of sap for blood creates the deep connection between nature and the African that both Césairean and Senghorian Negritude triumph; the verse also exalts characteristically African images (“païenne,” “vin de palme”). The interconnectivity between wine, blood, and sap also reinforces the nature of all three as symbols of essential, life-giving substances, suggesting a particular interrelatedness between man and nature.⁸

Blood, rhythm and nature are interlocking forces for Senghor’s Negritude:

J’ai choisi le verset des fleuves, des vents des forêts
L’assonance des plaines et des rivières, choisi le rythme de sang de mon corps
dépouillé (*OP/CO* 32).

This passage juxtaposes poetic and bucolic vocabulary, revealing a unifying rhythm flowing through nature and Senghor’s poetic expression, which is an integral component of his identification. Totem animals reflect another unique bond between man and nature. As Senghor’s family’s totem animal and also his father’s name (Diogoy means “lion” in the Serer language), the lion appears in several poems: “Prière aux Masques,” “Par-delà éros,” “Le retour de l’enfant prodigue” and “Le Totem.” Kesteloot is quick to point out a distinction between a Western and an African reading of this recurring image in relation to Senghor:

Le rappel du totem lion sera donc compris comme une métaphore du mâle
amoureux et vainqueur par le lecteur étranger, tandis que le Sénégalais en percevra

⁸ Palm wine is made from the sap of the palm tree. Senghor places himself as the tree; his blood is the sap and the wine.

le sens religieux, la relation, mystérieuse vraiment, entre l'animal et son homme, la force et l'instinct de l'un passés dans l'autre. Et le poète joue sur les deux registres de lecture, selon son habitude. (85)

Senghor's poetry walks the line between Western and African plausible interpretations; the fault would be in assuming an analysis can rely uniquely one or the other.

“Je me rappelle, je me rappelle...”

The Negritude movement would have never actualized, had its founders not been taken out of their respective homelands and thrust into an unknown environment. Paradoxically, both Senghor and Césaire had experienced relatively European upbringings in Senegal and Martinique and started to highlight their connection to their African roots while in Europe. While Césaire came to Europe ready to escape the discontent he felt in Martinique, Senghor immediately realized his longing for Africa upon arriving in Paris. Furthermore, Césaire's Negritude grew out of a feeling of detachment or uprooted self that quests for the wholeness he perceives Africa as holding. Senghor's Negritude relies on a resurfacing of preexisting traditions and an identity that had been instilled in him through centuries of African ancestry. These initial differences led Senghor to feel a certain homesickness that was not present in Césaire; it is this longing that feeds an idyllic construction of Africa, or Senghor's *Royaume d'Enfance*. Some, like Antillean Paul Nizer, felt Senghor misled them with a glorified image of Africa. Nizer went to Africa after WWII in search of the proclaimed ancestral sources

and returned disillusioned, a sentiment expressed in his poem, “Je n’aime pas l’Afrique.”⁹ He explains a gap between the physical continent of Africa and its image in Western discourse: “Nous avons vécu sur une Nigritie irréaliste, faite des théories des ethnologues, sociologues et autres savants qui étudient l’homme en vitrine. Ils ont piqué le Nigritien au formol et ils prétendent que c’est le type de l’homme heureux” (quoted in Kesteloot *Histoire* 196).¹⁰ Senghor’s recurring images evoking a former Africa lend themselves to attacks like these from his critics suggesting that he sells an unrealistic view of Africa to make it more appealing to an audience unfamiliar with the continent. I posit that his overwhelming nostalgia while in Europe must be measured against these idealized descriptions. The poems in *Chants d’Ombre* were most likely written in the last half of the 1930s, while *Hosties Noires* was primarily composed during WWII, including Senghor’s two-year imprisonment in a German camp. It is understandable that these events would increase a longing for home that had already been spurred by his time in Paris.

Senghor’s *Royaume d’Enfance* encompasses a number of qualities: the bucolic surroundings, innocence, family (his mother in particular, who protested his departure at age seven for boarding school),¹¹ and traditional practices of the village. He creates a

⁹ Senghor chose, in fact, to include this poem and several others from Niger in his *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, saying Niger was “de ces Antillais qui ne se sont révélés, parce que épanouis, qu’au contact de l’Afrique-Mère. Il nous a rapporté quelques poèmes violents et tendres à la fois comme la terre ancestrale” (91).

¹⁰ From Niger, Paul, *Les Puissants*. Paris: Scorpion, 1958.

¹¹ Senghor writes: “Mon père me battait, souvent, le soir, me reprochant mes vagabondages ; et il finit, pour me punir et “me dresser,” par m’envoyer à l’école des Blancs, au grand désespoir de ma mère, qui vitupérait qu’à sept ans, c’était trop tôt” (*Postface* 165).

world of pastoral simplicity that is far removed from the growing fascism and unease on the eve of the second World War in Europe:

Au détour du chemin la rivière, bleue par les prés frais de Septembre.
Un paradis que garde des fièvres une enfant aux yeux clairs comme deux épées
Paradis mon enfance africaine, qui gardait l'innocence de l'Europe. (*OP/CO* 35)

The parallel structures of the last two lines serve to equate Europe with a fever, suggesting either a frenzied, chaotic society, or a medically ill one.

The contradiction between his childhood—his own lived experience—in Africa and Western perceptions of Africa he begins to discover strongly influences Senghor's articulation of this *Royaume d'Enfance*. N'Tji Idriss Marik describes the essence of Senghor's imagined universe: "Il s'agit d'un univers non encore pollué par la civilisation avec des êtres mystérieux (les «kouss», les djinns...) un paysage d'eau et de terre (les bolongs et les tanns), mais aussi, des personnes chères" (Marik). I would dispute the term "pollué par la civilisation" to add "la civilisation européenne," as Marik's current definition implies a lack of any sort of civilization to Senghor's childhood home. It was, in fact, this exact critique that led Senghor to construct the beginnings of his conception of Negritude. His professor at the Collège Libermann seminary in Dakar, Father Lalouse preached an assimilationist doctrine: "Le père Lalouse nous enseignait en somme que n'avions pas de civilisation, nous n'avions rien pensé, rien inventé, rien apporté à la civilisation. Il s'agit donc pour nous d'être les Français à peau noire" (*Léopold*). Senghor realized that his childhood experience compelled him to protest these generally accepted teachings:

J'avais l'impression que la thèse du père Lalouse n'était pas vraie, que nous avions, nous aussi, une véritable civilisation, et belle de surcroît. Je me souvenais du Royaume d'Enfance dans la maison de mon père... il y avait un ordre fondé sur une manière de vivre, et, en définitive, une harmonie. Je sentais qu'il y avait là, une grande, surtout une belle civilisation, mais je n'avais pas encore d'arguments pour le démontrer, sinon, encore une fois, l'expérience de l'enfance. C'est à ce moment que je perçus que le meilleur moyen de prouver la valeur de la culture noire, c'était de voler aux colonisateurs leurs armes: d'être un meilleur élève encore. (Senghor "Poésie" 51)

Senghor determines the best way to convince the West of their misperceptions of Africa was on their own playing field, by turning the education he received due to colonialism against the colonial system.

Senghor's physical distance from this *paradis* correlates to the potency of these memories. His first realization of the *Royaume d'Enfance* came when he had been removed from his village life to Dakar; the memories only grow stronger to manifest themselves in his poetry against a Parisian backdrop. He writes: "Je sais le Paradis perdu - je n'ai pas perdu souvenir du jardin d'enfance où fleurissent les oiseaux" (*OP/CO* 45). This exile in Paris makes him aware of the differences between African and European civilizations, proving first to himself that there in fact existed a civilization in Africa, a knowledge he then promulgates in his writings. Bâ posits that: "The actual experience of exile followed by the analysis of its causes constitutes the first step toward the recognition of this negritude, which is both cause and effect" (28). Even though there was a remarkable gathering of the African diaspora in Paris at the time, there were more Antilleans than Sub-Saharan Africans, perhaps leading Senghor to feel especially isolated and further idealizing his descriptions of home (*Kesteloot Histoire* 155). Many of his poems act as memories of place: "Me souvenant de Joal l'Ombreuse, du visage de la terre

de mon sang” (*OP/CO* 12). His childhood town, Joal, stands as a physical location that can represent all the qualities of his *Royaume d’Enfance*. In the poem entitled “Joal,” he begins each stanza with “Je me rappelle,” reinforcing his current distance from that place. Only through exile is he able to call up these memories with such fervor. The last stanza exemplifies an isolation in Europe that provoked such nostalgia from the persona:

Je me rappelle, je me rappelle...
Ma tête rythmant
Quelle marche lasse le long des jours d’Europe où parfois
Apparaît un jazz orphelin qui sanglote sanglote sanglote. (*OP/CO* 18)

The lines carry the characteristic Senghorian rhythm, which, in conjunction with the lost in reflection repetition of “je me rappelle” and “sanglote,” reinforce that while his body may be in Europe, his mind is back in Joal.

