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# Black International Mobilities and Feminist Itineraries : Jessie Redmon Fauset and Paulette Nardal

Katherine Russell

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UNIVERSITÉ GUSTAVE EIFFEL

ÉCOLE DOCTORALE “CULTURES ET SOCIÉTÉS”

Laboratoire LISAA (EA 4120)

Thèse de doctorat en Études Anglophones

KATHERINE RUSSELL

**Black International Mobilities and Feminist  
Itineraries**

**Jessie Redmon Fauset and Paulette Nardal**

Sous la direction de Monsieur le Professeur Jean-Paul ROCCHI

Université Gustave Eiffel

Soutenue le 16 décembre 2022

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*Au Bois de Bouleau.*



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# Introduction

During the interwar period, Jessie Redmon Fauset and Paulette Nardal crossed the Atlantic to a Paris that was a cosmopolitan center, home of avant-garde artists from around the globe, the urban locus of new liberatory identities such as the modern woman, the “Jazz Age” of African American musicians, the *vogue noire* and “colonial balls”. All these aspects and more come to be defining scenes, milieus and atmospheres of this period, its celebration and its latter mythologization in France and elsewhere. Fauset’s travelling to France happened once during “her student years,” in 1921 for the European tour of the second Pan-African Congress and later in 1924-1925 when she travelled most outside of Paris, around France, to Rome and with friend and artist Laura Wheeler Waring to Algeria. Nardal’s trajectories in the interwar period were also marked by comings and goings with sojourns in Martinique, in Belgium and in Senegal. From 1920 onwards Nardal settled in Paris, then Clamart, with her sisters Jeanne “Jane”, Andrée and Lucy. Paris was different for each of these two women as much as it was for the many other artists, intellectuals, activists, and cultural producers that migrated to the Parisian space and its suburbs. Commonalities in Fauset’s journey can be found in her African American colleagues, both masculine and feminine. Fauset experienced Paris as liberatory and a “reprieve” from the antiblack racism of the United States. Racism in France existed but in comparison, Paris appeared a whole world away from the land that African Americans had left. As T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting underlines in her comprehensive study *Bricktop’s Paris: African American Women in Paris Between the Two World Wars*,

Between the first and second World Wars, the period some call the Jazz Age, France became a place where African American women could realize personal freedom and creativity, in narrative or in performance, in clay or in canvas, in life or in love. Paris, as it appeared to them, was physically beautiful, culturally refined, inexpensive as a result of the war, and seductive with its lack of violent racial animus. “The power of place” was indeed remarkable. Places determine reality; as distinct settings, they are laden with cultural significance. Therefore speaking, thinking, doing, simply living are never unaffected by where such activities take place.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop’s Paris: African American Women in Paris Between the Two World Wars* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 5.

The central protagonist of this study that covers the paths of twenty-five African American women in Paris is Ada “Bricktop” Smith. She opened a famous African American jazz bar in Montmartre and was an iconic figure amongst black and white, French and anglophone modernist circles. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Cole Porter, T.S. Eliot, Henry Miller, Ernest Hemingway could all be found in her establishment and where she had previously worked at the alternate hotspot of *Le Grand Duc*.<sup>2</sup> The Montmartre of Bricktop was also the grounds where other major players of black and white modernisms performed, intermingled, passed by each other, or perhaps spotted one another from across the room. Jessie Fauset, for instance, as well as Florence Mills, Countee Cullen, Lillian Evan-Tibbs, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Ethel Waters, Alberta Hunter, Gwendolyn Bennett, Josephine Baker, Augusta Savage, Nella Larsen, Anita Thompson Dickinson, Eslanda and Paul Goode Robeson as well as Zelda Fitzgerald, Nancy Cunard, Janet Flanner, Djuna Barnes, and Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven to name just a few.<sup>3</sup> Whether here, or across town in Montparnasse it is also likely that on more than a few occasions, the likes of Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Constantin Brancusi, André Gide, Kiki de Montparnasse, André Breton, Colette, or Paul Morand, were in the picture at bars or “colonial balls” as well as the Nardals, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, René Maran, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Roberte Horth, Prince Kojo Tovalou Houénou, or Jenny Alpha who performed alongside Baker and Duke Ellington during the interwar period. What Bricktop’s journey demonstrates, and those like Baker, Mills or the sculptress Elizabeth Prophet, who stayed for extended periods of time in the French capital is that in Paris, African Americans and particularly African American women could find opportunities largely unthinkable in the United States. But perhaps most importantly they could explore, create, and cultivate artistic expression and foster a sense of self, of being talented artists and integral human subjects. As Fauset will state in Paris, “it is just lovely to be oneself.”<sup>4</sup> However, travelling or migrating to a foreign land, even if it provides freedom from anti-black racism of America, does not mean that feelings of isolation, homesickness and dislocation are not a part of these journeys. Gwendolyn Bennett will write in her journal during her 1925 stay in Paris.

I know that the fourth of July happened! I say “happened” because that is how I feel about it. To have one’s National Holiday roll around when one is in a strange land and can’t speak the language is an experience never to be forgotten. A homesickness more poignant and aching than anything I can ever imagine held me in its grip. All day long I did not see or speak to a single one of my compatriots... nor did I ever hear a word of English spoken. There is this marvelous thing about my being here in

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<sup>2</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop’s Paris*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop’s Paris*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Jessie Fauset, “Letter to Langston Hughes,” January 6, 1925, James Weldon Johnson Papers: JWJ MSS 26, box 61, folder 1163-1167, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

France – a strange new patriotism has sprung up in me since I have been here in France... there are times that I'd give half of my remaining years to hear the "Star Spangled Banner" played. And yet even as I feel that way, I know that it has nothing to do with the same "home" feeling there when I see crowds of American white people jostling each other about the American Express.<sup>5</sup>

Bennett's longing for American culture nuances trajectories of migration. Like Fauset, Bennett's identification with her national identity is experienced differently, when away from its territory and distant from white Americans. Bennett recognizes that they too exist in Paris, and that her feelings of homesickness do not speak of the same "home" as theirs. And yet, travel appears to spark into existence perhaps new and surprising attachments and tends to transform ways of perceiving oneself and others that may not have been imaginable or desired previously. Whilst in Paris, Fauset will write for instance, "I find Americans, black or white, when they are nice, nicer than any other people in the world,"<sup>6</sup> and she will largely gravitate towards her fellow country men and women. As Sharpley-Whiting summarizes in *Bricktop*, African American women's "experiences as Americans in a foreign city certainly bound them together in the City of Light, but so too did their experiences as women on the threshold of something new, namely, their attempts to live differently and 'do' something differently."<sup>7</sup> With these experiences, the "newness" that is so integral to modernist sensibilities, and the keen insights of different ways race, gender, class and nationality are experienced or articulated within this specific colonial metropolis, these women "would return in the midst of the New Negro era, fully equipped to take up the roles as "pioneers" of the race in areas of art, education, and civil rights."<sup>8</sup> Fauset was no exception, and in a sense this also rings true for Paulette Nardal in her eventual undesired return to Martinique and the work she will go on to pursue within this Caribbean island. However, much of her "pioneering", as Nardal herself will describe it, was done here in the heart of the French empire.

As Jennifer Anne Boittin's *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* or Brent Hayes Edwards' *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*<sup>9</sup> underline, the reception of African American

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<sup>5</sup> Gwendolyn Bennett, "1925 Diary," July 26, 1925, Gwendolyn Bennett Papers: Sc MG 77, box 1, folder 3, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, NY.

<sup>6</sup> Jessie Fauset, "Letter to Langston Hughes," January 6, 1925, James Weldon Johnson Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

cultural practices in Paris by the metropolitan public did not always provide a happy union with other black communities cohabiting the city. One aspect of this is because the *vogue noire* that celebrated African American black expression fed into the French exoticism of popular culture or European avant-gardes that Paulette and Jane Nardal, for instance, were intellectually and politically working against. What differentiates Paulette Nardal's Paris, like her Antillean and African colleagues, to Fauset's Paris and that of her fellow African Americans, then, is that race or racism are not experienced in the same way. Paris was figured as the epitome of French civilization and the very materialization of the national pledge *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. Once arrived, the common event told by black colonial subjects is that the anti-black racism encountered burst the façade that they would be considered French too. They realized they were not seen as equal subjects or citizens within this nation state. As Jane Nardal writes in her article "Exotic Puppets," an Antillean student like herself could not be "like a little French girl of the middle class... in Paris pursuing studies that you began over there, in the Tropics, in high school."<sup>10</sup> At a time when the colonial propaganda of the Third Republic was in full force and France's colonial empire was at its apotheose, it is no wonder that subjects travelling from this nation's colonies were received differently to African Americans. On an administrative level, many black intellectuals and activists that spoke out against the French empire were surveilled and some were subject to extradition.<sup>11</sup> However, this conjuncture in Paris of different cultural expressions of blackness and intellectual exchange was particularly important to the creation of new cultural aesthetics that counteracted the stereotypical representations in France. Fellow Martinican Aimé Césaire's migration to the metropolis was pivotal to his understandings of *négritude* and as he will come to say, it was here that he "met Africa". In respect to Paulette Nardal, she attributes African American Spirituals to her coming into racial consciousness. Her intellectual and creative pursuits were influenced and inspired by African Americans in Paris, and she created long lasting friendships and collaborative creative projects with many of them. Her dissertation at the Sorbonne for her English diploma was on Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Also a student at the Sorbonne, Jane Nardal attended Anna Julia Cooper's doctoral defense for her thesis called "*L'attitude de la France à l'égard de l'esclavage pendant la Révolution*" which presented a rather ground-breaking approach to the subject as it centralized the

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<sup>10</sup> Jane Nardal, "Pantins Exotiques," *La Dépêche africaine* 8 (octobre 15, 1928): 2. All English citations of Nardal's article are translated by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting in her *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) 108-113. Jane Nardal, "Exotic Puppets," in *Negritude Women*, 108.

<sup>11</sup> The Center for Native Affairs (*Centre des Affaires Indigènes*) agents were charged with the surveillance of colonial migrants by the Minister of Colonies. A kind of French equivalent to the CIA, they reported, controlled, and kept track of colonial subject's movements, political ideas, actions, and knowledge production. Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, xxvi.

transatlantic slave trade in the historiography of the French Revolution.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, both sisters had the project to translate Alain Locke's *The New Negro: An Interpretation* and though this did not come to fruition it attests to the close relationships that they had with the Harlem Renaissance milieu. Thus, it may have been that the *vogue noire* and *art nègre* were taking the metropolis by storm, however Paulette Nardal appropriated her own Paris, forged spaces, and created representations of black feminine French identities in her own terms. The creation of her and her sister's salon at Clamart is a prime example. She not only brought Harlem Renaissance writers and musicians in conversation with Aimé Césaire, Léon-Gontran Damas and Léopold Sédar Senghor, known as the forefathers of Négritude, but experimented with making different types of spaces and communities within the migratory trajectory.

Yet this urban center of multifaceted modernist expressions, anti-imperial and anti-colonial struggles was not always known as such. Along with the works already cited, critical engagements like Michel Fabre's 1985 study, *La Rive noire de Harlem à la Seine*, Tyler Stovall's *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*, Petrine Archer-Straw's *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*, or more recent anthologies like, *Black France/ France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness*, are examples of visibilizing the black communities that were in Paris.<sup>13</sup> Particularly pertinent to this research is how these critical studies underline the ways in which black artistic and cultural productions informed and shaped the aesthetics of European modernisms and the avant-garde movements, and how black artists, writers and musicians responded to them. This was a necessary undertaking for even at the time, like Hemingway's 1920 *Moveable Feast* demonstrates, or later in art and literary history, interwar Paris was widely narrated through the celebration of white masculine artists and writers who were painted as the only creators and producers of the avant-garde scenes and modernist aesthetics. In this way famous figures such as Josephine Baker may be referenced, or the jazz bars in Montmartre or the colonial balls where Antillean and African musicians played may be staged, but they remained as the cultural (exotic) accoutrements to the Parisian capital and its European avant-garde rather than active participants in it. These critical engagements have thus changed the image of Paris to give a more accurate account of who lived there, who was a part of the effervescence of (black)

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<sup>12</sup> Claire Oberon Garcia, "Black Women Writers, Modernism, and Paris," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14, no. 1 (May 2011): 27.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Fabre, *La Rive noire de Harlem à la Seine* (Paris: Lieu Commun, 1985); Tyler Edward Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996); Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000); Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Tyler Stovall, eds., *Black France/ France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).



modernist creations and the transcultural and interracial dialogues and connections that can now be understood as constitutive of interwar Parisian culture. From this perspective, those working specifically on African, Antillean or African American communities in Paris and critically revisiting modernist aesthetics are similar to the efforts of other literary, cultural or art historians such as Andrea Weiss' *Paris Was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank*, Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940*, or Tirza True Latimer's *Women Together/Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris*.<sup>14</sup> Such scholars have also challenged white masculine and heterosexual genealogies of the modernist Parisian scenes by putting (mostly American but not only) women artists and writers who migrated to the capital back on the map of Parisian modernisms and brought to the fore the specificities of their aesthetics. Along with the writers and artists cited above, they include people like Gertrude Stein, Nathalie Barney, Mina Loy, H.D., Claude Cahun, Romaine Brooks, Tamara de Lempicka as well as Sylvia Beach who in 1919 founded a library and bookshop with her partner Adrienne Monnier and published James Joyce's *Ulysses* at her great expense. The store became one location of note within the lesbian cartographies of Paris and still exists as Shakespeare and Company today. Though, with these works that centralize women artists and challenge the heteronormative point of view of modernist aesthetics, a similar problem arises in the overriding of these worlds and those of the black artists and writers in Paris. Considering that most of the American or anglophone women artists, writers, and journalists, like their masculine counterparts, were very familiar with and frequently attended the social happenings of the *vogue noire* or the jazz bars in Montmartre or lived amongst black artists and writers in Montparnasse, it slightly skews the breadth and complexity of what was taking place. An anthology like Tirza True Latimer's and Whitney Chadwick's *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, published in the beginning of the twenty-first century, is one such example of the effort to fill this critical lacuna by bringing black and white women modernists' work in conversation with one another.<sup>15</sup> Sharpley-Whiting's *Bricktop* or *Negritude Women* are others, for she challenges masculine genealogies, white or black, and situates the circulations or interactions between American, African American, Caribbean and African contemporaries within Paris. Similar criticism that speaks to this venture include Claire Oberon Garcia's "Black Women Writers, Modernism, and Paris," where the author, like this thesis,

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<sup>14</sup> Andrea Weiss, *Paris Was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995); Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Tirza True Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> See Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, "Becoming Modern," in *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 3-21.

investigates the trajectories and works of Paulette and Jane Nardal and Jessie Fauset as well as some of their contemporaries. Garcia concludes,

What to modernism, is the black woman writer, particularly those associated with modernisms active in Paris between the two World Wars? It is a typical act of erasure to assume that Paulette Nardal, Jessie Fauset, and their contemporaries Gwendolyn Bennett, Suzanne Césaire, Suzanne Lacascade, Anita Thompson Dickinson and Eslanda Robeson, were disconnected from the artistic, political, and academic circles that were creatively exploring the meaning of race, the new understandings of sexuality and gender, and the power of art that were generated in Paris during the interwar years. Contemplating their presence in France and reading their work seriously demands that we see their modernisms and feminisms as an engagement with a modernity that is global and multifaceted, not restricted to particular and isolated aesthetics and forms in European societies.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, what Garcia and the above scholarship have in common is the broadening and expansion of understandings of the discursive and material socio-cultural realities in Paris. They bring to the fore the migratory trajectories of those from the Americas, the African continent, or other European countries that, in no small part, made Paris what it was during this period. Revealing the specificities of lived experience, intellectual production and aesthetics of artists and writers like Jessie Fauset and Paulette Nardal, changes the stories of modernisms and the contexts from which they emerged. It gives a clearer picture to the multifaceted aspects of modernisms that were being formalized and brings to light differing relationship to migration and mobility that underpin modernist sensibilities. As Garcia underlines, whilst Paris is one such center of modernisms it cannot be entirely reduced to this place. In Fauset's and Nardal's life and work, notions of home, exile, and community within migration are paramount to understanding their aesthetics and black feminist epistemologies that traverse numerous socio-cultural spaces and are international in scope.

Fauset's and Nardal's itineraries are thus inscribed into the transatlantic circulations of black and white modernisms as well as the happenings of the intellectual, political, and cultural milieus of black internationalism. As it was the case for these two authors and many of their contemporaries, the creation of a black modernist aesthetics was intertwined with pursuits for black emancipation and racial solidarity on an international scale. During the interwar period in places like Paris, black internationalism flourished because of the unprecedented coming together of black people from various cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds. It laid the grounds for debate and exchange between members of the black diaspora, and from which

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<sup>16</sup> Garcia, "Black Women Writers," 40.

emerged intellectual, creative, and political responses to racism as a global phenomenon. Therefore, black internationalism, just like the modernisms that were being formulated at the start of the twentieth century, was informed by the mobilities of its practitioners. Tracing genealogies of struggles against anti-black racism from the late 1700's till the present day, Fanon Che Wilkins, Oliver Michael West, and William G. Martin give a definition of black internationalism as follows:

To qualify as black internationalist, those struggles, although situated mainly in specific localities, would have to be connected in some conscious way to an overarching notion of black liberation beyond any individual nation-state or colonial territory. That is to say, at the core of black internationalism is the ideal of universal emancipation, unbounded by national, imperial, continental, or oceanic boundaries – or even by racial ones.<sup>17</sup>

To give two concrete examples in Fauset's and Nardal's interwar Parisian years is in the former's participation in the Pan-African Congress (1921) and the latter's activism in the fight against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935). Fauset was a participant in each congress that travelled from London, to Brussels, to Paris and finally to Geneva, and her speech spoke of international solidarity between black women and addressed African American women's fights and struggles in America. From this venture she also penned two articles "What Europe Thought of the Pan-African Congress" where she analyzes the literature on the event and "Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress" where she mobilizes her own lived experience in order to articulate her feminist perspective of black internationalism and the happenings that took place.<sup>18</sup> For Paulette Nardal, she published "*On nous prie d'insérer*" and "*Levée des races*" in support of Ethiopian independence and went on a tour around Belgium with Anita Véry championing its cause. Nardal also fictionalized the actualization of the ideals of black internationalism, like racial solidarity, in the microcosm of a Parisian café in "*Guignol Ouolof*".<sup>19</sup> What brings Fauset and Nardal together then, if not in real life, is in their black internationalist perspectives that inform the creation of modern black aesthetics, black feminine cultural identities and feminist epistemologies. One reason for this is because both writers draw on their lived experience of transatlantic itineraries that overlap the social and cultural geographies

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<sup>17</sup> Fanon Che Wilkins, Michael Oliver West, and William G. Martin, "Preface," in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, eds., Fanon Che Wilkins, Michael Oliver West, and William G. Martin (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2009), xi.

<sup>18</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, "Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 23, no. 1 (November 1921): 12-18; Jessie Redmon Fauset, "What Europe Thought of the Pan-African Congress," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 23, no. 1 (November 1921): 60-67.

<sup>19</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Guignol Ouolof," *L'Étudiant noir* 1 (mars 1935): 4-5; Paulette Nardal, "Levée des races," *Le Périscope africain* 7, no. 318 (octobre 19, 1935); Paulette Nardal, "On nous prie d'insérer," *Le Cri des Nègres* 4, no. 17 (juin 1935): 1.

of hexagonal France and its capital, Martinique, and the African American topographies of the United States. Fauset and Nardal work within and between political and artistic symbolic and material centers like Harlem of the Harlem Renaissance, New York of white American modernism, and Paris of black internationalism, the budding Négritude movement and white European modernism. To investigate how lived experience is operative in the works of Fauset and Nardal shows how they present the ways in which culture interacts with place (cultural geography) by inflecting such interrogations through the prism of race and gender. This critical approach, directed by close readings of Nardal's and Fauset's literary and intellectual pursuits highlights that their experiences as black women are endogenous to the creation of "new" identities and perspectives that underpinned modernists' strivings and black liberation movements. Thus, one of the central contributions of this thesis is to bring to light how Fauset's and Nardal's corpus challenge the parameters of what was and is understood and defined as cultural identity (French, America, Antillean, African American), black and white modernisms, and black internationalism. Their aesthetics and knowledge production call for a re-evaluation of these categories of analysis both at the time they were being formulated in the interwar period and now in the twenty-first century. One methodological choice made in order to approach this problematic is to focus on the notion of migration and this thesis orients its research to follow Nardal and Fauset in their respective literary and lived itineraries. Of particular interest to the present study is how France and Paris appear in relationship to, or in conversation with, other major social and cultural geographies of both Nardal's and Fauset's creative, intellectual, and personal journeys.

Because international mobility is an important part of Fauset's and Nardal's narratives, their understandings, and representations of black feminine cultural identities as well as their political preoccupations, migration is also a central theme addressed in the pages to come. When speaking of Paulette Nardal and Jessie Fauset it is important to note that a specific type of migration is relevant to their pursuits. They are both in line with the trajectories of their contemporaries and predecessors that crossed the Atlantic to Paris and France, for various reasons including to fight in World War One, in order to study, for pleasure, to seek greater opportunity, or to flee American anti-black racism. From a critical perspective, Nardal's and Fauset's crossings are also a part of what art historian Robert Farris Thompson first articulated as "the black Atlantic." Later popularized in Paul Gilroy's seminal text, *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, this concept puts to the task thinking culture, history, and identity through a strict national paradigm. Furthermore, the transatlantic voyage has not always been a matter of choice and Paulette Nardal and Jessie Fauset engage in this historical, familial,

racial, and gendered inheritance of the Middle Passage specific to the United States and Martinique. In their fictional and non-fictional work this is a part of the current journeying that they are undertaking and comes forth in moments of meditation on home or belonging such as in Nardal's short story "In Exile" or Fauset's article "Nostalgia".<sup>20</sup> Thus, as it is demonstrated in the title of this thesis, migratory trajectories are also referred to as itineraries, journeying, travelling, mobility or as being mobile to underscore the ongoing processes of (dis)identification that are tied to the experience of migration. Through the prism of migration and mobility, Fauset's and Nardal's black modernist aesthetic can come into conversation with those of others and the cultural milieus of the Harlem Renaissance or what will become Négritude across the Atlantic. In their work that exposes the ways in which black women are positioned in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality within society, the authors underline that questions of migration across certain socially defined barriers or into urban spaces are not confronted in the same way by their masculine colleagues. Both experienced, for example, what it was like to be stopped or relegated to the extremities of the Harlem Renaissance and Négritude as each shared in the appellation of "midwife" rather than being considered participants in the elaboration of the movement. Part of the journey, then, within and between white and black modernisms, between France and the United States, between Antillean cultural identity and white metropolitan exoticisms, is an itinerary that also has to make space for black women as producers of knowledge, as creators of modernist aesthetics, and as inventors of political visions of black internationalism.

In order to enter the discursive and lived experiences of these two authors, Chapter One will firstly delve into personal accounts of Fauset's and Nardal's arrival to and travelling within Paris, France, and Europe. Focusing on the specificities of their migratory journeys will work to continue with and nuance the snapshot of Paris given above. What each author finds or comes up against in Paris is unique to each individual and becomes the catalysts of reflections on where they have come from and where they are going to. For instance, the discussion will hone in on Nardal's articulation of her relationship to the French nation state, her intercultural identity and her upbringing in Martinique that are critiqued from her affective and intellectual responses to Paris and her interactions with African American culture. For Fauset, the change in how she relates to her national identity and her choice to interact with predominantly African American and American communities in Paris is investigated at greater length. What is

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<sup>20</sup> Paulette Nardal, "En exil," *La Dépêche africaine* 2, no. 19 (décembre 15, 1929): 6; Jessie Redmon Fauset, "Nostalgia," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 22, no. 4 (August 1921): 154-58.

underlined is the critical aspect of Fauset's perspective on the construction of national and cultural identity within the territorial boundaries of the United States. From a methodological point view, the first half of the chapter works as a foundation to the main axes of its explorations and to the thesis as a whole. For, as noted above, if conceptually Fauset's and Nardal's oeuvre challenge the shapes of black modernism or black internationalism then their experience of the social and cultural geographies from which they emerge is extremely important to understanding their corpora. And it is from the second part of the chapter onwards that this venture will be actualized. In an investigation in which Jane Nardal's work also comes to the fore, attention will be paid to how their lived experiences are intellectualized in each of their critical examinations of the French colonial imagination, the exotic and erotic consumption of blackness in the *vogue noire*, and in metropolitan society at large. For Fauset particularly, this will be approached in a transatlantic dialogue that she develops with the American context and presents to the readers of *The Crisis*. It is also in this chapter that another aspect of Fauset's and Nardal's work is introduced and sustained throughout the thesis. By tracing the phenomenological basis of experience and perceptions to the way they are mobilized in the oeuvre of Fauset and Nardal, this research highlights the spatial aspects of their aesthetics and intellectualization of identities.<sup>21</sup> This approach which requires theoretical tools outside of the domain of literary studies allows for the similarities in Nardal's and Fauset's creative methodologies to be investigated. Despite the cultural variations and differences in the socio-historical environments in which they work, what becomes apparent in their texts is how discursive and material spaces are made for black feminine identities to live and thrive as subjects. For instance, Nardal's "*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*" clearly connects possibilities of living out one's black feminine identity as a subject with the need to create spaces in which one can feel "right at home". In "Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress", Fauset underlines the racism of Belgian citizens by mobilizing how her appearance in the Congo Museum fundamentally challenges the colonial (spatial) understanding of domination and who has the right to occupy a particular space. Thus, this research demonstrates how Fauset and Nardal, in their fictional or non-fictional work, employ a spatial aesthetics within narratives of journeying to challenge tropes of black modernisms, to critically highlight the differentiation of black women's experience within a

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<sup>21</sup> This has been influenced by the work of Afro-Caribbean literary and cultural critics such as Hanétha Vété-Congolo, Edouard Glissant as well as specialists of Fauset's corpus, like Deborah E. McDowell and Cherene Sherrard-Johnson. Hanétha Vété-Congolo, *Nous sommes Martiniquaises. Pawòl en bouches de femmes châtaignes: une pensée existentialiste noire sur la question des femmes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2020); Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation – Poétique III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990); Deborah E. McDowell, "*The Changing Same*": *Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995); Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman: Visual and Literary Culture in the Harlem Renaissance* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

socio-cultural milieu and to put into question ideas of cultural and national identities that are over-determined by geographical location. The focus on their spatial aesthetics is one of the critical contributions that this thesis brings to the ongoing conversations on the lives and works of these two authors and it was made possible by the transdisciplinarity of this project.

One of the first decisions made during this research was to work with a transdisciplinary approach. In close readings of the primary sources, it became apparent that different analytical tools from a variety of intellectual fields would aid in comprehending Nardal's and Fauset's work and the contextual specificities of their period which they address. But the transdisciplinary approach is not solely for this purpose. It is through the prism of Nardal's and Fauset's works themselves that different concepts are brought together in order to see if they have relevance or not in regard to what the authors propose and how they are working to achieve their intellectual and creative pursuits. Making their texts primary to theoretical confrontations brings to light new aspects of their work but also allows for the boundaries of critical tools to be pushed, transformed, and tested. Interpretations of Fauset's and Nardal's intellectual production benefit, for instance, from feminist and anti-racist philosophy that works within a phenomenological perspective as much as the latter are benefited by the interaction with Nardal's and Fauset's theorizations. Also, in the comparative study of these two writers, it was only by searching in a wide variety of disciplines that the commonalities of their work could come to light, and this despite the differences that separate them. An example is the concept of affective geographies that is used in literary criticism but offers different meanings if drawn from its conceptualization in philosophy or cultural geography. In Chapter Three and Chapter Five this theoretical tool is employed to understand Fauset's and Nardal's creation of their imagined worlds thus drawing out new critical aspects of their aesthetic practices. The intellectual corpus that is operative within this thesis stretches across literary criticisms of the Harlem Renaissance, Négritude and Afro-Caribbean literature as well as French cultural history and colonial criticisms, art and literary theory of modernism, anthropology, sociology, postcolonial and queer feminist philosophy, political science, and cultural geography. With a theoretical apparatus that highlights the similarities between Fauset's and Nardal's corpus, another methodological choice was needed in order to leave space for the specificities of each one of their achievements. It was therefore decided to treat Fauset's and Nardal's texts separately for the remainder of the thesis. In this way, the comparative study makes space for the uniqueness of their lives and opens the analysis to the individuality of their respective authorial, journalistic, artistic, or personal voices. This structure was considered to be the most effective in bearing witness to the commonalities of

Fauset's and Nardal's trajectories and creative methodologies as well as to the multiple differences of their work that enrich and complexify the conversations undertaken.

Chapters Two and Three therefore will be dedicated to Jessie Redmon Fauset. The former focuses on Fauset's Harlem Renaissance and her critical and aesthetic interventions within the New Negro movement. Migration and mobility are central themes in this chapter but in the context of the United States and more precisely within African American lived realities, cultural imaginations, and artistic productions. In her own journey, Fauset's appointment as literary editor of *The Crisis* saw her arrive in New York in 1919. Prior to this move, her life had previously taken her once before to this urban center. Graduating as a valedictorian of her class in Philadelphia, Jessie Fauset's first choice of tertiary education was one of the Seven Sisters Colleges, Bryn Mawr liberal arts, but she was denied access because of her racial identity. Demonstrative of the complex ways in which racial discrimination is articulated in institutional spaces in *de facto* segregated states of America, it is Bryn Mawr that will help Fauset gain admittance and a scholarship to Cornell University in New York. As such, Fauset's first trajectory northwards to what will become the capital of the Harlem Renaissance, is consistent with the itineraries of African Americans during the Great Migration in the search for greater opportunity and freedom. Fauset's time at Cornell University, where she was the first African American woman to become a member of Phi Beta Kappa society and was awarded a Bachelor of Arts in classical languages (French and Latin), clearly provided her with opportunities that were not possible in the socio-cultural landscapes of Philadelphia or Bryn Mawr. However, the texts chosen for this chapter that include her criticism of the history of black performance in "The Gift of Laughter", the disillusionment of migratory journeys in "Nostalgia", her fairy tale "The Sleeper Wakes" and second novel *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (1929) continually question, in various ways, the difference between lived experience as a black woman and the perceptions of these northern spaces and urban centers in African American cultural imagination.<sup>22</sup> Sexism within the New Negro movement that she experienced, and in the (masculine) norms of black modernisms that were being created left little room for the belief, from Fauset's perspective, of the real possibility of an emancipatory black aesthetics for black

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<sup>22</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, "The Gift of Laughter," in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 161-167; Jessie Redmon Fauset, "Nostalgia," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 22, no. 4 (August 1921): 154-58; Jessie Redmon Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes: A Novelette in Three Installments (I-II)," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 20, no. 4 (August 1920): 168-173; "The Sleeper Wakes: A Novelette in Three Installments (III)," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 20, no. 5 (September 1920): 226-229; "The Sleeper Wakes: A Novelette in Three Installments (IV)," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 20, no. 6 (October 1920): 267-274; Jessie Redmon Fauset, *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, 1929, introduction by Deborah McDowell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).



women. Because migration to the urban metropolis was pivotal to the cultural understanding of the New Negro figure, as Marlon B. Ross demonstrates in *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era*, one of the underlying questions is who can move and have access to the material, cultural, and symbolic geographies of the “new”. Jessie Fauset develops the mobile trajectories of her feminine black characters as stories of complex negotiations of gender and sexuality, economic independence, and modern feminine identities. For a time, this aspect of her aesthetics was overlooked in the qualification of her work as respectable uplift novels of the striving middle class within the New Negro movement. Thus, whilst Fauset’s corpus can be read as such, other critical aspects can be brought to the fore by following the mobilities of her female protagonists, the narrative strategies mobilized and the spatial aspects of these journeyings. Fauset complicates African American cultural geographies within which she entwines her critical feminist perspective of the Harlem Renaissance and white modernism. For Fauset, this is achieved in no small part by continually underwriting the paths that her feminine characters choose within the traditional fairy tale genre and that lead them into the urban landscapes of modernism.

Also literary editor of *The Brownies’ Book*, a magazine for children started by W.E.B Du Bois during the interwar period, Fauset uses the fairy tale genre to disarticulate the expectations, sexual moralism, and normative (white) femininity proposed in this literary form but also in the society at large. This is as much true for the short story “The Sleeper Wakes” as it is for *Plum Bun* that is structured by the fairy tale narrative. The promise of happiness that this traditional genre presumes to outline for women runs into direct contradiction with Fauset’s young black protagonists’ search for freedom, independence, and fulfillment of their desires. Fauset’s non-conventional use of a conventional genre is one technique of her creation of a black modernist aesthetic. In this way, and in Fauset’s characterization of Angela Murray, *Plum Bun* can be interpreted as an allegory to black women artists’ and authors’ negotiation with the New Negro movement and what is taking place within the socio-cultural happenings of the Harlem Renaissance. By deploying the passing plot, Fauset investigates the possibility of Angela’s dream to become a successful artist within the United States and find her voice and identity within the cultural and social milieus and aesthetic norms that cross black and white modernisms. Angela’s exploration of identity navigates the forms of both the New Negro Woman and the New Woman. *Plum Bun’s* landscapes are populated with New Negro and New Negro Women figures like Angela’s sister Virginia, Angela herself, fellow artists Anthony Cross and Rachel Powell as well as its white modernists counterparts in the characters of Roger Fielding (also Prince Charming), Martha Burden and friends. Thus, in the character of Angela who journeys within both black and

white spaces it brings these figures of modernism in conversation across racial lines. As such, Fauset fictively interrogates the central trope to white or black modernisms that mobilize migration and mobility to the urban and the “new” as a necessary break with the “old” of tradition. This leap into (masculine) subjecthood that underpins modernist sensibilities simultaneously frames women as the embodiment of that past and therefore incapable of the creation of a modernist aesthetic. Fauset underlines to what extent the “newness” of white aesthetics is still dependent on the erasure of blackness because Angela’s time in the world of white modernism is premised on her racial passing. And yet, from the point of view of Harlem Renaissance ideologies and its masculine aesthetics, Fauset demonstrates that the “newness” of black modernism and its New Negro figure depends on the exteriorization of black women artists from the spheres of literary and cultural productions. This chapter brings to light how *Plum Bun* problematizes what is being constituted as black and white modernisms both in its critical investigations within the text as much as in its form and literary devices that with in Fauset plays with in her own creation of a modernist black aesthetic. At the end of *Plum Bun*, France comes into the picture as perhaps a place for black women artists and modern feminine identities to grow and flourish. Whilst Fauset’s Franco-American dialogue is present in the second chapter, particularly in her article “Nostalgia”, the ending of *Plum Bun* in Paris opens the door to a further examination of this transatlantic relationship in her two novels *There is Confusion* and *Comedy: American Style*.

The same literary investigations in *Plum Bun* are equally represented in her debut novel *There is Confusion* and her last novel, *Comedy: American Style*.<sup>23</sup> The mobilities of her female protagonists work through complex negotiations of their social identities based on class, race, gender, and sexuality in their search for emancipation. Where Fauset exposed the unequal symbolic and material access to spaces of modernism within the cultural geographies of the United States, this chapter will investigate how she continues these interrogations but on an international scale. What will be brought to the fore in Chapter Three is how Fauset draws France into these conversations, how this territory becomes a part of her imagined geographies, and how this culture is used to reflect, contradict with, or question her characters’ dreams and pursuits as African Americans. Fauset’s engagement with France dates back to her earliest published texts in *The Crisis*. Her poem “Rondeau” was published in April of 1912, for instance,

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<sup>23</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 1924, foreword by Thadious M. Davis (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989); Jessie Redmon Fauset, *Comedy: American Style*, 1933 (New York: Dover Publications, 2013).

followed by her short story “Emmy” in December of the same year and January of the next.<sup>24</sup> In these early texts, which include also “My House and a Glimpse of Life Therein” published in 1914, her 1915 “Tracing Shadows” and her 1917 “There Was One Time! A Story of Spring”, the readers can already observe Fauset’s formal experimentations that draw on traditional genres, like the rondeau or the fairy tale, in the creation of a modern black aesthetic from the perspective of an African American woman.<sup>25</sup> They also perceive Fauset’s ongoing engagement with the socio-cultural and linguistic space of France. In “Emmy”, the main African American protagonist was born in France and then migrated to America, or in “Tracing Shadows”, Fauset sets the narrative entirely in France at the outbreak of World War One. One notable exception of Fauset’s literary corpus is her third novel *The Chinaberry Tree: A Novel of American Life* and is the reason why it will not be treated in this present study.<sup>26</sup> Though it has informed the way her other texts have been analyzed, Fauset’s creative geographies in *The Chinaberry Tree* do not engage in a transatlantic dialogue and therefore will be left for later investigation. Focusing then on *There is Confusion* and *Comedy: American Style* what is demonstrated in this chapter is how Fauset symbolically and culturally overlaps America and France. In *There is Confusion*, Fauset’s mapping strategies present problems of cultural imperialism within the context of international black modernisms but also create spaces of emancipation for her black feminine characters. In *Comedy: American Style*, Fauset’s imagined world partakes to a greater extent in intercultural exchange between these two national cultures and territories thereby laying the foundations for critical explorations of identity and belonging on an international scale. In this way, the travellings of *Comedy*, its cartographies built and the processes of (dis)identification that its characters undertake come into an interesting resonance with Nardal’s intellectual and creative work. The understanding of the multiplicity of lived experience represented in the way Martinique comes to inhabit the colonial capital of the Hexagon, is one important aspect of Nardal’s intellectualization and creation of black feminine Antillean identities. Yet, and as it can be gleaned from the overview of Nardal’s interwar Paris, France and its capital represent and constitute a very different type of discussion than in the work of Fauset, not lastly because Nardal is French, and she grew up in Martinique.

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<sup>24</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, “Emmy,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 5, no. 2 (December 1912): 79-87; Jessie Redmon Fauset, “Rondeau,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 3, no. 6 (April 1912): 252.

<sup>25</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, “My House and a Glimpse of My Life Therein,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 8, no. 3 (July 1914): 143-145; Jessie Redmon Fauset, “Tracing Shadows,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 10, no. 5 (September 1915): 247-251; Jessie Redmon Fauset, “There Was One Time! A Story of Spring,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 13, no. 6 (April-May 1917): 272-277.

<sup>26</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, *The Chinaberry Tree: A Novel of American Life*, 1931 (New York: Dover Publications, 2015).

Nardal's Paris is a confluence of African, Antillean, French metropolitan and African American cultural experiences. It is where she studied at the Sorbonne, was able to attend concerts by the likes of Marian Anderson or Roland Hayes, construct lasting relationships with figures of the Harlem Renaissance, and engage in black international politics. In one of the many accounts given of Nardal's interactions within these transnational black communities, Brent Hayes Edwards speaks of her meeting with John H. Paynter. On this occasion Nardal took Paynter on an evening out to see Josephine Baker and Feral Benga perform at the Folies Bergère. Paynter, speaking of her "unusual Parisian charm" and her dark complexion that garnered the attention of the Parisian public, he states that "Mlle Nardal was, or seemed, oblivious [to it]; concerned with only where to go and how to get there."<sup>27</sup> Eslanda Goode Robeson paints a similar picture of Nardal's charm, self-assurance and because of this, her beauty, at the beginning of her article "Black Paris II" that was a product of Robeson's interview with Nardal.

Paulette Nardal is beautiful. Her lovely clear dark-brown skin has bronze lights in it; her face is full of intelligence and repose; her voice is low and soft, cultured and controlled, and her diction faultless. She is equally fluent in French, her mother tongue, and in English. She has poise and charm. She carries herself with quite unselfconscious dignity like some magnificent dusky queen.<sup>28</sup>

Robeson's article goes on to describe Nardal's childhood in Martinique, her work in interwar Paris, her salon in Clamart and the cofounding of *La Revue du monde noir*. Aside from her journalistic, associative, and creative pursuits, Nardal occupied the position of parliamentary secretary for the Martinican deputy Joseph Lagrosillière, and later the Senegalese deputy Galandou Diouf. For Nardal, however, her social and political engagements were not delimited to black communities. Whilst in Paris, she was active in catholic associations such as the *Union féminine civique et sociale* or the *Association universitaire catholique des laïques*. Furthermore, in her interviews with Phillippe Grollemund in the later years of her life, Nardal speaks of her affinity with Russian and Slavic friends that she felt on the same level, "more so than the French".<sup>29</sup> In these recollections, Nardal also presents certain interactions with white French culture as a richness to her Parisian life and which comes through in her cultural politics.<sup>30</sup> The diversity of Nardal's social, political, intellectual, and creative ventures are equally

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<sup>27</sup> Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 154.

<sup>28</sup> Eslanda Goode Robeson, "Black Paris II," *Challenge: A Literary Quarterly* 1, no. 5 (June 1936): 9.

<sup>29</sup> "Nous avons eu des amies russes aussi. Enfin, nous avons beaucoup aimé les slaves, ils nous ont énormément intéressées. C'est très curieux, nous trouvions de plain-pied avec eux, plus qu'avec les Français; c'est très curieux." Paulette Nardal and Phillippe Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire. Entretiens / Mémoires de Paulette Nardal*, préface de Christiane Eda Pierre (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2019), 25.

<sup>30</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 22-23.

reflected in the differing publications she worked for and published in. From a predominately Antillean and African readership of *La Dépêche africaine*, *L'Étudiant noir: journal de l'Association des étudiants martiniquais en France*, *Le Cri des Nègres* or *Le Périscope africain*, to a (white) metropolitan public of *Le Soir*, *Candide: grand hebdomadaire parisien et littéraire*, and the government requested travel guide to Martinique, and finally to a catholic based readership in her articles in *La Revue de l'Aucam*. The multicultural textual space that constituted *La Revue du monde noir* can be seen as bringing this scope together, under the banner of black internationalism, in one discursive place. As Paynter's and Robeson's meetings with Nardal cited above attest, Nardal's geographical, intellectual, and creative journeyings and experimentations were known to her contemporaries at the time and inscribe themselves in the trajectories of other "race women internationalists" as Imaobong D. Umoren qualifies them.<sup>31</sup> And whilst black internationalism did go beyond symbolic and material borders of nation states and particular empires it didn't preclude its participants in engaging with the specific national communities within which they lived or sojourned. Though Nardal's intellectual productions and fictional representations change and evolve over the interwar and post-World War Two periods, her critical relationship with the French Republic as a black Antillean woman remains fairly consistent. For instance, Nardal's black internationalist and feminist perspective that thinks through such pivotal concepts as "racial awakening", racial solidarity and global black emancipation is not undertaken in a rejection of white metropolitan culture and national identity. Throughout Nardal's corpus that is critical of the French Republic, her idea of emancipatory journeys for black subjects within this nation state is in fighting for the actualization of the ideals of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, and this for all subjects in all territories of France.

Chapter Four begins where the conversation ended with Nardal's non-fictional texts in Chapter One. The methodological decision to interweave a comparative study of Fauset's and Nardal's respective oeuvre, as Chapter One undertakes, whilst simultaneously treating their corpora separately, finds it critical purpose in chapters such as this one. This is because in

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<sup>31</sup> Like it was outlined above, Umoren underlines that mobility and migratory itineraries were foundational to black internationalism at the time. For instance, Umoren's study that includes Nardal, Robeson and Una Marson, the author states; "Race women internationalists were part of the wider movements of Africans, Afro-Caribbeans from the British, French and Spanish West Indies around the "circum-Caribbean migratory sphere," and African Americans during the Great Migration. Their sojourns enabled them to create and participate in the transnational black public sphere and civil society, a figurative and physical global community beyond imperial or nation state that engendered the growth of international organizations, associations, institutions, charities, and print culture." Imaobong D. Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists: Activist-Intellectuals and Global Freedom Struggles* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 2. Umoren cites Lara Putnam's study of the migratory paths of British Afro-Caribbeans within this international scene and transatlantic circulations. Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Nardal's critique of French colonialism and everyday metropolitan culture from her position as an Antillean woman clearly touches on different problematics than those underlined in Fauset's work. Nardal represents lived realities of Antillean women, in Paris or in Martinique, as a strategy to undermine the exotic imaginations of metropolitan readers and the sexism within black intellectual and cultural milieus. In this way she speaks to different articulations of race, gender and cultural identity in this national context than those addressed in Fauset's work in respect to France. Therefore, one of the aims of this chapter whilst treating Nardal's non-fictional work, is to bring to light tropes of Nardal's aesthetics in her representation of Antillean culture and specifically Antillean femininities. Another aim is to focus on how Nardal disconnects the Martinican space from the metropolitan colonial perspective and the relationships of power that are at work between the Hexagon and this island in the Caribbean. The first text to be investigated is Nardal's "Martinique" in *Guide des Colonies Françaises: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, St Pierre-Miquelon*. Published by *La Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales*, this colonial travel guide belongs to a genealogy of such publications commanded by the French colonial administration, this time for the Colonial Exhibition held in *Bois de Vincennes* in 1931.<sup>32</sup> The ideological formulation of "*la plus grande France*" within the pursuits of the Third Republic is a part of the political strivings of this travel guide and the Colonial Exhibition. Furthermore, as a brief contextualisation of the genre itself will show, travel guides and the practices of travel that they promote have, in France since the nineteenth century, been bound to conceptions of Frenchness and patriotism. At this historical moment then, the ideological pursuits to make French identity a colonial one coalesces with the practice of travel to French overseas territories. Whilst Nardal's colonial critique is stunted by this institutionalised space and the norms of the travel guide genre, she nevertheless presents images of Martinique, its populations and cultures that go against the grain of colonial imaginations. As an effect, her *Guide* questions ideas of national identity and the social and cultural geography of Frenchness.

Coming to light in the discussion of Nardal's *Guide* is how perception can be blocked by the ideological or fantasized filters through which one sees, in this case in travelling to new places. But it could also be a part of everyday occurrences in the places where one lives. Returning to the Hexagon in the second half of the chapter, the discussion will continue with this investigation in Nardal's series of articles on Antillean women that appeared in the newspaper *Le Soir* in June 1930. Addressing a predominately metropolitan readership, Nardal demonstrates that there are

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<sup>32</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Martinique," in *Guide des Colonies Françaises: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, St Pierre-Miquelon* (Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1931), 1-72.

gaps or blind spots to ways of perceiving and understanding oneself and others that prohibit seeing black Antillean women other to their stereotypical representation. Thinking through the interraciality and multiplicity of Antillean cultural identities, Nardal's articles are read alongside Gilbert Gratiant's intellectualization of the same subject in "*Mulâtres... pour le bien et le mal.*"<sup>33</sup> To bring Nardal's work in *Le Soir* in dialogue with Gratiant's article, published in *L'Étudiant noir* five years later, underlines the shared sexism that blinds intellectual thought and cultural "common sense", whether in the metropolitan public or in the black diasporic communities in Paris. As Aimé Césaire qualifies this article as the beginning of Négritude, the readers can see that the intellectual, political, and cultural conscientization of black masculine identity, his representation and his emancipation come at the price of black Antillean femininity. Nardal's work then, whether addressed to the Parisian public or black communities, is always making space for Antillean women, her emancipation, and her representation as a subject in the overlapping milieus of colonial culture, the *vogue noire* or the spheres of black internationalism and the budding Négritude movement. As her deployment of the specificities of black feminine experience within the colonial metropolis is one way to achieve this goal, the chapter finishes with a movement to her fictional text "In Exile" and the everyday racism encountered by the female protagonist Elisa. In this depiction her "difference" is perceived in the madras calendé that she wears. A marker of Antillean cultural identity and discussed in Nardal's articles in *Le Soir*, the author frames this racist act on the level of cultural difference. As such, when the metropolitan public are shown to be oblivious to the relationships of power involved in their discrimination of Elisa, the author spotlights these blind spots within quotidian interactions. For if Elisa and her expression of cultural identity (madras) were understood or read as a part of the multiple embodiments of Frenchness then it would seem that the public would react differently. The crossing over into Nardal's fictional worlds in the closing of this chapter both anticipates Chapter Five and opens the discussion to the notions of assimilation, exile, home, French identity, belonging and community that have been ever-present but now come to the fore.

The majority of critical literature on Nardal's life and oeuvre has focused on her journalism, the black feminist epistemologies that she creates and her political pursuits during the interwar period and after. Her short stories, "In Exile" and "*Guignol Ouolof*", have been

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<sup>33</sup> Gilbert Gratiant, "Mulâtres... pour le bien et le mal," *L'Étudiant noir* 1 (mars 1935): 5-7.

addressed in the works of Sharpley-Whiting and Edwards, for instance, both bringing to light important aspects of Nardal's literary endeavors. What Chapter Five aims to do is build from such literary criticism by dedicating its pages only to her fictional work. One of the specificities of Nardal's critical aesthetics is that in each piece she changes the point of view from which she explores the lived experiences of her protagonists' migration to and journeying within the colonial metropolis. As such, the author questions the delimited spaces of black international politics, what racial solidarity looks like and how communities are formed. Because fights against global black racism are collective pursuits but are not outside of discriminatory practices such as sexism, Nardal calls for a rethinking of social cohesion that is not predicated on the exclusion of difference. In "*Guignol Ouolof*" and "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*", the author demonstrates that community formation founded upon similarity is one logic of the current colonial society. In order to achieve the goals of global black emancipation and racial solidarity then communities need to be thought and actualized with another social dynamic. As an effect, Nardal's counternarratives present other ways of being in the world and understanding the self that could materialize a sociality that is not dependent on the domination of "others". The link between the individual and the collective is that both require a new form and conception of identity. For if the shape of the collective is to be transformed into a dynamic that brings people together across difference, then the individual's own apprehension of how his or herself is constituted requires alternate propositions to the dialectics of Self and Other. In line with her intellectual articulations of Antillean identity, one of Nardal's literary achievements is a creation of an aesthetics that represents experience of self and one's identity as multi-temporal and rich with the confluence of differing spheres of existence. What will be highlighted is that the author undertakes this by mobilizing a spatial aesthetics that interweaves differing socio-cultural geographies and thus delocalizes cultural identity whether on the level of the individual or the collective. Symbolically and materially, the author disrupts the understanding of self and community that functions on the basis of separation – geographical, social, racial or gender – that the colonial perspective promotes, and which is ideologically required to maintain relationships of power between whiteness and blackness, between metropole and colonies, between Frenchness and non-Frenchness and finally between participants of black internationalist milieus. In this way, Nardal's aesthetics disturb the modern tropes of mobility and migration as she puts to the task understandings of exile, belonging, home and assimilation from an Antillean woman's perspective, for instance in "*In Exile*" and "*Acts of Grace*". Her fictional voice resists the norms of colonial culture, of black internationalism and of black modernisms and thus pushes the boundaries of the categories of analysis used to understand them. This is formally echoed in



Nardal's work because, and like the end of Chapter Four bears witness, the boundaries between Nardal's intellectual and fictional discursive spaces are much more porous than the separate treatment of them suggest. Some of Nardal's pieces perturb clear classification such as "Acts of Grace" and "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*".<sup>34</sup> Both could be read as pertaining to the genre of a memoir, a section in a short story, or a cultural commentary. However, placing them alongside her short stories "*Guignol Ouolof*" and "In Exile" in a chapter of their own, calls attention to what Nardal achieves differently in these worlds. The last and final chapter of this thesis continues with Nardal's insights on collectivity that emerge from her fictional texts and traces how she experiments with or implements them in her own life and intellectual investigations.

The first part of Chapter Six breaks with the temporal and socio-historical interwar period figured as the parameters to this research. This methodological choice was made in order to incorporate Nardal's articles that directly address French citizenship. Though an ongoing interrogation in her fictional and non-fictional work, women's acquisition of universal suffrage after World War Two instigated, for Nardal, her direct engagement with questions concerning Antillean women and their equality within the French body politic. Back in Martinique after a year of recovery in England following her injuries sustained in the sinking of the *SS Bretagne* by German submarines, Nardal formed the *Rassemblement Féminin* and penned numerous articles for its newspaper, *La Femme dans la Cité*. As the name of the periodical suggests, the appearance of its first issue in January of 1945 comes in between Charles de Gaulle's official proclamation of the right to vote for women (April 1924) and its application after liberation marking women's institutional recognition in "the City of Men" in May of 1945.<sup>35</sup> Of the many articles that Nardal wrote for this newspaper, the chapter will address seven of them that speak specifically to her ideas of citizenship, of Martinican women's participation in politics and how the author works to broaden the material and symbolic spaces of French identity to go beyond its designation to the Hexagon. What connects Nardal's work across this historical moment and the interwar period is that she persistently emphasizes that if one wants sociality or national community to be otherwise to what the French colonial empire proposes, then one needs to act individually and collectively in order to make this so. This is in part why there is an urgency in the tone that Nardal uses within her articles for she perceives this moment, when the body politic has significantly changed, as one that could materialize and rectify some of the problems

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<sup>34</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Actions de grâce," *La Dépêche africaine* 2, no. 14 (mai 30, 1929): 3; Paulette Nardal, "On défrise les cheveux crépus," *Candide: grand hebdomadaire parisien et littéraire*, 18 juillet, 1935, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Paulette Nardal, "La femme dans la Cité," *La Femme dans la Cité* 1 (janvier 1945): 3.

of French universalism and national identity. What will also be highlighted in this discussion is the humanism that structures Nardal's intellectualization of citizenship and her political vision as a whole. As the chapter moves back to the interwar period, the investigation of Nardal's humanism will continue but this time with a focus on her articulations of black internationalism and experimentations of building collectivities otherwise. The concrete example is the salon at Clamart which has become known as a pivotal space of black internationalism. The Nardal sisters' salon distinguishes itself geographically, politically, socially, and creatively from salons taking place in the interwar period like René Maran's or Louis-Thomas Achille's and also from other women run salons like Gertrude Stein's and Nathalie Barney's. Nourished by Nardal's point of view that party-based politics adhere to the same kind of sociality based on exclusion, the proposition is that practicing community otherwise is a political undertaking but one that gives another feel and image to politics. As it was the material grounds from which emerged the collaborative project *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World*, the end of the chapter reaches the analysis of Nardal's seminal text "*Éveil de la conscience de race*" published in the sixth and final issue of this periodical.<sup>36</sup> In order to get there, the argument resituates the collectivity on the level of the international in her articles written against the Ethiopian invasion and the humanism that she mobilizes there within. Thinking global black emancipation and international racial solidarity through the prism of humanism seems to hinder these pursuits for it premises the unification of the human community on the European understandings of Enlightenment. This will be further problematized by bringing the conversation in conjuncture with another pillar of Nardal's international politics, namely African American culture and the important role it played in her own trajectory of racial conscientization. Paulette Nardal's placement of African American culture as the epitome of black emancipatory aesthetics and politics causes frictions in her work and contradicts her fictional representations of racial solidarity and collectivity. Tracing this through her portraits of Augusta Savage and Grace Walker,<sup>37</sup> and lastly in her "*Éveil de la conscience de race*", the contradictions and blind spots that come to the surface in Nardal's intellectualization and representation of the journey to black liberation attest to the complexity and richness of her perspective as well as the ongoing nature of the project of black internationalism. Whilst Nardal may not have been willing or able to fundamentally break with the logics of European

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<sup>36</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Éveil de la conscience de race / Awakening of Race Consciousness," *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World* 6 (1932): 25-31.

<sup>37</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Une femme sculpteur noire," *La Dépêche africaine* 3, no. 27-28 (août-septembre 30, 1930): 5; Paulette Nardal, "Une noire parle à Cambridge et à Genève," *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 1 (1931): 36-37.

Enlightenment and the humanism that it thinks, her pursuits for racial justice and gender equality contribute in a significant way to feminist epistemologies of black emancipation.

# Chapter One

## Migrating to the Metropolis

### Black Feminist Interventions in Colonial Culture

Jessie Fauset's and Paulette Nardal's literature, as well as many of their contemporaries, are informed by their trajectories to, interactions within, and habitations of Paris. They translated the specificities of their experiences within this urban space into a variety of representational forms such as newspaper articles, short stories, novels, and essays. The particularities of their identities, both collective and individual, will inevitably affect their perception of Paris and France, the way in which they inhabit the reality of the city and how they position themselves within it. As a consequence, interwar Paris can be read as both the center of empire as much as it is a site of black diasporic communities who work to disturb the ideological and imagined boundaries of the nation space and the social identities constructed within it. Furthermore, the hierarchical organization of space, peoples and objects changes how "others" are received and perceived. This manifests in everyday acts of racism or sexism, for instance, but it is not the only form of its effects. It also impacts which cultural identities are considered legitimate in their appearance in a given environment, what kinds of knowledge are permissible, and what cultural practices are à la mode. The argument, therefore, is that within this space at the heart of the French colonial empire, Paulette Nardal and Jessie Fauset, will defy who has the right to produce and consume within this cultural economy. The very act of inventing and producing in this environment is an act of resistance against the level of institutional and symbolic powers that find their expression in interpersonal interactions, knowledge, and cultural production. As these writers negotiate a space for themselves within the material realities of Paris, they equally create room for the representation of black female subjectivities in literary space. Everyday experiences are formalized in their writing in order to invent alternate ways of looking at the world around them. Placing lived experience as integral to new forms of representation is not simply a technique or discursive tool. When Paulette and Jane Nardal and Jessie Fauset critique French colonial culture it needs to be understood in the larger frame of their migratory trajectories in which feelings of "uprootings" and attachments are experienced. Critical reflection, knowledge

production or literature become a part of what could be called “homing devices”, creating spaces for black female subjectivities to live and dwell.<sup>38</sup> In order for this to be elucidated, the specificities of their experience of coming to the metropole need to be addressed. This is because differences in social identity such as nationality, ethnicity, race, class, gender, and sexuality will determine, in part, how one is positioned within the capital of the French empire where the civilizing mission was in full force, or as Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison argues, the “imperialization” of the Third Republic was well under way.<sup>39</sup>

## 1.1 “Uprootings” and Attachments: Heterogeneity of Lived Experience

### 1.1.1 Paulette Nardal: “C'est en France que j'ai pris conscience de ma différence”

For Paulette Nardal, her experience as a black woman in a white city scape and her participation in dialogues with black and white cultures laid the necessary context for the development of her ideas on racial and gender identity, black aesthetic practices and international politics. A letter detailing her memory of her arrival to Paris was quoted in a documentary by Jil Servant entitled *Paulette Nardal. La fierté d'être négresse*.

A mon arrivée en France j'avais une telle admiration pour l'Occident, je suis arrivée quelques années avant Joséphine Baker, mais j'ai souvent souffert... En réalité, je me considérais comme une occidentale à peau blanche, demoiselle Nardal, une bourgeoise noire. A cette époque, les étudiants étaient beaucoup plus considérés qu'ils ne le sont maintenant, il n'y avait pas encore beaucoup d'immigrants noirs... nous n'avons pas eu à souffrir de manière permanente des préjugés de couleur pour la bonne raison que nous étions très peu nombreuses en tant que filles. J'ai seulement pris conscience de ma différence après quand on me la fait sentir. Mais à mon arrivée, c'était une telle innocence.<sup>40</sup>

What is interesting is that Nardal indicates that she did not experience color prejudice in a permanent way precisely because she and her female colleagues were numerically a minority. This is demonstrative of her self-positioning within the urban landscape, and more specifically in the microcosm of the university, for she differentiates her position as a black female student. She does not assume her experience to be the same as that of her male colleagues that were perhaps more numerous (though still a minority). Her reference to Baker is clearly evocative

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<sup>38</sup> This term is developed in Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castaneda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller, *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (London: Routledge, 2003). A discussion of the authors' findings will be given below.

<sup>39</sup> Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *La République impériale. Politique et racisme d'état* (Paris: Fayard, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Jil Servant, *Paulette Nardal. La fierté d'être négresse*, documentaire (France: Les Productions de la Lanterne, 2005).

of another form of difference, namely nationality, that is used to situate herself in the context. Nardal's mobilization of the figure of Josephine Baker in her retelling of this cultural milieu also broadens her experience of "difference" to an international frame. Whilst Nardal speaks to the specificities of racism within the Parisian landscape it does not preclude the global reach of anti-blackness in the Western cultural imaginary. In her migration to the metropole, she encountered her "difference" as a black woman when white patriarchal society "made her feel it". The feelings and realization of her own difference through the eyes of white others is thus understood, with the mentioning of Baker, as being a part of the globalization of racism and racialization since the advent of Western modernity and colonization. Moreover, the description suggests that this experience of racism and sexism within the capital is as much about anti-blackness as it is about the way in which French cultural identity was seen and understood at this time. From Nardal's perspective, her cultural identity was a mixture of white French and black Antillean cultures. However, they were not attributed with the same value in French colonial society. To take another example of her memory of her arrival in France, but this time in the context of an interview with Phillippe Grollemund, she writes:

C'est en France que j'ai pris conscience de ma différence. Il y a certaines choses qui me l'ont fait sentir, et puis il ne faut pas oublier que nous avons été élevées dans l'admiration de toutes les œuvres produites par les Occidentaux. Ce qui nous ramenait à presque rien.<sup>41</sup>

Nardal underlines that she is speaking of cultural identity as she addresses specifically "the works produced by Westerners". In this cultural frame, "works" can be understood as both artistic and intellectual. They are the images constructed within aesthetic practices or the intellectual reasoning in knowledge productions. As she is speaking of her childhood and adolescence in Martinique, it is likely that she is referring to her education. Being a colony at this time, the French education system in Martinique had been and still was under the auspices of the French colonial empire and one vector of the Third Republic's civilizing mission.<sup>42</sup> Whether in the metropolis or in the colonies the French education system at this time, from primary school to university, had as one role to inculcate all of its children with the idea of the superiority of French civilization.

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<sup>41</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> French education played a role in what Grandmaison will later develop as the imperialization of France. He describes this process as follows: "Cette *impérialisation* doit être considérée comme la somme des conséquences, dans l'ordre interne, de la colonisation accélérée du monde par la France, mais elle a aussi contribué à soutenir cette dernière en fournissant des hommes, des savoirs et de savoir-faire indispensables à sa réussite. Double processus où chaque moment renforce l'autre, et réciproquement." Grandmaison, *La République impériale*, 81.

Faire découvrir les “mérites” de l’expansion coloniale française, réputée plus humaine que celle des Britanniques notamment et supérieure à elle, et contribuer ainsi à forger une opinion publique favorable à l’empire, tels sont les buts de cet enseignement, qui a certainement joué un rôle significatif dans la diffusion de la mythologie impériale-républicaine reposant sur l’axiome suivant : grâce à la France des Lumières et de la Révolution, la colonisation est devenue l’instrument de la civilisation des “races inférieures”.<sup>43</sup>

What Nardal indicates, then, in her being raised to admire all things from the West are practices undertaken by colonizing powers in order to assert their domination over the colonized populace, namely cultural engulfment. Nardal frames this through the term assimilation: “we were students entirely assimilated”.<sup>44</sup> She grew up understanding (or believing in) the superiority of the French civilization and white European identity. Thus the readers get the impression that Nardal’s use of “assimilation” has less to do with the complexity of citizenship, the different legal status of colonized subjects under the definition of “citizen”, and the contestation of this difference by colonized subjects that in turn effected the very way citizenship was thought.<sup>45</sup> Rather, for Nardal, assimilation seems to point to the fact that processes of internalization of racism and subjugation are accompanied by fascination and admiration of the culture which is in the position of power. This came necessarily at the devaluation or illegitimacy of her Antillean cultural identity. If French culture is considered as the apotheosis of civilization then peoples of “the inferior races” were not considered, amongst other things, as agentive participants of the creation or of the transmission of their own cultures, both in the past and present. “We admired unconditionally the model that they proposed to us,” Nardal states in respect to her time as a student in Martinique.<sup>46</sup> This does not mean that Nardal was not familiar with creole culture for it is in Paris that she will draw from this rich heritage. Nardal seems to suggest that as students the cultural engulfment was such that they came to admire the only perspective that they were taught as having value, namely the ways of thinking and seeing the world proposed by the French colonial perspective. It can be understood, then, why Nardal, before her arrival, thought of herself, or at least identified in part as belonging to a white European cultural identity produced and celebrated within this context. She considered herself French. In Paris, when she was made to feel different it was also due to the fact that through the eyes of metropolitans, blackness

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<sup>43</sup> Grandmaison, *La République impériale*, 75.

<sup>44</sup> “Nous étions étudiants, complètement assimilés”. My own translation. Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> See Silyane Larcher, *L’autre citoyen. L’idéal républicain et les Antilles après l’esclavage* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014). In respect to Nardal’s work, questions of cultural assimilation will be further problematized in Chapter Four and Five and political assimilation in terms of citizenship will be addressed in Chapter Six.

<sup>46</sup> “On admirait inconditionnellement le modèle qui nous était proposé.” My own translation. Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 50.

was incompatible to French cultural identity within the colonial imaginary. “Difference” not only precludes Nardal from being considered French but because of her racial and gender identity she was not considered an equal subject. It was after this realization that she and her sisters began to move “away from the white model”.<sup>47</sup>

Later, Nardal will formalize the specificity of her lived experience and her migration to the metropolis. In her article “*l’Éveil de la conscience de race*” published in 1932 in *La Revue du monde noir*, she describes these movements, both to Paris and “away from the white model”, as “uprootings” which instigate “awakenings”. From new experiences come new and different learnings. Therefore, crossing the Atlantic was not just about traversing geographical borders or inhabiting different spaces, but it equally opens new horizons of intelligibility. Citing her friend and colleague, Roberte Horth’s short story “*Histoire sans importance*” also published in *The Review of the Black World*, Nardal argues that due to the specific social identity of “colored women” living in Paris, they were the first to experience the need for “racial solidarity”.

The colored women living alone in the metropolis, until the Colonial Exhibition, have certainly been less favored than colored men who are content with a certain easy success. Long before the latter, they have felt the need for racial solidarity which would not be merely material. They were thus aroused to race consciousness. The feeling of uprooting which they experienced which was so felicitously expressed by Roberte Horth in a “Thing of No Importance” [...] was the starting point of their evolution.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 50. Nardal and her sisters were not alone in connecting their migration to Paris, their experience within white society and their interactions with diasporic communities as pivotal to their understandings of self, colonial society, and an “awakening” to racial consciousness. For fellow Martinican Aimé Césaire, Paris was equally tied to the development of both a phenomenological and political understanding of race and race consciousness. He will write: “A Paris, en même temps que je découvrais la culture, j’ai mieux compris les raisons de mon insatisfaction: j’ai pris conscience de mon appartenance à la condition originale de Nègre. Ma poésie est née de cette contestation.” Similarly, Léopold Sédar Senghor, both friend and colleague of Césaire and Nardal, will negotiate a similar path in the Parisian context. However, according to his biographer, Janet Vaillant, this racial consciousness has more to do with a common experience of ostracization experienced by “men of color” which sparks the need for solidarity. Painting the picture in this light, Vaillant tends to dilute or subdue the political dynamic of Senghor’s négritude. “(Senghor) est parvenu à cette découverte (la négritude) en partie grâce à un travail d’introspection, en partie à travers le regard des autres et enfin en participant à la vie du milieu spécifique qui se cristallisait à Paris [...] Des étudiants de tout l’empire, des hommes de couleur comme ils aimaient s’appeler, se retrouvaient dans le sentiment partagé d’appartenir à un monde à part. Cette perception a momentanément obscurci les grandes différences qui existaient entre eux. Ils se réunissaient pour discuter pourquoi et comment ils étaient différents des Français. C’est dans ce contexte qu’est née l’idée de négritude.” Janet G. Vaillant, *Vie de Léopold Sédar Senghor. Noir, Français et Africain*, trans. Roger Meunier, Histoire Des Suds (Paris: Karthala - Sepsis, 2006), 130, 118.

<sup>48</sup> “Les femmes de couleur vivant seules dans la métropole moins favorisées jusqu’à l’Exposition coloniale que leurs congénères masculins aux faciles succès, ont ressenti bien avant eux le besoin d’une solidarité raciale qui ne serait pas seulement d’ordre matériel: c’est ainsi qu’elles sont éveillées à la conscience de race. Le sentiment de déracinement qu’a exprimé avec tant de bonheur “Histoire sans importance” de Roberte Horth, parue dans le 2<sup>e</sup> numéro de *La Revue du monde noir*, aura été le point de leur évolution.” Paulette Nardal, “Éveil de la conscience de race / Awakening of Race Consciousness,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World* 6 (1932): 29. As this is the bilingual publication, the English or French version will be quoted in the body of the text with the other in the footnotes.



Lived experience, then, is the “starting point” of black women’s intellectual and emancipatory pursuits. From Nardal’s perspective, this racial solidarity is “not merely material” for it consisted in the creation of feminist collectivities within the often masculine dominated worlds of black anti-imperial associations and their respective journals.<sup>49</sup> With her sisters Jane and Andrée, she undertook this challenge along with other female colleagues within the spaces of the journal *La Dépêche africaine*. Therefore, “racial solidarity” can also be understood as the invention of new forms of knowledge and representation focused on thinking the specificities of black female cultural identities within the diaspora and within the context of the metropolis. In Paris, the lived encounters and transcultural exchanges within the black diaspora lay the grounds for Nardal’s pursuit that “moved away” from the “white model”.

The exoticism that underpinned the *vogue noire* of the Parisian culture scene during *les années folles* was highly contested by members of the black diaspora. Jane Nardal critiques the exotic representations of Antillean femininity which will be addressed below. However, it was also an environment where people from within diasporic communities could experience different expressions of black cultural identities. For Paulette Nardal, Paris, unlike Martinique, was the place in which she could go and see performances of Roland Hayes, Marian Anderson, and the Fisk Jubilee Singers and their interpretations of the Negro Spirituals. On these experiences she recollects:

Au cours des années 20, l'art des noirs américains a fait littéralement irruption dans notre sensibilité d'étudiantes antillaises. Les Noirs avaient donc, dans le domaine artistique quelque chose qui leur appartenait en propre. Cela nous comblait de fierté et aussi le fait que les Negro-Spirituals, les « Plantation Songs » avaient constitué à un certain moment la seule poésie de l'Amérique. Avec quel enthousiasme et quelle émotion allions-nous saluer Roland HAYES et Marian ANDERSON après leur récital qui faisaient courir le tout Paris artistique ! Ils exécutaient les grands classiques à la perfection, mais terminaient toujours leurs récitals par des Negro-Spirituals.<sup>50</sup>

During this time of the *vogue noire*, Nardal highlights the fact that African American art and representations of African American cultural identity “irrupted” not only the sensibilities of “Antillean students” but all of the Parisian artistic milieu. In respect to the African American artists, they were the ones performing and creating the representations of their cultural identities.

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<sup>49</sup> As Jennifer Boittin demonstrates in *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*, the articles published in the anticolonial and anti-imperial newspapers like *Le Cri des Nègres* or *La Race Nègre*, were not only written almost exclusively by men, but they are demonstrative of the sexism that existed within these political circles. Jennifer Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 157–59.

<sup>50</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 152.

In terms of the black audiences, Nardal is insinuating that there is a difference in how they perceive and receive these performances because of a shared racial identity. From Nardal's perspective, despite cultural or national specificities that exist between different black identities and black cultural and artistic expressions, there will always be something shared, "that belongs to" black people and to which the white audiences will not have access. This is furthered when she writes,

Inutile de vous dire à quel point j'ai été heureuse et fière de voir comment les Occidentaux, les Parisiens, les Français pouvaient vibrer devant ces productions noires et pouvaient admirer les acteurs de passage, comme Roland HAYES, par exemple ; des salles pleines au théâtre des Champs-Élysées.

Ce n'était pas alors par reflet du public parisien, il y avait une adhésion intérieure. Tout de même ! Il ne s'agissait pas d'imiter !

Cette adhésion était-elle la même que celle du public parisien ? Certainement ! Sûrement plus profonde ! Il y a l'élément racial... Il y avait quelque chose en plus, l'expression d'une âme noire, l'expression du noir qui se trouvait dans des conditions, peut-être, que nous n'avions pas connu. L'esclavage. C'était une révélation ! Nous faisons connaissance, là, en même temps avec l'histoire des noirs ; car les Negro spirituals sont l'aboutissement de toutes leurs souffrances ; nous faisons connaissance avec cette histoire. Et puis, n'oublions pas que c'était la vogue de l'art noir, la sculpture noire, la peinture noire ; dans les années 1928, 1929.<sup>51</sup>

Nardal sees an "adhesion" on the part of the white public, but she suggests that it was not the same for black audiences. There was the "racial element" and "the expression of a black soul" that they could connect to in a different way. However, racial identity is not understood here by Nardal as essentialist and biologically determined. She specifically connects the "racial element" to the shared history of slavery. Because the Spiritual tradition emerges from this experience in the African American context, these performances are underlined as a way to become familiar with this history and therefore the socio-historical elements that inform black diasporic experience and identity. Nardal articulates this as an encounter, for like many of the people of the black community of her generation, she is a descendant of slaves, but she never experienced it – "knew it" – herself. The Spirituals transmit the stories and "suffering" of black people during slavery, and it is this history that she is "getting to know". Experiencing these performances then, as a black subject, is for Nardal revelator of processes of (racial) identification across cultural and historical difference.<sup>52</sup> She feels "pride" which is interconnected for Nardal with coming into

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<sup>51</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 26–27. Ellipsis in the original.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Gilroy, in the chapter "'Jewels Brought from Bondage': Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity" identifies this connection between racial identity, audience and performance in his discussion of black expressive culture within the black Atlantic. Drawing on Foucault, he argues that "racialized subjectivity (is) the product of the social practices that supposedly derive from it." For Gilroy identity is "lived as coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self". What this means is that it cannot be understood through essentialist paradigms – "fixed essence" – nor purely

“racial consciousness”. Transcultural exchange, then, is experienced as a pedagogical moment. This history that Nardal is “getting to know” is expressed from the point of view of those who were subjected to it and emerges from the specificities of their social cultural identities. Transmitting past lived experiences and realities of slavery from this perspective is far different from the one that was taught in the French education system that was inculcating students with the “benefits” of continual colonization and domination of people of color. Interestingly, Nardal’s description of new understandings garnered from interaction and lived experience is similar to what Jacqui Alexander discusses in her book *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred*. In this study, the author uses the metaphor of the Middle Passage in order to disrupt the production and transmission of knowledge that has been “imprisoned withing modernity’s episteme”.<sup>53</sup> What the latter means for Alexander is the way of seeing and understanding the Self and the world through hierarchal classification, separation, and domination of “Others”. What Nardal highlights is that transcultural dialogues between peoples of African descent in the interwar period are the grounds for alternate types of learning that were absent in her traditional French education. This is because it was an institution that was one avenue for the diffusion of “modernity’s episteme”, or as Grandmaison articulates it “the diffusion of the imperial republican mythology” of the civilizing mission and the superiority of French civilization. Therefore, when Nardal articulates cultural exchanges as “revelation” or migration as an experience of “uprootings” that lead to “awakenings” then it is clear how she sees these transcultural dialogues as opportunities to change and evolve.<sup>54</sup> What is at stake here is that Nardal is attempting to work from within an alternate episteme whereby dialogues across differences could form and inform how the self and the world are thought and experienced. She is looking for a different model to what is presented in institutional knowledge, modernity’s episteme, and the eurocentrism – European or French culture’s denial of the fact that they are

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constructionist perspectives – “utterly contingent construction to be reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists, and language gamers”. Identity, whilst “often felt to be natural and spontaneous, remains the outcome of practical activity: language, gesture, bodily significations, desires.” This inherently political aspect of identity is evident in Nardal’s citation above when she recognizes the expression of a black soul in the performance of the Spirituals and the processes of identification that this ignites. For Gilroy, it is in intimate interactions between performers and audiences that ideas of a “black soul” or “internal racial core” are communicated. The practical activities of identity such as gesture, bodily significations, and language are “condensed in the process of musical performance” and “in the black Atlantic they produce the imaginary effect of an internal racial core or essence by acting on the body through the specific mechanisms of identification and recognition that are produced in the intimate interaction of the performer and crowd. This reciprocal relationship can serve as an ideal communicative situation even when the original makers of the music and its eventual consumers are separated in space and time...” Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso Books, 1993), 102.

<sup>53</sup> M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>54</sup> This discussion will be returned to and nuanced in respect to Nardal’s fictional pieces (Chapter Five) and particularly her intellectualization of racial conscientization in Chapter Six.

forged and transformed within their interactions with other cultures – that underpin them. Furthermore, to remember that French civilization sees black racial identity and black cultural expressions as inferior, less valuable, or illegitimate, then the idea or feeling of “racial pride” that Nardal mobilizes demonstrates to what extent these experiences interact on the level of the individual as well as the collective. In these processes of transformation and understanding that are taking place, the commitment to “making the world more intelligible” is one that accompanies the subject and her experience of self as “more fully human”.

J'insiste sur ce mot intuition. C'est pourquoi j'ai employé l'expression « suivre la pente de mon tempérament ». La fierté noire ne se fait jour dans ma conscience claire qu'après avoir entendu les negro spirituals et fréquenté les musiciens et des intellectuels américains.<sup>55</sup>

For Nardal coming into “racial pride” or “racial consciousness” was not a solitary pursuit. It was in dialogue with African American musicians and intellectuals and the “Negro Spirituals” that “pride” emerged in her horizon of intelligibility. Thus, transcultural exchanges are presented as central to Nardal’s intellectualization of black cultural identity. As Nardal yokes the domination of the “white model” she searches for new ways of understanding and representing the self and the world around based on connection which allow her to negotiate the mixed cultural heritage with which she identifies.

1.1.2 Jessie Fauset: “I find Americans, black or white, when they are nice, nicer than any other people in the world.”<sup>56</sup>

Fauset and Nardal share one commonality in their recounting of their experience of migration and inhabitation of Paris. The former will also articulate her experience in the French capital as that which transforms how she perceives and understands herself and the world around her. However, Fauset’s dialogue and interactions in France pertain mostly to her associations with her fellow country men and women, either black or white. Whereby Nardal’s experiences are marked by an evolution into “racial consciousness” and “racial pride”, Fauset will articulate an evolution in respect to her national identity, a certain “integrity” that she will come to experience as an African *American* in Paris.

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<sup>55</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 30.

<sup>56</sup> Jessie Fauset, “Letter to Langston Hughes,” January 6, 1925, James Weldon Johnson Papers.

Jessie Fauset never settled in Paris though she spent time in the capital intermittently for periods lasting up to a year. This was not unusual for artists of the Harlem Renaissance who would come for sojourns when they could afford it. In her archived correspondence to Langston Hughes and Harold Jackman, Fauset paints a picture that evokes sentiments anchored within African American popular culture. France is perceived and experienced as a destination of freedom from the racism and segregation in the United States. As literary critic Claire Oberon Garcia mentions,

When James Weldon Johnson described the thrill of being able to acquire rooms at an elegant hotel and be called ‘Monsieur’ or Alain Locke romantically (and, as René Maran pointed out to him, inaccurately) claimed that there was no color line in the army of the country whose avowed principles are *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. He was also strategically tapping into what was by the 1920’s a familiar connotation in black American popular culture: of French society as the antithesis of the violently white supremacist United States.<sup>57</sup>

Given the United States context post World War One, the increase in lynchings, or the Red Summer riots that ensued the return of African American soldiers in America, it is no wonder that France was mythologized as the antithesis of the racial violence in the United States.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, even if France is romanticized, there is nevertheless a significant change to the everyday realities of African Americans who had undertaken the transatlantic voyage. Fauset writes,

For a brief space I was bewildered when I came over this time. Six months of freedom – more freedom than I’d ever had at one time in my life, enough money to manage and no restraints. Grown-up though I am and have been now for some time I had not known such independence... It is lovely just being oneself and not bothering about color or prejudice...that is why my work progresses so slowly because I am away from the pressure.<sup>59</sup>

In migration, France provides reprieve from the pressures and lived realities of a white supremacist state.<sup>60</sup> The emphasis placed on the joy of being independent and “oneself” speaks

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<sup>57</sup> Garcia, “Black Women Writers,” 33.

<sup>58</sup> As the biographer of Jessie Fauset, Carolyn Wedin Sylvander, indicates, African American soldiers “returned to the twenty-five major riots and lynching of the “Red Summer” of 1919. The Ku Klux Klan saw a resurgence in membership, claiming 100,000 in its ranks when D.W Griffith *Birth of a Nation* appeared on the screen in 1915. Over seventy Blacks were lynched in 1919 alone, ten of them soldiers, some still in uniform.” Carolyn Wedin Sylvander, *Jessie Redmon Fauset: Black American Writer* (New York: Whiston Publishing Company, 1981), 54.

<sup>59</sup> Jessie Fauset, “Letter to Langston Hughes,” January 6, 1925, James Weldon Johnson Papers.

<sup>60</sup> In another letter to Hughes: “I see I’m saying very little about Paris but what could I tell you who now must know it so well? Of course, I am liking it, not so much for the sake of Paris but because I’m having an unusual period of freedom composed of all sorts of phases of liberty such as I have not known before in my life. But I’ve been working pretty hard in Paris, going to school, trying to write and what not.” Jessie Fauset, “Letter to Langston

highly to the differences experienced in France because it suggests that in the United States Fauset cannot afford to be herself in her own country. This therefore not only attests to the extreme violence that works on the symbolic, material, and existential (individual) levels of American society, but France is a space where these forms of alienation and segregation – on the level of everyday experience of being able to be oneself – are no longer there. In the transatlantic voyage, these borders that prohibit the self to be, disappear. This highlights a significant contrast in Fauset’s and Nardal’s journey across the ocean. When Nardal came to Paris she was made to feel her “difference”. In a way, she came up against these borders, this violence of not being able to be herself, a subject. It is similar, to an extent, to what Fanon will later retell in his study *Black Skin, White Masks*, of his lived experience in Paris.<sup>61</sup> Following the discussion where he is interpellated by white passengers “look a Negro” and the “fear” that this arouses in the young girl, Fanon states,

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who mercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men.<sup>62</sup>

This interpellation of racial identity sets him apart and creates a border between the white public and himself. The barrier that is put in place through racial discrimination attests to the violence of such frontiers. Fanon is not only “made to feel different” as Nardal would articulate it, but he describes the racist act as being physically torn apart as he experiences his own objectification. Whereas Fauset describes her experience as a subject within the metropolis, “it is just lovely to be oneself”, Fanon articulates it as an unrealized desire, “all I wanted was to be a man among other men”. The difference in Fanon’s articulation of being “imprisoned” as opposed to Fauset stating that in Paris she experiences more freedom than ever is telling. Whilst “no restraints” also refers to her economic situation and not having the responsibilities of her work, for example as editor of *The Crisis*, the freedom expressed is “not bothering about color

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Hughes,” December 21, 1924, James Weldon Johnson Papers: JWW MSS 26, box 61, folder 1163-1167, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

<sup>61</sup> I say to an extent because there are thirty or so years that separate the moment when Nardal is speaking and the publication of *Black Skin, White Masks*. Important historical events such as World War Two (Fanon’s experience of racism within the French armed forces) and the departmentalization of Martinique in 1946 which should have assured its political status as being on par with the metropole took place during these thirty years. Furthermore, Fanon is speaking of the specificities of racism in terms of black masculinity. This will be returned to later in the thesis.

<sup>62</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 112. Originally published, Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952).

prejudice.” The commonality, then, between Fanon and Nardal is that they are both Martinican and thus, in the French nation space, are socially positioned as belonging to “the inferior races” whom are under the auspices of the French empire and its civilizing mission. Due to this specificity of their socio-cultural identities, there will be differences in experience between themselves and other members of the black diaspora, such as Fauset, whose experience, as is shown above, is determined, in part, by the context in which she has come.

What is apparent in Fauset’s remarks and in the kind of romanticization of Paris that exists within African American popular culture is that the French capital, imagined or real, holds a promise of “freedom” from American white supremacy and racial prejudice. At the same time, and as Nardal said, during the 1920’s, “black American art literally exploded” onto the cultural scene of the *vogue noire*. What this infers is that the French public’s perceptions of African Americans will be different to their perceptions of black francophone members of the diaspora. It is to highlight that Fauset and her fellow African Americans are positioned differently within the French empire. This is not to say that anti-black racism did not exist with respect to African American people in France, nor does it mean that forms of American anti-black racism were not present.<sup>63</sup> For example, African Americans were perceived by the majority of the French

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<sup>63</sup> Members of anti-imperial movements and organization within the francophone diasporic communities also wrote extensively on the existence of an American form of racism that was taking place in Paris during the interwar period. Not only was this attributed to the immigration of white Americans to Paris, but it was also attributed to American economic and cultural imperialism that was ever increasing after World War One. It is documented that the number of black anti-colonial and anti-imperial associations totaled forty in interwar Paris, such as the *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre* (CDRN) the *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre* (LDRN), and the *Union de Travailleurs Nègres* (UNT). See Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 80-83. The articles published in their respective newspapers attest to a certain “Americanization of France”. Numerous incidences of cafés owners refusing entry to black clientele in order to appease their white American costumers and the physical violence that sometimes ensued appear consistently within the pages of their newspapers. The Damyean, Prince Kojo Tovalou Houénou, editor of *Les Continents*, and cofounder of *La Ligue Universelle de Défense de la Race Noire*, experienced this brand of American racism first-hand. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting tells of this experience as follows; “He had been pummeled with fists and feet by a group of American tourists in 1923 at a bar in Montmartre and then thrown out by the French proprietor at the request of the Americans who did not like his presence at the bar.” T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 32. The French proprietor subsequently lost his bar license. *La Dépêche africaine*, the journal of the political organization *Le Comité de Défense des Intérêts de la Race Noire*, published an article called “Les Américains en France”. The article, signed by Géo P, retold the event of M. Stephen Alexis, a black government official of Haiti, who was refused service at the request of the white American clients at the famous café la Coupole in Montparnasse. Arguing that this was neither a unique nor new state of affairs, American racism is framed as being one aspect of its cultural and economic imperialism, that they perceive to be taking over France. Géo P writes: “Depuis longtemps, certains commerçants, à plat ventre devant leur clientèle américaine, refusaient aux noirs l’entrée de leurs maisons... Après la Western-Electric, La Thompson-Houston Téléphone, après Pathé-Kodak, après Citroën, après l’Ile Saint-Louis, après Montmartre, le boulevard Montparnasse était devenu américain: maisons américaines, boissons américaines, bars américains, produits américains, capitaux américains, préjugés américains. Toute cette américanisation devient, pour nous Français moyens, parfaitement insupportable.” Géo P., “Les Américains en France,” *La Dépêche africaine* 2, no. 9 (septembre 1929). The appearance of the American type of racism in Paris is therefore bound to a larger problem of American imperialism of France. Within black anti-imperialist and anti-colonial organizations this can have an effect of creating gaps between francophone and African American racial politics within black diasporic communities. For more

public as being either jazz musicians or stage performers. Langston Hughes speaks of the fact that, not having either of these talents, he was informed by his compatriots that he “may as well go back home.”<sup>64</sup> Inquiring about construction work, he speaks of how the French employees had chased him away shouting “*salaud*”(bastard) and “*sale étranger*” (filthy foreigner).<sup>65</sup> Recognizing that was perhaps because of a “bitter anti-foreign feeling” amongst the French workers because of recent increase in Polish and Italian immigrants who worked for “lower wages than the under paid French”, Hughes’ encounters with the job market nevertheless show that in terms of work, African Americans were largely limited to activities within the cultural milieu of the *vogue noire*.<sup>66</sup> His experiences demonstrate that for certain immigrants – black or white – coming to live in Paris during this period after the first World War was not a particularly easy venture. Fauset is well aware of this, and this is part of the reason why her specific trajectory is met with such an experience of “freedom”. From her perspective, in France, one is more “conscious of the hardness of life and the driving fear of poverty” than in America.<sup>67</sup> In 1924, she writes to Harold Jackman stating,

French ordinary life is so humdrum; people work so hard; one is much more conscious of the hardness of life and the driving fear of poverty than one ever is in America. But the sense of freedom! So, if one doesn’t have to dread shortness of funds etc., it is just heaven. Particularly for us, - but I would hate to be genuinely poor and live in Paris or anywhere in France for that matter.<sup>68</sup>

It is in a passage like this that Fauset evokes a shift in her perspective from an imagined or romanticized form of Paris to a more realistic impression of France. Reiterating her sense of “freedom”, Paris is “heaven” only if one can afford it and “particularly for us”. What can be read in this “particularly for us” is her awareness of the possible differences of experiences of

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on white Americans in Paris see, for example, Nicole Fouché, “Les Américains en France, 1919-1939: un objet d’étude pour les historiens de l’immigration,” *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 14, no. 3 (1998): 159–70.

<sup>64</sup> Speaking to African American musicians at a café in Montmartre, Hughes writes, “I’ve just come to Paris, and I am looking for a cheap place to stay and a job.” They scowled at me. Finally, one of them said: “Well what instrument do you play?” They thought I was musical competition. I said: “None. I’m just looking for an ordinary job.” Puzzled, another one asked: “Do you tap dance, or what?” “No,” I said, “I’ve just got off a ship and I want any kind of job there is.” “You must be crazy, boy,” one of the men said. “There ain’t no ‘any kind of job’ here. There’re plenty of French people for ordinary work. ’Less you can play jazz or tap dance, you’d just as well go back home.” Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography by Langston Hughes*, 1940, introduction by Arnold Rampersad (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 175.

<sup>65</sup> Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 182.

<sup>66</sup> Hughes ends up finding work at a bar in Montmartre run by a Martinican woman. This demonstrates that employment opportunities for members of the francophone diaspora were also affected by the *vogue noire* of *les années folles*. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 183-184.

<sup>67</sup> Of course, this would depend from what socio-economic group one is speaking.

<sup>68</sup> Jessie Fauset, “Notes of Paris: Letter to Harold Jackman,” December 21, 1924, James Weldon Johnson Papers: JWW MSS 114, box 5, folder 102, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.



anti-black racism, for example, within the black diasporic communities in Paris. During Fauset's participation in the Second Pan-African Congress, she meets many francophone members of the black diaspora, and for some, like René Maran, this will transform into a lasting epistolary conversation. Fauset's subsequent articles on this Pan-African Congress are demonstrative of the fact that these European spaces are not inhabited in the same way by different members of the diasporic community. Thus, when she speaks of Paris as "heaven" it is not that she perceives France as void of racism, discrimination, and class exploitation. Rather France is simply not America.<sup>69</sup> There is a sense, then, that having lived in Paris for a time, the material and cultural realities experienced have disrupted some of Fauset's preconceptions held, or myths shared within African American communities before her arrival. Furthermore, like Paulette Nardal's trajectory to Paris, Fauset's migration gave rise to collectivity. It is not one based on racial identity, but a community based on a shared national identity. Between the "reprieve" and "freedom" that Fauset feels in France, only then to surround herself with fellow Americans, white or black, may appear on the surface as a paradox, or at the very least ironic. And yet, looking into her discussions of her national identity, and more specifically the growing attachment that she feels to it during her time in Paris, it is not as paradoxical as it first appears.

Apart from her critical work on the Pan-African Congress published in her articles in *The Crisis*, Fauset gives few details of her interactions with diasporic communities in Paris. She speaks ambiguously about going to balls and cafés in Montmartre, often mobilizing certain racial, gender, class, and sexual stereotypes of exoticism and moral looseness associated with these areas.<sup>70</sup> Unlike Nardal, who places intercultural dialogues within the diaspora as central

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<sup>69</sup> This brings her perception of France closer to what James Baldwin will articulate in respect to his migration across the Atlantic. After the Second World War, and years later in his 1972 memoir *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin speaks of his experience in Paris, and whilst singular to him, he has a similar tone to Fauset in the need and desire not to be in America. "I had never, thank god – and certainly not once I had found myself living there – been even remotely romantic about Paris. I may have been romantic about London – because of Charles Dickens – but the romance lasted for exactly as long as it took me to carry my bags to Victoria Station. My journey, or my flight, had not been *to* Paris but simply *away* from America." James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 1972 (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 39.

<sup>70</sup> In a 1924 letter addressed to Hughes she writes of her anticipated arrival to Paris. "You can take me to all the dangerous places, she says, and I can take you to all the beautiful ones." The power of the machinations of exoticism that ties these bars and balls to promiscuity and non-normative sexuality, thus potentially morally and socially "dangerous" places, finds its echo in Fauset's letter. In a subsequent letter to Hughes when Fauset is in Paris, she states that, "I have a friend here who will take me and protect me. I don't believe I'd choose McKay to accompany me to such places." Fauset mobilizes racial, gender, class and heteronormative stereotypes in her evocation to Hughes, especially when she suggests that Claude McKay, a queer Caribbean working-class black man, would be partaking in this perceived moral looseness, or at the very least, would not be a considerate chaperone. Jessie Fauset, "Letter to Langston Hughes," April 20, 1924, James Weldon Johnson Papers: JWJ MSS 26 box 61 folder 1163-1167, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. And Fauset, "Letter to Langston Hughes," January 6, 1925, James Weldon Johnson Papers.

to her life and intellectual pursuits in Paris, it does not appear, even in her work, that Fauset perceives it as an extremely important quality of her experience. Fauset may have met Paulette Nardal, for instance. One possibility of the encounter is at René Maran's salon that Fauset attended with fellow African Americans like Gwendolyn Bennett and Augusta Savage and which is documented as also the occasion when Nardal met Savage.<sup>71</sup> But what can be said for sure is no lasting friendship nor epistolary relationship formed between Nardal and Fauset. On the whole then, whilst Fauset does maintain correspondence with René Maran when in America, it appears that she preferred the company of black and white Americans than that of black and white French or francophone communities, regardless of the fact she was fluent in French and had a wealth of knowledge on French culture (clearly evident in her literary, editorial, and journalistic work).<sup>72</sup>

Like you, I find Americans, black or white, when they are nice, nicer than any other people in the world. I need to like the French but this time they leave me... the war has spoiled them poor things. I've been lucky enough to be seen into a group of writers that I knew slightly in New York. Now I know them much better and they have been glorious. Through them I have seen the Paris cafes up here in the student quarter, have been invited to literary teas and heard literary groups and I am to meet Sinclair Lewis.<sup>73</sup>

The group of writers that she is plausibly referring to, other than those involved in the Harlem Renaissance, are white American artists and writers who lived (mostly) in Greenwich village and who migrated to Paris and spent much time there during the interwar period.<sup>74</sup> What her account shows is not only her perception of French people and France but also a reflection of

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<sup>71</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris*, 138. What can also be said is that Jane and Paulette Nardal probably had read Jessie Fauset's work, at least the latter's article "The Gift of Laughter" that was published in Alain Locke's anthology *The New Negro*. This can be stated because it is known that Jane and Paulette Nardal wanted to translate Locke's anthology. Furthermore, these women would have been aware of one another through mutual friends and correspondents such as René Maran. Except for these interconnections, it appears that neither Nardal nor Fauset established a critical or amical dialogue with one another. In contrast, Eslanda Goode Robeson will interview Nardal and publish an article based on their encounter in the *Challenge: A Literary Quarterly* in 1936. Eslanda Goode Robeson, "Black Paris II," *Challenge: A Literary Quarterly* 1, no. 5 (June 1936): 9-18. Similarly, Paulette Nardal will interview Augusta Savage whilst the latter was working in Paris. Nardal created a written portrait of the sculptress, published in the *La Dépêche africaine*. Paulette Nardal, "Une femme sculpteur noire," *La Dépêche africaine* 3, no. 27-28 (août-septembre 30, 1930): 5.

<sup>72</sup> Brent Hayes Edwards describes René Maran as the "Francophone intellectual in closest contact with his African American counterparts in New York and Washington, D.C. He corresponds or interacted with almost all the significant participants in the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes Countee Cullen, Gwendolyn Bennett, Jessie Fauset, Claude McKay, and Rayford Logan. In 1927, he was closely involved in the effort by Paulette and Jane Nardal to translate Alain Locke's anthology *The New Negro*, and the next year he was instrumental in the publication of a French version of Walter White's 1924 novel *The Fire in the Flint*." Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 98-99.

<sup>73</sup> Fauset, "Letter to Langston Hughes," January 6, 1925, James Weldon Johnson Papers.

<sup>74</sup> Fauset fictionalizes a group of white American writers and artist of the Greenwich village in her short story "A Sleeper Wakes" and her novel *Plum Bun* that will be addressed in the following chapter.

her fellow countrymen and women brought about through the experience of migration. Fauset's preference for the company of Americans in France seems to suggest a type of patriotism or attachment to American culture. For T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Fauset's "Paris without the French" was influenced by her distastes of French chauvinism which pushed her to seek the company of white and black Americans "to such an extent that Fauset absolves her fellow Americans of their complicity with the forces that led to her rupture with America in the first place."<sup>75</sup> Whilst Sharpley-Whiting's conclusion underlines a just point, what is also possible is that Fauset's "France without the French" speaks to her explorations of what it means to be American and what it means to be a black American woman. For instance, in Fauset's novels France is fictionalized predominantly "without the French". It becomes an elsewhere to America and is the setting in which she explores African American identities and issues specific to the African American context in America. Whilst Fauset's employment of the geographical space of France in her fiction will be developed at length at another time, it is worth mentioning now because it sheds light on the comments that she makes about her time in France. In a letter to Harold Jackman during her stay she evokes again the joy that she feels interacting with Americans across the color line.

I've met a lot of Americans over here, writers etc. who have been exceedingly kind. They give teas, not social ones, and they meet in cafés to drink aperitifs (perfectly harmless things) somewhere between the hours of 4:30 and 6:30 and to discuss, well the world at large. And believe me I sit with them whenever I am invited, I never see such life as this in America and it is worth, - oh so much!<sup>76</sup>

The "life" that is worth "oh so much" which she did not experience in America, is here in France, but with other Americans. This is interesting if it is remembered that in Paris it is also where Fauset reflects that it is "lovely just being oneself". As Fanon expressed that he just wanted to be a man among men, not reduced to his racial identity, it seems that Fauset's experience of being "oneself" is in part attributed to the fact that she is an African American considered as American among Americans. France is another setting where Fauset experiences a belonging to her national identity within her relationships across the color line. Therefore, this attachment is as much about a self-positioning and identification as it is about belonging to a collectivity. Fauset negotiates crossings of national and cultural boundaries in the French context as well as those between African American cultural identities and (white) national cultural identities with her fellow countrymen and women. In her 1925 article "Yarrow Revisited" Fauset elucidates,

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<sup>75</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris*, 84.

<sup>76</sup> Fauset, "Notes of Paris: Letter to Harold Jackman," December 21, 1924, James Weldon Johnson Papers.

Yet there is something about Paris. In the beginning I said that life in Paris is the same as life the civilized world over but that there was one exception. In Paris I find myself more American than I ever feel in America. I am more conscious of my national characteristics than I have ever been in New York. When I say: “We do that differently in America,” I do not mean that *we* do that differently in Harlem, or on “U” street in Washington, or on Christian Street in Philadelphia. I mean that Americans white and black do not act that way.<sup>77</sup>

In the 1920’s, Harlem in New York, U Street in Washington, and Christian Street in Philadelphia, were all known as being African American cultural centers, and in the North, were *de facto* segregated spaces. This emphasizes her movement from speaking from within an African American collectivity – “I do not mean that *we* do that differently” – to a national collectivity, “Americans white or black do not act that way”. Fauset does not deny her racial identity nor does she mobilize a chauvinistic patriotism. In an interview in *The Paris Tribune*, Fauset will relate that “I am colored and wish to be known as colored” but what she finds in Paris is a sense of “integrity”:

I like Paris because I find something here, something of integrity, which I seem to have strangely lost in my own country. It is the simplest of all to say that I like to live among people and surroundings where I am not always conscious of ‘thou shalt not’. I am colored and wish to be known as colored, but sometimes I have felt that my growth as a writer has been hampered in my own country. And so – but only temporarily – I have fled from it. I adore my own people and I like to be among them, despite the race issue in America.<sup>78</sup>

If integrity is understood on affective registers as feeling a sense of alignment with oneself and one’s identity – Fanon’s desire to be a man among men, Fauset’s experience of being herself – then in light of the above discussion, “the something of integrity” that Fauset lives in Paris is feeling both African American and American. As having a place in her national community, or at least having the experience of belonging as a subject and citizen. This is implicitly stated as being impossible in the white supremacist patriarchy of the American national territory. It is almost the opposite to what Nardal felt arriving in the metropolis. The latter “was made to feel” different because of her racial and gendered identity, and not at all a part of the national community. The “uprooting” Nardal experienced, or as Fanon articulates it the “imprisonment” felt in Paris are thus almost the antithesis to Fauset’s experience of “integrity” “freedom” and notions of feeling more American than she has “ever felt in America.” Regardless of these differences, what can be said is that for both Nardal and Fauset their inhabitation of Paris has

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<sup>77</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, “Yarrow Revisited,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 29, no. 3 (January 1925): 109.

<sup>78</sup> Cited in Garcia, “Black Women Writers, Modernism, and Paris,” 37.

been the grounds for a search and exploration of new ways of understanding oneself and the world.

### 1.1.3 “Homing” Devices in a Hostile World

For Nardal or for Fauset, migration is not simply a straight line between origin and destination, between French colonies and the metropolis, between the United States and France. The negotiation of different environments, transcultural dialogues, and the feelings of “uprooting” and attachment experienced, provide the grounds for different forms of learning and changing in turn the way one perceives and understands. What this says is, experience and the processes of making the world intelligible to oneself is as much a subjective process as it is a collective one. On an affective register, feelings of displacement and attachment are therefore also lived at once individually and collectively. The concept of “uprootings/regroundings” developed by Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castaneda, Anne Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller is useful here. As editors of the book *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, they place this concept as central to the reflection of their study.

The concept of ‘uprootings/regroundings’ provides a framework for rethinking home and migration in ways that open out the discussion beyond oppositions such as stasis versus transformation, or presence versus absence. Rather than thinking of home and migration as constituted through processes that neatly map onto ‘migrating’ and ‘homing’, uprootings/regroundings makes it possible to consider home and migration in terms of plurality of experiences, histories, and constituencies, and of the workings of institutional structures. The task, therefore, is not to categorize ‘home’ as a condition distinct from ‘migration’, or to order them in terms of their relative value or cultural salience, but to ask how uprootings and regroupings are enacted – affectively, materially, and symbolically- in relation to one another.<sup>79</sup>

Nardal for example linked the feeling of uprooting not only to racial solidarity but to the invention of alternate forms of knowledge production. In this way, both her experience of this feeling and her dialoguing with others from within the black diaspora became “regrounded”. This is discursive, in the invention of new forms of representation and racial conscientization, as much as it is “regrounded” in the creation of community through “racial solidarity” and later with her salon at Clamart. What is being argued is that critical work that draws on lived experience in order to “disrupt” dominant forms of understanding (modernity’s episteme) is an act of creating space for marginalized subjects in both discursive and material realities. As Paul Gilroy argues in respect to “structures of feeling” within the black Atlantic and musical

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<sup>79</sup> Sara Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 1–2.

performance, these writers' interventions can be seen as communicative gestures that "are not expressive of an essence that exists outside of the acts that perform them" but rather work to transmit "structures of racial feeling".<sup>80</sup> This is to say that the act of critiquing racist representation of black femininity within French imperial culture, for example, works to carve out a space to (re)present her otherwise – a homing device– equivalent to creating a home, a space where black women can live and dwell as subjects within the metropole. On the one hand, it is pertinent to mobilize the idea of 'homing devices' in respect to Fauset and Nardal because home, or possibilities of a home in a hostile world are ongoing themes in their work. This will be articulated in different ways depending on the form that their œuvre takes. On the other hand, to look at their critical or artistic productions in this way brings to the fore the political dimension of their practices and the politics of building collectivities. In an environment that denies equality across gender, racial, sexual and class lines, it offers the perspective to see these engagements as acts of resistance that are at once individual and collective. This is because they are also acts of imagining and constructing spaces and interpersonal interactions that are more human than the ones that they know and experience.<sup>81</sup> In order to begin to demonstrate how this is achieved, the discussion to follow will focus on the critical engagements of Jessie Fauset, Paulette Nardal, and Jane Nardal. Taking the form of articles published in different literary and cultural magazines, all three writers intervene in French and/or European colonial culture during the interwar period and take as a point of departure their lived experiences in order to create space for other forms of knowledge and representation.

## 1.2 Critical Engagements in the *Vogue Noire*

What Paulette and Jane Nardal and Jessie Fauset have in common is that lived experience is not an anecdotal element in their work, nor merely a journalistic or literary tool amongst others. It is a way of creating space and thinking otherwise to that which is represented and that which is prescribed. This is emphasized by the style and tone of their articles that could be seen as taking part in literary journalism. Literary journalism is a genre developed in the recent work of many literary and cultural theorists such as William E. Dow and Roberta S.

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<sup>80</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 110.

<sup>81</sup> This will take more than the first chapter to argue but it is underlined here because it is from this point on that the ideas of home and creating spaces for black female subjectivities will be addressed.

Maguire who investigate the formative and transformative possibilities of the “*pairing* or *fusion*” of these two non-fictional and fictional narrative forms.<sup>82</sup> The potentialities of this genre to promote critical reflection and social justice are highlighted by Maguire and Dow for it is literary journalism that

can provide verifiable facts and polemical astuteness but should also be characterized by its capacity to procure wisdom; to enhance attunement to certain registers of human experience; to show a sharp awareness of the capacities of language as a medium; and to provide intense, transformative experiences in ways and forms that other narrative genres cannot.<sup>83</sup>

Whilst these two authors are specifically speaking of literary journalism in the American context, it is critically productive to approach the texts of Jane and Paulette Nardal and Jessie Fauset with these aspects of literary journalism in mind. This is because it will shed a light on the political and epistemological efforts of these three authors. Their strategy is to combine lived experience with literary tools in their journalistic pursuits which are grounded in observations of a specific event or context. The plurality of their migratory experiences and ways of creating a “home” in Paris inevitably means that the ways in which they approach the subjects of their articles are also plural. All three take as the material grounds for critique French colonial culture. However, issues addressed by Jane Nardal in “Exotic Puppets” with regard to French cultural identity and black female subjectivity, for example, will not be addressed as explicitly within Fauset’s articles. As she positions herself as an “American”, she will not directly confront or try and invent a space for representing otherwise black female subjectivity and sexuality within the Parisian *vogue noire*. Whilst the subject of Jane Nardal’s “Exotic Puppets” and Paulette Nardal’s “*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*” intervene in the spaces of exoticism in Paris, Fauset in her “Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress” will focus on colonial consumption in another context, that of the Belgium empire. In her “Yarrow Revisited”, “The Enigma of the Sorbonne” and “This Way to the Flea Market”, Fauset sets her critical reflection in the Parisian landscape. Nevertheless, and as it will be shown, her critiques of the social, material, and symbolic realities of the French capital are undertaken to reflect back and question notions of identity within African American culture. It is a space of mediation, much like the space that Paris provided Fauset in respect to her new ways of perceiving and understanding herself as an “American”. In other words, the articles may be set

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<sup>82</sup> William E. Dow and Roberta S. Maguire, “Introduction,” in *The Routledge Companion to American Literary Journalism*, eds. William E. Dow and Roberta S. Maguire (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2020), 22.

<sup>83</sup> Dow and Maguire, *The Routledge Companion*, 19.

in France but the “home” or space being created is situated in the United States.<sup>84</sup> For the two Nardal sisters, this is not the case. Their critical interventions into French exoticism are to create a space for black female subjectivities here in the metropole. They work to disarticulate the stereotypical representations of black identity constructed within a colonial perspective in order to show the power relationships involved in such depictions. This is not limited to the performing arts, like the revues playing in the Champs-Élysées, the jazz clubs, or colonial balls (*bals coloniaux*) but also includes the works of avant-garde artists such as André Gide, Paul Morand, Pablo Picasso, Man Ray, and Jules Pascin. All shaped by a colonial imaginary that has been formed over time, what is particularly recurrent in these modern artistic expressions is the overt sexualization of black femininity. Within this tradition, black female subjects are the objects of consumption for the titillation of white (and black) masculine heterosexual desire. Jane Nardal argues that black femininity and sexuality is constrained to two stereotypical representations. She is either the “exotic princess” who is there for the pleasure of (white) masculine desire or the “dangerous mulatta” that threatens it. In order to put into question this imaging of black femininity within modern aesthetics and consumer culture Jane and Paulette Nardal set their articles within the spaces of the colonial ball.

### 1.3 Jane Nardal’s “Exotic Puppets”

*La Dépêche africaine*, edited by Guadeloupean Maurice Satineau, was slightly different to other anti-imperial newspapers published during the interwar period, for example *La Race Nègre* or *Le Cri des Nègres*, because it had a “commitment to addressing social injustices in terms that were both racial and gendered.”<sup>85</sup> The two latter publications created by the black organizations *La Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre* and *L’Union de Travailleurs Nègres* respectively, championed masculine perspectives often framing it as *the* perspective of anti-imperial and anti-racist struggles. However, in *La Dépêche africaine*, women were not the objects of inquiry but the active participants, thinkers, and writers. It was thanks to the work of Paulette and Jane Nardal that this literary space was created within the journal, providing a platform which made it possible to link and articulate “feminist perspectives and social issues in a colonial context.”<sup>86</sup> It is here that Jane

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<sup>84</sup> This is also true in the way France appears in her novels which will be the focus of Chapter Three.

<sup>85</sup> Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 135.

<sup>86</sup> Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 175.



Nardal's article "Exotic Puppets" was published in October of 1928. To the predominately Antillean francophone audience of this magazine, the author presents a critique of the social milieus of the colonial balls and European modernism which she perceives as the sites that exoticize the Caribbean and Caribbean cultural identities. Far from a celebration of these scenes of *les années folles*, "Exotic Puppets" articulates the anti-black racism embedded within the aesthetics of exoticism, and more specifically the erotization of Antillean femininity and her sexuality. The form of the article takes shape as a literary and cultural critique intermingled with observations of these Parisian happenings. Rather than simply being an essay or exposé of why and how these representations of black femininity signify anti-black racism, it performs the way in which they effect the quotidian of Antillean women living in the metropole. It shows how ideologies and cultural imaginaries intervene materially in their experiences of the urban space and how they are perceived within it.

In order to present these connections, Jane Nardal begins by narrowing her intended readership to the Antillean community living in France. The opening lines read:

Regarding the evocative power of certain words, the Creole who has spent time in France can readily testify. Should it come to be known or perceived that you are "exotic" you will arouse a lively interest, preposterous questions, the dreams or regrets of those who have never travelled.<sup>87</sup>

In the French version the Creole is written "le Creole". The masculine gendered subject is understood to be a neutral pronoun in French like "l'homme" that designates a human subject both masculine and feminine. The speaker's voice then directly addresses her intended audience with a change to a collective "you". This creates a shared experience within the Antillean community of "time spent in France". What is shown is that despite an Antillean presence "here" in the white city scape of the metropolis, they are perceived as having their place "there", in those faraway lands of the colonies. Jane Nardal reaffirms this form of anti-black racism by mobilizing an account of an everyday experience of a female Antillean subject, who appears to be very similar to Nardal herself.

What a deception for him who evokes exotic princesses in your honor, if you were to tell him, just like a little French girl of the middle class, that you are in Paris pursuing studies that you began over there, in the Tropics, in high school? No, the rights of the imagination cannot be proscribed, you resign yourself to usurping the

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<sup>87</sup> Jane Nardal, "Pantins Exotiques," *La Dépêche africaine* 8 (octobre 15, 1928): 2. All English citations of Nardal's article are translated by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting in her *Negritude Women*, 108-113. Jane Nardal, "Exotic Puppets," in *Negritude Women*, 108.

role, to being someone who comes from those faraway lands where everything is vibrantly afire: air, hearts, bodies.<sup>88</sup>

The collective “you” is now transformed to a collective “you” but of women only. Under the eyes of the French public Antillean women become “exotic princesses”. Therefore, Jane Nardal firstly articulates commonality within the Antillean community only to then disarticulate it through the example of an experience of a black woman’s quotidian in Paris. This functions not as an exclusion of the masculine readerships but searches to encourage them to realize the different ways in which race, gender and sexuality inform how black women are perceived and how it effects black female subjects in the capital. The textual centering of black femininity and the specificities of her experience shows that it was important for Jane Nardal that the analysis of exoticism to follow is interpreted as coming from the point of view of a black female subject living in the metropolis. This is not an effort to present a critique from a disinterested, neutral, and objective position as is the tradition (and the problem) of Western knowledge production. Rather, the author is placing “her” perceptions and observations of these social and artistic milieus as central to the argument that is being made. When the spatial distinction between a “here” of Paris and a “there” of the colonies is furthered with the differentiation between “a little French girl of the middle class” and the “exotic princess”, what Jane Nardal is pointing to is the ideological construction within colonial thinking at the basis of exotic imaginaries. The specificities of the Third Republic, its civilizing mission and French universalism meant that in order to continue with its imperial pursuits, without infracting the Rights of Man, the superiority of the French civilization and the French (white) race was ideologically, spatially and temporally distinguished from non-white populations living in the colonies.<sup>89</sup> As such, those “faraway lands” are not only geographically distant to the European space but the black subjects that inhabit them are historically behind European civilization. They are “archaic” or “primitive”. As Anne McClintock argues, this construction meant that “geographical distance across *space* is figured as a historical difference across *time*”.

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<sup>88</sup> Nardal, “Exotic Puppets,” 108.

<sup>89</sup> For example, Albert Sarraut, a prominent thinker of the Third Republic describes the civilizing mission as follows: “Notre âme nationale a été lentement façonnée, modelée, pétrie, baignée par toutes ces influences (science, technicité) et toutes ces clartés ; par une sorte de capillarité, cette immense richesse morale s’est peu à peu répandue à travers toute la race ; et nous représentons ainsi une hérédité toujours en voie de liberté, une hérédité de lumière qui, aux colonies, se porte précisément au secours d’une hérédité de stagnation et de ténèbres. Et voilà l’essence même, la caractéristique, la raison d’être de la supériorité en vertu de laquelle nous avons droit de tutelle, d’autorité bienfaitrice, sur ceux que, depuis les anciens âges nous avons distancés sur les routes du progrès humain.” Albert Sarraut, *Grandeur et servitude coloniales* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2012), 111. During his political career, Sarraut occupied the positions of Governor General of Indochina (twice), Colonial Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs. His second book, *Grandeur and servitude coloniales*, was published (with re-editions) at the time of the Colonial Exhibition in 1931 and he was one of the officials who worked closely with its curator Maréchal Lyautey.

In the mapping of progress, images of ‘archaic’ time – that is non-European time – were systematically evoked to identify what was historically new about industrial modernity [...] at this point, another trope makes its appearance. It can be called the invention of anachronistic space [...] Within this trope, the agency of women, the colonized and the industrial working class are disavowed and projected onto anachronistic space: prehistoric, atavistic and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity.<sup>90</sup>

This is why the Antillean woman of the article can only ever be seen as an “exotic princess”. She is “inherently out of place” in the European space positioned as the apogee of enlightenment and civilization. By her very presence in the metropolis she disrupts the racial logics of the civilizing mission. For she is not in the darkness of irrationality but studying like “a little French girl of the middle class.” Jane Nardal argues that these ideological constructions are inevitably linked to the production of anti-black images within exoticism.

In vain you strive to destroy so many legends they hardly believe you: so much so that you reproach yourself for trying to destroy allusions profoundly anchored in the French mind and fallen from literature into the public domain.<sup>91</sup>

This demonstrates that there is a connection between ideology and the racist imaging within the colonial imaginary. It also underlines that this trajectory from the heights of “the French mind” into literature continues to trickle down into the “public domain”, popular culture, and interracial interactions. The closed circuit between ideology, representation, and the public is underlined by Jane Nardal when the black female speaker of the article tries “in vain” to correct the “legends” of (white) metropolitans but who will always only see her as “the exotic princess”. Instead of the onus falling on the French public to “destroy” their own illusions “profoundly anchored” in their minds, the female speaker finishes by “reproaching” herself for desiring to be considered as a subject. Reduced to her racial identity she resigns herself to being “the exotic princess”. What Nardal articulates, then, is that exoticism is not just about the creation of images of the “exotic princesses” for the desires of white French (masculine) public, but it is a tool mobilized for the domination of people of color. As the argument develops, Nardal demonstrates that the ideological landscape that naturalizes French superiority also naturalizes the colonies and “inferior races” as places and people that are used to provide the goods and services to the metropolis. The author exposes the colonial imperialism of the Third Republic

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<sup>90</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 40. Italics in the original.

<sup>91</sup> Nardal, “Exotic Puppets,” 108.

by explicitly connecting anti-black representation within the *vogue noire* with consumption, eating and service.

### 1.3.1 “With which sauce do we want to be eaten...?”

Jane Nardal frames French colonial culture, whether it be in the “African frenzy unfurled in the cubist decor of a nightclub”, Paul Morand’s love for “negro atavism”, or Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s sociological depictions of “witches” (“*quimboiseurs*”)<sup>92</sup>, as one that is based on consumption of “exotic” objects and peoples. Consuming is understood here as the act of physically ingesting food and drink to maintain bodily function as well as the ways to ingest (watching, reading, hearing) cultural products like music, performance, literature, and the environments of the colonial balls. This is illustrated through Nardal’s link between the consumption of exotic images in cultural milieus with the idea of eating the other, which is made explicit when she asks her readers “With which sauce do we want to be eaten: the idealist sauce or the realist one?”<sup>93</sup> For her, the representations of black identity within the Romantic tradition – the idealist sauce – or the modern tradition of avant-garde writers – the realist one – both construct images of blackness as those being in service to the desires, fantasies and imaginations of the (white) writers and readers. Black masculinities or black femininities are not portrayed as being subjects, complex in their individuality, but rather as stereotypes to be served up for the pleasures of the white audience and ingested in the satisfaction of their desires. Nardal immediately follows her question with a response. “Here is the right answer,” she writes, “the American novelist of color, dismissing their portrayers, have put themselves to the task. We will one day see whether they have fared better.”<sup>94</sup> By referring to the pursuits and objectives of African Americans she is proposing a possible answer to the problem of representing blackness in the French context. To her predominately Antillean readership she is intellectualizing that which is needed, from her perspective, for the creation of black cultural identities that are no longer in service to white imaginations. Representation, then, is explicitly linked to material realities of service. The main issue of racial stereotypes, such as the exotic princess, is that this image is repeated and disseminated in such a pervasive way within the cultural economy that this one signifier supersedes any other ways of representing black feminine subjectivity. As such if this one image persists as *the* signifier, then black female subjects will always be perceived or

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<sup>92</sup> Nardal, “Exotic Puppets,” 111.

<sup>93</sup> Nardal, “Exotic Puppets,” 110.

<sup>94</sup> Nardal, “Exotic Puppets,” 110.

understood as being in a place of service (and therefore inferior) within this cultural economy. More perversely, what is being suggested is that in racist representation black subjects will be symbolically and physically gobbled up in this imperial cultural economy. Within the *vogue noire*, Nardal specifically mobilizes another example of black representation emerging from African American culture, namely the performances of Josephine Baker. Her argument is that despite the fact that “American blacks” who have “dismissed their portrayals” and present a “modern” depiction of black identity the “blasé artists and snobs” only see “primitive beings” in the French context. Nardal describes this through creating a semantic chain of words associated with eating like “savory”, “spicy”, “sweet” and “aftertaste”. Therefore, these literary artists, the white French public and the French empire at large consume these “primitive beings”.

Here it is that a woman of color [Josephine Baker] leaps on stage with her shellacked hair and sparkling smile. She is certainly still dressed in feathers and banana leaves, but she brings to the Parisians the latest Broadway products (the Charleston, jazz, etc.) The transition between past and present, the soldering between virgin forests and modernism, is what American blacks have accomplished and rendered tangible.

And the blasé artists and snobs find in them what they seek: the savory, spicy contrast of primitive beings in an ultramodern frame of African frenzy unfurled in the cubist decor of a nightclub. This explains the unprecedented vogue and the swell of enthusiasm generated by a little *capresse* who was begging on the sidewalks of St Louis (Mississippi).

For she and her friends (Joe Alex, Douglas Johnny, Hudgins), in the course of entertaining the Parisian public, offer new and truculent images for avant-garde writers. In hearing their sweet and raucous melodies in concert, in the music hall, on records, these writers reconstitute a strange atmosphere where one still hears something reminiscent of the wailing of the poor slaves with an aftertaste of naïveté and now and then savagery. Thus, in modern, exotic literature, the poetic imagination loses none of its prerogatives, even when it is no longer awarded prizes for excellence to good “Uncle Toms”.<sup>95</sup>

Through her discussion of Baker, what Nardal accomplishes is not a critique of Baker and her fellow performers but rather a critique of the way in which these performances are perceived and consumed by the metropolitan public. Jane Nardal underlines that despite “modern” expressions of black cultural identity, the public nevertheless “find in them what they seek” which is the “savory, spicy, contrast of primitive beings”. Similar to what Paulette Nardal articulated in reference to the difference in reception and perception of African American cultural expression between black and white audiences, Jane Nardal suggests that there is no desire nor interest on the part of certain modernists to perceive black subjects as such nor black cultural practices as

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<sup>95</sup> Nardal, “Exotic Puppets,” 109. In this passage, Nardal mistakes the location of St Louis as it is in Missouri and not Mississippi.

“modern”. As a consequence, from Jane Nardal’s perspective, be it in popular culture, the nightclubs or in modernist’s productions, black identity is only ever understood as in service to these white writers’ own pursuits, agendas, and understandings of the world that are informed by French colonial ideologies.<sup>96</sup> These playgrounds in the Parisian context become, in a sense, a microcosm of colonial domination in the colonies. Focusing on eating and service within consumer culture and (European) modernism – “with which sauce do we want to be eaten...?” – the author demonstrates to what extent they are impregnated by the ideologies of French imperialism that commodifies and exploits the colonies and colonial subjects in its capitalist pursuits. The *vogue noire* in Paris, is informed by and coincides with the material and ideological realities of anti-black racism within the French empire.

One of the goals of the Third Republic was to reunite the French public under one common project, namely colonialism, that would be a source of national pride and identity. Much of the ideological work of the civilizing mission was in view of this goal. Olivier le Cour Grandmaison argues that at the heart of the construction of empire was the necessity to bring France and Europe together under a shared purpose in order to assure France’s survival against internal class conflict and to put an end to territorial conquests between European nations.<sup>97</sup> This impacted the way in which French cultural identity was constructed. The French public were encouraged to be the active participants of disseminating the “benefits of colonization” and French civilization to their empire, “*la plus grande France*”.<sup>98</sup> In the work of Albert

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<sup>96</sup> As bell hooks will later investigate in the context of American commodity culture, eating the other necessarily involves the objectification and instrumentalization of other bodies, cultures, and ethnicities, in service to or in the satisfaction of Euro-American desires. hooks writes, “when race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm power-over in intimate relations with the Other.” bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 23.

<sup>97</sup> “Si l’égalité des Blancs, conçue comme appartenant à une seule et même race, bannit l’impérialisme continental, leur commune supériorité par rapport au reste du monde les autorise à trouver ailleurs les territoires dont ils ont besoin. Relativement aux spécificités de la situation intérieure française, c’est un impératif qui permettra au pays d’anéantir la *Sociale* par la *Coloniale*, d’épuiser la lutte des classes dans la lutte des races en faisant de “l’homme du peuple”, dont la “lourde main est bien mieux faite pour manier l’épée que l’outil servile”, un guerrier capable d’utiliser sa “dévorante activité” pour la conquête des terres lointaines. “Voilà notre vocation” conclut [Ernest] Renan, qui est sans doute l’un de premiers à faire de la construction d’un vaste domaine en outre-mer un instrument majeur du redressement national.” Grandmaison, *La République impériale*, 275–76.

<sup>98</sup> Grandmaison’s discussion on the resignification of patriotism during this period is a clear example. As Grandmaison explains the term “patriotism” was previously understood as incompatible with the ideas of conquest, and colonial domination, as it would infringe the law that people have the right to self-determination. “En raison du triomphe de partisans de la “Plus Grande France”, la majorité des contemporains semble avoir oublié que le sens premier du mot “patriotisme” interdisait de l’employer pour rendre compte d’orientations reposant sur des guerres de conquête, la domination et l’exploitation des “indigènes”. Aussi est-il maintenant possible d’être un patriote et un farouche défenseur de l’empire; la contradiction d’une telle position, soulignée par Pelletan et Passy vingt-cinq ans plus tôt, a été résolue. La continuité du terme “patriotisme” désormais employé indifféremment par les uns et les autres, occulte donc une discontinuité radicale des significations et des pratiques qui permet de

Sarraut, the idea of the national body and its survival is clearly linked to consumption. Mobilizing the metaphor of a body, Sarraut speaks of the necessity of colonization for Europe and France. Though each nation had its own specificities in respect to colonial practices, ideologies and propagandist rhetoric, Sarraut's use of "Europe" appeals to the desired solidarity of European nations in its colonial pursuits. Thus, he writes, "Europe is the head of a vast body":

Née de l'expansion lointaine, sa civilisation capitaliste et industrielle est condamnée à en vivre, ou à mourir si elle en est privée. L'Europe, réduite à ses seules ressources, ne saurait plus se nourrir. Les produits des terres d'outre-mer sont devenus l'aliment de première nécessité de sa table, de son industrie, de son commerce. L'estomac de l'Europe et sa machine ont un besoin également impérieux des denrées et des matières qui viennent des contrées colonisées. Sucre, riz, café, thé, cacao, arachides, manioc, rhum, tabac – ceci pour la bouche – coton, laine, soier textiles végétaux, caoutchouc, bois et pâtes à papier, peaux, pétroles, oléagineux, huiles essentielles, phosphates, et tant d'autres ressources encore – ceci pour l'usine et le négoce – tout cet imposant apport du colonialisme à la vie européenne en condition désormais le rythme et la durée. L'industrialisme issu de la matière première coloniale a excité la surpopulation blanche, qu'il faut ravitailler et entretenir.<sup>99</sup>

In this way, colonies become the "store houses" ("*entrepôts*") for the metropolis. Their purpose is to provide goods for consumption for the European populace and the raw materials for its industry to ensure that it is "revitalized" and kept in good health. Sarraut's emphasis on biological processes by imaging a mouth and a stomach shows that the need for imperial expansion in order to ensure French survival, is about "an extension of the empire outward" as much as "a kind of swallowing up".<sup>100</sup> This constructs the logics of eating the other for it naturalizes the idea that racialized colonial subjects and other countries are there to be exploited or "eaten" for the benefit of white prosperity. The civilizing mission which nourishes a shared French cultural identity, thus also naturalizes the idea that French citizens (attributed only to white men at this time) are the sole subjects who legitimately have the right to consume, create and be in charge of production within this cultural economy. And this for existential survival. What underpins such a colonial logic is the philosophical ideas of the modern Subject. As Stuart Hall states, the modern Subject that emerges from European Enlightenment, "was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the

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conjoindre ces deux attitudes autrefois antagoniques. Identifié par son attachement politique de puissance indispensable pour faire triompher les intérêts de la France dans le monde, le "vrai" patriote ne peut être qu'un ardent "colonialiste" puisque l'un, soucieux de la grandeur du pays, doit défendre comme l'autre empire bâti par les fondateurs de la Troisième République." Grandmaison, *La République impériale*, 60.

<sup>99</sup> Sarraut, *Grandeur et servitude coloniales*, 145–46.

<sup>100</sup> Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003), 97.

capacities of reason, consciousness and action, whose 'center' consisted of an inner core.”<sup>101</sup> Within modernity the Subject is characterized by its principle of rationality, self-possession and social creation that distinguishes “natural man” from the “civil/political man”.<sup>102</sup> This conception of European modern Subject or “Man” establishes a relationship with alterity that is specific to this period. In order for modern society and the modern Subject to come into being, the conception of racialized “Others” as being biologically lacking with this capacity of reason was needed. Consequently, modern society and Subject were built on the premise that non-white populations could not possibly have their own forms of social organization on par with this European conception of the “civil/political man” and its civilization. European modernism therefore echoes these modern and colonial logics in so far as it centers white cultural identity as the purveyor of what is considered legitimate. As an effect, black expressions are not perceived as partaking in modernist artistic practices from this perspective because that would entail seeing black subjects as equals. Furthermore, stereotypical representation or commodification of blackness is inextricably tied to domination and control.<sup>103</sup> When Jane Nardal argues that the public find in the nightclubs “what they seek” or that artists nevertheless produce exotic images of “savourous, spicy, contrast of primitive beings”, it must be understood that these processes are taking place in order to shore up or reiterate the supremacy and legitimacy of white French cultural identity. Whether the artists that Nardal refers to are conscious of it or not, these power relationships are at work within cultural milieus of interwar Paris. Artistic practices that relegate blackness to the exotic other to be consumed is the scene of the very production of the white national body, (masculine) identity, and white supremacy.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” in *Modernity and Its Futures: Understanding Modern Societies, Book IV*, eds. Stuart Hall, David Hell and Tony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 275.

<sup>102</sup> Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 12.

<sup>103</sup> An example in French visual and commodity culture during the interwar period is the imaging of the *tirailleur sénégalais*. This figure became mostly attached to the chocolate drink called Banania Y’a Bon, as the company that produced it used this stereotype as a brand for its product. As cultural historians Nicolas Bancel et Pascal Blanchard argue: “Le corps du tirailleur dans les représentations est un corps superficiellement domestiqué, un corps militaire. Cette domestication est métaphorique de la possibilité de soumettre l’ensemble des Africains à une discipline européenne censée les élever aux frontières de la civilisation.” Nicolas Bancel et Pascal Blanchard, “Sauvage ou assimilé ?” *Africultures*, 31 janvier 31, 2000, <http://africultures.com/sauvage-ou-assimile-1215/>. The use of specifically non-threatening, disciplined images of the *tirailleur sénégalais* represents, then, the idea of the perceived ability to control and domesticate “savages”. For the soldier, he is in service to the nation, but as the commodification of this particular black stereotype is linked to the consumption of the chocolate drink one can see how the drink and himself - domesticated and obedient - are literally and symbolically swallowed up in the consumption of this liquid. Other food products that became a part of the everyday French commodity market and that work in the same manner include, “*Tête de nègre*”, a (white) marshmallow on a biscuit covered in chocolate. One has to remember that during the interwar period these images and products were common and pervasive within French popular culture.

<sup>104</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting in her essay on exoticism in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*, argues that “white supremacy takes many forms, from extreme hatred of difference to an intensified adoration of *Other* bodies. The exoticist represents the latter supremacist. He contemplates



### 1.3.2 Primitivism and the Constructions of Whiteness

In the article Jane Nardal singles out two representations of black femininity, namely the “dangerous mulatta” or the “exotic princess”. What the author demonstrates is that the portrayal of black femininity as overtly sexualized, immoral, or “primitive” invisibilizes the specificities of the historical and contemporary material realities of black women within French colonialism. For example, what the textual announcement of the incompatibility of “the exotic princess” and the “little French girl” tells the readers, is that this image of the “exotic princess” is constructed in order to attempt to control her place within society. She is not French, and she is not equal to the “little French girl”.<sup>105</sup>

Above all – and I’m finally lighting my lantern – all the trouble comes from the fact the vogues for Negroes these past few years has led to their being considered as folk destined to serve as amusement, to see to the pleasure, artistic or sensual, of whites...but when it is a question of intellectual or moral qualities, when it is a question of no longer being their clown but their equal that disturbs nature’s plan...<sup>106</sup>

Jane Nardal’s reference to “nature’s plan” clearly highlights the fact that ideologically speaking, inequality, anti-black stereotypes, service, and consumption are all underpinned (and naturalized) by biological conceptions of race. Supposed uncontrollable sexuality becomes a biologically determined characteristic of “black atavism” and as such the legitimate reason for colonial domination and exploitation of people of color. This ideological construct is linked by Nardal to consumption for it is the justification mobilized to keep people of color in service, and with respect to black femininity to keep her sexuality in service to white patriarchal desires. The sexualization of black women, be it in literary stereotypes or Eurocentric knowledge productions, is not only a tool to deny equality but it is intimately linked to the idea that black women can be “consumed” otherwise than the “little French girl”.

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black women as mere objects, things to be possessed, in his world of collectible exotica. In the exoticist’s world, the black female provides rapturous delights, a detour from the ennui of whiteness.” T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 86–87.

<sup>105</sup> The contemporary post-colonial critic and feminist phenomenologist Sara Ahmed argues that spatial distancing of others within proximity, “is a mechanism of demarcation of the national body, a way of defining borders within it, rather than just between it and an imagined or exterior other.” Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 100. This is to say that the whiteness – white socio-cultural identity – is delimited by its perceived ability to control and purvey what or who comes into proximity and what or who is distanced from its national body and relegation outside of it.

<sup>106</sup> Nardal, “Exotic Puppets,” 111.

I leave to others the task of getting indignant about these various caricatures of blacks. I will simply note that this latter stereotype of Negroes, for those who have lived in France the last few years, was already latent in certain minds, in certain milieus. Paul Morand did not invent it out of the blue – a few sharp observations bear this out. If the sociological work of Lévy-Bruhl, as he himself indicates, were his sources for the American Negro; if as I believe, he made extensive use of *The New Negro* by Alain Locke (a man of color) to represent the American black, who gave him the stereotype for the black Antillean? Undoubtedly the Blomet Ball, analogous to our casinos, or worse – his stopovers of a few hours in the Antilles – perhaps some “quimboiseurs” – and literary stereotypes, like that of the dangerous mulatto.”<sup>107</sup>

These sites of the *vogue noire*, like the Ball Blomet which was a famous white owned colonial ball situated in the 14th arrondissement, are the resources for exotic literature as much as they are the resources for knowledge production. Nardal’s argument is twofold. The first is to highlight to what extent the legitimacy of modernity’s episteme is questionable because it is dependent on fictional representation of blackness, such as the “literary stereotypes” that Lévy-Bruhl utilizes in his *La mentalité primitive*. As an effect the superiority of whiteness is equally a fiction told and constructed by such intellectuals. The second point of the argument, then, is that Eurocentric understandings of the world or European modernism, traced through Paul Morand’s work, necessarily reinscribe blackness as archaic or primitive. This is demonstrated by Nardal when she states,

Thus, for aesthetic pleasure, Paul Morand and his consorts rely on our return to the state of nature, like Mrs. Pamela Freedman. She has had enough of being a phony white woman. Why take pride in a borrowed progress? Having thought about this she returns to the state of savagery.<sup>108</sup>

Morand’s character Mrs. Pamela Freedman tires of “borrowed progress” (civilization) and returns to her “state of savagery”.<sup>109</sup> This colonial fantasy of black atavism is the reiteration of the construction or the performance of white identity. For if behind every Pamela Freedman who is “civilized in appearance” there is a “dangerous mulatta” or “witch” just waiting to return

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<sup>107</sup> Nardal, “Exotic Puppets,” 111.

<sup>108</sup> Nardal, “Exotic Puppets,” 111.

<sup>109</sup> For the Senegalese soldier, there is also an antithetical image created whereby black masculinity is depicted as barbaric, atavistic, and bestial that threatens civilization. Speaking precisely of the production of the non-threatening, docile and happy Senegalese soldier chez Banania, Nicolas Bancel et Pascal Blanchard describe the counter stereotype. “L’animalité du tirailleur réapparaît ainsi lors de la Première Guerre mondiale. Les nombreuses images d’assaut et d’exploit personnel font ressortir sa brutalité atavique, son goût du sang, souvent son inclination à l’anthropophagie. Confronté à une autre figure de la barbarie, l’Allemand, sa sauvagerie se manifeste. Ces images s’entrechoquent avec celle du “grand enfant,” antienne récurrente dès le début du siècle et matérialisé dans l’image parue en 1917 du “tirailleur Y’a bon,” reprise et exploitée jusqu’à l’écœurement par la marque Banania dans l’entre-deux-guerres.” Bancel et Blanchard, “Sauvage ou assimilé ?”

to her state of “savagery” then the role of white (masculine) figure as purveyor of civilization is needed. Nardal writes,

In the series of novellas, he presents in the following order (for he travelled over 50,000 kilometers and to 28 Negro countries): the Antillean black under the characteristics of the Haitian Occide, the black Czar who succeeds, in delivering his country from the American yoke only to turn it into a soviet republic and bring back the American; the American Negro, represented by the dancing girl Congo; a jazz musician; black leaders Octavius Bloom and Doctor Lincoln Vamp; and the mulatto multimillionaire Ms. Pamela Freedman; and finally, the African Negro into sorcery, fetishism and cannibalism.

You will note that he is careful not to confuse these different stereotypes; he uses them only to show, invariably, at the end of each of his novellas, the power of Negro atavism. Whatever he be, black or almost white, well-schooled or illiterate, French, American, or in a state of savagery, in short, civilized in appearance, the Negro, if the occasion permits, will return to his instincts of superstition and magic.<sup>110</sup>

From Jane Nardal’s perspective, despite the gender, ethnic, historical-cultural and national differences of Morand’s characters they all follow the same narrative trajectory back to precivilization of magic, superstition, cannibalism, and fetishism. When Nardal writes that it is for Morand’s aesthetic pleasures that Pamela Freedman “civilized in appearance” inevitably returns to a state of savagery – “a dangerous mulatta” – she speaks directly to the sexualization of race. Linking aesthetic and sensual pleasure of white cultural identity, the boundaries of whiteness are “threatened” by the imagined perversity of the figure of the “dangerous *mulâtresse*.”<sup>111</sup> She is the temptress of white male subjects who, being the progenitors of the French race, will be drawn into illegitimacy and immorality.<sup>112</sup> The figure of the *mulâtresse*

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<sup>110</sup> Nardal, “Exotic Puppets,” 110-111.

<sup>111</sup>The stereotype of black masculinity as a threat to civilization also intertwines sexuality and consumption. “The Negro” who returns to “cannibalism” is depicted as being unable to control his desires whether in terms of eating (framed as cannibalism) or his sexuality. The latter understood as his uncontrollable sexual desire towards *white* femininity. As Nicolas Blancel et Pascal Blanchard explain in respect to the ideological relationship between “savage” masculinity and white femininity: “Autre stigmaté de cette animalité tenue bridée par la discipline militaire mais toujours prête à la subsumer, les innombrables illustrations parues dans les années 1916-1918 sur les mairaines de guerres. Ces relations particulières, faites de cadeaux, de sorties, d’envois de photographies, entre des tirailleurs et leurs mairaines créent des liens inédits. Ils sont le thème de toute une iconographie populaire jouant sur la reconnaissance réciproque. Les images des soldats convalescents, entourés des attentions de jeunes infirmières ou au bras de jeunes femmes du monde, développent une vision paternaliste et stéréotypée. La suggestion d’une transgression socialement impossible, des interdits relatifs aux relations sexuelles entre une femme blanche et un homme noir est clairement mise en scène. De ce phantasme apparaît celui toujours suggéré de la sexualité débridée des Noirs, toujours proches de la nature et donc incapables de dominer leur propre corps et leur instinct.” Blancel et Blanchard, “Sauvage ou assimilé ?”

<sup>112</sup> For example, historian and cultural critic, Emmanuelle Saada, argues that at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the images produced by French photographers and writers have focused particularly on depictions of black Antillean women’s sexuality, which are ideologically and representationally constructed in opposition to white femininity and sexuality. “On trouve également dans tous les textes d’observateurs des Antilles une fascination d’une intensité particulière pour la sexualité de “la femme de couleur”, présentée comme une séductrice-née, promesse de tous

incorporates the “downfall” of civilization. Furthermore, these stereotypical representations of black femininity purposefully obscure historical and contemporary colonial domination. During slavery, not only were black women considered property but also sexual property of the white plantation owners. Interracial identities were in part issued from this extreme racial violence. The figure or stereotype of the *mulâtresse* has been fabricated in order to expunge the histories of colonial sexual exploitation as it paints her with the qualities of uncontrollable sexuality, degeneracy, and immorality. Thus her “primitivity” legitimizes her sexual exploitation as she becomes the very embodiment or “cause” of this racial and sexual violence. This threat to civilization that the “savage” image provides is, in fact, the reflection of the exploitative relationship, of consuming the other, that colonial ideologies and exotic imaginary depends. In the *vogue noire* of interwar Paris, this is articulated by Nardal when she states that the exotic images of black femininity are “for the pleasure” of artists or the French public in the colonial balls. The question, with “with which sauce do we want to be eaten...?” takes on, then, a particularly perverse meaning. Black femininity within the French colonial imagination is a femininity that can be “consumed”, violated, and exploited without her consent both in material and symbolic realities.

### 1.3.3 Conclusion: The Performance of Equality

In the article “Exotic Puppets”, Jane Nardal’s critique of European modernism and the particular brand of exoticism that is prevalent in some modernists’ works and in certain intellectual domains demonstrates how the construction of stereotypes affects lived realities of black women in the metropolis. She not only underlines the historicity of such stereotypical representation of blackness but shows to what extent they are produced and utilized during the interwar period as a way to legitimize the continual domination and exploitation of people of color in the colonies and the French continental space. Critiquing white cultural identity and the logics of colonial ideology as central to the way in which the world is understood, Nardal reveals that they necessarily depend on the imaging of blackness in a position of service to the needs of the French imperial project or the pleasures of the avant-garde writers of modernism.

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les plaisirs. Ainsi un texte de Petrus Durel sur les femmes des colonies, dont le langage scientifique dans sa précision minutieuse alimente un érotisme certain, insiste plus particulièrement sur les femmes antillaises. Restant pour la “créole” (c’est-à-dire pour la blanche) au niveau de la description des mœurs, il évoque pour chaque degré de métissage les différentes couleurs de l’appareil génital ainsi que l’intensité et a durée différentielles de la “sensation physiologique”. Cet exemple n’est que l’expression la plus crue d’une division raciale du domaine sexuel qu’on retrouve dans la plupart des textes traitant des Antilles, mais aussi dans la culture locale de l’époque. Aux femmes blanches, épouse et mères légitimes, sont associés tous les éléments de la respectabilité, alors que sont réservés aux femmes de couleur les tropes de la sexualité débridée et de la perversité.” Emmanuelle Saada, “Le poids des mots, la routine des photos. Photographies des femmes martiniquaises 1880-1930,” *Genèses* 21 (1995): 143.

With the black stereotypes discussed in the article, she exposes the asymmetrical relationships of power involved in the *vogue noire* whether it be in the material realities of black female subjects coming to Paris to study, the colonial balls such as the Blomet Ball or in the literary spaces of Paul Morand's work. Her argument is that the myth of black atavism, ideologically at the basis of the civilizing mission, is equally at the base of white aesthetic sensibilities. It is for the white subject's pleasure and desire that blackness is relegated to a position of inferiority. Pleasure is understood here as the consolidation of white identity itself as much as it is pleasure in terms of eating, sexuality, and aesthetics. Thus, when Nardal at the very beginning of the article mobilizes an account of an Antillean woman's experience in Paris, demonstrating that she will never be seen as a subject and equal to "the little French girl", she mobilizes lived experience as a mode of critique that disrupts European exoticism. On the one hand, this textual centering of black femininity and the specificity of her experience displaces the authority of the white colonial perspective. In the socio-cultural milieu of negrophilia that objectifies black femininity as an object for consumption, and which cannot perceive her as being the creator or producer of modernist cultural expression, then the very act of centering her voice contests the logic that whiteness is the sole purveyor of all things legitimate. Telling another story of history and events, Nardal nullifies the tropes and stereotypes employed within these literary, historical, and national imaginaries. As such, Nardal performs that which is denied in these material and symbolic spaces, namely her equality. This critical act engages in a construction of black feminine cultural identity who is not "in service to" the *vogue noire*, does not satisfy white masculine desire or lives the myths created within the Third Republic's colonial ideologies. The performance of equality creates a space for black feminist epistemologies within the bounds of the journal *La Dépêche africaine* as much as it forges a space for black female subjectivity in Paris. The fact that Nardal clearly underlines the interconnections between representation, knowledge production, and the interracial interactions in this cultural milieu, attests to such a pursuit. Thus, in Nardal's journalistic endeavors, lived experience is a point of departure at the same time as it connects the critical act as the pursuit of transforming social realities and creating places of belonging where black female subjects can live and dwell as such. For when Jane Nardal disarticulates the relationships of power at work in these material and symbolic cultural spaces, it could be argued that she is constructing the grounds of possibility for belonging to and identification with a collectivity that works differently to what colonial ideologies and culture prescribe. This is a question of both intra and interracial belongings and communities. It must be remembered that the readership of the *La Dépêche africaine* is prominently Antilleans living in Paris. The fact that Jane Nardal makes it clear that she works

from the perspective of an Antillean female subject at the same time as she focuses on the specificities of the articulation of race, sexuality, and gender in lived experience, then the performance of equality that she undertakes lends to the idea that she is also addressing questions of inequality within Antillean communities. As it was argued at the beginning of the chapter, textual performance and literary production could be seen as the act of “regrounding” or “homing” that creates spaces, at once material and discursive, for black female subjectivities as equals in environments that presently do not necessarily see them as such. Part of the interrogation is how to create a home or how does one feel at home in a hostile world. Paulette Nardal in her article “*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*” describes this environment as the space where “black people feel right at home”. In this article, Paulette Nardal similarly intervenes in the dynamics of exoticism of the *vogue noire* and the colonial ball culture. However, in this example, it is a ball that is outside the purview of the white public. For the reasons that Jane Nardal highlighted above, namely the a-symmetrical relationships that constitute exoticism and the consumption of exotic by the white public, members of the black diaspora constructed spaces within Paris, like the *bal Nègre de la Glacière*, that were organized and run by and for people of color. Like her sister, Paulette Nardal textually centers black female subjects at the event as she portrays an environment whereby black subjects are creators and producers of their own artistic expressions and cultural identities.

#### 1.4 Paulette Nardal’s “*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*”

In this article, published in *La Dépêche africaine* on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1929, almost a year after her sister’s “Exotic Puppets”, Paulette Nardal reports on a new ball run and organized by black people living in Paris. Unlike the white owned colonial ball in Blomet street which was in the 14<sup>th</sup> arrondissement (known at the time for being a pocket of avant-garde artists) or the jazz bars and nightclubs in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Montmartre, this new ball is in the eastern working-class industrial quarter of Paris, called Glacière. Because Nardal mentions its location both in the title and the beginning of the article, she is emphasizing the fact that the ball is situated differently to the happenings of the *vogue noire* within the Parisian landscape. The speaker of the article is in the first person which infers to the readers that Nardal wanted this article to be understood as coming from her perspective as a black female subject. From the very beginning of this work, then, it takes on a more autobiographical tone as Nardal reports

on her experience of the event. Much later on in life, Nardal recollects her ambitions for this text stating “in 1929, in Paris, I was already looking to valorize the contributions of black Antillean cultures.”<sup>113</sup> One of the tools that Nardal uses in order to do so is to frame white cultural identity as being symbolically and materially irrelevant to the interactions, cultural productions and the organization of this ball. As a consequence, the narrative trajectory of the speaker’s experience of the evening is portrayed as a movement away from whiteness. The two references to Paris and “Parisians” come at the start and the end of the article. What is implied is that in order to “valorize” Antillean cultural expression one must necessarily distance whiteness and its presumed position as purveyor of all things legitimate. Leaving the Parisian streets behind, Nardal introduces the space of the ball with a long and detailed description of the décor of the warehouse (“*hangar*”). After buying tickets from “two black people” one is pleasantly surprised that his or her “first impressions” were right. Instead of “cubist décor” and “African frenzies” at the Blomet Ball, one sees:

la vue d'une estrade au décor de verdure contre lequel ressort l'orchestre noir qui, en ce moment, joue une biguine à réveiller les morts. Cadre harmonieux. On se croirait subitement transporté dans quelque bal doudou antillais, au bébet tago, au cassé, au blessé bobo peut-être. C'est bien un hangar. On cherche des yeux le plafond et le regard s'accroche très haut à l'entrecroisement de poutres qui supportent le toit à deux pans inclinés. Les murs sont du même bois nu et brun. Ces derniers détails qui rappellent un peu les constructions antillaises aux poutres apparentes, complètent heureusement la couleur locale.<sup>114</sup>

Evident in Nardal’s description is her emphasis of the environment’s “harmony”. The greenery of the décor, the warehouse that is evocative of “Antillean construction”, the “local color” and the cultural practices that are taking place, they all fit together in a “happy” relationship to the extent that one would believe “suddenly transported” to the Antilles. This is contrasted by the “jarring opposition” of a “violently” European frame. Nardal continues,

Dans ce cadre les noirs se sentent bien chez eux. Aucune opposition choquante, comme dans d'autres dancings, entre leur type et un cadre violemment Européen. Rien dans cette salle qui rappelle la France, sinon quelques rares parisiens égarés dans la foule des "colored".<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> “Déjà, en 1929, à Paris, je cherchais à mettre en valeur l’apport noir des Antilles”. My translation. Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 130.

<sup>114</sup> Nardal, “Le nouveau bal Nègre de La Glacière,” *La Dépêche africaine* 2, no. 3 (mai 30, 1929): 3. The page numbers refer to the version republished in Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 130-133.

<sup>115</sup> Nardal, “Le nouveau bal Nègre de La Glacière,” 130.

