Echoes of Caliban’s Curse:
An Exploration of the Legacy of the Négritude Movement

by

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Explaining Caliban’s Curse: An Intro

Taking an African history class at the University of Paris-Diderot represented a union of my passions. I only ever conceived of myself as “African” after leaving Africa for college in America, and I wanted to learn more about this land that I embodied for so many people. As an unabashed Francophile, learning about it in the French context was fascinating to me. The Négritude movement lived in this intersection of Africa and France. I identified strongly with the first president of Senegal and champion of Négritude, Léopold Sedar Senghor. I too, am an African student studying in the West who loves poetry, and who is passionate about the development of his country. My familiarity with Senghor is both fuel and flame, and I had to negotiate it while writing this thesis: I admire him immensely while noticing how much, in the name of Négritude, he universalized a personal struggle and attempted to turn it into a national motto.

A big part of this thesis is making the argument that events in the life of Léopold Senghor ended up playing a major role in the way Négritude was spoken about and used in Senegal. I argue that personal experiences in the life of the Senegalese president rendered Négritude essential to his outlook on life and then he proceeded to project it on the young Senegalese state. Senghor was born in Joal, Senegal in 1906. He was the son of a wealthy Serer trader who managed to win the trust of the French exporters without losing the confidence of the
indigenous people in his village.\(^1\) Young Sedar, as Senghor was called, grew up in a devout Christian home and was well on his way to becoming a priest before his path was blocked by the racist head of his seminary.\(^2\) Senghor instead got the opportunity to study in France, and in 1928 he traveled to Paris and enrolled in the elite secondary school, Lycée Louis-le-grand.\(^3\) Feeling disconnected, lost, and isolated in Paris, Senghor described the next decade and a half of his life as “the sixteen years of wandering.”\(^4\) It was during this period that he met Césaire, Damas and the many other young Black students that served as thought partners in the nascent stages of Négritude. Senghor pursued further studies and went on to teach in France during the interwar period.\(^5\) Being a French citizen, Senghor was called up for military service during World War II and wound up being a prisoner of war for two years from 1940-1942.\(^6\) After being released due to illness, Senghor continued to write and teach in Paris before returning to Senegal in 1945 and beginning his political career.\(^7\)

Négritude started as a literary movement in the 1930s in France.\(^8\) Three Black students in Paris who were looking to revalorize African culture pioneered the movement. The cliché phrase “great minds think alike” takes on renewed meaning

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\(^2\) Ibid., 30.

\(^3\) Ibid., 67.


\(^7\) Vaillant, *Black, French, and African: A Life of LéOpold Sédar Senghor*.

when one looks at the brilliance and eventual success of the founders of Négritude.

Known today as “The three fathers of Négritude,” Léon Gontran Damas, Aimé Césaire and Senghor went on to have long, illustrious careers in poetry, academia and politics. In Paris, they gravitated towards each other based on their mutual zeal for Black literature. The writers of Négritude were avid students of the Harlem Renaissance. They read everyone from Langston Hughes to W.E.B DuBois and Countée Cullen. “One can assert that the real fathers of the Negro cultural renaissance in France were neither the writers of the West Indian tradition, nor the surrealist poets, nor the French novelists of the era between the two wars, but black writers of the United States.”

Indeed, the Harlem Renaissance provided a template for Black coming-to-consciousness movements.

The birth of the Négritude movement can be attributed to the founding of *L’Étudiant Noir [The black Student]* in 1937. This was a literary journal established by Aimé Césaire that served as a platform for the early work of many Black writers in France. In the first issue of this journal under the subcategory “Ideas,” Césaire called for racial consciousness and social revolution. “« Agissez », dit-on au nègre. Mais comme agir c’est créer, et comme créer c’est petrir et faire lever sa naturelle substance, le nègre de chez nous n’agira point.”

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11 Ibid., 11. [All translations are my own unless otherwise stated]
13 Ibid.
This was an indirect, exasperated call for Black people to be proactive about molding the type of life they want for themselves, regardless of the obstacles in the way. A great friend of Césaire and Senghor named Alioune Diop established a publishing house called Présence Africaine in 1947. This publishing house became somewhat of the headquarters of the Négritude movement, publishing the works of writers from all over the Black francophone world. Diop held that “any human being who does not affirm his personality is ignored” and posited Présence Africaine as an avenue for Black affirmation.

Négritude can be described in many ways because it was an ill-defined idea that was used in varied contexts. Négritude is defined as “the affirmation or consciousness of the value of black or African culture, heritage, and identity.” Senghor described it as a “humanism of the 20th century,” an affirmation of what African culture can contribute to global cultural dialogue. In his essay Qu’est-ce que la Négritude [What is Négritude] (1966), Senghor said it can be described as “Black personality” in reference to the same term used by African American poet, Langston Hughes. Senghor, Césaire and Damas referred to themselves as the militants of Négritude, and saw it as their mission to sing the praises of that which made Black people Black. This Black character was often denigrated and the fathers of Négritude

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14 Translation of this text was aided by Professor Meg Weisberg.
15 Kesteloot, Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude, 280.
16 Ibid., 284.
were defiant because of this, declaring: “Eia for those who never invented anything/ for those who never explored anything/ for those who never conquered anything/ but yield, captivated, to the essence of things”\textsuperscript{20} This quote from Césaire’s very famous poem \textit{Cahier d’un retour au pays natal (1939)} represents the violent affirmation that Négritude was.\textsuperscript{21} The confrontational militancy of Négritude is also represented in its name. The word “Nègre” is the French equivalent of the N-word and was no less a slur then than it is today. Négritude was weaponized language, an “\textit{Arme de combat pour la décolonisation}.”\textsuperscript{22} [Weapon for decolonization] The writers of the movement fought: against the idea that Africans were savages, against what Césaire called “the politics of assimilation,” and against the insidious inferiority complex that they felt had been instilled in Black people over the centuries.\textsuperscript{23} The literary movement of the 1930s that, as Léon Damas put it, “tried to avoid the absorption” of the French is what I call Classical Négritude.\textsuperscript{24}

The Négritude described above is different from a later rendition of the movement that I call Senghorien Negritude. This is the political conception that was born out of the Négritude movement in Senegal. Senghor tried his best to turn Négritude into a national motto of sorts, a rallying cry that Senegal could unite behind. Négritude was a personal ethos that Senghor attempted to universalize. At a

\textsuperscript{20} Aimé Césaire, Clayton Eshleman, and Annette Smith, \textit{Notebook of a Return to the Native Land}(Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 41.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Césaire, Eshleman, and Smith, \textit{Notebook of a Return to the Native Land}, 28.
1966 lecture in Montreal Senghor stated “Cette idéologie fondée sur des réalités physiques et spirituelles a soutenu bien de peuple, je dis toute une race depuis le fin de la Prêmier Guerre mondial.” 25 [This ideology, founded on physical and spiritual realities, has supported a whole race of people since the beginning of the First World War]. Senghor failed to appreciate that his experiences in France made Négritude a necessity for him, but it was not necessarily the case for the rest of the Senegalese people. In the speech that newly-elected President Senghor gave on Senegal’s independence day, he described Négritude as a combination of French socialism and traditional “negro-African communalism.”26 Senghorien Négritude is not literary. “It is a politicized version of Classical Négritude, one that posits itself as a goal that past Senegalese national heroes have been pursuing for years without even knowing it.27

In order to paint as comprehensive a picture of Négritude and its legacy as possible, this thesis will analyze the movement from four different angles: Politics, immigration, education and art. These categories form the four chapters of the thesis and are generally the four main components to Senghor’s conception of Négritude. Senghorian Négritude was used as a rhetorical tool, spoken about in so many different contexts that it often requires definitions specific to each particular chapter. It was also necessary for this thesis to be interdisciplinary so as to fully analyze this dynamic and multifaceted topic. Négritude was both a literary movement and a political philosophy. The questions raised in this thesis are therefore addressed by both

25 Senghor, Liberté, 3, 90.
27 Ibid.
analyzing literary texts (novels, essays, speeches, etc.) and piecing together a narrative based on social and intellectual history.

When talking about Négritude in the context of politics, it is a pan-African notion that promotes African solidarity. In one of the many definitions he gave this concept, Senghor said that “Négritude is the sum total of the values of civilization of the African world.”28 This entailed regional cooperation and an affinity for federalism. When I talk about Négritude in the chapter on politics, I am referring to a combination of the characteristics of African socialism according to Senghor: communalism, religion and an eagerness to cooperate with foreign nations.

In the chapter on immigration, Senghorien Négritude leans more towards the revalorization of African culture. In the intersection between immigration and Négritude are the seeds of movements like Négritude that speak to the contemporary moment. In this chapter, Négritude is focused on the past and the celebration of ancient African civilizations. While highlighting the breaks of the more contemporary Franco-African literary movements from Négritude, the second chapter also shows that Césaire, Senghor and Damas helped to lay the foundation for the new movements to exist.

My third chapter is on the marriage between Négritude and education, where Senghor speaks about the movement in an effort to highlight the intuition that he claimed made Africans different from Europeans. Senghorien Négritude taught that Africans were fundamentally different from Europeans and therefore needed to learn in a different way. The Négritude in this chapter was a mechanism to nurture the

Senegalese “New Negro” by incorporating aspects of traditional African society into formalized education.  

My fourth and final chapter looks at the centrality of art in the Négritude movement, and how Senghor defines Negritude as the African essence that causes its people to inherently be good at art. In Qu’est-ce que la Négritude, Senghor stated “Mais l’art, on le sait, est le domaine où règne le Nègre.”  

[We know that art is the domain of the Negro] Négritude as regards art is more a personal ethos and inspiration for artists to create pieces that celebrate their culture. Senghor went to great lengths to stress the role that African culture played in the development of Western art. He evoked Picasso and Rimbaud as examples of iconic artists who were influenced by African artistry, and seemed to posit that with proper patronage African art could make even greater contributions on the world stage.

The paradox of Négritude was the poet’s partiality for France despite all the literary work fighting for independence. Even as Négirtude was supposedly a strong opponent to French imperialism and the racism of its civilizing mission, both classical and Senghorien Negritude were centered on Paris. This manifested itself in Senghor being one of the founders of la francophonie, the organization that represents and connects French-speaking countries worldwide. Senghor described it as a “Commonwealth à la française.”  

It was no secret that Senghor had a “weakness” for France, a fact that he confirmed in his poem dedicated to his former classmate and

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29 Ibid., 19.
30 Senghor, Liberté, 3, 99.
good friend, President Georges Pompidou. The Senegalese poet’s admiration for French culture also showed in his policies: his reluctance to break away from French West African federation at independence, his insistence that there were positive aspects of colonialism, the decision to remain economically tied to France, etc. The paradox of Négritude is in the Janus face of its propagators who, at a time, derided the French for stripping African civilization of its dignity and at the same time favoured French culture and its institutions.

This thesis argues that Négritude was a personal ethos that Senghor attempted to universalize in Senegal. What started off as a mission to revalorize Blackness turned into a prescriptive, arbitrary national mantra that worked to co-opt the narrative of the Senegalese masses. The contemplation of Négritude helped Senghor work through the dissonance of an African student living in France at the apogee of the Mission Civilisatrice— that is the colonial-era belief that the European imperial powers had a duty to “civilize” dependent populations and territories. I see Senghorien Négritude as a manifestation of Senghor mistakenly assuming that the experience of Black students in the diaspora is the same as that of Africans on the continent. Aside from demonstrating this breakdown in communication, this thesis will also show that the legacy of Négritude, both classical and Senghorien, can be used to further diversity and multiculturalism in education and the arts.

The use of French in the Négritude movement, as opposed to indigenous languages of Africa or the Caribbean, was an attempt to appropriate the language of

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the colonizer. The French forbid the use of local languages in their colonies and mandated that French be used in all official capacities. French colonizers believed that “all other languages were nothing but folklore, gibberish, obscurantism, mumbo-jumbo, and seeds of the destruction of the Republic.” The defiance of the Négritude writers defiance of imperialism through language is reminiscent of a powerful moment in act 1 scene 2 of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Caliban, a subhuman monster, the son of a witch and the devil, a slave and a prisoner on his own island; spits at one of his captors, Miranda:

Miranda: *Abhorred slave...I pitied thee, took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour one thing or other. When thou didst not, savage, know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like a thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes with words that made them known...*

Caliban: You taught me language, and my profit on’t is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language!  

Négritude is, at its core, an echo of Caliban’s curse. It is defiance expressed in a language that Africans were forced to learn. By appropriating the French language Négritude turns one of the oppressor’s greatest tools against him. Classical Négritude, especially, firmly rejects the notion that Africans are somehow indebted to their colonizers, and instead valorizes the resilience of African culture in the face of such violent erasure.

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Introduction: On Senegal, Being a Bridge

I imagine the people in the stadium were drunk with euphoria and pride in equal parts. I imagine Senghor cutting a distinguished figure right in the center of the soccer pitch, and his voice ringing out through the speakers. It is September the 6th, 1960 and for the first time in over a century the people of Senegal were going to rule themselves. The first thing you notice about Léopold Sédar Senghor’s independence speech is that he uses both the feminine and masculine forms of the French word for “Senegalese”. The speech is addressed to “Sénégalaises, Sénégalais”, and anyone who is familiar with French grammar will tell you that it takes a very deliberate, conscious decision to add both genders when talking to a crowd of both men and women. The second most striking thing about the speech was just how well it was written. The perks of having a president who is an academic and a philosopher (and will go on to become the first black man to be inducted in the French Academy) is that you get to have the most poetic and rousing of independence speeches. Senghor did not fail to strike the right cords: he praised the richness of the nation’s culture, marveled at the abundant opportunities of the future, talked about the peaceful transition from imperial colony to independent country, all the while kindling the fires of nationalism. “Dear Old Senegal, it is time for us to wash you of the slander that has disfigured your face and rid you of your youth,” Senghor cried. He warned against Senegalese exceptionalism and put forward that it was the duty of

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2 Ibid., 6.
Senegal to defend Africa. “For Africa is not an idea but a knot of realities,” one that was valuable and needed to be treated as such.\(^3\)

Aside from how rich in allegory and alliteration Senghor’s independence speech was, there were other notable peculiarities. Senghor says that Senegal has historically been a “hyphen”, a link between different worlds that marries them.\(^4\) He purports that Senegal has always acted as a hyphen between the black world and the “arabo-berbère” world. His speech talked about the ties that Senegal has always had with Morocco and how this needs to be replicated in Tunisia and Algeria.\(^5\) Most notable, however, is how the same imagery is used when referring to Europe and Africa. Senghor was proud of the role that Senegal has played in being a bridge between France and West-Africa. “We have been a hyphen between Europe and Africa, and just as we have acclimatized ourselves to the humanism and culture of the West, we have also grafted European socialism to our own, ancient African communalism: Négritude.”\(^6\)

In this last sentence, Senghor posits the cornerstone of his political ideology and the subject of this thesis. How successful was this ideological graft and what fruits did it produce? Why was Négritude a worthy tool to drive Senghor’s politics? How did Négritude and French West Africa converse? This chapter will look to show that Négritude as a political ideology in Senegal ended up being prescriptive: a cooption of the narrative that he wanted so badly to reclaim.

\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid., 4.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Senghor, "Message De Monsieur Leopold Sedar Senghor Président De La République Au Peuple Sénégalais."
In order to situate the questions that this thesis will look to tackle, it will be important to understand the political climate from which the Négritude movement was propagated. Négritude was a literary movement born out of the discontent of black students in Paris in the interwar period. This chapter will look at how this literary conception was turned into a political ideology. What was this “humanism of the 20th century”—as Senghor called it—propagated in response to? The chapter will start off with an overview of Senghorian politics and what sort of policies came from his conception of Négritude. I will capture these policies and their application by analyzing Senghor’s _On African Socialism_, two essays that were transcribed from speeches that he delivered at the first Young Seminar of the Party of African Federation.

I believe Senghor really did have the interests of his country at heart, and do not doubt that he was trying to inspire a cultural revival in his country. The fact that I am arguing that Négritude was misplaced in Senegal speaks more to the tunnel vision of Senghor than it does to the nature of his intentions. Négritude was useful in Paris and was very strongly related to the experience of African students and workers in Paris, but was a prescriptive solution to African’s very different conditions. This thesis will look to explore the limits of the usefulness of the Négritude movement in Senegal. I will critique this concept through the work of Ousmane Sembene, a renowned Senegalese writer and filmmaker who produced some iconic work at the same time that Senghor was active in politics. _God’s bits of wood_ by Sembène is a novel based on the railway strikes of 1947-48 on the Dakar-Niger line in West Africa. I will use this novel to get a sense of the

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political climate of the time and will also outlay Sembène’s vicious criticism of Senghor and his Négritude.

I will then close out this chapter by evoking Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak and her take on the narratives of post-colonial societies and their “subaltners” in her essay *Can The Subaltern Speak?*[^10] I will incorporate my own critique of Négritude à la Senghor in the argument of Spivak and show that Senghor co-opted, albeit unintentionally, the different narratives of the Senegalese people to fit his own outlook.

**Senghor’s Domestic Policy**

Senghor elaborates on his conception of a socialism particular to Senegal in an essay entitled *Senegalese Socialism.*[^11] This essay was filled with references of Négritude and it was clear to see how much this concept was still affecting his way of relating with the world even four decades after starting the movement in France. By the time he wrote *On Senegalese Socialism* he had been president of the West African nation for over a decade, and the leader talked at length about his government’s vision of the way forward. Senghor talked about Marx and Engel’s writings, how they critiqued Hegel and Feuerbach, and laid out a plan specific to Western Europe in the 19th century. He touched on Lenin and his revision of Marxism to show how the classical Marxism could be re-conceptualized. For Senghor, the socialism specific to Senegal was as natural and as necessary as the ones in other parts of the world. He rejected “prefabricated models” stating, “we have not allowed ourselves to be seduced by Russian, Chinese, or

Scandinavian models.”¹² This was a manifestation of Négritude in that Senghor posited that the Senegalese socialism would offer another model, one that could legitimately be considered in the same conversation as other global models for socialism.

