

Subverting Empire: Gendered Narratives of Anti-colonial Resistance in Francophone Literature
and Politics, 1939-1960

By

Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

French

May, 2015

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved :

T. Sharpley-Whiting, Ph.D.

Robert Barsky, Ph.D.

Vera Kutzinski, Ph.D.

Paul Miller, Ph.D.

Tiffany Patterson, Ph.D.

Copyright © 2015 by Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel
All Rights Reserved

To the women who taught me: Laura, Jeannette, Agnes, Manette, Giselle...

and

To my husband Steeve, who is everything, always

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the financial support of the Pichois Grant for Dissertation Research, the Vanderbilt University Dissertation Enhancement Grant and the Carrie Chapman Catt Prize for Research on Women and Politics. Various advisors, colleagues, friends and family provided indispensable support. I am heavily indebted to T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting for her generosity with her time, her quick feedback and sharp questions to deepen my thinking about my work. I could not have imagined a better intellectual experience! I am incredibly grateful to the members of my committee, Robert Barsky, Vera Kutzinski, Paul Miller and Tiffany Patterson for their guidance through the project. In the Department of French and Italian and the Center for Second Language Studies, Virginia Scott, Todd Hughes, Felekech Tigabu and Tamra Hicks generously provided financial and/or logistical support for my work with the digital humanities tools and resources that allowed this project to evolve.

My sincere thanks go to Marc Césaire for his generous permission to view Suzanne Césaire's letters, and to Ève Blouin for sharing her memories and knowledge of Andrée Blouin's life and work. A huge thank you to Trica Keaton for showing me her Paris. Early conversations with Dominique Aurélia at the Université des Antilles et de la Guyane and Akosua Adomako Ampofo at the University of Ghana opened the way for this project. Jim Toplon at the Vanderbilt University Library provided much-needed help in locating important primary documents as did the archivists at the Archives Départementales de la Martinique, Archives Départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône, Archives du Sénat, Archives Nationales d'Outre-mer, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fondation Charles de Gaulle and the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center I am also grateful to Maïté Monchal, Manuelle Mieze and Magali Stratigéas for making my summers in Aix-en-Provence possible.

Thank you to those wonderful, kind, generous souls who patiently responded to panicked

calls and emails, who kindly read drafts and put flesh on the bones of this project: Stéphane Robolin, Robert Watson, Neil Roberts, Arthur Carter, Petal Samuel, Lucy Mensah, Kat DeGuzman, Nicole Spigner. Mèsi anpil to the Arel-Baste-Durand-Pecome family and to the Scott-Welches for homes away from home. Eternally grateful for friends who sustain and encourage, even when I disappear for long stretches of time: Yemisi Cookey, Julian Ledford, Roxane Pajoul, Lucia Wheller, Claire Schwartz.

To my family, my mother Jeannette, my father Andy, and my brothers Jnr. And Jean, thank you for giving this life and meaning, for making the heavy moments light and the light moments beautiful. And finally to Steeve, who holds me up and brings love and strength to each new day.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
INTRODUCTION.....	9
Pro-feminist, Anti-colonialist: Theorizing Liberation in Black Women’s Narratives.....	9
Intersectionality and the Praxis of Decolonial Feminisms.....	15
What is Literature?.....	17
Public Works, Private Lives.....	21
On Visibility and Archival Traces.....	24
Liberatory Narratives.....	27
 CHAPTER	
I. From <i>Tropiques</i> To <i>L’isolé Soleil</i> : Suzanne Césaire’s Politics And Poetics Of Liberation.....	33
“L’évasion sous toutes ses formes”: Vichy in the Tropics, Dissidence in <i>Tropiques</i>	40
“Oser se connaître soi-même”: Liberating Antillean Poetry from Assimilation and <i>Doudouisme</i>	42
“Corde raide de notre espoir”: Surrealism and Revolution in the Antilles.....	50
“Trop beau pour y voir”: The Great Camouflage of the Caribbean Archipelago.....	56
“La libération sera cannibal”: Suzanne Césaire’s Legacy in Daniel Maximin’s <i>L’isolé soleil</i>	61
II. <i>La Femme Dans La Cité</i> : Paulette Nardal And The Gendered Politics Of Departmentalization.....	75
“Une petite France une France lointaine”: The Colony/Metropole Relationship in Nardalian Thought from <i>La Dépêche Africaine</i> to <i>La Femme dans la cite</i>	79
“La femme martiniquaise est entrée dans la Cité des Hommes”: Citizenship and the Politics of Female Subjectivity.....	103
III. Women Of The Union: Eugénie Eboué, Jane Vialle And Anti-Colonialism In Overseas France.....	116
“Lutter jusqu’à la Victoire finale”: Resistance and Women’s Wartime Service.....	121
“La Liberté et le Droit”: Women’s Rights as Human Rights in a Postwar World.....	132

“The Curse of Uniformity”: Humanism as a Path to Decolonization.....	137
“Fraternité, ce mot féminin qui désigne un sentiment masculin”: Race, Gender and Republicanism in the French Union.....	143
“We Resent Being Called Dependent”: Racism and the (Im)possibility of a Post-colonial Future.....	154
 IV. Women’s Anti-Colonial Resistance In Aoua Kéita’s <i>Femme D’afrique: La Vie D’aoua Kéita Racontée Par Elle-Même</i> And Ousmane Sembène’s <i>Emitaï</i> And <i>Les Bouts De Bois De Dieu</i>	162
“Une petite négresse, une pauvre esclave”: The Coloniality of Gender in French Sudan.....	168
“Ma prise de conscience”: Contesting Citizenship and Voice in <i>Femme d’Afrique</i>	174
“Un trésor historique pour les générations futurs”: Feminist Rewritings of History in Aoua Kéita’s and Ousmane Sembène’s Works.....	179
“Un pagne qui a la valeur d’un pantalon”: Gender, Space and the Colonial Politics of Movement.....	186
 V. Metissage And African Liberation In Andree Blouin’s <i>My Country Africa: Autobiography Of The Black Pasionaria</i> And Henri Lopes’ <i>Le Lys Et Le Flamboyant</i>	199
“If It were my turn, I would speak”: Appropriating Voice in African Women’s Narratives.....	204
“Race, Our Land’s Greatest Single Drama”: Métis Politics and the Decolonization Movement.....	216
“Let it Not Be Said That I Did Nothing to Make the African Woman Free”: Violence and Labor and Anti-colonial Resistance.....	224
 CONCLUSION.....	231
 Feminist Networks And Diasporic Practices: Eslanda Robeson’s African Journeys.....	231
“How to Behave Abroad”: Black Transnationalism and the Geography of Anti-colonial Resistance.....	233
“A Dangerous Customer”: Race, Gender and Surveillance in the Colonies.....	239
“The Rising Tide of Color”: Imagining Post-colonial Futures in the African Diaspora.....	245
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	250

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Léopold Senghor and Ginette Éboué wedding press release.....	22
2. Léopold Senghor and Ginette Éboué wedding picture, magazine clipping.....	22
3. Jane Vialle portrait in Senate archives.....	26
4. Éugénie Éboué’s campaign poster for 1945 Constituent National Assembly elections.....	115

INTRODUCTION

Pro-feminist, Anti-colonialist: Theorizing Liberation in Black Women's Narratives

Ce n'est pas davantage la société coloniale actuelle que nous voulons prolonger, la plus carnie qui ait jamais pourri sous le soleil. C'est une société nouvelle qu'il nous faut, avec l'aide de tous nos frères esclaves, créer, riche de toute la puissance productive moderne, chaude de toute la fraternité antique

Nor is it the present colonial society that we wish to prolong, the most putrid carrion that ever rotted under the sun. It is a new society that we must create, with the help of our brother slaves, a society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all the fraternity of olden days.

—Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme/Discourse on colonialism*

In August 1944 as General Leclerc marched into Paris to liberate the city from German occupation, Andrée Blouin marched into the mayor's office in Bangui to obtain a quinine card for the malaria treatment that would save her two year old son René. Quinine cards were for Europeans only, and the mayor let the distraught *métisse* woman know this in no uncertain terms. Colonial guards dragged her out of the office as she screamed, "I am a French citizen, the same as you, and so is my son [...]. Yours is an accursed race! Cursed authors of a murderous law!" (Blouin, 145). In her autobiography, Blouin maintains that the events of World War II and her son's death in a far-flung outpost of the French empire in Africa were inextricably linked: "I have been asked 'Why would white people be so cruel to a child who was three-fourths white?' My answer is: this was deepest Equatorial Africa and the war was on" (145). The institutionalized racism that made black bodies dispensable on the battlefields of Europe was also at work in the "murderous law" that reserved anti-malaria treatment for whites only. René's death galvanized Blouin into political action. She first fought the quinine law and obtained a reform. From there her activism became more explicitly anti-colonial and took on a regional then international scale.

She worked as an advisor to Sekou Touré and Kwame Nkrumah, the first presidents of Guinea and Ghana respectively, and eventually became Patrice Lumumba's Chief of Protocol. Highly placed in Pan Africanist, anti-colonial movements, Blouin campaigned for African women's inclusion in public politics as a necessary condition for decolonization.

André Blouin would most likely agree with Aimé Césaire's assertion in the epigraph to this introduction that colonialism was a violent, even deadly form of encounter. Her descriptions of an "accursed race" perpetrating a "murderous law" align with Césaire's vivid image of colonial society as "la plus carne qui ait jamais pourri sous le soleil" ("the most putrid carrion that ever rotted under the sun", Césaire, 36/52). Like Césaire she identifies World War II as but another manifestation of Europe's colonial excesses. Blouin was not the only woman whose experiences of loss and trauma during the war informed her anti-colonial activism. In the mid-twentieth century, African and Antillean women generated a body of writing that connected France's colonial enterprise with the dual legacy of French resistance and collaboration during the war. Often located in forgotten corners of the empire, these women's wartime experiences forged their subsequent resistance to colonial marginalization and their rise to prominent leadership positions in anti-colonial movements. The women in this study were injured by German torpedoes, incarcerated in concentration camps and declared enemies of the Vichy state. They risked their lives and lost what liberty they had. In the process they developed a language to describe and strategies to resist the multiple, intertwined, institutionalized oppressions they had faced and continued to face as black female colonial subjects.

For Blouin and many other African and Antillean women, their wartime experiences were central in shaping the pro-feminist, anti-colonial nature of their literary and political activities. Like Aimé Césaire, they also imagined what a decolonized future might bring. For Martinican writers Suzanne Césaire and Paulette Nardal this future meant departmentalization for overseas

France. For the Guyanese-born senator Éugénie Éboué and her colleague from Oubangui-Chari (now Central African Republic) Jane Vialle, the end of colonialism meant incorporating the former colonies into a more democratic French Union. For Andrée Blouin, Malian deputy Aoua Kéita, and African American anthropologist Eslanda Robeson, only formal political independence for Africa would do. The political configurations that black women living in and/or traveling through the francophone world imagined were varied and often shifting. Despite their differences, they shared a common desire for women's emancipation in the post-colony. They were convinced above all that the new society ("une société nouvelle") that Aimé Césaire describes in the epigraph would require more than "l'aide de tous nos frères esclaves" ("the help of our brother slaves") and fraternal goodwill. Decolonization could not be attained without women's political representation and meaningful participation in public life.

Subverting Empire is the story of seven women who made significant contributions to the decolonization enterprise in the mid-twentieth century, contributions that have been largely overlooked or underestimated in retrospective analyses. The story, told from the double perspective of the literary history and politics of this period, begins with Suzanne Césaire's arrival in Martinique from Paris aboard the *SS Bretagne* in 1939 with war looming on the horizon. It ends with Andrée Blouin's departure from the Congo into exile on a Paris-bound flight, after the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1960. In a sense then this narrative is also about black women's geographies of resistance, about transatlantic movement as exile, as homecoming, as survival and even as liberation. In acknowledging the centrality of their roles, I suspect that many of these women would reject any claims of their "exemplary representativity" (Melas, 36). To borrow from Natalie Melas' work on sites of enunciation in postcolonial comparative contexts, these women do not stand *for* the world but rather stand *in* the world as witnesses to black women's theories and practices of liberation. The specific thesis of this work

is that the women studied here articulated variations of a decolonial feminism. That is, they recognized the intersecting forces of racial, gendered and class oppression as fundamental to colonial rule. Consequently they argued in their texts that there could be no real decolonization without women's emancipation. Through publishing venues that boasted a transatlantic readership, or from within the corridors of established political institutions such as the French National Assembly and Senate, black women engaged with power and representation at a particularly charged time in the history of French national identity politics.

World War II significantly altered France's discourse on national identity and changed the terms of its relationship with the colonies. In his 18 June 1940 BBC radio broadcast rallying support in Vichy-controlled France for the Free French Forces, Charles de Gaulle declared that despite German occupation, France was not yet fully defeated: "Car la France n'est pas seule! [...] Elle a un vaste Empire derrière elle" ("For France is not alone! [...] She has a vast empire behind her").¹ Once de Gaulle made it clear that a defeated France could only rise with the aid of its colonial subjects—until then the targets of France's exploitative, dehumanizing and sometimes deadly civilizing mission—colonial relations would never be the same again. The so-called savages that France had set out to civilize joined the war to save a crumbling Europe. As Paris fell to Vichy, the French collaborationist regime, the Guyanese Félix Éboué, then governor of Tchad made history by becoming the first French administrator to publicly support de Gaulle. Éboué organized troops throughout French Equatorial Africa to join the war effort. Radio Brazzaville became the voice of *la France Libre*. As Eslanda Robeson argues, "for the first time in colonial history, a Colony took over from the Mother country and became the leader—morally,

¹ Charles de Gaulle, "Appel du 18 juin 1940" BBC, London. 18 June 1940. Web. 12 Aug. 2014. <http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/pages/l-homme/dossiers-thematiques/1940-1944-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale/l-appel-du-18-juin/documents/l-appel-du-18-juin-1940.php>

legally, militarily, economically and practically.”² Consequently in the immediate postwar period, France’s colonized subjects increasingly challenged the metropole on its selective application of liberty, equality and fraternity in its colonies, particularly given the immense sacrifices that overseas populations made during the war.³

The changing discourse on colonial relations had important political and legal repercussions. The new postwar constitution, which established the Fourth Republic in 1946, also redefined the relationship between metropole and colonies. Notably, it founded the French Union, an uneven federation composed of metropolitan France which still wielded governing power, the *vielles colonies* (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane and Reunion) transformed into overseas French departments, and the newer colonies transformed into overseas territories. In short, the constitution did away with the colonial status and made all overseas populations French citizens, at least on paper. The promise of citizenship however did not always translate into concrete changes in the colonies. Uneven application of voting rights left out large segments of the African population. In the Antilles, France dragged its feet in extending social security benefits to workers. In effect many former colonial subjects soon realized that they remained recognizable outsiders in the French polity. Their citizenship, juxtaposed with that of their metropolitan counterparts, was to borrow Homi Bhabha’s formulation, “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 126). Even as France had to negotiate the terms of its colonial relations, it was also involved in redefining the role of women as citizens in the metropole. Notably in 1944 French women won the right to vote.

In this fluid, constantly changing political landscape, African and Antillean women presented their ideas on the complex nature of belonging as black women whose cartographies of

² Eslanda Robeson, “Felix Eboué: The End of an Era,” *New World Review* (Oct. 1952): 44–48.

³ Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006) and Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2005).

citizenship located them both in the metropole and in colonies that were the site of colonial trauma but also cultural regeneration. Without their works we have only a partial view of this process of redefining national identity in postwar France writ large, a view that leaves out precisely the demographic situated at the intersection of the two major constitutional changes that affected French women and colonial subjects: colonized women. The women analyzed here were not only perceptive readers of their societies in the different iterations of the French empire. They were also uniquely positioned to challenge France to recognize its reflection in what Suzanne Césaire has called the “miroir maléfique” (“malefic mirror” Césaire, 90/43) of its colonial identity.

In addition to their contributions in challenging French imperial politics, these texts also shift our understanding of African and Antillean women’s writings as focused on interiority and contained uniquely within the domestic sphere. More recently, writers including Mariama Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Gisèle Pineau have explored the raced and gendered foundations of colonial rule and the continuity of these intersecting oppressions today. In *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958-1988*, Susan Andrade questions the dominant narrative of African women’s writings as apolitical, “concerned only with domestic issues and certainly not part of the national narrative” (Andrade, 5). She argues that women writers who published novels immediately after independence articulated their ideas on nationalism through home and family as allegory. For Ileana Rodriguez in *House, Garden, Nation: Space, Gender, and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Latin American Literatures by Women*, Latin American and Caribbean women writers have grappled with the nation from within the home or the garden as micro-spaces that symbolize a larger political entity. Yet even these attempts to tease out the political in so-called women’s literature leave us with a significant gap. They elide the explicitly political writings by the colonized women who came before; women for

whom nationalism could be both an inclusive discourse and an exclusionary act; women who situated their engagement with imperialism not only in the home or garden, but also in the arena of public political action.⁴

Intersectionality and the Praxis of Decolonial Feminism

Examining women's activism requires grappling with the recent history of feminist movements and black women's positions in relation to these movements. Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* was published in 1949, around the time when Nardal, Vialle and Éboué circulated their essays on black French women's experiences as second-class citizens. Beauvoir's extensive historical and philosophical examination of the treatment of women in society takes into account some of the different kinds of oppression that women have historically faced. She explores among other things women's cultural production, suffrage and labor politics and concludes that "ce n'est pas l'infériorité des femmes qui a déterminé leur insignifiance historique: c'est leur insignifiance historique qui les a vouées à l'infériorité" ("it is not the inferiority of women that has determined their historical insignificance: it is their historical insignificance that has relegated them to inferiority" Beauvoir, 226). In arguing that women can only attain liberation through a combination of the right to vote and work in a socialist labor structure, Beauvoir acknowledges that they face multiple forms of oppressions, particularly along the lines of gender and class. Her work however stops just shy of examining the relationship among these multiple oppressions.

In the 1990s, US black feminists including Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins developed the theory of intersectionality and provided diasporic black feminists with a specific language to examine and describe the relationship among the different forms of oppression they

⁴ I do not discount domestic space as the location from which women have and continue to undertake political action. For many of the women studied here, silence on domestic issues was not to minimize the importance of that space, but rather a self-preservation tactic to protect themselves and their families.

experience. Crenshaw cogently argued that feminist and anti-racist practices often “expound identity as woman or person of color” (Crenshaw 1242) and thereby silence the voices of women of color whose experiences may be located at the intersection of racial and gendered oppression. In order to rectify this erasure and silencing, the theory of intersectionality recognizes a “matrix of domination” that is the organization of power that locates black women at the intersection of racial, gendered and class-based oppressions (Collins, 228). This recognition in turn reveals, as Maria Lugones argues, “what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are conceptualized as separate from each other” (Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender”, 4). Intersectionality allows us to “account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1245). It is therefore central to the present inquiry because even as Beauvoir was examining the evolution of women’s roles in society in the book that would become the central text for white bourgeois feminists, African and Antillean women were arguing that these roles were inextricably linked to their racial and class identities in the French empire. They had already understood what Patricia Hill Collins would succinctly express nearly half a century later, that “if power as domination is organized and operates via intersecting oppressions, then resistance must show comparable complexity [...]. Understanding the complexity of Black women’s activism requires understanding not only the need to address more than one form of oppression, but the significance of *how* singular and multiple forms of oppression are organized” (Collins, 203, emphasis mine). Many of these women show through their writings as well as through the transatlantic feminist networks they sought to create, that black women’s resistance to imperialism necessitated reckoning with the racial, gendered and class dimensions of colonial conquest.

I turn to Maria Lugones' concept of decolonial feminism in my reading of intersectionality in the French colonial context. Lugones' decolonial feminism combines the critical frameworks of intersectionality and the coloniality of power. This latter theory, introduced by Anibal Quijano, identifies colonial conquest as founded on the historical processes of capitalist exploitation and codification of racial difference. Lugones proposes the term "coloniality of gender" to account for not just the invention of race to serve Eurocentric capitalist interests, but also the construction of gender within this process of invention. She goes on to describe decolonial feminism as "the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender" (Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism", 747). It is the possibility of forming coalitions and relating to one another and the world in ways that do not align with colonial constructions of race and gender. Decolonial feminism requires a firm grasp of colonial power, its organization, its language, and a tenacious engagement with this power structure. Thus it provides a framework for examining the feminist and anti-colonial dimensions of African and Antillean women's politics as praxis.

What is Literature?

The women who subverted empire expressed their decolonial feminisms through their literary contributions which include short stories, critical and journalistic essays and autobiographies. However, the paucity of their works to be found in the public domain means that any reading of their contributions must necessarily push the boundaries of what constitutes a text to which we may apply a literary lens. For example, the handwritten campaign speech that Eugénie Éboué delivered to her Guadeloupean constituents on the eve of her election into the Constituent National Assembly is also an oral narrative that tells the story of the Éboué family's participation in the war effort in French Equatorial Africa. It straddles generic boundaries as much as it does continental ones. The Césaires' jointly authored letters to André Breton describe

their intense exchanges in Martinique with Breton during his stay in 1941, in terms that evoke the different poetic styles of both writers. These private letters are also historical artifacts. Suzanne's carefully formed cursive script sharing the page with Aimé's abrupt, telegram-style phrases, scrawled in what seems to be an impatient hand, attests to the close and lasting literary collaboration between the Césaires that scholars have yet to fully explore. On what terms then may we read extra-literary texts in conversation with traditional literary genres? Or better, how do we identify what is literary about a given text?

Sartre's ambitious attempt to answer the question "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" ("What is literature?") in 1948 provides a useful framework for this proposed reading. He presents the "literary object" ("l'objet littéraire", Sartre, 51) as one that allows writer and reader to enter into a relation of meaning making. This joint reader-writer production operates through a recognition of both parties' liberty:

Ainsi l'auteur écrit pour s'adresser à la liberté des lecteurs et il la requiert de faire exister son œuvre. Mais il ne se borne pas là et il exige en outre qu'ils lui retournent cette confiance qu'il leur a donnée, qu'ils reconnaissent sa liberté créatrice et qu'ils la sollicitent à leur tour par un appel symétrique et inverse. Ici apparaît en effet l'autre paradoxe dialectique de la lecture : plus nous éprouvons notre liberté, plus nous reconnaissons celle de l'autre ; plus il exige de nous et plus nous exigeons de lui. (Sartre, *Qu'est-ce qu'est la littérature ?*, 58)

Thus, the author writes in order to address himself to the freedom of readers, and he requires it in order to make his work exist. But he does not stop there; he also requires that they return this confidence which he has given them, that they recognize his creative freedom, and that they in turn solicit it by a symmetrical and inverse appeal. Here there appears the other dialectical paradox of reading; the

more we experience our freedom, the more we recognize that of the other; the more he demands of us, the more we demand of him. (Sartre, *What is Literature?*, 51)

Sartre's notion of liberty is both philosophical and political, coming on the heels of a war that called into question France's adherence to its republican ideals. Liberty necessitates recognizing that one's freedom is intertwined with that of all others and therefore requires an acknowledgement of the other's humanity, of his/her right to live. Consequently by Sartre's standards, it is impossible to produce good literature that is anti-Semitic, or else that is intended for an audience of slaves: "Ainsi qu'il soit essayiste, pamphlétaire, satiriste ou romancier, qu'il parle seulement des passions individuelles ou qu'il s'attaque au régime de la société, l'écrivain, homme libre s'adressant à des hommes libres, n'a qu'un seul sujet: la liberté" ("Thus, whether he is an essayist, a pamphleteer, a satirist, or a novelist, whether he speaks only of individual passions or whether he attacks the social order, the writer, a free man addressing free men, has only one subject—freedom" 70/64). To be literature, a text must take as its starting point the right to freedom of both creator and audience.

Sartre's formulation "la liberté d'écrire implique la liberté du citoyen" ("the freedom of writing implies the freedom of the citizen" 71/65), along with his recognition of a variety of non-fictional genres as literature, allows us to read African and Antillean women's writings as literary objects that open up new possibilities for meaning making and the praxis of liberation. Suzanne Césaire's private letters describing her vision for the liberation of Martinican creativity from French colonial representation, and the liberation of the island from Vichy rule; Eugénie Éboué's campaign poster juxtaposing her image with that of Marianne, the female embodiment of liberty in French Enlightenment iconography; all become "objets littéraires" that premise the meaning-making relationship between writer and reader on the humanity, citizenship and right to liberty of

both parties. Engaging in literary production then is an explicitly political act of asserting or at the very least negotiating freedom. This is even more so the case for black women writing through and against imperialism.

Certainly literary production in and of itself does not make colonized women free. It does not magically erase sexual violence, labor exploitation, or the denial of their basic rights. Rather black women's writing provides possibilities for circumventing some of the severe limitations imposed on their freedom and mobility. As Carol Boyce Davies argues, this writing, "read as a series of boundary crossings [...] redefines its identity as it re-connects and re-members, brings together black women dis-located by space and time" (Davies, 3). Writing allowed women to actively pursue coalitions across imperial, even linguistic boundaries through interviews and epistolary exchanges. In these textual spaces they also challenged the narratives used to justify conquest and the continued exploitation of colonized peoples. In her essays for the journal *Tropiques* in the 1940s, Suzanne Césaire took on *doudouisme*, the literary representation of France's island colonies as exotic paradise. Paulette Nardal sought to counter *doudouiste* representations of Antillean women in particular as passive sexual objects through a series of articles she wrote for the French newspaper *Le Soir* in 1930. Women writing from or about Africa, including Éboué, Vialle and Robeson, viewed France's discourse on the colonies' "debt" to the metropole for its "gift of civilization" with increasing suspicion and said so in their works.⁵ Literary production was a way to present counter-narratives that questioned the legitimacy of colonial power and imagined new ways of being for black women. In short, it was an act of resistance. This means that literary production was, to borrow from David Scholle "at its root, as

⁵ Françoise Vergès argues that the idea of the colonies' perpetual indebtedness to the metropole comes from the view that France had extended the colonial *don* (gift) of Enlightenment and progress to a backward continent. She describes this discourse as a colonial family romance, one that keeps the eternally indebted colonized as children always under the wing of maternal France, the *Mère-Patrie*. See Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham, [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 1999).

an activity [...] a defensive contestation, an act of refusal” because its goal, one it achieved with varying success, was to “work to limit the capacity of power to define the parameters of action” (Sholle 101).

Public Works, Private Lives

My focus on public acts of resistance in these writings is not to discount the domestic sphere as a space from which imperialism may be challenged and liberation imagined. Nor is it to suggest that public and private are distinct, non-overlapping categories. If anything, the women analyzed here show that the boundary between public and private is porous at best. Personal correspondence to friends and family and intimate journal entries provide much-needed commentary on women’s public lives, and reveal the complex relationship between their private desires and public utterances.

In some cases the intertwining of private experiences and public narratives impacted the discourse on race and gender in French and Afro-diasporic politics. Léopold Senghor’s marriage to Eugénie Éboué’s daughter Ginette and is a prime example. In September 1946, at least eleven newspapers in metropolitan France announced the forthcoming Senghor-Éboué union. Most of the newspapers limited their write-up to a short paragraph outlining Senghor’s position as Senegalese deputy involved in drafting the new French constitution, and Ginette as the daughter of Eugénie, a deputy representing Guadeloupe. Others saw the event as a metaphor. Their “Union dans l’Union” (“Union in the Union”) was a sign of transatlantic accord in the Constituent National Assembly and a symbol of the successful formation of the French Union.⁶ When they divorced in 1958 the French press viewed it as a new symbol, this time of the French Union’s dissolution that same year.

⁶ “Union dans ‘l’Union’” *Paris-Matin* 11 Sept. 1946 and “Accordailles à la Constituante” *L’Aurore* 11 Sept. 1946 in FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

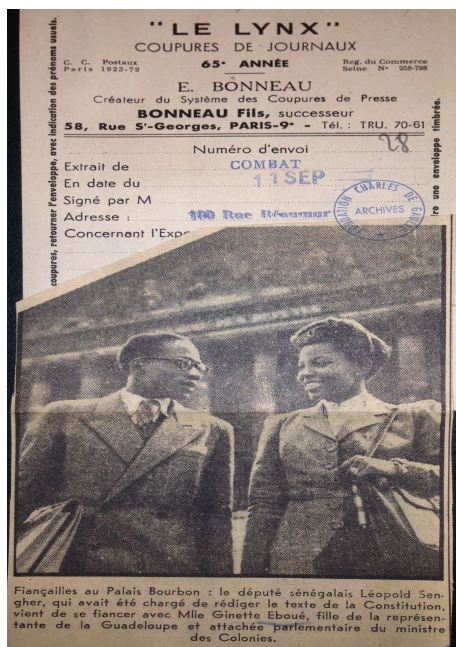


Fig. 1: This iconic photo of Senghor and Ginette accompanied all the press releases. The building that houses the French National Assembly serves as the backdrop for the “perfect political marriage.”



Fig 2: Their marriage remained a metaphor in French and francophone politics for decades to come. Their wedding picture is used in this magazine article to illustrate the break between de Gaulle and the Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP) party that had initially supported his return to the presidency in 1958.⁷

⁷ There is no bibliographic information available for this article because it is a fragmented clipping found in Éugénie Éboué’s private papers at the Fondation Charles de Gaulle. See FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

The Senghor-Éboué symbol persisted in French political rhetoric for decades. As recently as a 2007 interview, Daniel Delas author of *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Le maître de langue*, described the divorce as “L’échec d’un dialogue rêvé entre Antillais et Africains, qui, aujourd’hui encore, reste en filigrane et l’appel à la refondation d’un dialogue Nord-Sud où la femme occuperait une place centrale” (“The failure of the hoped-for dialogue between Antilleans and Africans, a dream which today remains implicit, and a call for the renewal of a North-South dialogue in which the woman occupies a central place”).⁸ If Ginette functions here as a symbol of rupture, Éugénie is largely understood to be the agent that actively severed the much hoped-for link between Africa and the Antilles. In her biography of Senghor, Janet Vaillant states that Senghor often found himself on the receiving end of racial epithets from Antillean women in general and Éugénie in particular.⁹ The Antillean woman in this case is the broken link between African and Antillean political unification.¹⁰ This narrative is even more troubling when juxtaposed with the story of the harmonious meeting between Africa and the Antilles embodied by Negritude’s “founding fathers” Senghor, Césaire and Damas. In this version of history,

⁸ “Ne prenons pas Senghor pour ce qu’il n’est pas: Entretien de Boniface Mongo-Mboussa avec Daniel Delas.” Web. 2 Sept. 2014. <http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=5900#sthash.NWmW5iLd.dpuf>.

⁹ France’s first lady Claude Pompidou weighed in on the issue in a private dinner conversation with Jacques Foccart, chief advisor on African affairs to Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou, and the initiator of France’s neocolonial *Françafrique* policies. Her contention that Senghor was to blame for the dissolution of his marriage because of his alleged infidelity stands as a competing narrative to Vaillant’s. Interestingly, Pompidou goes on to describe her disdain for “l’odeur de la peau des Noirs” (“the odor of the skin of blacks”, Foccart, 598) and her ability to overcome this dislike only in Senghor’s presence. Yet, if she was able to “forgive him” (“lui pardonner”, 598) for the sin of being black, she could not forgive the new airs she claimed he had adopted, “C’était un copain, et maintenant c’est monsieur le président de la République du Sénégal” (“He was a friend, now he is Mr. President of the Republic of Senegal”, 598). Embedded in Pompidou’s commentary is the idea that Senghor is “out of his place.” While a perfectly acceptable if somewhat subordinate acquaintance on his immediate release from a prisoner of war camp (598), occupying the presidency of a former colony constituted an affront to French national pride. It is also clear despite—or rather because of what—Pompidou leaves unsaid, that his second marriage to a white French woman was also an affront to French pride. Pompidou’s words, spoken in the setting of a dinnertime conversation with people who could and did shape French colonial policy, show that private lives and public politics were not diametrically opposed but rather intimately connected.

¹⁰ Even more troubling is Vaillant’s suggestion that it was only through his marriage to a white woman that Senghor finally managed to achieve Negritude’s project of racial harmony, this time between black and white. Vaillant describes Senghor’s son from his second marriage with the French woman Colette Hubert as “seemingly the perfect blend of black and white” (341). See Janet G. Vaillant, *Black, French, and African: a life of Léopold Sédar Senghor* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990): 99-100, 211.

African and Antillean men negotiate their political and poetic differences to unite around the idea of a shared racial identity. Antillean women function uniquely as a divisive element, unable to see beyond the colonial legacy of perceived Antillean superiority and African inferiority that Fanon so expertly deconstructs in his 1955 essay “Antillais et Africains.”¹¹ In this story of “the perfect political marriage” (Vaillant 280) gone wrong, public and private remain hopelessly tangled as individual relations come to stand in for the Negritudian project of fashioning a transatlantic black identity.

All the women analyzed here ultimately had to confront the relationship between their private lives and public activism in their writings. Their approaches were varied. For Suzanne Césaire, private letters to friends and family provided a safe space in which to engage her political ideas away from Vichy’s prying eyes. Aoua Kéita remained silent on her private life, perhaps viewing those details as a distraction from the political narrative she sought to transmit. For Andrée Blouin, personal tragedies including her son’s death directly motivated her anti-colonial activism. Eslanda Robeson perhaps comes closest to imagining a complementary relationship between the two domains when she argues that women’s experiences with domestic work such as raising children and managing household budgets make them uniquely qualified to take charge of national and international affairs. Thus as they worked through what it meant to be present in male-dominated spaces as writers, politicians and activists, these women also had to navigate the politics of visibility.

On Visibility and Archival Traces

To retrace black women’s contributions to anti-colonialism and feminism in the francophone world is to invariably grapple with their contemporary legacies. It means thinking through visibility and invisibility as central to the project of excavating private lives in public

¹¹ Frantz Fanon, “Antillais et Africains” *Oeuvres* (Paris: Découverte, 2011): 704-712.

archives. In undertaking such a project the researcher is first confronted with the striking dearth of materials, not because women did not write in this period, as some commentators have suggested, but rather because too many of their works are lost, as in the case of Suzanne Césaire’s play *Youma* or Jane Vialle’s short stories published in Algeria during World War II.¹² In some cases family members closely guard their legacies, wary of the ways in which their ancestors may be represented.¹³ The gaps and silences, willful or otherwise, raise questions on who is made to be visible and on what terms.

Unearthing documents, images and testimony as part of the research process involves navigating the intensely political waters of archival access. One such space where this access means quite literally wandering the labyrinthine halls of power is the Senate archives located in the Palais du Luxembourg. Entry requires getting past armed guards, a metal detector and several receptionists with the requisite forms and two pieces of ID. The reading room itself is small. A few paintings in somber shades hang discreetly on the walls, but one bright, colorful artwork is prominently displayed opposite the entrance and is the first thing one sees on walking into the room. It is a painting of Jane Vialle. According to Pauline Debionne, the archivist I met there, her colleague found the painting in the basement and thought it would be funny (“marrant”) to display it in the reading room.¹⁴ Vialle is highly visible in the archives. However with no identifying information on the artist or his/her subject, the cavalier display of her image also renders her invisible, her presence acknowledged only as a potential source of amusement to the viewer.

¹² See for example Irène I. Almeida, *Francophone African women writers: destroying the emptiness of silence* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994). Almeida concludes that this supposed absence of women’s writings is a sign of their “intellectual oppression” (Almeida, 4).

¹³ The family members I interviewed in the course of my research cooperated to varying degrees. Marc Césaire gave his consent to view Suzanne Césaire’s letters but would not discuss his memories of his mother’s work. Conversely, Ève Blouin generously shared her personal testimony of her mother’s work and life but could not grant access to Blouin’s papers.

¹⁴ Pauline Debionne, personal communication, 13 May 2014.



Fig. 3: Portrait of Jane Vialle in the Senate archives.

For those who know where and how to look, Vialle's portrait is a reminder that the arc of French political history includes the people that France sought to re-make in its image, sword in hand.¹⁵ The plush Palais de Luxembourg is not only the seventeenth-century residence of the Queen Regent Marie de Medicis and the current seat of the Senate. It is also the space from which African and Antillean women like Vialle and Éboué challenged the hubris of the French imperialist project of assimilation and asserted black French women's right to first-class citizenship.

Vialle's portrait shows the invisibilizing tendencies of forms of commemoration that remain mute testimonies of black women's presence and contributions. Today the Residence Jane Vialle youth hostel in Marseille, with no accessible historical documentation or commemorative plaque on the simple white building, is the only remaining trace of the fact that only a few years after her liberation from a concentration camp, Vialle managed to purchase several buildings in

¹⁵ Jules Michelet, *Introduction a l'histoire universelle* (Paris: Colin, 1962): 64.

France's second largest city to house female students from the colonies struggling to live on inadequate and often delayed government stipends. Who, we might ask, was Éugénie Éboué before she became a street sign among many in the Parisian suburb of Asnières? The form of commemoration, in making her name more visible, leaves her contributions to the discursive framing of black, French, Afro-diasporic identity unspoken. In thinking about African and Antillean women's roles in shaping anti-colonial thought in the francophone world, the fact that many of these subjects remain on the margins of history even when seemingly immortalized by cultural and historical artifacts suggests that there may be other ways to remember.

Liberatory Narratives

The women in this study are not uniformly radical. Their political views are as diverse as the historical processes that shaped them. They range from Paulette Nardal's progressive race politics tempered with her brand of Christian humanism to Aoua Kéita's radical rejection of French citizenship in favor of independence at a time when African deputies like Senghor and Lamine Guèye were advocating for colonial reform within a French federation. Different women walk on and off the stage of each chapter as they support one point of view or express their discontent with another. As T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting reminds us, "it is impossible to situate this or that [work] as *the* oppositional text of black female representation" (Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus*, 121, emphasis in original). The variations and contradictions within and across these texts show the complexity and range of experiences that these women sought to capture in their writings.

Divided into five chapters, *Subverting Empire* begins with Suzanne Césaire. Chapter 1, "From *Tropiques* to *L'isolé soleil*: Suzanne Césaire's Politics and Poetics of Liberation," reads Césaire's work as a proto-nationalist and sometimes proto-feminist exploration of Martinican identity. Suzanne Césaire published seven essays in *Tropiques*, the journal she co-founded with

her husband, Aimé Césaire, and Martinican philosopher René Ménéil, between 1941 and 1945. Her writing makes an important intervention in imagining a new Martinican and ultimately Pan-Caribbean identity at the height of World War II. With a particular focus on previously un-cited personal correspondence in conversation with her published works, I argue that Césaire articulated a joint politics and poetics of liberation. She believed that liberating Martinican cultural production from the constraints of French assimilation was fundamental to freeing the island from Vichy occupation. For Césaire, World War II in the Antilles was a crucial moment to question the French colonial project and to assert the Caribbean's place in the world. New archival evidence also sheds light on her extensive stay in Haiti, its impact on her subsequent writing, and her role in anti-imperial movements on the island that Aimé Césaire once called the birthplace of Negritude.¹⁶ Finally, the chapter also traces Césaire's often-unacknowledged influence on literary theorists in the Antilles including Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé, Daniel Maximin and the founders of the *Créolité* movement.

Chapter 2, "*La Femme dans la cité: Paulette Nardal and the Gendered Politics of Departmentalization,*" traces Nardal's varied articulations of the France/Martinique, metropole/colony relationship over nearly three decades of writing in multiple venues scattered across continents. I identify two major ideas that span the body of her works from the late 1920s to the early 1950s, and that allow us to analyze her contributions to articulating black identities within the framework of French citizenship. First, Nardal grapples with the uneven power relations between Antilleans and metropolitans in France's capital. Second, she remains keenly aware of the ways in which racial and gendered hierarchies constitute intersecting forms of oppression that marginalize Antillean women both in France and in the Antilles. A number of Nardal's essays in Paris-based journals have increasingly gained traction in studies on her

¹⁶ Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. (England: Bloodaxe books, 1995): 90.

contributions to Negritude and black internationalism.¹⁷ I turn to her writings from Martinique, editorial essays published in the journal *La femme dans la cité* between 1945 and 1951, in order to examine her astute observations on local politics in an international context. Her essays document the implications of French women's suffrage in 1944 and Martinique's transition from colony to overseas department in 1946 on Martinican women's political participation and socio-economic mobility. Nardal's writings pick up where Suzanne Césaire's leave off, sharpening her compatriot's focus on French colonial legacy in the Antilles, embodied by the "femmes aux quatre races et aux douzaines de sang" ("women of four races and dozens of bloodlines" Césaire, 86/40) in her call for these women to now assert their place in the changing political landscape of France and the Antilles.

Chapter 3, "Women of the Union: Éugénie Éboué, Jane Vialle and Anti-colonialism in Overseas France," functions as a bridge between the first two chapters on imagining possibilities for liberation located in the grey areas of the Antilles' changing political status, and the last two on African women's demands for independence from colonial rule. The collaboration between two French senators, Guyanese-born Éugénie Éboué and Jane Vialle from Oubangui-Chari shows that transatlantic feminist coalition building was an important strategy for decolonial feminism. Between 1946 and 1952 Éboué and Vialle were particularly invested in advancing the cause of women's rights in the French Union. Through their work in the French Resistance, Senate and international feminist organizations, they provide a clear blueprint for that elusive term "women's emancipation." They define first-class citizenship for black French women as access to education

¹⁷ See Jennifer A. Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003) and T. Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

and healthcare, and as the valorization of their cultural and intellectual contributions to the francophone world.

In Chapter 4, “Women’s Anti-colonial Resistance in Aoua Kéita’s *Femme d’Afrique: la vie d’Aoua Kéita racontée par elle-même* and Ousmane Sembène’s *Emitai* and *Les bouts de bois de dieu*,” I read the autobiography of Mali’s first female deputy Aoua Kéita alongside Ousmane Sembène’s novel *Les bouts de bois de dieu* and his film *Emitai* in order to show that rural women employed strategies of collective resistance that often placed them at the forefront of anti-colonial struggle in West Africa. Kéita’s and Sembène’s writings move us away from the realm of urban educated elites and into the world of non-literate rural women whose engagement with colonial power took the form of an even keener battle for land and the resources needed to survive. The strategies of anti-colonial resistance that emerge in this context of 1940s and 50s rural West Africa, are markedly different from those of the preceding chapters. Notably, women use physical mobility and acts of violence to counter the colonial practice of policing black women’s bodies. Their counter-violence in particular reveals that anti-colonial resistance often existed within and was shaped by the very colonial structures that women sought to resist.

Chapter 5, “Métissage and African Liberation in Andrée Blouin’s *My Country Africa: Autobiography of the Black Pasionaria* and Henri Lopès’ *Le Lys et le Flamboyant*,” weaves in the voices of an oft-ignored segment of actors: mixed-race African women. I interrogate the autobiographical and fictional interventions of Andrée Blouin, Patrice Lumumba’s Chief of Protocol and Henri Lopès, current Congolese ambassador to France. In the starkly Manichean binaries of black/white, colonizer/ colonized that characterized much of the political discourse at the height of African independence movements, *métis* Africans were highly visible and controversial figures, often located at the intersection of racial discrimination and privilege. Ideas of political in-betweenness and liminal identities are at the heart of Blouin’s and Lopès’ writings.

I examine what Lopès calls *écriture métisse*, a literary aesthetic that captures the *double appartenance* of mixed-race Africans grappling with colonialism and its legacy. Blouin's narrative reveals the particularly gendered nature of negotiating belonging and political alliances as she constantly works to situate herself vis-à-vis black and métisse women as allies, white women as employers and rivals, black men as colleagues in the Pan Africanist movement, and white men as husbands, lovers and fathers.

Eslanda Cardozo Goode Robeson is the glue that binds these interconnected stories. In her journalistic and anthropological work in the United States, Central Africa and Europe, she encountered nearly all of the women whose works are examined here. She interviewed Nardal in Paris, Éboué in the United States and Vialle in Oubangui-Chari. Indeed many of these women were directly or indirectly connected. Kéïta and Blouin were both participants in the historic 1957 congress of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain party that brought hundreds of West and Central African delegates together to discuss independence. Vialle and Blouin knew each other.¹⁸ Robeson was particularly invested in documenting the lives and experiences of black women and sought to valorize their literary, cultural and labor contributions. I dedicate my conclusion to her work, not to signal it as incidental to this narrative, but rather to bring together these multiple experiences and perspectives in order to examine their impact on contemporary discourses of black feminist Afro-diasporic politics. Viewing decolonial feminism through the lens of Robeson's work is important because it decenters French colonialism as the binding force among these women. Resisting imperialism was ultimately about finding new ways to be in the world and to relate to one another that were not determined by colonial definitions of race, gender and class. Robeson's work posits a black feminist diasporic identity that displaces subjection to French imperial rule as a way to think about what ties these women together. Her carefully

¹⁸ Ève Blouin, personal correspondence, 18 May 2014.

documented observations on the conditions of women in the French colonies and her astute comparisons with her own dual reality of privilege and disenfranchisement in the United States, shows that as imperialism spanned continents so did feminist networks and modes of resistance.

CHAPTER I

From *Tropiques* to *L'isolé soleil*: Suzanne Césaire's Politics and Poetics of Liberation

Oui, le poète possède une clairvoyance car il est le seul à relier en profondeur poésie et politique. [...] Quand je dis le poète, je ne veux pas parler de celui qui écrit des poèmes mais celui qui a une conception du vrai rapport entre poétique et politique –Édouard Glissant, “Solitaire et solidaire: Entretien avec Édouard Glissant”

Yes, the poet is clairvoyant because he/she is the only one to profoundly link poetry and politics. [...] When I say the poet I do not mean one who writes poems but rather one who understands the real relationship between poetics and politics.

The Martinican literary canon has come to be constructed as a linear evolution from Negritude to Antillanité to Créolité, a masculine genealogy often articulated in terms of “founding fathers” and “fils spirituels”.¹⁹ In “Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer”, Maryse Condé analyzes the gendered implications of this supposedly neat literary trajectory and its obsession with prescribing rules that would impose a certain—often-masculine—order on Antillean literature. She proposes a parallel genealogy of Antillean women writers whose thematic concerns differ from the preoccupations of their male compatriots. Thus Condé argues that the works of Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant, for example, manifest a “confusion between political and poetic ambitions and the belief in the importance of the community” (Condé, 157). In contrast, Antillean women writers, through their focus on themes of madness and family, “imply that before thinking of a political revolution, West Indian society needs a psychological one” (162). In short for Condé, the masculine order privileges

¹⁹ Léon Gontran Damas famously described Negritude’s co-founders as the trinity with Léopold Senghor as the father, Aimé Césaire as the son and Damas himself as the Holy Spirit (Warner 24). Nearly a decade later in their creolist manifesto, the authors of *Éloge de la Créolité* articulate their ideas in the language of intellectual filiation: “Nous sommes à jamais fils d’Aimé Césaire” (“We are forever Césaire’s sons”, Bernabe, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, 18/80).

representations of territorial politics whereas women writers eschew these concerns in favor of more pressing portrayals of racial and gendered hierarchies in Antillean family and social units.

While such corrective, female-centered genealogies are sorely needed in order to restore women's voices to narratives from which they have previously been excluded, they also raise important questions. In particular, what would it mean to analyse women's writings not as parallel or in opposition to a male-dominated canon but rather as contributions that both shape and disrupt a larger, complex and more nuanced history of literary production than the canon allows us to see? Where do we situate a writer like Suzanne Césaire, whose direct opposition to the colonial, fascist policies of Vichy in the Antilles disrupts what readers have come to expect of women's writings? Suzanne Césaire is a particularly important figure to examine in this context of women's disruptive and influential contributions to Antillean literary history. Her essays take on the project of defining the state of Martinican literature during World War II and imagining the role that artistic production would play in the struggle for freedom from Vichy occupation. Despite the obvious influence of her work on later generations of writers including Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé, Daniel Maximin, Jean Bernabé et. al., she remains an understudied figure, eclipsed by her illustrious husband Aimé Césaire.

This chapter foregrounds the political dimensions of Suzanne Césaire's writings. I situate Césaire at the centre of my analysis of French and Antillean literary theory and criticism, as a key figure in understanding the evolving cultural and political relationship between Martinique and France, and between Martinique and the rest of the Caribbean in the turbulent war period. Reading Césaire's published works alongside her rich, personal correspondence, I argue that she practises a joint politics and poetics of liberation. Césaire's preoccupation with defining Martinican identity—arguably a proto-nationalist project at this time—went hand in hand with her calls for an Antillean cultural renaissance. Her articulation of a complex, multiracial

Caribbean identity, far ahead of its time, served as an important precursor to later literary and cultural movements, including Antillanité and Créolité.

The first part of this two-pronged inquiry examines the political dimensions of Césaire's writings, particularly her vision for Martinican literature as a revolutionary force in the face of Vichy occupation in the French Antilles. Her philosophical engagement with thinkers as varied as Victor Schœlcher, Leo Frobenius and André Breton, whose work she marshalled in the service of her anti-colonial and antifascist discourse, is all the more radical when read in the context of Vichy's dangerous, anti-black, anti-woman laws at this time. In order to examine the political dimensions of Césaire's work, I draw on Glissant's theory of "poésie-politique" (Artières and Glissant, 3), that is the inextricably intertwined relationship between poetic expression and political activism. Specifically, Suzanne Césaire articulates a joint politics and poetics of liberation that imagines freedom from Vichy oppression as well as from the reductive, exoticizing representations of the Antilles in French colonial literature. The second part of this work identifies the influence of Césaire's politics and poetics of liberation on subsequent generations of Antillean writers, with a particular focus on Daniel Maximin's *L'isolé soleil*. Through his engagement with Césaire, Maximin disrupts the supposed linearity of Antillean literary history and depicts instead a cyclical genealogy of Antillean writers, philosophers and activists who engage with this joint politics and poetics of liberation.

Born in Trois-Ilets, Martinique in 1913, Suzanne Roussi joined the ranks of Antillean students in Paris in the 1930s, where she studied philosophy. She met fellow Martinican student Aimé Césaire and the two were married in 1937. In 1939 with war looming on the horizon, the young couple returned to Martinique aboard the *Bretagne*, a vessel sunk by German torpedoes on its return voyage to France. The period between 1939 and 1945 was both a time of political upheaval in France and its colonies, and a period of close collaboration between the Césaires.

Aimé and Suzanne both worked as teachers and co-founded the journal *Tropiques*, whose editorial board included other Martinican intellectuals like René Ménil, Lucie Thésée and Aristide Maugée. Suzanne Césaire's seven essays in *Tropiques* over the course of the journal's lifespan from 1941 to 1945 constitute the entire body of her published works. Consequently, she has until recently remained a relatively obscure figure in Caribbean literary studies.

Much of Césaire's legacy is marked by an uneasy combination of presence and absence. On one hand, recent studies have examined her contributions to the Negritude movement, black modernism and Caribbean literature.²⁰ Daniel Maximin's 2009 publication of Suzanne Césaire's collected works and its subsequent English translation, have also done much to increase her visibility in the last few years. On the other hand, some literary scholars have either erased Césaire completely from Antillean literary genealogy by declaring that there were no women writers before the 1950s, or partially by asserting that she disappeared after *Tropiques*, doing more dishes than writing.²¹ Despite the increasing interest in Césaire as a literary figure, there are still significant gaps in the biographical information available. For example, Jennifer Wilks and Daniel Maximin state in their respective studies that Césaire taught with her husband at the prestigious lycée Schœlcher. However, Roger Toumson's biography of Aimé Césaire as well as recent documents made available by the Conseil Général's digitized archive, the Banque Numérique des Patrimoines Martiniquais, suggest that she taught at the lycée technique Bellevue

²⁰ See for example Kara K. M. Rabbitt, "Suzanne Césaire's Significance for the Forging of a New Caribbean Literature," *The French Review* 79 (2006): 538-548, T. Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and Jennifer Wilks, *Race, Gender, and Comparative Black Modernism: Suzanne Lacascade, Marita Bonner, Suzanne Césaire, Dorothy West* (2008).

²¹ See for example Nicole Aas-Rouxparis, "Espace antillais au féminin: présence, absence," *The French Review* 70 (1997): 854-864, Kara Rabbitt, "In Search of the Missing Mother: Suzanne Césaire, Martiniquaise," *Research in African Literatures* 44 (2013): 36-54 and Ronnie Scharfman, "De grands poètes noirs: Breton rencontre les Césaire," *Nouveau monde, autres mondes: surréalisme & Amériques*, eds. Daniel Lefort, Pierre Rivas, and Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron (Paris: Lachenal & Ritter, 1995).

instead (Toumson 2002).²² Although Césaire remains an elusive and enigmatic figure, her work is unquestionably indispensable for understanding the evolution of Antillean literary thought in the twentieth century.

Given the gaps in biographical information and the paucity of primary sources, it is all the more crucial to read Césaire's work alongside historical documents that allow us to better situate her ideas. Newly uncovered archival evidence shows Césaire's political engagement during her seven-month stay in Haiti in 1944, and later in Paris on the eve of France's adoption of the law of departmentalization. Her personal correspondence over at least two decades with writers and intellectuals including André Breton, Henri Seyrig, René Etiemble, Yassu Gaucière and Janheinz Jahn attests to the fact that she remained an avid reader and critic of colonial politics even after *Tropiques*. Rather than attempt to fit Césaire into the mould of an imagined "Madonna" of Negritude (Wilks 109) or as the missing "figurative mother [of Antillean literature] embracing the potential of her brood" (Rabbitt, "In Search of the Missing Mother", 39), the new evidence considered here allows for an in-depth examination of the political dimensions of Césaire's work in the 1940s.

Tropiques, as René Ménénil would later describe it, "a été l'expression des perspectives, des espérances, de la volonté de la gauche révolutionnaire antillaise dans les années 40" ("was the expression of the perspectives, the hopes and the will of the revolutionary Antillean left in the 1940s", *Tropiques*, XXXIV). Suzanne Césaire's work certainly contributed to the journal's revolutionary tone in her practice of a joint politics and poetics of liberation. Liberation for Césaire was not an abstract concept. On the political front in the context of World War II it meant

²² The BNPM is a digitized archive made available by Martinique's Conseil Général. A recent exposition of digitized archival material celebrating the centenary of Aimé Césaire's birth, states that Suzanne Césaire taught at the lycée technique Bellevue. See Banque Numérique des Patrimoines Martiniquais, 'Césaire au fil des mois'. Web. 30 Nov. 2013. <http://www.patrimoines-martinique.org/?id=109>.

freedom from the oppressive policies of Vichy occupation in the Antilles. Thus throughout her works, both published and unpublished, Césaire remains deeply preoccupied with the political and economic status of Martinique specifically and the Caribbean as a whole. Her essays give voice to her dissident thinking and scathing attacks on fascism and racism, camouflaged as reviews of literary and ethnological studies in order to escape censorship. She also espouses a poetics, a literary aesthetic that imagines authentic Martinican art forms free from restrictive stylistic rules and stereotypical representations of the Caribbean as an idyllic tropical paradise.

For Césaire, political and artistic liberation were inextricably intertwined because politics and poetry themselves were intimately linked. In her 1942 essay “André Breton, poète” she describes surrealist poet André Breton’s clairvoyance. She cites in particular Breton’s analysis of World War I and his apparent ability in 1925 to predict the events of 1939. For Césaire, a poet is ultimately a prophet of sorts, one who is able to see patterns in world political events and articulate those patterns through poetry. We now know that Suzanne Césaire taught nineteenth-century French literature and was most likely heavily influenced by the work of Rimbaud. Her emphasis on the poet’s clairvoyance recalls Rimbaud’s *Lettres du voyant* and in particular his insistence that “il faut être voyant, se faire voyant. Le Poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens” (“one must be a seer, must make oneself a seer. The Poet makes him/herself a seer by the long, immense, rational derangement of the senses”, Rimbaud, 95). Like the surrealists with whom she also engages, Césaire embraces Rimbaud’s *dérèglement*, the rejection of restrictive rules of logic as the only way to apprehend the world. Like the surrealists, she recasts the *voyant* as an explicitly political figure, one who through this dérèglement of the senses is able to access knowledge and information not available to others, in

order to understand and perceive the political reality of the world around him/her.²³ In the epigraph to this chapter, taken from a 2003 interview on the political nature of Antillean poetry, Édouard Glissant expresses this same idea of the poet's clairvoyance and his/her ability to see and articulate the fundamental relationship between poetics and politics, in language that bears an uncanny resemblance to Césaire's.

