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ABSTRACT

"In Search of Systemic Liberation: Black Feminist Activism amongst French Women of African Descent in Contemporary France" examines the activisms of Isabelle Boni-Claverie, Assa Traoré, and the anti-racist and feminist collective, Lallab. In so doing, this thesis examines how the collective of each challenges France's narrative around race, belonging, and national identity. Through the analysis of the works by Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab, as well as the analysis of the responses from French media and French politicians, this thesis examines the ways in which these activists' political ideology and organizing pushes against France's national narrative of color-blind universalism in the present-day. Through a qualitative analysis grounded in postcolonial theory, critical race theory, and Black feminist theory, this thesis addresses the ways in which each activist invokes North American Black feminist theory in their political message and their political ideology with the goal of bringing systemic and structural change to the French institutions that actively oppress its nonwhite citizens. Moreover, this thesis traces the works of Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab, and connects their forms of activism to the larger Pan African liberatory thought and practice. Through this consideration, this thesis posits that the activisms of Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab are part of the larger Pan African liberatory thought and practice because of their collective efforts to reorient France's perception of peoples of African descent as well as their commitment to grassroots organizing and community outreach. For these reasons, the activisms of Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab are distinct in the larger social justice movement occurring in France today.

In Search of Systemic Liberation: Black Feminist Activism amongst French Women of African Descent in Contemporary France

by

Jordan E. Thomas

B.A., Hons., Washington and Jefferson College 2020

Thesis

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Introduction

On July 1st, 2021, *Elle* magazine published an exclusive interview with Emmanuel Macron, France's current president, in an article titled "Exclusif – Féminicides, Égalité, première dame, crop top : Emmanuel Macron répond." (Exclusive – Femicide, Equality, the First Lady, Crop Tops: Emmanuel Macron Responds)[1] Within this interview, which heavily focused on Macron's response to femicide in France and how his administration is working to combat it, the interviewer asked the president about his approach to feminism and whether it was universal or intersectional. To this question, Macron responded with, "[m]y feminism is humanism; it is a question of citizens' dignity. I am on the universalist side. I do not recognize myself in a fight that returns everyone to their identity or their particularism… The social difficulties are not uniquely structured by gender and by skin color, but also by social inequality, assignment to educational residence, among others."[1] After further questioning about the struggle for peoples with overlapping, or intersectional, identities, in this case the example of the struggles that 'Black' French women face, the French president responded with:

> The whole question is whether this difference is unsurpassable. I see society progressively racializing itself… This question is at the heart of the democratic debate. Yet, intersectional logic fractures everything. The illegitimately of someone who is other than me to represent me, myself, and my subcategory, which can be disassembled into as many subcategories, is the negation of something universal in the republican, national, and human adventure. That does not prevent recognition, including from the unsolvable part that participates in your proper identity. But what is most important for me is the common part that I have with you and the fights that I am going to carry out in your name to permit you to access an equal dignity to your neighbors. It is precisely what allows us to live together.[2]

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[1]Note on translation: Unless noted elsewhere, all translations from French to English are my own.

While originally talking about his approach to feminism, Macron's response, and targeted remarks on the dangers of intersectional thinking for French society, highlights the larger debate in the French political, intellectual, and social spheres on French universalism versus 'American' intersectionality.

More importantly, this ongoing debate in a France ravaged by the Coronavirus pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the #MeToo movement further exemplifies Macron's fear of the recognition of intersectional, and/or hyphenated, French identities because it supposedly fractures French society and its universal promise of liberty, equality, and brotherhood for its citizens. According to the French journalist Nicolas Poincaré, in response to Macron's interview with *Elle* magazine, "[w]hat Emmanuel Macron explains is that he sees society progressive racializing itself. 'We freed ourselves from this concept,' said the president, 'and voilà we re-essentialized people by their race."[3] Poincaré continues, "the racialists defend that in France there is structural and institutional racism wanted to guarantee a social order… These are the theories that Emmanuel Macron denounces. For him, it is the negation of universalism."[4] The arrival of intersectional theory, or "the study of those who suffer from multiple forms of domination," in France thus further illuminates the fractures in its idealistic Republican universalism.[5]

The current debate surrounding French identity and social and structural inequalities is not a new one; long has France touted itself as a colorblind and racially harmonious nation in which ardent support for the Republican tenets of liberty, equality, and fraternity affords each French citizen equal opportunities. While idealistic, repeated events in France's recent history further fracture its idealistic notion of universal equality and treatment for all its citizens, especially its citizens of African descent.[6] Within the last twenty years, France has seen

continued civil unrest that has resulted in protests around the country and continued pressure on French politicians and French media to grapple with the concept of French Republican universalism and if each French citizen, regardless of socioeconomic and ethno-racial background, truly have equal rights. This rise in civil unrest throughout the country has also sparked the growth of social justice movements centered around France's most marginalized communities and how they have turned their personal lived experiences as oppressed beings into political ideology and political action. In thinking about the emergence of such people and such organizations, this thesis asks the following questions: how has the emergence of different activist organizations surrounding the lived experience(s) of peoples of African descent in France challenged France's questions surrounding French identity, belonging, and equality? What methods have these different organizations taken to spread their political ideology and their organizing throughout France? What does putting these different activists in conversation with one another reveal about the different approaches to social justice in France today? Can the current work undertaken by these different activists be considered a part of a larger Pan African liberatory movement?

This thesis, "In Search of Liberation: Black Feminist Activism amongst French Women of African Descent in Contemporary France," analyzes the ways in which French women of African descent are working to actively disrupt and change France's colorblind rhetoric to create a new multicultural and equitable society that better represents French society today. In so doing, this thesis investigates three different case studies to see the ways in which French women of African descent, either individually or collectively, are politically, socially, and culturally partaking in protesting the French Republic and its universalist color-blind ideology. In investigating these various examples of protest, this thesis examines the works of Isabelle Boni-

Claverie, Assa Traoré and the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* (Truth for Adama Committee), and the French-Muslim feminist collective Lallab to show how different iterations of protest and political strategy, from literary critique and social media activism to in-person protesting, have affected French peoples' conceptualization of race and multiculturalism in France today. In this way, I contend that these French women of African descent from the 'other France' are fighting to break France's conceptualization of Republican universalism colorblindness that has been remained the national rhetoric since the end of the Second World War and the creation of the Fifth Republic.

Through this investigation, and in building upon Black feminist, postcolonial, and critical race theory, I argue that these French women of African descent and their different forms of activism are important to further analyze and draw attention to because of the ways in which they actively or passively invoke Black feminist rhetoric in their activism through the invocation of intersectionality, turning personal lived experiences into political ideology and action, grassroots organizing and community outreach, and attempting to liberate those most affected by overlapping oppressions. Moreover, I argue that these French women of African descent through their forms of activism are an example of the larger Pan African movement for the liberation of peoples of African descent in their quest to bring about a new humanism in France that recognizes the humanity of peoples of African descent and actively includes them in the nation-making of a multicultural and equitable France today.

The work that my thesis addresses is important for the growing scholarship on race and its manifestations in France today because it highlights the voices of largely underrepresented and marginalized peoples and communities both in French national rhetoric and in existing scholarship. This work highlights the legitimacy of these French women of African descent's

activism and shows that they are actively involved in the conversations taking place in France surrounding the role of race and racism and how it affects the lived experience of peoples of African descent but also in the work surrounding trying to bring long-lasting change to France. Furthermore, this work is important because of its role in the Pan African project for the upliftment and liberation of peoples of African descent. Lastly, this work is important because of the way in which these French women of African descent use tenets of American Black feminism, mainly intersectionality and grassroots organizing, and have molded into Afrofeminism to the realities of France and its struggle to grapple with its colonial past and its involvement in the enslavement of African peoples.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

In building on pre-existing scholarship, this thesis is centered around a qualitative historical and, at times, sociological, analysis of French society since the creation of the Fifth Republic in 1958 to see how the country's invocation of French Republican and universalist ideology affects the lived experience of its citizens of African descent in a 'post'-colonial France and how France's growing diversity has resulted in questions of national identity, power, and culture. To further clarify, this historical analysis is centered around both intellectual-and-cultural historical analyses to both trace trends in French intellectual and political writings, but also to investigate the effects of these writings on both French culture and on French peoples of African descent. The intent on framing this historical analysis on these grounds is to continue work from scholars such as Jean Beaman, Erik Bleich, Alice Conklin, Alec G. Hargreaves, Marie-Crystal Fleming, Michèle Lamont, Emmanuelle Saada, and Dominic Thomas whose works all center around the themes that this thesis addresses.

By framing this thesis around this historical approach, and to further the scholarship written on French history and French cultural studies, the primary emphasis is placed on postcolonial theory, critical race theory, and North American Black feminist theory to pushback against ideas of France's cultural homogeneity and the belief that French Republican universalism in contemporary France gives each of its citizens equal opportunities and equal rights. In describing postcolonial theory, Violet Bridget Lunga notes, "a single definitive definition of postcolonial is difficult if not controversial and impossible… Broadly speaking, definitions of postcolonial can be classified into three interrelated categories. First, postcolonial is used to describe experiences within specific geographical spaces. Second, postcolonial describes a specific period… The third category describes postcolonial as a critique or textual approach to realities of oppression and subjugation."[7] From Lunga's definition, this thesis' use of postcolonial theory pertains to both the period and a critique on the subjugation and oppression of peoples of African descent in France. In thinking about the temporality of 'post'-colonialism, this thesis contends that France has shifted from colonial domination to neo-colonial domination both domestically and internationally, which has resulted in its treatment of French peoples of African descent as subjects rather than citizens. Emphasis is further placed on postcolonial theory as it rose in prominence following the independence of some African countries. In the French context, as Emily Apter notes, "[m]any French intellectuals have difficulty in grasping the pertinence of postcolonial theory to the contemporary politics of culture, despite their recognition that Maghrebi, Caribbean, West African and Indochinese exclusion from mainstream *francité* continues to inflect internal political and cultural affairs as well as the export of French culture abroad."[8] Apter exemplifies the precarity of postcolonial theory in France and how its very idea goes against a hegemonic idea of French identity and French culture. This situation is

then further illuminated through the works of scholars like Beaman, Fleming, and Saada, who all push against France's traditional and homogenous Republican ideals on nationality and culture through their work on race/racism and culture in postcolonial France.

Secondly, this thesis employs critical race theory as it pertains to the idea of racial construction and power dynamics. In defining critical race theory, scholars Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic write, "the critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power… Critical race theory questions the very foundations of liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law."[9] As it relates to the research surrounding this thesis, critical race theory is applied in that these different activists recognize the existence of the social construction of race and how this social construction, despite its evolution from scientific racism and eugenics, manifests physically as implicit and explicit racial discrimination, systemic inequality, and structural segregation. Therefore, while these activists acknowledge that race is a social construction and a social phenomenon, they push against France's color-blind rhetoric by showing the physical representations of racism in French society and how its pervasiveness directly and indirectly affects the lives of all French peoples of African descent, but more broadly all of France's non-white population. These activists fight against the power of the French State and how this power manifests as systemic and structural discrimination and segregation, rendering France's non-white populations to feel permanently excluded from nation-making and participation in an allegedly homogenous cultural society. This thesis' approach to critical race theory is predicated on the historical analysis of racial construction in France, racial hierarchy and white supremacy that emerged, and the power dynamics at play that dehumanize and vilify peoples of African

descent. Through this racial construction and powered dynamics at play, critical race theory is integral in explaining how and why a French identity that is not rooted in whiteness has been met with such fierce resistance in the country.

Lastly, this thesis employs North American Black feminist theory as its teachings resonate in the activisms of Isabelle Boni-Claverie, Assa Traoré, Lallab, and France's growing Afrofeminist movement today. In describing the ideology of Black feminist thought, scholar Barbara Ransby notes, "… radical Black Feminist tradition that emerged in the 1970s [was] transmitted through books, poetry, images, personal relationships, and shared political spaces. This tradition, holistic, intersectional, radical, and inclusive, recognizes that the personal is political, and the political is profoundly personal."[10] This thesis draws close attention to North American Black feminist ideology surrounding intersectionality, or the recognition of overlapping oppressions and how this affects one's personal lived experience, which was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.[11] Within the activisms of Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab, intersectionality stands at the forefront of their political ideology and political organization. This thesis also draws close attention to the belief that one's personal lived experience is inherently political and that these experiences can be used to create a message that resonates with a larger population. This manifests most presently in the activisms of Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab through their community outreach and grassroots organizing, which happens through digital, print, and physical mediums.

Methods and Methodology

In analyzing the activisms of Isabell Boni-Claverie, Assa Traoré, and Lallab and how their activism challenges France's construction of race, cultural homogeneity, and color-blind universalism, this thesis approaches three main methods: close reading analysis, discourse

analysis, and prosopography. In implementing these different research methods and how they apply to a qualitative historical and sociological analysis of France's current wave of social justice, this thesis analyzes the writings of Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab, and how their political ideologies have resulted in a direct response from the French State, both by French media and French politicians. In describing close reading analysis, English professor Andrew DuBois writes, "…close reading is a very detailed analysis of a text that includes commentary on such formal features as meter, theme, imagery, figurative language, rhetorical strategies, tone, and diction."[12] The implementation of close reading analysis as a methodological tool is most present in the analysis of Isabelle Boni-Claverie's memoir, *Trop noire pour être Française* (*Too Black to be French*) and Assa Traoré's first text, *Lettre à Adama* (*Letter to Adama*). Through the close reading analyses of Boni-Claverie's memoir, and Traoré's long-form letter written to her dead brother in the months following his murder by the French police, this thesis looks at the language used in each text and how it evokes an emotional and an inspirational response from the reader, which ultimately serves as a successful tactic for these women to spread their political message and hopes for France's future.

The second methodological tool that this thesis employs is discourse analysis, which presents itself most notably through the political ideologies and messages by Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab, and how their respective ideologies and messages evokes discourse from French media and French politicians. This thesis, then, analyzes this discourse to show the growing disconnect between France's marginalized populations and France's establishment surrounding the questions of race and racism and how each, against France's color-blind universalism, evokes a clash in ideology. In describing discourse analysis, British sociologist Rosalind Gill writes, "[d]iscourse analysis is the name given to a variety of different approaches

to the study of texts, which have developed form different theoretical traditions and diverse disciplinary locations. Strictly speaking, these is no single 'discourse analysis,' but many different styles of analysis that all lay claim to the name. What these perspectives share is a rejection of the realist notion that language is simply a neutral means of reflecting or describing the world and a conviction in the central importance of discourse in constructing social life."[13] Discourse analysis, within the context of this thesis, then, manifests itself through published texts by these French activists but also through published newspaper articles, social media posts, and televised speeches and debates by French politicians.

Lastly, this thesis employs prosopography as a methodology in that it focuses on the individual biographies of Isabelle Boni-Claverie, Assa Traoré, and Lallab, and how these individual biographies and similar lived experiences as French women of African descent relate to the larger phenomenon of race and racism in contemporary France. As a historical methodology, prosopography centers around a group of individuals and their relation to societal phenomena. In describing prosopography, scholars Crystal D. Coles, F. Ellen Netting, and Mary Katherine O'Conner write, "[t]he method provides a useful approach to gaining insight into a group of individuals as a collective and their contributions to society. Prosopography offers the ability to investigate the similarities within and between individuals with various background characteristics by systematically bringing together all relevant biographical data of groups of persons, particularly when specific information is difficult to attain from the individuals."[14] Prosopography is vital to this thesis as it relates to the North American Black feminist tenet that the personal is inherently political and that the political is always personal. By giving voice to Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab, prosopography is vital as it raises the voices of the most oppressed in French society and allows them to reclaim their history, their identity, and their

personal and political power. As much as this thesis is an analysis of the activisms of Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lalla, it is also the story of different activists and organizations using their voices as French women of African descent to bring meaningful change to France. Their voices are no longer silent as they force the French State to contend with its history of the enslavement and colonization of peoples of African descent and how these shadows of the past reverberate in present-day life, breaking the illusion of French universalism.

Literature Review

This section will discuss the literature and research on the race and racism, French national identity, and Black feminist and Afrofeminist activism in contemporary France. Scholarship on these themes has largely been centered around Anglophone scholars and their approach to French Republican universalism and French political thought from an American and/or British perspective. Furthermore, questions surrounding race, racism, and the lived experience of French peoples of African descent has largely remained absent from traditional French scholarship. This has changed over the last decade; while Anglophone scholars still actively produce scholarship surrounding these themes, there has been an increase in diversity of scholars and scholarship surrounding these research themes in Anglophone and Francophone academia. In understanding the role that race and racism plays in shaping the lived experience of peoples of African descent, this thesis aligns with the conversation engaged by sociologist Jean Beaman in her 2017 text *Citizen Outsider: Children of North African Immigrants in France.* Beaman posits, "[t]hese individuals' marginalization reveals both how race and ethnicity remain significant in shaping life circumstances in French society and how citizenship status is not a sufficient boundary defining insiders and outsiders. Rather, acceptance as a fellow citizen is inextricably linked to boundaries around French identity marked by race and ethnicity. Despite

promoting a colorblind ideology, France, at both the state level and through microlevel interactions, reinforces the differentiation between nonwhite individuals and the rest of French society…"[15] As Beaman demonstrates, despite operating under a colorblind rhetoric, France classifies its citizens among racial and ethnic markers while further emphasizing a separation between its white and nonwhite citizens. In this way, despite France existing in a 'post'-colonial framework, it still subjugates its nonwhite citizens and prohibits their complete integration into French society.