This juxtaposition, then, works to make a clear distinction between the “harmony” of this black space and the “violence” of the European frame of whiteness. Furthermore, Paulette Nardal linguistically interrupts “la France” as she employs “colored” to describe the attendees. On one level this references African Americans, African American cultures, and the American context. Textually however this linguistic border crossing emphasizes the “lost” aspect of the “rare Parisians”. Because they are, in this instance, the embodiment of French national culture and its national language, both become “lost” amongst the people of color. Symbolically whiteness, French cultural identity and the French language lose their power. Thus, Paulette Nardal ironically shifts the logics of exoticism where whiteness is the purveyor of all things legitimate. At the same time, Nardal’s use of “colored” assumes that her readership is already familiar with and understands this linguistic crossing and the cultural context that it references. They do not become “lost” as is the case of the “rare Parisians” in these multi-lingual diasporic spaces that are understood as encompassing not only Europe and the Caribbean but also the United States. There is nothing here that reminds one of France because black people are, in this (international and transcultural) environment, agentive subjects, creators and producers of black cultural expressions which are not restricted to national/ European conceptions of culture and identity. If, in other “dancings” exoticism and whiteness reign, here in this ball, black people create a space in which they could be equals and feel at home. This feeling of “home” is understood as not simply a familiarity with a given place or cultural tradition, but rather a “home” whereby black subjectivities can dwell, live, and thrive. This is not to say that it is a space free of conflict or inequalities based on gender and sexuality for example. Akin to Jane Nardal, Paulette Nardal textually centers black femininities in this space. In order to do this, the author continues the narrative arc of the article by moving to a critique of the “European Frame” – presented through her discussion of a statue called “Reconciliation” – only to then focus on black feminine representations and sexualities. Firstly, what this implies is that if black people “feel right at home” it is a result of their actions that the “European frame” is disarticulated and displaced. Secondly, Nardal’s logical progression suggests that if it is a space where *all* black subjectivities can thrive as equals then the exoticism of European modernism needs to be critiqued from a perspective that addresses the specificities of the articulation of race, gender, and sexuality.

Before leaving behind the “European frame” for good Nardal introduces a statue in the ball with an apparent oversight, “I was going to forget...”. This rhetorical device signals to the readers the importance that the statue will inhabit in her text as it draws their attention to it.



J'allais oublier à droite de l'estrade un groupe assez inattendu, un plâtre représentant une femme assise serrant dans ses bras deux hommes qui s'étreignent. Cela s'appelle « Réconciliation ». Une pancarte attachée au sol prie le public de respecter ce groupe qui déjà eu à souffrir de l'ardeur destructrice des camelots du roy.<sup>116</sup>

The text does not shed light on the “unexpected” presence of this statue. For example, if it was already in the warehouse before the event or the artist who created it. From the information that Nardal does include, the statue conveys ideas of conflict (given the time period possibly World War One) and its resolution, as well as notions of peace, love, and protection. The woman who embraces the two men sitting on her knee conjures conceptions of a benevolent maternal figure, of family, and, in a wider frame, of nation and national identity. The love and guidance that she gives to the fraternity brings it close to ideas of the French national motto, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, for the two masculine subjects – fraternity – are on the same level and thus equal in her embrace. Therefore, from the portrayal given in the text, the readers could understand this statue as symbolic of French cultural identity and French/European formulations of nation and citizenship. It is representative of “the European frame” as Paulette Nardal describes it, and this frame is considered “violent”. The placing of the sign in front of the statue that asks “the public to respect this group who has already suffered the destructive ardor of the King’s Camelots” provides the ground for such an interpretation. And it is this act that Paulette Nardal draws attention to.

During the interwar period, the King’s Camelots were an extreme right youth organization, affiliated to *L’Action française* and Charles Maurras, the main political thinker of this party whose work promoted ideologies based on anti-black racism and antisemitism.<sup>117</sup> Paulette Nardal was familiar with Maurras’ work as she states in her interview with Grollemund: “from a political perspective, I read Charles Maurras’ articles and really, they just rolled past me like a water off a duck’s back. The 6<sup>th</sup> of February, I lived all of that.”<sup>118</sup> Whilst she is referring to the extreme right uprising on this date in 1934, therefore years after “*Le nouveau bal*” was written, it nevertheless testifies to her knowledge of all the political currents of the interwar period, including that of *L’Action française*. As for the King’s Camelots, they were renowned for their actions against students in the Latin Quarter. Considering that many of the members of the black diaspora in Paris were students, often left wing and/or lived in this area, it is highly likely

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<sup>116</sup> Nardal, “Le nouveau bal Nègre de La Glacière,” 131. Camelots du roy is spelt in this way in the text.

<sup>117</sup> The nationalism of Charles Maurras was influential to Phillippe Pétain’s “national revolutionism” of the Vichy government and its collaboration with Nazi Germany.

<sup>118</sup> “Au point de vue politique, je lisais les articles de Charles Maurras et vraiment, cela passait comme ça, comme de l’eau sur les plumes d’un canard. Le 6 février, j’ai vécu tout cela.” My translation. Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 23.

that some attendees of the ball and the readers of Paulette Nardal's article had experienced first-hand the discriminatory acts of the Camelots, or would be familiar with who they were and their actions.<sup>119</sup> The pro-monarchic stance that informs the Camelots and Maurras, interconnects ideas of nation and national identity with the notions of transcendental law. What this means is that family and nation are inextricably linked to notions of racial purity. National cohesion, that the patriarch assures in the reproduction of that nation in the family unit, is predicated upon the exclusion of all religions other than Catholicism and all "races" other than the French race, understood but not acknowledged as white. In part, this is what gives rise to the antisemitic and anti-black racism, for example, within Maurras' thinking and that of the King's Camelots. The readers can see then how the reference to the latter in the sign placed in front of the statue is conjuring certain ideas of national identity that ascribes people of color outside of the national and human community. The dehumanization of "others" legitimized by such understandings of nation/ national identity is echoed in the "destructive ardor" that "this group has already endured at the hand of the Camelots". Paulette Nardal's "Reconciliation" and the sign in front, brings to the fore, then, the shared experience of racism and discrimination that the statue symbolizes in this context. Furthermore, the sign is raising certain questions about processes of identification and equality. As opposed to what the statue represents – nation and national identity based on exclusion of Others – the act of placing the sign creates a relationship. The community at the ball is being constructed through actions that do not deny or erase (violently) the existence of alterity but that overcomes, in a certain sense, the barriers between self and other. It suggests that (racial) identification is more malleable than what the Eurocentric understandings propose, at the same time as it grounds collectivity in "respect" for others that is premised on equality within the human collectivity. If there is nothing at this "ball that reminds one of France" it is due to the (political) actions of those organizing and attending the ball. Nardal's discussion of "Reconciliation" then works to represent black cultural identities as active participants in the creation of spaces and identities that render possible other forms of

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<sup>119</sup> Victor Sablé, a fellow Martinican living in Paris during the interwar period and who was familiar with the Nardals describes an incident of his experience with the Camelots du Roi: "Une autre fois, j'eus un incident juste à la sortie de la Faculté. 'Les Camelots du Roi' ne cessaient d'organiser des manifestations contre Gaston Gèze. J'étais pressé d'aller retrouver mon nouveau flirt, Cynthia, une belle italienne, admiratrice d'Alfred de Musset. Deux étudiants me barrèrent la route. L'un d'eux brandissait sous mon nez d'une manière provocante un journal et lançait comme un cri de guerre 'Lisez l'étudiant français' organe de 'Camelot de Roi' contre les juifs et les métèques. Comme il devenait le plus en plus menaçant, j'ai pris une position de boxeur prêt à l'attaque." Victor Sablé, *Mémoires d'un foyalais: des îles d'Amérique aux bords de la Seine* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1993), 68.

interactions than those within the French colonial imaginary. Thus, the organizers and attendees at the ball feel “right at home”.

#### 1.4.1 Black Feminine Cultural Identities

When Paulette Nardal turns to the discussion of the cultural practices and attendees of the ball, she highlights the diverse cultural and national backgrounds of the participants. However, in the article this space is represented as mostly populated by feminine subjects. Nardal does spend time speaking of the musician Stellio, the “famous Guianese clarinet player” who is leading the orchestra, and yet in terms of the male attendees she will dedicate only three sentences to their depiction towards the end of the article.<sup>120</sup> Similar to the rhetorical work of Jane Nardal in “Exotic Puppets”, Paulette Nardal’s centralization of black women and the specificities of their lived experience at the ball textually creates a space for the (re)presentation of black femininities and feminist epistemologies. Whether it is at the ball, within the space of *La Dépêche africaine* or the colonial context at large, Paulette Nardal underlines the importance of a critical perspective that incorporates the articulation of race, gender, and sexuality if the logics of exoticism is to be undone. She writes,

Dans cette salle s'offre à l'observation de l'artiste, toute la gamme des tons qui rend le teint des noirs si difficile à reproduire. Elle va de la blanche carnation de la mulâtresse aux cheveux plats, au noir mat de la négresse à la toison épaisse et si parfaitement frisée, en passant par l'aigre blondeur de la chabine, la brune couleur de cannelle, tous les tons riches de bois précieux et la capresse couleur de sapotille.<sup>121</sup>

The public is described solely through feminine subjects. Her detailing of the “range of tones” could be seen as a continuation of a logic of racial thinking whereby subjects are biologically determined by their skin color. In Nardal’s work, however, the description of the variety of black subjectivity through tones of blackness is her way to celebrate and valorize ethnic diversity specifically in the Antillean context.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, her aesthetic attention to different embodiments of black feminine subjectivity is laying the grounds to destabilize her stereotypical representation in exotic imaginaries. Black female identity cannot be reduced to one lone image for she is portrayed here, by Nardal, as multiple and diverse. From this premise, the author depicts

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<sup>120</sup> “Parmi les hommes il y a beaucoup d’Antillais, des Guyanais, des Africains et même des Abyssins, au type latin et à la peau de bronze foncé. Ils sont quatre qui étudient la peinture à Paris.” Nardal, “Le nouveau bal Nègre de La Glacière,” 133.

<sup>121</sup> Nardal, “Le nouveau bal Nègre de La Glacière,” 131.

<sup>122</sup> It in fact becomes an aesthetic trope in her work and cornerstone to her cultural politics which will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four.

“these free women of the tropics” in their individualities and their differences. This is emphasized by the fact that she positions herself as an “observer” of what is happening in “the room” of the dance floor. This is to say that spatially the observations are taking place from one location of the room that sees people entering, exiting, and going about their activities. One gets the sense that the strong independent women that Paulette Nardal portrays are constantly appearing in the dancehall. Therefore, the representations offered to the readers in the article manifest as merely a few examples of all the strong, creative, intelligent, “free” black women at the ball that could have been included.

Voilà une femme qui ne semble pas avoir trouvé un cavalier « à la hauteur », car elle s'est lancée toute seule dans la danse, bras levés, hanches roulantes, en une sorte de galop rythmé qui rappelle les évolutions des masques antillais, descendant en « vidé » les rues de Fort- de-France, musique en tête par un dimanche de carnaval. Il ne manque que le fameux « quadrille » que l'on danse dans les bals populaires de la Martinique, sorte de french cancan pour les pays chauds.<sup>123</sup>

This Martinican woman, who has not found a man – *un cavalier* – equal to herself, moves through the dance floor with a rhythm that recalls the tradition of Mardi Gras in Fort-de-France (the capital of Martinique). By underlining her independence – she dances “all alone” – Nardal also suggests that she does not need, nor settle for, a male partner to express herself. She is agentive in her own right. The author constructs this Martinican woman’s identity and subjectivity as unchained from her social definition that is articulated through opposition to masculinity. She is, acts, and dances for the experience of her own pleasure and she is portrayed as being agentive in the expressions of her desires and sexuality. Not finding a partner “à la hauteur” suggests that she is in the position of power over (masculine) desire. This depiction is far from the black woman as sexualized object of the exotic imaginary. Paulette Nardal furthers the argument by purposefully connecting this feminine subject’s movements as the embodiment of the history and tradition of Antillean cultural practices. Through her expressions she recalls “the evolution of Antillean masks” as the Martinicans parade (“*en vidé*”) the Sunday of Carnival. Martinican black cultural identities are carried by her. Therefore, by focusing on these cultural specificities Paulette Nardal revalorizes and simultaneously rehumanizes black cultural identities. This is reiterated in her description of the music and the musicians at the ball, as the author goes into minute details, explaining the genres and the dances that accompany them.<sup>124</sup> Nardal continues for “another woman has just entered”.

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<sup>123</sup> Nardal, “Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière,” 132.

<sup>124</sup> Nardal, “Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière,” 131-132.

Une femme vient d'entrer, au teint brun rouge, que l'on sent doux au toucher comme de la soie. Elle est coiffée d'un petit feutre marron dont les découpures accentuent très heureusement son type de guerrier égyptien. On la croirait échappée d'un bas-relief de l'époque des pharaons.<sup>125</sup>

As soft as silk but with the strength and courage of an Egyptian warrior, Nardal portrays this woman as defying the representational norms of orientalist fantasies. The civilization and culture of the Afroasiatic Cushitic peoples that she incorporates, reaches far back in history, to the “time of the Pharaohs”. Emphasizing the longevity and tradition of this specific culture Paulette Nardal problematizes the cultural primacy and superiority that French civilization attributes to itself. The author pursues her argument by turning to another embodiment of black feminine identity.

Quelques-unes sont en costume tailleur, ce qui ne les avantage pas. Parfois, l'une d'elles traverse la salle dans sa largeur, alors on remarque une fois de plus les jambes élancées et nerveuses, les attaches fines, la fierté du port, car elles relèvent toutes la tête d'un air légèrement provocant.<sup>126</sup>

In spite of Nardal's aesthetic disagreement with these women's self-expression, she not only includes them in her article but valorizes them in her representation. As such, the author demonstrates what it means to consider others with respect and to see them as equal in spite of differences in terms of identity and individuality. Nardal's representation of these women evokes the confidence and pride that they embody as well as a certain playfulness and empowerment that they express in their sexuality. Furthermore, the author's description of these feminine attendees takes on a different aspect to the preceding portrayals. In the previous examples, attention was paid to history, tradition, and transmission of cultural practices. The presence of these “women in suits” in her article points to a particular contemporary debate on feminine identities in the French context. Nardal appears to be evoking the modern feminine figure known as the New Woman, *la femme moderne*, or *la Garçonne*. This is not to say that one embodiment of black femininity excludes the other, as if cultural tradition was incompatible with “modern” expressions. Rather, with the representation of these specific “modern” women Nardal disarticulates another aspect of exoticism which is to reduce blackness to the inevitable return to pre-modern, and pre-civilized atavistic states. At the same time, Nardal is putting into question the presumed heterosexuality of the environment of ball culture. It is not about reading and thus ascribing a sexuality onto these women. What the author appears to be suggesting is that in order to

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<sup>125</sup> Nardal, “Le nouveau bal Nègre de La Glacière,” 132.

<sup>126</sup> Nardal, “Le nouveau bal Nègre de La Glacière,” 132.

disarticulate the exotic imagination and represent black women that are in charge of their own sexualities then exoticism's heteronormativity has to be equally disarticulated. Nardal reappropriates and disarticulates black female sexualities from the fantasies of (white) masculine (hetero)sexual desires. As an effect, Nardal's representation of these modern black women echo back and undo some of the fantasies of heterosexual patriarchy in respect to their depictions of white modern femininities.

#### 1.4.2 *La Garçonne* and Black Modern Women in Paris

The New Woman figure emerged from the artistic and social movement of the same name. Its modern aesthetics worked on transforming the representation of women as much as it worked on transforming women's way of life and their position in society. As a figure, *la femme moderne* embodied her era, "personifying the social, political, intellectual and technological changes that shaped daily life in bourgeois Western urban centers."<sup>127</sup> As Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer reflect, the image of the New Woman in interwar Paris was literally "going places" often figured in cars, speed boats, outdoors playing sport, or on an airplane. The mobility of a figure "in transit" was also inscribed in trajectories of migration "from her national and/or familial points of origin to migrate or immigrate to cultural capitals like Paris, where she pursued her independence via new vocations."<sup>128</sup> Arguably it is this too that brings the black modern women of Nardal's depictions to the ball and in the wider frame to Paris. At the very least their trajectories are similarly marked by migration. As their dress style echoes the figure of the Modern Woman, the appearance of the black suited women in Nardal's article intertwines these particular black feminine embodiments into this overall context of modernism and urbanity. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *la femme moderne* was also culturally associated with female homosexuality. In the literature being written at this time, to state that a woman was "modern" often implied she was lesbian or at least had deep intimate attachments with other women.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, "Becoming Modern: Gender and Sexual Identity after World War One," in *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>128</sup> Chadwick and Latimer, "Becoming Modern," 3.

<sup>129</sup> For example, in Lillian Faderman's study *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, she dedicates a chapter to the figure of the New Woman and her representation in literature. Faderman argues "how closely the New Woman and the new possibilities of the love between women might be aligned in women's minds everywhere by the turn of the (20<sup>th</sup>) century." The author suggests that "*moderne*" was used like the word "gay" would later be used in the 1960's. It was a way of designating female homosexuality when the term was socially not employed nor understood as such. In her discussion of Harriet Levy's short story "A Beautiful Girl" which is set in Paris and speaks of an interaction between an American woman and an Austrian female opera singer, Faderman shows how Levy uses the term "*moderne*" to signify lesbian in the short story.

But the New Woman figure during the interwar period is not necessarily restricted to the cultural codes of homosexuality. *La Garçonne* of the 1920's came to represent femininity that was in charge of her own actions and life, whether it be in terms of her sexuality, her individuality, her social relationships or her financial independence.<sup>130</sup> In her study of French interwar fashion and the cosmetic industry, Sophie Kurkdjian argues that “the liberation of the body and the social liberation of women become visible in public space” and for the feminine press the notion of modernity or what was considered “modern” was articulated through the fashion, style and image of *la Garçonne*.<sup>131</sup> Kurkdjian explains further in respect to *French Vogue*.

Pour mettre en lumière le changement qui s'opère au niveau de la féminité *Vogue français* s'appuie sur deux figures de la modernité, à l'image de l'hybridité du magazine, propriété américaine mais édition française : celle américaine de la *New Woman* qui, bénéficiant dès l'avant-guerre de tout un arsenal de nouveaux produits, devient très tôt un modèle que les annonceurs veulent exporter, et celle de la “Garçonne”, figure popularisée par la nouvelle éponyme de Victor Margueritte publiée en 1922.<sup>132</sup>

As *French Vogue* or Victor Margueritte's *La Garçonne* exemplifies, the representation of modern femininity tended to be associated with white femininity. Within the logics of colonial patriarchy, white femininity is constructed in opposition to black femininity. The figure of the New Woman is dialectically dependent, to a certain degree, on the presumed “premodernity” of other racialized embodiments of femininity, including black femininity. For example, in “Exotic Puppets” Jane Nardal demonstrated one stereotypical representation of black feminine identities and sexualities is the “dangerous mulatta” biologically determined by her atavism and thus characterized as having “degenerate” sexuality. In this image the black female subject is portrayed as lacking in agency concerning her own sexuality and is bound to logics of presumed heteronormativity. When Paulette Nardal includes the description of the black women wearing the fashion of *la Garçonne*, she points to the fact that in lived reality New Women are also black women. This is to suggest that they are active participants in the expression and construction of this particular form of “modern” femininity. In terms of black feminine sexuality this is important because precisely what the Modern Woman or the *Garçonne* achieves is the transformation of female

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Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1981), 189.

<sup>130</sup> See Christine Bard, *Les Garçonnes : modes et fantasmes des années folles* (Paris : Flammarion, 1998).

<sup>131</sup> Sophie Kurkdjian, “Être moderne, c'est être belle, jeune et mince. La nouvelle féminité des années 1920 à travers la rhétorique publicitaire de *Vogue français*.” *Apparence(s). Histoire et culture du paraître* 7 (2017): <https://doi.org/10.4000/apparences.1369>.

<sup>132</sup> Kurkdjian, “Être moderne, c'est être belle, jeune et mince.”

agency in respect to her sexuality, be it within, or other to, hetero/ homosexual paradigms. What this means is that in Paulette Nardal's article, black femininity and sexuality are not understood in opposition to white femininity, as is the case in colonial ideology. Rather, her depictions of black modern women, to a certain extent, cross over racial difference, and challenge how (white) modern women are perceived and received in the French cultural imaginary.

Whilst Victor Margueritte's *La Garçonne* follows its New Woman heroine, Monique Lerbier, who breaks gender and sexual stereotypes in her pursuit of independence and freedom, her sexuality and other ways of living that she explores are in the end recuperated within the fantasy of heterosexual masculine desire.<sup>133</sup> Her bisexual explorations are framed as beginning when her fiancé cheats on her at the start of the novel and end in her return to heterosexuality and marriage. As such, female homosexuality is portrayed as a kind of rebellious detour before a return to the bounds of heterosexuality and societal gendered norms such as marriage and childbirth (in Margueritte's sequel to the *La Garçonne* Monique has a child). The fantasy is then, that whilst Monique's search for emancipation may subvert certain gender and sexual norms, patriarchal order will be restored. It recenters the symbolic and material (economic) power of the masculine figure of the patriarch. And though the representation of the New Woman figure is not restricted to Margueritte's depiction, *La Garçonne* nevertheless captured the fascination of its audiences evidenced by its transatlantic success and did much to shape the French cultural imaginary, both black and white, during the interwar period. Victor Sablé in his *Mémoires d'un foyalais*, describes Jane Nardal by referencing Margueritte's novel.

Jane Nardal, première licenciée de lettre des Antilles, épatait le boulevard avec son élégante silhouette noire, chapeau cascadeur, gants gris perle, canne à la main comme une héroïne de "La Garçonne", militante des droits de la femme, en compagnie de sa jeune sœur Andrée Nardal, une vraie beauté exotique, corps voluptueux.<sup>134</sup>

The difference between Paulette Nardal's representation of these modern women in her article and their depiction in *La Garçonne* is that she does not center the masculine figure, she displaces it. Though she may disagree with their aesthetic choices, Paulette Nardal does not recuperate these black women. In her representation, as is the case for all her representations of black femininity in the article, these women exist in their own right in the text. They have their own expression, their

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<sup>133</sup> Victor Margueritte, *La Garçonne* (Paris : Flammarion, 1922).

<sup>134</sup> Sablé, *Mémoires d'un foyalais*, 63.



own individuality, sexuality, identity, and sensuality. Within the space of the ball then, Nardal represents “free” women whose subjectivities are not defined in opposition to white femininity nor by a colonial heteropatriarchal perspective. Disarticulating the tropes of black femininities and sexualities within the exotic imaginary, does not only debunk racial stereotypes but also stereotypes based on gender and sexuality. Paulette Nardal releases black feminine representations from the norms of French colonial culture and the restrictive understandings of modernity’s episteme. This in turn comments upon other normative representations of femininity, the white modern woman, being the example in this case.

In the article “*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*”, Nardal is offering a different way of being and understanding oneself and the world, a different “frame” to the “European” one. By proposing images of black cultural feminine identities, it in turn creates the space for black feminist epistemologies. Thus, as in the space of the ball where Paulette Nardal highlighted the processes of individual and collective identification and spatial appropriation undertaken by the black organizers and participants in order to create a space where they “feel right at home”, so too does she engage in these processes in her text. Akin to Jane Nardal, Paulette Nardal’s reporting of her lived experience in the metropolis enacts equality in the invention of black cultural representation and knowledge production, challenges the primacy of masculine perspectives, and creates another story, another “frame” in which to see, understand and interpret the world. Here at the Glacière ball black subjects do not have to decide with what “sauce” they wanted “to be eaten” for the French colonial perspective and its exotic imaginaries have been displaced and render irrelevant to the interactions and activities taking place. Nardal’s representation of black femininities in the article are similarly freed in her text. Their representations in the article are emancipated from gender, racial and sexual norms of black feminine imaging in colonial heteropatriarchy. This is to say black femininity is here de-commodified. Thus, what “Exotic Puppets” and “*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*” have in common is that they are critical interventions into French exoticism that create a space where femininity can live and thrive – a “home” – for black female subjectivities here in the metropole. In contrast, Jessie Fauset interacts with the French and European material and symbolic realities as a way to mediate and reflect on questions concerning African American cultural identities and the American context at large. Her articles that address racial and gender tropes of exoticism, French commodity culture and colonial ideologies, are critical investigations that create space or a “home” for black cultural identities in the United States.

## 1.5 French Exoticism from Jessie Fauset's Point of View

As it was discussed in the first section of the chapter, Fauset's migration to Paris sparked a shift in how she perceived herself, how she experienced her identity and subjectivity. Far away from white supremacy and racial discrimination in the United States, Fauset takes pleasure in simply "being herself" both African American and American in the French capital. Amongst other Americans, white and black, that she gathered around her, she expressed an "integrity" as having a place in her national community, or at least having the experience of belonging as a subject and citizen. This will affect the way in which Fauset approaches the subjects of her articles and it will differentiate her perspective to that of Jane and Paulette Nardal. Furthermore, Fauset's journalism will be informed by the target audience that she addresses. The four articles, "Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress", "Yarrow Revisited", "The Enigma of the Sorbonne" and "This Way to the Flea Market" were all published in *The Crisis* which had a predominately white and black American readership. Jessie Fauset's reporting on the French context will involve aspects of translation – across differing national and cultural imaginaries – that the Nardals did not necessarily face due to their majority francophone and Antillean readership. However, what these three authors have in common in their journalistic pursuits is the fact that they mobilize lived experience in their critical work. This centers their perspectives, observations, and experiences as black feminine subjects in the metropolis. As such their respective points of view tend to have moments of convergence in their cultural and social critiques of French colonial imperialism and anti-black racism.

### 1.5.1 "Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress" and the Belgian Museum

The Pan-African Congress was organized at the initiative of W.E.B Du Bois, with the help of prominent francophone people of color, like Blaise Diagne and Gratien Candace. A continuation of the First Pan-African Conference that took place in London in 1900 (and also organized by Du Bois), the first Pan-African Congress was held in Paris, from February 19 to 21, 1919. The Second edition, which is the subject of Fauset's article, extends its reach, travelling between the European capitals of London, Paris, Brussels, and Geneva, from August to September in 1921. For this continental tour, Fauset addressed the public at each congress,

presenting a paper on the emancipation of black women in America. In her article, “Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress”, published in November 1921, Fauset mentions only in passing her participation. However, her speech will find its way into various newspaper articles, one of which was reprinted in the December issue of *The Crisis* in 1921.<sup>135</sup> *The Glasgow Herald* recounts Fauset’s London speech as follows:

On the subject of the colored women in America, who, she said, had been a great moving force behind all movements for emancipation [...] Colored women had taken up social work in the great cities of America, and were rescuing many girls who came into the cities from other parts, and who, through their ignorance, might be otherwise exploited. Colored women are everywhere branching out into every field of activity in the professions and business. She asked the African delegates to carry a message of friendship and encouragement to African women from the colored women of America.<sup>136</sup>

The solidarity between “colored women” in the United States in the context of the Great Migration, to which the article refers, is then expanded out to “African women” when Fauset’s asks the “African delegates to carry a message of friendship and encouragement to them” on behalf of “colored women of America”. Fauset’s speech therefore makes international solidarity between women of color integral to the struggle for racial and colonial emancipation. She at once evokes the broad goals of the Pan-African Congress and makes women central to their achievement.<sup>137</sup> In Fauset’s article, she portrays the Congress as the platform for cultural and intellectual exchanges between members of the black diaspora. After listing all the speakers of the London meeting, she states,

We listened well. What can be more fascinating than learning at first hand that the stranger across the seas, however different in phrase or expression, yet knows no difference of heart? We were all one family in London. What small divergences of

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<sup>135</sup> In her article Fauset writes that she gave a speech that evoked “colored graduates in the United States and showed pictures of the first women who had obtained the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.” Jessie Redmon Fauset, “Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 23, no. 1 (November 1921): 14.

<sup>136</sup> Cited in Sylvander, *Jessie Redmon Fauset*, 67.

<sup>137</sup> The focus of these congresses was to bring people of African descent together in order to create an international community and solidarity along racial lines for the purpose of fighting for racial, social, and economic equality. Though in reality, the congress brought together only people of African descent living or originating from French, British or Belgium colonies in the Antilles or Africa, and African Americans. For example, as Jennifer Boittin notes, the First Pan-African Congress, which was held in Paris in 1919 had as its focal point « that African nations could present a unified front when protecting their interests at the Versailles Peace Conference » Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 80. Given this political context post « the scramble for Africa » and WWI, people within the black diaspora living in the countries of South America, for example, were not present. The geo-political reach of these conferences was within the French and English-speaking worlds of the United Nations, then called the League of Nations.

opinion, slight suspicions, doubtful glances there may have been at first were all quickly dissipated. We felt our common blood with almost unbelievable unanimity.<sup>138</sup>

The congresses were spaces of transnational and transcultural “learning”, “listening” and sharing. Inequality was being fought, new ideas were being formulated through actions and dialogue that brought people together across national and cultural differences. What is more, Fauset makes it clear to the readers, that these meetings were not only about sharing intellectual or political strategies for emancipation but were also sites of sharing lived experiences, and cultivating feelings of kinship, belonging, confidence and openness.<sup>139</sup> There were white attendees, but Fauset represents the space as predominately populated by people of color. And whilst from these exchanges emerged concrete propositions, that Fauset goes on to describe in detail, she places attention on the affective registers of such gatherings, “we were all one family in London”. These experiences described through feelings of kinship and family, of an “almost unbelievable unanimity” frames the conferences as also building a platform for a type of homing device that provide, in an anti-black world, moments of grounding; of experiencing black subjectivity and identity as a joy and having value in and of itself. This is further underlined when she concludes her report on the London congress with “we clasped hands with or newly found brethren and departed, feeling that it was good to be alive and most wonderful to be colored.”<sup>140</sup> This joy in being a person of color arises from the atmosphere of shared experiences and understanding thus creating a shelter from the hostilities of anti-black racisms of white European culture. Fauset’s focus on the affective registers of solidarity invites the readers of *The Crisis* in America to feel a part of this international racial “brethren”. As a consequence, Fauset not only underlines the importance of racial solidarity in an anti-black world, be it in the United States or in this international context, she is placing the shared experience of feeling good “to be alive and most wonderful to be colored” as an important component of politics and fights for black emancipation. As she brings her readers into the fold of this international sphere, notions of belonging, pride and value of African American identities also cross over into this global frame. Fauset is breaking the delimitation of cultural identity and belonging to a strictly national territory in order to posit a certain universal quality to black identities and blackness. In a way, Fauset’s idealization (and normative ideas) of this global family has

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<sup>138</sup> Fauset, “Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress,” 12.

<sup>139</sup> On the London Congress Fauset writes “of necessity those first meetings had to be occasions of getting acquainted, for bestowing confidence for opening up our hearts”. African Americans, Africans and Antilleans “stood side by side and said, ‘Brother, this is my lot; tell me what is yours!’” Fauset, “Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress,” 12.

<sup>140</sup> Fauset, “Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress,” 13.

superseded her efforts to complexify black subjectivities. Her premising of black female subjects and feminist solidarity “across the seas” is seemingly absolved in this rather romantic depiction of a black universalism articulated through the image of a “racial brethren.” At the same time, Fauset’s emphasis of “almost unbelievable unanimity” felt at the London congress will be put into question as the congress moves to Brussels. It is in this space where anti-black racism appears, articulated through her own experience in a Belgian museum, and connected to the anti-blackness involved in everyday forms of consumption in the European context.

The first major contrast introduced by Fauset in the description of the Belgian congress is that it is a space populated, for the most part, by white people. This has an impact on the outcomes achieved and the experiences lived by the participants of the congress. “The congress itself” Fauset writes,

was held in the marvelous *Palais Mondial*, the World Palace situated in the Cinquantaire Park. We could not have asked for a better setting. But there *was* a difference. In the first place, there were many more white than colored people – there are not many of us in Brussels – and it was not long before we realized that their interests were deeper, more immediately significant than that of white people we had found elsewhere. Many of the Belgium’s economic and material interests center in Africa in the Belgian Congo. Any interference with the natives might result in an interference with the sources from which so many Belgian capitalists drew their prosperity.<sup>141</sup>

As opposed to London that was depicted as a black space, Brussels is a white space. Fauset infers that it is not simply because the black participants were numerically in the minority. Rather, the problem arises by the fact that her and her colleagues are perceived as “interferences”, to the power of the white “Belgium capitalists”, whose “interests” were deeper than “white people elsewhere”. “After all,” Fauset continues, “who were these dark strangers speaking another tongue and introducing Heaven only knew what ideas to be carried into the Congo?”<sup>142</sup> Racial solidarity and black emancipation are framed as a disruption to the economic profitability of Belgium’s colonial project. Fauset constructs this cityscape as a hostile environment. She furthers her critique by narrating her experience of anti-black racism in the Congo Museum in Brussels. As such she articulates the interconnections between colonial domination, possession, and capitalist exploitation with the construction of white European/ Belgian identity. In the space of the museum where all the “treasures” and exotic objects are displayed Fauset and her friends are

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<sup>141</sup> Fauset, “Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress,” 13.

<sup>142</sup> Fauset, “Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress,” 13

“watched” by the “Belgian men and women”. This racist act of the surveillance of their presence in the museum represents the safeguarding of the symbolic and material boundaries between whiteness and blackness. For, as Fauset argues, this form of daily consumption in colonial commodity culture presumes that these exotic objects, the “treasures” and “all the wealth in the world” of the colonies, are there for the consumption of Europe, the prosperity of the “Belgium capitalists”, and for the viewing pleasure of white “Belgian men and women”.

After we had visited the Congo Museum, we were better able to understand the unspoken determination of the Belgians to let nothing interfere with their dominion in the Congo. Such treasure! Such illimitable riches! What a storehouse it must plainly be for them. For the first time in my life I was able to envisage what Africa means to Europe, depleted as she has become through war and famine and plague. In the museum were the seeds of hundreds of edible plants; there was wood – great trunks of dense, fine-grained mahogany as thick as a man’s body is wide and as long as half a New York block. Elephants’ tusks gleamed white and shapely, seven feet long from tip to base without allowing the curve, and as broad through as a man’s arm. All the wealth in the world – skins and furs, gold and copper – would seem to center in the Congo [...] Native wealth, native art lay about us in profusion even in the museum. Small wonder that the Belgian men and women watched us with careful eyes.<sup>143</sup>

Fauset represents the museum in the text as the material instantiation of what Africa means to Europe. The perspicacity of her observation that Africa is a “store-house” for Europe prefigures what Sarraut will later go on to formalize in *Grandeur et servitude coloniales* in the French context. As noted above, he precisely describes the colonies as the “store-houses”, providing France and Europe with the goods and service required to “feed” the metropolis. European capitalist consumption naturalizes the idea that racialized colonial subjects and other countries are there to be exploited for white prosperity, including the “Belgium capitalists”. Fauset realizes this through her lived experiences: “For the first time in my life I was able to envisage what Africa means to Europe.” As Sarraut mobilized the metaphor of the body to demonstrate that if France and Europe were “deprived” of their “far away expansion” they would no longer “know how to feed themselves,” Fauset perceives these colonial logics at work. She observes that the museum’s display of “treasures” is intimately tied to what can be utilized or consumed. There were “the seeds of hundreds of edible plants”, “skins and furs, gold, and copper” and “fine-grained mahogany”. Wealth is not strictly monetary but something that adds to the cultural accoutrements of European identity, culinary or otherwise. Furthermore, when Fauset states that “all the wealth in the world”, displayed in the museum, “would seem to center in the

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<sup>143</sup> Fauset, “Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress,” 14.

Congo” she sows doubt in the assertion, with her employment of “would seem”. It draws attention to the constructed nature of the display. The museum and its objects are not a simple reflection of “what Africa means to Europe”, rather this space and its objects have been carefully presented to convey colonial ideologies to the public. When Fauset concludes the above paragraph with “small wonder that the Belgian men and women watched us with careful eyes,” surveillance becomes the delimitation of the possibility of people of color to move and be in this space as subjects. Metaphorically “the eyes” represent colonial domination which is enacted through this instantiation of anti-black racism by Belgian citizens. What Fauset points to is that within imperial transatlantic circulations, staged in this encounter in the museum, the objects displayed mediate an intimate relationship between “bodies here” and “bodies there”.<sup>144</sup> With the presence of people of color, in the museum or in Belgium, it “interferes” and disrupts the circulations of commodity culture and empire whereby Europeans have the power and freedom to consume and circulate whilst the colonial subjects are understood as the source of (invisible) labor of those products and thus need to be kept “there” in the colonies.<sup>145</sup> As it was discussed in the racist stereotypes of the exotic imaginary in Jane Nardal’s “Exotic Puppets”, this racist imaging required that blackness remain “fixed” either in stereotypes or historically in atavistic states of pre-civilization in order to articulate the advances of modernity and the progress of European civilization and white identity. It is the attempt to “keep” people of color in their place of exploitation which the colonial project depends rather than in a position to move freely and emancipated from colonial domination. What Fauset represents in her experience is that her position as a consumer of culture within the museum, not only disrupts colonial understandings of the world but in her and colleagues’ presence in the metropolis, their bodies come to symbolize black mobility and black emancipation in this context. On the one

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<sup>144</sup> This is an idea presented by Mimi Sheller and Sara Ahmed. Quoting Ahmed, Mimi Sheller articulates the relationship to bodies “here” and bodies “there” that are produced in the circulation and production of consumer goods originating from the colonies, such as sugar. In the colonial imaginary, sugar, represents for bodies “here” in the metropolis, something pleasurable and sensual, even if its production and arrival to the metropole had come from enslavement, physical violence and exploitation of bodies “there”. Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 94; Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*. On intimacy and imperial power see also Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule: With a New Preface* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>145</sup> Again, I refer to Mimi Sheller and Sara Ahmed. Mimi Sheller argues that by following “circuits of consumption” “it becomes evident how various mobilities are crucial not only to the formation of world systems of trade and production, but also to the constitution of world systems of consumption. In following the tracks of mobility and consumption, however, we must also attend to the things and people that are kept in place in order to enable the mobility of others (Ahmed 2000; Ahmed et al., forthcoming, Cresswell, 2001.) How, for example, did the enslavement of human beings fix them in chains in order that they could be moved, and then hold them in place as coerced laborers even after ‘emancipation?’” Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 15. Sheller cites Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings*, and Tim Cresswell, “The Production of Mobilities,” *New Formations: A Journal of Culture, Theory, Politics* 43 (Spring 2001): 11-25.

hand, the “Heaven knows what ideas” that “these dark strangers” introduce are understood as a resistance that would “interfere” with the prosperity of “Belgian capitalists” as the congress works to create international black solidarity in the struggle for black emancipation. On the other hand, Fauset is arguing that their appearance as subjects in the colonial capital, their daily activities like going to the museum, are under “watchful eyes” because they embody the black emancipation that threatens white cultural identity, superiority, and the colonial project. And though Fauset does not draw any explicit comparisons, the attention she pays to articulate that an effect of racism is the attempted control of black mobility, she is drawing similarities of European forms of anti-blackness and its expression in the American context. Written at the time of segregation (*de facto or de jure*), when the Great Migration is still taking place, and when there is a rise of lynching and riots upon the return of African American soldiers mobilized during the first World War, there is an echo to American white supremacists’ logics that perceive black mobility as a “threat”. Therefore, her retelling of her experience of racism in the Congo museum not only highlights the specificities of the asymmetrical relationships that constitutes the European colonial imperialism, but it also tends to put into question some of the myths circulating in African American communities that the European space is a reprieve from racism. Fauset’s attention to economic-racial exploitation in the European space in “Impressions” is furthered years later in her articles written specifically about Paris and France. In her articles “This Way to the Flea Market” (1926) and “Yarrow Revisited” (1925) Fauset focuses her critical attention on class exploitation in order to draw parallels and reflect on anti-black racism in the American context. As it will be demonstrated specifically with “Yarrow”, her stated goal of the article is to trouble the idealization of France within African American culture. This runs into possible contradictions in her “The Enigma of the Sorbonne” published in the same issue of *The Crisis* in 1925.



### 1.5.2 “This Way to the Flea Market”

Published in the *Crisis* in February 1926, “This Way to the Flea Market” describes Fauset’s venture to the Flea Market (*marché aux puces*) in Porte de Clignancourt. She begins by her reservations in going there, with an anecdotal encounter with these “pests” when she first came to Paris. Anecdotes in Fauset’s work are not incidental but performative in the literary space of her articles. Here, it aids in developing the overall structure of the text, framing it, in part, as a travel narrative as it borrows techniques from the genre. The speaker of the article is in the first person which positions the readers to think that these are Fauset’s observations of her ventures and her journeying. Because of the style of literary journalism that Fauset employs, akin to the Nardal sisters’, it is perhaps more beneficial to investigate how certain tropes of the travel writing genre combine in the journalistic aspects of the article, that focus on reporting on a specific context at a specific time. For example, the “distaste” that she felt in her “encounter” with the “fleas” in her “first few days in Paris” represents this event as an example of the new experiences (not always positive or pleasant) one has whilst travelling to foreign countries and cultures. This therefore sets up one of the main themes of the article, in line with a major theme of the travel genre, namely the encounter with the “other” or “others”. Fauset is reassured however by her “friend’s” explanation of the origins of the name Flea Market.

Originally the name was given because only very old and usually stolen wares were put on sale. But now both old and new objects are to be had and the market is a fully recognized and legitimate business.<sup>146</sup>

Apart from providing the basic history of the market, this description evokes an overlapping of dirtiness, fleas, poverty, and criminality within this marketplace, even if now it “is a fully recognized and legitimate business.” Before the readers are led into the market, Fauset is alluding to the organization of the Parisian space. Generally speaking, the center is the symbolic and material space of power that relegates “others” – the poor, working class, people of color – to its peripheries. From the perspective of French capitalist patriarchy there is an ideological relationship that constructs “others” as being supposedly predisposed to criminality, dirtiness, and impurity for example. Also, the readership is given the impression that Fauset’s journey needs to be understood as going from what the readers and herself know about Paris to that which is unknown or foreign. Fauset presents the marketplace in the Parisian landscape, for it is “outside of one of the gates of

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<sup>146</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 31, no. 4 (February 1926):161.

Paris – for Paris being a fortified city has many gates”. When Fauset crosses this frontier, she builds on the trope of moving from known to the unknown in travel narratives by describing her first impressions of the market as akin to what “we see” on the east side of New York.

I was not impressed at first for I saw to one side only a few booths, very much as we see sometimes on the East Side in New York, and on these booths were exhibited very ordinary articles of commerce - neckties, soap, powder, stockings. But presently the boulevard halted, vanished, to reappear in a broad muddy plain covered entirely with tents, booths, portable shops, vans, even desolate automobiles.<sup>147</sup>

To the American readership this comparison with New York helps them envisage what this space may be like for those who have never been. At the same time, the description with the similitudes of New York frames the disappearance of the boulevard as the disappearance of familiarity. It creates a traversing from known to unknown territories, where a plethora of sale platforms display such a diversity of goods that “not even in a department store”, Fauset states, “do I remember such a variety of objects”.<sup>148</sup> This overwhelming quantity of things for sale in the market that “her pen tires of enumerating” brings on a kind of moral reflection on the consumer logic of modern liberal society and what “civilization” has become.

Very often as I gaze around the interior of a large shop catering as modern stores do to an appreciable portion of the increasing number of our needs, I wonder what Adam and Eve would think if they might spy just once the first aids to living which civilization has gathered about itself. They would, I think, murmur: “But we lived without any of these things! After all, Life is the important, the supreme end of existence; how can people be encompassed about with all these gee-gaws and yet find time to live?” Some such thought came to me at the Flea Market.<sup>149</sup>

This apparent ethical dilemma brought out in respect to the “increasing number of our needs” and desires constructed through consumer culture is given an ironic twist with Fauset’s biblical reference to Adam and Eve spying on these “gee-gaws”. The futility and abundance of objects for sale in modern civilization comes into proximity with themes presented within the narrative of the Book of Genesis, most specifically, temptation, sin, life, condemnation, expulsion, knowledge, and the fall. There is also a superimposing of liminal spaces that is taking place. The “gates” that mark the inside/outside of Paris overlap with the limits that mark the inside/outside of the Garden of Eden. The alignment of Paris with the Garden, the market in Clignancourt and the space outside of Eden, traces Fauset’s travel across the fortifications with

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<sup>147</sup> Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” 161.

<sup>148</sup> Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” 161.

<sup>149</sup> Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” 162.

Adam and Eve's (forced) travel and expulsion. Whilst this appears to be an idealization or paradisaical representation of the French capital in opposition to its exterior – the space of criminality, dirtiness, and sin – it could also be read as an attempt to desacralize understandings of the nation, French identity and power that symbolically inhabit the city. Fauset's critique appears to put into question at once the transcendental law of God and the supposed supremacy of French civilization. In this interpretation, the systems of domination that have relegated "others" outside of the city gates is not understood as an untouchable and unchangeable law or truth but rather as being embedded within human constructions of what is "modern" society and its consumer culture. This not only means that these structures or understandings of the word are mutable, but also casts a light on those in the marketplace as being agentive subjects. As Fauset wanders through the market, she watches "the poor of Europe" "searching restlessly, feverishly, through heaps of fixtures, rusty and even broken" or sorting through the piles of "worn and faded and altogether horrible clothing."<sup>150</sup> Fauset surmises that because of their economic precarity they are forced to

approach in candor and simplicity their idea of living the Adam of Eve of my conjecture. Life, the mere business of living, is their supreme occupation, let its trappings be as sordid, as infected, as repellant as may be; so long as the precious jewel of life is contained therein, what matter? It is a hard philosophy, but an inevitable one in a people who have fought so long and so often for the right to survive; and it is a philosophy too, mind you, born of terrific experience, not a mere dumb, driven acquiescence of the inequalities of life.<sup>151</sup>

Fauset's mention of "hard philosophy" recalls the parallel with Adam and Eve and their condemnation and expulsion outside of Eden after eating from the tree of knowledge. The people in the market space have learnt, by necessity, how to fight to survive through their own lived experience of inequality and oppression. Fauset does not paint the "poor of Europe" as being in a passive acceptance of the inhumane aspects of "civilization" that relegates people to the ideological and material extremities through exploitation and domination based on race, class, gender, and sexuality. Rather, there is a sense of defiance that Fauset evokes in her description. Despite the "hardness" of life, the author implies that resistance in this environment is having as "supreme occupation" of existing and valuing that existence, "the precious jewel of life". This is further developed when Fauset speaks of economic exchanges taking place at the market as the author begins to complicate the argument by adding a gendered aspect to the equation. She asserts that

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<sup>150</sup> Fauset, "This Way to the Flea Market," 162.

<sup>151</sup> Fauset, "This Way to the Flea Market," 162.

“the women merchants are the hardest bargainers, seldom if ever yielding.”<sup>152</sup> The evidence given for such an observation is presented through a speech act that takes place between Fauset’s “guide”, her friend’s father, and one of the female merchants. “You know I’ve got to live, Monsieur.” The father replies, “yes but you shouldn’t try to make all your profit on me.” “I’m not trying to” says the merchant, “it isn’t necessary for you to have that mat, but it is necessary for me to make my living. *Il faut vivre, Monsieur.*”<sup>153</sup> The merchant’s statement announces the economic and gender inequalities present in this interaction. Not only is the buyer in a position of power in relationship to the seller but is the masculine figure who has the disposable income to buy unnecessary things. For Fauset, it appears that the most important aspect of this interaction is the defiance of the female merchant’s character regardless of the power difference in the exchange.

And not one sou would she yield. I was glad she would not. Her attitude, her calmness, her determination even to the point of grimness is characteristic of this class. There is something tremendously hard and stratified in the French character, a granite-like quality which results from the continuous necessity of being at the grips with life itself. One always comes back to some evidence of that, the struggle for existence, the struggle with the soil and the struggle to keep the soil. And this struggle with its resulting hardness shows nowhere more plainly than the poor and middle-class French woman. It is an extension of that instinct which makes the small and cornered animal fight so bitterly, converting him finally into a truly formidable opponent. Women being the weaker creature must harden herself proportionately just that much more to meet the exigencies of her existence.<sup>154</sup>

Fauset centralizes feminine subjectivity within class oppression for the female merchant becomes the embodiment of “this class.” This gendered inflection continues as Fauset re-evokes “the struggle” and “hardness” of what was before characteristic of the life of “the poor of Europe” but is now differentialized as that which is no more evident than in the “poor and middle-class French woman.” It is arguably problematic that Fauset reduces the multiplicity of experiences and identities within the lower and middle classes to one female embodiment. Furthermore, as a whole, Fauset’s depiction tends to run the risk of a certain romanticization of working-class experience which can be read as the continuation of class oppression. It may be important, however, that her distinction based on gendered social identity coincides with Fauset’s shift from “Europe” to “French”, for it is the first time in the text that she identifies the people at the market as French. When Fauset states women are perceived as the “weaker

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<sup>152</sup> Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” 162.

<sup>153</sup> Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” 163.

<sup>154</sup> Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” 163. “Sou” which is another word for money in French is written without italics or quotation marks in the article.

creatures” she creates a rhetorical loop back to the narrative of Genesis, whereby it was Eve who was supposedly weak and tempted by the serpent. This patriarchal perspective is inverted by Fauset. Whilst those in power look upon these “weak creatures” as “animals”, they cannot recognize that in reality these people are agentive subjects who live and fight for their existence. They are the “formidable opponents”, and in Fauset’s article, it is the poor and middle-class woman that represents Frenchness to her readers rather than the white French bourgeois man, the symbolic embodiment of this nation. With these echoes in place Fauset’s last major description of the market is of the diverse ethnicities of the crowd who were all “representatives of the poorer groups”. The logical progression that started in generality – “poor of Europe” – to specificities of gendered aspects of oppression in France is now articulated in respect to racialized identities. She focuses on the Kabyles who were

all thin... wore dull red fezzes, their hair lank and oily, their faces grimed; yet even so one received an impression of pride and aloofness... They made me think of sick eagles. They were cold poor things. Hardy sons of the desert they might be, yet not the least of much nostalgia as they felt could be traced back to an unvoiced sense of contrast between the dampness of the French winter and the baking of the sun of Africa.<sup>155</sup>

Fauset’s allusion to the “sons of the desert” ties in with the article’s biblical parallels that have been made thus far. She conjures notions of wandering and exile in a liminal space (or wilderness) that brings this description into line with the overarching themes of the article and narrative trajectory. Furthermore, the image of “sick eagles” brings to mind the image of the American national bird which is a symbol of freedom. Due to the fact that Fauset explicitly indicates that the “nostalgia” of the Kabyles has little to do with the contrast between winter and “the baking sun of Africa”, it asks the readers to understand this “nostalgia” as a longing for a lost freedom (“sick eagles”). As a consequence, it paints the picture of the appearance of the Kabyles in this marketplace as something pertaining to a forced movement and the colonization of their land by the French. It highlights that this population have not only experienced (historical) oppression at the hands of the French empire, but also the *mission civilisatrice* of the Third Republic has, by no means, brought *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* to these peoples. As it has been argued above, Fauset’s symbolic play brings to the fore notions of condemnation, exile, and wandering in order to demonstrate that those ostracized to this market space outside of the cities fortified walls is not just a natural happenstance but a result of the practices of oppression, domination, and exploitation that capitalist colonial patriarchy

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<sup>155</sup> Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” 163.

depend. In this sense she exposes the ideological construction of such discriminations, yoking the “supremacy” of power, whether in terms of God’s condemnation or French civilization. In the closing of the article Fauset attempts to break down the architectural symbols of these two (interconnected) systems of power and their logics based on exclusion.

The narrative trajectory of the article concludes in Fauset’s return back into the enclosed Parisian space. The attention of the discussion thus returns to the barriers of the city understood as symbolic markers of power that separate and marginalize people of color and the working class.

I was surprised that so much vacant land should be lying unused at the very approach to a great city; one would have expected clusters of houses, small businesses, gardens, streets and trees. But here was nothing but a trackless waste, the nearest houses towering aloofly, several hundred meters away. My friend told me that this was the land left bare all around the city so that the approach of an army would readily be descried! This turned my thoughts again to the fortifications curving away from us enclosing the great proud city, the darling of French, the Mecca of Europe, the glory of the world! Vast grey stones bastions as tall as a two-story house, surrounded by a moat which could of necessity be flooded with water... “A fortified city,” I murmured, “we never have them in America.” “But you would have them,” he replied grimly, ‘if you had the Germans for neighbors.’<sup>156</sup>

The male speaker of the dialogue portrays the fortifications as that which defends the French capital from European opponents, in this case, the Germans. Fauset’s description takes on a different tone. Firstly, considering that she has represented those in this extra-Parisian space as “formidable opponents” one gets the idea that these fortifications are also protecting the nation and its ideological constructions from their resistance. As she learns that the empty space around the limits of the capital was a tactical military defense Fauset turns her attention to the great stones barriers and specifically describes them in reference to houses. As a consequence, it undercuts that which represents the national military power for the male speaker. These fortifications, in Fauset’s perception are transformed as they become the markers of welcome for those marginalized others outside of the city scape. Paris changes into the “Mecca of Europe”. Coming after her description of the Kabyle peoples in the market her allusion to the Islamic faith is not coincidental and is furthered when the *Sacré Coeur*, which comes into view as she journeys back into Paris, is described as “mosque-like”: “In front of us

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<sup>156</sup> Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” 163.

against the wintery-silver sunlight rose the mosque-like towers of the *Sacré Coeur*.”<sup>157</sup> Interestingly, and whilst the history of the site in Montmartre as a religious space precedes the current edifice called *Sacré Coeur*, the latter was built as a “national wish” after Germany defeated France in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

La démarche de Messieurs Alexandre Legentil et Hubert Rohault de Fleury est spirituelle. Ils font vœu de construire une église consacrée au Cœur du Christ « en réparation » (c’est-à-dire en pénitence pour les infidélités et les péchés commis) car pour eux, les malheurs de la France proviennent de causes spirituelles plutôt que politiques.<sup>158</sup>

When Fauset describes this church as “mosque like” she is shifting its symbolism as the spiritual home of Catholicism at the same time as it aids in the transformation of the fortifications into a welcome to “others”. If the *Sacré Coeur*, from a national catholic perspective, symbolizes the “reparation” and repentance of France’s spiritual woes that caused its defeat, Fauset’s description of the church suggests that these ails could also be understood in reference to colonial practices. In order for France to make a spiritual and political reparation for its capitalist imperialist pursuits, both the myths of its progress, military prowess, and “civilization” need to be transformed and resymbolized. By juxtaposing the *Sacré Coeur* and the Islamic faith, at the same time that Fauset depicts the fortifications as houses, it consequently comes together in the text with the interpellation,

“Come in ... you are welcome!” Behind us curved and closed the fortifications; viewed from this side they emanated security protection. “Pass in,” they murmured, “You are safe”.<sup>159</sup>

Fauset’s revisioning of the architectural and symbolic boundaries that delimit these social spaces blurs the boundaries between inside and outside, of inclusion and marginalization. As such she is framing Paris as a place where everyone is “welcome”. She counteracts the ostracism of women, working class and people of color in the colonial capital. Fauset imagines it as providing a home, where subjects are “safe”, where the national motto is, in reality, put into practice. The author is looking to represent the possibility of social relationships other than what is prescribed by colonial patriarchy even though she and her readers know it is not yet an actuality. However, Fauset’s use of literary devices of the genre of the travel writings means that the overall trajectory of the narrative of her article also poses its limitations on the re-

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<sup>157</sup> Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” 163.

<sup>158</sup> “A l’origine de la construction de la basilique, un « vœu national,” last consulted 20/07/2022, <http://www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com/francais/histoire-et-visite/article/histoire>.

<sup>159</sup> Fauset, “This Way to the Flea Market,” 163. Ellipsis in the original.

symbolization she is working to achieve. With the closing of the article, though Fauset likens the fortification to houses, and through personification it is they that call to those outside to “pass in... you are safe” they nevertheless close in around her. Therefore the “protective” space, the home in which she is creating is distinguished and distanced from the market, the latter being the unknown place of the narrative, flea ridden, dirty, multiethnic and poverty stricken. As an effect this tends to make Fauset’s trajectory of border crossings a kind of adventure into the dangerous lands of the unknown, meeting “others” along the way but returning safely to the protection of “home.” The speaker of the article refers to herself as a “visitor” to this space, whilst the public that she meets there disappears at the end of the article. Whilst the meaning of their disappearance is ambiguous, it does suggest that they did not take the same trajectory back into Paris. Therefore, Fauset tends to distance herself from this reality, and it is she “the visitor” that can cross these boundaries but not the people marginalized outside of the fortifications. As such the re-significations that she undertakes tend to be hindered by the narrative strategies of the travel and adventure novel. At the end of the market-day, it is the speaker of the article that is in a position of power and who is free to move which sees her cross these limits and return home. This not only places the speaker in a hierarchical relationship to the others she encounters, between observer and the “observed” between traveler and “native”, but also places the American readers in the same position as herself. Consequently, they are distanced from the realities and experiences of the public in Clignancourt. This limitation does not completely unravel all the inventive techniques and multiple symbolic and material crossing or resignifications that Fauset is representing in her text. Rather, it leaves the door of interpretation open enough to read this piece as a kind of entertainment where one follows the journey of the speaker on her day out to the market, accompanying her in the trials and tribulations she experiences, seeing the plethora of objects that abound in a mud filled, poor, and dirty environment before returning safely home. As such, this interpretation recalls ideas of the racial logics of exotic commodity culture where otherness or “others” are there for the entertainment of the spectators, or readers in this case. Furthermore, it tends to problematically perpetuate a certain moral rhetoric that overlaps sin, impurity and criminality with certain class, racial and gender identities that obscures the prejudices behind such moralism. When Fauset addresses the same theme of consumption and commodity culture in the French context in her article “Yarrow Revisited”, published almost a year earlier in January of 1925 than “This Way to the Flea Market” she leaves less room for such interpretations. In part, as it will be discussed below, this is because she changes the position from which she speaks. The narrator of the article wants to “see France as she is”. Working as a counterpoint to “Yarrow”, her article



“The Enigma of the Sorbonne” published two months later, mobilizes tropes of the African American cultural imaginary that in “Yarrow” Fauset is working to debunk. In order to bring this to light, these two texts will be analyzed simultaneously, even though “Enigma” takes the discussion slightly away from French commodity culture.

### 1.5.3 Counterpoints: “The Enigma of the Sorbonne” and “Yarrow Revisited”

Fauset’s “Yarrow Revisited”, published in *The Crisis* in January of 1925, critically reflects on American cultural representations of France and how they affect and are transformed in her observations of Paris. Her intertextual reference to William Wordsworth’s trilogy of poems “Yarrow Unvisited”, “Yarrow Visited”, and “Yarrow Revisited”, sets the tone of the article.<sup>160</sup> This is her perspective of the capital, like Wordsworth’s parish in the Scottish borders, where one’s experience of travel and migration changes one’s outlook as she or he let go of idealization of places or dreams that may be projected there. This runs almost parallel to the publication in *The Crisis* of her article “The Enigma of the Sorbonne”. In this piece, where the author gives a detailed history of this French institution and its corresponding bodies such as *Le College de France*, she undertakes an ongoing comparison with the university system in the United States. The article, for instance, highlights the benefits of French laicity and public run universities as opposed to predominately privatized schools in America. As it will be shown, Fauset’s depictions of the student life at the Sorbonne give an idealized image of the university and evoke the trope of a racist free France. In appearance it seems to run into contradiction with that which ‘Yarrow’ is trying to interrogate, namely, the projection or idealization of certain places and cultures. For, as Fauset quotes Wordsworth in “Yarrow”, “The visions of the past/ sustain the heart in feeling/ life as she is -”, she too is searching to know “France as she is”.<sup>161</sup> The opening paragraph of “Yarrow” follows loosely the themes of Wordsworth’s trilogy, as Fauset reflects on her idealized and romantic memories of her past travels to France.

This is not the Paris of my student days nor even the Paris of the second Pan-African Congress held three years ago. I seem to glimpse in the memories of those visits an enchanted city of gay streets, blue skies, or romantically historic monuments, a playground, a court of justice of the world.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Poems of William Wordsworth* (London: Edward Moxon, 1858).

<sup>161</sup> Fauset, “Yarrow Revisited,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 29, no.3 (January 1925): 107.

<sup>162</sup> Fauset, “Yarrow Revisited,” 107.

These reflections are used to frame Fauset's perspective of Paris in "Yarrow" as a critical one. The capital is no longer the "enchanted city" of "gay streets". Rather what is to come is a dismantling of idealizations of Paris that may be present within herself and the American cultural imaginary at large. In a continual (sometimes implicit) comparison between America and France she exposes the similarities of these two nation states in terms of class, gender, and racial exploitation. France is not the "playground" nor "the court of justice of the world" it is dreamt, hoped, or imagined to be. Fauset describes a type of stoicism that she perceives in the French, something that becomes a trope in her articles written during this period. She highlights, for instance, a harshness in living in France in "This Way to the Flea Market" as well as in her letters to Hughes. In "Yarrow" this finds its articulation in Fauset's observations on working life.

Such busy people! Gone in this section of the city at least is that illusion of Paris, the playground of the world. I have never seen people work so hard in my life nor with such seriousness.<sup>163</sup>

Fauset's juxtaposes notions of childhood and play with adulthood and work. Considering that the author constructs this article by building on the themes of Wordsworth's "Yarrow Revisited", this tends to paint this "playground" as an ideal place of romanticism. A romantic topos of a return to purity and innocence of youth far from the problems of adulthood or civilization. This adds an interpretative layer to the metaphor for it can be read as an image of the desire to return to a time prior to the problems or exigencies of adult life. As such, it brings into the fold questions of racial, gender, and class exploitation – mechanisms of civilizations – that are invisibilized in the "playground". Fauset could be suggesting, then, that if herself and her American readers maintain the understanding that Paris is a playground – free from various forms of social oppression – then they do not see Paris "as she is". In this way one indirectly renders invisible relationships of power and domination within French society. In "The Enigma of the Sorbonne", she paints the university as an idealized space that corresponds to this very trope within African American cultural imaginaries. In light of the above discussion, the author runs into a possible problem of covering over relationships of power that may take place within the university walls as much as in the "playground" of an imagined Paris.

In "Enigma", Fauset characterizes the "specialty" of this symbol of French culture as being its "cosmopolitanism". This may be a critical element, for her representation of the Sorbonne as

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<sup>163</sup> Fauset, "Yarrow Revisited," 109.

such questions the French colonial perspective that ignores the multicultural aspects of Frenchness. Fauset's ideal image of the life of the students, then, takes on performative aspects as she depicts the happenings in this space as if multiculturalism was an integral component within this microcosm of French society.

the Sorbonne is a veritable Tower of Babel, just so with regard to customs, appearance, manner of conduct [...] This I believe to be absolutely true: nowhere are students so free, so unfettered, so completely themselves as at this shrine which Robert de Sorbon dedicated to the study of God through mankind [...] Across the courtyard they file, loitering, rushing, gesticulating, exclaiming, living being, - *being* simply what they are; unhampered by externals, impervious to criticism.<sup>164</sup>

This description echoes Fauset's own subjective experiences in Paris as being "completely herself" which she garners, in part, from her time as a student at the Sorbonne. The vivacity in which she paints the scene and emphasizes the freedom of "*being*" whilst acquiring an education is evocative of the contradistinction, as a black woman, in battling to get an education in segregated America. Fauset clearly makes the comparison in general terms: "The shape and form, the definite aspect of university living, features so marked in our own advanced institutions, are to be remarked here only by their absence."<sup>165</sup> Looking at the "myriad of students" and the multiplicity of "appearances" and "languages" spoken, the narrator expresses a joy and excitement that resonates out of this article. Simultaneously, it returns to the readers the common trope that France is without color prejudice. For instance, it is a very different image of the Sorbonne and the anti-black racism experienced there which Paulette Nardal evoked in "*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*". Though Nardal's article is written four years after Fauset's "Enigma", her reference to the King's Camelots (who were active between 1908-1936) does suggest that the Sorbonne was not a place in which everyone is as free and unfettered as Fauset describes them to be. Another aspect that is not brought to the fore in the article, is that this intellectual and cultural center of the French Republic is tied to the dissemination of colonial ideologies. Fauset mentions the change that colonization had on the intellectual material being taught at university but does not critique them: "The colonial expansion of France has made courses in International, Consular and Colonial Law almost necessities, certainly matters of extreme importance."<sup>166</sup> There is an ironic tone that reverberates within the last part of the sentence which puts into question the "extreme importance" of such "colonial expansion". As it was demonstrated earlier, the inculcation of

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<sup>164</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, "The Enigma of the Sorbonne," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 29, no. 5 (March 1925): 219.

<sup>165</sup> Fauset, "The Enigma of The Sorbonne," 219.

<sup>166</sup> Fauset, "The Enigma of the Sorbonne," 218.

colonial ideologies and the white colonial perspective is something that the Nardal sisters are attuned to, evidenced by Jane Nardal in “Exotic Puppets” and by Paulette Nardal’s recounting of her experience within the French education system in Martinique or Paris. Fauset’s ironic allusion to such problematics could be a choice specific to her ambitions of the article or a difference in lived experience in comparison with the Nardals. However, it does not preclude the possibility that Fauset may not want to place her critical lens on the subject and bring it to the fore. Dissimilar to her objective to expose idealized images of Paris in “Yarrow”, the author’s descriptions in “Enigma” seem to gloss over certain realities of the social and cultural geographies of the Sorbonne.

In a passage that ends the article, Fauset’s attention is captured by two black women: “two absolutely black girls swing through the rectangle, Haitian, I judge from their accent, pure African, I am sure from their coloring.”<sup>167</sup> It is a potential misreading on Fauset’s part for qualifying Haitian identities, feminine or masculine, as “pure African” seems to run against the (violent) colonial histories and transatlantic slave trade of this Caribbean island and the production of black cultural identities that Haitians are creating of and for themselves. In a sense, they are brought into the fold of Fauset’s idealization in so far as the two black women stage (or are used to stage) the non-existence of the color line within this space. Represented as free and independent women in their own right –“their voices ringing clear...their movements unrestrained”<sup>168</sup> – they become the black protagonist in a scene of interracial interactions in the Sorbonne.

Louis Pasteur and Victor Hugo, ruminating at the base of the church steps, regard them with benign indifference and the same indifference of extreme tolerance informs the countenances, yellow, brown, white, and ruddy, by which they are surrounded. But of this the black girls are unaware. In this atmosphere so completely are they themselves that tolerance is a quality which they recognize only when they are exercising it towards others.<sup>169</sup>

Victor Hugo and Louis Pasteur at the time of Fauset’s article were both resting in the Pantheon and are two examples of prominent French men within the national cultural imaginary. In the case of Hugo, he is a principal figure of French humanism and who publicly affirmed his support for colonization in Africa in a speech given on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May, 1879 to mark the

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<sup>167</sup> Fauset, “The Enigma of the Sorbonne,” 219.

<sup>168</sup> Fauset, “The Enigma of the Sorbonne,” 219.

<sup>169</sup> Fauset, “The Enigma of the Sorbonne,” 219.

anniversary of the abolition of slavery.<sup>170</sup> In this speech, that Fauset may well have been aware of, Hugo makes clear that all originating from the continent of Africa are on the side of “*la barbarie*” but it is the great humanist project to bring Africans up to French civilization, which Hugo believed was possible. As Fauset casts these masculine white characters of the scene as statues – memorialized and glorified in the history of France – the author makes them perceive these two “pure African” Haitian women in a way that they may not have done in real life. It could be interpreted that Fauset performs a gaze that inverts Hugo’s racist understandings of “Africans”. It is he, and Pasteur, who observe these women as free subjects with indifference and “extreme tolerance”, setting the tone of the social interactions between the students. Like the irony of “extreme importance” that the author mobilized in regard to colonial knowledge, here, “extreme tolerance” is cast with the same ironic shadow. The readers can also understand, in part, why Fauset posits the “pure African” characteristic onto the “Haitian women” in her scene where she makes Victor Hugo one of the main white protagonists, given his ideas of African peoples. What is more, as Fauset paints the two black women as completely indifferent to or “unaware” of this “extreme tolerance” in the French context, it renders the colonial perspective, of the past or the present, completely irrelevant to their lives and pursuits. However, if read as a construction of an idyllic space for her (black) readers in America, the critical aspects of this performance tend to diminish and create other problems within the text. It could almost be read as a celebration of figures like Victor Hugo, who in their humanist beliefs assured the civilizing mission and thus their “extreme tolerance” is, in part, why the two “pure African” women are at the Sorbonne. Though Fauset emphasizes the autonomy of these two “African” Haitian women, when the author paints this university as the polar opposite to American race relations it has a consequence of overriding the relationships of power that could exist in this space and even between the author and the subjects she represents. Thus, on the one hand, the representation of an ideal interracial social and intellectual environment could be interpreted as a message of hope for Fauset’s readership, perhaps speaking to dreams that one day such environments could exist in the United States. In this way, the idealization of the Sorbonne reaches out particularly to her black feminine readers for whom access to all disciplines of tertiary education is more limited than for their masculine comrades. In order to create hope for the future (or in a reparation of the past) Fauset transposes an image of the Sorbonne that responds to desires for freedom of intellectual pursuits or dreams of equal and

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<sup>170</sup> See for instance, Pierre Magnan, “Quand Victor Hugo Défendait la colonisation de l’Afrique”, *Franceinfo: Afrique*, April 21, 2019, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/culture-africaine/quand-victor-hugo-defendait-la-colonisation-de-l-afrique\\_3402337.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/culture-africaine/quand-victor-hugo-defendait-la-colonisation-de-l-afrique_3402337.html).

accessible education in the United States. On the other hand, redeploying tropes within African American cultural imaginations in “Enigma” creates problems in its transposition in which the Haitian women are used in Fauset’s idealization. One notable aspect that sets Fauset’s “Yarrow” apart from “Enigma” is that the author frames her objectives to see “France as she is” in a class critique of white French society. Another important difference between these two articles is that in “Yarrow” Fauset’s depiction of the Parisian space that dialogues with African American and American cultures, other members of the black diaspora do not feature. In “Yarrow”, Fauset continues her critical analysis by drawing on an American stereotype of French culture, namely the image of a French person with a baguette under the arm. By focusing on this image, she is able to allude to racial, gender and class exploitation that structure capitalist imperial circulations of commodities that underpin this everyday act of consumption.

Like the French berets, the image of a white Frenchman or woman with a baguette under the arm is one of the most recognizable images of French culture, at least in anglophone worlds. This seemingly banal act of buying a baguette is transformed in Fauset’s critique. She exposes this image for what it is, a stereotype and deconstructs certain ideologies which are sedimented in daily practices. From Fauset’s perspective, it is the “decidedly logical hard matter-of-factness” of the French people that over time and repetition has produced a certain cultural “common sense”.

Rue de Sèvres which leads from the Boulevard Montparnasse, where my friends live, to my street is an impressively busy place. There are all sorts of businesses here jumbled close side by side, delicatessens, bakeries, milliners’ establishments, hardware stores, jewelers, photographers, a cutlery. Out of the apparent confusion rises gradually some appreciation of the unexpectedly hard common sense of the French which says: “One has to have all these things in order to live; why not have them all close to hand?” One would never have to walk a mile for a camel here either a literal or a figurative one. If French people elected to use camels they would be found, I am quite sure, along Rue de Sèvres tethered a bit too near perhaps to the exposed cheeses and the cuts of meat. It is a decidedly logical hard matter-of-factness which is, I am beginning to think, the Frenchiest quality about the French. One sees it cropping out in all sorts of ways. This is the sort of thing which is at once back of the spectacle of the irreproachably dressed householder emerging from the bakery with a large half loaf of bread tucked unwrapped under his arm and that other different spectacle of the exposure of the human form upon the French stage to a degree totally unparalleled by any theater in America. “Life” says the Frenchman without cynicism, “is bread and is also shining flesh. Why bother to wrap up the one or to disguise the other?”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Fauset, “Yarrow Revisited,” 108.

Consumption of “all the things in order to live” is brought into a relationship of proximity. It needs “to be close at hand”. With reference to a camel, Fauset draws the discussion of these goods into imperial circulations. If the French were to “use camels, literal or figurative,” they are transported from the colonies into the reach of the Parisians in the metropole and their marketplace. This “hard logic” of the consumer culture and colonial circulations is tied to French identity, “the Frenchiest quality about the French”. Life is having access to all goods from bread to camels including that of “shining flesh”. The meaning of the “spectacle” of seeing a Parisian with a loaf of bread under the arm is changed in its convergence with the “spectacle” of exposure of human form. With Fauset’s ascription of masculinity to what had thus far been a gender neutral “French”, squarely places the critique within the gender, sexual and racial dynamics of exoticism. For as Fauset knows, these exposed bodies on the Parisian stages are those of both black and white women. The “unwrapped” loaf of bread image is eroticized by Fauset and the exposure of “human flesh” is rendered banal. This normalization of erotic consumption as part of the French “way of life” from a masculine perspective, underlines to what point access to staple products, like bread, is equated to access to women’s bodies within the symbolic figure of French identity, a white man. She unravels the domination (and exploitation) of black and white women within this cultural economy as it has become a part of everyday life. Fauset also highlights the ideological sedimentation required for things to be considered “common sense”. It is not just simply there or “natural” but rather it is achieved through a constant process of iteration and performance of identity, acts, and behaviors. This is underlined because the author describes both the scene at the theater as “spectacle” and the banal occurrence of buying bread as a “spectacle”. As the article moves from rue de Sèvres, Fauset returns to notions of economic inequality and class exploitation that was observed at the start of “Yarrow” as she directs the discussion to Albert, the concierge of her pension.

Albert in the hotel carries terrible trunks, loads and loads of heavy, heavy linen, huge baskets of wood, – all day he trudges up and down, apparently never thinking of using the elevator. His aspect is not the least bit servile, yet I do not remember seeing any one so consciously a servant. Or perhaps his heavy air is due to a dull inner wonderment. “Was it for this I crouched day and night in the trenches?” I have heard Dr. Du Bois speak many times of that something in colored Americans which simply will not let them work too long or too hard. That was god’s greatest gift.<sup>172</sup>

Fauset’s reference to African American experiences through her paraphrasing of Du Bois is one of the few moments where she explicitly mentions this context. Likely pointing to the Post-

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<sup>172</sup> Fauset, “Yarrow Revisited,” 109.

emancipation and Reconstruction era, the appearance of “colored Americans” coincides with Fauset’s reflection on Albert, a French working class war veteran, and his perceived conscious self-positioning as “a servant”. What she perceives in the latter, or “the work ethic of the French”, is that in a sense, the Third Republic’s propaganda that France is the apotheosis of civilization and bearer of the “Rights of Man” is successful in obfuscating from those concerned (Albert in this case) the exploitation exercised upon them for the continuation of its capitalist imperial pursuits. The cross-cultural reference to the African American context suggests that unlike Albert, African Americans could not consciously position themselves as “servants”, that there is “something in colored Americans” that would revolt at such exploitation. If read in this way, Fauset’s placing side by side Albert and African American historical experiences may possibly be a tool given to her audience in order to comprehend Albert’s situation in the French context. She appeals to the specificity of racial oppression and exploitation in the American context in order to shed light on the French context. As such, the author opens the door to identification and dialogue not only across national and cultural differences but also racial and class differences. Fauset concludes the article by stating,

And I recall now as I write that practically all the public buildings here bear on them the legend: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*.<sup>173</sup>

Fauset’s citation of France’s national motto is called “the legend” which signifies it in the realm of myth. Perhaps she is suggesting that myths have the capacity to obscure “life as she is” and thus hinder critique. Therefore, whether from an (African) American perspective or a French perspective, “illusions”, “legends” or “myths” obstruct critical points of view and the sharing of them through dialogue. By translating or making clear to her American readership what lies behind French “common sense” or everyday acts of consumption, she underlines the relationships of domination in France and their possible similarities to those in the United States, in spite of historical, racial, and cultural differences. “Yarrow”, then, demonstrates this by example. Instead of speaking from the perspective of a “visitor” as in “This Way to the Flee Market”, or redeploying certain tropes in “Enigma”, in “Yarrow” Fauset puts to the task some of the idealized images of Paris, hers included, and as such opens the text to a kind of critical transatlantic dialogue. As opposed to her depictions of the Sorbonne and the problems that this raised, Fauset’s expressed desire to see Paris without illusions in “Yarrow” brings to the fore her own negotiation between that which is imagined and that which is experienced within the overall narration of the

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<sup>173</sup> Fauset, “Yarrow Revisited,” 109.



article. This subsequently leads to the conclusion that France, may not be “the court of justice of the world” it claims itself to be; that despite *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* that is written on almost every building there is an experiential gap between this ideal or myth and her observations of discrimination. As a counterpoint, “Enigma” confirms how ideals can obscure critical knowledge. For, and as it was underlined, Fauset’s idealization of the Sorbonne reaffirmed, in part, the myth of France without color prejudice to her readers. As such it blurred or glossed over power relationships including those between the speaker and the subjects presented. In “Enigma”, the representation of the two Haitian women became entangled in such dynamics and were coopted in the larger idealization taking place. Thus on the whole, what Fauset’s two articles bring to light is the interrelationships between myth, reality, and the production of critical knowledge. It aligns her work with what Jane Nardal underlined in “Exotic Puppets”.

In Nardal’s discussion of Lévy-Bruhl’s *La mentalité primitive*, she showed how Bruhl based his “theories” on the “literary stereotypes” of blackness. Modernity’s episteme informed and formed as it is by structures of domination and subjugation of “others” necessarily depends on myths, legends, or fantasies in order to justify its exploitative actions and its crimes against humanity. Though not entirely consistent across all the articles addressed in this chapter, what Jessie Fauset’s, Jane Nardal’s and Paulette Nardal’s works do underline is that these legends and myths found in oneself, in African American cultural imaginaries, in Antillean points of view or in the colonial perspective, can be undone over time and through critical perspectives that emerge within lived experiences. They share a common strategy of the centralization of black female subjectivities within the text, and all speak from a politicized “I” which proposes other ways of understanding the world by assuming that their point of view is legitimate in and of itself. They yoke that which is prescribed by exoticism and the modern episteme – illegitimacy, inferiority, inequality, subjugation – as they live, experience and act as creators of their own identities and producers of their own ideas. In textual space, by transforming black feminine identities and ways of understanding the world, these authors are also transforming their material realities as they create spaces for marginalized identities to live and thrive.

# Chapter Two

## Fauset and The Harlem Renaissance

### Fairy Tales of Migration and Modern Representation

#### 2.1 (Re)Configurations of Cultural Imaginaries and Identities

##### 2.1.1 Migration, Urbanity and Representation

In the United States, constructed as it is through histories of colonialism, indentured servitude and institutionalized racism, the freedom to move has underpinned and continues to underpin major conceptions of identity. The ideological constructions of racism and white domination affect the spatial organization of social and cultural environments within its national borders and across state lines. Black subordination is expressed in the legal and social restriction of movement of black subjects. In the material, symbolic and cultural realities of before, during, and after emancipation, for a black subject, freedom and agency is complexly correlated with mobility, or the possibility to move freely. This specificity of black experience in respect to mobility and migration has informed and shaped cultural production and identity, including that of the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro. This is to say that the social and cultural geography of a specific space is entwined and transformed in the everyday experiences and aesthetic production that imagine the possibilities of a place where desires of freedom and equality could exist. In respect to the Spirituals, for instance, Angela Davis notes:

During slavery, the North had been an enduring symbol of freedom and hope, frequently merged with visions of heaven in the spiritual music produced by slaves. The South, under the reign of an oppressive slaveocracy, was the geographic locus of black people's lifelong troubles, and site of oppression from which millions of African Americans wished to escape either home to Africa, a place also frequently merged with heaven in the spirituals, or to the promise of freedom in the North.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 109-110.

The symbolic and material realities that shape this perspective of the North continues to inform African American experiences and imagination well after the abolition of slavery. One example is the African American migration narrative that is understood as a “new” form of cultural production from the early twentieth century onwards. Farah Jasmine Griffin’s study, *“Who Set You Flowin’?”: The African-American Migration Narrative*, investigates the geographical tropes in such narratives across visual, musical, journalistic and literary forms of African American cultural productions of the twentieth century.<sup>175</sup> For Griffin, the African American migration narrative mobilizes a similar imagined geography to the Spirituals in which the Southern and Midwestern provincial spaces are the points of departure – described mostly as flight or escape from violence and oppression – to the northern and eastern urban spaces that convey, amongst other things, notions of freedom.<sup>176</sup> For both Griffin and Davis, migration is not simply a theme that appears in African American literary, visual or musical culture. Rather it shapes and transforms the form of the work in order to search for a space to reconceptualize and reconfigure notions of black identity, subjectivity, and experience. However, as both writers readily point out, the realities for a large majority of black immigrants within these highly urban and industrialized settings were often harder economically than in their homelands left behind. The symbolic northern space, imbued as it was with the hopes and dreams of freedom from slavery and racial violence was in itself an already fictive or imagined space. Through the experiences of coming to the North, perspectives tended to shift. Whilst this does not speak for every black immigrant’s reality nor was migration northward and eastward a complete disillusionment, nevertheless, in African American cultural production, notions of belonging, community, home and identity will be challenged and explored from these experiences of migration to particular urban, industrial and cosmopolitan spaces.

In *Black Manhattan*, James Weldon Johnson describes the economic opportunity in Harlem never before witnessed by black communities in the United States. Old-residents and “newcomers” alike, found employment in this urban environment “as fast as they could take

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<sup>175</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin, *“Who Set You Flowin’?”: The African-American Migration Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). In terms of literature, the beginning of the book focuses predominately on the first half of the twentieth century in a study of novels such as Richard Wright’s *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938) and *Native Son* (1940) before turning to the second half of the twentieth century and works from authors such as Amiri Baraka, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Maya Angelou to name just a few.

<sup>176</sup> According to Griffin, the four main elements that characterize the migration narrative are: “(1) an event that propels the action northward, (2) a detailed representation of the initial confrontation with the urban landscape, (3) an illustration of the migrant’s attempt to negotiate that landscape and his or her resistance to the negative effects of urbanization, and (4) a vision of the possibilities or limitations of the Northern, Western, or Midwestern city and the South.” Griffin, *“Who Set You Flowin’?”* 3.

it". This led to disposable income that translated into access to the property market described as a "contagious fever".<sup>177</sup> Furthermore due to the lack of what he refers to as "gang labor" (setting Harlem apart from Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburg, and Cleveland) Johnson surmises that "race friction, as it affects Harlem, as a community has grown less and less each year". As such, "although Harlem is a negro community, the newest comers do not long remain merely "Harlem Negroes"; astonishingly soon they become New Yorkers."<sup>178</sup> It is arguable that Harlem and New York were yet to experience, for instance, the magnitude of the 1919 "red summer" race riots that took place in cities such as Chicago and were contemporaneous with the period that Johnson outlines above. However, this is not to say that there were no conflicts at all. It begs the question if Harlem was exactly the multi-ethnic community, whereby everyone slips easily into the new grooves of urban life, leaving behind "old" identities to become "New Yorkers".<sup>179</sup> This is not to say that Johnson's study and observations are at fault, rather it points to the inevitable contradictions and mis-understandings within different experiences of (urban) environments that cut across differences such as race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality and class.<sup>180</sup> This differentiation of lived experience will impact the ways in which places, people and migration are represented in cultural production. As Davis finds in the blues aesthetics, the trauma of migration to the North is evidenced in songs that invert "the traditional imaginary associated with the spirituals" that aligns the North with a land of freedom. Bessie's Smith's "Louisiana's Low-Down Blues" and "Muddy Water" are the examples Davis gives of a nostalgic reminiscence for the South, as both songs focus on the ideas of a "homecoming".<sup>181</sup> So whilst these songs also champion ideas of movement and migration, Davis argues that the inverted traditional imagery in terms of geography are one example of the aesthetic practices that have emerged from the specific experience of northward migration.

Conspicuously absent in the North were the cultural unity and extended family support systems they [black immigrants] had known in the South, by means of which they had succeeded in humanizing their environment. As the socioeconomic realities of the North shattered black immigrants' illusions, the historical meaning

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<sup>177</sup> James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 1930), 153.

<sup>178</sup> Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 156–57.

<sup>179</sup> See for example, Wilfred Aldophus Domingo, "The Gift of the Black Tropics," in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 341-353.

<sup>180</sup> See for instance Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* which explores these themes. Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem*, 1928 (London: University Press of New England, 2012). For a discussion on McKay's *Home to Harlem* see Elisa Cecchinato, "Fire on the Harlem Renaissance: Black Cultural Identities, Desiring Agency and the Disciplinary Episteme," (PhD diss., Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée, 2018).

<sup>181</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 111–12.

accorded to the South was reconfigured and became associated with release from the traumas of migration.<sup>182</sup>

For Davis, this nostalgia for the South that Bessie Smith writes and performs, cannot be conflated with the sole yearning for a “homeland”. In other words, migration is not only about going from one geographical place to another, and perhaps on arrival yearning for a “return”, but it also involves the negotiation of limits and borderlands in respect to identity, subjectivity, and perception. The idea of departure and arrival, of before and after, is far less linear than feelings of nostalgia would suggest. Interestingly, there is a resonance with how Nardal and Fauset speak of their migration across the Atlantic. Both arrive in the metropolis with cultural specificities that inform their perspective and experience. Also, as it was shown in their respective articles, the creation of “home” for black feminine subjectivities is a constant negotiation between material and discursive spaces, between a “here” and a “there”, and, for instance, between lived experience and imagined or idealized images of a place. A common denominator, then, whether in travels to the French metropolis or here within the American space and African American culture, is that experience of migration which is mediated through artistic production brings to the fore the importance of narrative in relationship to formation of identity. The idea of the mutability of identities themselves begin to take shape. They are the stories that are recounted about where one comes from, where one is going (or not going) that span temporalities of past, present, and future, and extend across geographical, social, and imaginary lines. And it is in these processes of translating experience into aesthetic practices in order to express or communicate an emotion or desire, for “home” for example, to audiences that reconfigurations of shared cultural identities and imaginaries seemingly take place. As Davis writes in relation to the work of Bessie Smith, she

assisted in the creation of a new consciousness of African American identity, a consciousness that was critical of the experiences of exploitation, alienation – and for women, male dominance – in the North, which had been the focus of black people’s hopes and dreams since the earliest days of slavery. Her songs, more than those of any other blues performer of the era, constructed aesthetic bridges linking places and times permitting a collective *prise de conscience* encompassing both the unity and heterogeneity of black experience.<sup>183</sup>

Paulette Nardal and Jessie Fauset approach these questions of identity, migration and (constrained) mobility within their fictional and non-fictional pieces and for Fauset her editorial

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<sup>182</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 110–11.

<sup>183</sup> Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 116.

work. As this Chapter is dedicated to Fauset's corpus within the African American context in the United States, this will be furthered in respect to Paulette Nardal at a later stage. Like the above discussion has contextualized and will be furthered below, some of the major debates taking place within the Harlem Renaissance over the elaboration of a modern black aesthetic are intimately tied to notions of movement in and across material, cultural and symbolic spaces. The figure of the New Negro, for instance, is conceptually understood and aesthetically formed in a dialectical relationship between the South and the North, the past and the future, and between tradition and modernity. What Fauset's work demonstrates is that this figure and understandings of mobility does not come without its problems from a perspective of an African American woman. To begin this investigation, the discussion will commence with her understanding of the interconnections between mobility, representation and modern black expressions in African American theater and the anti-blackness that practitioners face in this milieu.

### 2.1.2 "The Gift of Laughter" and the "Unwritten Laws of Representation"

By the time that "The Gift of Laughter" was published in Alain Locke's 1925 anthology *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, Fauset had established herself as one of the prominent voices of the New Negro movement, both in her position as literary editor of *The Crisis* (since 1919) and her literary and journalistic work.<sup>184</sup> This was aided, in part, with the publishing of her debut novel *There is Confusion* that was launched at the Writers Guild Dinner in 1924, an event that was credited by some as the launch of the Harlem Renaissance. In the article "The Negro in American Literature", also published in *The New Negro*, William Stanley Braithwaite formulates her aesthetic achievement in this novel as follows:

Nearer to the requirements of art comes Miss Jessie Fauset's novel *There Is Confusion*. Its distinction is to have created an entirely new milieu in the treatment of the race in fiction. She has taken a class within the race of established social standing, tradition, and culture, and given in the rather complex family story of the *Marshalls* a social document of unique and refreshing value. In such a story, race fiction, detaching itself from the limitations of propaganda on the one hand and genre fiction on the other, emerges from the color line and is incorporated into the body of general and universal art.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, "The Gift of Laughter" in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 161-167. The text cited in this thesis is, Jessie Redmon Fauset, "The Gift of Laughter," in *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 515-18.

<sup>185</sup> William Stanley Braithwaite, "The New Negro in American Literature," in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 29-47. This thesis has cited the version, William Stanley

This perspective on Fauset's novel arguably rings true for her work published in the decade preceding *There is Confusion* and "The Gift of Laughter". One example is "The Sleeper Wakes" that will be addressed at length below. To underline, however, how Braithwaite and others regarded *There is Confusion* shines a light upon her critical investigations in "The Gift of Laughter". This is because it is in this article that her presentation of modern aesthetics is intertwined with ideas of migration, mobility and "the treatment of race" in artistic practices. Fauset's conceptualization between the "old" and the "new" forms of black cultural expression complicates the parameters of the New Negro movement.

The article encompasses Fauset's critical reflection on the politics of representation that was a highly debated topic during the Harlem Renaissance and specifically around the years 1925-1926. "The Gift of Laughter" will do this in two equally connected arguments. The first is the articulation between constraint and movement in both material and representational spaces. The second is a reflection on how this impacts the cultural practitioner in regard to conceptions of identity and agency in both his or her lived experiences and his or her creation of a black aesthetics. These two arguments pivot on a centralized distinction between "old" and "new" forms in the context of African American theater and more specifically the comic aspects attributed to African American characters. The former refers to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Minstrel tradition – the "imitative" aesthetics of the "Georgia Minstrels and the likes" – whilst the latter refers to "colored shows" like *Shuffle Along*, being performed in Harlem in the first half of the twentieth century. This cleavage between "old" and "new", between the past and the present corresponds spatially to the symbolic, cultural, and geographical distance between the South and the North. This was a common aspect within the Harlem Renaissance and the construction of its central figure, the New Negro. In Alain Locke's introductory essay to his anthology, he observes that with each successive wave of migration northward and eastward,

The movement of the Negro becomes more and more a mass movement toward the larger and more democratic chance – in the Negro's case a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to the modern.<sup>186</sup>

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Braithwaite, "The Negro in American Literature," in *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*, eds. Venetria K. Patton and Maureen Honey (New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>186</sup> Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 6.

Movements towards Northern urban centers are passages into the modern. This is not just in terms of flight from “medieval” white supremacy in the South, as Locke infers, but also in terms of coming into “the modern” of black aesthetics. Mobility northward then, is clearly coupled with the notion of black emancipation that grounds the conditions of possibility for modern forms of intellectual and cultural production that seek new representations of black subjectivities, identities, and experience. The figure of The New Negro is one central example. In “The Gift of Laughter” Fauset follows this same socio-temporal and geographical trajectory as she speaks of the Minstrel Shows in the South and “colored shows” in Harlem. However, Fauset complexifies this articulation between mobility of the subject and the creation of modern aesthetics in her discussion of Egbert Williams. What Fauset underlines that it is the journey towards the urban, rather than the arrival, that appears to lay the grounds for representing black cultural identities otherwise to those proposed by white American perspectives.

Fauset’s main critique of the Minstrel shows is that black actors were constrained to reproduce the racist stereotype of the “buffoon” character. As she argues, through these performances the black man became “the funny man” of America.<sup>187</sup> Giving a brief genealogy of the tradition, Fauset highlights specific black actors who were able to transgress, or push back, the restrained boundaries of such representation. For instance, she describes Ernest Hogan as the “pioneer comedian” of the late nineteenth century who,

changed the tradition of the merely funny, rather silly “end-man” into a character with a definite plot... The method was still humorous, but less broadly, less exclusively. A little of the hard luck of the Negro began to creep in. If he was a buffoon, he was a buffoon wearing his rue.<sup>188</sup>

Similarly, she speaks of the Bert Williams and George Walker duo, who, in the dynamics of their partnership were able to combine comedy with glimpses of real-life (oppressive) experiences represented in the “hard-luck” persona performed by Williams. As such, even if the audiences “could not dream of a situation in which colored people were anything but funny” they were able to introduce “with the element of folk comedy some element of reality.”<sup>189</sup> Continuing with her genealogy, Fauset attributes the collaborative work of Bob Cole and the Johnson brothers, J. Rosamond and James Weldon, as fabricating “the form of the Negro

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<sup>187</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 515.

<sup>188</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 516.

<sup>189</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 516.



musical show which still persists and thrives on the contemporary stage”.<sup>190</sup> However, at this point, the author stops her temporal progression and returns her focus to Bert Williams, making him one of the central figures in her article. What Fauset brings to the fore is that “he was, as few of us recall a Jamaican by birth.”<sup>191</sup> Though Fauset missteps for Williams was born in Nassau in the Bahamas, her attention to his immigration to America broadens the frame of the discussion on African American aesthetics and its articulation with mobility. She highlights that for Williams, “the ways of the American Negro were utterly alien to him and did not come spontaneously” rather it is through knowledge and experience, living and migrating throughout the United States, that this actor learnt of “the ways of the American Negro”.<sup>192</sup> As a result,

he was able to portray for us not only that “typical Negro” which the white world thinks is universal but also the special types of given districts and localities with their own peculiar foibles of walk and speech and jargon.<sup>193</sup>

Migration breaks the intranational borders of black aesthetics in America as Fauset foregrounds the connection between his movement across differing, national, cultural, geographical spaces and imaginaries to his ability to understand and portray specificities and differences of blackness. As such, his representations of black characters were able to go beyond the “typical Negro” of the white racist imaginary as his depictions onstage brought “some element of reality” of black people’s experiences in the United States. This is furthered in Fauset’s rhetorical question:

Can anyone presume to say that a man [Bert Williams] who travelled *north, east, south* and *west*, and even abroad in order to acquire accent and jargon, aspect and characteristic of a people to which he was bound by ties of blood but from whom he was natively separated by training and tradition, would not have been able to portray with equal effectiveness what, for a lack of a better term we must call universal rôles?<sup>194</sup>

Fauset layers the American space with black international and diasporic spaces through the journeying of Bert Williams. The text infers that the “ties of blood” are not understood as familial bonds, metaphorical or biological, of African American communities but that of a shared afro-descendance. What the trajectories of Williams reveal is that the specificities of African American cultures and representations of blackness, whether “north, east, south and

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<sup>190</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 516.

<sup>191</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 516.

<sup>192</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 516.

<sup>193</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 516.

<sup>194</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 517. Rôles spelt like this in the text.

west” are endogenous to these particular socio-geographical spaces as much as these delimitations are porous and traversable. This problematizes the thinking of a modern black aesthetics within the Harlem Renaissance and its figure the New Negro because migration nor cultural productions are articulated within the dialectics of north-south, medieval-modern, departure-arrival as was the case in Locke’s description. Granted, and as Fauset points out, Williams is performing at a time that precedes the creative effervescence of black modernisms that is the Harlem Renaissance. However, Fauset’s emphasis on Williams’ inter and intranational mobilities and his representation of blackness reminds the readers, perhaps, that the articulation of migration and black aesthetics has been taking place for some time. The inference is that not all follow the same path as prominent figures, like Locke, are defining as the way toward modern black aesthetics. Furthermore, significance is placed on the process of journeying itself for it does not appear, in Fauset’s description of Williams, that there was a clear point of arrival or destination like an urban center. This said, the cultural crossings that Fauset underlines in Williams’ life and artistic ability are only understood as possible from a black perspective. When it comes to the white American audience and the particular genre of the Minstrels, Williams has very little room in his exploration of black representation. Despite his capacity to speak, act and perform a rich diversity of black characters that is more reflective of “real life”, Fauset demonstrates the white racist logics of the Minstrel genre in what she calls the “unwritten laws of representation.” Williams’ freedom and ability to move and journey in both life and artistic expression has as one major wall the formal aesthetic constraints of white supremacy. This is the tragedy of the black comedic actor: “W.C Fields, himself an expert in the art of amusing, called him [Williams] ‘the funniest man I ever saw and the saddest man I ever knew.’”<sup>195</sup> Fauset continues:

There is an unwritten law in America that though white may imitate black, black even when superlatively capable, must never imitate, white. [...] Williams’ color imposed its limitations upon him even in his chosen field. His expansion was upward never outward. He might portray black people along the gamut from roustabout to unctuous bishop. But he must never stray beyond those limits.<sup>196</sup>

The unwritten laws racially segregate actors as much as they set the aesthetic codes of black performance that conforms to white audience’s perception and ideological construction of blackness. Here in the microcosm of the theater, (white) audiences’ expectations control the movements, gestures, and voice of that which the black performers can express in order to

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<sup>195</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 517.

<sup>196</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 517.

perpetuate white superiority and black inferiority. Fauset's foregrounding of Williams' diverse migratory trajectories thus also work to highlight through opposition the extent to which his movements were controlled on the theater stage. "The unwritten laws of representation" resonate with other norms, such as "codes of conduct" that were put into place after black emancipation. In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, Saidiya V. Hartman analyzes "the codes of conduct" that worked through processes of social normalization (or normalization of performativity) to control the movement of black subjects and their subjectivity. This is very similar to what Fauset is underlining in respect to the aesthetic codes of whiteness. Hartman states that "in the context of freedom, the need to reimpose black subordination [...] was actualized not only through forms of legal repression and punishment but also through the inculcation of rules of conduct."<sup>197</sup> These rules of conduct worked on the level of everyday life. As the author demonstrates, behavioral guidelines were written for black freemen and women by those of the white ruling class in order to "minimize white discomfort with black freedom" and re-establish the social relations of servility.<sup>198</sup> Control of black mobility is understood then both in terms of one's person – the way one behaves, acts, speaks – and in his or her movement away from the plantation. Hartman writes:

Not only were the freed encouraged to be subservient, obedient, and humble and remain with their former owners until death, but also, they were asked to refrain from asserting their liberty in every meaningful and imaginable way. The effort to sustain the control of black labor through the cultivation of dutiful conduct and other techniques of self-fashioning discloses the affinities of will and compulsion, reason and repression, and coercion and volition. One was obliged to endure these encroachments of freedom not because one was still a slave without choice, but, ironically, in order to exemplify the dutiful and rational behavior of a freeman.<sup>199</sup>

This irony is revealed in W.C Fields' statement that Bert Williams was "the funniest man he knew but the saddest person he had ever met" and resurfaces when Fauset infers that Williams was free to choose his career, but it did not mean he was free in the practice of his art. As cited previously, "Williams' color imposed its limitations upon him even in his chosen field". The tragedy of the black comedic actor in his or her required obedience to the "unwritten laws of representation" parallels the "tragic limits of emancipation" that Hartman is tracing in the "codes of conduct".

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<sup>197</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Race and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 148.

<sup>198</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 148.

<sup>199</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 149.

Blacks did not move as equals in civil society, nor were they endowed with rights that others were bound to respect or permitted to entertain ideas of equality without risking accusations of “putting on airs”. The tragic limits of emancipation were borne in the designation of the plantation as the imagined space of freedom and happiness; this restricted landscape was deemed a place presumably as good as anywhere else in the world to explore the nascent experience of liberation. The freed could be as “free and happy” in their old home as anywhere else in the world. Unfortunately, this was true to the degree that freedom was no less elusive or more realizable on one plantation than another in Georgia rather than Alabama.<sup>200</sup>

The Minstrel shows, that often-reproduced scenes within the plantation, is arguably the *mise en scene* of these enforced limits of emancipation and from which emerges the racist figure of “funny man” of America. Williams could move “upward but never outward”, never beyond this white imaging of blackness that “minimizes white discomfort with black freedom” that is clearly linked to the control of black mobility, in the microcosm of the stage or elsewhere. What Fauset exposes is that aesthetic codes or laws not only shape the way blackness is represented but points to the extremely violent material realities in which they emerge and the affective, psychological, and physical effects of such a violent aesthetics on those that perform them.

For years the Caucasian in America has persisted in dragging to the limelight merely one aspect of the Negro characteristics [“funny man”], by which the whole race has been glimpsed, through which it has been judged. The colored man who finally succeeds in impressing any considerable number of whites with the truth that he does not conform to these measurements is regarded as the striking exception proving an unshakable rule...

In passing one pauses to wonder if this picture of the black American as a living comic supplement has not been painted in order to camouflage the real feeling and knowledge of his white counterpart. Certainly, the plight of the slaves under the mildest of masters could never have been one to awaken laughter. And no genuinely thinking person, no really astute observer, looking at the Negro in modern American life, could find his condition even now a first aid to laughter. That condition may be variously deemed hopeless, remarkable, admirable, inspiring, depressing; it can never be dubbed merely amusing.<sup>201</sup>

Performing a stereotype, like the “funny man” that stands in for the (racist) determination of “the whole” is precisely the logic of objectification mobilized for the “need to reimpose black subordination”. Fauset underlines the perversity of this racist imaging and control of black performance, firstly, by arguing that it “camouflages” the “feelings and knowledge of his white counterpart”. As she subsequently refers to system of slavery in the plantation, what Fauset proposes is that black actors are made to perform “funny men” as it evacuates a white subject’s,

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<sup>200</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 150.

<sup>201</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter,” 515.

a white audience member's or a white slave master's responsibility of his or her extreme racial violence. The second aspect of the perversity is that in the "laws" of white aesthetics this is achieved by making a black actor or actress perform his or her own objectification, just as Hartman showed that black people were asked to regularize or limit their own behaviors and movement for the sake of "white comfort". Thus, despite Williams' agency to move, or his expression of freedom in his personal life, it was impossible for him to represent a black character as a subject for he had no room to be a subject. Each time he went on stage it meant the performance of his own alienation, his own objectification. As the author pointed out at the beginning of her discussion of the Minstrels, Williams and his colleagues did challenge these "codes of conduct" or "unwritten laws of representation". This came at a price for Williams, but it was also the work of such actors, as Fauset indicates, who paved "the way" for the next generation behind the "colored shows", like *Shuffle Along*, *Runnin' Wild* and *Liza*. In Fauset's turn to modern theater in her contemporary period, the main difference for her is a "movement outwards" in form and representation. For Fauset, space is being created for the portrayal of "the Negro in modern American life" which includes a depth and complexity of expression that belies experience and performance of black characters as subjects. She places a caveat at the end of her article, when she writes, "we find ourselves slowly but surely moving towards that most glittering of all goals, the freedom of the American stage."<sup>202</sup> Fauset's demonstration between the articulation of freedom of movement in opposition to the constraints experienced in the performance of white aesthetic codes is echoed in the rhetoric she uses such as "movement outwards" or "moving towards" in the period of modern theater. This is to recognize the dynamic relationship between lived experience of one's subjectivity and aesthetics norms of representation. As Jane Nardal revealed in "Exotic Puppets" a black woman's experience in the metropolis was affected by the way she is represented in artistic practices. What perhaps distinguishes the French context and the context in which Fauset is writing is that anti-black racism in the United States, as Hartman underlined, has the specificity of perceiving black mobility, in aesthetics, in thought, in imagination or in physical movements as an inherent threat to white "comfort" or its supremacy. Fauset's portrayal of racist surveillance in the Belgium museum and how the black subjects were, in their presence, challenging the colonial logic that they should be over "there" in the colonies, points to a commonality between these spaces but it would be a stretch to say they were the same. One notable difference is the concept of the color line that has its material expression of segregation. This is arguably why, in the Harlem

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<sup>202</sup> Fauset, "The Gift of Laughter," 518.

Renaissance, as in Fauset's "The Gift of Laughter", mobility and freedom in both discursive and material spaces is used to override the racial domination of white supremacy. It is a recurrent theme in the creation of a black aesthetics. Locke's brief description of the New Negro cited above, and the way that Fauset disturbs this in "The Gift of Laughter" is one example. Another can be found in Brenda Ray Moryck's literary critique "A Point of View (An Opportunity Dinner Reaction)."<sup>203</sup> Citing Irvin Cobb and Octavius Roy Cohen as examples of white writers that produce stories of "ebony hue and chocolate flavor", the fact remains that though these authors can "sketch life wherever they can find it" they keep their "darker brother ... within the narrow and confined areas of his (or her) own racial precinct".<sup>204</sup> Pointing to the "unwritten laws of representation", but this time in literature, Moryck states,

If then, a survey of colored American life reveals the fact that people are people, white or black, the Negro prose writer with safe insurance *may invade with his pen* any world he desires, for by merely knowing his own race people, he knows in addition all other people of his country not alone through study and observation but *per se*.<sup>205</sup>

The color line should not pose a barrier within the imagination and literary production of any writer white or black. Moryck foregrounds the spatial aspects of this both previously with "narrow" "confined" and "precinct" and here "invade". As opposed to the white masculine writers who can go anywhere in mind, imagination, or person, such is not the same for black subjects and their artistic pursuits. Within the racist logic of the United States, one determinate aspect of *being* a subject as such is one's capacity to move without constraints and thus the deployment of tactics of violent control of black subjects. It follows then that the same is true for social identities such as artist, writer, actor or even citizen. Moryck infers this in her argument, and it lies behind Fauset's statement at the end of "Gift": the "Negro actor must come finally through the very versatility of his art to the universal rôle and the main tradition of drama as an artist first, and only secondly as a Negro."<sup>206</sup> What both touch upon is one of the central issues of the Harlem Renaissance that connects emancipatory aesthetics to political advances towards equality. Du Bois, for instance, championed the idea that aesthetic practices could intervene in the fight for social and political justice such as equal rights for black subjects

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<sup>203</sup> Brenda Ray Moryck, "A Point of View (An Opportunity Dinner Reaction)," *Opportunity* 3, no. 32 (August 1925: 246-249). Here cited from Brenda Ray Moryck, "A Point of View: An *Opportunity* Dinner Reaction," in *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*, eds. Maureen Honey and Venetria K. Patton (New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 28-36.

<sup>204</sup> Moryck, "A Point of View," 34.

<sup>205</sup> Moryck, "A Point of View," 35. Italics in the original.

<sup>206</sup> Fauset, "The Gift of Laughter," 518.

guaranteed under the social and legal definition of American citizenship.<sup>207</sup> Fauset fictively addresses notions of citizenship or the possibility of black women to be considered artists in the United States in her *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*. This will be returned to in the last section of the chapter. For now, the exploration will continue with Fauset's investigation of migratory journeys within and to this American space that is present in her article "Nostalgia". The author continues her reflections on aesthetics, identity, and mobility; however in this article they are addressed through questions of home. As it was shown in the relationship to Bessie Smith's blues aesthetic, Fauset too is critical of the oppression and discrimination experienced in the North, and the (un)fulfilled desires that come with experiences of (dis)location. By the end of the article, Fauset will propose a particular aesthetic that strives to articulate the specificities of African American experiences within the United States.

### 2.1.3 "Nostalgia" in Migration: Articulation of an Aesthetic Practice

Fauset's 1921 article "Nostalgia" published in *The Crisis* discusses the ideas of immigration and home through the speaker's interaction with different individuals who have come to the United States and are now currently living in Philadelphia. The article is framed geo-politically within the transatlantic space. The first three interviewees, recently immigrated to the United States from Europe, are contrasted with the final interviewee, an African American second lieutenant who has returned after serving in the First World War. The affective and material reality of nostalgia is explored through each recounting of the subject's identity and connection to his or her respective homeland. The four interviewees are drawn together in the shared feeling of "nostalgia... a pain for returning home"<sup>208</sup> in their everyday lives within the borders of this nation space. As such, nostalgia acts as an affective counterpoint that puts into question, in increasingly incremental degrees, the relationship between lived experience and discrimination, of feelings of belonging and the possibility of home in a migratory trajectory.

For the first two interviewees, nostalgia acts as the driving force for a "return". Both the older Greek fruit seller and the young Italian bootblack (names not given) envisage their respective home countries as the end point to life's trajectories.<sup>209</sup> For the second, his dream

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<sup>207</sup> For further examples and discussion of artistic practices and the link with citizenship see: Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *Nation*, June 23, 1926; Braithwaite, "The New Negro in American Literature," and Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing," *The New Challenge* 11 (Autumn 1937): 53-65.

<sup>208</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, "Nostalgia," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 22, no. 4 (August 1921): 155.

<sup>209</sup> Fauset, "Nostalgia," 154-155.

was to “make plenty of money” thus prompting the move to the United States. However, the article puts into question the opportunities available to him in “the land of the free”.<sup>210</sup> Even if the Italian bootblack considers himself American, he is presented as “trapped by life” in his position in a lower working-class profession, and paints his aspirations to return wealthy to Italy as a near impossibility.<sup>211</sup> The third interviewee is a twelve year old girl named Rachel, born in the United States, who tells the story of her parents’ trajectory from Romania. According to Rachel’s father, the same antisemitism experienced in Romania befall them here.

My father says, “here or in Romania it is all the same, - no place for a Jew. For a Jew, living in a Christian country is like being a stranger in someone else’s house. You are never at home; you always feel you are not wanted. But Jerusalem,” he says, “that is ours, we can do as we please; nothing that we shall do shall be odd. The other people will be strangers.”<sup>212</sup>

To be Jewish in a Christian country, is to be a “stranger in someone else’s house”, to be different, to be Other. What this citation demonstrates then is the affective reality of discrimination. As it was addressed in Chapter One, the Euro-American model of the nation is understood through demarcating a distinction between insiders and outsiders, Self and Other, in order to construct a homogenous and unified national identity.<sup>213</sup> For Rachel’s father, this feeling of not belonging ignites the desire for the only possible home in Jerusalem. Interestingly this is described as the desire to want something that “is ours”, where “nothing that we shall do shall be odd” and it is in fact others who will be “strangers”. Carrying on the binary logic between insider and outsider, between “us” and “them” or “strangers”, Jerusalem becomes an imagined place of belonging. He projects his desires into a space that he does not know, similar, perhaps to the symbolic importance of the North in African American cultural imaginary. His dreams are already tied to a place that is imagined, that embodies a promise of home and freedom from discrimination, and that, even though it exists concretely, (he has already bought land there), he has never lived there. Home then, is in part, a fictionalized space that orients him in his present reality. It is at this moment that the structure of the article, leading us from one interview to the next with differing

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<sup>210</sup> “I look around at the mean shop, with its iron stove in the center, which keeps only itself warm; I glance at the pile of ugly, wrinkled shoes over which he stands his hours, and reflect how hard indeed must it be for the poor in Italy, if in spite of soft skies and blue seas, he can force himself to live thus under the shadow of the ‘L’.” Fauset, “Nostalgia,” 155.

<sup>211</sup> “His *tragic* eyes follow me out into the drab weather; pass beyond me, across the Alps, to Italy!” My emphasis, Fauset, “Nostalgia,” 155.

<sup>212</sup> Fauset, “Nostalgia,” 156.

<sup>213</sup> Sara Ahmed’s *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, was cited at the time of this discussion. See also: Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, Difference Incorporated (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).



degrees of discrimination, culminates in the fourth and final interviewee, an African American second lieutenant, returning from the First World War.

The second lieutenant, “a young colored boy”, (again no name is given) last seen by the speaker of the article in art school, wears an “unfamiliar khaki” that the readers learn is of “French cut”. Fauset is therefore positioning this second lieutenant within the context of African American soldiers who fought with the French army, such as the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, more commonly known as the Harlem Hell Fighters. The significance of this context is that these soldiers were able to fight and serve their duties in positions unthinkable or impossible for them within the discriminatory and segregated environment of the American Army forces.<sup>214</sup> The speaker asks if he is happy to be home to which he replies,

Home?... Where is it? Do you know? I never knew what home was until I went to France. There in the midst of all those strange people, and the awful food and the foreign jabber, I felt myself less homesick than I have ever felt in my life – yes, than I feel this minute... Home... I don't know how to define it. Is it where one is surrounded by the sights and sounds to which he's been used all his life? Or is it where mentally and spiritually he is recognized and taken for what he is? What is home?<sup>215</sup>

Contextually, and what the young lieutenant will go on to discuss, is that his return “home” to the United States from France, as it was the case for many African American soldiers, was met with an eruption of white supremacist violence.<sup>216</sup> It was the bitter message for those who had hoped that fighting for their country in the war would provide equal rights of citizenship within the borders of this nation. What is at stake here is that no “home” can be found in a place “where he is not recognized for who he is”, namely, and amongst many other things, American. This is an interesting resonance with how Fauset will describe her time in Paris and the freedom to be “herself” as an American four years later. For this young lieutenant he perceives a greater possibility to find a “home” in France. But he is caught in a double bind. Fauset concludes her article with:

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<sup>214</sup> For a further discussion on the history of African American soldiers during the First World War and their perception and experience in France and with French citizens see Tyler E. Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

<sup>215</sup> Fauset, “Nostalgia,” 157.

<sup>216</sup> Stovall, *Paris Noir*, 27-35. As Stovall points out, the reception of African American War veterans returning from Europe was somewhat mixed. For example, the Harlem Hell Fighters returned to great celebration and applause in New York. At the same time, justification of lynching was intensified in the South, and the practices of lynching itself gained quickly in number. This will lead to the Red Summer of 1919.

That second lieutenant is doomed to know homesickness of both body and spirit. In France he will want the comforts of America; in America, he cries out for the Rights of Man which he knew in France.<sup>217</sup>

Culturally the lieutenant is a foreigner in France, but he is also one, for different reasons, in the United States. Fauset argues quoting W.E.B Du Bois' *Darkwater*, what will set the African American lieutenant apart from the other three interviewees is that he knows no other "home" but the United States. Historically speaking, he has been cut off from most knowledge, tradition, and language of his African "home country" during the triangular trade.

Like all the other descendants of voluntary and involuntary immigrants in the seventeenth century – Puritan, pioneer, adventurer, indentured servant, - he feels himself American. The past is too far past for him to have memories. Very, very rarely does he have a backward reaching bond, be it never so tenuous.<sup>218</sup>

The lieutenant "feels himself American" yet is rendered outside of and other to the nation-space and national identity. Neither here, nor there in Africa or France, it seems, could a person of African American identity find a "home". Fauset is implicitly tracing and critiquing the symbolic spaces of freedom which, as it has been shown, were being reformulated through the experience of African American migration northward and eastward at the time that Fauset wrote this article.<sup>219</sup> And it is at this point that Fauset will propose a response to such an experience. She writes:

In the main, the American Negro is without ties and the traditions that throw back. Instead, he has built unconsciously from his childhood a dream country, and yet surely no dream country since it is founded on that document which most realizes and sets forth the primal and unchanging needs of man – the Constitution of the United States.

Where the Greek dreams of his statues, he dreams of Justice; where the Italian yearns for his opera, he yearns for Opportunity; and where the Jewish visionary longs for freedom of sect, he cries out for an escape from Peonage.

As a child in his readers, he learns of great principles in the Declaration of Independence, in Fourth of July speeches, in extracts from Daniel Webster, in Mr Lincoln's Gettysburg address.

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<sup>217</sup> Fauset, "Nostalgia," 158.

<sup>218</sup> Fauset, "Nostalgia," 158.

<sup>219</sup> Arguably, this article is rooted in the contemporary discussion within African American communities on heritage, that is inextricably linked to notions like identity and subjectivity, as well as opportunity, progress and belonging in an environment of violent prejudice. In part, and perhaps one of the more iconic contemporary examples of a response to these questions is Marcus Garvey's continuation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "Back-to-Africa" movement. Garvey, president of the political party Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA), organized a project to settle in Liberia. With his Black Star Line (1919-1922) the idea, that was in part actualised, was to passenger African Americans (and more widely people of African descent living in the United States) back to the African continent, Liberia being the chosen destination. Therefore, Fauset's proposal to questions of "home" needs to be also read in this context and thus implying that her response is a commentary on, or critique of, Marcus Garvey's pursuits, for example.

He grows up and finds them – not here – just beyond, always beyond; in a country where all things are possible, he has found what ought not to be possible.

He keeps on longing for these principles with an aching, voiceless longing; with Chateaubriand's "Exile" he sighs:

*"Their memory makes me sorry everyday".*<sup>220</sup>

Given the erasure of traditions, knowledge, language and culture during the Middle Passage and slavery the "American Negro is without ties and traditions that throwback". Thus, in the early twentieth century, whilst the child learns "American" cultural and social history – Declaration of Independence, fourth of July speeches – he realizes that he has neither a place as a participant in the national culture nor equal rights that the constitution declares. Though the "American Negro" has potentially access to this cultural-historical knowledge that helps forge national identity he or she is not part of it. Epistemologically, culturally, historically, and politically he or she has no place in it, will not "find" access to the possibilities in a country "where all things are possible". Rendered outside and other to the material and symbolic borders of the nation state, she or he will imagine a "dream country" that is "always beyond". By employing an intertextual reference to Francois-René de Chateaubriand, "their memory makes me sorry everyday", Fauset is arguably pointing to a potential rhetorical response to such a reality that disturbs, or provides a way out of, the social death of a black subject in the United States.

#### 2.1.3.1 Beyond "Nostalgia"

The importance of Fauset's intertextual reference, as it will be shown in the paragraphs below, is that she performs an impossible event in the recognition of a black man or woman as a subject with equal rights in the United States. Because she draws on literature from another socio-cultural context this performative act works in two specific ways. The first is that it creates a bridge or "connection" between shared experience within the black diaspora, and the second is that it disturbs the socio-cultural imaginary from which it comes and in which it is used. By resignifying Chateaubriand's verse, it dislocates it from the fictive and imaginary world that is couched in colonial domination, anti-black racism, and exoticism in the French context (though the machinations of these power structures share much with America) and replants it, producing a different and (im)possible meaning in the socio-cultural imaginary in the United States context. And it is these slippages and slides across borders between differing socio-cultural contexts, nations, languages, and discursive forms like literature and her non-

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<sup>220</sup> Fauset, "Nostalgia," 157.

fictional space of the article, that Fauset enables a critical dialogue on notions of home, social, cultural, and national identity, and belonging in her text.

In the end of the passage cited above, the subject “he” of the paragraph expresses his “voiceless longing” for social justice, equality, freedom of religion, and freedom from discrimination and exploitation through a citation of Chateaubriand’s poem “Exile”.

He grows up and finds them – not here – just beyond, always beyond; in a country where all things are possible, he has found what ought not to be possible.

He keeps on longing for these principles with an aching, voiceless longing; with Chateaubriand’s “Exile” he sighs:

*“Their memory makes me sorry everyday”.*<sup>221</sup>

Fauset’s use of an intertextual reference which is outside the space of the United States (and therefore a different cultural imaginary), attests to her use of the French language and its national and cultural spaces in her oeuvre at large. Speaking of the former, literary critic Claire Oberon Garcia states:

In Fauset’s work, the French language, rather than being a marker of sophistication, functions as the connection to the brutalities of slavery, the shared legacy of both colonial subjects and citizens.<sup>222</sup>

Therefore, whilst the citation from Chateaubriand’s poem may at first appear to be either a “marker of sophistication” or in a certain sense a privileging of a (white) European tradition and culture it is in fact doing something quite different. Chateaubriand profited economically from his father’s enterprises within the slave trade. He was also pro-royalist, a staunch Catholic, strongly behind the continuation of colonialization and slavery and was unsurprisingly highly critical of the Haitian Revolution.<sup>223</sup> In his literary imagination he draws from a shared cultural imaginary of colonial domination of 19<sup>th</sup> century France and the power relationships which are symbolically embedded in artistic production within movements such as exoticism.<sup>224</sup> Fauset’s

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<sup>221</sup> Cited above.

<sup>222</sup> Garcia, “Black Women Writers,” 38.

<sup>223</sup> See Christiane Taubira, *L’Esclavage raconté à ma fille* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2015).

<sup>224</sup> To make the point a stanza from Chateaubriand’s poem “*L’Esclave*” (The Slave Woman) can be cited: “Mon pays, que j’aimais jusqu’à l’idolâtrie, / N’est plus dans le soupir de ma simple chanson ; / Je ne regrette plus ma mère et ma patrie ; / Je crains qu’un prêtre saint n’apporte ma rançon. / Ne m’affranchis jamais ! laisse-moi mon entrave ! / Oui, sois ma liberté, mon Dieu, mon Univers ! / Viens, sous tes pieds nus, viens fouler ton esclave, / Toi que je sers, toi que je sers !” François-René de Chateaubriand, *Œuvres complètes, vol 3*, ed. Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (Paris: Paris Garnier frères, 1861): <http://archive.org/details/oeuvrecomplte03chatuoft>.

citation more than likely taken from “Le Montagnard Exilé”,<sup>225</sup> a poem written before and then cited by Chateaubriand himself in his novella *Les aventures du dernier abencérage*, published as a trilogy along with *Atala* and *René*.<sup>226</sup> All three are examples of the Troubadour romance literature where themes such as impossible love and the triumph of faith over carnal pleasures are common. *Les aventures* is set in Granada and imagines Aben-Hamet, the only survivor of the prestigious Muslim family the Abencerage after the Granada war of 1482-1491. Historically, this event ended all Islamic rule in the Spanish region of Andalusia which Chateaubriand uses to express the rightfulness and superiority of Catholicism. For example, he will have Aben-Hamet state,

après tout, se disoit-il, le Dieu des chrétiens est peut-être le Dieu véritable. Ce Dieu est toujours le Dieu des nobles âmes, puisqu’il est celui de Blanca, de don Carlos et de Lautrec.<sup>227</sup>

Blanca, the figure of impossible love and sister to don Carlos the Spanish conquistador, and don Carlos’ friend, Lautrec, the French chevalier and prisoner, are all, in their own ways, exemplary characters of the Christian faith. All act as figures of civilization against the supposed barbarity of the Moors in Chateaubriand’s orientalist story. And it is Lautrec, having lost his “*patrie*”, who sings the poem that Fauset cites. Longing for his love, for his France, the poem ends:

Oh ! qui me rendra mon Hélène,  
Et ma montagne, et le grand chêne ?  
Leur souvenir fait tous les jours  
Ma peine !  
Mon pays sera mes amours  
Toujours !”<sup>228</sup>

The line refers to his longing for the memory for his home country, “his mountains”, “his oak trees” and a certain “Hélène”, the female figure of the nation. In Fauset’s use of “*their memory makes me sorry everyday*”, whilst it could refer to this nostalgia for a homeland, it is arguable that she is deliberately mistranslating it. This is not in the strict sense of the translation of language but in context and meaning. In Fauset’s use, “their memory” takes on two different significations. It is, at once, the longing for “the principles” that she refers to in her text such

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<sup>225</sup> There are two possible locations where Fauset’s citation could have come from. The most likely, seeing as though Fauset puts in quotations marks “Exile”, leading the readers to believe it is a poem, is this reference to “Le Montagnard Exilé”.

<sup>226</sup> This self-citation is presented in the novella with a footnote at the end of the first line of the poem stating: “Cette romance est déjà connue du publique. J’en avais composé les paroles pour un air des montagnes d’Auvergne, remarquable pas sa douceur et sa simplicité.” Chateaubriand, “*Les aventures*,” 126.

<sup>227</sup> Chateaubriand, “*Les aventures*,” 125.

<sup>228</sup> Chateaubriand, “Le Montagnard Exilé,” 127.

as “Opportunity”, “Freedom of Sect” and “escape from Peonage”. In the history of the United States, black subjects have had little accessibility, if any at all, to such cultural values that America prides itself on. Therefore, “their memory” also refers further back to the shared experiences of all African descendants in the United States and, on a wider scale, all European colonial nations that constructed themselves through the enslavement and oppression of black people. What this means is that it makes the figure of Chateaubriand say, “their memory”, now referring to black subjects, “makes me sorry every day.” The very thought that Chateaubriand and more importantly all that he represents (colonial slavery, white patriarchy, the French Monarchy/ nation, capitalism) would express some sort of regret or *recognition* of the brutalities of colonial capitalism and exploitation, is, at this point, unthinkable, or impossible. But the text actualizes it. And it is through this textual performance that Fauset not only creates connections within the black diaspora, but she also links the actors of colonial domination and slavery, in this instance France and the United States, and in a sense England. The text performs the recognition of a black man or woman as a subject and citizen, privy to the same rights as outlined in the American Constitution. It is this “always beyond” that Fauset creates by these textual performances where black subjects can find a home in realities of oppression and discrimination. It is a fictional actualization of the eradication of social death of a black subject. Fauset’s article “Nostalgia” can therefore be read as an articulation of an aesthetic practice that is employed in her fictional work which will be addressed below. What she suggests is that the space of literature could be an “always beyond”, a somewhere else that intervenes in the social and cultural imaginary of a given place and comments on reality to explore and transform them both at the same time. Fauset works to transform traditional, cultural, and social imaginaries, as she searches to make oneself home with reality. She looks to create new aesthetic forms that make possible different ways of being in the world and the possibility of narrating these stories. And she does so by border crossings be they symbolic or material, intra or international. Like the “bridges” evoked by Davis in Bessie Smith’s work, that link places and time through the translation of experience of migration into aesthetic practices and in turn reconfigure cultural identities and imaginaries, Fauset is arguably doing something similar as she casts this mediation of experience and realization of “home” in the frame of migration. The first fictional text that will be addressed are those within Fauset’s fairy tale corpus and which the remainder of the chapter is dedicated to. In the short story “The Sleeper Wakes” and her novel *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, Fauset’s explores her African American women protagonists’ negotiation of limits in terms of migration, identity, and emancipation as she intertwines their journeying within the narrative arc of the fairy tale genre. Criss-crossing generic convention of

the Euro-American fairytale, Fauset creates a self-reflexive text that puts the borders of the fairy tale into question and the ideologies that have worked to construct its aesthetics.

## 2.2 Journeying Through the Fairy Tale to Create a Modern Black Aesthetics

### 2.2.1 Situating Fauset's Fairy Tales and *The Brownies' Book*

Contemporary literary critics of Fauset's work like Claire Oberon Garcia and Deborah McDowell, underline her engagement with the fairy tale genre and it is in her second novel *Plum Bun* that she works most explicitly within this frame. As the latter states, it is in this novel that Fauset exposes "the powerful role fairy tales play in conditioning women to idealize marriage and romantic love".<sup>229</sup> However, like these critics argue, if one takes into account her earlier short stories published in *The Crisis*, readers see how Fauset critically engages with this genre across her career, employing certain codes and narrative structures of the fairy tale in order to deconstruct notions of cultural, gender and racial identity, sexuality, and desire, from a black feminist perspective. Through the journeys of her characters, Fauset suggests that the tropes and cultural fantasies of Euro-American fairy tales – the destinies of their prince and princesses – are "inappropriate" at best, for the lived realities of her African American protagonists in the early twentieth century.<sup>230</sup> This is also true of her short stories "The Sleeper Wakes: A Novelette in Three Installments" (1920)<sup>231</sup> and "There Was One Time! A Story of Spring" (1917)<sup>232</sup>. In a discussion of the second, Oberon describes Fauset's techniques as "anti-fairy tale turns" within her work.<sup>233</sup> Another critical prism to approach Fauset's aesthetics within this genre is to perceive it as a re-imagining of the fairy tale rather than being in a relationship of dialectical opposition to it. As such, it brings to the fore the self-reflexive element in Fauset's aesthetic. Her texts comment

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<sup>229</sup> Deborah McDowell, "Introduction," in Jessie Redmon Fauset, *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, 1929 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), xvii.

<sup>230</sup> Garcia, "Black Women Writers," 39.

<sup>231</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes: A Novelette in Three Installments (I-II)," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 20, no. 4 (August 1920): 168-173; "The Sleeper Wakes: A Novelette in Three Installments (III)," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 20, no. 5 (September 1920): 226-229; "The Sleeper Wakes: A Novelette in Three Installments (IV)," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 20, no. 6 (October 1920): 267-274.

<sup>232</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, "There Was One Time! A Story of Spring," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 13, no. 6 (April-May 1917): 272-277. For an analysis of this short story and Fauset's "Emmy" published around the same time see: Masami Sugimori, "Black Subjects' 'Literal' Resistance in Jessie Redmon Fauset's 'Emmy' and 'There Was One Time,'" *Melus: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 43, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 124-147. Jessie Redmon Fauset, "Emmy," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 5, no. 2 (December 1912): 79-87.

<sup>233</sup> Garcia, "Black Women Writers," 38.

implicitly on their structure and form which highlights a literary self-consciousness within African American literary tradition. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes,

The black tradition has inscribed within it the very principles by which it can be read. Ours is an extraordinary self-reflexive tradition, a tradition exceptionally conscious of its history and the simultaneity of its canonical texts.<sup>234</sup>

The self-reflexive aspect of Fauset's fairy tales is a literary technique which echoes back and comments upon the social, historical, and political context in which a literary genre emerges. This interpretation poses problems for critics of Fauset in her contemporary period who placed her work in the "rear guard" of the Harlem Renaissance because of her "imitative" and "conventional" uses of literary genres for the benefit of white critical approval. To begin the demonstration of how Fauset plays with this genre it would be useful to understand what the Euro-American fairy tale proposes and how Fauset and her colleagues in *The Brownies' Book* worked to challenge this for their young African American audiences.

Within the Euro-American fairy tale tradition its aesthetic was a white one. Dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century French *conteuse*, these aristocratic women used the world of the fantastic to communicate (orally and then later in word) coded messages in a critique of the social and cultural norms of this period. Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy, has become perhaps the most well-known *conteuse*, and it was she who coined the terms "*conte de fées*".<sup>235</sup> Thus in the beginning, fairy tales were subversive texts recounted and read between adults. By the Victorian period, and the co-optation of these original fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm, the literary genre was no longer for adult audiences and was used as a platform to install the normative social, cultural, and moral values of Victorian society into young readers' minds.<sup>236</sup> In their collection of

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<sup>234</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxiv.

<sup>235</sup> The work of Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy and her contemporaries such as Mademoiselle L'Héritier, Madame Charlotte-Rose de la Force, and Comtesse Henriette-Julie de Muret are now being brought back into critical discourse, thanks in no small part to the work of feminist authors and literary critics who have retraced the genealogies of fairy tales. For example, the Australian author, Melissa Ashley, has recently published a fictionalized account of d'Aulnoy's life in *The Bee and the Orange Tree* (which is the title of one of d'Aulnoy's tales). Melissa Ashley, *The Bee and the Orange Tree* (London: Hachette, 2019). See also Jean Mainil, *Madame d'Aulnoy et le rire des fées* (Paris: Kimé, 2001); Anne Defrance, *Les contes de fées et les nouvelles de Madame d'Aulnoy, 1690-1698: l'imaginaire féminin à rebours de la tradition* (Genève: Droz, 1998); Nadine Jasmin, *Naissance du conte féminin: mots et merveilles: les contes de fées de Madame d'Aulnoy, 1690-1698* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002). Furthermore, the reception of the *conteuses* stories reached all levels of society and were popular well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century thanks to their publication in the chapbook, *Bibliothèque Bleue*. See: Melissa Ashley, "The First Fairy Tales were Feminist Critiques of Patriarchy: We Need to Revive Their Legacy," *The Guardian*, November 11, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/nov/11/the-first-fairytales-were-feminist-critiques-of-patriarchy-we-need-to-revive-their-legacy>.

<sup>236</sup> Jack Zipes, "The Changing Function of the Fairy Tale," *Lion and the Unicorn* 12, no. 2 (1988): 7-31.



‘volks’ tales, the Brothers Grimm’s dismissal of the *conteuse* and their fairy tales, as scholars have shown, was a part of their nationalistic and masculinist projects. This also meant that archetypal characters of the fairy tales had transformed, for instance, independent women heroines into the passive princesses, evil witches and wicked stepmothers readers know today. The Grimm’s tales naturalise the nationalist, gender, racial and heterosexual ideologies of their époque. The genre was no longer about changing social norms but of their very reproduction. As Jack Zipes highlights, it becomes “regularized within the public sphere [...] and plays a role in forming and maintaining the cultural heritage of that society [...] The genre itself became a kind of self-perpetuating institute involved in the socialisation and acculturation of its readers.”<sup>237</sup> Being an institution, the genre confers identity and becomes disciplinary. In the context of the United States, this means maintaining the power of the dominant group and the social and cultural norms of white patriarchal society. Therefore, the institutionalisation of the genre and the solidification of its aesthetic form was premised upon the necessary exclusion of blackness, or the objectification of black subjects if they were represented. African American children or adults are rarely represented in children’s fairy tales, and if they are, they are always represented within well-rehearsed racist stereotypes.<sup>238</sup> The socialisation and acculturation of its young readers, whether African American or white, reinforced the white supremacist and (hetero)patriarchal ideologies of this time. The characteristics of its protagonist, such as beauty, happiness, love, and courage belonged to the white world.<sup>239</sup> As an intervention into this racist imaginary, W.E.B Du Bois called for a children’s literature to create a corpus that explicitly addressed the lives, imaginations and lived realities of African American children. This was to become *The Brownies’ Book* (January 1920 - December 1921). In line with Du Bois’ affirmation that “art is propaganda”, with *The Brownies’ Book*, his aims were not only to counter act racist propaganda within children’s literature, and in print culture at large, but also to provide “positive” representations of blackness for African American children. As an effect, the didactic components of the magazine were to teach children that honour, courage, love, happiness, goodness, and beauty are not necessarily equivalent to whiteness. Fern Kory suggests that it is in fact Jessie Fauset who played a large part in this. Being both editor and literary editor of *The Brownies’ Book* she oversaw the choice of texts as well as running the day-to-day editorial tasks

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<sup>237</sup> Jack Zipes, “Introduction,” in *Spells of Enchantment: The Wondrous Fairy Tales of Western Culture*, ed. Jack Zipes (New York: Viking, 1991), xxvi.

<sup>238</sup> Fern Kory, “Once upon a Time in Aframerica: The ‘Peculiar’ Significance of Fairies in *The Brownies’ Book*,” *Children’s Literature* 29, no. 1 (2001): 100, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.0.0803>.

<sup>239</sup> For further discussion see Donnaræ MacCann, *White Supremacy in Children’s Literature: Characterizations of African Americans, 1830-1900* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

(despite Du Bois being named editor).<sup>240</sup> Described as a publication for “kiddies from Six to Sixteen” *The Brownies’ Book* searched “to teach Universal Love and Brotherhood for all little folk – black and brown and yellow and white” and was published monthly. At the time when Fauset was also editor of *The Crisis*, her role in *The Brownies’ Book*, as well as her contributions to it, resulted in a collection of texts that were broad and international in their perspective. Fauset’s poem “Adventures on Roller Skates” encouraged exploration and aspirations for international travel.<sup>241</sup> Whilst the young speaker is out on her skates, in her imagination she travels across the globe to Russia, to Switzerland, to Greenland and to Norway. In this way it opens the bounds of possibility and frames freedom and mobility in the experience of skating out on the street as also skating across the world. Furthermore, texts and poems by Yolande Du Bois, Bertie Lee Hall, Julian Elihu Bagley, Effie Lee Newsome, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Nella Larsen, and Langston Hughes sat alongside tales and folk songs from the African diaspora. Tales from non-anglophone worlds such as “The Story of Prince Jamala” translated from Spanish by Mary Cook, were amongst its pages filled with pictures of African American children in various daily activities, as stories were accompanied by drawings by Laura Wheeler Waring and Hilda Wilkinson, for example. Articles were dedicated to African American leaders like Sojourner Truth in “A Pioneer Suffragette”, whilst regular columns such as “The Little People of the Month”, Du Bois’ “As the Crow Flies” and Fauset’s unsigned “The Judge” spoke of black children’s lives, current events, and ethical and moral issues, respectively. It was thus a magazine that not only worked on a pedagogical level but also on the level of representation of blackness, concerned with the compilation of texts that spoke to a cultural heritage that is invisibilized in the white world of children’s literature. It created images – be they visual or literary – that accompanied black children’s imaginations and identity formations. As Jessie Fauset’s poem “Dedication” suggests:

To Children, who with eager look  
Scanned Vainly library shelf and nook,  
For History or Song or Story  
That told of Colored Peoples’ glory, –  
We dedicate The Brownies’ Book.<sup>242</sup>

In terms of fairy tales themselves, Fauset’s contributions touched very little either on the subject or on the aesthetic form of the genre. However, she translated a French tale written by Jean

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<sup>240</sup> Kory, “Once upon a Time in Aframerica,” 94.

<sup>241</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, “Adventures on Roller Skates,” *The Brownies’ Book* 1, no. 5 (May 1920).

<sup>242</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, “Dedication,” *The Brownies’ Book* 1, no. 1 (January 1920): 32.

Aicard “The Return of the Bells” which she will refer to in one of her pieces published in *The Crisis*, “Sunday Afternoon”.<sup>243</sup> This bridge or echo that is created between *The Brownies’ Book* and *The Crisis* was characteristic of her choices in her editorship, the content of her contributions, and the themes within her short fiction. In the 1912 “Children’s Number” of the *Crisis* as in her “Judge” column in *The Brownies’ Book* she will recommend, on both instance, canonical European fairy tales such as the Grimms’ and Anderson’s collections or Parker Fillmore’s *Czechoslovak Fairy Tales*.<sup>244</sup> Whilst in “Judge” Fauset does speak of tales written by “one of us”, notably, A.O Stafford’s *Animal Fables of the Dark Continent*, it seems that she champions European tales for children over those written “by colored writers, mostly for colored people.” Alternatively, it can be seen as in line with her international vision for her editorial and writing practices. Fauset’s editorial voice in *The Brownies’ Book*, as in *The Crisis*, journeys across multiple cultural and geographical borders collecting a wide range of texts from these spaces, including those from the dominant tradition. The fairy tales written for *The Brownies’ Book*, however, have a clear aim in challenging the aesthetics of the Euro-American tales. Representing black characters and their destinies otherwise within this tradition not only intervenes and challenges the aesthetic norms of the genre but also the social ideologies which it conveys. For instance, Yolande Du Bois’ “The Land Behind the Sun” plays with the chromatic symbolism in the traditional fairy tale, filling her fictionalised world with a rich and varied palette that destabilizes the strict white, black and red symbolic of the former.<sup>245</sup> The wicked witch of Du Bois’ story is aligned to whiteness whilst goodness power and beauty, for example, are tied to her “brown” protagonists.<sup>246</sup> And whilst this may seem like a mere inversion of the fairy tale tropes, the transformation of the symbolism, narrative strategies and characters, like for the other authors in *The Brownies’ Book*, in fact changes the form of the Euro-American fairy tale itself. This self-reflexive move within the text, broadens the horizon of possibilities for the young readers in their life’s pursuits because it opens paths, or other ways of being in the word, that previously were not represented in their imagination. It is what literary critique Serpa Salenius calls a “double radicality”. Changing the white female protagonist of these tales into the strong

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<sup>243</sup> Jean Aicard, “The Return of The Bells,” trans. Jessie Redmon Fauset, *The Brownies’ Book* 1, no. 4 (April 1920): 99–103; Jessie Redmon Fauset, “Sunday Afternoon,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 23, no. 4 (February 1922): 162–65.

<sup>244</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, “The Judge,” *The Brownies’ Book* 1, no. 7 (July 1920): 214; Jessie Redmon Fauset, “The Judge,” *The Brownies’ Book* 1, no. 6 (June 1920): 176; Jessie Redmon Fauset, “Some Books For Boys and Girls,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 4, no. 6 (October 1912): 295.

<sup>245</sup> Yolande Du Bois, “The Land Behind The Sun,” *The Brownies’ Book* 2, no. 12 (December, 1921): 232–35.

<sup>246</sup> Sirpa Salenius, “Doubly Radical: Girls in *The Brownies’ Book* Reshaping Gender Ideologies,” in *Neglected American Women Writers of The Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Verena Laschinger and Sirpa Salenius, Routledge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature (New York: Routledge, 2019), 128.

independent black female characters, the authors of the fairy tales undermine both the gender, racial and at times, class assumptions. As Salenius states,

Many of the stories offer feminist cultural codes that undermine traditional ideologies. The girls overturn convention as they revise the white heroine, transforming her into an independent, clever, courageous, and smart black girl. The stories, hence, address race, gender, and class difference; they examine division of power between black and white, men and women, the wealthy, and the poor.<sup>247</sup>

The ideologies in the Euro-American fairy tales which construct the female characters' passivity and submission are therefore doubly contested by these fairy tales as they aesthetically revise the tropes and narrative structures of this tradition. In Fauset's work there is a cross pollination between her time at *The Brownies' Book* and the texts of her colleagues published there within. Readers see in this magazine folk songs and dances from St. Helena (known for its creole Gullah language and culture) one of which, "Sissy in the Barn", is incorporated by Fauset in her novel *There is Confusion*. It is the example of black expression from within the diaspora that the main protagonist Joanna performs, leading her to fame and fortune in the New York theater scene. She will also reference characters from the fairy tales published in *The Brownies' Book*. The Carey family, and specifically the mother Olivia Carey, alludes to Grandma Cary, the main protagonist of "The Fairies' Flower Garden" written by Grace White.<sup>248</sup> But Fauset's dialogue with *The Brownies' Book* is most evident in what Salenius refers to as "double radicality". In "The Sleeper Wakes", Fauset engages with the archetypal characters of the Euro-American tradition to disturb, through the journey of her black female protagonist, aesthetic and social norms of the genre. Fauset deconstructs the illusory promise of following (white) norms of society and thus, from a black perspective, critiques the power relationships at play in the fairy tale and the patriarchal white supremacist society that it reflects.

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<sup>247</sup> Salenius, "Doubly Radical," 133.

<sup>248</sup> Grace White, "The Fairies' Flower Garden," *The Brownies' Book* 1, no. 5 (May 1920): 131–33.

## 2.2.2 “The Sleeper Wakes” and Amy’s Trajectory to “Happiness”

Fauset’s short story “The Sleeper Wakes” serialised in *The Crisis* in three instalments in 1920 was therefore published (and presumably written) during Fauset’s time as literary editor of *The Brownies’ Book*. The title, alluding to the fairy tale of *Sleeping Beauty* frames the story, whilst the narrative follows a Cinderellaesque tale of the heroine Amy’s pursuit of happiness. Fauset, on one level, works with the codes, characters, and narration of the Euro-American fairy tale at the same time as she interrogates the (white) fairy tale formulas available to young women. The story puts into question the ideological apparatuses that equate happiness and fulfilment of one’s life with (hetero)sexual coupling and marriage. There are, for example, the beneficent adoptive family, The Boldins, the Prince Charming, Stuart James Wynne who will take Amy, the Princess, to his castle to live happily ever after. On another level, “The Sleeper Wakes” constructs a fairy tale world which is not a fantastical one. The importance of what could be called Fauset’s realist fairy tale setting is that she uses the genre and its narrative arc to comment upon migration to urban centres and perhaps the illusory promise that these northern metropolises hold in terms of freedom and fulfilment of desires for her African American feminine characters.

The readers are introduced to Amy trying on clothes in front of a mirror in a dress salon: “The dress was an apricot color shading into a shell pink and the shell pink shaded off again into the pearl and pink whiteness of Amy’s skin”.<sup>249</sup> At this point, Amy is presented to the readership as white for the readers only learn later that Amy is African American. The racial ambiguity that is established at the beginning of this text works as a dramatic effect that will unravel the tropes of Euro-American fairy tale narrative. The mirror reflects Amy’s beauty, but it also reflects the desires of others. Amy glances two (presumably white) men passing by. As they comment on her beauty, she sees in the reflection “that look” in their eyes. “She had seen it before in men’s eyes” the narrator states, “it had been in the eyes of the men in the moving-picture which she had seen that afternoon. But she had not thought that *she* could cause it.”<sup>250</sup> Framing desire and (white) heterosexual attraction within performativity – both in the mirror play and reference to the motion picture – Amy learns of her ability to excite desire in others. This not only points to the performative aspects of gender identity and heterosexuality but brings to the fore the fantasy of the fairy tale. The movie that Amy refers to is also a

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<sup>249</sup> Fauset, “The Sleeper Wakes,” 168.

<sup>250</sup> Fauset, “The Sleeper Wakes,” 168. Emphasis in the original.

Cinderellaesque story of love and marriage. The mise en abyme of a fairy tale within a fairy tale structures the narrative, directs Amy's desire to a life "happily ever after" and places this fantasy into the real-life experiences that she will encounter.

Situating the fairy tale within the white world and circulation of such fantasies in popular culture, Amy's path will disturb social conventions, the gender and racial ideologies and heterosexual fulfilment within the fairy tale genre. Together with the technical aspects of Fauset's construction of the story, the aesthetics of the fairy tale genre will similarly be put into question and transformed. One technique used to do so is her play with modes of double significations that work to code and decode those of the fairy tale narrative. Similar to what Gates Jr. will refer to in *The Signifying Monkey*, this play of signification engages in rhetorical games, a strategy that he finds in African American literary tradition. His argument is that signification is not just the act of signifying, but the writer "signifies in *some way*".<sup>251</sup> In Fauset's "The Sleeper Wakes" Amy's character traits are a prime example. She is described as absent minded "always living in some sort of story", not dependable, frivolous, and superficial. These character traits are all socially placed on (white) feminine identity within a patriarchal society.<sup>252</sup> Coupled with her path in life "to live happily ever after" accomplished with her marriage to her Prince Charming, Stuart James Wynne, her character takes on the tropes of feminine identities and destinies of the fairy tale. And yet from the beginning, she is also portrayed as being independent and self-sufficient: it is her "fastidiousness that kept her safe" when she ran away to New York.<sup>253</sup> This is doubled in Fauset's mobilisation of the passing narrative and Amy's negotiation of racial identity across the color line. In contradistinction, the character traits of Stuart James Wynne are drawn from the typical Prince Charming. He is white, "immensely wealthy", "widely travelled", "very set and purposeful and polished" with "proud features".<sup>254</sup> Whilst Wynne is afforded some character flaws, he loves Amy because in his eyes, she is fragile, naïve and needs to be taken care of. And yet, this Prince Charming, is also signified as the white master and slave owner from the South.<sup>255</sup> The "*some way*" that Fauset engages then in this rhetorical play works to undermine what is symbolised in the fairy tale. It exposes the ideologies involved in creating figures like these Princesses and Prince Charmings. And it is by these "*ways*" that Fauset will transform the path of her heroine as her

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<sup>251</sup> Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*, 54.

<sup>252</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 168–69.

<sup>253</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 170.

<sup>254</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 172.

<sup>255</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 226–27.

destiny will be re-routed from the typical trajectory laid out for Princesses in the traditional fairy tale formulas. They could be called metaphorical glitches in the narrative that dialogue with the genre of the fairy tale and the social and cultural mores that they perpetuate. It could also be suggested that these are Fauset's ways of signalling to the readers that these paths are not the only ones to be taken. They are her aesthetic tools that re-route or re-orientate already well-worn roads to show directions to other roads and to other possibilities of being in the world.

#### 2.2.2.1 The Depart

Amy's family life and youth are framed as a crossing from the white to the black world. This is staged by the white care woman who takes her to the home of her adoptive black family the Boldins. This passage across racial lines is marked by Amy asking the "tall white woman", "Am I going to be colored now?" The woman speechless stammers, "You - yes you are going to be colored now".<sup>256</sup> Fauset's use of ellipsis in the woman's response speaks as loud as Amy's misunderstanding of the situation. It suggests that from the woman's perspective, Amy was always "colored" hence her being placed with an African American family. This interaction that "chokes" the white interlocutor's speech marks the point that both Amy and the readers see her racial identity. The stutter, or textual interruption, performed through the ellipses re-orientates the way the audience perceives Amy at the same time as it asks Amy to perceive herself in a different way. Framed as such, this will put her desires to live "happily ever after" into question, and signals to the readers that Amy's object of desire and the path she must take to get there is not, at the end of the day, a desirable one. Within the comfortable and loving familial setting that are the Boldins, this is echoed through the voice of Mr. Boldin. Describing the film that Amy saw that day Mr. Boldin replies "you'd better stop seeing pretty girl pictures, Amy... they are not always true to life."<sup>257</sup> And yet, in her bedroom, Amy, again in front of the mirror, (which echoes the opening scene and the performativity of gender and (hetero)sexual desire in a white space) plays with lights and scarfs to create a certain image of herself that she perceives as beautiful.

There, she said, I'm like the girl in the picture. She had nothing but her beautiful face- and she did so want to be happy... "I want to be happy, too." She intoned it earnestly, almost like an incantation. "I want wonderful clothes, and people around me. I want-everything! It will come, it will all come because I want it so."<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 168.

<sup>257</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 169.

<sup>258</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 170. Ellipsis in the original.

Beauty and fulfilment are more than suggestively linked to whiteness and fantasies of fairy tales. And it will instigate her sudden feelings of being “caged” and “imprisoned” in Trenton and the Boldin family home, from which she abruptly decides to run away. In her search for “happiness” Amy flees to New York. Her desires project the fantasy and freedom onto the cityscape that evokes the trope of urban migration evidence differently in both white and black modern aesthetics.

This departure as flight from “imprisonment” to the fulfilment of her desire to live happily ever after “orientates” Amy in a certain way. As the feminist post-colonial philosopher Sara Ahmed has shown in her book entitled *The Promise of Happiness*, and then returned to in her *Living a Feminist Life*:

happiness, is often assumed to be an end point: as what we want to reach, as the point in life, the aim of life. The path we should follow is the path that leads us to happiness.<sup>259</sup>

Building on her idea of “orientations” in terms of sexuality (that will be discussed below), the path “we should” follow becomes directive – and therefore normative – which means thinking of a futurity that imagines reaching certain landmarks along the way. For example, for women, marriage and reproduction are two points along the way that leads to the fulfilment of this happiness. Ahmed underlines that many narratives in popular cultures are, for women especially, based on these types of fairy tale formulas. If one chooses otherwise, or other paths, there can be feelings of frictions or “walls”: “you can come up against momentum when you are not going the right way”.<sup>260</sup> As it has started to be developed, Fauset’s “The Sleeper Wakes” fictionalises these normative paths as Amy negotiates the road “she should follow”. And it is at several moments in the narrative before its final denouement that Amy’s trajectory will “come up against momentum” that disentangles what happiness signifies and the path needed to achieve it.

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<sup>259</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 48; Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>260</sup> Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 49.