The language Senghor employs in his descriptions of Africa has led to criticism that he is glorifying an imagined version of the continent. When confronted with the accusation that he is creating an exoticized myth of Africa through his imagery, Senghor argues that he is simply employing the correct lexicon:

Quand nous disons *kôras, balafongs, tam-tams*, et non harpes, pianos et tambours, nous n’entendons pas faire pittoresque ; nous appelons “un chat un chat.” Nous écrivons, d’abord, je ne dis pas seulement, pour les Français d’Afrique, et, si les Français de France y trouvent du pittoresque, nous serons près de le regretter. (*OP Postface* 163)

Senghor implies that it is a skewed Western perception of his imagery that in fact creates the myth. Antillean, Maryse Condé, has a slightly different argument, proposing that Senghor sees only the Africa of the aristocracy because his family owned a substantial

amount of land and slaves: “C’est à l’Afrique des dirigeants en robes somptueuses, avec leurs griots, leurs guerriers, leurs troupeaux, leurs kôras, leurs esclaves qu’il songe” (415). Condé criticizes Senghor for effectively silencing Africa’s unpleasant history of slavery to present Africa only in a positive light, thus misrepresenting the realities of the continent.

These attacks on his African imagery seem to stem from two related sources: the perceived class gap between Senghor and Césaire and the differences in their treatments of their respective homelands and histories. The commonly held view that Césaire’s miserable upbringing in poverty led him to be the “revolutionary” and Senghor’s bourgeois lifestyle molded him into the conciliatory “collaborator” with the West proves to be an oversimplification of much more complex relations. Kesteloot explains that while Césaire’s great-grandfather might have been a peasant, his grandfather was a high school teacher and his father managed a plantation. Césaire was born into an average bourgeois Antillean family, but he appropriates the general misery of the common Antillean to draw attention the proletariat voice that was going unheard (*Pont* 95). Senghor employed the same tactics as Césaire, but in reverse and for a different purpose; he did not lead a luxurious life in Joal, but what comes through in his poetry are only the most wonderful memories that serve to combat the stereotypical image of an uncivilized, dark continent. The fact that Césaire’s *Cahier* opens on a desolate landscape and an equally languid people and Senghor’s compilations continuously sing the praises of Africa in all its aspects reflect each poet’s *perception* of their childhood, as opposed to a journalistic account of reality (Kesteloot *Pont* 99). Senghor believes in a creationist

power of describing his *Royaume d'Enfance*: "Il m'a donc suffi de nommer les choses, les éléments de mon univers enfantin pour prophétiser la Cité de demain, qui renaîtra des cendres de l'ancienne, ce qui est la mission du Poète" (*Postface* 165). The poet's duty involves awakening the past by its depiction in order to bring about a conception of the future. Furthermore, the Atlantic slave trade normally does not appear in Africans' perceptions of their histories, as the captives were removed and thus neither buried nor remembered in their homelands. This difference proves critical to the divide between Africa and the Americas.

A Call for *métissage culturel*

"Que j'entende le chœur des voix vermeilles des sang-mêlé !"

Although Senghor has often been criticized as too European, due to his education and upbringing under colonial assimilationist rule, I will argue that his African background plays just as large a role as his European influences in his desire for cultural *métissage*, an idea that is reflected, not only in his many essays, but also in his poetry. Diouf's work into Senegalese oral histories suggests that tradition may be a driving force in Senghor's self-designation as métis, as well as his advancement of *métissage culturel*. There is an ancient fable, "la Pirogue brisée à Sangamare," that explains the connection between all Senegambian peoples. In short, three sisters, Againe, Diambogne and Mâne board a canoe and set off on rough seas not far from the coast. The sea smashes the boat into three pieces, one for each sister, and the waves carry each of them to different parts of the coast, where they establish what are now the Jola, the Lebou and the Serer ethnic

groups (Diouf 35). Diouf explains the permanent effect this story has on Senghor's perception of his Serer background:

Ce qui est donc essentiel, dans le mythe de la Pirogue brisée, c'est la pérennité du pacte de sang ou d'alliance scellée là, sur les rives de l'océan, qui survit aujourd'hui sous la forme d'une parenté à plaisanterie entre Diolas et Sérères d'une part et entre Sérères, Toucouleurs, Peuls, Mandings et Lébous d'autre part. A cause de cette position intermédiaire, de centre de gravité, de "*nombril des races*", et de relais entre toutes les ethnies sénégalaises, Senghor a pu écrire à propos des Sérères et de la mère de Sira Badral, une autre migrante, fondatrice de Royaume, qu'elle "*sera le sel des Sérères, qui seront le sel des peuples salés*" (CO/OP 35). (37)

An acceptance of a common origin between different ethnicities may have led Senghor to affirm his internal hybridity, in a biological and cultural sense. From an early age he was conditioned to believe that *métissage* was not a handicap, but a stabilizing force that placed one at a balanced center of gravity.

Much of Senghor's political and philosophical rhetoric revolves around the concept of *métissage*; in an attempt to establish a sentiment of Africa unity, he uses a scientific argument to dissolve the strict division between ethnic groups. In a conference at the University of Cairo in 1967, he cites numerous ethnological studies to prove the prevalence of this mixing: "Les Blancs, comme les Noirs d'Afrique sont, aux yeux du savant, de l'anthropologue, des métis, les uns, de races noires, les autres, de races blanches" (Fondements 43). In unifying African nations with the argument that they shared a common denominator in biology, Senghor hopes to foster an atmosphere of exchange between Africa and Europe. His conception of a Eurafrique could only be realized if Africa was a strong, unified global force. Christian Roche explains the basic principal of Eurafrique:

L'intérêt du problème de l'Eurafrique est que les deux continents, parce que opposés, comme l'homme et la femme sont complémentaires, qu'entre les deux blocs antagonistes, qui ne croient plus qu'à la violence et se préparent à y recourir, ils peuvent constituer une force plus grande de culture, partant de paix. (67)

To start on the path to this perceived solution, Senghor choses to highlight the biological rhetoric to suggest that there were also underlying cultural values to which all Africans ascribed. He choses biology over politics in his argument, as he believes it unwise to base African unity on the growing anti-colonialist sentiment:

Fonder l'organisation [Organisation de l'Unité africaine] commune que nous avons dessein de bâtir uniquement sur l'anticolonialisme, c'est lui donner une base bien fragile. Car le passé colonial ne nous caractérise pas en tant qu'Africains. ... [notre avenir] ne peut reposer solidement que sur des valeurs qui soient communes à tous les Africains et qui soient, en même temps, permanentes. (*Fondements* 6)

Solely by its creation, this set of values—defined by Senghor as *l'âme noire*—supposes a rigid dichotomy between blacks and whites. Critics of Senghor's choice to proclaim the existence of an *âme noire* argue that it is an inherently racist ideology; a set of permanent determiners for the black race implies that humanity will forever be confined to a strict dichotomy of Otherness. Senghor's most succinct definition is, in fact, an opposition: "l'émotion est nègre, comme la raison est hellène" ("Ce que" 24). Senghor sees this dichotomy, however, as a positive factor in the global community, so long as there exists a cultural exchange between the two groups: Africa will fill the void in whatever Europe is lacking and vice versa.

Senghor's celebration of *métissage*, biological and cultural, can be found embedded in his poetry. In "Que m'accompagnent..." he sings the praises of his mother's—and his own—mixed lineage:

Tu es son épouse, tu as reçu le sang sérère et le tribut de sang peul.
Ô sangs mêlés dans mes veines, seulement le battement nu des mains !
Que j'entende le chœur des voix vermeilles des sang-mêlé !
Que j'entende le chant de l'Afrique future ! (*OP/CO* 36)

He suggests that an Africa united by its universal *métissage* will be a stronger Africa in the future. His poem entitled, "Prière aux masques" exemplifies his positive rhetoric of biological and cultural exchange. We can read the tribute to various types of masks in the first lines as a celebration of African diversity that maintains a common denominator:

Masques ! Ô Masques !
Masque noir masque rouge, vous masques blanc-et-noir
Masques aux quatres points d'où souffle l'Esprit
Je vous salue dans le silence ! (*OP/CO* 25)

Diouf sees these masques as representing the various occupational castes and ethnicities that gave life to the poet. He concludes: "la couleur de leur peau (celle de masques ancestraux) pourrait être une indication de leur origine respective" (43). This poem also includes a direct reference to the indisputable connection between Africa and Europe that Senghor hopes to redirect from a dominant-subservient relationship to one of collaboration and confederation: "Et aussi à l'Europe à qui nous sommes liés par le nombril" (*OP/CO* 25). The image of a link as strong and as permanent as biology, suggested by the word "nombril," places Africa and Europe's relationship on the same

level as Africa's inter-ethnic relationships. Senghor goes on to delineate how the continents should complement one another:

Ainsi le levain est nécessaire à la farine blanche.
Car qui apprendrait le rythme au monde défunt des machines et des canons ?
Qui pousserait le cri de joie pour réveiller morts et orphelins à l'aurore ?
Dites, qui rendrait la mémoire de vie à l'homme aux espoirs éventrés ? (26)

Senghor's message is not one of racial superiority, but one of cooperation and reciprocity. Each culture is dependent upon the other for the successful development of both. Jean-Paul Sartre's definition of Negritude as a "racisme anti-raciste" has misrepresented Senghor's notion of a Yin-Yang balance between Europe and Africa. Senghor expressed his disagreement with Sartre's term, including his idea that Negritude was a moment in time that is now outdated:

La négritude "ghetto noir," la négritude raciste, devant la deuxième guerre mondiale, en effet nous l'avons dépassée. [...] Mais la négritude comme culture différente, je pense que cette négritude ne sera dépassée, ne doit pas être dépassée. Tout en nous ouvrant aux autres cultures, nous devons être enracinés dans notre propre culture. [...] Nous ne sentons pas comme les blancs. Nous ne pensons pas comme les blancs. Nous ne rions pas comme les blancs. Nous ne réjouissons pas comme les blancs. Nous avons pris une partie de l'esprit d'organisation et de méthode des blancs, évidemment qui s'étonnent aujourd'hui de voir des mathématiciens sénégalais, mais les blancs ont également pris une partie de notre rythme. (*Léopold*)

Senghor wants to move past the interwar period Kesteloot defined as "militant Negritude" (*Histoire*), while keeping the underlying principals of the movement intact: a valorization (for Senghor, this includes a lengthy process of definition) of black culture in order to adequately accept and value other cultures.