In relating France as a 'post'-colonial State while simultaneously treating and policing its nonwhite citizens as colonial subjects in the modern-day, this thesis aligns with the views of urban studies scholar Mustafa Dikeç and French political scientist François Vergès. In his 2017 book chapter, "The Algerian War is Not Over in France," in *Urban Rage: The Revolt of the Excluded,* Dikeç posits, "[a]s we will see there are continuities between the colonial practices of the French state and its treatment of *banlieues* and their residents in the post-colonial period. This is why I prefer using the term 'colonial present' to emphasize how the colonial imaginary still persists and is today played out in French *banlieues.* These continuities are most visible in police practices, urban policy, official discourses and in a series of legislative initiatives."[16] From this formulation of France existing in a 'colonial present,' Dikeç contends that France exists as a post-colonial nation only in periodization but still actively subjugates and polices its nonwhite citizens through practices and policies during its colonial era. In this way, France is not 'post'-colonial, but is rather a neo-colonial nation. This sentiment is further reified by Françoise Vergès in her 2010 article, "'There Are No Blacks in France': Fanonian Discourse, 'the Dark Night of Slavery' and the French Civilizing Mission Reconsidered." Through discussing the rhetoric of the late Frantz Fanon and its relation to France's post-colonial period, Vergès puts forth the idea

that the French *banlieues,* loosely translated to French suburbs or working-class neighborhoods, exist and operate as an internal colony, while also contending that the creation of the French Republic is rooted in racial capitalism linked to France's enslavement and colonization of peoples of African descent.[17] In this way, this thesis aligns with the argument that France treats its nonwhite citizens, particularly its citizens of African descent, as colonial subjects rather than citizens and polices them through practices linked to colonialism and enslavement. Furthermore, this thesis aligns with the arguments made that the French Republic's creation is directly linked to racial capitalism and the dehumanization of peoples of African descent through its involvement in enslavement, particularly with its sugar colony St. Domingue through the 17th-19th centuries, and its colonization of North and West Africa throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

In further analyzing the role of Black Feminist and Afrofeminist organizing in France today and how it relates to challenging France's colorblind narrative, this thesis aligns itself with the views of the Martinican political scientist Silyane Larcher, sociologist Akwugo Emejulu, and digital media studies professor Francesca Sobande, predominantly through their contribution to the following texts: *Black French Women and The Struggle for Equality, 1848-2016,* published in 2018, and *To Exist is to Resist: Black Feminism in Europe,* published in 2019. In defining Afrofeminism, Emejulu and Sobande argue, "[i]n parallel to Black feminism, Afrofeminism—particularly in francophone Europe—has been the space for many Continental European Black women to collectively learn, organise and mobilise for their interests. There are many similarities between Black feminism and Afrofeminism but Afrofeminism insists on grounding analysis and action in the particular and specific histories of colonialism, racial formation, and gender hierarchy of the various European nation-states in which Black women live."[18] In their framing

of Afrofeminism in a French context, this thesis aligns with the belief that the mentioned activists have adapted North American Black feminist thought and practice into the context of their own lived experiences as French women of African descent. This has manifested in the form of linking their oppression and the shared oppression of French peoples of African descent to the legacies of colonialism and enslavement. Furthermore, as Silyane Larcher outlines in her chapter "The End of Silence: On the Revival of Afrofeminism in Contemporary France," France's current Afrofeminist movement exists outside of the constraints of France's mainstream feminist movement because of the ideological differences surrounding the belief of race and racism, intersectionality, and the failures of French universalism for France's non-white population. Larcher posits, "[i]f the space of antiracist rallies is today experiencing profound divisions between activists because of the very interpretation of racism and the means judged indispensable for combatting it, it seems the feminist milieus do not escape this rift for precisely the same reasons: an inability to properly account for race and its very concrete manifestations in French society. This confrontation essentially constitutes a battle over the history of feminist struggles as the scene of emergence of political subjects."[19] As Larcher demonstrates, this thesis adheres to the belief that France's Afrofeminist movement exists outside of the margins of France's mainstream feminist movement because of its roots in North American Black feminist thought and its importance of recognizing and giving power to intersectional identities. This sentiment reverberates amongst the activists studied in this thesis.

Contribution to Pan African Thought

While Pan Africanism is traditionally perceived as the study of peoples of African descent in Africa and throughout its diaspora, the main regions of study have been historically linked to Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and South America. In this way, despite its

growing population of peoples of African descent, Europe has largely remained unstudied in the context of Pan African thought. In thinking about this thesis' contribution to Pan African thought and literature, this thesis works off the concepts of Pan Africanism as defined by the likes of Walter Rodney, Horace Campbell, and Micere Mugo.[20] In defining Pan-Africanism, Horace Campbell notes, "Pan Africanism had arisen as a philosophy to restore the humanity and dignity of the African person and indeed all humans."[21] Furthering this definition and the origins of Pan-Africanism, Campbell notes, "…the important point was that Pan-Africanism did not emerge out of the brains of intellectuals, but out of oppressed people who were engaged in concrete struggles… 'Pan' means all, so Pan Africanism includes all people of African ancestry living in continental Africa and throughout the world."[22] With the importance of Pan-Africanism as both a philosophy and a grassroots movement for the upliftment of Black life, attention is drawn towards the importance of understanding the development of the West at the expense of the underdevelopment of Africa, leading to further fractures throughout the continent. Rodney notes, "[a]bove all, capitalism has intensified its own political contradictions in trying to subjugate nations and continents outside of Europe, so that workers and peasants in every part of the globe have become self-conscious and are determined to take their destiny into their own hands."[23] On the importance of a Black feminist approach to Pan-Africanism through the centering of women, youth, and the masses, Micere Mugo writes, "…unless women, youth, and the general African masses are involved in redefining the new Pan-Africanism project right at its inception—meaning that their involvement has to move beyond mere inclusion to assume indispensable agency—there can be no serious future for Pan-Africanism."[24] Once again, then, this thesis draws on the importance of inclusive Pan-Africanism at the grassroots to understand how the political ideologies and actions of the central actors of this thesis work to bring about greater

change to France, the lived experience of its peoples of African descent, and an overall more humanistic perspective of all French peoples.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1, "*Trop noire pour être Française:* An Interrogation of Color-Blind," analyzes French-Ivorian author, screenwriter, and film director Isabelle Boni-Claverie's memoir, *Trop noire pour être Française* as a reproduction of North American Black Feminist thought. Through this close reading analysis of Boni-Claverie's memoir, this chapter argues that the analysis of Boni-Claverie's *Trop noire pour être Française* is important because of her intersectional approach to discussing France's racial politics but also in the solutions, which I locate as being deeply ingrained in Black feminist, or Afrofeminist, and Pan-African tradition, to create a more equal and inclusive French society. In this way, Boni-Claverie's work is not only political because of its personal retelling of a prominent French women of African descent in France today, but also in its call for French peoples of African descent to unite as a political force to subsequently work together with their fellow French citizens to find a solution to France's racial climate. Moreover, this chapter argues that Boni-Claverie's memoir is a continuation in France's Afrofeminist tradition in that it includes the discussion of gender and class to France's 'race question' to show how these overlapping identities affect one's lived experience. This chapter then moves on to employ close reading analysis of different section of Boni-Claverie's memoir to document her understanding of being a racialized women in a supposed color-blind country, how this understanding changed her perspective of herself and of France, and how she used this shift in perspective in her professional career to advocate for the betterment of the lives of French peoples of African descent in popular media.

Chapter 2, “Comité Vérité pour Adama: The Activism of Assa Traoré,” analyzes the birth and evolution of Assa Traoré’s career as an activist and how she turned her personal grief surrounding her brother’s murder by the French police in July 2016 into a political organization and the ideology that France needs to undergo a revolution to better the lives of its peoples of African descent. Through this analysis, this chapter traces the evolution of Assa’s activism and political ideology through the publication of her two texts: 2017’s *Lettre à Adama* and 2019’s *Le combat Adama* to show how her continued work as an activist and her exposure to new social circles cemented her thinking and actions surrounding her committee. Within this chapter, I argue that Assa Traoré’s rise in domestic and international recognition as a prominent activist is the direct result of her strong conviction to seek justice for her younger brother’s murder, her indomitable focus on organizing French citizens at the grassroots through physical and digital mediums, and her unwavering optimism to bring about meaningful systemic change to France in the hopes that French Republicanism becomes more inclusive and multicultural. In this way, the study of the evolution of Assa’s activism is important because it illustrates the momentum she accumulated as an ‘ordinary’ French citizen turned activist and the ways in which she turned her personal grief into a political message and agenda. This evolution is important to the larger activism surrounding social justice in France today because the persistence of Assa’s message and of her mobilizing tactics has resulted in a larger amount of ‘ordinary’ French citizens from all ethno-racial and socioeconomic backgrounds to think about the country’s history of slavery and colonialism and how these historical practices resonate in the country’s institutions today.

Chapter 3, “Lallab and the Fight for Muslim French Feminism,” analyzes the creation of the anti-racist and feminist group, Lallab, in May 2016 and how its emergence and quick growth speaks to the desire of French Muslim women to have their voices heard and to speak for

themselves freely. In tracking the growth of this feminist collective, this chapter situates the organization in France's larger history of Islamophobic sentiment and highlights the factors that led to its increase throughout the late-20th and 21st centuries. From there, this chapter situates Lallab in the larger French mainstream feminist movement and how Lallab is not a part of the French mainstream feminist movement because of conflicting ideologies, but also how it cannot necessarily be characterized as an Afrofeminist movement, despite the organization's roots in North American Black Feminist history. Within this chapter, I argue that the creation and the activism of Lallab is important to further analyze in the larger context of contemporary French social justice movements, particularly France's different feminist movements, because of its unique intersectional approach to fighting for the rights of French Muslim women and how this fight challenges the narratives of Islam, race, gender, and feminism in French media and French political conversations. This approach to activism, then, manifests through both digital and physical mobilizing around the country in the hopes of reaching wider audiences to change the narrative surrounding Islam in France. Furthermore, I argue that the activism of Lallab is important to analyze because of its position in the larger debate about Muslim identity in France and how its organization fights against French institutions in France today. Lallab is unique in its formation and its activism because of its centering around the voices of French Muslim women and how these women's narratives are challenging French media and French politicians.

The conclusion of this thesis briefly summarizes the different case studies, their impact on France's social justice movements happening in this contemporary period, and the larger implications that France's political climate will have on these activists in the years to come. This thesis then briefly ends with the discussion of these activists and how their collective efforts to achieve the same desired outcome can be linked to a larger Pan African liberatory movement.

Chapter 1 - *Trop noire pour être Française:* An Interrogation of a Color-Blind France

In 2017 French author, screenwriter, and writer Isabelle Boni-Claverie published her memoir, *Trop noire pour être Française (Too Black to be French)*. Continuing the reflections found in her 2015 documentary of the same name, *Trop noire pour être Française* tells the story of Boni-Claverie's life as a French woman of African descent living in an alleged color-and-race-blind France. As noted on Boni-Claverie's website detailing the memoir:

> At the age of 6, Isabelle discovered that she was black. She dreamed of playing Mary in the school nativity play. She would be Balthazar, the Wise Man from Africa. For this little girl raised in a smart neighborhood of Paris, it was a shock. Day-to-day racism had entered her life. From Paris to Abidjan, from her private Catholic school to working in television, Isabelle Boni-Claverie tells her story. A black woman from a privileged social background, she nonetheless must face the obvious: in France, class does not erase race… With great sensitivity, Isabelle Boni-Claverie encourages us to question our relationship to difference, to plurality. She develops the reflection begun in her documentary of the same title on the way in which France's colonial past continues to affect French society today. In turns funny, uncompromising, and moving, she ends on an optimistic note proposing that we at last opt for real equality. Acclaimed writer Henri Lopès compared this autobiographical account to a modern-day Black Skin, White Masks (Frantz Fanon).[1]

As the book summary details, Boni-Claverie's *Trop noire pour être Française* calls attention to and disrupts France's state-sanctioned racial colorblindness in two important ways. First, the book highlights the lived experience of a rather prominent French woman of African descent, her struggles being a racialized being in a race-blind society, and the obstacles that she has faced based on the color of her skin to convey that one's socioeconomic status does not exempt them from racial discrimination. Secondly, the book is marketable towards a larger audience with the intention on finding an optimistic yet sensible solution to bridging France's racial climate in a way that incorporates all French citizens. While inherently political, Boni-Claverie's message is

delivered through her plainspoken and approachable diction that allows the 'ordinary' reader to think of France in a different light from an underrepresented voice and perhaps reorient their own views regarding France's 'racial question.' Furthermore, Boni-Claverie's memoir invites the reader to think through these larger claims and theories in a non-academic setting, which ultimately serves to attract more readers than academics. This ultimately leads to the goal of addressing France's race-blind rhetoric in the 21st century in a way that is perhaps more optimistic, welcoming, and inclusive. For these reasons, therefore, further analysis and discussion of Boni-Claverie's memoir matters in the context of race in modern-France.

It is through her grappling with France's 'race question,' and feeling of belonging, then, that the acclaimed Congolese writer, diplomat, and political figure Henri Lopes compares Boni-Claverie's memoir to the late Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks)* because of its shared observations of French society and its racial climate from a non-white and middle-class perspective. Initially published in 1952, *Peau noire, masques blancs* serves as a memoir of sorts detailing Fanon's experience moving from Martinique to France while also discussing "…race and its dehumanizing effects across racial lines."[2] This observation, I contend, is most prominent in the fifth chapter of *Peau noire, masques blancs,* "L'expérience vécue du Noir" ("The Fact of Blackness") in which Fanon details his lived experience in the Metropole as a French person of African descent in the mid-20th century and his struggle coming to terms with the shortcomings of French Republican universalism and its racial discrimination. By putting Boni-Claverie's memoir in conversation with Fanon's "L'expérience vécue du Noir," it becomes evident that France continues to abide by its policy of color-blindness in the 21st century while also continuing to dehumanize and exclude its non-white citizens. In looking at these different outcomes, one tracks the progression of Black

liberatory thought in France from the mid-20th century to present. In thinking about the gap between Fanon's publication of *Peau noire, masques blancs* in 1952 and Isabelle Boni-Claverie's publication of *Trop noire pour être Française* in 2017, what does Boni-Claverie's memoir speak to the climate of race and colorblindness in France today? Furthermore, how is the publication of Boni-Claverie's memoir and her continued work in traditional media a form of activism within itself?

In this chapter, I argue that Boni-Claverie's *Trop noire pour être Française* serves as a form of Black Feminist protest because of her intersectional approach to discussing France's racial politics but also in the solutions, which I locate as being deeply ingrained in Black feminist, or Afrofeminist, and Pan-African tradition, to create a more equal and inclusive French society. In this way, Boni-Claverie's work is not only political because of its personal retelling of a prominent French woman of African descent in France today, but also in its call for French peoples of African descent to unite as a political force to subsequently work together with their fellow French citizens to find a solution to France's racial climate. In this way, I put forth that Boni-Claverie's memoir is a continuation in France's Afrofeminist tradition in that it includes the discussion of gender and class to France's 'race question' to show how these overlapping identities affect one's lived experience and how France's historical involvement in the enslavement and the colonization of peoples of African descent reverberates in its political and social institutions today.

To explore how Boni-Claverie's work adds more thoroughly to the work of Afro-Feminism in France, the chapter begins by foregrounding Boni-Claverie's story addressing France's 'race question,' being racialized in an allegedly race-blind society, and the conclusions she draws surrounding France racial climate. From there, the chapter's focus shifts to situating

Boni-Claverie's memoir in a larger Afrofeminist tradition in France by investigating the history of Black feminist thought and its evolution to Afrofeminism in France today. Lastly, this chapter further analyzes the solutions that Boni-Claverie puts forth and how these solutions are rooted in both Black feminist and Pan-African tradition.

Section 1- D'où viens-tu ?

In grappling with France's 'race question' and highlighting the ways that she came to understand herself as a racialized being in a race-blind society, Boni-Claverie situates her memoir around several critical themes: the sense of belonging, questions surrounding Black feminism, and the steps needed to bring about the liberation of French peoples of African descent. By first focusing on the sense of belonging with her birth in the Ivory Coast in the 1970s and following her life in both Paris and Abidjan, Isabelle Boni-Claverie recalls her childhood and her initial memories of being racialized, and subsequently alienated, for 'being Black.' From the beginning chapter of her memoir, aptly titled "Si seulement tu avais été plus Claire" ('If Only You had Been Lighter), Boni-Claverie goes into great detail about how growing up as a 'Black' girl in both Paris and in Abidjan directly affected the perception of herself; growing up in a predominantly white setting as the only 'Black' child caused Boni-Claverie to notice that something was inherently *wrong* with her dark skin color, so much so that others around her had hoped that she would have been born with a lighter complexion.[3] In further describing her familial background and the events that led to her birth in the Côte d'Ivoire in the 1970s, Boni-Claverie notes that her biological parents comprised of Jean-Pierre Boni, the *métis* (mixed) son of Ivory Coast's Chief Justice Alphonse Boni and an African mother, Léonie. Though her parents separated not long after her birth, Boni-Claverie notes that this union between her métis father and dark-skinned *African* mother was taboo and could have had potential consequences

for Boni-Claverie; "[w]hen I was born, my mother feared that my dark skin disqualifie[d] me in the eyes of my paternal family."[4] As she describes her birth and the racial politics in the decolonized Côte d'Ivoire in the 1970s, Boni-Claverie begins painting the picture of the importance of skin color and the way that it determines one's future and one's possibilities. The union between her biological parents was not deemed problematic solely for the difference in socio-economic status between the two but more importantly because Boni-Claverie's mother's skin color was darker than that of her mixed father's. In this way, while she was 'luckily' accepted by her paternal family, the darker color of Boni-Claverie's skin would remain a point of conflict throughout her childhood both in a Côte d'Ivoire still mired in its racial hierarchy and in a supposed 'colorblind' France.