### 2.2.2.2 On Being Directed: The Journey into the Urban

Drawing on the tropes of urban migration, New York becomes the cosmopolitan setting for Amy's financial independence. After a few years of working as a clerk and waitress at a bakery "on the edge of Greenwich Village" she meets the New Woman figure, Zora Harrison. Within the social geography of New York at the start of the twentieth century, Greenwich Village was the space of artists and writers of the New York avantgarde. It was symbolically and socially coded and organised as a White Manhattan space as opposed to what James Weldon Johnson refers to as Black Manhattan, namely Harlem.<sup>261</sup> Though these inner-city limits were more permeable than this opposition suggests, Greenwich Village in the 1920's was synonymous with cultural movements working, creating, and living for a (white) modernist aesthetics that was throwing off the shackles of (white) Victorian puritanism. It is the home and symbolic space where gender identities and non-heteronormative sexualities are contested and transformed. Here in "the Village" of "bohemia" emerge ideas like the New Woman, incarnated by the literature and lives of artists who lived there such as Djuna Barnes, Edna Saint Vincent Millay, Marianne Moore, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, to name but a few. Echoing this setting in "The Sleeper Wakes", it is at this café on "the edge of Greenwich Village" that Amy will encounter Zora Harrison. And whilst it is through Zora that Amy will eventually meet her Prince Charming, the story (ambiguously) takes a certain detour before this eventual meeting.

Just before the encounter with Harrison, Amy's life is described as isolated, in a sense virginal, and with the promise of happiness to come:

Unbelievably then she lived two years in New York, unspoiled, untouched, going to her work on the edge of Greenwich Village early and coming back late, knowing almost no one and yet altogether happy in the *expectation* of something wonderful, which she knew one day must happen.<sup>262</sup>

It is the meeting with the artist Ms. Harrison, who lived on 12<sup>th</sup> Street in a "house inhabited only by artists", that ignites in Amy a desire to be with others. Before having "no yearning" to socialise, she is drawn to Zora and the world that she represents whilst Zora reciprocates this desire for Amy. The fulfilment of Amy's happiness is not Prince Charming, at this point, but

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<sup>261</sup> Johnson, *Black Manhattan*; Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996).

<sup>262</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 170. Emphasis my own

Zora and her world. In a way, Amy is redirected from the path to heterosexual fulfilment promised in the normative narrative of happiness. Sara Ahmed's concept of "orientation" is helpful here. She argues that sexual orientations are not simply given, rather she invites readers to think about them as the way one positions oneself in the world. This self-positioning and being positioned by the world around, brings one into contact with certain objects. What does or does not appear "in reach", what is perceived as in or out of place, who one encounters and how 'the other' is perceived, is determined, in part, by the way one is oriented.

To become straight means that we not only have to turn toward the object that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also, we must "turn away" from objects that take us off this line. The queer subject within straight culture hence deviates and is made socially present as deviant. [...the] argument [is] that what is "present" or near is not casual: we do not acquire our orientations just because we find things here or there. Rather certain objects are available to us because of lines that we have already taken: our "life courses" follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of following a direction or of "being directed" in a certain way.<sup>263</sup>

Amy is "magnetised" by Zora, "she could not keep her eyes from her face, from her wonderful clothes...Purple, dark and regal, developed in velvets and heavy silks and strange marine blues she wore, and thus made Amy absolutely happy."<sup>264</sup> Amy is "ushered" by her desire towards Zora and the life that she leads. In this subplot, she directs herself away from the strict heterosexual path towards Prince Charming as she turns towards Zora. As for Zora, "she took Amy on a footing with herself – the girl's refinement, her beauty, her interest in colors... all this gave Zora a figure about which to plan and build a romance".<sup>265</sup> Whilst their attraction towards each other seems purely aesthetic, this suggestive sentence is ambiguously left open. To plan and build a romance for whom and between whom? Furthermore, it is in their interaction alone that the narrator provides the most chromatically filled palette within the whole fairy tale, which as noted above, breaks with the general chromatic ranges of the fairy tale based on black, white, and red. This comes at the same time as the re-appearance of the mirror scene at the start of the short story. When Amy moves into Zora's apartment where they live alone, with "the maid Julienne" – a homosocial space then – this mirror scene of heterosexual desire is restaged and displaced. Zora is a portrait artist for whom Amy poses and it is at this point that the readers are given a different description of the latter's beauty. Mimicking but displacing the men's "eyes" in the initial scene, it is suggestively through Zora's "eyes" that we are given a long descriptive and rather sensual portrait of Amy:

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<sup>263</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 21.

<sup>264</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 171.

<sup>265</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 171.

Her looks at this time belied her – her perfect ivory-pink face, her deep luminous eyes – very brown they were with purple depths that made one think of pansies – her charming, rather wide mouth, her whole face set in a frame of very soft, very live brown hair which grew in wisps and tendrils and curls and waves back from her smooth, young forehead. All this made one look for softness and ingenuousness. The ingenuousness was there, but not the softness- except for her fresh vibrant loveliness.<sup>266</sup>

It is true that the expression of homosexual desire is on the level of inference. For example, at no point is love or sex an explicit question in the relationship between Zora and Amy. However, to ignore it would be to de-complexify what is happening in the story in terms of desire and fulfilment. First of all, as it has been shown, Zora is the New Woman figure which alludes to the artistic scene of Greenwich Village and the homosexual identities that were being explored. As it was highlighted in the first chapter, this is not to say every New Woman, in Paris or New York, was a lesbian. The term, ‘lesbian’ itself is a denomination too strict for the non-heterosexualities being lived, explored, and portrayed at this time by women. For instance, Tirza True Latimer in her study of “lesbian” artists living in Paris between the two World Wars writes:

I choose to use *lesbian* throughout this book as a sort of free-floating signifier. In doing so, I do not mean to imply a singular, historically or culturally transcendent erotic or affective orientation but the various alternatives to normative (patriarchal) relational and social models imagined by women together and apart in Paris between the wars. Some women I investigate here would not have described themselves as lesbians or would have described themselves as such under certain circumstances and not others, or at given moments in their lives and not others. I use the word loosely, therefore, but not without deliberation, as a rhetorical device capable of evoking the subject of female homoerotic desire, the broader if more precarious notion of cultural identity, and the implicit theme of female autonomy.<sup>267</sup>

As Fauset frames and displaces the heterosexual exchange of desire within the mirror to the portrait of Amy by Zora, it is arguable that she is referring to aesthetic practices of homoerotic or affective orientations between women. This effected how women and their bodies were portrayed by breaking the confines of their objectification within the male and heterosexual gaze. On the whole, Amy’s first desire is for Zora which puts into question heterosexual orientations in the fairy tale narrative where homosexuality is impossible. At the same time, in this scene of the portrait, framed as it is in the repetition of the initial mirror-scene, it paints the

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<sup>266</sup> Fauset, “The Sleeper Wakes,” 172.

<sup>267</sup> Tirza True Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 3.

performance in white. This is because Zora's desires and perceptions are marked by her impossibility to see Amy as African American. She sees only her "perfect ivory-pink skin". At this point, what could be argued, is that as a result, Fauset frames homosexuality in a white world and or a steppingstone towards heterosexual fulfilment, with Amy's eventual marriage to Prince Charming. Another possible interpretation is that because the story does not provide the heterosexual fulfilment that the fantasy of the fairy tale promises, what arises in the relationship between Zora and Amy questions the possibility of equal, affective (or erotic) relationships across racial and class lines. Zora and Amy are "on equal footing" in terms of gender, however Amy is in service to Zora – she makes clothes and poses for Zora in lieu of rent – and Zora's hatred towards "local color" denies and renders invisible Amy's racial identity. It appears that these inequalities are the reasons why their relationship is impossible. Furthermore, it is after her relationship to Zora that Amy will start to put into question the fantasy of the fairy tale and its "happily ever after". Amy's awareness of the racial and economic inequalities between her and Zora are echoed in her courtship, marriage, and eventual separation with Stuart James Wynne. The narrator describes Amy's uncertainty of Wynne's courtship, that repeats and performs all the fairy tale codes of heterosexual pursuit, ending in a marriage proposal.<sup>268</sup> Though she will "resolve" to marry him, as it seemed to her that "somehow she was driving a bargain", marriage as a promise of happiness is already destabilized. Convincing herself to marry Wynne, Amy states "and after all... it really is my dream coming true."<sup>269</sup> Structuring the tale as such, the subplot of Zora and Amy's relationship is not recuperated or restored to the norms of heterosexual fulfilment. Rather the impossibility of their relationship because of class and racial inequality prefigures and reiterates itself in Amy's marriage to Prince Charming. Both heterosexual or homosexual coupling in the story is premised on economic exchange and the perception of Amy as white thus suggesting that any type of sexual expressions, desires, orientations, and affections are inflected by class and race. For Amy, when the wedding day does arrive – the happiest day of her life – the narrator describes the scene as solemn. Now on the road she "should" be on, Amy "stumbled somehow through the service, struck by its solemnity."<sup>270</sup> To stumble on the "right" path then is, ironically, to come up against momentum even if one *is* going the right way. This, as referred to previously, is another literary and metaphoric glitch that Fauset mobilizes in her aesthetics as signs to the

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<sup>268</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 173.

<sup>269</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 172.

<sup>270</sup> Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes," 173.

readers that the “right way” is not perhaps what it promises, re-orientating their perceptions of the events unfolding.

### 2.2.2.3 *Prise de Conscience*: Reorientation

The readers accompany Amy in her understanding that the desire for a “happily ever after” is thwarted as little by little the narrator and Amy uncover the power relationship at play on the level of race, gender, class, and sexuality within these fantasies. As a result, the message conveyed by Fauset in this story, is not only the exposure of such ideological apparatuses within the normalized narrative of the genre but is also that love and “happiness” across racial, class and gender lines is impossible if an inequality of power persists and is enforced. Amy’s flight to New York provided the environment for such a *prise de conscience*. She did not find an unfettered freedom because of her relationships with Zora and Stuart, and thus the urban landscape signifies in this short story the site of inequality and discrimination. As the story continues Amy and Stuart’s migration to his mansion in the South frames this Prince Charming as the figure of the slave owner. Interestingly, it is in the South where Amy’s agency is “awakened” for in an act of racial solidarity, she both defends one of her husbands’ servants and reveals her own racial identity. With Amy’s blackness now represented within the form of the fairy tale, the Euro-American generic norms collapse upon themselves and the promised happily ever after as well. For Prince Charming, poor black women can only be mistresses, which underscores the sexual, economic, and racial exploitation of fairy tales and their masculine heroes. This also fundamentally contradicts his portrayal as the epitome of an honorable, courageous, and upstanding man. Following this implosion of the codes and conventions of Euro-American fairy tale, Fauset re-directs the path to happiness through Amy’s subsequent emotional and economic independence (through hard work she pays off her debt to Wynne) and her desire to return to the Boldin family home. Amy’s emancipation from Wynne is her emancipation from racial, sexual, and economic discrimination that the fairy tale narrative paved and perhaps even her emancipation from the Euro-American fairy tale form itself.

By the end of “The Sleeper Wakes” the happy ending is re-imagined and paints a picture that would be inconceivable within the expectations of this kind of fairy tale. Amy is a strong independent “adventurous” African American woman whose happiness lies, it is suggested, in the pursuit of these adventures. She projects her desires to be a “citizen of the world”, and live life within African American communities: “the only ones who have really cared for and

wanted me”.<sup>271</sup> Amy’s reference to citizenship but one of “the world” alludes to what is in the background in the failed marriage to the white Prince Charming. Like the African American interviewee in “Nostalgia” laments on the impossibility of finding a home in the United States as an equal citizen, the recognition of Amy’s (white) citizenship would have taken place in her marriage to Wynn. Granted, at this time white women did not benefit from the status of full citizenship like their masculine counterparts. But what “The Sleeper Wakes” dramatizes is the impossibility of this for Amy. At the moment of her identification as African American, which breaks down the marriage, it also precludes her forever from the symbolic realm of citizen within the American space and the Euro-America fairy tale genre that is structured by it. This is not resolved in “The Sleeper Wakes” but the fulfilment of Amy’s expressed desire to be “a citizen” is neither imaged in a (vicarious) relationship to a male figure or within the United States of America. In Fauset’s *Plum Bun*, another example of her fairy tales, the notion of citizenship is foregrounded and therefore this discussion will be returned to at this time. What Fauset’s aesthetics propose with Amy is a re-orientation of journeys towards fulfilment through the revelation of the articulations of power based on gender, race, class, and sexuality that structure the narrative of the traditional fairy tales. As such, the paths laid out make room for other ways of being and doing in the world that do provide the freedom and happiness that Amy sought in the first place. It is, in this sense, an emancipatory aesthetic which works both on the level of representation – countering for example the negative and racist stereotypes circulating in popular culture – whilst also reworking, through the creation of the literary object, the institutional and social codes of the genre and the ideologies from which their aesthetics emerge. Fauset’s “The Sleeper Wakes” in part accomplishes this through the author’s attention to migratory trajectories informed by the context of the African American mobilities and white supremacist attempt to control this, whether aesthetically, symbolically, or materially. In this short story, Amy’s idealization of the urban center was put into question through her lived experience. She was awakened both to new desires but also to the discriminations within her social interactions and fairy tale promises. In her realist fairy tale, Fauset plays with the fictional space and generic conventions by engaging with the cultural climate of the time. One effect is the creation of an aesthetics that intervenes in the “real” at the same time as it forges a space for the experimentation or exploration of contemporary aesthetic issues being debated within the Harlem Renaissance. In *Plum Bun* the clear example is whether, in fact, aesthetics can be emancipatory, and if so, to what extent, and from whose perspective? As the first part

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<sup>271</sup> Fauset, “The Sleeper Wakes,” 173.

of the chapter has outlined, in the Harlem Renaissance this is intertwined with migration to urban centers and the figure of the New Negro. What was not drawn out explicitly was the gendered aspect of the conceptualization of this “New” figure. As a way in, then, to Fauset’s fictional representations and dialogues with these debates within black modern aesthetics, a contextual introduction of the trope of the New Negro and that of its co-figure the New Negro Woman will be given.

### 2.3 *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* and Fauset’s Modernist Explorations

#### 2.3.1 “On Being Young – A Woman – and Colored”<sup>272</sup>

Locke’s formulation of the New Negro, as discussed above, distinguished itself in two important ways. The first is in the migration to urban centers one moves from the traditional to the modern, from a space of racial oppression to an (imagined) space of black emancipation. This is echoed by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett in their introduction to the anthology *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation and African American Culture 1892-1938*. The New Negro figure was transfigured in oppositional response to the “Old Negro” in “Sambo art”, that was geographically tied to the southern regions of the United States, much like the Minstrel shows that Fauset addressed in “The Gift of Laughter”.<sup>273</sup>

The fiction of an American Negro who is “now” somehow “new” or different from an “Old Negro” was sought to counter the image in the popular American imagination of the black as devoid of all characteristics that supposedly separated the lower forms of human life from the higher forms.<sup>274</sup>

Because the “new” aspect of black modern aesthetics is combined with the movement to urban centers it means that in this crossing it requires a break with the past, whether in terms of

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<sup>272</sup> Marita O. Bonner, “On Being Young – A Woman – and Colored,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 31, no. 2 (December 1925): 63-65. Cited from the version Marita O. Bonner, “On Being Young – A Woman – and Colored,” in *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*, eds. Maureen Honey and Venetria K. Patton (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 109-113.

<sup>273</sup> Sambo art refers to the racist stereotypes in circulation in American culture, like the African American men portrayed in the Minstrel shows as always happy, irresponsible, lazy, and carefree. Gates Jr. and Jarrett write: “Whereas the image of a “New Negro” has served various generations of black intellectuals as a sign of plenitude, regeneration, or a truly reconstructed *presence*, the image of the black in what could be thought of as “Sambo Art” has served various generations of racists as a sign of lack; degeneration, or a truly negated *absence*.” Italics in the original. Gates Jr. and Jarrett, *The New Negro*, 3.

<sup>274</sup> Gates Jr. and Jarrett, *The New Negro*, 3.

temporality (traditional, modern), representation (Old Negro or New Negro), or legacies of slavery, cultural heritage, and familial or generational ties. Thus, whilst the New Negro was one response to emancipate blackness from the racist American imaginary it simultaneously came with the covering over of parts of black cultural identity, such as genealogies of resistance. Gates Jr. and Jarrett refer to this as the paradox of the New Negro figure for, in order to come into representational being, the masculine figure needed a kind of “self-willed beginning”.

“success” depended fundamentally upon self-negation, a turning away from the ‘Old Negro’ and the labyrinthine memory of black enslavement and toward the register of a “New Negro”, an irresistible, spontaneously generated black and sufficient self.<sup>275</sup>

What Gates Jr. and Jarrett don’t underline is that the “New Negro” also requires a severance to matrilineal ties for this masculine figure to appear spontaneously as “self-sufficient” and there in his “new” urban self. Whilst this formulation of the “New Negro” also leaves behind the father figure the “Old Negro” in the northward journey, from a black woman artist’s perspective, the erasure of mothers or in general women, has specific consequences in the creation of a black emancipatory aesthetics. This is evidenced in the appellation of women artist, like Fauset, as “midwives” to the New Negro movement. It infers they are outside of the material and symbolic spaces of emancipatory aesthetics and politics, never creators of it, for they are the women who birth the sons that go on to be the New Negroes. In general, sexism within struggles for black emancipation has long preceded the New Negro and his modernism. This challenges the “new” quality of this figure for the inferred or explicit sexism at work is not particularly novel. Thus, it is from the contestation of the sexism and (normalized) masculine voices within the Harlem Renaissance that women practitioners worked to define their own aesthetics and New Negro Woman figures.

As it has already been outlined, Bettie Smith’s blues or Fauset’s “The Sleeper Wakes”, “The Gift of Laughter”, and “Nostalgia” challenge the narrative of the New Negro in so far as they disturb the possibility of breaking with the past by putting into question ideas of linearity and progress (in

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<sup>275</sup> Gates Jr. and Jarrett, *The New Negro*, 4. Full citation: “The “New Negro”, of course, was only a metaphor, a trope. The paradox of this claim was inherent in the trope itself, combining as it did a concern with time, antecedents, and heritage, on the one hand, with that for a cleared space, the public face of the race, on the other. The figure, moreover, combined implicitly both eighteenth-century vision of utopia with a nineteenth century idea of progress to form a black fin-de siècle dream of unbroken, unhabituated, neological self – signified by the upper case “Negro” and the belated adjective “New”. A paradox of this sort of self-willed beginning was that its “success” depended fundamentally upon self-negation, a turning away from the “Old Negro” and the labyrinthine memory of black enslavement and toward the register of a “New Negro”, an irresistible, spontaneously generated black sufficient self.”



terms of home and migration) as well as demonstrating the experience of continual oppression and (economic and racial) discrimination in the urban centers. By the mid 1920's, there was no shortage of critical feminist discourse that underlined the sexism within struggles for black emancipation or black modern aesthetics. One example is the essayist and playwright Marita O. Bonner's 1925 article "On Being Young – a Woman – and Colored" published in *The Crisis*. Another is Ruth Whitehead Whaley's "Closed Doors: A Study in Segregation" printed in *The Messenger* in July 1923.<sup>276</sup> Both a lawyer and activist, Whaley will become the third African American woman to practice law in New York in 1925 and the first in North Carolina in 1933. In their articles, both Whaley and Bonner draw explicitly on ideas of migration in order to argue the specificities of being a black woman in the United States. Equally and in interconnected ways, the authors' arguments depend on the mobilization of gendered identity "woman" before racial identity as a "Negro".<sup>277</sup> This is a political strategy that has been passed down from generations of black women fighting for racial and gender equality. In bell hooks' study entitled *Ain't I a Woman*, a citation from Sojourner Truth's famous allocution, the author reminds her readers that black women activist at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth, Mary Church Terrell, Amanda Berry Smith and others,

participated in both the struggle for racial equality and the women's rights movement. When the question was raised as to whether or not black female participation in the women's rights movement was a detriment to the struggle for racial equality, they argued that any improvement in the social status of black women would benefit all black people.<sup>278</sup>

hooks argues that these women did not place the hope for freedom from racial oppression as all that is necessary for "us [black women] to be free", something that she juxtaposes with the "us" of her contemporaries (or at least at the time of this book's first publication in 1981).<sup>279</sup> Therefore, what hooks highlights in the work and lives of these black women is that because they believed that "true freedom" came in the liberation from both gender and racial oppression;

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<sup>276</sup> Ruth Whitehead Whaley, "Closed Doors: A Study in Segregation," *New Negro Woman's Number*, special issue of *The Messenger* 5, no. 7 (1923): 771-772. This thesis cites from the version Ruth Whitehead Whaley, "Closed Doors: A Study in Segregation," in *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*, eds. Maureen Honey and Venetria K. Patton (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 17-21.

<sup>277</sup> The title of Bonner's article reflects such a logic.

<sup>278</sup> bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 14–15.

<sup>279</sup> hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 14. Speaking in a collective "us" for herself and her contemporaries, hooks writes, "our silence was not merely a reaction against white women liberationists or a gesture of solidarity with black male patriarchs. It was the silence of the oppressed – that profound silence engendered by resignation and acceptance of one's lot. [...] Racist, sexist socialisation had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and to regard race as the only relevant label of identification." hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 14.

they emphasized the “female” aspect of their being which caused their lot to be different from that of the black male, a fact that was made evident when white men supported giving black men the vote while leaving all women disenfranchised. Horace Greeley and Wendell Phillips called it “the Negro’s hour” but in actuality what was spoken of as black suffrage was black male suffrage.<sup>280</sup>

We see this echoed in both Bonner’s and Whaley’s articles. In Bonner’s link between northern migration, urbanity, and her identity as a woman, she points to the unequal accessibility to the material and symbolic “modern” urban environments of the New Negro that have been defined as such.

You hear that up at New York this is to be seen; that, to be heard.  
You decide the next train will take you there.  
You decide the next second that the train will not take you, nor the next – nor the next for some time to come.  
For you know that – being a woman – you cannot twice a month or twice a year, for that matter, break away to see or hear anything in the city that is supposed to see and hear too much.  
That’s being a woman. A woman of any color.<sup>281</sup>

Bonner underlines the articulation between unequal mobilities and gender discrimination. The inference is that she cannot break with the past and arrive at the modern for she is materially and socially constrained to geographies of “tradition”. Speaking throughout the article from her position as a black woman, she mobilizes gender identity, to demonstrate the effects of sexist oppression in relation to men, “of any color” who can “break away” and take a train “up to New York.” However, like Truth or Cooper for example, Bonner is clear on the complex ideological constructions of gender differentiation across the color line within the sexist and racial structures of the “warped” and “stunted” American mind. In her article she links the stereotypical performance of white femininity with a critique of how “they” (white men) see black women:

Why, unless you talk in staccato squawks – brittle as sea-shells – unless you “champ” gum, unless you cover two yards square when you laugh, unless you taste runs violent colors – impossible perfumes and more impossible clothes – are you a feminine Caliban craving to pass as Ariel?  
An empty imitation on an empty invitation. A mime; a sham; a copy-cat. A hollow re-echo. A froth, a foam. A fleck of the ashes of superficiality?”<sup>282</sup>

Similarly, she indicates the sexualization of black women on the part of white men:

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<sup>280</sup> hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman*, 15.

<sup>281</sup> Bonner, “On Being Young,” 110.

<sup>282</sup> Bonner, “On Being Young,” 111.

Why do they see a colored woman only as a gross collection of desires, all uncontrolled, reaching out for their Apollos and Quasimodos with avid indiscrimination?<sup>283</sup>

Therefore, the rhetorical strategy of the mobilization of the category “woman” is not to place all women into one same experience nor decomplexify the constructions of gender and racial identity. Rather it highlights a sexism equally present within the struggle for freedom from racial oppression. If, as in this case, a black woman cannot take a train to New York and participate in the “new” urban environment that is linked to black emancipation then how could this really achieve freedom for everyone? Just as “the Negro’s hour” was, in the end, only the hour of black male suffrage. This is exactly what Whaley will take up in her article “Closed Doors: A Study of Segregation.” As the title suggest, Whaley engages in a critical exploration of twentieth century segregation. Whilst her analysis of the material, psychological and experiential effects of segregation on both sides of the color line is extremely interesting,<sup>284</sup> what is pertinent to this discussion is the way she describes the “double doors” experienced by black women. Whaley mobilizes the “closed door” metaphor to describe the material and subjective experiences of “restriction”, “constraint” and complete inaccessibility to move within and across metaphorical, juridical, economic, social, and imaginative spheres. When she states, “if there is any one person against whom the doors have been closed it is the New Negro Woman” the full import of her argument expresses its weight. Alluding to the New Negro (being the only time that she refers to the figure of the New Negro) she critiques the separation and discrimination that is taking place within the Harlem Renaissance movement and the politics of racial uplift. Access to spaces as a New Negro Woman, be they in terms of coming to the large urban areas, or in terms of intellectual or creative engagements within the cultural movement, are restricted at best, and at worst completely shut. She writes:

In the Negro world there is one figure who is the victim of a two-fold segregation and discrimination – The New Negro Woman. Woman’s emancipation is strangely parallel with the Negro’s struggle. Inferiority is the reason given for her oppression. She has been considered as mere chattel, cowed and subdued, taught that she, like children, must be seen and not heard. Petted as an ornament of the home, a plaything

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<sup>283</sup> Bonner, “On Being Young,” 111.

<sup>284</sup> For example, Whaley connects material realities of segregation and “the atmosphere” or perception that this creates from both white and black perspectives: “The dividing line is so visible until, being constantly seen, it nurtures a particular train of thought, a distinct psychological reaction. Segregation is the chief exponent of “divine right of race.” The tendency is for the dominant group to excuse and justify the segregation with false and illogical reasoning. They finally believe it. The segregated groups become over-race-conscious, hates bitterly and loses the value of inter-relation. The justification offered for segregation is the inferiority of the Negro. The blight of segregation is the belief in his inferiority it engenders in both groups. It colors the treatment which the dominant group gives the segregated. It has an unwholesome effect upon the oppressed.” Whaley, “Closed Doors,” 18.

for the male, producer of a line of warriors and race builders. Lacking all chance for development, she is called inferior because she hasn't developed. The Negro woman falls heir to all these prejudices, and to add injury to distress she is a Negro. If there is any one person against whom the doors have been closed it is the New Negro Woman. As a woman she was outside her sphere. As a Negro woman she was impossible.<sup>285</sup>

As she points to the material conditions of women's "inferiority", Whaley addresses sexism both within the white and black worlds. She has been mere "chattel", a reference to slavery but also "producers of a line of warriors and race builders", a reference to the politics of the Harlem Renaissance. This infers, that with the New Negro figure, the separation with the past and the negation of "labyrinthine memory of black enslavement" as Gates Jr. and Jarrett write, it figures black women as the permanent embodiment of the history of "chattel" slavery. As such it simultaneously erases the New Negro's connection to this legacy and the extreme sexual violence against black women within the plantations. With the sentence "woman's emancipation is strangely parallel with the Negro's struggle" Whaley critiques that racial and gender identity are "strangely" thought as disconnected from each other within. A black woman as a subject cannot be thought as equal to black men, nor as actors and creators of modern black aesthetics for it appears it would undermine the figure of the New Negro himself. Without a black woman to figuratively "break" from, the "New Negro" cannot come into his "irresistible, spontaneously generated black and sufficient self." As such the New Negro Woman is "impossible". This is echoed later by African American literary theorist Gloria T. Hull in *Color, Sex & Poetry*. She argues that social factors, such as men's attitudes towards women and their construction of a male centered aesthetic norms and expectations, meant that though women participated fully in the Harlem Renaissance, they were often marginalized or excluded.<sup>286</sup> And whilst there were multiple points of view on the representation of the New Negro Woman and the creation of a modern aesthetics from a feminine perspective, one commonality, as demonstrated above, is the critical articulation of black feminine identity, mobility and modern experience. In respect to Jessie Fauset's and Nella Larsen's oeuvre, Hazel V. Carby argues that both locate black female subjectivity in the cosmopolitan urban environments as their women protagonists negotiate the specific socio-economic relationships of a white supremacist, capitalist, and patriarchal society.<sup>287</sup> Through movement across people, places and spaces, be they transnational, intranational, regional or urban,

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<sup>285</sup> Whaley, "Closed Doors," 19.

<sup>286</sup> Implicit in this exclusion are notions of perception and judgment which will be taken up below. See, Gloria T. Hull, *Color, Sex & Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>287</sup> Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 170.

both portray the specificities of coming into or living out black feminine identities. Though Fauset's and Larsen's aesthetics vary, in their own ways they explore tensions of black women's lived experiences – between family, independence, responsibility, expectation, autonomy, economic opportunity, citizenship and a recurrent theme for both, the economic-sexual relationship of marriage – and their identities inflected by race, gender, class and sexuality. Neither frame migration (transnational, South-North, or North-North migration) to a self-willed severing with the past toward a utopia free of discrimination and oppression or where desires and destinies are fulfilled and achieved. Fauset's *Plum Bun* is no exception to which the discussion will now turn.

### 2.3.2 Setting the Scene of Angela Murray's Fairy Tale Adventure

*Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* is the second novel of Jessie Fauset published in 1929 preceded by her debut novel, *There Is Confusion*, published in 1924. Biographically speaking, the time frame that expands these two publications was a time of many changes for Fauset. Between the launch of *There is Confusion* and the publishing of *Plum Bun*, Fauset resigned from editorship of *The Crisis* and travelled to France. Chapter One addressed much of her work produced during this period and *Plum Bun* was in part written during this sojourn. It was also at this time that the critical debates on representation, the New Negro and the New Negro Woman took place, as shown above. This, plus the internal logic and aesthetics of the novel, gives cause to believe that *Plum Bun* is, amongst other things, Fauset's commentary on such discussions as well as the accumulation of her aesthetic reflections and achievement to this point. The proposition is that the novel can be read as an allegory to the scenes of the Harlem Renaissance, its figures of the New Negro and the New Negro Woman as well as scenes of white modernisms and its "New" figures. Through the trajectory of the main protagonist Angela Murray and her path to become an artist, Fauset stages her journey in a negotiation of both worlds and as such critically explores questions like who can be active participants in these modernist milieus, and what aesthetics are being formulated. In the United States is there enough room – symbolically and materially – for aesthetic practices to be liberational for a black woman artist? It is from this prism of interpretation that *Plum Bun* will be analyzed which is inextricably linked to the narrative of migration presented within the novel and the passing plot. As Deborah McDowell and Cherene Sherrard-Johnson have underlined, Fauset challenges the conventions of the passing plot within this "richly textured and ingeniously designed narrative, comprised of plots within plots and texts within texts that refer to and comment upon

one another in intricate and multiple ways.”<sup>288</sup> The self-reflexivity of Fauset’s novel highlighted by McDowell is thus in line with the interpretation being proposed. It also joins Sherrard-Johnson’s investigation of *Plum Bun* as a novel “that foregrounds the obstacles faced by the modern black female artist in the Harlem Renaissance in a passing narrative that explores ever-shifting categories of race, culture and identity.”<sup>289</sup> Because Angela’s journey is to New York and contemporaneous with her decision to racially pass, this allows the narrative to investigate both sides of the color line concerning modernisms, the social and aesthetics codes produced within these two milieus, and the “pitfalls” that Angela finds in each.<sup>290</sup>

Fauset structures *Plum Bun* through a third person narrator who slips and slides between omniscient and limited perspectives. The narrative arc follows the main protagonist, Angela Murray’s journey through life, as she ventures from Philadelphia to New York seeking the fulfilment of her desires. Through the course of the novel, Angela’s path is articulated through the interconnected plot lines of racial passing, becoming an artist, migration, the fairy tale and marriage, which work together to comment upon or expose the obstacles on her way to seek what she desires. The novel itself is framed by its epigraph, the nursery rhyme “To Market, To Market”, giving *Plum Bun* its title and its five-part structure: “Home”, “Market”, “Plum Bun”, “Home Again” and “Market is Done”. The readers meet Angela Murray and her family – her father Junius, her mother Mattie, and younger sister Virginia – through a description of Opal Street in Philadelphia. With an opening befitting to a fairy tale, the readers see:

Opal Street, as streets go, is no jewel of the first water [...] It has no mystery, no allure, either the exclusiveness or of downright depravity; its usages are plainly significant, – an unpretentious little street lined with unpretentious little houses, inhabited for the most part by unpretentious little people [...] In one of the houses dwelt a father and a mother and two daughters.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Deborah E. McDowell, “*The Changing Same*”: *Black Women’s Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 65.

<sup>289</sup> Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman: Visual and Literary Culture in the Harlem Renaissance* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 50.

<sup>290</sup> For example Sherrard-Johnson writes; “Fauset negotiates a space for the African American female artist, that does not eschew the important aspects of the nineteenth-century African American women’s literary tradition but that is also completely engaged in negotiating the competing modernisms of the 1920’s and 1930’s. [...] Her direct references to Fourteenth Street display with modernism, yet her investment in the passing narrative and the New Negro ideology place her work squarely within the purview of the Harlem Renaissance. *Plum Bun*’s nuanced exploration of class boundaries, gender roles, and female sexuality in two distinct locales – the bohemian culture of Greenwich Village and the Harlem of the New Negro – distinguishes it from contemporaneous passing narratives such as Walter White’s *Flight*.” Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman*, 50-52.

<sup>291</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 11.

Interweaving this fairy tale genre and its normative journey towards marriage that Angela will negotiate, Fauset introduces from the beginning of the novel the plot of racial passing. “Angela had no purpose in life [...] True she thought she might become eventually a distinguished painter”<sup>292</sup> but for her, the central driving force was the idea of “Freedom!” The narrator continues:

That was the note which Angela heard oftenest in the melody of living which was to be hers. With the wildness that fell just short of unreasonableness she hated restraint [...] Color or rather lack of it seemed to the child the one absolute prerequisite to the life of which she was always dreaming [...] the mere possession of black or white skin, that was clearly one of those fortuitous endowments of the gods. Gratitude was no strong ingredient in this girl’s nature, yet very often early on she began thanking Fate for the chance which in that household of four had bestowed upon her the heritage of her mother’s fair skin.<sup>293</sup>

Freedom, understood by Angela as equivalent to whiteness, is confirmed in her experiences of racism and exclusion in the first part of the novel. Passing itself was a practice that she “learnt” from her mother, who passed on occasion. However, for Mattie, passing is not a means to an end as it becomes for Angela. The readers are informed that her mother simply did not correct those who perceived her as white. In this way, notions of heritage, gender and racial identity are framed within a feminine genealogy. Whilst her father Julius is portrayed as a kind, loving father and husband, the main relationships that will orient Angela’s path and form her subjectivity are those she has with other women, the two exceptions being Prince Charming, Roger Fielding, and the New Negro figure, Anthony Cross. It is Angela’s mother, for instance, who will be the voice that echoes the fairy tale plot, but with an important racial inflection.

Finishing the stories that she read to her children, Mattie would say, “and they lived happily ever after just like your father and me” whilst adding what she saw as an assured path beyond the exploitative past she herself suffered as a lady’s maid. For her daughters, they will have a good education, become financially independent as teachers and only then “if they got it in them to travel over all the rocks that’ll be in their way as colored girls, they’ll manage.”<sup>294</sup> And yet, teaching is a career path that Angela is sure she does not want to take. Even if it means financial independence, she seeks to be an artist and her own vision of emancipation. Though the narrator contradicts Angela’s understanding on numerous occasions, the latter figures her

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<sup>292</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 13.

<sup>293</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 13–14.

<sup>294</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 55.

best option to satisfy “her restlessly conscious desire for broader horizons”<sup>295</sup> is through whiteness. Angela acknowledges the fact that racial and gender identity are constructed and performed. On one occasion of passing with her mother the readers enter Angela’s thoughts: “she let herself dwell on the fallaciousness of a social system which stretched appearance so far beyond being.”<sup>296</sup> Though she perceives the fallacies of discrimination based on “appearance”, her experience of being seen as white and finding a place in white social spaces, in this instance a tearoom, provides her the freedom she desires.

No one could tell, no one would have thought for a moment that she and her mother had come from tiny Opal Street; no one could have dreamed of their racial connections. “And if Jinny were here,” she thought, slowly selecting another cake, “she really would be just as capable of *fitting* into all this as mother and I; but they wouldn’t let her light.”<sup>297</sup>

Freedom for Angela is a freedom from “racial connections”, “from tiny Opal Street” and from violence of racial discrimination which allows her to “fit” into a new space of whiteness. Jinny her sister is barred from such experience of freedom for she would be, from the outset, denied access to the tearoom. The parallel that Fauset is establishing with the “New” figures of modernism, black or white, is evident in Angela Murray’s conceptions of freedom. In order to journey into whiteness there is a required disconnection with heritage that could expose the new (white) identity she is looking to inhabit. Angela and her journey symbolize a critical counter image and path to the New Negro figure, his mobility and modern aesthetics. At this point the resonance is one of ironic tension, for as Gates Jr. and Jarrett outlined, “success” of the latter “depended fundamentally upon self-negation” as much as Angela’s passing depends on her self-negation in respect to her racial identity. At the same time Fauset is creating a dialogue with the modern figure of the New Woman as she explores Angela’s identifications in the white world. This said, the willed severance to the past, ancestry, and familial ties, especially to the mother figure, is specific to masculine modern aesthetics in the United States and in Europe.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 64.

<sup>296</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 58.

<sup>297</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 58.

<sup>298</sup> The discussion above has approached the problematics of the New Negro figure within African American aesthetics and the Harlem Renaissance movement. Turning to white modernism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century one can see commonality between masculine (and sexist) conceptions of “self-willed” emergence of the New in modernist avant-garde practices. Women are framed as the “bearers” of these new men but never creators nor participants in the new modern expression. To take just one example, it is to recognize that a very similar logic is at work in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s conception of futurism at the beginning of the twentieth century. Clearly there are enormous contextual differences between the Harlem Renaissance and Italian Futurism, and very different understandings of white masculinity and black masculinity. However, why is it that what resonates across the two is a required “break with the past” (at the cost of women) in order for the emergence of the New Man? Marinetti, the Italian futurist, and later supporter of fascism will create a world where men give birth to themselves



These critical parallels that are coming to the fore in Angela's character and her trajectory are structurally supported by the text. Fauset performs the necessary break with the past that she is critiquing in the organization of the novel. As Angela's encounter with New York commences in the first pages of the second section "Market", her movement across state lines is framed by a textual separation from the previous section "Home". At the same time as the structural separation becomes the visual metaphor of her severance to the past, within the spheres of the characters it is dramatized by the sudden death of Angela's parents. At the end of the first section "Home" the older generation figured by Junius and Mattie disappear from this fictional world and the narrator dedicates only a few pages to their passing. In the narrative trajectory their death symbolizes the break of intergenerational ties and the social death of blackness both of which are required for Angela to pass into her "new" identity in New York. Angela and her sister Virginia are left with the material heritage of the house which counteracts, to a certain degree, this possibility of severance that is metaphorized in the parents' death. However, her sister Jinny, in the last sentence of "Home" will close the door of this space of Angela's racial and familial ties: "She [Angela] ran down the steps, glanced happily back. But her sister had already closed the door."<sup>299</sup> The door closes for Angela to her family, to her ancestry, so that a new one can open as she travels, at this point in the novel, into whiteness and the urban. Her new identity is also reiterated in the character's practice of self-naming once arrived in New York; Angela Murray becomes Angèle Mory.<sup>300</sup> In the overall narrative arc of the fairy tale, and akin to Fauset's strategy in "The Sleeper Wakes", Angèle's migration begins the unravelling of the "happily ever after" scenario. The dialogues and resonances that have been developed by Fauset, and traced in the discussion above, allegorize from a black feminine perspective, Angèle's misadventures and the collapse of fairy tale promises, with the (im)possibility of an emancipatory aesthetics. Angèle and her journey, her perceptions and experiences, are the living negotiation of the possibilities of freedom for a black woman in the world of modernisms, in the material urban environment of their emergence, and in the representational spaces of their expressions. It is with this in mind that the readers pass over with Angela into her life in New York in "Market".

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as they become the self-willed autonomous "new" subject of modernism. Importantly, this trope is connected to the practice of artistic creation itself. The difficulty in negotiating with what has come before, in aesthetic tradition or in social material world appears to only come with the metaphorical and material exclusion of women. It seems that women, from the masculine perspective, embody, as argued above, the constant reminder of "a past", whether historical, genealogical, or familial that fundamentally disturbs the New Negro, or the New Man-Machine as is the case for Marinetti. On this subject see; Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>299</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 83.

<sup>300</sup> Note the explicit reference to French culture with her chosen name Angèle.

### 2.3.3 “Free White and Twenty-One” in New York.

The first paragraph of “Market” opens with Angela’s (not yet Angèle) experience of the urban cosmopolitan space of Lower Manhattan in New York.

Fifth avenue is a canyon; its towering buildings dwarf the importance of people hurrying through its narrow confines. But Fourteenth Street is a river, impersonally flowing, broad bosomed, with strange and devious craft covering its expanse. To Angela the famous avenue seemed but one manifestation of living, but Fourteenth Street was life itself. Here for those first few weeks after her arrival in New York she wandered, almost prowled, intent upon the jostling shops, the hurrying, pushing people above all intent upon the faces of those people with their showings of grief, pride, gaiety, greed, joy, ambition, content. There was little enough of this last. These men and women were living at a sharper pitch of intensity than those in Philadelphia. The few colored people whom she saw were different too; they possessed an independence of carriage, a purposefulness, an assurance in the manner that pleased her. But she could not see that any of these people, black or white, were any happier than those whom she had observed all her life.<sup>301</sup>

The trope of anonymity or “impersonality” and the immensity of symbols of technical achievement in the urban dynamics echoes the celebration of such spaces in modern aesthetics.<sup>302</sup> The author situates her scene in the frame of the symbolic and material spaces of the Fourteenth Street School which was at the time the urban branch of American scene paintings.<sup>303</sup> The passage is also evocative of the modern figure of the *flâneur*, or in this case *flâneuse*, as Angela wanders amongst the flowing river of faces, expressing a myriad of emotions on which her perceptions focus. As such, Fauset paints the urban environment of the New York of the novel as the site of modernism and figures Angela with an agency reserved for men within these aesthetic norms. In this sense, Fauset is reformulating, to a certain degree, these norms through the way Angela moves, sees, and acts within this space. As the feminist geographer Doreen Massey argues in *Space, Place and Gender*, the social organization of urbanity in modernist literature, represented by the travellings of the *flâneur*, is not a neutral one. Massey traces this through her analysis of nineteenth century French literature in the works of writers like Charles Baudelaire. Underling the importance that “master narratives” play in constructing the aesthetic norms she writes:

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<sup>301</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 87.

<sup>302</sup> See for example, Christina Walter, *Optical Impersonality: Science, Images, and Literary Modernism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014).

<sup>303</sup> Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman*, 50.

The spaces of modernism which are mostly celebrated are the public spaces of the city. It was in the rapidly growing Western cities, especially Paris, that modernism was born. And the standard literature from Baudelaire onwards is replete with descriptions of boulevards and cafés, of fleeting, passing glances and the cherished anonymity of the crowd. The spatial and social reorganization, and flourishing, of urban life was an essential condition for the birth of a new era. But that city was gendered.<sup>304</sup>

Massey connects material and social transformations in the way that cities were inhabited and experienced which inform the change of its representations. For example, during the nineteenth century there is an important separation between public and private spaces in which women were understood as belonging or having their place in the latter. Public spaces were therefore masculine. Within literature, “the public city which is celebrated in the enthusiastic descriptions of the dawn of modernism was a city for men. The boulevards and cafés, and still more the bars and brothels were for men – the women who did go there were for male consumption.”<sup>305</sup> The figure of the *flâneur* is one embodiment of modern masculine identity. Be it within the aesthetic or social norms, it was considered improper for women to walk the city streets unaccompanied, and for those non-respectable “women who did roam the public spaces movement would be effectively restricted by the threat of male violence”.<sup>306</sup> As such, the figure of the *flâneuse* is at best deviant at worst impossible.

One of the key figures embodying the experience of this definition of modernity is the *flâneur*, the stroller in the crowd, observing but not observed... In part, the notion of *flâneuse* is impossible precisely because of the one-way-ness and directionality of the gaze. *Flâneurs* observed others; they were not observed themselves. And, for reasons which link together the debate on perspective and the spatial organization of painting, and most women’s exclusion from the public sphere, the modern gaze belonged (belongs?) to men.<sup>307</sup>

Angela’s position as observer then is an important one. She performs what is inscribed as “masculine” within this space, she is the *flâneuse* that observes but is not observed. In the description that the narrator gives, the direction of Angela’s gaze forges a space for her to move through within this urban environment. And her observations at this time will be, one day, made

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<sup>304</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 1994 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 233. It should be noted that when Massey refers to Paris as the space where modernism was born speaks to European modernism and does not account for modernisms in their plural form. This said, as Fauset is deploying tropes of white modernism Massey’s observations of the city and the gendered aspects of this celebration within modernist literature correspond with the discussion taking place.

<sup>305</sup> Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 234.

<sup>306</sup> Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 234.

<sup>307</sup> Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 234.

into “a great picture” that she will call “Fourteenth Street types.”<sup>308</sup> This masculine artistic trajectory is thus paralleled in Angela as “she wandered, almost prowled” through the urban setting after having migrated from the suburbs of Philadelphia and the private sphere of femininity. Also, in the overarching allegory that Fauset creates, Angela’s contemporary experience is intertwined more explicitly within genealogy of white modernisms. The freedom she experiences is clearly signified as possible, in her mind, because of her new racial identity.

But *she* was happier; she was living on a crest of a wave of excitement and satisfaction which would never wane, never break, never be spent. She was seeing the world, she was getting acquainted with life in her own way without restrictions or restraint; she was young, she was temporarily independent, she was intelligent, she was white.<sup>309</sup>

Her affective experience of freedom is narrated through the metaphor of the wave and reiterated in her movement and mobility “without restraints”. Angela’s wandering without restrictions continues to evoke the figure of the *flâneur* and aligns Fauset’s resignification of feminine urban experience with other modernist work of New Women. Romaine Brooks’ iconic 1923 *Self-Portrait* (completed six years before the publication of *Plum Bun*), for example, works precisely on questions of representation of femininity and sexuality through playing with the aesthetic norms and social meanings of the *flâneur*. In Tirza True Latimer’s essay on Brooks, she describes the painting where Brooks is depicted on a balcony and which rings true with Fauset representation of Angela’s experience of the urban.

The feminine subject here takes on the aspect of the *flâneur*, a subject imbricated in, rather than “sheltered” from, the city. Brook’s self-portrait transforms the balcony, a privileged and discrete point of observation, into an architectural figure for the *flâneur*’s gaze.<sup>310</sup>

Though Angela is not on a balcony her imbrication within this urban environment is clear. Also, Angela’s experience of freedom as a wave is not without its sensual or sexual undertones. In this way it overlaps with Brooks’ work, and others’, in redefining feminine (homo)sexuality by refiguring the masculine figures and their access to the urban environment and women’s bodies “without restraints”. However, because the readers know that Angela’s current freedom is premised on her being white, the narrator’s painting of her as a Modern Woman or *flâneuse* is marked by a

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<sup>308</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 89.

<sup>309</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 88.

<sup>310</sup> Tirza True Latimer, “Looking Like a Lesbian: Portraiture and Sexual Identity in 1920’s Paris,” in *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 130.

certain illusory tone. If in white modernist aesthetics the *flâneuse* was “impossible” than a black *flâneuse* is doubly so. This “inconsistency” of Angela’s experience in the urban center of modernism is exposed by her own thoughts and gives rise to the image of her dream. The above passage is followed by:

She remembered an expression “free, white and twenty-one” – this is what it meant then, this sense of owning the world, this realization that other things being equal, all things were possible. “If I were a man,” she said, “I could be president,” and laughed at herself for the “if” itself proclaimed a limitation. But that inconsistency bothered her little; she did not want to be a man. Power, greatness, authority, these were fitting and proper for men; but there were sweeter, more beautiful gifts for women, and a power of a certain kind too. Such a power she would like to exert in this glittering new world, so full of mysteries and promise. If she could afford it, she would have a salon, a drawing-room where men and women, not necessarily great, but real, alive, free and untrammelled in manner and thought, should come and pour themselves out to her sympathy and magnetism.<sup>311</sup>

The reference to being “free white and twenty-one” – a cultural idiom in the United States amongst white-collar workforce in (amongst other large cities) New York – predicates the necessary whiteness, masculinity and middle-classness for “all things to be possible”.<sup>312</sup> What the narrator also reveals is the power crystallized in figures like the *flâneur* and potentially sought after in the feminine signification of this modern aesthetic trope. Angela acknowledges that power is embodied in white masculinity but does not connect it to her experience of freedom and movement. It is the way that the narrator presents the scene for the readers which connects mobility in the urban space and Angela’s experiences of freedom as already possessing a certain power (and sexuality) through the gaze of the *flâneur* / *flâneuse*. Angela “laughs” at the limits of her previous feelings of no “restraint or restrictions”. Her dream still presents a similar image to the life of the New Woman, filled with social gatherings between “free” men and women and much artistic creation. And though Angela will participate in this world with her friends, all of whom are figured as tropes of the New Women like Martha Burden, her goal drastically takes a fairy tale turn.

To accomplish this she must have money and influence; indeed since she was young she would need even protection; perhaps it would be better to marry... a white man. The thought came to her suddenly out of a void; she had never thought of this possibility before. If she were to do this, do it suitably, then all that richness, all that fullness of life which she so ardently craved would be doubly hers. She knew

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<sup>311</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 88-89.

<sup>312</sup> See for example Adrienne Brown’s subsection “Free White and Twenty-One: The Racial Romance of the Skyscraper” in, Adrienne Brown, *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 181–86.

that men had a better time of it than women, colored men than colored women, white men than white women. Not that she envied them. Only it would be fun to capture power and protection in addition to the freedom and independence which she had so long coveted and which now lay in her hands.<sup>313</sup>

Angela's appropriation of the city space that was accompanied by multiple gender and racial crossings both in her character and in modern figures and aesthetics mobilized, is starkly contradicted by her allegiance to the narrative of Prince Charming. Angela switches her orientation from a modern identity to a turning back to tradition. The readers, knowing that Fauset has already demonstrated at what point Euro-American fairy tales are illusory promises for white or black women's liberation, are thus distanced from Angela's plan and aspirations. They know from the beginning that this path will not provide her with what she seeks. Therefore, the narrator highlights the character's misstep in a search for an emancipated feminine identity and her pursuits of becoming an artist. Angela aligns herself with traditional narrative trajectories and roles reserved for (white) women in a society organized by (white) patriarchal power. The thought of marriage as a solution to her desires, that came to her suddenly out of the void, is exemplary of Fauset's irony. The idea did not come from a void, rather it came from the fantasies of fairy tale narratives and centuries of social normalization. Angela describes herself as the young woman needing to be saved and "protected" by wealthy (white) men. As such Angela positions herself in way that only allows access to power in society through a vicarious relationship to the position of her husband. Angela does not recognize it yet, but culture, money, influence, life, power, and freedom are interconnected in the necessity of an economic-sexual relationship that is set within the limits of whiteness, restraining Angela to her "place" as a woman and wife. Angela will later realize this through her failure to "secure" marriage with Roger Fielding, the white Prince Charming of her fairy tale dreams. She becomes aware that the only person who benefits from such adherence to normative gender, racial and class roles is the white moneyed man: the person who is "free white and twenty-one" for whom "all things are possible".<sup>314</sup> Much later in the novel, for instance, when Angela is no longer passing and identifies as African American, she reflects on her migration to the metropolis:

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<sup>313</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 89.

<sup>314</sup> As Deborah McDowell highlights in the introduction to *Plum Bun*, by quoting a passage of an unpublished article written by Ian McInnes: "If the nursery rhyme epigraph is part of the white male narrative of hope and fulfilment, it is also part of the white male narrative of political and economic opportunism. The only character in the novel that actually buys much of anything, for instance is Roger Fielding. The verse is thus sexually as well as racially ironic". McDowell, "Introduction," xvii.

so far as leaving Philadelphia was concerned she had left it to seek her fortune under more agreeable circumstances; if she had been a boy and had left home no one would have had a word of blame, it would have been the proper thing, to be expected and condoned.<sup>315</sup>

Here Angela clearly links mobility and freedom with power, social standing, and normative gender roles. It is normal, even expected of a black masculine subject (this time importantly reflected by race) to travel and find success and freedom (New Negro) but not so for a black woman. The irony that rings through the text, and that is most evident when Angela's plan to marry comes from a void, colors all of Angela's journeying in the urban environment and representational spaces of modernism. A black *flâneuse* is unimaginable in the white modernist aesthetic and that Angela herself redirects through her choice of Victorian or "traditional" roles. As a black woman, her dream of becoming an artist within this aesthetic, appears as illusory as the fairy tale she chooses. It pre-empts the conclusion of *Plum Bun* that the possibility of black liberatory aesthetics, from the perspective of a black woman artist, is outside the realms of either black or white modernisms being formulated in the first half of twentieth century New York. In order to develop this further, more investigation is required. As feminist art historian Griselda Pollock argued in her book *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, if one is to understand the connections between artistic practices and social processes then it is not only about "the spaces represented, or the spaces of representation but also the social spaces from which the representation is made and its reciprocal positionalities."<sup>316</sup> With Angela's journey and the meta literary dialogues that are undertaken by the author in *Plum Bun*, Fauset puts into action these interrelationships in her text. This is continued in the narration of Angela's practice as an artist, what she represents and from what environment she creates which the discussion will now turn.

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<sup>315</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 308.

<sup>316</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 66.

### 2.3.4 The Color Line of Representation

Angela's career as a painter and her main practice of portraiture precedes her move to New York. Her experience of racism in the Philadelphia Fine Arts Academy represents one instantiation of unequal access to education in America for black women. In this state, where segregation is no longer legalized, anti-black racism structures this institution and the socio-educational environment between peers and teachers. It also echoes Fauset's trajectory and experience within the tertiary education system in Pennsylvania when she was denied access to Bryn Mawr. However, for Angela, this prelude to her studies and life in New York anchors her belief that the only way to achieve what she desires is to pass as white and eventually have the power and prestige that this identity bestows upon her. Though the narrator contradicts Angela's fairy tale path, with scenes like the following, the readers understand that there are real barriers confronted by Angela in her identity as an African American woman artist. If she cannot fine tune her craft through education and therefore access the world of art, how can she be recognized as an artist and be legitimate in her position as creator of aesthetics and culture? If she is continually reduced to her social identity as a black woman, how can she be an artist?

During a life drawing class, the model who comes to pose for the students is a white woman that went to high school with Angela, Esther Bayliss. The two recognize each other. For Angela, she "saw no reason why she should speak to her and presently, engrossed in the portrayal of the round, yet pointed little face, forgot the girl's identity."<sup>317</sup> Esther, on the other hand, is unable to keep her "pose". Admonished by the teacher, Mr. Shields, who implies that they can't "keep her on" if she were to continue in such a fashion, Esther's reaction engenders the following scene:

"I don't want you to keep me on." She spoke with an amazing vindictiveness. "I haven't got to the point yet where I'm going to lower myself to pose for a colored girl."

He looked around the room in amazement; no, Miss Henderson [the one "colored" girl in the class] wasn't there, she never came to this class he remembered. "Well after that we couldn't keep you on anyway. We're not taking orders from our models. But there's no colored girls here."

"Oh yes there is, unless she has changed her name." She laughed spitefully. "Isn't that Angela Murray over there next to that Jew girl?" In spite of himself, Shields nodded. "Well she's colored though she wouldn't let you know. But I know. I went to school with her in North Philadelphia. And I tell you I wouldn't stay to pose for her

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<sup>317</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 71.



not if you were to pay me ten times what I am getting. Sitting there drawing from me just as though she was as good as a white girl!”<sup>318</sup>

This paragraph dramatizes the outing of Angela to her teacher which terminates in him asking why she never said she was “colored”. Her response being: “She felt as though she was rehearsing a well-known part in a play. ‘Colored! Of course I never told you that I was colored. Why should I?’”<sup>319</sup> Coupled with the fact that Mr. Shields surveilles the classroom to see if Miss Henderson is present, the narrator racially inflects his position of authority making him both the transmitter of aesthetic practice and the gatekeeper of interracial (non)interaction. Interconnected to his overarching position of power, the scene attests to power relationships that can be involved in portraiture, depending on where one is spatially positioned in the atelier, behind the canvas or in front of it.<sup>320</sup> Within this representation, Esther recognizes this imbalance for she states that she would never “lower” herself to pose for a black women painter. The (racist) outrage of Esther is not that Angela is passing but rather that she is in a place of power over her, the model: Angela was “sitting there *drawing from*” her. This, in the white racist imagination, is unthinkable. As it was discussed in respect to the *flâneur*, the gaze of the painter here is unidirectional, for Angela, “engrossed” in her depiction of Esther “forgets her identity”. This scene also recalls the “unwritten laws of representation” that Fauset spoke of in “The Gift of Laughter”. White actors, writers or painters have the freedom to depict black subjects in any way they see fit and which often correspond to their (racist) imaginings of blackness, but black artists, writers or actors can never cross the racial line in their depictions. As it was highlighted, these norms are inextricably linked to the control of black mobilities whether in respect to black aesthetic practices or in real life expressions of freedom like travelling from one place to another. Angela as the portrait painter is in a position of agency as she not only is practicing her aesthetics, but she is also representing white femininity. What the scene reveals is that for her to be in this position and take up space in this way in the studio (or on her canvas) is a destabilization of the (semantic, symbolic, material) white order of things. The outrage that Esther performs is the reestablishment of these “unwritten laws of representation” as she violently reinstalls her control over the situation. It stops Angela. She

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<sup>318</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 71–72.

<sup>319</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 72–73.

<sup>320</sup> This is evidenced in the sexualization of women within the (male) painter’s gaze. Another example is exoticism whereby the (white male) painter’s gaze represent the sexualization and fetishization of black female models. Both perpetuate and re-affirm cultural stereotypes and objectifications of the other. Much of western art history is the history of the world perceived and imagined through the (white) masculine perspective. Nardal demonstrated this in her “Exotic Puppets”, and as discussed above, Romain Brooks for example, challenged the masculine heterosexual erotization of women and the images created from this. This discussion will be furthered in the conversation below.

has to cease her artistic practices at the Fine Arts academy (that was the central source of motivation and life for her) and Mr. Shields puts an end to the mentor relationship that he and his wife had with Angela. On the institutional level, through Mr. Shields, the narrator demonstrates that the Academy supports the racism of Esther, if not directly then indirectly, and lets Angela fall, as it were, in her dismissal from the school and the breaking down of her mentorship. As an effect, though it was Esther that performed the racist act, at the end of the day it is the figure of the white man that bars access to Angela's pursuits of becoming an artist and controls the creation of her aesthetics and representation of (white) feminine identity that she was currently practicing in her portrayal of Esther. In a broader context this scene symbolizes the inequality on the level of race and gender of the "social spaces from which representation" is created. Mr. Shields is the white masculine figure who deems and judges who can be in a position of creation of culture and what aesthetics are created in "the spaces of representation". Angela is prohibited at this point in creating her own representation of femininity on her canvas. When Angela arrives in Lower Manhattan, her desire is still to be specifically a portrait artist. As such, her aesthetics are particularly concerned with the experimentation of expressing subjectivities in representational form. As Angela articulates in her first encounter with New York, "A great picture!" she thought. "I'll make a great picture of these people someday and call them 'Fourteenth Street types'." <sup>321</sup> This aligns with her own journey and exploration of identity that she is currently undertaking. However, it is Fauset through the narrative voice that is painting a portrait of Angela. In this way, the narrator makes the readers aware of problems, blind spots or misunderstandings in Angela's negotiations of identity and how she positions herself in the world. When the scene of Philadelphia Art's Academy is restaged later at the art school Cooper Union in New York, and subsequently echoed in the reuniting of Angela/Angèle with her sister Virginia at Pennsylvania train station, what the narrator exposes is that the same relationships of power are at work even if Angèle does not to fully acknowledge it and even if she is perceived as "white".

Now in New York and where it was left in the conversation above, Angela is following the traditional fairy tale narrative and it is her belief that whiteness and marriage to Prince Charming will guarantee her economic stability, success, and recognition as an artist. When Angela enrolls in an art class in Cooper Union she rejoices at the fact that "for the first time, she would be seen, would be met against her new background or rather, against no background

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<sup>321</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 89.

at all.”<sup>322</sup> The triple signification of the “no background at all” refers to her blank canvas ready for her creations, the understanding of “background” as the past – personal, familial and collective histories, of being recognized as “colored” – and “no background at all” as the metaphor of whiteness. Therefore, not only does she rejoice in the fact that she will be seen as a blank canvas, but now in her identification as white she has the possibility to participate in cultural production. She, as a white female painter, has the social standing, access to education, and freedom to paint her “Fourteenth Street types”. Implicit in Angela’s excitement and enthusiasm is that she is in a social environment that she perceives as opposite to her experience of Philadelphia Arts Academy. It appears to her as if such relationships of power could not be at play. However, the narrator translates what took place at Philadelphia between Esther, Angela, and the authority figure Mr. Shields as purveyor of aesthetic, gender, and racial norms. It is displaced because the narrator is now working within the fairy tale narrative that Angèle entwines into the pursuit of her artistic career. But in this displacement another important element of the power relationships across racial and gender lines can come to fore, namely, the articulation of race and sexuality. In this scenario at Cooper Union, the authoritative figure is Prince Charming, Roger Fielding, Angèle is in the position of white femininity that awaits him in front of the art school, and Rachel Powell is Angèle’s African American colleague who is exposed to racism. Akin to the portrayal at Philadelphia Arts Academy, the racist violence takes place between two women – though this time it is Angèle who is the actor of discrimination – with an overarching figure of power being white masculinity. What is striking is that it is in the anticipation of this masculine figure that the racist encounter is performed. Roger is not present, as Mr. Shields was, but arriving on the scene. Exiting the doors of Cooper Union Rachel calls out to Angèle who is by the road waiting for Roger. As the latter turns around in response, Rachel greets her with a familiar gesture.

She laid a hand on Angela’s arm, but the latter shook her off. Roger must not see her on familiar terms with a colored girl for she felt that afternoon portended something as she wanted no side issues. The colored girl gave her a penetrating glance; then her habitual reserve settled down blotting out the eagerness, leaving her face blurred and heavy. “I beg your pardon, Miss Mory, I’m sure,” she murmured and stepped out into the tempestuous traffic on Fourth Avenue. Angela was sorry; she would make it up to her tomorrow, she thought, but she had not dismissed her a moment too soon for Roger came rushing up, his car resplendent and resplendent himself in a grey suit, soft grey hat, and a blue tie.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 93.

<sup>323</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 148–49.

Angèle's reaction, as did Esther's, violently reinstalls the white world order of things. The affectionate and physical proximity with blackness that Rachel's touch signifies is equally unthinkable in the white supremacist imagination as it was for a white woman to pose for black woman painter. Rachel's "penetrating glance" seems to understand that this touch is met with such offense because of the mechanics of Anglo-puritanism and its libidinal economy. The purity of whiteness is threatened by the supposed impure (sexual) contact with blackness. Angèle may be aware of this when she states, "Roger must not see her on familiar terms with a colored girl" and that whilst sorry she "had not dismissed her a moment too soon." With her sights set on her goals of achieving marriage to Roger, Angèle does not seem to grasp the gravity of her racist act but Powell does. At the same time, Angèle accepts the dictates of the authority figure, thus transferring, in part, the responsibility for her racist action. The figure of the "free white and twenty-one" with his grey suit and blue tie polices racial and (hetero)sexual boundaries between whiteness and blackness, which in the libidinal economy that is at work, confirms white identity to itself including Angèle's. This is translated into "the spaces of representation" when Fauset paints these scenes of whiteness with the necessary exiting of Rachel from within the frame. Similar to the scene in Philadelphia, Rachel's black feminine identity has no place in this traditional performance between Prince and Princess of Euro-American fairy tales set on the modern stage of New York and Cooper Union Arts School. This is confirmed at the end of the novel in the repetition of racism within the bounds of the modern art world. Right now, what is evident in both Philadelphia and New York is the white heterosexual masculine figure's gaze that surveilles the boundaries of whiteness on the level of social interactions is equally operative on the level of representation, form and meaning. Fauset's depiction, taken as a sequence of paintings, shows that in the first, the white feminine figure had to be portrayed as agentive in her actions that rejects the approach (mobility) and contact of black femininity and thus reestablishing her superiority and her whiteness. In the second portrait where white heterosexual coupling is represented, black femininity cannot even be on the canvas. She is already out of sight and out of the frame in Fourth Avenue. Toni Morrison's assertion that blackness "haunts" white American aesthetics even if black subjects are not depicted rings true with Fauset's portrayal of this scene.<sup>324</sup> In a way, this haunting is embodied by Angèle herself, firstly in her feelings of regret, and secondly because passing as white, it is the social and symbolic death of her own black identity that she actualizes in the

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<sup>324</sup> See Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992). In the analysis of Fauset's work, Morrison's idea will be engaged with in more detail in Chapter Three and thus it is only mentioned here.

dismissal of Rachel. This is repainted by Fauset in Angèle's reunion with Virginia. As in the restaging of Philadelphia Arts School in this scene at Cooper Union, the same power structures are reiterated but other elements come to the fore as the new character, in this case Virginia, brings a different aspect to the picture. On this occasion it is Virginia's familial relationship with Angèle and her representation as a New Negro Woman within the landscapes of *Plum Bun* that will draw out different aspects to Fauset's previous depictions.

In the structure of the novel, Virginia is the embodiment of a strong black woman striving for her desires and goals despite the racism and sexism that she faces on a daily basis. She also embodies the New Negro Woman living in Harlem, and wanting what respectable black women should want for the advancement of the race. She is a successful music teacher, she is proud of her racial heritage and above all she desires to marry, make a home, and have children. Though there are a few turns in Virginia's path, Fauset makes Virginia Angela's moral counterpoint, and which reflects the torments of Angela into the realms of the tragic mulatta in more conventional passing narratives. Whilst the trope of the tragic mulatta figure will be problematized, Fauset's representation of Virginia as "an innocent, idealized race woman of the sort portrayed in the New Negro periodicals such as *The Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and the *Messenger*, and enshrined in the uplift ideology of the New Negro movement,"<sup>325</sup> holds true with Fauset's overall investigation of the place of black women within the creation of modern aesthetics. Virginia is the representation of the New Negro Woman deemed appropriate by certain masculine conceptions of racial cultural politics. In respect to urbanity as the center of modernism, Fauset shows that this figure of black femininity is incompatible with the strivings of black modernist creations that Angela's path seeks. This is geographically and symbolically instantiated on one occasion, as Virginia returns for a time, with her lover and eventual husband Mathew to Pennsylvania and his milieu of respectable "old Philadelphians".<sup>326</sup> By the end of the novel, this is equally represented by the gap that Angela feels between her and her sister's life choices. Whilst the narrator does not make a judgement on Virginia's decisions, nor in the end does Angela, what is evident in both embodiments of black femininity is that neither find (or for Virginia desire) a place in the production of a modernist aesthetic in Harlem. However, to bring the discussion back to when the sisters were estranged and Angèle is waiting for Virginia at the train station, the readers can see how Virginia's presence acts as a mirror to Angela's choices to racially pass.

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<sup>325</sup> Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman*, 54.

<sup>326</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 266-267.

Virginia is Angèle's familial connection that reminds her of her racial identity and history. Since leaving Philadelphia and migrating into the white world, Angèle had no physical contact with her sister until Virginia also moves to New York. The two women organize to meet at New York Pennsylvania station in order to welcome Virginia upon her arrival. As this is a repainting of the scene in front of Cooper Union between Rachel, Roger and Angèle, Fauset has Angèle waiting again, this time not for Roger but for Virginia. Roger nevertheless appears.

A man sprinted in desperate haste, brushing so closely by her that the corner of his suitcase struck sharply on the thin inner curve of her knee.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed involuntarily.

For all this haste he was a gentleman, for he pulled off his hat, threw her a quick backward glance and began: "I beg your pardon – why darling, darling, you don't mean to say you came to meet me!"

"Meet you! I thought you came in this morning." It was Roger, Roger and the sight of him made her stupid with fear.

He stopped and kissed her, tenderly, possessively [...] What are you doing here?"

What was she doing there? Waiting for her sister Jinny who was colored and who showed it. And Roger hated Negroes. She was lost, ruined, unless she could get rid of him.<sup>327</sup>

The fear that she would be "lost and ruined" if Roger was to find out that she was waiting for "a Negro", let alone if she was black herself, reiterates his position of authority and his control over what takes place, who interacts on the scene and what is represented. His voice, for instance is the voice of aesthetic judgement that defines white femininity: "Oh Angèle you *are* a beauty! Only a beauty can wear plain things like that" he states after having kissed her "possessively".<sup>328</sup> His gaze, presence and expression determine whiteness and the heterosexual coupling of this portrait and at the necessary exclusion of blackness. In an important contrast to Angèle's reaction in "shaking off" the touch of Rachel, this time her mind is set on getting "rid" of Roger. This change infers that the affective and familial attachment that Angèle has with Virginia, though estranged from one another for a considerable time, still persists. As their initial separation symbolized the "door closing" for Angèle to her blackness, her heritage and family, this begins to disturb, whether in white or black modern aesthetics, if the newness of modern identity can really be premised on a break with the old.

There was Jinny, her head suddenly emerging into view above the stairs. She saw Angela, waved her hand. In another moment she would be flinging her arms about

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<sup>327</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 157.

<sup>328</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 157.

her sister's neck; she would be kissing her and saying, "Oh, Angela, Angela darling!"

And Roger, who was no fool, would notice the name Angela-Angèle; he would know no colored girl would make a mistake like this.

She closed her eyes in a momentary faintness, opened them again.

"What's the matter?" said Roger sharply, "are you sick?"

Jinny was beside her. Now, now the bolt would fall. She heard the gay, childish voice saying laughingly, assuredly:

"I beg your pardon, but isn't this Mrs. Henrietta Jones?"

Oh, God was good! Here was one chance if only Jinny would understand! In his astonishment Roger had turned from her to face the speaker. Angela, her eyes beseeching her sister's from under her close hat brim, could only stammer the old formula: "Really you have the advantage of me. No, I'm not Mrs. Jones."

Roger said rudely, "Of course she isn't Mrs. Jones." Come Angèle." Putting his arm through hers he stooped for the suitcase.

But Jinny, after a second's bewildered but incredulous stare, was quicker even than they. Her slight figure, her head high, preceded them; vanished into a telephone booth.<sup>329</sup>

Knowing that her sister was likely affiliated to the white man present, Virginia reverts to a childhood game that they played: "But isn't this Mrs. Henrietta Jones?". This greeting performed as a coded message of black communication between the two sisters completely loses its sense on Roger. He has neither the codes, culture nor conventions to understand it. It both heightens the segregation of white and black worlds and cultural identities at the same as it subverts, momentarily, his position of power and shaper of culture and meaning. In short, he has no hold over Virginia in this scene. But Angèle repeats the racist act she inflicted on Rachel Powell in the non-recognition of her sister. As such, it underlines the fact that cultural identities are performative and created in their repetition for Angèle reiterates her whiteness through her actions.<sup>330</sup> However, because of the historicity and affection that the secret communication between the sisters signified, Angèle's disavowal of her sister, of her past and of her blackness throws her into self-doubt of the path she is taking and the social identity that she is reaffirming.

For the first time in the pursuits of her chosen ends she began to waver. Surely no ambition, no pinnacle of safety was supposed to call for the sacrifice of a sister.

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<sup>329</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 158–59.

<sup>330</sup> As Judith Butler has famously theorized in her theory of performativity, normative identity is not constructed through one act but a repetition of speech and acts that the social audience understands to be "feminine" for example. "Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist determining it fully in advance." Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 95.

She might be selfish, – oh, undoubtedly she had been selfish all these months to leave Jinny completely to herself – but she had never meant to be cruel.<sup>331</sup>

Her affective realities question the tenability of her pretense of her fairy tale dreams and her racial passing. But also, the narrative interrogates if freedom to create and live out a “new” identity can be actualized in a severance to the past, articulated here as “sacrifice of her sister”. Contrary to her racist act against Rachel that haunts Angèle for a mere line, her “guilty conscious” stays with her and continues over several pages. She recollects her mother’s attitude of passing in regard to her father: “her husband was her husband, and she was glad to acknowledge that relationship.”<sup>332</sup> In a time when all of a sudden family is very present in Angèle’s mind she begins very slowly to understand her actions and the full gravity of the power relationships involved in the path that she has chosen. Reaching back into past learnings such as her mother’s passing and the connection Mattie had to Julius, it gives her the tools to chip away very incrementally to what she thought she knew and begin to comprehend differently.

A sick distaste for her action, for her daily deception, for Roger and his prejudices arose within her. But with it came a dark anger against a country and a society which could create such an issue. And she thought: “If I had spoken to Jinny, had acknowledge her, what good would it have done me or her either? After it was all over she would have been exactly where she was before and I would have lost everything.”<sup>333</sup>

The sick distaste and the dark anger that well up into her conscious thinking sheds a different light on her acts of racism, on Prince Charming, and most specifically on the country that is, in the novel, contained to the modern urban metropolis. It is clear to the readers that Angèle struggles with this for “what good would it have done” if she had acknowledged Virginia, but it is the exemplification of a shift in her perception of herself and the world around. When she goes to apologize to Virginia, still adrift in her inner turmoil, she justifies all of her actions from the same perspective she had been previously working with. They arrive at an “impasse” which separate them across the white and black worlds they inhabit. Virginia laments to herself: “I really have lost her, she’s really gone out of my ken just as I used to lose her years ago when father and I would be singing ‘The Dying Christian.’”<sup>334</sup> What Angèle sees as an “impasse” is re-signified in Virginia’s thoughts as death. And this death is the social death of blackness that Angèle’s position in the world demands. Thus, whilst Virginia mourns the loss of her sister, she also mourns the fact

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<sup>331</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 159.

<sup>332</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 163.

<sup>333</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 162.

<sup>334</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 167.



that Angèle can't see that her actions tried to force the death of blackness upon Virginia during their encounter at the train station. Though Virginia listens to her sister and "the everything" that she has gained since inhabiting the white world, she simply states:

Perhaps you are right Angela; perhaps there is an extra infusion of white blood in your veins which lets you see life at another angle.<sup>335</sup>

In an ironic repetition, Virginia confirms what Angèle is starting to realize but cannot yet articulate. Her sister's voice then, which is both the echo of Angèle's past and the present embodiment of a proud and successful African American woman, returns, as it were, Angèle's delusions to her. As this has been an experience in which Angèle "begins to waiver" and an important event along her path, Virginia, in a way, gives Angèle the keys to her freedom. This is evidenced in the text when Angèle does start reflecting on her sister's precise words.

Her father, her mother and Jinny had always given and she had always taken. Why was that? Jinny had sighed: "Perhaps you *have* more white blood in your veins." Perhaps this selfishness was what the possession of white blood meant; the ultimate definition of Nordic Supremacy.<sup>336</sup>

Angèle's journey to life as an artist could thus be interpreted as one that was made impossible by her choice to accomplish this through possessing "Nordic Supremacy". This would re-evoked the kind of tragic mulatta figure of other passing narratives. That her pursuit for a fairy tale Prince would provide her with the freedom she desired, as Amy discovered in "The Sleeper Wakes", is completely illusory and entangled with gender, sexual and racial domination. Though, at the end of the novel when Angèle and Virginia are reconnected, and Angela is no longer passing, Virginia's way of life is not possible for her either because of Angela's different desires to be an artist. What can be said for sure at this point in the novel, is that Angèle's "angle" shifts from which she sees and paints. This is epitomized in a (self) portrait that is revealed at the end of her journeying in the white world. Fellow African American artist and representation of a New Negro figure in the novel, Anthony Cross, looks through Angèle's work and uncovers her sketches.

"What's this?" He had turned again to the sketch book and was pouring upon a mass of lightly indicated figures passing apparently in review before the tall, cloaked form of a woman, thin to emaciation, her hand on her bony hips, slightly bent forward, laughing uproariously yet with a certain chilling malevolence. "I can't make it out".

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<sup>335</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 168.

<sup>336</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 275.

With something shamefaced in her manner she took it from him. “I’m not sure yet if I will develop it. I - its an idea that has slowly taken possession of me since I’ve been in New York. The tall woman is Life and the idea is that she laughs at us; laughs at the poor people who fall into the traps which she sets for us.”<sup>337</sup>

The grammatical ellipse of “I - its” installs an ambiguity in the representation inferring that, from Angèle’s perspective, it could be a portrait of “Life” as much as a self-portrait of her time in New York and her explorations in the white world. The mass of “lightly indicated” figures that pass before the cloaked woman represent the mass in the urban space. Angèle’s celebrated such scenes of urban anonymity on her arrival to New York and before she became wrapped up by the “traps” of life. Now almost ghost-like the people walk before this figure as she “reviews” them. An “idea that has slowly taken possession” of Angèle is, in the self-portrait aspect of the work, like a mirror to her own trajectory. In this interpretation Angèle is figured in the emaciated cloaked woman as much as she is within the anonymous crowd. She represents (her) white femininity that laughs at her pursuit for power, marriage with Roger, and sacrifice of her sister, for instance. The portrait dramatizes the fact that this “Life”, aesthetically, materially, and symbolically means the death of blackness. On one level then, the “traps” are suggestively aesthetic ones, not in the “imitation” of whiteness but rather the (im)possibility of the representation of blackness within the aesthetic norms of the dominant forms of modernism. In the frame of the painting, Angèle sits in judgement of this untenable position both in terms of her life and in terms of aesthetic practice, from her perspective as an African American woman. This is confirmed by the text in Angèle’s thoughts that shortly precede the manifestation of the painting within the narrative. At a time where she finds herself, finally, in a circle of friends headed by the New Woman figure Marth Burden and comprised of middle to upper class white people the narrator states:

But this was not her world; for years she had craved such a *milieu*, only to find herself, when launched into it, outwardly perfectly at ease, inwardly perturbed and dismayed. Although she rarely thought of color still she was conscious of living in an atmosphere of falseness, of tangled implications.<sup>338</sup>

Fauset’s visualization of Angèle’s realization in the painting exposes through aesthetic practices the inner tension that she feels and what Virginia had already exposed with her speech act. Angèle could not articulate it to her sister at the time but in this portrait she images the “angle” that Virginia was underlining to her. This echoing of black subjectivity through Angèle’s

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<sup>337</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 280.

<sup>338</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 271.

painting and what it represents resolves the “impasse” that separated the two sisters across racial lines. The voice of black subjectivity calls back and survives its silencing, reconnecting Angèle with her black subjectivity, her family, and her history. As such, Fauset’s recourse to the visual arts within her literary text is used as a tool that acts as a vehicle that crosses or moves between the segregated spaces of white and black worlds. The employment of ekphrasis is therefore not just a description of a painting but it is the rhetorical device that performs the resignification of Angèle’s identity. What can be said then is that Fauset uses a technique that migrates across artistic borders to produce a new meaning within the text in order to instantiate the movement across structurally and socially closed social spaces. It reaffirms the interpretation that the major obstacle for Angèle was in her passing and searching for expression in white codes of Euro-American traditional fairy tales or modernism. At the same time, Fauset leaves the door open to reading Angèle’s journey as a critical commentary, also, on the modernisms being formulated within the Harlem Renaissance. The “New” figures that are symbols of an emancipatory aesthetics, like the New Woman, the New Man, or the New Negro, all of which Angèle and the narrator negotiate with in various degrees and in different manners in the urban environment do not seem to provide her with any solutions either. In the example with Angèle’s relationship to Jinny and the New Negro Woman she embodies, it does not provide Angèle with a model to shape her path to become an artist, but it is in her interaction with Virginia, and her past, including her thoughts to her mother that in the end guide her towards what she seeks. To recall the discussion of the New Negro and what Fauset’s colleagues exposed, such as Marita Bonner, black women have long been fighting for liberation on two fronts both in terms of gender and race. Emancipatory politics and understandings of black femininity have been passed down from generations. This is therefore echoed by Fauset in Angèle’s becoming. This character’s effort to sever from her past in the move to New York is inflected by these concerns because, as it is the case with the New Negro, the blocking of tradition not only relegates women outside of the sphere of aesthetic production but perhaps conveniently ignores this history of black feminist politics. Fauset underlined this through Angèle’s journey, in the limited freedom and social mobility that she finds by severing herself and passing over into the new of New York, and in the importance that this reconnection with her family and past has in her search for creation of a liberated identity whether in life or on the canvas. This can be further instantiated with the New Negro figure of Anthony Cross that parallels Angèle’s trajectory, and later in Angèle’s alignment with Rachel Powell who she had originally dismissed when performing the façade of whiteness and traditional fairy tale narratives. Because black men and women are differentiated unequally within society or centers of modernism it will inform and affect the way that art is produced and

how emancipatory aesthetics are represented and thought. Different experiences and different identifications, as it was shown above, entails seeing things from different “angles” and thus creates a different aesthetic practice and approach, even, to what art can achieve.

### 2.3.5 Notes on a Black Modernism: African American Women Artists in America.

In the sections “Market” and “Plum Bun” we follow Angèle’s path to eventual disillusionment to secure power, position, and wealth through marrying Roger Fielding. All throughout this plot line, the narrator exposes the doubts, initially only fleeting, that Angèle experiences along the way which come to a critical point in her encounter with Virginia. As Angèle is “visually minded”, that which psychically challenges her willed position amongst white society are the “pictures” of her past that come into her consciousness. This takes place, even though she is seen and recognized in the way that she desires.<sup>339</sup> These are the portraits of her past that are a cause of inner tension within herself.<sup>340</sup> Each time, however, Angèle moves quickly on. The pictures and what they represent are relegated to the side and focus is placed on what Angèle is “learning” about being a woman in the white world. This pushing to the side frames Angèle’s experience as a performative act in the playing out of (white) gender norms – of following the order of things – expressed for example in the narrative structure and character types of the fairy tale. The narrative voice that brings back these pictorial reminders creates a critical distance between the readers and Angèle, which has been the narrator’s function all through the novel. Fauset uses these narratological strategies in order to highlight the power relationships that Angèle finds herself tangled up in, in this white patriarchal capitalist society. Another example is how Angèle contemplates the possibilities of her success within the art market. She surmises that the social position as a woman artist has its limitations, even if one is white, to the power and standing she desires: “it was absurd for her, even with her ability, to consider Art an end.”<sup>341</sup> As the overarching narrative is tied to the fairy tale trajectory at this time, it superimposes Angèle’s position in the art market with that of the marriage market. This is further supported by Fauset in setting the characters reflections in the section “Market” and “Plum Bun”, the latter understood in the nursery rhyme as the object bought at the market. Due to the economic precariousness that seemingly awaits her as an artist, she places marriage to a white man, as the necessary step to being recognized as a

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<sup>339</sup> In the beginning of her relationship with Roger the narrator states : “She had for him the quality of a foreigner” Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 123. So whilst this suggests that Roger does not see her as a white American, the “foreignness” in which he sees is not linked to her past and racial identity, though still suggestibly outside of the nation space.

<sup>340</sup> See for example: Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 116, 205.

<sup>341</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 110.

prestigious portrait painter. Angèle does not abandon her pursuit to become an artist. Rather, she is acutely aware of material realities that artists face, in particular women and even more women of color in this art market. This is articulated through a comparison with the New Negro figure Anthony Cross.

Yes, she might do worse than follow the example of Mr. Cross and become a portrait painter. But somehow she did not want to have to do this; necessity would, she was sure, spoil her touch; besides, she hated the idea of the position in which she would be placed, fearfully placating and flattering possible patrons, hurrying through with an order because she needed the cheque, accepting patronage and condescension. No, she hoped to be sought after, to have the circumstances which permit her to pick and choose, to refuse if the whim pleased her. It should mean something to be painted by “Mory”. But all this would call for position, power, wealth. And again she said to herself... “I might marry – a white man. Marriage is the easiest way for a woman to get those things, and white men have them.”<sup>342</sup>

The passage reiterates Angèle’s logic when she first had the idea, at the beginning of “Market”, that marriage to a white man was the way forward. The prestige, power, and economic comfort that she seeks are, in a sense, beyond questions of being an artist. The passage infers that Anthony Cross has only the latter as his objective, which Angèle surmises “she could do worse”. This is confirmed shortly after when Angèle perceives the determination of Anthony to “seek for the expression of truth and of himself even at the cost of trimmings in life.”<sup>343</sup> This romanticized vision of the artist, represented in the New Negro figure, points to the idea that this is possible because of his masculinity. It also highlights a potential misstep on Anthony’s part. For the trope of the starving and suffering artist is historically a myth created within the art world that both celebrates this figure at the same time as keeping him or her in a position of financial precarity, in part, to make a profit from their work. In modelling Angèle’s thoughts in comparison to the idealized image of Anthony as artist, like in the beginning of “Market” when Angèle states “women have it worse than men, black women than black men”, the narrator demonstrates that she is tuned into the difference that separates her and Anthony and the choices they have in front of them. In Philadelphia Arts Academy she experienced this firsthand. Her (mistaken) solution to this problem, to pass as white and marry Roger nevertheless recognizes that success in the art world is inflected by race, gender, and sexuality in New York, the microcosm of black and white modernisms in *Plum Bun*. Angèle decides then, that a “sacrifice” has to be made if one has neither the material support, the “right” social

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<sup>342</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 111–12. Ellipsis in the original.

<sup>343</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 112.

position, or racial identity, in the (libidinal and monetary) economy which correlates power, prestige, and wealth with the figure of the white heterosexual man. The overlapping between the art market and the marriage market infers that both share in the economic-sexual exchange of women. It casts a shadow over the workings of the art world and alludes to the unequal relationships that are established between artist and patrons that may entail more than monetary exchange.<sup>344</sup> This is because it paints Roger as her white patron. In respect to Angèle, the readers know that her relationship to Feilding involves many kinds of “sacrifices” of her body and identity and it preempts her “sacrifice” of her sister Jinny. It also entrenches this symbolic white masculine figure into the material and complex realities of white patronage within the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>345</sup> Thus for Angèle who is negotiating her position as a (black) woman artist in comparison with Anthony Cross whose “sacrifice” is life’s trimmings, the text exposes her “sacrifices” to be of a different order. Paradoxically perhaps, Angèle has a moment of clarity that the path she is choosing is one that will end in the “sacrifice” of her identity and her art.

And she was ashamed, for she knew that for the vanities and gewgaws of leisurely and irresponsible existence she would sacrifice her own talent, the integrity of her ability to interpret life, to write down a history with her brush.<sup>346</sup>

Though her focus is on “vanities and gewgaws” that she desires, and it is this that will be her downfall, which in part it is, she anticipates that fairy tale marriage is equally entangled by economic, racial, sexual, and gendered hierarchies. The commonality is the figure of the white patriarch who symbolizes and enforces the power relationships that intervene in both worlds (marriage market and art market). This, Fauset seems to be indicating, is what one needs to grapple with in terms of artistic pursuits being an African American woman and that is voiced on numerous occasions as Angèle negotiates her place as a (black or white) woman artists in

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<sup>344</sup> Angèle is not wrong to make the connections she is making. There were few women artists that could continue their practice and live their identities without fear of economic reprisals or social ostracism. For some economically privileged women, like Nathalie Barney or Gertrude Stein, they could use this economic power to move to France on a permanent basis, thus escaping perhaps familial or at least American puritanism. This of course is not to be understood as the sole reason for which both women chose to work with explicitly lesbian themes, nor were they or women like them completely free from discrimination or other forms of control such as censorship. One could also speak about the financial dependence of the now celebrated European avant-garde artists to the bourgeoisie as well as the racial asymmetrical dynamics of their use of “*art nègre*” on top of which they made their careers and the misogynistic and often exoticized relationship that these artists had in respect to fellow women artists.

<sup>345</sup> There is a lot of critical literature on white patronage within the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes, for example will speak of his relationship to Mrs. Rufus Osgood Mason and the power dynamics involved in the artist/patron interaction: Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 316, 325. For later critical analysis see, Marlon B. Ross’s discussion of *Nigger Heaven*, homosexuality and white patronage in *Manning the Race*, 294-295; Bruce Kellner, “‘Refined Racism’: White Patronage in the Harlem Renaissance,” in *The Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004); Cheryl A. Wall, “Histories and Heresies: Engendering the Harlem Renaissance,” *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 2, no. 1 (2001): 59-76.

<sup>346</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 112.

the society at large. To take but one example on the subject of economic opportunity and questions of passing that narrator states:

“Would it be worthwhile to throw away the benefits of casual whiteness in America when no great issue was at stake? Would it indeed be worthwhile to forfeit them when a great issue was involved? Remembering the material age in which she lived and nation of which she was a member, she was doubtful. Her mother’s old dictum recurred: “Life is more important than passing”.<sup>347</sup>

To return to the romanticized place of the artist that Anthony embodies, Fauset ties this perspective of “life” and artistic pursuits with political ambitions of this New Negro figure. Anthony’s conviction to pursue “Real Art” at the “sacrifice” of economic security is tied to aesthetics of racial uplift. When Angèle goes to Harlem with her white companions to watch the race leader Van Meier speak, Anthony is amongst the crowd of “the most advanced colored Americans”.<sup>348</sup> Here her affective experience of her arrival to New York are recalled in the “waves” she feels in the “fullness, richness even the thickness of life”.

The stream of living ran almost molten; little waves of feeling played out from groups within the audience and beat against her consciousness and against that of her friends, only the latter were without her secret powers of interpretation.<sup>349</sup>

Setting her painterly perception apart from her white cohorts, the speech given by Van Meier is one of “racial sacrifice”.

He urged the deliberate introduction of beauty and pleasure into the difficult life of the American Negro. These objects should be theirs as racial heritage and compensation. Yet for a time, there would have to be sacrifices, many sacrifices made for the good of the whole. “Our case is unique,” the beautiful, cultured voice intoned; “those of us who have gained the front ranks in money and training, will not, are not able as yet to go our separate ways apart from the unwashed, untutored herd. We must still look back and render service to our less fortunate, weaker brethren.”<sup>350</sup>

Though Angèle leaves Harlem stating that she has never been “more interested in her life” in what has just taken place, the “racial sacrifice” that is overlapped in Anthony’s path of economic sacrifice for “Real Art” is something that Angèle/Angela will continually dispute. It suggests too that, in this refusal of sacrifice, she also challenges the overtones of superiority and explicit paternalism of Van

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<sup>347</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 333.

<sup>348</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 216.

<sup>349</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 216.

<sup>350</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 218.

Meier's speech. In her discussion with Virginia, where the latter describes Anthony as an "ascetic", and Angela broaches Miss Powell's fight against the decision to take away the prize she was awarded (addressed below) she states:

Of course in a way it would have been a fine thing if she [Rachel] could have held on, but she was perfectly justified in letting go so she could avoid still greater bitterness and disappointment and so she could have something left in her to devote to her art. *You can't fight and create at the same time.*<sup>351</sup>

This is repeated a few pages later and again in conversation with Virginia. Remembering that within the landscape of the novel Virginia is the figure of the New Negro Woman, and thus a character that adheres to the pursuits that Van Meier outlines, Angela expresses that she wanted "to spend [her] life doing something besides fighting". It appears that from her perspective, artistic practices shouldn't have as a point of departure the social and political goals of racial uplift and more generally racial and gender emancipation. It does not necessarily infer that art or aesthetics are not political, however, from Angela's point of view, creating to be political (propaganda) seems to hinder the practice of creation. This at least in America, for her summation that "you can't fight and create at the same time" solidifies her desire to travel to Paris where Angela imagines she could pursue her artistic career.<sup>352</sup> What resonates out of the text on the whole is that in the United States, as a black woman artist, politically struggling for social change, and more so because of how women's roles are defined by their masculine comrades, is not contemporaneous with the creation of aesthetics and artistic pursuits. To nuance this Fauset aligns Angela's path with her African American colleague Rachel Powell. Rachel specifically works in portrait painting, like Angela, but her main ambition is to reimagine modern black feminine identities and create alternate cultural aesthetics to the norms of black and white modernisms and the figures that they represent.

Throughout the narrative, Fauset draws a parallel between the character of Angèle and Rachel who she met at Cooper Union. The freedom and mobility that Angèle expressed through her move to New York is similarly voiced by the narrator in Rachel's desire for agency and autonomy. However, for the latter, it is not imagined within the national space of the United States but in France.

Inquiry revealed that the young lady [Rachel Powell] had one secret aspiration; to win or earn enough money to go to France and then after that, she said with sudden ardor, "anything could happen." To this end she had worked, scraped, saved, gone

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<sup>351</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 354. My emphasis.

<sup>352</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 358.



without pleasures and clothes. Her work was creditable, but not sufficiently imbued, Angela thought, with the divine promise to warrant this sublimation of normal desires.

Miss Powell seemed to read her thought. “And then it gives me a chance to show America that one of us can stick it; that we have some idea above the ordinary humdrum existence.”<sup>353</sup>

Already, Rachel appears to understand that the likelihood that she may become a successful artist in America is compromised if not impossible. Her sights are set on France as the space that will open this opportunity for her. Angela’s aesthetic judgement of Rachel’s work is very critical. It could be interpreted as the mimicking of codes of white aesthetics, for it is at this time that Angela is working and speaking from this position. As such, Rachel’s work goes beyond her capacities of aesthetic judgement. Rather than understanding that this may be limitation of her perspective, Angèle surmises that Rachel’s creations are not good enough for her to dream of a career in France. Rachel herself speaks back to Angela’s limitations. She wants to show “America” that she has something to say, that no matter what difficulties “America” dishes out, she can “stick it”. In this way, Rachel Powell becomes representative of another New Negro Woman’s voice emanating from within the Harlem Renaissance but alternate to the figure and trajectory of the race woman embodied by Virginia. Powell’s desires for herself and her work are intertwined with the cultural politics of the Harlem Renaissance. As the narrator states, “the self-consciousness of color, racial responsibility, lay, Angela had discovered, deep upon her.”<sup>354</sup> However it is in the imagined France of the novel where “anything can happen” for Rachel. It is only outside of America where she can find the space for her creative practices that work to aesthetically transform the racial, gender and sexual stereotypes of black femininity. Set in New York, this impossibility is thus framed in respect to both the white and black modernisms being formulated at the time. Furthermore, whilst many creators of the New Negro movement travelled also to France for the same or similar reasons to Powell’s, her trajectory is differentiated from them for her dream is never actualized in the novel. She never gets to go to France.

In the final section “Market is Done” Rachel and Angela enter an art contest, and if successful, it would assure them money to travel to France and secure a place at the Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts. This school is “financed by *Americans*” who established “a summer school for *American* architects, painters and sculptors.”<sup>355</sup> Both artists were successful in receiving a prize: Angela for

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<sup>353</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 109–10.

<sup>354</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 334.

<sup>355</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 331. Emphasis my own.

her painting of “Fourteenth Street Types” and Rachel for her “A Street in Harlem”. Everything is arranged, they had received their scholarship, their passage to France was paid and “a considerable savings” had been made in terms of tuition fees for the school at Fontainebleau. They were to sail in June and “were looking forward to a year of pleasure, of inspiring work, to a life that would be ‘different’.”<sup>356</sup>

Angela was relieved, but Miss Powell was triumphant; not unpleasantly, she gave the impression of having justified not only her calling but herself and, in a lesser degree her race.”<sup>357</sup>

And yet Rachel Powell will not be allowed to go. The “American committee” of the school discovered her racial identity and withdrew her place and the prize money she was awarded. Interestingly, Fauset is fictionalizing a real-life incident that occurred for the African American artist Augusta Savage who, like Powell, received a scholarship to study in Fontainebleau but was subsequently refused a place in the program after her racial identity was known. Thus, this enforces the ongoing dialogue that *Plum Bun* is undertaking with the milieu of the Harlem Renaissance. From a transatlantic perspective, what is also interesting to note is that Paulette Nardal will report on Augusta Savage’s experience of racism and the differentialized opportunities for international mobilities between black men and women to participate in these circulations of modernisms.<sup>358</sup> In *Plum Bun*, the narrator represents the fictive American committee as playing the same role as Mr. Shields in Philadelphia and of Roger in the fairy tale plot. This is because the scene reiterates the same power relationships one the level of gender, race, and sexuality. Akin to the other moments of repetition, with the change of characters involved in the scene comes a change in what manifests. The “American committee” that polices the borders between whiteness and blackness is more evidently connected to notions of national identity and belonging. Powell’s ostracization from the program is also the exemplification of her non recognition as an American citizen.

They [the American committee] said they themselves were without prejudice, but that they were sure the enforced contact on the boat would be unpleasant to many of the students, garnered as they were from all parts of the United States. Furthermore, they couldn’t help but think that such contact would be embarrassing to Miss Powell.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 334.

<sup>357</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 334.

<sup>358</sup> This article will be addressed in Chapter Six.

<sup>359</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 335.

Rachel's very presence on the ship would make the other white students feel uncomfortable in this "enforced contact" with her. As it was highlighted in the discussion of "The Gift of Laughter" black mobility is controlled and stopped for "white comfort". The violence of the committee is demonstrated to be inextricably intertwined with a discourse of sexual morality. As it was brought to the fore in Roger's policing and Angèle's act of brushing off Rachel Powell's touch, this passage demonstrates the effects of the perverted logics of American racism informed by puritan ideals. Words like "contact", "unpleasant" and "embarrassing" emphasize the libidinal economy that is operative in the racism used to police national borders that are analogous to white identity. The sexual morals of Anglo puritanism that renders impure or "unpleasant" the contact between white and black subjects not only assures the purity of whiteness through the humiliation and rejection of black subjects but also sadistically enforces them to be complicit in their own humiliation. Rachel would be "embarrassed", the committee states, if she were to be exposed to "such a contact". With the same character of Rachel, Fauset draws a continuation of this articulation between the racialization of sex and the sexualization of race. Whether on an interpersonal level between subjects (Angèle and Roger) or on the level of the institution (American Committee) the consistency of the same experience that Rachel has to endure is thus figured as a common occurrence in the life of black women. It is carried on in the next scene in which a group of white reporters come to Rachel's house without her consent (consent is to be understood here with all its sexual implications). At this point Angela happens to visit and enters the scene. The subject of the transatlantic passage and the "uncomfortable" situation that this would engender is raised and Miss Tilden, one of the reporters, gives her opinion.

"Well of course, this is awfully plain speaking and I hope Miss Powell won't be offended," resumed Miss Tilden, showing only too plainly that she didn't care whether Miss Powell were offended or not, "but after all we do know that a great many people find the – er – Negroes objectionable and so of course no self-respecting one of them would go where she wasn't wanted."

Miss Powell's mother hovering indefinitely in the background, addressing no one in particular, opined that she did not know that "their committee owned the boat. If her daughter could only afford it she'd show them how quickly she'd go where she wanted and not ask no one no favors either."

"Ah but," said Miss Tilden judicially, "there's the fallacy. Something else is involved here. There is a social side to this matter, inherent if not expressed. And that *is* the question."<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 343-344.

Rachel's mother's irony is lost on Tilden as well as her reference to the complex relationship of white patronage. Condescending in her tone, Tilden speaks as if neither Rachel, her mother, nor Angela could "know" that this was a social question, which she frames as "social equality". This repeats the denial of black subjectivity as Tilden talks on their behalf. Another reporter, "a short, red-faced young man" takes up the charge in agreement with Miss Tilden.

Doesn't the whole matter resolve itself into this: has Miss Powell or any other young colored woman knowing conditions in America the right to thrust her company on a group of people with whom she could have nothing in common except her art? If she stops to think she must realize that not one of the prospective group of students who would be accompanying her on that ship would really welcome her presence.<sup>361</sup>

The "uncomfortable" situation is translated into the "right to thrust her company on a group of people". "Thrust" a word that connotes domination and power in male heterosexuality par excellence is attributed to Rachel's presence on the ship. What this masculine subject's interlocution reveals, perhaps unconsciously, is what the racial, gender and sexual articulations of whiteness covers over in its projection onto Rachel. Her "right to thrust" herself invisibilizes the very violent reality that it is the white masculinity who believes that he has "the right to thrust" himself on women especially black women. The male reporter's speech act externalizes this sexual perversion on which normative white masculine heterosexuality is built and puts it onto a black feminine subject which makes this subject the embodiment or source of that perversion. What is at the libidinal core of white masculine and heterosexual domination becomes the phantasmagorical "threat" created by this power structure in the displacement of the tools of its domination. Rachel's body is therefore read by the white subjects on the ship, and the reporters in her house, as the threat not only to them but to American identity and the purity of its whiteness. Rachel's identity as a black woman is sexualized and masculinized to perversion and as such cannot partake in national identity. She cannot get on the ship, in part, because this scholarship is for "Americans" and she is not one in the eyes of the Committee and the United States at large. For them, whether she is here or in Fontainebleau, she is not a citizen, and it is her fault. This is demonstrated again when Angela informs the reporters of her racial identity, and who subsequently "report" the matter:

Miss Tilden's was the silliest and most dangerous. She spoke of mixed blood as the curse of the country, a curse whose "insidiously concealed influence constantly threatens the wells of national race purity. Such incidents as these make one halt

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<sup>361</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 344 - 345.

before he condemns the efforts of the Ku Klux Klan and its fight for 100 percent Americanism.”<sup>362</sup>

Through the voice of Miss Tilden, a white supremacist of the first degree, the passage reiterates that black identity is physically and symbolically outside of the (white) nation and national cultural identity. Black subjects are a threat to “100 percent Americanism”, read “100 percent” whiteness. The reiteration of sexual moralism such as “mixed blood”, “a curse”, “threat”, “purity” and “dangerous” belie the national taboo of interracial mixing – the one drop rule – that the biblical and puritan language used in this passage is meant to condone in the continuation of white (masculine) domination. Importantly this is expressed by Miss Tilden who is a figure of the New Woman which reiterates white femininity, even in its modern depictions, as being tied to the articulations of white supremacy, in real life or in aesthetic form. Akin to how Rachel was described, Angela is represented as the one at fault. Her very existence is deviant as it is the “curse” of national race purity and identity. The casual reference and allegiance to the Ku Klux Klan in a newspaper article on art represents to what extent the violence of racial oppression in the United States permeates every part of this society, even the art world. The artistic institution represented by the “American Committee” cuts the economic and career opportunities that the scholarship at Fontainebleau could have provided Angela and Rachel. This event confirms the unequal access black women have to institutional spaces, to the pursuit of artistic practices and therefore the creation of their own modern aesthetics. When Angela’s racial identity becomes known, she loses her employment, her prize money and place at the Fontainebleau school. The donor of the prize decides to withdraw the contribution because she or he was not interested in “Ethnology but in Art.”<sup>363</sup> Angela and Rachel are placed outside of the nation space as much as the perception of their work is rendered outside the space of “Art.” What was before presumably seen as “Art”, given the fact that Angela and Rachel were awarded the prize, now, suddenly, is interpreted as aesthetically outside of it, or as having no aesthetic quality at all. This clearly draws the color and gender line in the art world. From this donor’s perspective, those who are in the position to legitimately produce culture in America are white (masculine) artists. In part, *Plum Bun* is the call that an African American woman artist is seen for who she is: recognized as having equal rights, autonomy in perspective and subjectivity, in short, an artist who creates art. For Fauset, as fictionalized in Angela’s path, but also in Rachel’s, this is impossible in the United States portrayed within the novel. Like the

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<sup>362</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 352.

<sup>363</sup> Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 359.

African American lieutenant in “Nostalgia” who cannot find a home where he is recognized for who he “is”, for these two women artists the search undertaken was to find a home, understood as a space in which they could create their own aesthetics and nurture their artistic practices. Angela eventually takes the transatlantic voyage to France. But as Fauset demonstrated in the (im)possibility of the lieutenant’s search, and in Rachel’s unrealized dream, this imagined France is already colored by the fact that it may not be a land in which Angela finds what she desires. Whilst Angela and Anthony are reunited – Anthony is sent over as a “gift” for Christmas – the abruptness of the ending renders this “happily ever after” ambiguous. Furthermore, Fauset leaves unresolved questions on art, interpretation, and aesthetic practice which have been developed above. The narrative finishes before the readers know what, if any, possibilities there are in France for Angela’s and Anthony’s pursuit of artistic careers and creation of their black modern aesthetics. However, what both Angela’s and Rachel’s trajectories do comment upon is the possibility of participation in cultural production, whether in black or white worlds. If social inequality persists – on the level of race, class, gender, sexuality, or national identity – then it seems that artistic production and its aesthetics will be judged by its reduction to the identity of the artist creating it. Whoever holds the dominant perspective has a tendency to interpret the work of an “other” as inferior, or lacking and not up to the standards of aesthetics norms that they prescribe.<sup>364</sup> What has been argued throughout is that Fauset’s *Plum Bun* dialogues with and allegorizes in her characters journeying the specificity of black women’s search for emancipation in the urban environment, the epicenter of modernism and the creation of an artistic practice that seeks to develop a modern aesthetics. Particularly from Angela’s perspective that crosses into both white and black worlds, the normative codes of either do not provide a very emancipatory path for her. That in the United States fictionalized in the novel, the idea that black aesthetics could intervene in the fight for social equality is impossible given that it is the dominant group that will always already see and define art through a lens of racial or gender prejudice. For art to be perceived as such, it depends on a shift of perspective on their part. This is not to say that black artists are dependent on the recognition of Euro-American modernisms to create aesthetics. This was counteracted by the Harlem Renaissance and it is in this way that Fauset’s work aligns itself with the New Negro movements pursuits. However, Fauset, in her characters

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<sup>364</sup> Claude McKay reiterates this point in his *A Long Way from Home*. He retells the anecdote of submitting some short stories to be published, using his name, and which were subsequently rejected. McKay then resends them under a different name to the same publishers and they were accepted. The point is, that the person making the editorial decision, in the second instance, presumed that the writer was white and therefore judged the work to be aesthetically sound for publishing. Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 1937, ed. and introduction by Gene Andrew Jarrett (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 216.

and in her text, is asking if art as propaganda, or art as an emancipatory aesthetics, is realizable from a black woman artist's perspective. For her, if art is to be revolutionary, she has "two doors" to negotiate within the creation of a black aesthetics. As the "paradox" of the "new" showed, the denial of the past to take a temporal leap into the modern has the effect of ascribing women's places outside and irrelevant to modernism because of their social identity. As such, the continuation of sexism that came with the New Negro into his modern embodiment perpetuates similar logics to what Fauset exposes in the reduction of Rachel's and Angela's art to "ethnology". Furthermore, from a black feminist perspective, it questions, even, the tenability or political and cultural saliency of breaking with the past in order to make something "new". For as generations of black feminist activists and creators have shown, fights for black emancipation are only successful if they emancipate all members of the black community. As Angela's journey crosses and negotiates both black and white worlds, both black and white modernisms, Angela's movement to another socio-cultural space of France – and Rachel's desire to do so from the outset – is more than suggestive that in the American space, the norms, codes and conventions being created and legitimized leaves very little room, if any, to think of these aesthetics as emancipatory from black women artists' perspectives. As such, Fauset repositions herself in terms of what was becoming a central argument and voice, (notably that of Du Bois) within the Harlem Renaissance. Angela's repetition of "you can't fight and create at the same time" is highly evocative of this and challenges the function of art as propaganda. In Fauset's narrative strategies and the explorations of her main protagonist Angela, the readers learn that it is in constant processes of decentering or (dis)locating perspectives that the conditions of possibility of critique, of agency, of subjectivity and of emancipatory aesthetic practices are laid.

## Chapter Three

# Jessie Fauset's France(s): Imagining Geographies for Black Feminine Identities

### 3.1 Problematizing Home and Migration

Chapter One discussed the migratory trajectories of Paulette Nardal and Jessie Fauset to the French capital in order to highlight the connection between specificities of lived experience and the invention of black feminine cultural representations and feminist epistemologies. As it was also the case with the work of Jane Nardal, this insight into their practices of literary journalism recognized that symbolic and material realities were negotiated in order to create space for the living out of subjectivities in an environment that was at once the center of colonial power and the site of communities from the black diaspora. These writers' literary and experiential travels – “uprootings” and “regroundings” – underlined the uneven effects of the Third Republic's colonial imperialism which was traced through consumer culture. What was also demonstrated was how the aesthetics of modernism, or who and what were considered “modern” in this context, was equally informed by such ideologies. It is in this sense that these authors participate in critically questioning the primacy of the Euro-American modernist aesthetic and as a consequence point to the possibility of wider understandings of modernisms. In this chapter and the chapters to come, the main investigation that speaks to such critical pursuits is in the way that Fauset and Nardal represent mobile trajectories and create cultural identities within a transatlantic frame. For instance, to investigate how Fauset and Nardal's characters travel, settle, or move on within their fictional worlds demonstrates how their aesthetics work to unravel binary logics that are at the foundation of the Euro-American point of view such as black-white, colony-metropolis, or center-periphery. One non-fictional example of this is Paulette Nardal's travel guide to Martinique and how she represents the island and its populations in order to counteract metropolitan expectations and exotic fantasies tied to this French colony. In the context of the United States, as it was analyzed in Chapter Two, Fauset's work demonstrates that the leap into



the future taken through migration by the New Negro figure is at the expense of African American women. In this way, both Nardal's and Fauset's retelling of mobile identities problematizes the cultural geographies in which they write and the distinctions between a "here" and a "there", between past and future, the traditional and the modern. It is in decentering or destabilizing the dominant point of view and its geographical delimitations where one can begin to think, create, and experience plurality of cultures and the cohabitation of supposed mutually exclusive identities, such as black Franco-Antillean or African *American* femininities. Another aspect then, is that pushing against the homogenizing tendencies of nation state, national cultural identity, and masculine created modernisms, Fauset's and Nardal's discursive geographies and the characters that populate them compel the readers to question understandings of "home", "homelands" and one's relationship to them. Reflections are presented both in terms of a home at a new destination but also in terms of identity and belonging in a home that was the point of departure. To return to the critical work of *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, the idea of "homing" that is presented is beneficial to what will be investigated and adds to what has already come to light in the previous two chapters.

Ahmed, Fortier, Sheller, and Castaneda underline that the critical interventions that think migration through the prism of diaspora demonstrate the "need to rethink the assumption that 'home', in migration is simply something we 'leave behind'". One of the critical projects of *Uprootings/Regroundings* is the call to "re-form or re-animate our perceptions of home, without then assuming home is fixed prior to the experience of migration".<sup>365</sup> In order to do

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<sup>365</sup> Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 8. The specific critical literature on diaspora that these writers refer to in this discussion are the works of Paul Gilroy, Avtar Brah, and James Clifford. Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996); James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1994): 302-338; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, and Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London: Penguin, 2000). Furthermore, the editors give examples of theoretical work that has come to complicate traditional understandings of home but not necessarily in relation to migration. For instance, they point to black feminists' work that analyze the ways in which the intersections of race, family, and nation articulate themselves in certain ideas of 'home'. Citing the studies of Patricia Hill Collins, Stephanie Coontz, and Hazel V. Carby, to name just a few, they build on these critical interventions that "have challenged universal definitions of home defined in terms of white-middle class patriarchal family" as they "seek to take this challenge forward by questioning the very *terms* of home which delimit it as an accomplished site of belonging and governance. Homes are always made and remade as grounds and conditions (of work, of family, of political climate, etc.) of change." Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 8 – 9. Emphasis in the original. Hazel V. Carby, "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood," in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, ed. Center for Contemporary Culture Studies (London: Taylor and Francis, 2005); Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation," in *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*, eds. Sandra Harding and Uma Narayan (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 156-177; Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

this, the editors of the study argue for a process-based approach that, much like their idea of uprooting/regroundings, puts into question notions of home in so far as the experience of it is a project, a practice, and therefore a necessarily ongoing pursuit. Like identity then, understood as a necessarily ongoing negotiation of subjective and collective experiences within symbolic and material realities, this concept of “homing” insists that home does not have an “essential meaning, in advance of its making”.<sup>366</sup> As such, creating a home “depends on the reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted – in migration, displacement or colonization.”<sup>367</sup> Paulette and Jane Nardal’s and Jessie Fauset’s representations of black women and black cultural identity that counteract stereotypical representation of blackness in the Euro-American modernist literature could be seen precisely as one of these “reclaimings”. They are ongoing pursuits that are continually returned to in their discursive spaces. Furthermore, what is particularly pertinent in the critical investigations of migration in *Uprootings/Regroundings* is that imagination plays an important role in these processes of making a home. The editors write in their introduction,

Inherent to the project of home-building *here and now*, is the gathering of ‘intimations’ of home, ‘fragments which are *imagined* to be traces of an equally imagined homely whole, the imagined past ‘home’ of another time and another space’ (Hage 1997: 106 emphasis added). In this respect, being at home and the work of home-building is intimately bound up with the *idea* of home: the idea of a place (or places) in the past, and *this* place in the future. Making home is about *creating* both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present.<sup>368</sup>

It is limiting to understand that home is simply a projection onto reality, for as the authors concede, uprootings/regroundings and home-building “can entail forms of mourning, nostalgia and remembrance as well as a physical sickness and experiences of trauma”.<sup>369</sup> Just as Fauset and Nardal underline in their lived experiences, migration provides both freedom and loss, idealization and deception. Similarly then, creating homes in the grounds of the present is traversed by a multiplicity and at times contradictory affective realities. What Fauset, Nardal and the authors of *Uprootings/Regroundings* have in common then, is that home building or creating spaces in which black feminine subjects can live and thrive points to an interrelationship between lived experience, imagination, and creation. For it is through a

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<sup>367</sup> Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 9.

<sup>368</sup> Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 9. Work cited, Ghassan Hage, “At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, Ethnic Food and Migrant Home-Building,” in *Home/World: Space, Community and Marginality in Sydney’s West*, eds. Helen Grace, Ghassan Hage, Lesley Johnson, Julie Langsworth and Michael Symonds (Annandale: Pluto Press Australia, 1997), 99-153.

<sup>369</sup> Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 9.

negotiation of both pasts, presents, and futures that are localized in the idea and material reality of a home, a place, a dwelling that one imagines and creates. The relevance of this formulation of home in terms of processes of producing literature starts to become clear. It would be to see writing and the literary space, in part, as a home-building practice and consequently, it would be to understand that the act of creation is neither void of the extremely difficult and sometimes painful affective realities nor void of political implications. What this means is, like in Paulette Nardal's short story "In Exile", the literary text does not simply engage in notions of migration, nostalgia, mourning, exile and home via its aesthetic tools such as setting, plot or narrative. It acts also as a space in which new notions of home can be imagined, with all the negotiations between self and other, between past and future, between text and author, or reader and text, that this implies. What will be demonstrated in the coming chapters is that in their discursive worlds and particularly in their imagined geographies, Paulette Nardal and Jessie Fauset challenge the fixity of location – of what is understood as the United States or France for example – which is generative of other ideas of home but also of community and identity. And it is addressing the texts of Fauset and Nardal with such a critical frame that will help draw out the political implications of their work. For in a world that is organized by colonial heteropatriarchy, to create and question the possibility of home in this sense, is equally a journey to imagine and hope for a world that is other and better than the reality that they know. By destabilizing location, socio-cultural identities and concepts of modernism and modernist aesthetics these two writers create spaces and places where characters journey, revisit the past, investigate the present and future and transform them in an imagined world that seeks to represent something other than domination, oppression, and discrimination. As this will take longer than the present chapter to accomplish, this chapter, like the title suggests, will focus specifically on how France comes to occupy a space in Fauset's fiction. The first issue to address is to critically engage in certain conceptions of international modernisms that territorialize these artistic movements in centers or hubs, such as Paris.

### 3.1.1 Circulations of Modernisms and Thinking in Hubs

Across all of Fauset's work France will occupy a continual though changing place. Whether in her journalistic endeavors, her editorial work, her translation choices, her published short stories or the imagined realities of her novels, the French nation is there materially, symbolically, and linguistically. In a broad context this French-American connection in her literature, is in part, a product of the time in which she lived. These two nations had just fought side by side in World War One with America's intervention being attributed, by some, to France's defeat of Germany. It is also in this post war period that the American economic and cultural empire is growing and expanding, becoming the forerunner in the Western geo-political scene, and reaching across the Atlantic to the French shores. In general, American culture tended to perceive France as a place that offered different values and cultural practices than those in the United States. As a consequence, this painted France in a negative or positive light as being either a space of moral looseness or a space of opportunity to live outside of the strict social and moral codes of American society. It is not by happenstance that the migration of prominent (openly) lesbian writers and artists such as Nathalie Barney, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Janet Flanner (to name just a few), moved and made their lives in Paris during the interwar period. Nor was it by happenstance that Paris provided a sanctuary for African American writers, artists, and intellectuals from the extreme racial violence of the United States. If these two general observations of the French cultural space – imagined or real – held in American imaginaries was put into a commentary on modernism, what can be suggested is that for some white and black Americans, France symbolizes a space where desires for freedom and the “new” could be explored, in literature and in lived realities. And this was not strictly limited to American culture. According to Pascale Casanova, Paris was *the* site of modernist cultural production during the late nineteenth and twentieth century. In her study *La République mondiale des lettres*, that looks to account for the way in which literary modernism as a system works on a global scale, Casanova's vision frames cultural production as a kind of fight for the literary fittest. From her perspective, cultural producers' participation in international modernism is presupposed by an almost necessary (literary or literal) move to the French capital, and is premised upon a sacrificial gesture by the author of his or her “difference” – understood as national or regional – in order to voluntarily “assimilate the

values of the great literary centers”.<sup>370</sup> Whilst Casanova does dedicate much of her argument to the dialectical relationship between established or legitimate genres (center) and those considered illegitimate (periphery) at the time (and the reciprocal influence they have on one another) the centralizing aspect of her critical model tends to nevertheless overwrite the multiplicity of modernisms, as well as the multilocal and multidirectional aspects of cultural exchange and circulation. As an effect, modernist themes of migration and exile seemingly reinstall the trope of modernism of a “willful forgetting” of the past in order to achieve the “new” in the acculturation or “assimilation” of the “great literary center”. Thinking about cultural hubs of modernism in an international frame, as Casanova’s model does, tends to restrict understandings of these human experiences and the way they are represented. The cultural politics and fictional work of Jessie Fauset and Paulette Nardal challenge such critical hypotheses. This is to say that what may be evident in the life and work of James Joyce, one of the writers whom Casanova bases her model, may not be evident or even tenable in respect to France or Paris in the life and work of Jessie Fauset or Paulette Nardal.<sup>371</sup> For example, one of Fauset’s Frances appears in her corpus as the site of French colonial culture and histories of the slave trade in order to critique African American oppression in the United States. This was shown in the discussion of her article “Nostalgia” in Chapter Two. “Nostalgia” addressed the (im)possibility for an African American lieutenant to find a home in the United States or France. Thus, in Fauset’s exploration of a modern topos within dislocation and relocation, instead of retelling a journey to Britain and drawing on British colonial culture, which would follow the specific history of colonization in the United States, Fauset opts for the French context. This choice suggests that this France strategically appears in Fauset’s texts to serve her political purposes. To recognize the possible political motivation of this

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<sup>370</sup> Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999); Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 108.

<sup>371</sup> In *Modernism in a Global Context*, Peter J. Kalliney underlines the possible shortcomings of Casanova’s theorization of literary modernism in a global context. As it has been outlined above, Casanova’s “sacrifice”, perceived as a necessary choice that the author has to make in order to overcome the specificity of national and cultural identities and aesthetics in his or her pursuit of global recognition, means that Casanova characterizes this relationship between national and global cultural contexts as an antagonistic one. Peter Kalliney points to the fact that this may not be true for all writers, and as an example he cites such authors as Léopold Sédar Senghor. Kalliney argues, “this general model [Casanova’s model] may work well for some writers, but the empirical evidence does not seem to support this in other instances. Could it be really asserted that a writer such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, political leader of postcolonial Senegal, cofounder of the Négritude movement, and inductee to the *Académie française*, subordinated his regional or national aspirations in order to achieve recognition in Paris?” Peter J. Kalliney, *Modernism in a Global Context* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 14. Retrieved online March 7, 2021, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474219631.0004>. Kalliney suggests that there is a potential depoliticization of the lives and work of those like Senghor in Casanova’s approach to thinking global literary culture. Though Kalliney does not state this explicitly, perhaps this is because the sacrificial gesture in Casanova’s model is predicated on the individual rather than the collective. What this means is that the understanding of global literary cultures is premised on the choice or act of an individual as if that individual was outside of socio-cultural dynamics of identity constructions that are differentiated across race, class, gender, and sexuality.

act says something about the creation of her aesthetic practice. As it was underlined during the discussion of “Nostalgia” her reference to France and French culture through the work of Chateaubriand, is not a literary exile to France that provides the freedom from social death of a black subject in the United States. Rather it is in the interaction of this symbolic and fictionalized space with the American context through the course of her article that actively produces or provides another geography within the text. It was neither “France” nor “the United States” but an imagined reality constructed by multiple socio-cultural, linguistic, and geographical border crossings. In “Nostalgia” she referred to it as an “always beyond”. Therefore, being neither a strict opposition (negation) nor acculturation (sacrifice of difference) of a dominant culture, Fauset’s France in “Nostalgia” doesn’t seem to fit neatly into the thinking of modernism through central cultural hubs which are tied to specific geographical locations. The exclusion of (national) difference to move into (international) universal literary modernity seems to be put into question by Fauset’s aesthetic proposal. This, however, demands further investigation not the least because France, or Europe, do not appear in the same way in all of Fauset’s work. Within her aesthetic experimentations there will be important differences in the role played by this imagined space in the travellings of her characters. This will not only impact questions on the specificities of black cultural identities within the American context but also thinking modernisms in an international one.

### **3.2 France in *There is Confusion***

#### **3.2.1 Situating Fauset on a Black Modernist Map**

Fauset’s debut novel *There is Confusion*, originally published in 1924, came out at a specific moment of the Harlem Renaissance. As Thadious M. Davis remarks in the foreword to the 1989 republication of Fauset’s novel, “at no prior point in African-American literary history had there been such a conjunction of talent in expression and access to publication.”<sup>372</sup> Davis sites for example, the publication of Jean Toomer’s *Cane*, and Claude McKay’s *Harlem Shadows* that preceded the appearance of *There is Confusion* by little over one and two years respectively. Furthermore, in the spring of 1924, Walter White’s *Fire in the Flint* was due to come out and the subsequent years would see the arrival of Alain Locke’s *The New Negro*,

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<sup>372</sup> Thadious M. Davis, “Foreword to the 1989 Edition,” in Jessie Redmon Fauset, *There is Confusion* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), v.

Countee Cullen's *Color* and Langston Hughes' *Weary Blues*. A specificity of the publication of *There is Confusion* is that it got rushed into print by the publisher Boni and Liveright in order to capitalize on the hype that the downtown white literary establishment had for Harlem Renaissance writers but also to profit "on the fact that Fauset's was the first novel to come out of the literary activity of Harlem".<sup>373</sup> As a consequence, and as Fauset herself regrets in her introduction to the first edition, her novel of modern American life that addresses a wide range of themes from environmental determinism and heritage to racial, gender and class mobility and emancipation, was initially published with "a number of errors". Whilst this first edition has not been consulted in order to say whether these errors refer to the structure of the novel, or concern grammatical mistakes, or both, it nevertheless demonstrates that Fauset was met with pressure to finish her debut novel. She had to concede to the publisher's timeline of economic profitability rather than her own timeline of literary creation.<sup>374</sup> Perhaps this does not account entirely for possible critical misgivings one may have with the aesthetics – structure, narrative, character formation, or style – proposed by Fauset in *There is Confusion*. It is however helpful to keep this editorial context in mind when approaching Fauset's modern literary experimentations in this text. The final contextual remark before delving into the travels of Fauset's protagonists across the Atlantic is to frame *Confusion's* and Fauset's work in general within transatlantic circulations of black literary production.

Published at roughly the same time as "watershed" publications of the Harlem Renaissance like the works mentioned above, and particularly Locke's *The New Negro*, *There is Confusion* was likely affected by this burst of African American literary creation. At the novel's launch in 1924 during the Writers' Guild dinner at the Civic Club in Lower Manhattan, its celebration was foreshadowed by the attention paid to Alain Locke's upcoming editorial of *Survey Graphic* and his anthology. Rendered peripheral in the proceedings, to which Locke was master of ceremonies, Fauset's position as recognised writer and producer of black modernist aesthetics along with her (male) contemporaries, was potentially thwarted. Ironically many of these writers were in fact people whom she had mentored in her position as editor of *The Crisis*, which leads to the later labelling of Fauset by the likes of Langston Hughes "as midwife" to the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>375</sup> As Davis points out, this event "further meant that in

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<sup>373</sup> Davis, "Foreword to the 1989 Edition," v.

<sup>374</sup> Davis quotes Fauset's introduction to the first edition of *There is Confusion*. "Because of the great interest shown in the novel prior to its publication, the attempt to meet the publication date has caused a number of errors to appear uncorrected in the first copies printed." Davis, "Foreword to the 1989 Edition," v.

<sup>375</sup> Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 246.

the next three dynamic years, the influential leaders in the literary movement were all males, some of whom, like Locke, were not only male chauvinist but misogynist.”<sup>376</sup> In a transatlantic perspective, to take for example the importance that *The New Negro* played in Paulette and Jane Nardal’s interaction with the Harlem Renaissance writers (both literarily and in reality), there are questions to be explored in respect to what texts make their way across the Atlantic and by consequence how this affects the cultural environments of their destination. The Nardal sisters had for a time prior to the appearance of *The New Negro* been familiar with work emerging from within the Harlem Renaissance and African American culture at large. This is evident in Paulette Nardal’s recounting of the performances of African American Spirituals in Paris during the 1920’s as it was addressed in Chapter One. However, the arrival of *The New Negro*, as well as other influential African American works such as Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* and the literary magazines *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* had a significant aesthetic, cultural and political impact on the work and lives of the two sisters, their colleagues, and the then budding Négritude movement.<sup>377</sup> This influence can be traced, for example, in Paulette and Jane Nardal’s desire to translate *The New Negro* into French in 1927 as well as in the cultural and literary criticisms of *La Dépêche africaine*, for which Jane and Paulette Nardal were literary editors. Furthermore, it is arguable that the ideas presented in Jane Nardal’s “*Internationalisme noir*” published in *La Dépêche africaine* in 1928 and Paulette Nardal’s “*Éveil de la conscience de race*” appearing in *La Revue du monde noir* in 1930 are evocative of issues raised in *The New Negro* but adapted to the Francophone context.<sup>378</sup> On the one hand, these demonstrations of the literary transatlantic exchanges between Harlem and the black Francophone communities during the 1920’s do show that Fauset’s work did make it across the Atlantic, for “The Gift of Laughter” was included in *The New Negro* and much of her literary journalism and short stories are within the pages of *The Crisis*, not to mention her editorial work for this magazine. This said, even in the works of Jane and Paulette Nardal themselves, the literary genealogies given for these interactions, and the novels from Harlem Renaissance writers that were subsequently translated into French are

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<sup>376</sup> Davis, “Foreword to the 1989 Edition,” xxiv.

<sup>377</sup> As T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting observes, “the writers of the Negro Renaissance, specifically Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson and Sterling Brown, as well as W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*; the philosopher Alain Locke’s 1925 anthology *The New Negro: An Interpretation*; Carter G. Woodson’s *Opportunity*, the popular organ for the National Urban League; and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s political vehicle *The Crisis* [were] primary influences on their [Francophone intellectuals and writers] consciousness about matters of race, culture and identity, and hence on their poetical undertakings. As Senghor revealed, “the general meaning of the word [*Négritude*] – the discovery of black values and recognition for the Negro of his situation – was born in the United States of America.” Sharpley-Whiting, *Négritude Women*, 13. Sharpley-Whiting cites Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Problématique de la négritude,” *Présence africaine* 78 (1971): 12-14.

<sup>378</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Négritude Women*, 37.



predominately those of masculine authors. Whilst there will be time at a later date to investigate the implications of this, it is arguable that Fauset and her colleagues were likely to have been aware of these issues.<sup>379</sup> As such Fauset's fictional representations of her characters journeying to French shores, and the space of France itself, could be interpreted, in part, as questioning who participates in the international scenes of (black) modernisms and what constitutes black modernist aesthetics. It would be to recognize that feminist sensibilities evident in her work and her aesthetic practices may have, to a certain degree, emerged from these national and transatlantic realities.

### 3.2.2 Who Gets to Go Abroad? Transatlantic Sea Journeys.

*There is Confusion* represents one of the varying degrees of French connection in Fauset's work. In *Plum Bun*, Angela moves to Paris at the very end of the novel as it becomes the final destination within her character development. It completes the journey of Angela's experience with racially passing and is the site of the consolidation of her romantic relationship with fellow Anthony. One possible interpretation of this ending is that it frames exile to Paris as the leaving behind of American racism and heading towards a new and brighter future. However, as it was argued in Chapter Two, the speed in which the novel ends tends to suspend the promises that Paris could provide for artists like Angela and her search of black modernist aesthetics. As it was also highlighted in the previous chapter, fellow artist Rachel Powell was prohibited from undertaking the transatlantic crossing due to the anti-black racism of the white American Committee and the nation at large. Fauset highlighted the racist logics of the sexualization of race and the racialization of sex at work in her description of the reasons given for Powell's exclusion. This imagined scene on the boat to France (it is imagined because Powell never gets on the boat) is an experience understood as being specific to Powell's identity as a black woman in America. What was not addressed at the time of the discussion is that this puts into question, or at least bends, some themes of modern literatures and more precisely diasporic modernities in respect to this naval space. Take for example Paul Gilroy's understanding of critical modernity as an aesthetics of motion. Thinking through this motion, Gilroy draws on sea travel in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that, in a sense, doubles the shared black diasporic

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<sup>379</sup> For example, Thadious M. Davis quotes David Levering Lewis in her introduction to *There is Confusion* stating, "There is no telling" the latter observes, "what she [Fauset] would have done had she been a man, given her first rate mind and formidable efficiency at any task." Davis, "Foreword to the 1989 Edition," xxiv.

experience of the Middle Passage which is cornerstone to his theory.<sup>380</sup> In this transatlantic space between England, the United States and the English speaking Caribbean, Gilroy argues that “the involvement of Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Claude McKay and Langston Hughes with ships and sailors lends to the additional support to [Peter] Linebaugh’s prescient suggestion that ‘the ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record.’”<sup>381</sup> Gilroy’s discussion on the sea voyage is subsequently connected to questions of aesthetics. Giving a genealogy of mostly male artists, he concludes his argument by stating that “the ship is the first of the novel chronotopes presupposed by my attempts to rethink modernity via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora into the western hemisphere.”<sup>382</sup> The ship then is one material and symbolic space of Pan-African communication and dissonant modernist expression. Whilst Gilroy’s analysis is highly pertinent, to look from Rachel Powell’s perspective, the question becomes what if you cannot “get on board”? Though just one chronotope used to rethink modernity, the masculinized space of the ship points to the tensions inherent in ideas of mobility as characteristic of modernities.<sup>383</sup> With Powell’s anticipated journey to France, framed as the continuation of this protagonist’s explorations of black modernist expression, Fauset seemingly suggests that Powell is barred from participation in what is thought as modernisms within an international context. This is perhaps why, in *Plum Bun* and in *There is Confusion* Fauset does not paint the naval passage as a hybrid cultural experience and space of exchange of “Pan-African communication.” Rather, it is the site in

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<sup>380</sup> Drawing on the lived experiences of early nineteenth century figures of the black diaspora in the English context, namely William Davidson and Robert Wedderburn, Gilroy states, “It is particularly significant for the direction of my overall argument that both Wedderburn and his sometime associate Davidson had been sailors, moving to and froe between nations, crossing borders in modern machines that were themselves micro-systems of linguistic and political hybridity. Their relationship to the sea may turn out to be especially important for both the early politics and poetics of the black Atlantic world that I wish to counterpose against the narrow nationalism of so much English historiography.” Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 12.

<sup>381</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 13 citing Peter Linebaugh, “All the Atlantic Mountains Shook,” *Labour/ Le Travailleur* 10 (Autumn 1983): 119.

<sup>382</sup> The passage in its entirety is as follows: “It should be emphasized that ships were the living means by which the points within the Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting of spaces in between the fixed places they connected. Accordingly, they need to be thought of as cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of the triangular trade. They were something more – a means to political dissent and possibly a distinct mode of cultural production. The ship provides a chance to explore the articulations between the discontinuous histories of England’s ports, its interfaces with the wider world. Ships also refer us back to the Middle Passage, to the half remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialization and modernization. As it were, getting on board promises a means to reconceptualize the orthodox relationship between modernity and what passes for its prehistory. It provides a different sense of where modernity might itself be thought to begin in the constitutive relationships with outsiders that both found and temper a self-conscious sense of western civilization. For all these reasons, the ship is the first novel chronotopes presupposed by my attempts to rethink modernity via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora into the western hemisphere.” Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16-17.

<sup>383</sup> In the American context this was addressed in Chapter Two in respect to African American mobility in northbound migrations.

which socio-cultural relationship based on race, gender, and sexuality specific to the United States are negotiated or exposed, as was the case for Rachel Powell even if she never got to board. Furthermore, Angela's passage across the Atlantic – the one and only crossing of the novel – is omitted altogether from the narrative. In contrast, in *There is Confusion* the Atlantic crossing is an important redemptive event for two characters of the novel, African American Peter Bye and white American Meriwether Bye. It is here, through their chance encounter, that the Bye family history in terms of slavery is somewhat ideally repaired. As a consequence, Fauset's ship is not distinct from the United States but a grounding of this context in an elsewhere that provides the possibility of the performance of resolutions to American social-cultural issues.

In *There is Confusion*, the transatlantic crossing on the ship is a chronotope that is characterized by its masculinity in the mobilizations of American soldiers towards World War One. In terms of gender, then, it echoes Gilroy's prism of interpretation. In so far as this is a space-time that sails into black modernisms, the themes of interracial reparation and repair in the American context that Fauset privileges on the journey can be interpreted as an aspect important to her modern aesthetic. What it suggests is that rather than seeing modernism as a break with the past, as certain aesthetic theories of the New Negro champion, Fauset is formulating a literary aesthetics that looks to negotiate this past in numerous ways in order for the modern to emerge. This is demonstrated through the evolutionary journey of her characters. This scene takes place three quarters of the way through the novel, and like Angela's journeys in *Plum Bun*, this movement across the sea is bound to Peter's and Meriwether's development and maturity. For Peter Bye, it comes at a moment of existential confusion and complicated (romantic) relationships between himself and the two main African American female protagonists, Maggie Ellersley and Joanna Marshall. The narrator describes Peter Bye's start on this particular path.

At first the war presented itself to Peter in a purely personal aspect. It was a long time before he envisaged the struggle as a great stupendous whole. Boyishly egotistic, he saw it simply as the next big moment in the panorama of his life following on his break with Joanna and his puzzling relationships with Maggie.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 237.

Directly before the text passes onto the ship, Peter states “oh damn all women. I hope to God I get killed in France”.<sup>385</sup> Thus emphasizing Peter’s existential anguishes, Fauset similarly prefaces the homosocial space of the boat through his speech act. Whilst Maggie and Joanna are present in the crossing through Peter’s conversations with other soldiers, Fauset’s framing leads the readers to interpret the interactions taking place as something specific to male bonding and masculinity. It also challenges, in a sense, heteronormative relationships and the roles performed by each gender. For example, in this space free of women, the narrator speaks of Peter’s encounter and subsequent friendship with another soldier, Harley Alexander, in such a way that evokes sensuality and desire. “The two had become “buddies” in the camp” (training camp) the narrator informs the readers “*and now on the trip*” she continues, “over the long days of inaction were awakening one of those strange intensive friendships between two people in which each tries to bare his heart to the utmost before the other.”<sup>386</sup> The differentiation between the space of the camp and the space of the boat suggests that there is something specific about this seaward environment. Granted, the training camp was also a homosocial space, however it was socio-geographically situated within the confines of American nation state, the site of Peter’s troubles, amongst others, with women. Now on the boat, the narrator’s use of “awakening” “intensive” and “strange” alludes to a desire and love between men that is intimate and exposing – “bare his heart” – and which pushes the boundaries of heteronormative understandings of masculinity and bonding between men. This is recuperated, to a certain degree, by the fact that part of this bonding is derived from discussions of Peter and Harley’s respective “disastrous” courtships of women. Nevertheless, this subtle pushing of prescribed gender and heterosexual norms in a space understood to be populated by Americans but not fixed to its geographical space, premises the bending of the (discriminatory) norms of interracial interaction between Peter Bye and Meriwether Bye in the following paragraph.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator provides a detailed genealogy of the Bye family. The story of this family works within the social landscape of the book as a typical representation of the legacy of slavery on American soil. What is important to know for the present discussion is that Peter and Meriwether Bye are interconnected by the slave owner, also called Meriwether Bye, two generations their senior. Peter’s family, also referred to as the “black Byes” therefore inherited their surname from within this structure of indenture. Peter’s encounter with Meriwether Bye (grandson) on the ship is the scene that acts as a kind of

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<sup>385</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 238.

<sup>386</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 239. My emphasis.

reparation between the two characters and an acknowledgement of the atrocities committed by the “white Bye” family. Hierarchically distinguished by Meriwether’s rank as lieutenant, their interconnected histories are recognized by Peter. “You know me then. May I ask how?”, states Meriwether.

“I’ve always known of you indirectly,” Peter told him coldly. “My great-grandfather spent all of his working life working for yours – for nothing. There was a black Meriwether Bye, my father, named after him, though I am sure,” he added with rude inconsequence, “I can’t imagine why.”<sup>387</sup>

This meeting gives way to numerous exchanges between these characters which are slightly unbelievable in terms of their effect on Peter. Meriwether shares his perspective of the situation, his disgust with the white Byes’ past and the barbarity of slavery. Peter responds in turn by relinquishing his long-term resentment and anger against white people that inhabits his whole being. As the narrator states, “something, some aching tiger of resentment and dislike, which always crouched in Peter ready to spring at the approach of a white man, lay down momentarily.”<sup>388</sup> The rapidity in which centuries of violence find their resolve in the interaction of these two characters does not help the credibility of the event within the narrative. Furthermore, Meriwether’s recognition of the fact that his family would not have been rich without “free labor” of the black Byes and his rather odd and problematic anti-racist discourses,<sup>389</sup> seem to be affectively paid for by his melancholic demeanor. Peter recognizes a “friend” in him across the color line for he perceives Meriwether’s morosity as regret and thus the tension within himself and the years of pain he endured disappear. It is possible that the scene, in general, is supposed to be interpreted ironically. The fact that Meriwether is unequal in rank to Peter sets up the hierarchy within their relationship and is furthered by the condescending tone of the white Bye that structures their dialogues. The narrator states for example, “after that day they met daily; Meriwether expounding, explaining, unconsciously teaching; Peter listening and absorbing.”<sup>390</sup> The final ironic twist from Peter’s perspective is that Meriwether is a medical doctor which was Peter’s aborted dream in the narrative arc of his

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<sup>387</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 240-241.

<sup>388</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 241.

<sup>389</sup> For example, “From the outset, he told Peter gravely, “I knew that you meant something to me. That was why I used to watch you so closely. I used to wonder and speculate about you. Something in you made me think of myself. It was as though you, all unrelated even racially, represented something which might have been a part of myself, as though you,” he said dreamily, “were living actively what I was thinking passively. I have often tried to picture myself as a colored man. I think if there had been any of that selfish admixture of blood between the white and black Byes and I had heard of it, I’d have gone the United States over but what I’d have found my relatives, and have claimed them, too, before all the world.” Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 244.

<sup>390</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 243.

character. This said, these potentially ironic elements do not override the disequilibrium of power between them or the idyllic reparation that their encounter symbolizes. However, whilst this interracial friendship may not be believable, nor Peter's resolved hatred towards white people for example, the overarching commentary on the possibility of relationships across the color line within the context of legacies of slavery does have its merits. Within the novel, it is significant that Fauset purposefully situated this scene during the Atlantic trip. The implication is that it could have only taken place on the ship. Outside of the limitations of the nation state, the location of the boat is constructed as being a space of possibility for that which is unthinkable in the United States. It is thus not imagined as a place of black diasporic exchange, like its signification in Gilroy's theory, but of the negotiation of American race relationships. The historical and cultural context follows these two characters on their journey. This is solidified in the final dialogue between Peter and Meriwether before their embarkment in France.

"It is amazing the confusion slavery threw American life," he [Meriwether] said, launched on one of their interminable discussions. "Here America was founded for the sake of liberty and the establishment of an asylum for all who were oppressed. And no land has more actively engaged in the suppression of liberty, or in keeping down those who were already oppressed. So that a white boy raised on all sorts of high falutin idealism finds himself when he grows up completely at sea. I confess, Bye, when I came to realize that my wealth and all the combination of environment and position which has made life hitherto so beautiful and perfect, were founded quite specifically on the backs of broken beaten slaves, I got a shock from which I think I'll never recover. It has robbed me of my happiness forever."

"I like to hear you acknowledge your indebtedness," said Peter frankly, "but I don't think you should take on your shoulders the penitence of the whole white nation."

"No, I don't think I should, either," Meriwether returned unexpectedly, "but that sort of extremeness seems to be inherent in the question of color. Either you concern yourself with it violently as the Southerner does and so let slip by all the other important issues of life; or you are indifferent and callous like the average Northerner and grow hardened to all sorts of atrocities; or you steep yourself in it like the sentimentalist – that's my class – and you find yourself paralyzed by the vastness of the problem.

He slipped into a familiar mood of melancholy and brooding. It was at such a time that he spoke to Peter of his willingness, of his absolute determination to lose his life in the Great War. For this reason he had gone into the ranks instead of the medical corps where he would have been comparatively safe. "Don't think I am a fanatic, Peter. I see this war as the greatest gesture the world has ever made for Freedom. If I can give up my life in this cause I shall feel that I have paid my debt."<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 245-246.

In Meriwether's image of the founding of America and his analysis of its contemporary context, the discussion expresses a structural understanding of race and racism. Whilst this is given, in part, through Meriwether's soliloquy, Peter's response to him underlines it and puts it into question. The former's melancholy is disrupted, to a certain degree, by Peter's assertion that he shouldn't take on "the penitence of the whole white nation". As an effect, it ironically highlights Meriwether's self-positioning as erroneous when he states that a "white boy" or "the sentimentalist class" he belongs to grow up to find themselves "completely at sea". Fauset suggests that Meriwether's desolate erring towards death – the payment of his "debt" for American history – is futile, if not delusionary. A type of self-grandeur or egocentrism of the white subject that understands his position as the center of the world, and thus his (individual) death could and would in some way pay for histories of slavery. Implied therefore, is that this sacrificial act is a repetition of racism rather than a "debt" being paid. What is more, the notions of death and sacrifice are echoed by the logics of war that frame the wider context which is bringing Americans to the French shores. This finds a resonance also at the beginning of the sea voyage in Peter's utterance that he wished he were "dead" as he fled from his romantic relationships. Despite differing significations of freedom, death, and sacrifice in each of the character's speech acts, the echoes that Fauset creates between them predicates how the shores of France appear in the imagined territories of the novel. The readers are invited to understand that the concerns addressed on the ship are going to be continued in France, and this from an American perspective. It is in this way, like the ship, France begins to take shape in geographies of the novel not as a place of escape nor exile from the American context but as a United States grounded elsewhere. As it will be argued, Fauset, through intertextuality, setting and character development, maps America onto the French space. Fauset creates a slightly different America that is reflected back to the "America" across the shore.

### 3.2.3 The Arrival in France and Fauset's Mapping Strategy

As it has been ascertained, France and Paris hold a material and symbolic importance in the cartography of modernisms at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, to centralize Paris as *the* cultural capital of modernist expression did not come without its own problems. The main issue highlighted was the fact that it has the potential to reduce the multiplicity of modernisms. It also invisibilizes nuances in certain authors' relationship with the dominant form of Euro-American modernism. Premised on the idea of sacrifice of one's specificity in order to assimilate into an international modernist culture, this cartography that maps Paris as the center obfuscates, then, the various and differing relationships with other places and other identities on this modernist map. Just because France appears in Fauset's fictional landscape does not mean that this nation (and by extension its capital) work as a fixed signifier of modernity. What this means is that this geographical location could be interpreted as negotiating relationships between what is considered modern, a modern aesthetics, where it is located, and how an African American author, such as Fauset, positions herself and her black modernist aesthetics in interaction with the dominant form. As such, her technique of mapping the United States onto France, as the discussion has already begun to demonstrate, reflects in a way American socio-cultural relationships and values back to themselves. But it also will point to an understanding of cultural identities that is much less rigid and clearly defined than the dominant formulations of identity prescribe. If Fauset can map America onto France and transform them both at the same time, then it is conceivable that this can also be true in terms of racial and gendered identities. They too can be translated or unhinged from their specific cultural spaces including that of the body understood as a physicality that is socially and culturally codified. In a wider context of modernisms, then, this has the effect of displacing the Euro-American frame. By creating a fictional space that is and is not "America" Fauset centralizes African American characters, their perspectives, experiences, and cultural identities, as she puts them on the map, so to speak, both as subjects in a white nation state and "modern" within the framework of international modernist aesthetics.

When Peter Bye arrives in France after the Atlantic crossing, Fauset does not immediately represent this space as void of French people, nor certain ideas of France that are imbedded in African American culture. For example, the fact that France is imagined as free of anti-black racism and therefore an antithesis to the American context is mobilized by Fauset through the interaction of French citizens and soldiers with white and black American soldiers. In Brest



where Peter is stationed, though it is not described without conflict, the quarrels that take place are specified to be between white French and American soldiers.

All about were people, people, too many people, French and Americans. And finally the relations between the two nations, allies though they were, developed from misunderstandings into hot irritations, from irritations into clashes. First white Americans and Frenchmen clashed; separate restaurants and accommodations had to be arranged. Then came the inevitable clash between white and colored Americans; petty jealousies and meanness arose over the courtesies of Frenchwomen and the lack of discrimination in the French cafés. The Americans found a new and inexplicable irritation in the French-colored colonials.<sup>392</sup>

The absence of a clash between “Frenchmen” and African American soldiers contrasts the “irritation” that “Americans” had with “French colored colonials”, thus characterizing racist acts and sentiments as endogenous to America and (white) Americans within this space. The understatement of “petty jealousies” felt on the part of the white American soldiers in respect to the interracial attraction between African Americans and French women is restaged in a fight instigated by “American Southerners” in Lathus, another town in Brittany. The repetition of American racism in Brest and Lathus emphasizes its continuation across the seas and is that which follows the soldiers wherever they go.

“Look! Darkies and white women! Come on, fellows, kill the damned niggers!”

There was a hasty onslaught in which the colored soldiers even taken by surprise gave as good as they took. Between these two groups from the same soil there was grimmer, more determined fighting than was seen at Verdun. The French civil population stood on the church-steps opposite the square and watched with amazement.

“*Nom de dieu!* Are they crazy, then, these Americans, that they kill each other!”<sup>393</sup>

It is through the voice of the French population that the “craziness” of American racism is reflected back to the readers. France and French culture, then, could be interpreted as an antithesis to the American nation. At the same time though, being set in a public space of Lathus, it demonstrates that the France of the novel is now understood, in a certain way, to be inhabited by America, American cultural identities and the racial violence that underpin them. On the one hand, the mirror effect that Fauset employs is suggestive of the fact that the race relationships specific to the United States are incomprehensible from an outsider’s or foreigner’s perspective. On the other hand, the placement of the speech acts – one from a member of the “American Southerners” and one made by a member of “the French population” – so close in proximity to each other point also to the specific role that French characters play

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<sup>392</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 247-248.

<sup>393</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 250.

in *There is Confusion*. One interpretation is that they do not exist in the narrative to investigate or explore French identity or French culture. Rather, they are used to underline to (American) readers what the United States is and its socio-historical problems, from an African American perspective. This will have consequences in terms of intercultural relationships, for it will shut down any form of cultural exchange between France and America. Furthermore, the non-reciprocity that Fauset stages between white French culture and African American characters comes to shed a light on certain mechanisms of white supremacy inherent to (Western) national culture be it American or French. This is demonstrated earlier in the novel when the main protagonist, Joanna comes into contact with France in her move to New York.

At this stage of the novel, Joanna Marshall's arrival to New York is inscribed in African American trajectories towards urban environments and the cultural hub of Harlem. Joanna's desire to be a successful performer also aligns this mobility with modernist preoccupations that envisage the large metropolis as the grounds for the exploration of new identities and aesthetic experimentation. However, Joanna is unable to find a dance teacher that will be willing to instruct her because of her racial identity. The discrimination that she faces is resolved when her friend and fellow dancer, Helena Arnold, speaks to her of the French instructor Monsieur Bertully. He had initially refused to take on Helena a year before, also because of her racial identity, but it is articulated by Bertully's apparent incomprehension of American racism. "I'm sorry, Mees, but the white Americans like not to study with brown Americans. Vair seely, but so. I am a poor man, I must follow the wishes of my clients."<sup>394</sup> Joanna and Helena devising a plan, ask if he would do a separate class for African American students if they could gather enough clients. Bertully agreed and Joanna and her colleagues begin courses. To a certain degree then, Bertully and the nation state that he embodies are representative of the opportunities unavailable to Joanna in New York, and in a wider context, participation in Euro-American modernism. However, Fauset's narrative strategy also underlines the complicity of Bertully in the ideologies of white supremacy or whiteness to which, in part, he derives his identity. Whether in France or America, in spite of his superficial outrage or incomprehension of American racism, Bertully's speech act announces his adaptation to the American environment as he plays with the codes of this context for his own economic benefit. The alignment of his identity with the white students not only consolidates his whiteness and the structural power that this confers him but also evacuates any personal responsibility for his own

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<sup>394</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 95-96.

racism and racists attitudes. Fauset's staging of this interaction throws the spotlight on anti-black oppression and white supremacy and places it into its transcultural and transnational context. Fauset shows how the white French public's or Bertully's speech acts are not necessarily a denunciation of American forms of racism, but rather examples of cultural articulations of whiteness. Therefore, in these interactions between the French and African American characters, what the narrative divulges is the impossibility of any form of reciprocal relationships between oppressed and oppressor in the context of an anti-black world. As such, Fauset not only puts into question the idea that France is the antithesis to America in terms of racism but inscribes this particular white culture into the dynamics and mechanism of white supremacist ideology. The skewing of a clear distinction between one culture with the other helps Fauset build upon her strategies of mapping. Blurring boundaries between international and national frameworks allows for the localization of an America that is not America in France.