Senghor's first poem in *Chants d'Ombre*, "In memoriam" shows an apprehension about the relationship between France and Senegal—the title suggests France's disregard for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*—but also an affirmation that Senghor holds an identity that is a collaboration between two worlds: "Jusqu'en Sine jusqu'en Seine, et dans mes veines fragiles, mon sang irréductible" (*OP/CO* 12). The parallel structure and spellings of "Sine" and "Seine" reflect this connection between worlds that is vital to Senghor's identity, in addition to his blood as "irréductible," which can be read as both "unrelenting" and "irreducible," in other words unable to be broken down into a single unit. Senghor implies he is ready to take on the challenges this union may pose: "Que de ma tour dangereusement sûre, je descende dans la rue / Avec mes frères aux yeux bleus / Aux mains dures" (*OP/CO* 12). As the inaugural poem to this compilation, "In memoriam" is essential in setting the tone for the poems to follow. In his "Prière des tirailleurs sénégalais," he prays for an equality of cultural *métissage*: "Que l'enfant blanc et l'enfant noir—c'est l'ordre alphabétique—, que les enfants de France Confédérée aillent main dans la main" (*OP/HN* 74). Inserting the comment "in alphabetical order" displays a certain caution on the part of Senghor not to offend either side, even in the slightest, in his diplomatic endeavors.

A Different Relationship

"Seigneur Dieu, pardonne à l'Europe blanche !"

Two fundamental differences between Senghor and Césaire caused them to establish different relationships with France, leading to critique of Senghor's perceived non-revolutionary stance towards the colonizer: Christianity and participation in World

War II. Kesteloot highlights Senghor's religion as a important factor that separates him from other members of the Negritude movement:

Il s'est en effet toujours présenté comme catholique pratiquant. Or, cette revendication est suffisamment rare pour qu'on la remarque : les écrivains de la négritude ont le plus souvent réagi contre le christianisme qu'ils assimilaient sans nuance au colonialisme occidental. (*Pont* 155)

Césaire's critique of Christianity, and Catholicism in particular, is strikingly evident in *Cahier*, equating Catholic missionaries and their assimilationist teachings to the general hypocrisy of the West. Senghor's steadfast Christianity may have led him to interpret the Surrealist movement in a different way as well. While Césaire remained closer to the surrealist themes, Senghor applied the term "surréal" in relation to Negritude to describe the part of the *âme noire* that allowed for a communion between this world and the beyond: literally a sense of an "above-reality." In describing this characteristic, he actually defines the surreal as a religious experience. Kesteloot summarizes Senghor's view of African Surrealism as opposed to its Western counterpart: "l'artiste africain tente d'appréhender un univers religieux, peuplé de forces objectives extérieures à l'homme, tandis que le surréalisme européen ne révèle qu'un monde intérieur, psychologique, inconscient" (*Histoire* 101). The world of exterior *forces vitales*, is however, not a tenet of Césaire's views on Surrealism, which focus more on a collective subconscious (101).

Christianity, for Senghor, spans both continents and acts as a connective force in his relations with France. It was in Africa that he discovered Christianity and began seminary; and it was through his disagreement with parts of this religious education that he began shaping his idea of Negritude. He used his religious knowledge to his advantage

in a French setting. Through his extensive religious studies, some of his best subjects were Latin and Greek, propelling him further in his overall education. In his “Prière de paix,” he highlights in Christianity in order to relate to his French counterparts: “Bénis ce peuple qui m’a apporté Ta Bonne Nouvelle, Seigneur, et ouvert mes paupières lourdes à la lumière de la foi... Je vous salue tous d’un coeur catholique” (*OP/HN* 99). This passage details the success of the French *mission colonisatrice*, but as Senghor perceives it, this process of assimilation should actually be an exchange that works both ways. He excelled not only in his religious studies, but also in his secular education. His decision to combat père Lalouse’s racist attitudes by accessing the highest academic ranks led him to be the first African *agrégé*, passing the French grammar *agrégation* in 1935. In order to qualify to take the examination, Senghor had to acquire French nationality. This initial injustice may have ultimately benefited his pursuit of a European-Senegalese collaboration. His standing in French academics and his religious views positioned him as an intermediary in French-Senegalese cultural relations; he spoke the religious and intellectual language of the colonizer, allowing him to frame his arguments in a way that would better speak to the West.

Senghor seamlessly infuses both pagan and Christian traditions into his poetry. In “Joal,” he describes many scenes of traditionalist Senegalese customs:

Je me rappelle les fastes du Couchant
Où Koumba N’Dofène voulait faire tailler son manteau royal

Je me rappelle les festins funèbres fumant du sang des troupeaux égorgés
Du bruit des querelles, des rhapsodies des griots. (*OP/CO* 17)

Despite the violent connotations of the second verse when taken out of context, the scene of ritual sacrifice as a whole gains a feeling a reverence. Senghor then injects a Christian influence in the next line: “Je me rappelle les voix paiennes rythmant le *Tantum Ergo*.” Even though he asserts that the voices reciting this Latin religious chant are still pagan, the fact that they are repeating Catholic verse shows the extent to which Christianity has blended into traditional practices. Senghor’s many poems addressed to “Seigneur,” clearly the Christian God, may make his work seem more approachable to a certain French audience, curious about the African customs he presents, but reassured in a way by his Christianity. While Senghor underscores the importance of indigenous African religions and traditions to his conception of Negritude, he does not show himself as actively participating in these practices. He often has a sort of mediator, whether it be his maternal uncle, his ancestors, or other actors; he is merely a spectator, or journalist, reporting his memories to his audience. At times, his uncle, Tokô’Waly, holds the key to accessing his ancestors: “Toi Tokô’Waly, tu écoutes l’inaudible / Et tu m’expliques les signes que disent les Ancêtres dans la sérénité marine des constellations” (*OP/CO* 38). His dialogue structure lends itself to this feeling of removal, as he is communicating with someone else instead of providing the reader with a personal introspective. While a communion with the beyond, including traditional pagan practices, is an integral part in Senghor’s definition of the *nègre*, he may distance himself from direct associations with this “surréalisme” to alleviate the personal divide he may feel as a devout Christian. Kesteloot says: “Senghor en effet se veut très purement chrétien. Il refuse toujours toute allégeance, même mentale ou formelle, à l’animisme familial (*Pont* 156).” This distance

may have helped his perception in the West and his continued argument for a collaboration between Europe and Africa.

Senghor's experience fighting together with French soldiers against a common enemy must have led him to perceive the French in a different light than Césaire, who returned to Martinique before the war erupted in Europe. While Césaire founded the review, *Tropiques*, in Martinique to continue the struggle against colonialism, Senghor was fighting for the survival of the allied forces. Even though racial divides still existed in war time—Senghor was fighting with the *tirailleurs sénégalais*—they were more relaxed. France did not want to appear to preach the same racial purity as the Germans they were fighting.¹² Senghor expresses sympathy for a certain image of France he holds as “the true France,” while simultaneously condemning France's complete lack of recognition for the service of the *tirailleurs*; the combination of attack and sympathy leads some critics to see him as disingenuous or irresolute. Condé argues that even though he seems to demand France's respect for the dead *tirailleurs*, he does not protest their initial conscription: “Aucun doute exprimé sur la validité de ces morts. Aucune protestation sur l'utilisation de ces bras noirs dans une tuerie qui ne les concerne pas” (415). His protest does not revolve around whether or not African soldiers should have been recruited by the French army; he focuses, rather, on why these soldiers did not receive adequate compensation for their service.

His fight for the recognition of the *tirailleurs*, in conjunction with his appeals for a Eurafrikan collaboration, allows this apparent praise to acquire a tactical quality as well.

¹² This will become an important argument for independence movements after World War II. See Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme*.