Following her birth story, Boni-Claverie details her departure from the Côte d'Ivoire to live with her *métisse* paternal aunt, Danièle, in France. It would be Danièle and her white husband, Georges Claverie, who assumed the parental role over Isabelle; "I would be their biological daughter, born from Danièle's stomach, the daughter of a white man and a mixed woman… No one is fooled but me."[5] At this point in her early childhood, Boni-Claverie already describes herself as being imperfect because of the color of her skin which comes to further complicate her family's attempt of being perceived as a 'normal' French family. In this way, Boni-Claverie's perception of herself picks away at her childhood innocence and further removes her from the feeling of 'normalcy' because she is *not* like the others in her environment, even though her adoptive family tries to uphold the illusion. Rather than having her darker skin celebrated and beautified, it already presents itself as an obstacle barring Boni-Claverie from living a normal childhood in France. This obstacle not only causes tension with her adoptive parents, but also sews the seeds of a feeling of guilt for Boni-Claverie; "Black. Too black. I did

not get the right genes. Irony of life that inscribed in me, on me, as a form of resistance, the trace of this African who presided over my birth and who they had not ceased to erase."[6] Once again, rather than feeling a sense of pride or beauty in her darker complexion that she inherited from her mother, Boni-Claverie expresses frustration at 'this African' whose darker skin color and its 'limitations' has followed her and further barred her path to living a 'normal' life in a raceless France.

By conjoining the first theme surrounding her sense of belonging to her socioeconomic status, Boni Claverie notes that her privileged upbringing and relatively successful parental sheltering from racism did not free her from this process of racialization from external forces. One striking example of this process occurred at Boni-Claverie's Catholic school when she lost the role of Mary in the Nativity Play and instead played Balthazar because of her skin color.[7] And yet, these continued instances of othering were subtle enough to not be considered racist encounters by French society because they did not imply that Boni-Claverie was a member of a *separate* race. In that way, these day-to-day acts of social racism were not considered as such in France because Boni-Claverie was part of the human race. And yet, despite this 'enlightened' stance taken by France under French Republicanism in the late-20th century, Boni-Claverie was still *othered* because of the color of her skin and was still made to feel like was not a *real* French citizen. In this way, the effects of daily subtle social racism were perhaps more insidious because of the lasting psychological effects that left Boni-Claverie questioning the ill will of these events. Boni-Claverie notes, "[t]he word 'race' has become a dirty word in France, which has been removed from law and which one no longer dares to use except to clarify that there only exists one human race."[8] Despite the omission of the word 'race' in law and in public culture following the end of World War II and the Vichy Regime, racism remains intertwined with French

Republicanism and persists in modern France, even if this discrimination is more 'cultural' than 'biological.' In this way, regardless of being 'biological' or 'cultural,' the *effects* of racism and racial discrimination continues its role in objectifying and other those receiving said racism and racial discrimination.

As Boni-Claverie further explains, in discussing the 2000 Human Genome Project, "it is reassuring, this pulls the rug out from under[*] the tenets of biological racism, but that does not eradicate all the other forms of racism, notably cultural racism. It is not enough to prove that there is only one human race to invalidate five centuries of domination in the world."[9] In post-war France, then, as Boni-Claverie perceives it, "[r]ace, in its social, political, and cultural acceptation, continues today to still be omnipresent. It ensures a very effective line of power-sharing for the benefit of a minority that could be described as white, and which was for a long time European then Western."[10] As Boni-Claverie argues, while the word 'race' is no longer used to differentiate between different ethnic groups in France following World War II, the effects of perceiving race as a biological truth, and in turn using this to justify the enslavement and colonization of African peoples, remains present in France today. In this way, Boni-Claverie exemplifies the inherent contradiction to French Republicanism and French universalism: being regarded as a French citizen is contingent on one's proximity to whiteness. Despite its insistence of recognizing all French peoples as indivisible and guaranteeing the same rights and opportunities to all in a color-blind world, Boni-Claverie pointedly makes clear that France 'sees color' and actively others those not perceived as white while simultaneously insisting such actions cannot be considered racist in nature.

From the retelling of her early childhood growing up in a home that placed socioeconomic status over 'race' and attempted to shield her from racial discrimination, Boni-

Claverie makes clear that this privilege did not completely shield her from feeling othered and different from those around her, even if she did not receive the full brunt of racial discrimination. In her early childhood, Boni-Claverie was 'accepted' by her adoptive father's circle because she and her aunt were *not like the other* peoples of African descent depicted in France; "[n]ot like the other Blacks, not like the Arabs, not like the 'banlieue youth.' It is so easy to think that one has no racist background, that it is the others who are not adequate…"[11] As Boni-Claverie highlights in discussing how Georges' circle, which largely reflect white French bourgeois society, accepted her and Danièle, they were still the *exception*; being the exception, however, did not mean exemption from racial discrimination. Moreover, this passage illuminates the seemingly impossible obstacles one must overcome to become an *exception* and to be 'accepted' into French society. In this way, Boni-Claverie puts forth that French people of African descent must be 'model citizens' and behave in a way deemed acceptable by the white French bourgeois society to be included and accepted. And yet, this performance is not true inclusion, as Boni-Claverie laments, "[w]e were far from Georges' circle."[12] While Boni-Claverie did not receive the same form of racial discrimination as the *others* on the account of her family's socioeconomic status, the retelling of her early childhood shows the early instances of her having to contend with the 'race' question and why she was singled out for not being like her white peers in this 'colorblind' society.

Ironically, as Boni-Claverie notes, her family's return to the recently independent Côte d'Ivoire in the 1980s forced to really "receive the question of race full-faced."[13] While being racialized as a child in French schools as well as in daily society, Boni-Claverie's socioeconomic status and parental figures shielded her from having the color of her skin and her family dynamic constantly questioned; "In Paris, my classmates left me alone about my parentage.[*] In Abidjan I

discovered that each child is potentially a genetic doctor… They object with contempt that I am too dark to be born from a white man and a mixed woman."[14] With her initial interactions with her new classmates in her new environment, Boni-Claverie came to experience firsthand the lasting effects of colonial domination on a recently independent nation. In France, Boni-Claverie experienced alienation principally in the form of not looking like her fellow peers, but in the Côte d'Ivoire, this initial alienation came not from her looks but rather her mannerisms and behaviors as a "small White [French] girl," thus further breaking the country's perception of what people with her skin complexion were capable of doing."[15]

With her return to a former French colony, Boni-Claverie was no longer guarded from France's colonial legacy, namely the creation and reinforcement of racial hierarchies and the integral role it played in colonial governance. Boni-Claverie writes, "[a]s in all the other countries that had been colonized, where a strict social hierarchy was established according to color, separating the Whites from the Blacks, giving rights and privileges to the ones that the others did not have, giving a special status to the mixed [ones], the Ivorians developed a particular attention to the questions of melanin… The colonizer had done its work well, instilling in the psyches the evidence of its superiority."[16] As Boni-Claverie continues detailing her life in Abidjan, she makes further comments on the lasting psychological damage from colonization within the country and the way that the French, or whiteness more largely, remained superior. In this way, whiteness is capital and one's proximity to it, be it mentally or physically, allows for more benefits and opportunities in society. Living in this space, then, is what further opened Boni-Claverie's eyes to the reality of the role that 'race' plays and the ways that it was weaponized to keep nonwhite peoples in their designated 'place,' both physically and psychologically. This lingering psychological effect in part manifested, as Boni-Claverie

observes, though the Côte d'Ivoire's insistence on European, or white, educational superiority as well as the strive to emulate conventional European beauty standards. Boni-Claverie writes, "…when I lived in Côte d'Ivoire, and for a longtime afterwards, the absolute fascination was the creole Caribbean or the American in way of Beyoncé. Caramel complexion, long curly or done up hair, and, as a bonus, light eyes are the absolute jackpot."[17] In this way, despite living in a predominantly Black region, one's proximity to whiteness, be it through academic pursuits, emulating European beauty standards, or having a lighter skin complexion, propelled them in society.

Living firsthand in a post-colonial Ivory Coast still grappling with its colonial past not only further emphasized Boni-Claverie's 'black' skin but also further exposed her to the disconnect surrounding France's societal color-blindness rhetoric in the Metropole compared to the way that skin color, or 'race,' governed former French colonies, both physically and psychologically through a racial hierarchy. Contrary to the French Republic's universalist ideology, then, Boni-Claverie quickly learned how proximity to whiteness meant the attainment of power and success. Additionally, Boni-Claverie's years spent in Abidjan exposed her to the fact that though independent, Côte d'Ivoire remained psychologically shackled to Eurocentric principles, customs, and beauty standards. As Boni-Claverie notes, "[e]ven if, at the age that I was then, I was not capable of formulating it clearly enough, it is an obviousness that develops in me: the singular history of my grandfather liberated our family from the inferiority complex implanted by the colonizers."[18] Mirroring her grandfather Alphonse Boni, whose parents sent him at the age of fifteen to pursue secondary education in France, Boni-Claverie recounts how her return to France to finish her secondary education in Bordeaux would further change her perception of the country as a universal and color-blind society.

With her return to France to finish her secondary education, Boni-Claverie's arrival in Bordeaux marked a noticeable shift in her life; her transition from schooling in the Ivory Coast to schooling in France resulted in others perceiving her as a foreigner. Boni-Claverie notes:

> When I arrive in Bordeaux, I am officially, and in the eyes of others, a stranger. I have an Ivorian passport. I must report to the prefecture. I am lucky, it happens quicky, a simple check in. I would not have imagined, anyway, that it could be otherwise. Nevertheless, I do not consider myself French. 'A small Ivorian.' 'A small African.' It is in these terms that my parents speak of me. It is therefore thus that I designate myself in front of others. And it is thus how they perceive me: a small African come to pass her bac in France. The fable is not completely honest. If my parents did not worry about making me have French papers, I can by my birth claim both nationalities.[19]

Through this explication of her return to France and the situation she found herself in dealing with French immigration laws, Boni-Claverie illuminates the fact that despite being able to obtain dual French-Ivorian citizenship by birthright, she still returned to France feeling like a stranger. This sentiment was further upheld by Georges and Danièle. Even if the phrases 'small Ivorian' and 'small African' could be interpreted as terms of endearment, they still convey the overwhelming sense that Boni-Claverie was *not* French even with her familial lineage. Through this feeling of alienation reinforced by her French peers and her adoptive parents, Boni-Claverie recounts further examples of childhood memories in which her parental figures reinforced this idea of her skin color being incompatible with French citizenship.

With her return to Bordeaux to finish her secondary education and with her reflections on her childhood thus far, it is during this period of her life where Boni-Claverie begins to question the tenets of French Republican universalism and her association with its philosophy. During this period of her life, Boni-Claverie wrestled with internalized questions of belonging because of her adoptive parents' assistance that she is African and not French. And yet, thinking more through this logic, Boni-Claverie concludes, "I embody, without knowing it, the principles of Republican

universalism. I am the ideal realized, including in its ambiguities. I have everything right. I have no class or race consciousness. I sincerely believe that everyone is the same, that everyone is equal. I do not see that I am Black and the others white. I am not practicing, but I have the good taste of being culturally Catholic, which, [even though] the Constitution does not say it, places me on the good side of secularism. I am surely unaware of my ethnocentric presupposition on which my universalism is based on."[20] During this period of her life, Boni-Claverie further recounts the ways in which she was raised to believe in European academic and cultural superiority while also being denied identifying as French by her ado parents. Through these growing pains, and as a step to further independence, Boni-Claverie concludes that she must embark on her relationship with her 'Blackness' and how this affects her relationship with her universalism.

By the time she reaches full independence as a university student in Paris, Boni-Claverie details her initial experiences dealing with the full brunt of racism. Once living as an independent without the shielding from her adoptive parents' socioeconomic status, Boni-Claverie became one of the *others* instead of the *exception.* In this way, Boni-Claverie experienced Paris in a different light and under different circumstances. As Boni-Claverie writes, "[n]ow that I live alone, without displayed pedigree, I am no longer Isabelle Boni-Claverie, daughter and granddaughter of, nor even an African come to study in France with the fantasies that it can carry, I am a Black… to be Black in France is to permanently suffer a process of social inferiority."[21] In this way, Boni-Claverie came to learn that her 'Blackness,' and therefore her *place* in Paris, is determined by the way that white French peoples view her. Being a 'Black' in Paris, then, is to be subjected and attempted to be kept to the fringes of bourgeois society.

In the process of thinking through this phenomenon of Black inferiority, Boni-Claverie traces the treatment and place of peoples of African descent in France to the history of the country's involvement in both the Transatlantic slave trade and the colonization of Africa; "[t]his history, even when we do not know all its details, so strongly anchored in our collective unconsciousness, created stereotypes so powerful that it is very difficult to escape from them."[22] As Boni-Claverie sees it, despite her upbringing believing in French Republican universalism and seeing people indivisibly, France's perception of its peoples of African descent are rooted in racialized stereotypes that reinforce the belief of their inferiority to European exceptionalism. In this way, Boni-Claverie notes that her lived experience in France as a woman of African descent is one in which she is perceived in a fixed way that renders her incompatible with true French identity because of her Black skin.

This experience as she depicts in her memoir comes to fruition in one of the most important chapters, "*D'où tu viens* ?" ("Where do You Come From?") Within this chapter, Boni-Claverie reflects on when she began claiming her French citizenship in her early twenties and how this change, appeared to her rather uneventful given her native French citizenship status at birth, was a monumental occasion for her adoptive father. In detailing the exchange between her and her adoptive father, Boni-Claverie writes:

> The day where I return from the city hall with my new passport and identity card, Georges calls me, all excited: 'So, are you happy?' His question took me by surprise. Happy? Happy for what? To be officially French? I do not see why I should be delighted for something that is neither more nor less than an arbitrary birth. I had no more choice being French than being Ivorian or female, like I did not choose the genes that I have and that determine for a long part my health, my emotions, or my intellectual quotient. This is part of the determinism that make me and with which I make. French, I am already it, by the blood links and the culture that impregnates me. I have a hard time seeing which supplementary benefits French papers are supposed to bring me when nobody in France spontaneously considers me as French. Paradoxically, it is this denial that, little by little, will bring me to attach great value to my French nationality. [23]

From her retelling of this story, Boni-Claverie puts forth two important things about her lived experience in Paris as a woman of African descent. Firstly, Boni-Claverie discusses the arbitrary meaning behind her French citizenship and how becoming an 'official' French citizen made no difference to her perception of herself or the way others perceived her. Secondly, despite being a *française de souche,*[*] Boni-Claverie emphasizes that nobody in France perceives her to be a native-born French citizen because of the color of her skin. In this way, despite having French citizenship by birth and being raised culturally French, Boni-Claverie emphasizes that her lived experience in France is marked by others denying her the right to claim being a true *Française de souche.* In the way that Boni-Claverie sees it, 'officially' claiming her French citizenship does not change this societal phenomenon.

This denial of her French nationality, as Boni-Claverie observes, is succinctly exemplified from the simple question asked by white French peoples: *d'où tu viens ?* (Where are you from?) This simple question, which Boni-Claverie views as a microaggression against France's minority communities, acts to further reinforce the belief that French nationality is rooted in whiteness and that non-white peoples living in France cannot be *real* French people, even if they are legal French citizens. As Boni-Claverie notes, "'where are you from?' white people ask Black people, without realizing that they are inducing a hierarchy by their very question. I am from here, implies the one that asks the question. It goes without saying that I do not have to justify being French. I draw a legitimacy from it that allows me to ask you about your origins, you whose skin indicates to me that you come from elsewhere, you who cannot be as French as me, even if we have the same papers… Asking the prior question of origin re-establishes without saying it a racial definition of national identity."[24] Through this example, Boni-Claverie shows that her lived experience in France as a woman of African descent is one

that experiences the direct contradiction of French Republican universalism, mainly in that she is not viewed as an equal to white French peoples because of the color of her skin.

Boni-Claverie's retelling of her childhood and the evolution of her disillusionment with French Republicanism in the early part of her memoir is important because of the discussion of how her personal lived experience, both in France and in the Ivory Coast, made her contend with questions that French Republican universalism does not address: what does it mean to exist as a racialized being and experience the physical manifestations of systemic discrimination in a supposed color-blind society? Through this retelling of her childhood and the process of her learning how to be a 'Black' French person, Boni-Claverie invokes the North American Black feminist ideology surrounding the concept of intersectionality and how her overlapping identities paints her lived experience in France. By invoking this ideology, this section of Boni-Claverie's memoir allows the reader to orient themselves with this line of thinking from an approachable manner to get a better understanding of what racialization and oppression looks like in France today. This practice, through her writing, is a form of activism in that she reaches out to a larger audience using traditional media and challenges the audience to think about these concepts by reading about her own lived experience as a French woman of African descent.