To return to Peter Bye's arrival in France, the French characters that appear, and who are instrumentalized in the narrative, finish by disappearing from this nation space. This will have an impact, from the point of view of black modern aesthetic practices, on the understanding of France and Paris as the legitimate cultural and geographical center of modernism. Fauset leads the readers, through the narrator and the character's movements and experiences, to question the signification of modernity and its location. It is over a few pages that France is depopulated of French people as the narrative follows Peter from Brest to Lathus, onto La Courtine, and then finally to the "front in the Metz Sector".<sup>395</sup> Swiftly after arriving at the front, Peter, in the "blackness" and "hellishness of No Man's Land" comes upon two men fighting: Meriwether Bye and an unspecified German. Peter, stabbing the German, could not however save Meriwether who dies in his arms one page later. Peter tries to reassure Meriwether before his death.

The chill was the chill of death, a horrible death. Meriwether coughed and choked; Peter could feel the life struggling within the poor torn body. Once the cold lips said: "Peter you are a good scout".

Just before a merciful unconsciousness enveloped him for the last time, Meriwether sat upright in the awful agony of death. "Grandfather," he called in a terrible voice, "this is the last of the Byes".<sup>396</sup>

In this scene where Meriwether speaks of the last of the white Byes – understood in the novel as the microcosm of histories of slavery and white America – the text performs the symbolic

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<sup>395</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 250.

<sup>396</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 253.

death of this history. Fauset gives Meriwether what he wanted in his desire for death as the “debt” he could pay for his family’s past. Furthermore, Fauset’s emphasis of the darkness that engulfs the scene of Meriwether’s Christ-like sacrifice in Peter’s arms seemingly comments upon the representation of masculine bonding across the color line. As it echoes the naval setting which stretched the boundaries of normative homosocial and interracial masculine bonding through the interactions between the characters, it does not appear to be happenstance that Fauset, at this point, inverts the trope of black sacrifice and death for white masculinity. Historically speaking, as Toni Morrison argues, the “Americanness” – understood as white and masculine – in American literature has been articulated, in part, through the death of black characters. In this national literary tradition, blackness, or traces of Africanism as Morrison refers to it, is signified by the disembodiment of black subjects. They are present even in their absences as characters, for example in the natural world or the darkness of the setting in contrast to the illumination of blinding whiteness.<sup>397</sup> These representational norms are reversed, to a certain extent, by Fauset. In the blackness of the “hellishness of No Man’s Land” the “Americanness” of Meriwether is disarticulated from its cultural-geographical specificity (“No Man’s Land”). As such, this masculine subject undergoes a kind of racial passing into blackness that is re-instantiated by both Peter’s taking Meriwether into his arms as much as in Meriwether’s ultimate passage into the “unconsciousness of death”. This infers that Meriwether’s payment of the sin of slavery through death is also payment for the sin of interracial (non-biological) familial love and perhaps homosexual desire between these two characters. It is telling, then, that Meriwether’s loss of his whiteness – his Americanness – in this scene is located in a space that is not strictly speaking France nor America. Where the text disturbs American culture, it also problematizes France and French culture. If the latter are understood to be both the locus and legitimate purveyors of modernism<sup>398</sup> Fauset seems to be disarticulating this in order to racialize and problematize modernist geographies. This space takes on a landscape that, as it has been argued, is America

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<sup>397</sup> Morrison states, “explicit or implicit, the Africanists presence informs in compelling and inescapable ways the texture of American literature. It is a dark and abiding presence, there for the literary imagination as both a visible and an invisible mediating force. Even, and especially, when American texts are not “about” Africanist presence or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation.” Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 46. In terms of the articulation of whiteness or “Americanness” premised on the death of black characters or the return from the “forbidden space of blackness”, Morrison argues that this is demonstrated in the adventures of the white characters in such works as Saul Bellow’s *Henderson the Rain King*. Bellow’s novel, Morrison states, “ends the hero’s journey to and from his fantastic Africa on the ice, the white frozen wastes. With an Africanist child in his arms, the soul of the black king in his baggage, Henderson dances, he shouts, over the frozen whiteness, a new white man in a newfound land: ‘leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence.’” *Playing in the Dark*, 58. Saul Bellow, *Henderson the Rain King* (New York: Viking Press, 1959).

<sup>398</sup> See the discussion of “Exotic Puppets” and “Le nouveau bal Nègre de La Glacière” in Chapter One.

but not America, and now it could be suggested that it is also France but not France. Unhinging the attachment of cultural identity (whiteness) to its national-geographical parameters preempts the unravelling of certain binaries, such as center and periphery, black and white that are at the foundations of Euro-American modernity. During the passage from one chapter to the next, Fauset also changes locations and narrative perspectives. No longer on the front in Metz, the readers are taken to Chambéry and the story continues with the journey of one of the main African American woman characters, Maggie Ellersley. Therefore “France” of the novel will now be experienced through a gendered and racial perspective which adds an interpretive layer to the conception of modernist expressions and the space that it occupies.

Chapter XXXI opens with the voice of the narrator as she describes Maggie’s arrival in Chambéry. Maggie has come to France to be a nurse during the war, and similar to Peter Bye, Maggie’s transatlantic crossing was motivated, in part, by her experience of inner turmoil. Based on lived experiences of African Americans during World War One, Fauset relocates her narrative to Chambéry because it was here that a (segregated) base was created for African American soldiers. In this chapter, Fauset, through description of place, juxtaposition, and intertextuality, re-introduces the notion of non-reciprocal comprehension across the color line in order to flip the power dynamic of anti-black racism. The narrator states:

Chambéry the capital of Savoy, a town situated toward the south of the extreme east of France, has not always been well known to America as its more important neighbors, Grenoble and Lyon. Up to a few years ago it was celebrated chiefly because it was the location of the chateau of the old dukes of Savoy and the birthplace of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Now it is known to thousands and thousands of Americans because during the great War it was metamorphosed into a rest center for colored soldiers.

To the tourist’s mind it might stand out for three reasons: as a city in which it is well-nigh impossible to get a lost telegram repeated; as a place where one may procure at very little expense the most excellent of manicures and the most delicious of little cakes. And, thirdly, as the scene of the novel by Henri Bordeaux, “La Peur de Vivre,” the story of a young girl who, afraid to face the perils of life, forfeited therefore its pleasures.

Certainly Alice du Laurens, the young woman of Bordeaux’s novel, would have been no more astonished to find herself in New York than Maggie Ellersley, who she so closely resembled in character, was to find herself in Chambéry.<sup>399</sup>

The narrator expresses her knowledge of French geography, history, and literary culture. Chambéry, now known “to thousands and thousands of Americans” brings this space into the

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<sup>399</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 254.

sphere of African American and “American” history. What was once embedded within French culture and history – “Jean-Jacques Rousseau”, “the dukes of Savoy” and the reference to the writer Henri Bordeaux, whose family moved to the Savoy area just after its annexation to France – is now rewritten, racialized, and re-located, in a certain sense, to American socio-historical and cultural imaginary. A continued destabilization of location of French culture is developed by Fauset’s intertextual reference to *La peur de vivre*, and its protagonist Alice Du Laurens who is paralleled with Maggie Ellersley in *There is Confusion*.<sup>400</sup> The suggested resemblance lays in their fear of life which inhibit them from enjoying its “pleasures”. As the narrator reminds the readers, Maggie is (temporarily) experiencing a “nervous breakdown”.<sup>401</sup> However despite this mentioned commonality of the characters, it is arguable that Fauset is deliberately being ironic in the parallel drawn. Firstly, Maggie’s character development throughout the narrative – her struggles for personal and economic freedom – contradicts the fact that she acts out of the fear of the “perils of life”. Her character, a manifestation of modern black femininity has, by her own merits, faced hardships and with courage surmounted them, achieving social mobility and economic independence. Secondly, because Fauset employs intertextuality to dislocate France and French culture her reference to Bordeaux becomes significant precisely because of his depiction of Alice Du Laurens, the New Woman. Fauset plays with the authors depiction of this new woman and the role her character plays within his traditional and conservative narrative.

Henri Bordeaux’s *La peur de vivre*, as was the case for most of his novels, explores the negotiation between individual pursuits and desires and familial (and national) unity in modern society. From his perspective, the demonstration of secular individualism that he finds mostly embodied in New Women pose a threat to Catholic solidarity, understood as the foundation of French society. As literary critic Charles Plet notes, Bordeaux’s didactic tales of moral conservatism depict modern women contrary to their representations in the Euro-American cultural productions.<sup>402</sup> The author creates Alice to be identifiable by the readers as a New Woman, but her actions come to signify the opposite to what, for some, this modern figure represents, such as emancipation from gender oppression. In *La peur de vivre* then, personal autonomy becomes degenerate egoism. A woman who seeks not to be beholden to her feminine

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<sup>400</sup> Henri Bordeaux, *La peur de vivre* (Paris: E. Roger et F. Chernoviz, 1910).

<sup>401</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 255.

<sup>402</sup> Charles Plet, “La ‘femme nouvelle’: contre-modèle pour le roman traditionaliste catholique,” *MuseMedusa* 7 (août 2019), [http://musemedusa.com/dossier\\_7/plet/](http://musemedusa.com/dossier_7/plet/) (Page consultée le 19 mars 2021).

duty, to prescribed social norms or patriarchal domination is unveiled to be weak, frightened, and lacking in both moral character and individual will power to put oneself in service to the common good, understood as the family, nation, the French race, and Catholicism. As Charles Plet argues, “preacher of tradition and known for his ‘family novels’, Henry Bordeaux draws from a panoply of deranged new women figures in order to further instantiate his traditional theories borrowed from Catholicism.”<sup>403</sup> In *La peur de vivre* the two examples, Alice du Laurens and Isabelle Orlandi, “not only corrupt their own families but the entire familial system and beyond that, the French nation.”<sup>404</sup> As Plet recognizes, this is inextricably linked to ideas of the French race and colonization. Whether it is in Alice’s refusal to marry Marcel Guibert – the heroic masculine figure, colonialist and martyr for his country during the war – or in her marriage to M. de Marthenay that distracts him from his career as colonial authority and soldier, she interrupts “the familial and national tradition founded upon the expansion of the French race overseas.”<sup>405</sup> The fact that Bordeaux characterizes Alice’s actions as being motivated by fear rather than by a refusal to submit to the patriarchal and colonial order, for example, sheds a light on Fauset’s ironic engagement with this French author and the comparison made between Alice and Maggie. It nuances Fauset’s displacement of France and French culture within the text. For now, both are underlined as being built on traditional views (Bordeaux’s novel), on colonialism, supremacy of divine law and the gender and racial oppression that they mobilize. It ironically frames France as the home to traditional aesthetics practices which directly contradicts its signification as the locus of modernism. To a certain degree, as Bordeaux utilizes and hijacks the figure of the modern woman to articulate his perspective, Fauset does the same thing but with French culture, here exemplified in the work of Bordeaux. As a consequence, when the narrator states that the character Alice “would have been no more astonished to find herself in New York than Maggie Ellersley, who she so closely resembled in character, was to find herself in Chambery” Fauset seemingly points to both the representation of modern femininity and the tension between tradition and modernity. Because these two characters are understood as New Women it suggests that Bordeaux’s representation of Alice is incompatible with the “New York” of Fauset’s novel as much as Fauset’s modern woman Maggie is incompatible with “Chambery”

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<sup>403</sup> “Chantre de la tradition et ‘romancier de la famille’, Henry Bordeaux se sert d’une panoplie de figures dérangeantes de femme nouvelles dans le but d’asseoir davantage ses théories traditionalistes empreintes de catholicisme.” My translation. Plet, “La ‘femme nouvelle,’”.

<sup>404</sup> “corrompt non seulement sa propre famille mais l’ensemble du système familial, et par-delà, la nation française.” My translation. Plet, “La ‘femme nouvelle,’”.

<sup>405</sup> “En ‘détournant (son) mari de sa carrière’ de soldat-colonisateur, Alice Dulaurens contrarie ainsi la tradition familiale et nationale fondée sur l’expansion de la race française à l’étranger.” Plet, “La ‘femme nouvelle,’”. My translation. In *La peur de vivre* and Plet’s article Alice Dulaurens is spelt in this way whereas in Fauset’s novel it is “Du Laurens”. Fauset’s spelling has been kept.

or France in Bordeaux's novel. It is almost as if neither character could survive the intertextual and cross-cultural journey from one imagined reality to the other. It is thus in the displacement of this "France" that Maggie can be in Chambéry. The disarticulation of Bordeaux's work emphasizes the disappearance of French history, culture, and civil population of Chambéry. Consequently, it becomes the place where Maggie reaches personal and intimate fulfillment and happiness that was not possible in the United States. And Maggie's fulfillment is not only personal but spiritual. Continuing on with a kind of hijacking of the themes presented in Bordeaux's work – the role that (white) women are supposed to play in the assurance of moral health and familial and national unity – Fauset is proposing an alternative to the dichotomies between traditional-modern, secular-religious, individual-community, national unity-disunity, France-America in this space that is neither France nor America. For Maggie, Chambéry becomes the site of her redemption. Not a redemption from sin but a spirituality that is, in a sense, laic or rather, not within the structure of Catholicism, and thus bound to the institutions of family and nation. This is, within the context of war, articulated through Maggie's new-found value of life. Amongst the destruction, death and atrocities of war, Maggie "realized the beauty inherent in life itself, the miracle of health, of sane nerves, of the ability to make a living, of being helpful to others."<sup>406</sup> Chambéry and Aix-les-Bains being also the spaces of American anti-black racism, the readers understand that this is as much about finding value in life, desire, joy and hope for the future within the experiences of racial and gender oppression. This is shown when the narrator, speaking from Maggie's perspective, describes the anti-black racism within the army as well as the racism of white American civilians who now populate the France of the novel.

They were brave fellows, conducting themselves as became soldiers, persistently cheerful in the face of the hateful prejudice that followed and flayed them in the very act of laying down their lives for their country. For a time, the Negro soldiers had been permitted to go over to Aix-les-Bains once a week, to reap the benefit of the baths, but a white American woman seeing in this an approach to "social equality" contrived to start a protest which resulted in a withdrawal of this permission and the black men were confined strictly to Chambéry. A new sense of values came to Maggie, living now in the midst of scenes like these. The determinedly cheerful though somewhat cynical attitude of "the boys" in such conditions seemed to her the most wonderful thing she had ever witnessed. It was though they said to hostile forces: "Oh, yes, we know you'll do for us in every possible way, slight us, cheat us, betray us, but you can't kill the real life within us, the essential us. You may make us distrustful, incredulous, disillusioned, but you

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<sup>406</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 256.



can't make us despair or corrode us with bitterness. Call us children if you like, but in spite of everything, life *is* worth living, and we mean to live it to the full."<sup>407</sup>

Rather than seeing spiritual practices in a sacrifice of the individual for the common moral good and national unity – as it is the case in Bordeaux's novel and which also recalls Meriwether's "sacrifice" as payment for the history of slavery – spirituality, and the recognition of the value of life emerges from within individual and collective experiences of oppression and death. It appears to be a spiritual realm that works differently to the religiosity of the nation state and colonial domination, the racism and sexism that it articulates, and that Bordeaux and others exalt. It is a spirituality of liberation rather than a spirituality of sacrifice, condemnation and sin. Maggie's journey of "redemption" then is not only about her recognizing "the beauty in life itself", or valuing "the miracle of health" but also a path that inscribes her person in the collective path to liberation from racial oppression. In the Chambery of the novel, constructed at once within and other to the (historical) violence and oppression of (French and American) white supremacist patriarchy, Maggie finds faith, healing, strength, courage, and love. As an effect, the journey to the "new" of modernisms is not framed in Fauset's novel as a cut with the past, the (impossible) death of tradition (the white Byes), nor an escape from, for example, American racism, because it is precisely this that followed Peter and Maggie to "France". Rather, the journey that her characters take is a path into and through the past and contemporary experiences of oppression that get transformed – symbolized in Maggie's spiritual awakening – into the fertile grounds for something "new" in the present and for the future. This resonates with the understanding of "homing" that is presented in *Uprootings/Regroundings*. "Homing" as an ongoing process "is about *creating* both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present". Thus, in the text and her imagined geographies, it is arguable that Fauset mobilizes her aesthetics in exactly these ways. Her imagined geographies actualize a place in which Maggie can also undertake these processes of homing that traverse the past, present and future. One required aspect of the creation of such a space was the disarticulation or detachment of socio-cultural identities with their accompanying geographical parameters. As such, Fauset's France which reflects a different America back to itself shines a light of hope and way forward to build such a home in America for black femininities, and, from a black woman artist's perspective, a black modern aesthetics that displace the sexism of the New Negro and the Harlem Renaissance. At the same time, Fauset's literary technique of mapping America onto

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<sup>407</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, 259-260. Emphasis in the original.

France, though it achieves all that which has been outlined above, does come with certain problems.

Fauset's technique of mapping tends to carry with it articulations of imperialization and to a certain degree colonialism. If one is referring to "homing", for instance, what this means is that others need to be displaced in order for this home to be created. Speaking of white supremacy and the material and symbolic space that whiteness occupies, it is arguable that such a displacement is not only required but perhaps the problem in the first place (colonization). As it was shown in respect to Fauset's use of French characters, the author underlines the workings of whiteness across cultural difference. Furthermore, in Fauset's engagement with Henri Bordeaux's novel and that which it represents, she disarticulates structures of power and domination based on religion, gender, race, and colonization in the French context precisely to displace it. Simultaneously though, and perhaps the most obvious absence created through mapping America onto France is the non-existence of dialogue between different members of the black diaspora. Fauset mentions the "French colored colonials" but there are no relationships between the characters that form in the narrative. Thus, whilst Fauset may displace whiteness of both France and America in her other "America", the only black people that could inhabit this space, could find a home there, are African Americans. Considering that Fauset speaks from a black international modern perspective and *There is Confusion* is set in a transatlantic context, it is quite striking that no other members within the diaspora appear in its pages. To refer back to Chapter One, this echoes Fauset's own trajectory and socializations in France and more specifically, in Paris. As it was argued for here, the author's experience of feeling American amongst Americans was something that drew her towards her fellow compatriots and was made possible in this place that was not within the geographical confines of the United States. This may have informed her narrative choices. If her work can be interpreted as creating a dissonant or critical modernist expression – challenging the conceptions of the Euro-American modernism and the ideologies that underpin it – what does it imply if the only black characters that are subjects in the space of her novel are African American? It almost seems that "the French colored colonials" are not envisioned as being or belonging to spaces of modernism nor the other America that Fauset creates. Thus, there are shortcomings to the technique of mapping America onto France. One aspect is that it leaves little room to encounter black subjects from other socio-cultural backgrounds, and another aspect is that it excludes them entirely from "the home" for black subjectivity that the text creates. As an effect, it reterritorializes cultural identity that Fauset was working to unhinge. The problem of cultural imperialism that the

mapping technique mobilizes is that it frames African American cultural identity as the leaders in the creation of an international black modern aesthetics and identities. This line of inquiry can be furthered in the discussion of Fauset's third novel *Comedy: American Style* for it is here that her aesthetics hinge on geographical disturbances in order to expose the impossibility of escape from racism in an anti-black world. Though the methodology is the same in both novels, namely the blurring of these nations' territories in the creation of her imagined cartographies, and the explorations are similar, such as her characters' search for identity and emancipation, the techniques used to achieve this are different. One of Fauset's techniques that differ is that she creates resonances between Europe and North America in *Comedy* as opposed to the placement of one onto the other as in *There is Confusion*. As an effect, in the landscapes that Fauset creates, cultural specificities tied to or considered determinate of one social-cultural geographical location are blurred and mixed across national demarcations. In this way it reshapes the material grounds for character development, narrative trajectory and the protagonist's negotiations of affective landscapes now understood also as being inextricably enmeshed and attached to histories of European colonization, the black diaspora, and the making of the "new" in America. Before arriving at *Comedy: American Style* this particular aesthetic attention can be traced in her article "The Eucalyptus Tree: A Reverie of Rome, the Catacombs, Christianity and the Moving Beauty of Italy".<sup>408</sup> Because it was written during her 1924-1925 sojourn in France and published between *There is Confusion* and *Comedy: American Style* it indicates the author's aesthetic investigations and critical interpretations that find their place in the latter. To turn to this article, then, as one point on Fauset's own migratory and creative journey, it can act as a way into *Comedy: American Style*.

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<sup>408</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, "The Eucalyptus Tree: A Reverie of Rome, the Catacombs, Christianity and the Moving Beauty of Italy," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 31, no. 3 (January 1926):116 - 117.

### 3.3 “Eucalyptus Tree: A Reverie of Rome, the Catacombs, Christianity and the Moving Beauty of Italy.”

During her stay in Paris, Fauset would also travel to Italy which results in her article, “The Eucalyptus Tree: A Reverie of Rome, the Catacombs, Christianity and the Moving Beauty of Italy” published in the *Crisis* in 1926.<sup>409</sup> Akin to her articles addressed in Chapter One, this work pertains to the genre of literary journalism in so far as Fauset mobilizes literary devices and narrative strategies in order to report her observations and experiences at the catacombs of St. Callixtus (spelt like this in the article) in Rome. The title proposes the article’s central metaphor, the eucalyptus tree, as well as introducing certain themes such as spirituality, movement, and dream. The author presents the events of the article through a linear narrative that follows Fauset and her friend’s journey to the site, their venture within it and the eventual return from beneath the ground. This linearity is accompanied by a clear spatial distinguishing between the inside and the outside of the catacombs. The author emphasises the difference between “the confines and darkness” of “the bowels of the earth” in the catacombs and the “endlessness of space” in the “blueness of the sky” in the “sweet world” above.<sup>410</sup> Throughout the article these clear spatial and temporal demarcations are blurred by the speaker’s descriptions of her perceptions and experiences. Already, the “reverie” of the title is evocative of a productive tension between that which takes place and how its perceived, between the site of the catacombs in Rome and the dreamscape that the first-person narrator communicates to the readers. Entering the catacombs, she states:

Death was about me. I knew it, I felt it. Old death echoing back from centuries before. Not the mere cessation of living but the death of high hopes, of burning love. The death that had been presaged by utter despair. On and on we paced through earthy passages; earthy, oozing ceiling above us; smooth, cold, earthy walls hemming us in. And in those walls, those ghastly spaces where Christians had slept first the sleep of life and then the sleep of death.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> Another text resulting from Fauset’s travels during this period is the essay published in two parts and dedicated to her time in Algiers, “Dark Algiers the White: Part I” and “Dark Algiers the White: Part II”. Jessie Redmon Fauset, “Dark Algiers the White: Part I,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 29, no. 6 (April 1925): 255-258, and “Dark Algiers the White: Part II,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 30, no. 1 (May 1925): 16-19. As my interest is in the Franco-American connection, I will not address these articles. For an in-depth discussion of these texts see Gary Totten, *African American Travel Narratives from Abroad: Mobility and Cultural Work in the Age of Jim Crow* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

<sup>410</sup> Fauset, “The Eucalyptus Tree,” 116.

<sup>411</sup> Fauset, “The Eucalyptus Tree,” 116.

The narrator foregrounds the confinement, restriction, and earthiness of this material cavern. In the speaker's experience of the skeletons that lay around her, "death" disturbs the linear temporality that the text sets up. It extends into the future as cessation of hopes and desires, as it reaches back into the past, "old death" which summons ideas of history, memory, and heritage of those who once lived. And, through the subjective reality of the narrator, death is also in the present. Time in this space becomes multiple as the past, present, and future are interwoven and are experienced simultaneously. This effects how the space of the catacombs is also experienced. "On and on we paced" not only evokes the sense of movement and motion that the title refers to but also tends to characterise this space as if it was never ending which runs up against the confinement of this underground tunnel that is "hemming" the protagonists in. In Fauset's textual construction the multiplicity of times and the contradictory descriptions of the experience of the space do not collapse the text but rather open it. This is furthered as the author continues to flesh out the visceral experience of the speaker.

As the journey continues, the monk guides the visitors through the catacombs and tells of the stories of "men and women who had died simply and willingly for the cause of Christ."<sup>412</sup> It is at this juncture that layers of voices, light, and thoughts filter into the article as the speaker and her friend move along through the catacombs. The monk's voice is not presented through a speech act. Rather it enters the scene as it "floated back down the narrow hall".<sup>413</sup> Furthermore, before reaching Fauset and her friend, and thus the readers, "his words couched in incomprehensible English were relayed to us by our guide", who also, as Fauset had previously mentioned in the article, does not speak English well.<sup>414</sup> This echoing or *mise en abyme* of voices fills the textual space with a kind of cacophony of approximative English that the readers come to hear through her description. This could be interpreted as a reference to everyday experiences of communication whilst in a foreign country. And yet, and as it has been argued previously, anecdotes do not appear in Fauset's work as an added spice to her literary journalism. They are important aesthetic tools in her textual construction. The cacophony that this anecdote brings to the text, then, is amplified and enhances the disturbance of spatial/temporal boundaries within the catacombs. This is underlined by the author, once more, as she presents an image which is almost synesthetic in quality. The flickering light of the candle "continued to burn fitfully in some strange unison of the articulated tones of the

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<sup>412</sup> Fauset, "The Eucalyptus Tree," 116.

<sup>413</sup> Fauset, "The Eucalyptus Tree," 116.

<sup>414</sup> Fauset, "The Eucalyptus Tree," 116.

monk”.<sup>415</sup> The sensorial overlapping within a space where past, present, and future similarly superimpose seems to indicate to the readers that there are possibly other forms of echoing or relaying that are taking place in the text, or between the text, its content, and the readers themselves. For example, according to the speaker, these tales of sacrifice that are retold by the monk are not the most wretched imagined reality. For her, the less fortunate fate is found in the stories of those

who worse still had *lived* through nameless tortures of fire and water and shame for that same cause; stealing out to gatherings beneath the Italian moon; assembling fearfully in cypress groves and with great good luck returning through the midnight watches to their living tombs.<sup>416</sup>

Fauset’s use of italics here clearly distinguishes her position from that of the monk’s. Living or life is given an ambivalent meaning, for whilst it is the worst of the two options and filled with fear and tortures, the passage also presents undertones of survival and resistances for a “cause”. As the article continues, Fauset draws a parallel to this historical experience of persecution and her experience in the catacombs.

To be lost in those subterranean passages, to wander ceaselessly groping through the dark, to have one’s fingers encounter a dank case where a skeleton reposed! The slow dissolution of courage! The imminence of madness! Despair! Sudden death would be sweeter.<sup>417</sup>

The conclusion that instant “death would be sweeter” doubles her conception that living through persecution is worse than the stories of those who died, and that the monk is retelling. The narrator’s perception of this past oppression which is intermingled with her present experience of the catacombs, suggests that oppressive experience is akin to constantly living with or in death. An experience that is at once extremely restrictive but that goes on without an end, akin to the protagonists who go “on and on” or “wander ceaselessly groping through the dark”. Whilst Fauset does not make any clear reference to African American historical or present racial oppression in the United States, the narrator’s prism of perception of this space alludes to the possibility that there may be common aspects of living through “nameless tortures”. Through the author’s literary techniques of the spatial-temporal disturbances that are engendered by the narrator’s own subjective experience – highlighted by the synesthetic qualities of her sensorial apprehension of the environment – the text promotes a co-existence of differing realities. In

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<sup>415</sup> Fauset, “The Eucalyptus Tree,” 116.

<sup>416</sup> Fauset, “The Eucalyptus Tree,” 116. Emphasis in the article.

<sup>417</sup> Fauset, “The Eucalyptus Tree,” 116.

this way, though it remains at the level of allusion, the text is left open to such interpretations by her readers but is not limited to it. As the narrator carries on through what appears to be a never-ending journey in the dark, she redirects the discussion to notions of hope and desire. As such, another possible response is proposed to this atmosphere of the living dead (oppression) than the sweetness of death itself.

When in the catacombs, the narrator reflects that it was kinder to be delivered from this reality through instant death. “I cannot tell you what negation of existence as I knew it descended upon me as I stood there within an earthen chamber” Fauset writes.<sup>418</sup> This feeling of non-existence sinks momentarily into “despair” or “madness” in “the utter darkness” that surrounds her, to which “death would be sweeter”. And yet, from within this existential negation the narrator brings forth the desire for life. As such, and as it was alluded to previously, Fauset brings desire into the realms of resistance. Desiring that which systemic oppression tries to deny, namely “life” and “freedom”, is a form of resistance. After encountering the carving of St Cecilia, the speaker states “it’s beautiful perfection is not for me; I will muse on it later” concluding, “but now all my desire is to leave behind this horrible place and to find ... life”.<sup>419</sup> The ellipsis singles out the importance of this object of desire and its expression coincides with the apparition of the eucalyptus tree that comes into view as the speaker is on the *threshold* of the “depths below” and “the sweet world that beckons” above.<sup>420</sup> The tree figures this crossover, or intersection, acting like an open door that connects these two spaces. The speaker states:

It is (the eucalyptus tree) green and perfect, towering a huge, graceful pyramid more than a hundred feet in the air. A little wind coming across the meadow played through its flowing pendent leaves. From within its foliage, I caught a faint continuous murmur, like the running of water. Like the running of the rivulet composed of all the tears which Christians had shed in those terrible days of doom and death. But the murmur of the wind rose above like an obligato, like a chant of life, of endurance, of the immanence in Christianity of well-being and ultimate good [...] The roots of the eucalyptus tree are plunged deep in that cemetery, but its branches bear a beneficent sap within their veins. Baffled, beaten its beginnings in the catacombs of doubt, misinterpretation, tears, Christianity yet rises, rises with healing in its wings.<sup>421</sup>

The author emphasises movement and song. Through simile, repetition, and personification this continuous motion is embodied in the relationship between the different natural elements and

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<sup>418</sup> Fauset, “The Eucalyptus Tree,” 116-117.

<sup>419</sup> Fauset, “The Eucalyptus Tree,” 117.

<sup>420</sup> Fauset, “The Eucalyptus Tree,” 117.

<sup>421</sup> Fauset, “The Eucalyptus Tree,” 117.

cultural productions signalled by the reference to “obligato”. This mixture of nature and culture paints the human experiences of hope and desire through the image of the eucalyptus tree. As if, in the overcoming of oppression or religious persecution there was something fundamental in the expressive act of singing the “chant of life” or of hearing the wind which evokes the call of the desire to live. The fluidity of the description that does not separate between nature and culture creates the “immanence” of life that vibrates throughout this image, tying together the below and the above in the visual of the tree. Though there is nothing new in using the metaphor of the tree as life – and the evident connection to the biblical Tree of Life – Fauset nevertheless tends to disturb, to an extent, its symbolism. Firstly, the tree comes to embody Christians’ experiences “in those terrible days of doom and death”. It is from this past that the roots of the tree have found its source to grow. Thus, whilst Fauset states that “Christianity” rises following the elevation and verticality of the tree from the roots to the leaves, it seems that Christianity is not an immaterial concept but rooted in the lives of those who practice it and who were persecuted in its name. It is the “tears”, “misinterpretation”, “doubt” pain and suffering – human experiences – that are transformed through the symbolism of the growth of the tree into hope and desire for life. As those once oppressed now rise within the tree it is aligned with the processes of metamorphosis from death and destruction, in which the roots of the tree are embedded, into the “beneficent sap” in its veins. This to say that spirituality is represented as material. As the act of singing overcomes or helps endure death and destruction, Fauset suggests that deliverance is not given by a beneficent immaterial being – God – but takes place in collective human experience and struggles, “the beneficent sap”. The speaker’s impressions of human experiences from oppression and persecution to the desire for life and freedom that are translated through her perceptions of the catacombs ring out of the text like the musical wind in the tree. It is rather evocative of Fauset’s depiction of spirituality in Maggie’s redemption in *There is Confusion*. Here spirituality was disconnected from connotations of judgement, sin and repentance and grounded in the materiality of Maggie’s individual and collective experience as she formulates a desire for life despite the socio-cultural realities of discrimination and oppression. In this text, Fauset’s imaging of the catacombs and the subsequent portrayal of spirituality leaves the piece open to the possibility of many interpretations from many differing perspectives. Perhaps, Fauset’s “Eucalyptus Tree”, as suggested above, is productive of resonances with racial oppression and the African American context in the United States. It could be a musing on ways of living with legacies of death, slavery, and oppression as a black subject, in America or within the African diaspora at large, but mediated through the narrator’s specific experience of the Italian catacombs and Catholic persecution of the past. It is evocative of a reflection on how and in



what way one remembers or experiences the past that is marked not only by factual lacuna, but also the inexpressible or incommunicable qualities of extremely violent lived experiences. The narrator has a relationship to the skeletons or death in the space but because they are no longer here to tell their stories she imbues this impossible gap with her perceptive and affective world, overriding even, that which the monk or the guide are retelling. Thus, Fauset's literary technique foregrounds the subjective reality of the speaker's experience which has the effect of creating a co-existence of times and spaces. In this way this strategy distinguishes itself to her technique of mapping. The imagined landscape or "reverie" which is interwoven with productive tensions and constant motion create a setting that cannot be fully determined or attached to one specific cultural-geographical territory. The article and narrative are clearly set in St. Callixtus, Italy, but that which is described from the speaker's perspective makes it not necessarily so. Unlike in Fauset's mapping technique which places America on top of another cultural-geographical space and therefore propels a form of imperialization, in "Eucalyptus Tree" it points to another aesthetic landscape that creates a non-predetermined relationship between the speaker and the environment. It is an aesthetic that experiments with a different kind of relationality whether within the text itself or the text and its readers. With what has been drawn out of this example of Fauset's aesthetic experimentations, her imagined cartographies in *Comedy: American Style* can be addressed.

### 3.4 Fauset's *Comedy: American Style*

Fauset's fourth novel published in 1933 explores the (tragic) consequences of racism, sexism, and class prejudice through the inter-generational tale of an African American family, the Carys. In the ironically titled *Comedy*, Fauset combines setting and character development to intertwine socio-geographical spaces – urban centres, households, boarding schools – with the affective geographies<sup>422</sup> of her characters as they move and grow in and through these different locations. One aspect of the novel's geographies is that certain aspects of "France" – and histories of European colonisation – build the landscapes of "America" and what is understood as "America" are employed in Fauset's landscaping of France. This blurring of cartographical separation across the seas effectively exposes, amongst other things, the shared anti-black realities of these two nation states. It is in this way that Fauset challenges the foundations of Americanness, premised, in part, on the very idea that it is divorced from "the

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<sup>422</sup> There is much critical literature on the theoretical concept of "affective geographies" and it is utilized across many different disciplines, from computer science to philosophy, art and literary criticism, behavioral studies, psychology, and geography. Linguist and literary critic Naomi Greyser uses it in her study on nineteenth century sentimental literature in order to argue that "the sentimentalists evoked sympathy to express a desire for a *place* that was both territorial and emotional – what I call *affective geography*." For Greyser, affective geographies disturb territorial distances in one's affective experience that brings these faraway places into proximity with the subject. Naomi Greyser, *On Sympathetic Grounds: Race, Gender, and Affective Geographies in Nineteenth-Century North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1. This aspect of reimagining the linearity and spatial organization of territorial cartographies in a person's own subjective world is an aspect of affective geographies that the discussion above draws on. Another element is how affective geographies are understood by feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed. From her phenomenological perspective, Ahmed thinks through how subjects "orient" and are oriented in a given space through the spatial, political, and relational aspects of emotive experience. It is a directive aspect of human experience which means that subjects "gather" around certain objects or places rather than others. In Chapter Two, this has been discussed in the example of Amy being directed toward the social object of marriage that, in a society normalized by heterosexual patriarchy, is the "promise" of happiness for women. This took her to certain places on her journey and distanced her from others. It also brought Amy into violent confrontation with white supremacy, Prince Charming, and the south in the United States. Another example is how one's loving attachment to a home can make it appear bigger or closer to that individual than it is represented on the map. But if that home has been the site of familial disgust and rejection of that individual's homosexuality, for instance, the home would be represented in his or her affective geography in a very different way. Thus, the concept of affective geographies works with the idea that emotions are both embodied in an individual subject, are important prisms through which one apprehends the world around but are also not contained to the individual. One's or a social group's affective geographies, as it will be largely discussed, are shaped by the environment, and play a major role in shaping that landscape as it can be made into the image – cartography – that satisfies one's own affective mapping of the world and who and what comes into proximity or relegated outside of its borders. What Ahmed shows is that affects not only change one's perception and understanding of spaces in their own imagined mappings of the world around but also affects how certain subjects move through spaces because of them. As Ahmed argues, "feelings become a form of social presence rather than a self-presence. In my model of sociality of emotions, I suggest that emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So, emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others." Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Routledge, 2015), 10.

Old” world of Europe. One may even argue that the setting of *Comedy* embodies what has come to be symbolised by the hyphenated expression Euro-American modernity or Euro-American modernism. Constructed in this way, the author encourages a certain critical lens in which to approach either the imaginative world of her novel – and the protagonists’ journeying within it – or the realities of a world created through histories of European colonisation and transatlantic slavery. Reshaping what is perceived as “America” or “France” of the novel highlights how whiteness and white supremacy structure both literary modernisms and these nation states. This allows Fauset to represent how her characters negotiate their black identities, or the very impossibility of that blackness in literary space, but equally makes her fictional world communicate with social and cultural realities of white supremacy in the author’s contemporary America and France. This becomes inextricably linked with notions of home because *Comedy*’s plot is centralised through the lives of the members of one family, beginning with, departing from, and possibly making returns to the family residence. Firstly, the discussion will turn to the formal elements, general comments on the narrative and character construction in order to bring to the fore the aesthetic scaffolding designed by Fauset in order to unhinge or dislocate social-cultural geographies, how they are represented (cartography), and the impact that this has on identity construction and processes of identification.

### 3.4.1 The Making of a White American Stage

Fauset’s technique of placing at the centre of her narrative one African American family whose lives represent a microcosm of American society is common to her literary aesthetics. Her investigation of the Cary family in *Comedy: American Style* – the mother Olivia Cary, the father, Christopher, the eldest son also Christopher, the daughter Teresa and the youngest son, Oliver – advances perhaps the bleakest but also the most critical perspective of racialised patriarchy and its representation in her imagined lands. Developed and explored in the intimate spheres of the Carys’ home, this investigation is carried out by following one of the main characters, Olivia, who identifies as a “white woman” and embodies the predominant voice of anti-black racism in the narrative. Employing certain tropes of the passing plot from within the African American literary tradition, Fauset demonstrates how Olivia Cary’s domination, power and “whiteness” are the structuring principles of this family. The narrative develops as each family member responds to or tries to survive the actions and attitudes of Olivia, which will eventually break the Carys apart and for Oliver, her “black” son, it will mean his death. The structural work of both whiteness and its embodiment in Olivia is furthered by Fauset as she inscribes Olivia’s

genealogy into histories of European colonisation and transatlantic slavery. This character's maiden name "Blanchard" announces at once, French culture, Euro-American white supremacy and colonial legacies. It linguistically determines Olivia as a white woman, the "*blanch(e)*" of Blanchard which is emphasised by the suffix "ard". In French "ard" designates a specific characteristic or quality of a person – in this case white – but does so by adding both a determinant (and sometimes negative) connotation to the characteristic specified. In certain respects, Fauset overdetermines Olivia's identity as "white" through this repetition of whiteness of her character. Olivia identifies as white, and is, in this trans-linguistic play, designated as "white" which is furthered again with the additional "ard". The internalisation of anti-black racism and whiteness that constructs Mrs. Cary's character and organises the Cary family, also comes to be the principal force of the novel, as it is made to structure *Comedy* formally and aesthetically. Understanding Fauset's literary strategies in this way could affect how the readers interpret the characters and the tragic events that unfold in the narrative. For example, Fauset's framing of Olivia makes it difficult to interpret her "choice" to pass as purely individual and solely emerging from the United States context, thus putting into question some premises of passing novels whereby the figure of the tragic mulatta is represented as a personal (and often judged as selfish) choice to cross the color line. Whilst Olivia's actions can be seen as her way of getting ahead at the expense of others in an anti-black world, interpreting her character and the novel only from this perspective tends to reduce or obscure Fauset's commentary on the institution of whiteness and how, within her own aesthetics, she makes it the edifying structure that holds the novel together. Therefore, this purposefully built African American tale within spaces formed by whiteness not only comments upon socio-cultural relationships of domination and power but also points to aesthetic questions of the possibilities of black representations within modernism. The European traditions of "Comedy" and "Tragedy" are used to organise the novel. Fauset's (modern) rendition of the traditional theatrical genre allows her to divide *Comedy: American Style* into "The Plot", "The Characters" "Teresa's Act", "Oliver's Act", "Phebe's Act", and "Curtain". Because each "Act" focuses on the life of one main protagonist of the younger generation this structure solidifies the disconnection between the characters' gendered and racial identities and across generational lines. Thus whiteness, or Euro-American literary traditions and culture are here understood as that which works, in part, via the impossibility of a cohabitation between whiteness and blackness. As it is Olivia's character (and the white world that she represents) who is the central force of the novel, this idea is introduced at the very beginning of the novel in the "Plot" chapter.

“The Plot” provides the readers with the information of the lives of the first and second generation of the Cary family, that the youngest and third generation are not privy to for they do not enter the story until after, in the “Characters”. “The Plot” is, in one respect, a genealogy of differing members of the family. In another, it acts as an evidencing of the circumstances in which Olivia shapes herself and is shaped by whiteness. As such this chapter works as the background to the “Characters” and the “Acts” sections, which builds on the premise that it is whiteness that will formally organise this novel, the characters, and the settings within it. The separation of familial bonds is already part of the narrative as Olivia rejects the memory of her visibly black father Lee Blanchard who died after her birth, placing enormous tension on the relationship with her mother Janet Blanchard, who could also be perceived as white. The absent presence of Lee Blanchard signals already that Olivia’s pursuit for “white” femininity is predicated on the death of black masculinity.<sup>423</sup> However, Fauset also shows that, in this instance, whiteness and white femininity are equally determined in their relationship to black femininity. This finds its representation in young Olivia’s determination that her and her mother racially pass which culminates in Janet leaving and moving to Boston “to live with her own people.”<sup>424</sup> Once the members of the first generation disappear, Olivia has the supposed freedom to pass into and come to embody whiteness and white femininity which will be put into question most dramatically when she gives birth to her son Oliver. What is demonstrated here, and developed through the rest of the novel, is that within this African American family, interactions between characters who identify as white and those who identify as black are articulated through spatial distance and proximity, and, most importantly, through affective registers such as conflict or attachment. Olivia’s row with her mother over racial identity that separated the two are brought back together again when Olivia learns that her mother has married Ralph Blake, an African American who is as “fair” as they are.<sup>425</sup> Together, Janet and Ralph have two twins, David and Janet. “They were striking children, with Janet’s *mat* white skin, and with their father’s thick dark hair and blue eyes”.<sup>426</sup> This “white family”, from Olivia’s perspective, brings her back into the fold of this community and into the horizons of their “home”. She creates affective attachments to the twins and the relationship with her mother improves along with that of her new stepfather. From the point of view of Olivia’s character, this equation of blackness and distance, whiteness and proximity, is the textual instantiation of the spatialization of race

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<sup>423</sup> This will be explored in more detail in the discussion to come with respect to Olivia’s relationship to Oliver and how his suicide is represented in *Comedy: American Style*.

<sup>424</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, *Comedy: American Style*, 1933 (New York: Dover Publications, 2013), 15.

<sup>425</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 29.

<sup>426</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 24. Emphasis in the original.

relations in the United States, organised as it is by whiteness. Olivia's affective geography is being created and overlaps with the national cartographies of race. Her pursuit to be recognised and accepted as white is her "desire" that comes to orient her pursuit of homemaking and shapes the environment of this space. Olivia will only engage in intimate attachments and sexual relationships with those with whom she can create a "white" family. This is exemplified by Olivia's thought process given in her choice of husband Christopher Cary. Set in the closing paragraphs of the "Plot" section, it frames Olivia's desire for whiteness in the large context of being an African American woman in American society and the possibilities, or lack thereof, afforded to her.

Suddenly to Cary's and her own mother's complete amazement she married him. They would have been more amazed, completely indeed, taken off their feet, if they had known the course of reasoning which had made her decide to act.

It was the twins who turned the trick!

They were so completely white.

Olivia had long since broken loose from the idea of life spent with the soda-jerker, the mill-hand, the small-town clerk. She began to understand her mother's insistence that it was important for one's husband to belong to such or such a class. She knew now that it was highly unlikely that she would meet with and marry a white man of Cary's education, standing and popularity. Certainly not in this section of the country where her affiliation could be so easily traceable.

Of course she could go away from home where she was unknown. But strange to say she was in no respect the adventuress. Whatever she might accomplish toward the fulfilment of this strange desire of hers she expected to be brought about more or less by mere verisimilitude; she did not at this time expect to have much to do with the marshalling of events [...]

Why not take advantage of what already lay to her hand? Cary's friendships, his contacts, the enthusiastic welcomes and greetings which seemed to rain down upon him wherever he went... With a background such as this, to what heights might not their children attain? And she as dowager would share all their triumphs, their opportunities, their advantages. They should know from the very beginning, and quite naturally, the desires of which her young life had been balked...

She and Cary were as fair as her mother and Dr. Blake. They would have white children. The twins had shown her that. So at last she would obtain her desire.

And for that reason and no other she married Christopher Cary.<sup>427</sup>

Fauset places this last sentence of the chapter by itself on the white page which adds dramatic effect to Olivia's concluding remark. What could be first read as a compromise of her desire to marry white with the "importance" of class standing and social popularity, what Olivia's thoughts reveal is her understanding of identity and her processes of identification. As it was evidenced with her and her mother's family, to be close to whiteness assures, to a certain extent,

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<sup>427</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 28-29.

this identity. In this sense, “verisimilitude” suffices for her to achieve her “strange desire”. Olivia comprehends, and in a way lives (her) racial identity as that which is on the level of appearance. For instance, this informs her (eugenicist) perspective that it is through descendance that blackness can be symbolically and materially eradicated from the Blanchard line. In the passage above, what Olivia’s anti-blackness suggests is that questions of exclusion or belonging, be it familial, within a community or society, are based upon the ocular dynamics of self and other, of looking acting and being alike as opposed to looking different. By tying this effect of institutional racism and sexism to the familial sphere, Fauset evokes ideas of inheritance and transmission of these structural relationships of power. Social identity is not determined biologically in this scenario. Rather, it indicates the specific roles that social identities play in how one comes to inhabit the world. The social identity of whiteness does not determine Olivia either. Because it is something she desires, and logically reasons for in the passage above, she contours her affective registers to bring about the landscape that would guarantee her pursuit of being recognised as “white”. The text frames heritage and identity in the realms of performance which is emphasized by Fauset’s choice to engage with the theatrical genre. Olivia’s identification as white and her will to make the environment around her the same, exposes the fact that access to power and to the benefits of belonging to a group, is, in part, about blending in, about acting alike, and about adopting the normative roles prescribed that “already lay to her hand”. To put it alternatively, there is already a white cartography of the American space that impresses upon Olivia’s affective world and how she forms herself and projects onto her homemaking. As Sara Ahmed underlines in her reading of Fanon, “if the world is made white, then the body at home is one that can inhabit whiteness.”

As Fanon’s work shows, after all, bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which makes the world “white” as a world that is inherited or already given. This is the familiar world, the world of whiteness, as a world we know implicitly. Colonialism makes the world “white”, which is of course a world “ready” for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach. Bodies remember such histories, even when we forget them. Such histories, we might say, surface on the body, or even shape how bodies surface. In a way, then, race does become social as well as a bodily given, or what we *receive* from others as an inheritance of this history.<sup>428</sup>

If the social drama that is played out on Fauset’s American stage is one in which the backdrop is constructed by hierarchical relationship based on race, class, gender, and sexuality then a (survival) strategy to attain “opportunities” and “advantages” is to seep into the outlines of this

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<sup>428</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 111.

white patriarchal backdrop. As Olivia reckons, “with a background such as this, to what heights might not their children attain?” This is formally mirrored by Fauset as this is taking place within “The Plot” chapter which functions as the background to the novel. With this in place, the “Acts” will play out on the novel’s stage dramatizing the violence of American society. It would be helpful to recognise that in a theater one of the main purposes of a backdrop and stage curtains are to block out any peripheral light so that the stage appears as a *black* box. What this implies is that Fauset purposefully decides to do the opposite in her literary construction. She exposes her fictive stage to a blinding light of whiteness which echoes Olivia’s character, her affective geographies, her trajectory and vice versa. As an effect, it not only signals to the readers that the novel is aesthetically organised by this whiteness – and thus white supremacy – but it also suggests that Mrs. Cary’s futural desires and goals, that she can make a “white” home for herself and pass it on to her children is the false promise that sets up the tragedy. Thus, from a broad perspective, the novel and theater genre that Fauset uses comments upon the racial aspect of aesthetic norms of Euro-American modernism. As Toni Morrison argues in terms of American literary aesthetics, Fauset makes blackness the haunting presence of her white stage. This haunting is placed on Olivia’s path when she recognises, for example, that it was “highly unlikely” that she could marry a white man of Christopher’s standing for “in this section of the country” her racial “affiliation could be so easily traceable”. However, another example of haunting is how Olivia’s whiteness is made to follow Teresa’s path which will end in her eventual demise in France. Therefore, to the same extent that blackness haunts the novel’s white stage and Olivia, white supremacy is revealed in its haunting of Fauset’s black characters. This contradistinction that creates dramatic tension throughout the novel, is strategically undertaken by tying her characters’ identities and processes of identification to the specific landscapes and locations of the narrative. As Ahmed highlights, “the body at home” is the one that can inhabit whiteness. Fauset explores this very premise in Olivia’s homemaking and her selfidentification as white. The narrative descriptions of how Mrs. Cary shapes herself to the white world and makes her family home in this image determines the paths that her children take. In “The Plot” then, Fauset’s meta-imaging of a theater stage allows her to engage and develop the other landscapes of her fictive world. This is to argue that as much as Fauset reveals the making of her characters’ identities through their narrative trajectory, so too does she suggest that how one sees, feels, hears, or makes a home within a certain space or how systems of domination interact with spatial organisation of a given place (including the world) are complexly intertwined. But, as the characters’ emotions and affective geographies are



shown to be, in part, products of social construction, the author points to occasions when they could be exposed, undone, and transformed.

### 3.4.2 Tracing Cartographies of Whiteness: Desire, Identity and Landscape.

In light of the above discussion, the readers are invited to see that for Olivia, making a home is attached, in certain aspects, to the construction of her identity and how she understands her position in society. For Teresa, her daughter, the white landscape that Olivia produces within the family home is an environment of non-belonging and non-identity. As it was suggested, this whiteness haunts her character as much as it comes to haunt the lives of her siblings, Christopher, and Oliver. Later in the novel, in “Teresa’s Act” this accumulates in the narrator’s assertion that, in America, “emotionally as far as race was concerned [Teresa] was a girl without a country”.<sup>429</sup> In Teresa’s affective geographies, the United States does not even appear in its representation or cartography. To understand this, Fauset accompanies the readers in two important ways. Firstly, and as is the case in all of Fauset’s novels, Teresa’s character development as a member of the youngest generation is filtered through a perspective of the intergenerational effects of systems of domination. What is specific to *Comedy* is that this inheritance of whiteness – and to a certain extent class prejudice and gender normativity – is explicitly represented in Olivia’s home building. Structurally speaking, Fauset demonstrates this by introducing the children of the family in “The Characters” chapter through Olivia’s perspective. The readers come to know the third generation from the perspective of whiteness. To understand Teresa’s character the readers are invited to look at her relationship with the older generation, and specifically her mother, which has started to be developed above and will be continued below. Secondly, the way in which Fauset constructs the places that Teresa journeys to, including France, will be pivotal to interpret Teresa’s identity construction and subjective experiences and how she arrives at feeling she is without a “country”. As the narrator’s statement evokes the cohabitation of both affective (“emotionally”) and national geographies (“country”), it will be shown how Fauset blurs local, national, and international spaces, and draws from the wider global (historical) context of colonial racialised patriarchy in order to interweave them with the micro-level of Teresa’s making of identity and her affective cartographies.

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<sup>429</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 89.

The opening scene of “The Characters” is set in the Cary household. The first image given to the readers is one in which Mrs. Cary looks out the window of “*her* pleasant residence in West Philadelphia”<sup>430</sup> as she watches her daughter Teresa and her friends returning from school. This position of peering out sets the tone of Olivia’s authority and positions her action as one of surveillance of the boundary of the familial sphere. This is racially inflected as the narrator recounts the scene to follow.

One of her [Teresa’s] companions, a very fair blond with dark blue eyes and gay gilt hair, Mrs. Cary identified immediately as Phebe Grant. She was not sure of the identity of the third youngster. Closer inspection revealed to her however the dark brown skin, the piquant features, the sparkling black eyes and the abundant, silky and intensely curly locks of Marise Davies. Mrs. Cary frowned. “As often as I’ve told Teresa to keep away from that Davies child!” she murmured angrily to herself.

She met them at the front door. The countenances of the three children were in striking contrast. Teresa’s wore a look of apprehension, Phebe’s of bland indifference, Marise’s of acute expectancy.

“Good-afternoon, Teresa,” Olivia said. “Good-afternoon children. I’m afraid it’s not best for Teresa to have so much company today. She gets excited and worn out and it’s hard afterwards for her to settle down to her lessons. I don’t mind if one of you stays. Phebe suppose you may come in and play with her a while, and Marise, you can come back another time.

“Tomorrow?” asked Marise, whose black eyes had never left Olivia’s face.

“Well hardly tomorrow,” the woman replied, flushing a little. She really disliked this child. “Horrid little pushing thing,” she inwardly apostrophized. But aloud she continued. “Hardly tomorrow, but some other day very soon, I am sure. Come on in Phebe.”<sup>431</sup>

The narrative voice accompanies the representation of Mrs. Cary’s racial surveillance of the household by articulating this scene from her perspective of “whiteness”. This can be seen by the very fact that Teresa appears to the readers for the first time, not in her own terms, or from her perspective, but through the words of Olivia. It is she who is in the position to attribute characteristics to Teresa (and her friends) and thus define the latter’s identity. For example, Teresa “gets excited and worn out” if she has too many friends over to play. What appears to be developed here is the fact that Olivia’s white identity and her desire to create a white world extends further than her bodily limits and her own subject. Her house seems to be a kind of extension of self, as if, this home were the material and symbolic spatialization of her (desired) identity. To put alternatively, for Olivia to understand herself as white and to be at home this becomes a requirement of the others that live there. Olivia is actively transforming this

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<sup>430</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 33.

<sup>431</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 33-34.

environment into a white one. Notions of this white world-making and familiarity are equally evoked in the above passage when whiteness is “immediately” identifiable by Olivia as opposed to black identity which is not easily recognisable, at least not at first “glance”. This distinction pre-emptly the eventual refusal of Marise into her white world. It suggests that white identity and making a place for itself is premised, in part, on continually enforcing this (spatial) separation from blackness.<sup>432</sup> For instance, Mrs. Cary murmurs to herself “*as often* as I have told Teresa to keep away from that Davies child!” Numerous examples are presented in the novel to confirm both the necessity of repetition in the construction of identity and transformation of place for it to inhabit. Be it through Mrs. Cary’s rules and regulations, the cold and indifferent environment that her presence creates within the home for her son Oliver,<sup>433</sup> the décor of the home,<sup>434</sup> the people that she populates it with,<sup>435</sup> or through the constant sound of her (racist) speech acts,<sup>436</sup> Olivia *affects* and shapes this landscape. And what is witnessed in the above scene is that this similarly affects Teresa. In Phebe’s refusal of Olivia’s invitation to enter the Cary home, it points to the impact that Olivia’s desire, identity, and authority will have on Teresa’s character formation and sense of self. In this concrete example, Teresa misses out on passing time with her friends. In general, the narrator emphasizes this at many different points of Teresa’s journey.

For twenty-one years, almost a third of her [Teresa] allotted span, she had yielded to her mother’s obsession. She would probably yield again... for the breakdown in her resistance showed her clearly how completely her inner self was under her mother’s domination.<sup>437</sup>

The effect of Olivia’s desire is so encompassing, so penetrating that it reaches Teresa’s “inner self”, violating the supposed barrier of corporeity. Teresa’s hopes and desires are not simply affected by her mother’s presence. Rather, Mrs. Cary’s whiteness transforms (to the point of

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<sup>432</sup> This is very similar to what Fanon will highlight in *The Wretched of the Earth* and his understanding that colonialism compartmentalizes spaces and peoples – “a world cut in half” – to which racial apartheid is just one example. Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, préface d’Alice Cherki et postface de Mohammed Harbi (Paris, La Découverte, 2002), 43. Furthermore, Fanon connects this spatial organization with the affective and embodied realities of those impacted by it. Thus, articulating a phenomenon similar to what has been discussed above through affective geographies, Fanon demonstrates the “compartmented world” shapes the colonial subject’s response to it on the micro level of dreams, muscular movement, and imagined actions: “L’indigène est un être parqué, l’apartheid n’est qu’une modalité de la compartimentalisation du monde colonial. La première chose que l’indigène apprend, c’est à rester à sa place, à ne pas dépasser les limites. C’est pourquoi les rêves de l’indigène sont des rêves musculaires, des rêves d’action, des rêves agressifs... Je rêve que j’éclate de rire, que je franchis le fleuve d’une enjambée, que je suis poursuivi par des meutes de voitures qui ne me rattrapent jamais. Pendant la colonisation, le colonisé n’arrête pas de se libérer entre neuf heures du soir et six heures du matin.” Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, 53.

<sup>433</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 195.

<sup>434</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 207.

<sup>435</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 210.

<sup>436</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 44.

<sup>437</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 148-149.

complete subjugation) Teresa's very existence as Olivia moulds the environment into her own white image. Thus, in Fauset's landscaping, she interweaves processes of identification, spatialization of identity and one's affective geographies that transform the environment that surrounds the subject. Calling on the work of philosopher and psychologist Vinciane Despret's concept of territory, Fauset's aesthetic tools of setting and character formation could be further explored.

In Vinciane Despret's study, *Habiter en oiseau*,<sup>438</sup> she puts into questions notions of territory by critically examining (historical) works of ornithologist and their hypothesis on territorial behaviour of certain species of birds. As with much of Despret's work, (another example being *Autobiographie d'un poulpe: et autres récits d'anticipation*<sup>439</sup>) her investigations of animals – their way of being in the world – and the signification that the human perspective places on certain attitudes and behaviours are put to the task in order to question the very ways in which human animals inhabit the world and their understandings and relationships to alterity, human or not. As such when she critically re-examines ornithologists' findings on territorial behaviours of the Great Tits, (*les mésanges charbonnières*), for example, the readers understand that she is also speaking about the ornithologists themselves and their ways of being and perceiving. In her interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's processes of territorialization-deterritorialization in terms of writing and the novel, Despret explains that for them, "deterritorialization is to unmake a relationship in order to reterritorialize in/on/with another."<sup>440</sup> The author continues:

Territorialiser prend alors son sens : c'est entrer dans un agencement qui territorialise celui qui y entre. Ce qui signifie que toute territorialisation suppose, d'abord, que l'on déterritorialise quelque chose pour le reterritorialiser autrement. Et l'on devrait, de ce fait, ne pas parler tant de territoires, que ce soit à propos d'écriture ou d'oiseaux, mais bien d'*actes de territorialisation*.<sup>441</sup>

What Despret goes on to discuss is that some of these acts are precisely gesture, expression, and rhythm that materialise in space in world making processes.<sup>442</sup> Territory, or as it has been

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<sup>438</sup> Vinciane Despret, *Habiter en oiseau* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2019).

<sup>439</sup> Vinciane Despret, *Autobiographie d'un poulpe et autres récits d'anticipation* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2021).

<sup>440</sup> "Se dessine ici ce que peut signifier "déterritorialiser" et son importance: déterritorialiser, c'est défaire un agencement. Mais pour se reterritorialiser sur un autre." My translation. Vinciane Despret, *Habiter en oiseau*, 100. Despret refers to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2. Mille plateaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980).

<sup>441</sup> Despret, *Habiter en oiseau*, 101.

<sup>442</sup> For example, citing *Mille plateaux*, Despret argues: "l'être territorialisé est non seulement une autre manière d'être, mais une manière d'être pour laquelle tout devient matière à expression. Plus précisément, 'il y a territoire dès que des composantes de milieux cessent d'être directionnelles pour devenir dimensionnelles, quand elles cessent d'être fonctionnelles pour devenir expressives. Il y a territoire dès qu'il y a l'expressivité du rythme. C'est l'émergence de matières d'expression (qualités) qui va définir le territoire." Deleuze et Guattari, *Mille plateaux*,

referred to here in the connected concepts of cartographies, landscapes, and affective geographies of Fauset's novel, is constructed in a similar way to what Despret is outlining in her investigations. Fauset's imagined landscapes that are created within the interactions or relationships ("*agencements*") between her characters, places and events, and the extension of Olivia's white self can be interpreted as this type of world making which *affects* and creates the landscape in which she desires to live, such as her white home, and vice versa. Olivia's desires that propel her actions are not mapped onto space but rather are produced in processes of interaction with others and her environment, or as Despret would argue "internal impulsions are no longer simple causes but melodic counterpoints of external circumstances."<sup>443</sup> The reprieve from whiteness, for Teresa, is framed only in her mother's disappearance, when she goes away on her trips to Europe, New England or Chicago. "Teresa hoped that her mother would not return for a long time."<sup>444</sup> This home and Olivia are representative of an eternal return of white supremacy which Fauset develops through making it the rhythm that accompanies her novel and therefore her invented cartographies. Fauset emphasises this constant return and repetition of the melody of white supremacy that is expressed by Olivia as she makes herself "home" in the world. What is shown is that this idea is not specifically rooted to the family home but is thought also as being extended through reproduction and inheritance. "Every time" that Olivia "appeared in public with the little girl [Teresa] she was presenting the incontestable proof of her white womanhood."<sup>445</sup> Home-scape or territories as a locus of identity, of certain ways of being in the world, are broadened out into the "public" spaces because it is when Olivia is with her daughter that she lives her "white womanhood". Consequently, the text comments upon belonging to the national community at large. White racial identity is one social construction – or one type of relationality (*agencement*) – that is not only required to be at home within the boundaries of this nation state, but it also shows the necessary externalisation of alterity, of blackness, in order for whiteness to have a home. It requires a specific kind of relationality which is rhythmised by white supremacy, one expression of which is demonstrated in the text as being that of bad faith. Olivia's motivation for refusing to invite Marise into *her* white household is in stark contrast to the actual

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386, Despret, *Habiter en oiseau*, 109. It is in this way that both Despret and the authors of *Mille plateaux* conclude that "territory would be the effect of art" and of artistic expression. Furthermore, and as Despret highlights, this expressivity of a subject, for example, is understood as being in relationship with the environment that surrounds them: "Les qualités expressive ou matières d'expression entrent, les unes avec les autres, dans des rapports mobiles qui vont exprimer le rapport du territoire qu'elles tracent avec le milieu intérieur des impulsions, et avec le milieu extérieur des circonstances." Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 390. Despret, *Habiter en oiseau*, 110.

<sup>443</sup> "Les impulsions internes ne sont plus de simples causes mais les contrepoints mélodiques de circonstances externes." My translation. Despret, *Habiter en oiseau*, 110.

<sup>444</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 48.

<sup>445</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 37.

reason given. As the readers are aware of this, but not necessarily the characters in the text, it creates a critical distance, thus highlighting the logics of Olivia's thinking and the type of relationship that is being "territorialised" and shaping her whiteness.<sup>446</sup> What is made plausible by Fauset's depiction of Mrs. Cary is that the existence of white identity itself is, in part, determined by a certain way of being and relating to its external world. Creating a home for its identity consequently creates a hostile world for others (human or otherwise). The idea of bad faith and the specific types of relationality that construct and are constructed by Olivia's expression of identity will return a few pages later in "The Characters" section with the readers, and Olivia's, first encounter with Oliver.

Akin to Fauset's framing of the readers' encounter with Teresa, the audience meets the youngest member of the family, Oliver through Olivia's narrated point of view. With respect to Teresa, Olivia's voice replaced the former's subjectivity. Teresa, unlike Marise or Phebe, did not speak, for example, in this scene. The sole gesture or expression of her subjectivity was summarized in one line, "Teresa wore a look of apprehension". In contrast, the text witnesses Oliver's self-expression, and it is his cry of coming into the world that Fauset places the principal catalyst of the novel and the beginning of Olivia's, Teresa's, and Oliver's undoing. Time quickly elapses in the narrative between Olivia finding out that she is having a third child and the moment of his birth. The readers are informed of her secret plan to "take the child away", perhaps to England, for long enough to bring him up as a "member of the dominant race".<sup>447</sup> It is because of this that she rejoices in his becoming.

"This one will be a boy," she told big Christopher gaily. "He'll be the handsomest and most attractive of us all. And I'll name him after myself. An Oliver for your Christopher." [...]

"I'm sure I will be up very soon, Chris," she told her husband. She adopted one of her rare moods of coquetry. "And when I do get up, you ought to award a dutiful wife. How would you like to send her and her baby son on a little trip to England? [...]"

But the unforeseen happened. The baby arrived in due course. "Hale and hearty," said his beaming father. There never was a baby haler and heartier. But Olivia did not fare so well. She had one sinking spell after another. For the first time she was unable to nurse her child [...] So that it was a full month that passed before the baby was set before her, crowing, and laughing and persistently and futilely striking his little hands together.

Olivia sat up arms outstretched to receive him. Her baby! Her eyes stretched wide to behold every fraction of his tiny person. But the expectant smile faded as

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<sup>446</sup> The concept of bad faith refers to the work of Africana philosopher, Lewis R. Gordon, and how he conceptualizes the Sartrean bad faith as a phenomenon of anti-black racism. See Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999).

<sup>447</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 40.

completely as though an unseen hand had wiped it off. She turned to her husband sharply:

“That’s not my baby!”

But it was her baby. It was a boy, handsomer and more attractive than the other children. He was named Oliver.... They had been calling him that for a month, her delighted children assured her...his hair was black and soft and curly...and he had the exact bronze gold complexion of Lee Blanchard.<sup>448</sup>

This scene crumbles Olivia’s racist fantasy that she will isolate her son from the family so that he may grow to be completely “a member of the dominant race”. The echoing of Lee Blanchard’s absent appearance in Oliver’s complexion continues the exploration of identity and inheritance of oppression and power with the intergenerational tie to blackness that needed to be put to death for Olivia’s whiteness to exist. Mrs. Cary’s white familial cartography that she has created is ruptured and made impossible by the appearance of Oliver. Even before Olivia is herself aware of her son’s blackness, her embodiment of whiteness is rendered ill. As opposed to her experience with her other fair skinned children, the birth of Oliver leaves her “sinking” and incapable of nursing. What appears to be a kind of post-natal depression (common for women and often scrutinized as a failing of their motherhood) is represented here as an unconscious foreshadowing of her denial of Oliver as “her” son. Thus, it is not a failing of her motherhood or womanhood that is put into question. Rather it is her white racial identity that is put into physical and existential crisis. In the context of wanting to raise a “white” son, the idea of children as an extension of self is repeated by her desire to name him after herself. Resonating then with the incident with her other child Teresa, Olivia’s whiteness extends out but is also guaranteed by the appearance of her children. This unequivocally fails, then, with Oliver. White identity fails to be returned in this hermetically sealed loop of racial identity. And it is here where Fauset builds the continual rhythm of whiteness that returns again and again as it constructs Olivia and forms the landscape of the family and home. This is precisely because it is thrown off beat by Oliver’s arrival and expression of self. So, whilst the failure of return works on the level of appearance of blackness it is not only this. The interruption of whiteness is represented through the voice of Oliver’s “crowing and laughter”, and his gestures, “striking his little hands together”, in short in the expression of his subjectivity. Framed in this way, Olivia’s speech act “this is not my baby” represents the necessary denial of his black existence and subjectivity for Olivia to recuperate from her illness and to make her whiteness healthy again. With this overt expression of her bad faith it cruelly reinstalls a white supremacy to the scene which materializes in her white landscaping of the home. Also, there seems to be

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<sup>448</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 40-41.

a link between possession and identity that has thus far remained without comment. For instance, it was when Olivia was with *her* daughter that her white femininity was at home in reality. When Olivia states “this is not my baby” it is not just an act of non-recognition, but one of dis-ownership. If possession is understood as property, the connection to anti-blackness is apparent, namely the justification to render black subjects sub-human and therefore legitimise that they be considered as the slave owner’s property. However, when Olivia does not recognise Oliver as *her* son, the readers get the impression that the possessive “her” is not solely understood as property, as an object owned. What the narrator’s description of these two encounters with Olivia’s children implies is that they are *her* children in so far as they are acknowledged by her as either being extensions of herself or as having this self reaffirmed by their presence (the case of Teresa). What Fauset represents in the character of Olivia is that possession and its contrary have more to do with her sense of self and her affective geographies that are deployed in her world making. Following the line that Vinciane Despret traces, this is a dynamic whereby “acts of territorialisation are about transforming the space not so much into one’s ‘own’ but into one’s ‘self’.”<sup>449</sup> The suggestion is that whiteness requires a specific way of being, relating, and expressivity in the world (territorialisation) that transforms the places it inhabits into this white self. Fauset continues this in her textual construction of her imagined geographies as she takes the readers outside of the family home and into other states within America and across the Atlantic to France.

In the above example within the birth scene of Oliver, Olivia fantasises of taking him far away. But it is not just anywhere that Fauset situates her desired location. The author (and Olivia) specifically chooses England. Mrs. Cary’s desire to go there – which can now be understood as the expression of self that extends out and colors the desired space as much as that space is desired because of the whiteness that it will confer to her – pulls European colonisation forward into the contemporary moment of the text making this historical process have a presence in the novel and the understanding of white identity. Such is Olivia’s perspective of France, which similarly frames France’s appearance as conferring whiteness and white identity. Olivia’s intentions for taking Teresa to France, aside from her own desires to live there, is because “there would be no complexities. Nothing to make Teresa feel that she was abandoning her own... her own were not here to be abandoned.”<sup>450</sup> To remain at this time within the bounds of the American nation state, what can be seen is how Fauset locates European metropolises in the national geography, namely in

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<sup>449</sup> Despret, *Habiter en oiseau*, 110.

<sup>450</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 176. Ellipsis in the original.



the region of New England. Olivia's racially motivated choice to send Teresa to Christie's Academy in New Hampshire is due to a "comparative inaccessibility" and "the type of girl she had found there". From Mrs. Cary's point of view, these were not just children of the upper-middle class but were the children of "men" who were "thoroughly American and for the most part New England American".<sup>451</sup> This "thoroughly American" identity is not only gendered masculine but is directly issued from "old" colonial families, specifically designated in the text using the term "Yanks". New England American identity is thus understood as the embodiment of colonial patriarchy, and it is these families that inhabit this state. It opens the text to the interpretation that this landscape is characterised, in part, as being a European metropolis and thus incorporates the specific spatial dynamics of colonial imperialism namely, centre and periphery and the metropole and the colonies. As the novel reaches "Teresa's Act" this aspect of Fauset's landscaping comes to the fore. For now, what can be stated is that white supremacy is shown in its multiple sites of articulation. From the micro level of the cartographies of individual desire (Olivia's) to the scale of transatlantic colonial domination, Fauset makes it productive of affective (individual), local (familial), national and international realities which accumulate in the New England of the novel. Fictionally centring New England as the metropole of colonial empire within the United States contradicts or at the very least puts into questions the independence of white American identities. Fauset exposes that American's sense of self as "new" as opposed to "old" Europe is perhaps a national fantasy by demonstrating this continuity. Akin, therefore, to the creation of Olivia's family home, going into whiteness – into New England, to France, to the metropole – is not just about going to a white space. In Fauset's aesthetics, the landscapes are not shown to precede identity or to precede her characters arrival in these spaces. Rather they are formed by the characters and form the characters themselves. This allusion to processes of settler colonialism are hard to ignore, specifically because Fauset makes this a part of her landscaping. As these interactions and co-construction of space and identity are sustained throughout "Teresa's Act" this discussion can continue to explore the fluctuating relationships between belonging, home, identity, and territory. What will come into focus is the Franco-American relationship that Fauset builds within *Comedy* by placing it on the path of Teresa's journeying.

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<sup>451</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 70.

### 3.4.3 “Home” and the Soundscapes of Subjectivity

*Comedy: American Style* can be interpreted as a critique of white colonial society which has been set in its transatlantic context. Due to Fauset’s blurring of national boundaries in her fictional landscapes, it attests in part, to her political stance of approaching anti-black racism from an international perspective. Fauset’s evocation of the effects of racism (and other forms of domination) on a world scale not only frames it as a global phenomenon but also demonstrates certain shared aspects of *making* society that resonate across the Atlantic. The author exposes the fact that such worlds and identities are constructed rather than given. As such, she partakes in the critique of systems of power and their effects via the production of her own imagined worlds. The literary text, then, seems to be a privileged site for the exploration of ways of making society – be it on the level of the nation state, the community, the family – for it requires, to a certain extent, similar acts of creation or imagination.<sup>452</sup> Unlike theoretical analysis that tends to (importantly) deconstruct society in order to better understand its mechanisms, literary texts have the potentiality to produce critical perspectives that emerge from the specific ways an author mobilizes particular aesthetic tools over others in order to build one world rather than another. Thus, the fictive element of literature can provide a space for speculation that incorporates (present and futural) desires for other ways of being and interacting in the world. In *Comedy*, Fauset pays attention to the construction of identity and environment as she draws the readers’ attention to white world making that she herself partakes in for the purpose of the novel and that she explores, to a large extent, through the character Olivia. In Olivia’s making of her home, or in the “Yanks” that are mobilized to paint New England as a kind of colonial metropolis, the characters’ actions and (self) expressions take on geopolitical aspects in *Comedy*. Fauset builds on this by encouraging the readers to listen out for musical counterpoints in her text, as argued above, that hold a specific place in her oeuvre. What was developed at this time is that one form of manifesting existence and one’s identity is through expressivity that “territorializes” or transforms the places one inhabits. Olivia’s incessant denial of blackness underpins Fauset’s text like the cadence of the eternal return of whiteness. The “no” that resonates throughout the text, builds the world around her, and moulds the affective geographies of the other characters that live within it. But, as it was demonstrated, it was also thrown offbeat by Oliver’s “crowing and laughter” which took place with his being coming into existence in the birth scene. Oliver’s

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<sup>452</sup> I am referring to Roland Barthes idea that Western countries not only construct themselves through myths, but these myths are mobilized in order to naturalize certain ways of being in the world, and certain world views, over others. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002).

expression of his subjectivity, that was accompanied by his clapping hands, acted as the counterpoint to Olivia's speech act that denied the fact that he was her son. Therefore, whether in a more constructed sense of self expression, such as language or speech, or in noises that Oliver makes such as "crowing", Fauset explores how particular sounds take up space in everyday interactions and how they affect subjectivity and intersubjective relationships. It would be to suggest, that Fauset asks the readers to tune in to sounds – utterances, noise, voices, discourses, music, literature, language – not only to point to aspects of cultural specificity but how they effect the characters' formation of identity. This is to say that it is important to approach the text with a broad understanding of expressivity. As it was interpreted in the example above between Olivia and Oliver, there was no differentiation between a speech act and an utterance for both, on a phenomenological level, are manifestations or acts of bringing oneself into being. Aesthetically speaking, and as it will be demonstrated below, when Fauset fills her setting with noises, poetical voices, discourses, types of music, or the French language they all have a commonality in the sense that they partake in making of her imagined worlds and her characters negotiation of identity through subjective experience. The first part of this overall exploration will take place in the ways in which music and musicality work in Fauset's *Comedy*.

In general, Fauset's aesthetics incorporate music less by the attention that she pays to the lyricism of her writing (though at times it is this as well) than to what can be attributed to three types of musical appearance.<sup>453</sup> One such method is her use of the French language and how its melody resonates within her fictional worlds. As it will be developed at length below, the musicality of this foreign language signals, amongst other things, certain ambiguities in her landscaping and character development. For example, the readers are invited to hear its song in the voice of her female protagonists, or of those who come along their path, as a tool for emancipation. Arguably, such is true for Angela Murray in *Plum Bun* and Teresa Cary in *Comedy*. At the same time, the French language is the sound that is indicative of the French empire, colonial domination, and black exploitation. This was, for instance, demonstrated by Fauset in her intertextual reference to Chateaubriand's poem, "Exile" in the article "Nostalgia", and will come to work in a similar fashion in Teresa's journeying in *Comedy*. The second manner in which music appears in Fauset's work is that she often creates one African American female protagonist whose plot follows her pursuit and desire for a musical career. In *There is Confusion*, this is the case of Joanna Marshall and in *Comedy* it is Marise Davies who embodies the beauty, talent, and ambition of musical

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<sup>453</sup> The exception is Fauset's last novel *The Chinaberry Tree: A Novel of American Life* which functions quite differently to her other novels, and as outlined in the introduction, does not fall into the critical parameters of this thesis.

stardom. In both examples, Fauset specifically constructs these characters as representative of strong and independent women whom, unlike some of the other characters, are proud of, and identify with, their blackness. As such, Fauset draws music into her texts to mirror, to a certain extent, the social realities of her contemporary America. On the one hand, the author frames a musical career as one opportunity for African Americans, and more specifically African American women, to be financially independent and experience a relative freedom in an anti-black patriarchy. On the other hand, her characters' musical talents and achievements are ways to celebrate, or bring to the fore, the specificities of black expressive culture within her fictional America. This is intertwined with her third use of musicality which is more attuned to her creation of setting and character construction. As the above discussion of *Comedy* has started to argue, what this suggests is that black expressive culture and music are not simply the songs that are playing in the background, akin to a piece of furniture placed to fill out a description of the room where the events take place. Rather, Fauset incorporates music and musicality in her landscaping and character construction to explore something specific to the ways in which they rhythm and paint lived experience and identity. Stretching the idea of music - pertaining not just to a song which is played or sung but also to other ways and modes of sound making (pleasant or otherwise) – the readers witness, for example, how Olivia's tune of whiteness is counteracted by the rhythms, poems and songs which make the household of the African American family the Davies.

In the second chapter of "The Characters" section which follows the opening scene of Olivia's (racial) surveillance of her household, the narrator (momentarily) takes up Teresa's point of view. Placed in contradistinction to the scene in Chapter One, it describes Marise Davies' home and Teresa's fond recollection of time spent there. This home is understood as a space of and for black identities and culture. Be it through the intertextual references made to Harlem Renaissance writers, the mentioning of African American icons and cultural leaders or the songs that the children sing, the Davies' household acts strategically as the antithesis to the Carys' white residence. As an effect, whiteness and blackness are once again spatially separated both in form (one chapter to another) and in environment (from one home to another) leading to the idea that each are uninhabitable by the other. Describing Teresa's "sparse visits" as "the acme of the few enjoyments which life had offered", one of the highlighted distinctions of the Davies' household is that "you could make as much noise, laughing, singing, romping as

you pleased.”<sup>454</sup> This sentence begins to align subjectivity and subjectivation with ideas of voice and the possibility of self-expression. The fact that the Davies’ household is loud – filled with laughter, song and playing – also means that it is a space which allows for those that inhabit it the freedom to explore, negotiate and communicate ways of living their specific identities. In part, this is because it works in opposition to the silent and oppressive spaces of whiteness of the Cary household. More generally however, it is because sonority is tied to manifestations of self. Oliver, for example, cultivates his subjectivity through his piano playing. Walking around the black neighbourhood, Oliver confides to his grandfather that “he would be a musician”. The narrator continues as they walked

Down South Street, teeming with unwashed Negroes and Jews, through Ninth Street, less picturesque and primitive, down, and across to Seventh and Race where they would sit in Franklin square [...]

He would write not the kind of music one usually heard, not simply a medley of sweet sounds, he explained in his childish terms, but music that told something, that drew pictures, that would make you see all of this. He pointed to the forms milling about the vicinity in which they happened to be.<sup>455</sup>

In Oliver’s projection he points to an aesthetic relationship between the production of sound and the creation of images. It adds a political dimension to Oliver’s artistic point of view because the music he wants to create is not simply for listening pleasure but has, as a goal, to tell a story of lived realities of oppression that, it is suggested, (some) people do not see. Thus, there is a parallel here to Fauset’s aesthetic technique. Music and musicality bring into existence or offers particular “pictures” to perception that, from the point of view of dominant culture and whiteness, would rather be ignored or are simply imperceptible. Oliver’s emancipatory musical vision is echoed in his own subjectivity for in the tragic setting of the Cary household, Oliver’s passion for music is represented as the one and only outlet for self-expression and desire. In terms of the landscape of the home, his “precious” piano is installed in the intimate sphere of his bedroom – “a large one on the third floor” – so that he may “practice at his ease”.<sup>456</sup> Oliver’s aspirations to be a pianist and composer, and the hours spent at the piano, work to signal his presence in the space of the house. To a certain degree, his character would have remained invisible or silent if it were not for his melodies emanating down from the third floor. Similar to the cry of his birth that threw off the tune of Olivia’s white fantasies, the sound of his music is the act of his self coming into being, of his subjectivity manifesting itself in space. And it is from this very same room, on the third floor,

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<sup>454</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 43.

<sup>455</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 192.

<sup>456</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 204.

that the sound of the gunshot is heard, representing the final counterpoint and definitive end, materially and symbolically, of his subjectivity. On another occasion, Fauset proposes this juxtaposition between death and life and its connection to music and sound. In “Oliver’s Act”, over the span of two sentences the readers are taken from a description of how he wished his (eventual) suicide would look to how Oliver “likes” music. In these opposed (though perhaps not mutually exclusive) expressions of desire for, on the one hand, death, and on the other, life, music falls on the side of the “waking”.

He hoped it (light) would rest long and lovingly across his face when he lay dead.  
In his waking hours he liked best people and music.<sup>457</sup>

What Fauset appears to suggest is that musical expression is comprehended as physical and material in the sense that its manifestation is also Oliver’s existence, and the materialisation of his blackness.<sup>458</sup> The remainder of the paragraph continues to nurture these interrelationships between Oliver, his subjectivity, and the socio-political dimensions of his artistic practices. The narrator articulates how Oliver envisions his path as an act of “translating” people, scenes, and landscapes “which his eyes had seen” into music. Importantly, sounds and images, images, and sounds, create each other through the mediation of Oliver’s imagination and his affective states or attachments to what he perceives in the world around him. For instance, what he sees in the faces of the labourers marching to work every morning from the stoop of his home is “calmness”, “peace”, “utter satisfaction” and ‘happiness’ that he is searching for himself.<sup>459</sup> Oliver perceives their daily routine as their walking “into new and unknown distances” and “questing the ultimate adventure.” It would not be a stretch to suspect that, for the workers, their journey to the factory is not experienced in the same way. However, their presence stimulates Oliver’s imagination as he dreams of finding a way to achieve this “peace” within his own being. The perceived and desired adventuring is appropriated in the following lines as he makes music his own quest. The laborers, “seemed so happy... Translating this look into

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<sup>457</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 193.

<sup>458</sup> It also frames Oliver’s character, his suicide and his musical inspirations, as being aligned with the role of music in general in African American literature, its articulation of black cultural identities, and the archetype of the musician as a figure within this literary tradition. Jazz for example worked in specific ways in the novels of fellow Harlem Renaissance writer Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, or within Langston Hughes’ poetics. Another later example would be James Baldwin’s *Another Country* where Rufus, like Oliver, is also the embodiment of the very sensitive musician figure and commits suicide in the beginning of the narrative.

<sup>459</sup> “There was something else he must get into melody [...] the calmness, the peace, the utter satisfaction that he had glimpsed on early summer mornings on the face of the laborers trudging serenely to work in the cool of the day before the sun had made a fiery furnace of the city [...] He used to sit on the steps of the house on Eleventh street and watch them walking off, off into the light, into new and unknown distances as though questing the ultimate adventure.” Fauset, *Comedy*, 198.

music would, he knew, be for *him* the ultimate adventure.”<sup>460</sup> In this sense, for Oliver, and for other characters in the novel, rhythm, sound, and song become the medium that allows Fauset to explore the interwoven elements of perception, imagination and creation within subjective experience and processes of identification. The sound of music is firstly the manifestation of Oliver’s existence which Olivia attempts to deny within her white family home. Secondly, Fauset spends time demonstrating his artistic processes and how they are tied to his subjectivity, his desire for emancipation that colors his perception of the world around him. To return to the Davies’ household, music, sound, and self-expression are equally explored in connection with processes of identification. For Teresa, the cherished memories of the happiness that she felt here are in part because each character has the space to express vocally their unique and individual embodiment of blackness. Her time spent at the Davies’ becomes not only a reprieve from the hostile environment created by Mrs. Cary but is demonstrated as that which changes the way she perceives and communicates her (racial) identity.

The Davies’ home is represented as being loud, filled with laughter and song, which distinguishes it from the oppressive silence of the Cary household. This is built upon when the points of view of each mother figure are diametrically opposed. The sounds of Mrs. Davies’ voice “mention only Happiness” counterpoints Mrs. Cary’s constant racial discrimination. The latter, as mentioned previously, fills the home with her discourses on “Racial Superiority”, the sounds of her negation of her children’s blackness or in the speech act that bars entrance to (visibly black) Marise Davies. Olivia’s racial surveillance of who does and does not come into her home and her words that enforce it are juxtaposed by Marise’s mother, who not only allows Teresa to enter the family home, but she “surveys” the children “with her wide, jolly smile” and voices statements like “have a good time, children” or “I want you all to be happy”. The difference in the ways that the two mother figures speak is a remarked change for the young Teresa in these two environments. As the narrator states, speaking from the point of view of her character: “It seemed so wonderful for the child that Marise’s mother, instead of talking of Ambition, or Standing, or Racial Superiority should mention only Happiness.”<sup>461</sup> This melodic counterpoint that the readers hear, and that impacts Teresa’s experience, is accompanied by a physical aspect in the change of atmospheric temperature. The coldness of the Cary household is filled with the warmth of the Davies’ home. Furthermore, the poetical voice of Claude McKay’s poem “Flame-Heart” is brought into the scene.

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<sup>460</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 198. Emphases in the original.

<sup>461</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 44.

“*We were so happy, happy, I remember –*”<sup>462</sup>

Fauset’s reference to “Flame-Heart” adds a sombre tone to Teresa’s memory, and there is a resonance created between it and the poem, for the latter is an evocation of McKay’s memory of Jamaica. Through the sound of the poem, the “happiness” that Teresa remembers experiencing is clouded in the blood red of the poinsettia tree, which is the “flame-heart” of this piece. This is emphasised by the fact that in the space of the poem, it is the only image offered to the speaker’s memory through its repetition at the end of each stanza. To quote just the final couplet of each verse:

...  
I have forgotten much, but still remember  
The poinsettia’s red, blood-red in warm December.  
...  
I have forgotten, strange, but quite remember  
The poinsettia’s red, blood-red, in warm December.  
...  
We were so happy, happy, I remember –  
Beneath the poinsettia’s red in warm December.<sup>463</sup>

Fauset’s intertextuality brings in other black poetical melodies and notions of exile to construct Teresa’s recollected experience of the Davies’ household and paints its environment with the aid of the imaginary landscapes of the poet. As an effect, it adds dimensions to Teresa’s memory of this site of blackness and inscribes this “home” in Teresa’s path, via the reference to McKay’s Jamaica, as the place that she will (be forced to) leave. But the poinsettia that casts its shadow on Teresa’s recollection is not connotative of her experience of this space. To a certain degree, this sense of loss, blood and exile juxtaposes the life and enjoyment felt in the Davies’ home by the young Teresa and her friends, and which the narrator goes on to describe. Musicality continues to be part of Fauset’s landscaping strategy and its shaping of the affective geographies of the characters of this scene. What is revealed through the narrator’s description is that the more “noise, laughing, singing, and romping” that takes up space the larger the place becomes. Expressivity has the effect of pushing back or expanding the interiors of this black home delineated by its metaphorical and literal walls, thus making (more) room for subjectivity. For example, the living room becomes the imagined world of Marise’s story, “I Was a Moonshiner’s Wife” that she recounts to Phebe, Teresa, and Nicolas. Now the site of Marise’s tale that “teemed

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<sup>462</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 44.

<sup>463</sup> Claude McKay, “Flame-heart,” in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, ed. James Weldon Johnson (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922). Consulted online at <https://www.bartleby.com/269/83.html> on the 31st of August 2021.



with bloodshed, terrible threats, gallons of whiskey, strong men, glamorous women, unbridled passion, sharpshooting and the moon!”<sup>464</sup> is said to “completely overwhelm” Teresa. Whilst the latter is astonished that a “girl of thirteen [could] know all these things”, Fauset’s use of the term “overwhelm” is telling of the spatial aspects that Marise’s world comes to occupy through her voice. It is as if her creativity and imagination stretch the horizons of her subjectivity and, as an effect, the delimitations of her corporeal boundaries similarly broaden. It is suggestively this that overwhelms Teresa for she is not familiar with the experience of a black female subject taking up space through the expression of self, starting with her own black subjectivity. Her only representation or figure of black femininity is her mother, who does not identify as such and enforces Teresa’s blackness into silence. This is furthered as Marise abruptly changes the scene through a speech act: “I’m tired of reading... Let’s play theater.” Her desire transforms this space from the imagined world of her story into the theater stage. Music, in the strict sense of the term, more explicitly constructs the space as “Nicolas sang in a breathy, boyish soprano” and Marise “played and sang and danced; her voice even at that age was thrilling”.<sup>465</sup> As everyone gets into costume, Teresa “accepted only a faded garland of flowers; she would be audience, she said. No one demurred; it was at times like this her favourite rôle.”<sup>466</sup> Teresa’s self-positioning as audience in this changing landscape is coherent, in a way, with her feeling of being overwhelmed by Marise’s self-expression. Her preferred “rôle” is one of an observer and listener, which places her in a form of passivity in relationship to the actors of the play. It appears that Teresa feels comfortable watching and hearing others move, sing, act and express but does not feel so in respect to her own performance. However, what could be seen as a passive role chosen by Teresa is challenged by the fact that she comes to actively identify with what is taking place on the stage. This interpretation is encouraged by the narrator as the readers are placed in Teresa’s subjective reality via the retelling of the events from her perspective.

Whilst time is spent delineating Marise’s performative talents,<sup>467</sup> Nicolas’ “masculinity” and the gender performance and heterosexual desire played out between these two characters,<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 45.

<sup>465</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 46.

<sup>466</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 46. Rôle is spelt in French in the text without the use of italics.

<sup>467</sup> “Already she [Marise] possessed charm, assurance, *savoir faire*. She was going to be an actress when she grew up, she always declared. Her dancing was beginning to show something of a professional quality, there was more to it than the spontaneous abandon of a child at play. Even with this unexact audience it was plain that she was doing her best; Marise would never be second in any line. She would either excel or withdraw.” Fauset, *Comedy*, 46.

<sup>468</sup> “Usually Nick’s eyes, at times like these, were fastened upon her [Marise]. And indeed it was to capture his unwilling attention that she performed her graceful antics. Between these two there was something half-sensed and deeply hidden ... As though his latent masculinity were lying in wait for her... as though some as yet undeveloped feminine quality in

the narrative voice focuses her attention on the way Phebe inhabits the rhythm of the stage through her “solo dance”. “Whatever Phebe did,” the passage states, “she did from the need to express herself, so, and not otherwise.”<sup>469</sup> Highlighting her “single-mindedness”, the readers are thus directed to make a connection between her interpretation of a butterfly and her experience of her identity.

Today, feeling within her the need for light, airy movement, she bent all her attention to expressing her concept of not only the motion, but the essential feeling, of the butterfly. She could not have explained to anyone what she was trying to depict; but she knew, it seemed to her, the special thrill which the lovely creature must feel when it knows itself able to yield completely to the caress of light and sun and air [...] to feel itself one with the essence of nature. Absorbed in this bewildering and yet related congeries of whirling and dipping and fluttering, she forgot her audience until she looked up to catch the eyes of Nicolas fastened upon her with the admiration and astonishment that she had seen in the glances she had occasionally intercepted in their course toward Marise.<sup>470</sup>

Phebe is set apart and she sets herself apart in her “solo”. In this performance she breaks the boundaries of the normative femininity that first caught Nicolas’ eyes.<sup>471</sup> Dance, the very embodiment of rhythm, transforms Phebe into a butterfly. Drawing thus on the natural world, the readers learn that her movement not only evidences a desire or need to “express herself, so and not otherwise,” but is in the search to communicate the “essential feeling” of this “lovely creature” when it is “able to yield completely to the caress of light and sun and air.” Framed as such, Fauset presents ideas of freedom as Phebe’s movement transports her beyond the normative premises of gendered constructions. By inhabiting this other way of being, Phebe forgets her audience – and prescribed roles – as she moves in time to another tempo, of the “whirling, dipping and fluttering” of the butterfly. Fauset intertwines motion, feeling and sound in this scene in which Phebe’s processes of identification (and performance) are articulated

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herself was luring him, spurring him on and yet evading him.” Ellipsis in the original. Fauset, *Comedy*, 46. What is shown here is that the scene is inflected by notions of gender performance, budding sexuality and desire between Nick and Marise. Furthermore, the use of words such as “evading” “luring” “lying in wait” emphasize the spatial negotiation between “masculinity” and “femininity” in such performances of heterosexual courtship and romance. What is suggested is that desire and subjectivity of each character interact, in part, through this physical spatial negotiation. Elements of this discussion will be touched upon above with regard to Phebe.

<sup>469</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 46.

<sup>470</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 46-47.

<sup>471</sup> “But today, Nicholas’ attention wavered; it wandered to Phebe, flickered once more to Marise and returned again to the little blonde girl, lost in the wonder and halo of her bright gilt hair; caught by the mystic chasteness lent her by her swathing; snowy robe and foamlike, diaphanous aureole with which her veil invested her. Phebe did a solo dance. In the fantasy which they were evolving together with an ease born of many spontaneous rehearsals, she was a butterfly. There was about her none of the sinuous virtuosity of Marise [...] whatever Phebe did, she did from the need to express herself, so, and not otherwise. She was a quiet, intense, independent little girl, made up of strange loyalties and predilections and almost as single-minded as Olivia Cary, the mother of her little playmate, Teresa.” Fauset, *Comedy*, 46.

through affective registers that are uncommunicable through words, “she could not have explained to anyone what she was trying to depict”. What is brought to the fore in the dance is that *feelings* of lightness and freedom are predicated upon other ways of embodiment that “forget” socially defined identities and which can be experienced beyond the horizons of intelligibility and explanation. The first is underlined by the fact that Phebe is brought back to her gendered self through Nicholas’s gaze upon her which affects her subjective experience and constricts her movements. “This phenomenon” the narrator states, “brought her back to herself; she subsided blushing and confused”.<sup>472</sup> What the text infers then, is that from Teresa’s perspective, the desire to feel like Phebe’s portrayal of the butterfly is in respect to the possibility to express herself and through this expression feel the freedom to explore the possibility of coming into her black identity (thus far erased). Thus, on the one hand, the Davies’ household, for Teresa, is a space that welcomes blackness as it signifies the warmth, and “happiness” of a “home” that her mother’s white household does not. But it is not just this. For Teresa, it is the environment whereby other ways of being in the world are presented to her which in turn affects the way she identifies herself. Whether it is in the idealised image of a mother figure that Teresa projects onto Mrs. Davies, or the girls’ performances that push the boundaries of normative gendered roles and transforms the landscapes of the home, Teresa begins to perceive, experience, and therefore identify differently because of time spent in this space. She starts singing a different tune as, on the way home, she starts to see herself as a black woman – previously made impossible in the presence of Olivia – thus projecting herself differently into the future.

Riding home in the Girard Avenue car, she saw visions ahead of her in the misty twilight and forgot all about Olivia’s silly plans and her own fears and quakes. She would grow up and have four children. All of them should be like her little brother Oliver and she would be a mother like Mrs. Davies.<sup>473</sup>

Echoing Phebe’s ‘forgetting’ in her solo dance, Teresa “forgets” her fears and Olivia’s desire to make her white. What Teresa’s identification demonstrates is that it brings about new images for her desire. And this is clearly linked to creation and imagination of an individual, traced through artistic practices, like Oliver’s music, Marise’s story and Phebe’s dance. Her lived experience in this space expands her horizons of possibility, it stretches her imagination and produces new pictures for the future, towards which she now orients her desire and identity.

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<sup>472</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 47.

<sup>473</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 48.

She starts to envisage what her future could look like as a black woman, articulating her wish to have black children, like Oliver, and be a mother like Mrs. Davies. When Teresa returns to her house, Mrs. Cary is not present which is shown to change the feeling of it, for now it was “full of warm cosiness and a sense of home”.<sup>474</sup> For Teresa, home comes to symbolise a place where she can explore all facets of her identity and where she can voice her own desires or sing her own melody. Consequently, Fauset’s landscaping of white/black spaces, of the hostile/non-hostile environment that this affords black characters is not simply about being surrounded by whiteness or blackness, though this is a considerable factor.<sup>475</sup> Following Teresa’s character, Fauset suggests that processes of identification are much more complex than being amongst people who look alike or identify in a similar fashion. As the argument has focused on rhythm, sound, and the spatial aspects of embodiment, what has been brought to light is that Teresa’s and Oliver’s struggles to find a way to live out their respective subjectivities in the anti-black microcosm of the Cary household partake in constant negotiations between the individual and the material and symbolic world that surrounds. Identity is presented as having much less to do with being than with doing, acting, creating, singing, dancing, observing, desiring. As such, and as it was outlined in respect to Fauset’s construction of New England for example, the characters themselves play a major role in shaping the landscapes that in turn shape them. In the above paragraph, this is signified through Oliver’s translation of self and the world into music, Marise’s creation of her imagined worlds, or Phebe’s movement and rhythm, all of which expanded and transformed the horizons of the spaces in which their subjectivities dwelled. Thus, when the narrator states that the only thing that threatens Teresa and her “home” is the figure of Olivia, what the novel suggests is that one aspect of anti-black violence works not only on the level of embodiment and spatiality – experiencing the sensation of constriction, lack of mobility or the “coldness” of a hostile environment – nor only on the level of voice – silencing – but also on the level of the imagination that is shown to be pivotal here to processes

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<sup>474</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 48.

<sup>475</sup> It could be possible that Fauset touches upon the social phenomenon in the United States that Charles Mills will later formalize as the Racial Contract. In *The Racial Contract*, Mills argues that the “racing of space”, or “the norming of space” is one element of the Racial Contract. The contractual agreement made by and for white people (hence the Racial Contract) conditions the individual and the space it inhabits for the two are inseparable from each other. Identity and space are in a constructive reciprocity. Mills writes, “The norming of space is partially done in terms of *racing* space, the depiction of space as dominated by individuals (whether persons or subpersons) of a certain race. At the same time, the norming of the individual is partially achieved by *spacing* it, representing it as imprinted with the characteristics of a certain kind of space. So, this is a mutually supporting characterization that, for subpersons, becomes a circular indictment: ‘You are who you are in part because you originate from a certain kind of space, and that space has those properties in part because it is inhabited by creatures like yourself.’” Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 41-42.

of identification. In this instance, the effect of anti-blackness is that it shuts down the possibility to imagine other ways of being in the world, to produce other images or to create a different melody to those prescribed by white supremacy. In Teresa's hope that her mother "would not return for a long time", Fauset calls on the cadence of the eternal return of whiteness, that she has developed to underpin the novel. For when her mother does return it restricts Teresa's experience of the broadening of her subjectivity as her mother sends her to the "Yankee" boarding school of New England which is the opening scene of "Teresa's Act". With the earlier reference to McKay's poem, Olivia's order to send Teresa away could be interpreted as trying to forcibly remove Teresa from her "home", from her path of aligning herself with her black identity. This is structurally supported by the fact that Teresa's first appearance in her own "Act", as she enters for her solo on Fauset's American stage, is precisely an entering into whiteness and the Euro-American colonial space of Christie's Academy. Thus, to follow Teresa is also to follow Fauset's exploration of how forms of domination, that reach, distort, and work on the level of an individual's imagination and desire shut down other possibilities of being in the world and other possible futures that Teresa was beginning to explore, imagine and build for herself. Fauset's attention to rhythm and sound is carried over to "Teresa Act" along with her landscaping strategies, to further problematise ideas of identity and belonging and the normative processes deployed in the making of this white world and those who inhabit it. This time, however, it is investigated more precisely through Teresa's relationship to language and the culture it embodies. What will be traced in the discussion is that Teresa's negotiation of living in this white space is also a negotiation of language, both French and English, or more precisely certain ways of using language. The type of language available, familiar, or known is shown to affect how Teresa understands herself as much as it leaves her, at times, unable to articulate the lived experience that she feels.

### 3.4.4 Teresa's Move to New England: Language and Identity

The two opening words of “Teresa’s Act” directly set the scene of Fauset’s stage – in bold and in capital letters – at “CHRISTIE’S ACADEMY”. As the appearance of this space is prefigured by the notion that Teresa was sent here against her volition and given its name cultural, New England, Teresa’s first experience of living away from “home” is convincingly painted as a type of forced exile to the Academy and rather evocative of past colonial trajectories of empire and the routes of the transatlantic slave trade. Along with Fauset’s landscaping as analysed above, the school and New England are understood to be more than the site of (white) national identity and anti-black racism specific to the United States as it is tied to its historical colonial context. Fauset’s imagined hybrid Euro-American setting is further developed, in “Teresa’s Act”, through Fauset’s attention, for example, to the change of seasons. As it will be demonstrated when Paulette Nardal’s fictional work is addressed, what these two writers share is that they mobilize the winter season not only to construct or signal European space but as a metaphor for systems of oppression. Like the “coldness” of the atmosphere that the characters felt in the Cary household – created by the form of anti-blackness that guides Olivia’s actions and transforms the environment around her – the events that take place at Christie’s Academy are for the most part set in winter. Summer vacations, for example, pass by in one line or happen in an elsewhere<sup>476</sup> whilst the plot at the school unfolds during the cold months of the year.<sup>477</sup> Another reason for the interpretation of New England as being inhabited, in part, by the dynamics specific to European colonisation is that France and the French language take up space in Teresa’s journeying.<sup>478</sup> At the boarding school, it is the first time in *Comedy* that Fauset draws on, in any major way, the material and symbolic realities of France as she grounds it to a certain extent, in the American geography. This cohabitation of national spaces in Fauset’s cartography work to build on the dramatic tension that Teresa is negotiating within herself and helps steer the readers within the character’s (ambiguous) relationship to the two different national languages.

Early on in “Teresa’s Act”, what is made readily apparent is that Teresa’s arrival in New Hampshire simultaneously marks her becoming distant to both her racial identity and certain desires that were produced (and represented) from within the scenes of the Davies’ home. At

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<sup>476</sup> This elsewhere is Chicago and the importance of this will be addressed at length below.

<sup>477</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 79.

<sup>478</sup> As it was highlighted in Chapter Two, a common literary strategy in Fauset’s work is the mobilization of France, its language, and its culture in order to explore, amongst other things, colonialism and anti-black racism within the transatlantic frame, rather than drawing on the British colonial empire.

the school, “gradually even Marise, Phebe and Nicolas” her African American friends in West Philadelphia “faded into the background of distance and dimness,” as she lived amongst her white peers, who “unquestionably accepted her as white.”<sup>479</sup> Her affective geographies are transforming and thus so too is her experience of the world, her pursuits, attachments, and desires. A journey down the road that takes her away from her African American identity and culture, immersed as she is in the whiteness of “Yankee” American identity, is accompanied by her studies of the French language and culture. To draw out the place of this *lingua franca* in Teresa’s trajectory the narration provides a meditation on discursive practices and rhetoric present at the school. Teresa’s relationship to Christie’s is ambiguous and contradictory, which is mirrored in how and what she verbalizes to herself and others. For example, in respect to Teresa’s obligation to go to this school the text states,

Teresa proved unexpectedly docile. She had to get her education someway, somewhere, she supposed. Lots of girls were crazy to get away from home. She would make the best of this. She would be uncomplaining, studious and contented. There were two or three sports that she would like to excel, notably tennis and rowing.<sup>480</sup>

Thus, she is passive and obliging at the same time as she is portrayed as resourceful and agentive. She takes charge of her own education at the same time as her objections to being at the school are not articulated. Given the fact that she must give up her racial identity and the future she was planning for herself, Teresa’s resolve not to voice this, or any other type of dissatisfaction appears baffling. The question that is left hanging is why Teresa would passively and uncomplainingly forgo her sense of self that she was exploring. The narrator implies that, in part, this is because she is beyond the authoritarian grasp of her mother. It was the “absence of the continual strain under which she lived at home that endeared this experience.”<sup>481</sup> As such, Teresa experiences an ease of living and an appreciated reprieve from her familial setting.

Life now, she had to admit, was very pleasant [...] She loved the cold, hard New Hampshire fall, the small informal classes, the granite farmer folk of the neighborhood, the simple pieties of many of the school girls [...] It seemed to her that she was living in a vortex, a pleasant manageable vortex, of many choices of interest. She felt proudly, immensely, free to make a selection which should carry her off once more into newer increasingly splendid fields of interest.<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 71.

<sup>480</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 70-71.

<sup>481</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 74.

<sup>482</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 74.

Moving away from West Philadelphia, Teresa recreates for herself new objects for her desire, she starts to like new things and makes the most of the possibilities or “choices” afforded to her at the boarding school. She experiences a sense of freedom, achievement, and self-confidence. And yet, this growing self-assurance and hope for the future is curiously represented with the appearance of a vortex. Perhaps “manageable” and “pleasant” the image of a vortex remains connotative of a whirling mass that is potentially unavoidable or inescapable. This metaphor could be interpreted as an emotive state, that, on a phenomenological level, betrays or contradicts the rational, stable, and clear sightedness of Teresa’s plans. If read in this way, it would be to suggest, then, that affectivity acts as a counterpoint to her logical thought processes that are employed to “manage” the vortex. Her affective geography that is trying to adapt, align and transform itself in relationships to the new environment irrupts the cartography of whiteness that is being laid out and the language used to shape its contours. Whilst she has been shown to redirect herself and her identity in this space, there are nevertheless resurgences of her affective realities that well up within the narrative, putting into question her understanding of her position here and exposing certain realities for what they really are.

On numerous occasions, the narrator describes Teresa’s experience at Christie’s through ambiguous and contrasting images. For example, in this environment “already her outlook was broadening, her mind maturing” at the same time as she regrets not being able to be “herself”.<sup>483</sup> Teresa fantasizes about being able to “entrust her secret” of her racial identity but refrains for she knows that if made explicit through language – communicated – it would be met with resentment.<sup>484</sup> On the one hand, Teresa figures that her adaptation to this world, and by extension her racial passing, affords her a place of safety and security.

In this part of the world, they would never see her, for instance, subjected to the heartbreak, the worry and discrimination which people of her appearance, carefully marked and tagged by public memory, would meet in their communities in the South; or with the deadly insult and indignity which her darker racial kinsmen would encounter anywhere.<sup>485</sup>

And yet, Teresa’s intellectualization of her place in the school and the protection from hardship that whiteness provides tends to run into juxtaposition with what she feels. There is a productive tension between understanding the world through language versus apprehending reality through

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<sup>483</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 74.

<sup>484</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 72.

<sup>485</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 73.



other sensorial pathways which is nourished by the narrator as she emphasizes, through repetition, the chatter of the girls in the school.

Filled too with talking, talking, talking in dormitory rooms after the cold black New England night had dropped down about the school buildings, bringing with it, through sheer contrast, a renewed sense of safety, warmth and comfort.<sup>486</sup>

Whilst conversations infuse the buildings of the school with a sense of warmth and kinship, the narrator's re-evocation of security, that Teresa observed previously, racially inflects this scene. It paints the way language is being used, and the sense of comradeship that it provides, as being specific to this white space and culture. This is revealed within the novel as Fauset renders explicit what these girls are conversing about. The importance of this interaction is brought to the fore because it is the only collective dialogue that is presented within the boarding school. And for Teresa, the apparent "warmth and comfort" that she feels, or the security and lack of racial discrimination that she articulated, is proven to be untenable through her emotive reaction to this discussion. The only "talking, talking, talking" that readers hear, is one filled with anti-black sentiment and racial stereotypes, which causes Teresa to go into a "daze of bewilderment and astonishment" from which she has to return in order to relocate her voice and be able to verbally respond to that which is being said.<sup>487</sup> Sparked by the upcoming arrival of Alicia Barrett, an African American student from Chicago, who is perceived as the first black person to attend the school, the readers hear such things as, "you know I have never spoken to a Negro in my life," with another responding "oh they're all right [...] my mother has a colored cook."<sup>488</sup> Notions of social and racial segregation and service (class) are thus present in these students' perspective of the world, as well as common stereotypical characteristics that are attributed to blackness. Marian and Ellen dialogue:

What would we do with one dancing around here like Topsy, and her hair sticking up all over her head!  
Ellen raised her voice indignantly. "It shouldn't make any difference to us how they look! Suppose she should be someone like Topsy! It would still be our duty to teach her deportment and cleanliness and neatness. It's our fault they are here. We bought them."<sup>489</sup>

This erroneous logic based on racist cultural representations of black femininity, Topsy, palpably fantasizes the other, Alicia Barrett, as distinct from the tidy, clean, proper, and orderly young

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<sup>486</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 75.

<sup>487</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 74.

<sup>488</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 76.

<sup>489</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 76.

women that they perceive themselves to be. They collectively identify and recognise themselves through social codes – “deportment, cleanliness and neatness” – as they come together through a sense of shared purpose to enforce this way of being on the racialised other. What this speech act implies is that social and cultural identity is conferred to each girl not only in the performance of social norms but also in the feelings of belonging to this particular social group that are premised upon the disavowal of Barrett’s subjecthood. Intimacy and bonding within white sociality is achieved through the violence inflicted upon black subjects. The scene and the language that the students employ, therefore, instantiates an aspect of the workings of whiteness in so far as it understands itself through opposition and repudiation of blackness. To put in a frame of affective economies, to be able to feel at home within this particular white feminine identity depends upon attempting to inflict pain – consciously or not – on the racialised other, in this context a black woman. This takes on a spatial aspect. If, as it was interpreted in the scene at the Davies’ household, dance is a practice that is generative of a form of expansion of horizons of subjectivity through (black) self-expression, from this white perspective, it is precisely because of “Topsy’s” dancing, that on a somatic level her black body needs to be controlled, pruned, cleaned, and tidied. In this context, the fact that the girls couch the inferred wildness of Topsy in a discourse of decorum encourages such an interpretation, for the readers comprehend that dancing signifies both black freedom that needs to be chopped down because the girls’ sense of self (or ‘duty’) and their place in the world, in part, depends upon it. The “daze of bewilderment” that Teresa experiences because of this speech act can be interpreted as her reaction to such white sociability – previously described as the “warmth and comfort” of kinship at this school – that is premised upon racial oppression. Furthermore, Teresa’s affectivity that overwhelms her passes by in half a sentence, suggesting that it is unintelligible via the ways in which language is being used. What this means for Teresa, caught between regretting that she can’t be “herself” at the same time as she finds camaraderie and a “renewed sense of safety, warmth and comfort” as she makes an effort to adapt to or adopt this social white identity, is that she is obliged, in a certain way, to hurt herself. She is required to enforce this disciplinary logic upon her own being.<sup>490</sup> In part this takes place through language and communication. There

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<sup>490</sup> This is evidenced in Teresa’s response to the discussion taking place on Alicia Barrett’s arrival. After returning from the “daze” in which she was thrown, she defends “colored girls”, and counteracts in a way (though not without mobilizing certain racist tropes around color and blood), the racism present in the dialogue. However, and not uncoincidentally in this context of white femininity, she must censor her expression concerning black masculinity. “‘Jennie’s right,’ she [Teresa] said. ‘Of course there’s no such difference. I’ve always gone to school with colored girls too. And I’ve never yet seen one of the pure Topsy type; though I suppose there are lots of them. And color has nothing to with their ambition or success.’ She thought of Marise and Phebe. ‘Why, when I was in graded school, the prettiest and the most popular girl there was a dark brown girl; not black, you know, but brown, like – like a young chestnut. Her skin was just as thin. You could see the red under it.’”

are no words and no space for her within this type of socialisation, the world it makes and the language it uses. Her blackness exists but it cannot be verbalised and come into the specific identity that is being articulated, or taking form, within the linguistic space of communication.<sup>491</sup> Teresa's refraining to divulge her "secret" or the noticeable absence of language at times when she experiences affective ruptures that contradict the whiteness in which she lives are two such examples. What could be derived from the above discussion is that the rationality which Teresa mobilized earlier about "the choices" that she has at the school – and which keep the vortex 'manageable' – do not, in the end leave her with many possibilities other than to find comfort and security in her own oppression. Fauset suggestively presents her character, and her biracial identity, as that which will be the source of constant tension and instability for her within a social organisation that demarcates clearly between black and white. The narrator anticipates this, to an extent, when she questions that in all of Teresa's experience it was hard for her to have "esteem for either race" and thus neither for herself that participates in both of these social identities. In this way, the arrival of Alicia is important for Teresa because Alicia represents the possibility of being a strong, independent, and "proud" black woman. Alicia appears to Teresa as a model or way of being that values blackness as opposed to this white environment that needs to deny it so that white social identity can flourish. Whilst Alicia may embody and exemplify an alternative for Teresa, the narrator frames the latter's perception and perspective as perpetuating this kind of impossible cohabitation between whiteness and blackness. Teresa sees Alicia as being beyond, indifferent too, or unaffected by her peers, the expression of their whiteness through language and the processes of (white) identification that shape this school. This interpretation is made possible by Fauset's use of Latin "*ne plus ultra*", for instance, to describe Alicia from Teresa's perspective. The author's recourse to Latin is built upon and drawn into the realms of France and the French language (a Latin base language) with her reference to the French author Edouard Pailleron. The readership get a sense, then, that something other than English and American culture is required in order to read Alicia's character in this space. Aligned with Fauset's overarching landscaping strategies of this imagined setting, it is as if, Fauset requires other linguistic-cultural spaces, or as argued previously, other rhythms and other songs to expose the effects of systems of domination in this "Yankee" land.

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She paused, wondering if she could ever make them see from a description the singular beauty of Nicholas Campbell. An afterthought convinced her that she'd better not say anything about colored boys." Fauset, *Comedy*, 77.  
<sup>491</sup> In *Peau noire, masques blancs* Fanon states : " la conscience noire se donne comme pleine d'elle-même, étape préexistante à toute fente, à toute abolition de soir par le désir. [...] Ma conscience nègre ne se donne pas comme manque. Elle est. Elle est adhérente à elle-même." Fanon, *Peau noire*, 109.

The contrast of the ways in which Alicia Barrett and Teresa Cary inhabit their surroundings is partially underscored by Fauset's imagined Franco-American cultural landscapes. Akin to Teresa's arrival, it is during winter – signifying the European space as much as it is a metaphor for systems of oppression – that Alicia enters the boarding school. However, working in juxtaposition to the ways in which Teresa remoulds herself into whiteness, gives up certain desires and learns to find warmth in the coldness of New England, Alicia's movements and her subject are described as being unaffected by it.

In the midst of the new environment Alicia moved freely and easily with little curiosity. She had always attended schools in which there were large numbers of white people and yet her identity had never been lost or overshadowed. She was a brilliant student; she dressed with a deliberate regard for her clothing; she was perfectly aware of her social background and completely satisfied with it. She was really expecting, in 1923, neither blind prejudice nor blind patronage.<sup>492</sup>

Born into a middle-class family – her father a judge and mother a successful musician – this “certain prominence” that she has grown up in is given as a possible reason for her self-assurance. It also appears to be due to her experience within predominately white spaces. Perhaps, along her travels, Alicia has learnt that in schools such as Christie's she has nothing to “gain but a superstratum of the much-vaunted Eastern culture plus the poise that comes from being forced to meet new people and cope with new conditions.”<sup>493</sup> The overtly intellectual words used to describe what Alicia can gain from Euro-American white culture, like “superstratum”, gives an aura of distance and detachment in the narrative voice which colors her experiences. The readers get the impression that this is also what permits her to move “freely and easily” whilst keeping her identity and integrity. All combined, Alicia's independence, confidence, ambition, and self-distancing from the (white) sociability and community of the school are shown to be elements or tools that aid her, and in a sense, protect hers within the horizons of whiteness that she negotiates. Because Alicia is shown not to need or want anything from her interactions, she floats through this social milieu without being emotionally disturbed. Her white peers cannot rile her, for “from her angle she had nothing to gain from these girls; her whole concern was really with the curriculum. But she did hope to live in peace and harmony”.<sup>494</sup> Counteracting then the white schoolgirls' image of black femininity as needing to be civilised or “taught” decorum *by* them, Alicia's outlook places whiteness and its perspective as irrelevant to the ways in which she identifies herself. Still, her self-positioning does

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<sup>492</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 82.

<sup>493</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 82.

<sup>494</sup> For example, the narrator states, “she did not rebuff nor did she accept to gratefully Ellen Ware's zealous overtures nor did she resent the frankly curious scrutiny of Marian Tilbury.” Fauset, *Comedy*, 82.

not inhibit her from being open to friendship with two of her peers namely Jennie and Teresa. Teresa's attraction to Alicia is one that borders on awe. The narrator leads the audience to believe that Alicia inspires her reverence because Teresa sees something that she desires.

Teresa, especially, felt drawn toward her not so much because of the unsuspected tie of blood secretly binding them as because of her admiration. Both proud and sadly envious of Alicia's assurance and independence she could not but compare the condition of her new friend with her own. Alicia's whole attitude said serenely: "Here am I, the best of my kind and I am perfectly satisfied with my kind." Thus she arrived at a *ne plus ultra* at once personally satisfying and completely baffling to all conjectures on superior bloods, racial admixtures, hybridizations and all the sociological and biological generalisations of the day.<sup>495</sup>

Two things are importantly presented in Teresa's view of Alicia. The first being her affective response and the second being the mobilisation of Latin to adequately communicate that which Alicia embodies. Teresa experiences contradictory emotions in respect to Alicia's "attitude" and her "peace" with her own identity. Inspiring both pride and envy within her character, it points to complexities that arrive within intersubjective identification and desire. Because she had been taught to deny her own blackness, Teresa's process of identification with Alicia appears to also take place via negation. She perceives in Alicia what she does not have or what she is not yet. Teresa envy connotes that in the very process of her identification with Alicia these power relationships of antiblack racism are insidiously still at play. For envy is a sentiment that involves a willed destruction of alterity. If Teresa finds herself lacking in that which she desires – a contentment with self, a freedom, an "ease" in living out and inhabiting a black feminine identity – within Alicia, then the envy that could inspire action searches to destroy the desired object in that other so that both parties are impoverished of that satisfaction. In this example, Teresa is shown as regretting the jealousy that she feels which softens this destructive aspect of envy. However, because the readership understands that Teresa is far from being at "peace" with her racial identity, it nevertheless exposes how emotive experience can be imbued by the workings of antiblackness regardless of the sincere resentment that Teresa has for feeling as she does. In a way, this provides a possible moment of reflection as it echoes the antiblackness that Olivia inhabits within her understanding of herself and the world around her. Perhaps the difference is that Teresa does not act, at this time, from this space of violence. Furthermore, her envy does not last or act as a barrier between the two girls who become "inseparable" as the plot continues. Potentially the (racial) gap between Alicia, Teresa and Jennie and their ways

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<sup>495</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 83.

of being in the world are bridged by their common pursuit of education – of immersion in “the much-vaunted Eastern culture” – at the boarding school.<sup>496</sup> Given that the narrator uses “*ne plus ultra*” to describe Alicia, it is possible that her recourse to Latin works as a way towards bridging this racial separation. To a certain extent, it offers another prism through which to see Alicia that counteracts the sounds of the classmate’s racist dialogue previously encountered. Through the latter’s discourse (and ideological point of view) it is impossible to perceive Alicia as a fully human subject and by extension qualify her as the *ne plus ultra* of black femininity. As such, this brief use of the Latin seems to take her beyond the conception of social identities and discriminatory hierarchisation of society in this context. This appears to be so, because in the very same sentence in which this expression is mobilized Alicia’s “whole attitude” is stated to be incomprehensible to the ways in which the white world and white identity is articulated in English. Alicia is “baffling” to the “conjectures on superior bloods, racial admixtures, hybridizations and all the sociological and biological generalization of the day.” A different cultural tongue to that of the articulation of white American culture potentially helps, in this specific space, to bring these girls together. Fauset continues to explore this idea in her intertextual reference to the nineteenth century French author Edouard Pailleron and his play *Le monde où l’on s’ennuie: comédie en trois actes*.<sup>497</sup>

Fauset’s references to French authors and specifically late nineteenth century texts are not uncommon to her œuvre, another example being Henri Bordeaux’s *La peur de vivre*, in *There is Confusion*. Such citations work as bearers of signification in Fauset’s imagined creations. In the discussion to come what will be argued is that this intertextual moment contributes to the overall structure of *Comedy* and the way in which Fauset creates her white American stage understood as being formed in part by its transatlantic connections to Europe. Fauset does this by evoking racist practices and racial ostracization that can take place within a *lingua franca* for it is the embodiment of (white) national culture. Thus, aligned with and adding to her exploration of the relationship between identity and language, what Edouard Pailleron’s appearance within the text highlights is how certain linguistic aspects of white supremacy work. It also exposes certain fallacies mobilized by the dominant culture concerning the purported universal quality of language. To return to the specific context of Fauset’s reference, *Le monde où l’on s’ennuie* enters a scene where Teresa and

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<sup>496</sup> For instance, the narrator says, “Something very fine and sweet began to grow up between the three girls, the clearly white Jennie, the apparently white Teresa and the frankly colored Alicia. It became natural for them to be found together at work, at play, at study.” Fauset, *Comedy*, 83.

<sup>497</sup> Édouard Pailleron, *Le monde où l’on s’ennuie: une comédie en trois actes*, vingt-septième édition (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1883).

Alicia discuss love and intimate experiences with men. The latter, true to her character, is shown to be as free, confident and as much at ease in the matters of the heart as she is in other aspects of her life, whilst Teresa has little experience, is unsure and rather uninterested when it comes to romantic attraction. The dialogue between the two characters is racially inflected, as Alicia, understanding Teresa to be white, presumes that she doesn't "know anything" of the beauty of "colored people".<sup>498</sup>

So she (Teresa) laughed and shook her sleek head. 'No, I've never known any boy well enough to like him, really, you know. It is such a crime?... Tell me about your beau... Is he very handsome?'

Alicia, for a fleeting moment, dropped her arm about her friend's slender shoulders. 'You know, Tess, you're such a surprise to me – you're so different from most white girls I've known. Usually your folks think that no colored person is good-looking because he isn't white.'<sup>499</sup>

Despite their differences across racial lines and romantic experimentations they are shown to share an intimacy, represented through gesture as Alicia places her arm around Tess. Furthermore, this experiential space between them is traversed, to a certain degree, by their studies of French culture. The discussion concludes (and the chapter itself) by Alicia stating,

"Don't I make you tired? ... Did you know Miss Cathcart gave us fifteen pages of 'Le Monde Où l'On s'Ennuie'? She may be sweet but she can certainly hand out a mean lesson."<sup>500</sup>

The work required by Miss Cathcart's pupils creates a sense of complicity between the girls as both need to endure her "mean lesson". Not an uncommon way of bonding between students regarding their teachers, the poetic irony of Fauset's intertextual reference to the genre *comédie des mœurs*, that Edouard Pailleron's text participates, resonates particularly loudly since it comes directly after the girl's dialogue of love, boyfriends and suggested sexual experimentations. To recall Fauset's parody of Henri Bordeaux's themes in *There is Confusion*, it was argued that she employed such intertextuality to highlight a potential impossibility for Fauset's female protagonist, Maggie, and Bordeaux's Alice to cross over from one culture and imagined reality to another. As an effect, it unhinged French culture from its geographical space as Fauset subsequently mapped onto this location events and characters specific to American socio-cultural space. Here, as Fauset's landscaping is constructed through an intermingling of the Euro-American territories and

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<sup>498</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 84.

<sup>499</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 84-85. The ellipses are in the original.

<sup>500</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 85. Edouard Pailleron's text is spelt like this with capitals in the novel. The ellipsis is also in the original.

imaginaries, her reference to *Le monde où l'on s'ennuie* is likely to generate different effects in *Comedy: American Style*.

The title of Pailleron's play could be read as comedic relief shared between Teresa and Alicia in their interaction. As it is not translated, it may be Fauset's intention to make the multiplicity of signification of "*s'ennuyer*" resonate through the text adding to what has already been developed in respect to Christie's Academy. Considering that the girls had just been discussing black feminine sexuality and (heterosexual) desire which, in contrast to this reality of a white world – its racial and gendered norms, talk of decorum and the future path it prepares for proper white ladies – the impropriety of such a subject is underlined. Whereas the event itself is presented as a moment of connection and even amusement between the two characters, the reference to "*s'ennuyer*" casts a symbolic shadow over the experience as one pertaining to, or cause of, troubles and boredom. As Alicia herself asks, "don't I make you tired". Suggestively, it is not so much the dialogue that is tiresome but the environment itself. Alicia's speech that articulates black female sexuality and desire is contrasted with the "mean lesson" of the teacher and Pailleron's book, the symbols of a white culture. It is herein that lies the comedic relief, for the impropriety of black feminine sexuality is flipped to place this point of view where it belongs – norms of white femininity – and qualify the latter as holding a promise of a boring future for these young women, white or black. From a broader perspective and given that Pailleron's novel is a *comédie des mœurs* in three acts, Fauset's intertextual reference puts into motion a structural *mise en abyme* with her *Comedy: American Style* that partakes ironically in the theatrical genre of comedy. On the surface, and as the former is understood as the satirical genre that criticizes the fallacies of upper-class society and its "good-manners", it could be argued that it appears here as an intended parallel that reinforces Fauset's exposition of the workings of American society. And yet, as Fauset tends to work through juxtaposition, this *mise en abyme* likely speaks more accurately to Fauset's overall making of a white "American" stage than a type of generic reverberation across the differences of these two cultures and imagined realities. As argued previously, Fauset frames Olivia's domination and power – whiteness – as a structural element to the Cary household and inscribed her character in genealogies of European and more specifically French colonisation, with the surname Blanchard. In this way, blackness haunts her American stage because aesthetically, she over-exposes it, and the events that take place, with whiteness. What is said of this architectural aspect of Fauset's aesthetics in *Comedy*, as with, for example, the cadence of the eternal return of whiteness that rhythms the novel, can also be said for her reference to Pailleron. It comes to be a part of Fauset's construction of her imagined world purposefully made white. Along with her other



landscaping tools, *Le monde où l'on s'ennuie* superimposes the microcosm of the boarding school with the broader context of transatlantic circulations involved in the making of white heteropatriarchy and territorial expansions and triangular trade that are bound to its construction. As such the appearance of Pailleron at this point in the novel expands – geographically and culturally – Fauset’s white “American” stage. Interestingly then, and as opposed to Fauset’s creation to her imagined world of *There is Confusion* whereby French cultural imaginary was erased, here it is made to be a structural component of her architectural edifice of *Comedy*. By extension this means that it is also structurally part of the white heteropatriarchy of American society and the violence of such a society that Fauset portrays on her theater stage. This critique of whiteness, from a transatlantic perspective, marks the continuum of anti-black racism within European colonisation and highlights to what extent it is an import to American soil, undercutting the myth of white American cultural identity as new and independent from this legacy. There is also one other significant way in which Fauset reference to Edouard Pailleron in *Comedy: American Style* differs to the intertextuality employed in *There is Confusion*. In the latter, Fauset cites the character Alice from *La peur de vivre* within the body of her text. The readers get the sense that Fauset is relating to and using, the themes, characters, and narrative of Bordeaux’s novel in order to generate specific effects in her imaginative world. In *Comedy*, this is not the case. Instead, Fauset mentions solely the title and its author. In this way, emphasis tends to be placed on Monsieur Pailleron the person and his context rather than his imaginary world. This interpretation is above all supported by the fact that Fauset names Teresa’s future French husband Astride Pailleron. If this is the case, Edouard Pailleron’s position or legacy within French culture is key to deciphering the literary import in Fauset’s *Comedy*. To come back to Alicia and Teresa’s relationship, the French language and the vaunted Eastern (white and understood in its transatlantic frame) culture’s capacity to bridge the gap between whiteness (Teresa) and blackness (Alicia) is rendered ambiguous by the appearance of Monsieur Edouard Pailleron, the figure of French colonial heteropatriarchy.

Because Fauset doubles Pailleron with her fictional character Astride who is uncoincidentally Teresa’s French teacher, then husband, she frames Teresa’s demise in France and within its language as an inevitability.<sup>501</sup> Evidence for this lies in the fact that Edouard Pailleron is not just any French dramaturge and *Le monde où l'on s'ennuie* is not just any other play. It was after the success of this piece that he was elected to the *L’Académie française*, the

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<sup>501</sup> This will be addressed in more detail below.

governing body, since its instauration in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, of the French language. Edouard Pailleron is therefore one member of these appointed gatekeepers of national language and culture. It is possible that this is fictionalised in the character of Astride for he is the one and only French man in *Comedy* – thus the only embodiment of this white masculine cultural identity – and a language teacher. As such, his character works also as a gatekeeper or medium via which Teresa and her mother, the foreigners in this scenario, learn and experience France and its language. When the readers get to France, this ongoing conversation between identity and language is also racially inflected in this cultural space. On one of her outings with Astride, Teresa observes the Senegalese soldiers quartered in Toulon, one of the known military bases for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. As Fauset’s reference to Edouard Pailleron and the French Academy, the historical accuracy of Fauset’s setting gives weight to Teresa’s reflection for it blurs the lines between fiction and non-fiction. What Teresa remarks is that the soldiers were speaking in “beautiful unaccented French”.<sup>502</sup> This statement alludes convincingly to the racist assumption that black subjects could not speak French correctly and therefore were subordinate to the civilised French. However, this exclusion from the language and its culture was orchestrated by France particularly regarding the colonial soldiers that were brought to the metropole. From the mid nineteenth century, a linguistic policy was put in place whereby colonial subjects were only taught a version of the French language called “*petit-nègre*”.<sup>503</sup> As it was addressed in Chapter One in the discussion of the racist stereotype of the *tirailleur sénégalais*, this figure and the *petit-nègre* that he supposedly spoke were highly prevalent in French society and culture. Though less widespread in contemporary France, *petit-nègre* became (and still is) one of the most overtly racist phrases in the French language and it was normalised during the colonial period. In other words, it no longer solely referred to this form of the French language as such but became a racial slur in everyday parlance used to negatively (and violently)

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<sup>502</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 182.

<sup>503</sup> Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard speak of this in their article “Sauvage ou assimilé ?” within the context of France’s colonial armies and the language manuals that were used in this context. “Dans cet objectif, des manuels spécifiques d’apprentissage seront élaborés au cours des années 1860, structurés sur la création du langage “petit-nègre” [...] Il est parfaitement symptomatique que les officiers français aient conçu pour les tirailleurs ces manuels [...] la maîtrise du langage est le signe distinctif de l’appartenance à une civilisation. Il est le lieu, aussi, du pouvoir. Le tirailleur parlera donc petit-nègre pour le différencier nettement des militaires français, pour ne pas franchir la limite fondamentale de l’égalité du langage.” And, as they argue, this (in)accessibility to language and by extension civilization is bound to the fabrication, by the French colonial Republic, of a new type of citizenship that had as its prototype, the *tirailleur sénégalais*. As Bancel and Blanchard underline, the new citizen was imagined not to recognize equality across racial difference but in order to reify the unquestionable and essential superiority of whiteness. “Bien avant les formulations juridiques qui entérineront la hiérarchie socioraciale coloniale en créant un statut spécifique d’“indigène”, le tirailleur sénégalais apparaît comme le prototype de ce nouveau citoyen imaginé par la République coloniale, image renversée du citoyen français, auquel on applique les paradigmes républicains tout en prenant soin qu’ils s’appliquent uniquement aux colonisés, les colons étant placés sur une autre strate, hégémonique, tant sur le plan juridique, politique que culturel.” Bancel et Blanchard, “Sauvage ou assimilé ?”

designate or refer to black people in general. As an effect, it evacuated *petit-nègre* from the racist, ideological, and historical context of this linguistic policy that was put into place by the colonial empire. For when colonial soldiers didn't speak French correctly, but only the *petit-nègre* that they were taught, it demonstrated the supposed incapacity of peoples of African descent to rise or assimilate into European civilisation. In turn, such 'evidence' of black inferiority was mobilized to persuade the French public of their important duty within the necessary pursuit of taking civilisation to the world and thus continue French colonial domination. This (racially) supremacist view of French culture and civilisation is evidenced in the character of Astride Pailleron. On the outing where Teresa observes the Senegalese soldiers speaking "in beautiful unaccented French" the narrator states, "For himself, he did not like 'ces vilains noirs.' They were all right as cannon fodder."<sup>504</sup> Whilst Astride's representation within *Comedy* as the masculine heteropatriarchal figure of French national identity will be addressed in more detail below, what can be said now is that Fauset's doubling of Astride and Edouard Pailleron – understood as linguistic and cultural gatekeepers – gives the readers the tools to understand the ambiguous relationship to the French language that she is proposing. As Fauset uses her intertextuality to add to her construction of white American stage, and the fact that she exposes the way language and culture is mobilized in both national contexts to maintain white supremacy, then the apparent bridge that the French language provided between Teresa and Alicia, between white and black culture in the context of the United States is now put into doubt. Thus, the racial separation between whiteness and blackness of the white world making that the English language is shown to construct in the school, such is the same, it appears for the French language. At this point, however, the ambiguous relationship and place that France, its language, and culture occupy in *Comedy* is not completely resolved for it will reappear again, at a pivotal moment on Teresa's journey (before her actual travel to France). To understand why it resists resolution at this point, the argument needs to continue with the characters relationship to language but return to the English language. This is because, and as this discussion of intertextuality has also demonstrated, it further sheds a light on questions of language, culture, and identity. What is being questioned is that, if language is both the vector and embodiment of a certain culture and identity, then perhaps colonial languages such as English and French may not provide the purported transcendence of difference in a kind of universal and equal ground for *all* speakers to inhabit. Travelling with Teresa and Alicia on their summer holiday in Chicago, Fauset takes on a literary investigation of the potential (im)possibility to traverse, or affectively connect,

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<sup>504</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 182.

across different cultures and different cultural identities that sharing a common language is assumed to accommodate.

### 3.4.5 “Emotionally, as far as race was concerned, she was a girl without a country.”

The narrator spatially organises Teresa’s holiday with Alicia and her family in Chicago by placing their movement away from the boarding school in New England (the white world) in geographical opposition to “Europe”. “The long trip halfway across the continent”<sup>505</sup> that “drew the girls ever more closely together” coincides with Olivia’s voyage to the European continent: “For once the gods were kind. Olivia went to Europe and Teresa went to Chicago”.<sup>506</sup> Traversing the American continent, then, is symbolically aligned with traversing the Atlantic. However, Teresa’s and Olivia’s movements are in opposite directions in the sense where the latter is moving towards whiteness and the former towards blackness. Fauset frames the girls’ journey as a return to blackness premised on the (necessary) distance or disappearance of whiteness (Olivia, New England, Europe). This correlation is furthered in Alicia and Teresa’s interaction that takes place on the train. Geographical displacement coexists with the crossing of racial and social boundaries. Firstly, Alicia and Teresa are met with “glances of curiosity” from the other passengers at “the sight of a white and colored girl travelling together.” In the train, the norms of racial separation are put into question by the appearance of whiteness and blackness sitting side by side. This event draws Alicia and Teresa closer together across the color line,<sup>507</sup> and creates the environment in which Teresa divulges her African American identity through a speech act.

Teresa considered. How wonderful it would be to live, act breathe, *be* one’s very own self... “Alicia, darling, can I really trust you? I want so much to tell you... but I always have to think of my mother. I’m not white really... I’m colored. I love being colored... but Mother has always been so set on passing.... She was never willing for a colored girl even to come play with me.... She wouldn’t even have them work for us....”

“But she knows you’re with me....”

“But she doesn’t know you are colored....”

Alicia stared at her, astonished and admiring. “Why Teresa, I never thought you had it in you....”<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>505</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 87.

<sup>506</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 86.

<sup>507</sup> The narrator states, “Of the two Alicia was by far the more self-conscious (of the fact that they were being observed) though she made a successful effort to conceal this fact. But her friend’s serene demeanor seemed to her worthy of the utmost admiration which she could bestow. In a final burst of appreciation she bestowed on Teresa her highest praise.” Fauset, *Comedy*, 87.

<sup>508</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 87-88. Ellipsis in the original.

Teresa's disclosure couched in another secret, the abundant use of ellipsis, and Alicia's surprise in Teresa's actions all work to paint the latter's allocution as one of defiance in respect to her mother but also whiteness. Alongside the spatial aspects, setting this event in the locomotion of the moving train symbolises Teresa's identification with her blackness as an ongoing process undertaken in a material and symbolic venture towards this African American milieu of the Barrett family. The readership can anticipate that during this holiday, beginning on the train, Tess is orienting herself on a new path other to the one that her mother had planned out for her in the white world. After all, whiteness – or her mother – went eastward to Europe and she headed westward to Chicago. Narrated from Teresa's perspective, this "heavenly vacation" provides the space in which she has the possibility of living her black identity, of cultivating her self-confidence, and finding romantic attachments in her first love Henry Bates. The holiday is nevertheless underpinned by one important aspect, namely Teresa's feelings of not belonging to or within the microcosm of black culture and black cultural identities that Alicia's family represents. In the narrative arc of Teresa's character, it echoes other moments of dislocation and alienation. The difference here is that the articulation of her experience clearly weaves a link between language, notions of belonging and identity. This is because, amongst people that speak the same language, Teresa nevertheless perceives them as "speaking another language" causing her to feel as if she does not belong in this black community.

From the Barretts' point of view, Teresa "was frankly a 'white colored girl' who struck them at times as being 'more white than the average white person.'"<sup>509</sup> This is the last sentence presented to the audience before a textual break which is visually marked by five black dots across the page. This architecturally separates the discussion that follows, which addresses Teresa's non-belonging to and non-identification with this black community, and the general description of her "heavenly" holiday. The latter is taken up again after another five black dots that signify the end of this aesthetic and thematic break. As an effect, the articulation of Teresa's estrangement is also estranged from the smooth continuation of the narrative of the characters' summer sojourn. Therefore, within the text itself, Tess's relationship to feelings of (non)belonging, language, and identity are set apart as a sort of incoherent interruption to a coherent whole. If interpreted as such, Fauset's structure emphasizes this by enacting Teresa's perception of self and her place in this community which is evidenced in the last sentence of this textual break. "She had become and will always remain, individual and aloof, never a part of a component whole."<sup>510</sup> The few paragraphs that make up this

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<sup>509</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 88.

<sup>510</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 89.

separated section – that is seemingly unable to fit neatly into the flow of the narrative – explains that Tess was “no more at home with this colored group”<sup>511</sup> than she was when she first arrived at the boarding school. The narrative voice contradicts itself, in a way, when it states that Teresa felt “estranged” from the white group due to “lack of interest”. This mishap lets down Fauset’s strategy in the sense that Teresa’s conflictual adaptation to the boarding school appeared anything but disinterested (as discussed at length above.) Nevertheless, this feeling of being estranged here in Chicago is due, the readers are told, to “lack of experience”.

For a little while it seemed as though they did not speak *the same language*. All her acquaintance and intimacy with Alicia had been based on the common school-life which they shared. Her carefully preserved secret of those days kept the two of them from building or developing the qualities of sympathy, understanding, pride even joy around their common heritage.

So with these new acquaintances. In her comprehension of their conversations and intercourse there were often strange lacunae, even strange ignorance because Teresa was not fully aware of underlying, fundamental causes prompting the conditions that were being discussed.<sup>512</sup>

Her racial passing, caused, for the most part, by the racist imaginary and whiteness in New England, is shown to have come between these two friends. Yet they had the “common school-life” that connected them, as previously discussed in respect to the French language and “Eastern” culture. Now, Tess perceives that there is or was always a distance prohibiting a certain type of intimacy. Her unfamiliarity with this African American milieu indicates that feelings of inclusion or identifying with a certain social identity is not guaranteed by her previous announcement that she too is black. Putting into words one’s identification with a social group is not sufficient to live within that identity. It suggests, then, that identification involves more than stating one’s perceived or factual membership to a particular identity as it needs to be validated by others. Here however, it is in the *feeling* that one shares in cultural and historical specificities of a social group, that appears to be pivotal not just to notions of belonging, but Teresa’s processes of identification. Thus, in her affective geography she is a girl “without a country”. In Teresa’s move from the white world of Christie’s to the black world of the Barrett family she has relocated to another country where they do not “speak the same language.” Framed as such, the transcultural element of Teresa’s interactions is brought to the fore and is shown to have a linguistic obstacle. This is interesting because all the characters involved do, in fact, share the same language. English, it appears, does not assure a

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<sup>511</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 88.

<sup>512</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 88-89. Emphasis my own.

symbolic meeting place in and of itself that transcends cultural difference. With the common ground of intelligibility that speaking the same language is supposed to provide, there seems to be uninhabitable places that fail to bridge the gap between these two almost foreign countries, foreign cultures, and foreign identities within transcultural interactions. The author is perhaps inferring that linguistic specificity is not only geographically located (Chicago or New England) but is produced in its use by its speakers. In this sense, language and its intelligibility are endogenous to communication rather than something that precedes the act of expression. It resists the idea that language is a symbolic structure that can be placed or mapped onto any territory or reality (colonialism). Fauset highlights this by tracing Teresa's lived experience within this community and the effects of the materiality of language, namely her exclusion because everyone seemed to her to "speak another language". There are of course other factors that contribute to her feelings of alienation. For example, the "lacunae" that come between her and the others is said to be based on her ignorance of African American history and culture and her "lack of experience" living within black cultural environments, which was the reason given at the outset. What is implied is that language, or the living of identity through language, is another one of these factors. From a wider point of view, then, and contrary to the biological or prejudicial conceptions of social and cultural identity, black cultural identity is presented here as something one lives in, that is cultivated over time, that is multifaceted and that requires specific forms of communication for its articulation and cohabitation with others. Teresa is unable to emotionally connect and identify with her peers because, in part, she does not have the words to express her lived reality and her affectivity from within her blackness. The last paragraph thus concludes,

Emotionally, as far as race was concerned, she was a girl without a country [...] Later on in life it occurred to her that she had been deprived of her racial birth right and that was as great a cause for tears as any indignity that might befall man. With no conscious volition on her part a metamorphosis had been achieved. She had become, and she would always remain, individual and aloof, never a part of a component whole.<sup>513</sup>

The description of her emotional statelessness underlines to what extent socio-cultural identities and processes of identification are spatially and affectively charged. Teresa's response is one of both detachment and geographical unhinging, almost as if one necessitates another, or that one cannot happen without instigating the other. From her perspective, she does not belong to the black community, they do not share a common tongue or historic-cultural specificities and

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<sup>513</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 89.

therefore, her person and her identity have nowhere to live. However, as the narrative returns to its former flow after this textual island that Fauset has created, Teresa's perceived isolation and aloofness tends to disagree with the stated intimacy that she shares with Alicia. The girls were "closer than ever" and they plan to live together in Chicago after they finish school. Another instance, is her love story with Henry Bates which lasts after the holidays and puts into motion a sequence of events that sees the two reaching out to a network of (African American) family and friends so that they may be married unbeknownst to Olivia.<sup>514</sup> Even in terms of her family, this metamorphosis into a stateless detachment is juxtaposed by the plot that takes her back to West Philadelphia where she experiences the family "house" as "transfigured into a home".<sup>515</sup> Therefore, the feelings of attachment, love, intimacy and belonging to black communities that these examples all imply, betray, in a certain sense, Teresa's transformation into a "girl without a country", aloof, and detached from the world around her. Some literary critics like Cheryl Wall have previously criticised Fauset's writing as lacking in formal coherence and plausibility as well as being overly didactic. As it has been argued, Fauset's textual break is suggestively an incoherent part of a mostly coherent narrative flow. In line with the character of Teresa herself, the content of this break was unable to find its articulation in the context at large. From Wall's perspective, this is caused, for the most part, by Fauset's reliance on traditional form, namely the conventions of the sentimental novel, that create problems for her as she attempts to adapt them to her own purposes. It is because of this that "the content and the form of her novels are at odds." As an effect, "their plots often strain credulity".<sup>516</sup> For Wall this is no truer than in *There is Confusion* and the character of Maggie Ellersly. Because Fauset works with the marriage plot – a typical convention of the sentimental Victorian novel – it means that Maggie, an otherwise strong black female character, who has fought for most of the novel against normative social roles of working-class black femininity, is fated to choose a life of marriage and domesticity at the end of the novel. In a short expanse of time, this female character does an

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<sup>514</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 113-114.

<sup>515</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 100. As in previous moments, the Cary household is felt as "home" because of Olivia's absence. Because Fauset repeatedly mobilizes this scenario, the readers understand at this point of the narrative, that it metaphorically signals the transformation of the Cary residence into a site of blackness, where black subjectivity can be lived out without the symbolic erasure that her presence connotes.

<sup>516</sup> "Following the example of earlier black women writers, Fauset attempted to adapt the conventions of the sentimental novel to her own purposes. Chief among these was her effort to explore the impact of racism and sexism on black Americans' lives and represent the means by which black Americans overcame these oppressions and go on with the business of living. But the content and the form of her novels are at odds. Their plots often strain credulity, and their resolutions are uniformly happy: the still courageous but chastened heroine finds happiness with a protective yet more understanding hero. The more progressive issues explored in her essays are relegated to the subplots." Cheryl A. Wall, *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 66.



about face, foregoing her independence to dedicate her life to the care of her husband injured during the war.<sup>517</sup> With Teresa, the readers could see something similar taking place, first in her failed marriage to Henry Bates and second in her resignation to her mother's wishes to pass and marry a white man, Astride Pailleron. Teresa's overall trajectory also "strains credulity", at times, indicated in part, by the inconsistencies pointed out above. However, if language is produced within interactions and is productive of socio-cultural identities, then these inconsistencies between detachment and attachment, aloofness and a clear engagement in the world could be seen as part of Teresa's processes of appropriation of a certain way of using language that allows for the coming into existence of her black cultural identity. Given the fact that languages are not the universal apparatus that confers an equal meeting ground across cultural difference but rather naturalises or provides a home for dominant culture at the exclusion of others, it nevertheless can be appropriated by those who have been ostracised, in a certain sense, from this linguistic space. The above examples then could portray the time, negotiation and "experience" needed for a transformation of Teresa's relationship to her own blackness, the relationships that she cultivates within the black community, and the way she understands the world around her, which had as a catalyst her time spent with the Barrett family. To approach Teresa's journey and the place that language occupies within it from this angle allows for another interpretive lens to understand certain strains in her character development and it arguably aids Fauset to develop the events that follow. This is because, and as it will be developed below, it shines a different light on Teresa's rather unbelievable obedience to her mother and her character's fated marriage – ascribed in part by traditional literary conventions – to Astride Pailleron in France.

After the summer with the Davies, Teresa attends Amherst College, again following her mother's desires for her white future. She continues her studies that belong to the "Eastern culture" like at Christie's but now she also applies herself in "the social sciences". The narrator states that she consciously becomes "more interested" in her studies and emphasis is placed on her endeavour to learn more about African American history and culture. At the outset of her time in Chicago, historical and contemporary experiences of black oppression were said to have "left her indignant, as a humanitarian might be indignant, but not disturbed as a member of the maltreated race".<sup>518</sup> At Amherst, the readers watch as Teresa begins to *feel* implicated, or "disturbed" by racial injustice because she is attached to a black community – mostly demonstrated in her and Henry's love story – and also because she positions herself in the world

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<sup>517</sup> Wall, *Women*, 68.

<sup>518</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 89.

as a black woman, though in this context she does not speak it outwardly. Becoming more aware of the realities around her, aided by her shifting perspective, Teresa comes into certain realisations that had previously gone unarticulated, or were in fact unspeakable from within the language and rhetoric of white culture that, for the most part, had shaped her world and outlook. This is evidence by the narrator as she puts into words Teresa's thoughts on racial violence that had thus far remained silent or invisible to her perceptions and therefore unheard by the readers. For example,

this senseless prejudice, this silly scorn, this unwelcome patronage, this tardiness on the part of her country to acknowledge the rights of its citizens... all these combined into a crushing load under which a black man must struggle to get himself upright before he could even attempt the ordinary business of life.<sup>519</sup>

Her current understanding is that black subjects, in the reality of this northern context, are in fact second class citizens who do not have the same rights as the white population. This social and legal inequality that Teresa recognizes is articulated through the masculine black subject that must resist such a reality before he even attempts "the business of life". Whilst gender specific in this case, as the plot continues, Teresa experiences first-hand, this "crushing" of American racism. Speaking and living from a non-white point of view is portrayed as being accompanied with greater risks. In a country where violent oppression organises sociality, what is implied is that as Teresa's perception of self and others change, it exposes her consciously and affectively, to a greater extent, to its effects. In her narrative journey thus far, Tess has encountered violence that she must endure. For example, the many moments of denial of her identity and subjectivity – whether in her mother's white world or that of the school – and whilst these have been demonstrated as difficult hurdles to overcome, she is shown to adapt, to defy and to continue to pursue the exploration and understanding of self and the world around her. Alicia remarked, for instance, upon Tess' defiance of her mother when she omitted Alicia's racial identity to her. She knows very well that her mother would not let her marry Henry Bates, but she falls in love with him anyway. The whole subplot around their marriage sees them both defying her mother's whiteness and her desires for her daughter. And yet, when Tess goes to Amherst with a stronger sense of self-confidence and comparative ease in her racial identity – nourished by her deepened understanding of the lived realities of racial oppression both past and present – two encounters with racial and gender violence will "crush" her indefinitely in the anglophone context. The first is her experience of sexual violence (and inferred rape) at the hands

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<sup>519</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 124.

of Jarvis Seely and the second is Mrs. Cary's racist onslaught in learning about her planned marriage to Bates. What is underscored is that identifying in a certain way – appropriating oneself through language, culture and cultivating affective attachments – can render the individual more vulnerable to the surrounding world. Certain “fallacies” and injustices can no longer be perceived as anything but the reality from which they speak. Even if, Jarvis Seely, the figure of white masculinity, sees Teresa as a “white woman”, Teresa cannot avoid the understanding that he enforces himself sexually upon her because of her gender and racial identity. This is demonstrated in the text because the event is explicitly racially inflected and this through his speech act. “What I want to know is why should you be more prudish with me ... a girl who runs around with niggers”.<sup>520</sup> Seely's presumption that he has the right to her body, despite her non-consent, is comprehended through the prism of gender, race, and sexuality. From his perspective, Teresa's proximity to blackness “brands” her with the tropes of black female sexuality, namely her oversexualisation. What is more, his words underline the idea that women's bodies, and more specifically black women's bodies, are his sexual property. In part, his anger and “molestation” of Teresa is because it is unconceivable from his point of view that Teresa decides to have intimate relationships with black men but not him. It frames the incident as a kind of restoration, through the punishment of Teresa, of his given right to own her. Far from yielding to this violent affront to her person, Tess slaps Seely in the face and defends the racist slander that he had directed towards Bates (not present).<sup>521</sup> Teresa's recognition that Seely's actions were racially motivated is further developed through the narrator's description of how she is affected by the attack. “Shaken and sick” she perceives that this was not solely about her standing up for her lover's racial identity but her own.