Suzanne Césaire was herself a visionary who in her writing articulated an awareness of the complexity of Caribbean identity that was far ahead of her time. For example, as Condé and Sharpley-Whiting have argued, Césaire was more concerned with the Antilles as a space for the convergence of complex, multicultural influences, and less interested in a return to an idealized African past as proposed by the other Negritude writers.²⁴ This Caribbean focus would only come to be integrated into Antillean literary theory almost fifty years later in the works of Glissant and later Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant. Sharpley-Whiting describes Césaire's "liberatory poetics" (Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* 97) as the poet's ability to represent not just the beauty of the Martinican landscape, but also "the island's history, pain, and exploitation" (102). My focus on Césaire's joint politics and poetics of liberation builds on this definition by examining her poetic clairvoyance in the specific context of World War II in France and its vieilles colonies. The "relation poésie-politique" (Artières and Glissant, 5) present in Suzanne Césaire's writing can only be fully understood within the historical frame of Vichy political, racial and cultural repression in the Antilles.

²³ Aimé Césaire arguably exemplifies the poet-politician in the Antilles. In his *Discours sur le colonialisme*, he cites Laotréamont's *Chants de Maldoror* as an instance where the poet looks into the face of society and sees the political reality of the pitfalls of capitalism: "La vérité est que Laotréamont n'a eu qu'à regarder, les yeux dans les yeux, l'homme de fer forgé par la société capitaliste, pour appréhender le *monstre*, le monstre quotidien, son héros" ("The truth is that Laotréamont had only to look the iron man forged by capitalist society squarely in the eye to perceive the *monster*, the everyday monster, his hero", Césaire, 56/66, emphasis in original).

²⁴ See Maryse Condé, "Unheard Voice: Suzanne Césaire and the Construct of a Caribbean Identity," *Winds of Change: The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars*, eds. Adele A. S. N. Horst, and Linda Strong-Leek (New York: Peter Lang, 1998): 6 and T. Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 102.

“L’évasion sous toutes ses formes”: Vichy in the Tropics, Dissidence in *Tropiques*

The three short years of Vichy rule brought significant changes to the political landscape of the French Antilles. The collaborationist government that ruled France from 1940 to 1943 appointed colonial officials sympathetic to the draconian laws of Pétain’s National Revolution. As vieilles colonies, Martinique and Guadeloupe had a long history of political engagement and representation in France, dating as far back as the final abolition of slavery in 1848. In his extensive study *Vichy in the Tropics*, Eric Jennings describes the erosion of already limited political freedoms with the arrival of Admiral Georges Robert, Vichy’s high commissioner to the French Antilles:

France’s much vaunted assimilation, and its ‘enlightened, humanist colonialism’ under the ideals of ‘Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity,’ had been more myths than colonial realities long before 1940. Hence, their elimination in 1940 caused less of a stir in areas where they had always been dead letters. Even as official myths, though, they had provided a modicum of restraint that administrators could impose on *colons*, and an albeit modest safeguard against outright fascist and avowedly discriminatory ideologies. Both these restraints and safeguards were lifted with the advent of Vichy in the colonies. (Jennings, 19)

This new regime saw the suspension of the Conseil Général, the local governing body. The Vichy government also revoked universal male suffrage, attained in 1848, and removed black mayors from their positions, often to be replaced by white businessmen. Arbitrary detention and deportation awaited dissenters. New measures required agricultural workers to be registered by government representatives, increasing surveillance and curtailing movement. For many in the Antilles, the new political climate with its attendant racial, social and cultural oppression bore a startling resemblance to slavery (89). Any form of dissenting public expression at this time was

therefore inherently a political act. Admiral Robert's newly created Information Services mounted pro-Vichy propaganda campaigns and actively censored local radio and press. Headed by Lieutenant Bayle in Martinique, the Information Services would soon find itself in direct confrontation with Suzanne Césaire and the rest of *Tropiques*'s editorial board. Bayle would eventually ban the publication of the journal in May 1943, citing its increasingly political tone.²⁵ In a letter to French writer Yassu Gauclère written from Haiti in 1944, Suzanne Césaire describes this period as “[le] moment où l’intolérable domination de Vichy exigeait l’évasion sous toutes ses formes” (“the moment when the intolerable domination of Vichy necessitated evasion in all its forms”).²⁶ The “great camouflage” is apt both as the title of her final essay and as a description of her entire body of works. At a time when political evasion meant a steady stream of Martinican dissidents to Dominica and then on to New York to join de Gaulle's Free French Forces, Césaire employed literary evasion, that is the skilful deployment of images and manipulation of language that allowed her to publicly express her politics and poetics of liberation in *Tropiques*.

Césaire's work was as an act of dissidence. She expressed her rejection of Vichy ideology in the Antilles both in her essays and in professional settings. Her well-documented habit of skipping the mandatory morning ritual of saluting the flag and singing the *Marseillaise* at school

²⁵ In his letter to the writers of *Tropiques*, Bayle accuses the journal of departing from its initial focus on culture and literature, and describes it as “révolutionnaire, raciale et sectaire.” It is therefore odd that in his biography of Aimé Césaire, Romuald Fonkoua argues that the merits of *Tropiques* resided in the editors's decision to remain a-political: “*Tropiques* a été conçue comme une revue culturelle. Elle le restera. L’intelligence du couple Césaire, sur ce plan tout au moins, est d’avoir su garder jusqu’au bout le cap; de n’avoir pas transformer cette revue culturelle en une revue politique” (“*Tropiques* was conceived of as a cultural journal. It remained so. The intelligence of the Césaires, at least on this point, was to have kept it so until the end; to not have transformed this cultural journal into a political one”, Fonkoua, 97). Fonkoua's characterization of the journal as a-political attests to the editors' camouflaging efforts that allowed *Tropiques* to fly under Bayle's radar for as long as it did.

²⁶ Suzanne Césaire, Lettre à Yassu Gauclère. 25 July 1944. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fonds René Etiemble, NAF 28279. In a 1943 letter to André Breton, Aimé Césaire aptly captures the violence of Vichy's censorship in his pithy description of *Tropiques* as “20 fois mutilé finalement interdit” (20 times mutilated, finally banned). See Aimé Césaire, Lettre à André Breton. August 1943. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Fonds André Breton BRT C 441 - BRT C 451; BRT C 453 - BRT C 457; BRT C 1751 - BRT C 175235.

was an important act of resistance because it stood in direct opposition to Vichy's core values of obedience and cult of the leader. As a public school teacher, Césaire's job and livelihood depended directly on the government, a livelihood that was crucial for supporting the young couple and their four children at the time. While there is conflicting information on where Césaire actually taught, archival evidence reveals that her position did not offer the same benefits and job security as her husband's. In a letter written to Henri Seyrig from Haiti in 1944, Aimé Césaire explains the difficulties of obtaining healthcare for his wife given the fact that she was not a permanent civil servant (*fonctionnaire titulaire*).²⁷ Further, the application of Vichy's sexist *Travail Féminin* law in the Antilles in 1940 meant that Suzanne Césaire's job was even more precarious than her husband's. This law, which affected female teachers in particular, sought to penalize or reward women based on their conformity to Vichy's views on women's roles at work and in the home. In addition to freezing new hires, the law also awarded a stipend to women who voluntarily resigned in order to get married, and could place women on indefinite leave without pay (Jennings 98). Skipping the *Marseillaise* therefore was not merely symbolic. It was a political act that could lead to economic deprivation and even incarceration in this period. Ultimately, however, Césaire's most vocal refusal of racism and fascism would come in the pages of *Tropiques* where she takes up two key problems in Martinique: assimilation and *doudouisme*. To address these, she turns to history, literary criticism and ethnology, all the while remaining keenly attentive to the geography of the Caribbean archipelago.

“Oser se connaître soi-même”*: Liberating Antillean Poetry from Assimilation and *Doudouisme

Throughout her contributions to *Tropiques* Césaire remained deeply concerned with the problem of assimilation in Martinique, the result of centuries-old racist colonial policies. In

²⁷ Aimé Césaire, Lettre à Henri Seyrig. 16 July 1944. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Henri Seyrig, lettres reçues, NAF 19792-19793.

“Malaise d’une civilisation”, she cites a number of eighteenth-century ordinances that sought to stifle upward class mobility for blacks and *gens de couleur* by regulating dress and access to non-agricultural work. Césaire argues that by actively barring slaves’ entry into the middle and upper classes, the colonial status quo ultimately made freedom synonymous with assimilation into these classes: “On comprendra dès lors que le but essentiel pour l’homme de couleur soit devenu l’assimilation. Et qu’avec une force redoutable s’opère en son esprit la désastreuse confusion: *libération égale assimilation*” (“One will understand that from that point forward the fundamental goal of the colored man became assimilation. And with overwhelming force, a disastrous confusion takes place in his mind: *liberation means assimilation*”, Césaire, 73/31, emphasis in original). Equating freedom with assimilation results in acute alienation particularly among middle-class Martinicans, a profound schism in the “moi collectif du peuple martiniquais” (“the collective self of the Martinican people, 73/32). In art, this alienation manifests itself in the dearth of poetry that truly captures the collective consciousness of Martinicans. Whereas folklore functions as a repository of rich images that convey both the beauty and suffering present in Martinique, literature produced by the bourgeoisie remains shackled to rigid French rules of style.

For Césaire, the first step to repairing this schism is to fully understand and embrace Martinican cultural identity. To this end, she applies the work of German ethnologist Leo Frobenius to her analysis of contemporaneous Martinican society. In her first essay for *Tropiques*, “Léo Frobenius et le problème des civilisations” (Léo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilizations”), Césaire explains at length Frobenius’ concept of the Païdeuma. Civilization, Césaire writes, is “une entité métaphysique” (“a metaphysical entity”, 31/4), an organism subject to the laws of the natural world. However, rather than progressing in a linear fashion “depuis la barbarie primitive jusqu’à la haute culture moderne” (“from primitive barbarism to modern high culture”, 7/36), civilizations transform and mutate, moved by the Païdeuma—that vital, creative

force—in multiple directions, “de ‘saisissements’ en ‘saisissements’” (“from one shock to the next”, 36/7). The appeal of Frobenius’ work for black students in France in the 1930s, including the Césaires, Senghor and Damas, is understandable. Rejecting the idea of a linear progress of civilization opened the way for a subsequent rejection of the traditionally held notion of black racial and cultural inferiority and European superiority. In his preface to an anthology of Frobenius’s work, Senghor recognizes the potential for liberation that comes from applying Frobenian thought to the theorizing of black identity and its relationship to colonial power: “Voilà des décades que je le dis, l’indépendance de l’esprit est une condition *sine qua non* de toutes les autres indépendances. Et celle-là, c’est Leo Frobenius qui nous a aidés à la conquérir” (“I have been saying for decades that independence of the mind is a *sine qua non* for all other forms of independence. It was Frobenius who helped us to conquer this independence.” Senghor, XIII). Frobenius’s departure from the stigmatization of so-called primitive cultures found in much of early twentieth-century ethnography opened the way for further explorations of the contributions of African civilizations to world history.

Frobenian theory was equally appealing to Suzanne Césaire because it provided a possibility for the “indépendance de l’esprit” to which Senghor refers, true liberation that counters the French colonial myth of assimilation as freedom. Césaire reveals in her personal correspondence that she read Frobenius’s *Histoire de la civilisation africaine* as Aimé wrote *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* and like her husband, sought to apply Frobenian thought to the socio-cultural realities of 1940s Martinique.²⁸ Consequently, in “Malaise d’une civilisation” she uses Frobenius to answer the central question: “Qu’est-ce que le Martiniquais fondamentalement, intimement, inaltérablement?” (“What is the Martinican fundamentally, intimately, unilaterally?” Césaire, 70/29). That Césaire poses this question at all is striking because her goal here is to

²⁸ Suzanne Césaire, Lettre à Yassu Gauclère.

define the Martinican independently of the French or the European. Such a proto-nationalist project of collective self-definition would become controversial after departmentalization, a few short years after the publication of this essay.²⁹ Césaire goes on to define the Martinican as an “homme-plante” (“a plant human”, 70), described as one who does not seek to dominate nature but rather allows himself to be possessed, moved along by the force of life. The *homme-plante* is present also in Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*: “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/mais ils s’abandonnent, saisi, à l’essence de toute chose/ignorants des surfaces mais saisis par le mouvement de toute chose/insoucieux de dompter, mais jouant le jeu du monde” (“Eia for those who have never invented anything/for those who have never explored anything/for those who have never subdued anything/those who open themselves up, enraptured, to the essence of all things/ignorant of surfaces but enraptured by the movement of all things/ indifferent to subduing but playing the game of the world” (Césaire, *Cahier*, 114/115). For Suzanne Césaire, the Martinican is fundamentally an homme-plante and this true nature, despite the effects of assimilation, remains present in contemporaneous society through architecture, folklore and traditional rites of passage.

Marie-Agnès Sourieau and Jennifer Wilks have each pointed out the troubling element of cultural essentialism present in Césaire’s use of Frobenian theory and her discussion of the “true nature” and “essence” of Martinican culture (Sourieau 71, Wilks, 119-121). Césaire’s over-

²⁹ In his essay “Antillais et Africains” Fanon argues that this need to define the Martinican as different from the European and to valorize this difference, was a direct result of the events of the war. He reads Vichy occupation as a symbolic killing of the father—that is of France as patrie. This defeat, coupled with the overt racism of Vichy’s representatives on the island, paved the way for Negritude as an assertion of Martinican identity independent of this new, undesirable (Vichy) France. Fanon stresses that Aimé Césaire’s Negritude gave Antilleans the vocabulary they needed to undertake this project of self-definition and valorization. Like many other intellectuals, Fanon does not mention Suzanne Césaire. It is however clear that her probing questions on Martinican identity fit directly into this collective reflection on race, power and identity during World War II. Suzanne, like Aimé, provided her Martinican readers with the conceptual tools to imagine and articulate a uniquely Antillean identity. See Frantz Fanon, *Œuvres* (Paris: Découverte, 2011): 704-712.

reliance on Frobenius' ethnography in her early works results in some of the conceptual limitations of essentialism, in particular "the reduction of [Martinican cultural] heritage to innate, immutable qualities" (Wilks 120). It also renders her early works Manichean in outlook, reducing cultures and civilizations to stark binaries: Ethiopian/Hamitic, homme-plante/homme-animal. The limitations of Frobenian theory most likely became clear to Césaire over time, as evidenced by the radical theoretical shift in her final essay "Le grand camouflage", a work to which I will return in later discussions of Césaire's vision for a Pan-Caribbean identity.

The limitations of Suzanne Césaire's chosen theoretical framework however, do not diminish the importance of her ultimate goal to draw her Martinican readership into a project of collective self-identification. The Martinican as homme-plante rejects the impulse to conquer and dominate—the violent, destructive impulse that fuels the war machine of the 1940s ("les puissantes machines de guerre que le monde moderne met à notre disposition," Césaire, 81). If she turns to Frobenius in the hopes of articulating a Martinican cultural identity, it is because for Césaire the realities of World War II necessitate that Martinique define itself and take up its place in the context of global political events: "Il est maintenant urgent d'oser se connaître soi-même, d'oser s'avouer ce qu'on est, d'oser se demander ce qu'on veut être. Ici aussi, des hommes naissent, vivent et meurent. Ici aussi, se joue le drame entier" ("It is now vital to dare to know oneself, to dare to confess to oneself what one is, to dare to ask oneself what one wants to be. Here, also, people are born, live, and die. Here also, the entire drama is played out", Césaire, 40/10). Césaire emphasizes Martinican agency in this project of self-definition with the use of both the reflexive pronoun "se" and the self-referential "soi-même". Camouflaged by the seemingly benign summary of Frobenius's ethnographic works is a call to autonomous therefore dissident thinking, a call that flies in the face of Pétain's emphasis on unquestioning obedience. Pétain issued his call for obedience in his first radio broadcast specifically addressed to the

French colonies on 19 September 1940. He reiterated his position in a 19 November 1942 broadcast: “Je reste votre guide. Vous n’avez qu’un seul devoir: obéir. Vous n’avez qu’un seul gouvernement: celui à qui j’ai donné le pouvoir de gouverner. Vous n’avez qu’une patrie, que j’incarne: La France” (“I remain your guide. You have only one duty: to obey. You have only one government: that which I have given the power to govern. You have only one fatherland, that which I embody: France”).³⁰ In Martinique, Admiral Robert’s obsession with surveillance, censorship and suppressing mobility meant that this was a dangerous time for Martinicans to embark on a project of self-definition. Embedded therefore in Césaire’s urgent call is both a poetics of liberation—to free Martinique’s cultural and artistic identity from the limitations of assimilation, and a politics of liberation—to recognize and acknowledge that Martinique too, despite its small size and seeming global insignificance, was an arena in which fascism and freedom were in direct conflict.

Césaire realizes that the kind of autonomous thinking she is calling for requires courage and therefore stresses through repetition the need to be daring (“oser”). Her private letters provide a textual space in which she could engage more explicitly with the political nature of her project—the radical conceptual shift from liberation *by* assimilation to liberation *from* assimilation—than the pages of *Tropiques* would allow. She dares to imagine, in a letter written from Haiti in July 1944, that the generative “feu du cosmos” would recreate viable art forms that permeate all aspects of Antillean culture:

J’ai été assez folle pour rêver d’un retour ou d’une récréation aux Antilles d’un style de vie moderne où se jouerait cette unité de l’homme-non-séparé. Je voulais trouver des (non pas faire revivre une tradition comme dans ‘le Serpent à plumes’, mais créer, susciter) formes d’art viable, des objets, des vêtements [...]. Mais

³⁰ “Le Maréchal de France, chef de l’Etat s’est adressé aux Français” *Le Petit Marseillais* 20 Nov. 1942: 1.

comme je ne veux pas parler de politique je vous renvoie à ce texte de Schœlcher [...] sur le destin des Antilles. Avec ce rêve et d'autres revendications plus précis nous avons essayé de bâtir ce que Mênil appelle le mythe de l'antillais nouveau.³¹

I was mad enough to dream of a return or a recreation in the Antilles of a modern way of life in which this unity of the non-separated-man would play out. I wanted to find (not to revive a tradition as in 'Le serpent à plumes', but to create, spark) viable forms of art, objects, clothing [...]. But since I do not want to talk about politics I will refer you to Schœlcher's writing [...] on the destiny of the Antilles. With this dream and other more specific demands we have tried to build what Mênil calls the myth of the new Antillean.

Although Césaire writes specifically for and about Martinicans in *Tropiques*—a move for which she is criticized by some of the Guadeloupean characters in Daniel Maximin's novel *L'isolé soleil*—she expresses here a vision for the Antilles as a whole. This shift in focus occurs during her time in Haiti, and accounts for the drastic change in tone and expansion in outlook that will characterize her final essay "Le grand camouflage" on her return from Haiti. In this letter Césaire moves carefully and systematically through her proposal for an alternative to assimilation. First she seeks a unification of the Antillean being with the Antillean way of life. Rather than a return to the cultural artifacts and traditions of a real or imagined African past as most Negritude writers argued for, Césaire looks forward to a modern way of life that takes into account all of the elements that make up Antillean identity. She goes on to express this project as an explicitly political one, in line with French abolitionist Victor Schœlcher's project for the Antilles. Césaire is most likely evoking here Schœlcher's unrealized vision of abolition "accompanied by full citizenship, socioeconomic equality, and proper integration into the republic" (Wilder, 111).

³¹ Suzanne Césaire, Lettre à Yassu Gauclère.

Césaire's Antillean renaissance therefore comprises both social and political transformation. While her specific political demands (“ce rêve et d'autres revendications”) are not fully fleshed out in the remainder of the letter, her rejection of assimilation and her later support for departmentalization suggest that her political vision for the Antilles closely mirrored her husband's.

For Césaire, the ability to capture the collective Martinican consciousness and experience is not only threatened by assimilationist bourgeois literature, but also by French colonial representations of Martinique. In “Misère d'une poésie”, she takes to task Parnassian poets like John-Antoine Nau and Leconte de Lisle who were firmly entrenched in the French literary academy at the turn of the century. Nau won the first Prix Goncourt in 1903 and Lisle succeeded Victor Hugo in the Académie française in 1886. In her scathing essay, Césaire cites at length extracts of their poems in which they portray the Antilles as an idyllic island paradise and calls into question the legitimacy of such works that claim to capture “l'âme nègre” (“the Black soul”, Césaire, 64/26). She then declares the death of this literary genre, which she describes as “littérature de hamac”, “tourisme littéraire”, “guide bleu” and “littérature doudou” (“hammock literature”, “tourist literature” and “sappy, sentimental, folkloric literature”, 65-66/26-27). As always, Césaire's choice of words is painstakingly deliberate. These descriptions do not simply dismiss *doudouisme*—that is the objectification and exoticization of France's island colonies through folkloric literary representations—as inadequate in truly representing the realities of Martinican society. They also reveal the danger inherent in these reductive images of paradise, the danger of glossing over the centuries-long history of French economic exploitation and racial discrimination in Martinique. Césaire extensively evokes the tourism industry and its complicity in this exploitation, in order to make her readers aware that this kind of poetry is in reality a literary manifestation of the colonizer's gaze.

Césaire also symbolically destroys the gaze by declaring the death of doudouisme. She negates its power by declaring it a non-gaze: “Il [the poet] passe à côté. Il regarde. Mais il n’a pas ‘vu’” (“He [the poet] misses the point. He looks. But he has not ‘seen’”, 64/26). Her formulation “il n’a pas vu” is a powerful gesture of negation if we consider the fact that Césaire was significantly influenced by the Rimbaudian literary tradition that equated the poet with a voyant. When Césaire says therefore that these acclaimed French poets are incapable of really seeing Martinique, of perceiving the connections between the island’s geography, history and contemporary political realities, she in one short sentence (“il n’a pas vu”) divests them of both the title poet and the power of the white colonial male gaze. Her now famous closing call “La poésie martiniquaise sera cannibale ou ne sera pas”, (“Martinican poetry will be cannibal or it will not be”, 66/27) encapsulates her poetics of liberation. It identifies the symbolic absorption and digestion of French literary forms as a necessary step in the generation of a new, distinct Martinican literature. Césaire opens up a space of possibility for Martinican literature to go beyond the limitations of doudouisme and seeks to liberate the island space from the restrictions of artistic mimicry and the objectification enacted by the colonial gaze.

“Corde raide de notre espoir”: Surrealism and Revolution in the Antilles

For Suzanne Césaire, surrealism was the ultimate tool of resistance that would allow both poetic and political liberation in Martinique. The Césaires’ encounter with André Breton in Martinique in 1941 was a source of poetic and political inspiration for them. The Césaires reveal the nature of Breton’s influence in a letter they wrote jointly to André and his wife in 1941: “Nous considérons cette merveilleuse rencontre avec vous comme un évènement capital dans notre vie. Pendant ces trois mois de liberté nous avons vécu, en profondeur, l’œuvre d’André” (We consider this marvelous encounter with you as a capital event in our life. During these three

months of liberty we lived profoundly André's work").³² In the midst of Vichy occupation, censorship and repression, Breton's work allowed the Césaires to imagine what political and aesthetic liberation would look like. The third issue of *Tropiques* published that same year, was organized around Suzanne Césaire's essay "André Breton, poète..." Selected poems by Breton including "La Mort Rose" and "Vigilance" served as poetic illustrations of Suzanne's essay.³³ She argues in this work that Breton's surrealism is concerned not just with art but with all aspects of human existence: "André Breton—en même temps que l'initiateur de la plus extraordinaire révolution qui soit, puisqu'aussi bien elle engage plus que l'art, notre vie tout entière" ("[André Breton] is the originator of the most extraordinary revolution that ever was, since it also involves not just art, but our life in all its entirety", 61/23). For Suzanne Césaire, surrealism was not solely a literary aesthetic. It was also a politically engaged movement that condemned imperialism worldwide.³⁴ She was a particularly avid reader of *VVV*, the surrealist journal edited by Breton and other French writers in exile in New York. Aimé Césaire and Wifredo Lam contributed poems and illustrations respectively to each issue. The journal, whose short lifespan consisted of only four issues between 1942 and 1944, stated as one of its goals victory "over all that is opposed to the emancipation of the spirit, of which the first indispensable condition is the liberation of man" (*VVV*, inside cover).

Although Suzanne Césaire did not write for the journal, she found the essays and poetry of Breton, Mabille, Caillois and Etiemble in *VVV* to be particularly perspicacious. These four writers contributed diverse reflections on surrealism as creative resistance, as an artistic means of

³² Suzanne wrote the bulk of the letter and Aimé chimed in towards the end. There are a number of these jointly written letters in the archives. Their pages are covered in two distinct handwritings and attest to the close collaboration between the Césaires. See Aimé et Suzanne Césaire, Lettre à M. et Mme Breton. 21 Oct. 1941. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Fonds André Breton BRT C 441 - BRT C 451 ; BRT C 453 - BRT C 457 ; BRT C 1751 - BRT C 175235.

³³ Aimé et Suzanne Césaire, Lettre à M. et Mme Breton.

³⁴ In the movement's first manifesto, Breton cites the surrealists' public protest of the Moroccan war in 1925 as a deciding moment in the cohesion of surrealism as not only an artistic but also a social and political movement.

facilitating and reviving social, cultural and political freedom in a period of historical crisis. In his essay “Situation du surréalisme entre les deux guerres” (“Situation of Surrealism Between the Two Wars”) published in 1943 in the joint 2nd and 3rd issues of *VVV*, Breton expresses the explicitly political nature of surrealism: “D’une guerre à l’autre, on peut dire que c’est la quête passionnée de la liberté qui a été constamment le mobile de l’action surréaliste” (“From one war to the other, one may say that it is the impassioned quest for liberty that has constantly motivated surrealist action”, *VVV*, 49). For Breton, liberation must occur on all fronts. He describes surrealism’s rejection both of Goebbels’s and Pétain’s politics, and of the strict stylistic and linguistic rules that had hitherto governed French literary production. Suzanne Césaire sees in this articulation of surrealism the possibility for joint political and artistic liberation in the Antilles also. Returning to her Rimbaldian roots, she proposes designating the poésie-politique of these writers in exile a “communion des voyants” (“communion of seers”).³⁵

In the Caribbean too, proponents of surrealism were deeply implicated in revolutionary political movements. Beyond the well-documented artistic influence of Breton’s visit to Martinique en route to New York in 1941, surrealist thought also directly influenced the events of the January 1946 revolution in Haiti, barely a year after the departure of the Césaires from the island. Testimonials from the leaders of the 5-day revolution that would come to be known as *Les Cinq Glorieuses*, affirm that while the causes of the revolution were rooted in long-term dissatisfaction with dictatorship and the American occupation of the island, André Breton’s provocative speeches, delivered during his two-month visit to Haiti, directly triggered the events of the movement that toppled President Lescot.³⁶ The zealously pro-American Elie Lescot

³⁵ Suzanne Césaire, Lettre à Yassu Gauclère.

³⁶ For first-hand accounts and original documents from *Les Cinq Glorieuses*, see Gérald Bloncourt and Michael Löwy, *Messagers de la tempête: André Breton et la révolution de janvier 1946 en Haïti*, (Pantin: Temps des cerises, 2007).

became president of Haiti in 1941 under suspicious and decidedly undemocratic conditions. Appointed by a specially selected parliament on the departure of his predecessor President Vincent, Lescot took advantage of the political climate of World War II to suspend the constitution, extend his mandate and establish handpicked military tribunals. It was into this atmosphere of suspended political rights that André Breton arrived in Haiti in 1945 at the invitation of Pierre Mabile, then French cultural attaché in Haiti. Breton delivered the first of his eight speeches at the Rex Hotel to a crowd of seven hundred people, under the watchful eyes of the military. Notable audience members on that day included Elie Lescot and his cabinet, as well as a number of armed Haitian students with bullets meant for the president. Two in particular would later become central figures on the Haitian literary and political scene: René Depestre and Jacques Stephen Alexis.

Although they aborted the assassination attempt that day, Depestre, Alexis and Haitian painter and photographer Gerald Bloncourt heard in Breton's words a call to mobilize and end the Lescot dictatorship. Breton made a particular impression on his listeners by grounding his speech in Haitian political history and closing with a strategically chosen quote from Jacques Roumain's novel *Les gouverneurs de la rosée*, a selection worth quoting here in its entirety for its powerful evocation of the Haitian proletariat as the ultimate catalysts of political change and social justice:

Nous sommes pauvres, nous sommes malheureux, c'est vrai, nous sommes misérable; c'est vrai. Mais sais-tu pourquoi, frère, à cause de notre ignorance: nous ne savons pas encore que nous sommes une force, une seule force; tous les habitants, tous les nègres des plaines et des mornes réunis. Un jour, quand nous aurons compris cette vérité, nous nous lèverons d'un point à l'autre du pays et nous ferons l'assemblée générale des gouverneurs de la rosée, le grand coumbite

des travailleurs de la terre pour défricher la misère et planter la nouvelle vie. (qtd. Bloncourt and Löwy, 28)

We are poor, we are unhappy, it is true, we are destitute; it is true. But do you know why, brother, it is because of our ignorance: we do not yet know that we are a force, a single force, all the inhabitants, all the blacks of the plains and the *mornes* united. One day, when we have understood this truth, we will rise up from one end of the country to the other and we will form the general assembly of the masters of the dew, the great *coubite* of those who work the land to weed out this misery and begin a new life.

By channelling Roumain, whose death barely a year prior had deeply affected Haitians, Breton establishes a strong link between national literature and the national liberation struggle. Despite Elie Lescot's obvious displeasure, Depestre and his collaborators re-printed Breton's speech in a special number of their journal *La Ruche: Organe de la jeune génération*, dedicated to André Breton. Jacques Stephen Alexis, writing under the pseudonym Jacques la colère, contributed the incendiary "Lettre aux hommes vieux" in which he condemns the moral and political corruption of the elites and announces a new era, characterized by awareness and lucidity of the masses. Alexis closes his letter with the ominous postscript to the ruling class: "P.S. à bientôt" ("P.S. see you soon", 171). Lescot's mounting displeasure with the surrealist-inspired student editors of *La Ruche*, culminated in his order for police to seize all copies of the journal immediately on its publication.

On 2 January 1946, the editors Depestre and Théodore Baker were arrested and imprisoned. Striking students took to the streets of Port-au-Prince to demand their release. In the coming days, their numbers increased to include workers, farmers, and other members of the Haitian public demanding an end to Lescot's dictatorial regime. In the days following Breton's

speech, the island was immobilized by general strikes and protests. On 11 January protesters imprisoned Lescot in the presidential palace. His tenure as president effectively over, he was whisked off into exile aboard a US military plane.

For Depestre, Alexis and the other contributors to *La Ruche*, surrealism was primarily a tool for political liberation. As they led protesters through the streets of Port-au-Prince during *Les Cinq Glorieuses*, they chanted “À bas Lescot” and “Vive les quatre libertés” (“Down with Lescot” and “Long live the four liberties”, 103-104). They reclaimed the four liberties suppressed by Lescot’s dictatorship: freedom of association, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and freedom to unionize. Understanding surrealism as a trigger for the 1946 revolution in Haiti—a revolution that expressed both a poetics and politics of liberation—is important for understanding Suzanne Césaire’s radical deployment of surrealism as a revolutionary tool in Admiral Robert’s Martinique. Depestre, in the *La Ruche* editorial that would land him in jail, echoes Césaire’s affirmation of surrealism as both literary aesthetic and political awareness when he affirms that “André Breton a conquis nos cœurs, et il a rallié nos sympathies pour le surréalisme qui est non seulement une entreprise de libération des richesses psychiques du cerveau humain, mais aussi un mouvement anti-fasciste qui n’a jamais manqué d’affirmer sa foi dans les aspirations légitimes de l’homme vers la justice sociale et la liberté” (“André Breton conquered our hearts, and he rallied our sympathies for surrealism which is not only about the liberation of the psychic riches of the human brain, but is also an anti-fascist movement that has never failed to affirm its faith in man’s legitimate aspirations of social justice and liberty”, qtd. Bloncourt and Löwy, 101). Surrealism provided a tool for imagining and articulating resistance to Lescot’s dictatorship in Haiti and Vichy’s oppression in Martinique.

If Breton influenced student activists in Haiti in the 1940s, the Césaires served as important precursors to the movement. In separate testimonies, the student leaders of *Les Cinq*

Glorieuses affirm that Aimé Césaire’s speeches and conferences during his nine-month stay in Haiti introduced them to surrealist thought and paved the way for Breton’s visit. Although some scholars have explored the influence of Haiti on Aimé Césaire’s works of theatre, no scholarship exists on Suzanne Césaire’s time on the island. Ironically, Romuald Fonkoua, who dedicates a few sentences of his biography of Aimé Césaire to Suzanne’s stay in Haiti, enacts the ultimate elision of her work. Fonkoua describes Suzanne’s admiration of the Haitian landscape while Aimé undertook more “professional activities” giving conferences and teaching the courses that would introduce students to surrealist thought (Fonkoua, 93). Certainly, precious little information remains on Suzanne’s time in Haiti. However, based on her letters and the significant changes in her writing style and scope after Haiti, Aimé’s succinct description of his stay may very well apply to Suzanne also. In the typical, telegram style phrases that characterize most of his letters, Aimé confessed to Breton in a letter from the Hotel Excelsior in Port-au-Prince: “Très net sentiment que ma vie est à un tournant décisive” (“Very clear feeling that my life is at a decisive turning point”).³⁷ Archival sources reveal that like Aimé, Suzanne too gave lectures on French literature to students, journalists and senators.³⁸ Like Aimé, she too was influenced by the history of black revolutionary struggle in Haiti as she reflected on liberation in the Americas. Suzanne Césaire’s only published work after Haiti, “Le grand camouflage” shows the impact that Haiti had on her thinking and writing because it reveals an expanded focus from her initial work centered on Martinique to a larger vision of the Caribbean.

“Trop beau pour y voir”: The Great Camouflage of the Caribbean Archipelago

Suzanne Césaire’s is at her most poetic and arguably at her most political in her final essay for *Tropiques* “Le grand camouflage”. Her voice finds a new lyricism that is largely absent

³⁷ Aimé Césaire, Lettre à André Breton, 26 May 1944. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Fonds André Breton BRT C 441 - BRT C 451 ; BRT C 453 - BRT C 457 ; BRT C 1751 - BRT C 175235.

³⁸ Suzanne Césaire, Lettre à Yassu Gauclère.

from the manifesto style of her previous essays. “Le grand camouflage” appeared in the final issue of *Tropiques* in 1945, two years after the fall of Vichy and the arrest of Admiral Robert. In this context, Césaire shifts her attention from the dual intellectual and political relationship between colony and metropole in wartime. She focuses instead on the geography of the Caribbean space and race relations in Martinique in terms that contain the germ of what Michelle Stephens would later articulate as an archipelagic approach to Caribbean Studies. For Stephens, this approach “would begin to understand the ways the unit of the ‘island,’ as a political and discursive construct, is actually not a part of an archipelago but rather its very antithesis. It is the archipelago, as opposed to the island, that offers a vision of bridged spaces rather than closed territorial boundaries” (Stephens, 11). Suzanne Césaire in “Le grand camouflage” reads the Caribbean as interconnected space, rather than as a series of discrete islands. Blurring both spatial and temporal boundaries, her authorial voice situates itself simultaneously in Haiti, Martinique and Puerto Rico, finding that each space is both “d’une intolérable beauté” (“unbearably beautiful”, Césaire, 87/41) and yet filled with “les formes dégradantes du salariat moderne” (“the degrading forms of the modern wage-system”, 88/42). The value of this spatiotemporal focus on the Caribbean archipelago is that it allows Césaire to confront the seeming paradox of the Caribbean as a space of both indescribable beauty and economic exploitation.

“Le grand camouflage” is best characterized in Césaire’s own words as “le grand jeu de cache-cache” (“the great game of hide-and-seek”, 94/46), a text that almost playfully weaves between veiling and revealing the geography, history and contemporary social reality of race relations in the Antilles. Césaire deftly juggles the images of lucidity and what Keith Walker, in his introduction to the English translation of her collected works, describes as “the wilful blindness [...] the work it takes not to see. As her mind spins around the Caribbean and back and forth through history, she sees more than one great camouflage” (Césaire, *The Great*

Camouflage, ix). If the external gaze enacts a form of colonial power, then camouflage, skilfully deployed, may well function as a strategy to resist this gaze. Throughout this essay, the Caribbean uses its blinding beauty as camouflage: “Il y a sous mes yeux la jolie place de Pétionville, plantée de pins et d'hibiscus. Il y a mon île, la Martinique et son frais collier de nuages soufflés par la Pelée” (“There is before my eyes, the pretty square in Pétionville, planted with pines and hibiscus. There is my island, Martinique, and its fresh necklace of clouds buffeted by Mount Pélé”, Césaire, 84/39). The beauty of the tropical landscape intoxicates poets (“monte à la tête des poètes qui passent”, 93) and prevents them from seeing clearly the economic depredation and racial malaise in the Caribbean. Rather than be a passive victim of reductive doudouiste representations and “wilful amnesia” (Walker, ix), the Caribbean actively shields its most inner, painful realities from outside scrutiny. The outcome may appear the same, that is both doudouisme and camouflage both present the Caribbean as idyllic tropical paradise. The crucial difference is one of agency and power over representation. Césaire reveals the potential for camouflage to function as resistance in her poignant closing lines: “Si mes Antilles sont si belles, c’est qu’alors le grand jeu de cache-cache a réussi, c’est qu’il fait certes trop beau, ce jour-là, pour y voir” (“If my Antilles are so beautiful, it is because the great game of hide-and-seek has succeeded, it is then because, on that day, the weather is most certainly too blindingly bright and beautiful to see clearly therein”, Césaire, 94/46).

Despite the camouflage, there are many in the Caribbean itself who are not able to turn a blind eye to racial inequality and economic disparity, both legacies of the Caribbean’s colonial history. In the case of Martinique, French civil servants in particular are confronted with the ugly image of their colonial presence: “Quand ils se penchent sur le miroir maléfique de la Caraïbe, ils y voient une image délirante d'eux-mêmes” (“When they lean over the malefic mirror of the Caribbean, they see therein the delirious reflection of themselves”, 90/43). Césaire's formulation

here depicts a reversal of the gaze. Europe looks through the lens of colonial exploitation and sees itself in the eyes of the Antillean looking back, a frightening reflection because it evokes the suppressed images of racial mixing which in turn evoke the violence of rape during slavery. Her language of alienation and misrecognition anticipates much of Fanon's and Memmi's writing on the self-perception of the colonized through the eyes of the colonizer. Here Césaire reverses the discourse on the gaze by turning it onto the white French civil servant. The *fonctionnaires métropolitains* sent to govern the Antilles, do not dare recognize the humanity of the Antillean for fear of having to then recognize her/him as "heir": "Peut-être voudraient-ils ne pas répondre à l'héritier antillais qui crie et ne crie pas 'mon père'" ("Perhaps they would not like to respond to the Antillean heir who shouts, but does not shout out "my father", 90/43). Recognition in this case is directly linked to political power. The fonctionnaire needs this wilful blindness in order to justify the colonial status quo that places him/her in a position of power in the Antilles. Césaire is also acutely aware of the intricate layers of racial inequality and colonial exploitation in the Antilles. In addition to French imperial presence, the economic dominance of *békés* presents another facet of the hidden ugliness of the Antilles.³⁹ She declares unequivocally that Martinique must rid itself of béké exploitation: "Qui jettera au rancart, avec le matériel désuet de leurs usines, ces quelques milliers de sous-industriels et d'épiciers, cette caste de faux colons responsables de la déchéance humaine des Antilles?" ("There the system will dump, along with the outmoded material from their factories, these few thousands of second-rate manufacturers and grocers, this caste of would-be colonizers responsible for the human deprivation of the Antilles", 89/42). She is particularly concerned about the miserable working and living conditions of the Antilleans whose bodies provide fodder for the béké economic machine (89).

³⁹ The term *béké* refers to the white creole planter class in the French Antilles.

To the problem of colonial exploitation in the Antilles, Césaire posits total lucidity (“lucidité totale”, 87) as a means of resistance. Throughout her work she argues for a three-pronged process: to remove the blinders of assimilation and *doudouisme*, to see the painful reality of the Antilles and to have the courage to confront this reality. Césaire issues another imperative in “Le grand camouflage” that reminds readers of the urgency of her wartime writings: “Il faut oser montrer, sur le visage de la France, éclairé de l’implacable lumière des événements, la tache antillaise, puisqu’aussi bien, nombre d’entre les Français semblent déterminés à n’y tolérer aucune ombre” (“Since many among the French seem determined to tolerate not even the slightest shadow being cast upon that visage, one must dare show, on the face of France, illuminated with the implacable light of events, the Antillean stain”, 88/42). The verb “oser” reappears in Césaire’s final essay because although the war is over, the Caribbean continues to be faced with a monumental challenge: to dare to name and grapple with the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination even in the face of France’s whitewashing of history. Césaire is aware that total lucidity is no easy task. As she writes from Haiti, “Je suis, je veux être tout à fait lucide. Je crois pouvoir affirmer qu’il n’y a pas trace chez moi de *bovarysme* ni d’aucune autre espèce de rêverie. Je ne rêve pas d’un mythe nouveau” (“I am, I want to be completely lucid. I believe I can affirm that I have no trace of *bovarysme* or any other form of reverie. I do not dream of a new myth”).⁴⁰ Césaire rejects the gendered charges of escapist daydreaming that Gustave Flaubert attributes to his heroine of Madame Bovary. Daring to dream meant daring to create, daring to bring into being an imagined Martinican civilization through art, culture and politics. Suzanne Césaire remained a lucid observer of colonial politics in the Caribbean even after the *Tropiques* venture had come to an end.

⁴⁰ Suzanne Césaire, *Lettre à Yassu Gauclère*, emphasis in original.

Her call for lucidity remains as urgent now as it was at the end of World War II. As recently as 2009, during the 44-day long strike that crippled the tourist industry in Martinique and Guadeloupe, workers took to the streets to protest the enduring legacy of the centuries of economic exploitation by *békés* that Césaire condemns in “Le grand camouflage”. In the chants of “Matinik se ta nou, Matinik se pa ta yo” we find that rare public revelation of the Antillean malaise that Césaire describes.⁴¹ We hear her remind us: “Mon regard par-delà ces formes et ces couleurs parfaites, surprend, sur le très beau visage antillais, ses tourments intérieurs” (“My gaze, over and beyond these shapes and these perfect colors, catches, upon the very beautiful Antillean face, its inner torments”, Césaire, 87/41). In the bitter complaints of tourists for whom the strikes were but an ill-timed inconvenience, we are reminded too that the great camouflage is still in place, that the Caribbean is still, for some, too beautiful to see clearly (94).

“La libération sera cannibale”: Suzanne Césaire’s Legacy in Daniel Maximin’s *L’isolé soleil*

Aussi, nombreux sont les intellectuels antillais qui ont reçu un héritage de concepts philosophiques, de thèmes idéologiques, de méthodes de travail dont ils ignorent la provenance exacte, le sens interne, et les limites précises. Et c’est obscurément et confusément qu’ils reprennent à leur compte tel thème mythologique, tel problème culturel, telle pratique de recherche fonctionnant dans *Tropiques* et qui agissent dans l’actuelle mentalité antillaise à la façon d’un *refoulé de la pensée*. –René Ménil, *Tropiques*, emphasis in original.

There are many Antillean intellectuals who have inherited philosophical concepts, ideological themes and methodologies, but who do not know the exact origins of this inheritance, the internal sense, the precise limits. And so obscurely and confusedly they reproduce as their own, this mythological theme, that cultural problem, that research practice which functioned in *Tropiques* and

⁴¹ Striking workers chanted “Martinique is ours, Martinique is not theirs” in the streets. This refrain establishes contemporary economic exploitation in the Antilles as a result of slavery. By rejecting the “yo”, alternately defined as metropolitan French and *békés*, the strikers seek to take ownership of the island space as the first step in resisting exploitation.

which functions now in the Antillean mentality as *a repressed thought*.

I began this chapter with the assertion that Suzanne Césaire’s legacy in Caribbean literature is marked by an uneasy combination of presence and absence. Although her essays have recently drawn increasing scholarly attention, little is as yet known of her influence on Aimé Césaire’s literary oeuvre. In his preface to the collected works of Suzanne Césaire, Daniel Maximin describes her as Aimé’s muse: “[elle] lui fit comprendre qu’il pouvait oser douter sans jamais douter de créer; qu’il devait oser créer en cannibale de son moi profond” (“she made him understand that he could doubt without having doubts about creating; that he had to dare to create cannibalistically from his innermost self”, Maximin 2009, 21). Césaire was indeed her husband’s muse, a role that involved not only inspiring the poet but also working in multiple capacities as literary agent and critic. As late as 1962, four short years before her death, we find her doing significant administrative work to facilitate her husband’s literary production. She served as intermediary between Aimé and his German translator Janheinz Jahn, who worked with Aimé on such projects as *Et les chiens se taisaient* and the German translation of *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*.⁴² Notably, Suzanne offered revisions and critical readings of the latter text when Aimé was unavailable to do so.

Suzanne Césaire’s close reading of a short verse from *Cahier* is worth reproducing here because it presents the rare opportunity to witness direct intellectual exchange and collaboration between the Césaires around such an important text in Antillean literary history. Suzanne’s reading comes in response to Jahn’s urgent request for clarification on the following stanza before final publication of the German translation: “Alors voila le grand défi et l’impulsion/

⁴² Suzanne Césaire, Letter to Janheinz Jahn, 25 February 1962. Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Berlin. I am extremely grateful to Alex Gil who so generously shared with me copies of Suzanne Césaire’s correspondence with Jahn.

satanique et l'insolente/ dérive nostalgique de lunes rousses,/ de feux verts, de fièvres jaunes!” (“So now come the great defiance and satanical impulse and the insolent/ nostalgic drifting of russet moons/of green fires, of yellow fevers”, Césaire, *Cahier* 98/99). In *Histoire de la littérature négro-africaine* Lilyan Kesteloot marshals this stanza as evidence that the poet rejects Christianity and Westernization by transforming himself into a sorcerer able to command nature (Kesteloot, 135). Kesteloot’s reading most likely arises from her interpretation of “feux verts” as green fires, an interpretation that also prevails in English translations of the text. Consequently “lunes” “feux” and “fièvres” represent the elements of nature that the poet uses to signal his opposition to the West. Suzanne Césaire provides a different reading:

Ces lunes rousses, feux verts, fièvres jaunes sont liés et le vers évoque pour moi comme une débâcle des structures des pays européens, symbolisés par les feux de signalisation aux carrefours des grandes villes. Le grand défi, l’impulsion satanique sont l’œuvre des nègres. Soit qu’ils se battent, par exemple dans une guerre anti-colonialiste, soit que le génie des nègres corrompe les rythmes européens comme on le voit à ce déchainement grotesque des jeunes gens des grandes villes qui aspirent à recréer la frénésie rituelle des danses africaines (style twist !).⁴³

These russet moons, green lights, yellow fevers are linked and the verse evokes for me something of a debacle of the structures of European countries, symbolized by the traffic lights at the crossroads of big cities. The great challenge, the satanic impulse is the work of blacks. It is either that they fight, for example in an anti-colonial war, or that their genius corrupts European rhythms as we see for

⁴³ Suzanne Césaire, Letter to Janheinz Jahn, 25 Feb. 1962.

example in the grotesque explosion of young people in big cities who aspire to recreate the ritual frenzy of African dances (for example the twist!).

She interprets “feux verts” as green lights such that “rousse” “vert” and “jaune” represent, not nature, but rather the traffic light as symbol of European industrialization. For Suzanne, *Cahier* is also a narrative of resistance and here the poet presents two options for blacks, resistance through armed struggle or through cultural appropriation and recreation. Although she had read the poem “un nombre incalculable de fois” (“countless times”) Suzanne felt uneasy providing an interpretation. Yet ever the perspicacious critic, she undertakes an intimate and insightful reading of a text which for her “a si profondément marqué ma jeunesse. Tout a péniblement changé depuis. Heureusement Cahier d’un retour reste impérissable” (“so profoundly marked my youth. Everything has changed painfully since then. Thankfully Cahier d’un retour remains imperishable”). Through her collaboration with Aimé and Jahn, Suzanne Césaire has left her own indelible mark on one of the greatest works of twentieth-century literature.⁴⁴

We now know from her private letters that Suzanne Césaire continued to write for over a decade after *Tropiques*, texts that apparently remained unpublished.⁴⁵ Her absence from the Antillean literary canon is further compounded by the fact that some of her works are no longer extant. In the 1950s, Césaire produced a theatrical adaptation of Lafcadio Hearn’s 1890 novel

⁴⁴ Suzanne suggests on multiple occasions that producing *Cahier* and living with its reception and legacy was an intense experience for the couple. As she reveals to Breton in a letter sent from Martinique in 1941, “A Paris il y a deux ou trois ans, il me semble que nous étions trop jeunes, trop occupés par des besoins idiots, trop diversement sollicités, trop absorbés aussi par nous-mêmes et nos propres problèmes. Ce style de vie que nous avons déjà choisi alors—trois ans dans la solitude et l’atmosphère du Cahier d’un retour—nous avons essayé de le maintenir ici en dépit des exigences du métier, de notre famille, de l’hostilité d’une société que nous avons délibérément ignoré” (“In Paris two or three years ago, it seems to me that we were too young, too busy with our stupid work, too much in demand, too absorbed with ourselves and our problems. This lifestyle that we had already chosen—three years in solitude and in the atmosphere of Cahier d’un retour—we have tried to maintain it here despite the demands of our work, our family, the hostility of a society that we deliberately ignored”). For the Césaires, *Cahier* is at once a space of solitude from everyday life and a means to navigate that life. They travel with and through the text as they negotiate their obligations in Paris and their return to Martinique.

⁴⁵ Suzanne Césaire, Letter to Janheinz Jahn, 1 Oct. 1957. Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Berlin.

Youma: The Story of a West-Indian Slave.⁴⁶ Although Césaire's text is now lost, her choice of title *Aurore de la liberté* testifies to her enduring focus on liberation in the Antilles. Hearn's *Youma* is a Martinican slave who finds herself torn between joining a slave revolt and remaining loyal to her masters. *Youma*'s reflections on race and her vacillating identification with her white masters and black slaves, recall Claire de Duras's character Ourika. Both women are moved to reflect on their conditions as objectified bodies of color caught in unfavorable positions in the racial and gendered hierarchy. Prior to *Aurore de la liberté*, Césaire does not explicitly discuss oppression or resistance in gendered terms. However, her choice to adapt a text with a female protagonist and to recast it as a reflection on liberty for the Martinican stage, suggests at the very least a proto-feminist outlook.

In Hearn's novel, *Youma*'s lover Gabriel encourages her to run away with him to the neighbouring British colony Dominica. For Gabriel, *marronage* means placing oneself not just beyond the reach of the plantation, but also outside the limits of the French empire. *Youma* refuses to join Gabriel, deterred not by the dangers of the sea crossing but rather by her feelings of gratitude and indebtedness to her master and godmother. Despite Gabriel's condemnation of slavery as a system of injustice and *Youma*'s own misgivings about the ethics of such a system, she ultimately chooses gratitude over liberty. She clings to the teachings on black inferiority and *béké* generosity she received as a child and chooses to perish in a fire with a group of *békés* rather than accept the chance to escape offered by the revolting slaves. Although we no longer have Suzanne's Césaire's adaptation of Hearn's text, we can imagine, based on her previous writings that *Youma*'s reflection on liberty in the context of Martinican history would be central both for Césaire as playwright and for the actors who would re-enact this history barely a decade

⁴⁶Scholars disagree on the exact date of this work. Some date it to 1952, others to 1955. See Jennifer Wilks, *Race, gender, and comparative Black modernism Suzanne Lacascade, Marita Bonner, Suzanne Césaire, Dorothy West*, 217.

after the occupation of World War II. It is however doubtful that Césaire's Youma would have made the same choices as Hearn's concerning her liberty and that of the revolting slaves. Specifically, the opportunity to seek freedom in Dominica would resonate with Césaire's own immediate past context of Martinican dissidents fleeing to Dominica to join de Gaulle's Free French Forces during World War II.

Although *Aurore de la liberté* is currently absent from the Antillean literary corpus, Césaire nevertheless remains a strong presence in contemporary Antillean literary theory. Her analysis of the Caribbean archipelago as a rich confluence of cultures and histories at a time when Negritude thinkers were increasingly turning to Africa, paved the way for later generations of artists and activists rethinking Antillean identity. In "Le grand camouflage" Césaire portrays the black Antillean peasant as an homme-plante rooted in the space of the Caribbean: "Il a senti en lui, à travers ses orteils enfoncés nus dans la boue, une lente poussée végétale" ("He [feels] rising within himself, through his toes dug firmly into the mud, a slow vegetal up-thrust", Césaire, 92/44). This idea of a rooted identity anticipates the rhizomatic form of Caribbean identity that Glissant proposes in *Poétique de la relation*. For Glissant, the rhizome is a kind of multiplied root, whose plural nature resists the totalizing tendency of a single root. Glissant articulates the rhizome, adapted from the work of Deleuze and Guattari and applied to the Caribbean, as identity that is always in relation (Glissant, *Poétique De La Relation* 23-24). The roots of Césaire's homme-plante too are multiple, composite, and transatlantic in nature. The Antillean peasant she describes straddles a transatlantic geography, "Antilles-Afrique" (93). The hyphen evokes the Middle Passage, the "racines sous-marines" ("submarine roots") that Glissant would later theorize as a unifying element of Caribbean identity in his *Discours Antillais* (Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais*, 231).

The numerous echoes of Suzanne Césaire in Glissant’s work are often startling—startling because the similarities are so vivid yet they remain unrecognized, almost camouflaged. Michael Dash has described Glissant’s archipelagic approach to representing Caribbean space as “pathbreaking” and rightly so.⁴⁷ However Dash places Glissant’s work in the context of what can best be described as a genealogy of rupture: “His ideas were radically different from the racial poetics of his predecessor Aimé Césaire and the revolutionary politics of his near contemporary Frantz Fanon.”⁴⁸ Here Glissant takes his place in a conspicuously masculine line of thinkers but his work fundamentally departs from theirs. Where do we find continuity if not in this discontinuous literary history? Suzanne Césaire is the missing link. Among the myriad philosophical influences and interlocutors present in Glissant’s work, it is also through Suzanne Césaire’s “Le grand camouflage” that Glissant can “attempt to grasp the complex reality of the Caribbean within the world.”⁴⁹

Césaire’s work also evokes the creolization that would become the focal point of the *créolité* movement. Her description of “femmes aux quatre races et aux douzaines de sang” (“women of four races and dozens of bloodlines”, Césaire, 86/40) is a precursory echo of the creolists’ bold assertion: “Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Créoles” (“Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles”, Bernabé et. al., 13/75). Indeed when the creolists declare “Nous sommes à jamais fils d’Aimé Césaire” (“We are forever Césaire’s sons”, 18/80) we cannot help but remark the irony of this claim to filiation given their indebtedness to “the other Césaire.” Nor can we help but think of Fanon’s *Les damnés de la terre* when Suzanne Césaire writes “des millions des mains noires, à

⁴⁷ J. Michael Dash, "Homme Du Tout-monde." *The Caribbean Review of Books* (Jan., 2011). Web. 22 Aug. 2014.

<http://caribbeanreviewofbooks.com/crb-archive/25-january-2011/homme-du-tout-monde/>

⁴⁸ J. Michael Dash, "Homme Du Tout-monde."