Instead of revolting against France, cutting off all hopes of a mutual cooperation, Senghor chooses to divide France in two, praising the side of liberty and fraternity in hopes of gaining a powerful ally, and condemning a corrupt, false side of France that disregards the loyalty of the *tirailleurs*, and has historically exploited Africa for slaves and raw materials:

Ah ! Seigneur, éloigne de ma mémoire la France qui n'est pas la France, ce masque de petitesse et de haine sur le visage de la France
Ce masque de petitesse et de haine pour qui je n'ai que haine – mais je peux bien haïr le Mal
Car j'ai une grande faiblesse pour la France. (*OP/HN* 99)

Framing this as a prayer brings Senghor's Christianity to the forefront of his argument, also allowing him to criticize France indirectly by pleading for God's forgiveness upon France's immoral behavior. In another poem, Senghor again uses Christianity as a roundabout way to condemn France's actions. In "Tyaroye" he addresses: "Prisonniers noirs je dis bien prisonniers français" (94), signaling that once having fought for France—and even worse, suffered capture—the soldiers deserve a status equal to that of any other French conscript. He goes on to ask: "Et votre sang n'a-t-il pas ablué la nation oublieuse de sa mission d'hier ?" (94). This verse creates a powerful parallel between African soldiers shedding their blood for a country unwilling to accept them and the image of Christ shedding his blood on the cross for a similarly dismissive population. Senghor also references the *mission civilisatrice* of assimilationist colonial policy, which had as a primary goal a transformation of the colonized Africans into "civilized,"

Christian subjects. Senghor would argue that France had not brought the full extent of its assimilationist mission to fruition: conferring full French citizenship upon the colonized.

In arguing, on a religious and political level, for the rights of the *tirailleurs*, Senghor advances his theory of collaboration between Africa and Europe; Europe should recognize a certain debt she now owes to Africa. In a poem entitled, “Aux tirailleurs sénégalais morts pour la France,” the last line in all capitals alerts the readers of the importance of his argument, saying the African soldiers were: “MORTS POUR LA RÉPUBLIQUE !” (*OP/HN* 68). He projects a more direct argument for equality in “Prière des tirailleurs sénégalais:”

“Que nous goûtions la douceur de la terre de France
“Terre heureuse ! où l’âpreté libre du travail devient lumineuse douceur.
“Nous ne savons pas si nous respirerons à la moisson pour quelle juste cause nous
avons combattu.
“Si l’on allait se servir de nous !... (*OP/HN* 73)¹³

Senghor’s rhetoric uplifts France as a land of liberty, where hard work is appropriately remunerated, and serves to reinforce his argument that the African soldiers fighting for a just cause should be rewarded in such a generous country. He uses this same strategy in the first poem of *Hosties Noires*, “Poème liminaire:”

Ah ! ne dites pas que je n’aime pas la France – je ne suis pas la France, je le sais –
Je sais que ce peuple de feu, chaque fois qu’il a libéré ses mains
A écrit la fraternité sur la première page de ses monuments
Qu’il a distribué la faim de l’esprit comme de la liberté
À tous les peuples de la terre conviés solennellement au festin catholique.
Ah ! ne suis-je pas assez divisé ? (*OP/HN* 58).

¹³ The entirety of the prayer within the poem is in quotes, solidifying it as an auditory appeal to God.

It is possible to see these passages as simple glorification of a the colonizer by a colonial subject that has been effectively brainwashed by assimilationist practices. The last interjection of this passage acts as the first sign that the relationship is much more complex, internally dividing the loyalties of the poet.

In addition to this political maneuvering—Senghor was beginning his political career in the *Assemblée nationale* as these two first collections were published—he likely felt genuine sympathy for both France and Senegal, his sympathy for Senegal evolving into distain for France’s colonial practices. In “Poème liminaire” he attacks the product of colonialism: “Mais je déchirerai les rires banania sur tous les murs de France” (*OP/HN* 57). The Banania ad campaign portrayed a *tirailleur sénégalais* as its spokesman; a smiling, harmless negro who spoke the pidgin French taught to him in the army that was to prevent him from adequately communicating with French civilians. The campaign used a pidgin expression as their slogan: “Y a bon, Banania.” This is one of very few moments that we see an unveiled passionate anger in Senghor’s poetry. Senghor fuels his anger surrounding colonialism and the *tirailleurs* into possible positive outcomes from this wrongdoing. His attacks on France are much more subtle than those of Césaire, but he does repeatedly assert negative connotations of the color white and positive aspects of black. Senghor states: “Prisonnier de mes draps blancs et froids bien tirés, de toutes les angoisses qui m’embarrassent inextricablement” (*OP/HN* 60); he equates white bread, milk and salt to “les mets substantiels qui ne nourrissent pas, qui divise les civils” (*OP/HN* 87). His books are “blancs comme l’ennui, comme la misère et comme la mort” (*OP/HN* 88). Conversely, the color black, normally associated with obscurity, is revered

in a positive light: “Nuit d’Afrique ma nuit noire, mystique et claire noire et brillante [...] Nuit qui fonds toutes mes contradictions, toutes contradictions dans l’unité première de ta négritude” (*OP/CO* 39). These reversals of the stereotypical “dark continent” attempt to underscore the arbitrary connotations of white equally good and righteous and black, evil and treachery.

We see this struggle between anger and forgiveness most clearly in the last poem of *Hosties Noires*, “Prière de Paix.” Senghor begins to enumerate all the injustices Africa has endured, but he realizes his anger is futile and attempts to hate only the evil side of France, not France herself:

Car il faut bien que Tu pardonnes à ceux qui ont donné la chasse à mes enfants
comme à des éléphants sauvages.
Et ils les ont dressés à coup de chicotte, et ils ont fait d’eux les mains noires de
ceux dont les mains étaient blanches.
Car il faut bien que Tu oublies ceux qui ont exporté dix millions de mes fils dans
les maladreries de leurs navires
Qui en on supprimé deux cent millions.
[...]
Et voilà que le serpent de la haine lève la tête dans mon coeur, ce serpent que
j’avais cru mort...
Tue-le Seigneur, car il me faut poursuivre mon chemin, et je veux prier
singulièrement pour la France.
[...]
Qui m’invite à sa table et me dit d’apporter mon pain, qui me donne de la main
droite et de la main gauche enlève la moitié.
Oui Seigneur, pardonne à la France qui hait les occupants et m’impose l’occupation
si gravement. (97-8)

Constructing this as a prayer allows Senghor to condemn the centuries-long violence inflicted on Africa, while simultaneously acting as the bigger man of the conflict. He is asking God to forgive the French and at the same time reminding them of all the

atrocities they committed to warrant such action. His Christianity seems to propel him to a position of superiority; he, like Christ, turns the other cheek even after enduring unimaginable persecutions. Senghor also held a significant respect for what he perceived in the African American as a strength to forgive, suggesting a superiority of spirit over the white man:

A ceux qui ont détruit sa civilisation, au négrier, au lyncheur, les poètes afro-américains ne répondent que par des paroles de paix :

Je la rends en tendresse;
Et je l'ai faite ainsi,
Car j'en ai effacé la haine
Il y a longtemps (Lewis Alexander : *Transformation*) ("Ce que" 33).

It is this spirit of forgiveness that Senghor attempts to accomplish in his poetry; the same attitude that many critics read conversely as Senghor's servitude to the French. Senghor sees an aspect of the *âme nègre* in this ability to overcome hatred. Commenting on the above poem from Lewis Alexander, Senghor says: "Cette 'humanité' de l'âme nègre, cette incapacité de haïr durablement a aidé à résoudre le problème racial en Amérique latine, même en Amérique du Nord" ("Ce que" 33). His poetry hopes to instill the same sentiment in Franco-African relations.

Poetry and Politics

Césaire and Senghor each led two seemingly opposing lives: an intellectual life of introspection and poetic expression and a public political life of policy making. The fundamental divide between Césaire and Senghor, in my opinion, stems from how these two different lives intersected. Césaire seems to have kept his literary career as removed

as possible from his political life. This may have been easier for him to accomplish; as mayor of Fort-de-France, his life was not a public as a president of a newly-independent nation. Facing the birth of a new country, Senghor may have felt more pressure to establish new definitions to distinguish it from its former colonized status, leading him to draw from his intellectual background in Negritude. Irving Markovitz sees Senghor as conforming the basic ideas of Negritude to a certain situation:

The philosophy of Negritude is the first systematic set of ideas whereby Léopold Senghor oriented himself to a foreign, European-dominated world. [...] As a student and young intellectual in prewar Europe, for example, Senghor was sensitive to accusations of membership in a race without culture or pride; as President of Senegal, he seeks to unite a nation in harmonious and rapid development. Senghor has adapted Negritude to these purposes. (40)

Markovitz argues that ultimately, this melding of philosophical ideals into practical application renders Senghor less effective. His literary idealism is too abstract for Senegal's particular situation (32). Denis Ekpo reframes this argument by his assertion that there are, in fact, two Negritudes present in Senghor: one of cultural nationalism—which he sees as most similar to Césaire—and one he deems “Senghorism:” “a philosophy addressed to Africa's modernization, centered first in a self-reassuring re-description to Africa and Africans and second in a politics of friendship and collaboration with the European holders of modernity's powers and skills” (Ekpo 178). Senghorism is a way for the poet to transition his literary theories into politics.