She thought of the blow that she had planted on Jarvis' face... for Henry, she had said. Hereafter she would strike such blows for herself. The world should know her for what she was if she had to wear a placard.<sup>522</sup>

Despite the strength and anger that this resolve evokes, the readers get the sense this may be the last defiant cry, or fight, for her blackness. This is because the event gives rise to such reflections as,

For the first time, though still disapproving, she conceded her mother's point of view. It was horrible, crushing to be thus despised. Why not get away from it?<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> This scene has strong allusion to rape because the pretext for Teresa and Jarvis's outing is going to the woods to collect violets, which in Fauset's linguistic play is likely a euphemism for *viol* in French. Fauset, *Comedy*, 122.

<sup>521</sup> “To her own amazement she found she had done two things. In one second with one small, firm hand she had struck his hateful face and in the next she was out of the car on the road.” Fauset, *Comedy*, 122.

<sup>522</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 124.

<sup>523</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 123.

This thought not only connects Teresa's experience of sexual assault with her forthcoming endurance of her mother's racist discourse, but it also communicates to what extent things have changed for Teresa in the way she identifies and positions herself. Assuming her blackness, living from the subjective position of her black femininity consequently opens her to *feel* the realities of being a black woman in American society. The concession of her "mother's point of view" sheds a new, perhaps more compassionate, light on Mrs. Cary's choices and desire to live as white. This could be interpreted, therefore, as a type of justification for racially passing in an anti-black world and in a certain sense a reasoning away, or displacing responsibility of the violence that Olivia herself perpetuates. Whilst this is true, what is being argued is that it is not only this. As discussed above, Teresa's previous experiences of racist and sexist confrontations have been the cause of overwhelming tumult within her subjectivity. However, this was largely accompanied by her incapacity to put words on these emotional states. They were the ruptures or vortexes that she learnt how to manage but were not articulated, or rendered intelligible at the time. She had devised for herself types of tools to continue on or to adapt, one of which, as it was demonstrated in the discussion, was to find a precarious "comfort" in her own oppression. Another was to never fully integrate black feminine identity into her understanding of self. One consequence of this was that she was not "disturbed" by racial injustice as one potentially would be if she understands herself as being the target of that hatred. It appears now, that this is no longer the case nor is it a possibility for Teresa. At present, her conception of self is inextricably linked and engaged with her black subjectivity "even if she had to wear a placard". This is to say the places that she moulded for herself using the tools and language of the white world are no longer inhabitable for her. Teresa's deeper understanding of the realities of domination are thus experienced in the full weight of the "horrible crushing" feeling of "being thus despised". It is not as if Teresa was previously in a sort of blissful state of unawareness, rather the instruments that she had at her disposition were not sufficient to construct or find a home in her biracial identity (though ironically it protected her, in a way, from what she has just experienced). As language is one such tool, and Teresa identifies otherwise, she needs to find a new language to express herself, which she begins to do as she defends herself and loved ones. However, the readers can see that in her new way of being, speaking and perceiving, the strength required to live in an anti-black world is perhaps not yet solid enough to resist it. When her mother finds out about her and Henry's plans to marry, which throws Mrs. Cary into a racist rage, Tess does not revolt as she did against Seely. Instead, she subsequently proposes to Bates

that they racially pass so that they may be married.<sup>524</sup> Teresa forgoes this new language and identity from which she is speaking and mimics the familiar language of whiteness that denies both her and Henry's racial identity. This time, rather than defying her mother, "something" is described to break within her. This echo of the crushing feeling experienced in the racial and gender violence of Seely is thus clearly linked to her mother's discourse, highlighting the gender and racial violence that it too mobilizes. When Teresa later reflects on the two events, the text states,

Something had given way within her. Something had betrayed her. Her mind plunging on and on, reviewing the situation through its thousands of cells, fastened on her last talk with Jarvis Seely; his scorn, his contempt when he spoke of Henry, the manner of his branding because of Henry's brown skin. [...]

That was what had done it, that was what had fashioned a breach in the wall which her own instinctive racial loyalty had tried to set up against the ever encroaching sea of her mother's protestation and revolt. And after all the wall had not been strong enough.<sup>525</sup>

This "something" that betrays Teresa is being interpreted, then, to be partially the way in which she uses language. The new way she was speaking about her identity and the world around falls away "before the first onslaught", like the "wall that had not been strong enough." This interpretation is rendered credible by Fauset's insistence on the materiality of white racist discourse and the phenomenological experience of it. The white way of using language, be it in the last "talk" with Seely or in her mother's "protestations" are the "cells" that fasten upon Teresa, that "brand" her and Henry, and that are felt as the mass of water that approaches her. The verbalisation of racial domination through the English language, accompanied with being physically violated by Seely, is suggestively, then, "what had done it". In the sequence of events, it was the final straw or that "something" that broke Teresa's resolve, "that was what had fashioned a breach in the wall" resulting in her readopting the sounds and the violence of the language of whiteness as she asks for Henry's passing. For, as Olivia states during her refusal of Teresa's marriage to Henry,

I'd rather see her married to one of these Portuguese down on the cape in the cranberry bogs. I'd rather see her dead.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> As Teresa has experienced the denial of her racial identity through her mother's desire to pass and the pain and violence that this has caused her, she in turn asks the same of Bates. Her "silly request" to pass affects Bates in a similar fashion, causing him to leave the engagement and Tess. "No, he had been pierced, and to the quick, by the fact that she had, by her silly request, shown that she had considered him imperfect in the one respect which he was quite powerless fundamentally to change." Fauset, *Comedy*, 147.

<sup>525</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 146-147.

<sup>526</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 143.

After Mrs. Cary announces the death of her daughter Teresa lives it. The black woman she was becoming, the way she positioned and understood herself in the world from the point of view of her blackness, the way she lived her black identity in the material and symbolic space of the English language has gone. Her desire, her attachments, and her sense of belonging to black communities and being African American dissipate in the “sea” of the language of whiteness that rolls over her. She inhabits a nowhere, she is interested “in no one” and in “no thing”.<sup>527</sup> Now, affectively, in terms of race, she is “a girl without a country”. Confined to her bed because of her “deathly sickness”, she reflects,

Lying wanly on her pillows she reviewed her tortured, wasted young existence, she had yielded to her mother’s obsession. She would probably yield again ... for the breakdown in her resistance showed her clearly how completely her inner self was under her mother’s domination.<sup>528</sup>

Recrossing into whiteness is this time existentially untenable. Through the experience of the traumatic punishment for her own emancipation, both in the rape scene and her mother’s words, the delirium in which she is thrown is the very annihilation of her subject. Therefore, when she is chastised for living her blackness it is not as if she can return to the whiteness of her biracial identity. Both are destroyed because both are components of her subjectivity. It marks her alienation for good from the English language and the world it creates in the American context. Fauset promotes such a way of reading these events because Teresa’s existential undoing coincides with the reappearance of the French language. It will occupy a considerable space in Teresa’s reality because it becomes a new tool with which she finds a way out of this unbecoming. She begins to climb out of her “deathly sickness” – her experience of self as being neither possible nor having any hope for a future in America – through teaching French to the friends of her brother Christopher. The readers see Teresa coming back to life as she finds a new purpose for her existence and a different linguistic space to inhabit. It is equally at this time that the decision is made that her and her mother will undertake the transatlantic voyage to France. In this way Fauset frames both Teresa’s reconstruction of her identity through the French language and the socio-cultural space of France as an existential necessity for her. As an effect, it responds to the overarching ambiguity that this *lingua franca* has had up until this point. It appears that this language and culture does offer Teresa another symbolic and material

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<sup>527</sup> “Finally her whirling mind carried her into a sort of delirium in which for a brief moment she was mercifully unaware of her thoughts...From this state she emerged wan and pale and meek, perpetually exhausted but without the hateful whirling in her brain. She was interested, however, in no one, in no thing.” Fauset, *Comedy*, 147.

<sup>528</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 148-149. Ellipsis in the original.

space for her to live out her subjectivity, a kind of promise that perhaps one day her blackness could live, speak, and find a home in an elsewhere and in another tongue. However, this is whilst her character is still in America. Fauset's final dramatic resolution takes place only when her characters travel to the France of her novel. The tragedy of Fauset's *Comedy* is that this last socio-geographical and linguistic dislocation that Teresa undertakes in her existential quest for self proves to be no different to what she experiences in America, namely the death of herself and her blackness. Despite the differences across these two nations, and the differences in sonority of these two languages, the thing that unites them is their white world which is demonstrated in Fauset's making of her fictional space that subsumes these two socio-cultural and geographical landscapes across the Atlantic.

### **3.5 France in *Comedy*: *American Style***

Fauset's imagined France appears in *Comedy* as a potential space where Teresa could find that which was impossible in the United States and the social and familial milieus in which she is embedded. In Fauset's novels, this is not the first time that France comes into the plot in this way. As it was demonstrated in *There is Confusion*, France represented the site of Maggie's spiritual redemption and existential healing. Much the same as Teresa's, her voyage across the Atlantic was prefaced by a personal crisis that she could not overcome in the United States. In *Plum Bun*, the French socio-geographical space arrives at the very end of the novel and is the site of the romantic reuniting of Angela Murray and Anthony Cross. The potential that this nation and culture hold for the fulfilment of the dreams and aspirations of these two African American characters is left open to the interpretation of Fauset's readership. Here in *Comedy*, Fauset clearly proposes a resolution to her investigation of alternative spaces for her characters. This is to say that Teresa's desire for freedom, for a place in which she can live out her identity without the violence and annihilation of her person that she has thus far experienced in her quest for self is represented as equally impossible in the French nation state. A contributing factor to such an ending lays in Mrs. Cary's presence on the overseas venture. Metaphorically speaking, the whiteness and racial prejudice of American culture that the former embodies follow Teresa and thus play a role in her demise. However, this is different to the way in which Fauset frames the displacement of American racist politics to France in *There is Confusion*. In the latter, the author mapped America onto her imagined France. As such, the French space became an

alternate United States rather than a territory inhabited by people of different cultural and social histories and identities. In *Comedy* Fauset engages with (white) French cultural identity, embodied by the character Astride Pailleron. This not only allows her to explore intercultural experiences, but also highlights the commonalities of certain effects of anti-black racism that resonate and circulate in the transatlantic sphere. Whether in Mrs. Cary's pursuit to be recognised as white, or Teresa's search for the possibility to live her biracial identity, France, though different, provides neither character with an alternative space to accomplish and fulfil their respective desires. Perhaps a better way to understand Fauset's different imagining of the French social and cultural geography in *Comedy* – as well as her characters interactions within it – would be to highlight the parallel between her characters' pursuits and the alternate space that literature itself provides. The question here would be, does literary space provide a way to modify reality, or at the very least explore other ways of being, doing and living to that which is prescribed by the hierarchically organised societies.

One way to read the characters' quest for alternate spaces to live out their subjectivities in Fauset's novels is to interpret these journeys as a comment upon literature as an alternative space to investigate and transform realities lived. It is to hear echoes between the characters' pursuits and a metaliterary exploration of the pursuits of fictional writing. Approaching literature from this perspective is a slightly different interrogation to the political impact that cultural productions could have to change the functioning of an unequal and an unjust society. As it was mentioned in Chapter Two, this was a point of view circulating within the Harlem Renaissance and championed for example by Du Bois. Along with many of her female colleagues, Fauset demonstrated that the aesthetic practices that were being defined, such as the trope of the New Negro perpetuated a sexism found within American society and Euro-American aesthetics at large and by consequence left little, if any space, for black women artists and their oeuvre to be interpreted as working to redefine criteria for artistic practices from a black feminine perspective. As underlined during this discussion, black writers and artists within this movement were creating and transforming the way in which art was made by and for African Americans. However, it tended to reinstall certain normative practices and criteria for such pursuits. The interrogation of art, or literary space, as a potential alternate site to re-imagine that which is taking place in reality is a different approach to the above concerns. This is because it displaces arguments that pertain to aesthetic judgement and criteria, to questions of the possibility of investing literary spaces with desires, hopes, or dreams that may only be partially fulfilled, if at all, in the real world and exploring what the journey to such fulfilment would look like. For, if in reality, those paths are not forged, it requires invention and



imagination that the fictional worlds of literature could provide. This may be a desire to unravel certain realities and find a readership or audience to that exposition, as the character Oliver envisions for his musical practices. For him, art is the site of his desire to transpose the existence of those oppressed which is bound to his desire for freedom from his own oppression. In part, music became the only medium via which he could apprehend or experience any sort of fulfilment of this desire. For in a world that is so overdetermined by social identities – represented in *Comedy* through the microcosm of the Cary family – there was no possibility, from his perspective, to find another way out. By the end, his investment in the alternative space of music was no longer enough to struggle against the walls that were closing in around him and so he put an end to both. What this suggests is that engaging in artistic practices, is, for some, aligned to the very real and material phenomenological experience of self and one's existence. Therefore, as opposed to equally important arguments around aesthetic judgement that focus on technical aspects of artistic productions, approaching the literary object as an alternative space for changing the real tends to shed a different light on the author's or readers' relationships to this aesthetic object and the imagined world within it. For instance, it opens the door to the potentiality of being a space in which the reader can enter this exploration and invest the text with his or her own desires, perspectives, imaginings and lived experiences. One of the tools that renders this achievable, in this specific artistic practice, is language. This would be to argue that, in respect to *Comedy* and the above discussion of Teresa's relationship to language and her identity, Fauset succeeds where Teresa fails. Fauset is able to create a world within the framework of the English language – and the colonial violence that this symbolic structure carries with it – to expose certain realities of American society (and French society as it will be shown) and bring into existence the richness and complexity of her African American character's identities. In the extreme violence that Teresa experienced within her trajectory, she could no longer find a place of agency in her relationship to the English language. This was supported by Fauset as she aligns Teresa's return from existential annihilation with the character's appropriation of the French language. As such and as it was suggested, it was via this *lingua franca* along with the French geographical space, that Teresa could dream of and hope for an alternative space to re-invest and resituate her desires and the quest for self. Within the novel, this was not the first time that Teresa's dislocation was accompanied by a re-shaping of her desires which consequently changed what the path to fulfil them looked like. At each point, however, she is unable to attain them. In France this is no different. The fact that Teresa, Mrs. Cary, and Oliver are unable to find such alternate spaces, whereas Fauset can in the creation of the text itself, effects the relationship between the author and her characters as well

as between them and the readers. It is productive of a critical distance. It not only presents a fictional world that appears self-contained or complete in and of itself (as if independent to its construction by the author), but also provides the readership with the room to reflect, critique and engage with the world offered. The literary text acts as a medium of communication that invites the readers to enter into a dialogue with it by addressing them as full and complex subjects. The presumption is that one comes to the novel with his or her own perspectives, experiences, and affective realities. The specificity of the alternate space of literature then, is that in fiction it could allow for dialogue and interaction with realities that are silenced or rendered extremely difficult to articulate. Consequently, it offers the possibility to transform the reality that surrounds the artistic object. If the argument now moves to France in *Comedy*, along with Teresa and Mrs. Cary, what can be implied is that Fauset sets up the alternate space that this country represents as breaking its desired promise of a different land where Teresa can live and be free in her biracial identity and where Olivia can fulfil her fantasy of becoming and being recognised as a white woman. Concretely this suggests to the readers, for example, that certain perspectives of France as being free of anti-blackness are illusory. The scope of an anti-black world is beyond the United States and American culture. Fauset achieves this, in part, by critically engaging in the colonial heteropatriarchy specific to French culture, which is a literary journey that in her previous novels, even though France plays a major role in the author's imagined worlds, she did not undertake. What is more, through the whiteness and desires of Mrs. Cary, Fauset also explores certain complicities of individuals' actions, identifications, desires, and perspectives that are made possible by white supremacy despite cultural differences. As it will be argued for at the end, Fauset's oppositional forms of alternate spaces – her novel and France for her characters – put into contradistinction what literature can do and achieve in a world rigidified by overdetermination and violence and what her characters fail to do in France.

### 3.5.1 Olivia and Teresa: The Continuity of Whiteness Across the Seas

Fauset premises the end of Teresa's journey in France merely paragraphs before she and her mother "sailed on the S.S. Paris".<sup>529</sup> Teresa's renewed sense of purpose in life through teaching French and the return of desire and hope for a possible future is struck down by the news that Mrs. Cary will be coming on the transatlantic voyage.

Teresa took the news of her mother's going with more equanimity than anyone had expected. Suddenly let down from the excitement and novelty of her pupils she was tired lonely and dispirited. Thoughts which she had deemed forever dismissed came crowding upon her... it was June again... This time last year, she and Henry had been in the midst of their buoyant planning... She reviewed once more the tragic and foolish dissolution of all for which she had so hoped.<sup>530</sup>

Teresa's remembrance of her undoing in America anticipates the continuity within these two national contexts, not just in Teresa's fate but also in specificities of anti-blackness. This is because the readers know her intimate relationship with Henry came to an end in her echoing of Mrs. Cary's racist fantasies and desires as she suggests that the couple could racially pass. This flow of whiteness across the Atlantic is enforced by Olivia's actual presence as the dryness of the narrative voice in the description of Teresa's preparation, highlights the sudden disappearance of any "excitement" and hope of her move to France. A third example that Fauset stages to highlight such a travelling of anti-black racism takes place on the SS Paris.

On the boat Teresa's dispiritedness is buoyed up by the diversity and cultural richness of the fellow travellers that she observes.

She liked the sea-trip. She liked the free-masonry which it engendered; she liked to watch the amazing lack of restraint which young America displays when she gets on, so to speak, her sea-legs. [...] All sorts of people on this boat too besides Americans. French people returning with unrestrained joy from perpetually unwelcome exile; South Americans, swarthy, wary, a trifle too urbane, asking few questions, listening attentively to answers, volunteering nothing enlightening about themselves; retiring, when questioned about themselves, into a sudden baffling non-comprehension of English.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 163.

<sup>530</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 162. Ellipses in the original.

<sup>531</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 164.

What the narrator brings to the fore in Teresa's observation is that she is attuned to the shared sympathy between everyone living, temporarily, in this common space. It is a microcosm in which rules of social norms of a given society, rooted in its national space, are momentarily suspended. This is demonstrated, for example, as Fauset deliberately genders "young America" female, implying that she permits for herself flirtations and perhaps sexual experimentations that she would feel "restrained" not to do upon the shore. The passage also evokes that it is a unique space where people who would not have otherwise met because of social, cultural, and racial differences gather. The fact that Teresa pays attention to this and enjoys it, along with the temporary relaxation of normative roles for social interaction, speaks to her desire to find such an environment to live her identity and the freedom to do so. This desire has been one of the main orientating devices of Teresa's journey and it returns here, to a certain extent. She deliberately chooses to observe that which she seeks, despite the fact, the narrator later states, that the "passengers mostly consisted of Americans"<sup>532</sup> and therefore its cultural particularities. With Fauset's example of anti-blackness on the ship – played out through the eyes and voice of an "impresario" (racial identity not specified) who shuttles back and forth from Europe to New York to "discover new talents" – she is starting to bridge the gap between Europe and America in terms of the effects of racism and heteropatriarchy.

The impresario is constructed to be a part of both European and American socio-cultural geographies, not only for his travels, but because the narrator states that he is of Russian origin who immigrated to the United States, presumably with family, when he was a baby.<sup>533</sup> The strategy here, of embodying anti-blackness in someone with a mixed culture heritage and intercultural life, signals to the readers that such a figure exists and can circulate, in part, because of potential similarities in these cultural contexts. This is metaphorically propped up by his appearance on the ship which traverses the ocean between these two continents. Teresa's childhood friend, Marise, who is now a famous dancer in New York is referenced in his speech act.

"That colored girl there," he said, pointing to one of the passengers, "has something attractive about her. I like to watch her dance. But she's too civilized ... It's a pity too; she might be another Marise, with a little more abandon, a little more give to her... if you know what I mean."<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 164.

<sup>533</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 164.

<sup>534</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 165. Ellipsis in the original.

There is a distinction between the impresario's observations and Teresa's. She enjoyed the fact that "young America" – who was not distinguished by racial identity – felt free enough in this space to explore her sensuality or at least enjoy the occasion to test out her "sea-legs...". From his perspective, he too perceives that people "often let themselves go on shipboard"<sup>535</sup> but this does not evoke a joy in seeing another's experience of liberation. Rather he capitalises on this context, travelling purposefully on "second-class" when he could afford first in order to find "talent". The inference is that those in second-class are more likely to have "more give" to them than the higher classes, both sexually and in their presumed susceptibility to his advances because of economic precarity. Therefore, his character represents the racist expectation that black women be a certain kind of savage – not "too civilised" – as much as it clearly demonstrates how capital intersects with gender, sexuality, class, and racial identity. Fauset emphasises this by playing with symbols of class, power, and masculinity. The impresario's fetishization of a "certain something" that black people have is juxtaposed with the image of his "superlative cigar" as he flicks "an inch of perfect ash".<sup>536</sup> The readers are taken from his gaze upon this particular "colored girl" whose embodiment does not easily bend to the eroticised and fantasised image he projects on her to him holding the phallically shaped cigar that is a metaphor of economic and symbolic power and prestige. Such a societal position confers him access not only to (black) women's bodies but also to geographical/ cultural mobility. This masculine figure is presented as able to move fluidly between European and American cultures – "this is his thirty-sixth trip"<sup>537</sup> – as he picks out talent that could be sold off along the way. Europe becomes more precisely France in the last two words of his speech act, which refer to Josephine Baker, and correspond to the end of Fauset's transatlantic ship scene: "Well I wouldn't give her [Marise] away. She is clever... wish I was her manager. I'd put her far past Josephine Baker."<sup>538</sup> Calling upon well-known performers of the time and the context in which they have risen to success, such as the cosmopolitan space of Paris for Josephine Baker and the fictional character of Marise in New York, Fauset blurs real life with her fictional world. The impresario can be read as a very likely player in these transnational environments which arguably stages the social mechanics and power relationships that lay behind the *vogue noire* in these respective metropolises. And it is in the appearance of such masculine figures that Fauset is honing in on the transcultural aspects of white masculine positioning in the world, something that she continues in her character Astride Pailleron.

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<sup>535</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 164.

<sup>536</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 165.

<sup>537</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 164.

<sup>538</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 166. Ellipsis in the original.

Fauset's protagonists - the impresario, Jarvis Seely, and Pailleron - represent the broader systems of domination that structure society. More precisely Fauset exposes how such systems of domination naturalise and render legitimate certain ways of being and living white masculinity. With the impresario and Seely, they understand that it is their given right to take from others that which they desire with little concern for notions of consent or respect for individual integrity. As Fauset moves this reflection on white masculinity into the international and French context it sheds light on the (thwarted) hopes and desires of both Teresa and Mrs. Cary in France. Similarly, it allows for the exploration of how her characters are shaped by, negotiate, and live their respective identities in a different cultural space. In Fauset's narrative strategy, what is first made apparent is the distinct ways that Olivia and Teresa approach interaction with cultural difference. The ways in which these two characters are oriented by the pursuits of their desires impacts how they relate to cultural others in France.

### 3.5.2 Experiencing Identity Through Intercultural Exchange

In the opening scene of Olivia and Teresa's arrival in France, the latter sees her world growing larger. Whilst this is short lived, the expansion of her horizons of possibilities are experienced in her capabilities in the French language. To return to the discussion in the above section, the French language then, is represented at this point as affording Teresa an alternate symbolic space within which she can mobilize her agency and subjectivity. The narrator implies that this is because it provides her with a new linguistic world that is outside of the reach of her mother, who does not speak French. Living events that prove her proficiency in this language, musters a sense of self confidence and excitement for Teresa, as she relishes in the cultural differences of the towns and the populations that inhabit this foreign land.

Teresa felt her spirits rising with the unbelievable quaintness of places and people; the precious fillip too that came from speaking a foreign language for the first time in the land of its origin, and finding it succeed!<sup>539</sup>

Teresa's interaction in French becomes a catalyst that propels her out into the world. She relays to her father the surprise in her achievement and the pride that she takes in it: "*they actually understood me...right away,*" she wrote to her father. "*Never asked me to repeat anything... I had a little trouble understanding them at first... Great Scott they talk fast!... You should see Mother*

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<sup>539</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 166.

*open her eyes at me!*"<sup>540</sup> From Teresa's perspective, Mrs. Cary is taken aback by the way her daughter moves fluently from one linguistic world to another, however it is not for this reason that Olivia acts the way she does. Directly following the above citation, the narrator states, "Olivia did indeed open her eyes... and her mind to a new thought."<sup>541</sup> Later, the readers learn that this new thought is Olivia's plan to marry her daughter to a white Frenchman, and as such, she could fulfil her desire to live out a white identity, something that she could not achieve in America. Effectively, Olivia recuperates Teresa's agency and becoming within the French language as she translates her daughter's freedom in a language that she cannot understand into something that makes sense to her own vision of the world, that takes place in the English language. What the readers are witnessing is Olivia's loss of power over Teresa – for the simple fact that Teresa is moving outside of her linguistic capacities and thus her realms of comprehension – and her subsequent idea on how to re-install it. This is developed by Fauset by their interactions in the French capital.

In Paris they stayed briefly... Teresa did not like it. She could see that it was a great, beautiful city but staying as they did on the Avenue de l'Opéra near, the Rue de la Paix, she found it too full of the remembered noise and traffic of New York, too cosmopolitan, not enough French and far, far too hot... And over everything and everywhere Americans, loud voiced, determined, pushing... They sat in the brilliant afternoon at a table outside of the Café Rue de La Paix and Teresa met a half-dozen classmates from Smith and Christie's, accompanied by mothers, fathers and brothers. There was a grand re-union, plans of endless sight-seeing excursions... "if you can ever make these French understand what you're saying to them... so dumb!..." They could have accepted invitations for a half-dozen teas and Teresa could see her mother's interest rising, but she remembered that they had to be in Toulouse within the next two days.<sup>542</sup>

"Staying as they did" in this area suggests that this microcosm of white America in Paris is not indicative of the social geography of the whole of the French capital. Fauset's first-hand experience of this metropolis aids in interpreting this choice of accommodation as a deliberate decision on Olivia's part. It is arguable, that Olivia, like Fauset, is aware of African American communities in Paris, and as such barred Teresa from coming into proximity with these milieus which were more likely to be found in the ninth, fourteenth and eighteenth arrondissements. Fauset uses her knowledge of Paris to accurately set this scene in the fifth arrondissement where white America was more likely to be found. Whilst the social geography of American communities, white or black – and, for that matter, many different cultural and national

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<sup>540</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 166. Ellipses and italics in the original.

<sup>541</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 166. Ellipsis in the original.

<sup>542</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 166-167. Ellipses in the original.

communities whether from within the black diaspora or not – are more porous than Fauset’s Parisian landscape suggests, it would be to recognise that the author’s choice of this neighbourhood peopled with white Americans from Teresa’s former schools has significance within the plot that is unfolding. Via the reference to Smith and Christie’s, Fauset translates her landscaping techniques constructed in America and particularly New England into this French space. This is to argue, as it was outlined above, that the overlapping of European and American spaces with which Fauset built the New England of her novel in order to draw continuities of colonial histories and her contemporary America, is translated here in the appearance of white American cultural communities in Paris. In this way it induces a similar continuity of colonial, cultural and ideological circulations. Furthermore, Fauset brushes upon the idea of American cultural imperialism when through a non-specified speech act – evoking the idea that any one of these white Americans could have said the same thing – the text highlights their condescension towards French people and culture: “if you can ever make these French understand what you’re saying to them... so dumb!...”<sup>543</sup> Foreshadowing this scene with Teresa’s excitement and confidence experienced in speaking French and being understood within it, not only sets her apart from this community, but casts a doubt that it is the stupidity of the French to understand Americans in these intercultural interactions. Rather, it is framed as the lack of ability to speak French or make oneself understood through it. If this is so, it affirms the hypothesis outlined above. Olivia’s “interest” rises in this community because they confer to her that which she desires, namely a white (American) identity, as well as having in common the linguistic barrier of this foreign land. Thus, there is a whole symbolic world that escapes their comprehension and just as Olivia seeks to bring this into her bounds of intelligibility by devising a plan to marry off her daughter, so too does it evoke such sentiments of annoyance at the French for not understanding “what you are saying”. Teresa is represented as being steered by her desires to search for alternative material and symbolic spaces. As such, it appears to open her to interactions with and across cultural differences. These white American characters are represented as being the opposite. They are presented as closed to any form of interaction that fundamentally puts their understanding and experience of identity into question – organising teas, re-unions, visits with other white Americans from Smith and Christie’s – as they place potential incomprehension or difficulties experienced within intercultural exchange onto or being caused by the cultural other, in this instance “the French”. By differentiating Teresa from her mother and these white Americans, Fauset infers that this way of being is something specific to (American) whiteness. This is

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<sup>543</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 166.



reinforced by the fact that this scene is connected to the overarching power and domination that Olivia's character has over her daughter and the loss of this power that Teresa's linguistic capacities represents for her. As the cited paragraph above ends with their need to travel to the south due to Teresa's engagement in French lessons at the University of Toulouse, it proposes that her relationship to this *lingua franca* saves her from the world that her mother desires, and from whiteness. The French language is reaffirmed as providing the needed barrier against the domination of her mother at the same time as it holds the possibility of Teresa's aspirations for freedom and the living out of her biracial identity in France.

Away from Paris and white America, Teresa's perceptions of the southern city of Toulouse are imbued with her hopes and dreams at the same time as it announces the annihilation of them. The narrator states,

She was never afterward to be able to reconcile her first impressions of that city with her later knowledge; the town was so still, so peaceful, so dreamlike under the almost tropical sky.<sup>544</sup>

The narrator's first descriptions of Toulouse place emphasis on Teresa's enthusiasm for being in this town. Teresa's wandering within its urban landscape is noticeably marked by her mother's absence as the readers get the impression that her exploration of this city scape is as much a discovery of certain parts of herself.

Toulouse appealed to her as strongly as Paris had offended her. For the first time in her life she was satisfied with the town which afforded the background for the school which she was to attend. She liked the narrow twisting streets, the chattering, clattering groups in them; she found herself a little awed by the age of the University buildings, the old decaying cloisters.<sup>545</sup>

Teresa enjoys the specificities of French culture and history exemplified in the medieval streets which do not remind her of things she already knows, whereas Paris reminded her of New York. As such, Fauset builds upon the distinction between Teresa's outlook and experience in migrating to this foreign land with that of her white compatriots, including her mother. In Toulouse, there is a sense of possibility and purpose for Teresa as she ventures through the streets to the University where she must enrol. If Fauset had not set up this place as the sight of Teresa's demise, one would think that perhaps finally she had found a space to be free, to

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<sup>544</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 169.

<sup>545</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 169.

live out her desires and be content and “satisfied”. The author’s reflection of Teresa’s openness to explore this new environment, before “her later knowledge”, creates dramatic tension in the larger scope of the narrative. For the linguistic, cultural, and geographical spaces that encourage Teresa’s sense of self and take her outside the reach of her mother are soon to be corrupted. Similar to the “walls” that Teresa had built to withstand Olivia, the barrier that the French language provides Teresa will not withstand her mother’s desires and the agency that Teresa feels in this place will be nullified by her interaction and marriage to Astride Pailleron. In a continuation of her literary investigation of identity formation, Fauset demonstrates how the specificities of white identity, as the above discussion has started to unravel, rhythms the imagined geography of this nation space, and turns the promise for Teresa’s freedom in her biracial identity into the site of a “colorless, bleak and futile existence.”<sup>546</sup> Through the character of Astride, Fauset delves into the specificities of French identity and culture during the interwar period.

### 3.5.3 Getting to Know Astride and White French Masculinity

In Fauset’s imagined France and her literary critique of the ways in which white colonial culture shapes national (masculine) identity, during the period in which France was experiencing the peak of its colonial imperialism, it is important to recognize that this is not undertaken through a story, for example, of government officials who work for the French administration in one of its overseas colonies. It is not an exploration of those who are representative of or in positions of institutional power. Rather, the author sets her investigation of white French masculinity and the symbolic power conferred to this identity in the environment of everyday France and a “little” Frenchman – as Teresa refers to him – Astride Pailleron. Similar to Jane Nardal’s demonstration of how the ideologies of the Third Republic trickle down into the public domain and popular culture,<sup>547</sup> Fauset’s character Astride is representative of how the overarching colonial imperial power is expressed through and incorporated by regular citizens of this nation state. The main part of her narrative in France does not take place in the capital – the center of power – but in the south in Toulouse and Toulon. It is through these choices of setting, narrative, and character development that the author delimits her focus of French white masculine identity constructions and how, on an individual and quotidian level, one is wrapped up and, at times, complicit with hierarchies that organize society based on class, race, gender, and sexuality. This in turn allows

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<sup>546</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 183.

<sup>547</sup> See Chapter One.

Fauset to expose how Astride's living out of his identity, the way he understands himself and the world around him, as being intimately tied to the power that this society bestows on his particular embodiment of social identity. Fauset's attention to how individuals are enmeshed in such systems of power makes room for complexities involved in identity, for example, how a subject can simultaneously occupy a position of power and a position of disenfranchisement. This is explicitly demonstrated in the marriage plot that underpins the (intercultural) interactions of Astride, Teresa, and Olivia. In order to fully comprehend the stakes involved in Fauset's exposition of this, the first thing that needs to be delineated is precisely what the French white masculine identity of Astride represents in *Comedy*. Therefore, the discussion will turn to two examples in which Astride's character comes into being in his performance of white masculinity and the colonial perspective that ideologically and culturally is constructive of this particular national identity.

As it was argued for previously, Fauset's overlapping of Edouard Pailleron (French playwright and member of the French Academy) with Astride Pailleron constructs the latter as the gatekeeper of French language and culture. This is solidified by his profession as a French teacher and reaffirmed by his linguistic talents: "He had spent two years in Paris perfecting himself as a linguist. He spoke German, English and Italian with equal facility, but he preferred teaching his own so-beautiful language."<sup>548</sup> The relationship between Astride and Teresa, linguistically, culturally, and socially, is one that is framed from the outset as being unequal. Apart from gender and racial difference, he is the professor and she the pupil, he has the familiarity and cultural capital within this space and she, as the foreigner, does not and above all, from his perspective France is by far more superior than any other country and culture, including white America, to which he sees Teresa belonging. In this environment marked by cross-cultural exchange, Fauset constructs Astride's character, in part, through Teresa's perspective of him. The latter is characterized by her misreadings of who Pailleron is and the motives and desires that mobilize his character. On one level, this is an observation of the almost inevitable gaps and misinterpretations that take place in intercultural interaction and experience. On another level, the gaps created between Teresa's reading of him are filled in by the narrator which, in a productive contrast, underlines the specificities of his French white masculine identity for the readership. From the metaliterary perspective, this is another moment of Fauset's text where she achieves what her character Teresa does not. Putting Astride in the

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<sup>548</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 172.

spotlight, Fauset can render more explicit the critique of this particular identity that she is investigating. This ongoing meta conversation is alluded to in the first example of Teresa's misreading of Astride and therefore, is in part bound to how Fauset makes her white Frenchman.

During an afternoon tea in the presence of Astride, Olivia and Teresa, the narrator prefaces the characters' dialogues with the former's thoughts in respect to America. Despite never having travelled outside of France, Astride thinks that "perhaps he would go one day, far, far away, as far as America maybe to seek his fortune."<sup>549</sup> What is inferred is that any other place in the world, even if he has never been beyond this nation state, is perceived as a potential space where he can find what he seeks. Presented as a hypothesis, it nonetheless suggests, that from a white masculine perspective, the world, as it were, is at his disposal. France's celebration of being the foremost colonial power in the interwar period shapes, in part, such a vision for its success is directly issued from this nation's expansion overseas to achieve prosperity. The colonial underpinning of Astride's assumption is supported in the dialogue that ensues because it highlights his fantasized image of America. The narrator's assertion and Astride's speech act bring together notions of international mobility of French white masculinity, French cultural superiority and the racist ideologies that underpin it and inform his image of America. "'I should like,' he said, helping himself to cake, 'to visit your Chicago; to see your Red-skins and your bandits.'"<sup>550</sup> His exotic vision of this nation state turns its space into one of wildness, criminality, and suggested savagery which, by contrast, places France and the French in the position of the civilized and thus superior. This is directly challenged by Teresa as she exposes the fantastical and exotic elements of Astride's point of view.

Teresa lay back in her chair and laughed. "I never expected to meet a Frenchman like you outside of an English novel," she said "picturing the streets full of Indians and men running around with sawed-off shotguns."

He took her amusement in good part. "Perhaps you will be kind enough to correct my errors," he said gaily. "I would like to know your country better."<sup>551</sup>

Similar then to Jane Nardal's critique of how colonial and racist ideologies inform stereotypical imaging of "others" and "other" cultures, Teresa's speech act puts forward Pailleron's view of America as being informed by fictional representations. At the same time, she misreads the national culture from which Pailleron's perspective emerges. Teresa attributes it to the British

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<sup>549</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 173.

<sup>550</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 173.

<sup>551</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 173.

cultural imaginary and therefore, to a certain extent, sees the “Frenchman” Astride through their perspective of French masculinity. Thus whilst, on the one hand, the dialogue stages how, for example, figures and symbols circulate or are shared across multiple cultural perspectives and imaginations – France, Britain, America – within the Western world, it appears that Teresa misinterprets Astride’s (racist) fantasies of unknown lands and the cultural superiority that it mobilizes as not being integral to French white masculine identity. For her, it hails from the British (colonial) imaginary thereby displacing the possibility that this could come from the material and symbolic boundaries of this nation space. Fauset, through the narrative voice, proposes another way to understand Astride, namely that which is evoked in his perspective is (also) a particularity of French culture. It places the readers in a privileged position in relationship to Teresa, for where she missteps, they are invited to see with clarity the French colonial culture that Astride mobilizes. This dynamic between Astride and Teresa – between the author and her characters, between the readers and the characters and finally between the author and her readers – is echoed in a subsequent interaction that takes place after their marriage.

In a scene that ends “Teresa’s Act”, Pailleron takes Teresa on an excursion to “the naval base at Toulon” for which he is employed as a guide for a small group of “young folks”.<sup>552</sup> Fauset’s setting of this event in Toulon, as indicated previously, draws on the real-life context of France for it is here that the Senegalese soldiers were stationed. As an effect it foreshadows the journey with notions of colonialism and military power. The narrator frames Teresa’s experience of the trip as an opportunity to have a vacation from the “uneventful domesticity”<sup>553</sup> of married life.

The association with the young folks, the sense of being on holiday, made her light-hearted and cheerful. She loved the blueness of the sea; the starkness of the little military town impressed and thrilled her; she saw France as the great world power which it was....<sup>554</sup>

In the new landscapes that Teresa is exploring what impresses upon her is the position that France occupies on the geopolitical scene of Western countries. The ellipses that end the paragraph suggest to the readers that something within Teresa’s perception of France as a world power will be put into question. This is traced by the narrator through detailing Astride’s

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<sup>552</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 181. The importance of Fauset’s figuring Astride as a guide will be addressed in detail below. For now, what is important to highlight is that it symbolically continues the author’s creation of this character as “gatekeeper” to French culture and identity.

<sup>553</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 179.

<sup>554</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 181. Ellipsis in the original text.

subjective experience of this trip. She begins by highlighting his familiarity with the town and the spatial organisation of the nation's army in the surrounding regions.

In spite of his intense insularity Pailleron was almost as familiar with the topography of this town on the Mediterranean as he was with that of his native city. As they dropped down into the Department of Var and approached Toulon, he was able to point out and call by name the great defensive structures of Mont Faron, Fort Rouge, Fort Artigues and Fort Noir, with its outlook toward the fabled Hyères. He had, of course, the Frenchman's indubitable dramatic feeling toward these evidences of his country's power.<sup>555</sup>

Acting as a demonstration of Astride's knowledge of these historical and contemporary bases as the character points them out to the readers and the group on the tour, the narrator highlights how these monuments affect the affective geographies of this Frenchman. She qualifies the relationship between Frenchness and the pride he experiences in the sight of such examples of his "country's power" as not merely being interconnected but unquestionable. It suggests it is a normal(ized) emotive response and a shared sense of self that shapes, more specifically, masculine identity within this nation state.<sup>556</sup> The narrator continues:

But he was equally at his ease in the quarters where the women were making lace, naming the various patterns and able to tell without aid of notes or book the countries to which the largest quantities will be exported. However, he was at his best when he was proclaiming the military prowess of his beautiful country. [...] It seemed to his young wife that his very stature increased as he pointed out to them the grim arsenal on the north side of the *Petite Rade*.<sup>557</sup>

Military power is coupled with economic prosperity on an international scale for the narrator speaks of exported goods and Astride's knowledge of them. The cultural good in question, lace, is in general culturally codified as feminine and has a symbolic social status for those who wear it in both American and French culture. Fauset chooses therefore a cultural object that resonates across the Atlantic. In effect the femininity, domesticity, and class position (bourgeois) that it designates is a transcultural aspect of this product. As such, it guides the anglophone readers, asking them to draw from their cultural imaginations in order to interpret what Fauset is staging in this French cultural context, and more precisely in terms of gender.

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<sup>555</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 181.

<sup>556</sup> On the ways in which emotions are normalized see Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, and *The Promise of Happiness*. For a reflection on how identities are shaped by shared sentiments within group experience see, for example, David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub eds., *Gay Shame* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010). On the construction of national affective responses that, in part, confer national identity and belonging via the exclusion of "others" see Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>557</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 181.

In the text, the link between lace and femininity is established through its fabrication by female workers. The problematic that is established is that whilst clearly these female laborers have the *savoir-faire* of lace production, it is Astride who speaks in their place and, as such, recuperates this knowledge. It is his person who relays to the readers the details of “various patterns” of the fabric and the countries to which it will be exported. Narratively positioned after “the Frenchman’s indubitable dramatic feeling” in respect to his country’s military power and how Astride partakes in this via communicating his knowledge of different forts, for example, paints this non-interaction with the female workers as also a recuperation of the prestige that the lace signifies of his country’s economic power. Represented in this way, what it implies is that on a national and individual level, whether military or economic, the symbolic and material status and power of masculine white identity are dependent on the invisibilized and silenced work (or exploitation) of others, in this instance the female labourers. It suggests, even, that they are not seen as legitimately participating in national sentiments such as pride which subjectively shapes (national) identity and lends to feelings of belonging to, and having a place within, this nation. The narrator continues this inference by redirecting the tour back to the military might of France and Astride’s orientation towards it. She recognizes that it is above all the “military prowess” of France that inspires his “stature” to grow tall. The verb chosen by Fauset “proclaim” colors the description with notions of power which in turn is emphasised by ideas of prowling and “prowess”. Astride’s incorporation of the symbolic and material force of his country that trickles down to his affective realities literally increases the space that his body occupies. Coupled with the reference to prowling or “prowess” the text also brings into the fold notions of (heteronormative) masculine sexuality as this growth of his stature is also evocative of the image of penile tumescence. Astride and his phallus distend, much the same as, on the national scale, France’s military and economy expand across the limits of the Hexagon in an enforced, oppressive, and extractive relationship to these other lands, their populations, and their riches. From this perspective, the correlation that white masculinity broadens with the growing of national territory and strength – even if the discussion is on the micro level of affective states – shows to what extent this social identity is wrapped up in the broader context of colonial imperialism. Now, the readers could suspect that one explanation for Astride’s growing “stature” is because he fought in World War One: “He had been born in this very town [Toulouse] and he knew the locality well, having left it to go to war.... ‘But yes, I was in the war, Madame, Mademoiselle. I am older than you think.’”<sup>558</sup> The fact that he survived the

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<sup>558</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 173. Ellipsis in the original.

Great War, and France came out triumphant, understandably procures “indubitable dramatic feeling” when in the presence of “his country’s power” as the narrator indicated above. Whilst this may attribute to Astride’s affective geographies and his lived experiences, it is, first of all, not the only (masculine) response to the destruction of the Great War.<sup>559</sup> And secondly, the narrator tends to favour the colonial interpretation for she clearly goes on to frame such “power” of France in respect to its (legitimised) exploitation of people of African descent, represented by the Senegalese soldiers quartered in Toulon. Questions of who is considered a “Frenchman”, who has a place within the contours of national identity and who can partake in shared sentiments such as national pride is inflected both through gender, as shown above with the women workers, and now race. The narrator develops this by juxtaposing what Teresa as a biracial woman perceives in respect to the Senegalese soldiers with what Astride says about them.

Astride’s pride in his country is shown to be infectious.

Somehow his pride became hers too and she was as possessive as he, and as complacent, at the site of the magnificence, protected anchorage which could shelter hugest fleets; it is background bristling with forts and batteries. She would never forget Toulon.<sup>560</sup>

Pride appears to go hand in hand with feelings of “possession” as Teresa adopts or is infiltrated by this shared national feeling. This, however, is put into stark contrast with the paragraph that follows and returns the readers to the question mark that was placed at the end of Teresa’s initial perception of “France as the great world power that it was...”. This is to say it exposes that which it takes to come to occupy such a position. It is first through Teresa’s eyes that the readers learn of the colonial quarters in Toulon.

The great, black Senegalese quartered there, speaking in some instances, beautiful, unaccented French, stirred her imagination. She saw her new country stretching hands across the seas to her black brothers, welcoming them, helping them to a place in the sun.<sup>561</sup>

Elements from this passage were addressed previously in respect to the French language and *petit-nègre* that was systemically taught by the French army to maintain colonial soldiers

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<sup>559</sup> Other responses include, for example, disillusionment and disgust in the nation and national projects, including colonial imperialism (for the Great War was, in part, a territorial struggle between European nations over their expansions overseas). The cost of human life in such pursuits evoked critical examinations of the French and European nation state that can be found in the works of Guillaume Apollinaire, for example, or artistic movements such as Dadaism that emerged in response to this context.

<sup>560</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 181-182.

<sup>561</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 182.



linguistically, culturally, and ideologically in their presumed position of inferiority. As it was argued at this time, the fact that the narrator highlights that these Senegalese men speak “beautiful unaccented French” betrays the fantasy of the superiority of French white civilisation by underlining that it is a myth constructed for the benefit of French domination. It similarly demonstrates that Teresa does not perceive the Senegalese soldiers through this colonial prism that is soon to be announced by Astride. Rather, the pride that she “somehow” felt in the presence of Astride, is reconfigured, and appropriated in her own vision of the world around her. It proposes that now that her identity, lived experiences and affective realities are intertwined to “*her* new country”, she perceives this encounter with other black individuals as a moment of racial solidarity across the seas. At the same time, her perspective seems oblivious to the fact that these Senegalese men are here precisely because of French colonial pursuits. In her vision, she misinterprets, perhaps deliberately, their presence within the hexagon in a separate “colonial” military base to the rest of the French army. She does not see it as a concrete example of colonialism and racism, but of solidarity that “welcomes” and “helps” other black subjects to come here, the centre of empire, and “have their place in the sun”. There is an awkwardness to Teresa’s perspective for her illusion to luminosity in this space of hexagonal France – the enlightenment provided by French civilisation – sets in motion the possibility that she is suggesting that the “black brothers” elsewhere are in a space of darkness and as such reproduces the trope within white colonial imaginary of the pre-civilized and savage states of blackness. Whilst, therefore, there is ambiguity to Teresa’s point of view, the interesting element that is brought to the fore, is that her vision of this event is tied to her subjectivity and, in the wider narrative, to her journey of identification within this nation space and culture. She perceives this situation in a way that corresponds to her desires and struggles for a space to live out her identity. As an African American subject, she projects affinity upon these Senegalese soldiers as she searches for a place where her blackness can make sense to her in France. In a way she searches for acceptance across difference, for example, the soldiers speak in “beautiful unaccented French” like herself, and they are all members of the black diaspora, Teresa included, here in Toulon, which “stirred her imagination”. As an effect, Fauset’s strategy to construct Astride’s character through the gap in his and Teresa’s perspective, comes to frame his anti-blackness as being directed against both the Senegalese soldiers and Teresa.

For himself he did not like “*ces vilains noirs*”. They were alright as cannon fodder. France it was clear, surrounded as she was by so many jealous enemies, must have some helpers if she hoped to survive at all. It was better, wiser, less costly to select

them from her colonials; it pleased the colonials and it safeguarded the diminishing ranks of Frenchmen. He was quite cold-blooded about it.<sup>562</sup>

His perspective surprises Teresa, she is “taken aback” by it.<sup>563</sup> Arguably Astride’s racism and condescension does not surprise the readers in the same fashion, for they have been privy to the narrator’s counterdemonstrations of Teresa’s misreadings of him. Furthermore, and up until this point, Teresa’s misinterpretations have conveniently made possible her rather delusional and neurotic reconstructions of her identity. It is however, in Astride’s racist speech act that Teresa begins to see him differently and her previous readings of him drop, like a veil, that was in front of her eyes. She lives his racism as affecting her directly for she brings it into her subjective world of past lived experience. Whilst she does not mention her biracial identity, she immediately tells Astride that she “hoped he did not feel that way about all people of dark blood.”<sup>564</sup> The narrator continues:

She knew many colored people in America, she said, whom she would like to visit her. She thought especially of Oliver but did not mention his name... There was a famous dancer in New York, Marise. Perhaps he had heard of her.  
“No” he replied, yawning inattentively, “I know nothing about her. She could hardly compare with our French dancers, I should imagine... But still if she is famous in your rich New York, she would undoubtedly pay well... yes you might have her over... But no men. I do not like any of them. I saw them in the war, *les Américains noirs*, neither black nor white. Our women liked them too well.”<sup>565</sup>

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The dots that come at the end of this passage causing a structural break in the text allows the readers, and Teresa, time to digest both Astride’s speech act but also the closing of the literary exploration of white masculinity that Fauset has been undertaking. His perspective echoes the racist, patriarchal logic presented in the character of the impresario on the SS Paris, as both men capitalize on black femininity and sexuality. His reference to “*les Américain noirs*” and white French women’s “love for them” coupled with the fantasised threat of black masculinity, is typical to the positioning of white supremacist masculinity, whether in the French or American context, for it is perceived as barring his right to access feminine bodies, black or white, at his leisure and legitimizes his violence towards black feminine and masculine subjects.<sup>566</sup> It is also now clear who Astride thinks is a “Frenchman”. The “indubitable” national sentiment towards

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<sup>562</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 182.

<sup>563</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 182.

<sup>564</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 182.

<sup>565</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 182. Ellipses in the original.

<sup>566</sup> This dynamic has been discussed at length in chapters One, Two and earlier on in this Chapter.

the evidence of France being “a great world power” belongs now, without question, to the sphere of white French masculinity. Teresa’s hopes and desires that France would provide an alternate space to America and presently in her tentative search for a way to live and identify with a form of French identity as a black woman, are both irreversibly shut down. The closing line of Teresa’s act reads, “gradually her expectation for change died away and she settled down to an existence that was colorless, bleak and futile.”<sup>567</sup> National identity, whether in France or America, cannot be embodied by black (feminine) identity. As it was shown in the incident of the women lace-makers, the Senegalese soldiers as “canon-fodder”, or Astride’s belief that Marise will “undoubtedly” make him money, white French masculinity is shown to be constructed the exploitation of others and the continual occupation of overseas colonies. This therefore is the reason why France occupies the position of “great world power” that it does, both in the novel and in the historical interwar period. Concomitantly, it is arguable that Fauset’s exploration of Astride’s Frenchness and whiteness is also the exposition of the same neurotic loop that Teresa experienced in America. Teresa’s silence on her racial identity conditions the revelation of Astride’s racism which in turn reinforces Teresa’s silence to the point that she gives up her “expectation for change”. Because Astride believes Teresa to be white the articulation of his character is intertwined with the demonstration of Teresa’s impossible passing. On the intersubjective level of Fauset’s characters, the above discussion has highlighted the way in which this impacts their everyday lives, their sense of self and how they perceive the world around them. In Fauset’s exploration of intercultural interactions and individual identifications she similarly works through this in her marriage subplot that, in the narrative trajectory, preceded the trip to Toulon. As it was left earlier on in the discussion, it is through the investigation of how Olivia, Teresa and Astride negotiate heterosexual courtship that Fauset asks (ethical) questions on the ways in which subjects interrelate. Similar to her previous investigation of identity in *Comedy*, Fauset works to demonstrate the interwovenness of environment and subjectivity, in this instance in Toulouse. She also exposes complexities of identity formation, such as holding simultaneous positions of power and disenfranchisement. But ultimately Fauset investigates how one’s way of living in the world – directed by his or her desires for certain (culturally validated) objects – can knowingly (or not) reproduce the relationships of domination forged by the overarching structures that organise society.

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<sup>567</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 183.

### 3.5.4 Olivia, Astride, and Teresa: The Tragedy of a Franco-American Tale

Astride's courtship of Teresa takes place, for the most part, during their outings chaperoned by Mrs. Cary, in which he assumes the role of guide: "No one, he was quite sure, could direct them to as many and as fascinating places of interest as he."<sup>568</sup> With Fauset's naming of Pailleron, and in light of the discussion above, it signals to the readers that the historical and cultural knowledge that will be shared likely pertains to a particular cultural history of France, spoken from a white masculine perspective. Furthermore, Fauset characterizes Astride by his position as a guide which is first introduced to the readership in this context of heterosexual courtship (and continued later in the events situated in Toulon). This particular role is significant to how Fauset explores processes of identification, this time linked to national history and belonging within this space, but also because she uses it to structure, and critique, the monetary exchange normalized in marriage. Being the guide, Astride shows Olivia and Teresa and the readers the places he deems "fascinating" in the Toulousian cityscape.

Certainly in this respect he was far from over-rating his prowess. Not only was he thoroughly conversant with the history of Toulouse but he had the faculty of transforming his knowledge into a real and interesting story. He took them to see the marvelous church of St. Sernin which dates from the third century and showed them the tombs of the early counts of Toulouse, making them live again. [...] For successive days they drove along the Boulevards *Allée St Etienne*, *Allée St. Michel* and the *Grande Allée*, and Teresa, through the eyes of Astride, was able to reconstruct the old city walls whose place the splendid avenue had taken.<sup>569</sup>

The author underlines the sedimentation of French history figured in the city. "Through the eyes of Astride" one sees "Hôtel Bruny" or "Hôtel d'Assézat" and one learns of tales of Clémence Isaure, a partly mythical personage and rich benefactor whose existence is crystallized and immortalized in the presence of her statue.<sup>570</sup> It is clear in the tone of the narrative voice that Teresa and Olivia were delighted by their experiences with Astride, occasioning as it does the discoveries of a new culture and its history. They get a taste of Toulouse, literally and metaphorically, by savoring its delights: "the mellow enjoyment to be found in the consumption of the justly famous pastries of Toulouse, eaten in little tea-shops in the surprisingly twisted streets."<sup>571</sup> The multisensorial aspect of cultural experience is one that traverses different epochs, different spaces, and different regimes of power as the stories and myths recounted by Astride cut across the materiality of the city, its

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<sup>568</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 174.

<sup>569</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 175.

<sup>570</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 175.

<sup>571</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 175.

symbolic spaces, and the imagination of the three characters' minds. Their perception is called upon in observing monuments and statues that figure what and who, was at one point, considered important to remember, and their tastebuds are ignited by the specificities of Toulousian culture. The representation of this complex tapestry of cultural experience is weaved into the story through the narrative voice as she emphasizes the multiplicity and congruity of sensorial and spatial aspects – material, symbolic, affective – which also make up one's subjective experience of cultural identity. This is because the role of guide that Astride performs in this depiction frames him as the translator of French history into *his* story. Along with the “pleasure” that he takes in showing the two women around, it implies that, in part, his translation of this national and cultural history into “real and interesting” tales is intertwined with his lived experience of his French identity.<sup>572</sup> In effect “it was he who opened their eyes to the beauties of those fine old renaissance buildings”<sup>573</sup> and to new perspectives and new understandings of the world that surrounds them. To a certain degree, Astride is the author of his own story that he is telling and creating, not just for Teresa and Olivia, but also for himself.

Astride's intimate connection to the world around him and the belonging that he feels to this shared national identity and culture are repeated in such phrases as: “I am very glad you and your mother out of all the other cities in *our* glorious France have selected *our* Toulouse for your sojourn...”<sup>574</sup> In the novel, individual appropriation of historical and cultural knowledge has been presented as one element within processes of identification. For example, Teresa's investment in learning African American culture and history was highlighted as one path to her coming into, identifying with and living out her blackness. The text indicates then that there is a commonality – whether in white masculine French identity or African American feminine identity – in terms of the living out of one's identity. It is not to say that it is one and the same thing. The violence that Teresa experiences, for example, being in the world as a black woman is something that Astride will never experience in the plot, and he will be the one perpetrating it. Rather, the point is, the subject has agency in what cultural genealogies and historical perspectives he or she ascribes to, appropriates, or champions which in turn affects stories he or she tells his or herself and others. From the perspective of the ongoing metaliterary conversation that perceives literature as an alternate site to change what is given in reality, what

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<sup>572</sup> For theoretical accompaniment to what Fauset is outlining above and the work which has inspired, in part, the interpretation presented, see Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien I: arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

<sup>573</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 175.

<sup>574</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 171. Emphasis of possessive pronoun is my own.

can be suggested is that Fauset frames Astride, and his position as guide, to be on the side of the writers of history. This infers that he is retelling, ascribing, and aligning himself to the story of the winners and makers of this nation's story. The increase of "his stature" as Astride was speaking of the "military prowess" of his country was one example of this. This type of cultural genealogy of French white masculinity, that Fauset unraveled in Toulon and with which Astride identifies, is complexified by the fact that the readers learn he is not from the social class that holds the symbolic and material power and status in this national story. Put simply he is not bourgeois but in the narrator's words he is "poor". He has the agency to choose what story he tells, but contrary to Fauset and her narrative, he did not write the history he is recounting. Through the voice of the narrator and the world she creates, the author disturbs the position of power that a white masculine figure holds to transform reality through their stories. This comes a little at the expense of Fauset for her painting of Astride as middle-class but poor tends to evoke sentiments of class discrimination in the text. However, in the overall narrative of marriage, this is negotiated and diminished to a certain degree by showing the same mechanism at work in the character of Olivia.

Astride's class standing arises in one of the planned outings, and thus still connected to the subplot of heterosexual courtship, when he asks Olivia to cover the expenses of their upcoming trip.

The war had swept away all their little savings, he had nothing but his little house which really belonged to *chère Maman*, and his little salary... No, he wanted nothing for his pains, but if Madame could arrange for expenses, transportation, meals etc., on their little excursions.<sup>575</sup>

Mrs. Cary and by extension Teresa are thus portrayed as being from a higher class than Pailleron. Yet, because the narrator is talking from Astride's perspective, it can be understood that it is his character that perceives them as such. Whilst he is not incorrect in his assumptions because they have, for example, the financial means to travel to France, pay for accommodation and Teresa's education, it does suggest that his perceptions of Mrs. Cary's financial situation are because Astride sees her as a white American. As the readers know that this is not the case, Fauset positions Astride's demand for payment due to him in ironic tension with the colonial logics that are at work in his character and that he is ignorant of in this situation. Fauset paints this economic exchange in the color of the colonial and imperial assumption that colonies and

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<sup>575</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 173. Ellipsis in the original.

their populations – here represented by Teresa and her mother – are always indebted to the metropolis. In the context of France, the clearest example of this is Saint Domingue and now Haiti’s (still) unpayable debt to the Hexagon. What is more, the perversity of this colonial domination is echoed in Astride’s demand for it is his services and “pains” that the two African American characters become symbolically and materially indebted. His role as a guide in this economy has a suggestible resonance with the idea that the colonized will forever be indebted to the metropolis because of the great sacrifice or “pains” of colonization that is framed as an invaluable benefit to the colonized. However, because Astride’s primary prism of the context is class, he passes completely unaware of the racial component of the economic exchange, the colonial culture that it represents and that he himself aligns with and champions. Thus, Astride’s presumptions that Mrs. Cary, as a white American, has greater wealth than he is read with an air of contempt – his “little” house, his “little” savings – in the frame of American prosperity post World War One whilst countries like France were financially and demographically devastated by it. The inequality of financial power on a geopolitical level is played out, to a certain degree, on the individual level of these characters’ intercultural interactions and perceptions and judgements of each other. The power conferred to Astride by his white (colonial) masculine identity, the history that he tells of dukes and aristocrats and “our glorious France”, and the indebtedness that he feels due for his services is not something that he fully understands whilst the readers and the author do. This perhaps gives thought and reflection to the reasons Astride positions himself as guide as he repeatedly affirms his availability to be in service to Olivia and Teresa. The fact that the latter two had chosen “our Toulouse” leads him to state, “you must let me show you my appreciation by rendering any service possible”.<sup>576</sup> On another occasion he will say “I am not putting myself out for you, *pas du tout*. I am merely giving myself a great pleasure.”<sup>577</sup> He even inverts the role of professor-student as he mentions to Teresa, “if it seems to you too great a favor to accept from a stranger, just think then, Mademoiselle, that I am getting an opportunity to learn very good English at first hand from a very good teacher...”<sup>578</sup> Each time that he asserts himself as such, ignorant as he is of the racial component of this economic-colonial transaction for services rendered, it brings the perversity of this logic to the fore layering it on top of Astride. It is true that certain narrative passages can be perceived as having a certain classism. For instance, the narrator follows Astride’s admittance that he is “poor” with,

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<sup>576</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 175.

<sup>577</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 172.

<sup>578</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 172.

About this [his lack of finances] he seemed quite sincere; driving hard bargains with chauffeurs and inn-keepers; figuring out the correct *pourboire*; advising them to postpone the purchase of this or that trinket or souvenir for the next town where it would be bought at a *beaucoup meilleur marché*.<sup>579</sup>

This tends to connect his financial status as determinate of his savviness, if not a bit of a hustler and potentially a fraud. Considering Fauset embeds the outlined events within the subplot of heterosexual courtship, however, it offers the reading that Astride's due is not merely an economic exchange but that of Teresa too. What he is owed, what is rightfully his, is Teresa. His statement "I want nothing for my pains" in being a guide for Olivia and Teresa is undermined because, even from his perspective that is blind to the colonial logic at work as opposed to the readership, he did want something and that something was Teresa. Therefore, whilst from his point of view his aspiration for Teresa is an opportunistic grab to better himself financially, which in part it is, there is also the critique that this is a path possible to him as a white man, precisely because of the gender, racial and sexual norms of heterosexual courtship bound to economic transaction. The text infers that the particular white masculinity that Astride identifies with and desires, makes the attainment of economic power that he lacks achievable through marriage, for the norms prescribe economic-sexual exchange of daughters between patriarchs.<sup>580</sup> He walks through the doors that the overarching power structures open for him being a white heterosexual Frenchman. This renders his trajectory as advantageously entangled with these forms of domination. Whilst the text exposes this at Astride's expense, what Fauset equally suggests is that Astride's efforts to better his class position and attain status as a married man, means that culturally speaking, these have already been deemed worthy pursuits. Within a specific culture, placing value on prestige, power, class status, masculinity, or whiteness for instance, makes them the worthy things to have as an individual – the right way to orient one's desires and way of being in the world – regardless of the exploitative means one undertakes to obtain it. This does not de-responsibilize the individual by the recognition that institutional forms of power shape identity and provide (unequal) possibilities for certain paths and orientations. On the contrary, the demonstration of Astride's profiting from the way things are opens an alternate door to see to what extent, on an individual level, one could seek to do and

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<sup>579</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 175-176.

<sup>580</sup> This term was first created and theorized by Italian feminist anthropologist Paola Tabet during the 1980's in her problematization of the social stigmatization of prostitution. Employing her concept of economico-sexual exchange she blurred the boundaries between that which was considered "normal sexuality" and "commercial sexuality" as she demonstrated that both partake, within a patriarchal system, sexual and monetary exchanges of women. Paola Tabet, *La grande arnaque*, Bibliothèque du féminisme (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004). A more contemporary collective study on Tabet's concept was organized by the EHESS in Paris. See, Christophe Broqua and Catherine Deschamps eds., *L'échange economico-sexuel* (Paris: Éditions EHESS, 2019).



be otherwise. For it leads not only to the notion that there are other stories to tell, other ways to steer oneself or one's desires (even if deemed cultural unvaluable) but also to ethical questions of individual responsibility in living and being in the world. At other moments of the narrative Fauset has already brought this to the surface. For instance, the author underlined Teresa's connivance with gender, sexual and racial norms in the frame of heterosexual coupling in her relationship to Bates whom she asks to racially pass. Fauset develops it further at this point in her restaging of individual entanglement with and reproduction of power that Mrs. Cary partakes in within the subplot of the marriage. In this context, what is foregrounded is that for both Olivia and Astride, their personal desires and the pursuit to satisfy them take precedence over the welfare of Teresa, just as in respect to Henry Bates, Teresa's desires and pursuits trumped (through denial) the respect of his personal integrity and subjectivity as a black man.

In the case of Olivia, her role in Teresa's marriage is framed in her larger pursuit of her desire to be white. As in other times in *Comedy*, this is premised upon the eradication of her daughter's blackness and of her own. The readers are privy to Olivia's thought processes for her daughter's marriage. The narrator exposes that it becomes a means to her end. In the guise of her care for Teresa's future, her reflections begin with this statement:

There was no doubt in Olivia's mind as to his ultimate intentions with regard to Teresa... For herself she was more than satisfied... Here there would be no complexities. Nothing to make Teresa feel that she was abandoning her own... her own were not here to be abandoned. And if she clung to her wild ideas of mingling to colored people, here in France they would certainly be acceptable.<sup>581</sup>

Mobilizing a trope specific to passing narratives in African American literary tradition, namely the betrayal or abandonment of one's "own" in the act of racially passing, in the French space and more particularly Toulouse this is deemed null and void because there were no "colored people" to be betrayed. This is supported by the text for they do not figure in this space. Apart from the fact that Mrs. Cary presumes to know what Teresa is feeling – shown to be illusory and incorrect in the narrator's detailing of Teresa's subjective experience – Olivia's anti-black racism appears specifically directed to black Americans. There is an ambiguity, for it is unclear whether Olivia thinks that black people in France are more "acceptable" or if, in France, Teresa's "wild ideas" of mingling with them would be more accepted. If it is the former, which frames Olivia's antiblackness directed solely towards African Americans, then it highlights at

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<sup>581</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 176. Ellipses in the original.

what point she has a very painful and problematic relationship to her own black identity. If it is the latter, Olivia's perspective mobilizes the myth that France is without color prejudice, or at least less so, than the United States which plays into the continuation of anti-blackness on an international scale.<sup>582</sup> This is furthered by the fact that Olivia's character is represented as being in collusion with Astride's plans – she “had no doubt” to “his ultimate intentions” – and by extension the overarching whiteness and patriarchy that conditions its possibility. Fauset aligns Olivia's complicity by interweaving her desire for whiteness with a desire for power which is ascribed to masculinity in a form of gender passing she must undertake to play the role of the white patriarch in the scenario. Since Mrs. Cary has been aware of Astride's intentions from the outset, it frames her paying for their outings together as the financial preliminaries to the main event of the marriage contract. She is knowingly involved, “more than satisfied” even, in his lie that he “wants nothing” from their interactions. Simultaneously, from the game played by Fauset against Astride it also means that, tragically and possibly unbeknownst to Mrs. Cary, the readers see her willingly complying to the colonial economic logic of indebtedness to the metropolis, here figured in Astride. This is amplified by the fact that, true to Teresa's character she misinterprets Astride's advances. As it has been signaled previously, Teresa's misreading of Astride is also a marker of convenience for her in the reconstruction of her identity in this nation space. Confiding to her mother she states, “if he were American... I'd say he was a very fast worker. As it seems he is just a simple, rather sweet little man.”<sup>583</sup> There is no response from her mother on her daughter's misreading. Tellingly, Fauset's euphemism “fast worker” for heterosexual courtship intensifies the connection between Astride's role as a (colonial) guide and what he is due as a white man within this logic, namely a (white) wife, sexual access to and possession of (black) femininity, and financial prosperity.

Her husband, she knew, would never consent to bestowing a *dot*... But Teresa was his only daughter. His favorite child. She was sure there would be many presents...  
“Presents?” Astride echoed dubiously, smoothing back his already sleek hair with long nervous fingers.  
“Of money,” Olivia went on. “Her father would always want her to be comfortable.”<sup>584</sup>

Mr. Cary, one embodiment of African American masculinity in *Comedy*, does not need to be consulted for Olivia to know that he would “never consent” to the sale of his daughter. Through some intellectual gymnastics Olivia finds a solution – that her figure as the white patriarch

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<sup>582</sup> On this topic, see the discussion of Fauset's articles on France addressed in Chapter One.

<sup>583</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 172. Ellipses in the original.

<sup>584</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 177. Ellipses in the original.

necessitates – as she promises “presents” as Astride’s compensation. This transactional relationship staged in the offering of Teresa, therefore, is squarely placed in the sphere of whiteness. As such, Olivia actively chooses to participate in the exploitation of her daughter, even if she believes it is for the best. And this as a stepping-stone in the pursuit of her final goal.

But in Olivia’s mind, the main thing was, with Astride and Teresa in the background, maybe her husband could afford to let her have a little place of her own in one of these exquisite Riviera towns, Villefranche or Juan-les-Pins... She could invite Mrs. Sturtevant over to stay indefinitely at her “villa”. Mrs. Sturtevant, a woman of independent means, was acquainted with everybody, simply everybody... she had numerous friends who visited the Riviera every year...

Olivia saw herself a gracious hostess, her little house teeming with interesting people from America... “my son-in-law; he is a professor at the University of Toulouse”... all of those people would be white... she would be white.<sup>585</sup>

The prestige that Olivia perceives she will attain via the status of her French son-in-law and Mrs. Sturtevant, her white American friend, provides her with a cultural currency in France to be a “gracious hostess” of her own “villa” and most importantly white. The way that Olivia pursues that which is deemed culturally valuable, as Astride’s character does, regardless of what this means for Teresa, thus reaffirms Fauset’s exposition of how identity is enmeshed in the overall power structures that organise society and how one can reproduce it in one’s actions, pursuits, and desires. Astride and Olivia do not identify in the same way, they do not have the same cultural background, and their paths in life are not oriented to precisely the same objects of desire. And yet, what is shown to be a common aspect of these two characters is that for their whiteness to come into being – for them to have a sense of self and be validated in their differing white embodiments – the journey and exploitation required are culturally valued. This, Fauset appears to suggest, is one of the cruelties of such social contexts for it not only normalizes relating to others as a means to one’s own end, but this way of being in the world is promoted, praised and considered valuable within the community. Regardless of the ideological apparatus that can be deployed for the justification of one’s own actions – on the individual, collective, or national level – it seems, in the instances of Astride, Olivia and even Teresa earlier in the novel, that putting the attainment of one’s desires and goals ahead of others is championed over respecting another’s personal integrity. It suggests that if this living out of identity is to change, which is so intimately tied to the individual’s sense of self and understanding of the world, then a reformulation of cultural values needs to be undertaken. At the end of the novel, Fauset does not present to the readers what that possible revaluation would or could look like.

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<sup>585</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 176-177. Ellipses in the original.

Rather, Fauset demonstrates what it looks like at the end of the road of these paths of destruction. For Teresa the readers already know that this road has left her in a “colorless, bleak and futile” existence. For Olivia this takes place in the “Curtain” chapter and the final scene of Fauset’s *Comedy* set in Paris.

Suddenly realizing how rapidly her funds were oozing away, she moved to another hotel, far cheaper. But she did not like this life. It was no fun, there was no zest, in being poor in Paris. Reluctantly, down to her last eighty dollars, she moved to the pension in *La rue Romain*... the pension with its horrid meals... with its decayed and frigid gentlewomen. With the exception of the lady and her son to whom she cared to speak. Unfortunately, the lady in question did not seem to feel the same way about her.<sup>586</sup>

Olivia, isolated and without funds desperately writes to her husband for financial help which is denied: “*what you ask is not only out of reason. It is impossible.*”<sup>587</sup> Mr. Cary’s words are a *double-entendre* for her Franco-American dream. Her pursuit, as an African American woman for whiteness, prestige and power was not only unreasonable but impossible which is imaged by Fauset in these closing scenes. Astride, her daughter – for Astride does not allow her visits – and Mrs. Sturtevant are not in the picture, nor is Olivia in a little villa in the French Riviera as she had envisioned. Though her dreams are starkly demonstrated by the narrator to crumble around her, Olivia continues to present the same story and sing the same tune. In a chance meeting with a fellow white American, Olivia jumps at the occasion of avoiding another “long dull evening close in upon her” and invites Mrs. Reynolds to her room.<sup>588</sup> In conversation Olivia states,

“I have a daughter in Toulouse. She’s married to one of the professors at the university there, a brilliant fellow and so charming! My daughter is always writing me to come there and live with them. But I always say young folks should be by themselves [...] And when my daughter isn’t writing me from Toulouse, my husband is writing me to come home to Philadelphia... I’m like you Mrs Reynolds, I love the life and freedom of Paris. It is so broadening to live here. Think of all the people one meets,” said Olivia, oblivious to the fact that she met no one in Paris, not a soul, except this woman from Connecticut who had a part interest in the world’s smallest hairdressing establishment.<sup>589</sup>

What she says, then, is clearly different to the reality that she is living. Fauset constructs this contrast, not only to emphasize it for the readers, but also so that she may succeed where Olivia

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<sup>586</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 326.

<sup>587</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 326. Italics in the original.

<sup>588</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 321.

<sup>589</sup> Fauset, *Comedy*, 323-324.

does not. The latter fails to perceive the illusory, but more important the fictional aspects of her story, whilst Fauset clearly does. In Fauset's alternate space of literature, she achieves a way to change, or at the very least question reality, whilst Olivia has lost track of it. She is unable to disentangle herself either from her delusional pursuits or the story she tells herself and the world around her. Demonstrated as being premised on the destruction of others, her desires, hopes, and journeying, took on the forms that the French and American cultures deemed valuable. So, though Fauset underlines throughout the narrative the violent impact Olivia's way of being in the world has on those around her, in the end, what is most clearly shown is the impact that it has on herself. Moulded by systems of power, her desires and choices for obtaining the objects deemed valuable by society is an (impossible) obstacle in her path toward her own flourishing.<sup>590</sup> On the one hand then, there is a moral to Olivia's racial passing, tying into the irony of Fauset title *Comedy: American Style*, as her path leads her to poverty and isolation. An African American woman could never achieve and have for herself a white (masculine) way of life and live the white Franco-American dream. However, Fauset's ethical considerations and her investigations of identity formation paint a much more subtle picture. Given the fact that a subject cannot extract his or herself from being embedded in systems of domination, it seems to be an inevitability that at one stage or another a subject is likely to reproduce them. Fauset demonstrates, through her productive contrasting, that her characters are not entirely forced to live in such a way. For example, though unsuccessful, Teresa directed her being towards the search for a place where she could live out her subjectivity and identity. She too reproduced power and anti-blackness as in the example of her request that her and Henry racially pass. She also breaks her promise – because of her racist French husband – to her brother Oliver that she would take him away from the Cary household and bring him to live with her. This is a contributing factor to Oliver's disillusionment and eventual suicide. And yet, Teresa's search for alternate spaces and other ways of being in the world for her biracial identity does set her on a path different from the one Olivia and Astride take by seeking that which white patriarchal society, both American and French has predetermined as valuable – whiteness, status, masculinity, prestige, power – and conditions relationships of exploitation and oppression. In Fauset's alternate space of her imagined world that has been set on her white stage, the author

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<sup>590</sup> What Fauset demonstrates here in respect to her characters is equally illustrated Faulkner's short story written in the interwar period called "Dry September". In this piece Faulkner demonstrates how racism and heteropatriarchy crush men and women, both black and white, and thus making a reality in which one either submits or (psychically or physically) dies. See William Faulkner, "Dry September," in *Selected Short Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: The Modern Library, 2012), 60-75. A much later and theoretical analysis of what Fauset explores can be found in the literary critic and feminist philosopher Lauren Berlant's meditation on what she calls a "cruel optimism". See, Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

works to change the interpersonal relationships that these overarching systems of power create, by exposing their dramatic and tragic consequences for all her characters. Where her characters fail in their pursuits of desires to be otherwise and the alternate spaces that could make this possible, for the numerous reasons that the author exposes, Fauset succeeds in staging potentially where, as it were, things went wrong. As it was mentioned, she does not propose or imagine what type of world it would be if subjects treated people with respect for their personal integrity, or what the reformulation of cultural values would look like, for example, if inclusive forms of freedom were considered more valuable than individual prestige and status. Rather, and perhaps enacting a type of ethical relationship that she is evoking, Fauset leaves this up to her readers, addressing them as subjects that come to the text with their own perspectives and lived experiences, and perhaps most importantly their own imaginations.

# Chapter Four

## Reorientations: An Antillean Feminist Perspective

### 4.1 Some Differences Between Paulette Nardal and Jessie Fauset

What can be ascertained from Fauset's essays and fictional work discussed up until now is that within this transatlantic frame she speaks from a black international perspective. What is understood by this term is the intellectual, political, and cultural movement against global anti-black racism that emerges during the interwar period, called black internationalism. Fauset's landscaping strategies in *Comedy* fictively represent this perspective as she blurs the boundaries between Europe and America to show, amongst other things, the continuity of anti-blackness both in her fictive America and her fictive France. As discussed in chapter One, events such as the Pan-African congress, organised mostly by an African American contingency is one concrete example of the rise in black internationalism at the start of the twentieth century.<sup>591</sup> Contextually speaking then, these political movements come into being, in part, from the increased migration of people from the black diaspora within the transatlantic frame, which shapes the conditions of possibility for intercultural and transnational exchanges.<sup>592</sup> Paulette Nardal works also from a black international perspective as does her sister, Jane Nardal, demonstrated in her article "*Internationalisme noir*" published in *La Dépêche africaine* in February, 1928.<sup>593</sup> During the interwar period black print cultures<sup>594</sup> attest to this global strategy in their content as

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<sup>591</sup> Black internationalism comes on the scene at the same time as other international political movements. For example, there is an overlap between these movements and the anti-imperial politics of the communist international movement during the interwar period. This is evidenced in the lives and works of Aimé Césaire, Lamine Senghor, Claude McKay, Léopold Senghor, and Gilbert Gratiant, (to name just a few) and newspapers that emerge from their political organizations, for example *L'Étudiant noir* (Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor) or *La Voix des Nègres* (Lamine Senghor). In the end, most distanced themselves from the Comintern due to the disregard for anti-racist politics.

<sup>592</sup> As a consequence, black internationalist circles were, to an extent, elitist, for the majority of its participants had a certain means of mobility and access to higher levels of education in the French metropolis or elsewhere.

<sup>593</sup> Jane Nardal, "Internationalisme noir," *La Dépêche africaine* 1 (février 15, 1928): 5. This article will be addressed in Chapter Six.

<sup>594</sup> As a theoretical concept "print culture" was popularized by the works of prominent scholars such as Marshall McLuhan and later Elizabeth L. Eisenstein. These two scholars, working on different periods and in different cultural contexts, link the development of print culture to technical advancements such as the printing press. Therefore, the term "print culture" covers interrogations on the production, use, circulation of texts and distribution. In the transformation of printing technologies, the idea of print culture also studies the effects this has on societies, how this changes social relationships to printed texts and images as well as the dissemination of knowledge and culture in a

much as their desired readership both within and beyond metropolitan centres and national linguistic borders (such as New York and Paris, English and French).<sup>595</sup> Paulette Nardal's *La Revue du monde noir*, that she co-created and co-edited with Haitian Léo Sajous, is a prime example. The bilingualism (French-English) of the periodical underlines that it was thought from its inception as being directed towards non-francophone black communities. Presenting the objectives of *The Review of The Black World*, "the direction" writes:

Créer entre les Noirs du monde entier, sans distinction de nationalité un lien intellectuel et moral qui leur permette de se mieux connaître, de s'aimer fraternellement, de défendre plus efficacement leurs intérêts collectifs d'illustrer leur Race, tel est le triple but que poursuivra La Revue du monde noir.

.....

The triple aim which La Review du Monde Noir will pursue, will be: to create among Negroes of the entire world, regardless of nationality and intellectual, and moral tie which will permit them to better know each other to love one another, to defend more effectively their collective interests and to glorify their race.<sup>596</sup>

These objectives for their magazine evidence what they understood by black internationalism and what they believed it could accomplish. To a certain degree it is not dissimilar to the aims of *The Crisis* or even *The Brownies' Book* whose international perspectives were assured and promoted by Fauset.<sup>597</sup> Whilst the goals initially outlined by Du Bois at the inception of *The Crisis* pertain

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specific context. The term is being used here to refer to the materiality of the production and circulation, for instance, of newspapers and other forms of texts emerging within black internationalism. It is to underline that these milieus engaged critically with social, cultural, historical, and intellectual aspects of a given societies, and participated in the creation of international black cultures which sought alternative discursive spaces to the western European (white) perspective. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Topographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1980) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>595</sup> As Brent Hayes Edwards writes in his study *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*: "Taking up questions of the travels of discourse of black internationalism requires investigating in particular the multiplicity of translation practices – and transnational coverage more generally – that are so crucial to the fabric of this transatlantic print culture. A significant subset of these practices is the bilingualism espoused so frequently by black periodicals at this period. In Europe, the *Negro Worker* circulated a mimeographed French edition; in New York, the *Negro World*, published a French page edited by Theodore Stephens and a Spanish page edited by M. A. Figueroa; in Paris, a number of venues (*La Revue du monde noir*, *Les Continents*, *La Dépêche africaine*) tried to publish an English-language section." Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 9. Though *La Revue du monde noir* did more than "try", for the periodical is entirely published in both French and English with the translation from each language into the other being assured by Paulette Nardal or her sisters, Jane and Andrée and colleague Roberte Horth.

<sup>596</sup> La Direction, "Ce que nous voulons faire"/ "Our Aim," *La Revue du monde noir* 1 (1931): 1-2, found in Jean-Michel Place, ed. *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World, 1931-1932, collection complète no. 1-6, préfacé par Louis-Thomas Achille* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2012), 3-4. This is the translation provided in the periodical. Therefore, the quirks in the way the English language is translated, including the mix of both English and French in "La Review Du Monde Noir" are present in the original text.

<sup>597</sup> See Chapter Two.



less to a clearly defined black internationalist perspective,<sup>598</sup> this periodical was implicated in thinking anti-racism on a global scale and it did circulate to other milieus. For example, Paulette Nardal received *The Crisis* at her home in Clamart. What can be said is that within the ever-growing circulation of black international print culture, or the migration and mobility of black subjects themselves from various cultural backgrounds, the black internationalist perspectives that are put forward during the interwar period are as diverse as the people that wrote them. Because the global reach of relations of domination and subordination based on race, class, gender and sexuality, do not have the same effects and articulations in each and every nation state, lived experiences of such systems will differ as much as the responses to it.<sup>599</sup> As it was developed in Chapter One in the context of Paris, the way in which Nardal and Fauset position themselves and are positioned by their national and cultural specificities will have an effect on the ways they formulate their cultural politics within black internationalism and represent black feminine identities. What was demonstrated at this time, and in respect to Fauset's work in Chapter Two and Three, is that both mobilise distinctions of black female identities and experiences, whether in the French, American or Franco-American space, to counteract the sexism within the patriarchal society as well as the predominantly masculine black cultural politics. What this means is that working towards a black emancipatory aesthetics on an international scale by changing the way black feminine identities are represented requires, to a certain extent, that their fictional or intellectual works make space for and think through difference. As such, specificities of certain national and cultural spaces are not set aside in the work of these two authors in pursuit of an international black politics. In their visions of what such a politics and black cultural aesthetics would look like, it is made clear that thinking through specificities and differences is integral in their representations and understandings of blackness. This does not essentialize their perspective, as black women, or act as a hindrance to the common goal of black emancipation, which is an oft mobilized trope of (masculine) points of view within this international frame. Rather,

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<sup>598</sup> For example, Du Bois writes that one of the main objectives of *The Crisis* is "the great problem of inter-racial relations, and especially those which affect the Negro-American." W.E.B Du Bois, "Editorial," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 1, no.1 (November, 1910): 10.

<sup>599</sup> For example, Edwards states: "Attempt to articulate the 'race problem as a world problem,' in Locke's phrase – to foster links among populations of African descent in order to organize the "dark peoples of the world" across boundaries of nation-states and languages – are necessarily skewed by those same boundaries. That is, the level of the international is accessed unevenly by subjects with different historical relations to the nation (for instance, in collaboration with a U.S citizen marked by of violent racist exclusion, disenfranchisement, and segregation of a minority population, and a French West African citizen marked by a context of colonialism, invasive subjugation of majority population, and Eurocentric structures of privilege and mobility). Thus, if cultures of black internationalism are shaped by the imperative of what Edward Said called 'adversarial internationalizations' (attempts at organizing alliances to challenge the prevailing discourses of Western universalism), those cultures are equally "adversarial" to themselves, highlighting differences and disagreements among black populations on a number of registers." Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 6-7.

acknowledging differences and the way in which people are differentialized appears in Fauset's and Nardal's intellectual and aesthetic practices as an indispensable step to achieve the desired pursuits of black internationalism. This is not only evident in their representations of black femininities thus far discussed, but also how Fauset, for example, creatively explores white French masculinity in the character of Astride Pailleron and the French racism and sexism that informs his world view. Another example from Fauset's work is the way in which the author differentializes feminine black experiences on the ship which is normalised as a masculine space. As it was shown, this not only puts into questions tropes of (black) modernisms but also highlights uneven participations in international mobilities. Furthermore, her spatial aesthetics of mirroring, mapping and in particular her landscaping strategies in *Comedy*, put forward an understanding of the formation of identity that is at once shaped by and shapes environments that surround the subject. Focusing, then, on the specificities of identity formation understood as ongoing process, what she demonstrates is that this pursuit is as much undertaken within national and cultural boundaries as in the spaces that traverse them and the new or different environments that her characters encounter. Interestingly, the readers see a similar aesthetic tool in Paulette Nardal's short story "Acts of Grace" or "In Exile". In the first, she blurs Martinique and the Hexagon to portray a certain relationship between these two spaces as a motif that represents the particularity of the black Antillean feminine speaker's perception. Another instance of Nardal's vision of black international politics is her pursuit in the choir *La Joie de Chanter*. Her compositions combined the formal style of Martinican creole songs with that of African American Spirituals which, as a cultural practice, expresses her vision of black cultural identities that reaches beyond national borders and are underpinned by processes of creolisation within the diaspora (the latter two will be discussed at length below).<sup>600</sup> Though there are commonalities that resonate in the work of Fauset and Nardal, that attest to certain similarities of living in the world as black women, it does not eliminate the ways in which their black international perspectives diverge.

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<sup>600</sup> *La Joie de Chanter* was created by Nardal on her definitive return to Martinique during the Second World War. In Martinique just before the war broke out – having been solicited by Georges Mandel, then Minister of Colonies, to produce a screen play called "Young Craftsmen of Cinema" – she was heading back to Paris on the *SS Bretagne* in September of 1939 when German submarines torpedoed the ship and during the rescue mission she permanently injured her leg which greatly affected her mobility. After spending a year of recovery in a Plymouth hospital, she returned to this Vichy occupied Caribbean island where she lived for the remainder of her life.

To return to the concrete example of their time in Paris, the fact that Paulette Nardal lived in this metropolis meant that her professional, social, cultural, and political pursuits were grounded in this symbolic and material space of the metropole. At the same time as her home was outside of Paris in Clamart, her professional life was very much in the institutional and governmental centres of the French empire. During the interwar period her activity as a journalist was accompanied by her political work as parliamentary secretary to the deputy of Martinique, Josèphe Lagrosillière, and later to the Senegalese deputy of the National Assembly, Galandou Diouf.<sup>601</sup> Another pertinent biographical element is that her travel, motivated by professional and political goals, sees her moving within the three continents of what is known as the triangle. Very similar to the trajectories of her sister Jane Nardal who travelled within these transatlantic diasporic spaces – Paris, Martinique, and Chad where she taught for two years – Paulette Nardal spent time in Jamaica studying English (prior to her move to the French capital in 1920) and after her definitive return to Martinique in 1939, she was appointed to work for the United Nations in New York where she lived for a year and a half (1946-1947). Furthermore, in 1937-38, currently secretary to Galandou Diouf, she sailed to Senegal where she was introduced to the thinkers and practitioners of Négritude movement in Dakar from which flourished professional and personal relationships with other black women writers, activist and cultural practitioners, such as Annette Mbaye d’Erneville.<sup>602</sup> Whilst some of the events of Nardal’s mobilities within the spaces of the black diaspora come after the publications that will be addressed below, it nevertheless demonstrates the proximity with which Nardal lives her life with members of the diaspora from different identities and nationalities to her own. This specificity of her life’s trajectory rings through her non-fiction and fictional works as much as it informs her international perspective. As it has been shown this is quite different to Fauset’s experience in Paris, the fictional worlds she creates and the articles she writes.<sup>603</sup> For instance, Nardal’s “*Guignol Ouolof*” explores the complexities of the practice of transnational racial solidarity within black diasporic communities in Paris.<sup>604</sup> In this short story the author stages interactions between two Martinican women and one Senegalese waiter, highlighting how, within the hierarchies of French colonial society the possible solidarity between these

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<sup>601</sup> Emily Musil Church, “In Search of the Seven Sisters: A Biography of the Nardal Sisters of Martinique,” *Callaloo* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 379-380.

<sup>602</sup> For a comparative study of “black women in the Négritude movement” that focuses on Senegalese writers, notably Annette Mbaye d’Erneville and Aminata Sow Fall, and Martinican authors Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire, see Korka Sall, “Négritude Feminisms: Francophone Black Women Writers and Activists in France, Martinique, and Senegal from the 1920s to the 1980s,” (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, 2021).

<sup>603</sup> Fauset, though she aspired to go to Senegal never got the opportunity to do so. She did however travel to Algiers and wrote two articles on her experience there. As mentioned previously they were “Dark Algiers in White: Part 1,” and “Dark Algiers in White: Part 2,” published in *The Crisis*.

<sup>604</sup> Paulette Nardal, “Guignol Ouolof,” *L’Étudiant noir* 1 (mars 1935): 4-5.

characters is thwarted because of the relationships of power that separate them. As such, she underlines difficulties of the implementation of black international politics in everyday life. In Fauset's fiction, whilst she touches on interactions between different communities within the black diaspora, they are limited, or as in *There is Confusion*, are overridden by the effects of her mapping strategy deployed. The distinct scope of Nardal's life and work is perhaps closer to other writers such as Claude McKay. His life trajectory took him to Marseille, where he met and socialised with black people from many different countries. This arguably affected his literary choices and subject matter. The stories he told in *Banjo* (1929), or the posthumously published, *Romance in Marseille* (1933, 2020), for example, testify to such overlapping of life experience and creation of imagined worlds reflecting how he represented or thought through black cultural identities from an international perspective.<sup>605</sup> Interestingly Nardal knew McKay and his work. He often frequented her gatherings in Clamart and Nardal published poems of his in *La Revue du monde noir*. Another biographical commonality between them is that they grew up in the Caribbean. Though this space is much more culturally diverse than this geographical appellation suggests, it is arguable that both McKay and Nardal experienced much of their life in socio-cultural spaces that are peripheral to the geopolitical transatlantic space that (historically) ties the continents of Europe, Africa and "the Americas" but arguably more specifically, the United States, when one is talking about international black cultural politics in the first part of the twentieth century. Whilst in the United States Afro-Caribbean perspectives were marginalised during this time within black cultural milieus, in the French context they were less so. For some, black Antillean perspectives were the dominant if not dominating points of view within black diasporic communities of Paris.<sup>606</sup> This said, the peripheral location of the Caribbean islands to the gravitational pulls of centres affected the circulation of black cultural productions specific to these Antillean spaces and characterises, to a certain degree, the particularities of Afro-Caribbean perspectives. What will become apparent in this chapter is that Nardal's political aesthetics and representation of black cultural identities are as much informed by the different communities she works with and frequents within the black diaspora as by the specificities of Martinican culture. For example, due to its socio-historical particularities Martinique, as Nardal and her colleagues such as Gilbert Gratiant argue, creole culture and identities emerge from various different racial and cultural backgrounds of its

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<sup>605</sup> Claude McKay, *Banjo*, 1929 (London: Harcourt Brace, 1957); Claude McKay, *Romance in Marseille*, 1933, edited and introduction by Gary Edward Holcomb and William J. Maxwell (New York: Penguin Books, 2020).

<sup>606</sup> See Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 37-111.

inhabitants.<sup>607</sup> In Nardal's aesthetics, multiculturalism and multiethnicity are structuring elements of her black cultural politics. This is to say that she mobilizes notions of plurality of black cultural identities to override anti-black racism and exoticisms of the French colonial imaginary. This technique was employed in her article "*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*", as discussed in Chapter One. For Paulette Nardal, blackness is understood as signifying an identity, a culture and a way of life that is always already plural, mixed, or creolized. In order to demonstrate how Nardal articulates this in her work, and the consequences of such a cultural politics, what will first be addressed is how she re-presents the Martinican space and black cultural identities in her non-fictional writings. The point of departure for this discussion is her contribution to the travel guide, *Guide des Colonies*, published in 1931. This will be followed by an analysis of her series printed in *Le Soir* on Antillean femininity. What becomes apparent in both discursive contexts are Nardal's efforts to displace metropolitan perspectives to transform the images created, to challenge the ideological assumptions that one may hold and thus redefine the relationships that one may have to this colonial space and the people that populate it.

#### 4.2 Metropolitan Travel and "*La Plus Grande France*"

At the request of French administration, new travel guides to France's colonies were printed for the occasion of *L'Exposition coloniale* held in the *Bois de Vincennes* in 1931. Numerous people were asked to contribute and Paulette Nardal signed and submitted her section on Martinique in the volume *Guide des Colonies Françaises: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, St Pierre-Miquelon*.<sup>608</sup> Published in January of that year, these were not the first French colonial travel guides. For instance, a *Guide des Colonies* was printed for *L'Exposition universelle* of 1889 in Paris. Continuing this editorial practice, what distinguishes this specific updated version is that it was used as a promotion tool for the Third Republic's colonial propaganda of "*la plus grande France*". Such political utilisation of this genre echoes the broader cultural context of the time whereby travel practices and attitudes towards holidaying were being transformed. Therefore, when approaching Nardal's contribution and the techniques that she uses to put into

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<sup>607</sup> Gilbert Gratiant, "Mulâtres... pour le bien et le mal," *L'Étudiant noir* 1 (mars 1935): 5-7. The evident sexism of this article will be addressed at the end of the chapter.

<sup>608</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Martinique" in *Guide des Colonies Françaises: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, St Pierre-Miquelon* (Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1931), 1-72.

question how metropolitan France perceives Martinique it would be beneficial to comprehend this cultural shift in respect to travel and how that effected the generic conventions of the travel guide.

Historical traces of travel and travel guides have a long history going back to the middle-ages with literature being produced for the purpose of religious pilgrimage, for example. However, the contemporary understanding of travel finds its origins in Western European social and cultural practices within the modern period. For Sylvain Venayre, the eighteenth century aristocratic practice of the *grand tour* was the debut of tourism in the West.<sup>609</sup> These ventures that could take place for years at a time, were perceived as a way for aristocratic men to make social and business connections but also as the completion of their studies through what was referred to as “*culture d’expérience*” ou “*école de la vie*”. Therefore, it was not just the invention of an international elite in terms of class but as one Renaissance philosopher Montaigne would argue well before the eighteenth century, “*la grande elite éclairée*”. This school of life, in practice, had other aspects that reached beyond the intellectual, such as the world of pleasure, which Montaigne also warned against in his reference to “*école du vice*”. With the development of the tourism industry during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries emphasis is placed on the *jouissance* of the traveller. Whilst the idea of travel was still partially underpinned by the pedagogical elements of the *grand tour*, this change in purpose of travel and therefore how it was practiced is informed by two major factors. The first is the evolution in locomotion such as the steam train – with new rail lines laid and paid for by private enterprises – which rendered travel more accessible to the French public. The second, is that socially and culturally, the “*droit au temps libre*” was becoming a widely valued cultural phenomenon which brought about institutional changes in workers’ rights. The fight for the “*droit au temps libre*” was premised by a cultural shift in people’s perception and relationship to ideas of free time, leisure, and holidays.<sup>610</sup> Travel as a practice was no longer perceived or imagined as merely pertaining to

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<sup>609</sup> Sylvain Venayre, *Panorama du voyage (1780-1920). Mots, figures, pratiques* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012).

<sup>610</sup> This is to argue that desire for free time, which is one expression of the fight for improvement in working conditions, precedes institutional changes in labour laws such as the limitation of working hours in the week (1848,1919). From the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century “free time” (*temps libre*) transforms (slowly) into a “worker’s right” (*droit social*). In terms of vacationing, this will come into effect institutionally in 1936 when paid holidays were written into law. Therefore, whilst this date is after the period discussed above and the publication of the *Guide des Colonies*, the political, social, and cultural climate nevertheless attest to this new relationship to the desire for free time, leisure activities and travel. The historian and sociologist, Nicole Samuel outlines this social and cultural evolution as follows: “La valorisation croissante du temps libre et en particulier du temps de loisir : un ensemble d’attitudes, d’opinions, de préférences, inspiré par des valeurs, accompagne tout phénomène social important et il en est ainsi aujourd’hui à propos de la montée du temps libre. Favorisée par l’augmentation de ce dernier, par l’expérience vécue du loisir, l’émergence de ces valeurs (qui traduisent de nouvelles attitudes, de nouvelles

the aristocratic elite but became a culturally and socially desirable activity and in turn intertwined with French cultural identity. In this first step towards the democratisation of travel – that will come into fruition in the 1960-1970's – meant that the time which one spent travelling became shorter for not all had years of free time nor the finances to support it like the aristocratic practice of *le grand tour*. As an effect, the tourist industry began to work within a logic of travel that promised the maximum amount of *jouissance* for the traveller in the minimum amount of time. A clear example of this new travel practice is the invention of *les trains de plaisirs* in the mid nineteenth century where one could go from Paris to La Havre and back again, enjoying the sights from the train window whilst participating in a day and a half of sensorial and perhaps sensual pleasures.<sup>611</sup> During the interwar period the Third Republic capitalizes on this shift in travel practices and brings it into the fold of its propaganda for “*la plus grande France*”. As an effect, the guarantee of the traveller's pleasure is layered and becomes enmeshed with colonial relationships to Martinique and the exoticism that colors it in the French metropolitan cultural imaginary. Nardal critically highlights this in the “*Avant-Propos*” of her *Guide* when she refers to adventure novels, such as Robinson's *Treasure Island*, that are fictively productive of exotic images of the Caribbean space. Because the French Government uses the form of travel guide as an aid for constructing national cultural identity as a colonial one, before arriving at the analysis of Nardal's intervention within its pages, it is important to understand the aesthetic components of this travel genre. In the broader context, as the desire for and the practice of travel changed and transformed so too did the style, aesthetics, and modes of production of the travel guide genre.

Before the mid nineteenth century there was a clear separation between two forms of travel literature: the travel guide that had as one principal objective to provide necessary practical information to the traveller and the travel and adventure novels that are invented worlds built with all the aesthetics and conventions involved in fictional writing practices. The fact that Nardal cites the latter in her introduction attest to her understanding of this shared genealogy and the commonality of aesthetic tools employed to entice the traveller. Though the guide and adventure novels are distinct, the editors of travel guides began to employ some of

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opinions, de nouvelles préférences dans l'aménagement du temps) accentue le désir et la revendication du temps libre.” Nicole Samuel, *Le temps libre: un temps social*, en collaboration avec Madeleine Romer (Paris: Librairie des Méridiens, 1984) 10.

<sup>611</sup> See Kristel Le Pollotec and Anne Fleury, “Épisode 2/4. L'invention des guides de voyage, un itinéraire de Paris au Havre,” *La Fabrique de l'Histoire*, série “Une histoire des routes et des chemins,” France Culture, Paris, 20 juin 2017.

the literary conventions, such as the picturesque, to conjure reveries, incite curiosities, provoke and even create desires that were previously not there within their readership. Formally speaking this is undertaken by multiple kinds of figuration, be it literary, telling stories that spark the imagination, or pictorially, with drawings, paintings, and photography. At the same time as these discursive spaces became more aesthetic, the publication of this genre became standardized. For example, Hachette published the *Guide Joanne* which later became the *Guide bleu* in 1919. In France it was one of the first editors to publish collections of travel guides, akin to the *Baedeker* in Germany.<sup>612</sup> As a result every guide worked with the same organizational structure which facilitated its use and guaranteed the satisfaction of the readers' expectations. Its goal was (and still is) to orient the reader, tracing out itineraries before the voyage and inscribe the traveller's path into a particular style or way of life that it promoted.<sup>613</sup> Culturally speaking this is connected to the promotion of belonging to or living out a particular cultural identity acquired in the practice itself. Inventions such as the star rating system worked along with the standardisation of form. This translates into a normalisation of how to travel by rating places to stay and things to see over others that intertwines with the construction of desire mobilized in the genre's aesthetics. The guide not only aids the traveller to experience the maximum amount of pleasure in a minimal amount of time, but it also works in shaping that which is culturally and sociably perceived as valuable and desirable. In this way this genre is not foreign to processes of normalisation at work in society at large and as such are political, in so far as they encourage a particular way of being over others. Travel became not only a better way to love France but one articulation of Frenchness.<sup>614</sup> It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the Third Republic profited on the atmosphere of the time and used the tools of the private travel industry, such as travel guides, to promote colonialism and help foster an understanding of

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<sup>612</sup> See Elisabeth Parinet, *Une histoire de l'édition à l'époque contemporaine. XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004).

<sup>613</sup> Referring to the common objectives between the *Guide Joanne*, *Baedeker* and the *Guide bleu*, the historian André Rauch describes the intended uses of the travel guides: "Il s'agit d'inscrire le loisir touristique dans un mode de vie (Renseignements généraux)...Le touriste qui quitte son domicile avec son guide acquiert les valeurs de la prévoyance : prévoir le budget de voyage, préparer son itinéraire, connaître à l'avance les curiosités sélectionnées, etc., canalise l'attention et rend la visite moins improvisée ou moins brouillonne... Aux émotions aléatoire, le guide substitue des dispositions qui lui ont été annoncés et qu'on lui garantit... [les guides] servent de référence et impriment leur style aux visites." André Rauch, "Le voyageur et le touriste," *In Situ. Revue des patrimoines* 15 (June 2011): <http://journals.openedition.org/insitu/533>.

<sup>614</sup> Take for example one of the first travel associations in France, the *Touring club de France*, established at the end of the nineteenth century, which was a bourgeois enterprise and promoted nationalism through holidaying. This is equally demonstrated in the promotion of alpinism at the beginning of the twentieth century. The alpine clubs that emerged to offer and organise mountain activities, in summer or winter, breathed into these outdoor leisure activities patriotic sentiment. In both examples, the way to better love France is to travel to all its differing regions, and in undertaking such ventures and leisure activities the subject reinforces or lives out his or her Frenchness.



Frenchness as a colonial identity. Just as the Colonial Exhibition was in part to bring the colonies into proximity with the metropolitan public – “*la plus grande France*” – and spoke to the effort of the government to intertwine France’s colonial pursuits in understandings of French cultural identity,<sup>615</sup> then the publishing of *Guide des Colonies* is one expression of this colonial ideology and national project. This is evidenced by the fact that the publishers of these specific travel guides, *La Société d’éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales*, which was founded in 1921, was a leading intellectual body responsible for producing knowledge on the colonies that echoed the national ideologies of the “*bienfaits*” of colonisation.<sup>616</sup> As the other kinds of travel guides, these colonial guides were conceived to construct the colonies as spaces of desire, *jouissance* and leisure for white metropolitan French public whom become better patriots by undertaking these travels. As Nardal critically examines in her *Guide*, one effect of such metropolitan travel is the way in which it impacts landscapes of the colonies and people who inhabit them.<sup>617</sup> Akin to the sugar plantations which occupy the Martinican countryside for the prosperity of the metropolis, this leisure practice participates in the dynamics of colonisation. For it too can participate in the transformation of the material and symbolic realities of the colony and re-installs relationships of power between the Hexagon and its overseas territory in its catering for the pleasures and experiences of metropolitan travellers.<sup>618</sup> In respect to visual

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<sup>615</sup> For an in-depth analysis on the ideological, cultural, and political goals of the French government in organising the Colonial Exhibition and the ways in which they esteemed to achieve this see, Patricia A. Morten, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

<sup>616</sup> For how the Third Republic disseminated its colonial ideologies through knowledge production, founding scientific bodies such as the one above and creating schools to form colonial patriots see Chapter One and Grandmaison, *La République impériale*. See also Françoise Vergès, *La République coloniale. Essai sur une utopie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2014). For a more targeted discussion on how colonial perspectives and ideologies coincide with the development of higher education in the hexagon during the Third Republic see Pierre Singaravélou, “L’enseignement supérieur colonial’. Un état des lieux,” *Histoire de l’éducation* 122 (2009): 71-92. And more specifically how this continues to mark social sciences and the practice of geographical studies see, for example, the issue of *Annales de Géographie*, entitled “Où en est la géographie culturelle ?” particularly Claire Hancock’s article: Claire Hancock, “Décoloniser les représentations : esquisse d’une géographie culturelle de nos ‘Autres,’” *Annales de géographie* 660-661, no. 2-3 (2008): 116-128.

<sup>617</sup> As the sociologist Denis Jallat argues, the construction of leisure activities for French metropolitans in the colonies does not escape the processes of domination and exploitative relationships of French colonisation. He asserts that not only does this frame the colonies – encouraged by both past and contemporary exotic representations in literature, for instance - as a space of pleasure for westerners but it also familiarises these geographical locations by organising recreational activities already valued, practiced, and known to the Hexagon. Denis Jallat, “Les représentations du loisir colonial dans la littérature des années 1930. Construire la différence, justifier la domination,” *Loisir et Société / Society and Leisure* 33, no. 1 (2010): 23-46.

<sup>618</sup> From the very beginning of modern practices of travel, it has an effect of transforming landscapes of desired destinations. In the eighteenth century, for example, the Côte d’Azur, was a highly fashionable travel spot that constructed and changed the real and imagined landscape of this region. This is evidenced later in other forms of travel in the nineteenth century, for instance, when it became fashionable for the mostly bourgeois class to travel to thermal stations in the mountains for health reasons. Thus, whilst the voyage undertaken was for the health benefits of ‘cures’, it was also promoted as the place for social and cultural interactions within upper-class milieus. What Sylvain Venayre highlights is that to attract tourists, activities that were desirable and a part of everyday life in the city, such as casinos, were constructed in these thermal stations, changing the landscape of the destinations to accommodate the desires and pleasures of its users. Tiphaine de Rocuigny with Sylvain Pattieu and Sylvain

colonial culture and travel, Mimi Sheller underlines that despite the fact that peoples and images travel to and from “the Caribbean”, the representations and perceptions of this space nevertheless stay within the confines of the white colonial imaginary: “The Caribbean is consumed both in travelling representations (texts, images, signs) that bring the Caribbean to the consumer, and by travelling consumers who organise their experience and perception of the Caribbean through existing visual regimes.”<sup>619</sup> The travel guide is one discursive vehicle for these images as much as it is a guide to ways of being and travelling. Formally speaking this is translated in the need to both entice the readership to visit places that they don’t know but also assure pleasures and speak to desires that are shaped by already accepted cultural truths, values and perceptions of the given destination and its inhabitants. Arguably, there is a fine balance that the guide treads between contrasting affective registers. On the one hand, it promotes a sense of adventure whilst on the other it reassures that with the guide in hand, the traveller’s desires or understandings of a given place will be satisfied. As it will be developed below, it is in the space of formal doubleness of travel guides and the ways of travel practices they promote or adhere to that Paulette Nardal establishes her own narrative. It is in this space that she mobilises her aesthetic tools to depict a Martinique that challenges the exotic fantasies and expectations of white metropolitan readers. This genre is limited in terms of what Nardal can achieve in un-doing such preconceived perceptions of colonial imaginaries and given its institutional nature (published at the request of the French government) even more so. Regardless of this restriction, the author puts into question exotic narratives and refigures Martinique not as the touristic site for the fulfilment of white (masculine) pleasures but a space of its own history and culture. As travel and travel guides are wrapped up in the construction of white colonial identity, what will also be traced is how Nardal’s *Guide* puts into question understandings of Frenchness that are being promoted within the circulations of “*la plus grande France*”.

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Venayre, “Épisode 1/4. Aux origines du tourisme,” *Entendez-vous l’éco?* Série “Les Vacances de Monsieur Éco,” France Culture, Paris, 2 avril 2018. Furthermore, for a sociological study that treats the inequalities and the relationships of power at work in tourism and the practices of travel see, Saskia Cousin, Bertrand Réau, *Sociologie du tourisme* (Paris: La Découverte, 2016).

<sup>619</sup> Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 63.

### 4.3 Paulette Nardal's Guide to Martinique

In *Guide des Colonies Françaises: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, St Pierre-Miquelon* the Martinican section is arranged in nine parts; “*Avant-Propos*”, “*Le Voyage*”, “*L'Étude géographique*”, “*L'Étude ethnographique*”, “*Notice historique*”, “*Fort-de-France*”, “*Excursions*”, “*Renseignements généraux sur la colonie*” and “*Bibliographie*”.<sup>620</sup> In Nardal's organization she remains relatively close to that of *Guide bleu*, and as such renders her contribution familiar to her readers. As is the case for the other travel guides published during this period, Nardal begins with a chapter introducing the traveler to the destination before the voyage.<sup>621</sup> It is precisely in the “*Avant-Propos*”, before the journey begins, that Nardal starts her critical engagement in the historicity of the island as well as metropolitan perceptions of it. As it will be demonstrated by the end of the *Guide*, the author works on the symbolic level of representations and imaginations as well as the material level, for in her role as writer of the guide destined for the white public, she uses her orientating tools to transform the cultural and social practice of travel itself. What this means is that by transforming the way one perceives or imagines a certain destination or place, it could change one's way of being in the world which has as one expression the way in which the subject travels. Nardal presents her readership with an alternative way of looking, experiencing, and travelling to and within Martinique which has as a political impetus to transform the relationships between self and other, between Martinique and the Hexagon, and between colonial domination and colony.

In the opening pages of the *Guide des Colonies*, Nardal brings together the two forms of travel genres – the guides and adventure novels – not only to infer that both share a genealogy, as discussed above, but also to demonstrate how both participate in cultivating exotic perspectives. Nardal highlights how aesthetics and fiction are mobilized in this apparent non-fictional genre of the travel guide for certain cultural, social, and political ends and as such exposes its conventions in order to shift the perceptions of her readers. By signaling to her readership this cross-over of fantasy and reality in the processes of mythification, Nardal's first

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<sup>620</sup> The following section dedicated to Guadeloupe is organized in the same fashion and unsigned, whilst the other contributions by G. Devez and P. Roussier are laid out differently. This perhaps suggests that Nardal also wrote the guide to Guadeloupe. Whilst no proof could be found except commonality in form and writing, the discussion will remain strictly on the Martinican section.

<sup>621</sup> For instance, in *Guide bleu: Paris et ses environs*, published in 1924, begins with the section, “*Avant de visiter Paris*”, written by G. Lénôtre, pen name for the French historian and playwright Théodore Gosselin. G. Lénôtre, “*Introduction*,” in *Guide bleu: Paris et ses environs*, ed. Marcel Monarché (Paris: Hachette, 1924).

tactic is to displace the white masculine perspective, be it the white masculine hero of the adventure novel or in colonial French patriarchy, by centering women in her introduction to Martinique.

Que Françoise d'Aubigné, devenue plus tard Mme de Maintenon, la Presque reine, passa à la Martinique une grande partie de sa jeunesse.

Moins connue que l'histoire merveilleuse et navrante de Joséphine, est l'odyssée d' Aimée du Buc de Rivery. Après une série de hasards heureux ou malheureux, où l'on compte un voyage, une tempête, des corsaires, l'arrivée à Alger, la faveur d'un souverain turc, Mlle de Rivery devait devenir la Sultane Validée, mère de Mahmoud II.

A la vie Romanesque de cette souveraine créole, on ne peut s'empêcher de trouver une certaine allure d'opéra-comique, ou de roman du XVIIIe siècle, au temps des pirates barbaresques.

C'est par toute cette grâce nonchalante qu'au siècle suivant, l'impératrice Joséphine, oiseau des Iles, conquiert après Napoléon, la cour française.<sup>622</sup>

The language that Nardal uses highlights the courage, strength, and adventurousness of these women, their “odysseys” of “conquering” lands and hearts around the world. Her descriptions are evocative of the tropes of the masculine heroes of adventure novels and as such she overlaps fictional and non-fictional worlds. Centering their travels and lives, Nardal makes them *les faiseuses d'histoires* of France (and pre-colonial Algeria) as she inscribes them into this larger narrative.<sup>623</sup> Implicit in her centralization of these active women is to redirect the expectations that this island is populated by “*les doudous*”. As it will be taken up at length later in the discussion, *la doudou* is the figure of black Antillean femininity who embodied the exotic and sexual fantasies of white metropolitan colonial imaginations. Because this reorientation is an ongoing project for Nardal throughout the *Guide*, it will take time to unpack. What can be said at this time, is that Nardal's displacement of masculine perspectives – in history, fiction, or travel practices – has a disruptive aspect that challenges the direction of power within the colonial circulations that intertwine hexagonal France and Martinique. These women go out from the island and not to it. In terms of geopolitical landscaping, the author presents individual trajectories whereby Europe is not the center from which characters of adventure novels depart, or colonial powers go forth and “conquer” the world. Rather, by rendering these historical

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<sup>622</sup> Nardal, “Martinique,” 1.

<sup>623</sup> I use the term “*les faiseuses d'histoires*” to refer to the study of Vinciane Despret and Isabelle Stengers that reinscribes feminine intellectual epistemologies and artistic practices into wider genealogies of knowledge and artistic production demonstrating how this changes what one knows and how one thinks. Vinciane Despret and Isabelle Stengers, *Les faiseuses d'histoires : que font les femmes à la pensée ?* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011).

figures primary to her description, Martinique becomes the local point of the making of French history, and as Nardal alludes, the creation of fictional narratives. Nardal adds,

Ces trois histoires tiennent presque du conte de fées et semblent avoir été inventées pour charmer l'imagination des enfants, comme ces romans d'aventures si captivants dont Daniel de Foë et son émule Stevenson ont situé l'action dans la mer Caraïbe : Robinson, l'Île au Trésor, etc.<sup>624</sup>

These real stories, with the inference that they are so unbelievable that they have fallen from the pages of a fairy tale tends to emphasize the fictionalization of the images of Caribbean and the characters/people that populate it. At the same time, the aristocratic feminine genealogy that Nardal has created and the way in which she symbolically intertwines it with fairy tales coincides with the history of this genre in France.<sup>625</sup> Before the transformation of the “*conte de fées*” by the Brothers Grimm, for instance, they were used as subversive spaces for the (cryptic) critique of patriarchal power of the regimes in place during this period. Arguably it is not by accident that Nardal likens the adventures of these women to the fairy tale genre. Through her simile she recalls examples of other women in charge of their own stories. Thus, she builds layers of feminine travelers, tellers, creators, and makers of history, whether in the fairy tale genre, the women that she centers in these opening pages or in the very practice that Nardal herself is undertaking as author and guide of her narrative of Martinique. On the whole, her strategies work together to write this space into the story of France, but the narrative is localized in Martinique and told from a black Martinican woman’s point of view. This is one of her political pursuits in the discursive space of the travel guide evident in such statements as:

L’histoire de la Martinique, reflet lointain de celle de la France, lui montrera, au contraire, chez ces descendants de blancs français et de noirs africains un loyalisme définitif dont ils ont donné maintes preuves éclatantes.<sup>626</sup>

The stated “loyalism” that descendants of slavery have towards French civilization appears politically problematic from a black perspective in the sense where it frames the former as passive in respect to the latter.<sup>627</sup> This said, in a publication that is destined for a white

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<sup>624</sup> Nardal, “Martinique,” 1.

<sup>625</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>626</sup> Nardal, “Martinique,” 2.

<sup>627</sup> Other instances of ambiguous descriptions of the relationship between Martinique and hexagonal France are throughout the guide. Some examples include: “C’est à la France que revient l’honneur d’avoir fait de la Martinique la colonie prospère qu’elle est maintenant. Mais ce ne fut pas sans peine et sans sacrifice de la part des premiers colons normands, bretons et gascons.” Nardal, “Martinique,” 24. “Il pourra constater que la Martinique est une petite France, une France lointaine. Les usages ne diffèrent pas essentiellement des usages français. La vie, là-bas, n’est qu’une adaptation de la vie européenne aux nécessités du climat tropical.” Nardal, “Martinique,” 5.

metropolitan readership and the expectations that travel guides are to cater for their pleasures and desires, it is arguable that she mobilizes certain familiar concepts and images before unworking them. As such, Nardal employs the conventions of the travel guide in speaking to certain assumptions of the traveler prior to shifting or introducing that which is foreign to him or her. It can be interpreted as a rhetorical strategy, employed throughout the guide, to create the space to work into her narrative another side of the story, another side of history and reconstruct representations of Martinique and Martinicans. For now, as Nardal centers Martinique in the global landscape, she dismantles the trope of white colonial perspective that the colonies, and more precisely blackness are in the backwaters of European modernity.

La Martinique! Ce nom aux claires syllabes, évoque tout un passé brillant : suprématie de la petite île qui, au XVIIIe s., devint le ch.-l. des Antilles. On disait alors : les seigneurs d'Haïti, les messieurs de la Martinique et les bonnes gens de la Guadeloupe. A cette époque fleurirent dans l'île toutes les grâces d'un siècle brillant et policé dont on peut retrouver un écho affaibli chez les actuels habitants de l'Ile aux Fleurs. Manières un peu désuètes. Vielle politesse française. Légère préciosité de la musique et de la danse. Recherche de costume. Expressions vieillies. Souvenirs galants ou aimables. Lent et doux parler.

Cette atmosphère d'ancien régime est propice aux évocations historiques et pour n'en citer que trois des plus prestigieux...<sup>628</sup>

The three examples to which Nardal refers are Françoise d'Aubigné, Aimée du Buc de Rivery and Joséphine de la Pagérie, cited above. Therefore, as Nardal centers these aristocratic women to displace European masculine perspectives, she suggests that it is partially this atmosphere of the “ancient regime” that continues to cloud Martinique and people’s perception of it. Historically, it is during the “ancient regime” that this French colony was socially, culturally, and legally organized by plantation economies and slavery. As such Nardal takes position by differentiating her narrative from these *faiseuses d’histoires* as she moves from the old to the new, from the past to the present. The temporal leap coincides with Nardal bringing black cultural identities explicitly into the Martinican space as actors and makers of culture and (French) history. As a consequence, it frames this socio-cultural space as modern, underwriting the preconceptions of what hexagonal “authors”, “tourist” or “reporters” think of Martinique and relay back to the metropole.

Mais en plein réalité, voici, avec le rhum et les épices, les souvenir parfumés et ensoleillés qui s’associent au nom de la Martinique. Pays du pétun ou tabac, que les belles dames du temps passé ne dédaignaient point de priser, pays du café odorant et des fruits délicieux, à la saveur étrange.

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<sup>628</sup> Nardal, “Martinique,” 1.

En plein réalisme, voici, sous la plume de romanciers trop pressés, de reporters qui ont voyagé trop vite pour voir juste, une population frondeuse, aux atavismes aussi complexes que ses origines, excessive et violente, à peine évoluée. Il est à souhaiter que le touriste puisse consacrer à la vérification de certains jugements trop partiels tout le temps nécessaire. Il devra, pour cela, se mêler à toutes les classes de la société martiniquaise.<sup>629</sup>

As Nardal brings her narrative into the present and into “plain reality” as opposed to fiction, she asks her readership to shift their perspectives. She places the onus on the tourist to “verify” what he or she has learnt in his or her formal education or literary explorations. As she calls upon the readers and emphasizes the subject’s personal responsibility in his or her travel practices, the presentation of travel as a learning experience takes on a self-reflexive quality. Effectively, in this introduction, she is shaping her readers to come into her story with new eyes and travel to Martinique in the same manner. Thus, she is not only presenting the possibility of travel as a way to change what one knows but rather how one relates to the world and how one understands the self in that relation. For example, Nardal writes,

Trois générations de Martiniquais de couleur qui ont donné des hommes éminents dans la plupart des branches de l’activité humaine, prouvent qu’en moins d’un siècle, les descendants de ces noirs attachés à la glèbe ont pu, après un rapide apprentissage de la liberté, assimiler l’essentiel de la civilisation française. Les spectacles de la vie indigène qui ne manquent point de pittoresque ne seront pas un de moindres attraits du voyage. Le touriste ne manquera pas de dégager sous la variété des types et des coutumes, l’universalité de la nature humaine.<sup>630</sup>

Once again, her argument is evocative of the Third Republic’s rhetoric of the “*bienfaits*” of colonization as she addresses the white hexagonal public. As argued above, Nardal mobilizes the conventions of the guide to draw in her public. In this instance, she presents that which is culturally familiar – ideas of assimilation – as well as working within the expected aesthetic form that uses such tools as the “picturesque” that she cites specifically above. In this way Nardal speaks in part to the desires of the tourist, implying a pleasure that will be experienced in witnessing the “spectacle of indigenous life”. Simultaneously, she is working to sublimate (expected) carnal pleasures to that of a pleasure garnered from the appreciation of black cultural expression. This movement is undertaken by her presentation of the “picturesque” and the “spectacles” as scenes representing “the universality of human nature”. Given the colonial exoticism that informs Nardal’s readership and at a time when travel came to be culturally perceived as a venture to provide the maximum amount of *jouissance* to the traveler – in which

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<sup>629</sup> Nardal, “Martinique,” 2.

<sup>630</sup> Nardal, “Martinique,” 2.

the travel guide was the means to guarantee this – Nardal resignifies the *jouissance* on offer. This is made clear when Nardal describes Carnival in Martinique that is specific to this space but also a part of Afro-Caribbean cultural practices in other socio-geographical spaces.

A l'époque du Carnaval, les rues des villes offrent, le dimanche, le spectacle le plus animé et le plus burlesque qui soit. D'abord le Carnaval dure plusieurs semaines et tous les dimanches, les masques emplissent les rues de leur irrésistible gaieté et de leurs drôleries. De janvier au mardi-gras, ce sont les facéties dominicales d'une foule qui s'est travestie à peu de frais, à l'aide des plus invraisemblables "rossignols", et qui, parfois, entraînée par les cadences endiablées d'un orchestre de musiciens locaux aux déguisements désopilants, parcourt les rues en dansant. Les masques vont même jusqu'à reconstituer, toujours dans la note comique, certaines scènes de l'esclavage (un intermezzo de danses et de chants entre deux reprises du travail dans les champs, sous l'œil féroce du "commandeur" armé d'une cravache).<sup>631</sup>

Nardal depicts Carnival as a multi-medium performance by highlighting theatrical aesthetics, like burlesque, masquerade, travesty, parody and comedy and different artistic forms such as sculpture (the masks), music, song, and dance. Far from representing it as a scene to entice potential sensual or sexual fantasies of her readership, Nardal focuses on the technicity of aesthetic production and the creation of collective cultural practices. What is more, the author underlines that this specific black cultural expression emerges from the very real lived experience of oppression and violence of slavery. The parody of the master-slave relationship within this performance demonstrates, then, that Mardi-Gras is one example of the transformation of experience into aesthetic form and which is inherently political. As Nardal describes it, it becomes the performative act of spatial appropriation – black artist and subjects "fill the streets" for weeks at a time – as they reappropriate the narrative of their own subjectivity, identity and (historical) experience exemplified by the performance of relationships of domination. The implication is that "certain scenes of slavery" are performed by and for black subjects to the onlookers, who were likely made up, in part, by descendants of old slave owners or plantation "commanders" at this time in the beginning of the twentieth century. As such, Nardal's representation of "Martinicans of color" as active creators of their individual and collective cultural practices and identities, thwarts the presupposition that black subjects are there in the colony to merely amuse white travelling metropolitan public and titillate their desires and (sexual) fantasies. Her depiction of these black performers shows pleasure, amusement and evokes ideas of *jouissance* that has little to do with the white gaze. Just as this creative practice reappropriates (historical) forms of domination and expresses black cultural identities for and

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<sup>631</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 2-3.



by black subjects, ideas of pleasure, joy and *jouissance* are reframed to be experienced by those participating in Carnival. Nardal anticipates the expected (sexual) pleasures of her travelling readership by depicting this “spectacle” as endogenous to this island and thus not performed for the tourist’s amusement. At the same time, she redirects the readership’s desires by encouraging a pleasure experienced through appreciation of cultural difference, a perspective that requires that Martinican people of color be recognized as equal subjects and agentive in their subjectivity. To return to the argument above, Nardal’s presentation of another way of seeing as she re-orientates the metropolitan traveler’s perception is therefore connected with other ways of relating to and experiencing the world around the subject. Given the author articulates this through notions of universal humanity, it suggests that she is stating something very specific about French cultural identity and the ideologies of universalism that supports it.<sup>632</sup> As noted previously, one of her tactics in her re-orientation of the readers’ perspective is to see “all classes of Martinican society”. What is suggested is that she demands the readership to drop the racist stereotypes of blackness and observe the social and cultural multiplicity of those who inhabit the island. Emphasis on plurality is repeated when she points out the “variety of types and customs” of Martinican population and its multiplicities of cultural expressions that make the “universality of human nature”. For Nardal, then, differing cultural practices and identities do not run counter to her universal humanism, but they do question the (racist) ideologies and stereotypical representation of blackness from the perspective of white French cultural identity and its conception of universalism. In all her literary strategies deployed thus far, what can be ascertained is that the alternative way of seeing and understanding the world that she is depicting for her readers, is that Frenchness or French cultural identity is in fact, historically or contemporaneously multicultural, and Martinique and Martinicans are a part of this national story and identity. For Nardal, this goes hand in hand with her efforts to overthrow the relationships of power within the colonial imagination that ideologically and representationally link nature and natural landscapes with blackness.

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<sup>632</sup> Nardal’s political vision of humanism will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Six. Here it is asserted to clarify her black aesthetics that are informed by an inclusive humanist perspective that runs counter to the presumed universalism of the French Republic.

#### 4.3.1 Rewriting *Doudouisme* Part 1: Natural Landscapes.

Paulette Nardal's deconstruction of the metropolitan points of view on what was then called "the old colonies"<sup>633</sup> began, as it was shown above, in debunking images created within literary spaces. As the guide continues, the author turns her focus on the expression of exoticism in relationship to tropical landscapes. As it was addressed in Chapter One, certain figures come to populate the French colonial imaginary and the examples discussed at this time were the Senegalese soldier of Banania and the Antillian "*quimboiseuses*" that Jane Nardal addressed in her article. Another is "*la doudou*" who is a feminine figure that comes into being through a particular perception and relationship to the natural landscapes of these "enchanted islands". Citing Régis Antoine's study *Les écrivains français et les Antilles, des premiers pères blancs aux surréalistes noirs*, Brent Hayes Edwards indicates that from the eighteenth century onwards the eroticized and exoticized image of *la doudou* has been entangled in narratives of white masculine desire and colonial relationships of sexual exploitation and racial domination.

By the turn of the twentieth century this figure had begun to extend and "unfurl" into the literary arena, in a subset of colonial literature that came to be termed *la littérature doudou* or *doudouisme*. In the depiction of the Antillean context, Antoine explains, "the young woman of color and her heartaches effectively became a motif inseparable from the countryside motif (*motif paysage*)." Providing the mythical foundation for any number of poems, sentimental novels, and travel narratives, the figure of the *doudou* came to serve as a reservoir of immediately recognizable tropes to inscribe the "wonderful islands" and to propel readerly desire. By World War 1, the literary *doudou* presented an "erotic object obligingly proposed for the consumption – the textual consumption – of metropolitan readers, by Antillean writers themselves as well as French voyagers."<sup>634</sup>

In the narratology of this colonial literature *la doudou* gives herself to a white French man, often a soldier or colonial officer, before he leaves her with child upon his return to metropolitan France. Because of the intersecting relationships of domination based on gender, race, and sexuality that reduce, in this instance, black femininity to states of "nature", both the figure of the *doudou* and the landscape of Martinique are symbolized as simply there for either the sexual

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<sup>633</sup> "*Les vieilles colonies*" is the term used to designate the first period of French territorial conquests and the lands colonized during this period (1535-1815). "The old colonies" are distinguished from the countries colonized during the second colonial empire that mostly pertain to those on the African and Asian continents. Apart from different types of colonial regimes that are found in the "new colonies" such as the protectorate, "*les vieilles colonies*" are mobilized to negatively set apart racialized subjects of the "new colonies" within the ideological constructs of the French empire. This can impact how Antilleans position themselves and perceive their identity as members of these "old colonies" through a dialectical relationship to other colonized subjects of the "new colonies" in Sub-Saharan Africa or the Maghreb, for instance.

<sup>634</sup> Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 159, citing Régis Antoine, *Les écrivains français et les Antilles, des premiers pères blancs aux surréalistes noirs* (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1978), 353.

fulfillment of the white masculine traveler or economic prosperity of France. What this means is that *doudou* literature mirrors the colonial ideology that white (masculine) French identity is fundamentally unchanged by its relationship to, or experience within, the Antillean space whilst the latter is changed. And this in respect to the colonial officer who leaves the *doudou* with child or the island's landscape turned into cane plantations and spaces of slavery that generate wealth sent across the Atlantic. As Nardal approaches the depiction of the natural Martinican landscape she engages in the literary tropes of *doudouisme* and releases the natural world from this perspective of domination.

Nardal frames her discussion on the Martinican landscape by underscoring its unfamiliarity or otherness to the natural environment of European climates: "as interesting as the human spectacles are in Martinique, it's above all the foreignness of its landscapes that will charm the modern traveler."<sup>635</sup> The author entices the reader to this destination. Nardal writes "the feeling of evasion is never as strong as standing before the unforgettable western coast of Martinique, beaten down by the waves of the Atlantic"<sup>636</sup> which promotes a sense of adventure and speaks to certain desires of the readership. And yet she interrupts this perspective of the French traveler's potential experience of Martinique by underlining multiple significations of the Atlantic seen from Martinique's shores.

Tous ceux qui ont visité cette partie de l'île vers Saint-Marie se souviennent de la sensation de grandeur et d'infini qu'ils ont éprouvée alors... En contemplant le Pitons de Carbet, on comprend que la légende caraïbe y ait placé "le berceau du Monde".<sup>637</sup>

The ellipsis works to render ambiguous who is experiencing (and from what perspective) these sensations. It could be interpreted as that which is experienced by French colonialists who crossed the Atlantic space. At the same time with Nardal's citation of "the cradle of the world" she alludes to the continent of Africa as much as the "Caribbean legend" speaks to the indigenous population that inhabited the island before colonization. In this way, Nardal brings into her depiction a sense of multiplicity in the ways that this landscape can be perceived and experienced. Like her representation of artistic practices in the Carnaval, Nardal shifts the focus to diversity, here, in terms of perception of the natural environment demonstrating that it can signify different

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<sup>635</sup> "Si intéressants que soient les spectacles humains qu'offre la Martinique, c'est surtout par l'étrangeté de ses sites qu'elle charmera le voyageur moderne." Nardal, "Martinique," 4. My translation.

<sup>636</sup> "Le sentiment d'évasion n'est jamais aussi complet que devant l'inoubliable côte orientale de la Martinique, battue des flots de l'Océan Atlantique." Nardal, "Martinique," 4. My translation.

<sup>637</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 4. Ellipsis in the original.

things to different people. In the section entitled “*L’étude géographique*” that provides, for the most part, a scientific and geological overview of the island, Nardal highlights the contrasting elements of the natural world.

Les côtes de la Martinique sont, avec certains aspects de la montagne, le point le plus pittoresque de l’île. Leur diversité n’est pas le moindre de leurs charmes. Point n’est besoin d’attirer l’attention du lecteur sur leurs formes régulières, leurs talus et leurs falaises au N. Le contraste que ces côtes offrent avec celles déchiquetées, érodées du S est assez frappant lui-même.<sup>638</sup>

This is, in one respect, simply a description of the landscape. In another, the passage that highlights geographical variation distinguishes it to the symbolic or material homogenization of this “enchanted island” be it in exotic imaginations or metropolitan agricultural practices. The author “regrets”, for example, that sugar cane plantations monopolize the agricultural space of Martinique at the cost of other cultivations destined to feed the population: “cane constitutes the primary cultivation of the island [...] Since the war, it is unfortunate that alimentary and secondary cultivations have been abandoned for this agricultural practice. Many coffee and cacao plantations, once flourishing, have now been planted with sugar cane.”<sup>639</sup> Arguably then, when Nardal underlines diversity that characterizes the Martinican natural environment it is not anodyne as it follows the same logic of her portraying the multiplicity of the ways the island and the Atlantic can be seen and experienced as the first example demonstrated. In both instances mountains come to figure in her descriptions which work symbolically to shift the experience and perception of the natural world to the perspective of people of color. This argument will be fully developed in the next section on Martinican cultural practices. What is underlined at this point is that in Martinique the mountains and its geographical partner *le morne* hold a specific place in Antillean cultural imaginary and identities. As such, Nardal starts mobilizing these specificities as she animates Martinican landscapes to challenge metropolitan perspectives.

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<sup>638</sup> Nardal, “Martinique,” 13.

<sup>639</sup> “La canne constitue la culture principale de l’île [...] Depuis la guerre, on ne cesse de déplorer l’abandon des cultures vivrières et des cultures secondaires, au profit de la culture de la canne à sucre. Beaucoup de caféières et de cacaoyères, jadis florissantes, ont été plantées en canne.” Nardal, “Martinique,” 17. My translation. Given sugar cane plantations were not owned by people of color but the class of white French colonists called the *békés*, the wealth generated from this, therefore, is to their benefit and that of the metropole. What this means is that the political and economic decisions made in the Hexagon transform the social and natural world rendering it homogenous on many levels. Any practice of a monoculture makes the landscape uniform as much as it reduces for many working-class people, comprised for the most part of people of color in Martinique, employment opportunities to one single option.

As argued, when Nardal states, “contemplating the Pitons de Carbet, one understands that the Caribbean legend situated the “cradle of the world’ here”, she alludes both to the indigenous culture, the African continent and by extension African descendants in Martinique. What is implied is that the author is inviting the traveler to look at the landscape from these latter perspectives as she paints – though always employing the charm of the “picturesque” – the Martinican natural world with a different symbolic and cultural imaginary. To take the cultural geography of African descendants is to recognize that the mountains and *le morne* were and are spaces of slave resistance and the creation of Antillean cultural practices.<sup>640</sup> As Nardal indicates, once again highlighting differentiations within the natural landscape, *les mornes* are the hills “with a rounded summit that create a strong contrast with the high pointed pyramids that we call pitons or mountains.”<sup>641</sup> The forests of the mountainous terrain that were too steep to be exploited provided the needed cover for those who escaped slavery.<sup>642</sup> In “*Excursions*”, where Nardal solicits the “professor M. Achille” to write the itinerary from Fort-de-France to Saint-Pierre, the old capital of Martinique, the latter refers to this socio-cultural history of the mountains.

Point de glaciers ni d’avalanches, mais des histoires légendaires vous sont contées des disciplinaires évadés ou des chasseurs égarés dans ces bois, dont jamais plus on n’a entendu parler soit qu’ils aient trouvé la mort au fond des précipices, ou que les serpents, jadis nombreux en ces parages, aient attaqué l’imprudent, qui venait les troubler en leur retraite lointaine [...] la route montueuse serpentent au pieds de pitons et la vue est bornée mais imposante. Le silence impressionnant des futaies qui croisent leur sombre ramure au-dessus du chemin ajoute une solennité du spectacle, et le moindre craquement de branche, la mélodie presque humaine de quelques notes du siffleur des montagnes font tressaillir le voyageur.<sup>643</sup>

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<sup>640</sup> This is a common aspect and shared history across colonized volcanic tropical islands where slavery was practiced and which is now institutionally recognized, as Anne Dominique Curtis highlights in her article on Suzanne Césaire’s by Unesco’s patrimonialization of “Le Morne” in Mauritius or the “Blue Mountains” and “John Crow Mountains” in Jamaica. Anne Dominique Curtis, “Suzanne Césaire et la *Tropiques*-poétique du morne : de *Tropiques* aux patrimoines immatériels des nœuds de mémoire,” *Revue de littérature comparée: La valeur littéraire à l’épreuve de l’archipel caraïbe* 4, no. 364 (Octobre-Décembre 2017, Paris): 404-422. See also Anne Dominique Curtis, “Cannibalizing *Doudouisme*, Conceptualizing the *Morne*: Suzanne Césaire’s Caribbean Ecopoetics,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no.3 (2016): 513-534; Pascale de Souza, “Gendering *mornes* and volcanoes in French Caribbean literature,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 6, no.3 (December 2003): 149-164.

<sup>641</sup> “Au cours de cette étude reviendra souvent le mot “morne”. Les mornes sont de faibles éminences au sommet arrondi qui forment un contraste puissant avec les hautes pyramides aiguës que l’on appelle Pitons ou Montagnes.” Nardal, “Martinique,” 12. My translation

<sup>642</sup> The mountains and *le morne* as spaces of resistance are tropes in Nardal’s aesthetics. This will be further discussed in her representation of the Martinican population below, and, in Chapter 5 when the discussion arrives at her fictional texts. In different ways, this political aesthetics or ecopoetics of *le morne* is an important topology for other Antillean writers such as Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire and René Menil. Later, Edouard Glissant speaks of socio-cultural spaces like *le morne* in Antillean literature which are intertwined with his conception of the poetics of relation. See particularly the sections “Theories” and “Poetics” in Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation – Poétique III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

<sup>643</sup> Nardal, “Martinique,” 44.

Achilles' description that may reference *marronage* when he speaks of "lost hunters" and "escaped disciplinaries" resonates with the ecopoetics that Nardal is working into the guide. Both tend to put into question the *doudouist* landscapes of frangipanis, exotic fruits, and luxurious black women. It is an environment that is "imposing", and the reigning silence is disturbed by "almost human" whispers, like the echoes of those who once found their fate at the "bottom of the precipice". Thus, whilst the historical landscape of the *morne* will become more explicitly represented later in the guide, Nardal's depictions of the Martinican landscape are already working to shift the cultural imaginaries from which they are perceived. It invites the readers to re-orient their perspectives and similarly asks for a change in the experience of travel practices. One can and does experience the "charm" of a given destination, or "foreignness" and "strangeness" faced with unknown landscapes or cultures, though it doesn't necessarily follow that they be exoticized within cultural imaginations. What Nardal evokes is that there are ways of being and experiencing difference that do not install relationships of power that are evident in *doudouist* literature, for instance. Similar to her tactic in her depiction of Mardi-Gras, Nardal works on the level of the voyager's expectations, and desires.

Il n'est pas jusqu'au charme brûlé du Sud, avec sa savane des Pétrifications, ses tons roux, sa mer d'un bleu limpide avec des hauts-fonds de sable blancs, qui n'ait, lui aussi, créé une légende. Légende qui touche d'ailleurs de bien près à la science. Les marins, n'affirment-ils pas que la boussole s'affole entre Sainte-Anne, village d'extrémité méridionale de l'île et l'îlet Cabrit.

Le touriste trouvera à la Martinique une nature dont l'étrangeté dépasse tout ce qu'il a pu rêver. Devant certains aspects de l'île, il se demandera s'il n'est pas le jouet d'une illusion, d'une invraisemblable fantasmagorie, surtout au moment des rapides crépuscules qui préparent la nuit antillaise.

Le charme de la Martinique est indéniable. Mais ce charme n'est pas l'envoûtement des îles du Pacifique. La beauté des Antilles est plus pure, moins morbide. Leur végétation a quelque chose de passionné, mais qui reste sauvage et beau.

Elle imprègne l'individu sans dissoudre sa volonté.<sup>644</sup>

Ironically Nardal refers to white fantasies of the exotic in French colonial culture as she frames the tourist as a toy of the natural landscape of this "enchanted island". The environment is so foreign or other to what the travelling perceiver knows that he or she believes it must hail from the realms of illusion or fantasy. Nardal's passage reverses the relationships of power between the white perceiver and that which is perceived. As such it is "he" that comes to be the "plaything" in front of such foreign beauty rather than the island and by extension the population, and specifically women of color, becoming a plaything for him. Nature takes on an active quality independent of,

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<sup>644</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 4.

or beyond, the perceiver. Therefore, Nardal undoes the colonial poetics evident in *doudou* literature that feminizes (renders passive) the landscape and therefore legitimizes colonization and domination. By resignifying the natural world as exceeding the (white) voyager, it is also symbolically resituating black femininity – *la doudou* – as being independent from the yoke of white masculine phantasmagoria. What is interesting is that Nardal articulates this deconstruction through the phenomenological relationship between the traveler and the island. The author frames exoticism or the exotic perspective as a way of *relating* to otherness or difference. Coming from a different angle, Nardal anticipates what fellow Martinican Edouard Glissant later theorizes in the idea of a relation founded on difference. Starting from the basis that identities are constructed in relation with others and the world around, Glissant argues that through the immediacy of sensory experience one can let enter other forms of apprehension which can in turn be a source of new ways of understanding, imagining and constructing identity.<sup>645</sup> What is inferred in Nardal’s passage is that exotic perspectives fail to drop the ideological and cultural prism from which they see and thus shut down the relationality that Glissant is describing. She exposes the processes of exoticization as a way for this onlooker to render intelligible something that is completely incomprehensible to him, even in his dreams: “*l’étrangeté dépasse tout ce qu’il a pu rêver*”. In the experience of relating to alterity that completely baffles the travelling subject – supported by the reference to the compass that spins out of control and the “rapid” descent of “twilight” that evokes a sense of incapacity to see clearly – the voyager recuperates power through exotic representation. “He” puts his world view back into order and himself into a position where he does not feel *déboussolé*. Rather than being at the mercy of nature – exposed to the elements of this landscape – he assumes to put it under his control, be it in regard to the landscape itself or through its representation. Interestingly Nardal uses the masculine figure at this moment in the text when previously she refers to women travelers and Nardal herself is a traveler. It is likely that they too have been faced with feelings of being lost when confronted with foreign lands whose strangeness may have been appropriated for themselves. This could also concern Fauset for she was also a fellow traveler. Both negotiate experiencing differences to their expectations of the French metropolis, for instance, as it was outlined in Chapter One. Here in the *Guide*, Nardal’s use of the masculine pronoun may be performative in so far as she is pointing to relationships of power involved in perceptions and thus represents this through the symbolic figure of the French empire. This does not exclude, therefore, that women may perceive in similar ways to what the author has just outlined above. However, it is indicative

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<sup>645</sup> Other than *Poétique de la Relation* one can refer to Edouard Glissant, *Philosophie de la Relation. Poésie en étendue* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009).

of a racial and colonial logic that imparts certain ways of doing white masculinity with the sentiment of being owed. In this way it predetermines how this debt be paid in “his” experience of a particular space and its population. Fauset fictionalized this metropolitan presumption that the colonies are indebted to the metropolis in the exploration of the economic and sexual transaction of marriage in *Comedy: American Style*.<sup>646</sup> As Nardal has traced the issues at stake in exoticism, *la doudou*, and the expected desires of metropolitan travelers, one can argue that in this frame, the sentiment of being owed, particularly because the travel is to one of France’s colonies, colors, to a certain degree, the prism through which “he” perceives. This adds complexity to the ideas of exoticism and stereotypical representation for it is not solely an image, for example, that is mapped onto this space by someone that has never been there. Though it could be this as well. Nardal suggests that, in part, exoticized representations have emerged from (unequal) *interaction* between subjects and landscapes, between perceiver and that which is perceived, and in this context between whiteness and blackness. In this way she shines a light on the fact that certain ways of being and seeing the world obfuscate the possibility of being, perceiving and travelling otherwise. This has a consequence of disturbing the logics of the travel guide itself. As Roland Barthes argues much later, because travel guides participate in processes of mystification (that exoticization is one expression) and present of (stereo)“types” of different socio-cultural identities, for instance, they act more like an apparatus that blinds the tourist rather than their supposed goal to illuminate and guide.<sup>647</sup> Here, Nardal is doing the contrary as she brings to light the processes of exoticism and as such does not close her images of Martinique within the colonial perspective. In the genre of the guide, she refuses to cater to metropolitan assumptions in her non return (or non-payment) of the ways that metropolitan readers may expect to be pleased in this colonial space. Rather she directs her readership to other ways of experiencing Martinique. Informed by different cultural imaginaries

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<sup>646</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>647</sup> When Barthes underlines the mystification of le *Guide bleu*, it is partially articulated through the bourgeois conception of mountains and the “mythe alpestre” created in travel practices. Whilst Barthes and Nardal arguments are not the same, the commonality between them is that they understand the genre of the travel guide as a discursive space that purposefully shapes the prism and expectations of the traveller. Speaking of stereotypical representations of people encountered during travel Barthes writes: “Pour le *Guide bleu*, les hommes n’existent que comme “types”. En Espagne, par exemple, le Basque est un marin aventureux, le Levantin un gai jardinier, le Catalan un habile commerçant et le Cantabre un montagnard sentimental. On retrouve ici ce virus de l’essence, qui est au fond de toute mythologie bourgeoise de l’homme [...] En général, le *Guide bleu* témoigne de la vanité de toute description analytique, celle qui refuse à la fois l’explication et la phénoménologie : il répond en fait à aucune des question qu’un voyageur moderne peut se poser en traversant un paysage réel, et *qui dure*. La sélection des monuments supprime à la fois la réalité de la terre et celle des hommes, elle ne rend compte de rien de présent, c’est-à-dire d’historique, et par là, le monument lui-même devient indéchiffrable, donc stupide. Le spectacle est ainsi sans cesse en voie d’anéantissement, et le *Guide* devient par une opération commune à toute mystification, le contraire même de *son* affiche, un instrument d’aveuglement.” Roland Barthes “Le *Guide Bleu*” in *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957), 113-115.



to the colonial perspective, Nardal points to a commonality in human experience when faced with that which is beyond the subject's horizon of intelligibility. She underlines that this landscape "has created" Caribbean legends which "are very close to scientific observation". As such, it is not just the colonial perspective that renders the world intelligible through representational practice. The difference is whether, in the phenomenological experience of alterity and its representation, relationships of power and domination are mobilized. Thus, in Nardal's description that universalizes the ways of relating to alterity, she not only exposes the processes of exoticization, but also underlines the constructed quality of human perception. In this way it could always be otherwise. The subject has the agency to transform his or her ways of perceiving and relating to the world, which is after all, what Nardal asks of the readership in the "*Avant-Propos*". This is also suggested in the closing lines of the above citation: the natural world of Martinique "impresses on the individual without dissolving his or her will". The "purity" of the Antilles, like Nardal's previous literary strategies, sublimates the environment taking it out of the libidinal economies of the exotic imagination and the fantasized tropes mobilized here within, such as the passivity and sexual availability of black femininity, *la doudou*, or the sorcery of her counterpart *la quimboiseuse* who casts a spell over white masculine characters and tempts them off the righteous path into "morbid" scenes of debauchery.<sup>648</sup> As Nardal articulates this through opposition to the Pacific islands, her deconstruction does come with a certain displacement of colonial logics for it frames these islands and their population as more "savage" than the Antilles and Antilleans.<sup>649</sup> This said, the way she grounds the experience of the natural environment by focusing on phenomenological experience, at the very same time as she underlines how the same landscape can be perceived in different ways depending on one's world view, Nardal de-essentializes nature and those that are considered (from a Western European perspective) to be inextricably bound to it. The author disturbs then the nature-culture divide, so omnipresent in the ideologies of colonization and Western modernity at large,<sup>650</sup> and as such she is opening the door to her representation of Martinican society, and more specifically people of color and the Antillean cultural practices that are endogenous to this (natural) space.

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<sup>648</sup> See Chapter One and the discussion on the white racist stereotype of black femininity as witch, "*quimboiseuse*", in Jane Nardal's "Exotic puppets".