⁴⁹ J. Michael Dash, "Homme Du Tout-monde."

travers les ciels rageurs de la guerre mondiale vont dresser leur épouvante. Délivré d'un long engourdissement, le plus déshérité de tous les peuples se lèvera, sur les plaines de cendre” (“Millions of Black hands, across the raging clouds of world war, will spread terror everywhere. Roused from a long benumbing torpor, this most deprived of all people will rise up, upon plains of ashes”, Césaire, 82/38).

In the epigraph to this section, taken from René Ménénil's 1978 preface to the collected edition of *Tropiques*, the Martinican philosopher predicted the journal's impact on subsequent generations of Antillean writers. Ménénil laments the fact that this influence, while significant, remains obscure and confused in the minds of contemporary thinkers because its source has not been adequately interrogated. To date, very few Antillean writers have actually acknowledged their debt to Suzanne Césaire. Maryse Condé pays homage to Césaire as the “founding mother” of postcolonial theories that seek to complicate the binaries of colonizer/colonized, white/black (Condé, “Unheard Voice”, 66). In his preface to the English translation of his novel *L'isolé soleil*, Daniel Maximin identifies Suzanne Césaire as inspiration and interlocutor:

Lone Sun [...] had to do with a major mythical figure of mine as well, with Suzanne Césaire. I discovered Suzanne Césaire in *Tropiques*, particularly in the last essay of the last issue—an essay written entirely by her—which I consider a capital document for the Caribbean. She had titled it “Le Grand Camouflage” (one might say “The Great Smoke Screen”). I had learnt it by heart, I liked it so. *Lone Sun* is the dialogue I've wanted to have with her, with all of the “women of four races and dozens of bloodlines” to borrow Suzanne's unusual phrase. (Maximin, *Lone Sun*, XXV)

Maximin's novel is to date the most extensive creative engagement with Césaire's politics and poetics of liberation. He insists on Césaire's authorship (“an essay written entirely by her”) and

announces his novel as one that seeks to reinstate her specifically and Antillean women generally in the literary historical record of liberation in the Antilles.

L'isolé soleil traces the history of Guadeloupe from slavery to World War II, through a family's genealogy. Through a collection of *cahiers* and epistolary exchanges Maximin weaves the story of Marie-Gabriel, her mother Siméa and four generations of ancestors whose lives were intimately bound up in revolutionary movements in the Antilles. Perhaps the most striking aspect of this novel is that it recasts the history of Guadeloupe, not as one of slavery and colonization, but rather as one of resistance. From marronage to dissidence, the continuous struggle for liberation is a thread that runs through the narrative. Maximin employs camouflage as a narrative strategy. The *cahiers* and artifacts passed down from generation to generation obscure almost as much as they reveal about each character. Temporal movement in the novel is cyclical—or perhaps best described as a spiral—rather than linear, such that the text does not always orient the reader, but rather like Suzanne Césaire's Antillean landscape, leaves the reader disoriented and unable to always see the full picture.

Beyond the narrative structure, Césaire also haunts the text as both a historical figure and fictional character. As a historical figure, she appears as the contributor to the anti-Vichy journal *Tropiques*, whose texts elicit strong reactions—both positive and negative—from Siméa, one of the novel's protagonists. As a fictional character, Césaire is re-cast as Paul-Aimée, the Antillean philosophy student living in a Parisian boarding house. She quotes extensively from Frobenius and like Césaire she returns to Martinique aboard the *Bretagne*. Paule-Aimée makes only a brief appearance in the novel, perhaps as a reminder that Césaire is not an abstract interlocutor for the novel's characters.⁵⁰ Instead she is an active member of the Antillean intellectual movement of

⁵⁰ If Paul-Aimée makes only a fleeting appearance, her friend Gerty—a fictional rendering of the Guadeloupean lawyer and politician Gerty Archimède—takes on a more prominent role in the novel. Archimède made history as

the 1930s and 40s, or what Maximin himself describes in the novel's appendix as the "bouillonnement politique et culturel d'une génération qui apprend à ne plus s'aliéner au seul miroir des yeux d'Europe" ("cultural and political agitation of a generation that is learning to no longer alienate itself through the single mirror that is the eyes of Europe", Maximin, *L'isolé soleil*, 283).

Suzanne Césaire's *Tropiques* essays serve as a blueprint for Guadeloupean dissidents in the novel. Siméa, a *paquebot* who facilitates dissidents' passage to Dominica, and Louis-Gabriel, a soon-to-be-dissident, hear in the works of Césaire a call to revolutionary action against the Vichy occupation of the Antilles. They reformulate her imperative "la littérature martiniquaise sera cannibale ou ne sera pas" into three rules for the forthcoming revolution: "La libération sera musicale ou ne sera pas" ("the liberation will be musical or it will not be", 172), "la libération sera folle ou ne sera pas" ("the liberation will be mad or it will not be", 173), and "la libération sera amoureuse ou ne sera pas" ("the liberation will be in love or it will not be", 175). Siméa and Louis-Gabriel cannibalize Césaire's text and transform her focus on literature into a direct engagement with political liberation. They maintain Césaire's emphasis on art as the medium through which liberation will be theorized, created and expressed (206-207). Like Césaire, the young writers and dissidents in the novel operate in both political and poetic registers. They seek both material liberation from Vichy oppression and artistic liberation from colonial representation. This dual nature of their revolution is best illustrated by the surrealist symbolism

the first black woman called to the bar in France and the colonies in 1939. She later served as a deputy in the French National Assembly and argued ardently alongside Aimé Césaire and Gaston Monnerville for social and economic improvements to the lives of the inhabitants of the overseas departments. As founder of the Union des Femmes Françaises in Guadeloupe, Archimède campaigned for women's increased access to education, political participation and social benefits in the immediate post-war period. In his introduction to *Le Grand Camouflage*, Maximin speculates that Suzanne Césaire, a close friend of Archimède's, would likely have followed the same path of an illustrious political career but was prevented from doing so by unspecified obstacles (17).

of their attack on the governor general's residence, using Molotov cocktails fashioned out of rum-filled bottles originally containing Vichy mineral water.

Maximin also engages with Césaire's analysis of the dual qualities of the *homme-plante* as strongly rooted in the past but also possessing regenerative qualities. Notably, the novel opens with the image of Marie-Gabriel, Siméa's daughter, in her favourite spot in a mango tree. The narrator portrays Marie-Gabriel in this scene as a sort of *femme-plante* whose connection to the tree also symbolizes a geo-historical rootedness in the Caribbean. On this occasion—her birthday—Marie-Gabriel finds the ring of her ancestor Angela hidden in a cavity in the tree trunk. We find out subsequently that Angela was killed during a raid on the *habitation* where she lived by a group of drunken *colons* and *commandeurs* in search of two maroons. This geo-historical rootedness goes hand in hand with regeneration, for through the tree the centuries of personal and national history contained in Angela's story become a part of the present. Nearly every character in the novel occupies a place in this cyclical history. Angela returns in multiple incarnations, including as the African-American civil rights activist Angela Davis. The Guadeloupean maroon twins Jonathan and George, and their mother Miss Bea return as Georgia Bea Jackson and her sons Jonathan and George killed in escape attempts from the now-infamous San Quentin prison in California in the 1970s. Louis Delgrès, who led revolting slaves to blow themselves up in Matouba in order to escape recapture is himself reincarnated multiple times, including as the dissident Louis-Gabriel, Marie-Gabriel's father. With these recurring appearances of historical revolutionary figures, Maximin weaves a narrative of resistance that spans generations and geographies of the African diaspora. Through this cyclical narrative structure he expresses what Suzanne Césaire only alluded to in her essays: the idea that each generation must see and resist the violent system of oppression to which it is subjected, and that these forms of oppression recur over time, in different yet familiar forms. Where Césaire suggests

connections between slavery and Vichy occupation, between abolition and decolonization, Maximin shows how oppressive systems and resistance strategies over time are ultimately new versions of old forms.

Although Césaire serves as a distant mentor of sorts for many of the novel's characters, Siméa in particular also challenges some of her ideas. In the conversation she carries on with Césaire through her marginalia in her copies of *Tropiques*, Siméa remains sceptical about Césaire's reliance on European theorists like Frobenius and Breton: "Suzanne, tu cherches au plus profond notre essence noire, et c'est chez un ethnologue blanc! Et nous appelons à l'appui la psycho-analyse, l'ethnographie, le marxisme et le surréalisme! Aurons-nous donc toujours besoin d'eux et de leurs *raisons*?" ("Suzanne, you search for the very depths of our black essence in the work of a white ethnologist! And so we call to our aid psychoanalysis, ethnography, Marxism and surrealism! Will we then always need *them and their reason*?" 192, emphasis in original). Siméa appears to be invested in a more explicitly black nationalist project of collective self-definition that rejects the influence of any white, European thinkers. Yet she also misses the radicalism in Césaire's work that attempts to move the discussion of Antillean identity beyond the black/white, European/Antillean binaries that characterized the conversations of her time. Siméa's insistence on the opposition between "notre essence noire" and "eux et leurs raisons" ultimately reduces the multiple cultural influences in the Caribbean to a dualistic relationship.

Siméa's critique of Césaire's reliance on European thinkers recurs in new yet similar forms over time in Antillean public discourse. For example Victor Schœlcher, the French abolitionist whom Césaire invokes in her correspondence as a precursor to her own reflections on Antillean political identity, is a somewhat controversial figure in the Antillean popular imaginary. As recently as September 2013, Martinicans woke up to find that the statue of Schœlcher had been quite literally defaced. Unknown parties had chiselled out the statue's face and inscribed on

it in a blood red that stands out against the all-white stone and that recalls the red paint poured on the statue of Josephine in Fort-de-France: “Honneur dignité et reconnaissance pour nos ancêtres africains” (“honor, dignity and recognition for our African ancestors”), “la liberté ne se donne pas elle se prend” (“liberty is not given it is taken”) and “viva la révolution.”⁵¹ The inscriptions express the discomfort surrounding the commemoration of white figures in the history of freedom struggles in the Antilles. Like Siméa, the statue’s defacers establish the binary between the European abolitionist and African ancestors, between liberty given and liberty taken. The violent and clearly premeditated act of rendering Schœlcher faceless seeks to reverse the anonymity of those Africans whose revolutionary acts have been lost in the grand narrative of slavery and abolition.

Suzanne Césaire’s essays advocate understanding these multiple contributions to the revolutionary history of the Antilles as a complex, composite whole rather than as competing memories. The urgency of her wartime writings and their continued relevance today, attest to the fact that her imagined project of artistic regeneration and political freedom remains to some extent unrealized. Césaire never pursued an active political career, most likely due to decades of serious health problems. If the letters and essays analyzed here provide insight into her ardent desire for Martinique’s liberation during the war years, they also raise new questions that for now remain unanswered. How did Césaire theorize departmentalization as an alternative to assimilation? What role did she envision for literary production in a postwar Martinique integrated into the French Republic? Where Césaire’s pen leaves off, her compatriot Paulette Nardal’s picks up. Nardal’s journal *La femme dans la cité*, published on the heels of *Tropiques* between 1945 and 1951, actively engages with the role women would play in the rebuilding

⁵¹*France-Antilles*, ‘La statue Victor Schœlcher vandalisée.’ Web. 12 Sept. 2013.
<http://www.martinique.franceantilles.fr/actualite/faitsdivers/la-statue-victor-schoelcher-vandalisee-220640.php>.

efforts of post-war France, through their political activism in the newly minted overseas departments. Nardal's work allows us to follow the thread of thought found in Césaire's essays on Antillean identity both within and apart from metropolitan France.

CHAPTER II

La Femme dans la cité: Paulette Nardal and the Gendered Politics of Departmentalization

Through her research, literary production and political engagement, Paulette Nardal made important contributions to the emerging cultural movements of the interwar years in France that sought to revalorize black identity. Born on 12 October 1896 in François, Martinique, she moved to Paris in 1920 to study English literature at the Sorbonne. Her publications in journals like *La Dépêche africaine* and *La Revue du monde noir*, which she founded in 1931, articulated an emerging consciousness of a collective black diasporic but also French identity. Nardal and her sisters Jane and Andrée opened up their salon in the Parisian suburb Clamart in the early 1930s to students and artists from Africa, the Antilles and the United States, and thus presided over a space for diasporic exchange, debate and literary creation.

After nearly two decades living and working in France, Nardal returned to settle permanently in Martinique under rather traumatic circumstances. In September 1939, she boarded the *Bretagne*, the ship that had transported Aimé and Suzanne Césaire on their return to Martinique. Heading back to Paris after a short work-related stay in Martinique, Nardal experienced first hand the violence of the recently declared war when the ship was torpedoed by German submarines and sank off the English coast. Nardal was rescued, but the ordeal left her with a permanent limp. After nearly a year in hospital, she chose to return, not to Paris but to Martinique where she taught English to young dissidents preparing to travel to Dominica to join the Free French Forces. In 1944 she founded the Rassemblement féminin, the Martinican branch of the moderate, Catholic French women's organization Union féminine social et civique. She also served as editor of the Rassemblement féminin's organ *La Femme dans la cité*, published

monthly between 1945 and 1951.⁵²

Much of the existing scholarship on Nardal focuses on her interwar writings, perhaps because she is most often read in the context of black internationalism and/or Negritude.⁵³ T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's annotated translation of selected essays from *La Femme dans la cité* is to date the only substantial examination of Nardal's work in Martinique.⁵⁴ While Nardal's writings in the interwar years certainly yield rich analyses of the on-going debates and examinations of black identity and race consciousness in France, her work in Martinique after the war is equally compelling and worthy of examination, particularly in the context of the present study, because it takes up the crucial question of Martinican women's political participation in the new overseas department. *La Femme dans la cité* featured an eclectic collection of pieces. Nardal's editorials appeared alongside film reviews, short news bulletins and poetry. A special issue dedicated to the centenary celebration of the 1848 abolition of slavery included an essay on Martinican music history submitted by her youngest sister Andrée. Nardal's editorials, particularly in the first year or so of the journal's publication, emphasized the need for Martinican women to participate *en masse* in the first postwar elections. The passage of the women's suffrage law in 1944 and the law of departmentalization in 1946 meant that Martinican women were in a unique position to advocate for improved social and economic conditions as citizens of the French Republic. Throughout the journal's lifespan, Nardal would remain unwavering in her

⁵² For a more extensive biography of Nardal see Emily M. Church, "In Search of Seven Sisters: A Biography of the Nardal Sisters of Martinique," *Callaloo* 36 (2013): 375-390 and *Paulette Nardal la fierté d'être négresse*. Dir. Jil Servant. Les productions de La lanterne, 2005.

⁵³ See Jennifer A. Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), Shireen Lewis, *Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Negritude to Créolité* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006) and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ Paulette Nardal and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Beyond Negritude: Essays from Woman in the City* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009).

view of women as principal agents of social justice and nation building.

France's long and vexed history with its vieilles colonies continues to be the subject of much critical debate.⁵⁵ Nardal's work allows us to approach the relationship in a new way, through Martinican women's political agency. The goal of this chapter is to analyze the ways in which Nardal's writings on Martinican women's involvement in politics, at the historical juncture of women's suffrage and departmentalization, further complicate the vexed metropole/colony relationship. To this end, I examine two key questions. First, in what ways did Martinique's transition from colony to overseas department alter women's access to political power and social mobility? I will show that throughout *La Femme dans la cité*, Nardal argues for Martinican women's participation in French elections in order to fulfill their civic duty of rebuilding a French nation ravaged by World War II. Political participation was also a way for Martinican women to reject the second-class citizenship that had until then been imposed on them as women and colonial subjects, and to access the full rights and benefits of French citizenship in the new overseas department. Second, how did women's political participation in turn influence the ongoing debates on citizenship and enfranchisement at this time? Reading Nardal's editorials in the context of her larger body of works, beginning with her contributions to Parisian journals in the 1930s, allows us to situate her argument for Martinican women's political enfranchisement in a larger discourse on the intersection of race, class and gender inequality. Doubly marginalized as women and colonized subjects, Martinican women's status as new citizens signals, for Nardal, the advent of a more democratic postwar France.

Certainly, it is impossible to talk about departmentalization without engaging with the

⁵⁵ See Raphaël Confiant, *Aime Cesaire, une traversée paradoxale du siècle* (Paris: Ecriture, 2006), Frederick Cooper and Ann A. L. Stoler, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda", *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, eds. Ann A. L. Stoler, and Frederick Cooper (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997): 1-55, Justin Daniel, "Political Constraints of Economic Dependency: The Case of Guadeloupe and Martinique", *Caribbean Studies* 26 (1993): 311-334 and Gary Wilder, "Untimely Vision: Aime Cesaire, Decolonization, Utopia", *Public Culture* 21 (2009): 101-140.

ideas of its great architect Aimé Césaire. As Sharpley-Whiting notes, “Sharing an intellectual affinity with Césaire from their days at her Clamart salon in Paris in the 1930s, in Martinique, Paulette Nardal became a political handmaiden of sorts to Césaire in his ambition to pursue political office.”⁵⁶ Both Césaire and Nardal, in separate venues, grapple with the “tensions of empire.”⁵⁷ Both attempt to define Martinique’s evolving political status, and the implications of this evolution on the lived realities of the Martinican population. In his impassioned speech presenting the law of departmentalization to the French National Assembly, Césaire draws on the centuries-long history of political relations between France and its *vieilles colonies*: “L’intégration réclamée ne constituerait pas une improvisation. Ce serait, au contraire, l’aboutissement normal d’un processus historique et la conclusion logique d’une doctrine” (“The integration that we seek will not be an improvisation. It will be, on the contrary, the culmination of a historical process and the logical conclusion of a doctrine,” 660).⁵⁸ He argues that departmentalization is but a logical stage in the evolution of outre-mer politics, an evolutionary process put in motion by Victor Schœlcher, who had articulated a vision for political integration of the colonies into the metropole, nearly a century prior.

Throughout his speech, Césaire often referred to his proposed law as one of “intégration” and “assimilation.” Despite the negative, “culturally humiliating” connotations of the term assimilation, he would come to see it as a powerful anti-colonial strategy.⁵⁹ During their student

⁵⁶ Paulette Nardal, and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Beyond Negritude*, 49.

⁵⁷ Frederick Cooper, and Ann A. L. Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony.”

⁵⁸ The Assemblée Nationale proceedings show that Césaire’s speeches often drew applause from the extreme left, and heckling or even racial slurs from the center and right. It is striking that his presentation of departmentalization was the only speech during his tenure as deputy that drew applause from all sides. The law was voted in unanimously, drawing support even from the Mouvement Populaire Républicain (MRP), a centrist party with significant right wing support at the time. That departmentalization garnered multipartisan support in an otherwise polarized assembly, shows that the letter of the law was appealing to all. Césaire deftly couched it in the republican language of liberty, equality and fraternity, a much-needed boost to France’s ego in the aftermath of Pétain’s national revolution. See *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 13 Mar. 1946: 660. Web. 15 Nov. 2013. <http://4e.republique.jo-an.fr>.

⁵⁹ See *Aimé Césaire une parole pour le XXIe Siècle = a Voice for the 21st Century*. Dir. Euzhan Palcy. JMJ

days in Paris, Césaire and Senghor articulated their position as black students steeped in French culture, in a formulation that applies equally well to the metropole/DOM relationship: “Assimiler pour s’enrichir. Assimiler pour s’en nourrir. Donc assimiler et non être assimilé, pour être conquis et dominés” (“Assimilate to enrich oneself. Assimilate to nourish oneself. Therefore assimilate rather than be assimilated to be conquered and dominated”).⁶⁰ Agency was at the heart of Césaire’s understanding of assimilation. Departmentalization was conceived of as a path to citizenship rights, political enfranchisement, and social and economic mobility for the Martinican population through its official belonging to the larger, wealthier French nation. What it was not, Césaire would later argue, was cultural assimilation or an erasure of Martinique’s specific history and ties to other spaces such as Africa and Latin America.⁶¹ Throughout *La Femme dans la cité*, Nardal would attempt to strike the same delicate balance as Césaire. Her editorials encourage Martinican women to take full advantage of their newly acquired French citizenship in order to ameliorate the material conditions of families and workers on the island. At the same time Nardal remained a strong believer in forging and maintaining Afro-diasporic alliances, and of preserving Martinican history and culture through music and intellectual production.

“Une petite France une France lointaine”: The Colony/Metropole Relationship in Nardalian Thought from *La Dépêche Africaine* to *La Femme dans la cité*

La Femme dans la cité has largely been ignored by critics, most likely because of the difficulty in reconciling the journal’s focus on Martinican women with Nardal’s interwar focus on race consciousness in France. Yet reading Nardal’s interventions together reveals a fascinating continuity between her articulations of black contributions on the French cultural and intellectual stage, and women’s contributions on the French political stage. Nardal’s extensive body of work

Productions, 1994. Videocassette.

⁶⁰ Aimé Césaire *Une Parole Pour Le XXIe Siècle*.

⁶¹ Aimé Césaire, *Aimé Césaire Une Parole Pour le XXIe Siècle*.

includes articles and essays in newspapers and journals and a tourist guidebook on Martinique commissioned by the French government in 1931. As Brent Edwards aptly remarks about her oeuvre, “there has not yet been a thorough attempt to take account of her work during the fifteen years she lived in Paris” (Edwards, “Pebbles of Consonance”, 138). Indeed much of the existing scholarship on Nardal focuses on a relatively small cross-section of her work, particularly “Guignol Ouolof,” her contribution to the journal *L’Etudiant noir* and “Eveil de la conscience de race,” published in *La Revue du monde noir*.

An in-depth study of her diverse publications written over nearly four decades and from at least two continents, though necessary, departs from the focus of this study. Rather than present a thorough reading of all her work, I focus on her contributions to *La Dépêche africaine* in the late 1920s, her profiles of Antillean women for the newspaper *Le Soir* in 1930, her 1931 tourist guidebook to Martinique, and her interventions in *La Revue du monde noir*. These texts allow us to trace the evolution of Nardal’s varied articulations of the France/Martinique, metropole/colony relationship, often analyzed in the context of the racial and gendered hierarchy of colonial French society. I identify two major ideas that span the body of her works from the late 1920s to the early 1950s, and that allow us to analyze her contributions as part of a transnational group of women political activists who articulated diasporic identity within the framework of French citizenship. First, Nardal grapples with the uneven power relations between Antilleans and metropolitans in France’s capital. Second, she remains keenly aware of the ways in which racial and gendered hierarchies constitute intersecting forms of oppression that marginalize Antillean women both in France and in the Antilles. The continuity in Nardal’s works allows us to better situate the ideas she articulates in *La Femme dans la cité*. Far from being an anomaly, her editorials in *La femme dans la cité* are better understood as the culmination of her desire for democratic inclusion of marginalized peoples, a desire first articulated in her Parisian oeuvre.

Nardal's earliest published writings include several essays, reviews and short stories, which appeared in the journal *La Dépêche africaine*. Published in Paris between 1928 and 1932 as the mouthpiece of the Comité de défense des intérêts de la race noire, *La Dépêche africaine's* monthly columns contained an “interesting patchwork of militant colonial reformism, assimilationism, and cultural Pan-Africanism” (Sharpley-Whiting, “Femme Negritude”, 10).⁶² Nardal’s articulations of the France/Martinique relationship in the journal are best characterized as writings on exile. They describe the experience of alienation suffered by Martinican students in Paris and constitute early articulations of Martinique’s sometimes-paradoxical place both within and apart from metropolitan France.

Many of her writings in *La Dépêche africaine* represent Paris as a cold, impersonal place, a space of alienation and exile for Martinicans in particular, and people of color in general. In the 30 May 1929 issue of *La Dépêche africaine* Nardal published two pieces, “Actions de grace”, a short reflection on the difficulties of acclimating to the weather in Paris, and “Nouveau Bal Nègre de la Glacière”, a review of a newly-opened *bal nègre*. In the former, Nardal describes the feeling of lightness, but also of nostalgia for the Antilles, brought on by the dawn of spring in France’s capital. The warmth and sunshine of spring are a welcome change from winter: “C'est d'abord une sensation de soulagement, les lourds nuages gris, le froid persistant, l'atmosphère triste de l'hiver; il me semblait que tout cela me pesait sur la poitrine, m'oppressait. C'était comme un mal intolérable dont il m'arrivait aussi, par la force de l'habitude, de ne plus souffrir” (“There is first of all a feeling of relief, the heavy grey clouds, the persistent cold, the sad atmosphere of winter; it seems to me that all of these things weigh on my chest, oppress me. It was like an intolerable ill

⁶² For further reading on women’s contributions to *La Dépêche africaine*, see Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, T. Denean SharpleyWhiting, *Negritude Women* and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, “Femme Negritude: Jane Nardal, *La Dépêche africaine*, and the Francophone New Negro,” *Souls* 2 (2000): 8-17.

that I was sometimes able to overcome by force of habit”).⁶³ Nardal’s *champ lexical* of *douleur*—particularly evoked by words like “lourd”, “triste”, “pesait”, “oppressait”, “intolérable” and “souffrir”—evokes the Antillean’s sense of alienation from the somber French landscape. She contrasts the gloom of a French winter with the “eternal summer” of the Antilles: “Au pays, c’est l’immuable été” (“Back home it’s eternal summer”). In this representation of Paris and Martinique as polar opposites of each other, Nardal establishes the Antilles as home, a place of origin that is connected to but different from the metropole.

In “Nouveau Bal Nègre de la Glacière”, Nardal develops further her representation of the Antilles as culturally distinct from France by contrasting the space of the bal nègre in Paris with the cold impersonal city outside.⁶⁴ The bals nègre—dance halls mostly frequented by Africans and members of the African diaspora in Paris—were meeting spaces for blacks of different classes and nationalities around a shared interest in music and dance, particularly jazz and the *biguine*. Nardal describes this dance hall in particular as a refuge from the rest of the city, one of the few spaces in Paris where blacks were not a minority, both in the numeric and political sense. She sets up a contrast between the welcoming atmosphere of la Glacière, “Dans ce cadre, les noirs se sentent bien chez eux” (“In this setting, blacks feel at home”), and the “cadre violemment européen” (“violently European setting”, Nardal, “Nouveau Bal Nègre”, 33) of other Parisian dance halls. Through her vivid descriptions of the biguine, she transports her readers, just as she herself is transported by the powerful rhythm, to “les rues de Fort-de-France, musique en tête, par un dimanche de carnaval” (“the streets of Fort-de-France, with music in my ears, on a carnival Sunday”, 3). Nardal’s descriptions of the geographic and cultural distance between Paris and Fort-de-France goes against the prevailing narratives of Martinique’s capital as a space of cultural

⁶³ Paulette Nardal, “Actions de grace,” *La Dépêche africaine* 30 May 1929.

⁶⁴ Paulette Nardal, “Nouveau Bal Nègre de la Glacière”, *La Dépêche africaine* 30 May 1929: 3.

mimicry, a replica of Paris in the Antilles. Rather, Fort-de-France is a city with its own vibrant culture that is both produced locally and exported to hexagonal France, contributing to the cultural landscape of the metropole. Throughout Nardal's writing, colony and metropole mutually influence and constitute each other. Yet they also often exist in stark opposition to each other. For Nardal at the bal nègre, the only jarring reminder that she is still in France, is the regrettable decision by the dancers to don suits and other markedly European costumes.

It is significant that Nardal highlights these cultural differences and describes the bal nègre as one of the few spaces of refuge from a city that is decidedly unwelcoming for blacks. Her emphasis on specifically Antillean cultural productions in the hostile space of Paris, flies in the face of French republican ideals exported as national myths to the vieilles colonies. For a Martinican to assert in 1929 that the Antillean was not simply a tan Frenchwoman/man stood in direct contradiction to the colonial education and socialization—often summed up in the shibboleth “nos ancêtres les gaulois” (“our ancestors the Gauls”)—Nardal would have received growing up in Martinique and studying in France. In *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* Césaire satirizes this myth of French cultural citizenship for all in the Antilles when he declares: “je ne suis pas différent de vous; ne faites pas attention à ma peau noire: c'est le soleil qui m'a brûlé” (“I am not different from you; never mind my black skin: I have been burnt by the sun”, Césaire, 126/127).⁶⁵ Nardal's insistence on the cultural differences between Martinique and France carries over into her later writings as she seeks to explore also the political differences between these two spaces. Establishing Martinique as a distinct cultural and even geopolitical entity from

⁶⁵ Both Césaire and Nardal reject in their writings the kind of mimicry that produces colonial subjects that are, according to Homi Bhabha's formulation, “almost the same but not quite” and “almost the same but not white” (Bhabha, 30). As Bhabha asserts, colonial mimicry is always partial, an empty form of imitation that furthers the status quo of uneven power. Nardal recognizes the dangers of such an uncritical acceptance of the French myth of full assimilation and throughout her writings will seek to emphasize black and/or Antillean cultural specificity and intellectual production, within the boundaries of the French nation state. See Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”, *October* (1984): 125.

France echoes Suzanne Césaire’s proto-nationalist, archipelagic approach to defining Martinican identity.

Throughout her early works, Nardal negotiates the contradictory impulses of belonging and unbelonging that characterize her presence in Paris. As Carole Boyce Davies cogently argues, “migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home or the longing for home become motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it” (Boyce Davies, 84). Nardal’s grappling with black presence “ici” in the cold Parisian space of alienation, also means working through her relation to the implied “là-bas” the home she left behind to study, work and live in France.

In “En exil”, a short story she contributed to the 15 December 1929 edition of *La Dépêche africaine*, Nardal describes this constant negotiation of home as being in exile.⁶⁶ The story also clearly articulates the Nardalian brand of intersectionality *avant la lettre* that would become the main focus of *La Femme dans la cité*. In this story, Nardal presents a moving tableau of the intersections of race, class and gender through her protagonist Elisa, an elderly working class Martinican woman living in economic exile in France. If in her earlier writings Nardal depicts the alienating effects of cultural and climatic difference on Antilleans in Paris, in this piece she shows how the fact of being a working class black woman exacerbates this alienation. France can never be home for Elisa: “Ce pays ne convient vraiment pas à une vieille négresse déjà alourdie par l’âge” (“This country is really not suitable for an old negress already weighed down with age”, Nardal, “En exil”, 6). Elisa is alienated not only by the cold weather that causes her rheumatism to flare up, but also by the racial slurs thrown at her in the street. Notably, a group of students mockingly call out “Oh! La belle blonde!” (“Oh! The beautiful blond!”, 6) as Elisa

⁶⁶ Paulette Nardal, “En exil”, *La Dépêche africaine* 15 Dec. 1929: 6.

walks past. This seemingly simple barb contains a number of negating elements. First, Elisa is not blond and therefore by their standards not beautiful either. Second, if she is neither *la belle* nor *la blonde*, then the remark ultimately erases her presence on the street—which here symbolizes Parisian public space—by addressing her as something she is not. The students’ negation of her identity illustrates the misrecognition and alienation that Boyce Davies argues forms part of the negotiation of home in exile (Boyce Davies, 84).

This misrecognition is present throughout the story as Elisa constantly confronts a white gaze that misreads the markers of her Antillean culture. For example, on the bus, her madras head tie marks her as foreign and exotic: “C’était surtout son madras calendré (*sic*), si curieusement noué, qui attirait les regards. Les gens n’avaient pas l’air de se douter que cela pût la gêner” (“It was above all her madras, so curiously knotted, that drew their stares. The people did not seem to realize that their stares could possibly bother her.” Nardal, “En exil”, 6). The madras head tie, also known as *une coiffe* or *une tête*, is a cultural and historical artifact in the Antilles that conveys messages on a woman’s marital status. For example, the style and number of knots in a head tie indicates whether a woman is married, single, looking for a partner or some combination of these. Elisa’s *tête calandée* is made from the technique of calendering, which consists of painting the lighter parts of the madras with a mixture of chrome yellow and gum arabic in order to make the otherwise dull fabric more lustrous.⁶⁷ Nardal mobilizes the symbol of a fabric that originated in India and became incorporated into Antillean modes of dress, in order to emphasize the island’s history and culture beyond the sphere of its relationship with France. She also signals the unreadability of Elisa’s Antillean heritage for her French viewers. Her madras remains opaque to them, conveying no meaning beyond her difference as a curious, exotic presence in their midst.

⁶⁷ See Lafcadio Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies* (2004), Project Gutenberg. Web. 15 October 2014. <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/6381>

Nardal complicates the image of intersecting racial and gendered oppression in Elisa's story by throwing class into the mix. As an elderly black woman who has immigrated to France in search of a better life for herself and her son, Elisa works as a cleaning lady, one of the few forms of employment readily available for a woman in her position.⁶⁸ She is alone, old, and poor, with no access to opportunities for upward social mobility. Further, her case is not singular but rather archetypal, as Nardal describes her as one of a group of several other Antillean women also in the same situation. Nardal's portrayal of Elisa is far from the sometimes-romanticized depictions of cosmopolitan blacks in Paris, sipping tea in bilingual salons and rubbing shoulders with international artists and intellectuals. Here we are far from the *bal nègre* and from Josephine Baker's stardom at the Folies Bergère. Nardal's choice to focus on the predicament of a working class Antillean woman prefigures some of her editorials in *La Femme dans la cité* in which she addresses relations among Martinican women of different classes. Her editorials will place these questions of class and gender in the context of Martinique's evolving political status as an overseas department. Here, however, she chooses the concept of exile to illustrate the multiple, intertwined forms of power that marginalize Elisa.

As Edward Said reminds us in "Reflections on Exile", "Paris may be a capital famous for cosmopolitan exiles, but it is also a city where unknown men and women have spent years of miserable loneliness" (Said, 289).⁶⁹ Elisa fits into the framework Said articulates for differentiating exiles from refugees and émigrés. Hers is "a condition legislated to deny dignity—to deny an identity to people" (289), "a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation" (291). Said argues further that "exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with, one's native place; what is true of all

⁶⁸ See Jennifer Anne Boittin's table on the distribution of jobs for Africans and Antilleans in Paris in the 1930s in *Colonial Metropolis*, 45.

⁶⁹ Page numbers are derived from a digitized version of this text.

exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both” (303). Nardal conveys the sense of loss that characterizes Elisa’s relationship to home through Elisa’s reverie on the bus ride to her cleaning job. She conjures the image of warmth, laughter, storytelling, and a community of friends left behind, an image that is already about loss because as a memory it is both real and imagined.

The bus conductor’s announcement of Elisa’s destination reinforces the violence of displacement and loss: “Ce cri, l’éclairage brutal des devantures, ont déchiré les voiles de sa rêverie. Revenant à la réalité, elle voit autour d’elle, les visages tendus, les yeux durs, les physionomies fermées ou indifférentes des blancs” (“The scream, the brutal lighting of the front window, ripped the veil of her reverie. She returned to reality and saw around her the tense faces, hard eyes, closed or indifferent looks of whites”, Nardal, “En exil”, 6). As Nardal suggests in another article submitted to the same issue of *La Dépêche africaine*, loss is inherent in the very definition of Martinique as a French colony in which economic and political power lie in the hands of *békés*.⁷⁰ “La terre de leur pays ne leur appartenant pas” (“Since the land of their country does not belong to them”, “Pour les sinistrés”, 1), poor workers like Elisa are dually displaced, first from a land to which they can claim no ownership, then from a larger French polity that continues to marginalize them along the lines of race, gender and class.

Nardal was also engaged in a proto-nationalist project of defining the Antilles as a political entity linked to but distinct from France. In “Pour les sinistrés de la Martinique”, she proposes an interesting and potentially controversial solution to Martinique’s economic problems, one that conveys this outre-mer nationalism. She begins with a succinct analysis of the problem: the difficulty for densely populated areas like Fort-de-France to absorb people displaced from the north of the island by volcanic activity. With the subtlety that marks most of her critiques of

⁷⁰ Paulette Nardal, “Pour les sinistrés de la Martinique”, *La Dépêche africaine* 15 Dec. 1929: 1.

racial inequality in Martinique, Nardal suggests that Mont Pelée's volcanic activity is only partly to blame for price inflation and high unemployment in urban areas. Poverty was also the result of unequal access to resources, particularly the hugely disproportionate land ownership by the *béké* minority. Nardal writes about the agricultural workers doubly displaced from their land by the volcano and by this inequality: "Ce n'est pas à la Martinique qu'ils pourront trouver à employer leur activité et leurs connaissances, la terre de leur pays ne leur appartenant pas, et les industries locales, si peu développées d'ailleurs, ne nourrissant pas leur homme" ("It is not in Martinique that they will be able to put their activities and knowledge to use, since the land of their country does not belong to them and the local industries, so underdeveloped, are unable to feed them", 1). However, Nardal does not advocate emigration to the metropole, a move that would most likely create more *Elisas*. Rather, she argues for a uniquely *outré-mer* solution that involves facilitating the emigration of Martinican agricultural workers to Guyane.

Nardal bases her proposed solution on the unique demographics of both colonies, that is, the overpopulation of Martinique's urban areas, and the abundance of land and shortage of workers in Guyane. Her proposition is further motivated by cultural concerns: "Si l'amour de l'île natale est profondément enraciné dans le cœur de certains, d'aucuns accepteront avec joie d'aller se refaire un foyer et de retrouver l'équilibre de leur vie matérielle dans un pays qui ne diffère pas sensiblement du leur" ("If their love for their home island is profoundly rooted in their hearts, some of them will still joyfully accept to leave, make their homes and find equilibrium in their material lives in a country that is not markedly different from their own", 1). Nardal emphasizes the need for *émigrés* to reconstitute family life and find economic stability, a direct contrast to people like *Elisa* who toil far from their families and find themselves isolated in a country whose weather and culture are decidedly alienating. Further, she argues that such a solution would be mutually beneficial to both territories, most likely in order to avoid replicating the uneven

relations of power between émigrés and locals that characterize Elisa's story.

Said's "Reflections on Exile" once again provides the necessary tools to parse out the nuances of the relationship between exile and nationalism present in Nardal's article: "We come to nationalism and its essential association with exile. Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages. Indeed, the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel's dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other" (Said, 290). Nardal imagines an outre-mer community with a shared cultural and linguistic heritage. It is this shared sense of identity that will make political cooperation over the relocation of Martinican workers possible. The geographic difference Nardal describes in "Actions de grace", the cultural difference in "Nouveau Bal Nègre de la Glacière", and the marginalization of working class Antillean women presented in "En exil", culminate in this articulation of Antillo-Guyanese nationalism.

Nardal continues the examination of the intersections of race, gender and class begun in "En exil" in a four-part series she wrote for the Parisian newspaper *Le Soir* in 1930 titled "Femmes de couleur: L'Antillaise."⁷¹ The goal of her series was to counter the doudouiste representations of Antillean women often packaged for the French public in what Suzanne Césaire called "littérature de hamac" (Césaire, 65). As Nardal argues in terms that her compatriot would echo: "Elle n'est pas la nonchalante fille que les romanciers du siècle dernier se sont plus à dépeindre. Plus de hamacs. Plus d'éventails. L'Antillaise, tôt levée, travaille autant que ses sœurs blanches. Voilà qui enlève un peu de leur poésie, aux "Iles de beauté". C'est tant pis" ("She is not the nonchalant girl that the novelists of the last century took pleasure in portraying. No more

⁷¹ Paulette Nardal, "L'Antillaise," *Le Soir* 2 June 1930, "L'Antillaise: Marchandes des rues," *Le Soir* 16 June 1930, "L'Antillaise: Bourgeoise créole," *Le Soir* 23 June 1930 and "L'Antillaise: Etudiante à Paris," *Le Soir* 30 June 1930.

hammocks. No more fans. The Antillean woman, an early riser, works as much as her white sisters. Thus we take away some of their poetic descriptions of ‘islands of beauty.’ Too bad”).⁷² In this opening paragraph, Nardal states that her first objective is to take away the power of representation from doudouiste poets for whom depicting the Antillean woman as an exotic object, was a source of (sexual) pleasure. Her short, quick negations “plus de hamacs. Plus d’éventails” show this efficiently. Her representation of Antillean women will focus on their hard work, a representation which as the rest of her series shows, is as much a reversal of the stereotype of the lazy Antillean as it is a subtle indictment of the colonial economy that necessitates back-breaking work for little pay. To this end, Nardal profiles three categories of Antillean women: “marchandes des rues” (“street hawkers”) “bourgeoisie créole” (“creole bourgeoisie”) and “L’Antillaise étudiante à Paris” (“the Antillean student in Paris”). It is interesting to note that these articles in *Le Soir* often shared the page with discussions of the imminent 1931 colonial exposition. They therefore function as direct counter-representations to the degrading images of black bodies on exhibition.

In the first article of the series, Nardal argues that doudouisme does not accurately represent the reality of economic hardship in the Antilles. For the “amateurs d’exotisme” (“amateurs of exoticism”) she warns that there is no more “grâce provocante du madras, l’éclat des bijoux d’or sur le bronze clair des visages, la soyeuse douceur du foulard” (“provocative grace of the madras, the flash of gold jewelry on light bronze faces, the silky softness of the foulard”). In the place of the sumptuously dressed Antillaise, we find women in ordinary, somewhat threadbare clothes in a colony whose economy cannot sustain even the most basic needs of its population: “Mais hélas! Le prix de la vie aux Antilles a augmenté dans des proportions effrayantes et la femme du peuple qui jusqu’ici avait conservé le costume local, se

⁷² Paulette Nardal, “Femmes de couleur: L’Antillaise”, *Le Soir* 2 June 1930.

voit obligée de lui préférer des robes à la mode, moins coûteuses” (“But alas! Living costs in the Antilles have risen to such frightening proportions and the average woman, who until now preserved the local dress, now finds herself obliged to prefer more fashionable, less expensive dresses”). Women’s clothing symbolizes a larger economic problem, which, as Nardal will suggest in her later publications, is in turn the result of colonial inequalities. In “Marchandes des rues” Nardal uses movement to great effect as she shows how Antillean women are affected by the colonial economy. She follows street hawkers as they crisscross Fort-de-France balancing heavy loads on their heads and calling out to potential customers from dawn until well into the night. She takes us to some of the poorest communes of the city, La Levée and Terres-Sainville. Yet in reversing the exotic representations of the island, in seeking to show us beneath the great camouflage, she does not turn poverty into a spectacle. She proposes a new way of representing Antillean women in the street, in the city, in public space. Her working class woman is a proud income earner: “Elle traverse maintenant Fort-de-France, la démarche fière, l’œil vif” (“She crosses Fort-de-France now, her step proud, her gaze keen”). They are also the producers and sustainers of Martinican culture, expressed through the local cuisine they make and sell.

In “Bourgeoisie créole”, Nardal continues to wrestle the power of representation away from metropolitan writers. She represents the middle class Antillean woman as sophisticated and knowledgeable of French fashion and culture. She also argues that metropolitan writers have misrepresented these women in their works: “Leurs sources sont ces reporters fantaisistes qu’un déjeuner pris chez le gouverneur suffit à documenter sur la vie antillaise, ces officiers de marine qui, après une brève escale où ils ne coudoient que la pègre des ports, s’amusent à publier des mensongères ‘Histoires de marins’ où ils salissent à plaisir les familles antillaises” (“Their sources are these fanciful reporters for whom lunch at the governor’s is enough to document Antillean life, these naval officers who, after a brief stopover during which they brush shoulders

with only the dubious people at the ports, amuse themselves by publishing misleading ‘Histoires de marins’ in which they sully Antillean women as they please”). Her use of words like “s’amusement” and “plaisir” suggests that these writers enact a colonial fantasy and obtain a kind of pleasure in reducing the Antillean woman to a sexualized object. Nardal chooses to focus instead on the bourgeois woman’s labor and states that after World War I, women have become an integral part of the formal workforce. This idea of Antillean women’s entry into the “cité” will be the focus of her articles in *La Femme dans la cité*.

Her final article on the Antillean student in Paris is an important precursor to her later work tracing the awakening of racial consciousness among black women in Paris. Nardal’s Antillean student leaves for Paris with a “curiosité intellectuelle et artistique” (“intellectual and artistic curiosity”) yet her arrival in the famed French capital leaves her cold: “Mais on peut dire que le premier contact avec la vie métropolitaine ne l’éblouit pas. Est-ce l’effet de ses lectures, du cinéma, du disque et même de la T.S.F?” (“But we might say that the first contact with metropolitan life does not dazzle her. Is this the result of her books, the cinema, the disc and even the T.S.F?”).⁷³ While Nardal’s question is multilayered, Jamaica Kincaid’s essay “On Seeing England for the First Time” allows us to peel back some of these layers. Kincaid expresses the disappointment and distaste she feels when she travels to England for the first time after years of colonial education in Antigua. She is particularly disgusted at being force-fed⁷⁴ the history and geography of a country whose only contact with hers had been one of domination, violence and erasure:

If now as I speak of all this I give the impression of someone on the outside looking in, nose pressed up against a glass window, that is wrong. My nose was

⁷³ Telegraph stations were often known simply as T.S.F, shorthand for “transmission sans fil.”

⁷⁴ The image of force-feeding is particularly apt because it captures the trauma that Kincaid describes as a reluctant consumer of food and clothing that bear the ubiquitous “Made in England” label.

pressed up against a glass window all right, but there was an iron vise at the back of my neck forcing my head to stay in place. To avert my gaze was to fall back into something from which I had been rescued, a hole filled with nothing, and that was the word for everything about me, nothing. (Kincaid, 35-36)

The iron vise represents colonial power. The colonizer negates the identity, history, the very humanity of the colonized (“a hole filled with nothing”), and then attempts to fill the void created with a longing for an unattainable Englishness. Nardal’s Antillean student, like Kincaid, has been subjected to French colonial ideology in every aspect of her life: in school, through cultural productions and technologies of communication between her island and the metropole. Why then is she not dazzled by the city of lights when she finally arrives? Kincaid explains the source of the disgust that the (formerly) colonized may feel on first arriving in the metropole: “The space between the idea of something and its reality is always wide and deep and dark. The longer they are kept apart—idea of thing, reality of thing—the wider the width, the deeper the depth, the thicker and darker the darkness. This space starts out empty, there is nothing in it, but it rapidly becomes filled up with obsession or desire or hatred or love” (37). For the Antillean student as for Kincaid, there is a *décalage* between the reality of the metropole and colonial propaganda. Her indifference to Paris, articulated as a negation (“le premier contact avec la vie métropolitaine ne l’éblouit pas”) rejects the colonial discourse.

From the metropolitan landscape, Nardal’s Antillean student turns her anthropological gaze on Parisians and is startled to find that as a black intellectual, they regard her with hostility and suspicion: “L’étudiante antillaise s’alarme de l’hostilité que voudrait créer en France une certaine presse à l’égard des intellectuels de couleur, là où il faudrait, au contraire, une véritable éducation colonial du public métropolitain” (“The Antillean student is alarmed by the hostility that certain press seeks to create in France with regard to intellectuals of color, in place of a

veritable colonial education of the metropolitan public”). Nardal enacts yet another reversal by calling for a colonial education of the Parisian populace in response to racism. She proposes in effect a reverse colonization of the metropole. Until then, the Antillean student remains aware of this racism, proves her intellectual capability by obtaining her *diplôme* and then returns to the Antilles, Africa or Madagascar with a renewed appreciation for home. Nardal’s “L’Antillaise” series is another rewriting of home in exile. Targeted at a Parisian audience, these articles rewrite black women’s bodies out of the colonial discourse and into an emerging tradition that recognizes their cultural, intellectual and economic contributions.

Nardal undertakes a different project of rewriting home in her 1931 tourist guidebook, commissioned by the French government as part of the *Guides des colonies* series. The volume contains a section on Martinique—complete with maps and photographs—written by Nardal, sections on Guadeloupe and Guyane contributed by Dr. G. Devez, and one on Saint Pierre and Miquelon by Paul Roussier. Throughout the guidebook, Nardal seeks to reassure would-be tourists that they will feel right at home in Martinique. She presents the island as just the right combination of familiarity and difference:

Le touriste [...] pourra constater que la Martinique est une petite France, une France lointaine. Les usages ne diffèrent pas essentiellement des usages français. La vie, là-bas, n’est qu’une adaptation de la vie européenne aux nécessités du climat tropical. Il ne rompra pas toute attache avec la métropole, ou, s’il est étranger, avec sa patrie, car, tous les soirs, le bulletin du câble le mettra au courant des événements mondiaux de la nuit précédente et de la journée. S’il a laissé de la famille au loin, le câble, la T.S.F., les courriers et les cargos le relieront à ceux qui lui sont chers. (Nardal, “Martinique”, 5)

The tourist [...] will realize that Martinique is a little France, a faraway France.

The customs are not essentially different from French customs. Life there is but an adaptation of European life to the necessities of a tropical climate. He [the tourist] will not break all attachment with the metropole, or, if he is a foreigner, with his home country, since every night the cable bulletin will keep him updated on world events of that day and the night before. If he has left family far away, the cable, the T.S.F, the mail and cargoes will connect him to all that is dear to him.

How do we reconcile her claims of Martinique's cultural specificity as presented in *La Dépêche africaine* and *Le Soir* with this image of Martinique as a tropical replica of France? Are we to assume that the latter image only emerges as a result of the nature of the publication, i.e. a tourist guidebook commissioned by the French government? On one hand we cannot reconcile Nardal's apparently dual position on the colony/metropole relationship. That she situates Martinique as both French and Antillean—where the latter designates a geography, history and culture distinct from that of metropolitan France—speaks to the apparent paradox of French Antillean political identity. On the other hand, Nardal's description presents Martinique as more than simply a remote outpost of France. For Nardal, the tourist finds continuity between France and Martinique thanks to the technological advances in communication that link the island to the rest of the world. Her archipelagic view resonates with Suzanne Césaire's. Like Césaire, she asserts that Martinique exists in relation to a world that goes beyond the narrow confines of the colony/metropole relationship. This assertion is important in the context of a tourist guidebook intended primarily for a French audience. Nardal suggests that Martinique is neither a pristine paradise in which the tourist can escape from the rest of the world, nor simply a replica of France in the Antilles. Rather, in the rest of the text, she offers a complex definition of Martinique as an entity within a larger French polity, a territory with its own unique history and culture rooted in the Caribbean archipelago, and a space that opens up onto the rest of the world.

Indeed what is most fascinating about Nardal's text, is not what it says but rather what it does. Contrary to what one might expect of a typical tourist guidebook, Nardal's includes much more than a list of hotels and sights. She situates the tourist experience within a larger presentation of the island itself, its history, political status and topographic features. Drawing on extensive historical and anthropological sources such as the works of Moreau de St. Mery and Dr. Léo Sajous, with whom she founded the bilingual journal *La Revue du monde noir*, Nardal devotes a significant portion of her text to the history of Martinique. Rather than begin with the arrival of the first French *colons*, she describes the culture and political organization of the Arawaks and Caribs, the island's earlier settlers. She is particularly intrigued by the Carib practice of incorporating Arawak women into their social units after conquering and killing the Arawak men. Nardal marshals evidence to paint an extensive picture of linguistic and culinary practices from these early inhabitants that persist in contemporary Martinican culture. For a 1931 publication, Nardal's tourist guidebook contained more information on Martinican cultural and natural history than textbooks found in colonial Antillean classrooms at the time. Thus despite saying that Martinique is but a "petite France," Nardal's text actually shows the opposite by presenting the island as a distinctly Caribbean space with its own history that is both intertwined with France's through the fact of colonization, and distinct because of its Caribbean specificities.

Nardal's representation of Martinique in her guidebook also reminds the reader of Suzanne Césaire's perceptive analysis of the Caribbean's great camouflage. In her description of the communes surrounding Fort-de-France, Nardal reserves special mention for Didier as "le quartier blanc créole en général: magnifiques propriétés de maître: pelouses, bosquets, jardins fleuris. Villa du gouverneur, du chef de cabinet, de négociants, de commerçants..." ("the white creole quarter in general: magnificent estates: lawns, groves, flower gardens. Villas of the governor, the principal private secretary, merchants and traders", 55). This description shows

Didier to be the seat of the economic and political power that is still largely concentrated among the békés.⁷⁵ Nardal is more subtle in her representation of *béké* dominance and exploitation than Suzanne Césaire, who describes the descendants of white colons as “ces quelques milliers de sous-industriels et d’épiciers, cette caste de faux colons responsables de la déchéance humaine des Antilles” (“these few thousands of second-rate manufacturers and grocers, this caste of would-be colonizers responsible for the human deprivation of the Antilles”, Césaire, 89/42). Rather, Nardal leaves it up to her reader to note the contrast in her descriptions of Didier and low-income areas like Terres Sainville, in order to see the intersecting racial and class inequality.

Throughout the text, images of abject poverty and economic exploitation peek through the cracks of what is an otherwise idyllic picture of a tropical paradise. For example, early in her presentation of the colors and sounds that will greet the tourist on her arrival, Nardal includes descriptions of poor, working class women hawking fruits by the side of the road or carrying large, heavy loads of charcoal. She describes both images as picturesque (“pittoresque”), apparently her code word for poverty: “Le spectacle, qu’on peut juger pénible, ne manque pas de pittoresque. Ces femmes, entraînées à ce dur métier, ont gardé des muscles longs, de la souplesse et en même temps du hiératisme” (“The spectacle, which we may judge as painful, has its fair share of the picturesque. These women, trained in this difficult job, have long muscles, flexibility and at the same time immobility”, Nardal, “Martinique”, 10). A few lines later she affirms, “On pourrait souhaiter moins de pittoresque et plus de propreté” (“We might wish for less of the picturesque and more cleanliness”, 11). This remark both highlights the conditions of misery in which these women labor, as well as Nardal’s own subversive use of “pittoresque” to denote this poverty. Her desire to give voice to these anonymous working class women links us back in time

⁷⁵ Over a decade later we find that Didier still stands as the symbol of racial and economic dominance in Mayotte Capécia’s *Je suis martiniquaise*. See Mayotte Capécia, *Je suis martiniquaise*. (Paris: Corrêa, 1948): 149-150.

to the story of Elisa, and forward to her numerous editorials outlining the working and living conditions of Martinican women in *La Femme dans la cité*.

Prior to founding *La Femme dans la cité*, Paulette Nardal sharpened her editing skills as co-founder of the bilingual journal *La Revue du monde noir*, a joint venture she undertook with Léo Sajous, a Haitian doctor in Paris. Six issues appeared between the journal's founding in 1931 and its demise in 1932 due to lack of funds. In June 1936, Dorothy West's periodical *Challenge* published an exposé by Eslanda Robeson on Nardal, as part of Robeson's "Black Paris" series. Robeson recounts the journal's origins and its goals: "The only forbidden subject, the only taboo is politics, because it is dangerous. Dr. Sajous and Mlle Nardal felt that if Negroes everywhere would read this magazine and contribute to it, the great barrier of isolation would be to some extent removed, and they would begin to be consolidated, at least from an intellectual point of view" (Robeson, 11-12).⁷⁶ Robeson's description of the journal's goal to foster intellectual solidarity among blacks in France is in line with the editors' own stated aims. The journal's bilingual nature and the geographic diversity of subjects and contributors establish *La Revue du monde noir* as a black internationalist project. The editors sought to "fend off exile, [...] to prevent its ravages" (Said, 290) by providing black intellectuals with a textual space in which to collectively present their works and counter isolation. *La Revue du monde noir* was a project of black cultural reconstruction that gave "rise to investigations of self" (301) and contributed to the emergence of Negritude.

The most interesting aspect of Robeson's description however is her assertion that politics was taboo.⁷⁷ Certainly, Nardal's journal did not have the same radical tone as some of the other

⁷⁶ Eslanda Goode Robeson, "Black Paris II." *Challenge* 1934: 9-12.