Any way the debate is conceived, it is clear that Senghor's establishment of Negritude as more of a solidified philosophical or even a political ideology has allotted him (and the Negritude movement in general) the most opposition. There do appear to be

inherent problems that arise when poetic expression is transformed into a definition of a people. Senghor's belief in an *âme noire* succeeds, in a way, in creating a sentiment of unity in the black community, but on a practical level, it only fuels a pre-existing generalization that blacks are fundamentally and permanently different from whites. The use of his personal experience and his Senegalese surroundings should not be generalized to a descriptor of the African experience either, as they serve to erase any encouragement to the outsider to expand his or her specific knowledge of the continent. In her discussion of Senghor's use of rhythm, Kesteloot specifies that the rhythm in Senghor's poetry is specifically characteristic of the Sine region:

Or, si le tam-tam existe partout en Afrique, les rythmes du Nigeria diffèrent de ceux du Zaïre et ceux-ci ont peu de points communs avec les rythmes du Sénégal – et même au Sénégal, les rythmes des Diola de Casamance diffèrent déjà sensiblement de ceux des Wolof ! (*Comprendre* 75)

Even though Senghor speaks of a generalized African rhythm, it should be understood as more of a metaphorical rhythm; this distinction, however, has a tendency to be overlooked. Senghor's hope that Africa could stand as a perfect complement to Europe now confronts new criticism from an era that no longer deals in absolutes or diametrically opposed categories. Condé and other more contemporary writers see Negritude as confined by its definition to a dichotomy established by the West. Even though he has been criticized for developing his poetic ideals into a practical political platform, Senghor argues that his dual nature as poet and politician can be united into one role:

La poésie est en réaction contre l'environnement, la création d'un monde idéal. De même l'homme politique digne de ce nom est un homme poétique. Il présente à son

peuple un modèle de société, et il fixe les principaux éléments de ce modèle de société et définit une action pour réaliser ce modèle de société le vrai homme politique est accoucheur d'une société nouvelle. C'est en ce sens que j'ai essayé de concilier la poésie et la politique. Je pense que le grand homme politique, c'est pas la brute politique. Ce n'est pas le révolutionnaire au sens de la destruction. C'est le révolutionnaire au sens de la création. (*Léopold*)

Perhaps Césaire sees a need to build from destruction, mirroring the volcanic geography of Martinique, while Senghor hopes to build off what is already in place, including an unavoidable connection with France and the West. Understanding why Senghor's Negritude attracted the criticism it did and viewing Senghor's choices as products of his African upbringing, European experience, and political career allow his Negritude to be assessed in a new light. Despite critiques of Negritude, the movement has undeniably left a lasting mark on contemporary African literature, due to its originality and the revolutionary thinking it provoked. Even as a point of contention, Negritude provokes dialogue and spurs new conceptions of Africa and the diaspora. Despite the variances in Césairean and Senghorian Negritude, the legacy left by both variations remains visible in both the Antilles and Africa.

CHAPTER V
IN CONTINUAL DIALOGUE:
NEGRIITUDE'S LEGACY IN THE CARIBBEAN AND WEST AFRICA

Just as Césaire and Senghor developed their own unique adaptations of Negritude, the legacies left by these two Negritudes have also varied. Both major political and intellectual figures, Césaire and Senghor's influence on Martinique and Senegal—and more broadly the Caribbean and West Africa—is undeniable. Césaire's Negritude has served as the platform upon which many new conceptions of Antillean identity have been built, including Antillanité, Américanité and Créolité. The essentialist aspect of Senghor's Negritude that addresses a uniquely "black soul" (*l'âme noire*) has proven itself outdated in a postmodern reality, but his stance on valorizing tradition while propelling African onto the global stage (Ekpo's "Senghorism") has influenced a number of West African works that address Africa's straddling of tradition and modernity. Present-day scholars have begun to equate Negritude with Modernism in order to explain the increasing incongruence between the movement and current postmodern notions of the margin and plurality. This new understanding of the link between Modernism and Negritude does not negate the relevance of Negritude; rather, it reinforces the movement's importance. Linda Hutcheon's reminder that even postmodernist thought derives from modernist perspectives exemplifies the role that I affirm Negritude to play in more recent conceptions of the diaspora. As Hutcheon argues: "The decentering of our categories of thought always relies on the centers it contests for its very definition (and

often its verbal form). [...] The power of these new expressions is always paradoxically derived from that which they challenge” (59). New developments like Créolité or Post-africanism developed in reaction to, and thus because of, Negritude, just as Negritude itself emerged from an opposition to Western supremacy and colonization.

Evolving Conceptions of Identity in the Caribbean

The Caribbean world recognizes Césaire’s Negritude as a first step in the construction and enunciation of a Caribbean identity. Condé, who has extensively criticized both Césairean and Senghorian Negritude, also, as a Guadeloupean intellectual, admits that Césaire’s work was essential to American and African literary development: “Si il n’avait pas Césaire, beaucoup d’écrivains d’Afrique et d’Amérique n’existeraient pas. C’est à cause de lui que nous avons respiré et que nous avons appris à vivre” (Palcy). Perhaps due to the relative fluidity and subjectivity of Césaire’s Negritude—grounding it in a certain time and space—allows other authors to easily build upon its basic structure. I will look at three such subsequent concepts: Antillanité, Américanité and Créolité as responses to Césairean Negritude.

Another Martinican, Édouard Glissant, proposed a next step to Negritude with the idea of Antillanité. The shift from a broad term like Negritude to a very specific one highlights Glissant’s first objection to Negritude: the Universal. Glissant saw a dangerous homogeneity in what he termed “l’Universel généralisant:” a remnant of Western ideology that had been carried over in the minds of Negritude’s founders (Lewis 70). He defines his theory, not as the opposition to Negritude, but as the complementary second stage of Negritude’s development:

La première réaction systématique contre la déperdition de la culture populaire aura été “généralisante,” du moins en Martinique. C’est l’ascèse nègre...la Négritude...La deuxième réaction, qui procède de la première, conçoit pour toute la Caraïbe la convergence des réenracinements dans notre lieu vrai. C’est ce que j’ai appelé la théorie de l’antillanité. Elle a pour ambition de continuer en les élargissant à la fois la dimension africaine, qui se change ici en se retrouvant, et la souche du langage, qui se renforce et se multipliant. (182)

Glissant does not reject the African component to the Antilles, but he also sees a need to root an Antillean identity in the physical space of the Antilles. In an attempt to guard Antillanité from the same essentialist critiques of Negritude, Glissant advocates a plurality of identity over the duality of Negritude’s black-white dynamic. Shireen Lewis describes this as a foray into the postmodern: “Glissant does not attempt to displace the center with the margin but to eliminate the very notion of margin and center” (87). In lieu of the Universal, Glissant proposed the *Divers*: an homage to the unique ethnic and cultural diversity at the heart of the Antillean’s self-construction.

Haitian, René Depestre, in *Bonjour et adieu à la négritude*, addresses the cultural and economic transformation of slavery into colonialism that manufactured the binary between “white” and “black” races. Depestre argues that if these are only constructed, meaningless terms, Negritude, as a movement based on these terms, only perpetuates this false system. He argues: “L’idéologie esclavagiste codifia les catégories raciales (fétiches et catégories de la production marchande) comme des produits de la nature, alors qu’elles appartenaient essentiellement à la société et à son histoire politico-économique” (93). “Race” is a direct consequence of slavery, perpetuated by imperialism to keep the superior-inferior dichotomy intact. For Depestre, Negritude does not fully express the miscegenation inherent in his notion of Américanité. Published in 1980, *Bonjour et adieu*

à la *négritude* resembled many of the ideas found in Antillanité with the exception of the New World implications found in the term Américanité. In his work, Depestre quotes René Ménénil's 1964 essay supporting Antillanité, in which he recognizes the significance of Césaire's work on these future movements. Ménénil admits that:

Le sentiment racial est une étape nécessaire, une expérience historique à travers laquelle doit passer l'Antillais, l'homme de couleur colonisé, pour être bien appuyé au-dedans de lui-même dans son affrontement avec le monde de l'impérialisme.
[...]
Nous retenons le fait (le sentiment racial) en prenant garde de ne pas hypothéquer l'avenir de nos sociétés par des conceptions théoriques élaborées (la *négritude*) qui dépendent d'options philosophiques et politiques implicites. (37)

Both Depestre and Ménénil, wary of the increasing politicization and theorization of *Négritude*, want to keep only the awareness of the detrimental reactions these manufactured racial structures produced, instead of building a new society from the same racial constructions. Depestre's statement: "il n'y pas de *négritude* de demain" (160), does not negate *Négritude* as an important contribution to the theories that succeeded it; rather, it implies that the racially-based term will no longer be adequate in describing the complex nature of the Caribbean particularity. *Négritude* acts as both influence and point of contention, driving the debate forward.