<sup>649</sup> This is something that haunts Nardal's aesthetics which can be traced throughout her work and political undertakings. In the travel guide, she recuperates this to a certain degree, when she addresses the illnesses that western travelers could be exposed to in this tropical climate. Her line of argument suggests that the biggest threat of illness to the voyagers is their own actions: "La grande condition de santé pour L'Européen à la Martinique est d'éviter l'abus de l'alcool et tous les abus en général." Nardal, "Martinique," 15.

<sup>650</sup> See for example, McClintock, "1. The lay of the land" in *Imperial Leather*, 21-54.

#### 4.3.2 Rewriting *Doudouisme* Part 2: Martinican Folk Culture.

In a literary form like the travel guide that feeds back to its public already established ideas and depictions of certain spaces and peoples, Nardal intervenes to re-signify representations of Martinican landscapes, population, and cultural practices and to tell a different socio-historical narrative. Much like her presentation of the performance of the master-slave relationship during Carnival, this is evident in Nardal's description of working-class men and women, folk culture, and her celebration of the multiplicity of epidermic tones of blackness. One strategy is to focus on the physicality of black embodiment. This may seem contradictory to her pursuit to counteract the essentialization of non-whiteness and therefore the naturalization of domination. However, working against the signification of (black) corporeity as a marker for the incapacity of subjects to reach the heights of "French civilization", Nardal's resignification of black embodiments symbolize black people as subjects and therefore producers of culture and history.

From the opening pages of the "*Avant-Propos*", Nardal depicts scenes of daily activities of working-class men and women. She outlines the morning procession of "merchants, with their skirts pulled up, bare feet, sinuous legs, rolling hips" as they make their way to the market carrying extremely heavy "large wooden 'trays' supported by their head and torso."<sup>651</sup> This image of black femininities that pays attention to their physicality, represents these women as active, strong, and independent and thus counteracting stereotypical representations of black women. Nardal repeats this imaging of black working-class femininity on the readership's arrival to Martinique. As the boat pulls into the port, one of the first things that Nardal has them see is not the "luxurious" landscapes but the men and women working to unload imported charcoal.

L'œil veut-il se poser sur la luxuriante végétation du lieu ? Il est arrêté par deux énormes tas de charbon qu'attaquent à la pelle de grands gaillards. Ceux-ci remplissent les paniers que leur présentent à la file les charbonnières. Des femmes en longues théories<sup>652</sup>, portant sur la tête des paniers pleins de charbon, vont les déverser par une écoutille dans les soutes de navires. Le spectacle, qu'on peut juger pénible, ne manque pas de pittoresque. Ces femmes, entraînées à ce dur métier, ont gardé des muscles longs, de la souplesse et en même temps du hiératisme.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> "Le matin, dans la campagne, ce sera, par la route couleur d'ocre, le défilé des "marchandes" avec leur jupes troussées, leurs pieds nus, leur jambes nerveuses, leurs hanches roulantes, tandis que la tête et le buste qui supportent des charges effrayantes, portées dans de grand plateau des bois appelés "trays" restent immobiles." Nardal, "Martinique," 3. My translation.

<sup>652</sup> "Théories" in this context is another word for line similar to *une file d'attente*.

<sup>653</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 10.

Resignifying what is expected to pertain to the “picturesque” Nardal re-presents black femininity and places (cultural) value on these everyday scenes and activities. What is suggested in both examples is that beauty or “charm” of these women has nothing to do with their passivity and sexual availability for the modern voyager. The “eye” of the travelling subject sees neither the lush tropical landscape nor *les doudous* in a row awaiting his arrival. Rather the subjects perceived are women whose physicality gives them an air of majesty and strength of character, and it is this scene of Martinican everyday life that is signified as “picturesque”. From a broader point of view, Nardal’s strategy of focusing on working-class black feminine embodiment to counteract stereotypical images of black femininity tends to utilize her figuration as a means to an end. Reworking metropolitan perspectives by mobilizing a rather romanticised image of these women, particularly when it comes to their corporeity, does perpetuate, at the very least symbolically, exploitation of working-class subjects. This is because, though Nardal refers to the fact that this is a difficult and extenuating profession, it has an effect of downplaying the material relationships of domination involved in such scenes. With this consideration in mind, the image that Nardal paints is rather evocative of Martinique’s past and the transatlantic slave trade. It is not a stretch to interpret this scene at the port as an echo back to the period when people of African descent were being imported in the “ships’ holds”, and just like the charcoal, were considered the necessary objects in the production of sugar and rum. This overlap between historical and contemporary scenes at the port, conditioned in both cases by the plantation economy and the white colonialists who own them, works to transform this charged space, history, and extreme violence and resignify both the port and the subjects working there. By depicting black women as subjects who are in this picture as active workers exercising their profession, it refigures their past objectification, enslavement and arrival in Martinique and recuperates this space of the port from white supremacy and domination. This type of echo, overlap and recuperation of spaces and places of a particular historical importance and violence from a black perspective is in continuity with the Nardal’s representations of the landscapes discussed above. The author symbolically and materially recasts the racist image of black embodiment that is worked upon by enslavement, erotic fantasies of the colonial mind or sexual violence, into a black embodiment that is working and agentive in her movements. The feminine figure is “majestic” in her subjectivity despite historical and contemporary forms of racial oppression that is inflected by class. This therefore also works to signify differently the places

that are the sites of this symbolic and material violence.<sup>654</sup> Nardal uses the same strategy when she writes of working-class men in the plantations.

In parts of the guide, Nardal's description of the countryside in opposition to the modernity of towns and cities, mobilizes certain tropes of the *paysannerie* and the *paysan* such as simplicity and quaintness.

La vie dans la campagne est simple et saine. Le paysan martiniquais se contente de peu, une case couverte de chaume de canne à sucre, entourée de lattes de bois et de feuilles de palmier sur un sol de terre battue, parfois une maisonnette fragile, en bois.<sup>655</sup>

At once a picture of lived realities in Martinique, this type of romanticization of those living with meager means, as indicated above, is not without class prejudice. A similar tone is evident in Nardal's representation of cane workers. In the section "*Excursions*" she accompanies the readership to an outing to a distillery. As she goes through the steps of rum and sugar fabrication, she pauses on the depiction of the laborers in the fields.

Dès 5h du matin, les travailleurs noirs peinent dans les champs, sous le frémissant blond et vert des cannes agitées par la brise. Jusqu'au soir, très tard, ils faucheront les cannes avec leurs coutelas aiguisés. Leurs mouvements sont si rapides et si souples que l'on comprend qu'aucune machine puisse lutter de vitesse avec eux. Ils ne s'arrêtent que pour manger ou pour boire avidement le rhum et l'eau que leur offre la « donneuse d'eau ». Ils sont vêtus d'un pantalon bleu que serre autour de leur taille une ceinture de cuir. Un chapeau de paille à larges bords ou encore un foulard rouge leur couvre la tête. Leur buste nu et bronzé, ruisselle de sueur.<sup>656</sup>

The rather poetical image given of the cane builds on the ideas of a quaint agricultural lifestyle whilst the practices of cultivation hail back to a time before the modernisation of farming technology. This is placed in performative contradiction, however, when Nardal describes the black workers' physical agility and technical aptitude with the cane knife that outrivals any mechanical invention of the industrial world. As this is within the space of plantation, the reference to technical progress alludes to the larger context, almost acting as a metaphor, to

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<sup>654</sup> After the abolishment of slavery, the organization of plantation economies based on the exploitation of its workers did not change drastically in their functioning though the old masters had to officially employ and pay their workers. The workforce, at the start of the twentieth century was predominately made up of the non-white population of Martinique. The creole working class population were often descendants of slavery but also consisted of other ethnic and cultural minorities such as people originating from India and China that migrated to the Antilles at the end of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and that Nardal will later point out in the *Guide*. Thus, in the Antillean context, class exploitation is inextricably linked to racial oppression and domination.

<sup>655</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 3.

<sup>656</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 56.

European modern logics that equate advancement – temporal or technical – with civilisation and therefore an expression of that which sets its civilisation apart and above all other non-white cultures and civilisations. It is in fact one of the ideological tools that inform the French civilising mission that presupposes people of color and the spaces they inhabit (the colonies) are primitive, pre-modern, and submerged in “states of nature” and therefore behind white French civilisation in every aspect on this techno-temporal trajectory. One interpretation of Nardal’s depiction then is that she problematizes this constructed timeline by disturbing the binary logic that correlates whiteness/technicity/progress as opposed to (the supposed inferiority and backwardness of) blackness/nature/primitive. When Nardal combines technical know-how with the physical aptitude of the workers it reframes the idea of progress. This embodiment of blackness is in part the site of technicity. Thus, not only are the movements of the black laborers in the field symbolized as actions of subjects in the scene depicted, it resignifies, to a certain degree, these same gestures undertaken to accomplish the same work when this setting was the site of black enslavement. The cane workers, regardless of the master’s perspective, were always already subjects. This reading of a resonance between agentive embodiment, technicity and its rewriting of history is supported by the fact that Nardal reiterates it in her representation of Antillean cultural practices that have emerged from plantations and slavery.

Le soir, après le travail, dans la campagne endormie, résonne parfois un bruit sourd dont la vibration se prolonge étrangement dans le silence. C’est le tam-tam qui réunit sur une aire de terre battue les rudes travailleurs qui ont peiné toute la journée dans les champs de canne. Une phrase, toujours mineure, chantée à l’unisson par des voix d’hommes, retentit sauvagement avec des accents imprévus. Par les nuits de lune, le spectacle des danseurs est vraiment impressionnant. Les hommes seuls participent à ces danses. Ces des vrais combats mimés, avec des feintes, des sauts, des élans, des détentes de fauves, tandis que le chœur répète inlassablement l’air lugubre que scande sourdement le tam-tam.<sup>657</sup>

Without making explicit exactly where this is taking place in the countryside, because the author speaks of the workers’ day in the cane fields it suggests that this scene is geographically located in *les mornes*. As mentioned previously, these are socio-historical spaces that are both the sites of enslavement and places of its resistance, be it through *marronage*, uprisings or cultural practices. The specific performance of Martinican folk culture that Nardal depicts is not named, though one could esteem that it is *le damnyé* (also referred to as *le laguïa*) in her reference to “mimed combat”. By mobilizing the culture of the *morne*, which includes other cultural expressions like *le Séga* (Mauritius), *le Gwoka* (Guadeloupe), or *le Bèlè* in Martinique, she underlines the element of

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<sup>657</sup> Nardal, “Martinique,” 3.

resistance in which all these cultural practices partake and locates them in the site of their creation. The fact that Nardal represents a performance of combat even more so. This is supported by the tone that she gives her description which is loud, somber (in minor key) and disruptive to the “sleeping countryside”. The beat of the tam-tam that “reunites” the performers on this “beaten land” and the “one sentence” sung in unison and repeated “lugubriously” by the singers evoke the collective experience of slavery. Nardal highlights this by distinguishing the mournful atmosphere with the strength, grace, and agility of the dancers. Thus, such examples of the creation of creole traditions are as much an expression of cultural identity and aesthetic practice as, in this case, ways of preparing the black masculine subject for combat in real (planned) or imagined uprisings. As musicologist Jacqueline Rosemain writes, le *damnyé* or *laguïa* was and is “the signifier of the struggle of black against white, of the slave against the colonialist.”<sup>658</sup> Through the collective performance of the *damnyé* the black subjects take charge of their physicality as they train and transform their body and being into agentive expressions and potential weapons against their oppressors. At the time of the publication of the travel guide, Nardal had already written an article and short story where the *damnyé* features. In the former it was the example given of Martinican folk culture and aesthetics as historical and contemporary resistance to anti-blackness. In the latter, Nardal draws on the Antillean imaginary of resistance as a resource that the character of the short story, Elisa, draws upon when faced with anti-black racism in Paris. Whilst this short story “In Exile” and the way Nardal employs the *laguïa* within the text will be addressed in the next chapter, what is interesting in her comparative study, “*Musique nègre: Antilles et Aframériques*” is that it prefigures her description given in the travel guide. Published in June 1930 in the *La Dépêche africaine*, Nardal explains that “Antillean music is essentially choreographic. Political, satirical, or sentimental songs, all are danced.”<sup>659</sup> Indicating therefore the specific relationship to music within Martinican culture, it sheds a light on her strategies within the guide. The choreography of music demonstrates that expressive culture, translated and performed through the body, works on the level of the symbolic and the material as a reappropriation of disenfranchisement. In the article “*Musique nègre*”, she writes,

Le laguïa qui se danse entre hommes simule un combat entre deux ou plusieurs adversaires. Le seul instrument qui accompagne cette complainte que chantent à l’unisson de rudes voix de travailleurs, est le tam-tam. Ces airs, toujours dans le

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<sup>658</sup> “le signifiant symbolique de la lutte de Noir contre Blanc, de l’esclave contre le colon.” My translation. Jacqueline Rosemain, *La musique dans la société antillaise: 1635-1902, Martinique - Guadeloupe* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1985), 22.

<sup>659</sup> “La musique antillaise est essentiellement chorégraphique. Chansons politiques, satiriques ou sentimentales, toutes se dansent.” My translation. Paulette Nardal, “Musique nègre: Antilles et Aframériques,” *La Dépêche africaine* 3, no. 25 (juin 30, 1930): 5. Consulted at the *Les Archives nationales d’outre-mer, La Dépêche africaine : organe d’économie et de politique*, 2MIA 242, Slotfom V2, Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.

mode mineur, comportent des temps forts syncopés, des phrases psalmodiées, qui, en tenant compte de l'espèce d'hypnose où vous jette le son du tam-tam entendu la nuit, au loin, dans la campagne... Ces danses, qui sont appréciées de tous les Antillais, sont surtout pratiquées par les gens du peuple, moins facilement influencés par la musique européenne. C'est donc chez eux que nous retrouverons pour ainsi dire, à l'état pur, les caractères naturels de la race.<sup>660</sup>

Thus, unlike her description of the *damnyé* that is not given a name in the travel guide, here it is explicitly referenced and the relationship between the political and aesthetic aspects of this cultural practice are brought to the fore. Considering that the article was written prior to guide, it suggests that Nardal underwent a self-editing process to fit within the institutional context of this colonial guide and white metropolitan readers' expectations. Significantly then, Nardal nevertheless includes this cultural practice within the guide. Furthermore, she uses similar tones in both discursive contexts and mobilizes descriptions that are almost repeated word for word. For example, "the complaint sung in unison by the voices of the rugged workers", becomes in the guide, "the rugged workers" repeat "one sentence, always in the minor key, [and] sung in unison by the men's voices." In both cases, the *damnyé* as a cultural practice is represented as being a process through which the black masculine subject psychically, materially, and symbolically reappropriates the complete dispossession of his person that slavery has forced upon him. The actions of the (forced) laboring body are transformed through the specific movements of the dancing-combative body and as such the performance generates different socio-cultural meanings and significations of blackness than the colonial perspective. In the representation of this cultural practice then, whether in the mise en scene of this "spectacle" by male dancers, singers and musicians or in its mise en scene in the pages of the travel guide, the dance comes to be the signification of black subject's desires, resistance and agency, even, it is suggested, during the time of slavery.<sup>661</sup> Read in combination with her representation of the *laguïa* in "*Musique nègre*" the specificity of "musical choreography" underlines that Antillean folk culture and cultural identities are indissociable from the experience of the black subject's own subjectivity and agency that are expressed through his corporeity. It is in these performances that history is recuperated and rewritten as much as blackness and the socio-geographical spaces of Martinique are symbolized otherwise. Nardal's focus then on the embodiment of blackness and the specificities of historical, cultural, and lived experiences in and of the island are depicted in a way that tells a

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<sup>660</sup> Nardal, "Musique nègre," 5.

<sup>661</sup> The fact that the practice of *damnyé*, for example, was prohibited and punishable within the plantation attests to what extent cultural expression was understood, even by the slave masters, as the embodiment and symbolic representation of black agentive subjectivity and resistance.

different story and draws on a different imagination than those familiar to the readership. And this is a story where black people are, and have always been, subjects. Her representation of the overlapping spheres of Antillean cultural identities, from the material – embodiment, phenomenological aspects of performance and geographical spaces – to the symbolic – cultural practices as generative of meaning, black identities, and cultural/ spatial imaginations – informs her celebration of the diversities of “colors” that make up Martinican population. This is to say that Nardal mobilizes complexion as a way to place significance on the specificities of Antillean cultural identities and represent the Martinican population in its diversity. It also impacts how historical elements of the island enter the travel guide and how Nardal weaves it into the wider narrative of France.

#### 4.3.3 Rewriting *Doudouisme* Part 3: Multiplicity of Blackness.

In Nardal’s representation of black working-class men and women, her focus on the materiality of the black body – strength, agility, performance – was interpreted as a strategy to resignify blackness and free it from the clutches of scientific racism and exotic fantasies. At the same time, Nardal symbolizes specific spaces like the port, and the Martinican population to reappropriate history and tell another story where people of color are active participants and creators of this history and culture. In her aesthetics, the celebration of skin tones can be interpreted as working in a similar fashion. In the author’s oeuvre, epidermic variations of non-whiteness are represented as important aspects of Antillean cultural identities for they are the signification of the multi-ethnicity of Martinique. Through Nardal’s representations she valorizes people of colors’ diversity and multiplicity so that in each different embodiment of non-whiteness it is the signification of a subject, rich and complex in their subjectivity and agentive in their actions. As in her reappropriation of historical spaces, it is arguably also a strategy to reappropriate the violent history and the sexual politics of the plantations from which, in part, Antillean identities emerged. From the outset of the *Guide*, the author asks the travelling readership to pay attention to “the variety of types” that make up this Antillean society.

Le touriste pourra observer dans leur variété tous les types issus du croisement de plusieurs races, types également intéressants du point de vue artistique. Entre le noir, couleur de vanille et la mulâtresse au type latin, il verra en des nuances presque imperceptibles passer toute la richesse des tons de bois précieux, la câpresse,



couleur de sapotille, l'aigre blondeur de chabine, la teinte de l'Andalouse, de la Mauresque, de l'Hindoue, de la Chinoise.<sup>662</sup>

Her focus on the multiplicity of racialized embodiment underlines the ethnic diversity issued from French colonization of the island. Elsewhere, in Nardal's article "*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*", published six months prior to the *Guide*, the readers witness the same focus on difference regarding racialized embodiments. In this article, the author celebrated the heterogeneity of the dancing public as she juxtaposed this space and its temporary inhabitation by people of color to the "violence of the European frame", which was understood as being populated by white French cultural identities.<sup>663</sup> Similar to the correlation that can be found between the description of the *damnyé* in both the *Guide* and her article "*Musique Nègre*", Nardal's depiction of ethnic diversity highlighted above is the echo of what she wrote in "*Le nouveau bal*":

Dans cette salle s'offre à l'observation de l'artiste, toute la gamme des tons qui rend le teint des noirs si difficile à reproduire. Elle va de la blanche carnation de la mulâtresse aux cheveux plats, au noir mat de la négresse à la toison épaisse et si parfaitement frisée, en passant par l'aigre blondeur de la chabine, la brune couleur de cannelle, tous les tons riches de bois précieux et la câpresse couleur de sapotille.<sup>664</sup>

Thus, redeploying similar phrases in each, such as "*bois précieux*" or "*la câpresse couleur de sapotille*", Nardal's aesthetic trope of complexion works to underwrite stereotypical representation of non-white subjects. The author's celebration of multiplicity of black embodiments is hindered, to a certain degree, by the fact that in both instance the figure of the artist is evoked. One could argue that Nardal is herself working within a stereotypical frame of artistic portrayals of black femininity, for instance, evident in the imagined worlds painted by Gauguin, Picasso, and Le Douanier Rousseau to name just a few. It is clear that painters do not remain in the strict color palette of either black or white and yet can participate in the exoticization of non-white subjects. This said, the caricatural depictions of black subjects that are very present in French culture during the interwar period do work in a strict color codification of white and black. Therefore, as she speaks to the metropolitan readership, it may be the imaging of blackness and other non-white identities in popular culture that she is problematizing. Furthermore, in the standard rhetoric of the time, racial embodiment is categorized using the terms white, black, yellow and red. For example, this is evident in the essay by Albert Sarraut discussed in

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<sup>662</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 4.

<sup>663</sup> See Chapter One, 1.2.2.1 Black Feminine Cultural Identities.

<sup>664</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 131.

Chapter One, or, as it will be shown in the discussion to follow, Gilbert Gratiant in his article “*Mulâtres... pour le bien et le mal*” employs such common parlance of racialized language.<sup>665</sup> Thus Nardal’s celebration of “*toute la gamme de tons*” that reappears across her oeuvre does point to a cultural politics that valorizes multiplicity and difference through various representation of blackness in order to disturb such color codifications. What will be made apparent is that in Nardal’s work, placing cultural value on multiculturalism and multiethnicity has an effect of chipping away at the erroneous and fantasied assumption of the homogeneity of white French national identity. Nardal’s celebration of diversity of colors seeks to deconstruct the symbolic and material power of whiteness and the world view that neither attributes subjecthood to non-white persons, nor perceives them as ever being active agents in the making of French “civilization”. In short, they could never partake in Frenchness.<sup>666</sup> As in the above examples addressed in the *Guide*, Nardal does this by drawing on historical specificities of Martinique. However, this time her black feminist politics comes to the fore because the historical entanglement between the metropole and Martinique, from which emerge Antillean cultural identities is demonstrated as partially issued from the sexual violence of French colonization and imperialization.

In the subsection of “*L’Étude géographique*”, Nardal addresses the (forced) migration of non-white people in Martinique, as slaves or laborers, in order to “work the land” which, in this context means for the benefit of white French proprietors, and by extension the Hexagon.

La population martiniquaise se compose donc d’hommes de couleur dont les ascendants étaient Sénégalais, Ouolofs, Foules, Mandingues, Bambaras, Quimbas, Congolais, ou encore originaires de l’Angola et du Mozambique... Leurs descendants, les sang-mêlé, se sont croisés avec les blancs... Vers le milieu du siècle dernier, on fit venir, pour le travail de la terre, des Chinois et des Hindous, qui, eux aussi, imprégnèrent à la race nouvelle leurs caractéristiques ethniques. On ne peut vraiment pas parler de l’influence du type caraïbe, étant donné que ces autochtones ont été exterminés par Duparquet en 1685 ... On comprend par la suite de ces inextricables mélanges, les teints et les types varient à l’infini... Cependant, on pourrait largement diviser la population martiniquaise en blancs, descendants de colons, ou Français, ou Européens, en mulâtres et en noirs. Mais les nuances entre ces diverses colorations sont multiples et insensibles.<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> “Tous ceux qui sont de sang mêlé, à quelque degré qu’ait pu se faire le mélange : sang blanc, noir éventuellement rouge et en portion infime, jaune, indien.” Gratiant, “Mulâtres,” 5.

<sup>666</sup> The monolithic and monocultural assumption of French national identity is inherently colonial and still subsists in contemporary France. It can be interpreted as the subsistence of a disavowal of multicultural and multiethnic dimensions of French national identity. See for example, Marcel Detienne, *L’Identité nationale, une énigme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

<sup>667</sup> Nardal, “Martinique,” 19.

Nardal's recognition of the multiplicity of ethnic, racial, and cultural origins of the population, frames the "new race" as the emergence of a new culture and cultural identities. The author places the epidermic on the level of the cultural as opposed to the biological. At the same time, Nardal highlights that this context is created by French colonial imperialism for it is they that "brought" slaves and laborers hailing from across the globe. The power, then, of whiteness which is clearly qualified as "European" or "French", is not just in the colonial project itself but also in the organization of Martinican society. For despite these "inextricable mixtures" it is "largely" divided between white, black or *mulâtre*. Being the cause of this racial structuring, the articulations of white supremacy are further developed by Nardal in terms of mixed racial identities when she speaks of the *Code noir*. In the section "*L'Étude ethnographique*" Nardal presents it as follows:

En 1685, le Code noir, œuvre de Colbert et Seignelay fut promulgué. Il étendait les droits des maîtres sur les esclaves, mais fixait les devoirs des colons vis-à-vis de ces mêmes serviteurs. Ce code, assez humain pour l'époque, ne fut pas, à vraie dire, strictement observé, pas plus que les restrictions du Pacte colonial, œuvre de Mazarin et résultat logique des doctrines mercantiles de l'époque. Ce pacte favorisait le commerce, l'industrie et la navigation de la métropole et frappait de droits prohibitifs le commerce de la colonie avec les autres nations. Ce régime commercial entrava l'essor économique de la Martinique et causa la faillite des Compagnies de colonisation.<sup>668</sup>

Her reference to the *Pacte colonial* reinforces the mercantile interest of the Hexagon and how it shaped the socio-geographical space of Martinique. Placing these two institutionalizations of colonial rule together, it not only posits slavery as the means to national economic prosperity but also infers the *Code noir* was not followed because of these pursuits. The willed autarky of France, as Nardal describes it, resulted in the plummeting of commerce and bankruptcy of colonial enterprises whilst Colbert's code, which in practice was not enforced, implies that economic policies and interests effected the social environment of the plantation. The inference that Nardal makes here will be defended explicitly much later by feminist philosopher Elsa Dorlin, who, in her study *La matrice de la race. Généalogie sexuelle et coloniale de la Nation française*, argues that the "plantation class" did not observe the *Code noir*, motivated as they were, by their own economic interests.<sup>669</sup> Given the fact that most of the "plantation class"

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<sup>668</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 26.

<sup>669</sup> "Ce texte, qui légifère sur les relations maître/ esclave dans les plantations et sur l'organisation sociale et administrative des colonies, n'est en pratique ni respecté ni même appliqué par les planteurs, qui y voient une atteinte à leur affaires – les plantations étant pratiquement de petites principautés où prime la loi du maître." Elsa Dorlin, *La matrice de la race. Généalogie sexuelle et coloniale de la Nation française* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), 235.

considered the *Code* as an improvement of their slaves' existence, it is perhaps why Nardal proposes that this law "was pretty humane for its time" for it attempted to curtail their absolute power.<sup>670</sup> Furthermore, understanding that white French identity is the pinnacle of the racial stratification of Martinican society, Nardal's overlapping of (exploitative) economy of France and the social relationships constructed within the plantation (supposedly regulated by the *Code*) suggests that there are particular understandings of Frenchness that are played out in the microcosm of the plantation. On the subsequent page of the *Guide*, Nardal brings interracial "unions" between masters and slaves to the foreground.

Vers 1700, une loi vint interdire les mariages entre blancs et noirs qui se produisent assez souvent. Cela n'empêcha point les unions entre les maitres et leurs esclaves, ainsi qu'en témoigne l'extraordinaire variété de teints que l'on peut observer chez Les Martiniquais.<sup>671</sup>

The accuracy of Nardal's historical fact could be questioned for it does not appear that there was a law – whether the *Code noir* or any other subsequent legislation – that formally banned marriages between white and black subjects.<sup>672</sup> However, what is accurate and being underlined by Nardal is that no legal, political, or institutional efforts to regularize these unions were effective. The failure of Colbert's legislation, that was in part to control the interracial populations born of these "unions", and who were considered as a disruption to the hierarchical structures of the plantations, is simply evident in "the extraordinary variety of colors" that make up the Martinican population. Nardal interconnects then, economic exploitation and metropolitan mercantilism with sexual exploitation

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<sup>670</sup> As Dorlin argues, despite the *Code noir* being the institutionalization of racist ideologies, and writing into the legal apparatus of the French nation the legitimization of white supremacy, it was nevertheless experienced by the plantocracy as laws that benefited or improved the conditions of slaves: "Ce code est considéré par la plupart des planteurs – des "habitants" – comme une législation en faveur de l'amélioration de la condition des esclaves." Dorlin, *La matrice de la race*, 307.

<sup>671</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 27.

<sup>672</sup> Elsa Dorlin's research tends to contradict Nardal's statement. Dorlin, *La matrice de la race*, 307. Also, the social historian George Fredrickson argues that whilst interracial marriages were disapproved, they were never legally banned in France, as opposed, for example, to the context of the United States. "Aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, les autorités des colonies de plantation des Antilles françaises (Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe et Martinique) n'encourageaient pas officiellement les mariages entre les Blancs et les Noirs, mais ne les interdisaient pas non plus. Les premiers colons, presque tous de sexe masculin, établis dans ces îles se sont tout naturellement liés avec certaines de leurs esclaves, dont ils ont fait leurs concubines; ils affranchissaient généralement ensuite leurs enfants mulâtres, posant ainsi les fondations d'une nouvelle catégorie sociale, composée de gens de couleur de condition libre. Les rédacteurs du "Code noir" promulgué en 1685 à l'intention des Antilles françaises ont essayé de réglementer ces relations et de les soumettre à la morale chrétienne. Le maître qui vivait en concubinage avec une esclave...se voyait enjoindre d'épouser chrétiennement sa concubine, après quoi celle-ci, devenue sa femme, et tous les enfants nés de leur union seraient émancipés. S'il n'obéissait pas à cette injonction, il encourait une amende et la confiscation de ses esclaves." George Fredrickson, "Mulâtres et autres métis. Les attitudes à l'égard du métissage aux États-Unis et en France depuis le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue internationale des sciences sociales* 183, no. 1 (2005): 111-120. Consulted online: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-des-sciences-sociales-2005-1-page-111.htm>.

of women of color within the plantation. By inferring that “masters” continued to do as they pleased, the author flips the sexual politics that underpin both *doudouist* fantasies and the narratology of this literary genre. Just as Nardal re-oriented the tourists’ perceptions upon the arrival to Martinique – thwarting their expectations that black women would be there waiting to satisfy their desires – Nardal retells the history of the emergence of the Antillean population which underlines these violent realities and sexual exploitation of black women. Nardal does not reduce the “new race’s” existence as only coming from this history but by underscoring the racialized sexual politics she both tells another story to the metropolitan readers as much as she re-appropriates this violence from historical erasure. Consequently, Nardal’s discussion of interraciality and creolization of the Martinican population in the *Guide* is framed in such a way that demonstrates to the readership how processes of colonization and imperialism have transformed the society and geography of Martinique and how France and French identity have equally been changed. The *Pacte colonial* or the *Code noir* are examples of how France’s institutional structure transforms in colonial relationships. The “unions between masters and slaves” also changed how ethnic and racial identities are thought from the metropolis, which is demonstrated in the very writing and implementation of the *Code noir*. This is to say, whiteness and French national identity are as much constructed and transformed in these microcosms of plantocracies as are the racialization of black or interracial identities. As Nardal demonstrated in respect to the shaping of perception – how this affects what one experiences and how the individual positions him or herself in *relation* to others – the disavowal of certain relationalities through ideological apparatuses such as racism, qualifies or characterize (white) ways of being, seeing and representing the world. Nardal tells a different story throughout the *Guide* as she represents Martinicans as both subjects and producers of culture and history despite centuries of domination all the while highlighting the relations of entanglement between the Hexagon and Martinique, between travelers, adventure novelists and inhabitants of the island and its landscapes. Her celebration of epidermic variation shows to what extent Nardal thinks through cultural identity – designated as white or black or otherwise – to be nevertheless inherently multiple and diverse. Deconstructing the myth of France’s cultural and ethno-racial purity, she reframes this violent and oppressive context underlining that both Martinique and Martinicans and the French and France are a part of the same history. This gives thought to Nardal’s overall strategies of (re)orientation of her *Guide* to Martinique. In her orientating devices that act like a compass to the Martinique she is guiding her readers through – presenting other perspectives, telling another story, transforming stereotypical imaging, redirecting the traveler’s (exotic and erotic) expectations – Nardal encourages another way of seeing, understanding, and positioning oneself in

*relation* to new environments and the people who live there. In Nardal's persistence and resistance in presenting Martinique and Martinicans otherwise, the metropolitan readers are asked not only to relate and perceive this socio-cultural space differently whilst travelling but also to question how they perceive themselves, in this context, as white French people. Nardal opens the door to understandings of self and the world in its multiplicity and difference. Perhaps then, the metropolitan public could see and understand that "life (in Martinique) is merely the adaptation of European life to the necessities of a tropical climate."<sup>673</sup> As it has been demonstrated at length above, such statements made by the author do not eliminate cultural specificity and plurality. Rather the idea is that everyone on the island, no matter their ethno-racial identity, have been and are entangled with "Europe" and more particularly are a part of this French nation state. In Nardal's cultural politics then, she creates space for thinking non-white identities within the construction and perception of Frenchness. This speaks to her black internationalism for whilst her thinking and aesthetics are grounded in Martinique and the specificities of French anti-blackness, her conceptions and representations of black identities posit thinking through difference as the starting point for global black emancipation. At this point, continuing on in the investigation of Nardal's cultural aesthetics and her black feminist politics furthers the development of her arguments and literary strategies presented in the institutional frame of the *Guide*. This will take place by turning to a series of portraits of black Antillean femininities that Nardal wrote for *Le Soir* in 1930.

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<sup>673</sup> "La vie, là-bas, n'est qu'une adaptation de la vie européenne aux nécessités du climat tropical." My translation. Nardal, "Martinique," 5.

#### 4.4 Four Portraits of Antillean Femininity in *Le Soir*

Paulette Nardal's four-part series on Antillean women was published in the colonial section in *Le Soir* during the month of June in 1930. She was hired by this quotidian newspaper at the end of 1929 specifically to work within the "Colonial Page" that it featured once a week. In retrospect, Nardal attributes her time here as a formative one, fine-tuning her journalistic craft and collaborating with other journalists such as Ludovic-Oscar Frossard, who, as she states, "taught me how to write an article".<sup>674</sup> In the four essays entitled "*Femme de couleur: L'Antillaise*", "*L'Antillaise: marchande des rues*", "*L'Antillaise: bourgeoise créole*" and "*L'Antillaise: étudiante à Paris*"<sup>675</sup> there is a resonance with her cultural politics outlined in the *Guide*, namely the representation of "all classes of Martinican society" as a way to demonstrate "the universality of human nature".<sup>676</sup> Her international politics that move from specificities of Antillean identities and cultures to her universal humanism and global emancipation of people of color finds a place in the context of the "Colonial Page" as she reports on a variety of topics from within the French empire and beyond. Similar to the challenge that Nardal undertakes in the format of the *Guide*, she works within these pages of the colonial section to question pre-established ideas or assumptions of colonization in the metropole and within the colonial imagination. Whilst Nardal published approximately two dozen articles for *Le Soir*, my focus will remain on her representation of Antillean feminine identities in her series. However, what is evident in her other essays, for example, "*La femme française aux colonies*", "*Les femmes de couleur dans l'ordre social*", "*Gandhi prévu par Kipling*", "*Civilisation américaine*" and "*Pas de Sénégalais en Indochine!*" is that they too mobilize her international perspective when thinking through cultural politics of blackness.<sup>677</sup> Nardal discusses the extreme racial violence in the United States and the practice of lynching in her "American Civilization". She presents her disagreement with the French colonial policy to mobilize Senegalese soldiers to calm the uprisings in "Indochina" for reasons that it would create "anti-black hatred."<sup>678</sup> In "*Gandhi*

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<sup>674</sup> "Il m'a appris à fabriquer un article." My translation. Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 85.

<sup>675</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Femme de couleur: L'Antillaise," *Le Soir*, 3 juin, 1930; "L'Antillaise: marchande des rues," *Le Soir*, 10 juin, 1930; "L'Antillaise: bourgeoise créole," *Le Soir*, 23 juin, 1930; "L'Antillaise: étudiante à Paris," *Le Soir*, 30 juin, 1930.

<sup>676</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 2.

<sup>677</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Gandhi prévu par Kipling," *Le Soir*, 14 avril, 1930; "La femme française aux colonies," *Le Soir*, 7 avril, 1930; "Les femmes de couleur dans l'ordre social," *Le Soir*, 21 avril, 1930; "Pas de Sénégalais en Indochine !" *Le Soir*, 26 mai, 1930; "Civilisation américaine," *Le Soir*, 19 mai, 1930.

<sup>678</sup> "L'envoi de tirailleurs sénégalais en Indochine créerait donc une nouvelle haine de race dont les noirs seraient les seules victimes." Nardal, "Pas de Sénégalais en Indochine !" *Le Soir*, 26 mai, 1930.

*prévu par Kipling*”, Nardal describes Rudyard Kipling as “the prophet of imperial ideals of England” who is “sincerely persuaded of the reality of the sacred mission of the ‘white man’s burden’ that God has trusted in the English.”<sup>679</sup> What is also evident in these articles is how Nardal approaches the subjects through the prism of her black feminist politics. In the “*Les femmes de couleur dans l’ordre social*”, Nardal broaches many different social, religious, cultural, and national contexts – India, Turkey, “The Americas”, Europe, France – to outline the global fight for emancipation of women of color on the political, cultural, or social fronts. More specifically speaking of the French context in “*La femme française aux colonies*” Nardal, “as a black Antillean woman”, (“*en tant qu’indigène*”) is highly critical of French women’s racial prejudice. Whilst referring to the painter and author Lucie Cousturier as one exception, Nardal states: “those [female] pushers of toxic curiosities that see in the indigenous population (evolved or not) only faults, vices and a supposed mediocrity...”<sup>680</sup> This last article approaches the thematic presented in Nardal’s series on Martinican women in so far as it underlines the political impetus (and arguably necessity) of making discursive space for the re-presentation of Antillean femininities as subjects. This is linked to her celebration of tones of blackness for in the first article of the series “*Femme de couleur: L’Antillaise*” the author dedicates the whole piece to the articulation of differing racial embodiments. Framing therefore the remainder of her articles in the series by this reflection, it demonstrates the importance of thinking through interraciality in her politics and the creation of her aesthetics. Nardal was not alone in making the multiplicity of cultures and racial identities cornerstone to her creation of Antillean cultural identity. However, what sets her apart from her colleagues, as the discussion below will highlight, is that her politics and poetics of color do not entail essentialized understandings of black femininities.

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<sup>679</sup> “Kipling, le prophète de l’idéal impérial en Angleterre...[est]... sincèrement persuadé de la réalité du “fardeau de l’homme blanc” de la mission sacrée que Dieu aurait confiée au peuple anglais.” My Translation. Nardal, “Gandhi prévu par Kipling,” 14 avril, 1930.

<sup>680</sup> “ces pourvoyeuses de curiosités malsaines qui ne voient chez l’indigène, évoluée ou non, que des tares, des vices ou une prétendue médiocrité...” My translation. Ellipsis in the original. Nardal, “La femme française aux colonies,” 7 avril, 1930.



#### 4.4.1 Paulette Nardal's Poetics of Color and Interracial Identity

In black print culture during the interwar period, articulating the specificities of interraciality in the creation of Antillean cultural identities is a theme that appears and reappears in the pages of these magazines and newspapers. As Nardal demonstrated in the *Guide*, this is in part because it is a unique characteristic of the Martinican population. But also, because of the transatlantic slave trade and the black diasporic populations born from this context, it is a fundamental nexus of deconstructing anti-black racism and transforming significations of blackness in an anti-black world. This, for example, is shown in Fauset's literary explorations of interracial identities in her characters and in African American literature at large with such narratologies as the passing plot. Thus, whilst Nardal's and Fauset's work resonate on this point, the way it is articulated is quite different because of the particularities of anti-black racisms in each nation state. One of the differences of Nardal's oeuvre is the fact that she underlines, as touched on above, that the mixed cultural heritage of the sociohistorical space of Martinique goes beyond a white and black dichotomy. At the same time, however, Nardal's creation of black feminine identities focuses on the specificities of anti-black racism, which can be seen, for instance, in her challenge to the *doudou* stereotype in exotic literature, which is particular to racist representation of blackness. This is to say, if in the French cultural imaginary whereby anti-black racism is not articulated in the same way, for example, as anti-Maghrebi or anti-Asian racisms, then the creation of an emancipatory black cultural politics must equally respond to such specificity. And this observation is not merely on the level of the symbolic or representational. Perhaps more importantly these differing articulations of racisms are experienced in lived realities by people of color. As it was addressed in Chapter One, the racism that Nardal experienced when moving to Paris is because she is a black woman. As she states, it was this that, in part, brought about her conscientization of her black identity: "I only became conscience of my difference when they made me feel it."<sup>681</sup> For Nardal this was understood in the context of global anti-blackness for she refers to Josephine Baker's arrival in Paris around the same time. During this discussion, Nardal's self-identification with her mixed cultural identity was also mentioned: "In reality, I considered myself as a white occidental woman, Miss Nardal, a black bourgeois."<sup>682</sup> What is highlighted is that her experience of anti-black racism

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<sup>681</sup> Cited in Chapter One but repeated here for convenience. Such is the same for the footnote below. "J'ai seulement pris conscience de ma différence après quand on me l'a fait sentir." My translation. Servant, *Paulette Nardal*.

<sup>682</sup> "En réalité, je me considérais comme une occidentale à peau blanche, demoiselle Nardal, une bourgeoise noire." My translation. Servant, *Paulette Nardal*.

ignores the fact that she positions and identifies herself in her multicultural identity. In Roberte Horth's short story "*Histoire sans importance*", multicultural identity is articulated through the interracial embodiment of the character Léa. The denouement of the story which was published in *La Revue du monde noir*, emphasizes the main protagonist's realization that the reason she does not find the space to live out her identity after migrating to Paris is because of "one little fact, a thing of no importance, the simple irony of her mixed blood."<sup>683</sup> Horth's short story dramatizes the disavowal of Léa's subjectivity through her experience of anti-black racism that delimits her person to only one part of her identity and their racist imaginations of what black femininity signifies. As it has started to be demonstrated in Nardal's work, from an Antillean perspective, the question of "*métissage*", multicultural or interracial identity is politically and culturally mobilized to counteract stereotypes and lived realities of anti-black racism. It is also a way to think through, valorize and live out one's own identity as rich, complex, full in its subjecthood which for some, is interracial. On the one hand then, in the black cultural and intellectual Parisian milieu mixed racial embodiments are representations of lived realities. On the other hand, in the discursive spaces of print culture, interracial figures are put to work in an aesthetics that disturbs a world that pretends to clearly distinguish between black and white. Furthermore, as in the *Guide*, Nardal showed interracial identity to be entangled with violence and colonial sexual politics which is perpetuated in the discursive spaces of exotic literature and often overlooked by black masculine perspectives of mixed racial identity. Therefore, when Paulette Nardal and her colleagues, like Roberte Horth, speak of interraciality from a feminist perspective they respond by de-naturalizing black femininity and sexuality and framing interracial identity as cultural. A clear example of this is in Paulette Nardal's "*Femme de couleur: L'Antillaise*" where she remobilizes her celebration of epidermic variation of blackness in her focus on interraciality. What will be shown through a comparative study of Gratiant's "*Mûlatres...pour le bien ou le mal*", is that Nardal dismantles certain sexist assumption propelled in discussions on "*métissage*" and creates her own liberatory aesthetics of black femininity.

In Nardal's "*Femme de couleur*" the readers come across familiar descriptive paragraphs of her celebration of epidermic variation but this time strictly speaking in terms of Antillean femininity.

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<sup>683</sup> Roberte Horth, "Histoire sans importance / A thing of no importance," *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World* 2 (1931): 50.

La race antillaise est, comme on le sait, fortement métissée. De l'extraordinaire variété de teints et de types qui frappe l'étranger dans toutes réunions de gens de couleur.

En effet, la gamme de tons est si riche qu'il est presque impossible de la définir sans recourir à une comparaison inédite.

Entre la noire, couleur de vanille, et la mulâtresse que parfois l'on peut à peine distinguer de la blanche, il y a toute la richesse de tons de bois précieux et exotiques, de l'ambre clair. Il y a la brune au teint sapotille, la métisse au teint de cannelle.<sup>684</sup>

Nardal's poetics of color, that places cultural currency on blackness and the "extraordinary variety" that this term signifies, is not dissimilar to Fauset's critique, for example, of who and what is considered valuable or worthy in certain cultural imaginaries. As it was discussed in terms of her *Comedy: American Style*, this not only directs the subject's desire towards the attainment of objects deemed worthy but also shapes the very way one lives out his or her identity. Whiteness, in France, was the object of Mrs. Cary's desire which in turn formed the way she related to the world around herself, such as marrying her daughter Teresa to Astride Pailleron, as a means towards this goal. Fauset, in her ironic comedy demonstrated that such a pursuit was futile, if not illusory, and highlighted the destruction that it created in regard to Teresa but also Olivia Cary herself. Using a different strategy to Fauset's productive contrast in *Comedy*, Nardal mobilizes difference and diversity as a way towards the symbolization of black femininities that are culturally (and humanely) valuable in and of themselves. In the scope of her four-part series in *Le Soir* this is the common thread that connects these discursive spaces. Here, as elsewhere, Nardal's multiplicity of representations of black feminine embodiment counteract the exoticism of the colonial imaginary as well as questioning how black femininity is figured in Antillean literary traditions, such as the conte, and how black women are represented from black masculine perspectives contemporaneous to Nardal's series.<sup>685</sup> What is more, her celebration of variation of blackness has an effect of disturbing that which the term "black" designates from the perspective of the white point of view. This is not only in terms of the color black as signifying importance and value – rather than, say, designating savagery – but in the different shades that Nardal mobilizes, it troubles, on the level of signification, what is meant in the racist imaginary when the term "black" is used. This is problematized when, as in other moments of her œuvre,

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<sup>684</sup> Nardal, "Femme de couleur," 3 juin, 1930.

<sup>685</sup> For example, Hanétha Vété-Congolo in her study of Martinican femininity, *Nous sommes Martiniquaises. Pawòl en bouches de femmes châtaignes: une pensée existentialiste noire sur la question des femmes*, the author underlines the gendered aspect of the "conte martiniquaise": "le sujet femme est un être immoral, parfaitement nocif pour lui-même et son entourage. Lorsque, à partir de la logique de l'apparence, la femme n'est pas dépeinte comme le paragon de la malveillance, elle ne manque pas d'être proposée comme frêle, inconséquente et crétule. Les prises de parole sur le sujet féminin sont directes et l'on parle du sujet à la troisième personne jusqu'à le "désujétiser" vitalemt." Hanétha Vété-Congolo, *Nous sommes Martiniquaises. Pawòl en bouches de femmes châtaignes: une pensée existentialiste noire sur la question des femmes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2020), 9.

Nardal highlights interraciality and multiethnicity which goes beyond, strictly speaking, the realms of black and white.

Les croisements ont produit des types imprévus. A coté de la noire au type presque pur, il y a la Caraïbe, l'Hindoue, la Brésilienne, l'Andalouse, la Mauresque, la Chinoise, la Japonaise... Beaucoup de mulâtresses présentent absolument les caractères de la race russe. Nous avons vu des photos de jeunes indigènes des îles océaniques que n'auraient pas désavouées nombre d'Antillaises. Il n'est pas rare non plus de rencontrer aux Antilles ce qui est convenu d'appeler « des profils de camée ». <sup>686</sup>

The supposed possibility to separate and designate – by epidermic color – differing ethno-racial identities is rendered obsolete in Nardal's descriptions of Antillean femininity. By extension this puts into question the categories of the racist color palette and the significations attached to such colorations. In the same gesture, this aspect of Nardal's cultural politics overrides, to a certain degree, the possible social antagonisms that take place in multicultural spaces like Martinique.<sup>687</sup> Focusing on the celebration of cultural diversity – that the readers understand is articulated by epidermic variation of the “new race” in Nardal's work – tends to depict an ideal and rather romanticized confluence of intercultural exchanges in the creolization of the population. This is not to assert that Nardal is ignorant of potential conflicts or tensions that may arise between differing ethnicities within Martinique. Rather it is mentioned to highlight the performative and therefore political aspects of Nardal's poetics of color. The performance of a harmonious relationship between an ethnically diverse population represents a political pursuit that strives for the recognition of intercultural and interracial subjects to be seen in their multiplicity. Nardal's representation of Martinican women, therefore, paints a different picture to Mayotte Capécia's black feminine character in *Je suis Martiniquaise* published almost two decades later.<sup>688</sup> Nardal's thinking of Antillean identities, masculine or feminine, in their multiplicity brings her work closer to Martinican artist and writer Jenny Alpha who takes charge against Capécia's reduction of all Antillean feminine subjects to one representation.<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>686</sup> Nardal, “Femme de couleur,” 3 juin, 1930. Ellipsis in the original.

<sup>687</sup> See for example, Ulrike Zander, “La hiérarchie “socio-raciale” en Martinique. Entre persistance postcoloniales et évolution vers un désir de vivre ensemble,” *REVUE Asylon(s)* 11 (2013): <http://www.reseau-terra.eu/article1288.html> An earlier study by Michel Leiris, cited by Zander, attests to the antagonisms between differing ethno-racial communities brought about by migration of various populations to Martinique. See, Michel Leiris, *Contacts et civilisations en Martinique et en Guadeloupe*, 1931 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

<sup>688</sup> Mayotte Capécia, *Je suis Martiniquaise* (Paris: Corrêa, 1948).

<sup>689</sup> As Vété-Congolo states, referring to Fanon's critique of Capécia's novel in *Black Skin, White Masks* : “Jenny Alpha s'insurge contre la mal-représentation de la femme martiniquaise et l'audace de Mayotte Capécia qui commet une synecdoque et, par son titre, insinue une universalité identitaire pour toutes les Martiniquaises. Jenny Alpha entreprend de corriger les erreurs de Mayotte Capécia, erreurs qui sont en fait des injustices rendant nécessaire l'élévation d'une “autre” voix, une autre perspective. La réponse rectificatrice de Jenny Alpha est fort cinglante. En fait, elle l'est bien

Speaking of Alpha's vision of Martinican identities, Hanétha Vété-Congolo addresses how the former understands and presents this particular socio-historical space.

Proposant une autre voix, elle se fait fort de soumettre aussi une autre définition de la Martinique et des rapports raciaux. Là où Mayotte Capécia avait acquiescé à une hiérarchie raciale tenant implicitement la personne de couleur pour inférieure contrairement à la personne blanche, Jenny Alpha avance l'égalité. La Martinique est un « arc-en-ciel de races », non pas sans confrontations raciales puisque le métissage que cela suppose n'est pas exempt de « problèmes ». Cependant, la situation pluriraciale est un terrain sur lequel peuvent germer des possibles. La réprobation va loin et Jenny Alpha met en relief la pauvreté des opérations critiques de Mayotte Capécia. Celles-ci portent plus sur des considérations raciales que sur le complexe chevauchement perpétuellement exercé de la classe sociale et de la race.<sup>690</sup>

Paulette Nardal's poetics of color which valorizes the multiplicity of Antillean identities and mixed cultural heritages evokes pride in one's subjectivity and difference which brings her perspective closer to Jenny Alpha's than Capécia's.<sup>691</sup> As it was outlined at the beginning of the chapter, this resonates with the objectives of the black international politics in *La Revue du monde noir*: "to create among Negroes of the entire world" a way "to better know each other to love one another, to defend more effectively their collective interests and to glorify their race".<sup>692</sup> Whilst Nardal never employs the word *négritude*, the performative aspects of her poetics of color that underline multicultural specificity as a quality of "the Antillean race" coincide with early formulations of what will become known as *négritude* in the works of Nardal's colleagues such as Gilbert Gratiant. In his article, "*Mulâtres... pour le bien et le mal*", that appeared five years after

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plus que celle de Fanon, car elle est à la mesure du coup que porte Mayotte Capécia dont le discours donne l'impression d'être, en effet, celui de toutes les Martiniquaises. C'est en tant que femme et femme martiniquaise que *Je suis Martiniquaise* atteint Jenny Alpha. Celle-ci refuse que le personnage Mayotte soit sa représentante, que l'auteure Mayotte Capécia soit sa porte-parole et prétende parler en son nom." Vété-Congolo, *Nous sommes Martiniquaises*, 78.

<sup>690</sup> Vété-Congolo, *Nous sommes Martiniquaises*, 81. Cited within the text: Jenny Alpha, "Mayotte Capécia. *Je suis Martiniquaise*," *Présence africaine* 5 (1948): 886-889.

<sup>691</sup> In the continuation of the discussion cited above, Vété-Congolo argues that one of Fanon's problems with Capécia's novel is that it would generate a self-hatred in Martinican women, and more specifically hatred of black Martinican men. Vété-Congolo articulates this in connection to Alpha's interpretation and critique of *Je suis Martiniquaise*. What becomes apparent, is that Fanon's rhetoric and argumentation is informed by an implicit sexism that is not present within Alpha's work. Vété-Congolo explains: "Selon lui [Fanon], l'ouvrage est capable d'influencer et d'entraîner les femmes de couleur à la haine de soi et la haine de l'homme de couleur : '*Je suis Martiniquaise* est un ouvrage au rabais, prônant un comportement malsain.' Il dévoile ainsi une condamnation générale de la gent féminine martiniquaise, une totale absence de confiance en la Martiniquaise simple et influençable. Mais alors que Jenny Alpha affirme que Mayotte Capécia n'est pas 'a Martiniquaise,' mais 'UNE Martiniquaise,' Fanon qualifiera le roman de roman anémié et érigeria Mayotte Capécia en exemple primitif de ce qu'est la Martiniquaise... Jenny Alpha n'avait pas ennemié Mayotte Capécia. Tout au moins, l'avait-elle considérée comme indigne d'estime. En tout cas, elle lui avait laissé l'espace d'appartenance au groupe martiniquais en lui répondant qu'elle était non pas la Martiniquaise, mais 'une' Martiniquaise." Vété-Congolo, *Nous sommes Martiniquaises*, 82-83. Cited within the text: Fanon, *Peau noire*, 48.

<sup>692</sup> La Direction, "Ce que nous voulons faire / Our Aim," 1-2.

Nardal's four articles in *Le Soir*, Gratiant takes up this question of "métissage" and frames it as integral to his understanding of Antillean identity and articulation of négritude.<sup>693</sup> Appearing in 1935 in *L'Étudiant noir: journal de l'Association des étudiants martiniquais en France*, alongside articles by Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Paulette Nardal's short story "Guignol Ouolof", this publication has, for some, been dated as the "birth" of Négritude. For example, and completely ignoring the fact that Nardal published a text in the periodical, Césaire himself will write in a preface to an anthology of Gratiant's work *Fables créoles et autres écrits*,

Beaucoup d'historiens et de critiques voient dans cette publication [*L'Étudiant noir*] comme l'acte de naissance du mouvement de la négritude : Aimé Césaire et Léopold Sédar Senghor y publient côte à côte des textes où s'esquisse leur future thématique nègre.<sup>694</sup>

In Césaire's erasure of women like Nardal from his genealogy of Négritude, he mobilizes the historicity of the movement to introduce Gratiant's article "Mulâtres". In this piece, Césaire argues,

Il se situe de manière nuancée par rapport à la thématique de la négritude alors en gestation. Il reconnaît qu'il y a en lui une part d'ascendance nègre, il assume pleinement une négritude politique (prise de position en faveur des victimes du racisme), mais il refuse de s'enfermer dans une identité seulement nègre.<sup>695</sup>

Césaire's summary of Gratiant's self-positioning and articulation of his relationship between négritude and creole identities is not entirely dissimilar to what Paulette Nardal is constructing in her work with the celebration of ethnic diversity of Antillean identity. Perhaps one difference, is that in Paulette Nardal's poetics of color it is the "extraordinary variations of tones" that is incorporated within the signification of blackness whereas, as Césaire highlights, the term négritude is the performative political strategy designating "an only black identity". At the same time, both Nardal and Gratiant underline the specificity of thinking through blackness in the Antillean space in respect to multiplicity, as it is demonstrated in the latter's refusal to identify or "enclose himself" within the appellation "nègre". Even if there are five years that separate Nardal's "Femme de couleur" and Gratiant's "Mulâtres" this commonality gives rise to other resonances in their work. For example, Gratiant writes,

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<sup>693</sup> Throughout Gratiant's œuvre "métissage" or "sang-mêlé" holds a significant importance in his emancipatory cultural aesthetics. To take but one example is his poem *Credo des sang-mêlé*, also entitled *Je veux chanter la France* published in 1961. Gilbert Gratiant, *Credo des sang-mêlé (ou Je veux chanter la France): poème Martinique à vol d'abeille* (Paris: Éditions Louis Soutanges, 1961).

<sup>694</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Préface," dans Gilbert Gratiant (aut), *Fables créole et autres écrits*, eds. Isabelle Gratiant, Renaud Gratiant et Jean-Louis Joubert (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1996), 20.

<sup>695</sup> Césaire, "Préface," 20.

Les Antilles ont une population formée pour une énorme proportion d'éléments africains, pour une petite proportion d'éléments européens. Et cette population n'est ni africaine, ni bien moins française. C'est au même titre que celle de Madagascar ou de l'Indonésie, une population noire, ayant acquis, par les conditions géographiques spéciales, dans lesquelles elle se trouve, une vie propre, une originalité. Notre peuple, est un peuple noir, bien différent des autres peuples noirs.<sup>696</sup>

Very similar to Nardal's presentation of black cultural identities in the *Guide*, Gratiant frames the Antillean population as endogenous to the "particular geographical conditions" of this space. In the context of black internationalism, each author strives for a homogeneous understanding of blackness across the world by recognizing that social, and cultural identities, black or otherwise, are shaped by the context from which they emerge. By consequence, both place difference and multiplicity as fundamental to their respective poetical aesthetics and within their fights for global black emancipation, which the budding Négritude movement is one cultural and intellectual response amongst many. Furthermore, and also akin to Nardal, Gratiant presents his understanding of blackness through the motif of "métissage", "sang-mêlé" or "man of color" as he disturbs the white/black frontier by broadening the scope of ethnic heritage of this particular cultural identity.

D'abord, qu'entendre par homme de couleur ? Tous ceux qui sont de sang mêlé, à quelque degré qu'ait pu se faire le mélange : sang blanc, noir éventuellement rouge et en portion infime, jaune, indien. Pratiquement si l'on excepte une étroite minorité de « bekés » créoles, tous les Martiniquais sont des métis et pour ceux-là mêmes, les bekés, je prétends que beaucoup de mes conclusions seraient valables, en dépit du non-mélange, véritable ou prétendu des races.<sup>697</sup>

As mentioned previously, the author uses the racialized vocabulary of the time. The readers see a marked difference between Gratiant's and Nardal's writing that highlights the political and poetical impetus of the latter's detailed imaging of skin color. Instead of using the caricatural or ideological color codification – red, yellow, black, white – Nardal creates her own color palette that, in its continuity across her work, includes such tones as, rich wood, sapodilla plum, cinnamon brown, carnation white, vanilla, and clear amber to name just a few. In contradistinction then, the richness and diversity of Nardal's colors highlights to what extent her poetics search to go beyond the imaging of caricatural or stereotypical representations, at the same time as she uses "variety of tones" to thicken and broaden differing embodiments of Antillean identity and more specifically women of color. Her color palette is as complex and

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<sup>696</sup> Gratiant, "Mulâtres," 5.

<sup>697</sup> Gratiant, "Mulâtres," 5.

as rich as the subjects that these colors represent. However, as in Nardal's depictions, Gratiant's "*homme de couleur*" or "*sang-mêlé*" are represented as significations of cultural specificity not one of biological determinism.<sup>698</sup> This is demonstrated, for example, when the author remarks that, even if the "*bekés*" pretend to (white) racial purity, it does not mean that they are outside of the interraciality that characterizes Antillean society.

Voici le fait banal, mais important toutefois et que l'on semble trop oublier : une civilisation nouvelle avec deux modalités d'expression variable et qui est la *Civilisation Créole*, qui unifie bien dissemblances, emprunte ceci aux nègres, cela aux blancs, cela encore aux nègres, cela enfin aux blancs.<sup>699</sup>

Therefore, both Nardal and Gratiant underline that even if it remains unacknowledged by those in power, whiteness, and by extension Frenchness, have been culturally changed within the inseparable relationships and entanglements brought about through the history of colonization and enslavement. More explicitly than Nardal, Gratiant highlights the historical, racial, and sexual violence from which "the existence of the man of color has come".<sup>700</sup>

Prenons le cas type bien connu et retenons comme ayant sa valeur, chacune des données essentielles, chacune des circonstances accidentelles. Il y a deux cents à trois cents ans – un Blanc, propriétaire d'esclave, maître tout puissant – a eu envie d'une jeune négresse et a cédé à son caprice – avec ou sans consentement de la partenaire – qui n'était point « personne » mais « objet légalement vénal ». L'homme avait une race, une religion, une langue, une civilisation, des intérêts de famille, de classe et de caste, tout cela *en propre*. La femme avait sa race, évidemment... mais allait la perdre, sinon en elle-même, du moins en sa descendance ; elle n'avait plus sa religion, mais une nouvelle imposée par la force et la ruse ; elle n'avait pas sa langue, mais une nouvelle imposée par la nécessité, le créole, elle n'avait plus sa civilisation, mais une nouvelle imposée par la nécessité, civilisation de compromis entre celle du maître et la civilisation africaine déjà vaincue et pratiquement éliminée ; ses intérêts de famille n'existaient qu'en fonction de ceux du maître ; ses intérêts de classe étaient refondus, (à partir de la classe ou de la caste africaine, éventuellement) en un vaste intérêt de classe confusément senti mais obnubilé par le régime de l'esclavage, puissamment aidé par la religion catholique.<sup>701</sup>

Gratiant's passage underlines the racial, gender and sexual exploitation and oppression, experienced by black women within the plantocracy. What is more, through "the woman", he addresses the complete erasure of identity – "*objet légalement vénal*" – that takes place in the

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<sup>698</sup> "*Métissage*" or "mixed blood" are notions that are wrapped up in histories of scientific racism which Gratiant is likely well aware. See Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>699</sup> Gratiant, "Mulâtres," 6.

<sup>700</sup> Gratiant, "Mulâtres," 5. Italics in the original.

<sup>701</sup> Gratiant, "Mulâtres," 5. Italics and ellipsis in the original.



context of slavery. Gratiant thus highlights how domination and colonization of an “other” works on every level of socio-cultural identity and subjectivity: religion, language, civilization, family ties, social position and subjecthood. The author continues his exposition by mocking the Martinique of white European scientists who look upon the population as an atavistic “laboratory” of race which is ideal for carrying out their experiments that prove the supremacy of whiteness.<sup>702</sup> Gratiant shines a light on this illusory pursuit that attempts to distinguish ethno-racial identities based on visible and “controllable physical characteristics”.<sup>703</sup> A similar argument takes place in Nardal’s work as the discussion of the *Code noir* demonstrated. Furthermore, whilst Gratiant’s deconstruction of history is more direct than any of Nardal’s formulations – often employing allusion and inference rather than frontal address – both authors appear to come together on the specificities of violence experienced by women of color. Perhaps one remark that can be made at this point, however, is that Gratiant’s imaging of “the woman” perceives her, to a certain degree, as the victim par excellence. This is because, in the logic of his argument, the author places “*la femme*”, subject of racial and sexual violence, in contradistinction to her “progeny” “*le mulâtre*”.

Des caractères spécifiquement créoles, jamais universellement nègres, nous avons vu pourquoi. Autrement dit, redevenant lui-même, le plus complètement, le plus sincèrement, le plus naturellement, sans contrainte, sans apprêt, sans arrière-pensée, l’homme de couleur de chez nous marquera cette reconquête de soi par quoi ? A titre d’exemple, citons deux ou trois manifestations caractéristiques, elles seront débordements sensuel amoureux ; danse ; musique ; flânerie ; récits et discussions ; usage du créole comme langue.<sup>704</sup>

When speaking of “*le mulâtre*”, it is clear that Gratiant is referring to a cultural identity for “creole characteristics” that are enumerated – language, dance, song – pertain to this sphere. In his formulation of the progeny born of the violence of slavery this is another example of refiguring “*métissage*” not as a biological marker but a cultural one. Another element of note is, considering the masculine pronoun or “*l’homme*” designates the general in French, it is arguable that Gratiant is referring to a creole subject, masculine or feminine. However, at the outset of the article he identifies the subjective position from which he speaks: “Today, I am satisfied to develop a few points and where possible, I place myself as the subject”.<sup>705</sup> This signals to the readers that his “observations” come from the perspective of masculine social identity which, on the one hand,

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<sup>702</sup> Gratiant, “Mulâtres,” 6.

<sup>703</sup> Gratiant, “Mulâtres,” 6.

<sup>704</sup> Gratiant, “Mulâtres,” 6.

<sup>705</sup> “Je me contente donc aujourd’hui de quelques remarques et de quelques mises au point, et dans la mesure où cela est possible, je m’inscris pour le sujet.” Gratiant, “Mulâtres,” 5. My translation.

intellectually safe-guards against any type of pretention to a speaker that reports from a purely objective and universal point of view. On the other hand, it infers that when he uses “I” or “*l’homme de couleur*” it does designate a masculine subject. The use of the first person, then, is as much autobiographical as it is a politicization of the “I” understood as “*le mulâtre*”. Therefore, in the remainder of the article as Gratiant represents this masculine figure – who “liberates himself” from both historical and contemporary oppression – becoming a political subject and embodiment of Antillean cultural identity, it means that “the woman” is left behind in her state of non-subjectivity. To put this alternatively, his movement from enslavement to freedom, from biology to culture and politics, coincides with his movement from feminine to masculine, thus framing the latter as the only actors in black emancipation. Echoes of this phenomenon traverse the Atlantic as it was developed in respect to Fauset and her colleagues within the Harlem Renaissance in Chapter Two. It was demonstrated in the discussion of the New Negro and the unequal participation in the creation of a modern black aesthetics.<sup>706</sup> The infusion of gender and sexual politics within black internationalism and struggles for black emancipation is what women like Fauset and Nardal had to fight against within these circles. Here in Gratiant’s article, black femininity is contained to her corporeity which is reinforced latter in the article. The only other time that Gratiant refers to Antillean femininity is in the context of the speaker’s gaze of sexual attraction. Described as a means to clarify and conclude his argument, the speaker responds to “*questions-types*” that he poses to himself.

1) D’une femme à plateau ou de telle femme réputée belle, comme la Vénus Hottentote et d’une jolie Française ou une belle mulâtresse, laquelle m’attirera ? Les formes du corps noir ou mieux de la sang-mêlé seront plus attrayantes, la figure incontestablement, des deux premières femmes ne m’attirera pas – si l’exemple est trop fort, qu’on en cherche d’autres : Victime d’un embourgeoisement séculaire ! dira-t-on et d’une déviation du goût ! Pas rien que cela.<sup>707</sup>

With the reference to “*la Vénus Hottentote*”, he points to the exploitation of black femininity of a well-known figure of the time, Sarah Bartmann, who was taken from her home in South Africa and exhibited as an exotic spectacle to (white) European audiences for she was deemed the living example of grotesque black femininity and sexuality.<sup>708</sup> In the French context, the white natural scientist Georges Cuvier used her as an object of his “studies”, producing racist discourses legitimized as scientific knowledge. The non-attraction expressed by Gratiant in respect to this figure may be interpreted as the rejection of such exoticization and scientific

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<sup>706</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>707</sup> Gratiant, “Mulâtres,” 7.

<sup>708</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus*, 32-41.

racism of black femininity and sexuality. At the same time, the fact that Gratiant mobilizes her too as object-figure of the speaker's sexual gaze, it echoes this logic of sexualization of black women and, to a certain degree, erases this violent history. As an effect, this gives the readers a moment to pause and question why he so explicitly outlined the violence and exploitation of "*la femme*" in the outset of his article. In the above citation, women are not only judged by their physicality alone, "*la victime*" re-emerges – this time qualified by their class position as bourgeois – with the inference being that the only way to better her social standing is via her sexuality. Thus, contained or even victim of her corporeity, Gratiant's earlier demonstration of the sexual violence in regard to black women, and "the sons" which follow, comes to be the performance of the political and cultural becoming of "*le mulâtre*".<sup>709</sup> This has two prominent effects. Firstly, Antillean femininity is framed in the domains of the non-political and non-cultural – "without language", "without civilization", "without religion", in short in the biological – so that the masculine creole subject can be highlighted as being the contrary: a political subject and producer of culture. Secondly, in Gratiant's logics, positing *le mulâtre* as such, creates a necessary symbolic rupture to (matri)linearity. The sexual, gender and racial violence against black women that he describes, then, is less about exposing such realities in and of themselves. Rather it is possible to read it as the demonstration of what this signifies for the new generation of "the sons" of this history, namely the dispossession of patriarchal power. As such, the required step needed to recuperate the power of *le mulâtre* that should rightfully be his, Gratiant needs a transgenerational severance to the past and to black women. In this performance of masculinity, *le mulâtre* requires an "other" (female) subject to dominate in order to experience such power. When Gratiant ends his article, informed by his Marxist perspective, it disqualifies Antillean women as embodying creole cultural identity and as actors towards black political

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<sup>709</sup> The conclusions being drawn at present are like those made by other cultural historians and literary critics who work on this period of black intellectual print culture. However, the argument is slightly different to the one presented, for example, in Jennifer Boittin's analysis of Gratiant's article. Underlining the sexism inherent in Gratiant's logic, Boittin argues, that he places "the burden for this race mixing squarely upon the shoulders of the black slave woman." Citing Gratiant's depiction of the context of slavery from which emerges Antillean identity, as well as underlining the way he objectifies black women, Boittin concludes, "while Gratiant did not overtly blame these women, he nonetheless surmised that *mulâtres* were the result of a transformation of the race produced by women. A complete one, at that, for he then resumed his essay by speaking of the son born of this master-slave union and considered that he himself (implicitly as one such son) was more attracted by the bodies of black and mixed-race women, and by the faces of white or mixed-race women. Even here colonized women were reduced to exotic bodies." As such, Boittin argues that Gratiant's conclusions "rested upon a corporeal definition of women". Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 159-160. The same conclusion is being drawn in the body of this thesis. However, the argument presented above diverges from Boittin's because it is less concerned with ideas of "burden" or "blame" but with the demonstration of how the politicization of black Antillean masculinity requires an recuperation of patriarchal power and a feminine other to be subordinate to him.

emancipation. It equally suggests that Martinican women may be obstacles to such international liberatory pursuits.<sup>710</sup>

Que conclure de tout cela ? Eh bien, que si le fait de proclamer : *Je suis nègre !* est la constatation du fait historique délimité que j'ai essayé d'analyser, je le proclame, mais cela n'a aucune valeur par ailleurs. Que si l'on veut entendre par là que, reconnaissant ce qui subsiste en moi d'âme nègre, sous sa forme créole, ou confusément, sous ses formes non éveillées, je rends hommage publiquement à ce fait magnifique, je crie avec un émerveillement joyeux ; *je suis nègre* mais ce cri n'est pas exclusif et j'ai autant de plénitude dans ma joie à me sentir mulâtre martiniquais ou tout bonnement français en Vendômois ... Voyant loin et penser dans le concret, apporter l'hommage de mes faibles efforts et de ma vie, à la lutte politique que la masses des exploités noirs, damnés de la terre, eux surtout doublement frères, mènent contre l'impérialisme qui les affame, les humilie, me torture.<sup>711</sup>

Whether in the proclamation “*je suis nègre*” or the joy experienced in living his identity, the politicization of blackness in Gratiant’s work leaves no space for thinking black femininity within this frame of “brothers, the wretched of the earth”. Rather, the war cry of black manhood emerges, in these dialectics, only via the foreclosure of the possibility that a black woman can also speak from a political and politicized “I”. Presented as “victim” to violence of slavery, or her corporeity – implied as her only (sexual) tool for social advancement – black femininity has no part in political struggles toward liberation. And arguably more importantly, black femininity cannot take part in feelings of pride in her black subjectivity, for she cannot politically or culturally pronounce and affirm her subject as such. Nardal’s depiction of working-class femininities, for instance, highlights an important distinction to Gratiant’s logics. On the whole, the main difference is that Nardal politicizes her representations of black femininities, inscribing them as political subjects and culture creators. In this comparative study with Gratiant’s article, the readers can see how Nardal’s depiction of Antillean women shines a light on the blind spots that sexism produces within Gratiant’s work and within cultural and intellectual milieus during the interwar period that focus on black masculinity. In this particular article, if femininity is biologized (inferiorized) because “*le mulâtre*” requires an “other” to substantiate his patriarchal power and come into political and cultural subjecthood, then the overarching political objectives outlined, like “*une*

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<sup>710</sup> This is similar, then, to the argument presented by Hanétha Vété-Congolo in respect to Fanon’s argument against Capécia’s novel, which concluded in disqualifying the totality of Antillean women in political struggles for they inherently “*nuire*” such fights for emancipation. As cited, above Vété-Congolo states: “Il dévoile ainsi une condamnation générale de la gent féminine martiniquaise, une totale absence de confiance en la Martiniquaise simple et influençable.” Vété-Congolo, *Nous sommes Martiniquaises*, 83.

<sup>711</sup> Gratiant, “Mulâtres,” 7.

*rénovation culturelle martiniquaise*<sup>712</sup> or the “cry” for class and racial liberation are thwarted. This is to say that rather than perceiving or thinking black femininity as the obstacle to black international liberation, it is in fact the sexism, masculine power, and his requirement of domination in understandings of a masculine self that hinder these pursuits. As a consequence, Nardal’s politicization of Antillean femininities via her understanding of *métissage* and the specificity of Antillean identity, sustains a possibility of thinking multiplicity as the basis of identity with more acuity than Gratiant’s proposals in this article. One particularity of Nardal’s aesthetics that allows for this is her poetics of color and the valorization of different embodiments of blackness. As argued above, it thickens and complexifies representation of Antillean identities as it broadens the palette of (white) codes of racial identification. Furthermore, when Nardal addresses historical violence with regard to black women within the plantocracy she does so in order to recuperate and re-write this history, showing black subjects, both masculine and feminine, to be actors and producers of Antillean culture. In her logics and cultural aesthetics, though they have their own blind spots, what it shows is that if black women are thought and represented as subjects equal to black men then it allows for thinking identity that is inherently multiple and not subsumed by one social identity over another. One consequence is that Nardal’s celebrations of mixed racial heritage challenges how Antillean cultural identities were being thought and created within the black intellectual movements in Paris. A second is, because she keeps multiplicity and difference performative in thinking and creating cultural identities, her work tends to disturb with greater effect the relationships of power involved in the construction of identities, white or black, French or Antillean. As it was highlighted above, both Gratiant’s and Nardal’s perspectives on the creolization of Martinican society challenge the assumption of the purity of whiteness which props up understandings of French national identity. Nardal’s “*Femme de couleur*” comments directly upon this assumption.

Mais le types qui étonne le plus l’Européen est celui de la « chabine » que l’on a dénommé « blonde des pays chauds ». La chabine a assez souvent un teint qu’envierait mainte jeune Anglaise à l’éphémère fraîcheur, des yeux bleus ou d’un marron doré et les plus surprenants cheveux crépus, allant du châtain foncé au blond.<sup>713</sup>

Nardal’s suggestion that one type of embodiment of blackness can be as visibly white as a “European” – that her beauty, even, can be the reason of English women’s jealousies – attests to

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<sup>712</sup> Gratiant, “Mulâtres,” 5.

<sup>713</sup> Nardal, “Femme de couleur,” 3 juin, 1930.

preconceived illusions of the purity of whiteness and thus European/ French identity. Therefore, in contrast to perceiving, imaging, or relating to the Martinican population as a “laboratory” for scientific racism, in *Le Soir* series Nardal reimages Martinique as (tactically) populated by Antillean women and inherently interracial, both being signified as not only the source of pride and culture specificity but also of liberation. This is not to argue that Nardal reifies Antillean femininity, as if she were the figure most oppressed in this context, and therefore the most radical in her possibility to disrupt colonial heteropatriarchy. Rather what her work demonstrates, and is being argued for here, is that if multiplicity and interraciality are fundamental to thinking, creating, and liberating Antillean cultural identities from the scientific and cultural racisms then this can only be effectively undertaken if all Antillean subjects are thought, perceived, and represented as such. In Nardal’s black internationalism informed by her feminist perspective, the argument that she puts forward is that thinking through difference is key to an emancipatory cultural politics, but it will only be so if such social differentiations are not 1) the premise for another’s liberation as outlined in Gratiand’s logic or 2) put to work in the construction of “otherness”. Thus, in the remainder of the articles in *Le Soir*, Nardal builds from the basis of her poetics of color in the first article “*Femme de couleur*”, to represent Antillean femininities in their multiplicity and importantly in their everyday lives. Nardal’s focus on their quotidian affords the author a possibility to address the more latent and invisible aspects of colonial cultural hegemony whilst speaking to her majority metropolitan readership. As an effect, she not only represents black women as subjects within the social, cultural, and political milieus that are at once located in Martinique, France, and the discursive and material spaces of black internationalism, but also investigates the articulations of whiteness and white French identity.

#### 4.4.2 The Power of the Everyday

As demonstrated in the discussion above, Nardal's poetics of color valorize the specificity of Martinican identities and cultural expression and are mobilized as performative tropes that highlight multiplicity inherent to her understanding of subjecthood. This was shown to act on (at least) two levels as she creates her cultural politics from a position that challenges both sexist logics with the predominately masculine black intellectual and cultural milieus and counteracts global antiblackness of which the French colonial perspective is one example. This can be further investigated by considering how Nardal addresses her mostly metropolitan readership and looking at the editorial line of the colonial page in *Le Soir*. What can be seen is that Nardal's four-part series distinguish itself from other articles in this weekly supplement. Unlike Nardal's critical work, much of the articles are evocative of what can be called colonial "common sense" that inhabits the very fabric of white cultural imaginary and participates in the constitution of white French identity and Frenchness.<sup>714</sup> It would appear that the editorial objectives were, in part, critical of the colonial project as the very presence of Nardal's contributions imply. And yet, the givenness or "ordinariness" of certain ideologies and image making rings through its pages and attests to the racial, sexual and gender presumptions within the atmosphere of the time.<sup>715</sup> For example, Nardal's first three portrayals of Martinican femininity – "*Femme de couleur: L'Antillaise*", "*L'Antillaise : marchande des rues*" and "*L'Antillaise: bourgeoise créole*" – appear next to articles reporting on the construction of the 1931 Colonial Exhibition that will take place one year later. Though the layout of the newspaper was perhaps not Nardal's responsibility, the placement of her article "*Femme de couleur*" alongside "*Au Bois de*

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<sup>714</sup> Antonio Gramsci's "common sense" is developed by the author at the same time as the articles published above, namely 1929-1933. His essays from this period are later published (and translated to English) under the Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks: Volume 1*, ed. Joseph Buttigieg, trans. Joseph Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Other authors and critics have employed Gramsci's "common sense" in respect to this context. See for example, Brent Hayes Edwards, "Unsettled Legacies," *PMLA/ Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 136, no. 5 (2021): 681-695.

<sup>715</sup> Alongside critical tools like Gramsci's "common sense", the work of social scientists and literary critics such as Michel de Certeau's study *The Practice of Everyday Life* are useful to this conversation. What de Certeau highlights, amongst other things, is that the culture in which one lives is formed, partly, by objects, images, habitual practices, and knowledge which, in their repetition and everyday occurrence not only seem given but also immutable truths that structure reality. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 16. One effect of such commonness, as de Certeau argues, is that it renders invisible the fictive or performative element of one's individual and collective experiences of and relationships to everyday realities. As such, the givenness or "ordinariness" of everyday life, makes it difficult to critically examine and change the "the way things are" as they appear immediately tangible, like an uncontested fact. This is precisely what Nardal questions – the latent givenness of reality – by mobilizing and making tangible everyday realities and common sense told from another perspective, that of Antillean women's "way of life".

*Vincennes : Exposition coloniale de 1931*” signed R. Frédéric, creates a stark contrast in respect to the content presented and language used. When looking at both pieces together, the readers can see to what extent Nardal’s aesthetics challenge colonial world views through her strategies of depicting the everyday realities of differing Antillean feminine identities that her series encompasses. For instance, in “*Au Bois de Vincennes*”, Frédéric writes,

Exposition coloniale... Ces deux mots devaient évoquer dans l’esprit de tous des paysages magiques et lointaines contrées. Les pavillons consacrés à chaque colonie, à chaque pays, se devaient de répondre à ces desiderata impératifs, parce que les plus susceptibles d’attirer la foule.

Les architectes, s’inspirant de ces données, ont dressé des maquettes qui rappellent l’architecture locale. L’ambiance sera habilement reconstituée et, avec quelques indulgences car le bois de Vincennes restera malgré tout le fond magnifique du décor, les visiteurs se trouveront tour à tour transportés dans les sites le plus diverse du monde transocéanique.<sup>716</sup>

Whilst the article implies that the construction of the exhibition has as its purpose to feedback metropolitan fantasies and expectations to them, this goal is not put into question. The fictional and fantasized elements of these “magical landscapes” of the colonies are overwritten by emphasis on the exactitude of the architectural representation of each colony. The technicity and aptitude of the (metropolitan) architects is celebrated and substantiated, for example, when Frédéric, referring to the “temple of Angkor” highlights that, “the reconstitution of the masterpiece of khmer art which was imperfectly done for the colonial exhibition in Marseille, is now, in the *Bois de Vincennes*, an exact reproduction.”<sup>717</sup> Thus the mise en scene that the exhibition partakes is presented as the realities of “the way of life” in the colonies which works to confirm or reaffirm fantasized colonial perspectives. A few columns over, the first two paragraphs of Nardal’s “*Femme de couleur*” read,

Elle n’est pas la nonchalante fille que les romanciers du siècle dernier se sont plu à dépeindre. Plus de hamacs. Plus d’éventails. L’Antillaise, tôt levée, travaille autant que ses sœurs blanches. Voilà qui enlève un peu de leur poésie, aux « Iles de beauté ». C’est tant pis.

Les amateurs d’exotisme regretteront aussi la grâce provocante du madras, l’éclat des bijoux d’or sur le bronze clair de visages, la soyeuse douceur du foulard qui orne le corsage cintré de la « grande robe » en soie brochée de fleurs éclatantes, la jupe immense qui se relève à gauche pour laisser paraître les riches jupons aux multiples volants brodés.<sup>718</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> R. Frédéric, “Au Bois de Vincennes: l’Exposition coloniale de 1931,” *Le Soir*, 3 juin, 1930.

<sup>717</sup> “La reconstitution du chef d’œuvre de l’art khmer qui avait été faite à l’Exposition coloniale de Marseille n’était qu’imparfaite ; celle réalisée au Bois de Vincennes est une reproduction exacte.” R. Frédéric, “Au Bois de Vincennes,” 3 juin, 1930. My translation.

<sup>718</sup> Nardal, “Femme de couleur,” 3 juin, 1930.



Nardal's point of departure is precisely the "*desiderata*" of the metropolitan public in Frédéric's article, however she does not return this fantasy back to her readership. By underlining the fictional element – "poetry" – of what is considered common knowledge, Nardal refuses to consolidate the colonial common sense and "*c'est tant pis*". Nardal's objective of her *Guide*, for example, to demonstrate Martinicans "in plain reality", equally informs her depictions of Antillean women. This is made clear by the juxtaposition of Frédéric's and Nardal's respective articles because it demonstrates how, as opposed to the former, she mobilizes quotidian lives of Martinican women which fundamentally disrupts the colonial "common sense" that is structured on and by oppression. As such, it brings to the fore the political import of Nardal's work. The Antillean woman, depicted above, is an active working subject with her own style and "grace" whose existence is not simply there or given to reaffirm white metropolitan expectations, fantasy, or desires. She is also the feminine figure who does not validate certain seemingly immutable cultural truths about the way things are as is the reported pursuits of the exhibition. This is a slightly different way at looking at Nardal's deconstructive work than that which has been addressed thus far. For the most part, her discursive strategies employed to combat anti-black racism and sexism have been traced in her dismantling of stereotypical representation and in her *Guide* the reorientation of white perspectives. What such discussions have shown, and as Jane Nardal explicitly pointed out in "Exotic Puppets", is that there is an overlapping between the ways in which racist stereotypes or ideologies are presented in discursive and literary worlds and how they inform and are formed by material realities and lived experiences. What is being argued for here is that Nardal is addressing the almost imperceptible aspects of colonial and patriarchal culture latent within her readership. In metropolitan print cultures (black or white) where she is developing her aesthetics and cultural politics, Nardal signals the often unconsciously held assumptions and exposes the discriminatory and oppressive aspects of what, from a certain world view, a subject or collective takes as given or fact. Within her fourth article, "*L'Antillaise: étudiante à Paris*", it could be interpreted that Nardal underlines this very objective.

Cependant pour peu qu'elle s'occupe de choses coloniales, l'étudiante antillaise s'alarme de l'hostilité que voudrait créer en France une certaine presse à l'égard des intellectuels de couleur, là où il faudrait, au contraire une véritable éducation coloniale du public métropolitain.<sup>719</sup>

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<sup>719</sup> Nardal, "L'Antillaise: étudiante à Paris," 30 juin, 1930.

In this passage, what is understood by “colonial education” is doubled. Firstly, Nardal refers to the teachings of the French education system – that is now understood as a platform to disseminate, amongst other things, racist ideologies of the period – and secondly, the call for a “real colonial education” in which her work participates. As such, it flips the assumption that those in the colonies are the ones needing instruction for in reality it is the metropolitan public that could use some “real education”. The feminine subject of the paragraph is also politicized. Biographically speaking, one cannot point to an incident in particular that may suggest that Nardal is referring to her own lived experience. However, the Antillean student’s recognition that black intellectual production (including, perhaps her own) can be disturbing or arouse hostility, exposes the politics of (possible) emotive responses when the givenness of reality is challenged or shaken. Nardal underlines then, that this is one expression of everyday racisms and sexism (or both), how (unconscious) assumptions about reality have material effects for some, and how hostility can be a reaction when one’s “truth” or “givenness” of the way things are is called into question. Other evidence of Nardal’s signalling of the banality of oppressive thoughts, perspectives and acts comes when she uses such terms as “surprise”, referenced earlier in her description of the “*chabine*”.<sup>720</sup> For instance, in “*L’Antillaise: bourgeoisie créole*” Nardal writes:

Dans cette société de couleur se rencontrent les gens les plus affinés, les plus cultivés. Les métropolitains qui se donnent la peine de fréquenter les familles antillaises ne manquent pas de s’en étonner, car ils arrivent mal renseignés.<sup>721</sup>

Presenting again the idea of education, what is “missing” within this interaction has nothing to do with “Antillean families” but the metropolitans that frequent such circles. Their “surprise” acts like a metaphor for what they, or their world view of the realities of Martinican life, lacks. By using setting as a tool that underlines the everydayness of this particular representation of the way of life on the island, Nardal points out the latent cultural truths held by the “mis-informed” metropolitans. This is continued throughout her series as she presents a multiplicity of women going about their lives. Through the female subject’s self-expression in the text, Nardal anticipates the potential misconceptions of her readership. As Nardal’s depiction of the women’s style and fashion that appears in each article, in the market, the cries of the women selling their goods or bargaining with a client, take on the aesthetic quality of “a poem”. Not an exotic poetics, but her own poetics of Antillean feminine cultural identity. This is emphasized by

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<sup>720</sup> As cited above “Mais le types qui étonne le plus l’Européen est celui de la “chabine” que l’on a dénommé « blonde des pays chauds.” Nardal, “Femme de couleur”

<sup>721</sup> Nardal, “L’Antillaise: bourgeoisie créole,” 23 juin, 1930.

a musicality that resonates from the text which is supported by the rhythmized atmosphere and theatricality of this daily scene, for the most part, between women.

Elle traverse maintenant Fort-de-France, la démarche fière, l'œil vif, et croise en route d'autres marchandes ambulantes, aphones d'avoir tant crié leurs marchandises... « Bouè cocos, bouè cocos ! » C'est cette chanson qui sert de réveille-matin aux Antillais. Aux cris de marchands se mêle le grattement rythmé des balais d'osier dur sur le fond de dalots... La marchande de légumes est arrivée au marché où elle entamera de bruyantes querelles avec d'autres marchandes, ou le plus souvent avec les bonnes... Le principe : « On ne prend pas les mouches avec du vinaigre » est appliqué avec exagération dans le petit commerce antillais... Marchandages sans fin. Faux départs de la cliente. Rappel de la marchande qui jure qu'on la ruinera. Gestes provocants, souplesse des attitudes ; la seule expression des physionomies à l'énoncé d'un prix exorbitant est tout un poème. Costumes bariolés, bijoux d'or.<sup>722</sup>

Elsewhere, it is Antillean women's artistic expression:

Les Antillaises sont en général très bonnes musiciennes. Elle se livrent avec passion à l'étude du piano, du violon, du violoncelle, du chant. Avec la danse, la musique est leur passe-temps favori.<sup>723</sup>

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Une forte majorité d'Antillaises se consacre à la musique où elle remporte des succès plus qu'honorables. L'une d'elles est soliste des concerts Colonne. Quelques-unes sont des premiers prix du Conservatoire, mais les Antillaises semblent préférer à ce concours le difficile professorat de musique.<sup>724</sup>

And again, in the last article, her voice is conveyed via her "intellectual curiosity" and achievement.

La jeune Antillaise poursuit normalement ses études sans plus de difficulté ni de succès que ses collègues métropolitains. Elle semble jusqu'ici préférer les lettres et les arts aux sciences. Il y a, parmi les Antillaises, de nombreuses licenciées en philosophie. Les langues étrangères, les lettres pures, l'histoire et la géographie ont aussi beaucoup d'attrait pour elles. Elles commencent à s'intéresser aux sciences sociales et au journalisme. On compte déjà quelques doctresses en médecine, mais beaucoup plus d'ingénieurs-chimistes, de dentistes et de pharmaciennes.<sup>725</sup>

In these descriptions, Nardal lays out, poeticizes, and politicizes the quotidian realities of Martinican women as their subjectivities are communicated through the variety of lived experiences. Within her poetics, she underlines an art of living Antillean style, that is filled with vibrancy, music, rhythm, vivacity, and intellectual brilliance. Cultural specificity is foregrounded, as in the market scene, but this does not prohibit these Antillean women to be

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<sup>722</sup> Nardal, "L'Antillaise: marchande des rues," 10 juin, 1930.

<sup>723</sup> Nardal, "L'Antillaise: bourgeoise créole," 23 juin, 1930.

<sup>724</sup> Nardal, "L'Antillaise: étudiante à Paris," 30 juin, 1930.

<sup>725</sup> Nardal, "L'Antillaise étudiante à Paris," 30 juin, 1930.

unequal from their “metropolitan colleagues”. Nardal’s strategy to focus on everydayness to combat the mechanisms of racism and sexism provides the possibility to signify and render significant that which is devalued in colonial culture and remains in the non-thought and the non-perceived aspects and articulations of discrimination and oppression. Nardal creates a political and cultural aesthetic that dramatizes the presence of blind spots within the white colonial gaze. She gives an image to quotidian realities of the Antillean women of her articles as well as materializing that which stagnates, almost imperceptibly in the cultural climate in which pre-established notions of gender, race and sexuality pervade. As an effect, the author valorizes Martinican feminine identities at the same time as she performs the impact that these blind spots of the colonial gaze have on a subject’s phenomenological experience of discrimination and oppression, such as the “hostility”. Her portraits act as a mirror for her readership. Not a mirror that satisfies or confirms their biases like the article on the colonial exhibition. Rather, the presence of a black woman as subject falsifies certain cultural assumptions as it reflects back to the readership the incongruities, the “mis-information”, the gaps of their “colonial education” that shape their world views. In Nardal’s politics and poetics she inverts the mechanism of individual or collective perceptions that are projected onto the “other” and returns them to her readership, at the very least, as something that needs to be questioned. As Nardal demonstrates with the staging of the interracial interaction with the Antillean family, they were not portrayed as exceptional or inherently different to other Antillean families of this class. Rather, the “astonishment” or “surprise” experienced, lived and felt, by the metropolitan is returned as his or hers. In this performance of return, Nardal shows that such preconceptions say more about white metropolitan identity than they do about the black subjects in the scene. Nardal demonstrates this strategy at other times within her portrayals of Martinican women as she renders tangible the moments when (colonial) common sense breaks or where world views fail to be confirmed.

As underlined in the discussion of Gratiant’s article, the perception of black women as obstacles to the goal of international black emancipation creates an impasse in his own argumentation. As an effect, it was shown to be the sexist biases – the blind spot in his work – that became the obstacle to these efforts. This means that whilst limitation or partiality of perception is characteristic of human existence, what Nardal shows is that ideologically constructing or projecting lack onto an “other” as an inherent quality of this “other’s” identity is the machinations of power. In light of the above conversation, it can be asserted that these articulations, projections, and experiences of self can be so intertwined into a culture and ways of being, acting and living that they are often rendered invisible and take place, even, on the level

of unconsciousness. By materializing and performing moments where the gaps, blind spots, and contradictions of the (white) male gaze are made conscious, Nardal opens the space for these projections to be returned to sender. Cultural objects, such as the madras, and the creole language perform in a similar fashion. Acting as cultural markers, that from the colonial perspective have been constructed to signify the supposed inferiority of blackness, Nardal takes them and demonstrates that they express more than what this world view apprehends. As such, cultural specificity found in objects or languages are not solely mediums through which Nardal brings to the fore the subjecthood of Antillean women. Rather, within their appearance in the ordinariness of everyday settings, the author mobilizes these cultural objects as the active agents that themselves disturb preconceptions and biases latent in quotidian (white) metropolitan perspective. As an effect, and like her poetics of color that valorized interraciality and presented understandings of Antillean identity as fundamentally multiple, Nardal problematizes the relationships that her readership can have to such objects, developed through the madras and the creole language. Given that both symbolize the history specific to Martinique and the mixed ethnic heritage of this particular space, the discussion will follow this genealogy through the madras. In *Le Soir* series, it is with this object that Nardal traces histories of slavery and Antillean cultural practice.

Whilst in secondary sources there is some conjecture in the precise timing of the madras fabric's arrival from India to Martinique, the important thing to understand in relationship to the work of Nardal is that cultural transfers attest to the uniqueness of Antillean culture at the same time as she acknowledges that, in part, this has been conditioned by French colonial and imperial project. The inheritance of various migrations of peoples and objects, as Nardal highlighted in the *Guide*, has an effect of "impregnating the 'new race'"<sup>726</sup> with different cultural specificities, which in the example of Indian culture, include cooptation of certain styles, fashions, religious beliefs, as well as culinary traditions like the columbo. Whether the madras was brought in the "luggage" of Indian workers who migrated to Martinique post emancipation, or this fabric's appearance in the Antilles, as it is argued by some, is dated to the seventeenth century,<sup>727</sup> Nardal shows the madras as figuratively and materially interwoven into the fabric of Antillean culture and cultural identities. It has taken on new cultural significations within this context, which for Nardal, demonstrate the creativity of cultural practices within

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<sup>726</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 19 and cited above.

<sup>727</sup> For the first perspective see Zander, "La hiérarchie "socio- raciale" en Martinique," and for the second see, Abel Alexis Louis, *Hommes en noir, femmes en blanc ? La culture des apparences à l'épreuve du système esclavagiste en Martinique (1765-1848)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2020).

historical and contemporary environments of oppression. As it has been touched on previously, in her *Soir* articles, Nardal underlines the beauty and fashion of Antillean women and the madras is an integral part of dressing styles. For example, in “*L’Antillaise: marchande des rues*”, Nardal takes the time to describe in detail the clothing worn by the subject of the text.

Taille cambrée, jarrets tendus, la marchande de légumes s’avance. Son torse droit aux seins qui pointent ne plie pas sous la lourde charge que soutient la tête. Les bras levés rétablissent de temps en temps l’équilibre du tray rempli de fruits à pain d’un vert électrique de mangues dorées et de pommes d’eau rouges et vernissées. Lorsqu’elle abaisse les bras c’est pour mettre le poing droit sur la hanche qu’enserme un madras bariolé. Ce madras qui souligne le balancement des hanches remplace le corset et sert en même temps à relever la jupe de la « grande robe » si encombrante sur les routes.

Levée dès cinq heures, elle est partie, pieds nus, par les pentes parfumées qui l’ont menée à la route coloniale. Elle fera ainsi trente kilomètres avec bien autant de kilos de légumes sur la tête.<sup>728</sup>

As this representation prefigures that of the market women given in the *Guide*, the readers see a continuity in Nardal’s strategy of mobilizing working-class identities to override stereotypical imaging of black femininity. The strength of the subject’s body corresponds with the strength of her character and underlines her independence. The madras is brought into the same realms of signification in this painting of an Antillean woman. In “*Femme de couleur*”, this is affirmed when, the madras appears directly after Nardal’s reference to metropolitan exotic expectations of “Islands of beauty”. She writes that “amateurs of exoticism will regret the provocative grace of the madras.”<sup>729</sup> This statement is in line with the preceding poeticizes image given of a woman dressed in traditional clothes: “the sparkles of gold jewelry on her clear bronze face”, “the silky softness of the scarf”, “the large skirt tucked in on the left reveals the richly embroidered under layers”.<sup>730</sup> The madras, that “highlights the swaying of her hips” and has “provocative grace”, is also threaded into the rich tapestry of traditional costume in “*L’Antillaise: bourgeoise créole*”.

L’Antillaise fine et cultivée, sait le plus souvent assortir ses robes à son type. Elle adore les couleurs bariolées et il est à souhaiter qu’elle leur reste fidèle. Nous croyons que, pour l’Antillaise, la vraie formule vestimentaire est une harmonieuse combinaison de la mode française et des éléments que lui fournit le costume local. Il est une gracieuse coutume qui consiste pour les Antillaises à revêtir le costume

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<sup>728</sup> Nardal, “*L’Antillaise: marchande des rues*,” 10 juin, 1930.

<sup>729</sup> Nardal, “*Femme de couleur*,” 3 juin, 1930. This was cited above in the body of the text and here presented with my translation.

<sup>730</sup> “Les amateurs d’exotisme regretteront aussi la grâce provocante du madras, l’éclat des bijoux d’or sur le bronze clair de visages, la soyeuse douceur du foulard qui orne le corsage cintré de la « grande robe » en soie brochée de fleurs éclatantes, la jupe immense qui se relève à gauche pour laisser paraître les riches jupons aux multiples volants brodés.” Cited above. My translation. Nardal, “*Femme de couleur*,” 3 juin, 1930.

local, certains jours de Carnaval. Leur beauté n'est jamais aussi évidente que ces jours-là...<sup>731</sup>

True to the continuity within Nardal's work, the above passage finds its resonance in the *Guide*.

Parfois des jeunes bourgeoises revêtent pour l'occasion l'éclatant costume local que portaient leurs grand-mères : foulards, mouches assassines, madras, colliers « choux », robes somptueuses à ramages de 8 m. de tour, ramassées sur les hanches en énormes paniers avec, en dessous, la chute vaporeuse des jupons multiples volants. Elles se promènent dans des auto découvertes, offrant à l'admiration de badauds, leur beauté noire ou ambrée, qui n'est jamais plus évidente que ces jours-là.<sup>732</sup>

The interpretation that is offered to the readers is that Nardal is taking the provocative grace of black femininity outside of the realms of white masculine desire as the madras fabric becomes the cultural object that signifies her independence, creativity, and beauty. Nardal's interest in fashion however does not simply paint a (non-exoticized) picture of Antillean femininity it also underlines that it is a marker of class distinction. Where her portrayals of working-class femininities show the fabric to be part of their everyday realities it is only on the days of Carnaval that the bourgeois women wear the traditional costume. What Nardal evokes, then, is that in Martinique, as in many cultures, dress, fashion, and fabric are socially codified. What perhaps sets this codification apart from other kinds of social norms in respect to fashion is that it is entangled within histories of slavery, and thereby inherently inflected by race, as well as gender and class. Nardal references this history on at least two occasions in her work, one of which is in the first article of her series in *Le Soir*.

Les étoffes à impression "madras" (grand carreaux rouges, verts, gris, jaunes, dont les tons vifs chantent merveilleusement près de l'ocre de teints) sont plus accessibles à toutes les bourses. Au lieu d'en prendre huit mètres, l'Antillaise du peuple en achètera trois.<sup>733</sup>

Nardal's underlining of the eight meters of madras with which Antillean women have come to make their clothes is equally demonstrated in the *Guide*, as she describes the "eight meters" of fabric that make up the "*robes somptueuses à ramages*" cited above. Arguably, Nardal presents such specifics in relationship to Antillean fashion precisely because "eight meters" is the amount of new fabric – often twill – that the plantation owner is required to provide to each slave on a yearly basis according

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<sup>731</sup> Nardal, "L'Antillaise: bourgeoise créole," 23 juin, 1930. Ellipsis in the original.

<sup>732</sup> Nardal, "Martinique," 3.

<sup>733</sup> Nardal, "Femme de couleur," 3 juin, 1930.

to one article of the *Code noir*.<sup>734</sup> It appears, then, that the historical importance of eight meters in Nardal's descriptions is to demonstrate the genealogy of fashion from its emergence within the context of slavery. In *Hommes en noir, femmes en blanc? La culture des apparences à l'épreuve du système esclavagiste en Martinique (1765-1848)*, the cultural historian Abel Alex Louis inscribes the madras in the entanglement of French colonial rule and institutionalized racism. Providing a convincing argument that dates the madras' appearance in the Antilles in the seventeenth century as an object of trade between European empires, (as many had a base in India during this period, though it predates British colonization) Louis' study of fashion in Martinique traces the impact of metropolitan policies and the ways in which inequality is articulated through dress and style. Louis explains that from the *Code noir* onwards legislations were put in place to regulate the materials used and the clothes worn within the colony so that masters, slaves, and, emancipated people of color, could all be clearly distinguished.<sup>735</sup> By the start of the eighteenth century, clothing regulations of the *Code noir* were added to by the "Sumptuous Laws" that again codified social position through dress. Thus, whilst in reality the laws were not strictly followed, as Nardal pointed out in her *Guide*, the European stylistic symbols of power and wealth, such as hats, were regulated in such a way that free people of color and slaves could wear them, but they had to be "simple". According to one "*loi somptuaire*", this was to assure that "to the naked eye" one could distinguish between white and non-white subjects.<sup>736</sup> If the madras is one of the authorized fabrics for both slaves and free people of color, then the wearing of the madras as a hat or hairstyle, like the madras calendé of Nardal's working-class character Elisa in her short story "In Exile", is symbolic of this genealogy. In this way, Nardal's reference to the eight meters of fabric ties her contemporary portrayals of Antillean

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<sup>734</sup> As cultural historian, Francis Back indicates in his article on the representation of runaway slaves in a selection of Quebec's daily newspapers from 1766-1798, the *Code noir* made it the legal obligation of slave owners to provide workers with two new outfits each year, or, eight meters of twill cloth: "En 1685, la France émet le *Code noir* qui balise les pouvoirs et les devoirs des propriétaires des esclaves. Ce règlement souhaite que les esclaves reçoivent deux habillements de toile annuellement ou qu'on leur remette l'équivalent de huit mètres de ce même textile." Francis Back, "Les habits de la servitude," *Cap-aux-diamants: la revue d'histoire du Québec* 79 (2004): 20.

<sup>735</sup> Louis writes: "Les matières, tissus, étoffes utilisées en Martinique peuvent distinguer les individus, leur milieu professionnel, leur groupe social. Les lois somptuaires édictées à partir de juin 1720 et jusqu'en novembre 1809 vont dans ce sens. Les esclaves, très tôt, ont été différenciés de leurs maîtres par le vêtement. L'article XXV du Code noir en mars 1685 ne leur accordait que deux habits de toile. En juin 1720, une inflexion négative survenait à cause de la liberté prise par certains esclaves de se vêtir un peu plus luxueusement grâce à leur travail principalement... Le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle réduira considérablement cette égalité toute théorique entre libres de couleur et blancs. Par le vêtement notamment, les autorités coloniales, bien aidées des blancs, cherchèrent à restreindre le luxe des habits des libres de couleur en promulguant des lois somptuaires renouvelées au fil du temps (7 septembre 1754, 30 juillet 1765 et 1er novembre 1809)." Louis, *Hommes en noir, femmes en blanc?* 35-36.

<sup>736</sup> "En bref, il s'agissait de rendre possible pour l'administration coloniale la distinction à l'œil nu entre un blanc et un libre de couleur par la vêtue car il arrivait parfois que par leurs traits physiques, il fût impossible de différencier un blanc d'un sang-mêlé, d'un mamelouk voire d'un quarteron. Dans ce siècle des Lumières liberticide, le vêtement devait continuer et contribuera à distinguer socialement les blancs, mais en outre aussi et surtout, les blancs des libres de couleur, discriminés." Louis, *Hommes en noir, femmes en blanc?* 99.



femininities to this specific history. Consequently, the author recuperates the madras fabric from the past, and presents this textile and the women who wear it as beyond the codification and definition imposed, for the most part, by the laws, regulations, or social restriction of the colonial project. Reappropriating history, as the readers see at other times in Nardal's aesthetics, allows her to tell a different story and create new images of black femininity and Antillean culture both past and present. As such, in Nardal's articles, supported by her strategy of valorizing Antillean women through their aesthetics of beauty, fashion, and the madras' "provocative grace", these women stand in their own right and thus independent of any preconceived notions that the readers may have in regard to such celebration of black femininity. Furthermore, this resignification of cultural objects like the madras anticipates these very projections and sends them back to her readership by demonstrating, whether then or now, they have their own world of signification other than that which the white gaze perceives or enforces. This can be substantiated by how Nardal represents the creole language through the voice of a working-class woman in her third article "*L'Antillaise: bourgeoise créole*". Overlapping then what has been established with the madras, the sound and lyricism of the feminine figures self-expression comes to undermine and perform the breaking point of metropolitan perceptions.

In the "*L'Antillaise: bourgeoise créole*" Nardal writes:

Nous avons montré la femme du peuple dans ses occupations. Bonne, marchande des rues, elle est aussi ouvrière. Nous n'insisterons pas sur les "charbonnières" dont les noires théories tentent les kodaks de voyageur qui font escale à Fort-de-France... Volubile, l'Antillaise du peuple se parle volontiers à elle-même en allant à ses affaires. Elle est hospitalière et affable. D'un naturel gai et confiant, elle oublie ses ennuis aussi vite qu'elle se fâche. Elle dit tous ce qu'elle pense sans restriction et sans fard. C'est elle qui conserve au patois créole sa saveur caractéristique. Sous l'empire d'un sentiment violent, une image inédite, d'une étonnante justesse, jaillit, en mots drus et réalistes. Dans la colère, son parler si doux se hache d'accents forts et de syllabes explosives. L'expression qu'elle crée si spontanément est toujours d'une cruelle vérité. Les badauds qui s'esclaffent se chargent de faire la fortune du mot.

Cependant l'Antillaise du peuple comprend parfaitement le français et le parle correctement.<sup>737</sup>

Referencing the "*charbonnières*" that Nardal depicted in her port scene in the *Guide* in order to disturb the exotic fantasies of the travelling metropolitan public, in this article the author has the room to build on her portrayals of black women workers as she outlines general characteristics

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<sup>737</sup> Nardal, "L'Antillaise: bourgeoise créole," 23 juin, 1930.

of their personality. What is importantly emphasized is the way the subject of the passage expresses herself in creole. Quick to establish that speaking creole is a preference or choice for this Antillean woman, the author's detailing of the musicality of the language allows for the subject's voice to ring out through the text and "the cruel truth" that she speaks. Described as perceptive, insightful and a curious observer of the world around her – "*les badauds qui s'esclaffent se chargent de faire la fortune du mot*" – it is the feminine subject who creates a "new image" through her voice which is colored by "violent feelings" and "anger" as her language erupts and explodes with incredible "justice" and "truth". Thus, the creole language is painted here not just as a specific cultural expression, or the announcement of feminine subjectivity, but a voice or a song of resistance. Nardal's underscoring of "cruel truth" makes it appear as if this Martinican woman's enraged allocution of "justice" is directed to the readership of *Le Soir* as much as the public she is addressing in the scene represented. With her "explosive syllables" that announce the truth of her reality she shatters the white colonial perspective or common sense. The author's visceral description of the melodic specificity of the creole language suggests that it is in part this that holds the potential for such a fracturing. In opposition to the tonalities of the French language in which the article is written, it audibly counterpoints the certain aspects of colonial culture. The text, coupled with the voice of the Antillean woman, echoes back to the readership the possible prejudices projected onto black femininity and liberates the creole language from being a marker of her inherent inferiority. The linguistic performance staged is demonstrated to be limited by the gaps of the metropolitan ignorance of her language and voice rather than the reverse. Both the madras fabric and the creole language, then, are active cultural signifiers that work to invert discriminatory logics of projection. In Nardal's aesthetics she materializes the madras and its history through the descriptions she gives and in the repetition of their appearance within her numerous depictions of Antillean women. In Nardal's short story "In Exile", the madras calendé is the object around which an everyday act of racism occurs in Paris. Though this is a fictional text and her articles in *Le Soir* are not, what becomes evident is the crossover in form of her cultural aesthetics and how they work. As it was discussed above, in this short story, the madras renders visible that which is, from white colonial perspectives suggestibly invisible, undetectable, and unheard.

#### 4.4.3 Elisa's Experience of Everyday Racism

Nardal's "In Exile" was published six months before the series of articles in *Le Soir*.<sup>738</sup> The readers meet the main protagonist Elisa in Paris after her arrival to the metropole from Martinique. The narrative follows this working-class individual's quotidian in the French capital and is colored by Elisa's longing to return to her home across the Atlantic. Enduring the hostilities of the white metropolitan population on her return from work, Nardal shapes this scene of a racist encounter by centralizing Elisa's madras calendé.

L'autobus ne se fit point trop attendre. Le receveur, qui, pendant quelques semaines s'était amusé à la faire enrager, avait fini par la prendre sous sa protection. Il lui adressa un sourire familier. Elle trouva une place en seconde et s'assit au milieu de l'attention générale. C'était surtout son madras calendé, si curieusement noué, qui attirait les regards. Les gens n'avaient pas l'air de se douter que cela pût la gêner. A vrai dire, ce soir-là, ils n'existaient pas pour elle.<sup>739</sup>

The racist "glances" that Elisa is subjected to are not painted as the negation of her appearance as a black subject (the scene of racism based on epidermic negation takes place at the start of the story). Rather it is the cultural specificity of the madras and the way she wears it that becomes the marker of difference and point of discrimination. Within this scene, Nardal explicitly underlines the fact that the people staring were oblivious to the effect that their actions have on Elisa. Underscoring how that which is imperceptible for the public can have real and material effects on Elisa, Nardal counteracts this by Elisa's "frank" denial of their existence. Also, it is the work of the madras calendé that comes into play. The white gaze that perceives the madras as foreign or "odd" overlaps with their obliviousness to the effects of their prejudicial attitudes. As Nardal has made apparent in her articles in *Le Soir*, this fabric that is woven into the creation of Antillean traditions, identities and culture within the colonial context also suggests that this public is ignorant, firstly, of this tradition and its value, importance, or pride that Elisa may have in wearing her madras calendé and expressing her identity. Secondly, they appear to be ignorant of the colonial history of France, and thirdly, the people on the bus seem equally oblivious to the ways their racist act re-establishes their position or understanding

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<sup>738</sup> For this discussion the only aspect of the text that will be addressed is the racist interaction staged between the main protagonist Elisa and the metropolitan public. Other important elements and themes that Nardal explores in this short story will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

<sup>739</sup> Paulette Nardal, "En exil," *La Dépêche africaine* 2, no. 19 (décembre 15, 1929): 6. Translated and reproduced in its entirety in Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 116-118. "The bus was not too long in coming. The conductor, who for several weeks had enjoyed himself at her expense, had ended up taking her under his wing. He gave her a familiar smile. She found a place in second class and sat down amid a general uproar. It was especially her madras calendé, so oddly knotted, that drew glances. People didn't seem to suspect that it might bother her. To speak frankly, this particular evening, they didn't exist for her." Nardal, "In Exile," 117.

of self through this interaction. Thus, on the one hand, the public's perception of the madras aligns with, as Nardal argued, their "mis-education" about certain "truths" of French colonialism and the genealogies of slavery to which the fabric attests. On the other hand, in this performance of the white gaze that negates cultural difference, French cultural identity is framed in an almost necessary non-recognition, blind-spot, ignorance, or "oblivion" of these processes of othering that are constitutive of its identity. The inequality staged and that normalizes white cultural identity of the public, how they dress for example, requires a certain blindness for it allows metropolitan culture to maintain its position as hegemonic in this space but also sustain a certain understanding and conception of Frenchness. Why, for example, would Elisa's madras appear odd from a metropolitan perspective, if, as Nardal has repeatedly argued for, French cultural identities were understood in their multiculturalism? Why is the creole language perceived as inferior to the French language rather than being celebrated as an element of richness that is part of the complexity of French national identity? Why would the metropolitan be "surprised" by the Antillean bourgeois family he or she visits? Why would "the new race" and their ways of dressing, for example, need to be controlled, distinguished, and separated from French identity? Why would black women need to be relegated outside of the political sphere if there wasn't something inextricably bound to understandings of whiteness and or masculinity and the living out of these social identities that needed to be ignored, passed over or fictionalized so that certain realities are sustained and do not reach the breaking point of their horizons of comprehensibility? Overall, Nardal's work and particularly her four portraits of the *Le Soir*, bring to the fore such question for her readership. By representing Antillean women going about their daily lives, the author not only resignifies them as a subjects in their multiplicity but does so in such a way that disturbs or returns latent prejudices back to the readers. This is materialized in her texts by performing moments when certain world views contradict themselves or fail to be affirmed. What has been called blind spots of everyday cultural experience and the social identities that live their lives here within are, in part, given a solution by Nardal in the proposal of a "real education", in which her intellectual work and creation of her cultural aesthetics participates. Myths, beliefs, assumption or the thereness of everyday realities can be challenged and redirected through broadening what one knows, as it was presented in Nardal's *Guide*. Similar to how Fauset challenges certain myths held in the African American imagination, Nardal's strategy demonstrates that this can potentially change the way one perceives and experiences the world around. Above, Nardal's attention to the ordinariness of cultural experience highlighted how it can be imperceptible and thus how it can invisibilize the very real and material effects that certain ways of being have on others and on the self. Perhaps then,

intellectual or logical reasoning may not suffice in working towards a society that achieves equality across differing forms and embodiments of social identities. Elisa's denial of the metropolitans' existence infers such a conclusion for it suggests that this was the only way that she could relate to them at this particular time. She was limited in how she could react, not because she herself is in some way lacking, nor because other options were not available to her. One can imagine her speaking back to them like the female speaker who tells her "cruel truth" in creole in Nardal's "*L'Antillaise: bourgeoise créole*". What Elisa's non-action suggests is that she already knew that whatever she said would not change the way they were perceiving her, and on that day, she didn't have the energy to waste it on them, nor even let herself feel possible emotions evoked by such a racist encounter. Thus, whilst Nardal sends the metropolitan public's projections back to them and shows that their hostility forecloses the possibility of a relationship, it does not follow that even if Elisa did speak or engage with them, she would be heard. Given that human existence is marked by limitation – both existentially and in the way one perceives and experiences reality – there appears to be a non-negligible force of fantasy that fills lacunae or blind spots in order to construct a stable social identity, for example, or aid in a subject's experience of self as having continuity and feelings of a place or ground for this self within the world around. One effect of this is that it aids in covering over or appeasing the uncomfortableness of being faced with certain "truths" about the way one identifies and relates to the world around that Nardal does not hesitate to bring to light and direct her journalistic voice towards. At once Nardal promotes education as a path towards equality and global black emancipation as well as acknowledging that there are parts of subjective and collective experiences that go beyond horizons of comprehensibility. Both of these aspects are interwoven within Nardal's conscientization of blackness, her intellectualization of oppressions and inequality as much as they are tied to her writing practice and her creation of cultural aesthetics. This is demonstrated by the fact that Nardal calls upon fictional tools and literary strategies to present Antillean women otherwise within the non-fictional discursive space of her articles and of the *Guide*. What perhaps can be taken away from what and how Nardal works, and the questions that her texts produce, is that whilst it is a part of human experience to create stories to help in understand and interpret oneself and the world, it does not necessarily follow that lacks, gaps, limits or blind spots have to be fictionalized and projected as coming from an "other". "Others" are not inherently sources of one's pleasure or pain, economic prospects, sexual gratifications nor are they the cause of one's limits of understanding. Rather, perhaps where things could be improved is through the way stories are told, both on an individual and collective level, the narratives that are used, and the characters depicted.

## Chapter Five

### Paulette Nardal's Paris

#### Individual and Collective Experiences in the Centre of Empire

In Nardal's work addressed thus far, her aesthetic creations and cultural politics challenge the French colonial narrative that is constructed within hierarchical understandings of self and other, of Frenchness and non-Frenchness. As it was shown in the *Guide*, this works on numerous overlapping levels, from the institutions of power all the way to the level of the individual and the way he or she perceives and relates to the world at large. One of Nardal's strategies that challenges the hegemonic perspective of colonial patriarchy, is to place value on the specificity of Martinican culture and multiplicities of blackness that encourage an understanding of social identities as inherently diverse and multilayered. Furthermore, as the author focuses on the quotidian situations within her articles and short story, she underlines the banality of everyday racism and sexism. On the one hand, Nardal shows how power can work in the more non-conscious or non-thought ways and thus fall outside the horizons of perceptibility of experience. On the other hand, it implies that within the logics of reason – presenting, for example, an analysis of how racism exists and why it should be stopped – seems to face its own challenges and potential limitations in the overall goal of combating inequality and systemic oppression.

To take the example of Elisa's interaction with the metropolitan public on the bus, what was highlighted is the fact that she did not speak back. This suggested that her reality, and the violence of the metropolitans' racist act, would not be able to be received – heard, understood, seen – by them. Nardal's staging of this scene thus evokes such questions as, how different ideas and different ways of seeing and experiencing the world that challenge what is considered normal or “common sense” and potentially disrupt the order of things (power), can be articulated in a way that it is received by the hearer, the reader, or the perceiver.<sup>740</sup> Elisa does not voice her

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<sup>740</sup> With this reflection that Nardal's work proposes, it is difficult not to think of Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's question “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. The latter's conclusion is that yes, the subaltern subject can speak, and has been doing so. Rather the problem comes in using the same linguistic and logical structures of western thought

protestation against racism, nor counteract the public's ignorance of the potential effects of their actions. And yet, what Nardal's non-fictional work demonstrates in content, form, and volume of production, is that this does not take away the impetus to intellectualize and think through Antillean identity or colonial domination and oppression. Nardal's call for "real colonial education" in "*L'Antillaise: étudiante à Paris*" underscores the importance of learning and understanding as tools towards global black emancipation and the fight for a more just and equal society. On this point, then, it is arguable that Nardal is able to achieve in her non-fictional world that which does not take place in her fictional one. The contrast between these two forms in Nardal's oeuvre highlights pertinently the articulation between disalienation and emancipation, between cognition and agency. As the effervescence of intellectual and cultural productions within the black international movement attest, central to emancipatory politics and aesthetics are the processes of racial conscientization (disalienation) in order to create images that valorize black subjectivity.<sup>741</sup> In order to redefine and reimagine blackness in one's own terms this creative, political, or intellectual action needs to be preceded, to a certain degree, by the conscious recognition that a one is, perceives, understands and experiences him or herself as a unique and full subject. In this instance, disalienation is the cognitive processes that disentangles black subjectivity from the stereotypes of the colonial cultural imagination and the racialized ideologies that have been (negatively) defining blackness for centuries and violently oppressing people of color.<sup>742</sup> As it was demonstrated in Chapter One and developed in Chapter Four, one expression of racial conscientization is feeling pride in one's black identity. At the same time, Nardal acknowledges that in order to achieve global black emancipation it equally necessitates a redefinition of whiteness. As both Gratiant and Nardal pointed out, whiteness and understanding of the French self is as much produced within the relations taking place on the plantation as is blackness. Thus, what the non-fictional spaces of Nardal's oeuvre provide is the intellectual exploration pivotal to her black international politics that think

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which is the common platform of both subaltern subjects and those in power. As a consequence, because domination is within these symbolic and material edifices themselves, the subaltern subject cannot but reinscribe his or herself in a position of subordination. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (New York: Routledge, 2015), 66-112. For an analysis of this same problematic though centered on the Afro-Caribbean context see Henry Paget, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>741</sup> Nardal addresses this in "Éveil de la conscience de race" published in *La Revue du monde noir*, and which has been mentioned previously in Chapter One and Three but will be discussed at length in the following chapter. In pursuits for emancipation, whether on an individual or a collective level, the articulation between cognition and agency that belie processes of disalienation is equally found in Nardal's discussion on French citizenship that will also be explored in Chapter Six.

<sup>742</sup> As the introduction to Gratiant's article in Chapter Four pointed out, Césaire's understanding of *négritude* speaks to these same processes of racial conscientization. It is also evident in the texts of other black woman writers of this period such as Suzanne Césaire. See Suzanne Césaire, "Malaise d'une civilisation," *Tropiques* 5 (April 1942): 43-49; "Le Grand camouflage," *Tropiques* 13-14 (septembre 1945): 267-73.

through the stakes of how black subjects are positioned and position themselves within the French colonial empire. Though her articles are demonstrative of her cultural aesthetics, they speak on a different cognitive register than her fictional texts. Akin, then, to the articulation of processes of disalienation in which understanding oneself otherwise precedes agency, her fictional texts can be interpreted as the spaces in which her critical perspective and knowledge production are experimented with and fleshed out. This approach to Nardal's fiction is similar to what T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting presents in her reading of "In Exile." The latter describes this short story as "the canvas upon which [Nardal] deftly sketches" the "conflicts" which are faced by Martinicans coming to the metropolis, for, "they are exiles abroad in a place that should feel like a home away from home."<sup>743</sup> The alternative spheres of fictional realities, where ideals of political and intellectual thought are (con)tested and evaluated, participate in the intellectualization of the issues important to Nardal's cultural politics. With focus on her texts that are set in the colonial metropolis, "Acts of Grace", "In Exile", "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*", and "*Guignol Ouolof*", the discussion to follow will demonstrate how Nardal addresses issues key to her political and intellectual thought such as immigration, French identity, assimilation, and Antillean femininity. The methodological choice to investigate them within the author's fictional work, instead of continuing with her articles which will take place in the next chapter, is not only to foreground the former but also to highlight what Nardal can possibly achieve in her imagined worlds that may not find a place in her critical work.<sup>744</sup> In this way, one of the interrogations that will be explored in Nardal's writing practices is that her fictional worlds tend to evoke other forms of knowledge drawn from affective and spiritual domains of lived experience, for instance, and that are involved in racial conscientization.

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<sup>743</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, "The Clamart Salon," in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory, Sites and Symbols in Modern France*, eds. Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick and Lydie Moudileno (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 57-58.

<sup>744</sup> This is in line with what Brent Hayes Edwards articulates in terms of Nardal's oeuvre at large: "Sharpley-Whiting has suggested that the "next frontier" in Nardal scholarship will be "more in-depth probing of the *soeurs* Nardals' creative literary output" ("Clamart Salon" 60). This may not be a question of emphasizing her fiction over and against her nonfiction, however, but instead attending to the complex ways her experimental ethos as a writer working across multiple venues in the interwar period involved a productive blurring of generic lines, particularly among fiction, memoir, political commentary, and cultural reportage." Edwards, "Unsettled Legacies," 687.



## 5.1 Creating an Atmosphere for Change in “Acts of Grace”

The first two literary works that will be addressed are Nardal’s “Acts of Grace” and “In Exile” that, due to the six-month period that separates their respective publications in *La Dépêche africaine*, can be read almost like companion pieces.<sup>745</sup> Aside from the place and date of appearance, these two texts are intertwined thematically, for instance, in the exploration of what it means for an Antillean woman to immigrate to the Hexagon. This said, their formal aspects vary quite substantially which speaks to the author’s continual search for differing forms that can hold her fictional or intellectual experimentations. “Acts of Grace” published in May 1929, is an example of what Brent Hayes Edwards calls Nardal’s “amphibious pieces” that he defines as the “productive blurring of generic lines”.<sup>746</sup> This appellation is suitable for “Acts of Grace” in so far as, in appearance it could be considered as a short story, a memoir, an excerpt from a journal, or a cultural commentary. Unlike “In Exile” and “*Guignol Ouolof*” which pertain more clearly to the form of the short story, this is one of Nardal’s few pieces, fictional or not, written entirely in the first person, and which takes on an observational tone infused with affective realities of its speaker, who the readers know only as “an Antillean woman”. Constructed without clear narrative progression, “Acts of Grace” mobilizes the multi-faceted quality of experience and perception which is developed in the blurring of the landscapes of Martinique and hexagonal France which are brought together in an image of the mountains. This structural image, in part, gives shape to the exploration of the central themes of immigration, (dis)location, anti-black racism, French identity and assimilation. Whilst this appears to be a substantial amount to be covered within this piece that consists of six paragraphs, by grounding these concepts in the speaker’s affective and sensorial realities the text shows that they are all contemporaneous to the immediacy of her experience. As such the thematic density suggests to the readers that they cannot be separated from one another or abstracted from the subject’s horizons of perception for they are with her wherever she goes or whatever she sees in the context of the Hexagon. On the whole, the observational tone of the piece, the blurring of spaces across the seas and the thickness of the speaker’s subjective experience, participate in evoking the feeling that the content, images, and narration of the text

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<sup>745</sup> Paulette Nardal, “Actions de grâce,” *La Dépêche africaine* 2, no. 14 (mai 30, 1929): 3; Paulette Nardal, “En exil,” *La Dépêche africain* 2, no. 19 (décembre 15, 1929): 6. Both are translated and reproduced in their entirety in Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 114-115, 116-118. In the cataloguing of documents consulted at *Les Archives nationales d’outre-mer*, “Actions de grâce” seems to have fallen through the cracks. Therefore, the English translation will only be cited. For “En exil” this remained so both versions will be cited when the discussion turns to this text.

<sup>746</sup> Edwards, “Unsettled Legacies,” 684.

exceed its brevity and its formal structure that, itself, is not clearly defined. There is a parallel between this text's resistance to its own containment within the given frame and, as the readers have seen at other times in Nardal's work, the complexities of black feminine subjectivity that reach far beyond the latter's reduction to exotic fantasies or stereotypical representation. One other reason for such an interpretation is the third structuring element of this piece, namely the weather which works alongside the narrative voice and the mountains to weave together "Acts of Grace". Perhaps on the surface the climatic difference between continental France and Martinique is an obvious one. However, drawing on the polysemic aspect of atmosphere – meteorological and cultural – Nardal inscribes into the changing of seasons from the winter to summer, ideas of oppression, freedom, and assimilation. The author's use, then, of atmosphere as a structural element also lends to the sensation that this text resists its own containment because one characteristic of natural or cultural atmospheres is that they permeate across all levels of societies, landscapes, or milieus. As such, when Nardal begins the text with the question, "Do you realize what the return of spring, or rather summer, might be for an Antillean woman, having long lived in France?"<sup>747</sup> one may already wonder if this will be strictly a tale of meteorological differences between these two geographical spaces. As the narrative voice announces and inscribes the subject's trajectory from the colony to the center of empire it infers that the speaker or the author anticipate that the readership is unlikely to answer in the affirmative. If the readership were presumed to know, understand or be familiar with what it meant for an Antillean woman to live in hexagonal France then the question, it seems, wouldn't need to be posed. Nardal's use of irony, as in other moments of her work, both welcomes the readership through an invitation to see things from the narrator's perspective, but also cautions or troubles what they may be bringing to the text, for example their ideas of Antillean femininity, their fantasies of the Martinican space or their understandings of hexagonal France.

"Acts of Grace" starts with the inference that there exists a myriad of lived experiences within France and thus a multiplicity of ways of relating to and understanding the material and symbolic realities of this space. Characterized by her migratory experience, the speaker has her own point of view on the landscapes that draw out before her, which will be different, for example, to people who have lived in the hexagon all their lives.

In my homeland, it's perpetual summer. The coconut trees with their heavy fruit lean towards the sea with its odors of seaweed, and the long tails of their leaflets

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<sup>747</sup> Nardal, "Acts of Grace," 114.

rub against each other, like silk rustling. Standing before the delicate and uniform green of the chestnut trees in France, my thoughts evoke the somber mass of mango trees, breadfruit trees, sandbox, and fern trees.<sup>748</sup>

The natural world of her “homeland” is, on one level, put into comparison with what she is perceiving in the present. Images of Martinican landscapes come both before and after the narrator communicates the picture of what is in front of her in her current location. This sets up the contrast between the two geographical spaces and the two different temporalities of what was (before her migration) and what is now (in the hexagon). However, on another level, both are described in the present tense thus implying that they are being felt or perceived at the same time by the speaker. This is built upon by the consistency of the appearance of trees in this moment of the speaker’s observations. Though the trees may vary in their types or species of plant, their continuation is connotative of ideas of being rooted, of uprooting and, re-rooting in trajectories of migration. These processes, as the speaker suggests, are not linear for her present-day reality evokes images of Martinique. Disjunctive moments of time and space, therefore, are experienced simultaneously which gives the impression that there is a coexistence of these two places within the subject. Her point of view troubles a clean separation between the over there of Martinique, and the here of France that her own comparison tends to set up. In this sense, there is a blurring of Martinique with the Hexagon at the same time as it allows for appearance of variations. This simultaneous differentiation and connection is built upon when the speaker relates to the mountains.

Another characteristic of the Antillean landscape is its force, while in France the harmony of the landscape always appears a little bit weak. To relocate force and passion and even grandeur, you have to go to the mountains, to the Gorges of Chouigny, for example, whose rivers remind me of the Martinican torrents...<sup>749</sup>

The comparison presented upholds a distinction between the two places at the same time as other emotions and affective realities, that are almost personified in the landscape, are brought together, or resonate across the resemblance of the mountainous regions. Before bringing the full symbolic work of the mountains to light, what can be stated thus far in terms of setting, is that from the speaker’s perspective, Martinique does not become continental France or vice versa. Quite evocative then of Fauset’s blurring of cultural and geographical landscapes in her *Comedy: American Style* which alleviated the type of imperialism apparent in her mapping

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<sup>748</sup> Nardal, “Acts of Grace,” 114.

<sup>749</sup> Nardal, “Acts of Grace,” 115.

strategies in *There is Confusion*,<sup>750</sup> here in “Acts of Grace” Nardal works in a way that does not repeat directions of power. With respect to the French empire and colonial circulations, the landscapes of “Acts of Grace” neither continue them, mapping France onto Martinique, or reverse them by mapping Martinique onto continental France. What the speaker’s perception illuminates for the readers is that neither of these is true to her experience of the world that surrounds. As Nardal’s literary strategies in the *Guide* that disturbed the directionality of power when spoken from the geographical location of Martinique,<sup>751</sup> “Acts of Grace” has a similar effect but this time from the center of empire. Nardal’s landscapes that are charged with the affectivity of the speaker, as much as the speaker is moved in thought and feeling by what she sees, brings to the fore this coexistence of incongruous spaces within her subject. The speaker’s subjective experience of reality puts into question ways of looking and mapping the world that spatially distinguish between a here and a there and unevenly distributes power from the center to the periphery. By extension this also begins to touch upon overarching themes of the text such as assimilation, belonging and French identity, from the point of view of an Antillean woman who has “long lived in France”. These themes are explored through the speaker’s relationship to the European winter within the bounds of this *mère patrie*.

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<sup>750</sup> As it was shown at this time, the literary strategy of mapping erased the numerous cultural, geographical, and historical distinctions of France by placing an othered United States on top of it.

<sup>751</sup> See Chapter Four.

### 5.1.1 Winter and the Hostility of Colonial Culture

As it was discussed in Chapter One, one common aspect within the migratory experience of black French colonial subjects to the Hexagon is that their racial identities were put into question in a different way than in the colonies. As Nardal recounted of her own experience, it was only in France that she was made to feel aware of her racial identity: “I became conscious of my difference.” In a much later interview Nardal will repeat this whilst prefacing that prior to the experience of migration, “we were students, completely assimilated”.<sup>752</sup> As Césaire frames the “atmosphere of assimilation” which his *négritude* revolted against, this context of arrival sparks the desire to define blackness in one’s own terms and combat the racism faced in France.<sup>753</sup> What is also evident is that there is a sense of disillusionment, disappointment, or loss, coming to and living in the metropolis. What this presupposes is that one had expectations, or at least projected certain dreams and hopes of coming to the Hexagon, the home of French culture and the splendor of its civilization as it had been championed throughout the empire. In Nardal’s “*Éveil de la conscience de race*”, the author states that Roberte Horth’s, “*Histoire sans importance*”, encapsulates “perfectly” this experience of immigrating to the metropolis, the “uprooting” felt, why racial solidarity is needed especially amongst black women, and how this instigated the “evolution” towards racial conscientization.<sup>754</sup> Nardal alludes to a deception or disillusionment of coming to the Hexagon, both in the reference to Horth’s short story and in her own article when she states that black women “felt the need”, long before their masculine brothers, for a solidarity “that is not merely material.”<sup>755</sup> As it was discussed in the previous chapter, Horth’s story demonstrates the confrontation with everyday racism that her feminine protagonist endures, but it also explores Léa’s sense of loss that characterizes her migratory experience. Léa is disillusioned with what she finds in the Hexagon because it does not correspond with what she had imagined it to be. In thinking of her home in the ocean, which is never specifically named, Léa describes how she envisaged the metropolis before her arrival.

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<sup>752</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 26. “Nous étions les étudiantes complètement assimilées.” My Translation. The section of the interview where Nardal voices this statement on assimilation was also cited in Chapter One and is cited now for convenience: “C’est en France que j’ai pris conscience de ma différence. Il y a certaines choses qui me l’ont fait sentir, et puis il ne faut pas oublier que nous avons été élevées dans l’admiration de toutes les œuvres produites par les Occidentaux. Ce qui nous ramenait à presque rien.” Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 26.

<sup>753</sup> As Brent Hayes Edwards explains: “Césaire famously defined *Négritude* as “a concrete rather than an abstract coming into consciousness”, which, in the context of interwar Paris, meant coming to reject the “atmosphere of assimilation” that engulfed Caribbean and African students and intellectuals.” Edwards, “Unsettled Legacies,” 688.

<sup>754</sup> Nardal, “*Éveil*,” 27. Also referred to in Chapter One.

<sup>755</sup> Nardal, “*Éveil*,” 27.

Par-delà les mers elle a laissé « une petite maison à volets verts sur une grève sauvage ». Longtemps, face à l’horizon vide elle a bâti une ville de cristal et de rêve, un visage énorme, brillant et doux auquel elle donne un nom chantant. Elle entend dire que ce pays lointain est policé, courtois et que le peuple qui l’habite accueille tous les bons esprits.<sup>756</sup>

Looking out beyond the sea Léa imagines “a land of her dreams” which is intimately tied to the expectation that the country and its people would welcome her and any “intelligent stranger”. The emphasis of expansiveness, whether in looking out into the empty horizon or in her imagination of the city, infers that she believed she would find freedom and space to live out her subjectivity in this land. However, the stark contrast of the image of France she dreamt and the one portrayed in her first encounter with the metropole dramatizes the loss of her hopes and desires.

Elle y vient. Un matin on la conduit à une immense caserne dont les cours sont profondes et tristes et les salles bruissantes. Un peuple d’enfants sous la domination d’une divinité invisible et ferme. Léa oublie ses flâneries sur la grève, ses jeux sous le soleil.

Arrived in the land of her dreams, they lead her to a huge prison-like building with its long gaunt quadrangles and noisy class-rooms. She lived among a crowd of young girls under the guidance of an invisible and strong-willed divinity. Léa forgot her strolls along the beach, and her games in the sunshine.<sup>757</sup>

This enormous “prison-like” building is the image given to Léa’s affective realities upon her arrival and it sets the tone for the remainder of the short story. Furthermore, the juxtaposition between her home – the “hive of good-hearted women”<sup>758</sup> – and the metropole suggests that she left a place where she had more freedom to move, dream, be and pronounce her desires than in the realities that befall her in the Hexagon. This staging of loss of both her imagined France (before arrival) and of freedom as she enters into a kind of imprisonment – developed in the story by the discrimination and non-belonging experienced – symbolically, materially, and geographically situates discrimination at the center of Frenchness and French universalism. It brings to light the fundamental contradiction of such a universalism and the white supremacy that underpins it. As T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting asserted with respect to Nardal’s “In Exile”, people of color from the French colonies were forced to understand that they were not considered French, regardless

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<sup>756</sup> Roberte Horth, “Histoire sans importance / A thing of no importance,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World* 2 (1931): 48.

<sup>757</sup> Horth, “Histoire sans importance,” 48. Because of the variation in the translation of this particular passage the English version has also been cited in the body of the text.

<sup>758</sup> Horth, “Histoire sans importance,” 48.

of what the ideals of this nation may say and no matter how they themselves may identify. The loss or disillusionment of arrival in France is conditioned by what one projects, imagines, and hopes for in this futural space. But it is also inextricably intertwined with being faced by the impossibility of assimilation into this nation that bars (“imprisoned”) recognition of black subjects as such and in their Frenchness. Nardal investigates this through the speaker’s experience of winter in the metropolis in “Acts of Grace”. To understand what “the return of spring, or rather summer, might be” for the speaker would be to first comprehend what winter means for her. With the character’s homeland described as “perpetual summer”, the winter of continental France is something that was once unfamiliar to her. This particular season is something that she encountered or came to understand only after undertaking the transatlantic voyage. As a response to the opening question posed to the readership she states:

It’s first of all a feeling of relief. The heavy grey clouds, the persistent cold, the grim atmosphere of winter; it seems to me that all that weighed on my chest, oppressed me. It was like an intolerable pain that I also by dint of habit came no longer to suffer.<sup>759</sup>

The resonance with Léa’s prison-like building comes through in the somber tone of the wintery atmosphere. Whilst it is arguable that the shorter days, the cold, the clouds, and the grimness of winter is an experience that is shared by many amongst the readership, and thus not unique to an Antillean woman living in the metropole, the words that she uses to communicate her experience are less so. Winter impacts her corporeity, psyche and affective world. It is visceral, ever-present and oppresses her in such a way that it is likened to an intolerable pain that finds “relief” only in the return of summer. The duration of winter requires constant enduring for it “persistently” hollows out (“dint”) and works upon the speaker to the extent that it renders invisible or unrecognizable the suffering and pain it causes. In “Acts of Grace” the possible interpretation provided to the readers is that Nardal is symbolically and materially overlapping the speaker’s experience of the winter with her experiences of French colonial culture. As it was articulated in the precedent chapter, cultural atmospheres are characterized as much by their readily tangible qualities (readability) as they are by imperceptibility and incomprehensibility. At the time, the focus was on the imperceptibility of discrimination on the part of the metropolitan public. What “Acts of Grace” suggests is that the repetition of acts of discrimination and oppression can also render invisible this violence to those being subjected to it. By making the experience of winter representative of the speaker’s lived realities of the French colonial climate,

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<sup>759</sup> Nardal, “Acts of Grace,” 114.

Nardal also draws into the story questions of assimilation. This is because, winter, specific to this space, was encountered only in the character's arrival in the metropolis and as such is a season that she had to adapt to. What this implies is that aside from the constant experience of the "intolerable pain" that "weighed on her chest" and "oppressed" her, it also frames that in her immigration, she is asked by the demands of winter-French culture to fit into the colonial perspective of blackness which hollows out. This correlation between the experience of winter and the experience of racial oppression and assimilation is heightened when the speaker divulges how she relates to summer.

It now seems that everything has become light, light. The warm air, the blue sky, the odors wafting from trees and, especially, the sun finally triumphing over the greyness of winter; everything seems to me animated by holy mirth.

I have a desire to walk to run, in the gilded light. I want to be out in the country, to intoxicate myself with the odor of the earth, of the grass, to see the wet grass glistening in the sunlight and turning iridescent under the caresses of the breeze.<sup>760</sup>

Summer that "triumphs" over winter ignites the subject's desire which is emphasized by the lightness and movement in the description. She feels the urge to walk or run as her attention is drawn to the "wafting" odors in the trees, the glistening of the grass and "the caresses of the breeze". Her subjective world is re-activated as she experiences herself in her full subjecthood. She is no longer hollowed out by the habit of pain, or weighed down by the burden of being oppressed, but propelled by desire and agentic in her actions. The religious undertones of the piece that is initially introduced by the title, return to the surface as "everything seems to be animated by holy mirth" that adds another layer to her experience of liberation. Her gaiety felt in the absence of winter is given a spiritual dimension that colors what and how she feels and perceives in the world around her.<sup>761</sup> The changing of seasons reinforces the interpretation being proposed that aligns the character's winter experiences with that of the hostile cultural climate she faces in the metropolis. It parallels, to a certain degree, Léa's images of her imagined France and the prison like reality of the metropole in "*Histoire sans importance*". The reality experienced by the speaker in "Acts of Grace" or by Léa in their migration to the Hexagon witness that the metropolis has fallen far short of their expectations and its promise of a "home away from home" beneath the universal banner *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. Furthermore, this interplay of weather-cultural atmospheres gives voice to the affective realities, in the speaker's own terms, of

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<sup>760</sup> Nardal, "Acts of Grace," 114.

<sup>761</sup> This spiritual/ religious dimensions of Nardal's fictional work will be discussed at length in the analysis of "In Exile" further below.



what oppression, ostracization and assimilation *feel* like. Because the changing of seasons is a relatable topic for the readership (mostly living in Paris) the text opens the specificity of the speaker's subjective experience to being heard and communicated to the readers. Perhaps, there are those looking at this short story who have never experienced oppression. Or possibly there are readers, that because of "dint of habit", no longer come to recognize the violence that they are being subjected to in the colonial culture. As such, Nardal's literary strategy not only creates a way to express the specificities of the speaker's affective world and her point of view, but within the uniqueness of her experiences it broadens the text through a resonance that can be identified, or identifiable within the readerships' own lived experiences. It encourages self-reflection as a possibility to understand the speaker's reality regardless of the differences and distance that the readership may have with this character. What is a notable aspect of the speaker's journey in "Acts of Grace" is that summer does return inferring that, here in the Hexagon, things can be other to the "intolerable pain" and suffocation that she feels during the winter/colonial cultural atmospheres.

#### 5.1.2 "This summer has come like an act of grace."

The first literary strategy addressed in "Acts of Grace" was the concomitance of the Martinican space and that of the Hexagon within the lived realities of the speaker. Different but threaded side by side through the character's perceptions, this co-existence of different aspects within her person is accompanied by the different seasons. In this particular cultural climate, the text suggests that there is the same chance for a black Antillean woman not to experience hostility in the Hexagon as there is that winter will not return the following year. Starting from this basis, the question becomes how the speaker can find peace, gaiety, desire, and freedom of the summer months, even if during winter she is faced with the contrary. In "Acts of Grace" the differentiation and yet co-existence within the speaker's sensibilities of both summer and winter, and of the center of empire and its peripheral colony, sets up the way in which she could find a response to this question. It would be that within herself she realizes, that in spite of the toll of winter or colonial culture, she can be both black and French, both French and Antillean. This is to argue that "Acts of Grace" is a depiction of a subject's racial conscientization presenting what it looks and feels like for her. The possibility of finding a place for subjectivity here in the Hexagon is given an image and place in the mountains, and the coming into racial consciousness is enacted by the speaker in the way she looks at them.

Is there not something passionate in the Antillean landscape, even in its most intimate and familiar sites far from the mountains, which the French landscape cannot give us except in the mountains? Something overly civilized, overly refined, overly artificial emerges from this delicate and graceful undergrowth whose ground is carpeted with little dead leaves and quilted with spots of shade.<sup>762</sup>

The passion of the Antillean landscape which is portrayed as endogenous to this space (familiar, intimate) extends far from its mountainous regions. As the author brought to light in her *Guide*, the mountains in the Martinican landscape are rich in signification within Martinican culture for they are bound to material, symbolic and historical realities of black enslavement and resistance to it. A site of *marronage* from the plantations situated below, the wild and rocky landscape of the mountains are linked to the culture of *le morne*, the example given in the last chapter being the combative dance called the *laguïa*. Here in this piece the passion that the speaker observes within this socio-geographical space is convincingly a reference to this historical and cultural genealogies of black resistance. In France it is only the mountains that can “give us” this passion. The reference to collectivity, may speak to the Antillean population in the metropole but it is not entirely reducible to this “us”. The overlapping that is taking place within this one imaging of the mountains tends to render ambiguous whether this overly civilized being which emerges as such from the “delicate and graceful” undergrowth is located in the Hexagon or Martinique. Arguably this is a desired ambiguity for if the speaker perceives mountains and Martinique as the material and symbolic ground of Antillean identities and culture which emerged from histories of colonization, then, as the author has argued previously, this is a history of entanglements of whiteness and blackness regardless of ideological separations that run through structural forms of domination. Thus, in line with the weather strategies and blurring of landscapes in the speaker’s perception, this is another moment of relocation of these colonial entanglements to the center of empire.

Another characteristic of the Antillean landscape is its force, while in France the harmony of the landscape always appears a little bit weak. To relocate force and passion and even grandeur, you have to go to the mountains, to the Gorges of Chouigny, for example, whose river reminds me of Martinican torrents: great, black rocks break up its course; it bubbles and foams all around without being able to cleave the obstacle, all in the frame of immense jagged boulders.<sup>763</sup>

In this passage partially cited above, the mountains that “give” passion are affectively thickened by force and grandeur. The idea of the relocation of these qualities that are initially attributed to

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<sup>762</sup> Nardal, “Acts of Grace,” 114.

<sup>763</sup> Nardal, “Acts of Grace,” 115.

the island inscribes itself into the larger narrative of immigration and develops further in the speaker's need to travel again within this hexagonal space. These three affective states that have come to signify the space of Antillean identities are carried on in the sense where it is the speaker that has found them in these gorges of Chouvigny, located in the Rhone-Alps. In the Hexagon, it is the passion of her history and her genealogy that she is perceiving. Similar to the history of colonialism, her identity and subjectivity are entangled within these two spaces, and it is her realization that she can find it here in France. In the overarching themes of this piece, what this valorization of her Antillean identity perceived or felt in the grandeur of the hexagonal mountains evokes is the conscientization of finding "force" "grandeur" and "passion" in both her black and French identity. Carried by the numerous metaphorical and symbolic work undertaken by the author, the speaker's affirmation of her multiplicity of identity is carved out in the geographical, symbolic, and cultural bounds of French identity. As the author closes the story the speaker states,

Thank God, summer's back. What a pleasure it is to get rid of those heavy furs to dress up in light fabrics with hot colors that themselves announce the return of good weather.

This summer has come like an act of grace.<sup>764</sup>

Leaving the "heavy furs" of metropolitan culture she slips back into the colors of her Antillean identity. Summer and winter characterize her experience of this space but neither has to necessarily preclude the other. Whilst white colonial culture (winter) may perceive her otherwise she can be a desirous and agentive being in her black subjectivity, here in the center of empire, but this strength, force, grandeur that she has inherited and is a part of her must be found, searched, and fought for within these landscapes of the metropolis. This is to say, the speaker suggests that she does not have to adopt the white perspective of herself that at times is so violent that she is anesthetized to it – "came no longer to suffer it" – nor respond to the impossible demand to assimilate into Frenchness for that would require the complete negation of her blackness. Rather she can take off these furs of white supremacy and live, walk, run, and experience pleasure in this space as a French Antillean woman. And it is this resolution and realization that is, like the coming of summer, "an act of grace". From a broader perspective then, the voice of "Acts of Grace" is evocative of a rallying cry out to members of the diaspora within the metropolis, particularly black women, as it is filled with hope and faith in the transformation on the level of the individual and the collective. This is portrayed most specifically in this short story by the

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<sup>764</sup> Nardal, "Acts of Grace," 115.

character's own coming into racial consciousness which echoes the efforts of black international politics at the time. As Nardal did in her "*Éveil de la conscience de race*", "*Acts of Grace*" makes this the key moment of the protagonist's path in the metropolis. At the end of the text there is a real sense that, just as summer follows winter, there are possibilities for black subjects to be a part of France and Frenchness, but on their own terms and through defining their own blackness and Frenchness. It is in this way that through this fictional piece, Nardal not only explores political and cultural objectives of her black internationalist politics, but she also creates an image, tone, voice, and form to these desires for the transformation towards a more equal and just society. The formal aspects of the piece echo this transformative spirit of social movements and liberatory aesthetics because, whether in the sense of its multilocality, the winter/colonial culture that permeates Nardal's text and the non-existence of clear linear narrative development, it resists its containment within its discursive boundaries. "*Acts of Grace*" is productive of its own atmosphere for change that speaks more to affective experiences, though grounded in the violence of reality faced, of what it feels like to search for the "force", "grandeur" and "passion", both collectively and individually, that energizes one into action and propels the desiring subject outwards or towards the search and fight for things to be otherwise.

## 5.2 Paris "In Exile": Complexifying the Migratory Narrative

In subsequent fictional work Nardal paints pictures of everyday interactions within Paris from the perspective of her Antillean women protagonists. Whilst not all are as evocative of a transformative spirit as her "*Acts of Grace*", as the discussion turns to "*In Exile*" what comes to light is the search for other ways of representation and understanding that challenge the aesthetics and cultural norms, whether from the colonial perspective or from the point of view of (masculine) black intellectual and cultural productions. Nardal's exploration of and experimentation with her writing practices and her cultural politics can be seen, for example, in her continual displacement of the point of view from which the text speaks. The choice of character Elisa, an elderly working-class Antillean woman, stands out, for example, in opposition to the speaker of "*Acts of Grace*" who is not qualified further than her Antillean feminine identity. At the same time as character development makes space within the author's text to broach themes of immigration, belonging, assimilation and anti-black racism from another angle, it also arguably testifies to a literary strategy that contests articulations of power,

such as normative reductions of identity, to one voice, or one way of being. As this comes to be elucidated in the discussion to follow, what is known so far with respect to “In Exile” is that it is set in Paris, and it stages everyday occurrences of racism. As demonstrated in the last chapter, Elisa was singled out on the bus by the “stares” of the metropolitan public that fixed on her madras calendé. What is interesting is that Nardal sets “In Exile” during one day in winter. This season comes, as in “Acts of Grace”, to voice affective experience of the hostility faced by Elisa and color colonial culture in the oppressive atmosphere of winter. The opening scene is the end of her workday as she returns home in the rain “climbing up the rue des Écoles” as she says to herself, ““this land does not truly suit an old Negress already weighed down by age and sometimes enfeebled with rheumatism””.<sup>765</sup> What the reality of “this land” is for Elisa is given directly after in the description of how she feels the winter weather.