Senghor’s socialism was about discovering true independence through following paths of governance specific to Senegal and its people. Négritude, in conjunction with Senegalese socialism, was to aid the untangling of Senegal from Colonialism’s residue. Senghor was an Africanist and had belief in Africa’s ability to thrive on its own, but felt that it only made sense for Senegal to stay close to France. This paradox is an extension of the contradictions in the Négritude movement, how the movement was supposed to uphold the French language while simultaneously breaking down the barriers that it constructed. But for Senghor, it was reductive to think of colonialism as merely a sum of errors and destruction. The imperial conquest was a revolution and “like any revolution it brings positive substitute values; it destroys in order to reconstruct.”¹³ The leader saw it as the responsibility of the liberated African nations to assimilate the positive aspects of colonialism and build their governments with them. Remaining connected with France was not only one of the conditions of independence when it was granted in 1960, but also the most beneficial move for Senegal if it was going to make up the ground it lost during the years of subjugation. For Senghor, Senegal was entering the world scene at a comparative disadvantage and needed all the intercontinental assistance it could get. “We cannot dismiss the other continents, especially Europe and America, without increasing our relative backwardness.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid., 91.
Senghorien Négritude encouraged reaching outside of Senegal to strengthen the interior of the country.

**Négritude and Marxist Class Struggles in Senegal**

Another distinct aspect of Senegal’s socialism as a manifestation of Senghorian Négritude was the fact that class struggles did not fit into the framework of development. The main reason Senghor went to such great lengths to discuss Marxism-Leninism in *Senegalese Socialism* is that he wanted to show how badly it suited Africa, and Senegal in particular. In discussing scientific socialism, Senghor showed how the idea of a dictatorship of the proletariat was not useful in a country that had neither bourgeoisie nor nobility. “To take Senegal as an example; there was in fact no proletariat, since there was no bourgeoisie; there was no capital, no saving, therefore, no capitalists.” So talking about class struggles in such a society was detrimental because unity among the whole nation was so important. The problem for Senegal was not to eliminate classes but to bridge the gap between developed and underdeveloped nations. Violence also had no place in Senegalese socialism because of related reasons; there were no capitalist structures to destroy. Violence would only be a distraction from the tasks at hand and would go against the unity that Négritude sought to achieve.

**Négritude and Religion**

The role of religion in Senegal’s socialism is also something that makes it markedly distinct from other forms of the political ideology. Senegal’s socialism is essentially religious just like the overwhelming majority of Africans, and Senghor taught that this political ideology will be compatible with the teachings of Mohammed or Jesus.

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16 Ibid.
Christ. One of the thinkers Senghor draws heavily from is Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard was the first to develop the framework that thought of political activity as trying to reach what he called “well-being” and “maximum-being.” Well-being would apply to economic, social and cultural development that is found in developed countries. Maximum-being has God at its center, and is described as the ultra-reflective life.\(^{17}\)

“Since Marx, since the decline of capitalism and the emergence of socialism, we have been at the threshold of the age of ultra-reflection, which will lead us from well-being to maximum-being before we are consummated in God.”\(^{18}\) Senghor holds that the negro-African is predisposed to internationalism because of the love and brotherhood that his religion preaches, and Senegal’s socialism provides for this.

**Critique of Senghor’s Domestic Policy**

The piece on “The African Road to Socialism” was actually the speech delivered at the first Young Seminar of the Party of African Federation. This is fitting because everybody in there was in a leadership position and could engage with the issues he was talking about, and at the level at which he was talking about them. One of the main critiques of Senghor was that he was detached from the over 90% of the population that was not as educated or as “cultured” as he was.\(^{19}\) He said culture was more important than everything, even politics, but not everyone had the same definition of culture as him.\(^{20}\) It would be shallow to fault Senghor for laying out an in depth analysis of Marx at the beginning of *Senegalese Socialism*, but it begs the question of who he was writing

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., 142.


\(^{20}\) Ibid., 209.
for. Was it the Senegalese public for whom this socialism was supposedly for or the
West, and the select few other Africans who could engage with his speech on equal
terms?

One of the main distinctions of Senegal’s socialism according to Senghor was that
it was not based on class struggle because that was inapplicable in Senegalese society. He
explained that this was so because Senegal was basically all made up of the proletariat.\textsuperscript{21}
But if there is one place in Colonial West Africa were class inequalities would exist, it
would be Senegal. The whole notion of \textit{évolués}, native Africans who had become
cultured enough to attain French citizenship, was predicated on dividing the country
according to class. Senegal is home to the \textit{École Normale}, a prestigious university that
was built to serve the whole of the AOF, the French federation of West Africa; it is hard
to believe that with such an institution churning out teachers, lawyers and doctors,
Senegal did not have a bourgeoisie. More than anything else, the attempt to obscure class
distinctions in post-colonial Senegal was not only an attempt to keep the state from
violent revolts and uprisings, but also a way to distance himself from Soviet communism
and align more with the West. This shows clearly how Senghor would use Negritude to
support and drive his political values.

Léopold Senghor was not opposed to the idea of recognizing the benefits of
colonialism. He thought it fine as long as the next step was then “to integrate, to
assimilate the complementary values with our own to make new blood.”\textsuperscript{22} This not only

\textsuperscript{21} Senghor, "Senegalese Socialism."
shows the somewhat disjointed nature of Négritude philosophy, it also stresses how Senghor was careful never to criticize France more than he absolutely needed to.

**Senghor’s Foreign Policy**

Senghor fought valiantly for African unity in the form of federalism, and this was characteristic of his whole foreign policy. Negritude had pan-Africanist tendencies, and Senghor tried everything he could to make this term be meaningful not only in his own country, but in the region as a whole. The president held that Africa must work towards a “United States of Africa” if it is to develop at the pace it needs to. Senghor was known for his nonalignment when it came to the cold war, but his version of nonalignment was very thinly veiled support and endorsement of the West. Senghor thought the US would be more beneficial to the continent than the Soviet Union, and he distanced himself on a number of occasions from the East. Senghor was indeed a respected man in Africa- he often served as mediator in a number of conflicts in North Africa. But the Senegalese leader’s reputation of being the darling of France and pushing a pro-French agenda followed him throughout his presidency and his relations with other states.

Senghor never could hide his fondness for France and French culture. He had very strong personal ties to the metropolis and this spilled over into his politics. Senghor was actually classmates with former French president George Pompidou. Senghor wrote a very famous poem called *À George et Claude Pompidou*. The poem is written in the form of a prayer to God, and in it he admits several times that he “has a great weakness for France.”23 This weakness is on full display once one analyses Senghor’s politics and it did not do him any favors in the eyes of his peer leaders. A 1978 article on Senghor’s

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23 Jones, *Voices of Négritude: The Expression of Black Experience in the Poetry of Senghor, CéSaire & Damas*. 
foreign policy shows that “His proposals have been dismissed by some critics as the obligatory statements of a decidedly pro-French African, but it would be misleading to consider them as such.” Senghor considered it the only option that he had. He would allow French forces and business to operate in Senegal, sometimes even at to the detriment of Senegalese interests. The way he saw it, if Africa did not stay connected to the metropolis then she had no chance of ever developing and bridging the gap between her and the developed world.

A foreign policy heavily influenced by the philosophy of Négritude was always going to be in favour of federalism on the African continent. Senghor tried on several occasions to form alliances of different kinds to unify and stabilize the continent. One of Senghor’s most public fall-outs had been with Modibo Keita, the President of Mali. Senghor spearheaded the Mali federation between Senegal and former French Sudan (today Mali). On the surface, these two leaders believed in a lot of the same things and had the same values: they both pushed forward the idea of non-alignment during the cold war, even though it can be argued that only Keita actually made this into policy. Both Keita and Senghor also had very essentialist theories about a socialism specific to Africa. In a famous 1961 speech at Chatham house in the United Kingdom, Keita talked about how Malian people in the villages worked collectively and how this is indicative of an inherent socialist disposition. “They have societies, called farming societies, which cultivate the fields of the village in rotation, and sometimes they have one collective field

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25 Ibid., 51.
26 Modibo Keita, "The Foreign Policy of Mali," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 37, no. 4 (1961).
which they work and harvest to cover the common expenses. We consider it would be bad policy to break down this traditional pattern of collective life;”  

For all the similarities that these two leaders had the one colossal difference between them was their views on the role that France should play in post-colonial African society. Keita was pretty militant about being independent in every sense of the word; he wanted every aspect of African culture to be run and controlled by Africans. This was the root of the reason why the Malian Federation failed.

Senghor talked about how Africa ought to engage with France in the changing political climate quite a lot in his speeches on African socialism. According to him, the aspects of imperialism that broke the Black spirit and preached superiority over Africa and its people needed to be combated. The complexes that were produced from these ideas needed to be deconstructed on an intellectual and philosophical level. But Senghor also warned that Africans should not throw the baby out with the bath water. Senghor felt that France’s presence in Africa had some redeeming qualities and that these ought to be exploited and utilized for the betterment of the people. These views stretched beyond Senghor and were held by a fair amount of African leaders at the time.

“With the failure of his first attempt at regional federation, [Senghor] made a fresh start when he led Senegal into a looser grouping with twelve nations in the Union of African states and Madagascar, then with twenty nations in the Monrovia group, and subsequently, in May, 1963, into the 32-nation organization of African Unity created at

\[\text{\textsuperscript{27}}\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{28}}\text{Senghor, "Senegalese Socialism."}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{29}}\text{Tony Chafer, The End of Empire in French West Africa: France’s Successful Decolonization? (Oxford;New York:: Berg, 2002), 185.}\]
Addis Ababa. Senghor played a big part in the coming together of these nations, clearly guided by his African humanist philosophies. At the first summit of the Organization of African Union in Addis Ababa Senghor and Keita embraced in symbolic reconciliation of the two countries. The Senegalese leader was diametrically opposed to any form of separation or secession. He wished to maintain the border integrity of every nation, especially the ones in his region. He tried his best to promote good relations between feuding countries like Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Mauritania. Another part of this federalism story was that it was supposed to tie former French West Africa to France. “The BCEAO represents the French West African Currency Union, tying a common currency (the Communauté Financière de l’Afrique franc, or CFA franc) to the French franc and ensures a degree of monetary stability.” Senghor was actually initially against total independence from France, but when it became clear that that was never going to work, he proposed that French West Africa remained a federation.

Senegal’s nonalignment was more a symbolic one than anything else. Senghor was quite clearly aligned with the West as he had spent so much time there, and negritude was built around the French language. But this, explicitly said, would not have sat well with other African leaders in the region. Marxism was such a fixture in Africa at this time. And so Senghor chose to push negritude at this point, and the idea that neither Western style democracy nor soviet communism would suffice for Africa. An article in Africa Report described it this way: “He sees Africa as becoming the arena for a ‘triple, economic, military and cultural conflict between the East and the West, with Africa’s

32 Ibid., 48.
salvation lying only in a socialist and democratic path adapted to an African context. While such rhetoric might be dismissed coming from any other Third World leader, coming from the founder of “negritude,” it has considerable credibility.”

**Senghor’s Grand Strategy**

The evidence that I have produced speaks to a man who was internally conflicted, found something that worked for him, and tried to prescribe it to the rest of Africa. I think negritude bridged several gaps in the personal life of Léopold Senghor, but was neither applicable nor relevant to post-colonial Africa. Negritude was used by a man who had been away for so long that he needed an ideological tool to reconnect him with his people. Senghor also needed negritude to keep Senegal together. The more disenfranchised the public got, the more Senghor seemed to lean into the tenets of negritude. Senghor held that culture was the most central aspect of any society, but I doubt the ordinary Senegalese cared too much about culture when they were jobless and trying to feed their families. It must also have been disillusioning for the few professionals who could understand what Senghor’s conception of Socialism actually meant. “Senegal’s average annual growth of GNP per capita between 1960 and 1977 was -0.3 percent. A recent but unpublished World Bank study shows that Senegal has the third-worst income-distribution situation in Africa (even worse than South Africa’s).”

With inequality this bad it is bound to have been frustrating to hear the president gloss over it and pretend like there were no social classes in Senegal in order to propagate an “African socialism.”

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Senghor took pride in the fact that Senegal acted as a link, “a hyphen”, between Europe and Africa, and wanted to keep the link strong.  

“Senegal has been one of the strongest promoters of multi-lateral development assistance to this area but at the same time has increased its efforts at obtaining bilateral assistance, particularly from the United States and Japan.”

Even though his was a stance of nonalignment, he had pretty good relations with the American government. He was received by President Kennedy in the White House, and courted Japan for aid. Senghor’s Grand Strategy also seemed to be built on a sense of security gotten from federations. He made serious strides in getting the African states to unite in one form or fashion.

**Ousmane Sembène and God’s Bits of Wood**

*God’s bits of wood* is a novel based on the 1947-48 railway workers strike on the Dakar-Niger line. This book tells the story of the vision of a railway workers union to attain better living and working conditions for its members. The effects of this vision on the community of union leaders, colonial administrators, workers and their families are a huge part of the narrative. The story starts with a community meeting on which a strike is decided upon and talks us through the hardships and hurdles that had to be maneuvered before the strikers had their demands met.

The story is told from the perspectives of different characters and is set in three different towns in contemporary Senegal and Mali: Thiès, Dakar and Bamako. Sembène based the characters in* God’s bits of wood* on real actors in and around the movement.

34 Senghor, "Message De Monsieur Leopold Sedar Senghor Président De La République Au Peuple Sénégalais."
35 Kessler, "Senghor's Foreign Policy: Preparation for a Transition [Policies under Senegal President Léopold Senghor]," 47.
Bakamoyo, Lahbib and Doudou are very much the leaders of the strike and work in different capacities to effectively be the heart, brains and soul of the several-month-long boycott. Bakayoko was an especially key figure. He was a charismatic leader who was also a beloved husband, father, son and lover, respected and revered among the people of Thiès. The author painted the picture of a man “whose shadow reached into every house, touching every object…His words and his ideas were everywhere, and even his name filled the air like an echo.”

No summary or analysis of this iconic piece of literature would be complete without highlighting the important role that women characters played in it. Through the wisdom of Ramatoulaye and N’deye Touti, the strength Mame Sofi and Penda, the author gives a unique agency to the women of Senegal. It is made very clear that without the resilience of the women this strike would not have been a success. In addition to having literally no source of income due to the strike, Thiès had its water and grain supply cut off by the colonial government. To say the community was stretched and relationships were strained would be an understatement. The novel shows how hardship changed roles and different social dynamics within the community.

Sembène filled this novel with examples of instances when women demonstrated their resolve and dynamism. From Ramatoulaye thumbing her nose at the indifference of the religious figures and killing a sacred ram, to Mame Sofi rallying the women of her neighbourhood to fight the police, there were countless episodes that demonstrated something of a rise of women. Probably the most telling episode of the resolve of women

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37 Ibid., 64.
38 Ibid., 34.
is when they decide to march from Thiès to Dakar. This procession of women was led by the strength of Panda and the quiet resolve of the blind Maimouna. It is safe to say that the disposition of the entire strike was encompassed in this one march. The idea of a women’s march was new, but was nevertheless embarked on with enthusiasm at the outset. But as the journey wore on fatigue started to set in. During the course of the long journey from Thiès to Dakar there was in-fighting, lulls in morale, spats of jealousy and one woman even had a seizure. The struggles of the March to Dakar are not unlike those of the general strikers: some within the movement were legitimately trying to undermine it. But it took the sheer grit and will of the leaders of both the general strike and the March to Dakar within it to make the movement a success.

On the one hand, *Gods bits of wood* portrays an important moment in the imperial mission of France: The *auxiliaries* workers attempted to shutdown the railway in 1938 and this was thwarted pretty comprehensively by the colonial power. The 1947 standoff between the workers union and the government must have felt like it represented a shifting of dynamics in the relationship of France and its subjects in West Africa. To be clear, no one was thinking about independence just yet, and the main goal of the strikers was the *cadre unique*, a single scale of wages for Africans and white Frenchmen alike.

Frederick Cooper put forward a strong critique of *God’s Bits of Wood* in his article entitled “Our Strike.” Cooper purports the idea that our reading of Sembène’s

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39 Ibid., 186.
41 Ibid., 82.
novel has been too literal, and that in actual fact the strike did not have as big an effect on the gender or racial social dynamics in Senegalese society. The author of this article downright questions the authenticity of some of the episodes Sembène included in *God’s Bits of Wood*. Cooper’s resistance to the novel is born of apprehension that historians and students alike might take literally some of the consequences that the narrative in the book puts forward.\(^{43}\)

This tension between reality and fiction in *God’s Bits of Wood* begs the question of what Sembène was trying to achieve by taking liberties with the reality in the novel. What does the alleged embellishment of that moment tell us about the socio-political environment in Senegal? Firstly, it is worth noting that any attempt to answer this question risks reading into poetic license too much. It was not uncommon of Sembène’s genre of writers to build stories around fact and history with fictional characteristics. Novelists like Ahmadou Kourouma, Chinua Achebe and Hampaté Bâ all wrote books focused on particular moments that were not necessarily factual historical accounts. But I think that it is still worth considering this question to better understand the political milieu in which Négritude operated in. Was Sembène trying to get at something?

I think to answer this question we have to delve a little deeper into the question of who the author was. Sembène is today considered one of the brightest stars of post World War II Senegalese literature and film. In many ways, *God’s bits of woods* is the author’s magnum opus. It is the second novel that he wrote and was released in 1960, the same year that Senegal got its independence. By 1956, Sembène had been a war veteran, a

\(^{43}\) Ibid.
dockworker, a railway worker and a bricklayer.\textsuperscript{44} He moved to Marseille in 1946 and lived in both Senegal and Marseille for about 10 years.\textsuperscript{45} He was a jack-of-all-trades and took every opportunity as it presented itself to him. A lot of Sembène’s pieces of work are based on experiences that he himself had while working in these various jobs. \textit{The Black Docker} (1956) draws on his experience working on the docks of Marseilles. His award winning film \textit{Camp de Thiaroye} tells the story of a bloody repression of a soldier revolt, and even though he was not in this specific camp he could definitely speak to the condition of being an African war veteran in Senegal. The massacre there hit home for him. It is clear from analyzing his work that Sembène always wrote from a very deep personal perspective.