Antillanité and Américanité posit themselves as logical progressions from *Négritude*'s influential base. The founders of Créolité, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, place their movement as an opposition to *Négritude*; however, for all their criticism of Césairean *Négritude*, they still admit:

C'est la Négritude césairienne qui nous a ouvert le passage vers d'ici d'une Antillanité désormais postulable et elle-même en marche vers un autre degré d'authenticité qui restait à nommer. La Négritude césairienne est un baptême, l'acte primal de notre dignité restituée. Nous sommes à jamais fils d'Aimé Césaire. (18)

Their Créolité manifesto, *Éloge de la Créolité*, is dedicated to Victor Segalen, Édouard Glissant, Frantz Fanon and also Aimé Césaire. While Créolité attacks what it perceives as Césaire's disregard for the Creole language and culture, it distinguishes Césaire as "ante-créole," as opposed to "anti-créole" (18). Créolité sees Césaire's focus on an ancestral source in Africa as detrimental to the awakening of a Caribbean collective consciousness. The authors of *Éloge* criticize Negritude as simply replacing one exteriority for another, thus failing to achieve a true Caribbean literature: "Thérapeutique violente et paradoxale, la Négritude fit, à celle d'Europe, succéder l'illusion africaine" (20). In contrast to this excess of exteriority, Créolité advocates a turning inward to the particular situation of the Creole. Once rooted in the specificity of their particular situation, Créolists will be able to more fully comprehend their relation to the rest of the world (38). Centering on the interior unearths the true hybridity of the Créole. The authors define Créolité as: "l'agrégat interactionnel ou transactionnel, des éléments culturels caraïbes, européens, africains, asiatiques, et levantins, que le joug de l'Histoire a réunis sur le même sol" (26). Instead of an Antillanité specific to the geographic space of the Caribbean islands, Créolité wishes to define its boundaries based on circumstance, not geography. The process of Creolization derives from:

la mise en contact brutale, sur des territoires soit insulaires, soit enclavés,—fussent-ils immense comme la Guyane et le Brésil—de populations culturellement différentes : aux Petites Antilles, Européens et Africains; aux Mascareignes,

Européens, Africains et Indiens; dans certaines régions des Philippines ou à Hawaï, Européens et Asiatiques; à Zanzibar, Arabes et Négro-Africains, etc. (30-31)

The inharmonious grouping of multiple ethnicities on the same soil, regardless of geographical location, but usually due to a plantation economy, forces this population to find a new way of interacting. Créolité succeeds in conceiving a particular identity in terms other than race or geography; however, any attempt to characterize a certain group of people can always be labeled exclusionary or essentialist. In their furthering of “Diversity” over Universality, Creolists refuse the previous acceptance of one history for a concept of *mémoire vraie*: an amalgam of histories, pulled from different domains, including fictional literature. The French term *histoire* best suits this increasingly popular notion of history, as it denotes both “History” and “story.”

The role of language marks a substantial divide between Créolité and Negritude, as Creolists strive to reinvest in Creole languages over French. While they condemn Negritude writers for writing in French—an assimilationist tactic to destroy a piece of Creole culture—they in fact published *Éloge de la Créolité* in French. This contradiction speaks to the division between ideology and practicality as they relate to language. In theory, Créolité writers would express themselves in Creole, but as an ever-evolving, primarily oral language, it impedes attempts at standardization. While the authors of *Éloge* refer to the Creoles specific to the Francophone Antilles, there are also many different creole languages throughout the world that the notion of Créolité attempts to encompass. Practically, writing in Creole acts as a barrier to communication with non-Creoles or speakers of other creole languages. The authors accept this poses a large

“risque d’incommunicabilité” (50), but try to find a solution by urging writers to create a unique Creole *langage* out of all the different *langues* spoken in Creolized areas:

La créolité n’est pas monolingue. Elle n’est pas non plus d’un multilinguisme à compartiments étanches. Son domaine c’est le langage. Son appétit : toutes les langues du monde. [...] Vivre en même temps la poétique de toutes les langues, c’est non seulement enrichir chacune d’elles, mais c’est surtout rompre l’ordre coutumier de ces langues, renverser leurs significations établies. (48)

The idea of breaking out of the established categorization of languages aligns with Créolité’s postmodern, deconstructionist style; it remains unclear, however, how Creole writers should achieve this linguistic goal.

Frédéric Bobin conducted an interview with Césaire in 1994, in which he addresses the new theories in Caribbean literary and cultural development. Césaire attributes Créolité’s internal focus to a persistent Martinican disdain for Africa, one that he has perceived throughout his lifetime. He believes this contempt towards Africa stems from two main issues: interiorized stereotypes and subconscious feelings of abandonment:

[Les Antillais] avaient intériorisé les valeurs qui avaient été inventées par leurs maîtres et par leurs colonisateurs. Même l’homme noir finissait par en être persuadé. Il y a à l’égard de l’Afrique un ressentiment antillais qu’il faut psychanalyser. Sans doute c’est la mère, mais c’est la mère dénaturée, c’est la mère ingrate, c’est celle qui nous a laissés partir, c’est celle qui nous a abandonné, c’est celle dont les rois ont trafiqué leurs sujets. (Bobin)

Cahier d’un retour au pays natal confronts both of these perceived impediments to the Antillean-African relationship in its discussion of an interiorized notion of the inferior Other as black (the description of the *nègre* on the tramway) and in its celebration of an African heritage that connects the Antilles to a culturally rich past.

In the interview, Césaire briefly mentions a generational gap dividing him from Creolist intellectuals like Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant that I believe merits further exploration. With this particular generational gap also comes the divide between the modern and the postmodern way of understanding the world. He views Créolité as reductionist, because it deals only in the Caribbean, while he brings all of Africa to the table. Thus, for Césaire, Créolité is a valid viewpoint, but it is only one department of the larger Negritude movement. Conversely, Créolité sees itself not bound by geography or race, positioned to accept the inherent chaos of clashing realities and constructed self-images. As opponents of a homogeneous Universality, Créolité praises specificity and difference as positive qualities.

In many ways, the shift from Modernism to Postmodernism is the real divide between Césaire and these new waves of thought, as opposed to the underlying ideas of both parties. Césaire actually expounds many of the same viewpoints as his successors. Decades before the postmodern emphasis on hybridity, Césaire not only expressed his internal heterogeneity, but also took pride in it. His self-construction in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* stems from what he deems: “le Caraïbe aux trois âmes” (23). He accepts not only his African influence, but his Antillean and French sides as well. Additionally, although the newer Caribbean movements present Negritude as a racially-bound concept, Césaire and Senghor have repeatedly designated Negritude as a humanism, striving to value all people equally. Créolité’s attempt to include *békés*—descendants of the European settlers—in the term “Créole” mirrors the humanist element in Césairean Negritude, only with a different terminology. In the 1994 interview, Césaire

tries to once more clarify this point that has perhaps been consistently clouded by the connotations of the term “Negritude.” When asked if he includes *békés* in his definition of a Martinican identity, he replies affirmatively that they are Martinicans as well. He goes on to say:

Encore une fois, ma négritude n’est pas du tout un négritisme étroit. Je suis un humaniste. [...] je crois qu’au siècle où nous sommes, tout cela peut pour le moins cohabiter harmonieusement et cela est nécessaire pour la politique de développement qui est indispensable à Martinique, indispensable aux Antilles si nous ne voulons pas continuer à nous vautrer dans une sorte d’assistanat sans gloire et sans perspective. (Bobin n. pg.)

Understanding more of the context surrounding the evolution in Caribbean cultural theory only serves to underscore Césaire’s essential contribution to the direction these theories have taken. Moreover, because of Césaire’s lasting impact, interpreting present-day conceptions of the Caribbean requires a detailed understanding of his version of Negritude.

West African Novels Struggle with Senghorian Negritude

In order to analyze modern African novels against a Negritude backdrop, we must first be cognizant of the two veins of Senghorian Negritude: one as a practical, philosophical or political theory and one as a literary, poetic expression. I will consider the way in which four authors—Bernard Dadié, Ousmane Sembène, Aminata Sow Fall et Koffi Kwahulé—treat the subject of Negritude in their own work. Negritude is still a present force in the background of African literary production, one that is constantly evolving. Chronologically, the farther removed from the birth of Negritude, the more

varied the interpretations of the movement become. Each author engages in a dialogue with the basic tenets of Senghorian Negritude: a essentialist view of the *âme noire* (his poetic Negritude) and a spirit that simultaneously values both tradition and modernity (his practical Negritude, or Ekpo's term, "Senghorism"). Dadié finds a way to valorize African orality in a Western printed format. Sembène and Fall display various deviations of Negritude after African Independence movements in the 1960s, placing an emphasis on a generational divide created by this Independence. Kwahulé delves into the absurd, stemming from the juxtaposition of an idealized Negritude and the reality of fratricide and war-torn regions, in his attempt to paint a realistic portrait of the chaos of present-day Africa.

Senghorism simultaneously advocates for a restoration of African culture that colonialism had stifled and for a collaboration with the West in order to endow Africa with the advances of modernity. These two competing forces, while not mutually exclusive, account for much of the ambiguity surrounding Senghorian Negritude. In the wake of the creation of Negritude and the duality it poses between tradition and modernity, West African literature has again and again explored this conflict, seeking after some sort of resolution. Looking at a selection of texts across roughly a fifty-year time period elucidates an evolution in the relationship West African authors hold with Negritude. Published in 1955, *Le Pagne Noir*, by Bernard Dadié represents the most direct link to a restoration of Africa as a racial and cultural homeland that is present in both the Césairean and Senghorian conception of Negritude. In Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme*, he constantly reminds the reader that there were civilized societies before

the colonizer's arrival: "C'étaient des sociétés communautaires, jamais de tous pour quelques-uns... C'étaient des sociétés coopératives, des sociétés fraternelles" (21). *Le Pagne Noir* centers around the notion of fraternity and the importance of collectivity embedded in traditional African tales. Dadié uses a spider, the main character named Kacou Ananzé, to explore the negative effects of an egotistical and individualist lifestyle. "Le champ d'ignames" clearly demonstrates the consequences of living only for oneself. Kacou Ananzé, in his indifference towards the community, wants to keep all the yams in the field for himself. With equal disregard for his family, he fakes his own death so he can hide in the field and eat the yams when no one else is around. When he is discovered, the community decides to burn him alive; even his wife is in agreement. The facet of Senghorian Negritude that celebrates pre-colonial African societies is, like these Dadié tales, didactic in nature, instructing the assimilated colonized and outsiders alike, who were led to believe that Africa was a savage, barbaric continent before Europe's "civilizing mission."