Section 2- From *Peau noire, masques blancs to Trop noire pour être Française:* France's Colorblind Universalism from the mid-20th Century to Present

It is through Boni-Claverie's recount of her adult lived experience in France as a French woman of African descent and her process of thinking through being a racialized being that one can draw parallels to the late Martinican-turned-Algerian Frantz Fanon and his experience coming to France in the mid-20th century chronicled in his 1952 work, *Peau noire, masques blancs.* Coming from Martinique, a French colonial possession turned overseas territory, to study

in France in the 1940s, Fanon's lived experience in France is what would inform his work. In writing about Fanon's life in France and the factors that led to the publication of *Peau noire, masques blancs,* historian Christopher J. Lee notes, "[Fanon's] first year in Lyon was largely isolating… But compounding these sentiments was his ineluctable status as a racial minority, despite his privileged upbringing, his military service, and his French citizenship by birth."[25] Much like the lived experience of Boni-Claverie in the late-20th and 21st centuries, Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* largely focuses on not only his lived experience as a French person of African descent in France but also on his growing disillusionment and eventual detachment from believing in the tenets of the French Republic. Lee writes, "*Black Skin, White Masks* grapples with the meaning of being both black and French. It is critical of assimilation, yet not anticolonial in a conventional sense… It is primarily concerned with the individual rather than the community, unlike *The Wretched of the Earth.*"[26] These sentiments are most articulately expressed in the chapter *"L'expérience vécue du Noir,"* most commonly translated into English as "The Fact of Blackness."

In "L'expérience vécue du Noir," Fanon grapples with the concept of blackness and how this blackness that defines him exists in the confines of whiteness. More precisely, then, Fanon argues that 'black' identity or the process of 'being black' in France has always been and can only ever be defined with whiteness. As he addresses at the beginning of his chapter, Fanon writes, "[a]s long as the Black man is amongst himself, he will not, except in the occasional small internal conflict, experience his being [through] others… For the Black man no longer must be black, but to be black opposite the White man."[27] 'Blackness,' then, exists within the definitions of what whiteness dictates it to be, which manifests in France's construction of racial hierarchy both domestically and throughout its colonies. Through the various encounters that he

experienced and details throughout this chapter, Fanon concludes that regardless of the efforts by French peoples of African descent to 'be' French, they will only ever be seen as black beings. And yet, Fanon contends that the French do not regard this racialization as an inherently racist act. Fanon writes, "[o]n that day, disoriented, unable to be outside with the other, the white man, who mercilessly imprisoned me, I carried myself far from my being, very far, making myself an object… I simply wanted to be a man amongst men. I would have wanted to arrive smooth and young into a world [that was] ours and build it together."[28] As much as Fanon simply wanted to be perceived as a man, just like all other white Frenchmen, France would continue perceiving him as a *black* man before anything else, *un nègre (negro).* Fanon continues, "[t]he white world, the only honest one, denied me from all participation. From a man, one demands the conduct of a man. From me, the conduct of a black man—or at least the conduct of a negro. I hailed the world and the word amputated me from my enthusiasm. It demanded that I confine myself, shrink myself… I am over-determined from outward appearance. I am not the slave of 'the idea' that others have of me, but of my appearance."[29]

Fanon concludes this chapter in a sullen, if not defeatist, manner. Having settled on the belief that Black identity will only ever exist in the confines of whiteness and that French people of African descent will only ever be considered *black* people and never true *français de souche* (native French), Fanon offers no solution to this phenomenon; "irresponsible, straddling between nothingness and infinity, I began to cry."[30] This, then, is the lived experience of the Black *man* in France according to Fanon; regardless of their efforts, French people of African descent are destined to live a life as a racialized other in a country whose rhetoric conveys the sense of equality and equity for all of its citizens. Although Fanon published *Peau noire, masques blancs*

65 years before Boni-Claverie's *Trop noir pour être Française*, both works offer more insight into Postwar France's "black condition."

As these accounts from Boni-Claverie and Fanon exemplify, the "black condition" in France is its unique phenomenon in the large Global African world; French people of African descent live in a society that claims to adhere to French universalism and true equality and equity for its citizens while simultaneously racializing and racially discriminating against its nonwhite citizens. Describing this phenomenon, French historian Pap Ndiaye writes, "[Black French people] are individually visible, but they are invisible as a social group and as an object of study for universities. Firstly, as a social group, they are not supposed to exist, since the French Republic does not officially recognize minorities and no longer counts them."[31] Under the tenets of French Republicanism, then, ethnic diversity is not recognized officially because French nationality supersedes other identities. However, as previously stated, this view of French citizenship harkens back to the formation of the French Republic following the French Revolution; "for the French citizen, belonging is political, but it also contains a vocation towards universalism… at the bottom, it consists of a single principle: the human subject as universal."[32] French universalism, then, is that one's political association with the French Republic renders them equal regardless of other identity markers. It is through this ideology that the French State continues to insist that France remains 'blind' from societal inequalities. This form of 'belonging,' however, was only ever intended for white Frenchmen and never for peoples of African descent. Concerning the practice of French universalism, this ideology is not only outdated but also incompatible with a 'post-colonial' France. Jennings notes, "[y]et, with the passing of time, this [Republican] vision has increasingly hard to sustain. A rationalist universalism, rooted in the philosophy of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, now looks more

like a form of European ethnocentrism, and thus like a form of domination rather than liberation."[33] While the French Republic continues to enforce the idealistic beliefs of how French universalism frees its citizens from their 'particularities,' the Republic concomitantly attempts to force its peoples of African descent into outdated notions of citizenship that were only ever intended for its white Frenchmen.

For Boni-Claverie, France's racial climate, and ultimately 'Black liberation' is an obstacle to overcome through small and persistent change beginning at the grassroots. Furthermore, this form of protest needs to be uniquely French in the way it addresses the country's racial climate; adopting a form of protest similar to that of the American Civil Rights Movement in the mid-20th century will not in France because it does not directly address France's own history and relationship with its citizens of African descent.[34] What Boni-Claverie is seeking, then, is an *actual* liberation of French peoples of African descent from France's racial climate both politically and socially, which is something that she argues has not been achieved in the United States.[35] Beginning at the grassroots involving all French peoples of African descent, this form of protest not only needs to be more political but also more inclusive in the sense that French peoples of African descent are recognized as a fixed and permanent population in France.[36] While Boni-Claverie does not directly give a name to this form of protest, and in fact voices her critiques of American and French Black feminism in practice in a French context, I contend that Boni-Claverie's vision of 'Black liberation' has inherent connections to in Black feminist, and more largely Pan-African, ideologies, because of her insistence of grassroots organizing, recognizing how overlapping oppressions shapes one's lived experience, and turning personal lived experiences into political ideology and organizing.

Section 3- Situating *Trop* noire pour être française: Black Feminism, European Black Feminism, and Afrofeminism in Writing and Practice

In chapter 28, titled "Solidarity," of *Trop noire pour être française,* Boni-Claverie further discusses the political climate of France following the 2005 Banlieue Riots and the political influence of France's minority communities, particularly those of African descent, in the country. Through this discussion, Boni-Claverie further argues that while French peoples of African descent do not possess sufficient political strength in the country, the Internet has provided a space for people to create their own identity and find community.[37] In discussing the emergence of digital spaces for French peoples of African descent to connect with one another and create their own individual and collective identities, Boni-Claverie exemplifies how Black feminism, or Afrofeminism, has emerged as one of the principal communities in France in the 21st century and the struggles the movement faces in relation to the French government. In briefly discussing the origins of the Black feminist movement in the United States amid the women's liberation movement of the mid-20th century, Boni-Claverie writes:

> Born in the United States in the 1970s, with leading figures such as Angela Davis and bell hooks, Black feminism calls out the patriarchal structure of the Civil Rights movement led by the great Black leaders of the 1950s and the 1960s but does not identify with the feminist movements essentially comprised of white middle-class women who shrug off the racism question. Why would the descendants of slaves fight to have the right to work like men when they have not stopped toiling, especially in the service of white women, of which some continue to show them contempt because of the color of their skin?[38]

Through this passage, Boni-Claverie notes the special factors that led to the creation of Black feminism as an ideology and political movement within the United States in the mid-20th century and how these efforts resonated with French women of African descent almost 40 years later. With its emergence in the mid-20th century and its resonance in France almost half a century

later, how exactly can Black feminism be defined and in what ways can it be used as a both an ideology and political tool for liberatory organizing?

During the time of nationwide political activism in the United States during the mid-20th century, Black feminism emerged as a way for women of African descent to address their specific lived experiences and oppressions. Furthermore, the emergence of Black feminism in the United States grew out of the political omission of women of African descent in other mainstream liberatory movements, such as the Civil Rights movement, the Black Power movement, and the Women's Liberation movement, of the era. In this way, Black feminism emerged as a way for Black women to properly discuss their lived experiences and how these experiences were affected by overlapping identities, which culminated in the creation of not only the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), but also the Combahee River Collective (CRC) in 1973 and 1974 respectively.[39] What set the CRC apart from the NBFO, according to Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor, was the fact that the CRC recognized that "the identification of racism alone as a phenomenon in the lives of Black women was politically insufficient as an analysis or as a plan of action."[40] In this way, the CRC stood out as a more radical Black feminist organization from the NBFO because it called out the structural inequalities under the capitalist system while also emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the overlapping oppressions Black women faced. As Taylor notes, in discussing the liberatory goals of the CRC, "…if you could free the most oppressed people in society, then you would have to free everyone."[41] Not only does this statement ring true for the lived experience of Black women in the United States at this time, but also included all peoples of African descent both in Africa and in its diaspora.

In describing how its politics incorporates the concept of intersectionality and is applicable to all women of color, the CRC states, "[t]he most general statement of our politics at

the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression… The synthesis of these oppressions created the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face."[42] Moreover, another core tenet of the CRC that would also become a core tenet of Black feminist ideology today is the belief that the personal lived experience of Black women, or any woman of color, is inherently political because of the placement of Black women in capitalist societies.[43] As the CRC Statement notes, "[i]n the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough."[44] In this way, the CRC not only highlights the fact that the personal lived experience of Black women is inherently political, but also that Black feminism does not follow a hierarchical system or place greater value on different people; it is intrinsically a political movement at the grassroots.

Lastly, the CRC, and subsequently Black feminism, places emphasis on the inclusion of *all* peoples in its organizing. While the liberation of all people cannot come until the Black women are liberated, Black feminism does not serve as a separationist movement; it is not an ideology or political movement exclusively meant for Black women. The CRC statement notes, "[a]lthough we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand…"[45] At its core, then, the CRC is advocating for a Black feminism that is inclusive of all peoples while ensuring that the voices of all Black women are being heard in order to bring about societal and structural

change. This form of organizing using Black feminism as a political tool not only needs to be inclusive, but also must be holistic and non-reactionary. Rather than subscribing to a reactionary practice matching violence with violence, the CRC advocates for a "collective process and a nonhierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society. We are committed to a continual examination of our politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice."[46]

Despite the CRC Statement being published in April 1977, these core beliefs surrounding Black feminism in ideology and in practice continue to resonate in present times and serve as a basis for modern-day organizing both in the United States and around the world. It is through these continued frustrations and aims of achieving liberation, especially in France, that Boni-Claverie exemplifies to explain how Black feminism emerged as a dominant movement for French women of African descent in the 2010s. In describing this phenomenon, however, Boni-Claverie makes note to distinguish between American Black feminism and French Black feminism, or Afrofeminism. Boni-Claverie writes:

> Like their American big sisters, French Afrofeminists assert their position at the intersection of the inequalities of gender, race, and class. This sometimes creates controversy. This was the case in June 2017 when the Mwasi collective announced the holding of a militant 'non-mixed' festival of which certain sessions would be reserved to Black women. Falling into the trap of the National Front which instantly cried anti-white racism (but curiously not anti-Arab or anti-Asian racism), the mayor of Paris threatened for a time to forbid the festival. Through the strong critiques of the LICRA [International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism] and of SOS Racisme against Mwasi, two forms of anti-racist activism clashed that oppose each other regularly, one wanting to appear to be universalist, the other asserting the fact of being driven by minorities themselves.[47]

The 'controversy' that Boni-Claverie references is born out of the attempt to orient the ideologies of American Black feminism in a French context; that is, trying to incorporate intersectional organizing to bring about systemic change to a country rooted in Republican universalism. In

this way, the Afrofeminist movement exists under the umbrella of a larger European Black feminist movement that highlights the unique lived experience of European women of African descent.

While operating out of the same principal beliefs of the American Black feminist movement of the 1970s, the European Black feminist movement sprung up out of the need to particularly highlight how the lived experience of Black women in Europe differentiates from Black women in the United States. In discussing the European Black feminist movement, Akwugo Emejulu and Francesca Sobande write, "Black women in Europe must struggle for our humanity while simultaneously negotiating the dominant discourses of racial, gender and intersectional politics of North American Black feminists that make it difficult to name and take action on our particular racialised, gendered and classed experiences in a European context."[48] In this way, European Black feminism seeks to acknowledge the groundwork laid by American Black feminists while also attempting to avoid the Black Americanization of the global Black feminist movement.

Moreover, this avoidance exists not only culturally but also linguistically and is what separates North American and European Black feminism largely from Afrofeminism. Emejulu and Sobande note, "[i]n parallel to Black feminism, Afrofeminism—particularly in francophone Europe—has been the space for many Continental European Black women to collectively learn, organise and mobilise for their interests."[49] In France, the Afrofeminist movement exists as a Black feminist movement that draws inspiration from American Black feminists while also highlighting the unique challenges French women of African descent face in a 'post'-colonial and 'colorblind' universalist country. In discussing Afrofeminism, Boni-Claverie notes that the movement grew in popularity in France during the 2010s as Internet communities became more

widespread and more people had the opportunity to connect with one another. This same narrative has been upheld both Anglophone and Francophone media particularly following the inception of the Mwasi Collective, one of the most notable and controversial French Afrofeminist groups in the country today. In an article titled “Understanding Afrofeminism in Five Questions,” Etienne Jacob, in conversation with French sociologist Christine Delphy, writes, “[i]n France, recently, the Afrofeminist movement is progressively developing through these organizations: Mwasi, Parlons des femmes noires, Afro-Fem, and others… For Christine Delphy, Afrofeminism in France was born after the ‘translation of texts written by Black women coming from the United States.”[50]

And yet, while Afrofeminism in France rose to prominence in the 2010s thanks to the Internet, its roots in the country date back to the early-20th century. In writing about Afrofeminist organizing in France on behalf of the Mwasi Collectif, Cyn Awori Othieno and Annette Davis write, “[t]he origins of Afrofeminism in France can be traced back to the Nardal sisters in the 1920s. Upon their arrival in France from Martinique, Jeanne Nardal and her sister Paulette Nardal (1896-1985) started a weekly literary salon in their apartment to encourage critical black thought.”[51] Following the contributions of the Nardal sisters to the origins of Afrofeminist thought as well as their involvement in the Négritude movement with the likes of Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, and Léon Damas, amongst others, the second emergence of Afrofeminist thought and organizing can be traced to the inception of both la Coordination des Femmes Noires (also known as le Mouvement des Femmes Noires) in 1976 and le Mouvement pour la Défense des Droits de la Femme Noire (MODEFEN) in 1981.[52] Yet, as has been stated, it was the digital age and the rise of Internet-based communities that led to current resurgence of Afrofeminist thought and organizing in France today. Within this resurgence of Afrofeminist

thought and organizing in France today, the group that stands out the most, and can almost be considered the 'face' of Afrofeminism in the country, is the Mwasi Collectif.

Founded in 2014 by Sharon Omankoy, the Mwasi Collectif is an Afrofeminist organization "exclusively open to Black and mixed-race women and femmes."[53] What sets apart the Mwasi Collectif from other Afrofeminist and liberatory organizations within the country is its revolutionary approach to its Afrofeminism. Rather than operating with a reformist vision, the Mwasi Collectif's political aim is for structural and societal change in France. From the Collectif's manifesto, in describing its Afrofeminism, "[o]ur Afrofeminism is a political and collective response the racist, hetero-patriarchal, and capitalist system, joining in the history and the heritages of women and black feminists having led the fights for emancipation and liberation by contributing in an important manner to the construction of feminist thought that is in France, in Sub-Saharan Africa, in the Caribbean, or in the afro diaspora."[54] Ideologically, Mwasi Collectif shares similarities with mid-20th century American Black feminists while also drawing inspiration from the Nardal sisters and their contributions surrounding the questions of race and gender to the Négritude movement. From its inception and inspiration from prior Black feminist organizations, the Mwasi Collectif further emphasizes the importance of incorporating an international Pan-Africanism into its feminist ideological framework through its activism in France and its political solidarity with women of African descent both in Africa and throughout the African diaspora.[55]

By further thinking through Mwasi's adherence to non-mixed space, this sentiment highlights Boni-Claverie's original remark about the difficulties of organizing in France for the advancement of French peoples of African descent because this community does not exist as unified and powerful political entity. Furthermore, Boni-Claverie's attention to the events

surrounding the obstacles and limitations that the Mwasi Collectif faces in its activism shows the ways in which it has 'fallen into the trap' of engaging in the fight for racial equality and equity with established organizations in France while still operating in exclusive capacity. As Boni-Claverie writes, "[b]uild your identity. Denounce. Condemn. All this, the associations that exist already do it. But what about the fight for inclusion?"[56] How exactly, then, can the Mwasi Collectif, and more largely the Afrofeminist movement in France today, achieve its goals of complete societal and transformation in the country without 'falling' into this trap? While the inclusion of 'non-mixed' spaces by and for French women of African descent are vital, it is also vital for a movement to be holistic and inclusive in its organizing and in its membership to truly bring about societal change at the grassroots. As Boni-Claverie notes, "[w]e protest, in general in our corner and between us… It seems to me that we remain in timid posture. It is time that we take our place, one that should have all French citizens, not less, not more."[57] The fight for the liberation of French peoples of African descent, then, is not one that can be fought alone. Furthermore, this fight must be uniquely French in its origin as it must specifically address France's imperial history.