Even more telling is the fact that Sembène had some pretty strong Marxist leanings. All his works seem to intentionally stress that he was a man of the people. Sembène was actually aligned with the French Communist Party for a short while. \textit{God’s bits of wood} can reasonably be classified as an epic because of the portrayal of the masses as heroes. And herein lies a possible explanation for some of the discrepancies that Cooper found in Sembène’s novel: Sembène was intent on underlining and stressing the strength of the people. In his critique of \textit{God’s bits of wood} Cooper denies finding evidence that the march on Dakar by the women at the end of the novel ever happened. This might have been Sembène’s own way of situating the strength of the resistance movement firmly in the people. \textit{God’s bits of wood} was written at a time when the knots of colonization were coming undone and many a political leader was trying to claim the

\textsuperscript{44} G. D. Killam, \textit{Literature of Africa}(Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004).
credit for this. In adding a women’s march that never existed in his book, Sembène might have been working to remind his readers that the people who actually got results were categorically not the men vying for office who were trying to take the credit for it. In expressing such sentiments even before the moment of independence had come, Sembène displayed remarkable foresight for the political machinations of post-independence Senegal. When his Marxist political views are taken into consideration, Sembène’s “march on Dakar” makes sense as an ideological statement.

*God’s bits of wood* did a lot of work to show that the African people were not a monolith, and that there were very many divergent opinions about the strike in the Senegalese community. Sembène, having experienced the strike and its effects himself, was not about to let anyone else co-opt the narrative and make it their own. In characters like Bakayoko, Doudou and Lahbib, Sembène recreated actual leaders of the strike who were doing work to mobilize, inspire and drive the movement at the grassroots level. He attributed to them characters of charismatic leaders, spiritual voices and intellectual architects of the strike. Sembène’s portrayal of the religious leaders was also very striking. The author made characters like El Hajj Mabigue look like cohorts of the administration who used their positions in society to discourage the strikers. Cooper, as noted above, says that this was not necessarily always true, and that a lot of the marabouts covertly offered support to the strikers.

*Ousmane Sembène and Marxism.*

By 1962, the hints of disdain that Sembène might have had for the bourgeoning African ruling class had turned into unabashed hatred. The older Sembène grew, the more ingrained his Marxist sentiments and philosophy became. Sembène absolutely despised
Négritude. He did not like how this philosophy seemed to portray a primitive Africa with none of the complexities of other societies. A common critique of Négritude that still persists to this day is that it was disturbingly close to racist European theorists who suggested that blacks were devoid of logical thinking and only approached life in a sensual fashion. Sembène held similar sentiments but expressed them in terms more in line with his own ideological frame of mind. Sembène claimed that Négritude was “a tactical move to deprive the African workers of their gains.”Whatever misgivings were hinted at in God’s bits of wood were exclaimed in an interview he gave for an article called “The Novelist-Critic of Africa” in West Africa. In the interview, Sembène bemoaned how badly the African worker was oppressed in the post-independence era. The writer claimed that judging from how disillusioned the African workers were with their governments, if they were given a chance they would go back to colonial governments. According to Sembène Négritude was “racist, deviationist, fake, retrogressive, a kind of intellectual intoxication being used by the rising bourgeoisie in Africa.” This kind of vitriol makes even Frantz Fanon’s infamous sharp and blunt criticism of Négritude seem tame.

Sembène’s interpretation of the Négritude movement speaks to a complete breakdown in communication between the leadership and its people, something that is also evinced by the work of Mariama Bâ. Again, it would be naïve to suggest that

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
Léopold Senghor did not actually value the revalorization of Africa and its culture. He was convinced that Négritude was the right way to approach such a difficult task. But the people this was supposed to aid in finding their place in the global cultural conversation did not seem to understand it. Sembène, for one, analyzed it through a very Marxist lens and concluded “the advocates of Négritude lean to a cultural past that favoured the caste system, feudalism and the spiritual oppression of the masses.”

Whereas other Senegalese undoubtedly shared these sentiments, I think that it would be safe to say that there were many different opinions and critiques of the Senghorian government. Mariama Bâ’s work talks about the heightened disillusionment of women in the post-colonial climate. *So long a letter* (1981) was an intricately woven story of a widow in Senegal, how she deals with the death of her unfaithful husband and how she hangs on to an old friendship to center her through the storm.

It is also, in many ways, a reflection on the tenure of the first President of Senegal and how his presidency might have made women even more dissatisfied with their status in the society because of the unfulfilled promises of independence. “Nearly twenty years of independence! When will we have the first female minister involved in the decisions concerning the development of our country?” exclaimed Ramatoulaye, the widowed protagonist of Bâ’s novel. Mariama Bâ thought about Négritude and its practitioner in Senegal from a feminist perspective. Even though both Mariama Bâ and Ousmane Sembène criticized Senghor and his government from different vantage points, they both show how disconnected a lot of the Senegalese people felt from Négritude.

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51 Sembène, "Novelist-Critic of Africa."
In Senegal, Can the Subaltern Speak?

*Can the Subaltern Speak?* is an iconic essay in the field of Subaltern Studies, that is, post-colonial and post-imperial societies.53 This particular essay uses a social theoretic framework to talk about the fact that oppressed and underrepresented people, by definition, are spoken for by the oppressor or by local elites. Spivak lends a particular feminist bent to this piece and focuses on the condition of “the third-world woman” in her society. The topic that drives *Can the Subaltern Speak?* is the question of female self-immolation in the face of a husband’s death in Hindu tradition. “The Hindu widow ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolated herself upon it. This is widow sacrifice.” 54 Spivak talks about how the British worked to abolish this practice definitively in the name of defending the free choice of the widows. This process of female self-immolation was called *suttee* and offended the senses of the British. She quotes British official correspondence as saying “The practice of suttee…is revolting to the feeling of human nature.”55

In laying out her argument Spivak uses a Freudian epistemic critique to show that there were two questions at play here, neither of which had the third-world woman as subject. “Faced with the dialectically interlocking sentences that are constructible as ‘White men are saving brown women from brown men’ and ‘The women wanted to die,’ the post-colonial woman intellectual asks the question of simple semiosis-What does this mean?-and begins to plot a history.” These two statements were epistemic tropes, à la Freud, that reveal the politics of the writer. Spivak uses them to show that neither the

54 Ibid., 97.
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British and their heroic complexes nor the Hindu and their “parody of nostalgia for lost origins” give space for the actual women in question to speak. “Speak”, here, referring to the power that comes with narrative. These narratives were effectively coopted by both the British colonialists and the Hindu “masculinists.” To be clear, Spivak is not interested in positing her own opinion on the matter. She merely uses this discussion to show that the subaltern is spoken over, and spoken for.

This argument drives at the heart of the problematic nature of the negritude movement, as political ideology. Negritude, at its roots, is an effort to get back the narrative that has been put out there of the African as sauvage, uncivilized. The entire aesthetic behind works like Senghor’s *Chants d’Ombre* (1956) and Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1960) was to revalorize the idea of blackness. This movement was born from defiance at the fact that the French ultimately viewed the African as sub-human. Negritude, as a political ideology, kept the elements of the early-movement that spoke to reclaiming a destructive story of African culture. It is important to remember that even though the Harlem Renaissance rendered the 1930s ripe for a redefinition of what it means to be black (in the West) it was against a larger backdrop of centuries of oppression that the negritude writers looked to build.

It is easy to see how essentialism slipped into the work of Senghor and friends. When your very humanity is threatened it is natural to try and identify what exactly makes you *who you are*, before defending that essence with your life. The problems with Négritude start when it is politicized. Senghor needed something to unify his people, who he understandably felt a little distant from. The difference between the life of Léopold

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56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 104.
Sédar Senghor, academic-statesman-poet extraordinaire, and the realities of the ordinary Wolof man in Senegal were like night and day. Senghor cared dearly about cultural revival and revalorization, but the tool he used for achieving this fit badly as a political ideology. The subaltern, in the case of Senegal, were the majority of the population, the *indigènes* who did not have the same chances of evolving into “good Frenchmen.” The sentiments of Ousmane Sembène make it clear that not everyone saw France as the benevolent dictator that Senghor made it out to be. He sought to burn the bridges that Senghor looked to maintain.

Nigerian Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, uttered the most memorable retort to the destructive aspects of Négritude to date. Soyinka was part of the crop of Igbo writers that stood up to the autocratic rule of the Yoruba leader in the post-independent Nigeria. "A tiger does not proclaim its tigritude," he said about the Négritude movement, "It acts." This critique encompasses the disconnect that many of the people of Senegal felt towards their leaders thoughts. The sentiment was noble, but Senghor effectively found himself trying to force things because his ideas about the revalorization of blackness would resonate more with Africans in the diaspora than it did with the people of Senegal.

From Négritude to Migrtude, Litérature-monde

This chapter will attempt to look at Négritude as it relates to the topic of immigration in France today. There are few topics more pertinent than that for the Afro-French. I would like to investigate how this idea of a revalorization of blackness can speak to the issue of immigration? How can the tenets of Négritude and some of its goals add to the conversation around immigration in France today? As I write this, it is barely one month after Paris came under terrorist attacks from the Islamist group ISIS. Incidents like this will inevitably bring the issue of immigration back to the front and center of political discussion. It is no coincidence that the first thing that the French president did after the attacks was to close the French borders. The French conservative party Le Front National was as vocal as ever about the permanent separation of the French state from the Schengen zone that allows free travel between 26 states in Europe. The aftermath of such brutal attacks is normally most dangerous for black and brown people who identify as French.

This chapter will argue that Négritude, though making for an ineffectve political ideology, paved the way for movements that are helping to shape Franco-African identity today. The writers of Négritude helped break down barriers and provide a space for writers of colour to tell their stories and have them contribute to French literature. The two contemporary movements evoked in this chapter are Migritude and Littérature-monde. These neologisms were both built on a foundation that was laid by the Négritude movement even though their goals might be completely different to Négritude. Aside from operating in different eras and dealing with different issues, the difference between
Négritude and the more contemporary movements is that their target audiences are
different. The Franco-African writers of Négritude were trying to achieve different things
than those of Migritude, and this entails that their messages were intended for different
destinations.

Even as this is being discussed it must be remembered that the issue of
immigration has been pertinent in France for more than a century. As far back as the 18th
century France was dealing with migration and the question of citizenship. Négritude did
not make for a very effective political ideology in Senegal, and a major reason why was
because the president was being arbitrarily dogmatic about the usefulness of it. This was
an idea that, as we will see later in this thesis, was extremely useful for Senghor and other
immigrants in France. It was a personal ethos-turned national motto that never quite
cought on. Senghor, Césaire, Damas and the other propagators of the movement needed
the stability of the bridge that Négritude offered them between their identities as Black
men and French men. I will look to build on this idea and show that Négritude’s legacy is
so far removed from the tenets of the original movement and does not speak to
contemporary immigration issues.

In this chapter I will analyze a school of thought called Migritude, the direct
literary link between Négritude and immigration. This is a more contemporary literary
movement that works to break away from the essentialist and afro-centric ideas of the
Négritude movement. Migritude looks to underline the experiences of people living in the
diaspora who are very much citizens of the countries they migrated to, but are still
influenced by their cultures of origin. A variety of African and non-African writers alike
are associated with this movement. I will be talking about how Migritude can very much
be characterized as part of the legacy of the Négritude movement even though the propagators of the former are fierce critics of the latter writers. I will then go on to talk about the various phases of the issue of immigration in France. I will talk about *les immigrés visibles* of the 19th century and go on to speak about the rights of the African soldiers who fought for France in the First World War. Such a conversation cannot take place without addressing the idiosyncratic arrangement that France had with four towns in Senegal that it offered French citizenship to. I will then go on to talk about *les pieds noirs*, the French people who returned to France after she lost the Algerian civil war. This will be followed by a short discussion of the demand for labor and manpower that precipitated mass immigration to France in the 1970s. Following that, I will talk about a couple of more contemporary immigration movements like the *touche pas mon pote* movement and the *sans papiers* movement.

In talking about all these movements I will try to draw out the fact that the tension between assimilation and the preservation of identity was at the heart of the Négritude movement. I will also look to show that Migritude writers are forward thinking Négritude writers who concentrate on the problems that are pertinent to them. There was nothing about Négritude that made it inherently essentialist. This was the by-product of constantly having to defend one’s own humanity against the daily attacks on it that France in the interwar period inflicted. One needed the reaffirmation and needed the reaffirmation to come from a black man. I do not think that Négritude was ever meant to be used as the end all be all solution for Afro-French problems at the time that it was being written. The differences that the Migritude writers might have with those who propagated Négritude, might be born from the fact that they were living in different
times, focusing on different issues. This is the “dot com” era, a time when the world is smaller than it has ever been. I will look to establish the relationship between the different movements that speak to identity in Afro-French society, and show that the Négritude movement set the foundation for the work that the supporters of a *Littérature monde* and *Migritude* do.

**Where Négritude and Immigration Intersect**

*Arafane, you are leaving for Taracounda. Here: say hello to everyone, tell them that we are in good health. When we become rich we will let them know. It is for them that we are here.*

(Malian poem)

The Négritude movement is closely linked to immigration in France because its pioneers were all immigrants who wrestled with concepts of French assimilation. Césaire described négritude as “a resistance to the politics of assimilation.” The way Césaire abhorred the *mission civilisatrice* and the erasure that it entailed is representative of classical Négritude. Senghorien Négritude, on the other hand related with immigration and assimilation in a different way because it encouraged Africans to assimilate and not be assimilated. In an essay entitled *Vues sur l’Afrique Noire ou Assimiler, non etre Assimilés (1945)*, Senghor promoted “*une assimilation qui permette l’association; mais*

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une assimilation par l’indigène.” Senghor favoured cultural hybridity but held that the indigenous African should do the act of assimilation. Immigration is and always was an important part of Négritude because it was a lifeline for people in the diaspora: Blacks in France dealt with the violence of assimilation directly. The fire of French assimilation burned brightest in Paris and it scorched those closest to it.

Gérard Noiriel has done a lot of work on immigration in France. In *The French Melting Pot* (1996) he noted that ebbs and flows characterize the history of immigration in France. The foreign presence in France was highest from 1891-1901, in 1931 and 1975. As the twentieth century progressed the largest “visible” immigrant community was that of the Algerians. “Free movement between Algeria and France became law in 1947, and the distinction between citizens and subjects in Algeria was dropped so that all Algerians were considered citizens.” Noiriel distinguished between different stages of Algerian emigration to France. He called them the Three Ages of Algerian emigration and based them on the different attitudes and motivations of Algerian émigrés in France. The first age had the (mostly young, male) migrants picked by the communities they came from, and entrusted with a “temporary mission” on the other side of the Mediterranean. In this first age of emigration the community to which the migrant

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3 Senghor, *Liberté*, 4, 68.Vues sur l’Afrique Noire ou Assimiler, non etre Assimilés, liberté 1


belongs is sufficiently structured to escape the destructive effects of emigration. The second age of Algerian emigration is characterized by the group’s disarticulation. The migrant is even younger than the émigrés of the first age, and is no longer sanctioned by his or her community. This age is also characterized by the desire of the migrant to seek revenge on “superior” members of the community, and to do well for themselves. The circumstances that precipitate this sort of migration normally leave the migrant more vulnerable in the face of the new world. The third age is normally that of definitive emigration. “The émigré is in the process of becoming an immigrant, who shared a number of needs and certain values of the host society but remains quite marked by the world from which he came.” This new wave of migration sees more women coming in, and the establishment of specifically Algerian shops and community centers.

It is against such a backdrop that the Négritude movement flourished. The third wave of the Algerian emigration described by Noiriel would be the one that most characterizes the emigration of the writers of Négritude. Senghor, Damas and Césaire were Frenchmen marked by their countries of origin. Présence Africaine, the publishing house that served as a foundation for the movement and a place where Négritude writers from all over the world could send their work to be published, is a perfect example of the organizations that sprout from a “third-age” mentality. All this to say that immigration was very much a factor in the naissance of classical Négritude because the pioneers of the movement were all immigrants. They were treated as such, as second-class citizens, and this was particularly disorienting to them because they technically were citizens of the French state. So even though Césaire, Damas and Senghor did not directly address issues

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7 Ibid., 111.
8 Ibid.
to do with immigration as we know them today, movement still made up a very big part of the Négritude.

The community of Black students that the writers of Négritude were a part of was one of the first groups of Immigrès Visibles in France. This is very important to understanding the urgency of classical Négritude in the interwar period. Immigrès Visibles directly translates to “visible immigrant” and represents the distinction in French society between White European immigrants and those of different races. Approximately 189,000 and 178,000 soldiers from the colonies fought in World Wars I and II, respectively.\(^9\) The famous Tirailleurs Sénégalais, the Senegalese soldiers, made up a large percentage of these soldiers. France is still getting used to the idea of calling non-white people French. “In France, immigrants from the colonies became ‘visible’ at the beginning of the 1930s, in particular in Paris…”\(^10\) This process was as much a function of colonialism as it was one of migration. Over the years “visible immigrants” have become more visible. That is: Black and North African immigrants have gradually made up a larger percentage of total immigrants, but the “percentage of foreigners in the total French population has remained relatively constant since the 1930s.”\(^11\)

A sizable Black intelligentsia formed in Paris in this period, among whom the pioneers of Négritude were prominent. This group was largely made up of students from French West-Africa and the Caribbean, and was very politically active. They experienced the marginalization of mainstream French society and resisted it by being as prolific as possible without much support from mainstream French literary magazines. The journal

\(^{9}\) Dominic Richard David Thomas, Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).
\(^{10}\) Ibid., 29.
\(^{11}\) Ibid., 26.
established by Aimé Césaire in 1935, *L'étudiant noir*, was only one of many that sprouted in this period. These included *La revue du monde noir* [The review of the Black world], *Légitime Défense* [Legitimate Defense], *Le paria* [The Paria], *La voix de nègres* [The voice of Negros] and *La race nègre* [The negro race].\(^{12}\) This was their war, and the pen was their weapon. These visible immigrants did everything they could to be heard as well as they could be seen.