⁷⁷ As shown in the previous chapter, the journal *Tropiques* was also described as a-political, suggesting a somewhat narrow definition of politics as solely affiliation with a political party. That *Tropiques* and *La Revue du monde noir* appear a-political perhaps speaks more to the delicate maneuvering and camouflage employed by their editors in

journals primarily concerned with race at the time. For example, *La Voix des nègres*, the mouthpiece of the Comité de défense de la race nègre, with such provocative headlines as “L’Afrique aux Africains” (“Africa for the Africans”) and “L’impérialisme yankee en action” (“Yankee Imperialism in Action”), was soon targeted by the French administration, which went as far as imprisoning vendors of the journal and confiscating copies meant for sale in the African colonies.⁷⁸ Likewise *Le Cri des nègres*, with which Nardal was also involved in 1935, was vocal in its anti-colonial agenda and published provocative pictures of corpses and decapitated heads, reported to be victims of colonial violence in Africa and Indochina.⁷⁹ In comparison, Nardal’s journal, with its literary and anthropological focus, was relatively benign. However, to characterize *La Revue du monde noir* as a-political is a misnomer. In “Éveil de la Conscience de Race”, Nardal argues for the inclusion of black history, literature and cultural production in official French courses of study both in the Antilles and in France. She envisions extensive institutional transformation that will signal a hopeful future for the black race.⁸⁰ As a black internationalist publication in colonial France, *La Revue du monde noir* was certainly a political undertaking, even if not a particularly radical one.

Examining the stated aims of *La Revue du monde noir* and *La Femme dans la cité* reveals important similarities in their political objectives. Where the former sought to give voice to black intellectuals and artists, the latter sought to do the same for Martinican women. Likewise, the former’s goal to defend the collective interests of blacks and highlight their social and cultural contributions, finds echoes in the latter’s goal to articulate and defend the collective political

order to thwart surveillance and—in the case of *La Revue du monde noir*—continue to receive funding from the colonial government.

⁷⁸ Copies of these journals are available on microfilm at the Archives Nationale d’outre-mer with the call number FR ANOM 4005 COL 2.

⁷⁹ For details on Nardal’s activities for *Le Cri des nègres*, see Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 134.

⁸⁰ Paulette Nardal, “Éveil de la Conscience de Race/Awakening of Race Consciousness”, in *La Revue du monde noir = The Review of the black world, 1931-1932: collection complète, no. 1 à 6* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992): 25/343-31/349.

interests of Martinican women. Both journals also sought to accompany written production with social and intellectual activism. For *La Revue du monde noir*, books, media coverage and conferences would complete the range of its activities aimed at raising awareness of black cultural and intellectual production in France. For *La Femme dans la cité*, it was equally important to carry out the journal's objectives in word and deed: "C'est pourquoi, joignant l'acte à la parole, nous avons fondé un Cours d'Enseignement ménager pour les domestiques [...] nous avons créé l'Œuvre des Layettes [...] nous avons décidé de nous transformer en assistantes sociales" ("That is why, combining action with word, we have established a course on Domestic Instruction for domestic workers [...] we have created the Layette Effort [...] we have decided to transform ourselves into social servants", Nardal, *La Femme*, 7/8).⁸¹ Both journals, in their aims, express a dialogical relationship between political thought and praxis and thereby engage in what Patricia Hill Collins has called "a critical social theory" (Collins, 32).

Although the language Nardal employs in expressing the aims of the 1931 journal resurface in her editorials over a decade later, it would be erroneous to describe *La Femme dans la cité* as a journal that simply replaces the racial concerns of *La Revue du monde noir* with gendered ones. Rather, *La Femme dans la cité* builds on the idea of democratic inclusion first laid out in *La Revue du monde noir* by examining women's contributions to social, political and intellectual life in Martinique. In 1931, Nardal and Sajous summarized their journal's aims as follows: "Et ainsi les deux cent millions de membres que compte la Race noire, quoique partagés entre diverses Nations, formeront, au-dessus de celles-ci, une grande DÉMOCRATIE, prélude de la Démocratie universelle" ("Thus, the two hundred million individuals which constitute the Negro race, even though scattered among the various nations, will form over and above the latter

⁸¹ Unless otherwise stated, all references to *La Femme dans la cité* are taken from Paulette Nardal, and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Beyond Negritude*.

a great Brotherhood, the forerunner of universal Democracy”, Nardal, *La Revue*, 3/4, emphasis in original). For Nardal and Sajous, giving voice to black intellectuals and writers in the pages of *La Revue du monde noir* was ultimately a move towards democracy, that is, the inclusion and participation of a marginalized race in global cultural and intellectual production. Nardal’s desire for democratic inclusion along racial lines in 1930s Paris would later influence her editorials in *La Femme dans la cité*, in which she locates the need for democratic inclusion at the intersection of race, gender and class in postwar Martinique.

Strains of Nardal’s intersectional focus, already articulated in her short story “En exil” and her “L’Antillaise” series, can also be found in her final essay for *La Revue du monde noir*, “Éveil de la Conscience de Race”. She examines the intertwined process of racial and gendered “awakening” among Antillean students in Paris that led to the journal’s creation. Nardal writes: “Les femmes de couleur vivant seules dans la métropole moins favorisées jusqu’à l’Exposition coloniale que leurs congénères masculins aux faciles succès, ont ressenti bien avant eux le besoin d’une solidarité raciale qui ne serait pas seulement d’ordre matériel: c’est ainsi qu’elles se sont éveillées à la conscience de la race” (“The coloured women living alone in the metropolis, until the Colonial Exhibition, have certainly been less favoured than coloured men who are content with a certain easy success. Long before the latter, they have felt the need of a racial solidarity which would not be merely material. They were thus aroused to race consciousness”, Nardal, *La Revue*, 29/347). She points the reader back to Roberte Horth’s short story “Histoire sans importance” as an apt portrayal of the intersecting forms of oppression faced by black women in Paris. Horth’s story recounts the experience of Léa, an educated Antillean woman, a woman “like any other.” Assimilation for Léa remains impossible because the color of her skin sets her apart as an exotic Other in the eyes of her Parisian acquaintances. For Nardal, black women were at the forefront of articulating a newfound race consciousness, specifically because they had to confront these

intersecting modes of oppression and marginalization. As Sharpley-Whiting argues, “The Antillean woman in Paris, learned in the ways of occidental culture yet rejected by that culture on the basis of her ethnicity, gender, and color [...] is not a Frenchwoman like other Frenchwomen; she is a racialized Franco-Antillean woman” (Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 76). In addition to serving as a historical record of women’s roles as forerunners in the emergence of the Negritude movement, Nardal’s account of the emergence of race consciousness among black women in Paris also reveals the intersecting forces of race, class and gender oppression that constituted Antillean women’s everyday experiences of marginalization in colonial France.

The thematic concerns of Nardal’s corpus during the interwar years certainly inform her editorials in *La Femme dans la cite*. In particular, she remains concerned with Antillean women’s work, bodies and aspirations but places this discussion now in the context of citizenship and departmentalization. In the opening lines of her first essay for *La Femme dans la cité* in 1945, Nardal asks: “Faut-il déplorer l’accession de la femme martiniquaise à la qualité de citoyenne? L’avenir nous le dira” (“Must we deplore the Martinican woman’s ascension to the status of citizen? Only time will tell”, Nardal, *La Femme*, 5/6) By examining the implications of the ratification of the vote for women in 1944, she articulates here an expanded focus from race and racism, to the complex matrix of racism and patriarchy that had previously excluded Martinican women from public life and denied them access to full citizenship. Nardal goes on to declare that women have as much to contribute as men, to the project of political and social inclusion after the hardships of World War II: “Devant le devoir social, elle est l’égale de l’homme. Elle est aussi en tant qu’être personnel, intelligent et libre. Mais en tant qu’être social, elle doit à la communauté humaine ses services. Comme l’homme, elle doit contribuer au progrès de l’humanité” (“Regarding social duty, she is man’s equal. As an individual, she is also intelligent and free. But as a social being, her services are bound to humankind. Like man, she must contribute to the

progress of humanity”, 5/6). This opening establishes the tone of Nardal’s essays in *La Femme dans la cité*. Throughout the journal’s six-year run, she advocates gender equality and social and economic justice, all the while outlining women’s roles in the rapidly changing political climate of Martinique after World War II and in the early years of departmentalization. She also situates her discussion of Martinican women’s political interests in the context of her larger vision of Martinique as a French island, distinct for its rootedness in Caribbean history and culture, a vision articulated throughout her Parisian writings of the interwar years.

“La femme martiniquaise est entrée dans la Cité des Hommes”: Citizenship and the Politics of Female Subjectivity

Ce sont les femmes qui font et défont les maisons;
Ce sont les femmes qui font et défont les familles;
Ce sont les femmes qui doivent faire la Nation et ne jamais
permettre qu’elle soit défaite⁸²

It is women who make and unmake homes;
It is women who make and unmake families;
It is women who must make the Nation and must never allow it to
be unmade

Nardal believed that women could effect significant political, economic and social change in Martinique, through the polls. Consequently, many of her editorials between 1945 and 1946 address what she observes to be Martinican women’s political apathy. For the first time in Martinique’s history, women could participate as voters in the historic post-war elections.⁸³ Nardal asserts in her editorial “Optique électoral”, written in March 1945, that Martinican women’s political action is informed by their local, immediate, everyday material realities: “A l’action politique elles apporteront leur force neuve, mais aussi leur bon sens et cette espèce de sagesse que donne le contact journalier avec les réalités matérielles. Car pour nous, la vie

⁸² E.D. “Pensée”, *La Femme dans la cité* May 1948: 4.

⁸³ 1945 saw Aimé Césaire voted into office as mayor of Fort-de-France, and in 1946 he was elected as deputy to the Assemblée Nationale.

continue avec ses nécessités inéluctables” (“To political action, they will bring their fresh strength, but also their good sense and the sort of insight that daily connection with material realities offers”, 17/18). Voting, as a means of enfranchisement, allows women to address the local problems that Nardal highlights in later issues of the journal, including the sometimes-explosive race relations on the island (69), poor living conditions of sugar cane workers (69) and gaps in the educational curriculum (75).

The Guadeloupean deputy, Gerty Archimède, stands as an example of Nardal’s strategy for Antillean women to vote into power politicians who could best advocate for their particular interests. Archimède was elected into the National Assembly at the same time as Césaire, and often argued alongside her Martinican colleague for full citizenship rights to be extended to the populations of the DOMs. During the 16 March 1948 sitting of the Assembly, Archimède noted with alarm that many of the necessary provisions had not yet been put in place in order to fully implement departmentalization by the agreed deadline of 30 March 1948. In her speech, Archimède gives voice to Antillean women’s concerns, particularly the intersecting racial and class discrimination that deprived them of the social assistance and benefits enjoyed by metropolitan women: “Depuis deux ans, les femmes de nos départements souhaitent bénéficier, elles aussi, de l’allocation servie aux mères françaises et ne comprennent pas la discrimination que semble vouloir instituer le Gouvernement” (“For the past two years, women in our departments have wished to benefit from the subsidies granted to French mothers and they do not understand the discrimination that it seems the government would like to institute”).⁸⁴ Social security benefits for women in the Antilles remained a key point of contention in the application of the law of departmentalization. Archimède and Césaire were at the forefront of this struggle

⁸⁴ *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 16 Mar. 1948: 1731. Web. 15 Nov. 2013. <http://4e.republique.jo-an.fr>.

throughout the early years. On 15 March 1950, Césaire again intervened in the Assembly's proceedings. In a lengthy speech that foreshadowed *Discours sur le colonialisme*, he condemned the colonial practices of discrimination, violence and cultural erasure that continued to characterize France's treatment of the Antilles despite the new departmental status. Césaire argued that the overseas departments could not lay claim to full citizenship status when women were systematically denied the ability to feed their children: "Car nous ne pouvons pas admettre qu'une Martiniquaise, qu'une Guadeloupéenne continue à percevoir, comme c'est le cas maintenant, 18 ou 20 francs par jour et par enfant, et quel que soit le nombre de ses enfants. [...] 18 ou 20 francs par jour pour un enfant à qui vous offrez généreusement l'égalité devant la mort, mais à qui vous refusez l'égalité devant le droit et devant la vie!" ("For we cannot accept that a Martinican woman, a Guadeloupean woman, continues to receive, as is currently the case, 18 or 20 francs per day per child, regardless of the number of children [...] 18 or 20 francs per day for a child to whom you generously offer equality before death but refuse equality before the law and before life!").⁸⁵ Césaire's position resonated with contributors to *La Femme dans la cité*, who declared themselves in solidarity with their elected representatives' struggles on their behalf.⁸⁶

Gerty Archimède was also an example of the serious opposition to women's participation in politics at this time. This opposition came from several quarters, including from political opponents who saw Archimède's increasingly distinguished career as a threat to the existing gender hierarchy in Guadeloupe. In 1959 when Archimède lost her seat as representative of Basse-Terre, members of the opposing party paraded her street, carrying an effigy with disproportionately large breasts and a large posterior. On another occasion, a group of opponents

⁸⁵ *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 15 Mar. 1950: 2077. <http://4e.republique.jo-an.fr>. Web. 15 Nov. 2013

⁸⁶ Marie Taillandier, "Avec nos élus nous travaillerons à façonner notre sécurité sociale", *La Femme dans la cité*, July 1951: 11.

attacked her while she was delivering a speech at a conference, and tried to strip her naked.⁸⁷ Both attacks indicate more than just differences in political ideology. They enact a specific kind of gendered violence that paradoxically seeks to erase black women's presence in the male dominated political sphere by making them highly visible as hypersexualized objects. Nardal was only too aware of the high costs of women's political inclusion: "celles d'entre nous qui, en 1948, se sont courageusement lancées dans la bagarre sollicitant et obtenant des sièges de conseillères municipales, se déclarent en majorité, écœurées de l'expérience. [...] Affronter l'ignorance hurlante, l'effarante crédulité ou le sectarisme perfide de certains milieux demande en effet un courage peu commun, un tempérament de 'dur', une santé à toute épreuve" ("Furthermore, those among us who, in 1948, courageously entered the fight soliciting and obtaining the seats of municipal advisors, declare themselves disgusted by the experience. [...] Facing blaring ignorance, astounding credulity, or perfidious sectarianism of certain milieus demands a rare courage, a hardened temperament, relentless health", 81/82). At the same time, the stakes were too high for her to do anything but continue to encourage women to be politically conscious, to educate themselves on political matters and to participate *en masse* in local and legislative elections.

In "Les femmes martiniquaises et la politique", written four months after departmentalization was voted into law, Nardal issues one of her most urgent calls for women's political action: "La Martinique devra se faire remarquer par l'importance de la participation féminine aux élections définitives. Il nous faut présenter cette fois à la France et au monde le vrai visage de la Martinique" ("Martinique should draw attention to itself through the importance of female participation in decisive elections. We must present the true face of Martinique, this time, to France and to the world", 49/50). Through defining their political interests, Antillean women

⁸⁷ *Gerty Archimède La Candidate Du Peuple*. Dir. Mariette Monpierre. Les productions de la lanterne, 2005. DVD.

would continue the collective project of self-definition that Suzanne Césaire called for during the war: “Pour mieux éclairer notre choix, nous avons donc le devoir de nous instruire des questions sociales et de nous entraîner à la réflexion profonde basée sur la connaissance de nous-mêmes et sur l’observation de la réalité” (“In order to better clarify our choice, we thus have the duty to inform ourselves about social questions and involve ourselves in deep reflection based on knowledge of ourselves and observations of reality”, 19/20). For Nardal, women’s political participation goes beyond the single act of casting a vote. It also involves a collective self-consciousness, cultivated by observing and gaining knowledge of the social realities on the island. In her May 1945 editorial “La misère n’attend pas” she envisions a critical mass of politically aware women with the will and agency to work for social justice and local legislative reforms: “nous poursuivons notre éducation sociale afin de nous préparer à mieux la servir, cette justice, dans l’ordre législatif” (“we pursue our social education in order to prepare ourselves to better serve this justice in the legislative order”, 25/26). She describes women’s emergence onto the political scene as a mental revolution (5) and a peaceful revolution (61). Nardal provides a woman-centered response to Suzanne Césaire’s wartime call to know oneself in the midst of political crisis and change. Where Césaire imagined a project of collective self-definition that would lead to a cultural revolution in Martinique, Nardal envisions a social revolution; improved living conditions for families and reduced income inequality brought about by women’s vote.

Nardal, like Aimé Césaire, also grappled with Antillean politics in the French context, as well as on an international scale. She evoked recent memories of war to stress Martinican women’s role in postwar rebuilding efforts. The epigraph to this section, contributed by the writer only known as E.D., served as the closing lines to the journal’s May 1948 issue. It is a pithy articulation of Nardal’s view that after years of war, women, by becoming full citizens and participating actively in political life, would be the ones to reconstruct the war-ravaged nation. In

short, Martinican women had entered the city to rebuild it. The question that immediately arises is, “which nation?” Martinican? French? Antillean? Nardal provides a complex yet revealing answer in “Optique electoral”:

La loyauté, l’esprit de conciliation, la concorde sont indispensables non seulement à la reconstruction de notre grande patrie, la France, mais encore à la vie, à l’avenir de notre petit pays. Les luttes politiques aux Antilles ne constituent plus un sport, un dérivatif à l’ennui que crée l’absence de distractions, de joies plus nobles. L’enjeu en est maintenant terriblement sérieux. Et puisque nous sommes appelées à participer à la vie de la Cité, que notre première contribution au bien-commun soit d’imprimer à l’effort collectif vers la justice sociale la marque de la paix. (19, emphasis mine)

Loyalty, the spirit of conciliation, harmony is not only indispensable to *the reconstruction of our great fatherland, France, even to the life, to the future of our little country*. Political struggles in the Antilles no longer constitute a sport, derived from boredom bred by the absence of distraction, of joys more noble. The stakes are at this moment terribly high. And since we have been called upon to participate in the life of the City, let our first contribution to the common good be to imprint on the collective effort toward social justice the mark of peace. (20, emphasis mine)

Nardal posits a metropole/outre-mer relationship that establishes France as patrie and Martinique as pays. This distinction, a curious one given that the two words are often used interchangeably, is best explained by Nardal herself.⁸⁸ In her exposé on Radio Martinique, published in *La Femme*

⁸⁸ Césaire also used this distinction in the National Assembly to decry what he called the myth of departmentalization. In a subtle rhetorical move, Martinique was no longer a “territoire” or “département” as it had

dans la cité in 1950, she describes the radio station's goals to maintain a balance between broadcasts from the metropole and airtime for local artists: "Que demandons-nous, après tout, à la Radiodiffusion française? De recréer, autant que possible, dans cette île que 3000 kms séparent de la Ville Lumière, un peu de l'atmosphère revivifiante de celle-ci tout en veillant à la préservation de notre art local" ("After all what is it that we ask of French radio broadcasting? To recreate, as much as possible, on this island 3000kms away from the City of Light, a bit of the latter's revitalizing atmosphere, all the while ensuring the preservation of our local art").⁸⁹ Funded by the metropolitan government but geared towards a Martinican audience, Radio Martinique functions as a symbol of the kind of balance that Nardal also sought to maintain in her definition of Martinican women's role in French and Antillean politics. In describing Martinique as *pays* and not as *colonie* or *territoire*, Nardal suggests that France as *patrie* does not preclude a nationalist identification with Martinique as its own distinct country. Written prior to departmentalization, Nardal's editorial recasts the disenfranchised colonized woman as a subject with political agency, a year before France recognized Antillean women as full citizens—a recognition that occurred only with the passage of both women's suffrage and departmentalization laws. Nardal puts into practice Césaire's distinction between being assimilated and assimilating on one's own terms. She frames Martinican women's French citizenship as a way to counter their double exclusion—as women and colonized subjects—from political discourse.

Throughout her contributions to *La Femme dans la cité*, Nardal locates Martinican women's political identity in multiple orbits at once: Martinican, French and Antillean. Like

been in his earlier speeches. Rather it was a "pays" whose culture and material realities were foreign to the administrators in charge of allocating funds to the island. *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 15 Mar. 1950: 2075-2079. Web. 15 Nov. 2013. <http://4e.republique.jo-an.fr>.

⁸⁹ Paulette Nardal, "Radio-Martinique", *La Femme dans la cité*, 1950: 8.

Suzanne Césaire, who writes of the “femmes aux quatre races et aux douzaines de sang” (Césaire, 86), Nardal also affirms that Martinique’s specificity lies in the multiplicity of cultural influences and political alliances present on the island. In “Les femmes martiniquaises et la politique”, Nardal describes “le vrai visage de la Martinique” (“The true face of Martinique”) as “Ce visage qui ne doit son unité qu’à la multiplicité de ses traits constitutifs” (“This face [that] owes its unity entirely to the multiplicity of its constituents’ traits”, Nardal, *La Femme*, 49/50). While she suggests here that the multiple components of Martinican society and politics exist in harmony, some of her other writings expose also the tensions inherent in the on-going negotiation of social advantages and political rights to be applied in the new overseas departments.

Two incidents stand out in the pages of *La Femme dans la cité* as emblematic of the sometimes-explosive race relations in a society that was in the process of grappling with the legacy of both plantation slavery and the colonial relationship with France. The first was “Autour d’un Crime”, Nardal’s October 1948 editorial condemning the cane workers who brutally murdered their white overseer at a rum distillery. Her editorial contains little contextual information on the cane workers’ motives. The assailants were however undoubtedly aware of the equally brutal murders of three cane workers in Carbet, a small town in the north, in March of the same year.⁹⁰ Striking workers at the *habitation Lajus* were lured into an ambush by their béké boss under the guise of paying their overdue salaries. On their way to the habitation, gendarmes opened fire on the workers, killing three of them and wounding several more. Newspapers carried the story in Martinique. In France, Aimé Césaire made urgent calls for the National Assembly to repeal Martinique’s first prefect Pierre Trouillet for his complicity and role in the affair.

It is therefore important to situate the murder discussed in Nardal’s October editorial, in

⁹⁰ *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 16 Mar. 1948: 1732. Web. 15 Nov. 2013. <http://4e.republique.jo-an.fr>.

the context of explosive and deadly race and class relations in Martinique at the dawn of departmentalization. In her editorial, Nardal argues that the cane workers were animated by racial and class hatred, and acted on false political propaganda (69). However she also recognizes the appalling living conditions of cane workers and argues that the exploitative labor conditions of the plantocracy (“l’exploitation d’antan”, 69) are no longer tenable in Martinique’s new political configuration. Here too, both Nardal and Césaire frame Martinique’s belonging to the French nation as a means to obtain social and legal justice in the face of historical inequalities. The formerly colonized population could theoretically use French citizenship as leverage against béké colonial practices such as economic exploitation and police brutality.

Nardal dedicated a portion of the July 1951 issue to a discussion of racism as tensions again ran high, this time over the problem of higher salaries for metropolitan government workers in comparison to salaries for Martinicans in the same sector. Nardal argues that this “humiliante inégalité” (“humiliating inequality”) had aggravated the “malaise racial” already present on the island.⁹¹ In the hopes of making *La Femme dans la cité* a space of interracial dialogue, she invited the reflections of “une amie métropolitaine” (“a metropolitan friend”). The one-page article, titled “Racisme” in large bold letters, is signed by H.D.⁹² Evidence from previous issues of the journal suggests that H.D. is in fact Hélène Durand, the wife of a French fonctionnaire who had moved to the island a year ago, and who contributed actively both to the journal and to its organization the Rassemblement féminin. That Durand would sign her full name to all her pieces but this one, attests to the sensitive nature of discussions around race and equality in Martinique as an overseas department. She argues, “Depuis plus d’un an à la Martinique, je constate chaque jour qu’un fossé se creuse davantage entre martiniquais et métropolitains. Un fossé de haine pour

⁹¹ “Discrimination raciale?”, *La Femme dans la cité*, July 1951: 5.

⁹² H.D., “Racisme”, *La Femme dans la cité*, July 1951: 5.

les uns, de mépris pour les autres. Et je sais bien—le mépris des uns étant antérieur à la haine des autres—à qui incombe la plus grosse part des responsabilités” (“Over a year now in Martinique, I realize that each day the gulf between Martinicans and metropolitans grows wider. A gulf of hatred for some, resentment for others. And I know full well—since the resentment of some predates the hatred of others—on whom to place the largest portion of blame”)⁹³ Durand’s analysis echoes both Nardal’s and Aimé Césaire’s diagnoses of a racial malaise stemming from Martinique’s long colonial history with France. Her intervention attests to Nardal’s project of creating a textual space in which women could participate in the on-going negotiation of citizenship in Martinique. Nardal salutes efforts by elected officials to put forward a law to address the clearly racialized income disparity. As Césaire would acknowledge in coming years, this strategy of using French citizenship as a means of anti-colonial resistance, would be a constant battle, one that Martinicans would not always win.⁹⁴ For now, however, this citizenship remained a viable tool for Martinicans—particularly for doubly marginalized women—to voice their dissatisfaction with inequalities and seek redress for them.

Paulette Nardal’s was not the only voice advocating for Martinican women’s meaningful inclusion in political discourse. Jane Léro founded the Union des femmes Martinique (UFM) in June 1944, barely six months before Nardal began the Rassemblement féminin.⁹⁵ Closely tied to the communist party, the UFM also sought to get women to the polls, increase their awareness of political issues, and provide social assistance for women in need. The two groups however had

⁹³ H.D., “Racisme” *La Femme dans la cité*, July 1951: 5.

⁹⁴ In a 1958 report delivered to the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais, Césaire outlined the negative effects of departmentalization on Martinique’s cultural development and its ability to form meaningful alliances in Africa and the diaspora. See Aimé Césaire, “Pour la transformation de la Martinique en région dans le cadre d’une union française fédérée”, in *Oeuvres complètes*, 3.

⁹⁵ Jane Léro was part of a close group of Martinican intelligentsia—which included the Césaires—based in Fort-de-France. Her brothers Thélus and Etienne were contributors to the 1932 journal *Légitime Défense*. Her sister in law Yva Léro (Thélus’s wife) actively contributed to the Union des femmes Martinique and explored the intersections of race, class and gender discrimination and prejudice in Martinican society in her 1957 novel *La Plaie*. See Yva Léro, *La plaie: roman* (Carbet: Imprimerie Copyrapid, 1957).

fundamentally different political ideologies. The UFM accused the Rassemblement féminin of catering to Fort-de-France's upper middle class and of reinforcing class boundaries by offering training courses for domestic workers rather than challenging the social and economic inequalities that made such work the only viable option for certain sectors of the population.⁹⁶ The UFM also described the Rassemblement féminin as a conservative organization affiliated with right-wing political parties.⁹⁷ Nardal adamantly refuted all claims of political party affiliation, particularly in her February 1945 editorial "Mise au point."

Although in her Parisian writings Nardal maintained a keen awareness of the effects of colonial power on black culture, intellectual production and economic advancement in the metropole, many of her contributions to *La Femme dans la cité* are indeed more reserved in their engagement with France as a colonial power.⁹⁸ However, dismissing Nardal and the important work of *La Femme dans la cité* as overly conservative, suggests an anachronistic reading of Martinican politics in the 1940s. The dawn of departmentalization, in the wake of a devastating world war, was a hopeful period for many Antilleans. Césaire himself only began to seriously propose alternative models of governance in 1958.⁹⁹ The more radical, anti-colonial movements such as the independence movement led by the Organisation de la Jeunesse Anti-colonialiste Martiniquaise (OJAM) circulated their famous manifesto "La Martinique aux Martiniquais!" in

⁹⁶ Gilbert Pago, "La Naissance de l'UFM", Mémoires, (Fort-de-France:s.n, 2000). Web. 20 Nov. 2013.

<http://www.unionfemmesmartinique.com/?article-1068-la-naissance-de-l-ufm>

⁹⁷ This last accusation was most likely fuelled even further by Nardal's publications in the Catholic journal "La Paix", noted for its anti-communist position. See Gilbert Pago, "La Naissance de l'UFM" and Armand Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique: Tome 2 - De 1848 à 1939*. (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1996).

⁹⁸ See for example her February 1946 editorial "Travailler", which Sharpley-Whiting describes as "a one-woman, single essay Festschrift of General Charles de Gaulle amid his resignation from French political office" (*La Femme*, 42). For Nardal, de Gaulle—and by extension the France he represented—was the "Savior" who bestowed on Martinique the gift of departmentalization, and on Martinican women the gift of the vote (42).

⁹⁹ In his 1958 PPM report, Césaire argued for a federalist model of government to replace the current DOM system. See Aimé Césaire, "Pour la transformation de la Martinique en region dans le cadre d'une union française federée", in *Oeuvres complètes*, 3.

1962.¹⁰⁰ Nardal's editorials in *La Femme dans la cité* therefore came at a time in Martinique's political history that was marked by the hope that assimilation would be more than a myth. Many still believed that France would make good on its republican promise of liberty, equality and fraternity for all of its citizens. As Gary Wilder argues, "total and immediate integration with France [w]as the surest route to substantive freedom for Antillean peoples, given their poor and weak status within an imperial world system" (Wilder 107). For colonized subjects turned citizens, departmentalization was a hopeful path to social and political agency, and Nardal's writings articulate that hope.

The *Chicago Defender's* 21 December 1946 coverage of Nardal's appointment to the UN as "area specialist for the French West Indies", sums up this hope: "Since the war [Nardal] said, the French franc has lost much of its value and the great losses had left many of her people poor. Their spirits have been elevated, however, due to the fact that in January they will become for the first time an official department of the French."¹⁰¹ Nardal once again embodies the seeming contradictions of Martinique's political position. On one hand, she articulates the hope that Martinique's status as a French department would better the island's economic fortunes. On the other hand, her stated objective at the UN, "to impart information about her country on questions of economic and social significance on non-self-governing territories", shows that Nardal remained keenly attuned to the particularities of Antillean social and political reality and sought to advocate for specifically Antillean interests on an international stage. Finally, that the headline to this newspaper article describes the 50 year old Nardal as "Martinique Girl Given High Post With UN Body" reminds us once again of the obstacles to recognition and equal treatment that

¹⁰⁰ See *La Martinique Aux Martiniquais, L'affaire De L'OJAM*. Dir. Camille Mauduech. France: Héবাদis Films. Videocassette.

¹⁰¹ "Martinique Girl Given High Post with UN Body" *Chicago Defender* 21 Dec. 1946: 13. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013.

characterized black women's inclusion in political discourse.

Nardal's continued focus on intersecting forms of oppression, present already in her Parisian writings of the 1930s, persists throughout her work in Martinique. In "Les femmes martiniquaises et l'action sociale", published in the October 1945 issue of *La Femme dans la cité*, she encouraged Martinican women to form coalitions across political party affiliation as well as racial and class differences (Nardal, *La Femme*, 31). Nardal herself formed an array of alliances in pursuing what she later calls "les légitimes revendications féminines" ("the just demands of women" 81/82). These connections included French and American feminist and religious groups, radical socialists and communist activists with whom the Rassemblement féminin stood in solidarity against fascism (31). Nardal was not alone in pursuing a transatlantic feminist politics. The collaboration between two senators, Eugénie Éboué and Jane Vialle, whose geographies included Central Africa, metropolitan France, the Antilles and Guyane, reveals the importance of transatlantic coalitions to decolonial feminism.

CHAPTER III

Women of the Union: Éugénie Éboué, Jane Vialle and Anti-colonialism in Overseas France

Éugénie Éboué's and Jane Vialle's work in the French senate in the 1940s and 1950s came at a time when France was reinventing itself as a nation and attempting to redefine what it meant to be French. Memories of the country's resistance to and collaboration with Nazi occupation were still fresh when the Constituent National Assembly voted in the new constitution in 1946. Éugénie Éboué, a deputy at the time, was involved in drafting this constitution that sought to replace the French empire with the French Union, a federation that included metropolitan France and its overseas territories in Africa, Indochina, and the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The dual discourse of resistance and collaboration that characterized France's involvement in World War II meant that this new federation was a way for the metropole to reinforce its sense of French identity through a show of its renewed commitment to the republican principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Éboué and Vialle were voted into the French Senate in this moment, historical not only for the change in status acquired by former colonies, but also for the extension of the vote to women. Both senators were deeply invested in passing legislation to increase economic and educational opportunities for African and Antillean women. Their work therefore allows us to examine women's political participation at the intersection of postwar French colonial politics and transatlantic feminisms.

The Éboué family story is also the story of the French empire-turned-union.¹⁰² Éugénie Tell was born in Cayenne, Guyane on 23 November 1891 to Joséphine and Herménégilde Tell. Her father would later become director of the *bagne* in Guyane. Éugénie married Félix Éboué,

¹⁰² For Éboué's brief biography in the senate archives see <http://www.senat.fr/evenement/archives/D35/eboue.html>. See also Fondation Charles de Gaulle (FCDG), Fonds Éboué, Papiers personnels d'Éugénie Éboué, cartons F22/26-F22/28.

also Guyanese, in 1922 and moved to Oubangui-Chari where her husband worked in the colonial administration. Félix already had two sons, Henri and Robert, from a previous union with an African woman whose only trace in the archives today is the inscription “mère inconnue” on her sons’ birth certificates. Eugénie and Félix had two children, a son Charles and a daughter Ginette, who later married Léopold Senghor. The couple spent two years in Martinique where Félix worked as general secretary until his transfer to French Sudan for the next two years. He was governor of Guadeloupe between 1936 and 1938 and then of Tchad from 1938. Félix Éboué was the first French administrator to publicly reject Vichy rule and join de Gaulle’s Free French Forces. On 26 August 1940 with metropolitan France firmly under the Vichy regime, Félix publicly declared his support for de Gaulle in front of the *mairie* at Fort Lamy and recruited troops for the Free French Forces throughout West and Central Africa.

History retains the story of Félix Éboué’s resistance efforts. On his death, French newspapers printed a special black-bordered edition of mourning.¹⁰³ He was the first black man to be interred in the Panthéon, one of the highest honors France confers on its departed national heroes. Though lesser known, Eugénie Éboué was just as ardent a Gaullist as her husband. She was one of a handful of people in the governor’s inner circle privy to the clandestine organizing of troops throughout Africa between de Gaulle’s Appeal of 18 June in which he announced the beginning of the Resistance movement and rallied support for the Free French Forces, and Félix’s public repudiation of Vichy and support for de Gaulle on 26 August.¹⁰⁴ She joined the Corps des volontaires de l’Afrique française combattante and was stationed as a nurse at the Brazzaville military hospital between 1941 and 1944. Her contributions to the war effort and subsequent

¹⁰³ Eslanda Robeson, “Félix Éboué: The End of an Era.” *New World Review* Oct. 1952: 44-48.

¹⁰⁴ The Éboués publicly supported de Gaulle at a time when it was neither popular nor safe to do so. They were particularly concerned about the safety of their children studying in Paris and Algeria at the time. The Vichy government condemned Félix to death in absentia and confiscated the Éboué family home in Paris.

political activism earned her at least twenty-six medals of recognition from France, Tchad, Côte d'Ivoire and the Comoros. Her citations include the Médaille de la Résistance (1945), Croix de Guerre avec Palme (1939-1945) and Chevalier de la légion d'honneur (1946). After the war and Félix's death in 1944, Éugénie ran for a seat in the Constituent National Assembly on the socialist party's ticket. She represented Guadeloupe in the Assembly from 1945 to 1946 and worked alongside Césaire, Senghor and others in drafting the constitution of the French Fourth Republic. Éboué was elected to the Senate in 1946. In addition to her governmental duties, she was also a member of the International Alliance of Women. She lost her seat in the Senate in 1952 but was elected that year as vice-president of the French Union. Upon the dissolution of the Union, she became councilwoman for Asnières, a commune in the suburbs of Paris in 1958 where she remained politically active until her death in 1972.

While in the Senate, Éugénie Éboué faced much opposition to her efforts to pass legislation in favor of women in the French Union. She found an ally in Jane Vialle, a senator from Oubangui-Chari.¹⁰⁵ Vialle was born in Ouesso on 27 August 1906 to Michel Vialle, a French man, and an African woman only recorded in the archives as Tchiloumba.¹⁰⁶ Her father, an ivory and rubber trader in Central Africa at the time, returned to France with a seven year old Jane in tow. She resurfaces in the archives in 1940 when she moved from Paris to Marseille at the start of the war. Vialle worked for the newspaper *Le jour* in the 1940s. She was also a clandestine agent for Jean Gemälhing, head of information services for the Provence-Côte d'Azur regional branch of Combat, one of the three major Resistance movements in the south of France. Vialle

¹⁰⁵ Éboué and Vialle collaborated on resolutions to apply French paternity law to overseas territories and to protect the immunity of Malagasy politicians. They also served together on the Commission de la France d'outre-mer.

¹⁰⁶ See Archives départementales des Bouches du Rhône, Côte 8W3 and 8W53. For Vialle's biography see also Jacques Serre, *Hommes et destins: Tome XI Afrique noire* (Paris: Académie des sciences d'Outre-mer : l'Harmattan, 2011) and http://www.senat.fr/senateur-4eme-republique/vialle_jane0151r4.html - 1940-1958 Unless otherwise stated, all quotations of Vialle are taken from J.D. Pénéel's compilation of her speeches and editorials. See J.D Pénéel, *B. Boganda, A. Darlan, J. Vialle: trois représentants oubanguiens du deuxième collège 1946-1952* (Bangui: Université de Bangui, 1985).

was arrested in January 1943 in her home in Marseille, along with Gemälhing who used the premises as an office. Both were charged with treason (“atteinte à la sûreté extérieure de l'Etat”). Vialle was interned for four months in the Brens women's concentration camp and then transferred to the Beaumettes women's prison in Marseille until December 1943. It is not clear if she was released as Jacques Serre asserts in his brief biography, or if she escaped as stated in her Citation à l'Ordre de la Nation.¹⁰⁷ We do know that Vialle was free in 1944 and that her wartime actions earned her a Médaille de la Résistance (1945) and a posthumous Citation à l'Ordre de la Nation (1953).

After the war, she founded the Association des femmes de l'Union française (AFUF) in 1946 and was elected to the French Senate in 1947. In her capacity as secretary general of the AFUF, she worked closely with Michelle Auriol who was then the first lady of France and president of the association, and Thérèse Monnerville who was the wife of the president of the Senate and vice-president of the association. Guyanese-born Gaston Monnerville was a crucial ally for Vialle and Éboué in the Senate because the office he held made him one of the most powerful politicians in the French Fourth Republic. He would have by law succeeded Charles de Gaulle as interim president of France when the former resigned from office in April 1969. However his decision not to run for re-election at the end of his Senate presidency in 1968, only a few months before de Gaulle's resignation, prevented him from becoming the first black president of France. Jane Vialle was also a member of the United Nations ad hoc committee on slavery between 1949 and 1951, and was charged with documenting the existence of forms of slavery in Africa at the time. She lost her Senate seat at the same time as Éboué in 1952, and died in a plane crash a year later.

¹⁰⁷ See “Citation à l'Ordre de la Nation.” *Journal Officiel* 23 May 1953: 4745.

Scholarly analyses of Éboué's and Vialle's contributions to the discursive framing of decolonization in Africa and the Antilles are today few and far between. Yet at the height of their political activity, they were two of the most powerful black women in the world. Éboué for example, was not only the wife of "the negro who defeated Hitler."¹⁰⁸ She was a major player in French and Afro-diasporic politics in the 1940s and 50s. Éboué was featured in the eighth edition of the encyclopedic collection *Who's Who in France*. She was one of the rare politicians whose interventions in the National Assembly and the Senate were often greeted with long standing ovations. During her numerous visits to the United States—according to *The Baltimore Afro-American* she had made 138 trips to the States by 1958—she was often met by a crowd of journalists who were eager to hear her analysis of race relations both in the US and in the French Union. *The Pittsburgh Courier* announced in 1946 that Éguénie Éboué held "the most advanced political position occupied by any Negro in the so-called Occidental world today."¹⁰⁹

Jane Vialle also had a significant political presence on both sides of the Atlantic. She was the NAACP's guest of honor in January 1951, and later that year was a speaker at Wellesley and Hunter Colleges, where she stressed that women's increased access to education was crucial for democracy in Africa.¹¹⁰ Vialle was also featured in a Negro History Week Kit, the only woman in a lineup of prominent black internationalist figures including Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B DuBois, Emperor Haile Selassie and Félix Éboué. The 32-page pamphlet was intended "for school and group use during Negro history week" and sought to "emphasize the struggles of Negroes at home and abroad to achieve first class citizenship."¹¹¹ In addition to recognizing Vialle's political

¹⁰⁸ George F. McCray, "The Negro Who Defeated Hitler" *Chicago Defender* 30 Apr. 1949: 18.

¹⁰⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier* "Editor's Note" 23 Mar. 1946: 1.

¹¹⁰ Lula Garrett, "Gadabouting in the U.S.A" *Baltimore Afro-American* 5 May 1951: 10 and "Hunter College Students Hear Senator Vialle of Africa" *New York Amsterdam News* 5 May 1951: 18.

¹¹¹ "Negro History Week Kit" *Baltimore Afro-American* 13 Jan. 1951: 3.

contributions, the publication, as a project of collective memory, also inscribed these contributions in the context of twentieth-century black internationalist politics.

Éboué and Vialle were two of the most prominent voices in the on-going conversation on race, gender and power on both sides of the Atlantic. Their articles and speeches are particularly valuable because they allow us to examine an emerging black feminist and anti-colonial discourse within the context of the peculiar and short-lived polity that was the French Union. In this chapter, I argue that the two women were engaged in a particular form of anti-colonial politics that recognized the intersectional nature of colonial oppression and envisioned French citizenship as the means to decolonization and women's emancipation. I read their political work as following a three-step trajectory. First, Éboué and Vialle troubled gendered ideas of women's social roles through their service in the French Resistance. Then, they drew on their wartime experiences as they advocated for the recognition of women's work and increased access to education and healthcare for women in the French Union. Finally, these wartime contributions also served as a platform on which to demand full citizenship rights in the French Union. I draw on Anibal Quijano's theory of the colonality of power to show that Éboué and Vialle were engaged in a project of decolonization as they imagined the political future of Africa and the Antilles free from illegitimate colonial power and founded rather on the democratic principles of the French Revolution. The final section of this chapter will show that for Éboué and Vialle, the continued existence of racial discrimination in the French Union was not a symptom of the failures of France's revolutionary promises but rather a holdover from colonialism that could only be eradicated by republicanism.

“Lutter jusqu'à la Victoire finale”: Resistance and Women's Wartime Service

Towards the end of World War II, French news media began to reflect on the social and political changes brought about by the war, and their implications for a postwar French nation.

The heroic actions of women and men from the metropole and colonies for example, raised questions on their subsequent representation in the workforce and in government after the war. On 29 December 1944, *Horizons*, a magazine published weekly in Marseille, ran an article on women soldiers. The author described women's military service as an important act of patriotism that began in France in 1792. The picture that accompanied the article, an action shot of women marching in military attire with rifles on their shoulders, bore the caption "Beaucoup d'Anglaises connaissent la vie du soldat et quelques Françaises d'Afrique la connaissent aussi."¹¹² The article establishes geographic and historical continuity between women's military service in revolutionary France, and their actions throughout the French empire during World War II. It also suggests a more inclusive turn in public discourse on who could partake in constructing this narrative of French history in the making. Through their participation in the Resistance, women like Éboué and Vialle disrupted the idea of black women in the French empire as silent and invisible, and became important symbols in this national conversation on race and gender in the nascent Union.

Éugénie Éboué's military service stands as one example of this disruption. Her assignment as a nurse stationed primarily in the maternity ward of the Brazzaville hospital, reinforces a gendered distribution of labor. Yet in the archives, reading her enlistment letter alongside the picture of Éugénie in full military uniform sheds new light on her negotiation of the masculine language and imagery of war in defining the terms of her service to the nation.¹¹³ In her letter, she pledges "de lutter avec tous les Alliés de la France Combattante contre tous ses ennemis jusqu'à la Victoire finale et en particulier de me soumettre aux obligations militaires" ("to fight with all the allies of France Combattante against all its enemies until final Victory is

¹¹² Max Levasseur, "Les femmes-soldats existent depuis longtemps" *Horizons* 29 Dec. 1944.

¹¹³ Jacques Foccart, *Dans les bottes du Général : 1969-1971* (Paris: Fayard : Jeune Afrique, 1999).

won, and in particular to submit to all military obligations”).¹¹⁴ She emphasizes her readiness to submit to military regulations, a point she reiterates several times in her letter. Éboué’s use of military language, particularly her adoption of the army’s tripartite motto, “devoir, honneur, servir” (“duty, honor, service”), seeks to include women in an otherwise masculine domain. After the war, this idea of women’s entry into traditionally masculine spaces will serve as a point of departure for her political work. She argues, as we will see subsequently, that women’s preparedness to take up positions of authority in politics and in the workforce comes from their military and economic contributions during the war. As she states in her 1945 electoral campaign speech in Guadeloupe, “pour la 1ère fois que les femmes sont appelées en France à jouir des mêmes droits électoraux que les hommes, s’il y en a qui gravissent les marches du Palais-Bourbon, elles devront par leur travail, leur maintien et leur dignité, montrer qu’elles étaient depuis longtemps mûrs pour de telles fonctions” (“for the first time, women have been called upon in France to enjoy the same electoral rights as men, if there are some women who climb the steps of the Palais Bourbon, they must, by their work, carriage and dignity, show that they have long been ready to take up these duties”).¹¹⁵ Here, in the specific context of overseas France, Éboué argues that women have long been ready to participate actively and meaningfully in government. Unlike Nardal, whose editorials encourage Antillean women to be politically active as a show of gratitude to the metropole for their inclusion, Éboué flips the gender script by suggesting that the state is merely paying its debt of gratitude to women who had proven themselves worthy of first-class citizenship through their wartime contributions.

I read Éboué’s emphasis on outre-mer women’s service as one of her early articulations of anti-colonial politics because it reverses the colonial discourse of the colonized subject’s eternal

¹¹⁴ FCDG F22/26-F22/28. Eugénie’s enlistment letter was fully typed out and appears to be her words rather than a prepared form to be filled and signed.

¹¹⁵ FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

indebtedness to a benevolent metropole. In *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage*, Françoise Vergès describes the colonial family romance as an unequal power relationship in which the colonized, conceived of as children, remain perpetually indebted to the *Mère-Patrie* for its colonial *don* (gift). As Vergès argues, “the debt was constituted by the ideals of the French Revolution, of the French republic. In territories where feudalism, barbarism, or backwardness reigned, maternal France had brought Enlightenment and progress” (Vergès, 6). In reversing the roles of debtor and lender, Éboué’s language also reverses the colonial discourse on the so-called *don*. The overseas populations step into the role of liberator, saving France and the rest of Europe from themselves.

Throughout her political career, Éboué continued to build on this idea of women’s wartime service in order to garner support for pro-feminist legislation. In 1947, she presented before the Senate a proposed law that would increase the state’s financial assistance to single mothers.¹¹⁶ This project was the result of her collaboration with Gilberte Brossolette, first woman vice-president of the Senate and wife of the decorated Resistance hero Pierre Brossolette. Madame Brossolette was a clandestine courier during the war, relaying information between London and Paris in the service of the Free French Forces. The Gestapo arrested her husband in 1944, tortured and killed him. Like the Éboués, the Brossolettes earned a number of France’s highest military honors for their work including the Legion d’honneur and the Médaille de la résistance.¹¹⁷ Éboué’s collaboration with senators like Vialle and Brossolette speaks to a particular feminist politics rooted in women’s wartime resistance. In her speeches, Éboué established a continuity of women’s service to the nation, beginning with their wartime activities and extending into the nation-building efforts of the immediate postwar moment. Their

¹¹⁶ *Journal Officiel* 29 May 1947.

¹¹⁷ For Gilberte Brossolette’s brief biography see http://www.senat.fr/senateur-4eme-republique/brossolette_gilberte0449r4.html

participation in the Resistance became a platform from which to demand full recognition as citizens of France and to advocate for women's increased access to politics, education, employment and state protection.

As a candidate for one of two Guadeloupen seats in the Constituent National Assembly in 1945, Éugénie Éboué based her campaign on her wartime contributions to France and the colonies. Her campaign poster urged voters to cast their ballot for “Madame E. EBOUE-TELL, première résistante de la France d'outre-mer.”¹¹⁸ She followed up this image with a fiery campaign speech delivered in Guadeloupe. The first third of this thirty-page handwritten document reads like an epic narrative on Africa's role in World War II. She provides a day-to-day breakdown of the clandestine organizing of troops between de Gaulle's 18 June BBC radio broadcast and the deployment of African soldiers in August. We hear de Gaulle's voice rallying all of France and her colonies to repudiate Vichy and join the Free French Forces, and we witness, through Éboué's first hand account, the impact of this voice on France's subjects in Tchad who responded immediately with a resounding “Oui!” According to Éboué “Quand le 18 juin, une voix grave, empreinte de mélancolie, malgré sa fermeté, se leva de Londres pour crier ‘La France a perdu une bataille, mais la France n'a pas perdu la guerre, il lui reste un empire *intact*’ [...] un tel frisson nous parcourut qu'on peut dire que pour le plus grand nombre la route était ouverte” (When, on the 18th of June, a deep voice, melancholic despite its firmness, cried out from London ‘France has lost the battle, but France has not lost the war, she still has an intact empire’ [...] such a shudder ran through us that one might say for most of us the way had been opened”).¹¹⁹ Éboué establishes this moment as the crucial opening salvo to an epic story that sees

¹¹⁸ FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

¹¹⁹ FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

battalions of African soldiers marching “de succès en succès” (“from success to success”) from Chad to the heart of Germany. Heroes fall on the battlefield for their beloved patrie.

Éboué recuperates the immediate past memory of war and crafts a new account of the French Resistance that places Africans and Antilleans at the center of the narrative. It is interesting to note that despite her use of quotation marks to demarcate de Gaulle’s speech within her own, Éboué misremembers his words. She quotes here a combination of de Gaulle’s 18 June *appel* and the catchy expression “La France a perdu une bataille, mais la France n'a pas perdu la guerre” (“France has lost a battle, but France has not lost the war”) that headlined the posters that appeared around London after the radio broadcast. Éboué is engaged in a deliberate production of world history that seeks to capture both the personal story of her family’s participation in the Resistance, and the collective memory of overseas France’s service to the patrie. As she outlines her own central role in this epic, Éboué assures her listeners that she and her husband often thought of “cette île d'Emeraude qu'est la belle Guadeloupe, sentant bien que vos cœurs battaient à l'unisson des nôtres” (“this emerald island, the beautiful Guadeloupe, feeling that your hearts were beating in unison with ours”).¹²⁰ Éboué therefore traces a line of continuity from her family’s military service in French Equatorial Africa in 1940, to her electoral promise in 1945 to obtain more equitable remuneration for exploited Guadeloupean cane workers: “C'est de cette Résistance que vous avez suivi et qui est devenue alors France Combattante que je me réclame aujourd'hui pour me trouver devant vous et recueillir vos suffrages” (“It is this Resistance that you followed, and which became France Combattante that I evoke today in order to stand before you and ask for your votes”).¹²¹ Her deft maneuvering between past and present, Africa and Antilles, was a stroke of political genius. As a Guyanese woman who had spent most of the past

¹²⁰ FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

¹²¹ FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

decade in Central Africa, she needed to establish her credibility as a politician who could represent Guadeloupe and advocate for the rights and benefits due the island's inhabitants as French citizens.¹²² She articulates through her narrative, a transatlantic connection that emphasizes a shared politics of liberation. French Equatorial Africa and Guadeloupe are linked by their ardent Gaullism and their rejection of Vichy.

Éboué's politics of liberation is different from but no less radical than Suzanne Césaire's. Where Césaire argues for an aesthetic liberation of the Martinican imagination from French imperialism, Éboué argues that it was metropolitan France that needed liberation, a feat it could not achieve without vital contributions from the colonies. She argues further that outre-mer populations, be they in Africa or the Antilles, deserved the same rights and state protections enjoyed by French citizens in the metropole specifically because they had risked and in some cases lost their lives liberating France. Her transatlantic politics of liberation are most clearly manifested in her contribution to the National Assembly's heated debate in 1946 on the modalities of citizenship in the French Union:

Il faut bien que chacun se pénétre du fait que ces noirs qui ont souffert, ces noirs qui ont donné leur sang pour que la France vive, en communion d'ailleurs avec leurs frères de la métropole, doivent recevoir aujourd'hui de la juste récompense qu'ils ont toujours espérée. [...] Ce n'est pas parce que j'appartiens maintenant à un département que je me sens éloignée d'eux pour autant. Je suis aussi près d'eux par le cœur que j'y étais hier, alors que notre pays natal n'était qu'un territoire d'outre-mer. [...] C'est à ce sujet que je demande au Gouvernement et à l'Assemblée tout

¹²² Eugénie affirms that members of the socialist party in Guadeloupe asked her to run for elections as a form of political homage to her husband. Although she had their support, she still faced stiff competition from other candidates and needed a sound campaign strategy to win over voters.

entière de songer qu'il est grand temps que satisfaction soit donnée à nos frères de race, aux miens, tout au moins, à nos frères tout court.¹²³

It is important for everyone here to recognize the fact that these blacks who have suffered, these blacks who have given their blood so that France might live, in collaboration with their metropolitan brothers, must receive the reward they have always hoped for. [...] I am not separate from them just because I now belong to a department. I am as close to them in my heart as I was yesterday when our native land was but an overseas territory. [...] It is for this reason that I ask the Government and the entire Assembly to consider that it is high time satisfaction is given to our brothers in race, to my brothers at the very least, to our brothers, period.

Éboué's expression of solidarity with the French African territories is based on the immediate past memory of a shared colonized status and on a shared racial identity that echoes some of the more politicized articulations of Negritude. Her focus on those who died in the war suggests that the "récompense" is not repayment to the Africans who fell in battle, as one cannot repay those who are no longer living. Rather, citizenship would symbolize France's recognition of the humanity of those who gave their lives to liberate the hexagon. Africans who were formerly seen as dispensable bodies on the battlefields of Europe, the formerly thingified colonized subjects—to use Aimé Césaire's formulation—would become French citizens.

In addition to evoking her Resistance activities in order to advocate for women's political representation, she also evoked the memory of her husband's actions during the war in order to advance her own political career. Eugénie was a savvy politician who was well aware of the prevailing suspicion of and hostility to black women in positions of power. Ascending the steps

¹²³ *Journal Officiel* 5 Oct. 1946.

of the Palais Bourbon, the historic palace that still houses the National Assembly today, would not be easy. Consequently, she strategically represented herself as the inheritor of her husband's political legacy by invoking Félix's name throughout her campaign and her interventions as deputy and senator. For example, in her speech advocating for France to recognize the full citizenship rights of Africans in the French Union, Éugénie used the collective memory of her husband's work to support her arguments: "Si l'homme dont je porte le nom avait pu se trouver aujourd'hui à la place que j'occupe dans cette enceinte avec son expérience de ses frères d'Afrique, il aurait affirmé qu'il n'est pas possible aujourd'hui que la France revienne sur les engagements qu'elle a pris [...]. C'est une voix d'outre-tombe qui s'élève par-dessus la mienne pour vous dire songez-y, répondez à leurs aspirations" ("If the man whose name I bear were here in this auditorium in my stead today, given his experiences with his African brothers, he would affirm that it is not possible today for France to renege on her commitment. [...] It is a voice from beyond the grave that calls out over mine to tell you to consider and respond to their aspirations").¹²⁴ In this act of ventriloquism, Eugénie speaks her words through Félix's voice in order to lend legitimacy to her demands in the eyes of her fellow deputies. She also appropriates the singular voice of a nationally recognized war hero, in order to speak for the voiceless African soldiers whose service France now hoped to conveniently forget. Her strategy was successful because it drew unanimous applause and approval from an otherwise divided assembly. Unlike Suzanne Césaire who was quickly eclipsed by her husband's literary and political reputation, Éboué merged her political identity with the collective memory of her husband's in order to gain recognition and to counter the erasure of her voice and presence. Yet she also continued to negotiate (in)visibility throughout her career. She remained visible as long as Félix was

¹²⁴ *Journal Officiel* 5 Oct. 1946.

remembered and celebrated. By the 1970s however, his prominence in French collective memory faded and consequently so did Eugénie's.¹²⁵

Vialle's negotiation of (in)visibility during the war was an even more delicate affair given her work as a clandestine agent. She worked as secretary to Jean Gemalhing, head of information services for the Resistance movement throughout the Provence-Côte d'Azur region. Vialle handled large amounts of sensitive information, expertly categorized and coded in language that Vichy police could not decipher. Entries like "GERVAIS, 12 rue Jean de Tourne" sent the police on searches from Lyon to Toulouse to Poligny with no results. In addition to the names and addresses that Vichy police found in Vialle's possession, they also discovered falsified IDs, maps and reports on the movement of German troops and the operations of Vichy police, as well as documents detailing the formation of de Gaulle's provisional government. During her arrest, interrogation and trial, she admitted only to possessing a falsified ID card under the name El Bidaoui.