Through Boni-Claverie's analysis of France's current production of Afrofeminist organization and its place in the larger fight for social justice throughout the country, Boni-Claverie further invokes North American Black feminist thinking in that the fight for the liberation of French peoples of African descent must be a holistic and communal effort amongst all French peoples. In this way, Boni-Claverie puts forth the notion that fighting for the liberation of French peoples of African descent must occur within the French institution and that violent and or exclusionary organizing tactics will not garnish meaningful results. In thinking about the activism of Boni-Claverie, her message surrounding France's current social justice movement

shows her belief in the power of the Internet in bringing together peoples from different backgrounds, but also that innovative and well-thought-out tactics must be taken if France is to see any meaningful change. Though these serve as suggestions on how to bring about meaningful change, these suggestions still serve as a political message that Boni-Claverie puts forth. For Boni-Claverie, her form of activism comes from the production of her works in traditional media mediums, not necessarily through online activism.

Section 4- Revolutionary Struggle: Pan Africanism in France

In thinking about the current phase of 'revolutionary struggle' for French peoples of African descent, Boni-Claverie puts forth two points. The first point is that French peoples must reconfigure their ideas about French nationality and what makes a person truly French. In this way, Boni-Claverie puts forth that the fight for the betterment of French peoples of African descent must be uniquely French in its conception and cannot follow in the footsteps of other liberatory movements. Secondly, Boni-Claverie contends that activists must reorient their approach for fighting for the betterment of French peoples of African descent to be more encompassing and multiethnic and multicultural. In this way, while not directly naming this conceptualization of activism as such, Boni-Claverie not only invokes a Black feminist, but also Pan-African, ideological approach to activism because of its insistence on intersectionality, its inclusion of all French peoples from every aspect of society, and its enforcement of the humanity of French peoples of African descent. In this way, Boni-Claverie's approach to France's current 'revolutionary struggle' is anchored more in a holistic process than one uniquely based on violence to achieve its aims.

Through her discussion of the current state of activism amongst French peoples of African descent in France today, Boni-Claverie argues that French activists cannot employ

similar methods to bring about this systemic and societal change as those in the United States because the fruit of this labor has yet to be fully realized in the United States. While she notes the success of the Civil Rights movement in bringing about legislative change in the United States, Boni-Claverie notes that the country's "mental structures" have not changed, which has led to the continuous subjugation of non-white peoples; "[s]till today, America continues to be shaped by this mortifying drive. It has confined the [Native Americans] in reservations where they die out. It massively incarcerates Black people. Like if it had the careless desire to erase their presence."[58] In this way, Boni-Claverie is comparing the United States' subjugation of non-white peoples to France and its subjugation of non-white peoples to further highlight the difficulties that lay ahead in trying to bring about meaningful and lasting change in the country. Furthermore, Boni-Claverie notably points out the challenge of trying to change the *mental* structures that complement the institutional discriminations and subjugation of France's non-white peoples. Simply put, violence cannot be a solution to improve the lived experiences of French peoples of African descent. In looking at France's history of its subjugation of non-white peoples, Boni-Claverie further writes, "I do not believe that a few riots, or even an insurrection, are going to bring the French to differently consider their proper trauma, the part of history that comes to contradict all the proclaimed ideas by the Enlightenment France and the rights of men: the enslavement of Black people, the colonization of Africans, North Africans, and Asians. It will be necessary to make other bets, slower without a doubt, but more political. Also counting on a part of good desire. Or, in its absence, creating it."[59] Here, Boni-Claverie highlights the important fact that societal change not only must come from the grassroots, but must also be all-encompassing and markedly pointed in its tactics.

Most importantly, as Boni-Claverie poses, one must *want* to make this change happen as it will not just spontaneously occur. Rather than giving into despair that lived experience of French peoples of African descent is a fixed reality or subsequently trying to fix the situation in a limited and exclusionary manner, it is vital that French peoples of African descent must find new ways to organize to achieve systemic and societal change in France. Through this interrogation of France's current state, Boni-Claverie comes to one large question: "[i]n a country in crisis, plagued by nostalgia for its past grandeur and its fear of a future decadence, is it right to deprive ourselves of the contribution of a young, dynamic, and resourceful population…?"[60] In asking this question, Boni-Claverie points towards the importance of looking towards the future and for the way that a younger population of French peoples can go about bringing great change to France so long as this group has a reoriented view of what *makes* a person French. In this way, Pan-Africanism in philosophy and in practice can serve as a tool to help bring about this change because of its approach to finding a new humanism.

In trying to simply define Pan Africanism and its different approaches, Horace Campbell writes, "Pan Africanism had arisen as a philosophy to restore the humanity and dignity of the African person and indeed all humans… At the period of slavery when the ideas of inferiority of black humanity became one component of enlightenment thinking, Pan Africanism emerged as a complex set of ideas and ideologies containing social, cultural, political, and spiritual aspects of dignity and liberation."[61] From this perspective, the conceptualization of Pan Africanism as a philosophy stresses the importance of restoring a lost humanity and dignity of peoples of African descent in order to bring about larger liberation of all peoples. In practice, as Campbell continues, "[i]t is the oppressed who are responsible for liberation themselves. If liberation is conceived, directed and executed by the usurpers-cum-vanguards of the people and their

struggle, the people will end up with new masters on the morning after the 'successful' revolution."[62] In situating this in the context of Modern France, then, this Pan-African 'revolution' must come from the grassroots and bloom from the country's oppressed peoples. Should such a movement arise in France, the inclusion of Black feminist ideology and its focus on inclusivity and intersectionality would only further enrich Pan-Africanism as an organizational tool.

In combining the ideas of intersectionality and group solidarity from Black feminist theory to the philosophical and practical tenets of Pan-Africanism, one finds that this liberatory 'revolution' must in fact be all encompassing and be achieved through holistic means. In discussing the role of women, the youth, and the masses in Pan-Africanism, Micere Mugo notes, "[a]s a movement, Pan-Africanism has been characterised by fluctuation, registering bouts of life and dormant lulls. On the other hand, its lived aspects, actual substance, or *essence*, have always remained alive and persisted over historical time. Ordinary people, or the masses, including the majority of Africana women, have been the key keepers or carriers of this *essence*."[63] As Mugo posits, the *essence* or lifeblood of Pan-Africanism, both in ideology and in practice, is found amongst the *ordinary* people rather than within academic or governmental institutions. In this way, it is evident that the 'common people' have the power to bring about change if they work together, i.e., at the grassroots. Furthermore, as Mugo points out, women are integral to the revitalization of the Pan-African project and must be included at the forefront should such a movement come into being. Mugo further notes:

> Pan-Africanism calls for united activism on the part of women, youth, men and the masses at large, envisaging women as pivotal. The reason for this is that, currently, women assume the lead in interrogating the status quo, gendering history and discourse, advocating for the equitable distribution of global wealth, insisting on a redefinition of power relations and generally fighting for a more peaceful, humane world. These are the discourses that must characterise the

> reconstruction of Pan-Africanism, with all the complexities inherent in the challenge. Ultimately, we conclude that Pan-Africanism is not only relevant for Africa to day, but that it needs to be urgently placed on the agenda for revitalisation and actualisation, placing an emphasis on it as a mass movement, with progressive women, youth and men shaping it anew.[64]

From Mugo's observations on the revitalization of Pan-Africanism as an all-encompassing mass movement, it is evident that a revitalized Pan-African project must break away from traditional masculine and violent means while also adding women and the youth to the mix. However, in this way, Mugo argues not for a movement built exclusively by women for other women, but one that encompasses all to bring about meaningful change. In applying Campbell and Mugo's definitions of Pan-Africanism and its uses as an ideological practice and a tool for mass movements to the context of modern France as portrayed by Boni-Claverie, it is evident that such a movement could take hold in France through a complete reorientation on the concepts of citizenship and nationality as well as the question of who can or cannot participate. And yet, most importantly, as Mugo questions, "[w]hether or not [Pan-Africanism as a mass movement] is an idealistic, unattainable dream becomes a hypothetical question that only a determined historical intervention on the part of all progressive, global, Africana people will have to prove one day."[65] In the context of modern France, such a movement is possible, as Boni-Claverie observes, but it must be born out of a desire to make such change.

Conclusion

In closing, this chapter has argued that Isabelle Boni-Claverie's *Trop noire pour être Française* serves as a form of Black Feminist protest because of her intersectional approach to discussing France's racial politics but also in the solutions, which this chapter has argued are deeply ingrained in Black feminist, or Afrofeminist, and Pan-African tradition, to create a more equal and inclusive French society. In this way, Boni-Claverie's work is not only political

because of its personal retelling of a prominent French women of African descent in France today, but also in its call for French peoples of African descent to unite as a political force to subsequently work together with their fellow French citizens to find a solution to France's racial climate. Furthermore, this chapter has argued that Boni-Claverie's memoir is a continuation in France's Afrofeminist tradition in that it includes the discussion of gender and class to France's 'race question' to show how these overlapping identities affect one's lived experience and how France's historical involvement in the enslavement and the colonization of peoples of African descent reverberates in its political and social institutions today.

As an activist, Boni-Claverie's form of protest on French institutions takes the form of working within the institution through the production of traditional media to reach a larger audience throughout France and internationally. In so doing, Boni-Claverie's activism through the retelling of her lived experience in France as a woman of African descent and through her contribution to print media surrounding questions of French national identity and the question of 'race,' allows her to use her personal experiences to craft a political message that reaches wider audiences. While Boni-Claverie's activism does not take the form of physical mobilizing, the political messages felt in her print and digital works give suggestions of what she believes should happen to bring about meaningful change in France. This is important, then, because of the power she has cultivated within French media and her ability to work within this system to change it internally while giving suggestions for external tactics.

Through her position in French society and the power that she has cultivated, the activism of Isabelle Boni-Claverie is rooted in mid-20th century North American Black feminist thought because of her belief in intersectionality and how overlapping oppression affects the lived experiences of others and through her insistence that the only way meaningful change will come

to France is through communal and holistic organization at the grassroots. While Boni-Claverie does not personally take the charge in these efforts, her activism must still be considered successful because of the audiences that she is able to reach and the lasting impact that her work has on others. In thinking about the first step of enacting change, outreach and communication is the most vital.

Chapter 2- Comité Vérité pour Adama: The Activism of Assa Traoré

Introduction

On July 17th, 2020, *New York Times* reporter Constant Méhaut published an article titled, "Fighting Discrimination, a French Woman becomes a Champion of Men." Within this article, Méhaut reports on the activism of Assa Traoré, a French woman of Malian descent, and her concerted efforts to receive justice from the French State for the mysterious and untimely murder of her younger brother, Adama Traoré, on July 19th, 2016, at the hands of three French police officers. The timing of the *New York Times* article and the growing international recognition of Assa Traoré and her activism coincided with the surge in Black Lives Matter protests across the United States and internationally following the murder of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020. Through this reporting, Méhaut draws the conclusion that issues of police violence and systemic inequality is not a unique issue only in the United States, but also across other Western countries like France. In reporting on Traoré and her string of marches for both Adama, Méhaut writes:

> Until a few weeks ago, Ms. Traoré, 35, a special-education teacher of Malian descent, was largely known as the spokeswoman for The Truth for Adama, an advocacy group that has demanded justice for her half-brother, Adama Traoré, who died in police custody in 2016 on his 24th birthday. But now, with the spread of Black Lives Matter protests, she has gained wider prominence as the champion of men who have been victims of discriminatory police violence in France. Ms. Traoré said that men in minority neighborhoods are more likely to be targeted by the police than women—and as a woman, she could help defend them by taking a stand where she least expected… In the aftermath of George Floyd's killing in the United States, which triggered a wave of anger that spanned the world, Ms. Traoré and her group have organized some of the biggest anti-racism protests in Europe. They assembled at least 20,000 protesters in front of a Paris courthouse early in June despite a police ban, then a crowd of 15,000 just 11 days later on the Place de la République. Protesters in recent weeks have included more white people and people from upper-class areas of Paris, Ms. Traoré said, as compared with the first demonstrations for Adama, back in 2016, which were mainly attended by people of color.[1]

Through the discussion of Traoré's efforts since 2016 to fight for the justice for Adama's murder, Méhaut highlights the surge of participants in the marches for Adama while also commenting on the energy of Assa an activist and leader of the Truth for Adama committee, le *Comité Vérité pour Adama.* Through this coverage of Assa and the way that she galvanizes massive crowds, Méhaut speaks on the important role that Assa plays in France with her fight against anti-racism and against police violence.

As the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* has grown since its inception in July 2016, the movement has reached wider audiences both in France and around the world through its active presence on social media, but also through the tireless work of Assa herself. In an age of activism strengthened through social media and public outreach, who, then, is Assa Traoré and how has her work as an activist for the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* since 2016 culminated in her ascent to international recognition? Furthermore, how does Assa's activism and commitment to bring about systemic change to 'post'-colonial France align with the larger global struggle for the liberation of peoples of African descent? In this chapter, I argue that Assa Traoré's rise in domestic and international recognition as a prominent activist is the direct result of her strong conviction to seek justice for her younger brother's murder, her indomitable focus on organizing French citizens at the grassroots through physical and digital mediums, and her unwavering optimism to bring about meaningful systemic change to France in the hopes that French Republicanism becomes more inclusive and multicultural. In this way, the study of the evolution of Assa's activism is important because it illustrates the momentum she accumulated as an 'ordinary' French citizen turned activist and the ways in which she turned her personal grief into a political message and agenda. This evolution is important to the larger activism surrounding social justice in France today because the persistence of Assa's message and of her mobilizing

tactics has resulted in a larger amount of 'ordinary' French citizens from all ethno-racial and socioeconomic backgrounds to think about the country's history of slavery and colonialism and how these historical practices resonate in the country's institutions today. In this way, by remaining persistent in her ideology and tactics, Assa's activism aligns itself in the larger fight for social justice in France as it indicates the presence of change to French society, even if it remains at the grassroots level. As a result, Assa's physical and digital activism culminates in her bringing the voices of the 'Other France' to the forefront of French politics and media, making her one of the most important figures of study in France today.

In conversation with the activism of Isabelle Boni-Claverie, Assa's activism further impacts France's conversation around racial equity and police violence because of her active usage of social media to bring awareness to her cause. Because of her active presence on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, Assa has managed to accumulate a large following of users both in France and internationally to follow her pursuit to achieve justice for her brother's murder. In contrast to the activism of Boni-Claverie, whose memoir and documentary serve as important pieces of popular media in the 2010s surrounding race and belonging in France, Assa's activism takes form both virtually and physically. Putting Assa's activism in conversation with Boni-Claverie is important because it further enriches one's understanding of the current wave of French Afrofeminist activism across the country because of the different methods used to approach the conversation surrounding the lived experience of French peoples of African descent. By using both popular and social media as tools of activism to disseminate information and ideology, analyzing Traoré's activism in conversation with Boni-Claverie further illustrates the power and influence that 'ordinary' French women of African descent have at different socioeconomic levels and how they can use their own lived experience and personal

circumstances in their favor to continue spreading awareness and enacting conversations around the lived experience of French peoples of African descent in France today. It is important to put these two French women of African descent in conversation with one another because it ultimately allows one to have a better understanding of how shared sentiments of non-belonging and discrimination in an allegedly color-blind society can result in similar, yet diverse, responses.

In studying the emergence of Assa Traoré as an activist and the evolution of her ideology and principles with the *Comité Vérité pour Adama*, this chapter follows Assa's path through the publications of her two texts *Lettre à Adama,* published in 2017, and *Le Combat Adama*, published in 2019, before concluding with an analysis of what revolution means to Assa and what her hope for a better France looks like. The first section, 'The Murder of Adama Traoré and its Aftermath,' traces the beginning stages of Assa's activism and the core themes found in *Lettre à Adama* that began shaping Assa's mission and purpose as an activist. The second section, 'The Maturation of Assa's Activism and Her Fight Against Police Violence in France' follows the transformation in Assa's ideology and message in her activism from the initial publication of *Lettre à Adama* in 2017 to her second publication, *Le combat Adama,* with French philosopher and sociologist Geoffroy de Lagasnerie in 2019. This section follows the solidification of Assa's ideas and tactics as an activist turned revolutionary and what factors led to this metamorphosis in the time between publications. The last section, 'Call for a Revolution in 'Post'-Colonial France' puts into question Assa's repeated call for a revolution in France and what her version of revolution looks like. The chapter concludes with conversation surrounding revolution and whether the activism of Assa Traoré can be considered as revolutionary and, if so, what stage her revolution resides in.

Section 1- The Murder of Adama Traoré and its Aftermath

Assa Traoré's life changed forever on July 19th, 2016. The daughter of a French-Malian father and one of 17 children, Assa grew up as a French girl of African descent in a country that instilled the ideas of liberty, equality, and brotherhood on all its citizens. In this way, despite her father's immigrant background, Assa grew up believing that she could obtain anything she wanted and that she was an equal member of French society. Because of the number of siblings that she had from her father's different marriages, Assa grew up in a supportive and loving community that looked out for one another. After growing up and aiding her father navigate life in France, Assa remained focused on pursuing her education and accomplishing her goals. In this way, Assa grew up and lived as an 'ordinary' French citizen, aware of French societal problems targeted at families of immigrants, but not at the capacity of becoming an activist by any means. This would all change following the events of July 19th, 2016.