**The March of the Beurs**

The early 1980s were a period when the rate of immigrants coming into France was the highest it had ever been before.\(^{13}\) Coupled with the economic downturn of the 1970s, this worked to increase the anti-immigrant sentiment in France as immigrants were seen as the reason for the deteriorating economy. Hardline right-wing parties like the Front National saw a surge of approval in the polls as they spoke up against the influx of immigrants.\(^ {14}\) The trope of the immigrant-scapegoat is one that is as old as migration itself. The destabilizing effects that immigrant communities can have were in full effect in France during this period. In 1983 there were riots in a banlieu near Lyon called Les Minguettes. Les Minguettes was the type of ZUP that was not unfamiliar with instability and clashes with the police. The riots in 1983 started up in October and involved a lot of the youth of the area. One such young man was particularly instrumental in the political action of the area. His name was Toumi Djaidja, 21, the son of an Algerian family.\(^ {15}\)

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*, 5;5; 101.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 90.

\(^{15}\) Rory Mulholland, "30 Years on, Leader of Anti-Racism March Says France Still Has Work to Do," The Telegraph,
Djaidja was the president of the local action group, *Association SOS Avenir Minguettes*, and many saw him as the voice of the youth. During the riots he was shot in the stomach by one of the policemen. There are many conflicting accounts of what happened, but the one that circulated in Les Minguettes at the time was that Djaidja was trying to save a young kid from one of the riot police dogs and got a bullet in the stomach for his troubles. This incident only worked to exacerbate the already tense situation in the area, and one account talks about how countless cars were burnt and buildings vandalized. The overlap between Négritude and immigration is found in the narratives of migrants caught in the crossfires of such socio-political forces. We can trace Franco-African dissonance with the Négritude movement from periods like this when the children of immigrants were identifying more with their present experience than that of their parents.

Laying in his hospital bed recovering from his wound, Toumi Djaouda saw the unrest as an opportunity to really get the grievances of his community heard. Him and the rest of the leadership of the *Association SOS Avenir Minguettes* organized a march from Lyon to Paris to raise awareness against racism and anti-immigrant sentiment in their society. The march was officially dubbed The March for Equality and Against Racism. Jean Costil and Father Christain Delorme were a Protestant pastor and a Catholic priest that jumped on board the movement and supported the young activists. The organizers put forward that they were molding their march after non-violent movements like


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.
Mahatma Ghandi’s and Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King’s. “The March of the Beurs” was the first real civil rights march by descendants of North American immigrants and it really set the tone for a politically charged decade for urban communities. Seeds of Migritude can be found in these civil rights movements where young French-born citizens were fighting back against societal erasure.

This march was not received well by all facets of the French community. Whilst it was going on, a brutal assassination took place when three French military recruits threw 26 year-old Habib Grimzi out of a moving train. This hate crime gathered a lot of media attention and prompted the spokesperson for the French government to speak out strongly against “the cancer that was eating away at the democratic foundations of the nation.” The murder of Habib Grimzi only added fire to the March of the Beurs because it was against such acts that the marchers were striking out. The riots and unrest in the banlieus were not happening in a vacuum and this hate crime served as proof.

In 2013, Belgian filmmaker Nabil Ben Yadir directed a film about this movement entitled La Marche (2013). In it, he showed that the goals of the movement were that the right to vote should be given to immigrants that paid their taxes and that a ten-year Residency VISA should be established. The march was initially supported by a religious organization called La Cimade and another called Le Mouvement pour une Alternative non Violante (MAN). These organizations stated that they were taking a stand against the current “state of apartheid”

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19 Ibid.
and were looking to help construct a “fraternal society.”22 By the end of the movement the March of the Beurs had so many more organizations supporting it and were met by over 100,000 people by the time they reached Paris. By this time the 21 year-old Toumi Djaidja was a cultural icon and had made numerous television appearances. The young marchers were given an audience by then President of the Republic, François Mitterand. He told them that he had been following the march since its inceptions six weeks earlier and that he would take some steps to address their concerns. Toumi Djaidja and his team of activists left the Elysées having helped extend Residency cards to last for ten years.23

The 1983 March of the Beurs led to the formation of the antiracist organization *SOS Racisme*. The slogan of the organization, *Touche pas à mon pote*, [*Do not touch my friend*] became ubiquitous in the French media and society at large. The March of the Beurs was soon followed by the movement *Convergences* in 1984. This movement was carried out on motorcycles and looked to address similar issues as the March of the Beurs. The year after, *SOS Racisme* organized a similar march in Brussels for the immigrant community there. This march also looked to extend the rights of children of immigrants who had been born in the diaspora. Such was the legacy of the March of the Beurs: it was the first of many movements that demonstrated how second generation immigrants found their voices in the housing projects that were built for them. I would describe these as the growing pains of a multicultural society. France was by no means a post-racial society, but at least there are at a point where people of Black and Arab descent can claim their French identity. The Marche of the Beurs was very much a rise to consciousness for the mainstream French society because the visible immigrants that had

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22 Ben Yadir et al., "La Marche."
23 Ibid.
more or less been socially sidelined were very visible on the 3rd of December 1983 when 100,000 of them showed up on the streets of Paris.

The offshoots of the Négritude were established against such a backdrop. It is safe to say that the Migritude movement was formed not so much because Négritude was bad but because it was insufficient. The issues that Senghorien Négritude sought to address were not as pressing as some of their present realities. The issue of immigration and the social movements that it precipitated in France presents an example of something that needed a revised version of Négritude to properly address it.

**On Migritude**

The literature of Franco-African immigrants is also known as a literature of wandering. In many novels in this genre, one has the impression of assisting the characters to find themselves. This construction of an identity, a making of space, is what is at the heart of Migritude. This neologism refers to a literary philosophy that highlights the specific experiences and realities of Franco-Africans living in France today. This school of writers represents the sentiments of second-generation immigrants who were not moved by the essentialism of Négritude. The term was initially coined by Jacques Chevrier to talk about the response to the Négritude movement among Franco-African writers. Author and specialist of Franco-African literature Sophie Lavigne described this generations sentiments towards the Négritude: “Il faut dire que les écrivains de la négritude ne touchent plus les jeunes générations qui lui reprochent son traditionalisme, et ses compromissions avec la bourgeoisie et même avec l'ancien colonisateur.”


25 Ibid.
Négritude writers do not speak to the young generation anymore, who reproach it for its traditionalism and compromises with the old colonial power. This quote shows that Migritude encompassed a school of writers who embraced movement and migration in a way that Négritude’s focus on the motherland never allowed for.

The dissatisfaction that is expressed and encased within the movement is born from the fact that the Africans in the French diaspora do not feel spoken for and that their experience is subjugated to uphold one that celebrates the African continent. The idea of Migritude provides a space for the honesty of children of immigrants who admit that they are not attached to Africa in the same way their parents are. Its literature is not based on nostalgia for some idyllic African past.26

Jacques Chevrier is the author who coined the term Migritude, and by it he looked to distinguish this conscious break from the traditions of the Négritude movement. Chevrier held that Migritude writers spoke about “une Afrique extracontinentale dont le centre de gravité se situerait quelque part entre Belleville et l’au-delà du boulevard périphérique.”27 [an extracontinental Africa whose center of gravity is somewhere between here and Timbuktu] Migritude addresses the same need for self-expression that characterized Négritude but speaks to a more contemporary moment.

In 1935, the addressees of the literary works now known to make up the earliest Négritude text were the Whites. What Senghor, Césaire and Damas essentially wanted was for the Black perspective and narrative to be added to the global conversation around

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humanism. Négritude was a vehicle to make African culture count in worldwide conversations, that is, conversations that were curated and controlled by Western Europe. Migritude, on the other hand, was written for Franco-Africans. The latter, more contemporary movement has less to do with finding a place in the mainstream and more to do with ensuring that a distinct identity is adequately defined for the Franco-African individual. This thesis does not exhaustively analyze any texts from the Migritude movement, but describes these writers’ general positionality of its authors. These are authors that refuse to live in a no man’s land between the country they immigrated to and their parents’ motherland. Jacques Chevrier talked about the openness to different cultures that characterized Migritude. “Les écrivains de la migritude tendent en effet, aujourd'hui, à devenir des nómades évoluant entre plusieurs pays, plusieurs langues et plusieurs cultures, et c'est sans complexes qu'ils s'installent dans l'hybride naguére vilipende par l'auteur de Aventure ambiguë.” [The Migritude writers tend indeed to become nomads who travel to different countries, speak different languages, experience different cultures and it is without any of the complexes of the old hybridity that are vilified by the author of Ambiguous Adventure.] Ambiguous Adventure is an iconic text in the Negritude tradition that I analyze in the next chapter. It deals with dissonance and reverse culture shock, and Chevrier posits here that Migritude writers embrace the wandering that is vilified in Ambiguous Adventure.

Even though the writers of Migritude are bound by a common desire to distance themselves from Négritude, the older movement paved the way for the sort of conversation that are being had now in French society. Disdain for the work put out by the older generation of Franco-African writers would be misguided because their
movement dealt with issues that were pertinent to them. The differences between living under colonialism and living under neo-colonialism are represented by the different goals of these two movements. Whereas the fathers of Négritude were preoccupied with a celebration of African culture to counter the Mission Civilisatrice, Migritude writers fight for the rights of immigrants or to improve the media portrayal of minorities. Both systems Both Négritude and Migritude ideas address the most pertinent issues of their times. Jacques Chevrier described Négritude as “terribly in fashion;” a refreshing movement with a very respectable line-up of writers. It is easy to let the Senghorian rendition of Négritude cloud the memory of this movement that was originally a veritable French Harlem Renaissance. Hindsight will always be 20/20 and Migritude writers must be careful not to criticize the past from the vantage point of today.

Pour une Littérature-monde

Descendants of Arab and African immigrants continue to negotiate their identities in French society. A true manifestation of this in the literary field, one that is connected to the Négritude movement, is the manifesto that was penned by writers Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud called Pour une littérature mond (2007). This is a polemic that makes a political and literary statement not unlike that of the writers of Migritude. Littérature-monde is also an ideal that firmly distances itself from the Négritude movement and looks

to posit a more robust representation of Franco-African and Franco-Arab identity.

*Littérature-monde* can be described as a push against the rigid and notoriously exclusionist French literary academy. The *Académie Française* is the pre-eminent French learned body that presides over matters pertaining to the French language. This body, to which Léopold Sedar Senghor was the first Black man to be elected, was responsible for the ideals of francophonie. It posited France as the cultural and literary hub of the French essence. The *Académie Française* set the standard and Francophonie was that standard. *Littérature-monde* speaks to a break from this ideal and the embracement of a more globalized view of French literature.

“*Fin de la francophonie. Naissance d’une littérature-monde en français*” [End of la francophonie, beginning of a littérature-monde in French] is their motto.\(^{30}\) This literary polemic is approximately two pages long and was put together by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud. It was published in Le Monde in 2007 and reads with a tone of exasperation. To the authors of this polemic, Francophonie clearly represented nothing but the vestiges of colonialism. They posit its out datedness and how it has proven useless to French writers from diverse backgrounds. “*Personne ne parle le francophone, ni n’écrit en francophone. La francophonie est de la lumière d’étoile morte.*”\(^{31}\) [No one speaks or writes in Francophone. La francophonie is the light of a dead star] In the epigraph of her novel *Les honneurs perdus* (1996), Calixthe Beyala underlines the double standard that Francophonie sets for French writers of colour. “*Le Français est francophone mais la francophonie n’est pas française.*”\(^{32}\) [The Frenchman is

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

francophone but la francophonie is not French] The fact that francophonie will always be an aspiration for francophone writers speaks to a problematic dynamic that this sets up. The signatories of this manifesto are a plethora of Franco-African, Maghreb and Franco-Asian writers in France. Writing down the names of the signatories of Pour une littérature-monde would be listing the notable minority figures in contemporary French literature: this list of 46 authors includes Tahar Ben Jelloun, Maryse Condé, Alain Mabanckou, Abdourahman Waberi and Edouard Glissant.

The writers of Pour une Littérature-monde give an example of the writers of the English language who come from different backgrounds but have successfully managed to integrate the nuances of their identity(s) in their work. They evoke Kazuo Ishiguro, Ben Okri, Hanif Kureishi, Michael Ondaatje and Salman Rushdie and point to how their work exists comfortably in their in-between-ness. “Ceux là, nés en Anglettere, ne vivaient plus dans la nostalgie d’un pays d’origine à jamais perdu.”33 [Born in England, these people do not live in the nostalgia of an everlasting motherland] This quote also speaks directly to the qualms that those who ascribe to littérature-monde have with the Négritude movement. The essentialism that the works of Senghor and Césaire are filled with, coupled with the Paris-centric focus of Négritude, work to uphold the tenets of Francophonie. The writers of Littérature-monde put forward the idea that even though Négritude was propagated to fight against European literary and cultural hegemony, its ideals work to solidify imperial dynamics. Defending Francophonie is defending the last avatar of colonialism.34

33 Rouaud, "Pour Une "Littérature-Monde" En Français".
34 Ibid.
You will notice that there is an overlap between the signatories of this statement and those of the Migritude movement. Edouard Glissant is probably the most notable because he is one of the pioneers of Migritude. There are obviously a lot of similarities between the two ideals. They both find Négritude’s nostalgia detrimental to the progress of Franco-African literature and cultural representation. They both look to take ownership of their statuses as settled immigrants who can add a valuable facet to francité. If anything, littérature-monde is a compliment to the Migritude movement. The former works as an ideological driver of the latter. Migritude no longer wants to take on what Odile Cazenave calls the burden of commitment of the African writer.\textsuperscript{35} This movement is the manifestation of writers looking to live in their present and engage in new aesthetics.

\textit{Conclusion}

This chapter sought to highlight the intersection between immigration and Négritude and how certain events in France necessitated the revision of the movement. Migritude was described as an identity and literature of wandering.\textsuperscript{36} The wandering in this phrase refers to the feeling of being in limbo that a whole generation of Franco-African people are made to feel while living in France. Migritude tries to articulate the life of being “The Other” in your own land. Littérature-monde embodies a similar attempt to carve out a space for oneself in an unforgiving society. This particular movement mourns the inertia of French culture to embrace diversity in their literature. By invoking


\textsuperscript{36} Lavigne, "La Migritude: Une Errance Identitaire Et Littéraire."
non-White British authors whose stories and points of view have been readily embraced by their readership, Littérature-monde attempts to stress how the idea of Francophonie is actually stifling to Afro-French writers. Even as propagators of these offshoot movements roundly criticized Négritude, it is hard to deny the foundation that this movement laid. The revalorization and call for recognition that classical Négritude precipitated for the Afro-French community planted the seeds for the some of the movements we see flourishing today.
Draft of Chapter 3

The Miseducation of a New Negro

The chamber of commerce in Dakar was buzzing. It was packed to overflowing with colonial administrators, businessmen, African civil servants, municipal politicians, merchants, trade unionists, religious leaders and students. People were known to faint in the crowds when one of these Négritude writers were in town. Said of Césaire when he was giving one of his speeches for an electoral campaign in Martinique: “Français a tellement chaud que la femme là tombé malcadi” [“his French (the refinement of his style) was so exciting that the woman swooned away.”]¹ But it was not the Martiniquais poet speaking that day in Dakar. It was the “peasant from Sine.”² When Léopold Sedar Senghor went back to Senegal in 1937, it was on the invitation of Marcel de Coppet, the famed intellectual and colonial administrator. Senghor was sent on a mission to upraise the colonial primary education system and do a survey of what the local bourgeoisie thought about it. Senghor conducted his research over the period of a summer and presented his findings in the form of a public lecture. The future president used this opportunity to put forward a polemic against retaining a school curriculum based strictly on the French model.³ The Senegalese intellectual spoke for about an hour, trying to articulate the midway point between “Africanizing” the school system and having them be carbon copies of the elementary schools in France. Senghor called this balance active

² Senghor, Liberté, 1, 11.
assimilation. This was as opposed to passive assimilation where one's culture disappeared into the French one. This was the crux of the “singer” of Négritude’s educational model: a critical consideration of assimilation.

This chapter of the thesis will consider the marriage of education and Négritude and why the former does not constitute a large part of the movement’s legacy. It is no coincidence that this movement was pioneered by members of the Black intelligentsia that formed in Paris during the interwar period. Senghor, Damas and Césaire were all very learned men; this was a characteristic that engendered and necessitated Négritude. The fact that they were learned exposed them to pro-Black movements in other parts of the world like the Harlem Renaissance. The fathers of Négritude were great students of Hughes, Cullen, DuBois and other such writers. They also clearly understood the full implications of the *mission civilisatrice* by virtue of their education. The French civilizing mission and its derogatory nature confronted them constantly during their years as students in Paris. Thirdly, education played a major role in the beginning of the Négritude movement because a French education in Paris was destabilizing for an African student. Part of this chapter examines the effect of the clash of customs and different education systems on an African student. Négritude, this literary movement and personal ethos, was both coping mechanism and rallying cry.

Education and Négritude are intricately tied together. This is true whether the movement is a political abstraction or a literary movement in France. I make a distinction between the two that I call Senghorian Négritude and Classical Négritude, respectively. I

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4 Senghor, *Liberté*, 1, 14.
will use Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure* to demonstrate the close relationship between education and Négritude, and to show that the particular coming to consciousness that Négritude embodied was the product of a Western education being superimposed on African traditions and values.\(^6\) This chapter will also discuss how Senghor’s education policy was flawed. The proposals that Senghor put forward in the public address I mention above were never grounded in practicality. This will be demonstrated through Mariama Bâ’s epistolary novel, *So long a letter (2005).*\(^7\) I will close by discussing how France can use some of the tenets of the Négritude movement to better grapple with multiculturalism in their contemporary education system.