La bise transperçait son mince manteau. Toute sa chair semblait se révolter contre cette sensation à laquelle elle n’avait jamais pu s’habituer. Son imagination avait presque personnifié l’hiver. Elle y pensait comme à un ennemi cruel et implacable. Il lui arrivait de se demander en punition de quelle faute le bon Dieu avait affligé les Européens d’un pareil fléau, car, dans son étroite jugeotte, il ne pouvait en être autrement.

« Oh ! la belle blonde »<sup>766</sup>

The winter atmosphere that permeates across “Acts of Grace” and “In Exile” finds certain resonances in each character’s experience of it, such as its visceral aspects felt and the pain it causes. Unlike in “Acts of Grace”, winter appears interminable “In Exile” because the temporality of the short story spans one working day. The author’s choice of the word “*fléau*” casts a symbolic shadow over the experience. It evokes epidemics and images the instrument (flail in English) utilized in grain production that has as its principal use the beating down of wheat. Thus, God’s punishment that beats down upon “Europeans”, likens winter to the curse of past periods of the plague whose appearance at the time was unknown to the populations that it devastated. In “Acts of Grace” the way the seasons traced, in part, the cognitive processes of the speaker through the productive contrast of winter and summer, “In Exile” winter is less on the level of consciousness or understanding in the character of Elisa. Winter, colonial culture, racism and oppression are felt and lived in its plague like pervasiveness unseizable to Elisa until

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<sup>765</sup> Paulette Nardal, “In Exile,” 116. “Ce pays ne convient vraiment pas à une vieille négresse déjà alourdie par l’âge et parfois perclue [perdue ?] de rhumatismes.” “En exil,” 6.

<sup>766</sup> Nardal, “En exil,” 6. “The icy wind cut right through her thin coat. All her flesh seemed to revolt against the sensation to which she had never been able to habituate herself. Her imagination had almost personified winter, which she thought of as a cruel and implacable enemy. It came to her to wonder what fault the Europeans had committed that the good Lord had seen fit to punish them with such a scourge, for in her narrow smarts, there could be no other explanation. ‘Oh! What a beautiful blond.’” Nardal, “In Exile,” 116.

her meditations on this season are, as is the text itself, interrupted by an anonymous racist speech act. “Oh! What a beautiful blond!” is not attributed to anyone in particular – a “bunch of students enchanted by their witty remark”<sup>767</sup> – and qualifies the possibility that this voice could come from anywhere and at any time within this cultural-meteorological climate. Though Elisa is described as being “indifferent” to the laughs of the metropolitan students it does not give rise to a critical reflection of racism, for instance, in Elisa’s “monologue” that she continues with herself. The anti-black racism that is spoken finds a response in “all of her flesh” that revolts against winter but her thoughts follow their previous trajectory. What this suggests to the readers is that Elisa’s story creates a different affective and social topography of Paris that distinguishes itself from “Acts of Grace” and Nardal’s other fictional pieces. As such, the author makes room for exploring otherwise one’s connection to home, Martinique, and the colonial metropolis.

Nardal characterizes Elisa’s immigration to the hexagon within a narrative of disappointment which aligns itself, therefore, with stories like Roberte Horth’s. Elisa regrets, for instance, that she gave up Martinique for “the mirage of Paris”.<sup>768</sup> At the same time, Nardal displaces from the very beginnings of the text the common point of view from which Antillean migration is explored in discursive spaces and which reflect the realities of interwar trajectories of black diasporic communities that came to Paris during this period. From Elisa’s perspective, the short story investigates what it means, how it looks, and how it feels to speak from a position that is marginalized in the white colonial culture but also one that is different to a large majority of the black population in Paris. Akin to her story “*Guignol Ouolof*” where the events take place at a café in the Latin Quartier, Elisa lives her life shuttling back and forth to this Parisian location. Because it is the student quarter and home to the Sorbonne where Nardal and her sisters studied like many of their colleagues, Elisa’s working life and lived experience is made to overlap with the symbolic and material sites of collective knowledge and cultural production within black internationalist circles. As Jennifer Boittin points out, distinctions of where black diasporic populations lived, socialized, worked and were politically active are fluid and resist generalizations. However, the Latin Quarter was nevertheless the place where black populations who were mostly educated, and therefore from middle to upper classes and predominantly

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<sup>767</sup> Nardal, “In Exile,” 116.

<sup>768</sup> Nardal, “In Exile,” 117.

masculine, tended to congregate.<sup>769</sup> This is equally evident in the passage of Victor Sablé's memoirs of his Parisian life, that Boittin cites, and that gives an image of the Latin Quarter:

On the boulevard Saint-Michel, Louis Achille, son of our respective professor and himself *agrégé* in English, was very stylish with his Knickerbocker pants whilst Charles Saint-Cyr, student of medicine, and Roland Boisneuf, student of law, were strutting about in melon hats, with umbrellas, like real dandies. Bocle and Mezin paraded about in the tails on the terrace of the Café de La Source, while waiting for a taxi to take them to the engagement dinner for Deputy Delmont's son.<sup>770</sup>

Nardal's topography of the same location proposes a very different picture to Sablé's and as such brings into the story a productive tension between the masculine, black, political, and intellectual milieu of the neighborhood and Elisa's experience. For Elisa, there is no free time for "strutting" nor dinner parties as her metropolitan experience consists in her journey from work to home whilst enduring the harsh winter day that falls upon her. She goes to "rue Cuvier" where she is a maid, then "rue des Écoles" and "rue Racine" on her journey home and which are all in the Latin Quarter. But she exits the bus at "rue de Rennes" and lives on the "boulevard Pasteur" which fall outside of this neighborhood.<sup>771</sup> Whilst the narrator states that she has friends "exiled like her", her working life leaves her no time for sociability.

Cette vie qui ne laissait aucune place à la bienheureuse flânerie, aux conversations joyeuses et animées le soir, avec sa colocataire et ses autres amies, comme elle, exilées, lui semblait par trop pénible.<sup>772</sup>

One reason, then, for her isolation within the metropolis is due to long working hours. This is added to, however, because the narrative is in or around the Latin Quarter thus inferring that these spaces of diasporic communities were not always sites of inclusion to all black subjects. Elisa's experiences run parallel to these worlds, but she does not participate in them. Her reality of this space is not one of political dialogue, of learning, or feelings of a shared purpose and struggle. The transformative energy of "Acts of Grace" gives way to a less optimistic narrative

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<sup>769</sup> Boittin's research finds evidence for this in the police reports that are the material traces of the officers' or informants' findings when following, spying, or involving themselves in black international circles. Boittin explains that the archives show "recorded addresses that subversive black men were overwhelmingly located in the Latin Quarter in the fifth arrondissement... The Latin Quarter was a popular meeting space, especially for socializing after official gatherings, signifying that to a certain extent organizations met near the homes of their core membership." Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 41-42. For a full development of her "racial topography" of Paris see the author's Chapter Two, "Dancing Dissidents & Dissident Dancers: The Urban Topography of Race," 37-78.

<sup>770</sup> Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 39 citing Victor Sablé's, *Mémoires d'un foyalais*, 63.

<sup>771</sup> Nardal, "In Exile," 116-118.

<sup>772</sup> Nardal, "En exil," 6. "This life – which left no room for contented idling, for happy and animated conversations in the evening with her roommate and her other friends, exiled like her – just seems too painful." Nardal, "In Exile," 116.

tone that situates Elisa's fight, in this neighborhood, as the solitary struggle to get through the day.

Mais déjà, la toilette la réclamait ; et à 7 heures, elle devait prendre l'autobus pour rejoindre l'appartement obscur de la rue Cuvier, où elle faisait le ménage. Ses vieilles mains, malgré les gerçures et leur passage de l'eau chaude à l'eau froide, avaient gardé leur finesse native, mais quand la bise soufflait, comme ce soir, elle en souffrait cruellement. Et malgré la courbature, la fatigue extrême qu'elle ressentait le soir, elle avait dû s'habituer à aller à pied jusqu'à la rue Racine, afin d'épargner les quelques sous d'une section.<sup>773</sup>

Considering that Elisa's struggles are confronted alone but within the Latin Quarter, the text presents a reflection on the difference between political ideals being formulated, like racial solidarity, and its application in real life. This is a conflict that the author interrogates in her piece "*Guignol Ouolof*", for instance. However, perhaps more pertinent to this particular short story is that through symbolically and materially placing Elisa outside black intellectual and social milieus, the author interrogates the normalization of black masculine bourgeois perspectives within these discursive and material realities. By speaking from the specificity of Elisa's tale of migration the author not only brings to the fore that which is different to the common trajectory but also voices it in such a way – through the symbolic, material, and affective realities of the character – that renders or gives importance to her point of view. The suggestion is that, how Elisa responds to anti-black racism, the way she envisages her island 'home', or draws on her cultural knowledge of Martinique within the metropolitan space is no less political than, say, the black masculine intellectual circles that she lives parallel to. Nardal's politicization of everyday realities recognizes that one's lived experience of the center of empire will vary according to the point of view from which one sees. As such, just because Elisa speaks from a place of difference, it does not mean that what this character voices in the remainder of the text is without political, epistemological, and cultural weight and value. Herself or her experiences do not fall outside of the world of politics and pursuits for black liberation and as such the texts counteracts the marginalization of women within black international circles.

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<sup>773</sup> Nardal, "En exil," 6. "But already she had got dressed; and at seven o'clock, she had to take the bus to reach the dingy apartment on the rue Cuvier, where she kept house. Her old hands, despite their wrinkles and moving from hot to cold water, had maintained their native finesse, but when the cold wind blew, like this evening, she suffered cruelly from them. And despite her being bent over and the extreme fatigue she felt at night, she had been obliged to accustom herself to walking by foot all the way to the rue Racine, in order to save the piddling pennies of an extra bus stop." Nardal, "In Exile," 117.



### 5.2.1 Elisa's Indifference to Whiteness.

The particularities of Elisa's person and her life's trajectory, complexify issues of immigration and belonging in the metropolis and frame her insights and actions detailed by the narrator as being on par with or equal to other ways of being, living and facing the white colonial culture as a black Antillean subject. This is staged through Elisa's interaction with the public and how Nardal explores the banality of everyday racism. In line with the symbolic work of the winter atmosphere, the two occurrences represented are made to feel as if they could have happened anywhere at any time. This is because the "“Oh! What a beautiful blond!”" or the odd stares directed at Elisa because of her madras are collective speeches or actions. A consequence of this is that through Elisa's experience of racism the narrative voice strips white metropolitan public of individuality. Working in contradistinction, the only time that the white public is individualized is in the character of the bus driver.

Le receveur, qui, pendant quelques semaines, s'était amusé à la faire enrager, avait fini par la prendre sous sa protection. Il lui adressa un sourire familier.<sup>774</sup>

Rendering explicit the fact that he had previously expressed racist or sexist sentiments towards her but now this is not the case, Elisa takes the time to acknowledge him in his individual person. A fleeting intersubjective interaction across gender and racial lines is thus portrayed via the "the familiar smile" which acknowledges one and another's presence and personhood. In the other two racist encounters, the metropolitan public is a block of faceless people that are not acknowledged in their individual subjectivity, just as they do not acknowledge Elisa and actively negate her subjecthood through their speech acts. On both occasions Elisa ignores them and turns her attention elsewhere. She is either "indifferent" to the students and continues with her monologue or, in the case of the white passengers on the bus, they "didn't exist for her" and she heads into a reverie of her home in Martinique. As an effect, the notion that Elisa is ostracized and in exile within this society is clearly underlined. Reciprocal communication between subjects across racial lines, except the "familiar smile" that she receives, is depicted as an impossibility for neither party recognizes the other as such. The second aspect of Elisa's experience is that she orientates herself towards her rich internal world of thought, affective geographies, and imagination. Whilst what is depicted in the dream will be addressed shortly,

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<sup>774</sup> Nardal, "En exil," 6. "The conductor, who for several weeks had enjoyed himself at her expense, had ended up taking her under his wing. He gave her a familiar smile." Nardal, "In Exile," 117.

it is the description of her return from dreaming that contrasts the reality she faces and the way she re-orientes herself to another space-time.

« Rue de Rennes ! »

La veille Elisa sursaute. Ce cri, l'éclairage brutal des devantures, ont déchiré les voiles de sa rêverie. Revenant à la réalité, elle voit autour d'elle, les visages tendus, les yeux durs, les physionomies fermées ou indifférentes des blancs. Et le fardeau de son existence retombe plus lourdement sur ses épaules. Son cœur aussi, lui semble lourd, lourd.<sup>775</sup>

With her dreaming of Martinique interrupted abruptly by the sound of the conductor's voice it tears open the surface of her reverie. Thus, rather than framing Elisa's experience of racism as only one of containment and ostracization, the readers get the impression that she took herself off to a place that provided her subject room to live as such in her response to the racist act. A world where "the weight of her existence does not fall heavy on her shoulders." Within an overarching narrative of mobilities – journey on the bus, social mobilities of class, and the transatlantic migration – Elisa's movement to her imagination or dream of Martinique has significant importance. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting demonstrates that the narration of Elisa's experience of everyday forms of racism is presented differently to the speaker of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. Sharpley-Whiting argues that whilst the child's "Oh look a negro!" resonates with the interpellation "Oh! What a beautiful blond!", Elisa's response of indifference distinguishes itself from the first person speaker of Fanon's text, who "laments these attempts to alienate him from himself".<sup>776</sup> Though not made explicit in Sharpley-Whiting's comparison, it is inferred, to a certain degree, that the possible distinction between Nardal's and Fanon's representations is marked by the fact that black masculinity is not racialized in the same way as black femininity within the structures of white colonial patriarchy. The main difference between the two is the racist fear that black masculinity inspires and the violence it triggers because of this delusional projection of the colonial mind. Fanon underlines that even if the black speaker "made no secret of [his] amusement" at the young boy's remark he felt contained by "the circle [that] was drawing a bit tighter"<sup>777</sup>. And it is when fear is expressed, "Mama, see the negro! I'm frightened", that the black masculine subject found it no longer possible to

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<sup>775</sup> Nardal, "En exil," 6. "Rue de Rennes!" Old Elisa gives a start. That shout, the brutal lights of the storefronts, have shredded the veils of her reverie. Coming back to reality, she sees around her the strained faces, the hard eyes, the closed and indifferent physiognomies of whites. And the weight of her existence falls heavily on her shoulders. Her heart, too seems heavy, heavy." Nardal, "In Exile," 118.

<sup>776</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, "The Clamart Salon," 59.

<sup>777</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.

laugh.<sup>778</sup> The fear of black masculinity imbued in the French colonial imaginary and culture is what escalates the anti-black violence against the speaker of the text. Not only does he understand himself in their objectification of him, but the tone of the text, which is dramatized through speech acts and the narrative voice are themselves more violent.

Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away?

“A Martinican, a native of ‘our’ old colonies.”

Where shall I hide?

“Look at the nigger! ... Mama, a Negro! ... Hell, he's getting mad .... Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilized as we ...”

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day.<sup>779</sup>

Thus, whilst there are significant differences between Nardal's and Fanon's depictions of everyday racism, one interconnection across the space that separates them is that Fanon also racializes winter as “white”. This is very similar to the way Nardal employs winter as representative of everyday colonial culture and racism from the perspective of her black feminine subjects. Furthermore, this white winter encircles questions of assimilation as both authors bring to the fore the burden of having to fit into (stereotypical) images of blackness that are equivalent to the demand, for Elisa, the speaker in “Acts of Grace” and the speaker of *Black Skin, White Masks*, to enact their own negation. What also holds true for Elisa and the first-person subject of Fanon's text is that both reorientate their thoughts or attention to other spaces, other times and to other black subjects. This argument is proposed by Sharpley-Whiting when she states,

[Fanon's] educated narrator, whose hope were dashed by the “mirage of Paris” and tortured by the distance between French assimilationist rhetoric and deeply racist daily practices, turns to the Négritude poets Victor Schoelcher, Maurice Delafosse, Leo Frobenius and others to ground him in the bounty of Africa's rich cultural heritage and historical legacies. Elisa's simple reveries of Martinique, on the other hand, already account for “African tales adapted to the Antillean soul” and the “soul of old Africa passing into the Antillean tom-tom”.<sup>780</sup>

What this demonstrates is that Elisa and the narrator of *Black Skin, White Masks* draw on genealogies of black resistance and black cultural expressions to subjectify or resituate the self

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<sup>778</sup> “‘Mama, see the negro! I'm frightened!’ Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.” Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.

<sup>779</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 113.

<sup>780</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, “The Clamart Salon,” 59. Sharpley-Whiting is citing excerpts from Nardal's “In Exile”, some of which have already come up in the body of the chapter. Nardal, “In Exile,” 116-117.

in the experience of racism. Sharpley-Whiting's work that foregrounds this commonality across gender differentiation, evoke the parallels that Nardal sets up in her text. Elisa's life and experiences may be running alongside the black intellectual circles of the Latin Quarter and yet her strategies of counteracting anti-black racism are shown to be no less effective for her character. Elisa may not turn to intellectual legacies as did the "educated narrator", however she does draw upon her knowledge and experience of Antillean culture and Martinique as a source of strength and subjectivation for her. Therefore, on one level, what Nardal's framing of Elisa's resistance or response to racism as a reverie or "interior monologue" spotlights is the potential resource that one's imagination and creativity can hold for the individual. On another level, Elisa's reverie, like Fanon's references to *négritude* poets, dramatizes the co-existence of different times and spaces of symbolic and material elsewhere – imagined, lived, perceived, fictional, material, symbolic, past, present, future – that are drawn upon within in the very localized event of the experience of everyday racism in the metropolis. To turn to Elisa's dream that could be read as a longing for a "home" that she cannot find in Paris as she is always "In Exile", Martinique and the dream itself can also be interpreted as the space that, in her memory and imagination, is the existent ground within her, no matter where she is located. As such, this island within the migration narrative of the short story, is not only across the seas. Within Elisa's daily mobilities and experience of Paris, Martinican landscapes and culture are both in the Hexagon and outside of it. In the narrative this is similarly demonstrated through images like Elisa wearing her madras calendé or when, in the "frightful regularity of European life" her only luxury is in her preparation of coffee, described as "the veritable nectar whose recipe is known only to Antilleans."<sup>781</sup> Temporality is also emphasized as multiple for in her dream, Elisa not only refers to Antillean traditions and cultural practices she also goes back to the place where she grew up : "with a far off gaze, she saw herself back in her birth town, Sainte-Marie, where she had spent her youth."<sup>782</sup> Whether it is Fanon's educated narrator or Elisa, both reach out or orientate themselves towards spaces where they can think, feel, imagine and be otherwise than what the metropolitan reality dictates.

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<sup>781</sup> Nardal, "In Exile," 116.

<sup>782</sup> Nardal, "In Exile," 117.

### 5.2.2 A Reverie of Home

Nardal's choice to situate Martinique in Elisa's dream within a narrative set in Paris colors her relationship to this space in an aura of longing for something lost or a projection of ideas of home when faced with hardships and difficulties in an experience of migration. This is not an uncommon trope in migration or exilic narratives where the homeland is idealized. Another possible interpretation of Elisa's attachment to Martinique and the way she dreams it, is that it provides her a momentary reprieve from her reality of the metropole, for she falls into "reverie" directly after the racist stares on the bus. All are equally possible and don't necessarily cancel out the other. The third interpretation being argued for is one that speaks to the co-existence of multiple lived realities in which her conscious dreaming (day-dreaming) of Martinique is one of these realities. Because Nardal frames Elisa's dream as a response to racism it is an imagined, symbolic, material, and affective world that she draws upon as a resource for herself and as such what she imagines will be conditioned by this. The way that Elisa envisages Martinique in her reverie is intertwined with the reality of the anti-black world that she is experiencing. This bridging between the metropolis and Martinique, embodied as it is within the reverie of Elisa, is continued by similarities that characterize what Elisa is living in Paris and what she dreams of in her homeland. For example, both her journey home after work on the bus and her dream take place at night-time. The dream begins:

C'est le soir. Après sa journée de repassage, elle s'est assise sur un banc vermoulu, devant la porte de sa maison basse, attirée par le bavardage des amis qui, comme elle, hument avec délice, l'air salin. Menus propos. Rires énormes. Quand le caquetage s'arrête, le bruit de la mer, toute scintillante de clair de lune, meuble le silence. La rue sombre et étroite, n'est éclairée que de loin en loin par un funèbre réverbère. Les rayons de la lune donnent un éclat singulier aux pommettes et aux dents des causeurs. On se laisse aller à la douceur de vivre dans l'air alanguissant.<sup>783</sup>

Another commonality created between these two spaces is through the description of Elisa's daily activities. In Paris "she keeps house" and in the reverie the workday is spent ironing thus echoing Elisa's reality as a working-class woman in both contexts. Though her day may look different in Martinique, this similarity suggests to the readers that the promise of a better life – "the mirage of Paris" – in terms of class mobility is yet another cause for Elisa's disappointment. There is a

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<sup>783</sup> Nardal, "En exil," 6. "It's evening. After a day of ironing, she sits down at a worm-eaten bench in front of her single-story house, attracted by the chatting of friends who, like her, inhale the salt air with delight. Small talk. Enormous burst of laughter. When the cackling stops, the sound of the sea, all glistening from the moonlight, fills the silence. A funeral streetlamp sparsely lights the somber and narrow street. The rays of the moon give a similar shine to the cheek bones and the teeth of the talkers. They let themselves flow with the sweetness of living in the languishing atmosphere." Nardal, "In Exile," 117.

mirror effect that Nardal mobilizes which connects the topography of Paris and the Martinique of Elisa's dreamscape and through reflection highlights their differences. In this way it underlines what is lacking for Elisa in the metropolis but also what is important to her and what she considers as valuable and necessary for living her life. For example, this scene in the reverie is painted with the animation of both the people and the natural landscape that populate it. Akin to the return of summer in "Acts of Grace", this juxtaposition breathes life into Elisa's subjective world and the "flow of the sweetness of living" runs from the subjects' expressions of gaiety and chatter to the sea "that fills the silence" and the moon that shines back onto the "teeth of the talkers". Working in contradistinction then, this evokes that which her urban Parisian reality lacks but in highlighting this lack it is also a proposition. Elisa's reminiscence of a time where her life was filled with social ties and community coincides with tracing relationships to the non-human world that surrounds. This works, on the one hand, to expand ideas of connection, belonging and collectivity beyond just interpersonal (human) interaction and as something important to her that does not exist in the urban landscapes. At the same time, the dream, framed like a resource for Elisa to go to or draw upon within her reality of Paris, proposes that this is vital for her in order to endure the winter of white colonial culture. This "flow" between other subjects and the natural and spiritual environments of her Martinican dream is self-affirming for her. The imaging of Elisa's reverie proposes that one's identity, which is conferred in part by human collectivity (belonging, recognition) is also intertwined with other dimensions of relationality, such as the natural and spiritual world. As it was broached previously, the religious and spiritual dimension of "Acts of Grace" appeared during the summer's "triumphing of the greyness of winter" and was perceived by the speaker in the natural landscape that "seemed animated by a holy mirth". Elisa's connection to the natural world, as in "Acts of Grace", resists an idea of nature or self that has an essence or is essentialized. Just as Nardal's symbolic work of winter is also not an essentialization of white colonial patriarchy, here, the island of Elisa's dream speaks to aspects of Antillean cultural identity that are understood as being interwoven with ways of being with alterity – human or not – that grounds Elisa's flourishing and "sweetness of living". The dreamscape is a place that Elisa goes to as a resource, but it also casts a shadow over the interactions made (im)possible for her in the urban landscape, the symbol of technical progress, urbanity, and French Enlightenment. It places value on other forms of interaction and connection than the dream of French colonial imperialism. The narrator continues,

Là-haut, sur la colline, l'église semble veiller sur le bourg à moitié endormi et lui donner une silencieuse bénédiction. Quelqu'un se met à « conter contes », sans oublier, en commençant, les formules traditionnelles : « Titime ? » « Bois sec » – « Trois fois bel conte ». Ce sont, comme toujours, les aventures de Compère Lapin, du Cheval Trois Pattes. Tout le folklore martiniquais y passe. Contes africains adaptés à l'âme antillaise. Mais voilà que résonne le tambour dans le lointain. Sur les hauteurs du côté de Fourniolles, quelque « laguïa » aura réuni, dans un espace en terre battue, les rudes travailleurs des champs de canne.<sup>784</sup>

Spirituality in the form of the Christian faith overlooks the villagers and contrasts with its initial appearance in the text. As opposed to the “*fléau*” of winter that God bestows on Europeans because of their faults, here the church looks down on this community in “benediction”. Presented contemporaneously with the voices of the group who are “telling tales”, and the “distant sounds” of the drums where the *laguïa* is being performed, one understands that for Elisa these two traditions are not two different sources of strength but are interconnected. Catholicism that has come also from colonial domination is grounded in the material realities and cultural practices that have emerged from (historical) resistance to black oppression. The church on the “hilltop” and the performance of the *laguïa* in the “highlands” places them both on similar altitudinal levels in the Martinican landscape. Whilst they are perhaps separated from a European perspective, there is a spiritual resonance between this practice and the image of the church which, without hierarchization from Elisa’s point of view, speaks to the creolization of traditions, in this case faith. This is expanded by the performance of folklore that voices “the African tales adapted to the Antillean soul” and reiterated in the final third of the dream which is dedicated to the description of the *laguïa*.

Deux grands noirs se défient, s’attaquent avec des détente des fauves et s’esquivent plus légers que des félins. Pourvu qu’ils ne s’excitent pas trop à ce jeu dangereux et que ce ne soit pas, une fois de plus, le « laguïa de la mort ». Un autre noir, à califourchon sur un baril renversé, le chapeau bakoua rejeté en arrière, tape sur le fond tendu d’une peau de mouton, avec ses doigts experts. Il en tire des sonorités qui, dans le lointain, retentissent comme un appel angoissant. C’est toute l’âme de la vieille Afrique qui passe, dans ce tam-tam antillais, éveillant chez les causeurs soudain attentifs, une obscure émotion.

- « Rue de Rennes ! »<sup>785</sup>

<sup>784</sup> Nardal, “En exil,” 6. “Up above, on the hilltop, the church seems to watch over the half-asleep town, giving it a silent benediction. Someone begins to “tell tales” without forgetting to put the traditional formulas at the beginning. “Titime?” “Bois sec,” “Trois fois bel conte.” They are, as always, the adventures of Godfather Rabbit, of the three-legged horse. The whole Martinican folklore goes by. African tales adapted to the Antillean soul. But then the distant drum resounds. In the highlands, near Fourniolles, some *laguïa* has assembled, in the clearing of trampled dirt, the rough workers from the cane fields.” Nardal, “In Exile,” 117.

<sup>785</sup> Nardal, “En exil,” 6. “Two big blacks challenge each other, attack with the explosiveness of wild beasts and withdraw more light-footed than cats. As long as they don’t get too excited at this dangerous game and that it’s not, once more, “the *laguïa* of death.” Another black, squatting on an overturned barrel, his straw hat pushed back, hits the stretched back of a sheepskin with expert fingers. He pulls out of it sounds that echo in the distance like an anxious call. It’s the

The church and “the soul” of Africa are dreamt as embodied within the performance of the dancers or musician that pull the past and intertwine it with the present. The sound that the “expert fingers” are conjuring along with the combative performance and staging of black liberation and struggle against the white masters, “awakens” an emotional response from the now “attentive talkers”. It is this last scene of her reverie, where she is imagining the *laguûa* that the metropolis brings Elisa back through the “shout” of the bus driver and “brutal lights of the store front [that] have shredded the veils of her reverie”. With this last scene, the dream as resource of strength and (re)subjectification for Elisa is heightened. It is framed as a place and her identity within it, that Elisa can call upon or go to when her subject has been faced with its attempted negation. The Antillean cultural traditions, the historicity of black resistance, her feelings of belonging, and the characters’ communion or relationships with the spiritual and natural spheres of reality, all equally inform and fill her subjecthood. With the mirroring effect that Nardal creates, the richness of human experience portrayed in the dream intimates, at least for Elisa, this cannot be found in the capital of the French empire and the center of Frenchness, and also the black intellectual milieus that her life has been shown to run parallel to. Furthermore, in this narrative of migration the text not only resists being fixed in location but also resists being still or stopped. Working in opposition to the very localized setting of the short story, the lack of social mobility that Elisa finds in Paris, her relegation outside of black communities, and the fact that Elisa is waiting or longing for a return, it dramatizes the motion and movement that is present in Elisa’s reality. It infers that resistance to discrimination and violence takes place because of these other symbolic and material spaces of subjectification that cannot be taken away from Elisa even if the racist act tries to reduce her to the colonial perspective of blackness. On a formal level, the text own resistance to its containment in both time and space creates a resonance with how Nardal is experimenting in fiction in the sense where it is the search for a form, like Elisa’s dream, to be able to express points of view that challenge the (aesthetic) norms ascribed by white colonial culture or black (masculine) perspectives. If the denouement of this short story is approached from this angle, what it evokes is that in the practice of black emancipatory aesthetics and new ways of understanding identity that do not, through the articulations of power, fix or reduce people to their place ascribed, then perhaps, one may look beyond the symbolic and material borders of France (including the colonies of the time) and Frenchness.

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whole soul of old Africa, which passes into this Antillean tom-tom, awakening a vague emotion in the suddenly attentive talkers. “Rue de Rennes!” Nardal, “In Exile,” 117-118.



### 5.2.3 Elisa's Return

The short story's narrative arc that follows Elisa's journeying in Paris is dotted with moments of immobility as the character anticipates and awaits her eventual return to Martinique. Textually this is announced with such sentences as "she would get herself repatriated as soon as possible" as well as the fact that economically, this venture back is dependent on her son's fortune: "If only her son, who had left almost five years ago to tempt his fortune in South America, would come back to her with a little money, she would return to her homeland."<sup>786</sup> As argued above, immobility and mobility are put into tension within the short story and on multiple levels. This not only works in a productive contrast to highlight one from the other but also to show that there is a complex relationship between the two that a subject, Elisa, is in constant negotiation with. Whilst Elisa may be immobile on the level of social mobility for example, she is not on another, represented in her orientation to her dream as a response to racism and the animation of the dream itself. To put it alternatively, Elisa is agentive in her actions in the way she reacts to racism even if at the very same time the act of racism itself attempts to stop her or deny her as an agentive subject. Nardal connects this complex relationship between mobility-immobility, agency-non-agency within Elisa's experience of her Antillean identity. And this both across racial lines and within them. In the portrayal of her son's social mobility, it suggests that he left because he would have more success in "Colomb" ("South America" in the translation) than as a black man in France. At the same time, the fact that Elisa awaits him for the accomplishment of her desires frames Elisa's immobility on this level as inscribed in a patriarchal logic of the active masculine character (as economic provider, as protector, or as savoir) and the passive female character. This interpretation is also made possible because Elisa's son comes through with the promise of her return.

Voilà déjà le boulevard Pasteur. La concierge lui crie au passage. – « Mama Elisa, une lettre pour vous. « C'est du Colomb ». Une lettre de son fils ! La tristesse de sa journée en est effacée, et ses yeux, tout à l'heure navrés, s'illuminent. Avec le laisser-aller des simples, elle ouvre immédiatement l'enveloppe, commence à lire, et, tout à coup, s'assied, suffoquée de bonheur, sur une chaise de la loge. Son fils, à qui les Américains ont racheté au prix fort son entreprise de peausserie, lui revenait

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<sup>786</sup> Nardal, "In Exile," 117. "Si seulement son fils, qui était parti, voilà bientôt cinq ans, tenter la fortune à Colomb, lui revenait avec un peu d'argent, elle retournerait au pays, dans sa douce Martinique qu'elle n'aurait jamais dû échanger contre le mirage de Paris." Nardal, "En exil," 6.

bientôt pour la ramener au pays. La veille Elisa pleure. Cette joie inattendue lui paraît presque intolérable après tous ces jours de désespérance.<sup>787</sup>

After years of waiting and facing her struggles alone, the masculine protagonist of the narrative radically changes Elisa's reality which is emphasized by her joy and the transformation of her character. Elisa flies up the stairs to inform her neighbors of her wonderful news : "Briskly, she climbs up her six stories, and the neighbors, who every evening have pitied her upon hearing her painfully clamber up the worn-down steps, wonder who indeed could be humming so..."<sup>788</sup> No longer is she weighed down by her existence but rejuvenated in her whole being as she sings a "strange refrain with the jerky rhythm and the guttural and sweet syllables..."<sup>789</sup> The latter, understood as a reference to a Martinican song, closes the story as Elisa's desire for repatriation becomes a reality. The gender normative roles in play during this resolution to Elisa's time in the metropolis is slightly displaced by the fact that the masculine character, in his role of economic provider and savior, is not the patriarch (the father) but her son. In this way, the denouement could also be interpreted as (necessary) familial and intracommunal support in the anti-black colonial metropolis. This is equally affirmed by the way the concierge addresses Elisa, calling her "mama", thus marking also the age gap between them. From a broader perspective, this ending is evocative of the idea that it is the work and responsibility of younger generations not only to take care of the elder members of the community but also to lead in political struggles like the global fight against anti-black oppression. Without erasing these interpretations there is arguably another which is presented to the readers. It is perhaps not by happenstance that her son goes to "Colomb" to seek his fortune. Later on in the description, the link to the South American continent is forgone as the narrator states it is "the Americans" that bought his tannery business. Constructed against the inaccessibility of achieving the same economic success in France, it underlines his social mobility in the American continent, with the allusion to the United States, as the grounds for his achievement but more precisely Elisa's journey home. Thus, the text opens itself to the interpretation that, in terms of transformative politics and emancipatory aesthetics, one may have to reach out to other black diasporic cultures

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<sup>787</sup> Nardal, "En exil," 6. "In the entryway her concierge shouts to her. "Mama Elisa, a letter for you! It's from South America!" A letter from her son! The sadness of her day is wiped away by this, and her eyes, heartbroken just before, light up. With the nonchalance of simple people she immediately opens the envelope, begins to read, and suddenly suffocated with happiness, she sits down in a lounge chair. Her son, to whom the Americans have paid a good price for his skin-dressing enterprise, is returning soon to take her back home. Old Elisa weeps. This unexpected joy seems almost unbearable to her, after all those days of despair." Nardal, "In Exile," 118.

<sup>788</sup> Nardal, "In Exile," 118. "Alerte, elle grimpe ses six étages, et les voisines qui, chaque soir, la plaignaient en l'entendant gravir péniblement les marches usées, ne reconnaissent plus ce pas léger et se demande qui peut fredonner ainsi..." Nardal, "En exil," 6. Point of suspension in the original.

<sup>789</sup> Nardal, "In Exile," 118. "ce refrain étrange, au rythme saccadé, aux syllabes gutturales et douces..." Nardal, "En exil," 6. Point of suspension in the original.

and what they are intellectually and culturally producing, in order to achieve the desired goals, here represented in Elisa's return. Knowing so far what Martinique means to Elisa from her reveries and how it has been framed within the narrative as a space of re-subjectification, the religious and spiritual dimension of this dream could now be read as Nardal's allusion to the African American tradition of the Spirituals. In order to give reasons that support this interpretation the discussion has to reach out to other discursive spaces of Nardal's own work. As an effect, this will similarly demonstrate how in different discursive forms Nardal applies or experiments with her cultural politics through fictional spaces and aesthetic creations.

African American cultural identities and expressions were influential to Nardal whether in terms of her Clamart salon and social life or in her intellectual and creative practices. As quoted previously, Nardal herself attributes the conscientization of her racial identity and the pride that she came to feel in embodying it from her interaction with African American culture: "It was only after hearing the Negro Spirituals and frequenting American musicians and intellectuals that pride in my blackness made sense to me".<sup>790</sup> In her study of Antillean and African American music, "*Musique nègre: Antilles et Aframériques*" published also in *La Dépêche africaine* yet after both "Acts of Grace" and "In Exile" Nardal highlights similarities and difference between these two respective cultures. This article, addressed in Chapter Four in relationship to Nardal's descriptions of the *laguïa*, takes as a point of departure two different musical and dance scenes that are happening in Paris. The first are "*les bals nègres*" where the Antillean *beguine* and "creole music" that accompanies it are being danced and performed. The second are the performance spaces such as the theater where the famous *La Revue Nègre* is starring Josephine Baker, or the negro balls where African American blues, fox-trot and spirituals are also interpreted. Within her comparisons, what comes to light is Nardal's understanding of the Spirituals. For her, the main difference between this tradition and Antillean musical expression is due to the ways in which the enslaved population responded, spiritually and emotionally, to "the nightmare that was slavery".<sup>791</sup> What is meant by this is furthered by the author.

Quand on a entendu et étudié les "Spirituals" qui représentent la musique classique et religieuse des Aframéricains, on ne peut manquer de s'étonner de l'absence de toute musique traditionnelle chez les Antillais. Improvisations d'esclaves réfugiés

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<sup>790</sup> "La fierté noire ne se fait jour dans ma conscience claire qu'après avoir entendu les negro spirituals et fréquenté les musiciens et des intellectuels américains." Cited in the first chapter. My translation. Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 30.

<sup>791</sup> "Chez les noirs américains, même joie de vivre que chez les Antillais, même fantaisie joyeuse, même sensualité de jeunes animaux en liberté; Là où les différences s'affirment, c'est dans leurs réactions émotionnelles et spirituelles au cauchemar de l'esclavage." My translation. Paulette Nardal, "Musique nègre," 5.

dans la forêt après d’harassantes journées de travail, les “Spirituals” expriment tous un intense sentiment religieux. Sous des paroles naïves où l’on retrouve des réminiscences de la Bible et des allusions aux actes les plus humbles de leur vie, revient toujours l’aspiration vers le ciel et la liberté. Après sa rude journée de travail, quand l’esclave épuisé ne trouvait même plus la force de manger, il ne pouvait qu’aspirer à la mort, comme au seul moyen d’acquérir la liberté. Pour lui, le mot “home” est synonyme de “ciel”, lieu de repos et récompense des maux endurés sur la terre.<sup>792</sup>

Arguably informed by her own musical training in “the classics” and the fact that religion holds a considerable place in her life, Nardal frames the lack of “intense religious sentiment” in Antillean culture as almost regrettable. The author’s appraisals of the Spirituals take on a judgmental tone which places this expression above all Antillean musical practices: “This genre of music is profoundly moving and naturally more learned than Antillean music.”<sup>793</sup> This said, Nardal’s reading of the Spirituals is reminiscent of the way spirituality is intertwined in the Martinican landscapes, the human and natural interactions, and cultural practices that take place in Elisa’s reverie. The act of dreaming as Elisa’s response to the metropolis, and what is represented in the dream itself, resonates with how Nardal understands the tying together of “home” “rest” and “heaven” in the Spiritual tradition. It does not make Elisa’s experience analogous to slavery nor her reverie a wish for death. Rather, on one level, it symbolically echoes a desire for freedom which is supported not only by the spirituality that is imbued in the dream but the articulation of mobility with agency that is explored within the metropolis, Elisa’s trajectory, and her desire to return to Martinique. On another level, the symbolism of the Spirituals works together with Nardal’s mirror effects for it envelops the metropolis with a new signification as being the site of Elisa’s social death. What this also means is that Nardal spatially blurs the geography of plantations – both in the United States and in Martinique – and repatriates them to the Hexagon. As such, Martinique as the place across the ocean or the space and culture that Elisa carries within her wherever she goes, is likened to heaven and the “space of rest” from the hardships she endures in Paris. Interestingly, Nardal’s understanding of the Spirituals in “*Musique nègre*” is not that different to Du Bois’ interpretation given in *The Souls of Black Folk*. He demonstrates how Christianity was appropriated and transformed by those

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<sup>792</sup> Nardal, “Musique nègre,” 5.

<sup>793</sup> “Ce genre de musique et profondément émouvant et naturellement plus savant que la musique antillaise.” My translation. Nardal, “Musique nègre,” 5. The greater sophistication attributed to the Spirituals is conceivably evidenced by the technicity that Nardal goes on to elaborate: “Les Spirituals sont généralement interprétés sans accompagnements sous la forme chorale et emploient des effets et de rythmes très variés. Les différents groupes de chanteurs qui se font entendre à Paris ont été justement comparés à des orgues humains.” Nevertheless, this hierarchization of African American music within Nardal’s comparison is not without echoes in her work at large which will be addressed in more detail in the chapter to follow.

enslaved and how their creative practices, even within this plantation space of complete suppression, oppression, and death, gave day to the Spirituals. On the “music of Negro religion” he writes,

Sprung from the African forest, where its counterpart can still be heard, it was adapted, changed, and intensified by the tragic soul-life of the slave, until, under the stress of law and whip, it became the one true expression of a people’s sorrow, despair and hope.<sup>794</sup>

Sacred music like the Spirituals, then, are expressions of a deeply religious practice as well as the aesthetics of collective experience, aspirations for emancipation, and also the very practice of agentive action despite the context.<sup>795</sup> In Nardal’s evocation of this symbolic and cultural imaginary and emancipatory practices within “In Exile”, the author creates a reverberation across cultural differences, as Elisa draws on her dream, the anticipation of the promise of return, and as she waits for the arrival of her son. As Du Bois states, in African American Spiritual tradition, the Lord becomes synonymous with emancipation: “Thus when Emancipation finally came, it seemed a literal coming of the Lord”.<sup>796</sup> In the explanation given in Nardal’s article, and the way religion is experienced within this African American musical practice, the materiality of the divine corresponds with the way spirituality is represented, experienced, and felt in Elisa’s reverie. As it was argued for in the interpretation given above, the narrator weaves into the Antillean folklore told, the *laguûta* danced, and the tom-tom played a spiritual element that was both figured in the church on the “hill-top” and the “whole soul of old Africa” which was conjured by the fingers of the musician and the voices of the tale tellers. How Antillean cultural practices are represented in “In Exile” seems to run into direct contradiction, then, with how Nardal represents Antillean music in “*Musique nègre*” as lacking a “profoundly moving” religious sentiment. Another way of looking at it is that the resonance being argued for is due to the symbolic work and literary choices that Nardal mobilizes in her writing practices. She frames Antillean cultural practices, through her narrator, as if they are similar to the tradition of the Spirituals in order to represent otherwise black Antillean femininity, the Martinican space

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<sup>794</sup> W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 191.

<sup>795</sup> Much later, Angela Y. Davis demonstrates in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday*, how religious practices were inextricably intertwined with experiences of everyday life, such as work, family, sabotage, and escape. “The spirituals,” she writes, “as they survived and were transformed during the post slavery era, were both intensely religious and the aesthetic bearers of the slaves’ collective aspirations for worldly freedom.” Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 31. On the subject of the spirituals, and aesthetics see also James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992) and John Lovell, *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame. The Story of how the Afro-American Spiritual was Hammered Out* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

<sup>796</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 201.

and the colonial entanglements within the French context. Granted, this cultural transfer or pollination may pose certain problems for Nardal in terms of her cultural politics. As it was evoked in her article, it may have an effect of hierarchizing African American culture over the Antillean practices she is representing and thereby overriding specificities of the latter (especially in respect to faith and spirituality) that has a different history to the context of slavery in the United States.<sup>797</sup> At the same time, the creolization of religion and spirituality that is implied within the reverie in “In Exile” takes into consideration both Catholicism and “the old soul of Africa”. Furthermore, in Nardal’s short story, “*Histoire martiniquaise*” published also in the *La Dépêche africaine* in August 1929 – thus between the appearance of “Acts of Grace” and “In Exile” – she explores the misadventures of the main protagonist Yaya, who goes to visit “*la quimboiseuse*” to know what magic and which spell to use in order to render her lover faithful.<sup>798</sup> Whilst witchcraft and religion are not the same thing, both attest to the spiritual dimensions of everyday life within Antillean culture. Thus, it would also be inaccurate to state that Nardal ignores multiple forms of religion and spirituality in Martinique that have their own genealogies and cultural expressions. What could be said of the way that Nardal creates a resonance within “In Exile” of the Spirituals is that she continues ideas of creolization presented, but this time framing it from emerging within other cultural and historical spaces and peoples within the black diaspora. This would be to propose that she mobilizes in the creation of her own political aesthetics and writing practice her understandings of black pride and racial conscientization that is unique to her point of view. Furthermore, as she states in “*Musique nègre*”, “it is true that the colonists had choked any religious sentiment amongst Antillean slaves for they feared the effects of religious instruction by the missionaries”.<sup>799</sup> What this means is that Nardal, like the Spiritual tradition, may be reappropriating this particular history in the Antilles and making European religious traditions, that which was not encouraged in order to maintain domination, a part of her liberatory Antillean aesthetics and cultural practices. In the short story, what globally comes to the fore is that faith is one aspect of lived experience that could help in building black pride and sense of self that is echoed in the character Elisa and the spirituality of the dream which were a source of strength

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<sup>797</sup> The history of religion and spiritual practices in creole traditions falls outside the scope of this study which is why it is only mentioned here but not expanded upon.

<sup>798</sup> Paulette Nardal, “Histoire martiniquaise,” *La Dépêche africaine* 2, no. 15 (août 1929): 3. As it was demonstrated in Chapter One in the discussion of Jane Nardal’s “Exotic Puppets” the figure of the *quimboiseuse* is exoticized in the white colonial imaginary and tied to the sexual politics of domination between white masculinity and black femininity.

<sup>799</sup> “Il est vrai que le sentiment religieux a été étouffé chez les esclaves antillais par les colons qui redoutaient l’effet de l’instruction religieuse donnée par les missionnaires.” My translation. Nardal, “Musique nègre,” 5.

within her subjective reality. In the context within which Nardal is writing, her incorporation of faith (particularly the Christian tradition) into her black feminist politics and liberatory aesthetics runs arguably against other liberatory black voices at the time and could be a possible reason for her being labelled as conservative by some of her peers and in later critical perspectives on her work. Another perspective, which the discussion traced throughout “In Exile” gives reason for, is that it belies less to a conservatism than to a freedom Nardal accords herself in thought, expression, and experimentation. The spiritual dimension of life that Nardal weaves into the combat of anti-black racism, that may be poorly or condescendingly viewed by a (laic) radical political left for example, evokes the liberatory aspects of faith and spirituality for both the individual and the collective. Enacting her own creolization of other cultural expression from within the diaspora, Nardal constructs an image of the co-existence of the fictional space of the short story, the Martinique dreamt, and the multi-dimensions of realities (natural, human, spiritual, cultural) of human experience and interactions. For Nardal, all are presented as spheres to explore, from which to draw on as a resource, and that may be fruitful in processes of racial conscientization, and the transformation of the problems faced as Antillean subjects within the French white colonial heteropatriarchy.

### **5.3 Fictionalizing Black Collectivities in the Colonial Metropolis**

In the space of literature, Nardal’s “Acts of Grace” and “In Exile” explore the material and existential conditions of black feminine subjectivity in the metropolis. Nardal’s fictionalized interrogations on immigration and assimilation, like her atmospheres, permeated or affected all levels of her protagonist’s lived experiences and characterized the social interactions that took place within the text. It’s a constant “weight” or pressure that her characters feel as the demand of assimilating into French society is equivalent to the negation of their Antillean cultural identities. As it was highlighted, these two pieces fictionally explore potential ways out of this containment and oppression, in part, through the characters’ processes of identification. Whether in the rally cry of “Acts of Grace” for different ways of inhabiting and being within the hexagonal space, Elisa’s reverie, or the fulfillment of her desire for repatriation, they negotiate the hostility that they experience via their own methods of becoming subject. This is heightened by the form that the author chooses, the literary strategies she uses and, as it was argued, particularly the

multiplicity of (symbolic and material) time-spaces that Nardal makes coexist within her work. Just like her characters' defiance to be something they are not (assimilate), the text themselves resist being fixed, situated, and contained. Jumping ahead on Nardal's literary timeline to six years later is to address the already mentioned shorty story "*Guignol Ouolof*", published in March 1935 in *L'Étudiant noir*, and "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*" that appeared within the pages of *Candide: grand hebdomadaire parisien et littéraire* in July 1935. Whilst there are some resonances between these four pieces, one of the noticeable differences in these later texts is that the narrator shifts her focus from individual experience to one of collectivity. Resituating the place from which these fictional texts speak, as it will be demonstrated in the discussion to follow, not only presents themes addressed in "Acts of Grace" and "In Exile" in another light, but also creates a space for the experimentation of political ideals of black internationalism by anchoring them in lived realities of the metropolis. In "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*", Nardal presents an everyday activity of going to the hairdressers and interrogates what constitutes a community in the staging of interracial interactions in the hair salon. In contrast, "*Guignol Ouolof*" investigates interaction only within the diasporic community. It puts into play ways that the Antillean female protagonist acts or fails to act in racial solidarity with a Senegalese peanut vendor in a café in the Latin Quarter. Thus unlike "In Exile" where intracommunal interactions are inferred too, but Elisa and her experiences run parallel and outside of the communities of black diaspora, "*Guignol Ouolof*" confronts the obstacles that may stand in the way of the practice of racial solidarity between an Antillean woman and a Senegalese man. As such, these two 1935 publications do not approach the position of the individual within the collective in the same way. In the earlier works, notions of community are present, and in "In Exile" (racist) interactions are staged, but the anchorage of perspective is from the individual which goes out to the collective. For example, in Elisa's dream in which feelings of communion and collective experience through cultural practices are imagined and drawn upon, the narrative voice speaks from her individual self, the rich world that constitutes her subject and colors her perceptions. This paradigmatic shift to explorations of what makes a community and the possibilities or no of black international racial solidarity in Nardal's work are, in part, informed by the context in which she writes them. As it has been argued, Nardal uses fiction as an alternative sphere to evaluate or explore political and intellectual ideas, which means that the contextualization of the geo-political environment during their production matters. Both "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*" and "*Guignol Ouolof*" are published contemporaneously to the lead up to and eventual invasion of Ethiopia by Italy. Whilst Nardal's intellectual and political articles on the Italo-Ethiopian conflict will not be analyzed until the next chapter, it would be



beneficial to outline how this event effected Nardal's activism and political orientations to have a sense of the background that floats behind these texts and sometimes reverberates through them.

Mussolini's invasion of one of the remaining two independent African nations took place in October of 1935. As one scholar of black international women's politics during this period, Imaobong D. Umoren underlines, the "Italian invasion of Ethiopia sent shock waves throughout the African continent and its diaspora".<sup>800</sup> In the United States, Umoren argues that this event changed the way black Americans related to the African continent in general. Citing Langston Hughes' poem "The Ballad of Ethiopia" the author traces a shift in the "dominant narrative of 'uplift' promoted through missionary, emigration, and repatriation schemes [to Africa] in the nineteenth century to one of collaboration and compassion."<sup>801</sup> It is within this movement that mostly communist-based organizations began politically mobilizing against the invasion and seeking ways to support Ethiopia. Across the Atlantic, communist-based black activists centralized efforts across political affiliations and racial backgrounds in order to counteract the impending invasion. As Jennifer Boittin describes it, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1935, the first meeting of the newly founded *Comité International pour la Défense du Peuple Éthiopien* "attracted eight hundred blacks, Arabs and whites in one place."<sup>802</sup> Paulette Nardal was strongly against the fascist invasion of Ethiopia which is evident in both her political activities and articles written in defense of this nation. Later, Nardal looks back on this period and includes it in her "important dates" timeline written for the occasion of a series of interviews with Phillipe Grollemund and published in *Fiertés de femme noire. Entretiens/ Mémoires de Paulette Nardal*.

1936 : 40 ans. Au nom du Comité de coordination des associations contre la guerre et le fascisme, je parcours des villes de Belgique pour porter la révolte des noirs devant l'agression fasciste (italienne) en Éthiopie. Cette action a consolidé mes convictions nouvelles.<sup>803</sup>

Presenting one of the political activities that she undertook during this conflict, the affirmation of her "new convictions" is echoed by scholars of Nardal's work such as Boittin, Umuren and

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<sup>800</sup> Imaobong D. Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists: Activist-Intellectuals and Global Freedom Struggles* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 37.

<sup>801</sup> Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists*, 38. Langston Hughes, "The Ballad of Ethiopia," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 28, 1935.

<sup>802</sup> Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 161.

<sup>803</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 19.

Gianoncelli who perceive the Italo-Ethiopian war as a turning point in Nardal's politics and intellectual thought.<sup>804</sup> This is similarly demonstrated in her unprecedented implication and involvement in communist-affiliated and predominantly masculine political spaces. From this perspective, one of the major charges brought against France and the League of Nations was their inaction in respect to the Ethiopian invasion with the inference that their ambivalence or indifference was due to a shared antiblackness across European nations. For example, Nardal wrote an open letter to the General Secretary of the League of Nations which was published in the first page of *Le Cri des Nègres*, the newspaper for the *Union de Travailleurs Nègres*, inciting them to intervene in the conflict.<sup>805</sup> From Nardal's point of view, the general indifference within white European populations crystallized a need for black international communities to revise their relationship to them. In *La Revue de l'Aucam*, Nardal writes,

Et puis, le conflit actuel a eu pour effet de faire réfléchir le noir sur sa condition par rapport à la race blanche. Les plus loyalistes, les plus assimilés de ces Noirs, n'ont pu s'empêcher de réviser certains de leurs jugements. Tel radical convaincu se demande si, après tout, ce ne sont pas les communistes qui ont raison. Tel étudiant, jusqu'ici indifférent aux questions politiques, sollicite dès l'ouverture des hostilités, son inscription au parti socialiste. Les marxistes Noirs triomphent.<sup>806</sup>

Nardal's political orientations towards predominantly masculine spaces and communist associations appear, then, to be a choice made faced with the difficulty of finding a space for her activism within white (masculine or feminine) political groups. As Imaobong D. Umoren argues, Nardal's implication within working-class black organizations attest to a move to position herself against fascism whilst remaining in the frame of black internationalist political movements.<sup>807</sup> Consequently, questions of racial solidarity and the making of black political communities are foregrounded in Nardal's literary texts, articles, and political activism. In 1935, Nardal began working with the *Union de Travailleurs Nègres* and their journal *Le Cri des Nègres*,<sup>808</sup> at the same time as being the secretary for the *Comité de Défense d'Éthiopie* founded by Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté.<sup>809</sup> Nardal also co-founded the *Comité d'Action Éthiopienne* with other communist-

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<sup>804</sup> Boittin, Umoren and Gianoncelli all cite Nardal's article "Levée des races" published in the Senegalese newspaper *Le Pèriscope africain* in October 1935 as evidence of this shift. As stated in the body of the text, Nardal's political work on this conflict will be addressed in the Chapter Six. Paulette Nardal, "Levée des races," *Le Pèriscope africain* 7, no. 318 (octobre 19, 1935); Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 162-164; Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists*, 40; Eve Gianoncelli, "La pensée conquise: contribution à une histoire intellectuelle transnationale des femmes et du genre au XXe siècle," (PhD diss., Université Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis, 2016), 280.

<sup>805</sup> Paulette Nardal, "On nous prie d'insérer," *Le Cri des Nègres* 4, no. 17 (juin 1935): 1. This letter will be returned to.

<sup>806</sup> Paulette Nardal cited in, Edwards, "Unsettled Legacies," 689. No reference was given for the original publication other than citing "*La Revue de l'Aucam*." This researcher could not find the original.

<sup>807</sup> Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists*, 40.

<sup>808</sup> Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 161.

<sup>809</sup> Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 298.

affiliated colleagues, including Kouyaté but also René Maran, Augustin Azango, Albert Raakoto Ratisimamango and R. Cenace Tahly.<sup>810</sup> What is more, with her fluency in English and in her role of secretary for the *Comité de Défense d'Éthiopie*, Nardal assured the communication between this collective and C.L.R James' organization, International African Friends of Ethiopia, based in England.<sup>811</sup> On the one hand then, Nardal's communist affiliation is reflective of a continuation of her critical perspectives in terms of class. This social critique is not foreign to her earlier intellectual and aesthetic productions and evident in "In Exile" or in her representations of working-class Antillean identities in the *Guide*. On the other hand, her movement is a clear political repositioning that emphasizes her affiliation with diasporic politics that speak from the position of international racial solidarity regardless of other social factors that may distinguish individuals, such as gender and national identity. To conclude that during this period Nardal exchanges her black feminist perspective for a black communist one would be misleading. However, it does testify to an importance being placed on thinking through collectivity in terms of race in order to act against international black oppression and the current violence, destruction and loss of sovereignty that is taking place in Ethiopia. Thus, for Nardal, this conflict places a different optics on interracial relationships in France and around the world, and the kinds of anti-black racisms experienced. The example given in Nardal's article is the untenability of the statement that a black subject "is assimilated" in France. She suggests that it has become almost illusory to think that one is assimilated into French culture, because of the anti-blackness in France's (and Europe's) indifference to stop the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. To demonstrate how Nardal interrogates these issues of international black solidarity, assimilation, and French anti-blackness in light of this context, the discussion will firstly address "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*".

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<sup>810</sup> Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists*, 41.

<sup>811</sup> Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 298.

### 5.3.1 “*On défrise les cheveux crépus*”

*Candide: grand hebdomadaire parisien et littéraire* is a Parisian newspaper that mixes cultural commentary, literary reviews, and literary texts. Its main editorial line is to present articles and literary productions that speak from within the symbolic and material spaces of the French capital. This said, readers also find amongst its pages, publications from literary texts outside of them, such as a series of translated excerpts of Agatha Christie’s 1933 crime novel, *Lord Edgeward Dies*. Organized into sections such as “*La Musique*” or “*Le Théâtre*”, *Candide* proposes a permanent feature called “*La Ville*”. It is in the latter that Nardal’s “*On défrise les cheveux crépus*” is published under the banner “*Harlem à Montparnasse*”. As the name of this part of the newspaper suggests, it dedicates its column space to the activities of Parisians and city life, whether cultural, festive, associative, societal, or other. For example, alongside Nardal’s work, the readers see under “*Des Halles à La Rue de Lappe*” the article “*Le 13 au soir, on a dansé*” that reports on a night out in this neighborhood from a first person perspective.<sup>812</sup> Also, two regular columns entitled “*A Paris tous les deux*” and “*Tout Paris à la plage*” address the important events of the week and the happenings of high society, like “*La défilé et la Duchesse*”.<sup>813</sup> Insofar as Nardal’s “*On défrise les cheveux crépus*” narrates a scene of an everyday occurrence within Paris, her piece corresponds with the thematic of the “*Ville*” section. Furthermore, akin to the article “*Le 13 au soir, on a dansé*”, “*On défrise*” is not clearly identifiable in its formal structure as it blurs generic lines between social and cultural commentary, a memoir or (a scene out of) a short story. Whilst it is unclear whether Nardal named the subsection “*Harlem à Montparnasse*” under which her text appears or whether it was an editorial choice, what does initially draw the readers’ attention is the relocation of Harlem and by reference African American communities to Paris. This tends to qualify black subjects in Paris, regardless of origin, as African American. As it was discussed in Chapter One, during the interwar period and even before, this neighborhood was home to American communities and artistic milieus both black and white. At the same time, as Jane Nardal’s “*Exotic Puppets*” pointed out with the example of the colonial ball in rue Blomet, Montparnasse was also frequented and populated by other black diasporic communities. Thus, as much as “*Harlem à Montparnasse*” could be read as a simple reduction of the diversity of black populations in this microcosm of Paris, it also displaces blackness outside of the capital of the French nation state. There is a tension between the equation of black identities with African

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<sup>812</sup> O.P., “*Le 13 au soir, on a dansé*,” *Candide: grand hebdomadaire parisien et littéraire*, 18 juillet, 1935, 5.

<sup>813</sup> René Richard, “*Le défilé et la Duchesse*,” *Candide: grand hebdomadaire parisien et littéraire*, 18 juillet, 1935, 5.

American populations – and the celebration of the *vogue noire* that was taking Paris by storm at the time – and the simultaneous erasure of blackness within Paris. In this way, it mirrors intentionally or not, themes explored within “*On défrise*” such as assimilation, blackness, and French national identity. It is also evocative of Nardal’s interrogation of the conditions of possibility for community making. This is because “Harlem” designates the place where black cultural identities are in the Parisian topography. In Nardal’s text the territorial boundary of blackness is the hair salon where multiple black characters come to get their hair straightened by white hairdressers. It is during this process and in this space that the black characters leave having had their blackness straightened out. The final sentence is: “The black woman from earlier is transformed into a Hindu and the ‘*chabine*’ resembles any other summer blond.”<sup>814</sup> The salon, being the material designation of the space of blackness in the story and simultaneously the site of its erasure parallels, then, “*Harlem à Montparnasse*” and highlights to what extent racial embodiments (Hindu) other than “summer blond” (whiteness) do not equate to Frenchness. This spatialization of identities (or the loss of them) that structures this piece is furthered by the author in the sense where the narrative only takes place in this salon. It is different to the expansiveness of summer and the mountainous regions that the protagonist experienced in “Acts of Grace”. It is also different to Elisa’s journeying in Paris and in her imagination in so far as, even if she was stopped, or rendered immobile, she always had alternative places where she could go. In “*On défrise*”, the author’s choice to explore assimilation, anti-black racism, and collectivity in the stifling and restricted environment of the salon infers that the hope of a place where things can be otherwise for black subjects within the colonial metropolis is little to none. With literary choices like these, the readers can feel the context of the Ethiopian war hanging over the text as it “makes black subjects reflect on their condition in relationship to the white race” as Nardal stated in response to the conflict. Thus, at times, this background resonates into events, descriptions and character development in this piece which overlaps the antiblackness of this everyday environment in the French capital with that of the antiblackness on a European (fascist and democratic) scale.

The huis clos of black identity that delimits the narrative is supported by the description of the spatial organization of the hair salon at the beginning of the text: “The small room reserved for women is at the end of a narrow hallway that runs along the men’s parlor. Three

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<sup>814</sup> “La noire de tout à l’heure est transformée en Hindoue et la ‘chabine’ ressemble à n’importe quelle estivante blonde.” My translation. Paulette Nardal, “On défrise les cheveux crépus,” *Candide: grand hebdomadaire parisien et littéraire*, 18 juillet, 1935, 5.

black women and one white woman sit waiting their turn on chairs tucked up against the wall.”<sup>815</sup> As in previous work, differentiated experience of the metropole is underlined through spatiality. The salon is a more restrictive space for women “at the end of a narrow corridor” than for men. The readers are informed, however, that in the hair straightening section, portrayed as only being experienced by black subjects, there is no gender separation. In this way, Nardal puts into motion her shift from the portrayal of specificities of lived experiences for Antillean women in Paris to the representation of shared practices within black diasporic communities. It is also this collective scene of the experience of anti-black racism in the salon which infers that the expression of anti-blackness resonates through other spheres of communities such as the national and the international including the Ethiopian conflict. This is explored through character development. For example, the first scene of hair straightening is likened to battle and is localized in “Africa”.

Un jeune noir (dans le salon de défrisage, on admet le mélange de sexes) subit le supplice du casque : avec son visage luisant surmonté de l’énorme séchoir qui remplit la pièce de son ronflement, avec son grand peignoir blanc. Il fait penser à quelque étrange guerrier africain posté en embuscade...<sup>816</sup>

The similitude of the character’s embodiment to an African warrior awaiting an ambush, colors this scene with aspects of war. Heightened by the use of the expression “suffering the torture of”, the enemies in this war, salon and paragraph are the apparatuses used for hair straightening: “*le casque*” and “*peignoir blanc*”. Within the narrative, the white bathrobe is layered with differing significations and repeatedly appears in the text. The object used by the yet to appear white hairdresser, becomes the symbol of the violence of what it means to assimilate – become white and the social death of blackness – which the practice is performing. It also acts as a grammatical device that sets up structural relationships of power in respect to race. As the adjective “*blanc*” characterizes the noun “*peignoir*” the inference is that it makes blackness white. It is the bathrobe that wraps the black subjects in white and thus erases it within the symbolic and material space of this language and this nation. This is carried on and complexified for the readers learn that those holding the white bathrobe are not only white but are all members of the same Alsatian family.

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<sup>815</sup> “La petite salle réservée aux dames est au fond d’un étroit couloir qui longe le salon des messieurs. Sur des chaises rangées contre le mur, trois clientes noires et une blanche attendent leur tour.” My translation. Nardal, “On défrise,” 5.

<sup>816</sup> Nardal, “On défrise,” 5. Ellipsis in the original.

A côté de lui, le coiffeur un jeune homme mince, plie en ondulations savantes la chevelure précédemment étirée d'une mulâtresse couleur de banane mûre. En face, la mère du coiffeur, une Alsacienne grande et forte, fait un shampoing vigoureux à une noire aux yeux immenses, aux traits égyptiens, perdue, elle aussi, dans les plis d'un peignoir blanc. La mousse de savon fait à son visage acajou une auréole immaculée. Et je pense à l'acteur noir qui au temps des rois, jouait le rôle d'Othello en perruque blanche...<sup>817</sup>

The rhetoric used to describe the black women with Egyptian characteristics as being “lost” amongst the white foam of the shampoo and “also” in the folds of the white bathrobe reinforces how the author is making this object work. Akin to her fellow African warrior, she is experiencing her erasure by the mechanisms (hairdresser’s equipment) and technicity (the practice of hairdressing) of whiteness embodied by the strong Alsatian mother and her children. As the black characters are represented as belonging to the African diaspora without further specification, this international or transnational frame of blackness is put into tension with the specific designation of the white characters as Alsatian. On the one hand, belonging or being a part of a white collectivity is represented as familial and one’s identity has been formed in connection to a specific geographical area, Alsace. On the other hand, the black subjects that gather in this space are not shown to be affiliated in any way nor share in a common territorial or cultural space of belonging. The only aspects that they have in common is a shared motivation to get their hair straightened (that is not explored) that the author presents as a common suffering of the “torture” of this practice. This is reminiscent of diasporic experiences, starting from the transatlantic slave trade, whereby dispossession of black subjectivity is accompanied by the dispossession of territorial, cultural, and familial connections. The author’s characterization of the white protagonists as Alsatian, rather than Parisian or French, also reflects whiteness into an international context to a certain degree. This is because this cultural identity emerges in part from the long and complex history of French and German cultural exchanges, occupations, and wars. However, the designation of Alsatian identity nevertheless ties these characters and notions of belonging to the geographical location of this limitrophe region in opposition to the black protagonists of the story. Why Nardal chooses Alsatian characters to represent whiteness in the story is left open to interpretation.<sup>818</sup> Given the context

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<sup>817</sup> Nardal, “On défrise,” 5.

<sup>818</sup> Interestingly, in Nardal’s own biographical trajectories her choice of Alsatian characters prefigures her own professional interactions with the mayor of Dakar, the Alsatian Armand Augrand. At the same time as Nardal was secretary to the deputy of Senegal Galandou Diouf, which took her to Dakar in 1938, Armand Augrand was acting mayor of the city (1934-1939). Appointed in 1934, the same year as Galandou Diouf was elected deputy and Nardal began working for him as secretary, it is likely that Nardal conversed with Augrand. See Nardal’s discussion of this trip in her memoirs, Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 91-92.

of the Ethiopian War, one possibility is that Nardal makes this family represent the shared white supremacy across European nations and which is being demonstrated either in non-action (France) or outright support (Nazi Germany) in and of the Italian invasion. Another is that her choice is informed by the intercultural (white) heritage of Alsatian identity. If it is one of these two reasons, both, or another entirely, what the narrator investigates in regard to the possible grounds of social cohesion remains largely unchanged. In the moment where differences are being established between white and black collectivities through the characters, practices, and symbolic work of the text, the narrator implicates herself within the narrative: “I think of the black actor who in the time of kings played the role of Othello in a white wig.”<sup>819</sup> Previously, the observational tone lent to the idea that the story was recounted by a third person narrator. However, by pronouncing “I” the narrator engages herself into what is taking place at the salon and inscribes her genealogy and identity as being part of this international diasporic community. This is supported by her likely reference to Ira Aldridge, who was one of the first African American actors to interpret the character of Othello at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Her affirmation and cultural affiliation with diasporic communities could be seen as an enactment of racial solidarity with those she is observing in this microcosm of the salon. The narrator, who does not pretend to neutrality, evidenced by the tone and symbolic work of the piece, comes to stand behind the themes explored in the text, and thus in front of the anti-black racism that is taking place and alongside of the protagonists of the tale. As an effect, the individual that pronounces “I” becomes politicized in its textual instantiation in so far as the “I” becomes a part of the collective identification of and with blackness. This ground of cohesion based on shared experience, here represented as hair straightening, is dissimilar to the (normative) understandings of collectivity depicted by the white family. In the latter, the group is conditioned by biology, characterized by the succession of generations presented in the text (mother, daughter, son) and through common economic interests that has as one of its costs the blackness of their clients. The text does not imply that as individuals the hairdressers should be morally or ethically accountable for a practice that expresses the structural anti-racism of the French nation. Nevertheless, it is the white collectivity of the story whose social cohesion (the family business) is predicated upon this act, and which is passed down from generations. And whilst ideas of family are not strictly reducible to biological inheritance, this text prefaces belonging to this white community as one based on biological understandings of identities. The irony is that, from a white colonial perspective, it is precisely this reduction of identity and

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<sup>819</sup> My translation of the sentence in the above citation.



belonging to a racial group with biology that informs their understanding of the inferiority of blackness and leads to sub-categorization of non-white races. It is ironic because in “*On défrise*” the possible grounds of social cohesion and solidarity, from a black perspective is represented as having very little to do with biology, or family, or territorial attachment, or national identity. On another level, however, and what remains unsaid in the narrative is the motivation of these black individuals to get their hair straightened which brings them together in salon. Where the narrator does take this story is into the portrayal of the (im)possibility of another kind of community based on gender. This is staged in the interracial interaction between Mademoiselle Héléne (daughter and sister) and a black female client.

In the salon, where the space is socially organized by the separation of men and women but then mixed again when it comes to the members of the black community, the narrator returns to a scene amongst women but across racial difference. This coming and going between different intra and extra-communal interactions based on various forms of social identity problematizes notions of collectivity and solidarity within the narrative and the context at large. Building on the symbolic work already put into place to signify the hair straightening process as the social death of blackness (assimilation), the narrator characterizes this relationship between Héléne and a black woman (who is never named) with a greater sense of violence than previous depictions.

Mlle Héléne, la sœur du coiffeur, n'en est qu'à la seconde partie de l'opération. Le séchage terminé, elle attaque avec un brosse métallique la chevelure de sa cliente, une « chabine » blonde frisée des pays chauds : le teint est chaud, le profil « de camée » et les yeux d'un gris bleu. Les cheveux rétractés en boules d'étope cèdent peu à peu sous la rude caresse de la brosse.<sup>820</sup>

The portrayal of this black woman is comparable to Nardal's representation of Antillean women in her articles. Readers of Nardal's work have previously come across such depictions as “*blonde des pays chauds*” or “*le profil de camée*”. This indicates that the Caribbean space is brought into the story. By the end of “*On défrise les cheveux crépus*” Nardal will specifically refer to the clients as “Antillean” or “Senegalese” which delimits, to a certain extent, the transnational context represented in this piece. In the above passage, however, the aesthetic tropes that have come to signify Antillean femininity in Nardal's work are built upon and trace a more explicit connection with afro-descendance and the transatlantic trade. The likening of the character's hair to “*étoupe*”

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<sup>820</sup> Nardal, “On défrise,” 5.

or oakum in English creates a symbolic link to its use in past methods of ship building, whereby the loose tufts of hemp or jute fibers are mixed with tar in order to caulk seams and pack joints of wooden boats. Traditionally, to gather the tufts of these fibers, old ropes would be unraveled and meticulously picked or combed through. On the phenomenological level of gesture this practice coincides with those of the hairdresser. The woman's hair in its form of "*étoupe*" is thus layered with cruel and visceral meanings. It is evocative of the utilization of the corporeity of black subjects as tools and objects in the topos of the sea passage, enslavement, and the manufacturing of European wealth. At the same time, the brushing out of the character's blackness that the "*étoupe*" represents is like the erasure of this historical violence that she carries with her and is entangled in her black diasporic identity. The commonality between the meticulousness and repetition involved in extracting hemp fibers and the practice of hair straightening brings these two possible interpretations together. Each stroke of the hairdresser's brushing enacts or reiterates this (historical) relationship between whiteness and blackness. Mlle Hélène's "attack" demonstrates that little by little the protagonist's hair ends up conceding to this affront. "Acts of Grace" demonstrated that it was in the reiteration of winter (colonial culture) that the speaker came no longer to feel it. Similarly, then, the constant brushing out of black cultural and racial embodiment frames dispossession of one's identity as, in part, the result of the persistence of white colonial culture, domination, and violence. At another moment of the text the practice is described again in its reiterative quality that goes up against the "resistance" of the man's hair before the latter is eventually forced to cede to the actions of whiteness.

Et le patient travail commence : mèche par mèche, la chevelure d'un blond foncé, si curieusement frisée, presque crépue, est étirée entre les branches du fer tiède. Et voilà qu'après quelque résistance, la mèche s'assouplit peu à peu.<sup>821</sup>

The repetition of whiteness is shown in the passage, as at other moments of the story, to be equally endured by black masculine subjects. And yet the symbolic connection to the transatlantic slave trade and Hélène's attack described as a "rude caress" is explored through an interaction between a white and a black woman. The same is true earlier in the text when the narrator observes the relationship between the mother of the family and a black client: "the mother of the hairdresser, a tall and strong Alsatian woman, vigorously shampoos the hair of a black woman with large Egyptian like eyes who is lost, also, under the folds of a white

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<sup>821</sup> Nardal, "On défrise," 5.

bathrobe.”<sup>822</sup> As such, the technicity and know-how of hair straightening, within the context of feminine interactions, is also shown as being passed down amongst women. This framing of racial violence, its continuation, and the dispossession of blackness that this practice signifies, has an effect of displacing the white masculine figure that represents the pinnacle of power in Western nation states. As Nardal underlined in her 1930 article “*La femme française aux colonies*” in *Le Soir*, the entanglement of white French femininity within the overarching structures of power means that, similar to their masculine counterparts, their identities are formed in opposition to the negative racialization of blackness.<sup>823</sup> As such, Hélène and her mother’s social position within the salon and the actions that they undertake also imply that regardless of a shared gendered identity (and oppression) with black women clients the possible political, intimate, and communal affiliations that could bring them together has the major obstacle of white supremacy. The perversity of racial domination, figured through the reference to oakum, is given another gender specific layering in the description of Hélène’s brushing as “a rude caress”. The potential intimacy and care that the gesture of hair brushing could show in exchanges between women is signified with “caress”, but it is one that reiterates the relationship between (masculine) master and (feminine) slave or how white feminine identity emerges in her opposition to black feminine identity. The narrator states: “one shudders seeing the hairdresser removing the hot iron from its minuscule warmer and apply it to the strands of dry hair, now untangled and a little longer. Won’t they burn?”<sup>824</sup> In this scene, then, that interrogates the possibility of any form of communion (affective, amical, political, perhaps even sexual) between white and black women, it appears that the conclusion is an affirmative no. Or inversely, interracial social cohesion is only possible if relationships of domination are maintained and the author demonstrates, who, in such an unequal interaction has to pay the price for the continuation of systems of domination. Nardal’s own political affiliations during this period tend to resonate with this depiction and the cruelty of the “rude caress” involved in the impossibility of other forms of solidarity and equality across racial difference. And in the story, the narrator carries on with this proposition by engaging with the collectivity that has thus far remained in the background, namely the metropolitan readership of *Candide*.

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<sup>822</sup> “la mère de coiffeur, une Alsacienne grande et forte, fait un shampooing vigoureux à une noire aux yeux immense, aux traits égyptiens, perdue, elle aussi, dans les plis d’un peignoir blanc.” Sentence taken from the above citation. My translation.

<sup>823</sup> Nardal, “*La femme française aux colonies*,” which was cited and addressed briefly in Chapter Four.

<sup>824</sup> « on frémit en voyant la coiffeuse porter ensuite le fer du réchaud minuscule dans les mèches séchées, maintenant démêlées et quelque peu allongées. Ne vont-elles pas griller? » My Translation. Nardal, “On défrise,” 5.

Halfway through the hair straightening process the narrator provides the following image.

L'aspect d'une chevelure crépue à moitié défrisée est quelque chose d'assez curieux : cela vous fait une moitié de visage presque sauvage, tandis que l'autre profil paraît singulièrement adouci et quelque peu étrange.

Mais le vacarme du séchoir n'empêche pas les langues de marcher : et le bavardage professionnel des Alsaciens se mêle à celui des Antillaises et des Sénégalaises.<sup>825</sup>

The narrator evokes civilizational rhetoric that equates black identity with savagery. As the narrative voice speaks directly to the readers (“vous”), it implies that this is their vision, or at least some of the metropolitan public’s understanding of the colonial mission that brings other populations up to the height of French civilization.<sup>826</sup> On the surface the narrator seems to affirm these colonial ideologies which have as a mission to “soften”, discipline, and bend blackness into a “less foreign” image of the subject. However, in light of the impossibility of such social cohesion portrayed between black and white women, it infers that the interracial chatter which emerges from the text is premised or conditioned by blackness becoming whiter. As it was the case above, interracial interaction is possible only if inequality and racial domination remains in place. As civilizational language of French colonial ideology is used, it magnifies the fact that notions of belonging to the French community is based on similitude of appearance. The white collectivity of the story represented as being connected through biological and familial ties works to substantiate this. The practice of hair straightening as the symbolic and material process of assimilation into this national community, then, juxtaposes the representation of black collectivity in the story that is one founded upon commonality of experience but not on cultural, biological, racial, or ethnic similarity. The narrator’s interpellation of the readership is followed by the voicing of the multiethnicity of blackness described through different natural appearances of black subjects’ hair. This trope in Nardal’s aesthetics and cultural politics of Antillean identity, as the readers now know, is understood as emerging from colonial entanglements with whiteness and from which the latter itself has been constructed.

Deux étudiantes commentent la dernière version grecque, tandis que l’on se donne des nouvelles du pays au cours de rencontres inattendues. On parle de l’Afrique, de l’Indochine, de congés de voyages... Les cheveux de Mme Une Telle ont-ils allongé depuis qu’elle se fait défriser ? Sujet passionnant. A qui connaît l’infinie variété de teints résultant des mélanges de races aux Antilles, gamme allant du marron violet au blanc mat, en passant par tous les tons de bois précieux, la diversité souplesse et de

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<sup>825</sup> Nardal, “On défrise,” 5.

<sup>826</sup> On the French civilization mission see Chapter One.

crépelé des chevelures correspondantes ne causera point d'étonnement. Chevelures courtes et crépues, crépues aux cheveux gros, crépues aux cheveux fins ; chevelures frisées, frisées à ondulations plus au moins serrées, frisées à large vagues : chevelures presque plates, mais aux cheveux gros : lourdes tresses caraïbes aux reflets d'un noir fauve.<sup>827</sup>

The assimilation into Frenchness via hair straightening that makes a black subject look “almost the same” erases such multiculturalism and richness that could be a part of this national collectivity if French identity weren't posited on similitude of appearance (whiteness). At the same time, this multiplicity and difference of black identities that constitute the Antillean collectivity reinforces the contrast between the understandings of Frenchness and arguably the French universalism that underpins it. It has an effect of rendering the latter lacking or poor in its comprehension and practice of collectivity on the scale of the national if not international. The paradox is that if the French national community is founded on the universalist principles of the Rights of Man, then, cultural, ethnic, and racial difference should not be a barrier to belonging within this collectivity. If social cohesion is premised on *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, then it should not be the case that interracial interaction is only made possible if inequality and white supremacy are maintained and which the text has repeatedly shown. At the end of the tale, the economic exchange that structures, in part, the bringing together of everyone into the same space of the salon is made explicit.

Une cliente plaisante :

- Vous savez, Mlle Hélène, je n'ai plus d'argent pour payer mon rouge à lèvres. Il faut que vous me fassiez crédit !  
Et la coiffeuse, fière d'étaler son savoir de répondre en patois créole, à la grande joie de son auditoire.
- Pas ni l'agent, pas ni rouge !<sup>828</sup>

The performance of Hélène's familiarity with black cultural expression suggestibly reaches a limit in this interracial interaction when it comes to questions of money. Whilst the narrator highlights that this is a pleasurable moment for all involved, the fact remains that it is whiteness who is in the position of power and receives compensation for a practice that “civilizes” black identity. And this leads to the concluding sentence and the existential expense of this exchange.

Mais la longue et fatigante opération est terminée. Elle a duré un peu plus de deux heures. La noire de tout à l'heure est transformée en Hindoue et la « chabine » ressemble à n'importe quelle estivante blonde.

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<sup>827</sup> Nardal, “On défrise,” 5. Ellipsis in the original.

<sup>828</sup> Nardal, “On défrise,” 5.

This “long and tiring operation” of hair straightening is not only represented as the costs of assimilation – social death of blackness – but continues similar reiterative work that took place with H el ene’s gesture. The economic transaction, like H el ene’s brushing, throws back to interracial sociality conditioned by the slave economy and European economic self-interest of the colonial project. Inferring that this is in part what stops the French national community in applying their universal principles in real life then it suggests that potentially there is another way of social cohesion that is not based on fulfillment of (economic) self-interest at the expense of another’s sovereignty, and social or existential existence. To a certain degree, framing the black collectivity as otherwise to the white family in the text suggests that it is possible and shows that this would involve a community that is brought together across geographical, national, cultural, and ethnic differences. Taken together with Nardal’s other representations of black collectivities framed as familial in “In Exile” (Elisa, her son and the concierge that calls Elisa mama, and the collectivity in Sainte-Marie), for instance, here in “*On d efrise*” the author moves to represent collectivities that are brought together in another way which opens the door to understanding social cohesion across differences. This is quite a contrast to Fauset’s collectivities in her imagined worlds and literary journalism. All of Fauset’s novels negotiate sociality, antiblackness, identity formation, questions of class, gender, and sexuality through the prism of familial relationships. Though there are other moments of community formation presented, such as relationships between friends and foes, her narratives and her characters’ journeys depart from one centralized familial environment. Furthermore, whether in her fairy tales “The Sleeper Wakes” or *Plum Bun* addressed in Chapter Two, or her more transnational explorations of *There is Confusion* and *Comedy: American Style*, the marriage plots that orientate her main feminine protagonists – even if this is for critical purposes – foreclose, to a certain degree, thinking black collectivities outside of familial attachments. The one notable exception is in Teresa’s interracial marriage to the white Frenchman, Astride Pailleron, in *Comedy*. However, this is bound to the tragic misadventures of Teresa and Olivia which not only have existential consequence for them but are shown to fundamentally destroy the social cohesion of the African American Cary family, the pinnacle of which is represented in Oliver’s suicide. Sociality thought through the paradigm of family is echoed in Fauset’s articles that speak from a black international perspective. For instance, in her work on the Pan-African congress addressed in Chapter One, she describes the black transnational community as a “brethren” and the coalition in the fight for global black emancipation as feeling a part of “one family”. Nardal, at times, mobilizes family to describe the human community too. Her article, “*Lev ee des races*” that speaks out against the invasion of Ethiopia explicitly intertwines her argument in notions of

familial relationships.<sup>829</sup> However, Nardal's explorations of social cohesion, as exemplified in "On défrise" and what will come to the fore in "Guignol Ouolof", is that she experiments with other models for social cohesion. One pertinent consequence of this is that unlike Fauset, Nardal's search for what brings the collective together does not mirror the wider frame of Western nations, in her instance France, that in "On défrise" was shown to be constituted by biological, territorial, cultural, and racial belonging within the space of the Hexagon. For Fauset, her familial prism through which she explores communities tends to reiterate (ideological) constructions of the (white) national collectivity and identity, that understands itself, in part, through similitude and the ostracization of difference, whether in respect to race, class, culture, sexuality, or gender. This finds its resonance in some of the silences in Fauset's fictional and non-fictional texts. For as it has been demonstrated in *There is Confusion*, or *Comedy: American Style*, there are very limited interactions between her African American characters and other members of diasporic communities. It was as if the latter could not participate in the sphere of black modern aesthetics being proposed, nor be a part of the international black community if framed within (familial) centralizations of African American (or American) cultural perspectives. Nardal's "On défrise" as a whole, then, and its proposition of other ways of community which are not tied to similarities of territory, culture, ethnicity, or national identity seeks for an alternative to the exclusionary processes that mark social cohesion. In the end, this type of collectivity could be a foundation for cohesion across racial difference that do not reinstall relationships of power which separated the white and black communities within the text. One final closing remark is to return to the narrator's silence when it comes to the individuals' motivations or desires to get their hair straightened or in the hairdressers' practice of it. Even if the latter's actions within the microcosm of the salon are made to represent the erasure of blackness, the readers do not know anything about their subjective realities, for instance, if they are in agreeance, or aware, of the racial domination that their actions perpetuate. Such is the case for the black characters of the tale. The readers are left in the dark as to what they think and feel, how they perceive assimilation or being asked to assimilate, or if they agree with how Nardal presents the practice of hair straightening. With Nardal's literary focus being that of the collective, these subjective realities and considerations tend to be pushed to the side. At the same time, it problematizes conceptions of liberatory struggles that place the onus of change on the individual self and thus highlights ideas of racial solidarity that inform the text. Something that Nardal explores in her Antillean women

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<sup>829</sup> This article will be addressed at length in the next chapter.

characters in “*Guignol Ouolof*” is that one can interrogate and question one’s way of being in the world in a search to put into practice just and equal interactions. However, what “*On défrise*” implies is that no one individual can take down power structures nor be responsible for the fact that they exist. After the representation of hair straightening within the text, readers may question if they want to keep doing it, or, if they do not practice it, may reflect critically on the normalization of seeing or expecting black people to have straightened hair. In both cases, the status quo of notions of beauty and blackness are challenged. But it does not seem plausible that the text suggests that this would therefore eradicate the disequilibrium of power within the sociality presented in the piece. As Nardal investigates in “*Guignol Ouolof*” even if there is desire on the individual and collective level to live and be otherwise to what the white colonial society proposes, it does not necessarily make for a utopian world free of unequal relationship of power, oppression, discrimination, conflict, disagreements, or uncomfortable interactions. In this short story that performs racial solidarity in everyday life, and which lets the readers into the subjective world of the characters, it frames the tensions, contradictions and conflicts represented as almost inevitable, if not normal, in this scene of intracommunal socialization. For “*Guignol Ouolof*” unlike “*On défrise les cheveux crépus*”, the characters’ interactions are amongst members of the black diaspora, though, white colonial culture hovers over the setting at the Parisian café.

### 5.3.2 “*Guignol Ouolof*”: Racial Solidarity on the Colonial Stage

Nardal’s short story was published in the first issue of *L’Étudiant noir* that Césaire, one of the principal editors of this journal along with Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon-Gontran Damas, champions as an early example of what will become the Négritude movement.<sup>830</sup> Issued by the *Association des étudiants martiniquais*, it advanced a black internationalist perspective which is reflected, firstly in its editing team and echoed in the contributions that are found within its pages. For instance, in the May-June publication of 1935, poems by Richard Wright and Stirling Brown appear alongside those of Léon-Gontran Damas, and cultural and literary critiques of the works of African American Paul Laurence Dunbar are published with those of the literary productions of Haitian writer, Jacques Roumain, and the new novel *Karim* by the Senegalese author, Ousmane Socé Diop.<sup>831</sup> In the first issue in March, the readership sees

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<sup>830</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>831</sup> Richard Wright, “Mains noires,” trad. A Maugee, *L’Étudiant noir* 3 (mai-juin 1935): 7; Sterling Brown, “Les hommes forts,” trad. A Maugee, *L’Étudiant noir* 3 (mai-juin 1935): 7; Leon-Gontran Damas “Obsession,” “Pour sûr,” *L’Étudiant noir* 3 (mai-juin 1935): 7; Sadio Teranga, “*Karim*,” *L’Étudiant noir* 3 (mai-juin 1935): 5-6; A. Maugee, “Jacques



Senghor's, "René Maran", Gratiant's "Mulâtres...pour le bien et le mal", the article "Langage et musique chez les nègres du Congo" written by Henry Eboué and Césaire's "Nègreries: jeunesse noire et assimilation."<sup>832</sup> Nardal's "Guignol Ouolof" which followed Eboué's article, is therefore different in its genre as a short story to the essays or cultural commentaries published. It is also the lone feminine perspective in the newspaper which attests to the predominately masculine spaces of black political and cultural milieus of the time. Thus, within the material realities of political organization or the discursive space of *L'Étudiant noir*, "Guignol Ouolof", both in form, the prism of approach to its literary investigation, or Nardal as a writer herself, are all situated as different to the main current of the journal. Within the short story, this inferred outsider or marginalized position is explored and nuanced as the Antillean feminine character of the story negotiates how she positions herself within society at large through her encounter with a Senegalese peanut vendor at a café in the Latin Quarter. Situating the scene of intra-racial interaction in this neighborhood, an important place, as it was shown, within the topographies of black intellectual and political groups, Nardal explores how social identities and articulations of power can separate the characters of the story. It is a tale of the possibilities of enacting racial solidarity in an everyday setting as much as it is a reflection on how the Antillean woman of the story is situated in respect to her position of power. The self-interrogation that is voiced by the narrator creates an echo with Nardal's place as a well-educated Antillean woman writer and musician, both in the discursive place of *L'Étudiant noir* and in the transatlantic spaces of political and cultural movements of black internationalism. Dissimilar to Elisa in "In Exile" who is situated, in terms of gender and class as not coming into contact with these black milieus, "Guignol Ouolof" engages with differing forms of black sociality and community and the complex ways in which one's identity is entangled and in part conferred by uneven distributions of power. In order to build this setting at the café in the Latin Quarter, the narrative arc that brings about the characters' interactions is propelled by the speaker and her friend's venture to the theater (though the friend is not referred to further). As it will be demonstrated, this has an effect of framing the café as a stage itself and the characters' actions as being, in part, a performance. Though "Guignol Ouolof" underlines how the characters' social identities inform their interactions, it also demonstrates that they are not wholly determined by it. It is in these cracks or openings of different ways to understand self and others and strive for interrelations

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Roumain: écrivain haïtien," *L'Étudiant noir* 3 (mai-juin 1935): 5; Louis T. Achille, "Paul Laurence Dunbar: poète nègre," *L'Étudiant noir* 3 (mai-juin 1935): 4-5.

<sup>832</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Nègreries: jeunesse noire et assimilation," *L'Étudiant noir* 1 (mars 1935): 3; Léopold Sédar Senghor, "L'Humanisme et nous: René Maran," *L'Étudiant noir* 1 (mars 1935): 4; Henry Eboué, "Langage et musique chez les Nègres du Congo," *L'Étudiant noir* 1 (mars 1935): 4.

that express and enact racial solidarity and equality that the characters look to circumvent the power exercised upon them (white colonial culture) but also the power that exists between them.

The creation of the café in “*Guignol Ouolof*” as a theater takes place at the outset of the story and frames the events and interactions of the three main black protagonists as actors on the colonial stage, who are asked to perform for the metropolitan public. Tied together by the Antillean women’s night out at the theater, this scene setting significantly thickens the problematics developed in the short story. This is because it alludes to historical and contemporaneous contexts of black performances for the pleasure of white audiences that are condensed within the everyday setting of the café.

Huit heures du soir. Avant le théâtre, “quick lunch” dans un café du Quartier Latin, qu’illumine le bariolage barbare des tubes de néon.  
Tout à coup, entre la lumière et moi s’interpose la silhouette d’un Noir immense.<sup>833</sup>

Akin to being in the theater before the play, the readers are taken from darkness of the night to the luminosity of the stage which is lit by “the barbaric neon lamps” of Paris. The technicity and aesthetics of the mise en scene, such as lighting, props, and set design, are framed as being created and orchestrated by white colonial culture of the metropolis which is developed throughout the narrative. The spatial and experiential aspects of theater are added to as a “large black man”, like an actor, “suddenly” moves from behind the wing to center stage. As the masculine black protagonist takes position between the narrator and the lamps, it locates the metropolitan public in the café as spectators to this performance and colonial culture in general is figured in the “barbaric” neon lighting that illuminates the stage. Though having few elements of the characters’ identities at this point, the readers do know that the narrator is bilingual, “quick lunch”, that he or she is interested in culture, and has the free-time and money to eat out and go to the theater. Without further exposing the narrator’s identity she/he provides a long description and renders visible the costume of the black masculine character.

Costume de général d’opérette. Drap noir sur lequel éclatent des brandebourgs imposantes, épauettes, casquette plate d’officier allemand, galonnée d’or et de rouge, et détail encore plus inattendu, monocle à cordonnet noir, encastré dans l’arcade courtilière gauche. Ce détail incongru, dans ce costume absurde n’arrive pas à donner au long visage ouolof, l’effet de grotesque recherché. Pris en lui-

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<sup>833</sup> Nardal, “Guignol Ouolof,” *L’Étudiant noir* 1 (mars 1935): 4-5. Also found reproduced in its entirety in both French and English in Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 181.

même, il me rappelle curieusement certains visages blancs, au sourire grave et à l'air infiniment noble...<sup>834</sup>

The details given clearly represent this costume as belonging to white French culture and more broadly European culture that the reference to “the German officer” infers. The character that the Senegalese man plays, which the title of the short story figures as “Guignol” or puppet, is shaped, clothed, and created by this perspective. Taken out of the décor of the colonial theater stage (“*pris en lui même*”) the black character carries his dignity and nobility, just like white men. However, because the stage is impregnated with the aesthetics of white colonial culture the performance of blackness that is orchestrated is “grotesque”. This, it is clearly stated, is for the spectators’ benefit: “But this caricatural Negro is there for the greater pleasure of the white customers.”<sup>835</sup> The incongruity and absurdity perceived by the narrator provide a critical contrast to the black masculinity that he is being asked to perform. It also implies that she/he does not speak from the point of view of whiteness that is looking to “drape” blackness in an aesthetics that inspires both laughter and repulsion in its audience. The demand that black actors embody and perform white racist images of black identity is heightened in the revelation of the man’s profession in contrast to his metropolitan white colleague.

Mais l'ensemble est indéniablement comique, et quand passe à côté de notre chasseur, vendeur de cacahouètes, son collègue métropolitain éphèbe blond à la sobre livrée marronne, et qui vend lui, des cigarettes le contraste est simplement révoltant.<sup>836</sup>

The “incongruity” between the Wolof man and his costume is doubled in the comparison to the white vendor and “his sober brown suit.” The opposition between whiteness and blackness, between cigarettes and peanuts, between “ephebe blond” and “guignol” catalyzes a chain of allusions to other contexts of spectacularizing blackness. One could think of the mostly stereotypical representation of blackness within the theatrical, literary, cinematographic, artistic productions, and popular ball culture of the *vogue noire*. With allusions to the circus, one could also think of Rafael Padilla who created his clown character *Chocolat* and performed to Parisian audience at the beginning of the twentieth century. The marked contrast made between the black vendor selling peanuts and the “white colleague... who sells cigarettes”, one could also view this scene as being likened to the performativity and theatricality involved in the

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<sup>834</sup> Nardal, “Guignol Ouolof,” 4, 181. Ellipsis in the original.

<sup>835</sup> “Mais ce Noir caricatural est là pour la plus grande joie de consommateurs blancs.” Nardal, “Guignol Ouolof,” 4. Cited above from the English translation provided in Edwards, “Guignol Ouolof,” 183.

<sup>836</sup> Nardal, “Guignol Ouolof,” 4, 182.

exhibition of exotic peoples and animals. Contemporaneous to the time of the short story's publication, for instance in the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* or the recent Colonial Exhibition of 1931, whether in human or animal zoos a common practice of the spectators is throwing peanuts and cigarettes to those on display.<sup>837</sup> By characterizing the black protagonist of the story as a peanut vendor does not figure him as one of his fellow countrymen, women, or children currently on display in the zoo. Rather it brings the performance of his exoticized image in a café into resonance with this highly exploitative and oppressed space of the zoos and European traditions of exhibiting “exotic” peoples. In both cases, the spectacle of blackness and ethnic difference is orchestrated by white metropolitan perspectives (the café owner, the zoo manager) which purposefully speak to and in part shape the colonial fantasies and exoticized understandings of racialized others within the spectatorship.<sup>838</sup> What also correlates in both contexts is that an outing at the human zoo and going to a café, are at this point of history, equally banal and mundane. As such, the spectacle of non-white racial embodiments is framed by a setting that obscures the constructed scene of the exhibit (or café of the story) and renders what is on show as pertaining to these populations lived reality.<sup>839</sup> The performance of an exotic image of black identity becomes equated with the existential and cultural reality of blackness and therefore believed to be real and, from a colonial perspective, reason for black inferiority. This is the kernel of what underpins the multiple contexts of black performances that the text alludes to and though they are presented as resonances in the text they are important to the narrative. This is because it provides a reflection on the various ways, depending on cultural, national, and ethnic identities, that non-white subjects are positioned differently within the French empire. In the *vogue noire*, for example, the performances celebrated by the majority of the metropolitan public were African American and in the instance of Rafael Padilla, Afro-Cuban. In the context of the human zoos, Antillean subjects were rarely if ever subjected to this practice. Those exposed were from indigenous populations within and beyond the French empire, such as Aboriginal, Kanak, and Native American, as well as different

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<sup>837</sup> Jean-Michel Bergougniou, Rémi Clignet et Philippe David, “*Villages Noirs*” et visiteurs africains et malgaches en France et en Europe (1870•1940) (Paris: Editions Karthala, 2001), 109.

<sup>838</sup> See Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtsch, Éric Deroo, Sandrine Lemaire, eds., *Zoos humains. Au temps des exhibitions humaines* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004); Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtsch, Éric Deroo, Sandrine Lemaire, eds., *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales. 150 ans d'inventions de l'Autre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011).

<sup>839</sup> For example, the documentary *Sauvages, au cœur des zoos humains*, directed by Pascal Blanchard and Bruno Victor-Pujebat speaks of how of the Fuegians from Patagonia are presented to the Parisian public as cannibals though nothing proves that this was a practice of this community. Pascal Blanchard and Bruno Victor-Pujebat, *Sauvages: au cœur des zoos humains*, documentaire (France: ARTE, 2017).

African ethnic populations including from Senegal.<sup>840</sup> Thus, on the colonial stage of “*Guignol Ouolof*” where the narrator explores the possibility of racial solidarity between Antillean women and a Wolof man the inference is that sharing a racial identity does not mean that their relationship to nor (historical) experiences of the violence and antiblackness of the French colonial project are the same. The author, having thus set out the problematics of black performance in colonial culture, and undertaken the symbolic and structural work of the text, the narration turns to the portrayal of how the characters negotiate their interactions with one another. Bringing the focus to the level of intracommunal relationships within members of the diaspora, the readers follow the narrator’s interrogations of how she is situated in this context and the unequal relationships of power that exist between herself and the Wolof peanut vendor.

The narrator’s recognition of the exploitative and racist image that the Senegalese man is asked to perform is followed with the revelation of her gender, cultural and racial identity. After pointing out the “simply revolting contrast” between the black peanut vendor and white cigarette seller she states:

Révoltant ? Du point de vue d’une Noire antillaise trop occidentalisée peut-être.<sup>841</sup>

What the readers already knew about her in terms of class, that distinguished the narrator from the peanut vendor, is furthered by her gender and Antillean cultural identity. The simultaneity in the divulging of her identity and her judgement of the white structured performance of black Senegalese masculinity creates a tension that has multiple effects. The first is that she positions herself on this colonial theater stage which aids the readers in understanding what is taking place. The second is that social differences like gender, class, cultural identity, and ethnicity create an even wider gap between the two characters. This is due to the fact that the instantiation of her Antillean identity comes through a judgement that is projected upon the Wolof man. As such, her identity is conferred and understood, in part, through this negative relation and it speaks to the inequality between them. Another effect, then, is that even if the speaker is aware of the absurdity and incongruity between the Wolof man’s performance and his person, she tends to conflate the two in her emotive reaction of revulsion. The description infers that she may have some prejudices of her own in respect to Senegalese masculinity that override, to a certain degree, her awareness that he is playing a role on this stage of white creation. However,

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<sup>840</sup> See, for instance, the discussion in Chapter Four on Sarah Bartmann.

<sup>841</sup> Nardal, “*Guignol Ouolof*,” 4, 182.

she puts her response into question in the passage above and continues to expose her interrogations to the readers.

Il s'approche de notre table. Il va nous parler. Tous les yeux sont braqués sur nous. Allons-nous contribuer nous aussi, à amuser un moment les Blancs désœuvrés ? Ou allons-nous, comme telle mulâtresse antillaise, nous enfuir à la vue de ce Noir grotesque, le cœur plein de ressentiment contre ce congénère sans dignité et son employeur Blanc ? Ou encore, prendrons-nous des airs pincés et affecterons-nous de ne pas le voir ? <sup>842</sup>

Let into the subjective reality of the speaker, the readers learn of the possibilities that she understands herself to have in the situation and her negotiation of the role she is going to enact in the upcoming encounter. Whist previously she voiced her (aesthetic) judgement towards the Senegalese man, the narrator resituates it as coming from the white metropolitan public. The pressure to be and perform in a certain way is described as emanating “from the eyes that are upon them” and their expectation to be entertained. Neither she nor the vendor can escape being subjected to the gaze of whiteness. In this position of being dominated that the characters share, the narrator develops the unequal power relationships that exist between her and the peanut vendor. Importantly this is undertaken through her questioning of her position as an Antillean woman. As it has been developed in other moments of Nardal’s work, in the overarching structure of colonial heteropatriarchy that the speaker has just referred to, black masculinity and black femininity are not stereotyped and racialized in the same way. Complexified here in respect to cultural and ethnic identity, the speaker as an Antillean woman could enact her disdain for “this grotesque black man” who she charges with reproducing the stereotypical ideas of blackness of his “white employer”. Her perceived superiority to her “fellow man” that is evoked within this reflection is substantiated by the third option at her disposal which is to completely ignore him and shut down any form of relationship between them. As it was underlined above, the fact that her Antillean femininity is partially conferred within a negative relationship to Senegalese masculinity, the position of power from which she could act is given form. Though it is clear to the speaker, and therefore to the readers, that in the overall context she is not in a position of power, she could none the less distance herself from being the amusement of “the idle white” public by ignoring the Wolof man and denying his subjectivity. As such, she could set into motion an interaction, based on her “airs of disdain” and prejudice towards the peanut vendor, where she gains from the unequal power between them. This is framed as much on the level of her person on the colonial theater stage of the

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<sup>842</sup> Nardal, “Guignol Ouolof,” 4, 182.

café, as on the level of the political with her reference to the collective “nous”. Within the text this “nous” is understood as the friend that accompanies the speaker to the theater. And yet the friend is never determined, described in person, nor given a voice, which has an effect of making the collective “nous” resonate out of the text to the readership of *L'Étudiant noir* and at the very least the association who are responsible for its publication. The speaker's looking down in judgement upon the peanut vendor because she perceives him as reproducing the stereotypes of white colonial imaginary equally follows this movement to the extra-discursive collectivity. What was framed as a question above in relationship to her own Antillean femininity is reiterated but this time in terms of the judgement that comes from the “black people who take themselves too seriously”.

Car enfin, en acceptant de porter cette livrée ridicule, qu'il n'a pas composée, il contribue à ancrer chez les Blancs, le préjugé du Noir amoureux du grotesque, histrion, baladin, non perfectible, toute choses fort désagréables aux Noirs assimilés qui se prennent au sérieux...<sup>843</sup>

Thus, whilst the speaker is ambiguous about who precisely she is referring to with the designation of an assimilated black population, the qualifier of “taking themselves too seriously” carries over the “air of disdain” that she articulates during her own interrogations. The feelings of “displeasure” cited in this black collectivity faced with the Wolof man's performance of white stereotypes loops back to the speaker's feeling of “revulsion” at the same sight. Both are underpinned by ideas of cooptation or acceptance of the colonial perspective in terms of the grotesqueness of (Senegalese) black masculinity, and perhaps in general Africinity. For in the first example, it was the speaker who described herself as a black Antillean woman who is “too westernized” and here it is referenced in the black population who are “assimilated”. Following the discussion that exposed the speaker's own prejudices and power relationship over the Wolof peanut vendor, the political sphere in which the text now speaks locates the possibility of such unequal positionalities of power within the struggles for black emancipation. The narrative highlights, for example, the peanut vendor's performance and continuation of racist images of blackness which he “accepts to wear” and thus does not fit into the creation of liberatory black aesthetics that works to counteract such stereotypes. This precludes him from the pursuits of the political community and suggestibly situates him as detrimental to if not against the efforts they are undertaking. However, the speaker complicates this logic by demonstrating that neither her Antillean femininity nor this assimilated black collectivity are disentangled from certain

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<sup>843</sup> Nardal, “Guignol Ouolof,” 4, 182.

prejudices of white colonial perspectives. Therefore, they contribute also, in their disgust of the Senegalese vendor, to the continuation of anti-blackness and reinstall an unequal relationship of power between them. The three options that the speaker outlined for herself above were to play into the expected pleasures of the metropolitan public, escape the interaction, or ignore the vendor. All are therefore examples where racial solidarity is foreclosed.

Il y a cependant, entre nous et lui, à défaut de solidarité réelle, celle apparente de couleur.<sup>844</sup>

The speaker demonstrates, then, that even if on the level of appearance they are both black, it does not necessarily mean that there is any form of racial solidarity. Through the speaker's questioning of herself and the place from which she perceives, she realizes that besides social differences based on class, gender, national and cultural identity, something that separates her (and the "assimilated" black collectivity) from this peanut vendor are ways of interacting that reinstall inequality.

Et puis, rejetant cette mauvaise gêne, pour ne penser qu'à la fraternité réelle qui nous unit aussi bien à ce Noir qu'à ces Blancs pleins d'illusion, nous répondons gentiment au vendeur de cacahouètes.<sup>845</sup>

Recognizing once more the emotive aspects of prejudice, the narrator takes her reflection into the realms of universal brotherhood. Akin to Fauset then, the human community is here described in familial terms. Though, through this reflection, the speaker discovers another way of interacting with the peanut vendor. As opposed to acting from disdain or disgust or seeing the peanut vendor as a "puppet" of white pleasure and entertainment, the speaker has found a path towards racial solidarity and the putting into practice of the ideals of black international politics. What is more, framing her dialogue with the Wolof man as also the enactment of universalist ideals, she critically alludes to French universalism that the metropolitan public does not embody in their actions on this colonial stage. In both cases, the grounds for possibility of a relation between these two characters is forged through the speaker's own critical examination of self and the power relationships that exist between them and by releasing her preestablished prejudices. It appears what underpins any notion of "real solidarity" is the premise that one believes, thinks, and relates to another as his or her equal. The speaker's fourth

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<sup>844</sup> Nardal, "Guignol Ouolof," 4, 182.

<sup>845</sup> Nardal, "Guignol Ouolof," 5, 183.



option of creating a dialogue with the peanut vendor represents this realization in action and corresponds with the end of the short story.

Poussée par la curiosité professionnelle, je n'hésite pas à lui poser une question dénuée de tact : "Ne trouve-t-il pas pénible de porter ce costume ridicule, et de faire rire les gens ?" La voix éraillée et un peu assourdie, il me répond avec beaucoup de sens : "Pas plus qu'un acteur comique de théâtre. J'ai d'ailleurs été acteur. J'aime autant faire ce métier ridicule que d'être chômeur ou de vivre de femmes..." Et qu'on les fasse rire, moi je veux bien... au moins, je peux manger..."<sup>846</sup>

Closing the dialogue and the story with the word of the vendor gives precedence to his perspective and opens the speaker further to be contradicted by the assumptions that her and the "assimilated black population" were portrayed as having. With his own voice the Wolof man falsifies their preconceived ideas that it is by choice that he wears this "ridiculous costume" and "anchors" the metropolitan public's "illusions" of blackness. The role that the peanut vendor is playing is not a question of desire or even "acceptance" but of survival for at least he "can eat". The gap between his pragmatic standpoint and the ideals of black international politics echoes out of the text as a reminder of the complexities of living as a black subject in the metropolis, particularly if one has limited options to make a living. The judgement that the speaker held over him can now be seen both as a prejudice, a lack of understanding of his position, or even an oversight of the material realities of working-classes. This job and the two other options that he gives, unemployment and being supported by women, are not expressions of his desires but the possibilities that he has in front of him. In contrast to the speaker enjoying a night out at the theater and a "quick lunch", the text instantiates a clear distinction between the characters in the ways in which one can live out one's subjectivity. Prior to the dialogue, thinking that the vendor even had desires of his own was not a part of the reflection. In the act of communication, where the speaker no longer perceives him as a puppet but addresses him as a subject, what is highlighted is that his existential reality appears. The interaction makes space for both of them as subjects. In creating the possibility of equal exchange, the irony is in the speaker's, and therefore the readers', discovery that they share similar points of view. The vendor is aware of the issues at stake in doing this "ridiculous job". The stage-café resonates with the Wolof man's analogy of the performativity of blackness in his profession to that of "a comical actor in the theater". He too perceives that the caricature of black masculinity that he is being asked to perform is clothed and shaped by colonial culture for the purpose of the metropolitan public's own amusement. From the speaker's perspective, opening herself to

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<sup>846</sup> Nardal, "Guignol Ouolof," 5, 183.

being contradicted in her preconceived notions of the Wolof man has an effect of exposing their shared perceptions of the effects of exoticism, of anti-blackness and the roles that it asks both of these characters to play in the café scene. Thus, the discovery of commonality despite the differences that separate them gives form to the practice of “real solidarity”. In this way it emphasizes the importance of dialogue and a willingness to understand and hear from multiple perspectives. Dialoguing implicitly infers the practice of listening which is highlighted in the text by the silence of the speaker after her initial question. In the textual performance of racial solidarity that this dialogue represents, it proposes the idea that listening to different perspectives than one’s own may not always be the case in other contexts. Taken together with the speaker’s meditation of the power relationships at play between her and the vendor it is evocative of other examples that have been discussed in respect to the predominance of masculine perspectives in black intellectual and cultural milieus. This was highlighted in Gratiant’s article in Chapter Four which is published alongside “*Guignol Ouolof*” in the *L’Étudiant noir*. As it was discussed at this point, Gratiant’s logic depended on the subjection of black femininity in order to articulate his cultural politics but at the same time to profit or attain power that is ascribed to masculinity within patriarchy. Nardal’s “*Guignol Ouolof*” shows that inferiorizing through prejudice is the major obstacle for the actualization of the ideals of black international politics. As such, in the literary space of the short story, Nardal explores what could happen if one did not perceive others as unequal. The author not only represents what “real solidarity” looks like but what it involves in terms of questioning one’s own position in relationship to others. Because she frames the café-stage as the set of metropolitan culture she demonstrates that it is clearly the French coloniality that unevenly structures society. As it was demonstrated in “*On défrise les cheveux crépus*” this model grounds social cohesion on the exclusion of difference. In “*Guignol Ouolof*”, Nardal materializes a collective experience based not on similarity but on the practice of equality. Whilst systemic change is not understood to be on the level of the individual, in order to create other ways of being and living together, it passes through the speaker’s transformation of her thoughts and actions and how she engages with the world around her. The space of agency that the Antillean woman has is in finding ways to create relationships that do not abide to or play out the roles prescribed by the colonial heteropatriarchy. “*Guignol Ouolof*” proposes that this individual process is a part of the journey to racial solidarity which is cornerstone to the collective struggles for global emancipation and international black politics.

## Chapter Six

### Humanism, Citizenship and Black Internationalism

In the interwar period, Paris was one meeting place of the practices of black internationalism. With an unprecedented coming together of different populations of black people within the French empire and the traversing of the Atlantic by African American artists and intellectuals, it sets the scene for exchanges between people on both what is specific to different national articulations of anti-blackness as well as that what is common amongst them. As a response, ideas of racial solidarity come to the fore within black internationalism. On the political front, racial solidarity is the way to combat anti-black racism on an international scale and pursue global black emancipation. One example of the political organization in line with such ambitions is the Senegalese Lamine Senghor's *La Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre*, (founded in 1927) which came to be spearheaded by fellow Senegalese Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté after the former's decline in health caused by exposure in World War One to toxic gas as a *tirailleur sénégalais*.<sup>847</sup> For a more punctual example of black international political organizing that shared the central concern of creating racial solidarity in the transnational context are the associations that came into existence against the invasion in Ethiopia. As mentioned in the last chapter, the mostly communist based associations included *Le Comité International pour la Défense du Peuple Éthiopien*, *Le Comité de Défense d'Éthiopie* where Nardal worked as secretary and assured communication with C.L.R James' International African Friends of Ethiopia as well as co-founding *Le Comité d'Action Éthiopienne*. Another instance of racial solidarity within black international circles is the co-organization of the Second Pan-African Congress (1921) by W.E.B Du Bois, Blaise Diagne and Gratien Candace which Jessie Fauset covers in her articles for *The Crisis*.<sup>848</sup> Because she reported from her feminist perspective, Fauset underlined the need for racial solidarity between

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<sup>847</sup> Senghor had also previously founded *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre* in March 1926 before splintering off to create the *Ligue*. Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 82-83.

<sup>848</sup> The first Pan-African Congress took place in July of 1919 in Paris. Following this meeting a number of black organizations came into existence, such as *La Fraternité Africaine*, *L'Amitié Franco-Dahoméenne* or *L'Union Intercoloniale*, in 1921. These groups mark the beginning of the proliferation of black international political mobilizations in interwar France and that are continued by key figures such as Marc Kojouhar Tivalou Houénou, from Dahomey, and his founding of the *La Ligue Universelle pour la Défense de la Race Noire* in May of 1924 and who worked with Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 80-81.

women of color throughout the world. What was also highlighted at the time of this discussion is that these congresses that took place in different European metropolises laid the foundations for Fauset's understanding of the different articulations of anti-blackness in comparison with those that she knew intimately well in the United States. Thus, in the practice of the goals of black internationalism like global black emancipation and racial solidarity, it becomes a political project as much as a social and a human one as the importance of racial pride attest. Informed by the specificities of her Antillean cultural identity and cross-cultural connection with African American artistic expressions, Nardal's black international politics are transcribed into her fictional works and journal articles in multiple ways depending on the chosen form. One example is her representation of different ways of experiencing and forming the collectivity, such as Elisa and the return of her son, the white familial bond of the hairdressers, the shared experience of anti-blackness by the clients or the actualization of racial solidarity at the café. The questions underlying all of these texts is what ties communities together, and more specifically, what unites black communities (racial solidarity) across difference and on an international scale. In real life or in discursive worlds, one part of this search is creating platforms for such interactions and coming together. In Nardal's fictional texts this is shown in the development of her characters and their negotiation of multiple spheres of lived experience. As it was demonstrated, Nardal entangles geographical spaces that are presumed distinct from the colonial perspective which usually encompasses the metropolis and colony. Within her characters' migratory journeys and how they relate to the world, she problematizes spatial relationships at the heart of concepts such as assimilation. On the one hand, this entwinement is both critical and political for it exposes the intervention of institutional racism and colonial ideologies on the level of the everyday. In "In Exile", "Acts of Grace" and "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*" Nardal exposes to what extent the characters' phenomenological worlds and daily activities are impacted by the impossible demand to fit into French society that takes the material and symbolic color of whiteness, the form of the patriarch and the shape of a Hexagon. On the other hand, the way in which Nardal nourishes the coexistence of spaces (geographical, experiential, symbolic, social) is a creative act because it proposes ways to go around these barriers on the level of the individual and the collective be it in a national or an international frame. Elisa's dream of life in Martinique, for example, calls upon different spheres of lived experience like the imagination, the (trans)cultural, the spiritual and the natural as resources for her strength and subjectivation after being stopped by racism. As an effect, this character's phenomenological experience of reality, where she was at once on the bus in Paris and in her hometown in Martinique, where she was awaiting a return and at the same time mobile

in her thoughts and imagination, challenges the spatial delimitations of systems of power and the mapping of the Western world view. From the micro-level of subjective experience and perception, Nardal fictionally constructs understandings of the world around that put to the task the tenability of the ways of being and knowing that look actively to separate, distance, or foreclose relations across the spaces of difference. One of the consequences of this which was brought to the surface was that it holds the non-universalistic application of French universalism accountable to its contradiction. As the author developed in “*On défrise les cheveux crépus*” and “*Guignol Ouolof*”, in order to transform social cohesion, the symbolic and material grounds of collective experience require reshaping. It is precisely this that can give rise to the possibility of racial solidarity championed by black internationalism and a different kind of humanism that could be the basis of the global community (both white and black) in the pursuit of global black emancipation.

In the microcosm of the hair salon, the Alsatian family is shown to be tied together by identifiable biological inheritance which is located within the boundaries of the Hexagon. As it was fictionalized, this racial, genealogical, cultural, and geographical determination of white social cohesion and the (unequal) relationships between self and other that it builds, is opposed in “*On défrise*” with the possibility of other foundations of living together. In Nardal’s critique of this practice of assimilation, she points to forging social cohesion on indeterminate or delocalized ethnic, territorial, genealogical, and cultural identities. In “*Guignol Ouolof*” it is the practice of new ways of sociality from within black communities that sets the standard for forming connections otherwise on the colonial stage of the café, the Parisian center of empire, the national collectivity or even the international one. From this angle, Nardal fictionally theorized that the Antillean women characters have the option not to act on the ideals of black international politics. They could carry on the dictated performance of colonial culture, deny the subjecthood of the peanut vendor and foreclose a relationship. They had a choice to act on their prejudices informed, in part by, gender, class, ethnic, cultural, and national origins that distinguish the Senegalese man to the Martinican women. This would have therefore perpetuated understandings of collectivity that determine socio-cultural identity and thus one’s inclusion or no in the community through geographical territorialization of origin. Such is the conception of Western humanism that depends on determination of not quite human Others in relationship to Man.<sup>849</sup> Nardal associates this with other forms of social exclusion and ostracization like sexism

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<sup>849</sup> Throughout this chapter what is understood by Western humanism and its Man is the genealogy of understandings of the Self and the world around that emerges from European Renaissance onwards. David Scott, in an interview

that on numerous occasions she has articulated to be a phenomenon within the black intellectual and cultural milieu. When the Antillean character chooses another option and creates a link across the differences that separate her from the peanut vendor these actions seek to nullify the relationships of power involved in such an understanding of community formation. Seeking connection rather than disconnection, whether between humans or non-humans (natural, spiritual world) or between different spheres of lived experience, reveals that the subject is never entirely one thing nor entirely in one place. At the basis of subjectivity there is an indeterminate and perhaps indeterminable quality. Nardal's fictionalization of building collectivity in another way to the dictates of colonial heteropatriarchy is as much a transformation of self as it is a transformation of the ways in which subjects interrelate. In the broader picture then, in order to accomplish a humanism that is more genuinely universal in both its conceptualization and its actualization – that could be a foundation for racial solidarity, global black emancipation and ultimately equality within the human community – Nardal fictionalizes a movement that is a constant back and forth between the individual and the collective, black communities and (white) national collectivities, national groups and international communities.

When Nardal reflects back on her time in the interwar Paris and her creative practices she states,

Je l'ai trouvée dans d'autres moments, cette joie de créer ; sûrement... De réunir tant de gens autour de moi, c'était [aussi] ma façon de lutter contre le colonialisme... Pourquoi ne pas rassembler les noirs du monde entier ?<sup>850</sup>

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with Sylvia Wynter, summarizes the latter's critique of Western Man that is fundamental to her oeuvre. Scott outlines that "the story of humanism" is a kind of "European coming-of-age story" that "marks a certain stage in Europe's consciousness of itself." Proceeding the Middle Ages, humanism and Man understand the Self and the world around in a different paradigm to the theological conceptions of existence. Man enters "into the rational spaciousness and secular luminosity of the Modern. As such, it forms a central, even defining, chapter in Europe's liberal autobiography. But the coming-of-age story has another aspect or dimension that is often relegated to a footnote, namely the connection between humanism and dehumanization. For this Renaissance moment of the birth of humanism... is simultaneously the moment of initiation of Europe's colonial project... inasmuch Europe's discovery of its Self is simultaneous with the discovery of its Others." David Scott, "Introduction" in Sylvia Wynter and David Scott, "The Re-enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," *Small Axe* 8 (September 2000): 120. Thus, one of the determining factors of Others in respect to Man is rational thought. As underlined in the body of the text this comes with certain geographical mappings of the world. Simply put Western Man and his rationality (which women, European or not, are automatically disqualified because of the gendered assumption that women do not have rationality as such) are tied to the European space. In Europe's colonial relationship, its Others are determined as not having self-consciousness or rationality, in part, because they come from different socio-cultural and geographical spaces. In her article, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," Sylvia Wynter describes this as follows: "Whatever the group – women, natives, niggers – whatever the category – the Orient, Africa, the tropics – the ordering principle of the discourse was the same: the figuration of an ontological order of value between the groups who were markers of "rationality" and those who were markers of its Lack-State." Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," *Boundary 2*, no. 12/13 (1984): 42.

<sup>850</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 71.

In light of above discussion, the readers can understand this as an expression or even definition of her black internationalism as well as feel the philosophical, cultural, social, and political weight behind such a simple statement. Two concrete examples of this that have yet to be explored are the Nardal sisters' creation of a salon in Clamart and the discursive space of *La Revue du monde noir* that was directly issued from the interactions that took place there. In line with what Nardal presents across her oeuvre, anti-colonial politics is understood as a creative practice that fosters sense of pride and "joy" and which is put into action collectively in the pursuit for things to be otherwise. In order to develop this in the discussion of Nardal's salon, her work on black internationalism and human universalism in the colonial metropolis, the first part of this chapter will break the temporal and spatial delimitations of the author's Parisian interwar period. One reason for this is that it is only during the period after World War Two and Nardal's permanent return to Martinique that she frontally addresses issues such as citizenship. This is connected, in part, to the change in political landscape of the nation state which brings to the surface the second reason. In the rebuilding of the French Republic post liberation, access to citizenship is opened to all members of society in the proclamation of women's suffrage and shortly after Martinique becomes a French department. The interwar period where Nardal explores the impossibility of assimilation of black subjects within the metropolis, for example, is in a context where institutional space in the French "community of equals" is inaccessible to half of the population, white or black, and the Antilles were still colonies. From a Martinican perspective, and as it will be problematized below, this is not the first time that questions of accessibility to the Rights of Man have been posed. In investigating Nardal's work during the time where institutional space is rendered accessible to all in the French nation (1945), what comes to the fore is a common thread between her work during the interwar period, her articulation of citizenship and the subsequent departmentalization of Martinique (1946). Whether one has access or not to universal rights or its national and symbolic spaces, it does not appear to change Nardal's argumentation. If one wants society to be otherwise, it is up to the individual and it is up to the collective to act in a way that makes it so.

## 6.1 French Citizenship in Martinique

After Paulette Nardal's definitive return to Martinique she co-created the association *Rassemblement Féminin Martiniquais* in 1944 with the first issue of its journal *La Femme dans la Cité* published in January 1945. This Martinican branch of the Christian based *Union Féminine Civique et Sociale*, which Nardal had previously worked with in Paris, pursued "social justice" from a "Christian humanist"<sup>851</sup> point of view, and focused particularly on the betterment of women's position within Martinican society. Both the association and its journal emerge during a period of political shifts within the island's landscapes and in France at large. Recently liberated from the Vichy Government and German occupation, *La Femme dans la Cité* coincides with the acquisition of women's suffrage in April 1945 and the departmentalization of Martinique in March 1946. As the name of the publication suggests, women are no longer outside of the symbolic and material bounds of the city but are citizens who can actively participate *in* it. In her article "*La femme dans la Cité*" published in the first issue of the newspaper, Nardal proclaims, "the Martinican woman has entered the City of Men".<sup>852</sup> What rings through this article and others is that citizenship, whilst it may be legitimized through legislation (after years of struggle) is above all a social practice for Nardal. In Nardal's "*Optique électorale*", "*Les femmes martiniquaises et l'action sociale*", "*Les femmes martiniquaises et la politique*" and "*Abstention: crime social*" citizenry is articulated not only as a "status" that one has but something that one does. Presented as a "duty" and "civil responsibility", it is in the practice of voting for example, that one becomes a citizen, and from Nardal's perspective, that one actualizes his or her equality. Thus, whilst materially and symbolically Martinique is integrated into France as a department, or its feminine population have arrived in "the City of Men", what becomes apparent in Nardal's work is that it does not guarantee a more equal and just society. The expansion of the polity to include women is extremely important, however, it is in women's social engagement as citizens that they affirm their identity as equal members of society and as such put into motion the possibility of socially, culturally, and politically "making" it otherwise. For example, in "*Abstention: crime social*"

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<sup>851</sup> What Nardal means by this will be returned to later in the discussion.

<sup>852</sup> "La Femme martiniquaise est entrée dans la Cité des Hommes." Paulette Nardal, "La femme dans la Cité," *La Femme dans la Cité* 1 (janvier 1945): 3. The essays in this section have been found in the bilingual anthology edited by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Beyond Negritude: Essays from Woman and the City*. Going forward, if the English translation is cited in the text, the French citation will be included in the note section. The page references will refer to this edition and will give the pages corresponding to both the English and the French versions. Paulette Nardal, "La femme dans la Cité," in *Beyond Negritude: Essays from Woman and the City*, ed. and trans. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (New York: Suny Press, 2009), 20/21.



Nardal states that it is above all, “the day of election that you become equal to man. It is on that day with all the class distinctions abolished, that you, like every woman, will apprise the nation of your autonomous will.”<sup>853</sup> In order to follow Nardal’s articulations of citizenship with women’s “ascension” into the universalization of the right to vote, the discussion will first address what Nardal presents as women’s “civic duties” and how she encourages them to actualize such responsibilities. This will be developed alongside Nardal’s problematization of the relationship between individual citizen and the nation, which is informed by Martinique’s specific relationship to the hexagonal space and French universalism that shapes it.

### 6.1.1 Antillean Women’s Social and Civic Responsibility

In Nardal’s previous texts, the author represents Antillean cultural identities and specifically Antillean femininity as being created over time in negotiation with, and resistance to, French colonial heteropatriarchy. Nardal’s work shows that social identities are inherently produced, indeterminate, and not founded upon a natural essence that works to legitimize domination. Therefore, when Nardal mobilizes essentialist language when speaking of “feminine roles” or “feminine vocations” in her articles on citizenship and Martinican women’s place in the city, it appears to run counter to her understandings of identity thus far addressed. In part this could be due to a change in context, subject matter, and readership from her Parisian years. It could also be due to the ambitions of her work.<sup>854</sup> For the latter, one of the principal concerns of her articles is to encourage women, who have been exiled from the city, to actively participate in it. “*La femme dans la Cité*” presents the same argumentation as in “*Abstention*” whereby Martinican women become equal to men through the practice of voting, but this time in respect to civic responsibility.

Devant le devoir social, elle est l’égale de l’homme. Elle est aussi en tant qu’être personnel, intelligente et libre. Mais en tant qu’être social, elle doit à la communauté

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<sup>853</sup> “Pourtant, c’est surtout ce jour-là, le jour de scrutin, que vous serez les égales de l’homme.” Paulette Nardal, “Abstention: crime social,” *La Femme dans la Cité* 26 (novembre 1946): 4; in *Beyond Negritude*, 74/75.

<sup>854</sup> Interestingly, Nardal’s gender essentialism runs parallel to the racial essentialism found in the poetics of Negritude leaders such as Césaire, Damas and Senghor. The latter’s use of essentialism has a self-affirming dimension that Nardal evokes in the context of women and their participation in politics. See Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 11. As the discussion will show, Nardal’s essentialism, much like the racial essentialism of Negritude poetics, resonates at times, with what Gayatri Spivak’s theorizes as “strategic essentialism”. This is because there are moments where Nardal mobilizes essentialist qualities as a way to draw in her feminine audience and demonstrate what they can bring to the political body as women. This collective overriding of difference within the female population (essentialism) by articulating “feminine vocations”, for instance, is in an overall goal to signify feminine identity as a political subject (anti-essentialism) and their relationship to the institutional spaces of the nation and equal rights. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Elizabeth Grosz, “Criticism, Feminism and the Institution: An interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,” *Thesis Eleven* 10-11, no. 1 (1985): 175-187.

humaine ses services. Comme l'homme, elle doit contribuer au progrès de l'humanité. Mais ce service, du fait de différences d'ordre physique et psychologique qui existent entre l'homme et la femme sera un service différent, mais pas nécessairement de moindre valeur parce qu'il est différent. C'est en l'accomplissant qu'elle restera fidèle à sa vocation féminine.<sup>855</sup>

Nardal essentializes the different roles that men and women “owe” to society but underlines that these should not give reason for their inequality. Whatever a feminine subject is called to do, it is through these actions that she is “equal to man”. Nardal’s framing of civic duties within the “human community” signals to her readership the international perspective from which the author works when thinking through citizenship and women’s social engagement. Nardal overlaps the sphere of the individual and the practice of her “feminine vocation” with the sphere of the social in the national context which resonates out and impacts the “progress of humanity”. In this movement to the universal community Nardal grounds the enactment of equality in the particularity of women’s actions. In the context whereby the boundaries of universal suffrage have been extended to include women in France, Nardal maintains difference in women’s gendered specificity. The feminine subject does not have to transform into the masculine figure who has up until this point been the political, social, and cultural embodiment of citizen and human Man, in order to be a “valuable” and equal member of this national and the international human community. In “*La femme dans la Cité*”, Nardal begins to articulate precisely what she perceives as women’s “social duties.”

En quoi consiste ce devoir social ? D’abord, à se débarrasser de préjugés anciens, de routines paresseuses, pour connaître des milieux sociaux autres que le leur. Les femmes martiniquaises devront donc étudier les problèmes concernant la famille, la profession, la cité... C’est donc à une œuvre d’éducation sociale qu’elles sont conviées.<sup>856</sup>

Elsewhere, in “*Les femmes martiniquaises et la politique*” women’s role as equal citizen is to convince other women to vote: “It is the responsibility of these valiant citizens to impress upon the abstainers with whom they are in contact the importance of performing their civil duty – their sole duty.”<sup>857</sup> In “*Optique électorale*” a woman’s feminine vocation is described in her apparent natural capacity, unlike men, to facilitate calm and peaceful negotiations.

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<sup>855</sup> Nardal, “*La femme dans la Cité*,” 20/21.

<sup>856</sup> Nardal, “*La femme dans la Cité*,” 20/21.

<sup>857</sup> “Il est du devoir de ces vaillantes citoyennes de faire comprendre la nécessité d’accomplir leur devoir civique - tout leur devoir – aux abstentionnistes avec lesquelles elles sont en contact.” Paulette Nardal, “*Les femmes martiniquaises et la politique*,” *La Femme dans la Cité* 22 (juillet 1, 1946): 4; in *Beyond Negritude*, 64/ 65.

Si sur le plan international, le rôle des femmes est d'œuvrer en faveur du maintien de la paix, sur le plan local, une tâche immédiate leur est dévolue. Fidèles à leur vocation féminine, elles devront s'efforcer de maintenir les contestations électorales dans les limites de la courtoisie. Au lieu d'augmenter de leur propre nervosité le degré des passions masculines, elles s'efforceront d'exercer une influence apaisante dans leur milieux respectifs. A l'action politique elles apporteront leur force neuve, mais aussi leur bon sens et cette espèce de sagesse que donne le contact journalier avec les réalités matérielles.<sup>858</sup>

Nardal's overlapping of the local and the international is echoed in this passage when women's peacekeeping duties get translated into the local electoral scene. At the same time, the particularity of a "new force" and "wisdom" that the feminine subject brings to politics is from her specific lived experience with "material realities". This is an exemplification of Nardal's essentialism, for women's supposed innate quality to be soothing, peace-keeping and in tune with material aspects of life are all characteristic of well-established gendered stereotypes. Essentialism, in this case, appears to be less a strategy mobilized in Nardal's work but a simple essentialization of Antillean femininity. This said, what it also demonstrates is a specific understanding of how the particular interacts with the universal. Whether in regard to universal rights or the global human community, the relationship is one in which the universal is grounded in the individual (the particular) and affirmed in social practices. Arguably, this is in part informed by her understanding of Christian humanism. In "*Les femmes martiniquaises et l'action sociale*" Nardal adds ethical and moral dimensions to women's civic responsibilities in the secular state. "Martinique has, as we know, a majority of Catholic women" Nardal writes, and it is "the desire to translate the Spirit of the Gospels into deeds that motivate most of us."<sup>859</sup> From this definition of Christian humanism, Nardal underlines once more that the universal (God) is in the actions of those of the religious community (the particulars). The author proposes that as another option to "the study of social issues" a feminine subject may realize her citizenship and equality through the practice of charity.

Après s'être oublié au profit des plus malheureux que soi. On se sent guéri des préoccupations personnelles, de cette absorption en soi ; de cette (*sic*) égoïsme qui engendre névrose et neurasthénie. Et il arrive même qu'avec l'habitude de se dévouer, on reprenne goût à la vie, on y retrouve « suc et saveur ».  
Voici bien le vrai remède et la vraie morale.

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<sup>858</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Optique électorale," *La Femme dans la Cité* 5 (mars 1, 1945): 3; in *Beyond Negritude*, 31/32.

<sup>859</sup> "Pourtant c'est la volonté de traduire en actes l'Esprit de l'Évangile qui anime la plupart d'entre nous. La Martinique compte comme on le sait une majorité de Femmes catholiques." Paulette Nardal, "Les femmes martiniquaises et l'action sociale," *La Femme dans la Cité* 13 (octobre 1, 1945): 3; in *Beyond Negritude*, 46/47.

S'oublier pour les autres, y-a-t-il là l'amputation de la personnalité ? Non, Mesdames. Je disais plutôt, enrichissement, élargissement de la personnalité aux dimensions de l'humain, aux dimensions du monde.<sup>860</sup>

In one's social engagement and her movement beyond the personal she symbolically grows into her identity as citizen, her dimensions as a human subject. The spiritual aspect of Nardal's work characterizes women's civic duties as guardians of the moral and political health of society.

A cette régénération de tout l'humain, nous femmes martiniquaises, nous pouvons apporter dans le domaine de la politique notre grand désir de propreté morale. Et nous y veillerons farouchement à quelque parti que nous appartenions.<sup>861</sup>

In her participation in the socio-political sphere as “educator”, “social worker”, and “peacekeeper” a feminine subject is also a citizen who watches over the inferred immorality of her masculine counterparts. From Nardal's perspective, women's civic responsibilities and the ways in which they can enact their citizenship and equality are in line with gendered assumptions of the role of women within society. Aside from the essentialism that this attests, the argument is that by valorizing the current qualities, skills, and know how women have – which have been shaped by gender determinism and inequality within society – Nardal creates the grounds for immediate action. On the one hand, Nardal accompanies the readership into this new world of “the City of Men” that has just opened to them and encourages their agency to act and live out their citizenship and equality. On the other hand, “feminine vocations” that have been ostracized from the political sphere are both politicized and universalized. Through her social engagement the feminine subject grows into her own incorporation of the political and the universal. Her form takes the symbolic contours of the universal figure “Man” but transforms it into her own feminine outline. From this perspective, Nardal's essentialization of women is less about restricting them to the biological-domestic sphere (patriarchal domination) but to demonstrate that women bring something different and valuable to “making society”, and as such, there is a possibility to fundamentally transform the local, national, and international shapes of collectivities.<sup>862</sup> Because Nardal posits equality and citizenship in its actualization the question becomes what if women do not go to vote? What needs to take place on the level of the individual subject so that she perceives herself as a valuable member to society and therefore live out this subjectivity?

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<sup>860</sup> Nardal, “Les femmes martiniquaises et l'action sociale,” 44/45.

<sup>861</sup> Nardal, “Les femmes martiniquaises et la politique,” 64/65.

<sup>862</sup> This will be developed at greater length in the third section of this discussion.

### 6.1.2 Enacting Citizenship and Equality in “the City of Men”

The opening lines of “*La femme dans la Cité*” reads: “Must we deplore the Martinican woman’s ascension to the status of citizen? Only time will tell. But one thing is certain: a revolution of the mind and spirit is now in progress”.<sup>863</sup> As Nardal understands citizenship and equality as achieved through living out one’s “status” as citizen, then it would appear that such action would be preceded, in part, by “the Martinican woman” seeing herself as valuable and equal participant in the making of society. Thus the “revolution of the mind and spirit” could refer to the society in general, but perhaps more importantly to the cultural and social transformation in the way women see and identify themselves. By inference, universal suffrage does not guarantee the elimination of oppression and discrimination that women may experience, nor does it automatically change their perceptions of their place in the city and their understandings of femininity. As it was broached in Chapter Five in regard to the processes of racial conscientization, the articulation between disalienation and emancipation is one of cognition and agency. Addressing the majority of black women that make up her readership, Nardal is pointing to the cognitive processes required for disalienation which are at least two-fold in respect to racial and gender oppression. If Antillean women do not consciously recognize themselves as equal citizens, then it is extremely difficult to act agentively as such. In the examples above, Nardal underlines these processes of conscientization by promoting further education, for example, or by valorizing what Martinican women have to offer the political sphere.<sup>864</sup> In Nardal’s 1945 article “*Les femmes martiniquaises et l’action sociale*” the author refers to an expected lag time between the right to vote and a development of political consciousness within the feminine population.

La majorité de femmes martiniquaises serait-elle indifférente aux questions sociales ? Je crois que non. Mais il nous faut avoir la patience d’attendre que la nécessité de consacrer un peu de leur temps à l’accomplissement au devoir social se soit imposée à l’esprit de nos sœurs au même titre que l’obligatoire séance chez le coiffeur...<sup>865</sup>

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<sup>863</sup> “Faut-il déplorer l’accession de la femme martiniquaise à la qualité de citoyenne ? L’avenir nous le dira. Mais une chose est certaine : une révolution s’accomplit actuellement dans les esprits.” Nardal, “*La femme dans la Cité*,” 20/ 21.

<sup>864</sup> Nardal also wrote an article for *La Femme dans la Cité* called “De la paresse intellectuelle” which tackles problems of the education system on the island. It speaks, in part, to the concerns being outlined above however in respect to children and adolescents. Paulette Nardal, “De la paresse intellectuelle,” *La Femme dans le Cité* 50 (novembre 1948): 1, 3; in *Beyond Negritude*, 90-93.

<sup>865</sup> Nardal, “*Les femmes martiniquaises et l’action sociale*,” 44/45.

The author frames political indifference as correlating with some of the feminine population's accomplishment of other "obligations" such as going to the hairdresser. This could be read as condescending as much as it could be read as ironical. It may also attest to the creation of feminine connivance between the author and her readership and a possible allusion to her own "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*" and what the "obligations" at the hairdresser meant in this piece. As such the passage takes on the doubleness involved in political conscientization (disalienation) of her readership. In both gender and racial terms, the author underlines the fact that what has been normalized as women's duties needs a reformulation in order to lead to a different understanding of self, one's social engagement and experience one's agitive capacities. By 1946, in "*Abstention: crime social*", Nardal directly questions the feminine readership on the issue of how they perceive and situate themselves within society.

J'en appelle à toutes les femmes qui jusqu'ici sont restées indifférentes à la chose politique mais qui trouvent néanmoins que tout va mal, à toutes celles qui ne votent pas.

Et je leur redis : « Vous avez la possibilité de changer tout cela en sortant pour un jour de votre léthargie, c'est-à-dire en allant déposer dans l'urne un bulletin pour le candidat de votre choix. Vous n'avez pas conscience de votre valeur. Vous ne vous comptez pour rien dans la nation. Vous méconnaissiez le grand honneur que vous a fait le Sauveur de la France en vous élevant à la dignité de citoyennes.<sup>866</sup>

The frontal address of women's self-perceptions reiterates the way in which Nardal describes the dialectic between becoming conscious of one's value to society and instantiating it through action with her interwar formulations of coming into racial consciousness and the experience of racial pride. Valorization of gendered political vocations or, in the latter, racial identity, is the recognition that dissimilarities are not markers of inferiority but that one is valuable and equal in these differences within the universal human community. In this context, as opposed to the interwar period, it is thanks to "the savior of France" Charles de Gaulle, that institutionally space has been made for women. What Nardal observes is that women are nevertheless reticent or are yet to acknowledge and practice their equality and be participants in transforming "all that is going badly". The effectiveness of encouraging women to realize their "sovereign will" through a moralism that rings through this article, and that comes forward at other moments of Nardal's work during this period, could be questioned. Furthermore, at numerous times across Nardal's oeuvre, such as in *Guide des Colonies*, the author demonstrates her awareness that the way one perceives and positions oneself in the world around is formed, in part, by complex relationships

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<sup>866</sup> Nardal, "Abstention," 74/75.

of oppression and discrimination based on class, race, gender and sexuality. Thus, Nardal's tone in her articles in *La Femme dans la Cité* that is dry and direct is possibly a strategic move. She knows that articulation between disalienation and emancipation is a complicated process, but she addresses her audience almost as if she is looking to shock her readership out of "lethargy" and into these cognitive processes. The urgency of the articles' voice as she incites women to see themselves and live out their identities otherwise, also evokes the perceived transformative potential and possibility for real social justice at this particular historical moment. Both "*En face de l'histoire*" and "*Abstention*" are published after the departmentalization of Martinique. In the former Nardal writes,

A travers l'étonnante diversité des individus, des partis, des nations, et des races s'affirme de plus en plus l'unité profonde de la nature humaine qui se traduit par un commun souci de la dignité de la personne humaine.

Se peut-il que des femmes martiniquaises restent indifférentes à cette passionnante gestation ? Est-il vrai que des femmes instruites n'écoutent pas les nouvelles de radio, ne lisent pas les journaux ? Se peut-il qu'elles ne comprennent pas que leur devoir de citoyennes est de suivre la réalité politique et sociale et de l'expliquer à leurs sœurs moins éclairées mais qui ne manquent pas pour autant de bons sens ? Est-il vrai que des dizaines de milliers de femmes se refusent à aller déposer un bulletin dans l'urne les jours d'élection, se refusent à « refaire le monde » à fabriquer l'Histoire ? Elles n'ont donc pas conscience de leur éminente dignité de personnes humaines, de la possibilité qui leur est donnée de changer la face du monde ?

Si telle était la vérité, je désespérerais des femmes de mon pays.<sup>867</sup>

This period represents nothing less than the possibility to "remake the world" in which diversities and differences coexist and are unified by "human dignity". As this takes place through individual and collective action, women's refusal to perform their equality or "human dignity" hinders such potentiality for change. Following Nardal's argument, the common concern for human dignity is what is at stake in women's abstention from voting. A woman's "indifference" or difficulty in perceiving herself as an equal member of society and thus affirm her political subjectivity as citizen is to deny her own humanity and thus obfuscate relating to the humanity in others. The idea is that if one does not recognize one's own human dignity then how can the subject recognize it in others and thus build relationships with those around based on "this common concern" and the "profound unity of human nature" that connects all? This understanding of collectivity that is defined as changing "the face of the world" infers that reciprocal recognition of one's humanity has not been the foundation for social cohesion

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<sup>867</sup> Paulette Nardal, "En face de l'histoire," *La Femme dans la Cité* 25 (octobre 1946): 4; in *Beyond Negritude* 68/69-70/71.

previously. Because Nardal links the social (human dignity, collectivity) with the political (practice of citizenship) the same logic applies within the nation space. If a woman does not perceive herself as an equal and valuable citizen in her difference as a woman, how can she recognize equality in those that are different to her? That this recognition be reciprocated? And the national “community of equals” be one that fundamentally accepts difference within this collectivity? To return to “*Abstention: crime social*” Nardal argues,

Combien seriez-vous surprises si je vous disais que l'ordre actuel qui ne vous satisfait pas, vous en êtes partiellement responsable ! [...] Si nous souffrons de ce que les rapports sociaux soient maintenant dominés par la haine, nous pourrions nous demander : « Qu'avons-nous fait pour améliorer le sort du peuple ? Nous sommes nous penchés sur sa misère ? Avons-nous étudié le moyen de régler la question sociale au mieux des intérêts de tous ? N'avons-nous pas laissé ce rôle à des gens qui l'ont utilisé à des fins personnelles ?<sup>868</sup>

The author's responsabilization of the feminine population that runs through the human, social and political sphere is reminiscent of what the author fictionalized in “*Guignol Ouolof*”. The initial gaze of the Antillean characters upon the Senegalese waiter had to be put into question. For a more equal interaction than what the current prejudices of the characters or norms of French society installed, the responsibility was, in a certain sense, on the characters to change. But Nardal also showed that they had the agency to do so. The idea being that instead of waiting for society to propose something different, the characters could act otherwise and therefore would head toward a more just interaction between self and other. Thus, as Nardal outlines the specificities of feminine citizenship, she is also outlining in general her visions for the foundations of making a just society that could resonate out into international relations. “Civic responsibility” is as much about changing the face of French Republicanism as it is about “changing the face of the world”. Nardal is proposing to her Martinican feminine readership that this is an occasion for fundamental changes to conceptions of French humanism that has colonized many parts of the world but has been far from universal in its application.

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<sup>868</sup> Nardal, “Abstention,” 74/75.



### 6.1.3 Changing the Face of France

Nardal consistently underlines what women can bring to the political sphere. The author's emphasis on specifically gendered "feminine vocations" infers that these new members of the political community could lead the way in tackling what is lacking in (historical and present) political worlds and circles of power in Martinique, and in hexagonal France. As discussed above, on the socio-cultural level of building collectivities, Nardal's politicization of what women have at their disposal (skills, lived experience, knowledge of "material realities", "desire for moral health") in the contemporary moment, seeks to empower women to act and participate directly in political and social life. In line with Nardal's articulation of coming into racial consciousness, her methods of valorization of "feminine civic duties" in the political domain work, in part, towards a collective coming into consciousness of women's recognition of their own "worth" as human subjects within society and therefore valuable and agentive in its making. This is important because she posits universal equality on the recognition of human dignity across differences within the human community and this recognition starts with oneself. In Nardal's pursuit in transforming human interactions, whether in her fictional and intellectual work during the interwar period, or here in the context of citizenship and departmentalization, the importance of practicing or doing society otherwise comes to the fore. The materiality of social and political life is perhaps the only way to put to the test the ideals of a given foundation of society, hold these principles accountable to what they proclaim, and transform them if needed. With the feminine populations' inclusion into "the City of Men" it is understandable why Nardal argues that this is an opportunity to transform and "change the world". Through their actions, Martinican women not only grow into the universal form, they disturb the boundaries of what has previously been delimited by the universal, the (white) figure of citizen and, from this island, the hexagonal shape of France. Historically speaking, it is not the first time in French colonial entanglements that new members have been assimilated into the French polity. As political philosopher Silyane Larcher reveals in her study *L'autre citoyen. L'idéal républicain et les Antilles après l'esclavage*, there has been consistent contestations throughout colonization between colonized subjects and metropolitan political rulers over who belongs to the "community of equals".<sup>869</sup> One of the principal demonstrations of the author's study is to show at what point equal rights and revolutionary ideas were not posited upon Martinique and other colonies.<sup>870</sup>

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<sup>869</sup> Silyane Larcher, *L'autre citoyen. L'idéal républicain et les Antilles après l'esclavage* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014).

<sup>870</sup> "A l'écart de l'idée convenue, et pour le moins téléologique, selon laquelle la Révolution aurait fondé aux 'veilles colonies' d'esclavage une politique cohérente et consistante définissant une stricte synonymie entre assimilation politique et égalité, dès la proclamation des idéaux révolutionnaires de liberté et d'égalité des droits en 1789, la

Rather, the symbolic and material grounds of citizenship and equality, for instance, transform and change in antagonistic relationships between the metropolis and those who fight for their rights to have the same rights in the colonies.<sup>871</sup> Larcher's work that intervenes in the post emancipation period is in no way comparable to the socio-cultural and political times that Nardal is writing in after World War Two. And yet, almost a century later, there are certain resonances in Nardal's formulations of citizenship that appear to respond to conceptions of second-class citizenry, for instance, that Larcher highlights in her investigation, and which will be addressed below. Another example is Nardal's perception that women's roles and civic responsibilities bring with them "a new force" that could transform French ideals into different and a more just practice of universalism. This is because Nardal works in a similar logic to what Larcher exposes in her study in the sense that it is in French universalism's confrontation with the material realities that its non-universalistic application can be questioned. As Silyane Larcher explains, on a juridical and political level, since the proclamation of the Rights of Man, the Republic opens itself up to its contestation from within.

Cette exposition toujours possible à une opposition de droit, effet induit de la proclamation de l'universalité des droits, telle une brèche du politique toujours ouverte, implique autant l'indétermination radicale des principes politiques modernes, qu'elle appelle au travail toujours à recommencer de leur définition, en bref à l'inlassable recommencement de la Révolution.<sup>872</sup>

Nardal's call for the practice of "civic responsibility" and qualifying De Gaulle as "the Great Savior" of France is not revolutionary. Nardal works within a reformist approach to French Republicanism that seeks change within its constructs, previously formulated as a more genuine

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citoyenneté française n'a cessé de faire l'objet de rapports de forces répétés entre acteurs colonisés et dirigeants métropolitains." Larcher, *L'autre citoyen*, 323.

<sup>871</sup> Whilst Larcher focuses on the period after the abolition of slavery she begins her study with the analysis of slave protests from the beginning of French Republic. What the author demonstrates is that the demands of the slaves were articulated using the vocabulary and ideas of the newly forming French Republicanism. Revolutionary ideas such as freedom and equal rights were mobilized as their claim to the "rights to the Rights of Man". In this contestation, as in other times during the post emancipation period, what becomes apparent is that in a system of racial domination, the inclusion of people of color into the political body or the social body challenged universalist principles and underlined the necessity to constantly re-negotiate who belongs to the national community and on what basis. "En désinvestissant la personne du Monarque de la source de la souveraineté pour s'inscrire dans un corps politique d'individus égaux associés par contrat en vue de délibérer sur l'intérêt commun, la modernité politique, entendue cette fois en son sens historique courant, avait introduit un principe radicalement nouveau dans la conception de la légitimité du pouvoir politique : un principe d'horizontalité dans l'institution du politique, impliqué par l'égalité entre individus autonomes. Au cœur du partage des droits se jouait l'élucidation des conditions d'un tel lien politique au fondement d'une communauté des égaux : avec qui, en effet, fait-on communauté ? Sur quoi se fonde le lien social et politique entre les citoyens ?" Larcher, *L'autre citoyen*, 69.