Vialle employed two principal strategies in her defense: silence and denial. While the other members of Combat arrested in connection with the "affaire Gemalhing-Vialle" gave lengthy explanations of their activities, Vialle responded with a terse "je désire m'expliquer en présence d'un avocat" ("I wish to respond in the presence of a lawyer"). When her interrogators asked her to explain why she had not burned the compromising documents in her possession as she claimed she had been asked to do by a (probably fictive) Madame CITRON, Vialle responded simply "Je ne me l'explique pas, mais je maintiens ma déclaration" ("I do not explain it, but I stand by my declaration"). She went on to deny all knowledge of clandestine activities and attributed the documents to a mysterious and most likely fictive tenant in her home, known

¹²⁵ Arlette Capdepuy, "Quelle place pour Madame Éboué dans le gaullisme de la Ve République?", *Histoire@Politique* (2012): 37-50.

only as “Philippe.” Piecing together Vialle’s Resistance activities in the archives produces a different narrative from Éboué’s. Where Éboué appropriates the masculine language of war to negotiate the terms of outre-mer women’s inclusion in the French Union, Vialle uses silence to counter Vichy’s language of criminality. Éboué’s visibility in full military regalia as a member of the Free French Forces also stands in contrast to Vialle’s desire for invisibility under Vichy surveillance. To be invisible and silent, usually understood as signs of subalternity, becomes a crucial means of resisting the Vichy regime.

Once the war ended, Vialle developed a new strategy for a new battle. She founded the AFUF and encouraged women of the French Union to use the association’s journal as an avenue for public expression and advocacy. Like Éboué, she argued that women’s participation in postwar politics grew directly out of their wartime actions: “Partout on sentait le désir ardent des femmes de continuer au grand jour l’action qu’elles avaient commencée dans la clandestinité” (“Everywhere we could feel women’s ardent desire to continue in broad daylight the actions they had begun clandestinely”, Vialle, 135). Like Éboué, she articulated a continuity of women’s resistance from World War II to postwar times. In her early editorials for the AFUF’s journal, Vialle traced the genealogy of the organization back to clandestine meetings she held with the other “femmes résistantes” who now formed part of the AFUF’s directorship. She uses the language of wartime activities and experiences to emphasize this sense of continuity: “Les femmes qui avaient connu la torture des prisons, l’horreur des camps de concentration, la vie traquée, et qui avaient, durant plus murs années, tremblé pour leurs parents, leurs amis, leurs compagnons de travail, voulaient associer dans un esprit de fraternité toutes les femmes de France et d’Outre-Mer, dans un même but: permettre à toutes de fonder un foyer digne et heureux dans une atmosphère de paix” (“The women who experienced the torture of prisons, the horror of concentration camps, the life of the hunted, and who, for many years, trembled in fear for their

parents, their friends, their work colleagues, wanted to bring together all the women of overseas France in the spirit of fraternity, to work towards the same goal: to allow all women to establish honorable and happy homes in a peaceful atmosphere”, 135). The AFUF locates its intended action in the domestic sphere, the “foyer.” Its understanding of domestic work is however deeply anchored in an immediate past history of women's service to the nation through their war efforts. The organization's goal of creating a coalition of metropolitan and outre-mer women may be read as subversive, as the continuation of women's clandestine resistance of the oppression and violence that reached new heights during the war.

As we will see subsequently, citizenship was at the heart of Vialle's and Éboué's discussion of France's debt to outre-mer women for their service to the patrie. In awarding Vialle the Citation à l'Ordre de la Nation in 1953, the ministère de la France d'outre-mer stated that French citizenship in the war years was a dangerous thing: “Mme Jane Vialle [...] a consacré tout son activité à la lutte contre l'occupant, malgré les dangers que lui faisait courir son origine française” (“Madame Jane Vialle [...] dedicated all her work to the struggle against the occupation, despite the dangers she faced because of her French origin”).¹²⁶ In the postwar context, Vialle and Éboué believed that since they had risked life and liberty as French citizens, they now deserved the full rights and protections of the French state. They hoped that in liberating the patrie, France would in turn deliver on its promise of liberty, equality and fraternity throughout its territories, and extend first-class citizenship to outre-mer women.

“La Liberté et le Droit”: Women's Rights as Human Rights in a Postwar World

Éboué and Vialle were ardent advocates of women's rights both in the Senate and through their work with various organizations. Éboué maintained a steady track record of feminist action that was also international in scope. In 1945, as she travelled to Paris to take up her position as

¹²⁶ “Citation à l'Ordre de la Nation.” *Journal Officiel* 23 May 1953: 4745.

deputy in the National Assembly, Éboué made a short stop in New York where she addressed American journalists. She affirmed that in helping to draw up the new French constitution, she would “speak for women and colonial peoples.”¹²⁷ A few years later in a New Year's address to her Guadeloupean constituents, Éboué reported on a recent trip to Belgium and on her meetings with Belgian feminists.¹²⁸ She believed that women worldwide were engaged in a similar struggle, and that “rien ne nous sépare” (“nothing separates us”). She also expressed an ardent desire to see all Guadeloupean women actively involved in bringing about “l'émancipation de la masse féminine” (“the emancipation of the feminine masses”). In her capacity as vice-president of the French Union, Éboué also turned her feminist focus to French Equatorial Africa where, she argued, women had a key role to play in the economic development and political life of the French federation.¹²⁹

Éboué later penned an article titled “Les roles des femmes” that appeared in the 2 February 1952 edition of the Guadeloupean newspaper *La Raison*.¹³⁰ She argues in this work that between 1914 and 1918 as African men in the French colonies left for war, women ably stepped into positions traditionally reserved for men, including factory work and politics. With the extension of French citizenship to all in 1946, some girls and women subsequently gained access to education and acquired the qualifications necessary for them to remain an important part of the workforce. She cites Jane Vialle as an example of an African woman who holds her own among her male African and metropolitan French peers in the Senate. For Éboué, Vialle stands as an example of women's skill and competence, as well as the level of success they can attain if given the right educational opportunities.

¹²⁷ “Assembly Member” *Baltimore Afro-American* 10 Nov. 10 1945: 1.

¹²⁸ FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

¹²⁹ “Impressions sur mon voyage en A.E.F par Mme Éboué-Tell. Vice-Présidente de l'Assemblée de l'Union française.” Archives du sénat.

¹³⁰ FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

Despite her progressive gender politics, Éboué's article also contains some troubling, less-than-progressive views on outre-mer populations in general and on Africans in particular. She describes Africans as "les populations les plus primitives de l'Union Française" ("the most primitive populations of the French Union") and argues that women gained their independence in these territories much later than in the metropole due to the climate, and to patriarchal traditions that were deeply rooted in culture.¹³¹ Yet even in employing the language of her times to describe Africans in general and African women in particular, Éboué paints a picture of a society in which women have access to formal education both at home and in the metropole, and contribute to the economic and political life of French Equatorial Africa. Her use of the past tense to describe women's subjugation sends a clear message that African women no longer occupy this subjugated position. Women's independence is not a hazy future goal but a reality in the present that requires on-going efforts to improve and sustain. It is significant that Éboué uses the word "indépendance" in this 1952 article, in a period when withdrawal from the French Union was gaining traction as a viable path to decolonization in francophone Africa. Whereas her use of "émancipation" in her New Year's address to her Guadeloupean constituents places women's advancement on a continuum that begins with the abolition of slavery in the Antilles, "indépendance" in the African context places gender equality squarely within a discussion of France's and Africa's political futures. For Éboué, women's emancipation/independence must be understood as central to the changing political configuration from empire to Union and beyond.

Given the international scope of Éboué's feminist action, it seems only logical that she should join the directorship of the International Alliance of Women/Alliance internationale des femmes. After World War II, the Alliance weighed in on the United Nations' draft of the

¹³¹ Based on the examples she gives, Eboué appears to use independence to mean specifically access to education, employment and political representation.

Declaration on Human Rights. In a letter to the Secretary General that included Éboué's name on the list of signatory members, the Alliance proposed an amendment to paragraph 2 of article 24 of the Declaration. This paragraph specifically stipulated that women should receive equal pay for equal work. Many women's organizations took the text to task, arguing that it set women apart from men as a special category and that such a move was problematic within a document that sought to guarantee equal rights for all without distinction. As Open Door International for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker put it, "we are persuaded that disservice will be done to women by the mention of any specific reform for women as such within a Declaration of Human Rights, the purpose of which is to enunciate that generality of rights which should be considered as inherent for every human being."¹³²

While Open Door and other women's organizations argued for the deletion of the paragraph completely, the Alliance supported an amendment that would guarantee that "all persons shall work with equal advantages, equal opportunity of access to all training and to all positions in trades, professions, etc. and shall receive equal pay without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."¹³³ This debate over the language of the Declaration of Human Rights speaks to the importance of crafting a narrative of fundamental rights and freedoms for all in the wake of the dehumanization of concentration camps that marked World War II. The Alliance and other organizations that weighed in, were engaged in a conversation on what it meant to define women as human, to include them in that supposedly all-encompassing "universal man" common to UN terminology. They argued for women's rights to be understood *as* human rights rather than as a special debate to be bracketed out of the larger conversation. Éboué's name on the letterhead is today the only trace in the archives of her contribution to this collective debate. Throughout her

¹³² See "Draft International Declaration on Human Rights" United Nations Central Registry.

¹³³ "Draft International Declaration on Human Rights."

political career, she employed this specific language of equal access to argue for the recognition of women's work in overseas and metropolitan France.

Vialle's feminist organizing also had an international scope. The AFUF's manifesto began, "We call upon all women of the French Union, the West Indies, North Africa, Black Africa, Madagascar, Indo-China, and all the overseas territories, who for six long years were separated from the metropolis and who suffered from the racist methods of the Vichy regime, to unite" (Ransby, 170).¹³⁴ Vialle worked towards creating a feminist network that would bring together the concerns of women throughout overseas France. In addition to its headquarters in France, the AFUF also had active branches in several territories in French West and Equatorial Africa. Like Éboué, Vialle was primarily concerned with the possibility of upward social and economic mobility for women throughout the French Union. The AFUF focused its resources on providing housing, counseling and healthcare for female students from the French territories studying in the metropole. Vialle took her action even further by advocating not only for girls to have the opportunity to study in the hexagon, but also for the French government to provide comparable higher education facilities in the territories. By collaborating with women who were highly placed in French politics, including Mmes Auriol and Monnerville, Vialle conceived of the AFUF as a strategic alliance. She sought to gather together a critical mass of women from all corners of the French empire, advocating for their political interests on an even larger scale than what Paulette Nardal envisioned when she created the *Rassemblement féminin*. Unlike Nardal, Vialle adamantly refused all attempts to label the AFUF a charity. She insisted that it was a social movement whose goal was to contribute to the intellectual uplift of women (Vialle, 135 & 160). To this end, she encouraged epistolary exchanges as one way of articulating feminist solidarity in

¹³⁴ The fact that the only known record today of this manifesto is preserved among Eslanda Robeson's papers at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center in Washington D.C, attests to the international circuit of feminist ideas to which Vialle contributed.

the French Union (157). She strongly believed, and said so on multiple occasions that there could be no “*évolution vraie et profonde sans l'avolution [sic] des femmes*” (“true and profound evolution without the evolution of women”, 160). This belief also informed her work in the Senate and resurfaced in her arguments against a proposed law that would take the vote away from African women (196).

Neither Vialle nor Éboué were radical to the point of imagining a political future for the overseas territories outside of the French Union. Rather, they worked within the Union and through women’s organizations, to counter the second-class citizenship of African and Antillean women. Through this work they sought to redefine the very understanding of womanhood and women’s political and economic contributions. This redefinition, as their writings and speeches demonstrate, was always a question of power. While keeping women’s advancement at the center of their politics, they challenged the foundational elements of colonial power by imagining a future in which African and Antillean women would gain full recognition as citizens.

“The Curse of Uniformity”: Humanism as a Path to Decolonization

Today the idea that Vialle and Éboué were actively engaged in a decolonization project through their demands for citizenship would raise eyebrows. Indeed since Aimé Césaire’s push for departmentalization, the idea of decolonization through French citizenship has been the stuff of many debates. Yet to view Vialle’s and Éboué’s work as anything short of anti-colonial would be to misread the nature of colonialism. Anibal Quijano’s theory of the colonality of power describes the historical processes by which colonial power came to be consolidated. Consequently it allows us to understand how colonial oppression functions and by extension what decolonization looks like. Quijano argues that European conquest in Latin America must be understood as the result of two historical processes: Eurocentered capitalist methods of labor control, and the codification of racial difference between colonizer and colonized (Quijano 533-

534). His argument, grounded in the history of Latin America, holds for the French Antilles and Africa because there too we find that colonial power dehumanizes the colonized through its process of racial classification that decrees Europeans as superior and Africans as inferior beings in need of civilizing. This racial classification in turn serves to supposedly legitimize European conquest and economic exploitation such that “both race and the division of labor remained structurally linked and mutually reinforcing” (536).

It is important for our present study to recognize the coloniality of power because it moves us away from the linear and seemingly straightforward association of political independence with decolonization. Political independence that does not do away with the fundamental elements of the coloniality of power is not decolonization. It leads instead to “a rearticulation of the coloniality of power over new institutional bases” (567). This is the case of independent African countries whose political and economic affairs remain tethered to their former metropolises. If decolonization is not (only) independence, then the kind of citizenship rights that Vialle and Éboué demanded for overseas France may be considered as an alternative anti-colonial model if they target coloniality’s dehumanization and exploitation of the colonized.

In her 1948 editorial on assimilation in the French Union, Vialle argued that the metropole needed to recognize the humanity of *outré-mer* populations. Her editorial was timely, particularly given the debate surrounding assimilation versus departmentalization in the French Antilles at this time. In this article, she puts forward the question at the heart of the discussion: “Devons-nous viser à l’assimilation? -éternelle polémique sui [sic] oppose les partisans de la libre évolution dans le cadre ancestral, et ceux de l’interpénétration des peuples et des races” (“Should we aim for assimilation? This is the eternal polemic that opposes the partisans of free advancement in the ancestral setting, and those who favor the interpenetration of people and races” Vialle, 157). Vialle sets up a binary that imagines two possible scenarios, civilizations

evolving separately or else in close contact with one another. The latter would result in each assimilating values, traits and practices from the other(s). Decades before Aimé Césaire's succinct formulation "assimiler et non être assimilé, pour être conquis et dominés,"¹³⁵ the Martinican writer and politician described the violent erasure of culture and history that characterized the exportation of European civilization to other parts of the world. In *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Césaire argues that colonial contact was not the productive meeting of civilizations suggested by colonial propaganda. Rather, it was accompanied by physical, psychic and moral violence, as well as economic exploitation. Césaire goes on to argue that productive exchange among civilizations is necessary and desirable (Césaire, *Discours*, 8-11). However, *being* assimilated is a manifestation of colonial dominance and precludes the kind of exchange necessary for the evolution and survival of civilizations.

Vialle echoes Césaire when she dares to imagine a more equitable, symbiotic form of contact as an alternative to the colonial model of assimilation: "A notre époque, on ne peut prétendre avoir une civilisation pure [sic], aussi bien je penche pour cette évolution- internationale [sic] qui fait de l'homme un citoyen du monde sans toutefois lui ôter l'originalité de son pays natal" ("In our times, we cannot pretend to have a pure civilization so I lean towards both, this international advancement that makes man a citizen of the world without at the same time taking away the originality of his homeland", Vialle, 157). Vialle's formulation goes against France's so-called civilizing mission that postulates the superiority of French culture and civilization to be spread by all means throughout the empire. She imagines instead a form of contact that is devoid of the desire to dominate and erase the other.¹³⁶ Vialle also extends the Césairean notion of

¹³⁵ See *Aimé Césaire une parole pour le XXI^e siècle*.

¹³⁶ In his essay for *L'étudiant noir*, "L'humanisme et nous: René Maran," Senghor identifies the Martinican colonial administrator as the embodiment of this productive encounter. He argues that in his writing, Maran draws on his observations of African landscape and culture and his knowledge of French and Greek literary traditions and

productive encounter by further engaging with the role of women in this context. She argues that women of the French Union would be the ones to both preserve traditional practices and lead their countries in fusing these practices with the knowledge they have acquired from French formal education: “Ce sont elles, avec leur cœur, leur intelligence, leur intuition de femme, qui pétriront la pâte dont seront faits les hommes de demain” (“They are the ones, with their heart, their courage, their womanly intuition, who will knead the dough from which tomorrow’s men will be made”, 157). Within her framework of productive contact of civilizations, men and women have complementary roles to play. Outre-mer women were to be the creative, formative force preparing a new generation of men who would in turn ensure the future of the French Union.

In rejecting the colonial system of assimilation, Vialle also rejects the idea of *évolués*, a category of people envisioned by the colonial administration to be useful allies by virtue of their French education and their adoption of French cultural elements including language and dress. In 1949, Vialle presided over a “journée d’Etudes Sociales” put together by a cultural organization just outside of Paris. She followed up on her intervention with an editorial in the AFUF journal in which she articulated her views on the event’s theme: “Est-ce que les élites d’Outre-Mer se préparent à répondre à l’appel de leurs peuples?” (“Are Outre-mer elites prepared to respond to their people’s call?” 164). Vialle begins her response by reiterating her belief that without women there could be no formation of the elite: “dans la formation de ces élites, le rôle des femmes est primordiale et, si pendant les années passées leur instruction a été négligée, depuis la libération une compréhension plus grande s’est faite sur le rôle de la femme dans l’évolution des peuples” (“women play a primordial role in the formation of these elites, and if, in the past years their education has been neglected, since the liberation there has been a larger understanding of the

considers both to be equally important and viable contributions to his work.

role of women in the people's advancement", 164). For Vialle, older women are crucial as advisors and teachers. Younger women and girls, particularly those exposed to the French system of education, are equally important as members of this elite, returning to serve as skilled workers steeped in and respectful of the traditions and cultures of their countries.

Yet Vialle also questions the unequal access to power and upward socioeconomic mobility inherent in the formation of a colonial elite. She takes to task *évolués* in particular, a move whose irony may not have been lost on her readers given that Vialle as a French-educated African *métisse*, would be considered the *évolué par excellence*. She was however quick to distance herself from this term. In her editorial, she distinguishes between an elite that would soon make itself obsolete by contributing to the uplift of all in the French Union, and *évolués* who primarily serve colonial interests. For Vialle, respect for local culture and a willingness to teach, distinguish the former from the latter. She argues for "la vraie civilisation c'est-à-dire la civilisation des masses, celle d'un peuple par la connaissance de lui-même... Lorsque l'Africain se connaîtra, le mot 'évolué' sera enterré." ("true civilization, that is the civilization of the masses, that of a people through knowledge of themselves... Once the African comes to know himself, the word 'évolué' will be buried", 166). Civilization of the masses is antithetical to the French colonial project of creating a small, selective cadre of Africans to help propagate the myth of French cultural superiority. It is not a superficial adoption or mimicry of French culture, but rather a deep, profound knowledge of oneself as African. Vialle's call for "la civilisation [...] d'un peuple par la connaissance de lui-même" echoes loudly Suzanne Césaire's assertion in Martinique that "il est maintenant urgent d'oser se connaître soi-même, d'oser s'avouer ce qu'on est, d'oser se demander ce qu'on veut être" ("It is now vital to dare to know oneself, to dare to confess to oneself what one is, to dare to ask oneself what one wants to be", Césaire, 40/10). Like Suzanne Césaire, Vialle seeks to shift the power of self-definition and agency from France as

civilizing agent to Africans as determiners of their own place in the constellation of civilizations that make up the French Union.

For Éboué, it was equally imperative that French citizenship be understood as a fundamental recognition of the humanity of the formerly colonized. In 1946, she wrote an article boldly titled “French End Colonial Era, Grant West Indies Citizenship”¹³⁷ and chose three African American newspapers to publish her article: *The Pittsburgh Courier*, *The Baltimore Afro American* and *The Amsterdam News*.¹³⁸ Her article examines the nature of France’s relationship with Africa and the Antilles and argues that citizenship in the former colonies is not only a question of voting rights and developing infrastructure. It is also a fundamental respect for “the original sources from which all those people derived their varied customs, beliefs and aspirations, and their age-old attitudes towards the great problems which confront every man in all his fields of activity as a member of social, political, religious and other collectivities.”¹³⁹ Éboué echoes Suzanne Césaire’s definition of a civilization. Making specific reference to Africa and the Antilles, she reclaims the value of these civilizations and argues that they have much to contribute to the world:

If humanity forms a whole and if all men are interdependent, the many ways in which on the other hand, they express those inner tendencies that produce different philosophies and customs, do not set up obstacles between them but, on the contrary, constitute inexhaustible riches, the diversity of which enables men to follow different paths, compare their ideas and hasten their progress. In other

¹³⁷ Eugenie Éboué, "We Resent Being Called Dependent" *Pittsburgh Courier* 23 Mar. 1946: 1.

¹³⁸ Éboué's choice of three of the most established African American newspapers at the time shows that her reflections on race are as much about the US and the Caribbean as they are about France. She clearly articulates her support for self-determination of black people in the Caribbean and in the US. She however describes this self-determination, somewhat paradoxically, as “problems of a national and governmental character.” For Éboué, self-determination was not synonymous with separatism or independence. Rather it meant working towards attaining equal rights and representation for all populations within the geopolitical limits of the empire-turned-Union.

¹³⁹ Eugenie Éboué, "We Resent Being Called Dependent," 1.

words, and in plain language, a threat hangs over humanity; the curse of uniformity.¹⁴⁰

In echoing Suzanne Césaire's idea of fundamental differences among civilizations, Éboué argues that these differences should not be a source of conflict, nor should they signal the supposed inferiority or superiority of one civilization over another. She explicitly names African and Antillean civilizations that were deemed inferior by the French civilizing mission, and thereby undertakes the kind of revalorization of blackness that the Negritude poet articulates when he declares: "et aucune race ne possède le monopole de la beauté, de l'intelligence, de la force/ et il est place pour tous au rendez-vous de la conquête" ("and no race holds a monopoly of beauty, of intelligence, of strength/ and there is room for all at the rendez-vous of conquest" Césaire, *Cahier*, 126/127). Like the Césaires, Éboué affirms one of the foundational ideas of Negritude, that all civilizations make their unique and valuable contributions to the world. She argues against the colonial models of assimilation and association in even stronger terms than Vialle when she describes the cultural violence and erasure that these models enact as "the curse of uniformity" that threatens humanity and its progress.

Citizenship-as-recognition was a strategic tool that allowed Éboué and Vialle to subsequently press for improved living conditions in the overseas territories. By affirming the humanity of their constituents, they could then hold France accountable for extending its republican promise of liberty, equality and fraternity to all its citizens.

“Fraternité, ce mot féminin qui désigne un sentiment masculin”: Race, Gender and Republicanism in the French Union

One can recognize an authentic heir in the one who conserves and reproduces, but also in the one who respects the *logic* of the legacy even to the point of turning it on occasion against those who claim to be its guardians, to the point of revealing, against the usurpers,

¹⁴⁰ Eugénie Éboué, "We Resent Being Called Dependent," 1.

what has never been seen in the inheritance: to the point of giving birth, by the unheard-of *act* of a reflection, to what had never seen the light of day. –Jacques Derrida, “The Laws of Reflection: Nelson Mandela, in Admiration” (emphasis in original)

At the end of World War II, political leaders in francophone Africa and the Antilles demanded a reconfiguration of the relationship between metropole and overseas territories. Acquiring citizenship rights was at the heart of this reconfiguration. Yet the question remained, how exactly was citizenship to be defined? While Aimé Césaire led the charge for departmentalization in the *vieilles colonies*, political leaders in Africa presented their own competing models for what citizenship might look like. The stakes in making a choice were extremely high. Citizenship was not simply an abstract concept to be debated by French-educated elites far removed from the everyday brutalities endured by the colonized masses. As Éugénie Éboué forcefully argued in the National Assembly in 1946, the debate on citizenship was “une question aussi grave pour la destinée de nos territoires d'outre-mer” (a serious question for the destiny of our overseas territories).¹⁴¹ It was, without hyperbole, a matter of life and death because it would determine access to adequate healthcare, formal education and employment, and would above all abolish the brutal colonial penal system, the hated *indigénat*.

Both Éboué and Vialle left their mark on the political destiny of overseas France through their proposed laws and voting record in the Senate. They sought to make citizenship a meaningful status that would guarantee political enfranchisement and recourse to the justice system for inhabitants of the French Union. What did citizenship mean to them? Neither Éboué nor Vialle put forward a single, clear-cut definition. However, their writings and speeches allow us to piece together the multiple and sometimes shifting positions that characterized their understanding of what it meant to be an African or Antillean woman and a citizen of France.

¹⁴¹ *Journal Officiel* 5 Oct. 1946.

Some of these ideas, as we will see, were quite progressive or even radical at the time. Others, such as their firm belief in the potential of the French Union to redress colonial inequalities, were very much in line with contemporaneous political views. As Frederick Cooper argues, “least attractive to the elites of both metropolitan France and French Africa throughout the 1950s was the alternative that eventually came into being: the separation of citizenships into those of France and of each of its former colonies.”¹⁴² Both women imagined a postcolonial future free from the coloniality of power, all the while maintaining a political affiliation with the hexagon. Specifically, they appropriated the language of French republicanism in their arguments for citizenship rights for all in the French Union.

Éboué’s recourse to the language of the French Revolution in arguing for citizenship shows the powerful seduction of French republicanism. Like Aimé Césaire and many of the other Antillean and African politicians in the mid-twentieth century and even today, she believed in, or at least argued for liberty, equality and fraternity as not only the foundation of France’s political identity, but also of its relationship with the overseas territories. In a 1946 unpublished essay defending the creation of the French Union, Senghor explains the seductive power of republicanism.¹⁴³ He argues that the newly drafted constitution was a testament to France’s renewed commitment to a republican tradition: “Car qu’est-ce en définitive qu’une bonne Constitution que le reflet d’un moment précis de l’évolution historique? C’est en vertu de ces principes que la République triomphante a toujours libéré les peuples d’outre mer asservis par les forces de conservation” (“For what, definitively, is a good Constitution if not the reflection of a

¹⁴² This quote is taken from the abstract to Cooper’s talk “Citizenship beyond the Nation: Decolonization and Federalism in Post-War France and French Africa” given at the Institut d’études avancées in Paris on June 18, 2014. See <http://paris-iea.fr/evenement/citizenship-beyond-nation-decolonization-and-federalism-post-war-france-and-french-africa>

¹⁴³ A typed copy of this essay can be found in Eugénie Éboué’s papers at the Fondation Charles de Gaulle. It remains unclear whether Senghor delivered this as a speech in the National Assembly or published it in another venue. See Léopold Sédar Senghor, “La Constitution de l’Union française: Tradition républicaine et sens du réel” 30 Apr. 1946 FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

precise moment of historic evolution? It is by virtue of these principles that the triumphant Republic has always liberated the peoples of the overseas territories subjected by conservative forces” 4). Senghor traces the history of this tradition from the French Revolution to the postwar period and argues that there are two Frances, republican France and royalist France. He goes on to cite the abolitionist leanings of the Jacobins as proof of republican France’s commitment to liberty in the colonies.

Thus in this crucial postwar moment when France urgently needed to reassert “liberté, égalité, fraternité” in order to banish memories of Pétain’s “travail, famille, patrie,” outre-mer politicians strategically appropriated republican language in order to advocate for the extension of French citizenship to the African colonies. As Senghor argues: “C’est parce que la IV^e République n’est pas la fille honteuse de la Monarchie, mais qu’elle est née de l’insurrection contre la dictature au double visage de Hitler et de Pétain qu’elle a repris une noble tradition. Et elle l’a reprise d’autant plus fidèlement que les indigènes d’outre-mer avaient pris une place importante au triomphe du soulèvement populaire” (“It is because the Fourth Republic is not the shameful daughter of the Monarchy, but is rather born from the insurrection against the double-sided dictatorship of Hitler and Pétain that she [the Fourth Republic] has taken up the noble tradition. She has taken it up all the more faithfully since the natives of the overseas territories played such an important role in the popular uprising”). Senghor, like Éboué, reminds France of its debt to the colonies. He places this debt in the context of a dichotomous relationship between republicanism and de Gaulle on one hand, and the monarchy and Pétain on the other.¹⁴⁴ He argues that the new constitution was the political expression of France’s self-consciousness and

¹⁴⁴ In “Antillais et Africains” Fanon traces the emergence of this idea of two Frances in popular Antillean consciousness during World War II. He argues that due to the overt racism of Vichy France, Antilleans came to view Vichy as “la mauvaise France”, a fraudulent creation of the Germans masquerading as the “true” France. De Gaulle’s France libre gave rise, by extension, to the myth of the good, non-racist and “true” France. See Frantz Fanon, *Œuvres*, 708-709.

collective identity. Thus its provisions extending citizenship to the colonies would be the ultimate testament to France's renewed commitment to its republican identity.

Éboué's politics were very much in line with Senghor's. Her campaign poster for the National Assembly elections in 1945 illustrates the pull of France's republican promise.

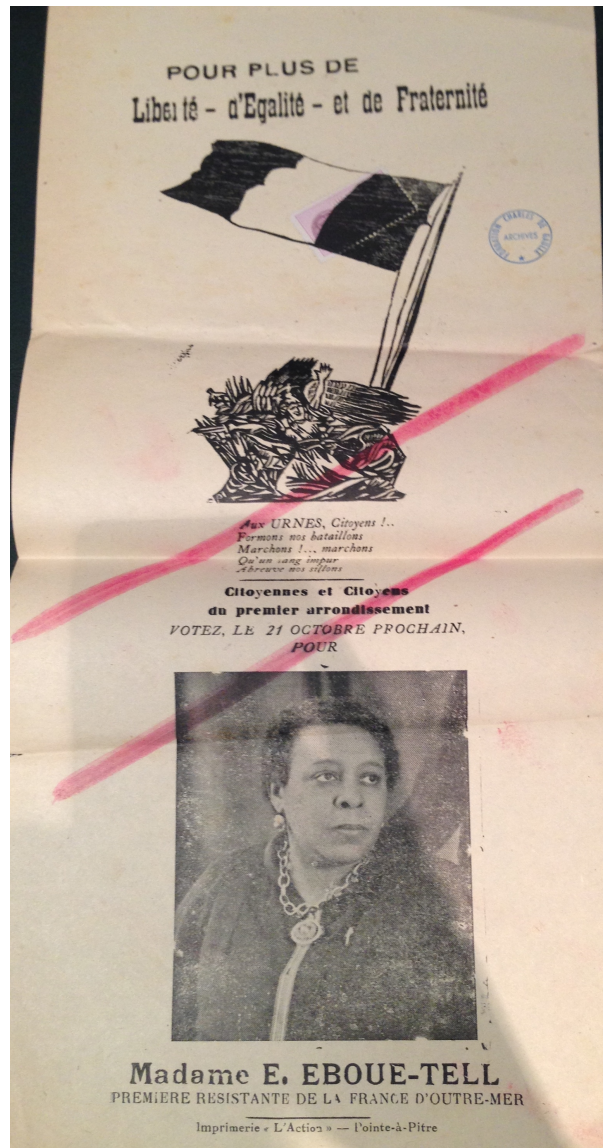


Fig. 4: Eugénie Éboué's campaign poster for 1945 Constituent National Assembly elections¹⁴⁵

The poster's portrait orientation creates a visual effect that draws the viewer's eye vertically from top to bottom. This strategy creates a line of continuity in a narrative that begins with the French

¹⁴⁵ FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

Revolution and ends with World War II. The alternating distribution of text-image-text-image-text reinforces this continuity by placing French republican iconography in the context of the 1945 National Assembly elections. It is particularly striking that the French *tricolor* flies over this invitation to all citizens (“Citoyennes et Citoyens”) of Guadeloupe’s *premier arrondissement* to vote for Madame E. Éboué-Tell. Even more striking is the large photo of Éboué with her close-cropped hair looking into the distance. This picture appears underneath a drawing of another woman leading the charge with her sword pointing forward, an image that is most likely intended to recall the figure of Marianne in Eugène Delacroix’s painting “La Liberté guidant le peuple” (“Liberty Leading the People”). As the viewer’s eyes travel up and down the poster between history and the present, Égéné becomes the feminine embodiment of Liberté. What could better symbolize the pinnacle of France’s recognition of all its citizens, and its love for liberty in the aftermath of a traumatic war, than the election of a black woman to one of the highest offices of the land? By promising “Plus de Liberté, d’Egalité et de Fraternité” (“More liberty, equality and fraternity”), Éboué suggests that voting the first black woman into the French National Assembly would be proof of France’s genuine adherence to its tripartite motto.

Yet Éboué’s was not an uncritical adoption of French republicanism. She quotes the refrain of the *Marseillaise* on her poster, but reformulates some of the text in a way that crafts a new, possibly more inclusive narrative of French identity. Notably, “Aux armes citoyens” (“To arms, citizens”) becomes “Aux URNES, Citoyens!” (“To the BALLOTS, citizens!”). “Formez vos bataillons” (“Form your battalions”) becomes “Formons nos bataillons” (“Let us form our battalions”). Éboué’s modification of the lyrics suggests a new revolution underway, one that would take place not on the barricades but in the voting booths. The shift from the plural second person pronoun “vous” to the collective first person “nous” suggests that Éboué and her Guadeloupean constituents form the new battalion of France’s most downtrodden who will fight

for citizenship rights and a more equitable distribution of resources. As with her epic retelling of World War II, Éboué engages with the history of the French Revolution in order to produce a more inclusive narrative of French identity.

Once elected, Éboué's rhetoric on citizenship did not remain on the symbolic order of Republican promises and love for the patrie. Rather, this language proved to be an important political tool for engaging the French government in a dialogue on what outre-mer French citizenship would look like on the ground. In a particularly heated debate on budget allocations, outre-mer deputies took their metropolitan colleagues to task on France's colonial economic policy. Aimé Césaire, Eugénie Éboué and Gaston Monnerville followed one another in rapid succession and demanded that the metropole redefine the terms of its relationship with its overseas territories. Monnerville aptly sums up Césaire's and Éboué's arguments in his own demands for a more equitable distribution of wealth in the colonies:

Je voudrais donc savoir exactement quelle est sa politique coloniale, c'est-à-dire celle du nouveau Gouvernement. Votre politique est-elle une politique d'investissements dans les colonies, c'est-à-dire de reconstruction, dont les territoires d'outre-mer ont tant besoin? Où est-ce encore la vieille politique de prestige qui consiste à faire des dépenses somptuaires, spectaculaires, au lieu de ce que nous appelons, nous, 'la politique du puits'—*je pense à l'Afrique—c'est à dire la politique dont tout à l'heure Mme Éboué a tracé les grandes lignes, qui consiste d'abord à penser à l'élément de la colonisation ou des territoires d'outre-mer: l'homme, à sauvegarder la santé de l'être humain, de façon à lui permettre de*

*produire à la fois pour lui, pour le territoire dont il est originaire, et pour la métropole?*¹⁴⁶

I would therefore like to know what exactly the new government's colonial policy is. Is your politics one of investment in the colonies, that is the reconstruction that the overseas territories so badly need? Or is it still the old politics of prestige that consists of sumptuous, spectacular spending, instead of what we call 'the politics of the well'—*I am thinking of Africa—I mean the politics that Madame Éboué outlined previously, which consists first and foremost of thinking about the human element in colonization or in the overseas territories: man, to safeguard human health in such a way as to allow him to produce at once for himself, for the territory that is his homeland, and for the metropole?* (emphasis mine)

Monnerville posits two kinds of colonial economies. In the first, France's so-called civilizing mission is manifested in the construction of sumptuous bridges and railway lines in a predatory system that exploits the labor and natural resources of the colonies while proclaiming the benevolence of supposed French assistance. Throughout his speech Monnerville is adamant that this exploitation occurs as much in Africa as in the Antilles and his native Guyane. The second and presumably more desirable model of colonial economy is defined by Éugénie Éboué. She proposes what can best be described as a humanistic colonialism, one that places the human at the center of its economic policies. This meant first moving away from the vision of the colonized as devoid of subjectivity, as subaltern, as thing, and recognizing his/her humanity. For Césaire, Éboué and Monnerville, citizenship would reconfigure the colonial system of economic exploitation and thingification primarily by recognizing the humanity of the formerly colonized.

¹⁴⁶ *Journal Officiel* 29 Dec. 1945, emphasis mine.

For French African and Antillean politicians, this recognition would in turn translate into concrete changes like improved education and healthcare, a local, semi-autonomous governing body, social security and workers' benefits, and development of infrastructure and resources that would allow the colonies to produce first for themselves, then for the metropole. This redefinition of the colonial relationship was an important precursor to the different forms of decolonizations—that is independence and departmentalization—that came to be in Africa and the Antilles. Certainly neither independence nor departmentalization has brought about the utopian state of equitable and harmonious exchange between France and its former colonies. Just as the supporters of the French Revolution grew disillusioned at the economic inequalities that persisted in France, so too did African and Antillean politicians and intellectuals grow disillusioned with French republicanism. As we will see, racism was still a reality that sat uneasily alongside the promise of liberty, equality and fraternity. Yet the fact that they continued to hold France accountable for upholding its tripartite motto abroad, attests to the seductive power of republicanism and the ingenuity of the French colonial model.

Jane Vialle also employed the language of French republicanism in articulating her own version of citizenship in the French Union, particularly through her work with the AFUF. “La Liberté et le Droit” (“Liberty and rights”, Vialle, 169) were guiding tenets of the association. In her October-November 1949 editorial for the AFUF journal, Vialle clearly defines these two terms: “Pour nous, la Liberté est de pouvoir choisir en toute conscience, sans crainte, sans préjugés à toutes les grandes périodes de la vie” (“For us, liberty is the power to choose in good faith, without fear, without prejudice, in the most important moments in life”, 169). Vialle’s definition of liberty as the power to make important choices may be read as a precursor to ideas of self-governance that would emerge in anti-colonial rhetoric in the coming years. For the AFUF, women of the French Union were citizens and no longer colonial subjects, at least on

paper. As such, they sought to claim that seductive yet elusive French republican promise of liberty as their fundamental right. This liberty, as per Vialle's definition, would in turn allow them to access better educational and employment opportunities, and to occupy positions of political authority in the postwar French federation.

Liberty alone was not enough to ensure equal access to social advancement and political enfranchisement for the new citizens of the French Union. Vialle establishes "Droit" as a necessary condition for this liberty and argues that both were to be foundational elements of political relations between the metropole and overseas France. She defines the latter as follows: "Le droit qui, par des règles consenties, limite, par les intérêts de tous, les privilèges de chacun" ("Rights which, by rules commonly agreed to, limit each one's privileges in the interests of all", 118). "Droit" emerges here as a collectively agreed upon set of rules that would limit the privileges that certain members of society enjoyed over others. Vialle's specific application of "Liberté" and "Droit" to relations between metropole and colonies challenges the imbalance of power inherent in these relations. For Vialle, only by recognizing the liberty and rights of all citizens could metropolitan France truly claim to have evolved from a French empire to a French Union.

Like Éboué, Vialle also engaged in the production of transatlantic history and memory as a strategy to buttress her arguments for full citizenship. Where Éboué retraces the French Atlantic triangle in order to establish a connection between the war effort in French Equatorial Africa, Guadeloupe and metropolitan France, Vialle's transatlantic memory work connects the abolition of slavery in the French Antilles to French Africa's demands for full citizenship. Notably, in a 1951 session of the Senate, Vialle argued that maintaining the double electoral college system violated the republican and democratic principles on which the French Union was theoretically founded. This electoral system contained one of the many contradictions of the French Union

because despite the extension of French citizenship to all, it maintained the distinction between French citizens and “autochtones” on the matter of elections. Vialle argues that this two-tiered system of voting was symptomatic of a two-tiered structure of citizenship that results in unequal access to rights and liberties. In her speech, she urges her fellow senators: “Rappelez-vous, mes chers collègues, l’époque de l’abolition de l’esclavage. Schœlcher a tout de suite compris qu’il ne pouvait y avoir de palier pour accéder à la citoyenneté française; car trop souvent le provisoire devient définitif” (“Remember, dear colleagues, the period of the abolition of slavery. Schœlcher immediately understood that there could be no halfway point in accessing French citizenship; for too often the provisional becomes the definitive”, 201). Vialle strategically invokes Schœlcher’s name in order to legitimize her arguments in the eyes of her colleagues who, while they may dismiss her as a black woman, could hardly dismiss the legacy of the great abolitionist. Her closing words, “trop souvent le provisoire devient définitif” aptly capture the ease with which inequality and imbalance of power crystallize into the status quo.

Éboué and Vialle remained enthusiastic ambassadors of French Republicanism abroad. They gave interviews and held press conferences in the US, where reporters were particularly interested in their views on race and racism in France and in the States. As black French women senators, they symbolized for some African Americans, France’s apparent advancement in race relations, particularly in comparison to the United States in the 1950s. As representatives of overseas French territories, both women toed the party line and maintained that their constituents had no desire to gain independence from France. Rather, they argued, their constituents were invested in developing local infrastructure and enjoyed full political representation as French citizens. Yet there is also much to suggest that this official rhetoric did not fully represent the range of their engagement with racism in the French and American contexts. Their Senate interventions, public interviews and private letters show that they were keenly aware of the

intersectional nature of power and oppression, and vocally opposed to institutional racism in France and abroad.

“We Resent Being Called Dependent”: Racism and the (Im)possibility of a Post-colonial Future

In 1943, as World War II blazed on, Éugénie Éboué wrote a two-page report on her sons’ service in the French army.¹⁴⁷ Éboué was particularly concerned by the ill treatment to which Henri, then 31 years old and Robert, 24, had been subjected by their commanding officers.¹⁴⁸ She describes their 18-month internment in a German prisoner-of-war camp and their daring escape. She then states that on their return to their regiment, her sons were physically assaulted and denied the basic rights accorded to soldiers in the French army. Éboué concludes that this treatment is a manifestation of anti-black racism in the French army, a phenomenon that violates the “minimum d’équité et de justice” (“the minimum of equity and justice”) to which all French citizens were entitled, particularly given their choice to risk their lives for the patrie.

Three years later, Éboué penned yet another report on race relations in France and its overseas territories. In “French End Colonial Era, Grant West Indies Citizenship”, she gives a glowing review of France’s track record on the subject of race and its treatment of its former subjects. She argues that metropolitan France had successfully taken the “arduous road” to racial harmony in its choice to respect the multiplicity of civilizations that made up the French Union. The result, as Éboué describes it, is nothing short of utopian:

There is nothing, at present, in the French world, to prevent any member of the French community from rising to the highest administrative or political positions;

¹⁴⁷ This document is undated and untitled. It appears to be something between a letter and a report as it documents evidence and makes a clear appeal for the transfer of her sons from France to England. Dates referenced suggest that it was written after 1942. FCDG F22/26-F22/28.

¹⁴⁸ Henri Éboué was one of the contributors to the March 1935 issue of *L’Étudiant noir*. His essay, “Langage et musique chez les nègres du Congo” shared the page with Senghor’s and Nardal’s contributions. It evoked Félix and Éugénie’s ethnographic research on the connections between language and music in Africa and the Antilles.

all literary, economic, social and other careers are open only to those who deserve them. In putting this policy into effect, France has obviously performed a true miracle, giving to the very different geniuses of African, Asiatic, Polynesian or other origin, an opportunity to profit by the forms of a Greco-Latin culture that formerly appeared exclusively reserved for the Indo-European races.¹⁴⁹

In painting a picture of racial harmony for her American readership, Éboué implicitly compares France to the United States under Jim Crow law, perhaps to buttress her claim a year earlier to American journalists in New York that “conditions in the French colony [of Guadeloupe] were far superior to the status of the American Negro.”¹⁵⁰

Yet the miracle of racial harmony that France has supposedly performed, appears more of an illusion than reality when read alongside Éboué’s private reports of racism in the French army. How do we reconcile her depiction of the ease with which a person of color may find him/herself “in the uniform of a French general” on one hand, with her condemnation of the racism to which her sons were subjected while in uniform on the other hand? This seeming paradox cannot solely be attributed to the different audiences to which these two documents are addressed, to the difference between private admissions of France’s failures in her report to a military official and her public acclamations of its harmonious democracy as a French deputy addressing a US audience. These seemingly opposed viewpoints may also be explained by the fact that for Éboué, the existence of racial discrimination was not a symptom of the failures of French republicanism. Rather, republicanism was the means by which racism—understood as holdovers from a colonial

¹⁴⁹ Eugénie Éboué, “We Resent Being Called Dependent,” 1.

¹⁵⁰ Éboué viewed the US as the ultimate imperial power. She expressed horror at the Little Rock Crisis in 1957. She remained particularly critical of Jim Crow and suggested that French Africans would not be receptive to cultural exchange with white America as long as the system continued. See Earl Conrad, “Eboué Widow, Elected to French Assembly, Tells Views on Colonies” *Chicago Defender* 10 Nov. 1945: 12 and “Madam Eugénie Eboué elated over courtesies in States” *Baltimore Afro-American* 12 Apr. 1958. Certainly, Césaire’s *Discours sur le colonialisme* makes a compelling argument against this view that French colonialism was any less violent.

past—would be eradicated. For Éboué, as for many Antillean and African politicians at the time, working towards full citizenship remained the principal strategy of decolonization.

While Éboué only used the term racism once in addressing the French government, Vialle did not shy away from discussing it openly throughout her tenure in the Senate. She was particularly invested in obtaining paternal recognition for métis in order to counter the racially motivated abandonment of children that had become the practice among many white men in the colonies. Consequently, she fought a four-year battle to extend France's paternity law to the overseas territories. The law would allow métis children to conduct a paternity search, and fathers could be legally mandated to recognize and provide for their children. As Owen White and Emmanuelle Saada have shown in their respective studies on métissage in twentieth-century overseas France, the French administration viewed the métis as *déclassé*, that is, one who did not fit into any of the social categories that made up the colonial hierarchy.¹⁵¹ In a period where racial essentialism held much currency, to be *déclassé* was understood to mean occupying a liminal position between aspirations of social mobility that stemmed from having French blood, and the inability to attain that mobility due to the influence of African blood. The colonial administration's response to the perceived problem of métis who were ever discontent with this in-betweenness, was to sequester mixed-race children in so-called orphanages, a policy which, as we will see in the case of Andrée Blouin, would often have negative psychological consequences on métis children and their families.

This was the situation Vialle sought to correct with her law. She drew on her own experience as a métisse, as well as empirical evidence provided by l'Association des métis in Bangui, Tchad and Cameroun. She argued, as Andrée Blouin would decades later in her

¹⁵¹ Emmanuelle Saada, and Arthur Goldhammer, *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012) and Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1895-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

autobiography, that the state-run orphanages only served to deepen colonial racial complexes for métis children and their families: “Quelle éducation leur donne-t-on dans ces établissements?” (“What kind of education do they give them in these establishments?”) she asks. Vialle responds to her own question: “En général, on en fait des enfants rempli de complexes, des enfants qui n'ont pas la conscience de leur personnalité, qui ne savent pas de quel côté se diriger, qui méprisent le milieu noir et envient le milieu blanc. Quand ils doivent se retremper dans la vie sociale, ils ne savent pas quelle attitude prendre, car d'un côté ils sont rejetés, et de l'autre ils ne sont pas acceptés” (“In general, they are made into children filled with complexes, children who are not conscious of their personality, who do not know where to turn, who despise the black milieu and envy the white milieu. When they have to re-immense themselves into social life, they don't know what attitude to adopt because on one side they are rejected, and on the other they are not accepted” 147). Vialle echoes the language of liminality that characterized French colonial discourse on déclassés. However, she does not subscribe to the essentialist ideas that métis occupied this liminal position because of their mixed blood. Rather, she attributes their socially in-between status to the coloniality of power. If métis children “méprisent le milieu noir et envient le milieu blanc” it is because they are inscribed into a colonial hierarchy that codifies racial difference and postulates the superiority of whiteness over blackness, all in the service of conquest and exploitation.

In addition to recognizing the psychological toll of the colonial status quo on métis children, Vialle was also keenly aware of the intersectionality at work in creating this situation.¹⁵²

¹⁵² She cited multiple examples of this intersectionality and continued to engage her colleagues in public debates on the subject. Her examples include the case of a doctor who could not find work in Madagascar despite her skills: “Elle est femme, elle est docteur, elle est malgache. Depuis plus d'un an, elle demande à retourner dans son pays y soigner les enfants; il n'y a pas de poste pour elle à Madagascar parce qu'elle est malgache, parce qu'elle est docteur, parce qu'elle est, pédiatre” (“She is a woman, she is a doctor, she is Malagasy. For more than a year she has requested to return to her country to care for sick children there; there is no position for her in Madagascar because she is Malagasy, because she is a doctor, because she is a pediatrician”, Vialle, 199). Vialle dismissed her

She cites the example of Tchad and states that the number of métis children there increased dramatically “après le passage de la glorieuse colonne LECLERC” (“after the passage of the glorious LECLERC regiment”). Vialle’s use of “glorieuse” here can only be read as ironic. Unlike Éboué who invoked the march of African soldiers from Tchad in order to remind metropolitan France of its debt to the colonies, Vialle paints the less-than-glorious picture of white French soldiers who, despite undertaking the noble task of liberating their patrie, abdicated their responsibility as fathers. For Vialle, this abdication was also about a fundamental disregard for African women: “On a trop souvent vu dans les territoires d'Outre-Mer, des femmes prises pour ‘ménagères’ par des européens et abandonnées, elles et leurs enfants métis, lorsque ces derniers venaient au monde [...] il importe donc, pour la dignité des enfants métis et le respect dû à la mère, qu'une recherche de paternité puisse être faite” (“We have seen too often in the overseas territories, women taken on by Europeans as ‘housekeepers’ and then abandoned, along with their métis children, once they give birth [...] it is therefore important, for the dignity of the métis children and the respect owed to the mother, that a paternity search be made possible” 140). As Vialle argues, and as Andrée Blouin attests, African women are objects of sexual desire, denied agency and rejected as viable spouses and mothers. Vialle uses the specific term “ménagères” to show the conflation of African women’s sexuality as labor in the colonial economy. To be a “menagère” was to occupy the dual position of domestic help and sexual object. Through her narrative, Vialle dissociates the image of French soldiers marching through Africa from the discourse on resistance and liberation, and deploys it as a symbol for colonial sexual violence and conquest. Her proposed law must, in this context, be understood as a powerful anti-colonial gesture because it refuses the very basis on which colonial power is

colleagues’ argument that the woman was denied a job because she was possibly a communist and insisted that the constitutive nature of racial and gendered discrimination kept her exiled from Madagascar.

founded. In seeking to obtain recognition from *père* and *patrie* on behalf of African mothers and their métis children, her proposed law holds at its core the same demand for the recognition of the humanity of the colonized that Éboué also articulates.

Her law was also ultimately about the viability of the French Union, the possibility of a postcolonial future in which republican principles held true for all French citizens regardless of race or gender: “Une des bases de cette union est le respect que les individus doivent avoir les uns envers les autres, et ce respect doit se manifester, aussi bien à l’égard des hommes, qu’à celui des femmes” (“One of the bases of this union is the respect that individuals must have for one another, the respect that must be manifested, not only towards men but also towards women” 140). Vialle was however cautiously optimistic about French citizenship and its ability to bring about this future, to function as the great equalizer that would immediately do away with racism. In short, she knew that France would have to transition gradually from the colonial past she knew to the post-colonial future she imagined. Thus when her fellow senator M. Carles tried to appropriate her paternity law as a symbol of the metropole’s triumph over all racial prejudice against *outré-mer* populations, Vialle sounded a note of caution. M. Carles, in his capacity as *rapporteur* for the commission on justice and civil legislation, declared victoriously in the senate: “nous venons donc, par cette modeste proposition de loi, de montrer une fois de plus, comme nous l’avons déjà fait à plusieurs reprises, dans cette Assemblée, que cette Union Française est vraiment une réalité, que tous les fils de la France métropolitaine et de la France d’Outre-Mer sont maintenant traités sur un pied d’égalité absolue” (“we have shown once again, through this modest proposed law, as we have done many times before in this Assembly, that this French Union is truly a reality, that all the sons of metropolitan and overseas France are now treated on an absolutely equal footing”, 146). For Vialle, Carles was prematurely claiming a post-colonial present and consequently ignoring the institutional racism still present in the French Union and

which made her law necessary: “Toutefois, je regrette de ne pas être tout à fait de l’avis de M. CARLES, parce que si, à cette tribune, nous prenons de belles résolutions, et si l’Union Française se fait ici, en France, on constate que, dans les territoires d’Outre-Mer, les pouvoirs publics n’ont pas toujours cette même compréhension, et n’appliquent pas forcément à la lettre les lois qui sont votées ici” (“Nevertheless, I am regretfully not of the same opinion as Mr. Carles because if, in this Senate, we undertake beautiful resolutions, and if the French Union is made here in France, we remark that in the overseas territories, those in power do not always have the same understanding we do, and therefore do not necessarily apply to the letter the laws we adopt here” 146). Vialle is concerned with the French Union’s geography of power. She recognizes the *décalage* between republican promises and colonial reality, between “ici” the metropolitan seat of power and the implicit “là-bas” where these promises were not yet a reality.

Why then pursue a four-year battle to pass a paternity law in the face of this apparent disregard for legislation by French administrators overseas? The irony is clear to the contemporary reader. Yet in the 1940s and 1950s when French citizenship and legal protection appeared to be the most effective counter to institutional racism, pursuing such a law made sense. For Vialle and Éboué, political representation was the first step towards the post-colonial futures they imagined. As Vialle would argue in the senate: “On doit faire l’Afrique avec les Africains, sans cela elle ne se fera pas ou elle se fera contre la France” (“We must make Africa with the Africans, without that it will not be made, or it will be made against France”, 181). In addition to calling for more equitable representation, Vialle’s prescient warning does indeed come to pass with the dissolution of the French Union and the move towards independence in the coming decade. In 1951, a year after her declaration, Aoua Kéïta, a midwife in the French Sudan renounced her French citizenship and joined the campaign for independence, a campaign that would result in her election as the first woman deputy of independent Mali. Kéïta’s

autobiography continues the story of political women in the French Union where Éboué's and Vialle's narratives leave off after their defeat in Senate elections in 1952. Kéita's text reveals the strategies for anti-colonial resistance that women employed when it became abundantly clear that French citizenship would not bring with it the political agency that Vialle and Éboué had hoped it would.

CHAPTER IV

Women's Anti-colonial Resistance in Aoua Kéïta's *Femme d'Afrique: la vie d'Aoua Kéïta racontée par elle-même* and Ousmane Sembène's *Emitaï* and *Les bouts de bois de dieu*

In the November 1964 edition of the bilingual West African journal *Awa: La Revue de la femme noire*, Marianne Sohaï, a Senegalese delegate who visited Mali to participate in independence commemoration activities that year, interviewed Aoua Kéïta.¹⁵³ Kéïta was the first woman deputy elected to the National Assembly in newly independent Mali. In the interview, she provided an extensive description of her political activism in French Sudan. Her conversation with Sohaï and by extension the readers of *Awa*, is one example of her transnational engagement with African women's issues. It is also a precursor to her autobiography published in 1975. To the title question of her interview "Qui êtes-vous Awa Kéïta?" ("Who are you, Awa Kéïta?") she responds with her own title *Femme d'Afrique: La vie d'Aoua Kéïta racontée par elle-même*.