The word Négritude is used a lot throughout this thesis and it is important to realize that this tended to have a nebulous and ambiguous meaning. The main subject of this thesis, Senghor, used the term as a rhetorical tool quite broadly. In order to anchor the thesis, it is important to understand that Négritude, as used in this chapter, speaks to the school of thought that was the brainchild of Senghor and his colleagues. In the context of education, Négritude is the common denominator in all African cultural and traditional pedagogical practices. In starting this movement, the fathers of Négritude hoped to precipitate a celebration of everything uniquely African that makes Black people, Black.

*On Senegalese Education: A Campaign Address 23 Years Early*

Senghor’s idea of what education in colonial West Africa (*Afrique Occidentale Française*) should look like is very much reflective of his personal philosophy: that of cultural hybridity based on a belief in a revalorized Blackness and the utility of French

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pedagogy. If you have ever taken a look at Senghor’s general writings on Négritude, this approach to educational reform will not come as a surprise. The statesman and poet was very dogmatic in his cultural beliefs.

Senghor’s education theory was broadly based on the idea of *bicéphalisme*. This is the positive duality that resulted from the mélange of indigenous African education and French instruction. “Nous pouvons, à présent, poser ce principe général, que l’étude de l’Afrique occidentale et de la France doit constituer les deux pôles de l’Enseignement en A.O.F.”8 [As a general principle, we can propose that African education and French education must constitute the two poles of the Education in French West Africa]

*Bicéphalisme* can also be described as an educational system that would teach colonial students about France and immerse them in their own African “grammar, history, geography, folklore and civilization.”9 Senghor held that the notion of *bicéphalisme* was essential for Senegalese people to relearn an appreciation for their own cultural heritage.

Another important component of Senghor’s educational model is being bilingual. Senghor stresses the fact that for the Senegalese student to reach their full potential they need to be able to express themselves in their mother tongue and French equally well. Being able to speak two languages would serve two purposes. The first and most important one is that being fluent in an indigenous tongue is important to appreciate the fullness of that culture. Senghor holds that one cannot really learn the culture without speaking the language and though French is a wonderful medium, it would not do the study full justice. “Il y a une certaine saveur, une certain odeur, un certain accent, un

8 Senghor, *Liberté*, 1, 14.
certain timbre noir inexprimable à des instruments européens.”¹⁰ There is a certain Black appeal, a certain flavor, a certain accent, a certain timbre that is inexpressible with European tools.] The French language had its inadequacies in an African context and Senghor wanted to posit the indigenous languages as a viable option.

The second reason bilingualism was important for the Senegalese student was because of globalization and the fact that Senegal in the interwar period was operating in an international milieu. In his public address following his survey on colonial education, Senghor put it this way: “Notre milieu n’est plus ouest-africaine, il est aussi française, il est international; pour tout dire, il est afro-française.”¹¹ [Our milieu is not just West-Africa anymore, it is also French, also international; It is Franco-African] Senghor often referred to Senegal as a hyphen, a link between West Africa and the Western world.¹²

In talking about bilingualism as an essential component of bicephalisme, the driver of this model of education, this address serves as both precursor to and evidence of an important component of the later Senghorien Négritude theory: that of its inextricable link to France. This link was a lot less paradoxical in 1937, when independence was but the wish of a few. It was clear to everyone involved that the Senegalese intellectual was tasked with finding a better way to do school in colonial West Africa, in AOF, and not in independent Senegal. The French were always going to be involved in such an endeavor. “The speech did not openly challenge the colonial state but raised pointed questions

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¹⁰ Senghor, Liberté, 1, 19.
¹¹ Ibid., 14.
¹² Senghor, "Message De Monsieur Leopold Sedar Senghor Président De La République Au Peuple Sénégalais."
about cultural policy in AOF.”\textsuperscript{13} But in the 1950s when independence became more of a reality and the voices calling for self-determination grew louder, Senghor’s “soft spot” for French culture becomes more problematic.\textsuperscript{14} The paradox of Négritude is brought under closer scrutiny: how can you revalorize a previously repressed culture using tools from the forces that did the repressing? Or rather, in the context of education, how do you encourage indigenous modes of instruction while still using the foreign methods that usurped and suppressed them in the first place?

The Senegalese student that this system of education is supposed to mold is a very specific one. Évolué is a term that directly translates to “Evolved” but refers to Europeanized indigenous Africans who, through education and cultural assimilation, were considered elite. Senghor, himself an évolué, spoke freely of the them and how important of a role they played in his idea of an ideal colonial education. It was the petit bourgeois of Senegal whose sentiments towards the education system he was sent to gauge during this survey.\textsuperscript{15} Judging from Senghor’s speech and the way he conducted his research, the cultivation and nurturing of a Senegalese elite was important for education and the nation as a whole. According to Senghor, bilingualism would help foster such a student, one he called the Nègre nouveau, after the “New Negro” of the Harlem Renaissance.\textsuperscript{16} This new Senegalese was to be a leader in the quest to uncover the “things

\textsuperscript{13} Wilder, \textit{The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars}, 235.
\textsuperscript{14} Jones, \textit{Voices of Négritude: The Expression of Black Experience in the Poetry of Senghor, CéSaire & Damas}.
\textsuperscript{15} Wilder, \textit{The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars}, 234.
\textsuperscript{16} Senghor, \textit{Liberté}, 1, 19.
of beauty” of the indigenous Senegalese people.\(^{17}\) In Senghor’s model, the people of the Black race would use their own languages to express the genius of the people.\(^{18}\)

Senghor’s vision for education was noble and in his public address on education he spoke like a true visionary, but even in its theoretical stage this plan does not give a concrete or realistic outline for Senegalese education. The fundamental flaws to this plan are twofold, which is why they manifest themselves later on when Senghor is president of Senegal. Firstly, as mentioned above, the future president and father of Négritude stayed true to form and expressed pro-French sentiments. He preferred that the language and certain aspects of the culture remained in the education system. This manifested itself in Senghor wanting elements of both French education and indigenous African education. He called for bilingualism, with French always being one of the two languages studied.

“For nous, Afro-Français, cela implique l’enseignement du français et d’une langue indigène, qui pourra tenir lieu de seconde langue vivante.”\(^{19}\) [For us the Franco-Africans, this means education in French and in an indigenous language, that will take the place of a second language] Whereas having an indigenous language be considered a second language as opposed to the main one is not uncommon in postcolonial African states, this coming from the “singer” of Négritude is significant. In hindsight, it precedes some of the problems that I talk about in a later section of this chapter: the subjugation of African cultural values to French ones in education based on historical power structures. Again, in the context of the time he was speaking this was expected, but it becomes a lot more problematic when independence from the patrie is in question.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Senghor, Liberté, 1, 18.
As big a proponent as Senghor seemed for the Africanization of the schools, if you look closely enough you realize that the statesman had a Janus face when it came to the issue. On the one hand, he was one of the Senegalese évolutés of the time who was wary of such a move by France. The évolutés believed that Africanization of the schools was a thinly veiled move to marginalize them because they had profited from French education for a long while. But on the other hand, the pan-Africanist in Senghor was also very interested in the appreciation of African culture and he saw education as a great avenue to pursue this. He built his education system upon a foundation of cultural métissage. This entailed urging young Senegalese students to embrace Western positive relativism while simultaneously staying true the African all encompassing intuitive reason.

A second aspect of Senghor’s educational plan that made it intangible was the fact that it was all centered on the flawed notion of African brains being different from European ones. All the more concrete suggestions that Senghor puts forward are centered on this idea that “emotion is negro as reason is hellenic.” These philosophical presuppositions cause Senghor to make suggestions that, however well intentioned, never really take root in reality. Examples of these propositions include an emphasis on manual labour and the handicrafts, what he called “les travaux manuels.” Senghor held that this was less about teaching young Senegalese about how to use a plough and more about “familiarizing them with the notion of technical agricultural tools.” The infusion of art

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23 Ibid., 16.
was another proposition that Senghor put forward. Taken in isolation, all of these are very worthy suggestions and recommendations. But when considered in the context of Senghor’s essentialist philosophy, they begin to take on a destructive, prescriptive hue. “I feel therefore I am,” according to Senghor, encompassed Black epistemology. So to make up for the inherent lack of discursive reason, the African schools should assimilate the rational-positivist attributes of Western schools.

It is worth pausing and pointing out the striking nature of what Senghor was doing here. Approaching a people with preconceived notions of what they can and cannot do is reminiscent of 18th century imperial lines of thought. A philosopher named Lucien Levy-Bruhl (1857-1939) did a lot of work making a distinction between the way “rational” Western societies thought, and what he deemed “inferior societies” with their “primitive mentality.”

It seems Senghor essentially makes similar claims using valorizing language when he talks about emotion being Negro and reason being Hellenic. The same seductive idea that Africans function according to “a law of ‘participation’ and magical thinking” appears in the theories of both Senghor and Bruhl. I unpack these parallels more in my next chapter on Négritude art but it is worth highlighting the overlap here, too, to put the paradox of Négritude in context.

**Ambiguous Adventure and Sixteen Years of Wandering**

A lot of the time, this clash of two cultures that Senghor tried to orchestrate is

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violent. It leads to veritable dissonance. Education was a big part of Négritude because it was a big part of the lives of the three Fathers of the movement, Senghor, Damas and Césaire. It helped form the essence of the movement. “l’essence de toute philosophie est la philosophie de l’éducation qui consiste à étudier comment bâtir un monde.”

[The essence of all philosophy is the philosophy of education that consists of learning how to fight a world] Education was intricately tied to Senghorien Négritude on both a personal and a political level. The fact that the poet was fortunate enough to go and study in Europe played a huge role in his view of cultural relativity, giving him the opportunity to reflect on his people’s place in the global context. It was out of education that Négritude was born. The 3 fathers of the movement were scholars and intellectuals, pillars of the Black intelligentsia that formed in Paris.

Cheikh Hamidou Kane wrote *Ambiguous Adventure* in 1961, barely a year after Senegal had gained its independence. In the style of many of his fellow West African writers, Kane penned a novel that was fiction but based upon his own life and experiences.

Kane was born in 1928 in Matam, on the eastern border of Senegal. He, like Senghor, did his primary education in Senegal before pursuing further studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. They both also attended religious institutions; Senghor studied at Libermann Seminary for 3 years while Kane went to a Quranic school in Maman.

Kane graduated from the Sorbonne with degrees in Law and History, a very educated man. *Ambiguous Adventure* is testament to how intricately Education and Négritude were tied.

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The protagonist in this story is representative of the experiences of Senghor, Kane and
many other colonial subjects who went to study in France. Négritude was made a
necessity because of the rupture that occurs when African students endured the identity
crisis of Samba Diallo, Kane’s protagonist. Kane held various positions in Senghor’s
government and wrote *Ambiguous Adventure* while serving as the *Ministre du Plan.*

Ambiguous Adventure is the story of Samba Diallo, a young Senegalese prince of
the Dialobe people. The novel chronicles the personal and religious journey of a young
man who was brought up pious and lauded as a future leader of his people. *Ambiguous
adventure* tells of the clash of Western education and traditional African tutelage,
embodied in the person of Samba Diallo. Cheikh Hamidou Kane carries the reader on the
protagonist’s journey from a place of deep religious faith to that of dissonance and
alienation while contrasting western modes of thought to that of the Dialobé people.
Samba Diallo’s journey in *Ambiguous Adventure* serves as a strong example for how a
midway point, a cultural *mixité,* was necessary for the African people to progress.

This story starts with Samba Diallo in a Muslim monastery of sorts. His family
sent Samba Diallo to the village’s religious teacher, Thierno, for him to study the Quran
under. Samba Diallo was a great student, the kind everyone understood to be Thierno’s
heir apparent. Not only was Samba Diallo a diligent student of the Quran, he also had an
aura about him. This aura shone through the rags that Thierno’s young disciples wore as
uniform and was the sort of dignity that was easily confused with aloofness. Samba
Diallo’s peers noted this most immediately. He considered his noble birth “a diadem
which was too cumbersome and too much in evidence,” as he was often teased and

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30 Elraz, "L’aventure Ambiguë De Cheikh Hamidou Kane."
provoked on account of this. In the character of his protagonist, Kane sought to represent the best of the native Senegalese people: religious, smart and noble.

This work was a great commentary on education, pedagogy and the theory of knowledge in Africa and the West. The characters in *Ambiguous adventure* are very much the drivers of these theories. They represent different aspects of their environment and the dynamics they live in. For example, the relationship between Samba Diallo and Thierno was packed with references to African oral, patriarchal and disciplinarian tradition. The novel is opened with Samba Diallo receiving a vicious beating from Thierno and this is a common theme in their relationship. Whether Samba Diallo did not recite the Holy text perfectly or he got into a fight, his teacher’s wrath was as sure as the sun in the Sahara. The teacher would strip to his waist and beat Samba Diallo slowly and methodically. His discipline accompanied his instruction and Samba Diallo seemed to accept this fact, inert in the storm of violence. That said, it was also stressed that the underlying sentiments in their relationship were love and respect. This was clearest in the tears that Samba Diallo wept for his teacher when he was told that he was to move from under his wing. The old teacher himself was surprised by the tightness in his chest when he was told that Samba Diallo was going to have to move to the French school.

31 Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*, 119; 119;.
32 Ibid., 4.
33 Ibid., 22.
34 It must also be noted that violence and physical abuse in these Quranic is well noted. In 2010, the Human Rights Watch released a scathing report of abuses in these schools, and noted that they are barely regulated. One can only imagine the severity of the abuse in the 1930s, when Kane was growing up. https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/04/15/senegal-boys-many-quranic-schools-suffer-severe-abuse
35 Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*, 119; 119;., 64.
36 Ibid., 38.
clear that the author intended for Samba Diallo’s time at the Burning Hearth to be representative of African education. It was Thierno’s message and the way that he delivered it that was contrasted against the French school.

Samba Diallo’s relationship with Thierno and (to a lesser extent) his father speak to an African form of education. The aspects of these relationships that speak to African epistemology start with the discipline and respect/reverence for authority. At a very early age, young African children are taught to associate punishment with any dissenting thought that they may have. This is me speaking from personal experience. Samba Diallo’s pinches to the thighs were my knocks on the head with a board ruler. Both were inflicted due to failure of total compliance and obedience. This reverence for authority and the older generation can also be seen in Samba Diallo’s relationship with his father, “The Knight”. Even as an adult struggling with identity, Samba Diallo acted immediately and without question when his father spoke. “It is my opinion that you should return home,” was the opening of his father’s letter to him. A few pages later, without warning, the reader joins Samba Diallo back in Senegal. No questions asked. The immediacy of his compliance is representative of African education. Another example of the absolute authority that teacher figures have over their students’ education can be seen in Léopold Senghor’s life. The young “Sédar”, as he was called growing up, always wanted to be a man of the cloth. But the director of the seminary is said to have grown to dislike Senghor. After 3 years of study and just before he was supposed to graduate from the Libermann Seminary, the director called Senghor in his office and curtly informed him that he would not be graduating from the school. The director told him that he was not cut

37 Vaillant, Black, French, and African: A Life of Léopold SéDar Senghor, 28.
out for priesthood. “Father Lalouse had the power to make this decision, and by doing so he effectively blocked Sédar’s path to the priesthood.”38 This goes to show that Senghor was very familiar with the absolutist authority of the pedagogue that African education entailed. Like Kane’s protagonist, this is a system he grew up adhering to before going to France.

The other aspect of this father-son and teacher-student relationship that speaks to strictly African tutelage is the absence of the space to think for, or about oneself. At the monastery Samba Diallo was meant to study the Quran and memorize the scripture. The reader learns repetition is an important part of the eduction at the very opening of the book. “Repeat it! Again! Again!”39 Unlike at the French school where he got to ponder the writings of Pascal and such thinkers, the education he got from the Burning Hearth Quranic school was force fed to him.40

Aside from never having the chance to ponder the material for oneself, Samba Diallo was also taught to be selfless in his acquiring of knowledge. He was learning in service of others; a future master who was handpicked to be a “guide in the way of God, as well as in human affairs.”41 He was the apparent disciple that was going to take over as Teacher of the Dialobe when the time came. Even when the student was sent to the French school, it was to learn how to conquer.42 Samba Diallo was never going to learn just for the sake of amassing knowledge. There were definitely technical and practical reasons for Africans to go to the French school. Learning “how better to join wood to

38 Ibid., 31.
39 Kane, Ambiguous Adventure, 119.;119;., 3.
40 Ibid., 96.
41 Ibid., 12.
42 Ibid., 152.
wood” was definitely a big attraction for the local people. But the more philosophical reason for someone like Samba Diallo to be sent to the French school was to “learn the art of conquering without being in the right.” This spoke to a desire to learn how the White man thought, operated and executed. The particular tribe of the Diallobé that Samba Diallo came from was a noble one. It was a sore point for the leaders of this group that the French defeated them. Samba Diallo’s own father sent his son to the French school with a heavy heart because this was tantamount to losing a cultural war, in addition to the physical one, to the French. “The Knight was suffering deeply in the face of this irreparable thing which was being accomplished here, before his eyes, upon his own flesh.” Samba Diallo was grudgingly sent to the school to learn about the French for the Diallobé. This is the milieu in which Négritude operates: The kind that conceptualizes a people as a mechanism of their beliefs and their education.

The ambiguity of Samba Diallo’s adventure is not unlike the one that was experienced by Senghor. The similar education, expectations and general life experiences that Samba Diallo and young Leopold Sédar Senghor put them in a very similar place in their adolescence. Georges Hardy, a French colonial educator put it like this: the African child being taught French is living in “two separate worlds: the real world from which he has come and to which he is passionately attached by the language of the country; and an artificial world- a temporary existence where he for the time being comes into contact with the French language.” What is described as Samba Diallo’s ambiguous adventure,

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43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 37.
45 Ibid., 68.
46 Vaillant, Black, French, and African: A Life of LéOpold Sédar Senghor, 22.
Senghor calls his “Sixteen years of wandering.” This was the period in which Senghor first went to the Sorbonne, then quit to go to a grand école. The celebrated poet failed many exams and certification tests during this period (1928-1944) and it is then that Négritude was born. In many ways, it was his lifeline. Education and Négritude are intricately tied even outside of Senghor’s political conception of the movement. This “humanism of the 21st century” was born out of the dissonance that the Western education gave to Black students in France. Ambiguous Adventure helps us understand how the marriage of education and Négritude is even bigger than Senghor.