July 19th, 2016, marked the birthday and the death day of Assa's little brother, Adama Traoré, who was murdered by the French police on his 24th birthday. On the day of Adama's birthday, Assa was in Croatia on a school trip with seven students, eager to give these students a chance to enjoy a paradisical vacation outside of France. Assa had wished Adama a happy birthday earlier in the day on Facebook and had gone about the events of her day until she received the update that Adama was in a 'crisis,' which eventually led to the announcement of his death later that evening. Over the course of a few hours, Assa's life had completely transformed. Losing a loved one on its own is an inexplicable pain, but Assa's pain was aggrandized by her physical distance from France and from the confusion and misinformation surrounding her brother's death. In such a short amount of time, Assa went from being an 'ordinary' French citizen who had received an education and had a successful career to a

grieving sister angered by the disillusionment of France and what French citizenship means for its citizens. As a result of her strong familial connection, her anger that came from grief, and her determination to uncover the truth behind Adama's mysterious and untimely death, Assa became a steadfast activist.

Assa's launch into activism is a direct result of the lack of clarity and transparency surrounding the events that led to Adama's murder at the hands of the French police. In the immediate aftermath of Adama's murder, the Traoré family struggled to obtain factual and concise information that could explain what exactly had happened to Adama and how an altercation with the French police during a surprise check for a *carte d'identité* (national identity card) directly resulted in the death of a healthy adult male. While Assa documented the slow release of information surrounding the conditions of Adama's murder in real-time through her first work, *Lettre à Adama* (Letter to Adama), it would not be until the following months of the book's publication where more information became available to the Traoré family. In retrospect, as Geoffroy de Lagasnerie and Assa Traoré detail in their co-publication, *Le combat Adama,* "Adama Traoré died from asphyxiation following the use of an arrest technique. He left during an identity check, he was caught and, to stop him, the police inflicted on him the *plaquage ventral*[2]: three bodies, 250 kilograms, that crushed him and held him down for several minutes."[2] While this information has been uncovered retroactively, Assa and her family remain in a legal battle with the French judiciary system in the attempt to charge the three officers involved in Adama's murder. As forensic architecture researchers at the Goldsmiths, University of London, in collaboration with French reporters for *Le Monde,* report, "[i]n spite of the detailed scrutiny to

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[2] Plaquage ventral can loosely be translated as a 'belly tackle' or ventral plating; it is an outlawed technique in other Western countries, such as the United States, but not in France. It is the process in which a police officer kneels on the back of the suspect during the arrest.

which the police officers have been submitted in their official interrogations, their statements do not allow for a single, unequivocal version of the events to emerge… Our investigation reveals how the main medical expertise commissioned by the justice system relies on a single, and contradictory, testimony… In spite of the numerous requests formulated by Adama Traoré's family and their lawyer, the French judiciary has yet to order that a physical reconstruction of the key moments of the case be undertaken."[3] In briefly recounting the events surrounding the murder of Adama Traoré and the aftermath, the version of Adama's murder portrayed by the French judiciary system and supported in the French press does not match that of the Traoré family and their lawyer. While not being recognized in this legal setting, it is known that three police officers arrested Adama Traoré on his 24th birthday, placed him in a belly tackle, and that Adama died shortly after en route to jail.

For Assa and her family, their personal loss and grief in the immediate aftermath led to their desire to search for the truth. By chance, Assa's continuous posting in the following days and weeks of July 19th, 2016, resulted in the growth of a following around France yearning for answers but also resonating with the Traoré family's story. In this way, Assa turned her personal grief into a political message aimed directly at the French State and the French police system; to bring about the end of a series of unjustified murders of predominantly French men of African descent around France's banlieues, grandiose systemic change was needed. In order to prevent another 'Adama,' it was necessary to organize France's population to bring about this change to allow the Republican ideology of liberty, equality, and fraternity to ring true. This, then, is the Assa Traoré that we find in 2017 with the publication of *Lettre à Adama.*

Ten months following the murder of Adama Traoré on July 19th, 2016, Adama's sister, Assa, co-published *Lettre à Adama* (*Letter to Adama).* Written as a letter to her deceased brother,

Lettre à Adama begins by detailing the events behind the murder of Adama on July 19th, 2016 and proceeds to detail the events in the following months after his death. In this way, Assa's *Lettre à Adama* serves not only to communicate with her deceased brother but also to show the readers who Adama truly was as a person to show that he was real and not just another faceless target of police violence. In the introduction of the book, Assa writes, "[t]he letter that I address to you is the daily account of the combat that we lead for you. The exposure of a system organized to return people like us to invisibility… I hope that all these words will arm other griefs similar to ours, that they will urge us to refuse shame and silence, that they will take us away from anger and its ravages, that they will convince us that your name is everyone's on Earth."[4] In following Assa's thoughts and actions over the course of *Lettre à Adama*, three core themes to the book's message emerge: the importance of family and belonging, mobilizing trauma and grief into political action, and the obstacles grassroots movements face when fighting against the State and its institutions. Rather than discussing each separately throughout the text, Assa blends each theme through each journal entry by detailing her grieving process and the work that the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* began undertaking following Adama's murder.

Through her brief introduction of the text and her explanation as to its purpose, the first core theme that Assa portrays is the meaning and the importance of her family and its interconnected history with colonial and 'post'-colonial France. By talking about the history of the Traoré family and her father's immigration from Mali to France in the 1960s, Assa exemplifies to the reader the important fact that her family is inherently French and that they deserve to be considered as such. In discussing her father's immigration to France and his setting roots in the Parisian suburbs, Traoré writes, "we are not 'from an immigrant background' although the media and politics repeat it over and over again for decades but are inheritors of a

shared history between France and Mali."[5] Assa's emphasis on her family's tie to France and the French citizenship shared by her father and her siblings is important to note because of the way in which the French media portrays victims of police violence in France to be citizens of 'immigrant background.' In her attempt to further humanize her brother, Assa shows the reader that her family deserves the same opportunities as other French families and that the murder of her brother was unjust and a contradiction of French Republicanism.

By detailing her father's life in France and the birth of her sixteen siblings, Assa demonstrates the importance of family for her and her siblings and how his tireless efforts were for the goal of giving them a better life and more opportunities in France; "our older brothers and sisters saw our father work hard to educate them, to help his own in Mali, to fight for France."[6] Once again, Assa depicts her childhood as one that appreciated the work of her older siblings and her father to give her more opportunities promised to her as a French citizen and to try to be as 'French' as possible. In other words, Assa's father worked relentlessly in order to give his children the opportunity to be like any other 'ordinary' French child and had hoped that further assimilation to French culture would allow his children to achieve their dreams uninhibited; the Traoré siblings deserved to follow their dreams because they *belonged* to France and were *enfants de la Patrie.*[3] In recounting her final moments with her father prior to his death from lung cancer in 1999, in part caused by his ingestion of asbestos during his time as a construction worker, Assa notes: "If anything happens to one of you one day, it will be necessary to count on your siblings… Here we are Adama."[7] By giving a small recount of her family's history in France and the importance of familial connection her siblings share, Assa exemplifies how

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[3] 'Children of the Fatherland' from the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*; selecting this line from France's national anthem further reinforces the fact that the Traoré siblings are French citizens, belong to France, and deserve to have equal opportunities free from racial discrimination as promised by French Republican tenets.

Adama's murder caused an irreparable rift in the Traoré family akin to the death of their father. Furthermore, Assa's father's final words to his children also highlights the importance of her family's efforts to avenge Adama; in taking one of the Traoré siblings away, the French State must contend with the ire of the others. The murder of Adama at the hands of French police officers was certainly an individual attack, but the outcome afterwards resulted in a concerted effort by the entire family to seek justice. Emphasizing the importance of family and its meaning to Assa in *Lettre à Adama* also allows the reader to better understand the origins and the nature of the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* as a family-centered movement first and foremost. Lastly, this emphasis on familial connection also allows the reader to better connect and resonate with the Traoré family because of the human aspect of this story; while Assa describes the ways in which she became an activist and how her organization formed, her letter to Adama more importantly highlights how her efforts are a result of her grief and her wish to see her brother still alive and vibrant. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding his murder, humanizing Adama and showing the importance of family to Assa allows the reader to empathize with her and her movement because of the shared human experience of loss and grief.

In connecting the importance of family to the loss of her brother, the second core theme that Assa portrays in *Lettre à Adama* is the ways in which she used her personal grief as a tool to mobilize others into political action. Through this transfiguration, Assa turned her personal suffering into political action by sharing her story in a way that harkens back to American Black feminist ideology. In a similar way to Isabelle Boni-Claverie's *Trop noire pour être Française,* Assa's *Lettre à Adama* serves as piece of work that documents her personal grieving process and the ways in which she took this healing process to bring attention to Adama's murder and mobilize others politically to call for systemic change to the French State. By her recalling the

moment when she learned of Adama's death and the immediate feelings that surfaced, Assa notes:

> 'Adama is dead'… I feel an electric shock that stiffens me: I am going to defend you. I am going to defend us. Do they know who we are? Do they believe that we are going to keep quiet? I am going to break the silence that grips me, the pain that is in the middle of engulfing me. I quickly search for contact details of journalists on the internet. I call them. I tell them: 'the police killed my brother!' You will not be a minor news item. You are Adama Traoré. We are sixteen brothers and sisters, an army behind you. I can't wait to see us again, to feel us all together. All of us, around you. I'm thinking, they got you. They wanted you for a long time. I'm going to fight.[8]

Adama's death shocked Assa into acting by circulating the information to as many journalists as she could. In so doing, Assa ensured that Adama's death would not go unnoticed or passed over simply because of his ethno-racial background as a person of African descent. While sitting in her grief momentarily, Assa's 'electric shock' resulted in her using her grief in a 'productive' manner; for Assa, mourning her brother took form of actively fighting for his justice. Not only did she ensure that Adama's name was being circulated around Paris, but Assa also ensured that her family actively took the helm. Through discussing the immediate aftermath of Adama's death, Assa also alludes to the French State and how the police disproportionately surveillance people that look like Adama, or more concisely, French men of African descent in the banlieues. By commenting on how the French police had wanted Adama for a long period of time, Assa makes commentary on the ways in which French men of African descent are targeted from a young age by the French police and how it is only a matter of time until they are arrested, or worse, murdered.

The birth of the movement to get justice for Adama, then, began the night that the Traoré family discovered that Adama died while in police custody. Starting initially as a family movement to uncover the truth behind Adama's death, the movement began at the grassroots

with Adama's friends and family members seeking out the truth before encapsulating a larger audience both in Paris and around all of France in the following months.[9] It was also during this time that Assa Traoré completely dedicated her life to uncovering the truth surrounding her brother's murder and using her social media platform and involvement with French media to demand justice not only for her brother but for all French peoples directly affected by police violence. These combined efforts culminated in the creation of the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* in February 2017; "it is also the moment that I chose to announce the creation of our association. Allow everyone to have access to the law and to justice, focus on building relationships without marginalization nor social divides, it is in partly the role that we set for ourselves."[10] It as this point that Assa's activism transitions from pursuing the truth for her brother to bringing about more systemic and long-lasting change to the French State for 'all of the Adama's' past, present, and future. While Assa details her grieving process throughout the text, the reader also sees Assa begin to contend with larger systemic ills in France and her desire to bring about change. Assa expresses a desire for change but at this point has not come to concrete conclusions of what that change looks like and how her committee could be the one to set it into motion.

In thinking about one's personal associations to loss and grief, Assa's message further resonates with the 'masses' around France because of the sentiment of innate injustice of Adama's murder. Through telling her personal story in popular and social media, Assa's humanity and conviction touches upon those who feel similar sentiments of non-belonging or injustice in France. While the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* is a grassroots movement based around the Traoré family, this human connection and transfiguration of personal matters into a political statement and agenda is what allows others to join her cause, regardless of if they had endured a similar situation to the Traoré family. The innate humanness of the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* is

what launched the movement and why it gained momentum in the following months of Adama's murder. This movement further touches on the desire for French peoples from all backgrounds to want to live in a better France and to want to feel included, equal, and protected.

The last core theme that Assa presents in *Lettre à Adama* is the struggles that her organization faced in its infancy in relation to the French State and its institutions. This took shape most directly in the ways in which the French police surveilled Assa and her family following the murder of Adama and the rise of protesting around the country in addition to the difficult the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* faced trying to actively organize in public spaces around inner-and-outer Paris. In the period following Adama's murder, Assa details the different marches that occurred throughout France with or without her involvement. In describing the marches against police brutality and the increase in attendance from other French peoples, Assa further exemplifies that the authenticity of her cause is what has led to its initial success.[11] Yet, during this period, Assa further highlights the setbacks faced as the French police and the French media tried to silence and repress her family's mission and her committee's actions. This repression began immediately by the French media portraying Adama as a criminal from a 'troubled' background while simultaneously pushing a false narrative with fabricated evidence surrounding Adama's murder to support the French police. As Assa notes, "you [Adama] supposedly died from a heart attack during your helicopter transfer, after having been stopped for the extortion of funds. The authorities already made you a delinquent."[12] In detailing the way that the French police and the French media collaborated immediately following Adama's murder, Assa illuminates the fact that France tried to quickly move on from Adama's death and, through the process of attempting to vilify him, justify why police violence was necessary in apprehending him.

This fact further illustrates Assa's discontent with French Republicanism because of its innate hypocrisy surrounding equality and protection; not only did Adama suffer at the hands of police violence because of increased police surveillance and identity checks around Paris' working-class neighborhoods, but the Traoré family itself received false information surrounding Adama's murder and an increased lack of cooperation with the French police and judiciary system. For the French State, it would have been easier for Adama to be added to the increasingly large list of French men of African descent who died mysteriously under police custody without a demand for an investigation. Assa writes, "[e]ach time that a person falls between the hands of the police, it is the same judiciary party, assembled in advance from scratch, that replays itself."[13] Assa and her family deviate from others, then, because of their unrelenting battle against the French judiciary system and their call to action of others around the country to empathize with the injustice and to act out in the hopes of creating a better France. This repression and vilification by the French media surrounding Assa and the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* in the following months after his murder further highlights the disparity between French peoples of African descent and 'normal' French citizens in the media; rather than portraying Adama's murder as an unjust and heartbreaking story, French media portrayed Assa and her family as disrupters and threats to the Republic. Rather than drawing attention to a flawed system and pointing out its hypocrisies in the hopes of creating a better future, French media depicted this desire as a threat to the country and its ideals.

This repression and altercations between Assa and the French State extended to French politicians as well in two distinct ways: lack of acknowledgement for Adama and his family's quest as well as direct altercations with Assa and her family in their attempt to continue marching in Adama's name. In the immediate aftermath of Adama's murder, Assa details the

way that there was a profound silence amongst French politicians across the political spectrum, but especially from François Hollande, who at the time was in his final year as President of the Republic. Mentioning Hollande and his silence surrounding the murder of Adama is important in that Assa discusses her family's political affiliation and how numerous members aligned themselves with the Socialist Party, of which Hollande is a member of; in thinking about the Social Party being more 'left' on the political spectrum, Assa details how her family members voted for Hollande in part because of his stance on immigration and those who lived in working-class neighborhoods. Assa writes, in discussing Adama's mother's alignment with the Socialist Party and her vote for Hollande, notes, "[s]he said, they had kind words for immigrants, these people, 'I believed in them.' She feels disgust when she admits that she gave her vote to François Hollande: 'my son is dead, the façade has collapsed, I see the true face of these smooth talkers, who despise the colonized that we have remained in their minds.'"[14] By discussing Adama's mother's disillusionment with Hollande but also the Socialist Party more broadly, Assa demonstrates the fact that French politicians have no regard for French peoples of African descent regardless of political affiliation because they still view these citizens as colonized subjects rather than French citizens. Hollande's noted silence in addressing Adama's case or his family's pursuit of justice broke this illusion that he was a politician for *all* French peoples; through this silence, Assa emphasizes that her family could not rely on those in power meant to work with and for its citizens. Assa notes, "[t]he only institutional and official support that we obtained came from abroad by the voice of the president of our country of origin, Mali. Here, no reaction, except a show of force expressed by the repression to relegate our grief to oblivion."[15] By mentioning the from the Malian president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, juxtaposed with the pointed silence from French institutions further illustrates the sentiment that France does not

view Assa's family, but French peoples of African descent more generally, as citizens of the Republic but instead as colonized subjects residing in the country temporarily.

In addition to the silence by French politicians in the aftermath of Adama's murder, Assa also details the direct altercations she and the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* faced against the far-Right mayor of Beaumont-sur-Oise, Nathalie Groux. Assa details the altercations between Groux and the Traoré family throughout the text, but one of the main takeaways was Groux's sympathies with the French police and the reinforcement of the idea that the Traoré family were not 'real' French citizens and her attempt to block the Traoré family from organizing around Beaumont-sur-Oise, the same neighborhood where the French police murdered Adama. In discussing these actions, Assa writes, "I learn that Nathalie Groux decided to pursue me for public defamation. Because I accused her in the media of never making the slightest gesture in our direction, to have chosen the side of police violence by putting obstacles in our way every time she could. I maintain that the mayor has never taken the side of social peace since the announcement of your death."[16] While directly confronting Assa on social media and in a legal setting, this repression also resulted in an increased police presence around Beaumont-sur-Oise in addition to increased surveillance during marches.[17] In this way, Groux further supported and increased police forces to 'monitor' Beaumont-sur-Oise in attempts to keep the 'peace,' but in reality as a way to control its citizens and to silence them. In discussing the way that Groux handles the residents of Beaumont-sur-Oise, Assa writes, "[l]es Beaumontois [citizens of Beaumont-sur-Oise] are housed like terrorists. About fifty armed mobile guards, municipal police, and dogs on leashes, are positioned around City Hall. In the surrounding streets, pedestrians and vehicles are controlled."[18] Here, Assa exemplifies the stark contrast between peaceful marches against police violence with the State response of increasing the surveillance

and policing of its citizens with the possibility of having things turn violent. And yet through the increased militarization of Beaumont-sur-Oise and the increased efforts to vilify Adama and the Traoré family in the media, the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* continued to grow because of the humanness felt in the organization.