Aoua Kéïta's feminist, anti-colonial activism began as early as her first job posting to the region of Gao as a Colonial Health Services worker in 1932.¹⁵⁴ At the age of 19, as the first midwife assigned to the area, Kéïta set about building the first maternity ward, and establishing the women's branch of the Union Soudanaise du Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (USRDA) party.¹⁵⁵ The colonial administration transferred Kéïta to increasingly remote outposts of French Sudan, often as disciplinary measures for her work organizing and consolidating women's branches of the USRDA wherever she went. The administration finally exiled her to the Casamance region of Senegal between 1951 and 1953. On her return to Bamako, Kéïta pursued

¹⁵³ Aoua Kéïta and Marianne Sohaï, "Qui êtes-vous Awa Kéïta? Députée à l'Assemblée Nationale du Mali," *Awa: La Revue de la femme noire* (Nov. 1964): 10-12.

¹⁵⁴ For biographical information on Kéïta see Aoua Kéïta, *Femme d'Afrique: la vie d'Aoua Kéïta racontée par elle-même*. (Paris: Présence africaine, 1975), Emmanuel E. K. Akyeampong, and Henry H. L. J. Gates, *Dictionary of African biography* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 322-324 and Jane Turriffin, "Aoua Kéïta and the Nascent Women's Movement in the French Soudan," *African Studies Review* 36 (1993): 59.

¹⁵⁵ The USRDA was the Sudanese branch of the Rassemblement Democratique Africain (RDA), founded in 1946. The RDA was a pro-independence party whose actions spanned French West and Central Africa.

her political activities and founded a women's trade union, the Intersyndicat des femmes salariées. In the coming years, she would represent French Sudanese women's and workers' interests in international meetings from Bamako to Dakar, Paris to Leipzig. In September 1958, the USRDA elected her to join its executive body, and appointed her to the committee charged with drafting the constitution of the Sudanese Republic, which would become Mali in 1960. In this same period, she was elected into office as the first female deputy in the Malian National Assembly, a position she used to push through marriage reform laws that gave women increased rights. Kéita's story ends abruptly with the dawn of Mali's independence in 1960. With the overthrow of Mali's first president Modibo Kéita (no relation), she found herself in exile in Congo Brazzaville, where she wrote and published her autobiography.

A number of scholars have identified *Femme d'Afrique* as the first published autobiography in French by an African woman.¹⁵⁶ Published by Présence Africaine, the text pulls out all the literary stops. Kéita inscribes herself in the *griot* tradition by recording the stories, songs and heroic actions of French Sudanese women and the USRDA at the height of the anti-colonial movement. A year after its publication, her autobiography won the Grand Prix Littéraire d'Afrique Noire, a prestigious literary award whose recipients include Léopold Senghor, Amadou Kourouma, Alain Mabanckou and Henri Lopès. Kéita was the first woman to win the award, opening the way for Aminata Sow Fall, Mariama Bâ, Ken Bugul and Véronique Tadjo among others. Despite this critical acclaim, Kéita's impressive 400-page tome went out of print in a few years. The story of her contribution to the anti-colonial struggle in French Sudan had all but disappeared from the dominant narratives of African liberation and independence.

There are a number of reasons for this disappearance. The general erasure of women's

¹⁵⁶ Beverly Ormerod, and Jean-Marie Volet, "Ecrits autobiographiques et engagement: le cas des Africaines d'expression française," *The French review* 69 (1996): 426-444.

voices from discourses of anti-colonial politics is only one side of the story. After all, texts by Aminata Sow Fall, Mariama Bâ, Ama Ata Aidoo and Tsitsi Dangarembga are often featured in the postcolonial African literary canon. A more likely explanation is that Kéïta's text does not fit into any of the recognizable genres of African women's writings. Her choice of genre already excludes her from some of the analyses that are more heavily focused on the novel as primary literary form. Further, her disproportionate focus on her work in the public sphere and her relative silence on her marriage and familial relationships, disrupt expectations of the kind of writing traditionally associated with African women, which usually focuses on the female protagonist's interiority. At least two critics, while praising her autobiography as a rich source of historical information, have bemoaned Kéïta's relative silence on midwifery practices, female genital mutilation and mother-daughter relationships.¹⁵⁷ This critique reflects dominant trends that situate African women almost exclusively within the domestic sphere.

In addition to the focus on her work as a midwife, commentators have also described Kéïta as "mother of the nation."¹⁵⁸ The title is indeed tempting given her occupation and the fact she delivered many of Mali's children, including one-time president Alpha Oumar Konaré. In *Singular Performances: Reinscribing the Subject in Francophone African Writing*, Michael Syrotinski asks, "Given Kéïta's inability to become a mother herself, does she, as some have suggested, sublimate her infertility into the symbolic role, as a famous midwife, of 'mother of the people'?" (Syrotinski, Michael 61). I would argue that the title "mother of the nation" is not a particularly productive one because it does little more than place Kéïta in an easily recognizable category, one established and defined by the very patriarchal narratives on African liberation and

¹⁵⁷ Bernard Mouralis, "Une parole autre: Aoua Kéïta, Mariama Bâ et Awa Thiam," *Notre Libraire* 117 (1994): 21-30 and Catherine Mazauric. Rev. of *Femme d'Afrique: La vie d'Aoua Kéïta racontée par elle-même* by Aoua Kéïta. *Notre librairie* 75-76 (1984):184-186.

¹⁵⁸ Mildred P. Mortimer, *Writing from the Hearth : Public, Domestic, and Imaginative Space in Francophone Women's Fiction of Africa and the Caribbean* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007): 36.

nationalism that Kéïta seeks to counter in and through her text.¹⁵⁹

The reasons for Kéïta's limited presence in scholarship are precisely the reasons why she is so important for this study. Because *Femme d'Afrique* is not easily reducible to or recognizable as belonging to the category of "women's writings", it challenges readers to question or at the very least expand their definition of this category. Further, unlike Nardal, Vialle and Éboué, whose writings give voice to an educated urban elite, Kéïta focuses on the significant yet ignored political contributions of non-literate women in far-flung rural outposts of the French empire. This chapter engages primarily with Aoua Kéïta's autobiography as a literary and historical source on the politics of women's self-representation and political participation in the years preceding independence. I also draw on works by Ousmane Sembène, who fictionalizes the mass political action led by women in colonial French West Africa. Sembène's creative works open up the field of possibility for imagining and representing women's resistance of colonial labor practices. Both Kéïta and Sembène are invested in a similar project of producing a decolonial feminist discourse that seeks to recuperate women's political participation as central to African political history.

Sembène's historical novel, *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, is one of the few accounts of the rail workers' strike that swept across French West Africa from October 1947 to March 1948. The workers' central demand was for the *cadre unique*, "a single, nonracial job hierarchy, with the same benefits package for all members, including the complicated supplements for local cost of living and family obligations" (Cooper, 218). As Frederick Cooper shows, the protracted strike ultimately became about the possibility for and extent to which local workers and trade unions

¹⁵⁹ For a discussion of the patriarchal nature of the "mother of the nation" rhetoric employed in the national narratives of newly independent African countries, see Amina Mama, "Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence Against Women in Africa," *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* eds. M. M. J. Alexander, and Chandra C. T. Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997): 46-62.

could make their voices heard and influence state decisions. Consequently its outcome went beyond guaranteeing equal pay for equal work regardless of race. It also reconfigured the balance of power between the French administration and African workers, in the context of labor relations. This reconfiguration is at the heart of Sembène's novel and is reflected both in relations between the sexes and in the transformations that occur within female characters. Sembène foregrounds women and their crucial contribution to the strike. The action culminates in a women's march from Thiès to Dakar to present the demands for the cadre unique to the governor. His novel fleshes out what the scant historical record shows, that the strike lasted as long as it did, because of the economic support provided by the local community as women worked and performed non-wage activities to sustain the strikers (Cooper, 221).

Sembène released the film *Emitai* in 1971. It was immediately banned everywhere on the continent except in Senegal. *Emitai*, like *Les Bouts de bois de dieu*, is also a fictional rendering of a historical event. Set in the Diola village Effok during World War II, the film shows the French practice of forced conscription, and the infamous rice tax levied to feed the soldiers set to depart from Dakar. Sembène's camera captures the women's resistance to French colonial exploitation by hiding the rice that they have grown, and refusing to hand it over to the authorities even when they are held hostage by the French colonel and his *tirailleurs*. Based on the true story of Diola resistance under the leadership of Aline Sitoé Diatta, a Diola woman, *Emitai* captures women's resistance strategies on screen. The film's production and subsequent reception also show the opposing elements of inscription and erasure present in the process of (re)writing history and engaging competing memories. The present analysis privileges Kéita's narrative because of the relative dearth of scholarship on her life and work. Sembène's work, in contrast, has attracted extensive commentary from scholars and film enthusiasts around the globe. I therefore engage with it only to the extent that *Femme d'Afrique* provides a new angle of vision on Sembène's

representation of women in moments of political upheaval.

The goal of this chapter is to analyze the feminist practices of anti-colonial resistance as presented in Kéïta's autobiography in order to tease out women's contributions as active agents in the making of the emerging, independent nation state. In order to understand resistance, however, it is important to identify the power structures against which this resistance occurs. The first part of this chapter therefore analyzes the coloniality of gender in French Sudan in the decades before independence. Maria Lugones theorizes the coloniality of gender at the intersection of Quijano's reading of the constitution of colonial power and Patricia Hill Collins's theory of the intersectional nature of racial, gendered and class oppression.¹⁶⁰ Lugones argues that the coloniality of gender "is what lies at the intersection of gender/class/race as central constructs of the capitalist world system of power" (Lugones, 746). In my reading of Kéïta's autobiography, I argue that French colonial power established a racial and gender hierarchy in postwar French Sudan that made women subject to distinct yet related forms of oppression by the colonial administration and male figures of authority in their communities. The second part of the chapter enumerates the feminist strategies of anti-colonial resistance employed by French Sudanese women to counter these different but interconnected forms of oppression. I will show that authorial voice and contested citizenship are two primary grounds of engagement for Kéïta. Further, the women of *Femme d'Afrique*, as well as those portrayed in Sembène's work, challenge traditionally held notions of masculinity and femininity and the colonial practice of policing bodies as part of their feminist anti-colonial resistance.

My reading of Kéïta's and Sembène's works as feminist is undergirded by Filomina Steady's definition of African feminism as focused on women's political, social, economic and

¹⁶⁰ Maria Lugones, "The Coloniality of Gender", *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise* (2008): 1-17 and "Toward a Decolonial Feminism", *Hypatia* 25 (2010): 742-759.

cultural liberation from oppression that operates at the intersection of race, gender and class (Steady 4). In the context of African feminism, identifying a male author and filmmaker as a feminist is not particularly contentious if we consider Steady's assertion that "African patterns of feminism can be seen as having developed within a context that views human life from a total, rather than a dichotomous and exclusive, perspective. For women, the male is not 'the other' but part of the human same" (7). Kéita and Sembène do not present all men as inherently complicit with patriarchy. Rather, they identify a specific racial and gendered hierarchy upheld by some men and women in positions of authority. Their works privilege women's efforts to challenge this hierarchy in order to attain social, political and economic equality for all.

"Une petite négresse, une pauvre esclave": The Coloniality of Gender in French Sudan

Multiple forces worked to exclude women from political participation in French Sudan. In a comparative reading of works by Aoua Kéita, Mariama Bâ and Awa Thiam, Bernard Mouralis argues that *Femme d'Afrique* engages with two distinct forms of power: colonialism and patriarchy:

En effet, Aoua Kéita montre bien que l'opposition qu'elle a pu rencontrer de la part des hommes désireux de maintenir la femme dans un statut social subalterne n'est pas du même type que celle que lui a opposée le colonisateur. Les sanctions qui lui ont été infligées (avertissements, mutations, retards de carrière) ne visaient pas la militante féministe créant, par exemple, des comités de femmes, mais tout simplement la militante du RDA. Et, par là-même, elle souligne cet effet paradoxal induit par le système colonial puisque la répression, dès lors qu'elle est menée sans discrimination sexuelle particulière, vient renforcer le statut des

femmes. (Mouralis, 23)¹⁶¹

Indeed, Aoua Kéita shows that the opposition she encountered from men who sought to keep women in a subaltern social position is not the same type of opposition she faced from the colonizer. The sanctions she faced (warnings, job transfers, career obstacles) were not aimed at the feminist militant who created for example women's committees, but simply the RDA militant. And by the same token she underlines the paradoxical effect that the colonial system creates because this repression, while perpetrated without any particular gender discrimination, ultimately reinforced women's status.

Mouralis argues that patriarchy in French Sudanese society sought to maintain women in a subaltern position. The colonial administration on the other hand engaged with Kéita as an RDA activist and not as a woman. Mouralis's analysis is convincing to the extent that it identifies the two main forms of oppression Kéita faced in her life and work. However, this seemingly clear-cut distinction between African patriarchy and French colonialism obscures the fact that these systems of power and control were inextricably intertwined in the colonial context.

If Kéita is invisible as a woman, it is precisely because the colonial administration constructs a hierarchy that places women so far at the bottom that they are often made invisible. It is also because many African patriarchal practices, as we will see below, were legitimized and supported by the colonial administration in order to maintain control over African women's bodies, movement and labor.¹⁶² Lugones describes these interconnected systems of power as the colonality of gender in which “‘colonized woman’ is an empty category: no women are

¹⁶¹ Bernard Mouralis, “Une parole autre.”

¹⁶² This is not to suggest that patriarchy did not exist in pre-colonial African societies. My specific interest lies in the ways in which local patriarchal practices—which may or may not have existed prior to colonialism—and the French racial and gender hierarchy often worked together to marginalize women.

colonized; no colonized females are women. Thus, the colonial answer to Sojourner Truth is clearly, ‘no’” (Lugones, 745). The coloniality of gender grants that gender is intricately bound up in the racialized power hierarchy and capitalist labor system of colonialism. Lugones argues too that resistance is possible if we consider that women are not only the sum of their oppression, nor are they solely constructed by colonial power. Thus in Kéita’s case for example, she is most dangerous when she makes herself visible as a colonized woman because she engages with the colonial administration on terms they would rather not recognize. On several occasions, French officials refer to her as “la petite sage-femme de Gao,” an expression that conveys their refusal to recognize her by using her name, and their desire to diminish her influence by reducing her to her government controlled position as an employee of the Colonial Health Services. Kéita chooses to reverse the connotations attached to an appellation designed to render her invisible by using it herself when she recounts moments of successful resistance (Kéita, 360).

Kéita’s narrative reveals the workings of the coloniality of gender, the interconnectedness of racial and gender discrimination in French Sudan. The first example takes place in Gao in the lead up to the 1951 elections when voters in France and the colonies chose the deputies who would represent them in the French National Assembly. Kéita recounts the central role she played in registering women voters, and in organizing adequate transport and electoral education for illiterate voters in far-flung rural areas. She also states that the French authorities in Gao were threatened by the increasing popularity of the pro-independence RDA party throughout West Africa, and therefore tried to gain support from the chiefs of some of the nomadic ethnic groups in Gao just before the election. Kéita reports: “On leur parla de la supériorité de la race blanche qui a été et demeure dominante partout et à toute époque. On leur expliqua qu’ils avaient tort d’écouter une petite négresse, qui sans la présence des Français, serait une pauvre esclave servant les femmes touaregs” (109). The French authorities use the language of European male

dominance in order to establish their position at the apex of the power hierarchy. They attempt to justify their subjugation of the local chiefs who must in turn relegate Kéita to the position of subaltern (“une petite négresse” and “une pauvre esclave”), with neither the right to speak nor to be heard.

In the second example, Kéita finds herself in direct confrontation with the chief of Singné, a small village she visited, this time as a candidate for the position of deputy in the 1959 legislative elections. The chief barred her access to the village and declared that he would not accept a female candidate on his turf. His tirade is worth reproducing in its entirety here because it shows the birthing pains of a nation that had to grapple with the social position of women as part of the process of reinventing itself as an independent country:

Sors de mon village, femme audacieuse. Il faut que tu sois non seulement audacieuse, mais surtout effrontée pour essayer de te mesurer aux hommes en acceptant une place d’homme. Mais tu n’as rien fait. C’est la faute des fous dirigeants du RDA qui bafouent les hommes de notre pays en faisant de toi leur égale. [...]. Koutiala, un pays de vaillants guerriers, de grands chasseurs, de courageux anciens combattants de l’Armée française, avoir une petite femme de rien du tout à sa tête? Non, pas possible. [...]. Moi, sergent-chef de l’Armée française, ayant combattu les Allemands, accepter d’être coiffé par une femme?¹⁶³ Jamais. [...]. J’ai trois femmes comme toi qui me grattent le dos tous les soirs à tour de rôle. Retiens ta langue. Si tu continues à me parler, je te ferai bastonner par les femmes. (390)

Get out of my village, brazen woman. You must be not just brazen but especially shameless to try and measure up to men by accepting a man’s position. But you

¹⁶³ Kéita explains earlier in the text that “coiffer” was often used to mean “diriger.”

have done nothing. It is the fault of the crazy RDA leaders who ridicule the men of our country by making you their equal. [...] Koutiala, a land of brave warriors, great hunters and courageous former fighters of the French army, have a little nothing of a woman at its head? No, not possible. [...] I, sergeant of the French army, having fought the Germans, accept to be led by a woman? Never. [...]. I have three women like you who take turns to scratch my back every evening. Hold your tongue. If you continue to speak to me, I will have you flogged by the women.

The chief's final command, "retiens ta langue", delivered in the overly familiar "tu" form of the imperative, seeks to silence Kéita by reducing her to a subaltern, one of the mute women in his harem whose only role was to scratch his back. Throughout the chief's tirade, there is significant tension between his views of Kéita as object and subject. On one hand, he sees her as a political pawn, an object in the hands of RDA men who want to make a mockery of local chiefs by imposing a female candidate on them. By insisting "tu n'as rien fait", he negates all of Kéita's autonomy and political action. At the same time, the chief is threatened by her ascension to power and the very real possibility that she could occupy a higher position in the power hierarchy described above.

The chief's speech reveals too the on-going struggle between old and new political orders. He evokes multiple times his service in the French army in order to legitimize his power. Yet on the eve of independence—this incident takes place a year before Mali's independence—this power is rapidly waning. The days of local chiefs arbitrarily installed by the colonial administration for such reasons as their service in the army, are giving way to a new political order. In the new era, the people will confer power and legitimacy—at least in theory—through their participation in democratic elections. In the new era, Aoua Kéita will make history by

becoming the first female deputy in French Sudan and one of the first in francophone Africa. Kéita describes this era as “cette période de la pré-indépendance où l’Africain, de plus en plus conscient de sa condition d’exploité, ne supportait plus docilement certain comportement” (“this pre-independence period in which the African, more and more conscious of his exploited condition, no longer docilely tolerated certain behaviors”, Kéita, 346). The old chief, symbolic of the dying embers of a particular form of colonialism and patriarchy, disappears rapidly from the text. In a few short lines, Kéita recounts her two subsequent visits to Singné after winning the election. On the first occasion, the chief refuses to see her and chooses instead to hide in the forest on the pretext of a hunting expedition. On the second occasion she learns that he has since passed away. A few pages later, in the penultimate paragraph of her autobiography, Kéita announces Mali’s independence. She ends her narrative at this historic moment, as though to suggest that her autobiography is a record of French Sudan’s transformation into the Republic of Mali. What happens once the republic is born is a tale for another day.

Although Kéita appears to emerge victorious in her encounter with the chief of Singné, leaving him fuming in the dust of her Land Rover, she also does not diminish the toll of such attacks on women. Kéita says that the chief’s words remain indelibly imprinted on her memory, and even at the time of writing, nearly two decades later, she still vividly remembers the splash of cola-stained saliva on her white dress where he spat on her in rage. Physical, verbal and psychological attacks such as the two described here, were frequent obstacles women faced in their political work. This kind of violence sought to silence women and to prevent them from upsetting the existing power balance. However, to argue that intersecting racial and gendered oppression effectively excluded women from political participation is to erase the multiple contributions women made to the anti-colonial movement. If, as Lugones argues, the colonial answer to Sojourner Truth is “no”, then Kéita’s assertion of her presence as an African woman in

the masculine space of colonial politics is necessarily a strategy of anti-colonial resistance. Kéita counters colonial silencing and marginalization in two main ways. First, she bases her political activism on a selective definition of French citizenship, evoking her electoral rights when necessary and rejecting citizenship when it becomes an obstacle to her engagement in local politics. Second, Kéita uses the act of writing, as a way to preserve the voices and stories of non-literate rural women whose stories have otherwise not been preserved in the archive.

“Ma prise de conscience”: Contesting Citizenship and Voice in *Femme d’Afrique*

Within French Sudan’s structure of male-dominated politics, women had to devise creative strategies in order to participate in the electoral process. For Kéita, women’s democratic inclusion required redefining the parameters of legally recognized French citizenship. For example, during her time in Gao, she led massive efforts to register women voters for the 1951 elections. She explains in her text that she rejected the French imposed minimum age limit of 21 and registered women who were much younger. She chose to redefine women’s eligibility, not by age, but rather by their status in the community as wives and mothers who had established their maturity by caring and providing for their families.

Shortly after the elections, Kéita recounts stitching together a flag for the local chapter of the RDA party. She embroiders the letters RDA over the French tricolor. The image here is powerful given that the RDA represented for many a Pan African independence movement. Kéita superimposes African liberatory politics on the quintessential symbol of French republican ideals. Women like Éboué and Vialle have shown that politicians in overseas French territories did not necessarily define decolonization as a clean break from France. Kéita’s flag symbolizes the fusion of seemingly opposed elements of French ideology and anti-colonial politics. This combination provided a fertile ground for Africans—particularly as citizens of France in the 1940s and 1950s—to challenge colonial inequalities. Ultimately, Kéita herself best articulates the

fluid nature of French citizenship in the African colonies: “La précision ‘Français de France’ est nécessaire ici car à l’époque, en plus des ressortissants des quatre communes du Sénégal, tous les ressortissants des territoires d’Outre-mer étaient des citoyens français. Ce sont ceux que j’appelais Français d’Afrique” (“The precision ‘French of France’ is necessary here because in this period, in addition to those from the four communes of Senegal, all natives of the overseas territories were French citizens. They are the ones I called French of Africa”, Kéita, 357). Like Nardal, Éboué and Vialle, Kéita recognized French republicanism as a potentially powerful tool for improving living and labor conditions. However, unlike her predecessors, she soon became disenchanted because the promise of liberty, equality and fraternity was incompatible with colonialism.

Kéita became aware early on that republican ideals would be applied to a very limited degree in the African colonies. She notes in her text the contradiction between France’s move to extend representation in the National Assembly and the derisory number of seats actually allocated to outre-mer deputies in the French governing body (302). The reality of French Sudanese second-class citizenship was particularly visible during elections in the colony. During the 1951 elections in Gao for example, Kéita was particularly frustrated by the presence of the *commandant* at the polling station. Dressed in full uniform, the commandant used his position as both military commander and colonial administrator of Gao to intimidate his subordinates and influence their votes. Kéita viewed his abuse of power, and the acquiescence of the men under his command, as a collective humiliation for the people of Gao: “Si un seul regard d’un homme peut renverser toute une situation où se trouve donc la démocratie? Où se trouve l’engagement, la conviction? A quel niveau se situe le courage? Où se trouvent cette liberté, cette égalité, et cette fraternité? A qui s’appliquent-elles? Que fait-on de la dignité de l’homme? Je fus blessée dans mon amour-propre de colonisée” (“If just one look from a man can overturn an entire situation

then where is the democracy? Where do we locate commitment, conviction? On what level do we situate courage? Where do we locate this liberty, this equality and this fraternity? To whom do they apply? What do we do with human dignity? My pride was wounded” 121). In the multiple rhetorical questions that Kéita poses, she challenges the legitimacy of French colonial power given its inherent incompatibility with the democracy it promised when it extended French citizenship to the colonies.

That Kéita questions the selective application of French republican ideals in the colonies on this occasion is not particularly surprising. However her closing assertion gives the reader pause because it is a short, evocative sentence that conveys the pain and disappointment that she feels at the realization that French citizenship did not bring with it the promised freedom and equality. “Amour-propre” denotes self-worth and value, the very foundational elements of human dignity. In this revelatory moment Kéita becomes acutely aware that colonial power strips away the humanity of the colonized. As Aimé Césaire would state in *Discours sur le colonialisme*, published three short years after Kéita’s experience, “colonisation = chosification” (“colonization = thingification”, Césaire, *Discours*, 19/42). Negating the political will and agency of the colonized, as the commandant did at Gao, was one of the ways in which this thingification was manifested. For Kéita, French citizenship ultimately became more of an obstacle than a tool for anti-colonial resistance. For example, although she could vote for deputies to the French National Assembly, she did not have the right to participate in elections to select representatives for local governing bodies (Kéita, 105). Kéita therefore officially renounced her French citizenship in 1951, a decision that further attests to the fluid and constantly shifting nature of identification with France as the mère-patrie.

In addition to citizenship as contested terrain, writing was also a significant political act in the joint struggle for women’s emancipation and African political liberation. Through her

autobiography, Kéïta attempts to counter the thingification of colonialism and reclaim her subjectivity. In writing *Femme d'Afrique*, she anticipates already in 1975, the exclusion of women's voices from narratives on anti-colonial struggle in francophone Africa. Michael Syrotinski attests that for African writers, authoring autobiographies is “an act of profound *political* significance” because it is “the first step in a process of revalidation, or of reclaiming an identity” (Syrotinski, 42, emphasis in original). Kéïta's autobiography charts her political coming of age in a territory that was itself metamorphosing from French Sudan to the Mali Federation (made up of Senegal and French Sudan) to the present day Republic of Mali. Her chapter titles capture this joint development: “Une éducation soudanaise traditionnelle” (“A traditional Sudanese upbringing”), “La genèse du RDA et mon baptême politique” (“The birth of the RDA and my political baptism”) and “L'apprentissage de l'indépendance” (“Learning independence”).¹⁶⁴ Her act of writing establishes women's emancipation as an integral part—rather than a by-product of—African independence.

Kéïta's narrative shows the political nature of self-representation through writing, particularly for an African woman.¹⁶⁵ She employs rhetorical strategies that articulate her project of recuperating a collective history of African women's political participation. *Femme d'Afrique* defies some of the conventions of autobiographic narration. Kéïta eschews the typical declaration “I was born on...”, the starting point of many autobiographies, in favor of a summary of her earliest recollections of her hometown Bamako. Her autobiography therefore begins: “Lors de ma prise de conscience...” (“At the time of my coming to consciousness”, Kéïta, 15) and proceeds to

¹⁶⁴ “Baptême” is an interesting choice of words given that Kéïta was a practicing Muslim. She made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1978. Likewise Nardal's work was heavily influenced by her Catholic faith. Further studies might investigate the role of religion in Afro-diasporic feminist practices.

¹⁶⁵ Several scholarly works have analyzed the political implications of black women's writing in the colonial context. See for example, Carole Boyce-Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London; New York, Routledge, 1994), Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, and M. Nourbese Philip, “The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy,” in *Rotten English* Ed. Dohra Ahmad (New York, WW Norton & Co, 2007).

situate this coming to consciousness first in the larger context of Bamako, then in the extended family home and finally in her mother's hut. Kéita also quickly decenters the singular "je" that Phillipe Lejeune identifies in *Le Pacte Autobiographique* as the mark of "l'autobiographie classique" ("the classic autobiography", Lejeune, 19). For Lejeune, while the authorial voice in autobiographies may vary, these variations are limited to "je", "tu" and "il" (18). His schema makes no provision for "nous", a collective identification that allows the narrator to remain present while articulating her development inseparable from that of her community. Kéita situates her earliest recollections in her mother's hut at storytelling time, a moment of socialization for the children gathered to hear stories of disobedient girls who suffer terrible fates after rejecting their families' choice of spouse and taking important life decisions on their own. Kéita would spend her life challenging patriarchal and colonial structures in seeming disregard of her mother's lessons on conformity and deference to figures of authority. However, a close reading of her narrative reveals that throughout her political career, Kéita draws on her mother's stories to emphasize the role of the community in taking important decisions. For Kéita, the collective trumps the interests of individuals or the numeric minority. Her autobiography, like Nardal's journal in Martinique and Vialle's in France, provides a textual space in which women speak collectively of strategies for resisting intersecting oppressions based on race, gender and class.

Kéita's privileging of a collective identity is evident not only in the content of her autobiography but also in its narrative form. Although she founded several women's chapters of the USRDA, she rarely served as president of these groups. She was most often the secretary, either because she was the only literate member, or else because she insisted on occupying this position. Kéita explains to her reader that in the Bambara language, "secrétaire" is synonymous with "écrivain", and is defined as "personne qui lit et écrit les papiers de notre organisation" ("person who reads and writes the papers of our organization", Kéita, 383). The secretary

establishes and maintains a written archive that will ensure the group's posterity (385). Kéita performs this role, not only in the RDA women's groups, but also through her autobiography. When she recounts tense electoral battles, her narrative reads like the minutes of a meeting. She gives an hour-by-hour breakdown of actions and events. Her short, quick sentences convey the urgency both of the situation being described, and of the task of recording it all for posterity.

By positioning herself as a scribe, Kéita remains present in the text but privileges the voices of the many non-literate rural women who contributed to the anti-colonial struggle in French Sudan. She does not speak for these women, but rather allows them to speak through her, by employing extensive quotes and direct speech throughout her text. This emphasis on the collective does not displace the "je" from the narrative but rather decenters it. Kéita remains an individual and her autobiography remains the story of her life. Yet the singular "je" is often expressed either as an integral part of a collective "nous", or defined in opposition to that collectivity, but never independently of it. The title *Femme d'Afrique: La vie d'Aoua Kéita racontée par elle-même* aptly illustrates the delicate balance between individual and collective identity present throughout the text. In the first part of the title, Kéita establishes her continent-wide affiliation. In the second part, she emphasizes the authenticity of her singular narrative and asserts herself as both author and storyteller. In writing *Femme d'Afrique*, Kéita engages in the very political act of self-representation.

“Un trésor historique pour les générations futurs”: Feminist Rewritings of History in Aoua Kéita's and Ousmane Sembène's Works

The role of women in nationalist discourses is an important issue, for historically women have expressed nationalist zeal and patriotism, although, often, they have been dispossessed in the documenting of nationalist struggles and/or in the shaping and reconstruction of new societies. –Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*

If we do not praise and dignify our women's heroism, which I see

as preeminent, Africa is not going to be liberated. Let's be clear about this: If we do not accord women their rightful place, there will be no liberation. Women work a whole lot more than men do, and if work was in and of itself liberating, women who farm fields daily would have long been liberated. Women's emancipation doesn't only depend on labor. If we do not wake up and appreciate justly the role of women and share responsibilities, we will lose. – Ousmane Sembène, “Still the Fire in the Belly: The Confessions of Ousmane Sembène”

Kéita's autobiography further complicates the political act of writing by undertaking a rewriting of the history of African liberation from a feminist point of view. *Femme d'Afrique* is a valuable archive that preserves not only the story of the individual as many autobiographies do, but also of a community of women that extends from Bamako to Gao to Dakar. Kéita herself emphasizes the need for workers to contribute to an archive of African political history:

Les travailleurs, même dans la vieillesse, peuvent continuer à apporter une contribution effective à la construction du pays. En effet, ces hommes, surtout ceux ayant un certain niveau intellectuel, débarrassés de toutes préoccupations matérielles, peuvent réfléchir, concevoir et écrire leurs expériences multiples et riches en événements. *Ces documents mis en forme par nos enfants plus lettrés, peuvent constituer un trésor historique pour les générations futures.*” (Kéita, 239, emphasis in original)

The workers, even in their old age, can continue to contribute effectively to nation building. Indeed these men, especially those who have a certain intellectual level, rid of all material concerns, can reflect, develop and write their multiple and rich experiences. *These documents, formatted by our more literate children, can constitute a historical treasure for future generations.*

Aside from titles of publications and words in African languages, this is the only italicized passage in Kéita's text, signaling the importance of this proposed archival project. Kéita moves

us away from the grand narratives of the political elite and calls for the contributions of salaried workers and former soldiers whose actions both on the continent and abroad would play an important role in the conception of and struggle for decolonization. Further, constructing the archive, like building the nation, is a multi-generational task. Rather than a collection of individual stories, Kéita imagines national narratives quilted by children writing the stories of their fathers. When she refers to “ces hommes”, whose writings would constitute an act of nation building (“la construction du pays”), Kéita does not use the universal “man” here but rather makes explicit reference to male workers. Yet even as she describes this writing as a uniquely masculine act, her own autobiography subverts this idea by chronicling women’s collective contribution to the emerging nation. Perhaps implicit in Kéita’s emphasis on the need for men’s narratives is the suggestion that *Femme d’Afrique* had already opened the way for women’s voices and that men now needed to follow suit.

Through her rewriting of history Kéita engages in decolonial feminism, that is, “the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender” (Lugones, 747). As Sembène and Boyce Davies argue in the epigraphs to this section, constructing the independent nation is as much a discursive act as it is a political, economic and social one. Sembène in particular is emphatic that the fact of women’s participation alone does not bring about their emancipation, particularly if these contributions fall out of public memory and historical narratives. Erasing women’s contributions to this process through the myth that they simply did not participate in politics or did not leave written records of their theories and practices of liberation perpetuates the kind of selective history that was used to justify colonial conquest in Africa. Rather, Sembène argues that women’s emancipation hinges on public, collective recognition of their contributions. As a self-described Marxist filmmaker, his definition of women’s emancipation from existing patriarchal narratives and systems of labor involves recognition and just compensation for women’s work, as

well as cultural productions centered on recuperating women's stories and weaving them into national consciousness. As Kéita's chapter titles show, women's emancipation and African independence are inextricably intertwined. *Femme d'Afrique* provides examples of what this decolonial feminist discourse might look like. Kéita asserts:

Et j'ai soutenu et continue à soutenir la thèse selon laquelle l'évolution d'un pays est fonction de la place que les femmes occupent dans la vie publique de ce pays. [...]. J'ai toujours continué à soutenir ma thèse, à la développer, car, j'étais convaincue et je le demeure, que cette reconversion de la mentalité des femmes est absolument nécessaire si nous voulons créer une société libre et prospère. (240)

And I have upheld and continue to uphold the idea that a country's progress is a function of the place that women occupy in the public life of the country. I will always continue to uphold this idea, to develop it, because I was convinced and remain so, that this reconversion of women's mentality is absolutely necessary if we want to create a free and prosperous society.

Women and the nation evolve together in a symbiotic relationship. Women's emancipation moves the nation closer to political liberation. At the same time, as we will see subsequently, women themselves are transformed by their political action and ultimately challenge the putatively neat divide between socially constructed categories of masculinity and femininity.

In the epilogue to *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Ousmane Sembène describes his own project of rewriting history through the novel. He asserts that the men and women who took part in the 1947-1948 rail workers' strike throughout French West Africa, "ne doivent rien à personne ni à aucune 'mission civilisatrice', ni à un notable, ni à un parlementaire" ("do not owe anything to anyone, not to a civilizing mission, nor to a public figure, nor to a negotiator", Sembène, 8). Sembène, like Kéita, anticipates that the voices of the workers and their families will be excluded

from historical accounts. He anticipates the official narrative of the strike as a struggle between colonial administrators and union leaders. Through his novel, Sembène privileges the voices of a variety of non-literate workers, their families and members of their communities, and shows the internal workings of the movement to which they were indispensable. He also undertakes a feminist rewriting of history by foregrounding women's resistance to colonial racialization and discriminatory labor practices. In short, his novel privileges women actors where the archive says there were none.¹⁶⁶ Sembène's rewriting should not be interpreted as proof that African women's historical contributions were so lacking that he had to fabricate the monumental women's march from Thiès to Dakar. If anything, Kéita's and Vialle's work analyzed thus far show that this was not the case. Rather, he opens up the field of possibility for understanding women's political action through his creative interweaving of fact and fiction in the novel.

In *Emitai*, Sembène performs the rewriting of history on screen. The film is based on the French massacre of the Diola people in the 1940s for refusing to pay the rice tax that would feed the French war effort. Historical sources name a Diola woman, Aline Sitoé Diatta, as a religious leader who led this resistance. Diatta has been described as a Senegalese/Diola Joan of Arc because she derived her authority from claims that she heard the voice of Emitai, the Diola deity, instructing her to resist colonial agricultural and taxation practices.¹⁶⁷ In dramatizing the events of Diola resistance on screen, Sembène replaces Sitoé as an individual, religious leader, with the village women as a collective, non-religious hero. He explains his decision as follows: "And then the mysticism of An Siteo made me sick, me who am an Atheist and Marxist. So I decided to remove An Siteo from her role as main character" (Sembène 2008, 20). Whether we read *Emitai*

¹⁶⁶ See Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question* (221) and Jim Jones, "Fact and fiction in God's bits of wood", *Research in African literatures* 31 (2000): 124.

¹⁶⁷ See Robert R. M. Baum, "Prophetess: Aline Sitoé Diatta as a Contested Icon in Contemporary Senegal", *Facts, Fiction, and African Creative Imaginations* eds. Toyin Falola, and Fallou Ngom (New York: Routledge, 2009)

as the making of a Diola national myth or a Senegalese one, Sembène's selective rendering of the events reveals the processes of inscription and erasure that go hand in hand in the creation of national myths.¹⁶⁸ As McClintock argues, "History is a series of social fabrications that we cannot do without. It is an inventive practice, but not just any invention will do. For it is the future, not the past, that is at stake in the contest over which memories survive" (McClintock, 328). That historical narratives are selective is no longer a particularly novel idea. Instead, Sembène's revelation of the inner workings of his production sheds light on the stakes of rewriting history for Africa's political past, present and future. Sembène asserts on multiple occasions that *Emitai* is as much about the failures of the governing African bourgeoisie as it is about anti-colonial resistance (Sembène 2008, 19 & 26). It imagines a future in which popular acts of resistance undertaken by marginalized populations—in this case women and members of the minority Diola ethnic group—become incorporated into the larger story of nation formation.

In considering how Sembène's work calls the past into being in the present, the concept of "rememory" is particularly useful because it articulates a relationship between past and present that characterizes Sembène's project. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe describes rememory as an image of the past that inhabits the present: "If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened" (Morrison, 36). Rememory encapsulates a number of components in the past-present relationship. It exists outside of the one who remembers (Sethe also uses it as a verb) and is

¹⁶⁸ One may argue that Sembène exerts his creative rights by removing Sitoé from his rewriting. It is possible to argue too that it is a particular form of power and male privilege that allows him to write her out of history. Ultimately Sembène closes off avenues for what is otherwise an important discussion on the role of religion in women's resistance against imperialism, a phenomenon that resonates throughout the African Diaspora from Nardal's Christian humanism to Black Christian Churches in the civil rights and anti-apartheid movements.

located in a specific place, usually the site of trauma. A third party to the event may consciously or inadvertently encounter the rememory at this site, suggesting a potential collective element as well. Ultimately, rememory argues for understanding the past as a concrete, on-going presence that is larger than individual recollections. In making *Emitai*, Sembène encounters the rememory of the Diola massacre at the site and in the people of Effok. His film functions as that picture “floating around out there.” In dramatizing the past and providing a commentary on Senegal’s political future, Sembène also makes this forgotten massacre a very real contemporary presence.

Just as past and present are inextricably intertwined in Sembène’s work, so are fact and fiction intimately connected. For example, Sembène participated in the strike that he later dramatizes in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*. He also plays the role of a tirailleur in *Emitai*, a role that was not far from his own reality of serving in the French army during World War II. Attempting to separate fact from fiction in these works is not a particularly productive line of inquiry because Sembène’s intricate weaving together of the two reminds the reader that official narratives of anti-colonial movements in Africa are themselves deliberately crafted by emphasizing some voices and excluding others.¹⁶⁹ A more productive engagement with these works would involve analyzing the ways in which Sembène and Kéita draw on historical labor and anti-colonial movements in order to expand the limits of possibility of women’s collective political action. If anti-colonial movements altered people’s relationship to power in French West Africa, then they also inevitably altered gender relations. As the narrator of *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* asserts, “Et les hommes comprirent que ce temps, s’il enfantait d’autres hommes, enfantait aussi d’autres

¹⁶⁹ Jim Jones, “Fact and fiction in God's bits of wood”, *Research in African literatures* 31 (2000): 124. Jones’ article seeks to separate the factual events of the strike from the fictional elements now popularized by Sembène’s novel. However as Elizabeth Alexander reminds us, “the historian laments caesuras in the historical record; the artist can offer deeply informed imagining that, while not empirically verifiable, offers one of the only routes we may have to imagine a past whose records have not been kept precious.” Sembène’s interweaving of fact and fiction challenges our understanding of these two as necessarily distinct and opens up the possibility for working with, through and beyond archives in reconstructing a narrative of African women’s anti-colonial resistance. See Elizabeth Alexander, *The Black Interior* (St. Paul, MN.: Gray Wolf Press, 2005), p. x.

femmes” (“And the men understood that if new men were born in these times, new women also were born”, Sembène, 65). We might therefore ask of Kéita’s and Sembène’s works, how were women transformed, both as individuals and as part of a larger society, through their collective acts of anti-colonial resistance? Both Sembène and Kéita show how women changed the meanings and expectations attached to gender categories by blurring the lines between masculinity and femininity. It is this fundamental exploration of social identities and transformation of their meanings, that most qualifies Kéita’s and Sembène’s works as feminist rewritings of history. As Boyce Davies argues, “feminism questions and seeks to transform what it is to be a woman in society, to understand how the categories woman and the feminine are defined, structured and produced” (Boyce Davies, 20). For Kéita’s and Sembène’s women, this social transformation occurs both in individual women and in a collective women’s consciousness, through political action.

“Un pagne qui a la valeur d’un pantalon”: Gender and Mobility in Colonial Space

In *Femme d’Afrique*, the *pagne* functions as a symbol of women’s redefinition of their social roles through political action. For example, Kéita recounts that after her massive grassroots campaigning efforts in Gao for the 1951 French National Assembly elections, the colonial administration declared her a threat and exiled her to Dakar. As Kéita makes her way through the crowd of people gathered at the train station to witness her departure, she overhears a conversation between two young men, one an RDA supporter, the other a member of the opposing PSP party. For the PSP man, it is important to remind his listener that Kéita is an unmarried woman. She does not occupy the socially acceptable position for a woman of her age. Further, her leadership position is not legitimated or sanctioned by a husband. The RDA man responds, “Cette femme dont tu parles est saine de corps et d’esprit et elle porte un pagne qui a la valeur d’un pantalon” (“This woman of whom you speak is sound of body and mind and she

wears a pagne that has the value of trousers”, Kéita, 160). The RDA man views Kéita’s identity as a fusion of traditionally male and female social attributes. The stereotypically masculine image of the pantalon does not replace the feminine image of the pagne. Kéita is not “a woman who wears pants” but rather a woman whose political activism imbues her social identity with the power and authority traditionally ascribed to men.

In challenging the social codes of femininity and masculinity, the women of Gao reveal the violence always simmering beneath the surface of the colonizer/colonized relationship. The women of Gao, who had come to rely on Kéita as midwife, scribe and political leader, hold a meeting and decide to organize a protest to challenge the administration’s decision to exile Kéita. Local police, concerned about the possible outbreak of violence—and perhaps being caught between executing the commands of their employer and attacking their wives, mothers and neighbors—advise the women not to protest. To this the women respond:

Si vous les hommes vous avez peur, cela vous regarde, quant à nous femmes sonraï, armas, arabes et touareg, nos pagnes sont solidement serrés autour de nos reins. S’il le faut nous achèterons des bandes de coton pour les ceindre davantage, nous le ferons avec empressement, car nous en avons assez. Nous ne pouvons plus continuer à subir toutes les vexations de ces brigands, qui nous ont arraché notre pays. (144)

If you men are afraid, that is your problem, as for we sonraï, arma, arab and touareg women, our pagnes are solidly wrapped around our waists. If need be we will by cotton bands to tighten them even more and we will do so eagerly, because we have had enough. We can no longer continue to suffer the humiliations of these bandits who have stripped our country away from us.

It is clear that the women of Gao consider Kéita’s removal from her position as yet another manifestation of arbitrary colonial repression. This is evidenced by the anti-colonial rhetoric

directed against “ces brigands qui nous ont arraché notre pays.” The women contrast the image of a country “stripped away” with that of their pagnes wrapped firmly around their waists. Tightening the pagne around the waist symbolizes their readiness to use violence if necessary. They refuse to be silenced by the warnings of the police, to have their collective political bargaining power stripped away like everything else by colonial authorities. Finally it is important to note in this extract that although the women identify with multiple ethnicities, they draw power and influence from their numbers as they unite for a common cause. By declaring that they are ready to fight the colonial administration if the men are afraid, they disrupt traditional narratives of African women’s social roles as either pacifists or passive victims of violence. Kéita does not place herself outside this process of women redefining socially acceptable behavior. In the incident with the old chief of Singné, she admits to pulling a revolver out of her purse and firing a warning shot in the air as the women of the village tried to chase down her Land Rover in order to attack her. Although she retells the story with some level of discomfort, she also suggests that carrying a gun in her purse was a necessary re-negotiation of ideas of decorum given the dangers that came with touring often sparsely populated regions as an electoral candidate and as a woman.

The pagne as symbol of the blurred lines between masculinity and femininity resurfaces in Sembène’s novel. The character Penda stands out as a particularly striking example of self-definition and identity transformation through political participation. The narrator introduces Penda as a seamstress from Thiès whose reputation in the community is that of a promiscuous woman. Although she is noted for her independent spirit and her transgression of social codes governing relations between the sexes, her identity is still very much defined through her relationships with men. The strike, as a moment of upheaval in which many of the social norms and codes are suspended, allows Penda to reinvent herself. She becomes a respected member of

the community who participates actively in labor union deliberations. She acts with the women in the community and spearheads the system of allocating rations as the workers and their families try to survive through the protracted strike. Through this action, she undergoes a radical identity transformation. She goes from being a stigmatized woman on the margins of the community to a central force in resisting oppressive colonial labor practices.

As the only woman among the union leaders, Penda's transformation is most evident in her practice of wearing an ammunition belt underneath her pagne. The reader is first struck by the violent image of an ammunition clip concealed in an intimate place beneath a traditional pagne and in such close proximity to a woman's body. Similar to the image of Kéita's fused pantalon and pagne, this image blurs the boundaries between two objects associated with masculinity and femininity respectively. This description also suggests that the strike transforms Penda into a soldier of sorts, doing battle against colonial oppression. Fulfilling this new role culminates in her death at Dakar when the *gendarmes* open fire on the marchers. She falls on the battlefield next to her male counterpart Samba N'Doulougou. Women's transformation through political participation does not mean that they replace their traditionally feminine roles with traditionally masculine ones. Penda does not metamorphose from a promiscuous seamstress into a soldier. Rather after her death, Bakayoko is unable to separate the multiple facets of her identity: "Penda, la fille facile, Penda la meneuse au pagne ceinturé" ("Penda the easy girl, Penda the leader with the ammunitions belt beneath her pagne", Sembène, 373); he is unsure which of these will be her legacy. If Sembène's women teach us anything, it is that foregrounding women's political participation in Africa's anti-colonial struggle is necessary in order to portray the full, complex picture of women's contributions as well as the impact of these contributions on their social roles.

In Sembène's novel, the process of social transformation is inherently violent, and occurs both at the individual level, as with Penda, and in collective consciousness. In describing the fight

between a group of women in Dakar and policemen over a goat that the women stole from a wealthy merchant in order to feed their families during the strike, the narrator employs the language of military operations to show the violence of such confrontations. After successfully fighting off the police, the women patrol the compound and interrogate anyone they think might be a policeman (177). As they compare their wounds, they weave a narrative that names each of the women as heroines in a battle for survival against the agents of the colonial administration. They pass around a *chéchia* taken from one of the policemen. The red cap functions as the symbol *par excellence* of African patriarchal complicity with colonial violence and repression. One woman tells the story of the *chéchia*'s capture: "Il y en avait un qui était tombé et pendant qu'on le tenait, elle [Bineta] lui tordait le... Il hurlait, il fallait l'entendre! Et puis Mame Sofi m'a dit: 'Pisse lui dans la bouche à ce cochon!' J'ai essayé mais je n'y suis pas arrivée! La honte m'a prise" ("One of them had fallen and while the others held him down, she [Bineta] was twisting his... He screamed, you should have heard him! And then Mame Sofi said to me: 'Piss in his mouth, the pig!' I tried but I wasn't able to! I was overtaken by shame" 177). The fallen policeman represents a weakened form of French colonialism. As Frederick Cooper argues, the West Africa-wide labor strikes that took place in the 1940s dealt a significant blow to French imperial power by appropriating the language of republicanism and France's modernization project—the very language that had been used to justify exploitative labor practices—against the colonial administration (Cooper, 205). Similarly, the women of Dakar use the policeman's own body as the instrument of his pain and torture, and ultimate defeat. The speaker's attempt to urinate in his mouth signifies a certain desire among the women to liberate themselves from social codes of "proper" behavior. Sembène crafts this scene, therefore, as the simultaneous liberation of women and the colony. Yet just as independence is imminent but not yet a reality, the women's liberation also remains in a suspended state. The speaker is not able to complete her

act because shame is still a very real social force that exerts its pressure on her. The ellipses also reveal more than they obscure, particularly the fact that women's liberation in this moment remains an unspeakable act.

Kéïta and Sembène also portray women's bodies in motion, using images that often counter traditional ideas of African women's bodies as passive or immobile. In "Race, Space, and the Poetics of Moving", M. Nourbese Philip describes carnival in Toronto as an occasion for black bodies to remember by re-enacting the kind of movement that has historically been viewed as a threat to imperial power and notions of order. If colonial conquest manifested itself in the appropriation of the land and its resources to be extracted for the benefit of the metropole, then demarcating that land and controlling movement was equally essential for maintaining imperial power. Kéïta's and Sembène's works emphasize the importance of understanding women's ability to move through space, and the terms on which that movement occurs. In Kéïta's case, the colonial government used space as a tool to silence and punish her for her work in founding and consolidating USRDA women's movements wherever she was posted as a midwife. As a fonctionnaire whose livelihood depended on her compliance with government rules, the colonial administration posted Kéïta to increasingly remote reaches of French West Africa in order to separate her from her family and systems of community support.

In May 1950, the colonial administration labeled Kéïta a "grande communiste, fonctionnaire indésirable" ("a great communist, an undesirable civil servant", Kéïta, 139) and posted her to Gao as a disciplinary measure. After her successful mobilization of women voters in Gao, Kéïta was exiled from French Sudan to Senegal, where she did not speak the local languages. For the colonial administration, removing a community activist from her home base was an effective way to end her activities. This worked to some degree given Kéïta's experience of alienation and isolation in Senegal. Yet, exile also expanded the scope of her activism by

giving her a view of colonial injustice, not just in French Sudan but throughout Africa: “Je résolu donc de mettre tout en œuvre pour la bonne marche de mon parti en participant davantage à toutes les activités politiques et syndicales non seulement de mon pays, mais aussi de l’Afrique entière—partout où je trouverai des sections du RDA et de la CGT” (“I resolved then to put everything in motion for the smooth running of my party by increasing my participation in all the political and trade union activities, not only in my country but also throughout Africa—wherever I would find sections of the RDA or the CGT workers’ union”, 161). With this resolution, Kéita tries to take back some measure of control by using these arbitrary colonial postings to militate for women’s and worker’s rights on a continental scale.

As colonial authorities sought to control the movement of women’s bodies through the space of the colony, Kéita and the rural women she worked with also used space as a strategy to counter the coloniality of gender. They did this in two key ways. First, they transformed spaces traditionally marked as feminine and a-political into spaces for political discussions and strategizing. For example, in Niono in the late 1940s, Kéita’s maternity ward was a safe space for women cradling their newborns to congregate and discuss political issues. During one of these meetings, her husband, Diawara, makes a surprise appearance. The meeting comes to an abrupt end because the women perceive his appearance as an intrusion and a threat to their ability to speak freely. Kéita also views her husband’s presence as a silencing force: “C’était pour lui aussi bien que pour nous une réunion clandestine. Je dis bien clandestine, parce que mon mari connaissant mon tempérament, m’avait à maintes reprises conseillé de ne pas faire dans l’immédiat de politique” (“It was as much a clandestine meeting for him as it was for us. I say clandestine because my husband, knowing my temperament, had advised me multiple times not to participate in politics for the time being”, 65). Transforming the maternity ward into a space

for political meetings allowed Kéita to counter her husband's imposition of silence.¹⁷⁰ A few years later in Gao, her home served as a meeting place for women—otherwise excluded from political discussions—to discuss their planned contributions to the USRDA's electoral campaign. They assigned tasks such as distributing voter cards, facilitating travel to the polling stations and providing refreshments to voters, to different women based on their role and status in the community.

In addition to taking advantage of feminine-marked spaces in order to speak, women also resisted colonial power by invading masculine-marked spaces. In the colonial context, African women, more than ever, were confined to domestic spaces, and public administrative spaces were often reserved for white male colonial administrators. Invading these masculine spaces was a crucial way to challenge hierarchies and to allow women to participate meaningfully in political decisions. For example, having accomplished the rare feat of becoming a registered electoral observer, Kéita occupied the office of the French commanding officer of Gao, which served as one of the polling stations for the 1951 legislative elections. In her writing she paints a vivid picture of the commandant, who in full military attire conspicuously cast his ballot for his chosen candidate then attempted to influence his subordinates to vote for the same candidate by remaining in the voting booth as each came in to vote. Aoua Kéita alone refused to be intimidated by the commanding officer's presence and challenged him directly, citing his violation of electoral laws. He responded: “Je me moque totalement de vos procurations, je suis dans mon bureau et j’entends y demeurer tant que je voudrai. Est-ce vous qui commandez Gao ou moi?” (“I

¹⁷⁰ If Kéita's first husband Diawara makes only a brief appearance towards the end of this chapter, it is because Kéita herself devotes very little space of her work to him—approximately ten out of four hundred pages. Further, she discusses Diawara in rather ambiguous terms. Her description of his interdiction of her political activities sits uneasily alongside her assertion that he introduced her to the RDA and party politics. We may attribute Kéita's relative silence and ambiguous representation of her husband to the trauma of her early divorce and to the fact that Diawara was still living at the time of *Femme d'Afrique*'s publication. However the fact that Kéita glosses over much of her personal life, signals clearly to the reader that her autobiography is intended first and foremost as a historical record of French Sudanese women's participation in the anti-colonial movement.

laugh in the face of your mandates, I am in my office and I intend to stay here as long as I like. Are you the commander of Gao or am I?" Kéita, 122). This remark reveals physical space as a central element in both exerting and contesting power. The commanding officer tries to stamp his authority on the space of his office, and then on Gao as a whole. Even as the people of French Sudan exercise their voting rights as citizens of the French Republic, the power relations between colonizer and colonized remain virtually unchanged.

Kéita's response is equally revealing of the fact that space was a crucial element in the power tussle between colonizer and colonized: "En temps normal vous commandez l'ensemble du cercle de Gao. Mais en ce jour d'élections, [...] ce sont eux qui...gouvernent cette salle. Durant la journée d'aujourd'hui, cette salle appartient à ce peuple pour lequel vous n'avez aucune considération. Donc, monsieur, vous sortez ou je fais arrêter les opérations" ("Ordinarily you command the entire Gao region. But on this day of elections [...] they are the ones who govern this room. Today this room belongs to the people for whom you have no consideration. Therefore, sir, either you get out or I stop the operations", 122). The commandant's office is not only a physical space of contestation but also a symbolic one. Kéita reveals her deep knowledge of electoral law and uses it as a means of leverage against the commanding officer who is ultimately exiled from his own office for the day. Further, she is able to contest his intimidating tactics because she is backed by a crowd of women, many of whom were voting for the first time. By the time the officer walks out, we see that he has been silenced, not by the other military personnel present, but rather by a large crowd of ululating women. Appropriating space was a crucial strategy used by the rural women of Gao to counter colonial repression and ensure their right to participate meaningfully in the political process.