20 Years of Senghorien Education in So Long a Letter

*So long a letter* was the opus of a Senegalese woman who was from the era of independence, and provides a worthy commentary on the effects of Senghor’s education policy on the country. Mariama Bâ wrote this epistolary novel based on a newly widowed woman maneuvering a society that had not yet truly made space for women. This novel serves as a powerful commentary on Senegalese education and calls the government to task for its policies on the advancement of women. The protagonist, Ramatoulaye, is a schoolteacher who is writing about her memories, fears and dreams to her best friend in the United States. This novel will help us understand how the marriage of Négritude and education played out in reality in Senegal and why it would have helped for Senghor to be less single-minded when it came to his policies. This story is important to consider when thinking about the intersection of Négritude and education in Senegal.

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because it serves as testimony to the outcome of Senghorien education policy in Senegalese society. If Senghor’s address at the public lecture in Dakar in 1937 was his manifesto, then *So long a letter* is the story that holds him accountable for the promises he made.

Mariama Bâ was born in 1929 and so made up a part of the generation that lived through colonialism and held the highest hopes for independence. She is credited as being one of the first feminist writers that came out of West Africa and did a lot of work with girls and women in Senegal. So long a letter was very much her magnum opus and helped establish her in the larger West African literary canon. Bâ’s novel has been translated to 16 different languages and is widely used in University curricula. In many ways, *So long a letter* is Mariama Bâ’s story. *So long a letter* belongs to the genre of African literature whose writers take it upon themselves to be the scribes of the times, recording what was happening in their society through novels. The author was indeed a schoolteacher who undoubtedly had to deal with the stigmas of educated women in Senegal. So she was not talking from without when she wrote “try explaining to them that a working woman is no less responsible for her home.”

The story is about Ramatoulaye who just lost her husband and this letter to Aissatou recounts the life of a forward-thinking, educated Muslim woman as well as the pulls that such an identity has on her. Ramatoulaye’s husband’s name was Modou Fall, and after 25 years of marriage he left her and their 12 children to marry a younger wife. Aissatou went through a similar predicament when her husband conceded to family

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51 Ibid.
pressure and took his cousin as a second wife. The two women react very differently to their husbands’ polygamy and the narrative of the story is centered on how women act and are acted upon in Senegal’s male dominated society. The story is also about love, both young and tested. The reader learns about how both women met their husbands and meet an old suitor who asks for Ramatoulaye’s hand in marriage again after Moudu’s death.

As mentioned above, the public lecture that Senghor gave was at the behest of a colonial administrator. The lecture was about a survey to gauge the Senegalese bourgeoisie’s opinion of the education system. *So long a letter* shows how the Senegalese bourgeoisie that Senghor spoke to, and on behalf of in 1937 were completely disillusioned with his education policy. The protagonist of the novel was a teacher and she describes the bourgeois lifestyle that she led. She had had two housemaids and would take regular holidays to “leave the stifling city to breathe in the healthy air of seaside suburbs.”\(^\text{53}\) Ramatoulaye also reminisced on life before she was widowed and before her husband left. “We lived:” Ramatoulaye stated, “Christmas eve parties organized by several couples, with the costs shared equally, and held in turns in the different homes. Without self-consciousness, we would revive the dances of yester-year: the lively beguine, frenzied rumbas, languid tangos.”\(^\text{54}\) This is a description of the sorts of things that only a certain standard of living can allow for. Not all Senegalese people could relate to these sorts of activities. This coupled with Ramatoulaye’s relatively high level of education fits her and her friend group firmly in the petit bourgeoisie class. This was the class of people who were to be most affected by Senghor’s education policy.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.
So long a letter demonstrates how let down the bourgeoisie was by the Senghorien government. After twenty years of independence, Ramatoulaye expected more from her government. Her husband, a labour union official, bemoaned the amount of money that was spent on superfluous institutions and functions. He cursed Senghor’s government “of too many embassies.”\textsuperscript{55} Mawdo Fall also growled about the “frequent invitation of foreigners” and how these were a waste of resources.\textsuperscript{56} This speaks to a frustration with Senghor’s outward looking style of governance. The president was a big proponent of regional cooperation and federalism. This was demonstrated by his foreign policy that was discussed in an earlier chapter. It follows that such an elaborate foreign policy would need many diplomats, and that is what this quote seems to be referring to. It is also worth noting that So long a letter was published in 1981, not too long after the Premier Festival des arts Nègres. Such lavishness must not have been easy to forget because it is highlighted in so many places in the novel. “So many schools, or so much hospital equipment lost! So many monthly wage increases! So many tarred roads!”\textsuperscript{57} This was the frustration of the people: that resources were being poured into “pure vanity” when there were so many facets of society that could use the funding. The group of people that was supposed to identify the most with Senghor’s cultural mission was frustrated with Négritude.

Another strong indicator that education policy influenced by Négritude had generally not had the effect that Senghor hoped it would is the failure of the mission for cultural hybridity. Senghorien bicéphalisme was based on a mélange of cultures and a

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 25.
pedagogical culture that incorporates both African and French educational methods. The critique that this chapter has offered up for such a plan is that the historically dominant, repressive culture would always be considered more important when paired in the way Senghor proposed. *So long a letter* provides a commentary on this based on the experience of Ramatoulaye’s eldest son, Mawdo Fall. Mawdo is described as extremely bright, always having excelled in literary works and always coming top of his class. Ramatoulaye wrote about how this year had been different because he had a White teacher who penalized him unnecessarily. This always causes Mawdo to come second to his White classmate, Jean-Claude. “The teacher cannot tolerate a Black coming first in philosophy.”58 This underlines the inequality in independent Senegal that is reminiscent of the colonial period. It speaks to the inevitable ordering of educational components in a hierarchy according to what is deemed to be more important. If Mawdo had come first in a subject that was deemed “African” there would not be a problem. The way in which Senghorien educational policy attempted to mix and combine aspects of both (what he deemed to be) French culture and African culture was always going to create a hierarchy. In a country that has been dominated by the French for the better part of a hundred years, there was only ever going to be one component that was deemed more valuable than the other. It was always going to be the French one.

Twenty years of Négritude in education policy and the Senegalese new Negro was still struggling. All the theorizing that Senghor did in his address in 1937 did not translate to a thriving education system. The author of *So long a letter* was best placed to contribute to such an assessment because she was a school teacher. The character that she

58 Ibid., 72.
created posited being an educator as more than just a vocation. “And we lived. When we stood in front of our over-crowded classes, we represented a force in the enormous effort to be accomplished in order to overcome ignorance.”59 Education was her life, her war. Books, to her, were the thread that “knit generations together in the same continuing effort that leads to progress.”60 For the protagonist, education provides the wings for children, especially girls, to flee the doldrums of poverty and ignorance. Ramatoulaye spoke very fondly of her education experience and was very appreciative of her teachers and professors. She wrote about her White headmistress in whom the word love had a particular resonance. “She loved us without patronizing us, with our plaits either standing on end or bent down, with our loose blouses, or wrappers.”61 And so it was particularly heartbreaking for her to see the young Senegalese students struggling as much as they did in the education system. Ramatoulaye described how hard it was for Aissatou’s brothers to assimilate in the system because of the heavy French influence. “Hard is the climb up the steep hill of knowledge to the white man’s school.”62 Ramatuolaye describing the Senegalese schools as “the White man’s schools” is telling of the fact that post-independence Senegalese education still felt Western. Senghor’s cultural mélange in education simply did not translate when it came to its practical usage in the classrooms.

If the literary and cultural analysis above seems far-fetched, both the text and independent statistics provide evidence to the fact that Senghor’s education mission has not been successful. The difference between Ramatoulaye, Aissatou and the majority of other women in Senegal was the fact that they are educated. This is also true of the

59 Ibid., 23.
60 Ibid., 32.
61 Ibid., 16.
author, Mariam Bâ, who attended the Ecole Normale d'Institutrices Africaines de l'Afrique Occidentale Francaise in Rufisque. To put this into perspective, consider that according to UNESCO, Senegal has the highest rate of Adult illiteracy in the whole continent. In 1947 when the author was at school, less than 1% of Senegalese women could read and write French. Such bleak figures seem very much present in the mind of the author because the whole book stresses the importance of education. The post-colonial foundation that was laid by Senghor was shaky and it does not seem that Senegal has managed to recover from it yet.

In my literary analysis of this classic African novel I have shown that the plans that Senghor eloquently put in place at the public address in the Chamber of Commerce in Dakar still left the Senegalese people feeling alienated by their education system. Using the work of a celebrated writer and activist of the post-independence era, one who veritably and consciously crossed the bridge from colonized to liberated, I have demonstrated how the Senegalese middle class was disappointed with the state of the nation. I have shown how Senghorien cultural hybridity in education was a burden on indigenous students because it skewed towards French traditions. All this cultural mixité managed to do was create a hierarchy of importance in the classroom, with French cultural norms and subjects being at the top. This book is very political minded and deliberately offers a real “slice of life” in Dakar. The reader is very much given the sense that the writer and recipient of the long letter that makes up the novel are part of a very

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63 Education statistics are taken from UNESCO Institute for Statistics Website: [http://www.uis.unesco.org/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.uis.unesco.org/Pages/default.aspx). See in particular their countries profile on Senegal.

64 Engelking, "Senegalese Women, Education, and Polygamy in "Une Si Longue Lettre" and "Faat Kiné"",, 328.
small minority. If the characters in Mariama Bâ’s novel are anything to go by, the
Senghorien nègre nouveau was a very frustrated individual.

**Saving The Baby, Spilling The Bathwater: On Négritude and Contemporary French Education**

One of the most famous contemporary manifestations of the Négritude movement came in the form of public outcry over a proposed law in 2005. Then President Jacques Chirac and his cabinet brought the law before the national assembly and it was passed. All 13 articles of it were centered on the memory of French colonialism, particularly the country’s presence in North Africa. The articles ranged from paying homage to the repatriated French people who lived in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia (called pieds noirs) to threatening anyone who spoke ill of the military organization that operated on behalf of France during the Algerian war of the 1950s and ‘60s. But, by far, the article that provoked the most reaction was article 4, which read as follows:

*Les programmes de recherche universitaire accordent à l’histoire de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, la place qu’elle mérite. Les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l’histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l’armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit...*

*Research programs accord the presence of France overseas, particularly in North Africa, the respect that it deserves. Scholarly programs recognize the positive role of France overseas, notably in North Africa, and accord the history and sacrifices of soldiers of the French army the pre-eminent position that it deserves...*

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66 Ibid.
This law was to be imposed on high school teachers to affect the way French colonial history was taught in schools. The outcry and dissent came swiftly and loudly as the law proved to have political ramifications. Those in the liberal party spoke out against it and called it blindness to the problems that colonialism caused. Former Minister of Justice under president Francois Hollande, Christaine Taubira, was the deputy of Guadeloupe at the time. The outspoken politician called this law “disastrous.” President of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, put a hold on signing a treaty with France because he held that the law was tantamount to mental blindness and “bordered on revisionism.”

Those in academia also had a very strong reaction to this law. They saw this as the imposition of an official history from the government. The piece of legislation was criticized for defying the tenets of French secularism by forcing pedagogues to teach “official lies.” Historians like Claude Liauzu, Gilbert Meynier, Gérard Noiriel and Frédéric Regent penned a petition to stop this law that ended up being signed by 1032 other academics. “En ne retenant que le "rôle positif" de la colonisation, elle impose un mensonge officiel sur des crimes, sur des massacres allant parfois jusqu'au génocide, sur l'esclavage, sur le racisme hérité de ce passé.” [In only holding on to “the positive role” of colonization, it imposes an official lie on the crimes, the massacres that verged on genocide, on slavery, on the inherited racism of this past.]

Even though this law mainly referred to the memory of the North African and Indo-Chinese colonies, the spirit of Négritude was front and center of the resistance to it.

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70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
Classical Négritude was mainly a literature of dissent against European hegemony. It was a resistance movement against colonialism and the inferiority complex that it instilled in its Black colonies. Aimé Césaire’s *Discours sur le colonialism (1950)* seemed to foreshadow the French government’s attempt at this casual erasure of history because he unequivocally stomped out the notion of positive colonization. “I see clearly what colonization has destroyed: the wonderful Indian civilizations—and neither Deterding nor Royal Dutch nor Standard Oil will ever console me for the Aztecs and the Incas.”

Césaire firmly rejected the idea of France’s civilizing mission and posited that it did the exact opposite of that. The poet saw the colonial civilizing mission as a contradiction because “out of all the colonial expeditions…there could not come a single human value.”

Senghor wrote these words more than fifty years before the French government proposed the law of 2005 but it seems like he was responding directly to article 13. Classical Négritude was pointedly anti-colonial and by proposing the law of 2005, the French government indirectly brought Négritude into the discussion. There was always going to be opposition to this law. Even within the party that proposed it there were voices that criticized it, most notably then Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin. “It is not up to parliament to write history,” he stated, “there is no official history in France.”

If criticism to colonial revisionism was inevitable, criticism by way of Négritude was just as likely. There was hardly a voice louder than that of Aimé Césaire when it came to the criticism of colonialism in 1950.

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72 Césaire and Kelley, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 42.
73 Ibid., 34.
74 "France under Pressure to Defend Its Colonial Past."
Old age did nothing to diminish the fervor of Césaire when it came to speaking out against imperialism. Current French territories and departments in the Caribbean opposed the law vehemently, and Césaire led this rejection.\textsuperscript{75} Protests broke out in the streets of Martinique when then interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy was supposed to visit the Island. By 2005 Aimé Césaire was a Martiniquais national figure who frequently received foreign dignitaries. In protest of the controversial legislation now, Césaire refused to meet Sarkozy.\textsuperscript{76} Sarkozy ended up having to cancel his trip to Martinique in light of this act and the unrest that his visit was proving to cause. The legacy of the Négritude movement, by way of one of its prominent voices, helped to derail historical revisionism in the French education system.

The political and societal pressure both domestically and abroad caused the French government to partially rescind this law. President Chirac took out the part of Article 4 that sought to valorize the positive aspects of French colonial presence in North Africa. This incident underlines two things: the first is the connectedness of the Maghreb and other colonized countries. Living under French “direct colonialism” gave them a similarity of experience that endures to this day.\textsuperscript{77} The fact that one of the pioneers of the Négritude movement could be so instrumental in fighting against revisionist policies like the 2005 law shows that the movement can be a tool in the shed of contemporary multiculturalism. Sarkozy eventually did visit Martinique and was received by Césaire. The venerable writer, ever the activist, gifted the French dignitary with a copy of

\textit{Discours sur le colonialisme}. Instances like these serve as examples of how the

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} "Les Relations Tendues Entre Aimé Césaire Et Nicolas Sarkozy," \textit{L'OBS} (2008).
\textsuperscript{77} Ben Naparstek, "Serious Case of Activism," \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald} (2007).
movement can have a legacy that adds significantly to the conversation of diversity and multiculturalism in French society. Like most things in life, Négritude was complex and had its pros and cons. Today’s franco-African generation should watch not to be blinded to the inheritances of Négritude, and should not throw the baby out with the bathwater.
Chapter 4

Dak’Art:

An Exploration of The Importance of Art in Négritude

My grandfather was an advisor to the first president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda. He traveled with the President all over the world and met so many other world leaders. Grandfather is getting on in years, and does not remember whether he actually met Léopold Senghor. He certainly heard about him and traveled to his country. Grandfather told me the general sense he got was that Senghor was respected less as a politician and more as a writer and poet. He was an artist, a man of culture. This perception of Senghor would not have upset him at all. After all, he did say “... Je pensais alors - et continue de penser - que la culture est plus importante que la politique : elle en est la condition première et le but ultime.”[^1] Art was very important to Senghor and he ran in its circles in Paris. And like Négritude, art was a personal passion of Senghor’s that he posited as a national value.

It is therefore understandable that art was a large and integral part of Senghor’s expression of Négritude. African literature and African art were the vital contributions to the global conversation that Senghor reckoned Black people had. Focusing on the marriage of Négritude and art in Senegal is focusing on a stubborn passion of Senghor’s. The school of Senegalese visual art known as L’École de Dakar refers to the brainchild of the first president. To him, visual art was more than just random combinations of lines and colors. Art to him was about how the artist used these lines and colors to express an

emotion. This is essential to point out in the African context because, according to the Senegalese poet, emotion and intuition was the way by which Africans related with the world. “Emotion is negro as reason is Hellenic” is one of the more controversial motifs of the Négritude movement. Be that as it may, what this logically translated to is that African conceptions of art were too important to be left out in the larger conversation on the topic. As was the case with the other aspects of this nebulous movement that I have covered in previous chapters, Senghorien policies towards art were prescriptive and increasingly paternalistic. This chapter will argue that the Senegalese poet’s conception of Négritude- the politics, poetics and policies that were derived from it- culminate in his exaltation of African art and his assertion of it as a fuel for the promulgation of the continent’s culture. The legacy of Négritude art, if patiently analyzed and properly dissected, can be an effective tool for social development.

This chapter will be centered on the idea that art is at the heart of Senghorien Négritude and will attempt to show this from various angles. We will see how the École de Dakar was the manifestation of the passion of Senghor for seeing Africanized art being appreciated worldwide. To show how integral art was to a Senghorien Négritude, this chapter will look at the background of the École de Dakar and analyze some of the main actors in it. Papa Ibra Tall and Ibba N’Diaye had very different philosophies and approaches to the pedagogy of art, but they were both important pioneers of the school. In the second section I will show how in a conversation about Nègritude à la Senghor, art and education are very intricately tied together. This is because Senghor spoke of African knowledge and epistemology as art. When he was speaking about African intuition he

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was referring to it in terms of how it can be used to create art. I will then go on to analyze this relationship between Négritude and art in Senegal, and how it manifested itself in policy. As is my wont, I will talk about what the policies in place were and what the École de Dakar looks like today. How can these contemporary manifestations of Senghor’s vision be used as tools to help improve the state of Franco-African art?