Outside of the thematic currents of the tales themselves, Dadié's method of production for this book represents a successful straddling of tradition and modernity that would correspond very well with Senghorism. In taking tales that were traditionally oral in nature and transplanting them into written form, Dadié uses a typically Western format and language to advance an important African tradition. By publishing the tales, he also allows for their transmission to a much larger public. Even though he employs Western methods, his style is permanently fixed in orality. His repetition of words or even whole phrases assigns an oral tone to the written pages. There are also moments that call for

nothing short of physical gesticulations: “ Et [Kacou Ananzé] mangeait, mangeait. Et il engraissait. Il avait des joues *comme ça!*” (15).¹ The storyteller also inserts rhythmic chants throughout the tales. The story, “La bosse de l’araignée,” begins with “Su-boum ! Su-boum-ka ! Su boum ! boum ! Su-boum-ka” (36) ! and this refrain repeats six times in the short story, the last time at the very end, signaling to a listener that the story had finished. These refrains also act as collective moments in the story that allow the audience to participate in the storytelling as a sort of chorus.

Dadié did not invent these stories himself, rather he is only one storyteller out of a vast collectivity of storytellers that play an important role in African society. Danièle Henky describes this centuries-old oral tradition: “Dans l’Afrique traditionnelle, le conteur est le détenteur de la mémoire collective et de la mémoire familiale ainsi que de la sagesse que sa parole doit transmettre” (n. pg.). Henky’s term, *l’oraliture*, represents the effort beginning in the 1950s and continued into present-day Africa of “translating” oral histories into written form. *Oraliture* effectively summarizes the convergence of tradition and modernity that forms a new genre, keeping the central principles of Negritude intact.

Le Pagne Noir was published during the dawn of decolonization and thus contains all the fervor of cultural nationalism found in Negritude. After the majority of the independence movements from around 1959 to 1962, it became necessary to see Negritude in a new light. Attempts to establish a new post-colonial order protested a total return to a pre-colonial state simply as a backlash against Western influence. Thompson

¹ My emphasis.

argues that in a post-colonial world: “Negritude loses prestige because it appears an obligated or dictated response to Europe” (146). Sartre’s definition of Negritude as a “racisme antiraciste” leaves a similar demarcation of the colonial hierarchy that post-Independence writers wished to confront.

Ousmane Sembène, in 1981 with his novel entitled, *Dernier de L’Empire*, investigates the issues surrounding Negritude in the context of decolonization: the question of authenticity—an interpretation of Senghor’s *âme noire*—and the praise for tradition in the face of modernity. The novel contains a wide range of perceptions on Negritude and suggests the ways in which it will integrate into a new postcolonial society, without ever explicitly referencing the name of the movement. There are characters that align themselves with the purest form of Senghorism (Cheikh Tidiane Sall and his wife, Djia), those who manipulate Negritude for political profit (Léon Mignane and Mam Lat Soukabe), and the younger generation that either misinterprets or feels little relation to the Negritude of their parents.

Cheikh Tidiane Sall vividly remembers the colonial period; like much of his generation he fought for the colonizer in the World Wars and has always been linked to the Western world through colonization and assimilation. He says: “Malgré le tiédissement de nos rapports avec l’Europe, nous [les anciens combattants] lui restons attachés” (Sembène 69). He has difficulty understanding the progressive attitude of the youth (like his son Badou) who have a totally different relationship with Europe. Ultimately, during his speech to the *Assemblée Générale*, he acknowledges that his generation should support the youth, as they will determine Africa’s future:

Nous devons tout faire pour que nos enfants contrôlent cette époque technicienne. Car ils sont—et seront—les créateurs d'un nouveau mode de vie, de culture, de civilisation. Ils doivent accueillir, faire fusionner toutes les ethnies pour façonner cette Afrique nouvelle, sans mimétisme d'une civilisation moribonde. (76)

Repeating the idea found in Senghorian Negritude of the *métissage* necessary for a new postcolonial African society, Cheikh represents this straddling of tradition and modernity imbedded in Senghorism.

Léon Mignane, President of the country deliberately kept anonymous by Sembène, bears a strong resemblance to Senghor. Sembène himself strongly opposed the Negritude movement and his critique shines through in Léon's idea of *Authénégraficanitus*: an interpretation of the detrimental effects of Senghor's essentialist *âme noire*. Referring to an interview with Sembène, Noureddine Ghali says:

Sembène adds here that he was in Senegal for the anti-colonial struggle -- a veiled allusion to the fact this concept [Negritude] was developed in intellectual circles in Paris -- and that the concept of 'negritude' meant no more to him than to his people in the development of that struggle. (52)

To Sembène, since Negritude was conceived outside of Africa, it had no import on the day-to-day realities of African life. The term, *Authénégraficanitus*, presents a mutation of Senghor's poetic Negritude as an exaggeration of cultural nationalism and a return to an "authentic" Africa, one that in fact never actually existed. The term signifies Léon's political platform, and by extension, Senghor's as viewed by Sembène. Publicly, Léon speaks of authentic blacks and of Africa for Africans, but his real political strategy lies in cooperation with European powers, signaling his submission to a neocolonial system. As we have seen, Senghor's transition of Negritude from poetics to politics spurred criticism

of the movement. Ekpo, by designating this side of Senghor's Negritude as Senghorism, accepts a practicality to the President's decisions: "He saw no intellectual or moral impediments in making strategic use of the resources of imperialism and later neo-colonialism, provided these could be deployed to aid and hasten Africa's transition to modernity" ("Introduction" 179). Sembène's treatment of this type of politics in the novel, however, presents it as innately hypocritical. Mam Lat Soukabe exploits this same overhyped sentiment of cultural nationalism, easily converting it into a militant nationalism. He says that the coup d'Etat he leads originated from the constitutional article permitting a prime minister to accede to the presidential post in the absence of the president, but in reality he leads the coup to prevent his country being led by a *casté*—a member of the lower caste. He argues: "Si Daouda arrive au pouvoir de cette manière... nous verrons à la longue l'éclatement de notre unité nationale" (Sembène 347). He manipulates the growing sentiment of cultural nationalism to serve his personal motive.

The youth in the novel have a completely different conception of Negritude from the older generations. Too far-removed from a precolonial memory, they set different objectives than the preceding generation: "L'exaltation de la culture du passé, les éloges de la solidarité africaine, de la démocratie à l'Africaine, ne les flattaient pas, n'éveillaient rien en eux" (280). This side of Negritude no longer seems valid to a generation consumed with pluralism and individual specificity. When President Mignane mysteriously disappears, the youth get carried away by the ensuing chaos, without fully understanding the ideologies that lie beneath the surface. After the coup, they support the militants with an "ambiance juvénile" (362). They participate in riots, as well as heated

debates over the country's direction, but they interpret a racism and a violence in the discourse circulating around Negritude that was not present in previous generations. One scene describes a disturbing encounter between two young white couples and a group of black African youth, impregnated with a cultural nationalism that has escalated to exclusionist racism. The young Africans force the white couples to flee to the Embassy, wishing them out of the country with a menacing, "Bon voyage" (363). This deformed version of Negritude was in part to blame for the enflamed racial tensions present at that moment in Africa's history.

Aminata Sow Fall also addresses the direction of the younger generation in her novel, *Douceurs du bercail*. Asta, a Senegalese woman, has a son, Paapi, who "ne rêve que de 'sortir' comme disent ceux qui veulent partir" (Fall 98). The youth dream of going to France, a country synonymous with "Paradise," to study and make a living. Fall's novel shows only the worst accounts of misery and betrayal experienced by Africans in France. As soon as Asta arrives in France, airport authorities detain her in the "depot," denying her any opportunity to contact her French friends, Anna and Didier. The officers accuse her of assaulting a security officer, despite Anne and Didier's attempts to prove her innocence. The authorities' request for her passport provokes immediate uneasiness in Asta: "la chose que [Asta] déteste le plus... c'est d'être la cible du regard des autres" (15). Here we see the interdependence that Otherness creates; the gaze of the French authorities marks Asta as the inferior Other, imprisoning the two parties in a fixed dichotomy. Fanon will argue: "c'est le raciste qui crée l'infériorisé" (75). The inherent violence imbedded in this relationship presents itself in a sexual aggression Asta

experiences during her security search. It is this perceived attack on her body that compels her to resist and leads to her arrest. The theme of sexual violence and power dynamics continues in the rape of one of the depot's detainees. Following Asta's arrival in France, everything becomes sub-human. The prisoners in the depot are treated like animals in a cage; consequently everyone involved begins to lose sight of their humanity. Even though Fall's novel takes place in postcolonial France, the racist structures of colonialism are still in place. *Douceurs du bercail*, published in 1998, testifies that the colonized-colonizer relationship can still be as violent and dehumanizing over thirty years after decolonization. The power of storytelling keeps the prisoners' dignity and sanity intact; orality ultimately saves them from losing themselves in the objectification of the guards.