Similarly, in Sembène's novel and film, women are neither passive nor immobile. They move through space as a collective body and constitute a threat to colonial power through their

physical movement. In *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, the women of Thiès move in unison during their march to Dakar. Once there, they assert their presence in the male-dominated space of union negotiations.¹⁷¹ The women of Thiès reclaim the space of the colony by marching from one end of the railway line to the other. This event is of utmost importance in the novel particularly because it enters into the social practices and collective memory of the Thiès community after the strikes. In the epilogue, the narrator describes post-strike Thiès as a ghost town: “On pouvait errer longtemps dans les rues sans rencontrer personne” (“One could walk down the streets for a long time without meeting anyone”, Sembène, 371). Only the women occupy the streets in their daily commute to a nearby lake to do their washing, cooking and sewing: “Quant aux femmes, depuis leur retour triomphal de Dakar, elles avaient organisé leur vie en une sorte de communauté [...]. La marche ne leur faisait plus peur” (“As for the women, since their triumphant return from Dakar, they had organized their lives in a sort of community [...]. The walk no longer scared them” 371). Through their political action, they develop a new relationship to the space they inhabit. Moving through the streets and occupying the space around the lake is both a means of reclaiming the territory still under colonial rule, and of remembering their contributions to the labor movement by re-enacting their march. According to the narrator, after their daily pilgrimage, “elles regagnaient la maison paternelle ou le toit conjugal” (“they returned to the paternal or marital home” 371). The women’s ritual fuses traditionally feminine household chores and obligations with their newfound boldness to appropriate public space. In the aftermath of the social upheaval in which colonized workers had effectively challenged the colonizer’s organization of labor, there is the sense that things are back to normal, but also that the movement

¹⁷¹ As the women march into Dakar, la grand-mère Fatou Wade welcomes them by spreading her pagne on the ground. The narrator describes her as a woman so old that no one knows her age. Fatou Wade revives the practice of welcoming heroes with pagnes as was done in her grandmother’s time. Her gesture symbolizes the continuity between past and present women’s heroic actions. This image is in direct contrast to Kéita’s representation of the old chief of Singné who represents the supposed rupture between colonialism and independence.

has brought about fundamental changes in women's relationship to space and power.

Sembène uses space and movement of bodies to great effect in *Emitai*. In this film, colonial power provokes disorder in the social, political and religious systems of the Diola people. Sembène portrays this disorder through the chaotic movement of bodies. Women run in all directions when the commandant invades the village with his army of tirailleurs in order to seize the rice. Their motions are again disorderly when the tirailleurs shoot a young boy, causing the women to scatter from their position under the tree where they were held hostage. Colonial brutality destabilizes social and political order, and the Diola women embody this destabilization through their frantic, disorderly movements. Yet Sembène also captures moments of order, when women move with a purpose through the village. In a particularly striking scene, the women march through the village on their way to hide the rice. Here their bodies move in unison in the dark. They stride purposefully in two lines, to the beat of drums. This scene parallels two others, one in which the new conscripts are marched off, and another in which a group of tirailleurs march through the village. On both occasions, the viewer sees neither the origin nor destination of this marching, just mechanical movements of bodies seemingly marching nowhere because they have been conscripted into a war they have little knowledge of. The women's purposeful march to hide the rice therefore stands in direct opposition to the colonial war machine.

The commandant's decision to immobilize the women takes on an added layer of meaning given the politics of women's mobility in the colonial context. If the Diola women's movement—physically and metaphorically—constituted a significant threat to colonialism, then restraining that movement was an act designed to restore the colonial balance of power. Sembène powerfully portrays the image of colonial power enacting this restraint on women's bodies when the commandant and his tirailleurs hold the women hostage under a tree. As the hours pass, the camera zooms in on one woman's neck as she angles it to avoid the scorching sun, or on another

woman's leg as she moves it slightly to loosen a cramp. These small, restricted movements of seemingly disembodied limbs symbolize the commandant's dismembering of the women's movement. In another powerful, unscripted scene, a small girl breaks away from the women under the tree and totters towards one of the tirailleurs. The camera zooms in on his rifle leaning against his leg. The little girl playfully reaches for the rifle, taking five or six steps forward as she holds on to it. The tirailleur in turn takes the same number of steps back, as though made to retreat by the little girl's strength. In this shot, the rifle and khaki-clad leg stand in for the tirailleur—for all the tirailleurs—and seems to suggest that if the older women have been immobilized, then a new generation of women will spring forward to precipitate the retreat of colonial agents. The Diola women's imprisonment eventually prevents them from performing their traditional rites at the funeral of a Diola soldier killed in a battle with tirailleurs over the rice. When they hear the drums announcing the funeral, the women sing the required funeral song as loudly as possible, as though willing their voices to travel to the burial site in their stead. They use their voices to reclaim a space that is theirs, much as Kéita does through her own autobiography.

Aoua Kéita's narrative ends with the birth of the independent Republic of Mali in 1960, and the beginning of her tenure as a deputy in the Malian National Assembly. Her silence on Malian politics following independence may be attributed to the fact that many of her colleagues were at the time still prisoners of the military government that deposed president Modibo Kéita—in whose government Aoua Kéita served—in November 1968. Kéita herself lived in exile in The Republic of Congo from 1970 to 1979, returning to Mali a year before her death. Kéita's story ends where Andrée Blouin's begins, in Brazzaville. For Kéita living in exile, the Congolese capital was a space of retreat from her political activities in Mali. For Blouin growing up in an orphanage for mixed-race children, Brazzaville was the space in which her political awareness of

racial and gendered oppression under French colonial rule first developed. Like *Femme d'Afrique*, *My Country Africa* tells the story of women moving through space, crisscrossing imperial lines as a means of active resistance to colonial oppression.

CHAPTER V

Métissage and African Liberation in Andrée Blouin's *My Country Africa: Autobiography of the Black Pasionaria* and Henri Lopes' *Le Lys et le Flamboyant*

Il serait erroné de penser que l'action politique des Africaines se limite au petit nombre de femmes qui sont sorties de l'anonymat. Aoua Kéita et Andrée Blouin ne représentent que la pointe de l'iceberg et des milliers de femmes dont les noms ont été oubliés par l'Histoire pourraient être mentionnées. Elles le sont d'ailleurs, par Andrée Blouin, de temps à autre, et par Kéita, constamment—Beverly Ormerod and Jean-Marie Volet, “Ecrits Autobiographiques Et Engagement: Le Cas Des Africaines D'expression Française”

The Rassemblement Démocratique Africain held its second congress in Bamako in September 1957. For five years the colonial administration in the French Sudan had thwarted any attempts at a meeting that would unite anti-colonial activists from all the territories that made up the French West and Central African federations. In 1952, the administration had banned the second RDA congress at the last minute and delegates en route from Abidjan had to return home.¹⁷² The 1957 congress was therefore a highly anticipated and charged event. Foremost on the agenda were the various independence movements that had gained momentum throughout the continent. Among the territories represented, Guinea would gain its independence a year later, and nearly all the other francophone colonies would follow suit by 1960.

Aoua Kéita and Andrée Blouin were both present at this historical gathering. Kéita was an observer for the USRDA and Blouin was an advisor to Sékou Touré, soon-to-be president of Guinea. In their autobiographies however, they each present radically differing accounts of the RDA's second congress and its implications for African unity and anti-colonial politics. For Kéita, the congress revealed the deep cleavages in political ideology among the leaders of the different French territories.¹⁷³ The Africa that she saw moving towards independence was not a

¹⁷² Aoua Kéita, *Femme d'Afrique* pp. 346-347.

¹⁷³ Kéita argues that the political leadership was unified on the goal of independence but had irreconcilable

unified one, but rather one divided along the lines of economic disparity and varying degrees of allegiance to France. For Andrée Blouin, the congress marked a turning point in her political work, an occasion to imagine herself “not as a woman of one country, but above all, as African. After the 1957 congress in Bamako when I made the acquaintance of the RDA’s great family in many countries, I was known to all as ‘our sister’” (Blouin, 204). For Blouin this historical gathering was evidence of successful Pan African unification. Andrée Blouin’s view on the RDA congress is but one of the ways in which her autobiography differs from Aoua Kéita’s. Unlike Kéita, who focuses on the experiences of black African women, Blouin brings the experiences of mixed-race women to the fore. Further, she departs from the prevalent discourse on métissage as a primarily racial and cultural identity. Her narrative represents the métisse as inhabiting an ever-shifting, politically charged space, particularly in the context of decolonization. Blouin is anything but Sembène’s idealized woman fighting to defend her community from colonial oppression. She shows that defining community and political alliances was a messy affair. She attempts through her narrative to develop a language that accounts for the shades and nuances that often fall through the cracks of anti-colonial discourse on black and white, African and European.

Andrée was born in Oubangui-Chari in 1921 to Josephine Wouassimba, a fourteen-year-old Banziri girl from the Kwango region, and Pierre Gerbillat, a French businessman.¹⁷⁴ She grew up in an orphanage for mixed-race children in the French Congo and ran away at the age of seventeen. From then, Andrée’s life seemed to follow the script for métisses as she struggled to negotiate recognition from her father and solidarity with her mother. She describes relationships

differences concerning the path to independence and the kind of nation state to be formed.

¹⁷⁴ She did not have a surname for the first sixteen years of her life because the colonial administration prevented her from using her father’s name. The colonial administration identified her in its records by a number. As a teenager, she fought to obtain the right to use a “mutilated” (Blouin, 55) version of her father’s name and became Andrée Gerbilla. Only much later in her adult years would her father allow her to use Gerbillat.

with white men that were as much about individual choices as they were about the consolidation of a racial hierarchy in colonial Africa. In 1939 she met Roger Serruys, director of the Kasai Company, and moved to the Belgian Congo.¹⁷⁵ A year later he abandoned her while she was pregnant with his child in order to enter into a socially acceptable and politically advantageous marriage with a governor's daughter. Andrée moved back to her father's house in Bangui, where she met Charles Greutz, an Alsatian businessman. They bought a coffee plantation 800 kilometers away "in the middle of the jungle" (Blouin, 128). In that isolated setting surrounded by her immediate family and the black workers under Charles's command, Andrée experienced first-hand her husband's racism, notably his brutality towards his workers and his racial slurs against her mother. In 1948 she met André Blouin, an engineer for the French Bureau of Mines. She obtained a divorce from Charles and married André. The couple moved to Guinea in the early 1950s.

Blouin continued to negotiate racial politics in her marriage with André. Yet she also departed from the colonial script for métisses as she crisscrossed multiple colonial borders through her political activism. She joined the RDA party in Guinea and went on to work closely with leaders of African liberation movements including Kwame Nkrumah and Sékou Touré. In 1960, after her grassroots campaigning efforts in the Belgian Congo, Patrice Lumumba appointed her to the position of Chief of Protocol. Blouin was one of three members of Lumumba's inner circle, working so closely with the Congolese president that the press nicknamed them "team Lumum-Blouin" (258). Her autobiography delivers a rare, insider account of the strategic meetings between Lumumba, Blouin, Pierre Mulele and Antoine Gizenga. At a time when the world's attention was riveted on the Belgian Congo and its role in Cold War politics,

¹⁷⁵ The Kasai Company was a concession company involved in the exploitation of rubber in the Kasai River basin. It was also the de facto government of the area. See Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

international news media focused not only on Patrice Lumumba, but also on “the woman behind Lumumba.”¹⁷⁶

The production history of *My Country Africa* is as charged and complex as Blouin’s own life story. Unlike Kéïta’s text, Blouin’s is not an autobiography in the conventional sense. In the paratext we find out that her story exists in writing through the intervention of a “collaborator”, Jean MacKellar. *My Country Africa* was born out of a series of interviews with Blouin in Paris. The text, though constructed as a seamless narrative written in the first person, bears many marks of the collaborator’s presence, not least of them being the fact that Blouin’s autobiography was published in English although she herself spoke French. MacKellar therefore functions, at the very least, as translator and transcriber. Sources suggest that Blouin later tried to sue MacKellar in order to prevent the manuscript’s publication.¹⁷⁷

Despite its turbulent production history, Andrée Blouin’s narrative is still an important historical archive that bears witness to the difficult transition that was decolonization. Yet despite her monumental contributions to African politics and the significant attention she attracted on the world stage in the 1960s, her experiences and analyses of the events of this period, like those of all the other women discussed thus far, have been overshadowed by the voices of more illustrious “founding fathers” of political movements. Existing scholarship on *My Country Africa* has largely focused on two themes present in Blouin’s autobiographical account: métissage and the mother-daughter relationship between Blouin and Josephine.¹⁷⁸ In *Gender and Decolonization in*

¹⁷⁶ “The Woman Behind Lumumba” *Baltimore Afro-American* 15 Oct. 1960: A5.

¹⁷⁷ In personal correspondence, Andrée Blouin’s daughter Eve could not confirm the reasons for her mother’s lawsuit. However she also did not deny that Blouin did indeed try to sue MacKellar. See also Karen Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo: the Legacy of Patrice Lumumba* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 72.

¹⁷⁸ See Irène I. Almeida, *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), Karen Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo* and Renée Larrier, “Discourses of the Self: Gender and Identity in Francophone African Women’s Autobiographies,” *Mapping intersections: African literature and Africa’s development* eds. Anne A. V. Adams, and Janis J. A. Mayes (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998).

the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba, Bouwer describes Blouin's autobiography as the story of two women, Andrée and Josephine. This view shapes much of the scholarly engagement with *My Country Africa* and frames the narrative as primarily an account of "colonial family romance and métissage", to borrow from Françoise Vergès.

There is however strong evidence that Blouin's narrative was motivated by a desire to preserve the legacy of her political work, particularly her role in the wave of independence movements that swept francophone West and Central Africa in the mid-twentieth century. Bouwer asserts that Blouin's major objection to MacKellar's manuscript was that it presented her story "in social-psychological terms, while Blouin wanted to leave a political testament" (Bouwer, 72). Blouin herself, as she boarded a flight to Paris after being forced out of the Congo by Mobutu in 1960, announced that "she would publish in France her memoirs 'containing sensational revelations.'"¹⁷⁹ She clearly intended her autobiography to stand as an act of resistance, to counter not just the general silencing of women in the archives, but the specific silencing imposed on her by political opponents. Ironically, rendering her account apolitical re-enacts the very silencing she sought to oppose.

This chapter therefore examines *My Country Africa* as primarily a political narrative that presents a new angle of vision on race, gender and politics at the peak of the decolonization period. I do not seek to redress the skewed focus on Blouin's interpersonal relationships by focusing exclusively on her political work. Rather, I will attempt to tease out the connections between Blouin's most intimate experiences of racial discrimination and privilege, and her political work as an anti-colonial activist. Three central questions guide the present inquiry. First, how does *My Country Africa* complicate our understanding of voice and agency in African

¹⁷⁹ "Congo Begins Rounding Up Undesirables: Crowd Sees Abduction of Beaten African" *Chicago Daily Tribune* 16 Oct. 1960: 16.

women's political writings, given its production history? I will examine MacKellar's paratextual interventions along with Henri Lopes' novel *Le Lys et le Flamboyant*, which is loosely based on Andrée Blouin's life. I argue that the contest over voice, memory and authorship that surrounds the publication of Blouin's narrative reveals the deeply political nature of representation, particularly of African women for a European and American audience. Second, given the liminal position that *My Country Africa* occupies between biography and autobiography, how does Blouin herself negotiate the *double appartenance* of her racial identity and political alliances as a métisse involved in the decolonization movement? Here I turn to contemporaneous theories of métis politics put forward by thinkers like Fanon and Senghor in order to show that Blouin's anti-colonial activism was motivated in part by her desire to reconcile her multiple and shifting positions vis-à-vis African and European communities in Central Africa. Finally, what strategies of resistance did women of the Belgian Congo employ in their anti-colonial struggles? Blouin's narrative testifies to the violence of racial and gendered forms of domination, and the counter-violence women enacted in their resistance.

“If it were my turn, I would speak”: Appropriating Voice in African Women's Narratives

My Country Africa blurs the boundaries between multiple genres: biography, autobiography, oral history and fiction. Although Blouin appears to control most of the narrative through her assertive use of the autobiographical “I,” MacKellar ultimately takes control in the epilogue with the shift from Blouin as first person narrator to third person subject. The paratext provides little biographical information on MacKellar, stating only that she graduated from Stanford University and “lived in Paris for 12 years, where she was closely associated with Andrée Blouin and many other personalities in the African independence movements” (Blouin, back cover). MacKellar's role in producing Blouin's narrative raises important questions about

authorship, voice and appropriation. For example, if *My Country Africa* is a translation without an original author—given that Blouin dictated her story to MacKellar in French who then transcribed it in English—then whose narrative is it? And further, if the goal of the text is to retell the intertwined coming of age stories of Blouin as an African woman and the Belgian Congo/Zaire/DRC as an African nation, then what are the implications of a MacKellar’s mediation for this project of retelling?

The text itself provides no easy answer to these questions. The Blouin/MacKellar collaboration exists in a space between written text and oral history. It juxtaposes the translator’s taking of liberties with an original in order to convey meaning to an Anglophone audience, with the biographer’s apparent fidelity to factual events. Blouin’s concluding words to the narrative, just before MacKellar intervenes with her epilogue, suggest that she may have been aware of the ambiguity of her own authorial voice given the circumstances under which *My Country Africa* was produced. She confides to the reader/listener on the penultimate page, “If it were my turn to speak, I would tell of my sad years in the orphanage for girls of mixed blood [...]. If it were my turn, I would speak of those blazing first months after independence [...] I would speak of an Africa that has not yet found its way...” (Blouin, 285). Blouin repeats “I would speak” seven times in an even, incantatory rhythm. Her emphasis on a *prise de parole* reinforces the idea of the autobiography as a means to resist the silencing mechanism of the colonialities of power and gender. Yet it is Blouin’s use of the conditional “if” that arrests the reader because it stands in direct opposition to and undermines her assertion that “in setting down my life here I have, in a sense, made this my celebration. I have taken my turn” (285). Given that *My Country Africa* is not the unmediated story of her life, the repetition of the conditional suggests that despite having delivered an almost 300-page account of her life, she is aware of the fact that MacKellar’s intervention is a necessary condition for the production and preservation of her story. In the

prologue to *Le Lys et le Flamboyant*, Henri Lopes's narrator alludes to Blouin's text and states that without MacKellar's intervention, "ce livre n'aurait laissé aucune trace dans les mémoires" ("this book would have left no trace in our memories", Lopes, 7). At the very least, MacKellar allowed Blouin's story to reach a wider, Anglophone audience and thereby gave it a relatively longer lifespan than Aoua Kéita's autobiography.

It is impossible to analyze the politics of voice and agency in *My Country Africa* without taking up *Le Lys et le Flamboyant* because Lopes frames his novel as a corrective to the Blouin/MacKellar production.¹⁸⁰ Through the novel's paratext, Lopes crafts an alternative history of the production of *My Country Africa*.¹⁸¹ The blurb on the back cover is atypical because it does not provide biographical information on the actual author. Instead it introduces three fictional characters: Simone Fragonard, alias Kolélé is the protagonist, whom the reader cannot help but identify as Blouin given the remarkable similarities in their biographies. Victor-Augagneur Houang is the narrator who speaks in the first person. "Un certain Henri Lopes" is the obscure author who once wrote Kolélé's/Blouin's story before Victor-Augagneur decided to intervene with his corrective version. *Le Lys et le Flamboyant* is therefore not Lopes' text, but rather the work of a fictional narrator. Like *My Country Africa*, the novel presents itself as a text without an author. Victor-Augagneur narrates the story just as Blouin speaks of her country Africa. Both written texts therefore emphasize the role of orality in their production.

¹⁸⁰ Henri Lopes is an interesting figure who, like many of the other personalities analyzed thus far, straddles the boundary between public politics and literary production. Born in Leopoldville in 1937, Lopes, like Blouin, moved between Oubangui-Chari and the French and Belgian Congos throughout much of his early life. From the late 1960s onwards, he occupied several ministerial positions in the Republic of Congo (former French Congo) and currently serves as the country's ambassador to France. As a writer, Lopes's novels have largely focused on the experiences of métis communities in Central Africa. He received the Grand Prix Littéraire d'Afrique Noire, joining the ranks of such distinguished African writers as Léopold Senghor, Aoua Kéita and Ahmadou Kourouma. He was also awarded the Grand Prix de la francophonie in 1993.

¹⁸¹ Lopes' framing of the novel as a corrective to Blouin certainly raises the specter of male privilege in much the same way as Sembène's erasure of Aline Sitoé. In contrast to MacKellar's work however, his text remains a fictional engagement with Blouin and ultimately undermines its own claims of being the definitive version of her story by calling into question the very possibility of a definitive narrative of Blouin's life.

The novel's prologue is as atypical as its back cover. Here we learn from the narrator Victor-Augagneur that the fictional Henri Lopes' biography of Kolélé was produced by a publishing house in Kinshasa which soon went out of business. Years later, an American edition appeared "qui a sauvé l'ouvrage de l'oubli, grâce au remarquable travail de révision de la traductrice, Marcia Wilkinson" ("that saved the text from obsolescence, thanks to the remarkable work of revision done by the translator, Marcia Wilkinson", Lopes, 7). The American version included a subtitle describing Kolélé as an African *pasionaria*. From Victor-Augagneur we also learn about the book's reception: "En ces années où le féminisme faisait fureur, la biographie de Kolélé répondait aux demandes du marché américain. Que l'héroïne du récit fût une Noire ajoutait de l'attrait à l'ouvrage et en faisait une marchandise 'politiquement correcte' et facile à promouvoir" ("In these years when feminism was all the rage, Kolélé's biography responded to the demands of the American market. The fact that the heroine was a black woman added to the text's appeal and made it 'politically correct' merchandise that was easy to market", 7). He argues that the subtitle was a calculated and successful marketing gimmick that allowed Wilkinson to sell more copies than Lopes' version ever could. In this rendering of events too Kolélé rejects the finished product after requesting a critical review in French from Victor-Augagneur.

The narrator's retelling of the production history of Blouin's narrative highlights the fundamental *décalage* between an autobiography written in English and its French-speaking narrator. It also invariably takes up the politics of publication by focusing on the publisher's packaging and marketing decisions. The subject of the narrative herself remains on the margins of this decision making process. Thus Kolélé appears on the cover of the fictional American version wearing a madras headscarf and flanked by the silhouettes of Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré and Patrice Lumumba, as though to suggest that her story is only worth reading when

framed within a larger narrative on the so-called founding fathers of African decolonization politics. In Victor-Augagneur's paratextual interventions we hear the same irreverent tone that characterizes the rest of the novel, as he questions the fabrication of Kolélé/Blouin as a heroine. His tongue-in-cheek description of the subtitle and cover image as simply packaging for an American pro-feminist audience challenges the need to refashion Kolélé/Blouin into a heroine recognizable by European and American readers.

Media representations actively contributed to this practice of repackaging Blouin for international consumption. Pierre Davister, a journalist writing for the Belgian newspaper *Pourquoi Pas?* first made reference to Blouin as The Black Pasionaria in his coverage of her expulsion from the Congo on the eve of independence (Blouin, 236). Davister equates Blouin with Spanish communist activist and orator Dolores Ibárruri, whose political work during the Spanish Civil War earned her the nickname La Pasionaria. Following Davister's lead, American publications chose to style Blouin "the Madame de Staël of [Sékou Touré's] revolutionary movement"¹⁸² and later of Lumumba's Congo.¹⁸³ The *Baltimore Afro-American* in turn described her as the "Red Mata Hari", making reference to the Dutch exotic dancer who was executed in France on suspicion of being a spy for Germany during World War I.¹⁸⁴ Perhaps most imaginative was the *Washington Post's* mention of Blouin as "the Eartha Kittenish Clara Petacci of the Congo's brief strongarm regime."¹⁸⁵ The *Post* reimagines Blouin as the African American singer, cabaret dancer and actress Eartha Kitt, one of the first black women to achieve mainstream television success as Catwoman in the 1960's series *Batman*.¹⁸⁶ It also likens her to

¹⁸² "The Female Touch" *Time* 15 Aug. 1960: 22.

¹⁸³ "Congo: The Edge of Anarchy" *Time* 29 Aug. 1960: 20.

¹⁸⁴ "The Red Mata Hari? Woman of Mystery" *Baltimore Afro-American* 5 Dec. 1961: 5.

¹⁸⁵ Russel Howe, "Communists Banished in Congo" *Washington Post* 18 Sept. 1960: A1.

¹⁸⁶ For more on Kitt's social and political work see Janet Mezzack, "'Without Manners You Are Nothing': Lady Bird Johnson, Eartha Kitt, and The Women Doers' Luncheon of January 18, 1968", *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 20 (1990): 745-760.

Mussolini's mistress Clara Petacci, who was executed alongside the Italian dictator. In each of these titles we find the desire to recast Blouin as a Congolese version of a familiar European or American figure, to render her more digestible to the reader. This, as Victor-Augagneur would argue, is essentially a question of repackaging Blouin for consumption in Europe and the US. Consumption here takes on multiple figurative meanings given that many of the descriptions also represent her as a highly sexualized object: a courtesan, a cabaret dancer and a politician's mistress. The alternating push and pull factors of exoticism and familiarity at work means that Blouin is not made into an exotic Other but rather an exoticized version of a recognizable Self.

In Lopes' novel, Victor-Augagneur rejects the representation of Kolélé/Blouin as "une 'héroïne positive' conforme aux canons esthétiques du réalisme socialiste alors en vogue dans certains milieux littéraires" ("a 'positive heroine' in accordance with the aesthetic canon of socialist realism that was then in vogue in certain literary milieus", Lopes, 290). He presents an alternative image when he declares early on in the novel: "En ce temps-là, toutes les métisses des deux rives étaient mes tantes" ("At that time, all the metises on both banks of the river were my aunts", 27). Kolélé is but one of the numerous métisse aunts who form part of the large, multi-ethnic community of Poto-Poto in Brazzaville.¹⁸⁷ Like them she negotiates life, love and family in the racially stratified society of colonial French Congo. Kolélé/Blouin is a woman like the numerous other African women who made important contributions to the anti-colonial

¹⁸⁷ Lopes argues that Poto-Poto as the métis quartier of Brazzaville is a space charged with political significance. He makes reference to "la déclaration d'un de nos Premiers ministres qui, aussitôt après sa nomination, avait annoncé qu'il était 'un enfant de Poto-Poto'. A Brazza, quand quelqu'un se proclame enfant de Poto-Poto, il se proclame être au-dessus des clivages ethniques qui empoisonnent tant la vie politique et sociale de notre pays" ("the declaration of one of our Prime Ministers who, on his nomination, announced that he was 'a child of Poto-Poto.' In Brazza, when someone proclaims himself a child of Poto-Poto, he proclaims himself above the ethnic cleavages that continue to poison the political and social life of our country"). To be metis in this context symbolizes the ability to transcend racial, cultural and political divides by embracing a composite identity. As we will see subsequently, Blouin articulates a similar project of transcending singularity and embracing multiplicity. See "Henri Lopes: le 'mentir-vrai' du romancier relève du grand art." *Radio France International*. Web. 12 March 2014. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20120522-henri-lobes-le-mentir-vrai-romancier-releve-grand-art/>

movement. She is differentiated only by the fact that as part of an educated, elite minority, she could leave behind a written testimony. Victor-Augagneur counters the representation of Blouin as heroine by employing a tone he describes as “la légèreté et l’humour qui conviennent aux sujets sérieux” (“the lightheartedness and humor suited for serious subjects”, Lopes, back cover) in his retelling of her story. In a notable example, both texts recount the singular moment of Blouin’s political awakening. Juxtaposing the two renderings of this event reveals the marked difference in tone:

I had no idea that he [Sékou Touré] would become the catalyst of my political commitment. This took place at a moment so clear, so overwhelming that it was like a mystical conversion. I was in a humble African shop in Siguiri [...]. As I waited for my change I raised my eyes to the poster photograph that was on the wall behind the shopkeeper. [...]. A spirit, a light, a recognition—I hardly know what to call it—came over me. The eyes that looked into mine challenged me. I felt sure I heard words spoken. ‘Why are you on the other side, in this struggle? Why are you against us? (Blouin, 183-184)

-Un jour j’ai rencontré des frères...

-Et tu as eu la révélation, comme saint Paul, ricana Josépha.

-C’est ça même, agréa Kolélé avec un sourire malicieux. Et pour bien montrer qu’elle savait rire d’elle même, elle tendait la paume de sa main pour que Josépha y topât. Les deux femmes s’esclaffèrent (-One day I met some brothers...-And you had a revelation like Saint Paul, Josepha snickered. -Exactly, Kolélé agreed with a malicious smile. And to show that she could laugh at herself, she held her palm out to Josepha who shook it. The two women guffawed. Lopes, 361)

Lopes is deliberate in his use of a champ lexical of *rire*, particularly evoked by verbs like

“ricaner” “s’esclaffer” and “sourire malicieux” to emphasize mockery. The irreverence of his retelling directly opposes Blouin’s use of religious imagery in raising her eyes to encounter this “mystical conversion.” It may be that Lopes’ mocking tone conveys his skepticism that this event actually occurred. However, read in the context of Victor-Augagneur’s insistence that Kolélé/Blouin “ne fut pas une héroïne de l’histoire de son temps” (“was not a heroine of her times”, 430-431), this mockery is more likely directed not at the episode’s veracity, but rather at its use in the text to set Blouin apart from other anti-colonial activists by representing her as a prophetic or messianic figure.

MacKellar’s epilogue provides us with an example of the potential pitfalls of fashioning a heroine as a singular character apart from all others. MacKellar asserts that “in a society where most women were consigned, with a swat, to their cooking pots, and where even today many thousands are still excised and sewn in one of the cruelest denigrations of the feminine sex in the world, this brilliant woman appeared, to provide an unparalleled example of courage and gifts realized. *Andrée Blouin emerges from the shadows of her continent as its first authentic heroine*” (Blouin, 292, emphasis mine). MacKellar’s intervention is useful because she acknowledges Blouin’s otherwise ignored role in African politics and preserves the story of her work for posterity. However, by casting Blouin as an exceptional woman, MacKellar confines African women within the role of passive immobility on a continent that very much resembles the setting of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. This form of imperialist feminism operates on the assumption “that the only relevant part of other women’s identity [is] their victimization by traditional practices such as veiling, footbinding, genital operations or sati. Gendered susceptibility to violence and violation [come] to stand in for the other woman’s subjectivity, and pain and suffering [are] its unique expression” (Pierce 14). Blouin herself would most likely counter MacKellar’s fabrication of a singular African heroine who emerges from a continent

otherwise populated by women memorable only for the mutilation of their genitals. The *Baltimore Afro-American* reports Blouin's response to the title Red Mata Hari: "I couldn't care less. Let small fools call me what they like. I am an African nationalist."¹⁸⁸ Blouin refuses the singularity of the title ascribed to her and rather establishes herself as *an* African nationalist, that is, one of many.

Through its imaginative recasting of the Blouin/MacKellar production, *Le Lys et le Flamboyant* questions the claims to truth and reliability inherent in the framing of *My Country Africa* as an autobiography. Victor-Augagneur performs this questioning in two steps. First, he unravels the assumption of authenticity and objectivity that holds *My Country Africa* together: "Connaissez-vous Kolélé? [...]. Un certain Henri Lopes aurait déjà raconté son histoire. Mais moi, Victor-Augagneur Houang, narrateur du *Lys et le Flamboyant*, je récusé son témoignage et vous restitue les événements dans leur authenticité" ("Do you know Kolélé? [...] A certain Henri Lopes has already told her story. But I, Victor-Augagneur Houang, narrator of *Le Lys et le Flamboyant*, I reject that testimony and restore for you the events in their authenticity", Lopes, back cover). Yet for all his claims to providing an authentic and definitive version of events, Victor-Augagneur is oddly ambiguous. Whose testimony does he repudiate in the above statement? Is it that of Lopes as author or Kolélé as narrator? Further, if Blouin's and MacKellar's voices are inextricably intertwined in *My Country Africa*, then whose voice does *Le Lys et le Flamboyant* ultimately subvert? This ambiguity characterizes much of the novel, such that the opening question "Connaissez-vous Kolélé?" appears to really be asking whether we can ever truly know Kolélé/Blouin, given the multiple degrees of mediation in her narrative. As Victor-Augagneur tries to peel back the many layers of Kolélé's identity, and as her unexplained absences and numerous pseudonyms (Simone Fragonard, Monette, Kolélé, Célimène, Malembé

¹⁸⁸ "The Red Mata Hari? Woman of Mystery," 5.

wa Lomata) veil more than they reveal, the answer to his question is a resounding no.

Once the claim to an objective account of Kolélé/Blouin's life has been thus unraveled, Victor-Augagneur proposes Aragon's concept of *mentir-vrai* as an alternative frame for producing and reading his version of the Kolélé/Blouin narrative. Louis Aragon's short story "Le Mentir-vrai" takes a fictional-autobiographical look at childhood. Through changing perspectives and questioning the narrator's own reliability, Aragon's text questions the "je" of the narrator and the "jeu" of the author in producing fiction. In a recent interview, Lopes names Aragon as a key influence, and argues that he too grapples with the interplay of truth and lies, fact and fiction in his literary production. He argues that "Ecrire, c'est prendre la complexité de la vie à bras le corps. Le 'mentir-vrai' du romancier relève du grand art" ("To write is to wrestle with the complexity of life. The novelist's 'mentir-vrai' is a work of art").¹⁸⁹ The physicality conveyed by Lopes' use of corporeal imagery emphasizes the intensity of this grappling with the complexity of representing life in fiction. Wrestling with representation becomes all the more difficult in a novel framed as a biography and presented as a corrective to an autobiography that is itself located in the hyphen between *mentir-vrai*. Victor-Augagneur explains to his reader: "Pardonnez-moi d'avoir voulu, moi aussi, 'mentir-vrai', c'est seulement pour vous rappeler qu'au bout du compte le réel demeure insaisissable et qu'il nous glisse entre les doigts alors que nous croyons le tenir" ("Forgive me for wanting to 'mentir-vrai' too, it is simply to remind you that at the end of it all the real remains ungraspable and slips through our fingers when we think we have a hold of it", back cover). Here too Lopes employs concrete, corporeal imagery in order to emphasize the elusive nature of any kind of objective, unmediated reality.

Does Henri Lopes ultimately undermine Andrée Blouin's voice by questioning the authenticity of her narrative? Does he impinge on that ability to speak that she so ardently sought

¹⁸⁹ "Henri Lopes: Le 'mentir-vrai' du romancier relève du grand art."

after? In his novel, Kolélé remains recognizable as Blouin despite the fact that some of her key biographical information—the most verifiable aspects of her otherwise contested text—does not correspond to the reality of Blouin’s life. Notably, the date and location of her birth and death are not factual. What Lopes intends his reader to take away then, is not so much the events of Blouin’s life and political work, but rather a more nuanced understanding of the mechanics of the production of her narrative: “Comment donc graver ces instants? Comment le faire avec l’accent du pays? Comment dire ce que fut cette femme?” (“How to engrave these moments?” How to do so with the accent of the country? How to say all that this woman was?” Lopes, 18). Throughout the novel, Victor-Augagneur is particularly conscious of the “how”, the narrative strategies and cinematic techniques he hopes to employ in preserving, through film, the story of Kolélé and the métis community of Poto-Poto (223, 225). His self-conscious narrative reminds the reader to take nothing for granted in Blouin’s autobiography. Victor-Augagneur questions everything, from the illusion of a linear, chronological narrative, to his/MacKellar’s roles as supposedly invisible “collaborators” in the production of the Kolélé/Blouin story. *Le Lys et le Flamboyant* unravels *My Country Africa*, not to discredit it, but rather to show its seams in order to make the reader aware of the politics that hold Blouin’s narrative together.

Lopes’ and Blouin’s texts operate within multiple liminal spaces and therefore perform what Lopes calls *écriture métisse*. In his compelling analysis of the intertextuality between *My Country Africa* and *Le Lys et le Flamboyant*, Richard Watts argues that the hybridizing function of both paratexts is doubled by the narrators who also inhabit the hybrid space of métissage.¹⁹⁰ Voice and agency are virtually impossible to pin down in Blouin’s narrative, in much the same way as Blouin’s own racial and national identifications constitute a constantly shifting terrain of

¹⁹⁰ Richard Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality the Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World*. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005):130.

engagement with colonial power. Lopes' écriture métisse draws on his *double appartenance* as a source of inspiration for both the content and form of his novels.¹⁹¹ His narrator Victor-Augagneur Houang for example, is an Afro-Asian Congolese man whose geographies crisscross Central Africa, France, the United States and China. This fictional narrator shares his name with the historical figure Victor Augagneur, a French socialist politician who was governor of Madagascar and then French Equatorial Africa in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Victor Augagneur was a particularly outspoken opponent of métissage in the French colonies, describing métis children as “a curse” and “a disruptive element”.¹⁹² In his écriture métisse Lopes cannibalizes—à la Suzanne Césaire—the historical Victor Augagneur. He absorbs the social and political issue of métissage in the colonies that so preoccupied the French politician, and regurgitates it in modified form. The fictional narrator Victor-Augagneur too is particularly concerned with métissage, but his concerns are informed by his own experiences as a Congolese métis.

My Country Africa too may be characterized as écriture métisse because it is a bilingual text, the product of a collaboration between a Congolese métisse and a white American woman. The text's métissage has important implications for our reading of the coloniality of gender and women's resistance in Central Africa. For Andrée Blouin, a métisse in colonial Africa, positioning oneself vis-à-vis black and white, African and European, took on a different shade in the starkly Manichean social and political divides that often characterized decolonization. As we will see subsequently, “in a world that pitted the whiteman against the blackman”¹⁹³ the métisse

¹⁹¹ For further discussions of Lopes' écriture métisse see “Henri Lopes: Le ‘mentir-vrai’ du romancier relève du grand art.” and Lydie Moudileno, “Henri Lopes – ‘La critique n'est pas une agression’ Entretien avec Lydie Moudileno”, *Genesis* 33 (2011): 93-100.

¹⁹² Owen White, *Children of the French Empire : Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1895-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 34.

¹⁹³ Preface to the 1969 edition of Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* quoted in Richard Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality*, 119.

occupied marginal and shifting positions in a racial and gendered hierarchy. This plural identification in turn had important political consequences, particularly within the anti-colonial movement.

“Race, Our Land’s Greatest Single Drama”: Métis Politics and the Decolonization Movement

Andrée Blouin experienced first-hand, the intersecting nature of racial and gendered oppression in the French and Belgian Congos. Although Blouin views these oppressions as personal hardships at the time that she suffers them, the hindsight afforded by reflecting on and retelling these experiences causes a shift in perspective. These injustices become manifestations of the institutionalized racism that was necessary for imperial rule to function. For example, in recounting her traumatic childhood in a Catholic orphanage for mixed-race girls in Brazzaville, she describes the intertwined nature of gendered repression as perpetrated by French nuns, and colonial oppression as perpetrated by European administrators. The opening sentences of her autobiography express this connection in powerful terms:

As punishment for the crime of being born of a white father and a black mother I spent my early years in a prison for children. This prison was the orphanage for girls of mixed blood at Brazzaville in the French Congo. The time was the dark years of colonialism in Africa. [...]. It was while I was still in the orphanage-prison that I first identified with the struggle for freedom of my black countrymen. Like them I was beaten with the *chicotte*, a whip made of ox sinews. Like them I was the victim of injustices of which I hardly knew the name but against which my blood never ceased to rebel. For many years, however, I did not participate in the African struggle for self determination. I could not overcome the resignation taught me by the nuns. I bowed my head, I held my tongue, I shut myself up in the dreary

passiveness of the other women of my race. (Blouin, 3-4)

Prison and the *chicotte* stand in for the colonial violence enacted on bodies of color. Blouin experiences the feelings of resignation, powerlessness and simmering rebellion that Fanon shows to be manifestations of the effects of colonialism on the psyche of the colonized. This brief passage also shows the multiple and sometimes rapidly shifting positions that Blouin occupies in the racial and gender hierarchy throughout her autobiography. As she is beaten with the *chicotte*, her body stands in for those of her “black countrymen,” the naked, chained, black male bodies she sees through the orphanage gates, being whipped as they are dragged to prison (17). Next she identifies “the African struggle for self determination” in which she would take active part, but not before passively accepting the social roles imposed on “women of [her] race”, the roles played by the métisse girls and young women in the orphanage who are taught that they are “made for nothing better than to be a servant to the whites” (184). These shifts occur throughout the text as Blouin tries to situate herself as a métisse vis-à-vis black and métisse women as allies, white women as employers and rivals, black men as colleagues in the Pan Africanist movement, and white men as husbands, lovers and fathers.

As Stuart Hall reminds us, “practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write” (Hall 222). Hall goes on to argue that “though we speak, so to say ‘in our own name’, of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place” (222). Blouin’s shifting positions of enunciation complicate Hall’s model because they show more than just a divide between speaker and subject. Each of these parties is herself involved in the production of identity through alliances across race and gender lines. Consequently, Blouin blurs the supposedly neat divides between colonizer and colonized, African and European in the Congolese setting. What she describes as “our land’s greatest single drama” (115) was also the

greatest drama of her life. Her daughter Eve asserts that “son statut de métisse la posait à un carrefour qui fut le joug qu'elle porta toute sa vie” (“her status as a métisse placed her at a crossroads and this was the yoke she carried all her life”).¹⁹⁴ The image of the “carrefour” moves us away from the discourse of duality that often characterizes reflections on métissage, including Lopes’ double appartenance. The crossroads represent Blouin’s awareness of the multiple lineages leading back to her composite métisse identity. That Eve characterizes this as a yoke (“joug”) suggests that these multiple belongings were never easy to negotiate, particularly given the language of stark binary divisions that framed anti-colonial movements.

For many influential thinkers writing about métissage and anti-colonial politics at the time of Andrée Blouin’s early adulthood brushes with the coloniality of power, these shifting positions suggest a disavowal of black and/or African identity. Senghor argues in his article for *Réveil*, the RDA’s mouthpiece in 1947, that métissage and racial identity were explicitly about political power in the soon-to-be postcolony.¹⁹⁵ Senghor boldly titled his article “Il n’y a pas de problème du Métis” (“There is No Métis Problem”) and published it in the middle of an almost year-long raging debate in the pages of *Réveil* on métissage in Africa. This debate took place in the midst of the on-going constitutional changes that brought about the French Union. Senghor is categorical about his position on métissage in the new political configuration. Despite “le sympathique effort de quelques métis de bonne volonté pour définir leur place dans la communauté négro-africaine, je pense qu’il n’y a pas de problème de métis” (“the kind efforts of some well-meaning métis to define their place in the Nergro-African community, I do not believe there is a métis problem”). For Senghor, the francophone African federations needed now more than ever to present a unified

¹⁹⁴ Eve Blouin, Personal interview. 18 May 2014. As a writer and filmmaker, Eve Blouin is particularly deliberate in her choice of words. Her most recent film project, *Dans l’Œil de la Spirale*, retraces Haitian poet Franketienne’s spiralist movement.

¹⁹⁵ Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Il n’y a pas de problème du métis.” *Réveil* 8 May 1947: 3-4.

bloc that would advocate for their best interests within the French Union. Consequently, his article argues that there is no singular “métis problem” because all Africans are métis. Further, the difficulty of navigating double appartenance cuts across racial distinction because métis share this difficulty with évolués, that is Africans who have assimilated French cultural values through education, religion, language etc.

Senghor’s objective is not to deny the presence of the significant métis population in French West and Central Africa. Rather, his perhaps equally problematic goal is to subsume them within what is for him the larger and more pressing issue of a unified African bloc, both within the French Union and on the world stage: “Qu’attendons-nous, nous négro-africains, pour être, nous aussi, un facteur important dans l’édification de l’Union française et de l’humanisme du XXe siècle?” (“What are we waiting for, we Negro-Africans, to also become in our turn an important factor in building the French Union and humanism in the twentieth century?”). Senghor acknowledges that métis, like évolués, may draw on multiple cultural influences. Yet he believes too that the political end goal requires making a choice. Whatever cultural ambiguity or multiplicity may be at work in framing métis identity, mixed-race Africans were ultimately “les derniers membres entrés dans la communauté négro-africaine” (“the last members to enter into the Negro-African community”). He calls on both évolués and métis to “transcender ses contradictions apparentes et de les transformer en ‘accord concilient’” (“transcend the apparent contradictions and to transform them into a ‘conciliatory agreement’”) in order to contribute to the unified African front that would make France’s former colonies a force to be reckoned with globally.

Interestingly, Jane Vialle responds directly to Senghor’s views on métis political identity. A few months after Senghor’s article, she declared in the Senate: “Il y a aussi certains amis africains—qui ne sont pas ici présent—qui prétendent que le problème du métis n’existe pas.

Hélas, lorsqu'on fait un tour en Afrique, et je viens d'en faire plusieurs, on voit partout, aussi bien en Afrique Occidentale Française qu'en Afrique Equatoriale Française, que le problème métis existe" ("There are some African friends—who are not present here today—who claim that the métis problem does not exist. Alas when you travel through Africa, as I have just done multiple times, you see everywhere, in French West Africa and in French Equatorial Africa, that the métis problem does exist", Vialle, 146). Vialle resists the political erasure inevitably enacted by Senghor's attempts to subsume métis political identity within a larger discussion of African anti-colonial politics. For Vialle, mixed-race Africans inhabit a particular racial identity and social position within the colonial hierarchy that require a different set of strategies to resist colonial oppression. Her rejection of Senghor's thesis forms part of her larger argument to extend French paternity laws to the colonies. She argues that the problem of abandonment in orphanages and non-recognition was a problem faced uniquely by métis children in the colonies. Her argument suggests then that for Senghor to assert that the political needs of mixed-race Africans were always a subset of the larger black population's needs was to deny their agency and erase their existence.¹⁹⁶

How might Blouin respond to Senghor's notions of métis politics as simply African politics? Her text gives us some indication that like Vialle, she too would reject this as an oversimplification of race in Africa, a need to reduce the complexities of identity and political affiliation in the colonies to a binary understanding of black versus white. Blouin explains:

Only when I had been married—ironically, twice to white men—did I find the

¹⁹⁶ Senghor's black and white notions of anti-colonial politics, while problematic as Vialle shows, were also an accurate reading of the reality of anti-colonial movements in Africa. Vialle experienced the marginalizing effects of this dualism first hand. When she ran for Senate reelection in 1948, the other candidates from Oubangui-Chari challenged her ability to represent her constituents on racial grounds: "il n'était plus possible de voter pour Madame Vialle, car elle n'est pas à 100% oubanguienne (elle est métisse d'un Français et d'une Congolaise) et qu'elle est trop bien avec les Blancs" ("it was no longer possible to vote for Madame Vialle because she is not 100% Oubanguienne [she is métisse of French and Congolese origins] and she was too comfortable with the whites"). See Jacques Serre, *Hommes et destins. Tome XI Afrique noire* (Paris: Académie des sciences d'Outre-mer: l'Harmattan, 2011): 765.

equilibrium and courage to become active in the cause of my people. Only then was I able to transcend my black and white inheritance and become more than the stereotype of each. To become, simply, a woman, a human being. It was then I opted to give my life to the struggle of the blacks. In this I was privileged to take part in the movement toward freedom of several African countries. I was to know some of the great leaders of Africa, and because of my passion for our cause, I was to be associated in their work. (Blouin, 4)

Blouin's analysis of the political implications of métis identity resonates with Senghor's to a point. She too emphasizes the need to transcend the contradictions of double appartenance in the service of a humanistic project. Yet transcending these contradictions—both Senghor and Blouin are relatively silent on how one goes about this—does not amount to becoming black or “négro-africaine” as Senghor argues. Rather Blouin's identifications remain ever-shifting, for even in this seemingly categorical declaration of African nationalism, she situates herself both as an insider to “the cause of my people” and as an outsider to “the struggle of the blacks.”

Fanon sets up a similar either/or paradigm in *Peau noire masques blancs*. In his reading of Abdoulaye Sadjí's *Nini* he argues that the mixed-race African woman “non seulement veut blanchir, mais éviter de régresser” (“does not only want to whiten herself but also wants to avoid regressing”, Fanon, 101). According to Fanon, for women like Nini and Mayotte Capécia, marriage to a white man is the path to recognition and upward socio-economic mobility. It also suggests a racial inferiority complex that results from the codification of racial difference and the devalorization of blackness enacted by the coloniality of power. There is much in Blouin's narrative to support Fanon's thesis. In reflecting on her relationships with three white men, Roger, Charles and André, Blouin analyzes also the absence of black men from this picture:

Not for me was the roving eye of the man who lived in polygamy. Nor could I

give myself in a life of love and service from the bargained position of a dowry, my mind, body, and person marked in the rude terms of material possessions. Dear as was my mother and the customs of her brave people in their simple village near the river, I was my father's daughter in my uncompromising pride; I wanted to be won for myself alone on my own terms. (157)

She articulates Fanon's notion of cultural and racial "regression" by associating the customs of her "little mother's [...] simple village near the river" with all that is culturally regressive and undesirable.¹⁹⁷ On the contrary, she imagines independence and self-determination ("on my own terms") as part of her French inheritance ("I was my father's daughter"). Her reflection reveals that she seeks the recognition she could not obtain from her father through her relationships with white men.

Yet Fanon's reading also leaves little room for negotiating multiple belongings as Blouin attempts to do. For Fanon's *métisse* there are only two possible choices. Through marriage she may become an insider in the hermetically sealed world of white power, that is, "[passer] du rang des esclaves à celui de maîtres" ("pass from the rank of slaves to that of masters", Fanon, 104). Or else she must make the "illogical" choice to marry a black man and thereby "regress" racially (101). Fanon's deliberate use of language in setting up the master/slave dialectic is a reminder that racial identification is always already about power. Andrée Blouin is constantly engaged in this power struggle, but her daughter Eve's image of the "carrefour" is more accurate than Fanon's dialectic in capturing the multiple paths on which Blouin attempted to travel simultaneously towards a coherent identity as an African *métisse*. Although Blouin attempts to embrace this multiplicity throughout her narrative, she is even more deliberate about it once she discovers that lactification—whiteness by marriage and childbirth—does not offer the promised

¹⁹⁷ Blouin refers to Josephine as "little" and "childlike" throughout the text.

protections from violence and marginalization in the colonial context.

Notably, Blouin identifies her son René's death as a catalyst for her political action, which would in turn allow her to unify—arguably with little success—the multiple components of her métisse identity. René died at the age of two because colonial quinine laws made him ineligible for the malaria treatment that would save his life. The colonial administration classified him as non-white despite having a white father (Charles Greutz) and a métisse mother. Blouin describes the catalyzing effect of this experience in highly political terms:

The death of my son politicized me as nothing else could. In the revolt that overwhelmed me after the first pain had passed, in the wonder and bitterness of my grief, I came to integrate in an entirely new way the meaning of the colonialists' terms in Africa. I understood at last that it was no longer a matter of my own maligned fate but a system of evil whose tentacles reached into every phase of African life. I experienced this evil in the grief particular to a female—in an orphanage for girls, as a repudiated mistress, and most of all, as the mother of a dying child. For men there were other kinds of torment and degradation. The difference between my new attitude and the old one was a matter of clarity of vision. I had suffered intensely for the blacks who were whipped with the *chicotte*, and I had been outraged by the forced marriages of my friends. These injustices I had related to my own. Still, it had been all a little removed from the understanding that is at the source of one's energy and will. When I lost my bronzed little boy I saw finally the pattern connecting my own pain with that of my countrymen and knew that I must act. (Blouin, 153)

Blouin moves carefully and deliberately through the process of her political *prise de conscience*. She begins by recognizing the intersectional nature of this oppression and the specific kind of

marginalization she faces as a métisse woman. In the colonial economy she occupies the multiply devalued social positions of orphan and sexual object. In causing the death of her son, the quinine law attempts to negate also her motherhood. René's death is the moment when Blouin begins to understand these multiply marginalized positions to be a manifestation of colonial power. The language of maternal grief gives way to that of awareness of institutionalized racism. Her shift in consciousness results in her realization that whiteness by proxy would not offer her the imagined protections from the colonial system. Her language becomes increasingly politicized as her "grief" "pain" and "bitterness" give way to "revolt" "outrage" and a will to "act." Blouin attempts then to forge multiple alliances of oppression with "the blacks who were whipped with the *chicotte*", with métisse friends forced into marriages with other métis, and with her "countrymen". Consequently she expands Fanon's analysis of the fractured métisse consciousness to imagine resistance beyond the lactification/regression binary.

There remains one constant in Blouin's shifting positionality. Like Aoua Kéita, she is unequivocal about her unique brand of African decolonial feminism. Although she does not commit to one racial identity, Blouin always articulates a specifically gendered political identity. Like Kéita, she makes an urgent appeal to understand women's emancipation and African liberation as interconnected events.

"Let it Not Be Said That I Did Nothing to Make the African Woman Free": Violence and Labor as Anti-colonial Resistance

Since I was not born a male I should at least have had a brother.
When I was suffering at the orphanage I thought 'If only I had a brother. I would teach him to do many things I cannot do myself. I would not have to bear in silence whatever they choose to inflict on me. I would teach him to kill. Yes, to kill! –Andrée Blouin

Blouin's reflections on the possibility of resistance from the cloistered space of the orphanage echo Fanon's thoughts on the violence of decolonization. Fanon argues that the only

viable response to the structural violence inherent in colonial rule is counter-violence on the part of the colonized. The colonized appropriate the force and brutality of a system that has overseen the destruction of local cultures and economies, and turn this violence onto the colonizer.¹⁹⁸ The orphanages for mixed-race children in the French colonies are examples of the physical and psychological violence that Fanon lays out in his work. This violence is manifested in the *arrachement* of métis children from their African families, the erasure of the existence of these families by designating them as orphans, and the brutalizing of their bodies through starvation, unhygienic conditions and corporal punishment.¹⁹⁹ Métis children received a vocational education designed to make them productive subjects of the colony in the long term, and to produce goods that were sold to fund the orphanages' activities in the short term. The orphanages for mixed-race children were at best an exercise in racializing, categorizing and codifying difference in the socially stratified space of the colony.²⁰⁰ The exploitation of métis bodies sequestered from public view in order to preserve the racial order was a manifestation of discipline in the Foucauldian sense: "If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination" (Foucault, 138). For Blouin as for

¹⁹⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Oeuvres*, 453-455.

¹⁹⁹ Owen White, *Children of the French Empire*, 50.

²⁰⁰ Mixed-race orphanages were one way in which French imperial power tried to contain the perceived threat that people of mixed parentage posed, to what was supposed to be a neat divide between Europeans and Africans. In addition to providing a "foyer" for métis children, the nuns and priests also served as teachers in the orphanage schools that were reserved for métis and selected black children. Consequently, the few girls who received any kind of formal instruction, particularly diplomas in teaching and midwifery, were often products of these schools. Among the many overlaps between Kéita's and Blouin's experiences we find that both women were educated in mixed-race Catholic orphanages. Kéita's educational experience was vastly different from Blouin's by virtue of their racial identities. As a black African girl in the colonial social and racial hierarchy, Kéita acknowledges that she was privileged in being able to attend school in the first place and in a setting reserved for *métisses* at that. Since she was not resident at the orphanage, Kéita remained connected to her family, who in turn provided a support system and intervened on her behalf in case of difficulties with teachers and other students. For Blouin, this same setting represented a form of colonial marginalization that isolated and alienated her from her family and community. These opposing experiences reveal the paradox of privilege and marginalization that characterized the complex experiences of mixed-race women.

Fanon, violence was the only productive means of resistance available to the brutalized, colonized body in order to end his/her personal suffering and strike a blow to institutionalized racism.