It has been established that Négritude was an ambiguous idea. That said, it will be important to define it in the artistic context and try to characterize it in a way that will make sense. Négritude, here, speaks to a philosophy that drives the Africanization of art. Whether the artist is painting or making tapestry, Négritude encompasses the traits that depict, speak to, and speak about Africans. In short, Négritude art is art that helps to celebrate, elevate and valorize Africa.

“Franco-Africa” is another term that is used frequently in this chapter, and that might need clarification. This term refers to French-speaking sub-Saharan countries and their people in the diaspora. It is a general term that refers to people that come from countries once under the French colonial umbrella. This, I realize, can be problematic. The author of Black France (2007), Dominic Thomas addresses this. In the introduction of his book about colonialism, immigration and transnationalism (which I use in chapter 2), Thomas talks about the need to cross “the arbitrary lines of demarcation between the colony and the post-colony” when talking about French identity politics. This is what I do in this chapter in trying to discuss Senghor’s ideas of Négritude, education and art.

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3 Thomas, Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism, 2.
“Emotion is Negro…”

This chapter is strategically placed last because Senghorien Négritude culminates in art. Art encompassed African knowledge and I will try to show this link is central to understanding. “Emotion is negro, as reason is Hellenic” is probably one of the most contentious phrases in Black intellectual history. For a lot of people, this statement has echoes of racist 19th century philosophy that looked to justify the subjugation of the Black man. Lucien Levy-Bruhl (1857-1939) put forward that there were clear distinctions in the way that the different races thought. The French philosopher essentially made a distinction between western societies suffused with rationality and the colonized world of what he labeled “inferior societies”, under the rule of “primitive mentality”. The fact that Senghor has used similar distinctions in his portrayal of Négritude philosophy has made a lot of people skeptical of his work. A contemporary Senegalese scholar named Souleymane Bachir Diagne does not think that this is necessarily true. In his book African art as philosophy (2011) Diagne points out that Senghor’s postulations on Négritude, art and epistemology were actually closer to the work of another French philosopher, Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Bergsonian philosophy is based on the idea that intuition and intellect are at play in everyone’s mind and that real progress will only be seen when humanity works to knit both these aspects of consciousness together. “Where [Lévy-Bruhl] envisions humanities separated according to the structures of their minds…[Bergson] envisions the

4 Senghor, Liberté, 4, 34.
becoming of a humanity that, overcoming it’s inner separation, accomplishes itself in the equality and ‘full development’ of the two forms of its conscious activity.” In Bergson, Senghor found someone who legitimized his emphasis on and appreciation of the intuitive strengths of African minds. Rather than simply reinforce the dualism of Lévy-Bruhl, Senghor stresses the role of intuition in African art.

This clarification is important because it helps highlight the link that Senghor sees between African epistemology (intuition) and art. Senghor’s Bergsonism helps us understand why art is at the base of Senghorien Négritude. “Senghor's theory of the African method of knowledge and his aesthetic theory” are not just “intimately related [but] even coincide.” This is so because of Bergson and Senghor’s common interest in rhythm. Senghor insists that what constitutes the individuality of a given force is its rhythm. Rhythm is also something that Africans have inherently. According to Senghor, the strong rhythm attitude that Africans possess informs both their relationships to objects (artwork) and information (epistemology). The roots of Senghor’s position on how African’s ultimately relate with art can be found in Bergson’s notions of rhythmical movement and creation. “La Négritude n’a pas d’autre ambition que de contribuer à l’Humanisme du XXe siècle.” [Négritude’s main
goal is to contribute to the humanism of the 20th century] Art was a cornerstone of Senghor’s revalorization project. It was the primary contribution of Africans to the world of the twentieth century. It turns out that when this is made apparent to people when thinking about Négritude, it has the potential to affect certain critiques that are leveled against the Senegalese poet. For example, Souleymane Bachir Diagne points out that in the article where Senghor was talking about reason being Hellenic he was leading up to an argument about the importance of African art. In the context of the article, the word emotion can also be exchanged for “rhythmic attitude.” “’Emotion is Negro, as reason is Hellenic’ can thus be understood, in the context in which it appears, in the following manner: emotion is to African works of art was reason is to Hellenic statuary.” The centric nature of art in this quintessential declaration of Senghorien Négritude goes to show just how fundamental it was to the movement.

**Patrons, Teachers and Students in the École de Dakar**

The École de Dakar refers to the art and its community that came out of Senegal under the patronage of Léopold Sédar Senghor. The statesman was extremely passionate about art because, to him, this was one of the highest forms of expression. We can tell that Senghor felt that the development of art in Senegal was essential for the building of culture because he often spoke about them in the same context. One of the main institutional manifestations of the École de Dakar was the prompt establishment of the École des Arts after Senghor was elected president. The learning institution was actually

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14 Ibid., 71.
established under the Mali federation in 1957 and was initially called the Maison des Arts du Mali. It provided courses in drama, music and the plastic arts. The École des Arts was in many ways the mainstay of the École de Dakar. Senghor made sure that the school bore the characteristics of an institution that held fast to the tenets of Négritude. At one point about a third of the nation’s budget was spent on the arts. This goes to show just how committed Senghor was to building a school of thought in art that was emblematic of the African experience by way of Négritude. In 1965 the École des Arts expanded to Thiès, where Senghor had a tapestry school built. This school, headed by an artist named Papa Ibra Tall, was called the Manufacture Sénégalaise des Arts Décoratifs (MSAD). It was in the production, consumption, interpretation and distribution of the objects made at the MSAD that one saw most clearly Senghor’s art world in motion.

The two main figures in the École de Dakar were Papa Ibra Tall and Ibba N’Diaye. The instruction in the visual arts in École des Arts was initially divided between these two established artists who had been trained in France. Senghor ensured that the Négritude ethos was part of the fabric of the École des Arts. In his mind, Senegal was to be the vanguard in the quest to revalorize visual art created by Black people. Tall was the artist closest to Senghor. He had completely internalized the Négritude ethos and saw the establishment of MSAD as an opportunity to nurture Senegalese talent in a similar spirit. “As one of his tasks, Tall sought to deemphasize the impact of Western education on Senegalese artists, claiming, ‘when one leaves the European schools of fine arts, one

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16 Ibid., 68.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 56.
spends the next ten years of life trying to undo these habits…one has to do exactly the opposite of classical education.\textsuperscript{19} Tall had a peculiar pedagogical philosophy that was, at it’s core, rooted in Senghorien Négritude. His emphasis on unlearning European methods of making art spoke to a belief that African’s had a more inherent, intuitive relationship with art. He talked about authentic Senegalese values, and how his journey in life took him all the way to Europe before he realized that he had to find and nurture those values at home. “We Africans have a philosophy, sensibilities, and values that we must translate into works of art.”\textsuperscript{20} Tall was in many ways given the mantle of leading the École de Dakar because he shared fundamental beliefs with the president. At the opening of the MSAD, Senghor referred to Tall as “\textit{non seulement l’artiste de talent, qui a su assimiler les leçons françaises, en n’en gardant que l’esprit- pour mieux retrouver le style nègre-, mais encore l’homme de caractère.}”\textsuperscript{21} [Not only a talented artist, who knew to assimilate French lessons, while only keeping the spirit- to better find the negro style-, \textit{but also a man of character.}] Senghor also showed a clear bias towards Tall’s department at the École des Arts. All this serves as further evidence that as far as Senghorien Négritude goes, art was an essential component of it.\textsuperscript{22}

It would not be far fetched to call Ibba N’Diaye the philosophical antithesis of Tall. He completed the binary that existed in the École des Arts when it came to epistemological philosophy. N’Diaye was also educated in France and did not feel that he had to reject the tools that the West gave him for artistic expression. Unlike, Tall,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 61.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Senghor, \textit{Liberté}, 4, 102.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Harney, \textit{In Senghor’s Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960-1995}, 64.
\end{itemize}
N’Diaye adamantly believed in the importance of technical training over the search for an innate Africannes and authentic aesthetic. He embodied another, slightly different aspect of Négritude that dictated that it would be erroneous of us to rid ourselves of all aspects of French culture. In essence, N’Diaye was ascribing to the side of Senghorien ideology that appreciated the creolisation of culture. “Be on guard against those who insist that you must be ‘Africans’ before being painters or sculptors,” N’Diaye said, “Against those who continue to want to preserve you in an exotic garden.” N’Diaye resisted the inherent essentialism in Négritude and represented what he thought was a more practical, less mystical way of making African art. He had a wariness toward the belief in the cult of the self-taught, innate, artist-genius. Suffice it to say that N’Diaye eventually became disillusioned with the École des Arts and its mystical leanings, as well as the fact that the president favored Tall’s department. Despite being immensely talented, N’Diaye left the École des Arts in 1967. These two giants of Senegalese art, Tall and N’Diaye, represented two schools of thought when it came to African art instruction: the laissez faire approach and the more structured approach that was modeled after the fine arts school’s in Europe. The two fit awkwardly in the same institution, but somehow both embodied parts of Senghorien humanism. By this, I mean that Tall veered more towards essentialism while N’Diaye embodied the aspects of Négritude that embraced “francité.” The split that took place when N’Diaye left the École des Arts to return to Paris is a representation of the paradoxes that were inherent in Senghorien Négritude.

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23 Ibid., 63.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 64.
26 Ibid.
In 1966, Senegal was “en fete.” Senghor hosted the *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres*, an extravagant forum to share and showcase the work of the artists of the École de Dakar. Looking back, it is safe to say that this was very much the apogee of Senghor’s patronage of Senegalese arts. The title alone speaks to the values of a man who had looked to celebrate “Blackness” and its culture on the world stage for a while. At the opening of the ceremony, Senghor talked about how the world could no longer ignore Black art. “Il en résulte qu’on ne peut nier longtemps l’Art nègre.”

27 [We cannot avoid Negro art any longer] The president also went on to implicate the rest of the country in the responsibility of being the vanguard of négritude art. “D’un mot, si nous avons assumé la terrible responsabilité d’organiser ce festival, c’est pour la Défense et Illustration de la Négritude.”

28 [In a word, we assumed the taxing responsibility of organizing this festival in the defense and illustration of Négritude] This festival drew dignitaries, artists, critics, performers and scholars from all over the world. It consisted of two large exhibitions, one showing “traditional” African art and the other showing contemporary art. There was a forum on the topic “The Function and Significance of Negro-African Art in the Life of the People and for the People.”

29 This symposium spanned a week and drew scholars of African art from across the continent and the globe as a whole. There was a tremendous amount of dance, drama and musical performance at the national theatre that was made almost just in time for this festival. There were talks given by luminary practitioners in various artistic fields from across the continent and the African diaspora. These included Langston Hughes, Aimé Césaire, James Porter, Wole

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28 Ibid.
Soyinka, Katherine Dunham etc. Miriam Makeba sang and the Alvin Ailey Company danced. Based on the title of the festival, Senghor’s opening speech, and the subject of the forum, there is no doubt that Senghorien Négritude was front and center of it all, the philosophical driver of the festivities.

In hosting this event, Senghor ensured that Senegal played the part of progressive post-colonial nation. Elizabeth Harney sought to remind people of an important fact: “One should not forget that in 1966, the Senegalese nation was but five years old, and in keeping with the tenor of the times, Senghor was quick to present an image of a civilized and forward-looking nation to an international gathering of powerful states whose foreign aid he actively courted.” Senghor sanitized the streets by having all the beggars removed from central Dakar. He had old buildings repainted, poverty-stricken areas cordoned off and even the university shut down to avoid student agitators. The whole endeavor was akin to a little boy shoving everything under his bed and pretending that he had cleaned his room. There was a careful culling of cultural elements deemed suitable for foreign consumption. Finally, this show of grandeur was also meant to legitimize his rule in the eyes of the Senegalese bourgeoisie. No nation is stable after only five years, and this was Senghor’s show of strength in the face of how tenuously he held onto power. He invested so much time, energy and resources into something that he believed to be an essential piece of the cultural rise of global Black art.

The *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* was both a success and a failure in achieving its objectives. It was a success because it was there that critics first began

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 76.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 73.
talking about an École de Dakar.\textsuperscript{34} It brought together people from all over the world in the hopes of showing not only that the country was thriving after colonialism, but also that an art scene was blooming. Senghor triumphantly declared that “the whole world has felt and will continue to feel the profound echoes of this Négritude meeting.”\textsuperscript{35} The coining of the École de Dakar speaks to how this festival also gave the Senegalese artists massive exposure and legitimized their profession in the eyes of their families. In Senegalese societies, where men were expected to provide for their families and contribute to the wellbeing of the clan, the life of an artist did not really compute. “In the case of many artists, it was a struggle to make their new career understandable to their families, for whom the life of a painter of sculptor showing in galleries, at home and internationally, did not constitute a familiar or accepted notion.”\textsuperscript{36} Inversely, however, such a large undertaking also exposed the inconsistencies and paradoxes inherent in Négritude, and by extension in the École de Dakar. African artists and intellectuals were turned off by how tailored the festival was to a European audience. More importantly, the philosophical underpinnings of Négritude did not sit well with a lot of the scholars who felt that a pan-African movement in the initial stages of nation building was not the best way forward for a lot of the young African nations. “The capital error of this older Négritude, the great sin of Négritude in general was to have been, at the outset, inverted love. It was to have believed, even before its birth, in universality when the universe was forbidden it.”\textsuperscript{37} This critique was strongly articulated at the follow up to the Festival Mondial that took place in Algiers in 1969. The festival in Algiers was of a very different

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 76.
disposition than the one that took place in Dakar, mainly because it was a more indigenous affair.\textsuperscript{38} The open and direct criticism of Senghor’s patronage is evidence that even as soon as three years after his big symposium, people close to the movement were highly critical of it. It is easy for a scholar to smugly look back fifty years later and call Senghor’s marriage of Négritude and art as vehicle for nation building ineffective. But the fact that criticism of his patronage was just as virulent only a few years later helps to underline the fact that one can objectively say that Senghor was being prescriptive.

\textit{Négritude as Art as Policy}

Following the trend of the preceding chapters, I would like to look at how Senghor structured policy around Négritude. This personal ethos was elevated to the status of political ideology and it helped inform Senghor’s patronage of national art. Now that it has been established how important art was to Senghorien Négritude, looking at how the policies around this played out on the ground is useful in gauging how successful this all was in the construction of a nation from a state. This section will also inform the conversation around what the legacy of this particular aspect of Négritude is, and how it can help drive the progress of Franco-African art today.

One of Senghor’s epithets was \textit{homme de culture}, a man of culture. It was therefore very fitting that he was as deliberate as he was about putting in place cultural policies in Senegal. The president took it upon himself to build and nurture culture in the newly formed West-African nation. The policies put in place to aid this largely took the form of patronage of art in the country. We have already discussed the \textit{Premiere Festival}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 77.
des Arts Nègres which was an ambitious venture that took seven years years to bring together. A lot of the cultural policies in the first decade after independence were built around the preparations for the festival to take place. Senghor was ambitious for this festival to really work as a celebration of Négritude as well as a means to legitimize the notion in the eyes of his political enemies. Examples of cultural policy that were put in place in preparation for the Premier Festival include setting up the École des Arts in Dakar. He did this fairly soon after getting elected. Senghor looked to strengthen and expand the École by establishing the Manufacture Sénégalaise des Arts Decoratifs (MSAD). As we saw earlier, this was established by decree in 1966 and was led by Papa Ibra Tall.

Senghor was very fond of tapestry and looked to assert it as some sort of national art form. Government offices were adorned with tapestry from the MSAD, and the works of art were also given as gifts to foreign dignitaries. Not only did Tall share the same vision as him, he was also very skilled at making tapestry. But it was also clear that one of the reasons that Senghor really tried to elevate tapestry in the artistic consciousness of his people is because it was a relatively harmless form of art. “Tapestry is far from threatening, so it is not surprising that the state funded this enterprise without placing any limitations on how tapestries were created or on what subject matter they expressed.” This is as opposed to art forms such as cinema, music, literature and theatre that can be politically weaponized to highlight the flaws that the government may have.

40 Ibid., 47.
41 Ibid., 50.
42 Ibid., 54.
43 Ibid.
This is by no means to say that Senghor did not extend his patronage to other forms of art. He was very passionate about theatre and ballet, too. Another example of policy he put in place to build and nurture culture was the establishment of the National Ballet. This was in many ways supposed to serve as the epitome of Senghorien rootedness, what he called *enracinement*. The National Ballet was established even before MSAD, in 1961, and was one of the earlier manifestations of cultural policy in Senegal. “The company selected the most talented dancers, drawn from different ethnic groups and regions, thus fostering a sense of national cultural unity.”

Yet another *Premier Festival* related example of culture building was the building of the *Musée Dynamique*. This museum is a beautiful oceanfront building located on the Corniche and modeled on a Greek temple. At the opening ceremony of the museum Senghor made it clear that this was no coincidence. “La vérité est que le continent africain a occupé une place importante dans l’élaboration de la civilisation grecque.”

The *Musée Dynamique* was not only a function of Senghor’s cultural policy, it was also homage to Africa’s influence on ancient Greek civilization.

The monetary support given to artists was also very significant and is an important example of cultural policy. There is no doubt that for Senegalese artists, the government was the surest ticket in town. It was the main client that bought their artwork and displayed it in their offices. Senghor’s government also paid subsidies to artists. Individual patronage was popular, even though some artists were made to wait a long time.

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44 Ibid., 45.
46 Senghor, *Liberté*, 1, 64.
time before they received their commissions.\textsuperscript{47} It is worth mentioning again that about 25\% of the annual budget was spent on culture and education in the first decade after independence.\textsuperscript{48} Senghor also established a \textit{loi decorative}, which reserved 1\% of the total cost of public buildings exclusively for decorative purposes (based on Negro-African aesthetics).\textsuperscript{49} This gives as a picture of how intentional Senghor was about building culture in Senegal and about how he went about doing this. The policies in place are also examples of how hard Senghor worked to make Négritude a big part of Senegalese culture in many different ways.