Assa concludes *Lettre à Adama* by detailing the metamorphosis of the rhetoric surrounding her demands and how it transitioned from not only seeking out justice for Adama, but to bring about systemic change akin to a revolution in France. Assa writes, "I speak of a revolution. I say that that it is prepared. If I can express myself today freely as a Black woman, it is because of the others who fought before us…"[19] Moreover, in the conclusion of *Lettre à Adama,* Assa speaks more on her role as a French woman of African descent and how her gender allows her to speak out against police violence in France and its disproportionate targeting particularly of French men of African descent. In reading through Assa's *Lettre à Adama,* one finds a budding activist working through her thoughts and emotions surrounding the death of her brother, but also the larger systemic inequalities that allowed his death to occur in the first place. At this point in her career as an activist, Assa is still actively working to find her voice and find a concrete platform for the *Comité Vérité pour Adama.* This is felt in part because of the nature of the text; rather than retroactively discussing the events surrounding Adama's murder and thinking through systemic inequality throughout France, Assa brings the reader through 'real-time' to track the progression of her thoughts and the growth of her movement. As a French woman of African descent, Assa uses her voice as way to amplify the lived experience of French men of color around the country's suburbs and how their lives are predetermined and shaped to be made into the criminals that the French media portrays them to be. The revolution that Assa calls for, then, is a direct call to action to find ways to abolish this systemic outlook.

Section 2- The Maturation of Assa Traoré's Activism and Her Fight Against Police Violence in France

Assa's life changed dramatically following Adama's murder and her first two years as a full-time activism. Within that period, Assa turned her grief and anger at the French State and turned it into a grassroots movement that addressed systemic discrimination and police violence in new and unique ways. Through her use of social media, persistent marches organized around major French cities, and continual contact with French and international press, Assa managed to turn her family's personal trauma into a galvanized political movement that forced Adama's memory and legacy to remain at the forefront of France's national consciousness. For Assa herself, and on behalf of the *Comité Vérité pour Adama,* Adama's murder would not become just another faceless casualty because of an unjust and inhumane system that disproportionately affects French men of African descent around France's banlieues. While Assa's activism reaches larger audiences, her tactics remain central to her family's grief and their pursuit of justice and clarity surrounding Adama's murder.

In the wake of Adama's murder and the publication of *Lettre à Adama* in the subsequent year, Assa underwent a transformation, both personally and politically. Not only did Adama's murder fundamentally change Assa's personal life, but her political message and input in her activism also underwent a maturation. In reading *Lettre à Adama* closely, one sees the way in which Assa's message remained centered around finding justice for Adama and how she did not time to thoroughly think through what leading a committee would entail and what her true message would be. While combating police violence is integral to Assa's mission, the events that led to the inception of her committee and its aftermath were a result of living in the moment and not entirely thought-out planning. As *Lettre à Adama* depicted, Assa's life and decision-making changed constantly as new information surrounding her brother's murder came to light. In this

way, while her activism rooted itself in bringing police violence and systemic discrimination to light, Assa's activism was still nascent and finding its maturation.

In the period following the publication of *Lettre à Adama,* Assa continued her organizing physically and posting regularly on her social media platforms. As a result of the publicity she received in the wake of her organization's creation, Assa had the opportunity to meet older generations of activists, while also developing relationships with French academics and media personnel. Through her continued efforts as an activist, her continued pursuit of reading literature around protest and systemic inequalities, and her contact with such people like Angela Davis, Samir Eleyes from the *Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues* (*Movement for Immigration and the Suburbs*), and French philosopher Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, Assa found her voice as an activist and connected her movement's goals to dismantling not only the structures put in place that allow police violence to occur in France, but also the structures that allow France to continue operating under a racial hierarchy that pushes its minority population to the fringes of society and prohibits them from actively participating in French nation-making. This maturation, both in Assa's character and message, is most prominently seen through interviews with French and international press as well as in the 2019 publication of *Le combat Adama,* which details Assa's political message with de Lagasnerie's sociohistorical perspective. In a short period of time, then, Assa's voice became more focused and powerful in calling for real systemic change in a 'post'-colonial France.

Following the aftermath of Adama's murder and the publication of *Lettre à Adama*, Assa's political message transitioned from calling for an end to systemic discrimination and police violence to that of calling for larger systemic change that reminiscent of student activism and Third World liberation of the mid-20th century. Through this transition and progression of

narrative, Assa found herself in a place of interacting with prominent activists of the mid-20th century in a way to discuss the similarities and differences to her vision. One such example of this occurred in 2018 when Assa spoke in conversation with Angela Davis regarding the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* and her approach to her activism both physically and digitally. In such a short period of time, Assa's input to the larger conversation surrounding race and racial discrimination changed from focusing on one targeted manifestation, in this case police violence, to be more encompassing of discussing the divide between and older and traditionalist France compared to the 'Other France,' which speaks more to multiculturalism and plurality. Furthermore, in this short period of time, Assa's input to the conversation transitioned away from just speaking about the Metropole and evolved to also speak on those oppressed by the French State around the world, particularly in France's former colonies and in its overseas departments and territories.

It is important to draw attention to the change of Assa's rhetoric and input to the larger movement for racial equity in France because her growth as an activist subsequently affected the tactics she invokes both digitally and physically. Moreover, this transition of rhetoric and strategy also illuminates the fact that Assa met other activists and scholars to broaden her horizons; while her activism is centralized around the murder of her brother, her targeted fight to bring about an end to police violence is part of a larger result of a system built on racial capitalism and the dehumanization of peoples of African descent. In this way, Assa realizes that her goal of bringing about overarching systemic change in France is not her fight alone. Moreover, Assa concluded that she could ally herself with other social movements around the country rather than trying to make her movement all-encompassing. Therefore, during this period, Assa discovered that police violence in France is not an isolated phenomenon and is

instead part of a larger systemic issue that goes back centuries. As she learned more about the history of activists' fight for systemic liberation both in France and around the world, Assa drew inspiration and channeled it into her own activism.

In conversation with Angela Davis, Assa discusses her committee and her vision for France's future. While she does not explicitly mention that her activism is founded on Black feminist theory, Assa still insists on the importance of her activism being able to reach large audiences and those of the 'Other France' come together at the grassroots to fight for this liberation. Assa notes:

> I hear the word 'convergence' since the death of my brother; it comes back very frequently, but above all I have the impression that it is a word to make amends for conduct or behavior that may have been directed at us… this word, I do not want it. But I speak of 'alliance.' Each fight has its own way of thinking and its political line that must be respected, whether we agree or not, but we all have the same system and the same State in front of us. Let us make alliances, therefore, to make it fold. We do not want words: we need to fight on the ground.[20]

From her perspective, Assa sees her organization and her activism as a small part of a larger communal mission in France. Even if each organization does not have the same political ideology, the overall goal is the same. As Assa remarks, it is vital to have this fight occur on the ground to show the French State the people cannot and will not be ignored. Fighting on the ground further proves the power of the collective and what working together can achieve. Furthermore, from her point of view, Assa manages to see the importance of her own efforts while also highlighting the work of others, even if their organizations do not personally collaborate with one another. Organizing to bring about change to France, then, is not a competition and is instead an integral way for Assa to keep her brother's memory alive. As she concludes in her conversation with Angela Davis through her discussion of organizing as a woman of African descent, "… Adama became a symbol: we want his name to carry many

things. Through my female voice, as a black woman and as a sister, I want to say that our brothers also have the right to speak."[21] While activism is inherently personal to Assa, by this stage of her growth as an activist Adama became a larger symbol.

This sentiment is further felt in the opening pages of the 2019 publication of *Le combat Adama.* By the time of its publication, Assa speaks about her brother's murder and its aftermath from a more analytical than emotional place; it is not to say that the emotion surrounding Adama's death is not there, but Assa's voice and mission throughout *Le combat Adama* is from a more removed place than in *Lettre à Adama.* Comprised into nine different thematic sections, *Le Combat Adama* follows Assa's political ideology and association with police violence and structural racism in France. Within these nine sections of the text, Assa's political ideology is then further supported and explicated by Geoffroy de Lagasnerie's comments on the sociopolitical and cultural ramifications of the same system Assa is trying to change. In this way, *Le combat Adama* departs from *Lettre à Adama* in that the text is more academic in nature and serves as a crucial text that explains modern-day race relations in France. By the point of publication, Assa had been organizing around the *Comité Vérité pour Adama,* both digitally and physically, for three years. Within this time, Assa remained in French press as more information surrounding Adama's murder came to light. In contributing to *Le combat Adama*, in opposition to *Lettre à Adama,* Assa's succinct and precise in her message and its delivery. Within the first page of the text, Assa succinctly details the events that led to her brother's murder and what his murder meant for her organization and its objectives. In discussing her committee, Assa notes, "The Fight for Adama is a fight against the bad France: we kill Adama Traoré, we put four of Adama's brothers in prison… we cannot be spectators of what we live. A citizen cannot continue their life as if nothing had happened—without being touched, without being affected, without

telling themselves: something must be done. It is not possible. Today, we are in a country that is doing poorly. France divides its people: an oppressed party and a relieved party."[22] From this introduction, Assa orients the reader with the larger theme of how the French police state has disproportionately affected her family and how their example can be expanded to apply to a larger population. While this situation is personal to Assa and her family, it speaks to the larger systemic issue of police violence and profiling around France. In discussing this in the opening paragraph, Assa, much like Boni-Claverie, allows the reader to make a personal connection with her story, but also to have a better understanding about the larger conversation at play.

As she continues discussing her organization and its objectives, Assa further maps out the problems with France and what contributes to the fight for Adama. Assa continues, "France has a problem with police. That makes part of the Fight for Adama. The youth make part of the Fight for Adama. Colonialism makes part of the Fight for Adama. Racism makes part of the Fight for Adama. Democracy makes part of the Fight for Adama. School makes part of the Fight for Adama. In the Fight for Adama, we speak of working-class neighborhoods, we speak of young men, of police, of racism, of precarity. We speak of violence. All of this belongs to a company."[23] In this brief introduction to the text, one sees the transformation of Assa from her last publication; rather than speaking directly to her brother in the immediate aftermath of his murder, Assa's narrative has changed to that of an activist who is focused and determined to achieve their goals while also calling others to the cause. By the time of publication, Assa reaffirms to the reader that her organization is no longer centrally focused on her family's pursuit of justice, but instead a political organization with the direct goal of bringing a political revolution of sorts to France. Assa writes, "what we do is political: we want to change the system. If today we are there, with the right to express ourselves in all liberty and to say what we

want to say, it is because of people who have fought. People who died so that we could benefit from certain privileges, people made a revolution so that we could have rights facing a State that, I say this, behaves in an antidemocratic way."[24] While Assa has been calling for a revolution since the beginning of her role as an activist, the way she addresses it in the begging of *Le combat Adama* is the result of years of endless work and optimistic conviction. This revolution that Assa calls for is not an inherently evil thing, but rather is meant to bring about change in a way that makes France more in touch with its lived reality.

Geoffroy de Lagasnerie's involvement in *Le combat Adama* further enriches the text in that his contribution to each thematic section provides a traditional academic perspective on the issues Assa raises. In this way, *Le combat Adama* is a revolutionary text in that it acknowledges the existence of structural inequality and police violence rooted in the formation of the French Republican State in a traditional academic sense; de Lagasnerie's contribution to the text, then, deviates him from other French academics that maintain the French colorblind rhetoric. Furthermore, de Lagasnerie's involvement in *Le combat Adama* shows the ways in which traditional French academics can involve themselves in revolutionary causes, thus making them 'revolutionary intellectuals.'[25] Within the introduction of the text, de Lagasnerie describes the moment he first encountered Assa, how their encounter led to his involvement in working with her, and what he hopes readers take away from this text. In describing his initial encounter with Assa and its significance, de Lagasnerie notes, "Assa Traoré and I met a short time ago. We crossed paths the first time in April 2017 from a public meeting. Before, we lived in separate worlds that social and racial logics carefully keep at a distance from one another."[26] This recollection is important because it speaks to the larger separation of the traditionalist version of France with the 'other France'; in all aspects of French society, particularly in French academia,

de Lagasnerie reveals the extent of which these paths do not cross under normal circumstances. This further highlights the hypocrisy of French Republican tenets by proving that all French citizens in fact do not have the same opportunities available to them and that the French State actively works to keep its society and institutions segregated to further cater only to 'white' French peoples. Through the maintenance of these 'separate France's,' then, French peoples of African descent are further rendered invisible yet simultaneously succumb to negative consequences of this exclusion and lack of political participation and nation-making.

Through discussing Adama's murder, police violence, racism, antidemocracy, and political organization, Traoré and de Lagasnerie turn personal grief and trauma into the political and sociological ramifications of the lived experience of French peoples of African descent. In so doing, the two bring to the light the way in which the French State sets French men of African descent on a predestined path to failure, and most severely, death. From this perspective, Traoré and de Lagasnerie expose the reader to the ways in which institutional discrimination and subjugation of French peoples of African descent are not isolated incidents and are in fact intentional byproducts of the French state and its institutions.[27] This phenomenon further reinforces Assa's main argument that French peoples of African descent are actively omitted from the construction of France as a nation and are instead attributes to French society by being put in prison. Traoré writes, "[t]hese young people, they participate in the construction of France by being put in prison. France creates good culprits. They are going to be created like that… They are not excluded. They are integrated in society despite themselves, to make the society that does not want them function, because they are needed to fill that void and to fill those walls."[28] Through this observation, Assa indirectly infers that French peoples of African descent cannot contribute to French society and be treated equally and fairly, but instead are still

commodified by the French State and are regarded in a way that is reminiscent to both slavery and colonialism. Therefore, French peoples of African descent are vilified and removed from society while simultaneously contributing to its financial capital through France's prison industrial complex.

Through the discussion of France's prison industrial complex and its modern iteration of racial capitalism in the country, Traoré and de Lagasnerie touch on how France's dehumanization and subjugation of French peoples of African descent factors into the country's antidemocratic practices. Through discussing France's 'antidemocracy,' Traoré and de Lagasnerie discuss the ways in which Assa's family has been personally affected by political repression, but also how this repression manifests politically around France. In talking about antidemocracy and repression, Traoré and de Lagasnerie highlight the way in which the French State has actively continued silencing the Traoré family and how the quest for finding truth behind Adama's murder has instead led to the French State protecting its police force and continuing to allow police violence to occur. The timing of this repression of the Traoré family is important to note because it highlights how the French State, regardless of the political affiliation of those in power at the local and federal levels, remains unchanged in its handling of police violence and conduct. As Assa writes, "[m]y brother died while François Hollande was president of the Republic. But when my brother was killed, not a word or even a message about the death of my brother, although it is reported by all the media… Macron who takes the presidency in 2017 and who makes it as if Adama Traoré did not exist, as if it was not a situation that he had considered. One more time, nonexistent. Our lives are worthless."[29] Hollande, a Socialist, and Macron, a Centrist, both refused to speak on the murder of Adama at the hands of the French police nor on the efforts of Assa and her family to find justice, or rather, their pursuance of

democracy. Assa's comments on this further exemplify her stance that the French State does not value the lives of its citizens of African descent and instead remains firm in its attempt to hold onto an outdated concept of the French Republic and its values.

In Assa's pursuit of justice and democracy for her brother, the response of the French State was instead to repress her grassroots movement and incarcerate more of her siblings, thus further showing the role of the French carceral state. Assa writes, "[m]y brothers become political prisoners. Political prisoners because they fight for justice and truth for their brother. We have a justice system that is supposed to guarantee our rights, that is supposed to protect us, that goes to condemn my brothers without any proof, without any investigations on the actions and declarations of the officers. It is like a counterbalance: when we advance for the Fight for Adama, in counterpart, they put my brothers in prison."[30] In this way, Assa puts forth the idea that the *Combat Adama*, in its quest for truth and justice, has instead been interpreted by the French State as an attack on France, has resulted in the employment of indirect and direct repression on the movement as a whole and the Traoré family personally. In viewing the suppression of the Traoré family and the *Combat Adama* as a direct result of political warfare, one sees the true hypocrisy of the French State come to light; fighting for democratic values supported by French Republicanism has instead resulted in political repression and an attempt to forcibly silence Assa, her family, and her organization. Therefore, Assa's calls for a revolution appear to have more substance as it is the direct result of the way that the French State has tried repressing her, her family, and her organization. Assa's further disillusionment with the French State and its institutions thus resulted in her desire to see them be transformed to represent a more holistic and democratic vision of the country and its future.