<sup>872</sup> Larcher, *L'autre citoyen*, 44.

actualization of human universalist principles.<sup>873</sup> Thus, it is not so much the “constant restarting of the Revolution” that finds a resonance in Nardal’s articles. Rather it is the understanding that because of the “right to opposition” which is written into universal rights, what defines equality and citizenship, for example, has the potential of always becoming otherwise. *L’autre citoyen* traces this phenomenon when there was a sudden change of the political and social body. After abolition, the black masculine population technically became “new members” of this “community of equals”. Larcher illustrates, however, the assimilation of ex-slaves into the political body as citizens turns into the “political production of alterity”<sup>874</sup> which legitimizes a hierarchization within a society based on equality. One of the key elements of Larcher’s findings for this discussion is that the relegation of ex-slaves in the Antilles to second-class citizens was legitimized through the colonial gaze. The latter perceived these “new citizens” as incapable of assimilating into “modern life” and living in conformity to “liberal and metropolitan values and customs”.<sup>875</sup> Equality became depoliticized in metropolitan’s anthropological and discriminatory prejudice against the ex-slave community in order to justify the separation between an “us” and a “them”. If an individual-citizen is identified by his “social independence and capacity to autonomy as well as [his] implication in the social fabric [...] in short any quality that socially attests to [his] reality as a political, responsible and autonomous subject”<sup>876</sup> then, in the eyes of the colonial authorities in the metropolis, an ex-slave could neither become such a subject nor practice his citizenship in working towards the “common good.” Racially distinguishing between citizens of the metropolis and second-class citizens in the colonies has an effect of territorializing the space of citizenship to the Hexagon and characterizes the colonial space as inherently compromised in the production of “good citizens”.

A cause de l’institution sociale qui les avait fondées, les sociétés coloniales post-esclavagistes étaient ainsi supposées *sui generis* impropres à produire les conditions sociales de subjectivation et d’autonomisation des individus. Pour le dire autrement, parce qu’ils avaient été façonnés par des sociétés structurées par l’ancienne division socio- raciale entre maîtres et esclaves, sociétés de ce fait potentiellement conflictuelles

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<sup>873</sup> However, it shouldn’t be ignored that the progressive aspects of her politics, for instance the urge for the recognition of women of color as fully human subjects within this nation state which fundamentally changes who is presently considered as Man or Citizen, would not have found a conservative backlash.

<sup>874</sup> “Dans l’alliance entre humanisme “moderne” et radicalité politique ou égalitarisme républicain, se dessinait donc déjà bien en amont du droit, l’assignation à une norme tacite de conformité aux exigences de la vie “moderne”, c’est-à-dire aux mœurs libérales et métropolitaines.” Larcher, *L’autre citoyen*, 327.

<sup>875</sup> Larcher, *L’autre citoyen*, 327.

<sup>876</sup> The full citation reads : “L’individu-citoyen, porteur des droits et membre Souverain, était identifié à tout ce qui attestait symboliquement à la fois son indépendance sociale et sa “capacité” d’autonomie, ainsi que son implication dans le tissu social (on pensera par exemple à l’importance de la domiciliation dans l’identification de l’individu) bref à toute qualité témoignant socialement de sa réalité de sujet politique, autonome et responsable, sujet rationnel et doué d’une volonté libre.” My translation, Larcher, *L’autre citoyen*, 51.

et instables, les ex-esclaves et leurs descendants apparaissaient aux autorités métropolitaines comme des « handicapés de la liberté » [...] Bien que libre et doté des droits civils et politiques du fait de son passé servile, l'ex-esclave ou son descendant se trouvait dès lors enfermé dans l'identité d'un citoyen toujours douteux, potentiellement incompetent, condamné à être un citoyen défaillant, bref un citoyen de second rang.<sup>877</sup>

One hundred years on, Nardal seems to respond to metropolitan conceptions and designation of second-class citizenry which is bound to the space of Martinique. The black feminine subject's genealogy as a descendant of slavery is not what precludes her from the political sphere nor determines her as an obstacle to freedom and the common good. Speaking to her feminine readership in Martinique, the author represents Martinican women as already "intelligent and free" and capable of exercising her capacity as an "autonomous subject" through the practice of voting, for instance. However, Nardal argues that there are obstacles in Martinican women's practice of citizenship which the author underlines as one's inaction, denial or non-recognition of social responsibility and political indifference. In "*Les femmes martiniquaises et l'action sociale*" the Nardal appears to infer that certain women's and upper classes' disregard for politics may belie the idea of "flawed" citizenry and "handicap to liberty."

Venez donc à nous, Femmes qu'attire un haut idéal de la vie. Venez à nous, de tous les points de l'horizon racial. Celles qui s'enferment dans une hautaine indifférence ne savent peut-être pas qu'elles travaillent à la destruction de leur personnalité tout comme les classes qui opposent à l'avènement de la justice sociale une aveugle volonté de non-intervention travaillent à leur propre destruction.<sup>878</sup>

Such could be said for her assertion that women are "unaware of the great honor that the Savior of France has bestowed upon [them] by raising [them] to the dignified level of citizens" in "*Abstention*". Another example is in her article "*Travailler*".

La Martinique, qui subit si douloureusement les contre-coups de l'incertitude matérielle et morale qui règne dans la Mère-Patrie, doit tirer de ces graves événements une leçon de sagesse. Les luttes intestines, l'appel à la violence et à la haine, s'ils procurent d'indéniables mais précaires succès, n'aboutissent jamais qu'à nous mettre en face de l'éternelle nécessité du travail. Si le peuple martiniquais veut s'épargner une effroyable dégradation, qu'il abandonne la conception à la fois enfantine, fantaisiste et déplorable de la vie matérielle qui a été jusqu'ici la sienne. Maintenant que des efforts méritoires sont faits pour égaler les salaires au coût de la vie, qu'il se mette résolument au travail.

Car il est grand temps que l'on commence à lui parler de ses devoirs.<sup>879</sup>

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<sup>877</sup> Larcher, *L'autre citoyen*, 328.

<sup>878</sup> Nardal, "Les femmes martiniquaises et l'action sociale," 46/47.

<sup>879</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Travailler," *La Femme dans la Cité* 17 (février 1, 1946): 3; in *Beyond Negritude* 60/61.

Written at the time that De Gaulle desisted from politics in 1946, the labor that Nardal refers to does not concern an individual's profession: "Whatever leader it has tomorrow, we hope that France regains not a taste for work – since the Liberation its workers have put forth an enormous effort – but the sense of its true spirit, the taste for liberty and a moral equilibrium that will allow it to reap the benefits of restored peace."<sup>880</sup> "These duties" are the specific ways individuals interact within society in which "internal conflicts" act as the roadblock to reforming the Republic. Coming from Nardal's perspective of Christian humanism, a subject's "destruction" because of his or her "indifference" or "infantile, unrealistic and deplorable conceptions of material life" prohibits the enactment of equality that Nardal considers to be based on the recognition of one's human dignity and thus what grounds the national collective. As such, the individual (or collective of individuals) denies the responsibility that one has for self and others and works towards his/her (or their) own destruction. As it was discussed above, if an individual does not already perceive him or herself as a valuable, equal and integral human subject, how can this individual affirm him or herself as such in the collectivity, recognize it in others and build a national community upon it? Where the metropolitan political production of alterity and second-class citizenry after the abolition of slavery overlaps with Nardal's vision is that both speak in civilizational terms. The *Rassemblement Féminin* states that one of their objectives is to "do civilizational work". In collapsing the social with the political it runs the risk of depoliticizing citizenship and equality to justify inequality, exclusion, and social determination of alterity. As Larcher argues, the metropolitan perspective of social determinism sees ex-slave communities as incapable of rising into the modernity of French civilization and thus incapable of being "good citizens". From this perspective, assimilation into the political body is amalgamated with assimilation into social and cultural values of metropolitan France and Frenchness. Nardal has clearly elucidated in her interwar fictional or theoretical texts that this metropolitan and discriminatory perspective makes it an impossibility for black subjects to assimilate into their social and cultural definition of Frenchness. Perhaps one major difference between metropolitan conceptions of citizenship and second-class citizenry and Nardal's is that whilst she may mobilize, at times, a conflagration between the social and political it is clear that she does not perceive Martinicans or Martinican women as inherently incapable of actualizing their citizenship. Another difference is that Nardal recognizes that the individual and the

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<sup>880</sup> "Quel que soit le chef qu'elle aura demain, nous souhaitons qu'elle retrouve, non le goût du travail – depuis la Libération ses ouvriers ont fourni un effort gigantesque – mais le sens de son vrai génie, le goût de la liberté et un équilibre moral qui lui permette de goûter les fruits de la paix retrouvée." Nardal, "Travailler," 58/59 - 60/61.

collective are intimately intertwined in so far as the experience of one's own human dignity affects how that self will establish relationships in the collective. Her humanist concerns are stronger, in a certain sense, than her analysis of the political intricacies of French Republicanism. Nardal is after all not a political scientist and the breadth of her intellectual and fictional work cover as many themes as the discursive forms they take. What does however come through all of her texts is a drive for a humanism that, as stated in her article "*Mise au point*", is understood as being "essentially of public interest". Nardal describes the objectives of *Rassemblement Féminin* in this article.

Le bien que nous entendons faire s'applique à la population dans son ensemble, sans aucune préoccupation d'ordre politique ou confessionnel [...] En outre, [notre programme] est basé sur des sentiments et des nécessités qui dureront aussi longtemps que l'humanité : solidarité, défense de la mère et de l'enfant, dignité de la personne humaine, défense de la santé des populations, etc.<sup>881</sup>

The association distinguishes itself from the pursuits of creating a political party and seeks not to discriminate on the basis of religious practice. Both, it is inferred, prohibit their objectives. Making human dignity a basis for Nardal's (or the *Rassemblement Féminin*'s) universalism it attempts to connect human subjects across differences rather than widening the gap between an "us" and a "them". Nardal acknowledges that there are obstacles, in respect to the history of slavery and the unequal relationships of power that structure society, but her civilizational work is to indicate that this can be overcome or made otherwise. Speaking of her engagement during this period she states,

On peut ainsi résumer "l'environnement" de ce que j'ai fait en Martinique : il y avait la petitesse du pays, les habitudes, les séquelles du colonialisme, de l'esclavage qui faisaient qu'on avait presque honte de soi-même ; le fait que la société est quand même gouvernée par des hommes...

Et la susceptibilité des gens, tout cela fait beaucoup d'obstacles sans soutien.<sup>882</sup>

Another distinction from the anthropological and social determinisms of the French metropolitan perspective is that Nardal grounds citizenship and equality as something that one becomes not something that one has. If social identity and political subjectivity are affirmed and conferred through one's actions and interrelations, then neither an individual nor collectivity can be fully determined. Both can always be otherwise and as such can fundamentally interrogate the

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<sup>881</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Mise au point," *La Femme dans la Cité* 3 (février 15, 1945): 3-4; in *Beyond Negritude*, 26/27.

<sup>882</sup> Nardal, Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 109.

principles of French Republicanism from within its structures, as Larcher demonstrated above. For Nardal,

Un monde se transforme sous nos yeux. Plus palpitant que celui d'un film à épisodes, le film des événements se déroule devant nous. A travers la douleur, les privations, dans la surprise, la déception, la joie, nous assistons à l'enfantement d'un nouveau monde. Nous avons appris qu'il ne fallait pas nous contenter de formules toutes faites car la réalité nous a infligé de dures leçons.<sup>883</sup>

From the space of Martinique, the population has the possibility to redefine the social, political, and ethical shape of France and French universalism. The population “must not be contented with ready-made formulas” that are announced from the metropole, or elsewhere. Rather the work is towards creating a new way of thinking and doing the national collectivity from the specificity of the Martinican population’s position as being those, or descendants of those, once subjected to the “reality that had inflicted hard lessons upon them.” Instead of waiting for societal transformation to come from the metropolis, now that Martinican women and Martinique are within “the community of equals” of the French Republic, what Nardal proposes for the Martinican population is to transform the way “we” do national collectivity from Martinique. Rather than continuing to build collectivities via the methods known, which are predicated upon domination, oppression, productions of alterities and geographical separations between a “here” of the Hexagon and a “there” of the colonies, Nardal calls upon Martinicans to “change the face” of their world through inventing and creating other ways of doing the national community and being human. This is Nardal’s reformist approach, as mentioned previously, and whilst it is not a revolutionary proposition, what she is proposing can, from a conservative perspective, be labelled as anti-republican because of the very fact that Nardal seeks to redefine who belongs to the national collective and what (territorial) shape France takes. From Nardal’s perspective, for this to become a possibility the work ahead is nothing less than a collective labor of a spiritual, cultural, social, and political transformation that remodels the national body and French identity.

Nardal’s focus on enacting citizenship is evocative of the understanding that historically access to universal rights has not guaranteed black subjects an equal place within this nation.<sup>884</sup>

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<sup>883</sup> Nardal, “En face de l’histoire,” 68/69.

<sup>884</sup> And for readers in the twenty-first century this continues to ring true for the period after departmentalization, whether in Martinique or other overseas French departments or territories. The unequal and discriminatory relationship that the metropole continues to have with these spaces and the relegation of the population to a kind of second-class citizenry has been well documented. Françoise Vergès denounces in *Le ventre des femmes* the gap between lived realities of (white) women in the metropolis and (black) women in Martinique and Guadeloupe in the

Political assimilation is therefore only one part of the story. Though Martinique may now be a French department and women are citizens, the foundation for building a “community of equals” and accomplishing a more just society is both presented as something to come and posited in the transformation of the way individuals and groups interact on this national stage. Through her prism of Christian humanism, equality and citizenship are not earned (meritocracy), rather it could be likened to the actualization, for instance, of the Gospel of Mathew 7:12 in the Sermon of the Mount: so in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. This conception of the individual intertwined to the collective, renders an individual extremely agentic and at the same time entirely responsible for his or herself and his or her actions. Formalized in respect to Martinican femininity, one effect of this is that it undermines the social determination of blackness that the white colonial perspective mobilizes to legitimize spatial separation either outside of the city or into the realms of second-class citizenship. Even if it is on a small scale of entering into dialogue at a café, an individual’s interactions with the world around and the relationships formed can challenge this world view. Nardal’s perspective that proposes a humanism which symbolically, materially, and geographically broadens the application of French universalism finds its reverberation in other contexts and statements that the author makes.

Par mon long séjour en France, j'ai rencontré des gens très intelligents, mais, aussi, hélas, beaucoup d'autres qui ne l'étaient guère. Toutefois, je garde une profonde reconnaissance à la France pour de nombreux bienfaits culturels. Et je ne supporte pas d'entendre ceux qui s'expriment très bien en français retourner leur culture contre la France et récuser leur assimilation. Je ne suis pas une assimilée et je ne l'ai jamais été. Mais je reconnais ce qui est.<sup>885</sup>

Similar to precedent fights for “the rights to the Rights of Man”, Nardal’s observation highlights that in some ways, regardless of political assimilation and institutional recognition, people of color were and are already a part of and within this nation. Thus, before Martinique’s departmentalization and universal suffrage, there are commonalities of Nardal’s approach to injustice and inequality in her vision of building communities otherwise. As it was analyzed in her fictional texts,

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period of the 60’s and 70’s. Her work attests to what extent political assimilation does not guarantee equal access to rights nor elimination of institutional forms of violence and domination based on class, race, gender, and sexuality. The example that Vergès investigates is that during the sixties and seventies whilst metropolitan women are contesting the universal right to decide freely what happens to one’s own body (right to abortion) the nation state was promoting abortion amongst the feminine population in the Antilles. What Vergès underlines is that this contradiction does not therefore mean the latter had greater freedom to choose what happens to their own body. Rather it is one effect of the criminalization and sexualization of blackness which legitimized a greater control over predominantly working-class women’s bodies, which included the practice of forced sterilization. Françoise Vergès, *Le ventre des femmes. Capitalisme, racialisation, féminisme* (Paris: Albin-Michel, 2017).

<sup>885</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 108.



particularly at the time of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, societal transformation will not take place in trying to fit in (culturally assimilating) to the defined spaces assigned to black subjects within the colonial French Republic. If there was any hope for such a pursuit the white supremacy and cohesion between European nations in their inaction to prevent (or outrightly support) this invasion, clearly showed that such a path was at best futile. Marked by an unprecedented move on Nardal's part towards communist and masculine dominated spaces in order to remain within black internationalist circles in the support of Ethiopia, she articulates how this event changes a black subject's relationship to "the white race" on a national or international stage. From this geopolitical situation, characterized by European fascisms, emerges the interrogation of the possibility that European nations would in fact propose anything different than continuing relationships of power, domination and legitimization of violence based on the production and determination of its non-human Others. On a social, cultural, and political level, Nardal's promotion of other ways of creating social experiences is understood as coming from within black communities by thinking and enacting that which unites across differences (racial solidarity). When Nardal states that her way of fighting against colonialism is to "reunite black people from all around the world" in the creation of her salon at Clamart it is not simply a gathering of black subjects in one place. Rather, it occasions an environment to establish and experiment with different ways of relating to others that have the potentiality, as she stated in her articles on citizenship, to change "the face of the world". Similar to when Nardal asks her feminine readership in "*Abstention: crime social*", "if we suffer from social relations that are now dominated by hatred, we could ask ourselves, 'what have we done to better the circumstance of people?'"<sup>886</sup> in the interwar period, one of Nardal's responses is the creation of a "we" in the salon. As Imaobong D. Umoren underlines, the regular meetings held at the Nardal sisters' home testify to the creation of space that "challenged the marginalization and isolation black women experienced and to help blacks from different parts of the world interact with each other and members of other communities."<sup>887</sup> Umoren's description foregrounds Nardal's critical perspective of the sexism that exists within the black cultural and political milieus and which effectively separate and ostracize women from equal participation within the symbolic, material and discursive spaces of black internationalism. In light of the above discussion, what can also be argued is that the salon is a place of experimentation in respect to how the "we" of a community is formed in order to pursue global black emancipation and real equality within the human community. It is putting into practice different types of relationality

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<sup>886</sup> Nardal, "Abstention," 74/75. This is a part of a passage cited above but this time employing the English translation.

<sup>887</sup> Imaobong D. Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists*, 17.

to self and to the world so that alternate propositions to European humanism – the community that it founds and the politics that it deploys – could potentially come to the surface.

## 6.2 The Sisters' Salon in Clamart

In 1931 while the Colonial Exhibition was underway in the *Bois de Vincennes*, Paulette, Jane, Alice and Andrée Nardal started their Sunday salons across town at their home on 7 rue Hébert in Clamart. Thanks to the work of literary scholars and cultural theorists, the sisters' salon that Paulette refers to as a “*cercle d'amis*”, has been placed as a pivotal space on the black internationalist map.<sup>888</sup> It is now established that the encounters of artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance and their black francophone colleagues in this space sparked into existence the Négritude movement. In practice what this meant is that thanks to the Nardals' fluency in English and their acts of translation, aided by colleagues and friends such as Clara Shephard, there was a greater ease and facility in establishing connections across linguistic and cultural barriers than in other black spaces of interwar Paris. This aspect of the social environment of the salon is concretized in the ambitions of *La Revue du monde noir* that, as previously mentioned, is a collaborative project which emerged from this space and was the first bilingual review to be published in black international spheres. Another aspect that characterizes the social scene created by the Nardals is that they opened their doors to a transnational, interracial, and religiously diverse community.<sup>889</sup> On a given Sunday one could find writers, musicians, intellectuals and activists like Alain Locke, Augusta Savage, Mercer Cook, Countee Cullen, Roland Hayes, Marian Anderson, Ralph Bunche, Claude McKay, René Menil, Leopold Sédar Senghor, Léon-Gontran Damas, Etienne Léro, Jules Monnerot, Louis-Thomas Achille, Nicolas Guillén, Léo Sajous, and Aimé Césaire. According to Achille, who gives the most extended account of the salon, the topics of conversation were largely around racial questions.

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<sup>888</sup> For example, the works of T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Brent Hayes Edwards, Jennifer Boittin, Imaobong D. Umoren, and Eva Gianocelli, that have been cited throughout this thesis have all contributed to recuperating the Nardals' œuvres and their salon following their (historical) erasure from the genealogies of black international movements of the interwar period. For instance, in early and important works on this period and transatlantic black communities, the Nardals' and other women creatives and intellectuals have been glided over in favor of masculine genealogies. An example is Michel Fabre, *La Rive noire de Harlem à la Seine* (Paris: Lieu Commun, 1985).

<sup>889</sup> There was however an “elite” aspect to the Nardals' salon which is reflected in the aims of *La Revue du monde noir*: “Donner à l'élite intellectuelle de la Race noire et aux amis des Noirs un organe où publier leurs œuvres artistiques, littéraires et scientifiques.” La Direction, “Ce que nous voulons faire,” 3.

On réfléchissait sur les problèmes coloniaux et interraciaux, sur la place croissante prise par les hommes et les femmes de couleur dans la vie française, on s'alarmait de toute manifestation de racisme pour aller le combattre ailleurs, avec des moyens appropriés.<sup>890</sup>

To think just of the African American contingency present, it is likely that the “manifestations of racism” stretched further than the French empire. The eclectic quality of the salon community is demonstrated more clearly in the discursive spaces of *La Revue du monde noir* in respect to the contributors, the issues discussed, and the literary forms represented. The review published many articles across the triangle evidenced by such titles as, “*Les noirs américains au Liberia*”, “*Le problème du travail en Haïti*”, “*Étude sur la biguine créole*”, “*La renaissance éthiopienne*”, “*La musique et le langage des Banda*”, “*Point de vue sur le Folklore nègre*”, and “*L’Institut normal et industriel de Tuskegee*” to name just a few.<sup>891</sup> The diversity of these intellectual and cultural reflections of “the black world” corresponds with the fictional texts and poetry printed within its pages: “To America” by Claude McKay, “I, Too” by Langston Hughes, “The Vagabond” by Flavia Leopold, “Haitian Poems” by Phillippe Thoby-Marcelin, “The Night Falls on Karukera Island” by Yadhé (Jane Nardal) “Recollection” by Magd. Raney, “Othello” by René Maran, “High Sea” by Gilbert Gratiant, or a chapter of *Fire in the Flint* by Walter White.<sup>892</sup> The few particularities of the Nardalian environment which have been underlined illustrates how creating the material grounds for certain forms of sociality has an impact on what is culturally, intellectually, and artistically produced or published. Another specificity that sets the salon apart is its location.

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<sup>890</sup> Louis-Thomas Achille “Préface,” in *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World: 1931-1932 Collection complète no. 1 à 6*, ed. Jean-Michel Place (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2012), xv.

<sup>891</sup> Léo Sajous, “Les Noirs Américains au Liberia,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 2 (1931): 81-84; Sénator Price-Mars, “Le problème du travail en Haïti,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 1 (1931):16-24; Andrée Nardal, “Étude sur la biguine créole,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 2 (1931): 51-53; Guetatcheou Zaougha, “La renaissance éthiopienne,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 4 (1932): 14-17; Felix Eboué, “La musique et le langage des Banda,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 6 (1932): 32-34; René Ménéil, “Point de vue sur le folklore nègre,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 3 (1932): 37-39; Clara W. Shephard, “L’Institut normal et industriel de Tuskegee,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 2 (1931):15-18.

<sup>892</sup> Claude McKay, “To America,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 1 (1931): 38; Langston Hughes, “I, Too,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 2 (1931): 34; Flavia Leopold, “Le Vagabond,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 6 (1932): 38; Phillippe Thoby-Marcelin, “Poèmes haïtiens,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 5 (1932): 32-33; Yadhé, “Le Soir tombe sur Karukera,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 3 (1932): 42-43; Magd. Raney, (Marie-Magdaleine Carbet) “Image oubliée,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 2 (1931): 45-47; René Maran, “Othello,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 3 (1932): 33; Gilbert Gratiant, “Pleine Mer,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 3 (1932): 4; Walter White, “A chapter XVII from *Fire in the Flint*, a novel,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 5 (1932): 37-43.

Situated outside the French capital and its symbolic frontiers of power, the sisters' residence also spatially distinguishes itself from other salons at the time and the collective happenings of black political, literary, and artistic communities. Practical matters, such as affordable rent and larger apartments may have informed their choice of neighborhood. At the same time, the literal and metaphorical crossings that the sisters and their guests undertake travelling to-and-fro to the salon installs different itineraries to the common circuits of diasporic communities and of Paulette Nardal's fictional characters and settings. The centralized locations of the Latin Quarter of "In Exile" and "Guignol Ouolof" or Montparnasse of "On défrise les cheveux crépus", are spatially in contradistinction to the sisters' experimentation with building different types of relationality and communities. It is to recognize that the decentralized place of this salon echoes social, cultural, political, and racial divergences from other black and white, anglophone and francophone, collective spaces in the metropolis that Nardal develops in her fictional worlds. The salon is other to the problematics of assimilation that takes place within "On défrise les cheveux crépus" and it is also different to the black intellectual milieus that Elisa's life ran alongside but never within. Speaking of the black landscapes of this city, the sisters' residence is located otherwise to the salons of René Maran or Louis-Thomas Achille that are found on rue Bonaparte and rue Geoffroy St. Hilaire respectively. The Clamart salon is also an elsewhere to the masculine occupied political meetings or "clubs" and the socialization that takes place in such spaces. If one approaches the topographies of women run salons of interwar Paris, the "cercle d'amis" distinguishes itself spatially and demographically to the salons held by Nathalie Barney or Gertrude Stein on the Left Bank.

The salons of women like Natalie Barney and Gertrude Stein in some way replicated the race/gender divide they left in America. Barney set up a "formal", essentially white feminist colony that transcended class, and Stein preferred to cultivate relations with predominantly male French and American expatriate community in her "casual" Parisian salon.<sup>893</sup>

Barney's efforts to create spaces for the invention of feminine homosexual identities and collective experience outside of the pressures of heteropatriarchy in Paris, nevertheless continued in terms of race the puritanism of the United States. As it was demonstrated in the discussion of Fauset's *Plum Bun*, white puritanism and the norms of heterosexuality in the American context are understood through racial distinction and the criminalization or deviancy

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<sup>893</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 53. See also Sheri Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

of black feminine and masculine sexualities.<sup>894</sup> One could argue that the differences between the Nardals' gender inclusive, transnational, interracial, interethnic and religiously diverse salon and those created by Barney and Stein simply highlight a variation of interests, lived experiences and cultural belongings. In part this is true. However, from a broader perspective three factors are of note. The first is to look at the commonality between these women, namely their upper-class backgrounds. With the aristocratic inheritance of Barney and the bourgeois background of Stein these two women reside within Paris and have no need to earn an income. Though the Nardals also come from a bourgeois background, this is not the same for the sisters. National belongings aside, the articulations of class and race locate these women differently in Paris and affects the social circles that are frequented and thus the ways in which communities are built.<sup>895</sup> The second is that norms of (white) sociality, whether Barney or Stein are conscious of it or not, have shaped the whiteness of these spaces.<sup>896</sup> As Nardal fictionalized in "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*", French colonial culture predicates social cohesion on (racial) resemblance and though this is articulated differently through legal segregation in the United States a similar normalization of sociality is proposed. With the exception of Augusta Savage, which attests more to her character than the community found in Barney's or Stein's salon, women of color were not found there. At the same time, one major distinction between the salon of Barney or Stein and that of the Nardals, is that on the artistic, cultural, and political agenda these are spaces open to sexuality, and more specifically, feminine homosexuality. Whilst the topographies of sexuality of the formers' salon, on the level of race, come with problems associated with American puritanism, the silence on (homo)sexualities within the Nardals' salon is significant. The sisters' creation of an environment that seeks to bring people together across differences and experiment with another type of community formation has one notable exception of evacuating difference based on (homo)sexuality within this space. As Paulette Nardal develops in "*Guignol Ouolof*" to break the norms of community building it is

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<sup>894</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>895</sup> Barney's salon often took place midweek and started during the day which automatically precludes those who work within a typical professional structure of a nine to five type routine.

<sup>896</sup> This is not true for all members of the white communities. For instance, the poet H.D (Hilda Doolittle) her partner at the time Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman) Paul and Eslanda Goode Robeson were friends and artistically collaborated together in the production of the film "Borderline". They were the actors in this film that addressed racial and sexual oppression within a narrative of exile and non-belonging. Whilst what is represented in "Borderline" can be critiqued in terms of race, gender, class and sexuality, the differences between this collaborative project and the friendships established to the sociality that emerges within Barney's or Stein's salon, for instance, is significant. See Ellie Jones, "Strangers in the Village? On 'Borderline' and Belonging," *Another Gaze*, April 7, 2016. Article last consulted 24th of May 2022: <https://www.anothergaze.com/borderline-kenneth-macpherson-1930-blackness-belonging-pool-group/>. Another example of interracial collaboration is Nancy Cunard's *Negro Anthology* published in the interwar period. Nancy Cunard, ed. *Negro: An Anthology* (London: Wishart, 1933).

underpinned by the understanding that the individual is open to being put into question. Similar to Nardal's articulation of citizenship, equality, and the work in creating a more just local, national, and international community, the way that individuals engage and interact with the world around lays the foundation for collective experience to become otherwise. In respect to sexuality and the Nardalian space, what this infers is that differences in respect to sexuality would in some way be an obstacle to that pursuit. Perhaps this speaks to potential (unquestioned) prejudices the sisters may have, or their limitations to incorporate questions of sexuality within the frame of black international solidarity and collectivity. For Claude McKay, for instance, it would be to acknowledge that he had to leave his homosexuality at the door rather than having the possibility to live this aspect of self as integral to being a human and equal subject that the Nardals search to make foundational (human dignity) to the collectivity. This said, one could estimate that the social environment of the salon encouraged individual change and transformation in the promotion of connections across national, racial, cultural, gender or linguistic barriers that, unconsciously or not, effect the norms of socialization. In its peripheral location, it creates different paths to the normal circulations and itineraries within black social topographies and collective experience. To an extent then, it disturbs the familiarity of the everyday - with the way things are or how things are done - thus exposing the subjects that congregate in this space to the potentiality of perceiving things in a different manner or forming connections to others in a different way. In the wider narrative of immigrating to the metropolis, this dynamic of destabilization when arriving or living in new spaces is what Paulette Nardal qualifies as an "uprooting". Formulated in her article for the *La Revue du monde noir*, "*Éveil de la conscience de race*", and as discussed in Chapter One, this uprooting is intimately intertwined with becoming conscious of one's racial identity. There appears to be a connection between ideas of "uprooting" and the sisters' creation of a space that is an elsewhere, different, or unfamiliar to contemporary social environments being proposed. The fact that *La Revue du monde noir* emerged from this context at the salon is one reason to believe that this may be true. As it has also been mentioned previously, the salon is a space that responds to the greater marginalization that black women experienced within black international milieus and the national community. At the same time, it does not seem easily reducible to this specific function. Paulette Nardal observes that salon attendees like Senghor and Césaire "took up the ideas tossed out by us and expressed them with more flash and brio... We were but women, real pioneers, let's say that we blazed a trail for them."<sup>897</sup> The trail blazed

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<sup>897</sup> Paulette Nardal letter to J.L Hymans, dated November 17, 1963, cited in, Jacques Louis Hymans, *Léopold Sédar Senghor: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1972), 35.

in and to Clamart is a venture in the pioneering of new landscapes for experiencing self and the collective that actively seek to cultivate connections otherwise to a separation of an “us” and a “them” and bring close the distances that set people apart whether on the black international map or the colonial geographies of national belongings.

### 6.2.1 The Politics of Creating Collectivities

Paulette Nardal’s assertion about her anti-colonial practice is in “gathering black people from around the world” is one of the few first-hand accounts from the sisters’ perspectives on the topic of their salon. Another is a general remark that Paulette Nardal makes about the happenings within the sisters’ home.

Nous avons eu le fameux quintette des “Fisk Jubilee Singers”. Je me souviens du récital qu’ils ont donné pour moi, chez moi à Clamart. Ils étaient amenés par une amie qui s’appelait Miss Mann et qui prenait des leçons d’orgue avec le comte de Saint-Martin, lequel était l’organiste de Notre-Dame. A partir de ce moment-là, j’ai reçu nombre d’artistes et aussi, ce qui est intéressant, les accompagnateurs de ces artistes qui m’ont donné beaucoup de conseils, de “tuyaux”, d’accompagnement du chant, ce que faisaient les noirs américains. L’accompagnateur de Roland Hayes... Nous avons beaucoup collaboré. Autour du piano, il donnait énormément de conseils.<sup>898</sup>

The transcultural exchange of musical practices was to have long lasting effects on Nardal’s own creative production, for instance in her choir *La Joie de Chanter*. With respect to the salon, the emphasis on black musical performance expands the idea that this is strictly a literary one.<sup>899</sup> For instance, Louis-Thomas Achille underlines,

Alternant avec le piano, lectures ou récitations des poèmes antillais de Daniel Thaly, E. Flavia Léopold ou ceux de Gilbert Gratiant, écrits en créole, apportaient un intermède littéraire. Il arrivait aussi qu’il se formât une chorale improvisée pour déchiffrer « spirituals » ou « blues » noirs américains.<sup>900</sup>

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<sup>898</sup> Nardal, Grollemund, *Fierté de femme noire*, 24. Whilst it is known that Roland Hayes was an attendee of the salon it is not entirely clear if Nardal is referring to one Sunday or if this particular event of the Fisk Jubilee recital was on another occasion.

<sup>899</sup> Victor Sablé, in his *Mémoire d’un foyalais*, gives a description that underlines the literary aspects of the salon. “J’allais parfois chez Paulette Nardal. Forte corpulence, beau port de tête, visage noir et fin rayonnant d’intelligence, tenant son salon littéraire, elle recevait les écrivains noirs américains de la première génération, comme Richard Wright et Claude McKay, des étudiants parmi les plus brillants candidats aux grandes écoles comme Bazabas et de Montaigne, où se piquant de la littérature, comme Léon Damas and Raphaël Tardon.” Victor Sablé, *Mémoire d’un foyalais*, 69.

<sup>900</sup> Achille, “Préface,” xvi.

The décor of the sisters' home also resonates with the tone and atmosphere of the diverse crowd and the multifaceted artistic practices of the attendees.

Le mobilier des deux pièces communicantes, salon et salle à manger, ne reproduisait en rien le décor d'un salon de la bourgeoisie traditionnelle de France ou des Antilles. Quelques fauteuils anglais, aérés, confortables et légers fournissaient les commodités de la conversation ; celles-ci, assez naturellement, se déroulaient en anglais.<sup>901</sup>

Within the space of Clamart, the Nardals transform what they were familiar with from their bourgeois upbringing in the familial home and invent something different. The house is reflective of their intercultural lives and politics. Achille situates the salon in the aristocratic tradition of French salons.

Grâce à ses animatrices, le fameux "salon" de Clamart reprenait sur un mode contemporain, exotique, international et interracial, cette fonction récréative et humanisante des salons français de l'Ancien Régime qui développèrent en Europe, non plus la rhétorique universitaire, mais l'art de la conversation au sens dialectique et convivial du terme. Des réunions typiquement mondaines, on évitait le snobisme, la pédanterie, l'intrigue, sans pour autant exclure le désir et le plaisir de plaire. D'ailleurs, l'absence de fortune personnelle de cette famille de fonctionnaires coloniaux et une modération toute féminine conféraient à ces rencontres une sobriété que n'entamait point la bonne humeur.<sup>902</sup>

Arguably the overlap that Achille perceives with this tradition and the salon at Clamart depoliticizes both the space itself, the practice of its creation and the environment nurtured. One reason for this is because of the gendered articulation of his point of view. Achille's reading of what makes this space different appears to be reducible to "feminine" qualities.

Une dominante féminine réglait le ton et les rites de ces après-midis conviviaux à l'opposé d'un cercle corporatif ou d'un club masculin... Ni vin, ni bière, ni cidre de France, ni whisky, ni café exotique, ni même ti-punch créole ne rafraîchissaient les gosiers. Seul le thé à l'anglaise coupait ces rencontres qui ne dépassaient pas l'heure du dîner et que réglait l'horaire des trains de Paris.<sup>903</sup>

Achille's observations witness, in part, the evacuation of sexuality within this space for the control over the social lubricant that alcohol can be and the inhibition of desires that it can encourage appears unwanted in this space, whether for men or women. Because Achille understands this through a gendered perspective, framing the tone of the space as evidence of the "feminine" characteristics of the organizers, it does suggest that, to a certain degree, the non-

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<sup>901</sup> Achille, "Préface," xv.

<sup>902</sup> Achille, "Préface," xvi.

<sup>903</sup> Achille, "Préface," xv.



existence of alcoholic consumption was to prevent articulations of power in unwanted advances of men in the frame of heterosexuality. What can be asserted is that this environment does create a different atmosphere to the masculine clubs, for example, that were taking place in Paris. However, what is being argued for is that what made this salon different is not merely its “feminine aspects”. The ambiguity of Achille’s tone between condescension and valorization of the sisters<sup>904</sup> correlates with other overly gendered determinations of the salon at Clamart as being too “rose colored” and “superficial” or in positing the sisters as “midwives”<sup>905</sup> to the Négritude movement. Aside from redeploing normative assumptions of what defines femininity, the consequence of this kind of gender reduction is that it does not allow for the sisters’ practice to be seen as “a fight against colonialism”. Seeking to build a collectivity otherwise to the social norms predicated by society is a practice that is not perceived as doing politics. Paulette Nardal will herself reinforce the idea that what is taking place in the salon, or *La Revue*, is apolitical. In Eslanda Goode Robeson’s article “Black Paris II” printed in *Challenge* after her interview with Paulette Nardal, the former underlines this in her description of *The Review*.

It was Dr Sajous’s idea originally. He had noticed that there was very little community of tastes between Negroes of different nations, and in different parts of the world; he felt if he could found a common journal of some kind, to include all sorts of articles, scientific, literary, geographical, etc., and a correspondence page on which all kinds of questions from Negroes everywhere could be answered, it would help draw Negroes all over the world together. The only forbidden subject, the only taboo, is politics because it is dangerous.<sup>906</sup>

What this passage infers is that politics are taboo, much like sexuality, in this discursive space because it goes against building a black international community. At the same time Nardal frames the creation of communities as a political action and fight against colonialism. This poses less of a contradiction if the perceived and asserted apoliticism of the salon (or *La Revue*) is understood from a certain definition of politics that the social fabric of Clamart redefines. Spatially separating the sphere of politics (masculine) and the spheres of “conviviality” or domesticity (feminine) reestablishes a heteropatriarchal understanding of the world and its forms of sociality. Paulette Nardal underlines that this type of politics, historically defined and practiced by (white) men, excludes difference and expresses a disregard for aspects of humanity

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<sup>904</sup> For example Achille states: “Rares seront les lecteurs qui auraient pu connaître, dans leur jeunesse, ces Martiniquaises dont la personnalité mêlait hérédité africaine, éducation familiale, culture créole, formation universitaire et chic parisien. Dans Paris, on se retournait sur leur passage conscient d’avoir croisé des êtres exceptionnels, restés si longtemps, trop longtemps, loin du rendez-vous de toutes les élites de la capitale de la France.” Achille, “Préface,” xvi.

<sup>905</sup> Edwards, *Practice of the Diaspora*, 157, and Sharpley-Whiting, *Négritude Women*, 17.

<sup>906</sup> Eslanda Goode Robeson, “Black Paris II”, *Challenge: A Literary Quarterly* 1, no. 5 (June 1936): 11.

such as human dignity, equality, and kindness that she finds important in bringing people together.

Durant cette même période, je me suis trouvée avec quelques socialistes ou communistes lors de conférences du Comité de Coordination contre l'invasion italienne en Éthiopie. Quelques-uns étaient si sectaires que j'en étais horrifiée. Une telle attitude me choque. Je proteste contre la haine.<sup>907</sup>

Therefore, whilst this way of doing politics is “taboo” because of the norms of its practice, it does not necessarily follow that the salon is not a political space. Achille remembers that conversations on political party leanings “were avoided” but it does not mean that this social space was not doing politics in an alternate way.<sup>908</sup> It infers that the internal disputes of “sectarian” attitudes or political party affiliations take away from the common ambition of racial solidarity on an international level. In creating a space that disentangles relationships of power in order to build collective ties between cultural, national, racial, and gender differences, the political aspects of instituting a “we” are going to look and feel different. And this different image of doing politics, the experience of it or the potentiality that it is proposing is not kept open in its determination as “feminine”. This pre-echoes Paulette Nardal’s days with the *Rassemblement Féminin* in which the social (building relationships based on equality and respect for human dignity) is intertwined with the political. In both the salon and the *Rassemblement Féminin* the strategy is that these environments adopt “political neutrality” in terms of party affiliation for it could create rifts that detract or run counter to the experimentation of social cohesion.<sup>909</sup> As the citation above infers and as is also evident in Nardal’s articulations of what women could bring to “the City of Men”, there are clearly things missing and counterproductive in the masculinized spaces of what is defined as politics. Furthermore, with *La Revue du monde noir*, Nardal and her colleagues promote its apoliticism in order to achieve their objectives. In *Colonial Metropolis*, Jennifer Boittin argues that “the review’s apolitical tone was inspired by a desire to escape the persecution reserved for militant papers, but also to obtain partial funding from the Ministry of Colonies.”<sup>910</sup> The apoliticism that is not very apolitical, uses the system against itself and plays with the normalized conceptions of how politics look. This highlights, then, the subversive actions of the sisters’ community building and to what extent creating sociality otherwise,

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<sup>907</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 108.

<sup>908</sup> Achille, “Préface,” xv.

<sup>909</sup> “De telles ramifications expliquent notre éclectisme, expliquent le fait que nous nous tenions volontairement au dehors des partis pour axer notre action sur le social et sur les besoins éternels de l’humanité. De telles ramifications expliquent l’orientation que nous avons donnée au Rassemblement Féminin. Neutralité politique et confessionnelle.” Nardal, “Les femmes martiniquaises et l’action sociale,” 46.

<sup>910</sup> Jennifer Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 151.

whether in the salon or in the discursive space of the review, is not perceived as politically, socially, and culturally challenging normalized ways of making society. From the perspective of the French government this blindness is short lived. The Ministry of Colonies and the special colonial section of the police force eventually realized that establishing connections across difference is, in practice, something that fundamentally puts into question the colonial world view.

As the existence of such [police] reports demonstrate, the paper was never truly apolitical, since the very act of founding a bilingual, international, and multiracial review in the 1930's Paris was provocative. Furthermore, the presence of women editors at *La Revue du monde noir*, as at *La Dépêche africaine*, gave women greater control over their writing and editorial discretion. Thus, several articles addressed the intersections between gender and race. Authorities quickly modified their assessment of the challenges posed by both the social dynamics and politics of such a publication and as a result the Ministry of Colonies withdrew funding, leading to an abrupt termination of the review in April 1932.<sup>911</sup>

Fostering friendly, creative, intellectual, professional, and sometimes romantic relationships other to the dictates of colonial society disturb the stability of pre-established norms and encourages that they be interrogated by others.<sup>912</sup> Overdetermining the Clamart salon as “feminine” thus forecloses the possibility of perceiving and understanding politics in another way at the same time as it closes interrogations on different forms of sociality for it too stabilizes or fixes an environment that is always becoming other to itself. A concrete example of this is the Négritude movement that is propelled into motion from the specific social encounters of the salon, and which could not have been foreseen prior to its creation. Paulette Nardal recognizes this herself when she states retrospectively that the salon blazed the trail for what the négritude writers would go on to do. It is also reflected in Brent Hayes Edwards’ descriptions of the environment of the salon.

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<sup>911</sup> Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 152. As it was demonstrated in Chapter One, Paulette and Jane played a pivotal role in the organization and creation of space for feminist perspectives within the pages of *La Dépêche africaine*. See Chapter One.

<sup>912</sup> For example Boittin cites the attention drawn by Louis-Jean Finot, one of the cofounders of *La Revue de Monde Noir*, and his interracial family. The independence of Madame Finot who was a celebrated violinist in the clubs at Montmartre was particularly suspicious for colonial authorities. “Of these individuals [who cofounded and collaborated with the review] only white Finot made the police nervous. [...] The police were unnerved by Madame Finot’s independence, and they concluded that while her husband might be socialist, more alarmingly he was driven by negrophilia to become the principal instigator behind *La Revue du monde noir*. Thus, while seemingly shifting their assessment from the political to the social, onlookers were in fact reflecting upon how disturbances of the social fabric – through a somewhat nontraditional marriage that also happened to be interracial – was a sign of anti-French politics.” Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 152.

The Nardals' *cercle d'amis* amounts to the argument that *l'internationalisme noir* requires what we might term the institutionalization of reciprocity: the creation of open and informal spaces to allow certain kinds of transnational, translinguistic dialogue rather than any particular social doxology.<sup>913</sup>

It is almost inevitable then, that some attendees established their own trajectories from within this space. It is also the case for Etienne Léro, Jules Monnerot and René Menil, all attendees of the salon and contributors to *La Revue du monde noir*, and who created their own more Marxist leaning group of intellectual and cultural exchange from which emerged the periodical, *Légitime défense*.<sup>914</sup> Another example is how Paulette and Jane Nardal describe the becoming of *La Revue du monde noir*. Based on an interview with the two sisters in Morne Rouge in August of 1973, Achille cites Paulette Nardal stating,

C'était une chose à laquelle nous n'avions jamais pensé. Cette revue, ce mouvement, c'est une chose qui devait arriver. Elle est arrivée "comme ça" comme une éclosion brusque.<sup>915</sup>

These unforeseen or "just like that" moments underline the indeterminate or indeterminable aspects of the social environment created within the salon. As it was highlighted throughout this chapter, for Nardal, determinations of subjects that are articulated through racism or sexism are mechanisms of a sociality that do not cultivate relating to one's or another's differences. In the space of the salon that topographically, linguistically, culturally, aesthetically, socially, and politically proposes new landscapes, it is possible that the difference of this environment, rather than being read as "feminine" or "apolitical", is because it resisted its own determination. Such an interpretation of the salon and the Nardals' socio-political visions that they put into practice is similarly proposed by Brent Hayes Edwards.

It is crucial to recognize the experimentalism and innovation in this institutional building, in this effort to create a new kind of migrant black communal space in Paris – a space sometimes identifiable as "bourgeois," sometimes identifiable as "feminist," sometimes identifiable as "intellectual" sometimes identifiable as "Anglophile," but more generally characterized as shifting and subtly defiant to our anticipations.<sup>916</sup>

To return to the example of Nardal's "uprooting" and the destabilization that this infers in coming into a new environment, the salon in its indeterminate and "shifting" qualities echoes a similar

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<sup>913</sup> Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 156.

<sup>914</sup> Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists*, 21.

<sup>915</sup> Achille, "Préface," viii. Reference to the citation is given as "Extraits d'entretiens enregistrés au Morne Rouge (Martinique) en août 1973."

<sup>916</sup> Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 156.

understanding. In “*Éveil de la conscience de race*” that which “awakens” the subject to the moment of seeing oneself and the collective differently (racial conscientization, race pride) is in subjective experience with alterity, either in oneself or in others. Though in this article it is in respect to being othered by racist acts in a majority white population, “the uprooting” that inspires one not to accept the racism he or she is subjected to has an echo with destabilizing community formation. In the salon where connections are encouraged across difference and to recognize one’s own difference (indetermination) is clearly not the same thing as being in front of the hostility of anti-black world (determination). However, building, imagining, or intellectualizing new landscapes that seek alternate forms of sociality has similar effects of “the uprooting and estrangement [Antilleans] felt in the metropolis”. As Nardal writes in her first article published in *La Revue du monde noir*, “*Une noire parle à Cambridge et à Genève*” it cultivates a “sense of dissimilarity but not of inferiority.”<sup>917</sup> As it was articulated in *La Femme dans la Cité*, recognizing and valuing one’s own dissemblance, “worth”, “equality” “human dignity” thus opens the potential to form relationships that recognize the human dignity and differences in others. “A few years ago,” Nardal states in the opening of “*Éveil*”,

One could not speak about slavery or proclaim his race pride of being of African descent without being considered as an overexcited or at least as an odd person. Such concerns roused no deep chord in the mature or in the young Antilleans’ thought. It is in fact that this almost disdainful indifference seems to be transforming itself into a wondering interest among the older generation and into a genuine enthusiasm among the younger.<sup>918</sup>

The resonance in the logic of racial “awakening” and Nardal’s presentation of feminine citizenship can be found on occasions such as these and the creation of the salon in general. It is inaction or “indifference” to the world around – the lack of “wondering interest” or “enthusiasm” – that creates barriers for a subject to access the possibility of seeing or experiencing oneself and the world otherwise. Thus, in Nardal’s articulations of citizenship and “civic responsibility”, the creation and experimentation of socially and politically doing things otherwise in the salon, or in her Antillean characters choice at the café to enter into dialogue with the peanut vendor, all emphasize a subject’s agency in individual and social transformation at the same time as it renders

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<sup>917</sup> Paulette Nardal, “*Une noire parle à Cambridge et à Genève*,” *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of The Black World* 1 (1931): 37.

<sup>918</sup> Nardal, “*Éveil de la conscience de race*”, 25. As *La Revue* is a bilingual newspaper and the translations were undertaken by the Nardals, either the English or French version will be used with its corresponding passage placed in the footnotes. “On ne pouvait parler d’esclavage ni proclamer sa fierté d’être descendante des Noirs Africains sans faire figure d’exaltée ou tout au moins d’originale. Ces questions ne provoquaient, chez les jeunes comme chez les jeunes aucune résonance profonde. Et voici que cette indifférence quasi méprisante semble se muer en un intérêt étonné de la part de l’ancienne génération et en un enthousiasme réel chez la nouvelle.”

the subject responsible for his or her actions, ways of being, and thinking. Thus, the salon can be seen as a response to this (political) responsibility and the sisters' way "to fight against colonialism" in their actions of creating a space that disturbs geographical, symbolic, and material fixity and familiarity and thus experimenting in a different foundation for the self and the community. It is discursively echoed in the presentation of *La Revue du monde noir*. In addition to those previously cited, the direction outlines the humanist principles that create "ties" between black people on an international scale.<sup>919</sup>

Par ce moyen, la Race noire contribuera avec l'élite des autres Races et tous ceux qui ont reçu la lumière du vrai, du beau et du bien, au perfectionnement matériel, intellectuel et moral de l'humanité.

Sa devise est et restera :

Pour la Paix, le Travail et la Justice.

Par la Liberté, L'Égalité et la Fraternité.<sup>920</sup>

Both within and beyond the French nation, the search to contest the non-universal application of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* in fights for justice, peace and global black emancipation is understood to transform and broaden the spaces of humanism. What Nardal demonstrates is that on the level of the individual or group of individuals, subjects' engagements with the world around open up the possibilities that other narratives can be told about different kinds of humans without reducing these differences to spaces of Otherness. On the level of cultural politics of black internationalism and literary production, this finds its expression when Nardal underlines in her article "*Éveil*" that the poems of Claude McKay and Langston Hughes show how "the young Negro writers, rejecting all inferiority complex, 'intend to express their individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame.'"<sup>921</sup> This resonates with what has been highlighted in Nardal's work, namely living humanist principles starts on the level of the everyday (individual/collective action) and in the environments readily accessible to individuals or her characters. For Nardal, relating with alterity – "dissimilar but not inferior" – in oneself or in the collective proposes another image and logic that challenges the West's ideas of Man. What she perceives in the work of McKay and Langston Hughes is that "without fear or shame" they express themselves as human subjects regardless of the non-human status conceived by the West.

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<sup>919</sup> The objectives of the Direction cited in Chapter Four in respect to building an international community were : "Créer entre les Noirs du monde entier, sans distinction de nationalité un lien intellectuel et moral qui leur permette de se mieux connaître, de s'aimer fraternellement, de défendre plus efficacement leurs intérêts collectifs d'illustrer leur Race, tel est le triple but qui poursuivra La Revue du monde noir." La Direction, "Ce que nous voulons faire," 3.

<sup>920</sup> Direction, "Ce que nous voulons faire," 3.

<sup>921</sup> Nardal, "Éveil de la conscience de race," 27. "Ils ont pu constater que les américains, ayant écarté tout complexe d'infériorité, expriment tranquillement leur 'être individuel à la peau noire, sans crainte et sans honte.'"

Telling different stories from a different point of view is aligned with Nardal's understanding that oneself and the collective can always be otherwise (indetermination) and thus resists being fixed. Both structurally counteract the mechanism of the humanist requirement of a non-human Other as a point of departure for thinking the Self and understanding of who is human. Simultaneously however, there are moments in Nardal's work when her humanism as the foundation for the local, national, and global community encounters problems in so far as it remains within the horizons of intelligibility of Western thought. As it will be investigated in the discussion to come, on certain occasions in Nardal's theorization of black international politics and paths towards common goals such as global black emancipation, she reproduces some cultural logics of Western humanism and creates contradictions within her work at large.

### **6.3 Nardal's Black Internationalism and the Persistence with Humanism**

Nardal's efforts to rethink a humanism that stretches beyond the world view of European nations, and more particularly France, is the structural apparatus that is ever-present in her oeuvre. It informs her cultural aesthetics and the multiplicities of Antillean feminine identities as agentive subjects and creators of culture as addressed in Chapter One and Four. She explicitly mobilizes her conception of humanism in her socio-political vision of citizenship and equality based on the recognition of human dignity during the period with *Rassemblement Féminin*. It has also been brought to the fore in her fictional representations of various types of communities and in the salon as another social space to do politics and collectivity differently. Taken together, her oeuvre participates in forging a narrative of what it means to be human. Across the multiple discursive, geographical, cultural, social, and experiential spaces that Nardal engages with, she is presenting and thinking other experiences of being human than that of Western Man. She gives images to what that looks like, what form it takes and what sound or voice it creates. Within the cultural and political milieus of black internationalism, whether in France or across the Atlantic, one of the important aspects of black cultural poetics and intellectual thought is racial conscientization of being "dissimilar but not inferior" that, as outlined above, Nardal perceives in the work of McKay and Hughes. Noted throughout the thesis, the specificity of Nardal's trajectory is that her lived experience of coming into racial consciousness has been largely through her interaction with African American culture and

particularly the Spirituals. It was in experiencing this musical tradition that pride in her blackness “made sense” to her.<sup>922</sup> To put it alternatively, her identification with blackness fills out as being human within the horizons of intelligibility. This cross-cultural identification intertwines into the uniqueness of Nardal’s path which takes place at a spatial and cultural juncture of the Hexagon, of Martinique and of the African American cultural geographies of the United States. It also informs the paradigm from which she theorizes black internationalism and the global human community. One example of this in Nardal’s work so far addressed is Elisa’s dreamscape which is the site of her humanization after the character’s dehumanization in the racist acts that she experienced in the metropolis and where Nardal wrote the African American Spirituals into Elisa’s story. As the readers know from “*On défrise*”, Nardal opens the door for the possibility of thinking collectivities that do not pertain to the territorialization of identity or familial-biological lineage that founds what and who Western humanism understands as the Self and by consequence its non-human Others. In reconceptualizing humanness, Nardal tells a different story to Man’s origin by refusing to look back into the times and spaces of the production of its non-human Others with Western eyes. This arises for instance in the *Guide*, where the authorial voice works to recodify historical spaces of slavery such as the port and the plantation. In her narratology, Nardal draws out and represents the humanity and (despite everything) agency of black subjects during the time of slavery. Her representations of Martinican working-class subjectivities as free and agentive actors in their daily working lives within these past material and symbolic worlds of their social and material death undermines Man’s story. This stretched even to the phenomenological level of the repetition of gesture of the cane workers, which within the Western humanist perspective were/are the (enforced) actions of a non-human or not-quite human Others. Resignifying these movements as the expression of skill, freedom, and practices of human subjects, Nardal goes beyond the institutionalized, discursive, and symbolic horizons of Western intelligibility in so far as these actions were always already a signification or expression of human subjects. As such, it destabilizes the dialectics of freedom/slave, Self/Other that are foundational to Man. Simultaneously it creates other significations, images, and lineages of what it means to be human and to be a human collectively. Where the conflicts arise for Nardal in the telling of this counternarrative that forms another kind of humanism is that her work posits the Enlightenment understandings of becoming conscious of the Self as the fundamental moment to her story. Without it, black people from around the world would not be conscious of themselves and the global human community in which they belong. In her

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<sup>922</sup> See Chapter 4.



“*Éveil de la conscience de race*” Nardal writes, “we are fully conscious of our debts to the Latin culture, and we have no intention of discarding it in order to promote I know not what return to ignorance. Without it we would have never become conscious of our real selves”.<sup>923</sup> To a certain degree, this reflects the very real fact that because Western humanism emerged along with colonialism it changed the conceptions of the world and humans’ place within it. To return to a geographical, material, symbolic and intellectual space-time prior to this, for a large part of the globe and its populations, is an impossibility. Nevertheless, at times when Nardal theorizes another humanism, which is informed by her specific trajectory and her relationship with African American culture and racial conscientization, her positing of self-consciousness, and rationality as the “benefits” of colonization works against a more humane humanism that she seeks to think and communicate. This finds numerous expressions and various consequences in her work and the first instances that will be addressed is her argument against the invasion of Ethiopia.

### 6.3.1 The Invasion of Ethiopia and International Racial Solidarity

Nardal engages in black international political struggles against Italy within the geopolitical landscape of the rise of European fascism that will lead both to the invasion of Ethiopia and to the Second World War. As underlined earlier, the call for racial solidarity across the globe in order to impede Italy’s invasion was unprecedented at this point in history and transformed the ways in which the black diaspora related to this black empire and in general to other countries on the African continent. In June 1935, Nardal’s letter to the League of Nations was published in the communist organ *Le Cri des Nègres*, in which she enumerates the international black communities that have come together in defense of Ethiopia.

Des représentants des groupements de couleur du monde entier, sans distinction de nationalité, de parti or de classe, (Côte de Somalie, Algérie, Aframérique, Cuba, Guadeloupe, Madagascar, Maroc, Martinique, Guyane, Tunisie, Ouest-Afrique, Syrie, Chine, Indochine, Japon, Sud-Amérique, Amérique centrale, etc...) profondément émus de l’évolution du conflit italo-éthiopien, et affirment leur solidarité avec le peuple éthiopien.<sup>924</sup>

When Nardal argues for the immediate intervention in Ethiopia she frames it as the assurance of world peace which is threatened by the rise of Italian and Nazi fascisms.

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<sup>923</sup> Nardal, “*Éveil de la conscience de race*,” 31. “Nous nous avons pleinement conscience de ce que nous devons à la culture blanche et nous n’avons nullement l’intention de l’abandonner pour favoriser je ne sais quel retour à l’obscurantisme. Sans elle, nous n’eussions pas prise conscience de ce que nous sommes.”

<sup>924</sup> Nardal, “On nous prie d’insérer,” 1.

Un comité, composé en majeure partie de Noirs s'est formé à Paris pour affirmer sa solidarité avec le peuple éthiopien. Le Comité a été constitué en dehors de tout parti politique. Il convie toutes les personnes animées de l'esprit de justice à éclairer l'opinion publique française sur la nécessité d'empêcher le conflit italo-éthiopien dont les conséquences s'avèrent dangereuses pour la Paix mondiale.<sup>925</sup>

Her appeal to the dangers of world peace that this event poses pre-echoes somberly the eventuality of World War Two and the Holocaust. By mobilizing democratic agreements and humanist principles such as justice, Nardal highlights the hypocrisy and white supremacy in play on this geopolitical stage. The author reminds this institutional body of the promise made to guarantee that Ethiopia remains an independent country ("the convention of 1906"). Nardal finishes the letter with:

Suivant les dispositions des articles 11, 12, 13, et 15 du Pacte de la S.D.N [Société des Nations], dont l'Éthiopie a demandé plusieurs fois l'arbitrage, il serait souhaitable que la S.D.N. prit, pour sauvegarder l'indépendance de l'Éthiopie, des décisions franches et dignes de la civilisation occidentale.<sup>926</sup>

Nardal articulates the League of Nations' non-response to Ethiopia's demand for arbitrations in civilizational terms. Using the West's own ideological rhetoric against itself she infers that European colonial powers are not fighting for their purported ideals of humanism when it comes to the independence of an African nation.<sup>927</sup> The blanket critique of European white supremacy during this conflict is furthered in her article "*Levée des races*", (re)published in the Senegalese newspaper *Le PÉRISCOPE africain* in October 1935 after its initial appearance in the French *Métromer*. Reiterating the global racial solidarity that was ignited because of this conflict, her argumentation points directly to the problem of the West's conception of who is Man. The last sentence of the article states, "is the pain of an Italian mother faced with her massacred son more poignant than that of an Ethiopian mother?"<sup>928</sup> In short, the question asks the readers, who counts and who decides who counts? In the body of the text, Nardal argues that though black subjects within European empires are "so loyal, so assimilated, so conformist" "how could they remain indifferent, in spite of their loyalty, to the fate of the last truly free black empire?"<sup>929</sup> This reference to the problematics of fitting into white colonial society as a

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<sup>925</sup> Nardal, "On nous prie d'insérer," 1.

<sup>926</sup> Nardal, "On nous prie d'insérer," 1.

<sup>927</sup> This is not to suggest that this perspective of the Italo-Ethiopian war, the League of Nations' inaction, and the reasons for that inaction, is how it happened, or that there were no other factors involved. The importance to this discussion is how this conflict was perceived within black international circles and more specifically Nardal's work.

<sup>928</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Levée des races," *Le PÉRISCOPE africain* 7, no. 318 (octobre 19, 1935). Cited and translated in Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 164. The original was not found to consult.

<sup>929</sup> Nardal, "Levée des races," 163.

black subject seemingly overlooks the experiences of alienation felt by the characters of “Acts of Grace” and “In Exile” for example. In her article that calls for racial solidarity on an international level and appeals to white nation states, it seems that the specificities of feminine experience of anti-black racism of her characters does not find a place in this frame. The author does present, to a certain degree, her argument through the prism of gender because of her reference to “Italian mother” or “Ethiopian mother”. However, the contradiction remains and announces others within the article. For example, Nardal describes the unicity of the human community in familial terms. In “*On défrise*”, Nardal exposes that the workings of white social cohesion, founded as it is, on familial, genealogical, and biological ties, is used as a function or legitimation of the dehumanization of blackness. Thus, in “*Levée des races*” the author’s critical voice of her fictional worlds is forgone when it comes to hierarchical differences and relationships of power that run through European societies and how communities are understood. This hinders Nardal’s argumentation to a certain degree. Considering that this article is asking for immediate action on the part of France and other European nations it could be a calculated strategy. Furthermore, she does not completely override the specificities of black experiences in an anti-black world. Reframing the argument presented in an international context as well as in the battle between democracy and fascism that this war represents, the author directs her attention to demonstrating transnational racial solidarity and processes of racial conscientization.

In a state of brutal shock of events, black populations disseminated around the world – who still yesterday were so indifferent to one another – suddenly found a common soul again in the common defense of Ethiopia... [and] the reasoned element of this awareness of racial solidarity is on the one hand a reaction against the feeling of inferiority that one sought to inculcate in the *Noir*, and on the other hand his original sense of justice.<sup>930</sup>

In line with her black international politics, coming into racial consciousness and pride of one’s blackness as a fully human subject creates the ground to come together within the human community and defend black freedom and independence. Activism in favor of Ethiopia is the actualization of the humanist values of “justice” and “peace” that the Western nations are ignoring, in part, because black subjects are not fully seen by them as human subjects. The black international humanist perspective from which this text speaks is placed in contradistinction to the inaction of these “modern nations” and highlights the paradoxes, and hypocrisy of “Western civilizations” and their designation of Man. As in other moments of Nardal’s work, those who endure the effects of structural racism are the ones that guarantee and fight for France’s own

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<sup>930</sup> Nardal, “*Levée des races*,” 163.

ideals: “the races of color evolve and imbue themselves with the intellectual currents that traverse modern nations”.<sup>931</sup> This described allegiance, or “loyalty”, with political and cultural values of the West is furthered in Nardal’s next logical step. She underlines the complete disregard for such humanist principles by the fascist states of Italy and Germany. The author describes them as currently “devouring niggers” (“*bouffer du nègre*”).<sup>932</sup> In her otherwise controlled address, this sudden irruption of anger resounds loudly from the pages. On the part of (some) European nations, they yet again, make clear the extreme anti-black violence that underpins their logics of imperialism. Though Italy, Germany and the current Ethiopian invasion appear to be the object of her anger the text does infer that it is also witnessing an anger towards (historic) violence of European colonization. She concludes that what is needed for or from Western democracies, other than direct action in Ethiopia, is a more humane practice of colonialism.

The implacable laws of nations’ economic expansion are happily compensated, in the modern conscience, by the evolution of the idea of colonialism toward more humane ends. This selfless emotion found in many men of the white race proves to us that the human family *is one*, in spite of ethnic differences.<sup>933</sup>

In the context of France and its colonial ideologies of the civilizing mission, for example, the appeal to a more humane colonialism is also a call for a broader definition of a human. Therefore, by mobilizing a universalist perspective, that is inclusive and applies to all – “in spite of ethnic differences” – the text exposes the contradictions and paradoxes of European and French values at the same time as it frames the Italo-Ethiopian conflict as the fight to protect and struggle for the values and ideals of Western civilization. As it was demonstrated in the above letter addressed to the League of Nations, what Nardal underlines is that these modern states are not fulfilling their duty and legal agreement (evidenced when she lists the codes of the “Pact”) or living up to their own ideals in practice. Overall, the strategy is to override, to a certain degree, the critique of white supremacy (and patriarchy) that underpins the geopolitical context and argue or address these modern nations as if their understandings of universalism were as inclusive as the author purports and that the human community is, in fact, “one”. Though Nardal places the human project as being put into action by black subjects (racial conscientization, racial solidarity) her logic can’t escape the overall structure of the Western world view, here expressed in the urge for a colonialism with more “humane ends.” As noted previously, the unicity of the human community is expressed in familial terms and what the text articulates in respect to the black

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<sup>931</sup> Nardal, “Levée des races,” 164.

<sup>932</sup> Nardal, “Levée des races,” 164.

<sup>933</sup> Nardal, “Levée des races,” 164.

populations represented, is that they are a part of this global family in so far as they have adopted ideals of the West. The oneness of the global community is made possible only if “the races of color” - who “yesterday [were] so indifferent to one another” – evolve within and towards the “intellectual currents” of Western modern nations, of Enlightenment ideals and humanist perspectives. As such, in “*Levée*”, Nardal does not break with the structure of the time – colonialism – for thinking how the human collectivity can come together. This is, in part, a consequence of situating European understandings of self-consciousness as pivotal to her cultural politics and the humanism that informs it. To analyze how this takes shape in Paulette Nardal’s “*Éveil*” the discussion will turn to her sister Jane Nardal’s “*Internationalisme noir*” (1928). Jane Nardal’s article, which appeared four years before “*Éveil*” (1932), distinguishes itself also by the fact that it was published in *La Dépêche africaine* whose readership, as it has been noted, is mostly Antillean and in which the Nardal sisters played a major role in shaping the editorial line to incorporate a space for gender critique. What, however, resonates across both is the place given to African American culture in the telos of racial awakening, the solidarity that it conditions and thus the fights of global black emancipations that can take place.

### 6.3.2 Jane Nardal’s “*Internationalisme noir*”

Jane Nardal’s intellectualization of black internationalism, its global pursuits and the humanist perspective that structures it is outlined in her “*Internationalisme noir*”. In this article the author represents Antillean identity that she coins as “Afro-Latin” and speaks of the fostering of racial pride in the realities of global anti-black racism. Jane Nardal illustrates that by creating new significations of interracial and intercultural identities one forges a path towards understanding oneself differently.

A idées nouvelles, mots nouveaux, d’où la création significative des vocables : Afro-Américains, Afro-Latin. Ils confirment notre thèse jetant une [valeur] nouvelle sur la nature de cet internationalisme noir. Si le nègre veut être lui-même, affirmer sa personnalité, ne pas être la copie de tel ou tel type d’une autre race [...] il ne s’ensuit pas pourtant qu’il devienne résolument hostile à tout apport d’une autre race. Il lui faut, au contraire, profiter de l’expérience acquise, des richesses intellectuelles, par d’autres, mais aussi pour mieux se connaître et affirmer sa personnalité.<sup>934</sup>

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<sup>934</sup> Jane Nardal, “Internationalisme noir,” *La Dépêche africaine* 1 (février 15, 1928): 5. The whole article is translated and reproduced in T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 105-107. “From these new ideas, new words, whence the creative signification of the terms: Afro-American, Afro-Latin. They confirm our thesis while casting a new meaning on the nature of this Black Internationalism. If the negro wants to know himself, assert his personality, and not be a copy of this or that type from another race

Jane Nardal mentions the benefits of white civilization in thinking through identities that have emerged from colonial entanglements and histories of slavery. At the same time, Nardal argues for the creation of a new vocabulary and new images that are distinct from the representation and understanding of blackness within the Western white perspective. On this “path of maturity” that “is barely trodden” she aligns “Afro-Latin” and African American cultural identities as the vanguard with the latter pioneering the way forward.<sup>935</sup> Because the article is framed within universal and humanist narrative, Nardal’s argumentation mobilizes a telos that sits on a comparison between those who are ahead and those who are not as advanced on this road.

Être Afro-Américain, être Afro-Latin, cela veut dire être un encouragement, un réconfort, un exemple pour les noirs d’Afrique en leur montrant que certains bienfaits de la civilisation blanche ne conduisent pas forcément à renier sa race.<sup>936</sup>

Nardal is quick to underline “the millennial traditions” of African populations “of which they are justly proud” and “the bitterness” felt in European colonization. However, the “peculiar effect of colonization” is bringing universal humanism to Africa which, for Nardal, means that “Africans” can now unify, “in racial solidarity, and, in spite of the feuds between the conquering peoples” link “together tribes who hadn’t the slightest idea in this regard.”<sup>937</sup> This cultural logic of enlightened Man is reiterated when Nardal states in respect to her fellow Antilleans,

Et déjà, aidés, encouragés par les intellectuels noirs américains, les jeunes Afro-Latins, se séparant de la génération précédente, se hâtent de rejoindre la masse qui évolue dans ce sens, de la dépasser même pour pouvoir mieux la guider.<sup>938</sup>

Nardal does not infer that by consequence those behind on this path are intrinsically inferior. And yet in the theoretical demonstration of this evolutionary road there are those that are located or temporally fixed as being behind, those that are in motion and moving beyond and those that

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[...] it does not follow from that, however, that he becomes resolutely hostile to all contributions made by another race. On the contrary, he must learn to profit from other’s acquired experience and intellectual wealth, but in order to know himself better and to assert his personality.” Nardal, “Black Internationalism,” 106.

<sup>935</sup> “Along the barely trodden path, American blacks have been the pioneers, I believe. To convince oneself of this, it suffices to read *The New Negro* by Alain Locke, which is slated to appear in a French translation by Payot.” Nardal, “Black Internationalism,” 106. Interestingly this pre-echoes Paulette Nardal’s description of the sisters as pioneers in the creation of the salon.

<sup>936</sup> Nardal, “Internationalisme noir,” 5. “To be Afro-American, to be Afro-Latin, means to be an encouragement, a consolation, an example for the blacks of Africa by showing them that certain benefits of white civilization do not necessarily lead to the rejections of one’s race.” Nardal, “Black Internationalism,” 106.

<sup>937</sup> Nardal, “Internationalisme noir,” 5, “Black Internationalism,” 106.

<sup>938</sup> Nardal, “Internationalisme noir,” 5. “And already helped and encouraged by black American intellectuals, the young Afro-Latin, distinguishing themselves from previous generations, hastening to catch the masses up with those who are involving to the effect, will go beyond them to better guide them.” Nardal, “Black Internationalism,” 107.

are already in front. It would be difficult to state that Jane Nardal is arguing for racial domination and oppression, yet, the articulation of the benefits of universal humanist ideas cannot escape the universe in which Western humanism is thought with colonialism. Here, even if the call is for a new vocabulary in order to represent blackness otherwise to the (white) colonial perspective, the narrative of progress and evolution presented cannot break with this overarching structure. In Nardal's logical articulation whereby Afro-Latins or African Americans are further along the path because they have emerged within the "benefits of white civilization" (self-consciousness), this genre of being human is territorialized as the fixed vantage point which closes the openness to seeing or perceiving "African Blacks" as having another way of knowing and being human. Nardal identifies Antilleans and African Americans together by differentiating them from Africans and the African space. Thus whilst, as with her sister Paulette, the intercultural exchange, creolization of identities and relationship to African American culture is informed by Jane's individual lived experience, what takes place in the argument for unicity of the (black) human community is a mapping that places this particular perspective onto Africa. This is similar to the problematics of Jessie Fauset's mapping strategy of African Americans onto the French space in her novel *There is Confusion*. It invisibilizes other ways of being and knowing as much as it tends to foreclose a relationship to others as subjects as the Antillean character of "*Guignol Ouolof*" realized after putting her initial perspective of the peanut vendor into question. Turning now to Paulette Nardal's portraits of African American women and her theorization of "racial awakening" in "*Éveil*" the readers see how similar conflicts arise and how they function within the texts themselves.

### 6.3.3 Humanism and the Cultural Politics of Racial Awakening

Nardal's portraits of Grace Walker and Augusta Savage, published in *La Revue du monde noir* and *La Dépêche africaine* respectively, are reflective of the creation of feminine epistemological and cultural genealogies in Nardal's contemporary frame. In both articles, Nardal foregrounds the achievements and success of these two women, whom she knew personally, at the same time as the author puts into play the possibility of cross-cultural, and at times interracial identification for her black and white readership. In this way the portraits are underpinned by conceptions of identity that are open and multiple and are therefore aligned with Nardal's vision of black cultural aesthetics and politics that she has developed elsewhere in her fictional spaces and journalistic work. In her portraits of Savage and Walker, however, the descriptions and interpretations given override, at times, the differences and multiplicities of black cultural identities. To begin with the article "Une femme sculpteur noire à Paris", Nardal tells of her meeting with the artist Augusta Savage at her atelier in Paris. One of the first things that the author underlines is that it was not necessarily an easy trajectory for Savage to be in Paris. The latter's voyage to the "old continent", was supposed to happen in 1923 but because of racial barriers in the United States, as Jessie Fauset fictionalized in *Plum Bun*, this particular opportunity fell through.

En 1923, elle obtient avec 99 autres étudiants, des Américains blancs, une bourse qui lui donnait la possibilité de poursuivre ses études au Conservatoire de Fontainebleau. Mais le Comité, apprenant qu'elle était de race noire lui supprime cette bourse.<sup>939</sup>

Nardal reports that in 1929, with the aid of fellow African Americans "Mrs. John E. Mail and Eugene Kinckle Jones of the National Urban League", Savage secures a fellowship from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Because Nardal includes the specificities of Savage's trajectory in her article it identifies the differentialized experience of being black women that they both share within international mobilities and black modernist itineraries. The author underlines the importance of racial solidarity, and as she states in "Éveil", it is women who perceived such a necessity long before their masculine colleagues. In the representation of this articulation of global anti-blackness, but localized in the United States, Nardal sets up for her majority francophone and Antillean readership of the *Dépêche africaine*, a moment of recognition of shared experience with those who come from different national and cultural places. This is

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<sup>939</sup> Paulette Nardal, "Une femme sculpteur noire," *La Dépêche africaine* 3, no. 27-28 (août-septembre 30, 1930): 5.



furthered when Nardal describes the aesthetics of Savage's sculptures and her perception of the artist in the "modest studio", situated on "*l'impasse de l'Astrolabe*".

Miss Savage est de ces artistes qui se dégagent assez facilement de la discipline classique pour laisser s'épanouir leur originalité. Son inspiration est avant tout d'ordre racial, chose assez rare chez les races conquises et transplantées. C'est pourquoi elle réussit aisément dans le genre moderne si imprégnée d'art nègre. La "Tête de jeune fille" et son "Danseur nu" sont remarquables.<sup>940</sup>

Nardal continues with the description of one of Savage's works that reproduces "a black divinity" born from the artist's imagination "nourished" by readings of African literature and legends. The readers can see that at moments like these, Nardal is tracing connections with the spaces across the triangle namely Europe, the Americas and Africa but from a black perspective. "The modern genre" that in Europe has its own (problematic) relationship to African art ("art nègre") in the *vogue noire*, is not exactly the same when spoken, or here sculpted, from a black feminine perspective. Augusta Savage may find success in this "modern" artistic milieu, though Nardal is careful to distinguish her aesthetics from her (white) contemporaries'. When Nardal arrives at the sculpture "Gamin" this spatial and cultural juncture of the triangle loses the African element and, to a certain degree, the African American context. Speaking to her majority Antillean audience, she frames her interpretation within a French and Afro-Caribbean cultural perspective.

Tous les gens de couleur reconnaîtront dans le "Gamin" que nous reproduisons ici la réplique en sombre du gavroche parisien. Augusta Savage a vraiment la vision aiguë du réel ainsi que le don de le reproduire. Nos lecteurs apprécieront tout ce qu'il y a d'agression, de gouailleur, de je m'en-fichiste, de débraillé dans ce buste et cette tête de gamin, dans la ligne de la bouche et celle du menton.<sup>941</sup>

This passage allows for identification between the readership and the sculpture. "All people of color" recognize "The Child" as a response to the Parisian Gavroche who is the character from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. On the one hand, the originality that Nardal perceives in Savage's work that reinterprets afro-descendance in modern black expression gives an image to what Nardal finds paramount to the fostering of race pride and racial "awakening" in black internationalism. It textually echoes Nardal's path of racial consciousness which takes place across the spaces of Antillean, French and African American cultures. On the other hand, in her interpretation of "The Child" with the reference to Victor Hugo, it is clear that she is perceiving

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<sup>940</sup> Nardal, "Une femme sculpteur noire," 5.

<sup>941</sup> Nardal, "Une femme sculpteur noire," 5.

it from her specific francophone Antillean identity. Assuming that “all people of color” will recognize or identify with the object in the same way, Nardal tends to place other interpretations of Augusta Savage’s work into the background. One possible reading of “The Child” that comes to mind is that it may signify a specific character within African American literary tradition or cultural imagination. Another could be that the figure is drawn from the imagined world presented in “African literature” that Savage is reported to be inspired by. In this way, Nardal’s presentation of Savage’s work does not leave the text or her sculpture open to other possible meanings in its framing in cultural specificity that the reference to the Parisian Gavroche exemplifies. To turn to her other article and almost a year later when Nardal publishes her piece on Grace Walker in the first issue of *La Revue du monde noir*, the readers know that what contextually differentiates these two texts is the creation of the salon in Clamart. Nardal’s interactions with African American writers find their influence in Walker’s article and the literary genealogy that she gives at this time.

Akin to her article on Savage, Nardal spotlights Grace Walker’s achievements in “*Une noire parle à Cambridge et à Genève*” and furthers the creation of feminine genealogies of black internationalism. Being sure to underline that Grace Walker is “the first Negro Woman to have spoken” at the very traditional institution of Cambridge, Nardal opens the article with,

Parmi les jeunes Américaines de couleur qui viennent acquérir le “fini” intellectuel ou artistique que seul donne le vieux continent et surtout la France, nous avons eu le plaisir de rencontrer Miss Grace Walker, maintenant de retour aux États Unis.<sup>942</sup>

Nardal ties the culture of “the old continent” and “particularly France” into an article that is reporting on an event that is not located there and is not the subject of Walker’s speech. The polish acquired in French culture infers that in comparison to white American or British culture the former is the more refined. Establishing a distinction between different white national cultures, Nardal presents her perception of the uniqueness and specificity of “black American life” presented in Walker’s speech.

Avec beaucoup de simplicité, elle parla de la vie noire en Amérique. Avant de lire et de commenter les poèmes qui étaient au programme, elle remplaça très habilement le Nègre dans le cadre de la vie américaine. Elle reconstitua l’atmosphère dans laquelle, au sortir d’esclavage, le Noir africain a évolué vers une forme de civilisation dont la conférencière est la vivante image. Avec une clarté froidement objective, elle retraça

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<sup>942</sup> Paulette Nardal, “Une noire parle à Cambridge et à Genève,” 36. “Among the colored American women who come every year to acquire that fine intellectual or artistic touch which only the old continent and especially France can give, we have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Grace Walker who has now returned to the States.”

les efforts qu'il dût faire pour s'adapter à un milieu étranger, le plus souvent hostile, à une religion et à une langue qui n'étaient pas les siennes.<sup>943</sup>

Highlighting the evolutionary journey from enslavement to freedom, Nardal describes Walker as the embodiment of this "form of civilization". She is the "living image" of what a black subject can achieve and be despite this extremely violent historical and contemporary context. Thus, with Walker represented as a subject, Nardal continues by paralleling this evolutionary road with the genealogy of "Negro literature" which, by contrast, is strictly masculine. It is unclear to the readers whether the history given was a part of Walker's conference or not. Nardal states in the following paragraph that "Miss Grace Walker recited certain poems from Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes and Jean Toomer" but in the literary history that Nardal presents, Walker is not referred to.<sup>944</sup> Her absence is felt also because African American women writers are similarly not a part of Nardal's depiction. The author may well be presenting her own understanding of African American literature, which is supported in part by the fact that in "*Éveil*" she gives a very similar genealogy and, contextually speaking, the readers are aware that the four writers cited above were attendees at her salon. With this ambiguity in mind, Nardal frames this evolutionary road from "first inarticulate babblings by which he [a black subject] tried to express his failures, his sufferings, his humble joys and sometimes his revolt" to the "magnificent flowering of modern Afro-american poetry".<sup>945</sup>

La poésie aframéricaine moderne, où on le voit vivre avec sa faculté d'oubli, son culte de la joie, son réalisme puissant, le sentiment de son étrangeté et non de son infériorité, et par-dessus tout, celui de la solidarité raciale que créent la commune souffrance et les humbles tâches courageusement acceptées. Le Nègre, dans son milieu où sévissent le machinisme et la standardisation, a conservé sa sensibilité profonde, sa fantaisie, son élan vital qui font de lui la véritable et seule poésie de la vie américaine.<sup>946</sup>

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<sup>943</sup> Nardal, "Une noire," 36. "With a quiet simplicity, she spoke of the life of the Negro in America. Before reading and commenting upon the poems which were on the program, she very skillfully framed the Negro in his American background. She reconstituted the atmosphere from which he has developed, up from slavery, toward a form of civilization of which the reader is a living image. With a composure, bordering on cold objectivity, she retraced the efforts that the Negro had to make in order to adapt himself to a strange and for the most part hostile environment, to a religion and a language which were not his own."

<sup>944</sup> Nardal, "Une noire," 36.

<sup>945</sup> Nardal, "Une noire," 37. "Afro-american" is spelt in this way in the original: "... dès ses balbutiements, cris inarticulés traduisant ses souffrances, ses échecs, ses humbles joies et parfois sa révolte, jusqu'à la magnifique éclosion de la poésie aframéricaine moderne."

<sup>946</sup> Nardal, "Une noire," 37. "There he is pictured, with his characteristic faculty of ready forgetfulness, his gift of laughter, his concrete conception of life, his sense of dissimilarity but not inferiority, and above all the link of racial solidarity which comes from common suffering and humble tasks courageously accepted. The Negro, in an environment tyrannized by machinery and standardization, has preserved his capacity for profound emotion, his sense of fantasy and his vital spontaneity which give to America its only true source of poetry."

In the subject's affirmation of his or her "strangeness but not inferiority", as it has been outlined above, is the foundation for thinking the human collectivity otherwise and enacting racial solidarity. Nardal's movement from "inarticulate babblings" to the flowering of modern African American poetics follows the movement from enslavement (dehumanization) to freedom in the discovery of him or herself, "the Negro", who is understood as embodying the universal human subject for "he" expresses the poetics and "truth" of "American life." It is he who represents the voice of all African Americans perceived as the symbiosis of white and black American culture. Of note is that this contradicts Nardal's representation of Walker. Though depicted in her subjectivity as a black woman, Walker is overtaken by the narrative given of "the Negro" voice. This is highlighted because the article itself is speaking of Walker's speech given at the conferences. The voice of "the Negro" eclipses, to a certain degree, her voice and allocution. Because Nardal gives a very similar literary timeline in "*Éveil de la conscience de race*", but reframed in a comparison to Antillean literary genealogies, the discussion will develop the other contradictory elements of such an articulation with the analysis of this text.

Setting her article in a comparative study, the opening lines sketch the main objective of the article which is the analysis of racial awakening "among Antillean Negroes". Throughout this thesis Nardal's "*Éveil*" has been broached. What has been drawn out thus far is that "racial awakening" emerges from the experience of "uprooting" felt by Antillean subjects in migrating to the colonial metropolis which sparked the need for black solidarity, particularly felt by women, within this space and on an international scale. What has also been addressed is that Nardal posits the benefits of French culture as being its enlightened humanist conception of Self. The conclusion of this text is that without it, Antilleans would not be aware of their "true selves". Before arriving at this point of the article, Nardal sets the scene of the context and underlines how black Antillean subjects surrounded by a majority white population in the Hexagon experienced their difference and were differentialized in the center of empire.

Cependant, la conscience de race s'était éveillée chez certains Antillais, mais il leur avait fallu pour cela, s'éloigner de leur petite patrie. Le déracinement qu'ils ressentirent dans la métropole où le Noir n'a pas toujours jouit de la considération qu'on semble lui témoigner depuis l'Exposition coloniale, leur avait fait, en dépit de leur formation latine, une âme nègre. Pourtant cet état d'âme ne s'extériorisait pas.<sup>947</sup>

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<sup>947</sup> Nardal, "*Éveil de la conscience de race*," 25. "However certain Antilleans had already been stirred to race consciousness, but it was the result of having left their small native islands. The uprooting and the ensuing estrangement they felt in the metropolis, where Negroes have not always been so favorably received as they seem

Both in the experience of everyday acts of racism or in the realizations that the metropolis was not the idealized capital that black subjects had been taught it was, as Roberte Horth fictionalized in *“Histoire sans importance”*, this movement across the Atlantic was a personal and collective putting into question of understandings of blackness. The migratory trajectory is intimately tied to the epistemic becoming of self. Nardal’s demonstration of this process of racial conscientization is described as something endogenous to lived experiences. As the article continues, in order to show the difference between African American culture and Antillean culture the author creates a timeline in which Antilleans are behind on the itinerary to the realization of racial pride and awareness of one’s own equality as a subject. As it can be garnered from the discussion above, for Nardal, those who are already there are African Americans. Nardal first speaks of the difference in “attitude” between these two cultures which she grounds in the contextual specificities of American and French anti-blackness.

L'attitude des Antillais en ce qui touche leur propre race, si différente de celle des Noirs américains, s'explique d'une façon évidente par le libéralisme qui caractérise la politique de la France vis-à-vis des peuples de couleur. [...] En outre, il était naturel que les Antillais, issus de croisement des deux races, noire et blanche et ignorants de l'histoire de la race noire, finissent par tourner vers l'élément qui leur faisait plus d'honneur.<sup>948</sup>

Read with the first passage cited, a paradox becomes apparent within Nardal’s argumentation. In the former, the author amalgamates Antillean and African identities in her use of “le Noir” in the context of the Colonial Exhibition. Here, Nardal suggests that Antilleans prefer to identify with French white culture because they were ignorant of the history of the “black race”. However, from the colonial perspective, this amalgam between Antilleans and Africans in respect to blackness far preceded, in the histories of slave trade and the plantations, Antilleans choosing to identify with the race or “element” that gave them “honor”. Nardal’s argument carries on, to a certain degree, the colonial perspective by mobilizing “le Noir” and stating that Antilleans come from “white” and “black” race, whereas in her other texts she has gone to great lengths to demonstrate the ethnic diversity of the Antillean population. In comparison to the United States context, Nardal states that what distinguishes France is its political liberalism.

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to be since the Colonial Exhibition, had given them a real Negro soul, in spite of their Latin education. Yet they never made articulate this state of mind.”

<sup>948</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 25-26. “The general attitude of the Antillean Negroes towards race problems, which is so different from that of the Afro-americans, can be obviously explained by the liberal spirit which characterizes the politics of France towards colored peoples. [...] Besides it was natural that the Antilleans who are generally half castes of Negro and white descent, imbued with their Latin culture and ignorant of the history of the black race should in the end, return to the element that honored them most.”

Nardal could be referring to France's civilizing mission and the ideology (or myth) that people of color can participate fully in national culture, belong to the national community, and become "truly French". This is one of the false promises of French humanism for in reality, as Nardal and her colleagues experience when coming to the metropolis or fictionalize and intellectualize in their works, this is not the case. By 1932 when "Éveil" appeared in *La Revue du monde noir*, Nardal had already published, for instance, "In Exile" that addresses acts of everyday racism and assimilation. Referring to *Is God French?* by Sieburg, Nardal writes,

Selon l'écrivain allemand, l'absence de préjugé de couleur chez les Français provient de leur certitude de faire du Noir, en un temps relativement court un, vrai Français.<sup>949</sup>

Strategically citing a European author instead of voicing this as her own idea, it nevertheless has the effect of downplaying anti-blackness within the material symbolic and discursive spaces of France. It also continues with the amalgam that she presents in her text and thus the colonial perspective. Though, in respect to the United States context, Nardal illustrates the understanding that anti-blackness does not have the same articulations according to each nation, in her comparison she both reduces the complexity and covers over the historical violence of French colonization in the Antillean or African contexts. By consequence the author affirms, to a certain extent, the ideological masking of French anti-black racism in this nation's self-conception as being the home and exporter of the Rights of Man. French white culture as opposed to white American culture manifests within this text as being more civilized and one of the reasons of Antillean belated "racial awakenings".

Tout autre était la situation chez les Noirs américains. Bien qu'ils ne fussent pas, eux non plus, de race pure, le mépris systématique dont l'Amérique blanche a toujours fait preuve à leur égard, les a poussés à rechercher, au point de vue historique, culturel et social, des motifs de fierté dans le passé de la race noire.<sup>950</sup>

It is from this point that the author traces the "repercussion of this situation" on African American literature. Starting from a similar place to the one described in her article on Grace Walker, Nardal begins her literary itinerary in the period of African American slaves' and ex-slaves' literature. The author explains, as these subjects were "adapting" to a new language and hostile

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<sup>949</sup> Nardal, "Éveil," 26. "Sieburg's book "Is God French?" contains, among other things, a very sensible remark upon the power of assimilation of the French genius. According to him; the lack of color prejudice among the French is due to the fact that they are certain to transform the mind of any a colored man into a truly French one in a comparatively short time."

<sup>950</sup> Nardal, "Éveil," 26. "Quite different was the situation among the American Negroes. Though they are not of pure African origin either, the deliberate scorn with which they have always been treated by white Americans, incited them to seek for reasons for social and cultural pride in their African past."

environment their literature was a “docile imitation of their white models”.<sup>951</sup> Except “certain slave narratives” during this period, it was only at the time of emancipatory struggles that there was an “outburst of a literature of controversy and moral protest”.<sup>952</sup> However, for Nardal, whilst “a considerable number of documents and memoirs which, from a historical point of view, are undoubtably valuable” the literature was beholden to “the appeals to pity”.<sup>953</sup> From 1880 onwards this changes. Nardal states that “we witness the ascension of the Negro to real culture.”<sup>954</sup> The author references Paul Laurence Dunbar “who used both dialect and the English language” in his “school of racial realism”.<sup>955</sup> Du Bois is also cited for his “literature of social protest” which advocated for “equal civic and cultural rights for Negroes and whites”.<sup>956</sup> But according to Nardal, the arrival at the pinnacle of “real culture” does not take place until the likes of Claude McKay or Langston Hughes bring to black cultural aesthetics “a new attitude” that “rejects all inferiority complex” in the expression of “their dark-skinned selves without fear or shame”.<sup>957</sup> In other words, Nardal perceives in these texts the voicing of awakened black cultural subjects in their own humanity. As the narrative given of African American literature in “*Une noire parle à Cambridge*” inferred, this coming to racial consciousness and ascension into “real” culture requires the emergence from the “first inarticulate babblings” to the assertion of the black self in English.

Mais c’est sous l’influence de Braithwaite que les auteurs modernes, dès 1912, sans abandonner les thèmes nègres et l’apport émotionnel dû à leurs souffrances ancestrales, en font leur point de départ de leur inspiration, les universalisent, et chose plus important encore, abandonnent les moyens d’expression spécifiquement nègres, pour employer les formes et les symboles de littérature traditionnelle.<sup>958</sup>

Nardal argues that the departure for racial consciousness is endogenous to the black experience of being othered and dehumanized. At the same time, from this alternative prism to the Western world view and its definition of Man, in the process of universalization (humanization) of experience, “specifically negro expression” falls out of the images created. It also infers that the negro expression that is written out of the story is culturally and historically tied to African

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<sup>951</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 26. Nardal does not give any references to texts nor authors at this time.

<sup>952</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 26.

<sup>953</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 27.

<sup>954</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 27.

<sup>955</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 27.

<sup>956</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 27.

<sup>957</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 27. Both of these authors are cited in the text.

<sup>958</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 27. “But it is owing to the influence exerted by Braithwaite that the modern writers, without discarding the racial themes and the emotional intensity due to their ancestral experiences, took them as the starting point of their inspiration and gave them a universal purport. It is important to note that they abandoned the Negro dialect in favor of the forms and symbols of traditional literature.”

languages and thus the space of the African continent. Also, as it is a masculine genealogy, black feminine subjects, and stories that they may tell seemingly do not participate in this “real culture”. Differences and multiplicities are reduced to one expression of the unification of white and black culture that Nardal perceives in these authors’ work. There are echoes in Nardal’s theorization of citizenship. Women change the form of the figure of the universal in their difference but in the argumentation their dissimilarities or diversities, that are elsewhere inherent to Nardal’s understanding of Antillean identities, are forgone in the presentation of the process to the universal and the human. In “*Éveil*” dissimilarity is ostracized from the canon of “traditional literature” in this same trajectory. As a consequence, “specific negro expression” is, in this becoming, the fixed and determined expression of a not quite human Other to the enlightened and “awakened” Self. Because Nardal frames African American culture as the pinnacle of “awakening” it locates this black cultural identity as above and beyond other temporalities and spaces on *the* evolutionary road for all black subjects in the global community. For instance, the painting of African American literature as the vanguards of black aesthetics structures how Nardal assesses Antillean literary endeavors.

Cette intéressante évolution intellectuelle du Noir américain nous incite à nous demander où en est maintenant son frère antillais qui lui, s’est développé intellectuellement, dans un milieu relativement plus favorable.

On peut dire sans injustice que si les préoccupations raciales ne sont point au premier plan de la production littéraire de la période consécutive à l’abolition de l’esclavage, aux Antilles, c’est que les « grands aînés » étaient alors fort occupés à batailler pour l’obtention des droits politiques pour toutes les catégories de la race noire en présence aux Antilles.<sup>959</sup>

The passage above proposes that whilst “the elders” were occupied with fighting for equality within the nation they were not paying attention to what could, on an international level, bring black people from around the world together in the pursuit of global black emancipation. For the author, as she argued in her article on Ethiopia, it is only after “awakening” that black people across the globe can unite in a common project and which fighting for equal rights in France appears to hinder. Along with the earlier suggestion that France is less hostile against black people than America, the Antillean literature at this time is “imitative” and will be for Nardal until the First World War, as opposed to African American culture that loses this quality from

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<sup>959</sup> Nardal, “*Éveil*,” 27. “This interesting intellectual evolution of the American Negro leads us to ask ourselves what stage of his own development his Antillean brother, who lived in comparatively favorable environment has reached. If Racial concern can hardly be found in the literary production which followed the abolition of slavery in the Antilles, it is because the “great forefathers” were busily claiming equal liberty and political rights for the different categories of the black race living on Antillean soil.”



1880 onwards. Citing authors such as Victor Duquesnay, Daniel Thaly, Salavina, Oruno Lara as part of the imitative tradition she remarks that during the same period, writers such as Les Dumas and José Maria de Hérédia “were in no way inferior” to their French contemporaries but they derived inspiration from “purely metropolitan themes”.<sup>960</sup>

Si l’on examine les œuvres de ces précurseurs on y trouve évidemment la glorification des petites patries lointaines des « Iles de beauté » (la mode est déjà à l’exotisme) mais rien qui ressemble à la fierté de race. Ils parlent de leur îles natales en amoureux, certes, mais il arriverait qu’un étranger les célébrât avec plus de bonheur encore (Voir Lafcadio Hearn, *Esquisse martiniquaise*) et témoignât pour les différents types raciaux plus d’admiration et de réel attachement. Leurs successeurs continueront à modeler leurs productions artistiques de celles de la métropole.<sup>961</sup>

From this analysis to the contemporary moment of 1932, Nardal states that there is “a generation of men whose racial tendencies have literature, politics or humanitarian concerns as a starting point”.<sup>962</sup> She speaks of René Maran’s *Batouala*, of a “young man from Guinea who enjoyed a certain success” with his essay “*Heimatlos*”, of the journals *Les Continents*, *La Dépêche africaine*, of Jules Monnerot and Césaire Philémon.<sup>963</sup> And yet she still perceives “that in none of these works are racial problems studied for themselves.”<sup>964</sup> This is because “in none of them do we find the expression of a sincere faith in the future of the race and the necessity of creating a feeling of solidarity between the different groups of Negroes living throughout the globe.”<sup>965</sup> It is perplexing that Nardal states this considering that much of her and her sister Jane’s articles were published in *La Dépêche africaine* which addressed or fictionally represented such themes as racial solidarity and black internationalism. Jane’s article “*Internationalisme noir*” would be the case in point. However, if the performative aspects of the text and the cultural spaces of identities that she temporally and geographically maps are considered, her narration of the Antillean literary past follows this logic. This is because she paints *La Revue du monde noir* as the “crystallization” of emancipatory black aesthetics, politics, and the nurturing of “feelings of solidarity” in the global collectivity. In order to posit this space as being temporally located in the same place as where she perceives African American literature and culture to be, the author

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<sup>960</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 28.

<sup>961</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 28. “If we examine the works of these precursors, we certainly meet with the glorification of their small far-away mother-lands, the “Isle of Beauty” (Exoticism was already the fashion), but no race pride is to be found there. Indeed they speak lovingly of their native islands, but it happened that a stranger celebrated them a still more felicitous way and accorded to the racial types more appreciation and real attachment. Their successors will continue to derive their inspiration from Occidental or purely metropolitan themes.”

<sup>962</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 28.

<sup>963</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 28.

<sup>964</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 28.

<sup>965</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 29.

needs spaces of negative otherness in the dialectic. It is equally at this time that Antillean women appear within the telos of racial awakening and on the black internationalist map.

Pourtant, parallèlement aux efforts isolés cités plus haut s'affirmaient chez un groupe d'étudiantes antillaises à Paris les aspirations qui devaient se cristalliser autour de *La Revue du monde noir*. Les femmes de couleur vivant seules dans la métropole, moins favorisées jusqu'à l'Exposition coloniale que leurs congénères masculins aux faciles succès, ont ressenti bien avant eux le besoin d'une solidarité raciale qui ne serait pas seulement d'ordre matériel : c'est ainsi qu'elles se sont éveillées à la conscience de race. Les sentiments de déracinement qu'elles ont exprimés avec tant de bonheur « *L'Histoire sans importance* » de Roberte Horth, parue dans le 2<sup>e</sup> no de *La Revue du monde noir*, aura été le point de départ de leur évolution.<sup>966</sup>

In Nardal's masculine genealogy of Antillean literature as lacking to the literary productions of African American male authors, the manifestation of Antillean women at this point frames them as already being equal to and in continuation with masculine African American intellectuals and writers. In Nardal's contemporary moment, this performance of equality counteracts Antillean women's ostracization from masculine dominated spaces as Nardal writes her story of black international struggles and emancipatory cultural aesthetics that black women have been systematically written out of. Another interesting aspect is that in the comparison between these two cultural identities and literary aesthetics within the region of the Americas, Nardal opens the text to identification across gender difference (as well as cultural). She affiliates Antillean women with African American men. This said, the discursive strategy evokes processes of determination of otherness that have yet to (or cannot) access this space of "awakening" that is required for global black emancipation. One notable consequence is that African American women writers are seemingly not able to be present in Nardal's theorization for they would take away from the light that she is shining on Antillean women in the metropolis. As such, the text, at times, speaks as if there is limited room on top of the pinnacle of black cultural aesthetics and racial awakening and is evocative of a competitive struggle amongst black subjects in order to get there. This has the effect of undermining the author's call for an international politics in which "feelings of solidarity between the different groups of Negroes" are fostered. Contradictorily then, there are both openings and closures within the

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<sup>966</sup> Nardal, "Éveil," 29. "However, parallel to the isolated efforts above mentioned, the aspirations which were to be crystallized in "The Review of the Black World" asserted themselves among a group of Antillean women students in Paris. The colored women living alone in the metropolis, until the Colonial Exhibition, have certainly been less favored than colored men who are content with a certain easy success. Long before the latter, they have felt the need of a racial solidarity which would not be merely material. They were thus aroused to race consciousness. The feeling of uprooting which they experienced and was so felicitously expressed by Roberte Horth, in "A thing of no importance", was the starting point to their evolution."

text. Speaking of Antillean women students in the metropolis, she cites her own thesis “The Life and Works of Mrs Beecher Stowe”. Writing herself as subject into the article, black internationalism, and temporalities of awakening, Nardal demonstrates that it is Antillean women who took the charge and exercised their agency in the search for other ways of being and understanding within the larger frame of global anti-blackness.

Au cours de leur évolution, leur curiosité intellectuelle s’est tournée vers l’histoire de leur race dans leurs pays respectifs. C’est ainsi qu’elles ont été amenées à déplorer l’absence de cette intéressante matière dans les programmes d’enseignement appliqués aux Antilles. Au lieu de mépriser leurs congénères attardées ou de désespérer de voir jamais la race noire arriver à égaler la race aryenne, elles se sont mises à l’étude.<sup>967</sup>

This is reminiscent of Nardal’s conceptions that black subjects are at once inherently free but also entirely responsible for how they think, see and act in the world. Instead of “despising” those who are not doing this or lose hope that things can be fundamentally different to the racial oppression of Western white supremacies, it is up to all, as Antillean women are, to get on with working towards that change. Part of the project is delving back into the past and discovering “the riches that the black race and the African continent offer”.<sup>968</sup> It is about opening epistemological spaces within French universities in the study of and interest in African American literature that transforms the whiteness of “American literature” taught there. Through these women’s actions Nardal reopens the transcultural and transnational interactions across times and spaces that are reflected in *La Revue du monde noir*.

C’est notre collaborateur, M. Félix Eboué, administrateur en chef des Colonies, qui a consacré de longues années à l’étude de l’ethnologie de certains peuples d’Afrique. C’est aussi M. Grégoire-Micheli, membre de l’Institut international d’Anthropologie, qui a donné à cette revue de remarquables articles, et qui a voué tous ses efforts à l’étude des religions anciennes de l’Amérique du Sud.<sup>969</sup>

This international black intellectual, cultural, and political community is “crystallized” in *La Revue*. Nardal recognizes that it is not only in this space that connections and racial solidarity

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<sup>967</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 30. “In the course of their evolution, their intellectual curiosity applied itself to the history of their race and their respective countries. They were thus led to regret the absence of such interesting matters in the educational programs ascribed to the Antillean schools. Instead of despising their retarded brothers or laying aside all hope of about the possibility of the black race ever being on par with the Aryans, they began to study.”

<sup>968</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 30.

<sup>969</sup> Nardal, “Éveil,” 30. “M. Félix Eboué, administrator en chef de Colonies, a contributor to the “Review of the Black World”, who for long years has studied the Ethnology of certain African peoples; M. Grégoire-Micheli, member of the International Institute of Anthropology, who contributed remarkable articles to this Review is an erudite specialist of the ancient religions of South America.”

within the “black world” are symbolically and materially taking place. René Maran’s *Le livre de la brousse* is described as the “real and splendid rehabilitation of the African civilization”.<sup>970</sup> Returning to her comparison with African Americans and now Antillean women as being already “awakened” on the evolutionary road of black intellectual and cultural pursuits the author states,

Il est à remarquer qu’un certain nombre de nos jeunes amis semble être arrivés spontanément à la dernière phase que nous avons notée dans l’évolution intellectuelle des Noirs américains. S’ils continuent à traiter des sujets purement occidentaux, c’est dans une forme extrêmement moderne et ils s’essaient en même temps à mettre en valeur des thèmes raciaux caractéristiques ainsi que nos lecteurs pourront le constater dans une série de très curieux poèmes que nous allons bientôt publier.<sup>971</sup>

The curious poems to which the author refers never saw the pages of this discursive space for “*Éveil*” was published in the last issue of *The Review*. These reopenings of her theorization on racial awakening to its demonstrations in various discursive, material, symbolic and geographical spaces ring true with the author’s oeuvre. Nardal’s representations of various embodiments of blackness and collectivities in her work that cross multiple literary genres and discursive spaces are both examples that witness this. It resonates with her call for a black international politics and humanism that puts into practice different ways of relating to others, fostering notions of the coexistence of dimensions of human experience and that promotes shifting, always changing and indeterminable understandings of self and the collective. But in “*Éveil*”, because Nardal concludes that what has made self-conception possible in the first place is the Self of Enlightenment, the article ends with the Western world view that reinstalls the hierarchical and contradictory aspects of the comparative study.

Nous avons pleinement conscience de ce que nous devons à la culture blanche et nous n’avons nullement l’intention de l’abandonner pour favoriser je ne sais quel retour à l’obscurantisme. Sans elle, nous n’eussions pas pris conscience de ce que nous sommes. Mais nous entendons dépasser le cadre de cette culture pour chercher l’aide des savants de race blanche et de tous les amis des Noirs, à redonner à nos congénères la fierté d’appartenir à une race dont la civilisation est peut-être la plus ancienne du monde. Bien informés de cette civilisation, ils ne désespéreront plus de l’avenir de leur race dont une partie semble maintenant en sommeil. Ils tendront

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<sup>970</sup> Nardal, “*Éveil*,” 31.

<sup>971</sup> Nardal, “*Éveil*,” 31. “It is worth noticing that some of our young friends seemed to have spontaneously arrived at the last phase observed by us in the intellectual evolution of the American Negroes. If, on one hand, they continue to treat purely Occidental subjects it is in an extremely modern form, on the other hand, they begin to bring into relief characteristics racial themes as our readers will soon verify in a series of poems we are going to publish.”

à ces frères attardés une main secourable et s'efforceront de les comprendre et de les mieux aimer...<sup>972</sup>

The Western humanist project and its understandings of Self are evoked in the tropes of “obscurantism” that is projected onto black non-human Others and which ideologically founds the perceived need for the French civilizing mission. Nardal speaks of going beyond this frame, and bringing the tools to foster racial pride, solidarity, and racial awakening to “retarded brothers” who are currently “sleeping”. Though it is not made explicit who the latter are, if taken strictly in the frame of the comparative study of the text and how Antilleans are positioned as behind (except a few in the contemporary moment), it is more than likely that these are the “brothers” that Nardal is referring to. In the broader picture of black internationalism, it doesn't preclude that the author may be thinking of the African continent and Africans in general, as it was presented in her sister Jane Nardal's formulation of black internationalism. In this article, as in her formulation of a more humane colonialism, Nardal does not break with the cultural logics of the colonial-humanist episteme of the West. Spatially and temporally *the* itinerary proposed in “*Éveil*” moves in the same logical direction with those behind in the dark and those in front and “awakened” with the latter reaching out and showing this way to other cultural spaces of the “black world”. Diversity becomes unified and the coexistence and overlapping of places and space are pinned down and territorialized. As such, the article does not leave room for the possibility that there are alternative ways to achieve the pursuits of black international politics, like global black emancipation and racial awakening, or that other elements may be important to such a political vision. It makes it difficult to hear alternative voices that may think and live blackness differently. What can perhaps be taken away from the conflicts and contradictions that arise in Jane Nardal's “*Internationalisme noir*” or in Paulette Nardal's “*Éveil*”, and to a lesser extent her portraits of Augusta Savage and Grace Walker, is that when attention is directed towards one particular cultural expression or intellectualization of blackness, as is the case here, then it is evident that the prism through which one sees and thinks will be largely colored by it. Because what Nardal presents in this article is largely informed by her own experience of racial awakening and pride in her black identity, perceiving African American cultural expression as the model or ideal is non

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<sup>972</sup> Nardal, “*Éveil*,” 31. Ellipsis in the original. “We are fully conscious of our debts to the Latin culture and we have no intention of discarding it in order to promote I know not what return to ignorance. Without it, we would not have never become conscious of our real selves. But we want to go beyond this culture, in order to give our brethren, with the help of white scientists and friends of the Negroes, the pride of being the members of a race which is perhaps the oldest in the world. Once informed of that civilization, they will no longer despair of the future of their own race, a part of which seems at the present time to be delayed in its evolution. They will tender to their retarded brothers a helping hand and endeavor to understand and love them...”

negligibly also a story about nurturing feelings of hope and aspiration in a future human community not posited on global anti-blackness. For Nardal, hope, racial pride, and “joy of creating” happened in communion with this culture across the Atlantic. Furthermore, it is also a way to approach facing and learning about an extremely violent past which distances, to a certain degree, her subject as an Antillean, by displacing this history into the context of the United States. Nardal acknowledges after her return to Martinique, that her relationship to African American culture created potential blind spots in terms of looking at the French colonial context.

Je répète que je n’ai jamais caressé l’idée de la décolonisation, par exemple. J’étais beaucoup plus sensible aux souffrances et humiliations imposées aux noirs américains.<sup>973</sup>

On a cultural level, another example of a blind spot in Nardal’s work is when she privileges the expression of African American Spirituals over Antillean musical practices. Nardal perceives the latter as more beholden to “negro expression” and thus not at the same stage of the voice of “real culture”. Arguably the times that Nardal gets out from underneath the structures of Western humanism and colonialism is in her fictional texts and, in real life, in the creation of her salon. In “*Éveil*” she cites Roberte Horth’s short story, as the point of departure of racial conscientization and race pride. The understandings of self and the world around that she explores within the imaginative spaces of literature perhaps give more room for the experimentation of other ways of being and doing. The practice of literature, like the practice of other forms of human connection in the salon, seem to be activities and alternative spaces that aid in moving away from the naturalized and normalized colonial perspective. Just like a sociality that leaves the community open and undetermined could spark into existence unforeseen and transformative ways of knowing oneself and the collective, so too could interactions with and creation of imaginative worlds that seek something other to what is proposed by the colonial perspective. This is not to put aside the richness of Nardal’s oeuvre that encompasses their contradictory aspects. One could argue, living with contradictions is a part of human experience for a subject is neither all-knowing nor omnipresent. Subjectivity is lived in relationship to how one understands the self and the world around which transforms and changes overtime, and that can be colored by one’s desires, affects, projections, memories, traumatic experiences, to name just a few. Part of this negotiation is being confronted with discrepancies between ideals and actions, between thoughts and feelings. As it was shown in the discussion of citizenship, it was the confrontation with material realities

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<sup>973</sup> Nardal and Grollemund, *Fiertés de femme noire*, 30.

that the contradictions of French universalism and the “community of equals” can be contested. Or it was in the café in “*Guignol Ouolof*” that the Antillean character was faced with her own biases which lead to the possibility to change the way she acted and how she perceived. In a certain sense, human subjects and their expressions, whether artistic, political, or other, are works in progress and therefore never truly determinable, complete as the unified Self of Western modernity. Nardal presents this understanding in her work and her ambition in presenting a counternarrative of what it means to be human. This is largely informed by thinking through and inventing ways to counteract global anti-black racism within black international movements which are themselves also works in progress. The suggestion that the practice of literature or experimentation with forms of sociality in the sisters’ salon could provide alternate spaces to negotiate the contradictions that live within the subject and move away from normative ways of being and knowing does not preclude the idea that this can also be done in intellectual pursuits. However, for Nardal’s oeuvre, the contradictions come most poignantly in the latter, whether they arise in the logics of her argument itself or in comparison with what is presented in her fictional worlds. Just like one could, if open to the fact, encounter discrepancies between the way one thinks and the way one acts fictional spaces or imagined worlds could provide a way to communicate with that which is beyond the horizons of an individual’s own intelligibility. As much as one can reproduce stereotypical images of blackness through artistic practices, one can also stretch capacities of understanding through the creation of other modes of representing the world, practicing alternate forms of sociality and in striving towards ideals that are not yet actualized.

# Conclusion

Jessie Fauset's and Paulette Nardal's achievements in their articulation of feminist epistemologies, their creation of black modernist aesthetics and new black cultural identities are not only important contributions to the period in which they lived but have significant impact in the twenty-first century. From their particular prism of lived experience as black women in France, in Martinique, or in the United States, their corpora interrogate alternatively the cultural geographies of these two nation states as much as they complexify what was and is thought as black international politics and black modernisms. At the same time, the resonances to the contemporary period that have appeared throughout the analyses of their work attest not only to the persistence of systemic forms of oppression in Western societies but more importantly to the fact that speaking from lived experience, as these authors do, has a way of transcending the socio-historical period from which one writes or thinks. This thesis and the resurgence of critical interest over the recent decades in the work of Fauset and Nardal testify to such an actuality. Their conceptualizations of black femininity mobilize theoretical tools to think how the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality are operative in their respective environments. Epistemologically speaking then, their work is politically and intellectually pertinent to theorizations that follow a similar intersectional approach in the contemporary period and within various disciplines of study. However, what will be the focus of this conclusion is Fauset's and Nardal's creative methodologies. This is because, despite cultural variations and socio-historical specificities of their milieus, Fauset and Nardal use similar methods to generate possibilities of thinking, being, and living otherwise to the norms of a given society. The reason that this can, and has, come to light is due to the transdisciplinarity of this research. Making their texts the filter through which the critical frame has been negotiated, the methodology of this thesis became isomorphic to the authors' own methodologies. Their pursuits were ones that required a persistent overriding of the overdetermination which they faced. In order to produce new understandings and significations of black femininity they had to reach beyond conceptual and representational restraints. In this manner, they gave mobility to meaning for they unlocked understanding considered only applicable (or appropriate) to a certain figure, identity, or cultural geography. Thus, the approach of this thesis takes a similar shape in its methodological form as it puts into circulation theoretical concepts from various disciplines which allows, and was



almost required, to track how this takes place in the authors' respective body of work. Some critical tools did not withstand their confrontation with the texts of Paulette Nardal and Jessie Fauset. Others became a part of the mobility of meaning that these writers were undertaking and therefore underwent a transformation in the conversation taking place across disciplinary borders. To assert, then, that Fauset's and Nardal's achievements have relevance to the present moment is not to conflate one period with another. The futurity lies in how Fauset and Nardal invested in thinking, creating and being apart of journeys towards emancipation.

At the end of the investigation into Paulette Nardal's corpus the idea presented was that literature could provide alternate spaces for characters, author, and readers to negotiate or reflect on a more just and humane world. Fictional realities may be built to create a place for the contestation of and experimentation with ideals of political or critical thought and thus participate in the intellectualization of black global emancipation. But fiction could also be a place that instigates shifts in one's perspective, for the author or the reader, as Nardal stages the actualization of black international pursuits like racial solidarity. Where it was left with Nardal and some of the contradictions highlighted in her intellectual pursuits, the suggestion was that literature, or spaces of dynamic interactions like the Clamart Salon, could be fruitful of personal or collective transformation that aids in going beyond one's own limitations in thought. With Fauset's *Comedy: American Style*, the proposal was that she was able to achieve in her fictional worlds that which her characters were unable to do or accomplish in their journeys. In this novel or her other literary texts, the authorial voice signals alternatives to the choices that her characters make thus pointing her readership towards other trajectories that could actualize emancipation and a more inhabitable world. In the works of both Fauset and Nardal, it would not be entirely correct to say that critical or intellectual discursive spaces, though they pertain to different rules, do not provide such possibilities. Producing knowledge that critiqued the dominant ways of understanding, whether from a colonial perspective, a white American one, or a black masculine one, both Fauset's and Nardal's intellectual engagements required as much invention as did their imagined worlds. That which brings both of these fictional and non-fictional worlds together is their methodology of making lived experience the foundation for their engagements in the search for a better world. To investigate the relationship between the intellectualization of lived experience and its transformation into imagined geographies shines a light upon these authors' practices and what they found or were able to do in these different discursive spaces. As both Fauset and Nardal (and their characters) are as mobile in their lives as in their texts, one

can return to the migratory trajectories undertaken and situate their achievements within these transatlantic circulations.

Within trajectories of migration, a concept developed throughout the thesis is to look at Nardal's and Fauset's discursive spaces as a way of "homing" or making space for black feminine identities. Homing, as it was shown, involves imagination and creation, is contemporaneous with experiences of "uprooting", dislocation, alienation, trauma, and loss but also of learning, racial conscientization, joy, emancipation, "reclaiming" and "regrounding". Home is something one does, experiences and is an ongoing investment in the world around that may stretch across different symbolic and material spaces, times, and geographical locations. As such, it parallels Paulette Nardal's and Jessie Fauset's mobilizations of meaning across conceptual restrictions in the creation of other significations. Their oeuvre speaks to the various spheres, temporalities and cultures that are endogenous to lived experience of one's present, wherever this present may be. Therefore, in the practice of their literary and intellectual investigations, like processes of homing, they open alternate understandings of identity and identification that accommodate multiplicity, multilocality and that resist being confined, determined, or fixed. This challenges major tropes of black and white modernisms such as the act of migration that requires a severance to the past – the halt to the mobility of meaning – in order to formalize the "new" of modernisms. From their black feminist and internationalist perspective they question the uneven experiences of mobility, the ways one comes to occupy and perceive the socio-cultural environments upon arrival and how one relates to the homelands that were the point of departure. In this way, the authors' critical perspectives disturb thinking and narrating cultural identities as those necessarily attached to a specific territory or urban location. Just as Nardal and Fauset were stopped by the discrimination that they faced within the predominately masculine black political and cultural milieus of the Harlem Renaissance, Négritude or black internationalism, both were able to override their fixity in the "place" ascribed to them. They recuperated mobility, for instance, in returning to feminist genealogies of the past or the spaces of enslavement to contest (sexist and racist) meaning in the present. Their intellectual and creative practices were ones of reclaiming and homing in order to make symbolic and material spaces for themselves, their ideas, and their characters. Within their migratory trajectories, lived experience that destabilized, (dis)located or "uprooted" the self, became productive of new ways of being, understanding, and imagining the world that surpassed what was previously known. Being within and negotiating different landscapes, atmospheres and cultures set the scene for transforming the way they perceived themselves and how they related to the world around. Now, these writers were not the sole people to experience

migration in such a way nor were they outside of the context that shaped them and that they worked to shape. Fauset's and Nardal's endeavors in fictional, non-fictional, geographical, material, and symbolic spaces make up two itineraries within previous, contemporaneous, and later transatlantic circulations. It is to recognize that political, social, and cultural strivings for black emancipation, for instance, have also come before and will be continued on after their life and work which underlines the ongoing processes of working towards a more just and equal world. Fauset's and Nardal's critical and creative investments can therefore be seen as choices made to engage (and spend much time and energy) in their present moment in venturing towards something that is, in a way, always to come. Their works share in the idealist pulsion and hope for a future place where a better world could one day be actualized, where a home could be made, even if it may not happen within their lifetime.

In respect to Nardal's corpus, it was suggested that the relationships between her non-fictional and fictional worlds are evocative of the articulation between "racial awakening" and emancipation. The cognitive processes of racial conscientization (disalienation) almost have to precede the creation of Antillean feminine identities in literary spaces. The unravelling of centuries of anti-black oppression and the ideological overdetermination of blackness from the Western perspective, need to be undertaken before one could perceive, represent, and define blackness otherwise and in one's own terms. What this means is that Nardal could voice in her intellectual work that which Elisa couldn't in "In Exile". The latter did not speak back to the racist act of the metropolitan public on the bus, however Nardal does in her articles. One could say the same thing about Fauset's corpus and take "Nostalgia" as one example. A potential "elsewhere" where black identities could live as subjects opened up through recourse to her intertextual reference to Chateaubriand. Within a meditation of the (im)possibility of home for African Americans in America or France, Fauset materializes this space within her text. Similarly, her article "The Gift of Laughter" that addressed the "unwritten laws of representation" intellectualized what Fauset practiced in her fictional worlds. Her meditation of a modern black aesthetics underscored the issue in which white (masculine) artists, writers, and actors can depict black characters but not the revers. In Fauset's novels the readers see her disregard for such norms of representation, for instance, in her astute and nuanced depiction of white French masculinity in the character Astride Pailleron in *Comedy: American Style*. In the *Guide* Nardal also refused to see and represent Martinique, Martinicans and Martinican culture through Western eyes. She reclaimed, rehumanized and resubjectified this geographical, cultural, and social space from its indentured past and from the exoticized colonial perspectives in her present. Thus, what is evident

in both Fauset's and Nardal's oeuvre, is that in order to represent and articulate alternative ways of understanding to the Euro-American perspective they had to have already, to some extent, disarticulated or disentangled their prism of comprehension from it. In order to shift points of view or palliate blind spots or gaps in one's understanding – whether in regard to the colonial gaze, the sexism of black masculine perspectives of black liberation, or in Nardal's and Fauset's works themselves – cognitive processes are clearly integral to such ventures. Changing how one sees consequently changes how one identifies and lives out this identity in relation to the world around. However, as their own lived experience demonstrated, such transformations are not purely a matter of the intellect. Nardal fictionalized in "*Guignol Ouolof*", for example, that it was in the Antillean character's interaction with the Senegalese waiter that she became aware of the prejudices she held. Though her process was in part an intellectual one, the gap between the ideals of racial solidarity and the prejudicial feelings she felt was significant and could have barred the actualization of engaging with the Senegalese man as an equal. This was exposed by the happening at the café and one may wonder if it would have taken place if not for this confrontation with reality. Alternatively, what Fauset highlights in "Yarrow" is that her journey to the metropolis put into question certain idealizations of France embedded within the African American cultural imagination. Fauset also expressed the new and changing attachment to her national identity and the broadening of her understandings of racism in the European context in her experience of the collective, social, and political environment of the Pan-African Congress. At the same time, in her fictional work she questions the possibilities of belonging and home for African American subjects within these transatlantic circulations. For Nardal, she was "made to feel different" in Paris as much as it was where she came to feel pride in her blackness. She found "joy" in musical collaboration or in gathering in one place "all the black people from around the world" in her salon, defining both as creative practices and "anti-colonial" politics. For the two authors, these rich affective, lived, and creative experiences and interactions seem to play a significant role in paths to "racial awakening" and in their articulation of black feminist epistemologies. Shifts in perspective or *prise de conscience* appear importantly accompanied or even informed by the rich tapestry of sensorial, perceptual, and affective realities that comprise subjectivity. Because Fauset and Nardal incorporate multiple sensorial realms to build fictional worlds, they can work with various forms of apprehension which include rationality, but fiction is not delimited to it as in the norms of intellectual endeavors. Thus, in their engagement in imagined worlds, the creative writing practice could be seen as establishing relationships with, in and to another place that can be a locus for change. It could be a way of migrating to different socio-cultural spaces, as they did in real life, that destabilizes, (de)localizes and "uproots" the

writer, the reader, or the characters within, and thus materializing another ground which instigates transformation to go beyond what was already known and thought. As such, it not only underlines the political aspects of Nardal's and Fauset's creative methodologies as they make space for their critical investigations in literary form. But it also highlights that their fictional works are imbued by the futurity and hope for a more just, equal, and humane world. Just as they sought other places where they could experience freedom of being themselves, and their black feminist epistemologies sought the mobilization of meaning from conceptual restrictions, their literary spaces are also journeys into a different land where these pursuits can be actualized in their present moment.

Nardal's creative practices are not comprised solely by her literary undertakings. Music was a major platform for the exploration of her cultural politics and the expression of black cultural identities. As her *La Joie de Chanter* in Martinique or as her musical collaborations with Roland Hayes or the Fisk Jubilee in Paris attest, music was a creative practice that forged spaces where her vision of black emancipation could materialize. The three pillars of her cultural politics, namely African American, French metropolitan and Antillean cultures came together in her musical scores that combine (European) classical music, creole poems and elements of African American Spirituals. Nardal's compositions bring into existence the voices and rhythms of her conception of emancipatory black cultural identities. As it was analyzed in "*Éveil*", part of her intellectualization of "racial awakening" was informed by a certain idealization of African American culture for the symbiosis of white and black cultural identities that it symbolized for her. In the context of black internationalism in Paris, "Acts of Grace" represents an individual's process of racial conscientization that correlates France and the Antilles, French and Antillean identities and thus speaks, in part, to this dream of harmony between whiteness and blackness within oneself or within the collectivity. The perhaps romanticized imaging of black feminine emancipation that belied this Caribbean speaker's migratory trajectory to the metropolis nevertheless created a place for her subjectivation as a Franco-Antillean woman. Nardal invests in this space as the material grounds in which the hope, joy, peace, and faith evoked could be communicated as an impetus for change within trajectories to liberation. Similarly, in "In Exile", Nardal frames Elisa's dream as a journeying towards the character's emancipation, of feelings of belonging, and of joy in being alive. Elisa was not stopped by racism in Paris for her mobility came in the act of dreaming and the author represents its realization as an echoing of the three pillars of her own intellectual, cultural, and political pursuits. As such, in the fictional space that follows the specific trajectory of Elisa's return home and towards her dream,

the text can also actualize, even if it is just within its pages, that which is embedded in Nardal's visions of emancipatory paths towards a more just and equal world. It materializes a ground for cognitive shifts required for black liberation according to the author's point of view. In these two texts as well as "*Guignol Ouolof*", the author chooses to represent and evoke, in different ways, the hopes, imaginations and dreams for things to be otherwise and which are actualized in the journeys of the characters and in the space of the text. Whilst "*On défrise les cheveux crépus*" differs in the sense where it does not give an image to liberatory transformation nor the overcoming of existential negation of its black characters, it still conjures affective registers that could be motors for change and subjectivation. They are not the joy, hope, or peace that are found in Nardal's earlier texts but rather the anger and frustration conveyed through the violence of the erasure of blackness in this hair salon. As it was highlighted at the time, "*On défrise*" was written within the context of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia which changed Nardal's position towards "the white race". For her, the inaction of France to intervene in the rise of fascism decreased the expectation that France would or could propose anything different to inequality and violent oppression in relationship to black subjects, communities, and nations. Reflecting on Nardal's conceptual shifts and her intellectual work at this time aids in understanding how critical aspects find a place in her fictional work.

Taking her literary texts together, it suggests that the fictional space provided an alternative sphere in which Nardal's critical voice, on some subjects like sexism within black intellectual milieus or white supremacy, could be heard and evoked in a more direct way than in her non-fictional texts. In all four of her fictional pieces, that which her characters experienced in coming to the metropolis – alienation, anti-black racism, sexism, intracommunal prejudices – fall from her argumentation in "*Levée des races*". Furthermore, in "*Guignol Ouolof*", the critical parallel that Nardal creates to the masculine dominated spaces and the sexism within the black international movement is something that she will not address in her non-fictional work. As this short story was interpreted, the criticism of sexism as obstacle for global black emancipation did resonate loudly from its pages and was mirrored by the Antillean woman's negotiations of her own prejudices towards the Senegalese man. In "*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*", Nardal implicitly counteracts sexism because she privileges the representation of independent Antillean femininities above those of the masculine ball attendees. However, her critique of the relationships of power that exist within black political and cultural milieus is not brought to the fore in her articles. Evidently, this is not to suggest that there are no critical elements to Nardal's articles and her *Guide* to Martinique that this thesis has widely broached. However, it appears

that the norms, expectations, and power relationships of various socio-cultural milieus did inform, at least partially, what she tackles in her intellectual pursuits. The fictional space, then, potentially provided Nardal with a greater freedom to present her critical perspective. What this means is that she could nourish both in her writing practices, the spaces created and in the readers' relationships to them, a cultural and political voice that was less determined, more (dis)located, and "uprooted" from the socio-cultural environment surrounding the text. On this same meditation, the criticism in Nardal's fictional space is embedded in the realities of her characters. Humanism, that is fundamental to Nardal's intellectualization, is lived out through the characters' actions and thoughts and the ways in which Nardal builds her fictional worlds. It suggests that humanism becomes critical when it is embodied in subjective experiences and demonstrated through all the realms that comprise the living out of one's identity. This observation comes from the fact that in "*Levée des races*", Nardal's movement to an ideal image of interracial human community as one family was premised on the dropping of critical aspects of her black feminist epistemologies. The same can be said for "*Éveil*" for in its interaction with French Enlightenment, the humanism that underpins Nardal's ideals of black internationalism became wrapped up in a logic of universalization at the exclusion of other voices towards black emancipation. Similar tendencies become apparent in Nardal's articles on citizenship where multiplicities of Antillean femininity were collapsed, to a certain degree, by her recourse to an essentialist language. In this way, Nardal's critical expression in her fictional texts, because entrenched in subjective experiences of her characters, do not move to the universal and thus, it seems, keeps the text more productively open in the communication of the black feminist epistemologies that the author entwines in the fictional world. As highlighted above, Nardal's intellectual work based on lived experience underlines to what extent cognitive shifts change the way one identifies and understands the world around thus effecting the knowledge produced or representations made. If literary texts are less determined by or more dislocated from the norms, expectations, and power relationships of socio-cultural environments, her critical (subjective) point of view could find a greater space for articulation. The author could effectively materialize her black feminist perspective of humanism and black internationalism in her feminine subjects' actualization of their journeys to emancipation.

Yet, some objects of inquiry will remain almost unvoiced in Nardal's work whether in fictional or in non-fictional texts. With the exception of "*Le nouveau bal Nègre de la Glacière*", and the sublimation of sensuality and sexuality in Nardal's *Guide* to underwrite the exoticism of her readership, Nardal rarely addressed black feminine or masculine sexuality, and never in a frontal

manner. She also only broached the subject of interracial sexuality in her critique of the *Code noir* and the sexual exploitation of women of color within the plantation. As it was demonstrated, sensuality and sexuality were also put to the side in her experimentation of forms of community building in her and her sisters' salon at Clamart. Perhaps she did address these subjects intellectually or creatively, but they were never published. The fire at the Nardals' house in Morne Rouge (Martinique) definitively destroyed all possibility to know such a thing. Later in an interview with Phillipe Grollemund, Paulette Nardal spoke of a certain form of (spiritual) sensuality that she ties to "the joy of creating" in her artistic practices and reuniting people at her salon at Clamart. The practice of literature or investing in creative processes and other forms of human connection in the salon appear to open the possibility of feeling the pulsion for existence (sensuality), the delight of being a black feminine subject, expressing that subjectivity and feeling free to do so. In the anti-black and sexist milieu in which Nardal circulated, as well as her characters, this is a non-negligible experience of emancipation and creation of spaces for self-expression. This is to recognize that Nardal's creative practices that seek the actualization of a better world that is not yet there, correspond to the experiences within migratory trajectories. What Nardal thinks through and emphasizes is forming connections and ways of being and understanding that celebrate difference. From a colonial and patriarchal point of view, differentiation becomes the cause for hierarchical and exclusionary socialization for domination depends on it. The migratory journey is one experience where, as Nardal highlighted in her own retellings or in her *Guide*, the subject has the occasion to relate to alterity and thus relate to his or her difference and non-determination of identity. It is the "awakening" to the idea that the way things are, what is considered common sense, and how people are socially or culturally defined, do not have to be so. Meaning and representation can be remobilized, put into circulation across a multiplicity of genres and be transformed. In short, realities faced could always be otherwise. Approached in this way, spaces of literature are places to migrate to, both in writing and reading practices, that can encourage transformation in relating to alterity. The writing process, similar to Elisa's dream in "In Exile", can create spaces of subjectivation for the writer, the reader, and the characters, and importantly garner feelings of emancipation and "racial pride" in interacting with the text as another place productive of processes of (dis)identification. Following Nardal's journeyings it appears that creative practices aid in leading her to new territories in order to explore, in other ways, her politics of black internationalism and black emancipation. And this she passes on to her readership in the pursuit for a more just and humane world.



Jessie Redmon Fauset's engagement in spaces of literature and the critical work undertaken in her imagined worlds speak to a similar relationship to Nardal's. Akin to the latter, Fauset presented her intellectual work through the prism of a black feminist and international perspective that inscribes itself in the invention of black feminist epistemologies in the first half of the twentieth century. Her breadth of topics mirrors that of Nardal and her strategy of mobilizing lived experience and literary tools to articulate her non-fictional articles are also shared by both authors. Similarly, Fauset does not address certain subjects in her intellectual pursuits though they find their extensive exploration in her literary corpus. Fauset, for instance, did not directly confront the sexism within the Harlem Renaissance in her articles. Though she did investigate this in *Plum Bun*. To give just one example from the novel which was interpreted as an allegory to Fauset's contemporary world, the readers met the character Virginia who embodied the figure of the New Negro Woman. Fauset made her path adhere to what was expected of "good" race women within the Harlem Renaissance. In contrast, one of the factors contributing to Angela's misadventures in the novel is that she did not want to occupy this role prescribed for black women. She wanted to be an artist and for her one "can't create and fight at the same time", especially not if the only way to be a part of the "fight" is in birthing the next generation of New Negroes. And yet Fauset could not escape it for she was coined "midwife", a designation that Nardal also shared. Thus, like Nardal's, Fauset's fictional oeuvre can be seen as the creation of spaces where she felt, perhaps, less curtailed by the normative pressures of the socio-cultural environment surrounding the text and its production. It was a space where both women could themselves be otherwise to their overdetermination that was constantly putting them in their "place". Fiction, then, is another world to create and to travel to that is more (dis)located from rules and norms of white or black cultural politics and aesthetics being formulated at the time. As such, it creates additional room for the communication of critical ventures from a black feminist perspective. This is not an assertion that Fauset's intellectual work is less critical. Rather, and as it was underlined with Nardal, the fictional world provides a space in which some objects of critique are investigated in depth and, in its construction, allows criticism to be accompanied by other spheres involved in subjectivation. The two major differences between Nardal and Fauset in respect to their fiction are the magnitude of Fauset's corpus and the fact that she engages in the genre of the novel. Whilst their creative methodologies are the same, the techniques that Fauset uses to build her fictional worlds as alternate grounds for change and transformation will vary to Nardal's writing practices.

The critical aspects of Fauset's aesthetics have at times been overlooked by her contemporaries, and later, in literary criticism. This is not to say that Fauset's critical perspective did not have blind spots of her own, nor that everyone would be in agreement with the way Fauset pursued the creation of a modern black aesthetics or represented modern black femininities. For some within the Harlem Renaissance her novels were found lacking in critical acuity because they present the respectable racial uplift of the striving middle class. Reading her novels on this level alone tends to pass over her critical voices that are there and in often more complex and richer ways than some literary critics have suggested.<sup>974</sup> The alternate approach to Fauset's aesthetics is to recognize that her texts operate on this level – almost passing for such respectable narratives – in order to create the room for critical perspectives. This would ring true with her non-frontal engagement with subjects such as sexism within the Harlem Renaissance in her non-fictional work. It also resonates with strategies of contemporary authors like Nella Larsen, in which criticism is fictionalized in a way that it could be, and was, invisible for some, particularly during the period in which they were writing. It is also arguably not a coincidence that in all of Fauset's fictional texts broached in this thesis, there is at least one main or secondary protagonist that chooses the path of becoming an artist: Joanna Marshall in *There is Confusion*, Angela Murray, Anthony Cross and Rachel Powell in *Plum Bun* and Oliver Cary and Marise Davies in *Comedy: American Style*. In these texts that cross socio-geographical borders of white and black modernisms within the United States and in France, this becomes one of the self-reflexive aspects of Fauset's fictional worlds. It shines a light on her critical perspectives of artistic practice, creation of modernist black liberatory aesthetics and the possibilities of being and becoming an African American woman artist in America. Fauset creates a space where this is possible, if not for her characters then for herself and by extension demonstrates this possibility to her readers.

In each one of the narrative trajectories of Fauset's artistic characters, the movements towards becoming an artist that take them to New York are tied to existential questions of identity and emancipation that are explored, for some, through the passing plot. The two African American women characters who achieve their search for something "new" (modern) in artistic practices are the singer and dancer Joanna Marshall and Marise Davies. For all of Fauset's other characters, however, this was shown to be an impossible dream to actualize. The most dramatic of Fauset's representations of the possibility of creative pursuits to be analogous with trajectories toward

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<sup>974</sup> The literary critics that come to mind and that have been highlighted in the thesis are Cheryl A. Wall's interpretation of Fauset's novels. For Wall, Fauset's aesthetics that attempt to transform traditional convention of the sentimentalist novel fall short of critical undertakings which Wall finds more explicit in her articles.

liberation, of self-expression and subjectification in the United States is in the character of Oliver Cary. The only reality that confers Oliver some sort of existential confirmation is in the practice of his art. In the anti-black environment that Olivia Cary reproduced within this African American family, it was through music that Oliver carved out a space in which he could live and express his identity that was constantly being denied. With music he began to formulate the desire for things to be otherwise and create an image of what this could look like for himself. Oliver steered his being towards the actualization of this futural, imagined and in this sense idealized space-time that made it possible for him to experience his subjectivity in the present. This could not be sustained and when Oliver lost joy in what he was doing and hope that things could be different he committed suicide. However, the narrator and the author, framing, creating, and exposing Oliver's journey as such accomplishes his pursuits where he could not. Fauset was able to continue in her fictional space and creative practices, in part, simply because the narrative did not end when Oliver dies. But also, Fauset's fictional endeavors mirror Oliver's methods in the sense where it is through artistic practice that she materializes a space of subjectivation and creates images in the present that seek to transform her given reality. It is suggestive that Fauset does not lose the hope or courage, as Oliver did, for she persists in her emancipatory pursuits. Her authorial voice keeps going in a search, within the space of *Comedy* or in her other fictional worlds, to actualize her vision and achieve that which the characters are unable, for various reasons, to accomplish. Thus, how Fauset unravels the journeying of her characters and exposes where they went wrong also points to the author's relationship to the text and how she invests in these fictional spaces.

Particularly evident in *Plum Bun* and the short story "The Sleeper Wakes" is how Fauset contradicts her character's fairy tale fantasies. The author exposes the illusion of fairy tale promises and the articulations of power that are involved within these narrative trajectories by underwriting her black women characters' choices to pursue freedom and independence in such directions. The narrative voice signals when Angela and Amy take wrong turns and provides the readership with realizations before the characters have them. Another aspect of Fauset's aesthetics is that she breaks white "laws of representation" on multiple occasions, as mentioned previously, with the character Astride Pailleron, and in *Plum Bun* with the white American modern man Roger Fielding, or the white schoolgirls or modern women that populate her literary landscapes. The author does not "fall into the traps" as Angela did in her search for an artistic career. Fauset mobilizes the aesthetic conventions or tropes of white modernisms when desired and for critical impact in the materialization of her modern black aesthetics. On a structural level, the blinding whiteness that over-exposes Fauset's African American stage in *Comedy* is also evocative of her understanding

that in American modern white aesthetics, or as Morrison argues in all (white) American literary traditions, blackness is that which haunts the white literary imagination. Fauset's oeuvre, then, plays with the codes of American literature that cross into European genealogies of literary traditions such as the fairy tale. Also, Fauset brings into productive tension (white) French cultural and literary imaginations in her intertextual references made within the narratives of African American characters. In *Comedy*, Edouard Pailleron's *Le monde où l'on s'ennuie* prefaced Teresa's tragedy in France in its appearance in the American landscape. In *There is Confusion*, Henri Bordeaux's *La peur de vivre* was used to displace French traditional culture and carve out a space for her African American modern woman, Maggie Ellersley. Using intertextuality as a device which overlaps the socio-geographical spaces of France and America, Fauset engages in intercultural meditations to construct her worlds, even if, in *Comedy* for instance, they do not provide habitable spaces for her African American characters. And where her characters do not engage in intercultural interactions in France, such as in *There is Confusion*, Fauset, from a broader perspective, makes this a part of her creative processes and imagined worlds. As such, Fauset's writing practices are like migratory journeys to different socio-cultural environments that (de)stabilize, "uproot" or unhinge her fictional geographies via their displacement from strict national territorial determinations. The author creates the possibility for the readers to do the same and thus interact with the text in a way that promotes transformation and shifts of perspective in their relationship to the imagined world that is being constructed otherwise.

The multiple ways in which Fauset shapes France in her imagined worlds could be seen, then, as echoing the pursuits of the author's own writing practices. In "Nostalgia" she mobilized Chateaubriand in her presentation of a modernist black aesthetic that could provide a "home" for African American people as subjects in the space of literature that was an "always beyond". The materialisation of neither a "here" nor a "there" but somewhere else worked to intervene in the socio-cultural imaginary of a given place and to comment on reality in order to transform them both. In this way, it builds relationships between author, novel (and its characters) and readers that are incite exchanges that question what may be already known or thought. This is reflected in *There is Confusion* as France is neither the territory of this specific national culture, nor was it simply America, but became another "America" within the novel. One of the methodological downsides of Fauset's mapping strategy was that it produced imperial overtones and delimited who could find a "home" in the lands she was creating. Except for a brief mentioning of "colonial soldiers", only African Americans existed in *There is Confusion* as subjects, and therefore to the readers. If Fauset's literary world is operative of transforming the way things are, the visuals of racial solidarity

on an international level, for instance, are non-existent. From an African American perspective, however, this different United States in the text parallels what is being traced in respect to Fauset's engagement in literature. Because this "other" America in France was not the land of either national culture, it became the locus of Maggie's transformation of how she experienced herself and the world around. Fauset's writing practices materialized a place for the emancipation of African American women which was an ongoing struggle, to say the least, in the reality in which she lived in the United States. In *Comedy* and on the level of whiteness, Fauset's black feminist perspective is international in scope because of her engagement with French culture and the continuities that she creates between America and France in respect to white supremacy. But, what is also characteristic of Fauset's fiction is that in her imagined world or in her characters' journeying, neither the readers, the characters, or the writer herself only fleetingly relate to members of the black diaspora outside of African Americans. It does not mean that readers from various ethno-racial and national backgrounds cannot relate to her texts, nor does it diminish the transformative potential that her imagined geographies present. However, it is a specificity of Fauset's oeuvre that is regrettable to pass over. Another interesting remark that can be made is that the character of Olivia in *Comedy: American Style* is always travelling to different socio-cultural geographies within the United States or in Europe, none of which provide the grounds for the transformation of her character. In contrast, when both Olivia and Teresa first arrive in France, Teresa experiences herself changing and coming into her subjectivity in the French language and through interactions with French people. The readers can feel how her perspective is shifting, her subjectivity thickening and the delight that she has in learning and exploring the different cultural and historical landscapes of Toulouse. However, if seeking other emancipatory ways of being and creating a world that is more just and humane is sparked by experiencing different cultures or social milieus within migration, this is not at all true for Olivia. It seems that nothing could inspire great shifts or "awakenings" in her conscious mind and thus there was no change in how she identified and how she positioned herself in French or American society. Olivia did not look for her own emancipation as a black woman and thus could not relate to herself and the world in an alternate way than through the violence that she had come to know. To a certain degree then, this puts a caveat on the assertion that migratory trajectories are fructuous of such opportunities of becoming other to what one knows and that creative practices and investment (reading or writing) in fictional spaces could do the same. However, the readership recognize Olivia's impossible dreams of being seen as a "white American" and how she is stuck on this path because of the way Fauset has built her fictional world. With Fauset's authorial voice that accomplishes what her characters cannot, she fills the blinds spots of her characters and for her readership. In this way, Fauset writes to the futurity and hope for the

actualization of emancipation where Olivia could not even begin to articulate the journey. Thus, in the productive contrast created Fauset spotlights how she succeeds in this venture by writing her novel into existence and giving a world to herself and her readers that could be the space of transformative interactions. As it was concluded in Chapter Three, Fauset leaves it to her readership to conceive or imagine how their emancipatory journeys will look. There are plenty of Olivias in the world but there are also many people who are inventing ways of being, doing and understanding that seek and hope for a more just and equal world for themselves, in their interactions with others and in futures to come. Both Fauset's and Nardal's journeys within symbolic, material, and discursive spaces appear to belong to the latter and encourage it in others. No definitive statements can be made about one's investments in creative practices, formulations of aesthetics, or constructions of fictional worlds as alternate grounds for change. Nor can they be asserted in respects to potential experiences of emancipation that the relationships between author, text, and reader make possible. But by these thoughts on migratory journeys, artistic pursuits and liberatory strivings, the hope is to bring to light specificities of Nardal's and Fauset's modernist itineraries and their creative, intellectual, and political pursuits in living and creating emancipated feminine cultural identities in view of a better and more humane world to come.



# Bibliography

This bibliography has been prepared and organized by themes, disciplines, and historical periods. Whilst this does not reflect the transdisciplinary approach of this study, it was thought to be the most effective way to facilitate consultation of the works that constitute this research. Concerning the decision to arrange according to different periods, the ambition is to clearly demonstrate the works that were being written and published during the happenings of the Harlem Renaissance, for instance, or those of black international movements that in this thesis takes place mostly during the interwar period but also after the Second World War. The organization chosen will, however, have its downsides for there are many works in the corpus that resist their categorization by themes, disciplines, or periodization. With this in mind, the classification was done in order to limit as much as possible the eventual reductive or overlapping aspects that may arise in such a bibliography.

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## Summary

This thesis concentrates on the works of Jessie Redmon Fauset and Paulette Nardal who, in the first part of the twentieth century, focused on the creation of black cultural identities and feminist epistemologies. Fauset's and Nardal's transatlantic itineraries, both in life and in their texts, traversed socio-cultural geographies of France, Martinique, The United States and grounded themselves within the urban milieus of the Harlem Renaissance, Négritude and black internationalism in Paris and New York. Mobilizing a transdisciplinary approach, this thesis seeks to highlight the specificities of Fauset's and Nardal's critical and aesthetic insights that disturb the delimitation of what was and is considered modernism and how politics towards global black emancipation were being thought and practiced. In the methodology of this research the texts of Fauset and Nardal are made primary to the theoretical corpus in order to bring to light new and important aspects of these writers' work, but also to confront the critical tools from various disciplines with Fauset's and Nardal's own theorizations. As such critical dialogues are established that, like the authors' own corpus, test the limits of conceptualization and scope of such theoretical tools. In this way, and tracing how Fauset and Nardal mobilize their lived experiences in fictional and non-fictional spaces, this thesis demonstrates that despite the social, historical, and cultural difference that separate these two authors, their creative methodologies work in a similar fashion to propose their black feminist cultural politics and liberatory writing practices. Nardal's and Fauset's lived, intellectual and literary itineraries were ones in which they forged spaces for themselves as producers of knowledge, as creators of modernist aesthetics, and as inventors of political visions that strove for a better world than they had known.

Key words: 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, aesthetics, black feminist epistemologies, colonialism, cultural geography, cultural identity, feminism, Jessie Redmon Fauset, lived experience, migration, modernisms, Paulette Nardal, phenomenology, transdisciplinarity.

## Résumé

Cette thèse est consacrée à Jessie Redmon Fauset et Paulette Nardal dont les œuvres ont participé à forger dans la première moitié du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle une conception culturelle des identités noires ainsi qu'une épistémologie féministe. Par les itinéraires transatlantiques qu'elles ont suivies et qu'elles transposent dans leurs textes, Fauset et Nardal font l'expérience d'une géographie socio-culturelle diverse réunissant la France métropolitaine, la Martinique et les Etats-Unis et plus particulièrement Paris et New York, centres urbains des mouvements de la Renaissance de Harlem, de la Négritude et de l'internationalisme noir auxquels elles prennent part. L'objet de cette thèse, au travers du prisme transdisciplinaire, est de montrer en quoi Fauset et Nardal, par leur esthétique et leur pensée critique, remettent en cause, dans sa définition et son périmètre, le modernisme tel qu'il fut conçu et tel qu'on le comprend ainsi que les politiques culturelles anti-racistes. La méthodologie adoptée ne subordonne pas les textes de Fauset et de Nardal au corpus théorique : ce faisant, ce que les œuvres ont de spécifique et d'original est mis en lumière. C'est également le moyen de confronter les théorisations dont elles sont aussi le creuset aux cadres et outils critiques de plusieurs disciplines. En miroir de celui que les œuvres mêmes mettent en scène, un tel dialogue critique permet d'établir les possibilités et limites de la conceptualisation et de la théorie. Ainsi et en étudiant la façon dont Fauset et Nardal font trace, dans leur production fictionnelle comme non-fictionnelle, de leur expérience vécue cette thèse s'attache à démontrer que, en dépit de différences sociales, historiques et culturelles, une méthode commune de création rapproche ces autrices et sous-tend dans leurs œuvres un positionnement politique et culturel noir et féministe ainsi qu'une conception émancipatrice de l'écriture. Déployé dans leurs vies de femmes noires, cet itinéraire littéraire et intellectuel a permis à Nardal et Fauset de se forger un espace pour elles-mêmes, pour le savoir qu'elles ont produit, l'esthétique moderniste qu'elles ont inventée et pour promouvoir une vision politique progressiste destinée à changer le monde.

Mots clés : colonialisme, épistémologies féministes noires, esthétiques, expérience vécue, féminisme, géographie culturelle, identité culturelle, Jessie Redmon Fauset, littérature du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, migration, modernismes, Paulette Nardal, phénoménologie, transdisciplinarité.