\textit{The École de Dakar: then and now}

The marriage of art and Négritude, as we have seen, turned out to be as contrived as similar unions that Senghor tried to put together. The difference between art and education, for example, is that the former formed part of the foundation of Senghor’s humanism. His philosophy was based upon ideas about the uniqueness of the African mind that manifested itself in the way that they did art. We have looked at some of the results of Senghorien patronage of Senegalese art: the \textit{Premier Festival des Arts Nègres} was both a showcase of Black art; a celebration of Négritude and its artistic expression. We have also looked at some of the policies that Senghor put in place to concretize his vision of the role Négritude should play in Senegalese art. As in previous chapters, I will look at the legacy of this particular aspect of Négritude today. What does the École de Dakar look like today, and how can Senghor’s vision for African art be used to strengthen

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\item \textsuperscript{47} Snipe, \textit{Arts and Politics in Senegal, 1960-1996}, 54.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 58.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
its position? How can Senghorien Négritude manifest itself in Franco-African art circles today? I will explore the questions that I have put forward by comparing and contrasting expositions in different eras of the École de Dakar. This will be done in the hope of finding how tenets from the roots of Négritude can be used to improve contemporary African art.

The first exhibition that I will look at is the one called *Art Sénégalais d’Aujourd’hui* from 1974. This exhibition was kicked off following the *Premier Festival des Arts Nègres* and was heavily supported by the government. It would be safe to describe this exhibition as quintessential to the early days of the École de Dakar. This was when Senegalese art was most infused with Senghorien Négritude because the president was directly involved in putting the exhibition together. The introductory text that accompanied the exhibition leaves no doubt as to how much it was influenced by Négritude philosophy. The Senegalese minister of culture, Assane Seck, talked about the exhibition being the manifestation of an artistic renaissance fostered by Senghor’s policies.\textsuperscript{50} In the introductory text of the exposition *Arts Sénégalais d’Aujourd’hui*, Seck authoritatively put it like this: “The spiritual forces which animate a people may have to lie dormant in silent catacombs for centuries; then, with millennial vigour, as it were, they suddenly surge forth in the new and different forms of the modern era.”\textsuperscript{51} Firstly, this quote invokes Senghor, specifically. The flourish with which it was written makes it clear that the president’s way with words was infectious. More importantly, the introductory text conveys the character of Senghorien Négritude because of how it


\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
alludes to the spirit realm. It goes back to the idea of Africans being emotion(al), being intuitive, living outside of Western rationalism. Seck’s quote also alluded to the modernist traits that were prevalent in Négritude art. The artists in this school recast cultural memories using the strategies and media of modernism.  

The language Senegal’s minister of culture used mirrors the sentiments of the French minister of cultural affairs, André Malraux, when he spoke at the *Premier Festival* several years earlier. "Just as one cannot deny the Renaissance, the masters of the Middle Ages, Cubism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Neoclassicism, one cannot deny the École de Dakar." This exhibition was purposely meant to be an extension of the *Premier Festival*, to carry the message of a forward-looking, self assured Senegal. Senegalese art scholar Joanna Grabski highlighted the link between the *Festival Mondial* and the 1974 exhibition. “As with the *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Negres*, the exhibition "Art Senegalais d'Aujourd'hui" acted as a strategic discursive space for narrating post-independence visual production as premised on the collective spirit and national ideology of Negritude." The exhibition traveled to Europe, the United States, and South America. It was very much the ideal way to promote an image of Senegal on the international stage. The exposition presented more than 100 paintings, tapestries and sculptures. These were mainly amassed from the preceding ten years, at the height of the Senghorien École de Dakar. The exposition toured for approximately ten years before returning to Dakar for good.

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52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 46.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
The contemporary equivalent of the exhibition *Art Sénégalais d’Aujourd’hui* is a biennale exhibition in Dakar called *Dak’art*. I posit this because both exhibitions are done by Senegalese artists and are widely associated with the École de Dakar. Both exhibitions are associated with Senghorien Négritude, be it consciously or simply by association. The Biennale of Contemporary African Art is today’s premier showcase of artwork from all over the African continent. As I describe the background of *Dak’Art* and the biennale exhibitions, I hope to make clear that there are still elements of Senghorien Négritude in contemporary African art. Even as Senegal, as a nation, has moved past Négritude, the *Dak’Art* Biennale of Contemporary African Art show strikes a healthy balance between using art as a mode of self-expression and burdening your work with the story of a whole race. The artists associated with this show have had to negotiate their contemporariness as it associates to Senghor’s theories on art. In an age where Senegalese art was no longer a visual corollary of Négritude, how does the contemporary art represent itself on the world stage?

The seminal work to answer the question about the *Dak’Art* Biennale of Contemporary African Art show was done by Yacouba Konaté, *Dak’Art: The Making of Pan-Africanism and the Contemporary*. Mr. Konaté is a curator and art critic at the University of Cocody in the Ivory Coast. The Dakar Biennale was a response to calls for the resurgence of Senegalese art. This speaks to a nostalgia that the art community had of the golden age of the École de Dakar, when art was put at the center of civil society. The author is quick to point out, however, that this nostalgia was accompanied by a

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57 Ibid., 492.
determined clear-sightedness regarding the future. The President who took over from Senghor in 1980 was called Abdou Diouf, and he said the Dakar Biennale was a question of “inventing the future.”\textsuperscript{58} But the author posits that the École de Dakar is continuously forced to learn from the mistakes of its predecessors. The art coming out of Senegal should never have had veered towards European modernism as it did. Konaté talked about how African artists were pressured into catering to both an African and European audience. “European artists are not specifically asked to move Africans as well as Europeans. Rather, it is supposed that if a European is moved, an African will be too.”\textsuperscript{59} Therefore, the issue of the contemporary for the African artist is made complex by knowing that their art is expected to remain grounded in African roots while aiming at a Western audience. Success has not yet been redefined in that sense; one still has to be international to excel.

The relationship between Négritude and contemporary Senegalese art is complex. While it is undeniable that Senghor paved the way for the Dakar Biennale to even exist as it does, contemporary African artists are constantly trying to break away from a lot of his traditions. The influence of Senghorien Négritude on the Dakar Biennale can be seen in the name of the grand prize, the institutions that host the event, and the precedence of French influence on such events. Konaté talks about the irony in “the contemporary” existing in such a traditional environment. He holds that “the traditional can feed parasitically on the contemporary and vice versa.”\textsuperscript{60} This illustrates the eagerness of Senegalese artists to free themselves from the burdens of Senghorien Négritude clashing

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 495.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 512.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 514.
with its remnants in contemporary art. But even as the legacy of Senghor is still heavily felt, artists are creating stuff about the world that they presently live in. They consciously break away from Senghorien cultural affirmation and the historically focused disposition of Négritude. The art they make speaks to their lives and contemporary Senegalese artists look to concentrate on issues that are more pressing in their times. “Subject matter and the narration of real, topical life reign supreme. Contemporary art accentuates and exacerbates this tendency.”

Another important thing to note before we look at specific pieces created in *Dak’Art* is the connection between contemporary art and the biennale as a specific type of exhibition. Konaté explains that institutional power that was well dispersed in the first decade of the École de Dakar was extremely concentrated thirty years later. During the *Premier Festival des Arts Nègres* influence was surprisingly decentralized considering how Dakar-focused the whole procession was. There was a museum of modern art and a museum of contemporary art—both testaments to how the *Premier Festival* was a celebration of modernity. These institutions did not exist anymore in the early 1990s, before the first biennale. Therefore, the entire power of the non-existant institutions was concentrated in the hands of the biennale. The biennale, through its community of gallery directors and curators, singles out major artists. Therefore, as an authority and an institution, the biennale plays a major role in the contemporary art system.

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61 Ibid., 517.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
Dak’Art 11th Biennale of Contemporary African Art (May 5th–June 8th, 2014)

To show see how tenets from the roots of Senghorien Négritude can be used to improve contemporary African art, I will have to look at one of the exhibitions in detail. The 11th Biennale of Contemporary African Art was held in 2014. “The exhibition took place at Village de la Biennale (a collection of warehouses that served as three exhibition spaces on the Route de Rufisque in the industrial zone of Dakar) and the Musée de l’IFAN and was accompanied by more than two hundred Off exhibitions in Dakar and Saint-Louis, Senegal, showing more than five hundred artists.”

The curators of the biennale, Elise Atangana, Abdelkader Damani and Ugochukwu Nzewin designed it with the theme “Producing the Common” in mind. The theme of the biennale was a nod to Martiniquais essayist and poet, Eduoard Glissant who put forward his own version of francophone creolization that he dubbed “tout-monde.” This was the 11th exhibition of the biennale, which is the fourth largest exhibition of its kind in the world.

It was a well-organized and almost flawlessly executed exhibition. This biennale also attempted to answer some enduring and very pointed questions about African art. Was this an exhibition of contemporary Africa n art for the continent or was this meant for a Western audience? Further, how can a pan-African exhibition define the experience of “the contemporary” when its artist come from such varied places? The curators of this biennale sought to address these questions by leaving out as much information as possible about the artists’ origins. The pieces of work were accompanied only by their

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
titles and the names of the artist. This move sought to question the place of locality in the conversation about the contemporary in African art.

Some pieces of note include Olu Amoda’s *Sunflower (2012)* shown below

![Image of Sunflower (2012) by Olu Amoda](Image1)

**Olu Amoda, Sunflower (2012), Steel, nails, and metal spoons; 205 cm diameter**

The piece was made from nails collected from shipping containers in which consumer goods are imported to Lagos. It’s a commentary on urbanization and the passion for consumption. The fact that the artist used nails from containers makes me think about the unseen, unsung elements of society that hold it together. One does not

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68 Ibid. This image was gotten from 1-54.com when the website did an Artist Spotlight on Olu Amoda. Find it at [http://1-54.com/new-york/artists/olu-amoda/](http://1-54.com/new-york/artists/olu-amoda/)

69 Ibid., 83.

70 Ibid.
necessarily see the nails that hold shipping containers together, but without them it does not exist. Amoda’s piece is typical of the spirit behind a lot of the contemporary works of art in Senegal: it focuses on his own lived experience.

Another notable piece of art was Amary Sobel Diop’s portraits made from mixed media, shown below:

![Portrait of Aline Sitoe Diatta](image)

_Amary Sobel Diop, Portrait Aline Sitoe Diatta (2013), Apologie pour la paix series. Aluminium, copper wire, and deodorant boxes; 80 cm x 106 cm._

This formed part of a series called _Apologie Pour La Paix_ in which the artist made portraits of leading female figures in Senegal. The portrait shown above is of Aline Sito Diatta, a Senegalese heroine of the opposition to French colonialism. Diop also uses recycled material and makes art from and about his environment. This particular peace was made from aluminium, copper wire and deodorant boxes.

Diop’s art engages with

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71 Ibid. This image was gotten from the official website of the Dak’Art Biennale 2014 under the ’Amary Sobel Diop’ exhibition. Please find it at http://biennaledakar.org/2014/spip.php?article120
72 Ibid., 84.
“assemblage, couture, toile, sculpture, peinture” and celebrates Négritude in a way that was often lacking from Senghor. Négritude was dominated by masculine voices since its inception in France and often did not speak to or for African women. It seems like the fact that the three pioneers of the movement were male set up a precedence of a very masculine movement. Even when Senghor referenced Black women in his poems, it was with a Western modernist eye. In his poem *Black Woman (1945)*, Senghor uses the line “Naked woman, Black woman” at the beginning of each stanza.\(^7^3\) Instead of being a celebration of the virtues of Black women the poem feels like Western primitivism, like the fetishes of someone who sees Black women from afar. Diop’s appreciation of the African woman manifests itself in the terrestrial materials that he used and him making the most honest portrait that he could make. In using Aluminium, copper wire and deodorant boxes Diop highlights the earth and nature, and it is typically the women that cultivate the earth where this material is coming from. Not only was Diop highlighting the influence of Senegalese women in history, his art was also a commentary on the environment. The fact that he used recycled material belies a consciousness of environmentalism and sustainability; an issue more and more African countries are beginning to pay attention to.

This last piece shown above is probably my personal favorite because of the message behind it. The artist’s name is Henri Sagna and the piece is called Témoins de Notre Temps. The artist uses burnt wooden containers to display religious symbols. The title directly translates to “Witness of our time” and the religious symbols placed like building blocks one on top of the other speak to how religion is a big part of Senegalese society. The piece also has a tenuous feel to it, like the blocks could drop at any minute. Senegal has not been spared the violence that has arisen in many African nations along religious lines. This is a perfect example of a piece that speaks to the contemporary...
moment. It calls for unity among Christian and Muslim congregations, as well as highlight the fact that there are very well differences among the Senegalese population. Senghorien Négritude had a Universalist feel to it, one that disregarded the very real differences among Blacks in Senegal.

**Conclusion**

Léopold Senghor was a personal friend of Pablo Picasso’s and he appreciated the strides the painter had taken in the advancement of modernist art. Picasso was often a fixture in Senghor’s speeches as an example of a Western artist who bore testament to the African roots of Western art. “Il a fallu que...Picasso fut ébranlé par un masque baoulé...pour que l’art de l’Occident européen consentit, après deux mille cinq cent ans, à l’abandon de la physéôs: de l’imitation de la nature.”[76] [Picasso needed to be shaken by a baoulé mask for European art to give in, after 2500 years, to physeos; the imitation of nature.] He dedicated a poem to Picasso,[77] and hosted the great artist’s last exhibition in Africa, which was held in Senegal in 1972.[78] Picasso was Senghor’s go-to example of the effect that Négritude art could have on the world if nurtured in the right way.

In outlining the lengths to which Senghor went to posit art and Négritude in the forefront of Senegalese society, I showed how Senghor’s personal leanings dictated so much about the direction of Senegalese nation building. A nation this young was always

75 Ibid., 85.
76 Senghor, Liberté, 1, 59.
78 "In Pictures: Picasso and Africa," BBC News.
going to be impressionable, was always going to take on the disposition of its leader. In Zambia, this took the form of every government official wearing safari suits and picking up golf as their favourite sport (Grandfather claims he went against the grain on both counts). The difference with Senghor was that he turned his personal interests into national policy. Even something as important as the exaltation of a historically oppressed people is bound to get messy when applied in this way. In a 1967 interview Césaire once admitted that he thought that Négritude had been over-theorized. “There has been too much theorizing about Negritude. I have tried not to overdo it, out of a sense of modesty.” Senghor had no such sense and ended up confounding the idea with philosophy, religion, psychology etc. The power Senghor had made his whims and preferences had ramifications on a national scale and actors in the contemporary moment are still having to negotiate them.

The major question that was addressed in this chapter is “How can these contemporary manifestations of Senghor’s vision be used to help improve the state of Franco-African art?” In talking about Franco-African art we can look at the Dak’Art Biennales or we can look at Africa Remix, a traveling exhibition that has the pan-African characteristics that Senghor would have appreciated. The answer to this question is that the way the Biennales are organized and executed in Senegal can be a great model for art in France. The traveling exhibition cannot help but be molded by the responses of the audiences it travels to. Even though the Dak’Art biennale was also struggling with questions of target audiences, the best chance that Franco-African art has to speak to its

79 Césaire and Kelley, Discourse on Colonialism.
own people is to stay in one location. One of the biggest victories that the École de Dakar can claim is creating a space in which the artist could “speak presently” to historical experience through their work.81 This is especially pertinent for a people whose identity has been formed as recently as this generation’s Franco-Africans. Ig art is going to be distinct it needs to cater to its people first, before traveling. The way the curators of the biennale play with the ideas of location and authenticity by doing away with indicators of both problematizes Négritude essentialism. This might be their way of taking the good of Négritude, while questioning the problematic. Creating such spaces and being a model for other Franco-African art communities in this regard is how contemporary manifestations of Senghor’s vision can contribute to the art scene.

This thesis has drawn from a wide variety of sources and has looked at both literary and historical texts to try and fully understand the legacy of the Négritude movement. It has been shown that Négritude was prescriptive and was projected upon the Senegalese people. But even as this is true in all fields of Négritude that we have looked at, politics, immigration, education and art, there are aspects of the movement that could add to the conversation of multiculturalism in France. These include: Making a case for federalism and regional cooperation outside of the umbrella of a European power. For the most part, African states have been peaceful towards each other. Whatever violence the continent does endure is either inflicted by non-state actors like terrorist groups, or by internal conflict. Through Négritude and the ideas put forward in On African Socialism discussed in Chapter one, African countries can build on this peace to form strong social and economic trade alliances. As discussed in Chapter two, the Négritude movement also

provides a template for other such minority movements in the face of marginalization and oppression. As much as the signatories of Littérature-monde do not want to be the spokespeople for a motherland they do not identify with, one cannot deny the fact that the Négritude movement left a mark on French society that others can try and emulate. Literary movements can be the intellectual arms of their social counterparts, like classical Négritude and anti-colonialism. If the March of the Beaurs had been recorded and immortalized by the Migritude movement, who knows how much better Maghrebi people would be integrated in French society? The legacy of Négritude art is the clearest indicator of the importance of this exploring this idea. The fact that Senghorian patronage, with all its flaws, managed to create the space for art to be a tool for development today is important. The work of artists like Sagna and Diop is an encouraging sign that African art can be posited in a global conversation about sustainability, gender and religion without being destructive to its community. Art does not have to serve as propaganda for its country’s government and does not have to be imposed on people’s lives. In questioning the ideas of location and authenticity in African art, the curators of the Dak’Art Biennale demonstrate how the legacy of Négritude does not have to be looked at as a zero sum game. Négritude in the contemporary context can be a wonderful if consumed like the wild loquat fruit: dissected with care, seeds kissed out gently and the sweet insides that have been allowed to ripen, extracted.
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