Even if we read Fall's negative presentation of France as an argument for a return to Africa, it is clear that Europe will still play a role in Africa's development. The novel ends with a reunion of the former prisoners in an African village where they will begin again from zero. Dianor's father, an *ancien combattant* for France, decides to return to his homeland because, as he says: "rentrer au bercail avant la nuit est un acte de sagesse" (103). France was, however, the catalyst that unified the prisoners, and they agree that a return to Africa does not imply a desertion from outside influences. In fact, Fall's novel proposes a symbiotic relationship similar to the values of Senghorism. Once back in Africa, the former prisoners buy a plot of land, in which they intend to plant a variety of crops. The different species of plants in African soil parallel a Senghorian collaboration between different ethnicities to produce the best results in African society. In speaking

about the group's plans for the site, Yakham says: "Notre idée est de régénérer tout ce qui pousse ici et d'implanter d'autres cultures, d'autres espèces pour enrichir le site" (205). A successful society will regenerate African culture, while also adding the benefits of other cultures. Senghor himself expressed in an interview that the poetic side of his Negritude could only achieve so much: "Cependant, la Négritude, même définie comme 'l'ensemble de valeurs culturelles de l'Afrique noire,' ne pouvait nous offrir que le début de la solution de notre problème, non la solution elle-même" (Kestlelout *Pont* 121). Africans cannot turn inward to the point of excluding the rest of the world if they also want to accede to the global stage.

Both Fall and Sembène focus their plots on the inherent tension in Negritude—giving value to African tradition and the necessity to enter into a globalized, modern world—while Dadié confronts this conflict on a structural level, mixing orality and writing. *Brasserie*, by Koffi Kwahulé, presents a complex and critical view of Negritude. The play opens on the aftermath of a massacre, a traumatic setting reflected in the characters, who are enveloped in the absurdity of the moment. Even though the scene's location remains anonymous, the description of the massacre and the German character, Magiblanche, suggest it is post-Rwandan genocide. The play begs the question: How can an African inflict this level of destruction on his neighbor if Negritude in fact still exists? Negritude denounces the destructive influence of European capitalism, brought through colonialism. In *Brasserie*, Cap'taine-S'en-fout-la-mort and Caporal-Foufafou dream of revitalizing their country's economy by restarting the brasserie—a product of capitalism—this time under their control. Developed out of a colonized state of mind,

Négritude ideally sought to valorize another possible reality: an Africa that could achieve modernization in her own way, as opposed to being dictated by an outside force. The reality of colonization, however, constructed a bond between the two continents that could never be broken. Magiblanche represents this inescapable European presence, as she finally “cedes” to the soldiers demands to divulge the key to running the brasserie’s machinery—“le savoir”—. She keeps five percent of the “secret” for herself; that way she will always have her influence and keep the others dependent on her.

In an article on Koffi Kwahulé, Randy Gener, describes the status of African theater:

By the 1990s, French-speaking theatre from Africa, which had relied on return-to-African rituals and folkloric traditions (the concept of Négritude), began to embark on a different course of theatrical action... Kwahulé belongs to a new generation of African-born dramatists who, in tandem with their French-Caribbean brethren, have embraced postcolonial ruptures and hybridization, freely appropriated Western forms and ideas, and repeatedly rejected the notion of « Africanness » and authenticity. (32)

Despite the fact that this simplified description of Négritude loses the profundity essential to its character, the progression outlined proves useful to this discussion. If the writers before Kwahulé’s generation see themselves as confronting a tradition-modernity dialectic, Kwahulé accepts the inherent hybridity of present-day Africa. He says: “The work I have tried to do was to complicate the report of the African, to show he has a shifting identity. I wanted to create doubts, flaws--to make sure people come to doubt the idea that they are Africans, so that can recognize our ability to be in the process of becoming” (Gener 32). Confining oneself to a fixed identity of a manufactured

“Africanness” is no longer effective in a complex globalized society that values a certain level of plurality. Kwahulé attempts to undo this strict adherence to a homogeneous African identity, which had arisen from the post-Independence fear of resembling anything “outside” Africa.

The linguistic hybridity in *Brasserie* oscillates to a such a degree that it begins to overwhelm the reader/spectator. The scene, “la Nouvelle Babylone” exemplifies this mixing of French, German and English, notably in the absence of any African language. Kwahulé defends his treatment of language with his call for post-Babylone societies: “For me Babylon wasn’t a failure. The myth of the Tower of Babel proclaims the wish to speak the same language. Post-Babylonianism asserts the necessity of speaking different languages, or building a common structure but with the diversity of our languages” (Mouëllic 107). He constructs his dialogues with this objective to complicate the African’s self-perception.

Kwahulé characterizes his life as a mix of influences from different cultures: childhood in Côte d’Ivoire, French education, Hollywoodian images and African American music. He says: “When I write, I can’t deny these parts of myself just because they’re French or American” (Gener 93). In addition to the multiple languages in the play, Kwahulé also infuses a number of outside influences that were not present in the aforementioned authors. He seamlessly inserts stereotypes of America in the dialogue between Cap’taine-S’en-fout-la-mort and Caporal-Foufou. Caporal-Foufou tries to figure out which of the country’s main institutions remained unharmed during the war. Between hospitals and theaters, he guesses “les Mcdo?” (Kwahulé 20). The two soldiers

also display a vast knowledge of Las Vegas imagery: limousines, boxing competitions, black-jack tables; they even mention the state of Nevada (37). It is clear they, and Kwahulé by extension, have been indoctrinated into American culture. In his writing, Kwahulé accepts his hybridity in such a way that would have proven difficult for previous generations.

Even though Negritude resulted in a powerful push to revalorize colonial Africa, it did create a controversy over the “right” way to live in African society during and after the period of decolonization. West African authors are still grappling with the ideas put forth by the founders of Negritude. Kwahulé says he combats the effects of Negritude that focused too much on African “authenticity:” “In the beginning, I was criticized for not writing “African.” Which means those people knew what “African” was. But for my part, I don’t. Writers or artists who try to be “African,” in reality, accept being fixed in a dated expression of themselves” (Gener 93). Clearly, the essentialist view of *l’âme noire* continues to create controversy in West African intellectual production, although it appears to be progressively overshadowed by a more postmodern approach. Even in his attempts to deconstruct a African authenticity, Kwahulé does not deny history’s influence on the contemporary African writer: “When a black author is studied, if what he writes doesn’t directly deal with the black question, black problems, people stop thinking about him as black. Nonetheless, all his choices--be they artistic, dramaturgical, esthetic, linguistic--are fed by his history” (Mouëllic 104). History surrounds and affects all aspects of *Brasserie*, achieving a status almost equal to that of a main character. Kwahulé

uses absurdity as an equalizing factor in the play, successfully demolishing any superior-inferior relationships created by a history of colonization.

The fact that Negritude is determined in part by historical context implies that while some ideas conceived by its founders no longer find relevance over time, new contexts will determine its future manifestations. Thus, while some present-day critics have declared Negritude “dead,” it can never be erased from the literary and cultural dialogue of Africa and the Antilles. Negritude constitutes a substantial portion in the cultural, political and literary history of both the Antilles and Africa and remains a point of departure for understanding and fashioning a collective existence in both spaces. In 1993, Senghor said: “I believe, like Jean-Paul Sartre, that ‘Negritude is dialectics’; I do not believe it ‘will be replaced by new values’... it will play, again, its role, an essential one, in the erection of a new humanism, more humane because it will have at last gathered in totality the contributions of all continents, all races, all nations” (Diagne 247). Césaire tends to agree with Senghor that Negritude continues to resurface in new theories of envisioning the African diaspora, but has also always conceived of Negritude as a subjective experience, open to new variations and interpretations. During an interview in 1972, he said: “Est-ce que la négritude est encore utile, je n’en sais rien, mais dans tous les cas, pour moi, ce fut un instrument de prise de conscience” (Kesteloot *Pont* 66). It seems upon further reflection, however, he supported Negritude’s legacy more explicitly. In an interview in 1988, he said:

Négritude provided me with clues in order to read Martinique, its mirror. People ask: “Is there still something relevant in Négritude? Isn’t it interesting only at a purely historical level?” This is not true at all. I think that as long as you will have

Negroes a little everywhere, Négritude will be there as a matter of course. The Martinican grievance that we wanted to voice out forcefully is not so much physical misery, economic exploitation, even if this was really the case, as the *alienation* which as policy has made the Martinican conscience founder. And, believe me, this fight against alienation is never totally over. (Rowell 992)

Even though Césaire situated his Negritude in its historical context, he finds it to still be relevant, especially to the Martinican situation.

Re-envisioning Negritude, not as a homogeneous consciousness, but more as a Venn diagram, exemplifies the essence of Césairean and Senghorian Negritude—sometimes coexisting, sometimes diverging—and compels a new understanding of the broader schema of Negritude, from its conception to its lasting legacy. Any contemporary criticism of this movement must take into account its historical and cultural context, not only because its structure reflects a modernist perspective, but also because the circumstances surrounding Césaire and Senghor's meeting in Paris both caused and shaped their conception of Negritude. On another level, context also determines the necessary separation between Césairean and Senghorian Negritude. Understanding the factors that contributed to this disparity sheds new light on the particular progression of each poet-politician, as well as on the unique nature of the Negritude movement.

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