In the epigraph to this section, Blouin suggests that violence as a means of resistance is in itself inscribed within the coloniality of gender and power. For her, striking out against the perpetrators of colonial brutality is an act reserved for the colonized male. The brother she fantasizes about would be a masculine version of herself who would carry out the act she knows how to perform but is unable to see to fruition. Blouin's articulation of anti-colonial resistance is marked by stark binaries. The options of fight or flight are particularly gendered: "As a girl I could not act on my feelings toward the nuns. All I could do was run away" (Blouin, 277). Yet once the nuns catch her after her escape from the orphanage, she threatens to kill herself if they send her back. Violence then is not reserved solely for the colonized male. He may inflict counter-violence, yet the female body remains always the recipient of violence, either at the hands of the colonizer or at her own hands as a means of escape. Blouin's understanding of anti-colonial violence reflects the racial and gender hierarchy of the colonial system and shows that violence as resistance does not exist outside the sphere of colonial domination but is rather determined by it.

Even as Blouin struggles to negotiate the terms of her resistance vis-à-vis colonial structures in her narrative, she collaborates with a Congolese woman whose anti-colonial activism centers around inflicting violence on the African female body. Blouin began her grassroots mobilization of women in the Belgian Congo in 1960. She organized the Feminine Movement for African Solidarity, whose charter outlined projects for women's health, literacy and battling Congolese women's alcoholism in order to make them more productive citizens of the emerging nation. For this last goal Blouin enlisted the help of Augustine, a popular figure in

beer advertisements. She describes Augustine as “big of voice, tall, portly, and with an exuberance, an authority of her very own flavor” (206). Augustine toured the country with Blouin, warning the crowds of women she addressed “If I see any of you drinking a bottle of beer before noon, I personally will bust you up. (*Je vais te casser la gueule*)” (207, emphasis in original). Augustine’s forceful physical presence and language diverge significantly from the traditional image of meek, submissive African women, or else women who appealed to one another’s emotions and/or maternal sensibilities in addressing political issues. Nor does Augustine adopt the more popular strategy of influencing men’s political decisions by denying them food or sex. Instead she presents herself as a woman literally ready to fight others for the good of the country.

The Congolese women in turn accept Augustine as a role model. Blouin analyzes the reception of her words as follows: “This proclamation electrified the crowd. It gave a whole new spirit to our movement. [...]. When this *bon vivant* personality who had always been associated with self-indulgence and good times turned around and lectured on the need to be responsible and work for the good of the country, the people were enormously impressed” (207). Beyond the humor generated by the big booming voice of Augustine promising to “bust people up” on the campaign trail, her words as well as Blouin’s analysis show that women saw themselves as an essential part of the emerging nation and understood themselves to be crucial for the productivity and economic development of the newly independent state. Ironically, Blouin does not recognize in Augustine’s threat a form of violence similar to her own threat of suicide if returned to the orphanage. Here too, African women’s bodies are the targets of corporal violence as a means of anti-colonial resistance.

The decolonization movement envisioned very specific roles for African women, roles that often focused on their bodies as instruments of reproduction. In “Sheroes and Villains”

Amina Mama argues that many of the “founding fathers of African nationalism were unable to view women beyond their reproductive and nurturing roles” (Mama, 55). In her work alongside these founding fathers, Blouin sought to transcend the narrowly defined scope of women’s roles in the envisioned postcolonial nation. She argued throughout her public speeches that African women’s emancipation from intertwined colonial and patriarchal systems was a necessary condition for the continent’s liberation:

The more I pondered the sad lives of the Congolese women the more I saw that one could not separate the problem of the African continent’s resources from the problems of the African woman. [...]. The need to utilize human resources better is one of the most important aspects of the economic development of the African nations. It has two sides: the idleness of the men on the one hand, and the overwork of the women on the other. A society can develop only through organized and fruitful labor. The African woman absolutely had to be freed from her role of servitude (209).

Blouin’s ideas on economic development and women’s emancipation replace reproduction with production. Beyond their nurturing and reproductive roles, women become productive citizens when the nation harnesses their labor meaningfully. In the current configuration of power, women are overworked and their labor is undervalued. Blouin’s own experiences, as a seamstress for colonial administrators’ wives in order to support herself when her first lover Roger abandons her, is an example of this status quo. She recounts walking long distances from Poto-Poto to the European quarter to deliver bundles of clothes, while heavily pregnant with Roger’s child. Her clients sometimes refused to pay her, and one even let her dogs loose on her. African women in Blouin’s situation often had no recourse to formal measures of redress for the exploitation they suffered in a labor system that was both racist and sexist. Countering the coloniality of power and

gender therefore meant recognizing the work that women were already doing as important contributions to nation building and the post-colonial economy.

Like Aoua Kéita, Andrée Blouin employs a decolonial feminist discourse in imagining and constructing the postcolony. Speaking of the dowry system for example, Blouin assured Congolese women “that this custom would be abolished if they worked to free their country, which would also bring about the liberation of the women. If she so chose, the woman could be the foremost instrument of independence” (205). Blouin emphasizes women’s indispensability to the overall anti-colonial project and thereby to their own emancipation from patriarchal practices. Her concerns about the dowry system echo Jane Vialle’s objections to a practice that not only reduced women and girls to commodities but also stood as a manifestation of class inequality in the colonies. Vialle explains that the dowry system represents “a new type of ‘inflationary’ slavery” in which girls are “sold off to the highest bidder.”²⁰¹ For Vialle, this practice was deeply inscribed within a capitalist system of exchange such that bride price was subject to inflation and “market conditions” annually. Blouin’s own parents stand as an example of these market forces at work. She states that her father Pierre Gerbillat, then in his forties, doubled the initial bride price already paid by Félix Éboué for Josephine Wouassimba (6-7).²⁰² Gerbillat acquired his young wife through wealth he obtained as a merchant in a colonial economy that functioned by exploiting the labor of black bodies. By linking the eradication of the dowry system to the liberation of African colonies, Blouin challenges the very foundations of the colonial economic system. She imagines a postcolonial nation that valorizes women’s labor and recognizes women themselves as citizens and workers rather than as objects of exchange.²⁰³

²⁰¹ James Hicks, “Inflation Hits ‘Bride Price’ in Africa. Millions in French Congo Unhindered by Color Bars” *Baltimore Afro-American* 12 May 1951: 10.

²⁰² This incident appears to have taken place about two years before Félix’s marriage to Eugénie.

²⁰³ Buchi Emecheta explores the practice of the dowry system in her 1972 novel *The Bride Price*. Where Vialle and

Blouin stands in a long line of African and Antillean women—some mentioned and discussed in this project, others awaiting excavation in the archives—whose writings invite us to recognize resistance not as “the end or goal of political struggle, but rather as its beginning, its possibility” (Lugones, 746). Their political contributions to anti-colonial movements involved imagining a more positive future for women as subjects and citizens of their respective emerging postcolonial polities. This future could only be realized through women’s political participation on their own terms, through their visions for political and poetic liberation, and through their strategies for resisting the intersecting racial and gendered imbalance of power.

Blouin focus on the economic implications of this practice, Emecheta pays particular attention to the perceived divide between traditional and modern practices in Nigeria after independence, and the psychological effects on individuals and families when traditional practices, no longer comptabile with an emerging way of life, are disrupted.

CONCLUSION

Feminist Networks and Diasporic Practices: Eslanda Robeson's African Journeys

Eslanda Cardozo Goode was born on 15 December 1895 in a decidedly segregated America.²⁰⁴ In 1913 she enrolled at the University of Illinois where the Ku Klux Klan had an active chapter. Moving to Harlem in 1917 allowed her to form friendships and working relationships with some of the celebrated artists of the Harlem Renaissance including Zora Neale Hurston and Carl Van Vechten. She also participated in the movement through, among other works, her interviews and profiles of black intellectuals in Paris, published in Dorothy West's journal *Challenge*.²⁰⁵ Essie, as she was affectionately called, married Paul Robeson, the celebrated singer, actor and civil rights activist. In the 1930s the Robesons moved to London where Eslanda began her graduate work towards a PhD in anthropology at the London School of Economics. In her recollections, Robeson affirms that she grew up "in a household wide awake to every phase of the Negro problem in America" (Robeson, *African Journey*, 13). Her descriptions of the seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the two halves of a composite black American identity in the context of segregation and discrimination in the United States mirror W.E.B Du Bois' articulation of double consciousness.²⁰⁶ Her commitment to democracy and racial equality in the United States would later inform her views on the possibilities for resisting European colonialism in Africa and the diaspora.

Eslanda Robeson visited over forty countries on five continents between 1930 and 1960. She met and interviewed Paulette Nardal in Paris, Jane Vialle in Oubangui Chari and Eugénie

²⁰⁴ For biographical information on Eslanda Robeson see Barbara Ransby, *Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Knopf, 1988).

²⁰⁵ Eslanda Goode Robeson. "Black Paris." *Challenge* 1934: 9-12. Print.

²⁰⁶ Du Bois defines double consciousness as the impossibility of a unified black American identity. The black subject in America inhabits a fractured consciousness, torn between self-perception and the images projected onto him/her by a racist society. See W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Pennsylvania State University, 2006): 9.

Éboué in New York. She also visited China and the Soviet Union to conduct research on communism.²⁰⁷ Robeson's most mediatized political act is undoubtedly her refusal to respond to Senator Joseph McCarthy's questions on her alleged adherence to the Communist Party during her 1953 appearance before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.²⁰⁸ However as her biographer Barbara Ransby cogently argues, "while much of the discussion of the Robesons' global politics in the postwar years focuses on the politics of East versus West, a more careful look at Essie's writings, speeches, and activism forces us to shift our attention from the Soviet Union to the growing sense of community and solidarity that was being forged in the global South" (Ransby, 7). Notably, Robeson travelled through Southern Africa in 1936 as part of her anthropological fieldwork and later through Central Africa in 1946. She carefully documented her observations of African experiences under colonial rule through journal entries, letters and photography.

Following Ransby's prompt, I am most interested here in Eslanda Robeson's travels through Southern and Central Africa because she engaged with the construction of race and gender in the European colonial context through the prism of her American experience. In her travel narratives she posits a concept of diaspora that displaces subjection to imperial rule as the imagined connection among African-descended peoples. Rather she imagined the African diaspora as defined by varied forms of concerted acts of resistance that would not only end colonialism but also bring about the new post-colonial future she imagined. Her work is therefore

²⁰⁷ Robeson wrote an article titled "What is Communism?" for the *Baltimore Afro-American* in 1950 where she argued tongue-in-cheek that since the US government had so often accused her of being a member of the Communist Party she thought it useful to learn about communism first-hand in order to formulate a knowledgeable response to the accusations. This commitment to documenting empirical evidence in order to formulate counter-narratives characterizes much of her political work. See Eslanda Robeson, "What Is Communism? Mrs. Robeson Searches for Answer Across World." *Baltimore Afro-American* 8 Jul. 1950: 13. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.

²⁰⁸ "Mrs. Robeson Proves Too Much for Sen. McCarthy" *Baltimore Afro-American* 18 Jul. 1953: 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.

important because it decenters colonialism even while engaging with it.

Robeson's travelogue *African Journey*, published in 1945, provides useful information on the reasons for her departure to Africa and the effects of her travel on her subsequent political work in the United States.²⁰⁹ The book is a collection of daily journal entries interspersed with Robeson's photography of the people, landscape and cultural artifacts she encountered on her travels through Southern Africa in 1936. The writing style evokes the logbook kept by a ship's captain or a missionary. Robeson appears to appropriate the genre by turning her anthropological gaze on the exploitative actions and policies of colonial agents. Her use of this kind of travel writing, more often associated with narratives of exploration and colonial conquest, raises important questions on power and representation that deserve a separate and thorough inquiry elsewhere. This study's emphasis on Robeson's engagement with the French colonial presence in Central Africa after World War II demands a somewhat narrower focus on the introduction and conclusion to *African Journey*. These bookends, written much closer to the date of Robeson's 1946 departure for Central Africa, provide insight into her evolving self-positioning vis-à-vis Africa and the specific questions on self-government that she sought to answer. Her unpublished journal entries, letters and published articles on her return to the United States allow us to trace the arc of her anti-colonial activism and her vision for collective resistance as a key element in connecting the African diaspora.

“How to Behave Abroad”: Black Transnationalism and the Geography of Anti-colonial Resistance

Defining the African diaspora as a history of migrations and dispersals, as the convergence of cultural identities and political interests that can be at once different and the

²⁰⁹ Her book was one of three African American works selected by the American Library Association for its list of fifty best books of 1945. The other two were *Black Boy* by Richard Wright and *Color and Democracy* by Du Bois. See “Books by DuBois, Wright, Mrs. Robeson Among 50 Best in ‘45.” *Baltimore Afro-American* 9 Feb. 1946: 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.

same, remains the stuff of an array of critical works. Patterson and Kelley argue that the imagined linkages that form a diasporic consciousness are not an inevitable result of the historical processes of dispersal. Instead, diaspora comes into being when it is articulated through scholarship, political movements and cultural production.²¹⁰ Their definition of articulation comes from Stuart Hall who describes it as utterance or speaking forth, and also as the connection or linkage by which different elements cohere into a unified discourse.²¹¹ Brent Edwards elaborates on the tension between sameness and difference in this understanding of diaspora as articulation.²¹² For Edwards, the term *décalage* captures the nature of the connecting ligaments that link separate geopolitical entities within the framework of the African diaspora. *Décalage* recognizes that articulation occurs at the joint, which is the site of both connection and separation in the body. Thus diaspora is characterized by the ambivalence of sameness and difference, connection and separation through which movement occurs. As scholarship on the African diaspora becomes increasingly focused on the cultural productions through which diaspora is continually made and unmade, it is important not to lose sight of the political imperatives to which these articulations of diaspora respond. In engaging with the concept here I am interested in how Eslanda Robeson employs discourses of difference and sameness in order to weave a narrative on diaspora that emphasizes anti-colonial resistance as the connective ligament that links African-descended peoples worldwide.

Robeson's reflections on her journey to Southern Africa form some of her earliest articulations of diaspora. In the opening lines of her introduction to *African Journey* she inscribes her travels in the genre of the homecoming narrative of African diaspora discourse: "I wanted to

²¹⁰ Tiffany Patterson, and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World", *African Studies Review* (2000): 11-45.

²¹¹ *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005).

²¹² Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

go to Africa. It began when I was quite small. Africa was the place we Negroes came from originally. Lots of Americans, when they could afford it, went back to see their ‘old country.’ I remember wanting very much to see my ‘old country’, and wondering what it would be like” (Robeson, *African Journey*, 13). Robeson locates her desire to see Africa first in the intimately personal sphere of her earliest childhood longing, then in the larger sphere of African diasporic homecoming and finally in the context of American immigration. In a few deft rhetorical moves, she suggests that her pilgrimage is both the story of African American displacement through the slave trade and a quintessentially American story of migration to which readers of all races can relate. Imagining the African diaspora in this desire to see the “old country” then is also a project of defining the United States and imagining how African Americans fit into the story of an imagined nation of immigrants, by also having their own “old country.”

In addition to the personal, spiritual element of her journey, travelling to Africa was also very much about producing a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse on black inferiority that Robeson encountered in the United States and during her graduate work in London. In her writing, she identifies the common thread that runs through the racist discourse on “the primitive [African] mind” (15) in her courses at the London School of Economics and the white American discourse on “the primitiveness, ignorance, laziness and smell of Negroes” (16) in the United States. In the initial counter-arguments she puts forward as the “obstreperous” (14) student in her seminars, Robeson begins to identify the economic deprivation in black communities worldwide as the effects of Western imperialism: “I’m educated because I went to school, because I was taught [...]. I’m cultured because my people had the education and the means to achieve a good standard of living [...]. Poor whites have neither education nor culture. Africans would have both if they had the schools and the money. Going to school and having money doesn’t make me European. Having no schools and no money doesn’t make the African primitive” (15). Robeson

is about a decade away from formulating the incisive, scathing attacks on “colonial white supremacy”²¹³ that would come to characterize her op-eds in American newspapers on her return from Africa. But already prior to her departure, although she conflates culture and Western models of education, Robeson recognizes the discourse on black inferiority as a flimsy justification for colonial exploitation. Her self-positioning also challenges colonial categories and shows the depth of her reflection on what it means to be African American in a global context. She refuses to be identified as European despite her education and social status. Nor can she accept the label “primitive African” as some of the Negritude founders did at the time in their efforts to reverse the negative connotations of this label. The desire to define what it meant to be black and African and American motivated Robeson’s journey: “I’d just have to go out to Africa and see and meet and study and talk with my people on their home ground. Then I would be able to say truly: I have been there too and I *know*” (14, emphasis in original). She places herself both as an insider and as an external observer seeking the empirical evidence that would allow her to articulate a more nuanced, quilted image of black diasporic identity that went beyond the homecoming narrative.

Robeson explored what it meant to be black and American in a global context throughout her writings and emphasized the importance of articulating counter-narratives in response to dominant racist ones. In 1955 she published “How to Behave Abroad” in the *Baltimore Afro-American*.²¹⁴ In this essay she provides a “Code of Behavior” (Robeson, “How to Behave Abroad”, 22) for African Americans abroad in response to questions on racism at home. She rejects the idea that African Americans need to portray a patriotic “unified front” (22) by staying silent on the realities of racism in the United States. She rejects further the official government

²¹³ Eslanda Robeson, “Africa- No Longer the Dark Continent” *New World Review* (1952): 3-6.

²¹⁴ Eslanda Robeson, “How to Behave Abroad” *Baltimore Afro-American* (27 Aug. 1955): 22. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014

narrative on what she calls “partial down payments on democracy” (22) that would highlight token appointments of African Americans in the army or public office as proof of racial equality.²¹⁵ Robeson presents a counter-narrative that denounces segregation and discrimination as “a festering sore, an abscess in the body of American life” (22). As Ransby notes, “Essie often had to defend her dual roles as an American citizen and an American dissident” (Ransby, 187), a careful balancing act of being an insider and also distancing herself from American racism and capitalist exploitation. In her “Code of Behavior”, as in the responses she formulated in her graduate seminars, Robeson resists colonial representations of the realities of black life and black experiences worldwide. Like all the other women analyzed here, Eslanda Robeson lived out Suzanne Césaire’s prescient words: “Il est maintenant urgent d’oser se connaître soi-même, d’oser s’avouer ce qu’on est, d’oser se demander ce qu’on veut être” (“It is now vital to dare to know oneself, to dare to confess to oneself what one is, to dare to ask oneself what one wants to be” Césaire, 40/10). Like Césaire, she situates this project of self-definition as both personal and collective, a communal redefining of the multiple layers of black identity and experience to counter dominant racist stereotypes. Throughout her work, Robeson imagined articulating counter-narratives as one of the key strategies of anti-colonial resistance that would connect different groups of oppressed peoples in the African diaspora.

Indeed for Robeson, no one embodied this idea of diasporic resistance better than Félix Éboué. She spent a portion of her nearly five-month stay in Central Africa in 1946—two years after Éboué’s death—retracing his footsteps and interviewing those who knew him. Robeson believed that Éboué’s position as governor general of French Equatorial Africa challenged the

²¹⁵ Robeson published her article in the midst of the Cold War, when the stakes were high for the United States in portraying a positive image of race relations. The government’s need to “whitewash a very dirty wall” as Robeson put it reflected its desire to win the competition for allies among the newly (or nearly) independent African and Asian nations.

colonial discourse on black inferiority that was used to disenfranchise blacks and bar their access to political power: “White supremacy was an all-important part of colonial philosophy, law and economy. Therefore when Félix Éboué, Negro from French Guiana, and very dark indeed, was appointed Chief of a Department, then Governor of a Province, and finally Governor-General of F.E.A., a revolution took place in colonial thinking. It could no longer be said that the Negro was not able nor [sic] ‘ready’ to govern himself. Was not Éboué governing the African people?” (Robeson, “Félix Éboué”, 44). Robeson’s emphasis on Éboué’s “very dark” skin is a response to the historical process that Fanon terms the “epidermalization” of black racial inferiority. Fanon believed that the white gaze refracts the black body into an inferior subject position by assimilating skin color with imagined markers of inferiority. Robeson echoed Fanon’s analysis in her works and here holds Éboué up as a symbolic figure that deflects this negative racialization of the black body. Unlike Fanon she remains optimistic that publicly highlighting the achievements of blacks would create a counter-narrative powerful enough to destabilize colonial discourse on race in Africa and the diaspora (*African Journey*, 16).

Robeson goes on to argue in her work on Éboué that the Guyanese administrator’s public support of de Gaulle at a time when much of France had capitulated to Vichy, made Central Africa via Guyane the birthplace of France’s liberation. She suggests that through his war efforts and successful economic reforms, Éboué was far more loyal to French Republican ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity than other colonial administrators: “*Éboué believed that the resources of Africa should be developed for the African people, not for the handful of exploiters who took everything, gave nothing, and in the war emergency proved to be cowards and traitors to France*” (“Félix Éboué”, 46, emphasis in original). Robeson re-maps the geography of French Resistance by highlighting the network of black transnational actors whose actions contributed to French liberation. She then establishes a connection between this commitment to France’s

freedom and the struggle for African liberation:

It has often been said by colonial ‘experts’ that the darker peoples of the earth are not yet ‘ready’ nor able to govern themselves. This is said despite the records of history which show that the darker peoples not only governed themselves efficiently, but also developed superior civilizations, while white men still lived in caves, almost on a level with the animals. Well the magnificent and shining example of Felix [sic] Éboué is a direct contradiction to all this. (44)

Robeson takes on multiple elements of colonial discourse at once. Her emphasis on “darker peoples” takes aim again at epidermalization. She also rejects the idea of Africa as an a-historical continent and points not only to its long history but also more specifically to its history of self-government before colonization.

So in 1946 Eslanda Robeson was thinking about black transnationalism, collective resistance and self-government as she trekked up the Congo River and bumped along un-tarred roads in Tchad. She interviewed colonial administrators, African deputies to the French National Assembly and disenfranchised laborers whose testimonies of their working and living conditions echoed the stories of debt peonage suffered by blacks in the American South under the sharecropping system.²¹⁶ She asked dangerous questions that ruffled feathers because they constantly challenged the racial social hierarchy that the colonial administration struggled to keep intact. That her presence set off a flurry of policing and surveillance activities shows the perceived danger that black women’s visibility and mobility posed to the colonial order.

“A Dangerous Customer”: Race, Gender and Surveillance in the Colonies

In July 1946, Sir Percy Sillitoe, head of Mi5, the United Kingdom’s internal security service, sent a memo to police commissioners in the British West African colonies of Gold Coast,

²¹⁶ See Barbara Ransby, *Eslanda*, 163.

Gambia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria informing them that Eslanda Robeson was visiting French Equatorial Africa, where she had made “indiscreet” comments about colonialism.²¹⁷ He warned them to keep an eye out for her possible arrival in the British colonies. Sillitoe was right to be concerned about Robeson’s presence. A confidential report he received from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Headquarters confirmed his suspicions that Robeson was a radical anti-colonial activist. In January 1947 she addressed an audience of two hundred and fifty people at the Canadian-West Indian Progressive Student Centre where she “harshly castigated the backward social conditions of colonization and interpreted [it] as ‘taking over and keeping by force.’”²¹⁸ Robeson stated that she was “glad to belong to the numerically superior ‘black’ race” because decolonization was inevitable and would possibly be violent: “‘Freedom has never been won without a struggle’[...] The fight for freedom seems to be a universal fight and the oppressed peoples will continue fighting until they achieve their freedom and colonization will be completely eradicated.”²¹⁹

Robeson’s was not the only voice calling for an end to colonialism. However her views were quite radical, particularly in comparison to those of the francophone African politicians she interviewed including Éugénie Éboué, Jane Vialle and Gabriel d’Arboussier whose anti-colonial politics centered on increased political representation in the French Union.²²⁰ As an outspoken activist with an international platform, Robeson’s presence in Central Africa posed a threat to colonial authority because her demands for African self-government put even more pressure on

²¹⁷ Declassified Mi5 surveillance files are available from the United Kingdom’s National Archives, call number KV/2/1829.

²¹⁸ Surveillance Files, National Archives, KV/2/1829.

²¹⁹ Surveillance Files, National Archives, KV/2/1829.

²²⁰ Gabriel d’Arboussier was a métis politician who crossed paths with many of the women studied here. In 1945 he represented Moyen-Congo (Gabon) as a deputy in the French Constituent National Assembly, which counted Senghor, Césaire and Éboué among its members. In 1946 he became a founding member and secretary general of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain Party, of which Aoua Kéita and Andrée Blouin were members. He served as vice-president of the French Union and was succeeded by Éboué. Robeson interviewed d’Arboussier during her 1946 travels through Central Africa.

colonial administrations facing increasing labor strikes and protests after World War II. It is no surprise then that in another secret memo to Mi5, the British consul general in Leopoldville described Robeson as “a dangerous customer” whose remarks in French Equatorial Africa “leave no doubt about her very advanced Leftist opinions and her determination to champion the negro cause at all costs. Her indiscretions have been numerous; her crowning one was the suggestion that the native in the Congo would only get a square deal when he was governed by one of his own kin.”²²¹

Eslanda Robeson would not have been surprised to discover that she was the subject of police surveillance in the French and British territories. She experienced colonial surveillance and border policing tactics firsthand in 1936 when the South African government refused to issue her a visa. Robeson identified these tactics as strategies to block articulations of a black diasporic consciousness through collective resistance. Her analysis of her experience is worth quoting in its entirety for its astute reading of border policing and surveillance as technologies of control:

The visas were the real problem. It seems if you are Negro, you can't make up your mind to go to Africa, and just go. Oh, no. Not unless you are a missionary. The white people in Africa do not want educated Negroes traveling around seeing how their brothers live; nor do they want those brothers seeing Negroes from other parts of the world, hearing how they live. It would upset them, make them restless and dissatisfied; it would make them examine and re-examine the conditions under which they, as 'natives' live; and that would never do at all. In fact it would be extremely dangerous. Something must be done to prevent this 'contact.' But what to do? It's simple: just keep all other Negroes out of Africa, except maybe a few who will come to preach the Gospel. The Gospel always helps to keep people

²²¹ Surveillance Files, National Archives, KV/2/1829, emphasis in original.

quiet and resigned. And how to keep them out? That's simple, too: just don't grant them visas. So they don't grant them visas. *Voilà*. (Robeson, *African Journey*, 18)²²²

Robeson steps out of the first person narrative voice with which she had until now described her motivations and preparations for her impending trip. She draws the reader into a collective "you" that is denied access to Africa through colonial gatekeeping tactics.²²³ She then slips into the third person, spoken from the colonial administration's point of view as she attempts to inhabit the colonizer's mind and explain his deep-seated fears of black mobility and transnational resistance to colonialism. Ventriloquizing the colonizer's voice, Robeson describes black people in Africa and the diaspora as "them", a mass of bodies that must be kept out or contained within manageable spaces in order to maintain the colonial racial social order. Border controlling practices such as issuing or denying visas become a key strategy in preventing the transnational "contact" among blacks to which Robeson refers. For those already within the borders, either by birth or because they have entered the territory by subverting border controls as Robeson did by travelling to South Africa without a visa, surveillance allows black bodies to remain visible to the colonizer's eye at all times. Thus border policing and internal surveillance are complementary strategies that allow colonial powers to keep some bodies in and lock others out.

Colonial surveillance was therefore fundamentally a racializing act. As John Fiske notes,

²²² Robeson emphasizes the role of religion in colonial conquest and control. Later in *African Journey* she also explores the use of violence in maintaining colonial rule. She reflects on a fellow passenger on her return voyage to the United States, a man she nicknames "the English Colonial from South Africa" whose racial prejudice colored his views of Robeson and her young son: "He has built himself into a very small, very limited world of his own, behind a towering, formidable wall of ignorance, prejudice and 'superiority.' This typical Colonial seems to me weak, uncomfortably self-conscious, lonely, pathetic, and frightened. Certainly he is weak, else why must he carry and maintain armed force—and plenty of it—everywhere he goes, always?" (151). Throughout her travelogue Robeson connects religion, surveillance and violence as interrelated strategies of oppression used to maintain minority rule over Africans in the colonies.

²²³ Jamaica Kincaid uses a similar rhetorical strategy to great effect in *A Small Place*. In this essay on tourism and colonial legacy in Antigua, she positions the reader as a tourist complicit in the island's exploitation. See Jamaica Kincaid, *A small place* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988).

“the development of surveillance technology is fueled, of course, by the social need to see, and that, in its turn, is motivated by the social significance of that which must be seen. In a racially unstable society where whites are about to lose their dominance in numbers, and fear losing it in politics and economics, the need to have the threatening other always in sight is paramount” (Fiske 68). By identifying black bodies as the undesirable others to be watched and contained, surveillance becomes a racialized tool of social control. As Simone Browne notes, these technologies of control “often uphold ‘Othering’ practices that first accompanied European colonial expansion and that sought to structure social relations and institutions in ways that privilege whiteness” (Browne, 73). For many of the women whose works have been central to the present inquiry, colonial powers employed different means of surveillance and policing in order to keep them visible as a means of control. Vichy police had Jane Vialle on their radar months before they arrested her in her home and interned her in a concentration camp. Aoua Kéita and Sembène’s women faced police and other figures of authority that sought to bar their access to public spaces that were marked as all white and/or all male.

Each woman used the tools at her disposal to resist these colonial spatial restrictions. Vialle attempted to subvert Vichy surveillance by obtaining false identification papers under the name El Bidaoui. Kéita and Sembène’s women occupied public spaces and reclaimed them as their own. Robeson resolved to use her husband’s celebrity status and her reputation as an internationally known public persona to attract media attention in the event that the South African government refused her entry into the country without a visa. Steve Mann’s concept of *sousveillance* allows us to understand these diverse actions as subversive strategies designed to limit the reach of colonial power. Mann proposes *sousveillance* or inverse surveillance as a way to describe individuals’ use of “panoptic technologies to help them observe those in authority” (Mann, Nolan, and Wellman 332). *Sousveillance* is an act of *détournement*, “the tactic of

appropriating tools of social controllers and resituating these tools in a disorienting manner” (333). Robeson’s decision to turn media focus on the South African government is an act of sousveillance because it destabilizes the colonial policing apparatus that designates the colonizer as the watcher and the colonized as the object to be observed.²²⁴ Similarly when Aoua Kéita and the women of Gao occupy the commandant’s office as electoral observers in order to prevent acts of intimidation perpetrated on voters, they reverse the policing gaze in order to hold the colonial administration accountable to African voters as French citizens. Through sousveillance black women living in or travelling through colonial Africa were sometimes able to elicit more humane, democratic treatment from those in power as a key step on the path to decolonization.

Over the years, Robeson became increasingly interested in locating women as a significant presence and political force, not only in restrictive colonial spaces but also in the space of feminist, anti-colonial struggles. In 1946, she and Jane Vialle interviewed each other over two days in Oubangui Chari, talking about African politics and women’s rights.²²⁵ Robeson was particularly interested in Vialle’s work with African women through the AFUF. She however remained skeptical about the efficacy of demanding women’s inclusion within the framework of French politics rather than in the context of independence.²²⁶ What is most interesting about

²²⁴ Simone Browne builds on Mann’s work to posit a theory of “dark sousveillance” that is the strategies of oversight or flying under the radar that blacks have employed throughout history, to counter racializing surveillance. Browne traces this history of dark sousveillance from slave plantations to contemporary border policing. Robeson’s and Kéita’s reversal of the gaze onto the colonial administration best fits Mann’s description of sousveillance as inverse surveillance. However, Vialle’s use of falsified ID to camouflage her identity and shield her from Vichy police is more akin to dark sousveillance. See Simone Browne, “Dark Sousveillance: Race, Surveillance and Resistance.” Hosted at the Graduate Center, CUNY by the Digital Praxis Seminar and the CUNY Digital Humanities Initiative. 9 Dec. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsMFdiLsqbg>. Web. 20 Sep. 2014.

²²⁵ Barbara Ransby, *Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013): 170.

²²⁶ She also interviewed Éugénie Éboué briefly at a press conference in New York in 1945 about her role in drafting the new French constitution. Notably, she asked Éboué “whether she thought it likely that the new Constitution might grant the French Equatorial Africans the right of secession if they desired to secede.” Éboué chose not to compromise her position as a spokesperson for the French government and said “she believed that the colonial population was not interested in secession.” See Earl Conrad, “Éboué Widow, Elected to French Assembly, Tells Views on Colonies” *Chicago Defender* 10 Nov. 1945: 12. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 Jul. 2014

Robeson's reflections on women's political participation is her articulation of the relationship between women's work in the private sphere and public domain. In a 1958 article titled "Women in the UN" she argues that women's experience with domestic work makes them uniquely qualified to manage national and international affairs: "[T]he United Nations is still predominantly a man's organization, and this may be one of the reasons why some of its important discussions continue to be unrealistic, impractical and futile. Women, with the day-to-day direct working responsibility for the children, the family, the home, and the budget are inclined to be, often forced to be, much more down-to-earth and common-sensical than men. Generally speaking of course" (Robeson, "Women in the UN", 33). For Robeson, private and public are not diametrically opposed. Rather, the home functions as a microcosm of the nation and even of an international community. Consequently tasks such as raising children and managing the household budget prepare women to take up public office.

Robeson presents us with another facet of the relationship between public presence and private lives that all the women analyzed in this study ultimately had to confront in their works. For Suzanne Césaire, private letters to friends and family provided a safe space in which to engage her political ideas away from Vichy's prying eyes. Aoua Kéita remained silent on her private life, perhaps viewing those details as a distraction from the political narrative she sought to transmit. For Andrée Blouin, personal tragedies including her son's death directly motivated her anti-colonial activism. Robeson perhaps comes closest to imagining a complementary relationship between women's roles in the home and their contributions to the nation. Her call for a United Nations that more accurately reflects "not only the nations but the *people* of the world" (33, emphasis in original) reveals her hopes for a more inclusive future of international politics.

"The Rising Tide of Color": Imagining Post-colonial Futures in the African Diaspora

We have not built any walls to limit our world. Walls have been

built against us, but we are always fighting to tear them down, and in the fighting, we grow, we find new strength, new scope. –
Eslanda Robeson, *African Journey*

When she returned to the United States after her travels through Central Africa, Eslanda Robeson toured the country giving speeches on black liberation struggles in Africa and the United States. Before a crowd of three hundred people in Milwaukee in April 1950 she declared that “colonialism is dead [...] and all that remains is to bury its corpse.”²²⁷ She stressed that Africans had not only shed the yoke of European colonialism, they were also actively resisting American projects of “exporting democracy” and development because they had been “developed almost to death” by Western imperialism. Robeson’s descriptions of the specter of colonialism, still an unburied corpse, echo Aimé Césaire’s words on colonialism as “the most putrid carrion that ever rotted under the sun” (Césaire, 52) that serve as the epigraph to this study’s introduction.²²⁸ As Robeson, Césaire and others show, decolonization was about throwing out the old system of exploitation and racial inequality. However they also insist that it was about ushering in a new future. On one hand we may read Robeson’s declaration of the death of colonialism nearly a decade before the wave of African independence as a premature dismissal of the still-powerful colonial forces at work on the continent. On the other hand it is possible to interpret her words as a necessary step towards beginning to imagine what comes after the heady moment when the Union Jack or Tricolor comes down and new flags go up. Robeson’s rhetorical strategy here allows her to once again move beyond colonialism even while engaging with it.

²²⁷ Dan Travis, “Author Speaks After Rebuff: Racism in U.S. Rocks World--Mrs. Robeson” *Baltimore Afro-American* 22 Apr. 1950: 12. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.

²²⁸ Robeson’s *African Journey*, published five years before Aimé Césaire’s *Discours sur le colonialisme*, converges with the Martinican writer’s work on multiple points. Notably, she identifies the rise of fascism in Europe during World War II as a manifestation of European colonial atrocities overseas, in terms that resonate strongly with Césaire’s ideas: “But Hitler, in his insistence upon the superiority of the few, *his few*, over the many, in his ruthless enslavement of some peoples and the extermination of others, has shown clearly that race inferiority, tolerated so complacently yesterday because it meant the non-white, today comes out to mean the non-Aryan, the non-Nazi; that slavery so complacently tolerated yesterday because it meant the African, the Negro, comes out today to mean all the conquered peoples” (Robeson, 154).

What would this post-colonial state look like? In 1952 Robeson sought to answer this question in an article she wrote in her capacity as “editorial consultant on Negro and colonial questions” for the *New World Review*, the mouthpiece of the Council on African Affairs founded by Paul Robeson and W.E.B Du Bois.²²⁹ In “Which Way for Africa?” she emphasizes agency as the vehicle for political and economic sovereignty. She imagines this post-colonial future as one in which African and Asian peoples “can control their own land and the fruits thereof, their own lives, their own destinies.” Robeson argues in another article for the *New World Review* that this future is now inevitable due to “the Rising Tide of Color [...]. People: white, yellow, brown and black, rising to take over their own countries, to govern them for their own benefit.”²³⁰ She emphasizes self-government and the use of Africa’s economic resources to benefit local populations first, as the key pillars of the post-colonial state.

For Robeson, Africa’s liberation was also intimately tied up with race relations in the United States. She asked her American readers in 1952: “Let us pretend that you are African, watching with profound understanding and deep concern the segregation, discrimination and violence carried out against the Negro people, officially and unofficially by the Government and Courts of Law in the United States. Would you want to open your riches exclusively to the United States?”²³¹ She believed that the newly independent African countries would be selective in choosing their allies and would remain committed to racial equality in the African diaspora, even if primarily motivated by self-preservation. Robeson was particularly interested in new technologies that would allow for these continued, sustained diasporic connections. She enumerates some of these methods in her conclusion to *African Journey*: “International airdromes have been established at strategic points in North, West, Central, and East Africa. Dakar, Cairo,

²²⁹ Eslanda Robeson, “Which Way for Africa?” *New World Review* (1952): 24-29. Print.

²³⁰ Eslanda Robeson, “The Rising Tide” *New World Review* (1952): 10. Print.

²³¹ Eslanda Robeson, “Which Way for Africa?”

Brazzaville are known to millions of the newspaper, radio, and film public. Formerly remote Africa is right around the corner by plane” (Robeson, *African Journey*, 154). For Robeson in 1945, the technologies that facilitate what is now commonly called globalization would be connective ligaments among different parts of the African diaspora. It is through these connections that she imagines breaking down the walls of imperialism that seek to limit the scope of transnational black resistance. She remains hopeful, as is evidenced by the tone of the epigraph to this section, that the end of colonialism would also be the beginning of new forms of solidarity between Africa and the diaspora.

Many of the narratives on women’s anti-colonial resistance that have formed the core focus of this study end on a note of beginning. In many ways “Le grand camouflage” was the beginning of Suzanne Césaire’s articulations of a Caribbean archipelagic consciousness. Aoua Kéïta closes her autobiography with an eye towards the future: “L’indépendance politique fut le grand couronnement de nos efforts et des sacrifices de nos martyrs. Mais la lutte n’était pas terminée pour autant. Elle continue et continuera encore longtemps pour la liberté, la démocratie et la paix universelle” (“Political independence was the culmination of our efforts and the sacrifice of our martyrs. But the struggle was not over. It continues and will continue for a long time, for liberty, democracy and universal peace” Kéïta, 395). Kéïta’s rapid tense shifts from past to present to future signal the long arc of women’s political resistance to colonial and patriarchal oppression. Through their struggles they sought to move ever forward towards building a more just, habitable world for all.

The years from the 1940s through the 1960s were indeed some of the most crucial years of black women’s activism in the francophone world because of the important advances made towards citizenship rights and women’s suffrage at this time. These women’s efforts in forging a black decolonial feminist praxis continue to resonate in the work of later generations of writers,

thinkers and activists. Given the relative dearth of written records of their work, there is much we may never know about their important contributions to the political movements that shaped their time and continue to influence ours. Yet rather than foreclosing further study of their lives and works, these archival silences should prompt us to imagine new ways of accounting for and engaging with women's enduring presence in the landscape of black liberation struggles.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aas-Rouxparis, Nicole. "Espace antillais au féminin: présence, absence." *The French Review* 70.6 (1997): 854-864. Print.
- "Assembly Member," *Baltimore Afro-American* 10 Nov. 10 1945: 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 10 Apr. 2014.
- Achille, Louis Thomas. *La Revue du monde noir = the Review of the Black World, 1931-1932: Collection Complète, No. 1 À 6*. Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992. Print.
- Aimé Césaire une parole pour le XXIe Siècle = A Voice for the 21st Century*. Dir. Euzhan Palcy. JMJ Productions, 1994. DVD.
- Akyeampong, Emmanuel Kwaku, and Henry Louis, Jr Gates. *Dictionary of African Biography*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- Almeida, Irène Assiba d. *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994. Print.
- Artières, Philippe, and Édouard Glissant. "Solitaire et solidaire: entretien avec Édouard Glissant." *Terrain* 41 (2003): 1-6. Print.
- Baum, Robert M. "Prophetess: Aline Sitoé Diatta As a Contested Icon in Contemporary Senegal." *Facts, Fiction, and African Creative Imaginations*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Fallou Ngom. New York: Routledge, 2009. 348. Print.
- Bernabe, Jean, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphael Confiant. *Eloge de la créolité*. Paris: Gallimard, 1993. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October* 28 (1984): 125. Print.
- Bloncourt, Gérald, and Michael Löwy. *Messagers De La Tempête : André Breton Et La Révolution De Janvier 1946 En Haïti*. Pantin: Temps des cerises, 2007. Print.
- Blouin, Andrée, and Jean Scott MacKellar. *My Country, Africa: Autobiography of the Black Pasionaria*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983. Print.
- Blouin, Eve. Personal Interview. 18 May 2014.
- Boittin, Jennifer Anne. *Colonial Metropolis the Urban Grounds of Anti-imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. Print.
- "Books by DuBois, Wright, Mrs. Robeson Among 50 Best in '45." *Baltimore Afro-American* 9 Feb. 1946: 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.

- Bouwer, Karen. *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.
- Boyce-Davies, Carole. *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London; New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Browne, Simone. "Dark Sousveillance: Race, Surveillance and Resistance." Digital Praxis Seminar and the CUNY Digital Humanities Initiative. 9 Dec. 2014. Web. 20 Sep. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsMFdiLsqbg>
- . "Race and Surveillance." *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*. Ed. Kristie Ball, Kevin Haggerty, and David Lyon. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012. 72-79. Print.
- La Martinique aux martiniquais, l'affaire de l'OJAM*. Dir. Camille Mauduech. Hévadis Films, 2012. Videocassette.
- Capdepuuy, Arlette. "Quelle place pour Madame Éboué dans le Gaullisme de la Ve République?" *Histoire@Politique 2* (2012): 37-50. Print.
- Capécia, Mayotte. *Je suis martiniquaise*. Paris: Corrêa, 1948. Print.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. England: Bloodaxe books, 1995. Print.
- . *Discours sur le colonialisme, suivi de discours sur la négritude*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 2004. Print.
- . *OEuvres complètes. Discours et communications 3*. [Paris]: Ed. Désormeaux, 1976. Print.
- , and René Ménéil. *Tropiques*. Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1941. Print.
- Césaire, Suzanne. *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)*. Ed. Daniel Maximin. Trans. Keith Walker. Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2012. Print.
- Césaire, Suzanne, and Daniel Maximin. *Le grand camouflage: écrits de dissidence, 1941-1945*. Paris: Seuil, 2009. Print.
- Church, Emily Musil. "In Search of Seven Sisters: A Biography of the Nardal Sisters of Martinique." *Callaloo* 36.2 (2013): 375-390. Print.
- Condé, Maryse. "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer." *Yale French Studies* 97 (January, 2000): 151-165. Print.
- . "Unheard Voice: Suzanne Césaire and the Construct of a Caribbean Identity." *Winds of Change: The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars*. Ed. Adele S Newson Horst and Linda Strong-Leek. New York: Peter Lang, 1998. 61-66. Print.

- Confiant, Raphaël. *Aime Césaire, une traversée paradoxale du siècle*. Paris: Ecriture, 2006. Print.
- “Congo Begins Rounding Up Undesirables: Crowd Sees Abduction of Beaten African.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* 16 Oct. 1960: 16. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 20 July 2014.
- “Congo: The Edge of Anarchy.” *Time* 29 Aug. 1960: 20. Print.
- Conrad, Earl. “Éboué Widow, Elected to French Assembly, Tells Views on Colonies.” *The Chicago Defender* 10 Nov. 1945: 12. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 Jul. 2014.
- Cooper, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Print.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1241-1299. Print.
- Daniel, Justin. “Political Constraints of Economic Dependency: The Case of Guadeloupe and Martinique.” *Caribbean Studies* 26.3/4 (1993): 311-334. Print.
- Debionne, Pauline. Personal Interview. 13 May 2014.
- Derrida, Jacques. *For Nelson Mandela*. Ed. Mustapha Tlili. New York: Seaver Books, 1987. Print.
- Duberman, Martin B. *Paul Robeson*. New York: Knopf, 1988. Print.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. N.p.: Pennsylvania State University, 2006. Electronic Classics Series. Web. 7 Oct. 2014.
<http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/webdubois/dubois souls black folk 6x9.pdf>.
- Éboué Eugénie, “We Resent Being Called Dependent.” *Pittsburgh Courier* 23 Mar. 1946: 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 Apr. 2014.
- Edwards, Brent Hayes. “Pebbles of Consonance: A Reply to Critics.” *Small Axe* 9.1 (2005): 134-149. Print.
- . *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003. Print.
- Emecheta, Buchi. *The Bride Price: A Novel*. New York: George Braziller, 1976. Print.
- Fiske, John. “Surveilling the City: Whiteness, the Black Man and Democratic Totalitarianism.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 15.2 (1998): 67-88. Print.

- Foccart, Jacques, Gaillard, Philippe. *Dans les bottes du général: 1969-1971*. [Paris]: Fayard: Jeune Afrique, 1999. Print.
- Fonkoua, Romuald-Blaise. *Aimé Césaire: 1913-2008*. Paris: Perrin, 2010. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977. Print
- Frobenius, Leo, and Eike Haberland. *Leo Frobenius on African History, Art and Culture: An Anthology*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007. Print.
- Lula Garrett, "Gadabouting in the U.S.A." *Baltimore Afro-American* 5 May 1951: 10. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 Apr. 2014.
- Geiger, Susan, Nakanyike Musisi, and Jean Marie Allman. *Women in African Colonial Histories*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. Print.
- Gerty Archimède, la candidate du peuple*. Dir. Mariette Monpierre. Les productions de la lantern, 2005. DVD.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Le Discours antillais*. Paris: Seuil, 1981. Print.
- . *Poétique de la relation*. [Paris]: Gallimard, 1990. Print.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. J. Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990. 222-237. Print.
- , and Lance Grossberg. "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall." *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Ed. David Morely and Kuan-Hsing Chen. London; New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Hicks, James. "Inflation Hits 'Bride Price' in Africa. Millions in French Congo Unhindered by Color Bars." *Baltimore Afro-American* 12 May 1951: 10. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 9 July 2014.
- Hearn, Lafcadio. *Two Years in the French West Indies* (2004). Project Gutenberg. Web. 15 Oct. 2014. <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/6381>.
- Hochschild, Adam. *King Leopold's Ghost a Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999. Print.
- Howe, Russel. "Communists Banished in Congo." *Washington Post* 18 Sept. 1960: A1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 25 July 2014.
- "Hunter College Students Hear Senator Vialle of Africa." *New York Amsterdam News* 5 May 1951: 18. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 Apr. 2014.

- Jennings, Eric Thomas. *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001. Print.
- Jones, Jim. "Fact and Fiction in God's Bits of Wood." *Research in African literatures* 31 (2000): 117-131. Print.
- Kesteloot, Lilyan. *Histoire de la littérature négro-africaine*. Paris: Editions Karthala, 2001. Print.
- Kéita, Aoua. *Femme D'Afrique: La Vie D'Aoua Kéita Racontée Par Elle-même*. Paris: Présence africaine, 1975. Print.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988. Print.
- . "On Seeing England for the First Time." *Transition* 51 (1991): 32-40. Print.
- Larrier, Renée. "Discourses of the Self: Gender and Identity in Francophone African Women's Autobiographies." *Mapping Intersections: African Literature and Africa's Development*. Ed. Anne V Adams and Janis Alene Mayes. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998. 123-135. Print.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *Le Pacte autobiographique*. Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1975. Print.
- Lewis, Shireen. *Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory From Négritude to Créolité*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006. Print.
- Lugones, Maria. "The Coloniality of Gender." *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise* Spring (2008): 1-17. Print.
- . "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia* 25.4 (2010): 742-759. Print.
- "Madam Eugenie Eboue elated over courtesies in States." *Baltimore Afro-American* 12 Apr. 1958. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 20 Apr. 2014.
- Mama, Amina. "Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence Against Women in Africa." *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. Ed. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. New York: Routledge, 1997. 46-62. Print.
- Mann, Steve, Jason Nolan, and Barry Wellman. "Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments." *Surveillance & Society* 1.3 (2002): 331-355. Print.
- "Martinique Girl Given High Post with UN Body," *Chicago Defender* 21 Dec. 1946: 13. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013.

- McCray, George F. "The Negro Who Defeated Hitler" *Chicago Defender* 30 Apr. 1949: 18. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013.
- Mezzack, Janet. "'Without Manners You Are Nothing': Lady Bird Johnson, Eartha Kitt, and the Women Doers" Luncheon of January 18, 1968." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 20.4 (1990): 745-760. Print.
- Michelet, Jules. *Introduction à l'histoire universelle*. Paris: Colin, 1962. Print.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved: A Novel*. New York: Plume, 1988. Print.
- Mortimer, Mildred P. *Writing From the Hearth: Public, Domestic, and Imaginative Space in Francophone Women's Fiction of Africa and the Caribbean*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. Print.
- Moudileno, Lydie. "Henri Lopes – 'La critique n'est pas une agression' entretien avec Lydie Moudileno." *Genesis* 33 (2011): 93-100. Print.
- "Mrs. Robeson Proves Too Much for Sen. McCarthy." *Baltimore Afro-American* 18 Jul. 1953: 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.
- Nardal, Paulette, and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting. *Beyond Negritude: Essays From Woman in the City*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2009. Print.
- "Negro History Week Kit." *Baltimore Afro-American* 13 Jan. 1951: 3. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 12 Apr. 2014.
- Nicolas, Armand. *Histoire de la Martinique: tome 2 - De 1848 À 1939*. N.p.: Editions L'Harmattan, 1996. Print.
- Ormerod, Beverly, and Jean-Marie Volet. "Ecrits autobiographiques et engagement: Le cas des Africaines d'expression Française." *The French review* 69.3 (1996): 426-444. Print.
- Patterson, Tiffany Ruby, and Robin D. G. Kelley. "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World." *African Studies Review* (2000): 11-45. Print.
- Paulette Nardal La Fierté D'être Nègresse*. Dir. Jil Servant. Les productions de la lanterne, 2005. DVD.
- Pénel, J.D. B. *Boganda, A. Darlan, J. Vialle: Trois Représentants Oubangiens Du Deuxième Collège 1946-1952*. Bangui: Université de Bangui, 1985. Print.
- Pierce, Steven, Rao, Anupama. *Discipline and the Other Body: Correction, Corporeality, Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.

- Quijano, Anibal. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1.3 (2000): 533-580. Print.
- Rabbitt, Kara. "In Search of the Missing Mother: Suzanne Césaire, Martiniquaise." *Research in African Literatures* 44.1 (2013): 36-54. Print.
- . "Suzanne Césaire's Significance for the Forging of a New Caribbean Literature." *The French Review* 79.3 (2006): 538-548. Print.
- Ransby, Barbara. *Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. Print.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Poésies*. Paris: L. Vanier, 1895. Web. 12 Aug. 2013.
http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettre_de_Rimbaud_à_Paul_Demeny_-_15_mai_1871.
- Robeson, Eslanda. "Africa- No Longer the Dark Continent." *New World Review* Aug. 1952: 3-6. Print.
- . "Félix Éboué: The End of an Era." *New World Review* Oct. 1952: 44-48. Print.
- . "How to Behave Abroad." *Baltimore Afro-American* 27 Aug. 1955: 22. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.
- . "The Rising Tide." *New World Review* Nov. 1952: 10. Print.
- . "What Is Communism? Mrs. Robeson Searches for Answer Across World." *Baltimore Afro-American* 8 Jul. 1950: 13. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.
- . "Which Way for Africa?" *New World Review* Dec. 1952: 24-29. Print.
- . "Women in the United Nations." *New World Review* Mar. 1958: 33. Print.
- Robeson, Eslanda Goode. *African Journey*. New York: John Day Company, 1945. Print.
- . "Black Paris." *Challenge* 1934: 9-12. Print.
- Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000. Print.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Qu'est-ce que la Littérature*. Paris: Gallimard, 1948. Print.
- . *What Is Literature?*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1949. *Internet Archive Digital Library*. Web. 2 Sep. 2014.
- Scharfman, Ronnie. "De grands poètes noirs: Breton rencontre les Césaire." *Nouveau Monde, Autres Mondes: Surréalisme & Amériques*. Ed. Daniel Lefort, Pierre Rivas, and Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron. Paris: Lachenal & Ritter, 1995. 231-239. Print.

- Senghor, Léopold Sédar. "Il n'y a pas de problème du métis." *Réveil* 8 May 1947: 3-4. Print.
- Serre, Jacques. *Hommes et destins. Tome XI Afrique noire*. Paris: Académie des sciences d'Outre-mer: l'Harmattan, 2011. Print.
- Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean. *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999. Print.
- . "Femme Negritude: Jane Nardal, La Depeche Africaine, and the Francophone New Negro." *Souls* 2.4 (2000): 8-17. Print.
- . *Negritude Women*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. Print.
- Sholle, David. "Resistance: Pinning Down a Wandering Concept in Cultural Studies Discourse." *Journal of Urban and Cultural Studies* 1.1 (1990): 87-105. Print.
- Sourieau, Marie-Agnès. "Suzanne Césaire et *Tropiques*: De la poésie cannibale à une poétique créole." *The French Review* 68.1 (1994): 69-78. Print.
- Steady, Filomina Chioma. "African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective." *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: A Reader*. Ed. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Andrea Benton Rushing. Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1996. 3-24. Print.
- Stephens, M. "What Is An Island? Caribbean Studies and the Contemporary Visual Artist." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 17.2 41 (January 1, 2013): 8-26. Print.
- Syrotinski, Michael. *Singular Performances: Reinscribing the Subject in Francophone African Writing*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002. Print.
- "The Female Touch." *Time* 15 Aug. 1960: 22. Print.
- "The Red Mata Hari? Woman of Mystery" *Baltimore Afro-American* 5 Dec. 1961: 5. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 20 July 2014.
- "The Woman Behind Lumumba." *Baltimore Afro-American* 15 Oct. 1960: A5. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 20 July 2014.
- Toumson, Roger and Simonne Henry-Valmore. *Aimé Césaire: Le nègre inconsolé: biographie*. Châteauneuf-le-Rouge: Vents d'ailleurs, 2002. Print.
- Travis, Dan. "Author Speaks After Rebuff: Racism in U.S. Rocks World--Mrs. Robeson." *Baltimore Afro-American* 22 Apr. 1950: 12. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.
- Turriffin, Jane. "Aoua Kéita and the Nascent Women's Movement in the French Soudan." *African Studies Review* 36.1 (April, 1993): 59. Print.

- Vaillant, Janet G. *Black, French, and African: A Life of Léopold Sédar Senghor*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990. Print.
- Vergès, Françoise. *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage*. Durham, [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 1999. Print.
- VVV: Poetry, Plastic Arts, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology*. New York: s.n., 1942. Print.
- Warner, Keith Q. *Critical Perspectives on Léon-Gontran Damas*. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988. Print.
- Watts, Richard. *Packaging Post/Coloniality the Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005. Print.
- Wilder, Gary. "Untimely Vision: Aime Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia." *Public Culture* 21.1 (January 1, 2009): 101-140. Print.
- Wilks, Jennifer M. *Race, Gender, and Comparative Black Modernism: Suzanne Lacascade, Marita Bonner, Suzanne Césaire, Dorothy West*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008. Print.