Assa's call for a revolution, then, is not simply political jargon meant to entice the reader and her followers both virtually and physically. Rather, Assa's call for a revolution is rooted in her sense of identity as a French woman of African descent and her desire to live in a 'better' France; a version of France that was not afforded to her brother, Adama, and all the other 'Adama's' around the country. By contending that the French State is anti-democratic and that France itself does not follow its own Republican values, Assa's mission is to therefore reconstruct the French State and its institutions from the ground up, starting with its public spaces.[31] Contrarily to the political message of Boni-Claverie, Assa's political message calls for more direct action to manifest itself physically and digitally. While Boni-Claverie expresses her opinions of the societal ills of France and exclaims that change needs to happen and that it can start with a stronger political organization comprised of French peoples of African descent, Assa's movement and political message proves to be that solution. While she is not a traditionally trained politician and does not define herself as one in that sense, Assa's political message and goal mimics that of a revolutionary politician trying to bring meaningful change. In avoiding operating under the label of a traditional French politician, Assa frees herself of systemic restrictions and politesse to get her message across. The *Combat Adama*, then, can be defined as a populist-based movement with Assa as its leader in a non-traditionalist sense. This, then, is the Assa Traoré that is present in *Le combat Adama*. By its conclusion, one sees that Assa's political ideas and tactics have matured to become realistic, yet incredibly difficult, goals. These goals, by this point in her journey as a non-traditional political activist, articulate themselves as a call for the overhaul of the French State and its judiciary and carceral systems, the integration of the 'Other France' to become active members in nation-making, and the implementation of political figures who want to see this change come to France rather than

continue trying to uphold an outdated, traditionalist, and unrealistic system in contemporary France. From these aims, then, what does revolution look like for Assa Traoré?

Section 3- Call for a Revolution in 'Post'-Colonial France

Following the publication of *Le combat Adama* in 2019, Assa had been an increasingly notable activist for three years. In that time, Assa continued solidifying her base, reached out to national and international activists from past liberatory movements, and continued to fight for justice and the truth behind Adama's murder within the French judiciary system. In the three years of her fight, Assa became a trailblazer capable of galvanizing those who follow her movement both digitally and physically. As her notability grew both domestically and internationally, Assa and her family faced increased repression by the French government that resulted in the subsequent incarceration of more of her brothers, increased surveillance by French police officers during marches for Adama, and her own charges of defamation of character by the police officers who murdered Adama. It is important to note, therefore, that Assa became a prominent figure in French liberatory activism beginning in July 2016; she had built her movement and solidified her political message and objectives within this period. Within these three years, then, Assa better articulated her desire for a political revolution in France. With this being established, then, the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota in May 2020, and its subsequent wave of Black Lives Matter marches throughout the United States and abroad is what caused a resurgence in international media coverage of Assa and her movement for Adama.

In the wake of George Floyd's murder and the subsequent spark of Black Lives Matter protests around the United States and internationally during the summer of 2020, both American

and French media published pieces finding similarities between the countries and cases of police violence. Through these comparisons, Assa's activism for the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* resurfaced in popular media because of its similarities to the Black Lives Matter protesting happening throughout the United States and the similar ways in which George Floyd and Adama Traoré were murdered at the hands of police officers. Through this heightened media presence, Assa managed to gain more momentum surrounding her cause and her call for a revolution in France. However, during this period, Assa made certain clarifications on the difference between protesting in the United States and in France surrounding police violence, structural racism, and the fight for the lives of peoples of African descent. In discussing both the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* movement and the larger Black Lives Matter movement to analyze police violence in both France and the United States, Traoré comments:

> When George Floyd died, he is our brother. They died in the same way. I recognize myself behind Black Lives Matter. We are all Black Lives Matter. Our common point is racial discrimination. Here and there, there are Black and non-white peoples who are being killed. But the American and French militarization are different. Within the Adama committee, it is a family that carries the fight. In the United States, it is not the case, it is a movement. They do not directly attack the American State. Us, we call the French State into question… The other difference between the United States and us is that they committed crimes against humanity, but they accept it and will say 'yes, it is horrible, but we did it.' And they will excuse it. France does not accept its racist, violent, and discriminatory behavior. Yet it is systemic. What we suffer in our neighborhoods date back to slavery and to colonization. It is a racism that has always been there and that has been maintained. Our police are historically violent…[32]

In response to the question about the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States and its relevancy to *Comité Vérité pour Adama*, Assa emphasizes the importance of global solidarity for peoples of African descent and that police violence against this population is an international lived experience rooted in enslavement and colonization, yet Assa further demonstrates the

differences between the two movements and why they should each be acknowledged respectively.

From her perspective, Assa furthers the idea that unlike the Black Lives Matter in the United States, her movement directly targets the French State to bring about structural and systemic change but remains confronted with France's colorblind and universalist ideology. In emphasizing these differences, Assa insists on showing the success of her movement and of the younger generation of French activists that are "products of France who grew up in the country and [who] do not give in."[33] In emphasizing the importance of youth and the importance of forging a new path with the knowledge of those that came before them, Assa further explicates the novelty of the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* and how France is ripe for the revolution she believes it needs. In talking about her hopes for the future, Assa comments, "I tell myself that I give hope for the new generation. I show them that we can do it, that we can occupy space without being walked on, that if we have something to defend, we're good to go… Today, we are still standing, the protests continue, and the people follow up. We already won!"[34] In taking an optimistic tone regarding the work of the *Comité Vérité pour Adama*, its resilience against political repression, and the role of a younger generation of French activists, Assa evokes the voice of Angela Davis in holding onto optimism as a tool to continue fighting against the French State and its institutions. Through this optimism, then, what does revolution look like for Assa Traoré, can her movement be considered as revolutionary, and has her movement already forced it into motion?

In analyzing Assa's call for a revolution, her intentions and goals begin with getting justice for Adama foremost. From there, her movement's goals target larger issues of systemic racism and police violence against French peoples of African descent in France's working-class

neighborhoods, the exclusion of French peoples of African descent from participating in French nation-making, France's denial to discuss its involvement in slavery and colonialism, and France's refusal to evolve its Republican values surrounding universalism and colorblindness. In writing about Assa Traoré and the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* in the wake of George Floyd's murder, journalist Lauren Collins notes, "[w]orking alongside other activists, Assa Traoré has built a movement that speaks in the voice of France's young black and Arab citizens rather than on their behalf… Its aims are both narrow (obtaining a conviction; banning certain police techniques) and far-reaching (challenging the entire system of 'social elimination of blacks and Arabs' that makes concrete goals so hard to accomplish). Its iconography is revolutionary: Traoré… rejected the archetype of grieving relation, preferring to meet the public with stone-faced discipline—a 'soldier, despite myself,' leading a 'machine of war.'"[35] Through her description of the movement and its leader, Collins depicts Traoré as a stalwart leader whose aspirations are both attainable yet far-reaching. Yet, it is unfair to Traoré and her movement to simply state that its agendas are far-reaching in the sense of revolutionary progress; Assa's call for a revolution in France is not inherently violent and a call for systemic change while operating within its restraints is a gradual process. Assa and the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* can both be considered revolutionary, then, because of their call and their involvement for drastic change in France. While Assa and the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* are both still fighting to attain their goals, the process of revolution has already begun at the grassroots; France's people are organizing around the movement virtually and physically and are becoming more vocal in challenging France's political establishment. This has taken form in different social justice activists speaking out in support for Assa and the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* as well French members of the Socialist Party sympathizing with her and her movement's efforts.[36]

Furthermore, it is important once again to address the uniqueness of Traoré's movement. While the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* is a movement inspired and influenced from other movements and activists from the past, Assa's efforts and call for a revolution in France are both the biproducts of her lived experience as French woman of African descent and her dissatisfaction with French universalism in its current iteration. While it is true that tenets of French universalism and colorblindness has existed as it presents today since the end of World War II, it is still important to note that Assa's goals and output is a direct result of current phenomena. In discussing the role of past activists and movements, Assa notes, "I read bell hooks, figure of American Afro-feminism, but also Thomas Sakura, who I love a lot. Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon… But I do not want to only speak of known names. We much be careful not to look too much for outside inspiration, with big names, because it contributes to the invisibility."[37] In this way, Assa's focus remains set on the future because that is where she believes the greatest change can happen. In drawing inspiration to a certain extent from past leaders and movements, Assa has been able to see their successes and shortcomings and what that meant for the larger goal of achieving 'Black' liberation throughout the 20th century. While Assa acknowledges the work of these past activists and their respective movements, she remains fixated on the work that her organization has accomplished on its own and its potential for the future. Through this lens, the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* is capable of remaining free from not only political affiliation but free of direct influence of the past. While Assa acknowledges the work of the past, she recognizes that the only thing she can change is the future.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has argued that the rise of Assa Traoré domestically and internationally as a stalwart fighting activist fighting for justice for the murder of her younger

brother Adama and fighting against police violence in France and its targeted attack against French men of African descent is a result of her strong conviction for her cause, the humaneness felt in her committee's message and goals, and her efforts mobilizing at the grassroots that manifests through her use of social media and physical organizing. Furthermore, this chapter has argued that the evolution of Assa Traoré as an activist between 2016 and present has been a result of her learning more about past examples of liberatory activism in the United States, France, and Africa, and her conversations with veteran activists such as Angela Davis and Samir Eleyes as well as her working relationship with French philosopher and sociologist, Geoffroy de Lagasnerie. As a result of her exposure as an activist to different social settings throughout France and internationally, this chapter has argued that Assa has managed to hone her political message and the actions her committee takes to bring about meaningful systemic change to French institutions today.

By looking at the evolution of Assa's activism through her two texts, *Lettre à Adama* and *Le combat Adama*, this chapter has argued that Assa successfully managed to turn her personal grief surrounding the murder of her brother into a political message that resonated and galvanized others at the grassroots level. While not calling herself a Black feminist in her works, Assa evokes North American Black feminist thought through her belief of taking an intersectional approach to her activism, turning personal experiences into political messages, organizing crowds at the grassroots level, and fighting for the liberation of France's most oppressed and underprivileged populations. Furthermore, Assa's relationship to feminism is that she can use her voice as a 'Black' French woman to fight against police violence because of France's exoticized view of the 'Black' female body. In this way, Assa's feminism is one that uses the perceptions of her 'race' and her 'gender' to advocate against the police violence

inflicted on French men of African descent. While she does not explicitly define herself as a Black feminist or as an Afrofeminist, the roots of North American Black feminist thought in her political message and her activism is still important to make note of.

Assa Traoré, much like Isabelle Boni-Claverie, exists in a space of operating within France's institutions to try to spread her message and her political goals to the 'masses' using both popular media and social media in addition to physical demonstrations around France and internationally. Nearly six years into her fight for justice and truth for Adama, Assa continues to keep his name alive by sharing her family's story and their fight against the French judiciary and penal systems, but more broadly France's political institution. While Traoré and Boni-Claverie have not worked in unison to champion the cause of the lived experience of French peoples of African descent, analyzing their work concomitantly allows one to have a better understanding of the different approaches taken to fight for 'Black' liberation in France today. Neither Traoré or Boni-Claverie are calling for an insurrection in the name of bringing justice to French peoples of African descent but are rather consistently attempting to force the country to have conversations surrounding race, racism, sexism, police violence, and direct and indirect discrimination in the hopes of bringing systemic change at the institutional level. In this way, both activists are similar in their approach to activism by keeping conversations alive.

Traoré deviates from Boni-Claverie in her approach to activism in that she has remained more forceful in trying to bring about change through physical demonstrations in addition to her continued presence on social media platforms. While Boni-Claverie advocated for a more forceful political party comprised of French peoples of African descent in *Trop noire pour être Française,* Assa's movement can be considered a makeshift version of this vision. Six years into her movement, Assa remains in a place of keeping Adama's memory alive through consistent

demonstrations and conversations both domestically and internationally. At this phase of her revolutionary tactics, it is seen that her revolution remains in a stage that is still mainly focused on spreading awareness and brining others to her cause but given the amount of people that attend her frequent marches against police violence throughout France, it is evident that Assa's message is being heard.

In situating Assa's activism in France's social justice movements and the larger liberatory movement, it is evident that Assa's *Comité Vérité pour Adama* can be considered a Pan African liberatory movement because of its fight against colonial systems meant to oppress and dehumanize peoples of African descent, its organizing at the grassroots to gain momentum as a movement, and because of its goal of dismantling these oppressive systems in the hopes of liberating French peoples of African descent from their subjugation in the hopes of bringing about a new humanism throughout France. These Pan African visions have been seen through Assa's political message, but also through her rise in popularity amongst peoples of African descent in Africa and throughout its diaspora; Assa's message resonates with many because of the shared experiences of dehumanization and oppression that peoples of African descent face in a 'post'-colonial world. While Assa's movement is still in its infancy and its call for a non-violent revolution in France is hindered by the French State, it is evident that Assa's conviction to her cause and her unwavering optimism in the face of the French State will result in continued growth and continued pressure against the French State for the justice for Adama, and all the other 'Adama's' of France.

Chapter 3- Lallab and the Fight for Muslim French Feminism

Introduction

On September 16, 2017, journalist Annabelle Timsit wrote an article for *The Atlantic* titled "The Muslim Feminist Group Scrambling France's Left-Right Divide." Within this article, Timsit discusses the antiracist and feminist group, Lallab, and how the group's existence and activism for Muslim identity in France has caused heated political debates about Islam and national French identity in France. In writing about the nascent feminist group and its effect on political conversations in France, Timsit writes:

> Lallab, a Muslim feminist organization in France, has been raking in national awards and media attention since its creation by two young students in 2016. It emphasizes the interplay of racism, sexism, and Islamophobia in Muslim women's daily lives in France, and its website is rife with language like 'intersectional' and 'allyship,' more reminiscent of American activism than French. Lallab's brand of feminism has made waves—last year, its treasurer got into a heated television debate with the former prime minister about the headscarf—and now, it's finding itself at the center of a controversy that shakes up the traditional left/right divide in France… The Lallab controversy is an illustration of the splits within France's traditional political groupings over the question of Islam. And that, in turn, is but once manifestation of what appears to be a broader realignment in French politics, where the groups defined by 'left' and 'right' labels are no longer as clear-cut as they have been in the past.[1]

By discussing the emergence of Lallab as an organization founded by two young students in 2016 and the impact that the organization has had since its inception at the time of the article's publication, Timsit reveals several points surrounding Lallab and its political impact: Lallab is a feminist organization rooted in ideology traditionally associated with American activism, the organization's advocacy for the improvement in the daily lived experience of French Muslim women has caused national outcry, and Lallab's emergence as a feminist organization surrounding the advocacy for French Muslim women has forced French politicians to contend with Islam in France and its relation to French national identity.

With its inception in May 2016, Lallab has managed in its brief time as an organization to garnish national attention surrounding the lived experience of Muslim women in France, the oppression that they face, and the way that France has made Muslims the scapegoat to vilify for the country's supposed decline in dominance and influence as a world power. In so doing, Lallab has managed to take power away from French media and French politicians surrounding conversations of Muslim women and has given this voice back to Muslim women themselves. In this way, Lallab has successfully managed to build a feminist organization through its belief in intersectionality, its empowerment of Muslim women, and its insistence in spreading awareness of how Muslim women exist in France today. These efforts have been reinforced through the organization's active online presence through the maintenance of its website, its frequent publication of its online magazine, and its active presence on various social media platforms. Furthermore, Lallab's growth as an anti-racist feminist organization is also due in part to its physical mobilization around France, its involvement in university talks, its participation in town hall events, and its work with community outreach. In thinking about the quick success of Lallab as an anti-racist feminist organization, what does the organization believe in and how has its emergence challenged debates surrounding Islam in France and French feminism? Furthermore, how does situating Lallab in the context of the activisms of Isabelle Boni-Claverie and Assa Traoré further enhance one's understanding of liberatory activism amongst French peoples of African descent?

In this chapter, I argue that the creation and the activism of Lallab is important to further analyze in the larger context of contemporary French social justice movements, particularly France's different feminist movements, because of its unique intersectional approach to fighting for the rights of French Muslim women and how this fight challenges the narratives of Islam,

race, gender, and feminism in French media and French political conversations. This approach to activism, then, manifests through both digital and physical mobilizing around the country in the hopes of reaching wider audiences to change the narrative surrounding Islam in France. Furthermore, I argue that the activism of Lallab is important to analyze because of its position in the larger debate about Muslim identity in France and how its organization fights against French institutions in France today. Lallab is unique in its formation and its activism because of its centering around the voices of French Muslim women and how these women's narratives are challenging French media and French politicians.

This chapter thereby outlines the surrounding factors in France's national narrative surrounding Islam in France and its policing of French Muslim women in the 21st century and how this sociopolitical climate led to the creation of Lallab in May 2016 by Sarah Zouak and Justine Devillaine in the attempt to change this narrative. Following its creation, this section takes a closer examination of the political ideology of Lallab, its values, its objectives, and how these objectives manifest virtually and physically. Following this, the second section of this chapter situates the emergence of Lallab as an anti-racist and feminist group fighting for the voices of French Muslim women in the larger Islamophobic rhetoric in France. By situating Lallab within this national narrative, this section provides a brief history of Islamophobia in France and how decolonization and the rise of migration of France's former colonial subjects led to a rise in national insecurity, the transformation of Islam into a generalized racial category synonymous of peoples of North African descent, and the further physical segregation of this population to the margins of French cities. This section also details the way that French politicians and French media used Islam as a scapegoat and weaponized secularism to stir national anxieties and render Islam as incompatible with French Republican values, leading to a

gendered vilification of French Muslims and French peoples of North African descent. Lastly, the third section of this chapter situates Lallab as a feminist group in the larger context of French feminist movements today and highlights the ways in which Lallab is incompatible with mainstream French feminism because of its North American Black feminist ideology, belief in race and racism and how it affects French Muslim women, and that Muslim women have the freedom of choice to wear religious dress. This section then situates Lallab in the context of France's growing Afrofeminist movement by defining what Afrofeminism is in a French context and putting it in conversation with France's most known Afrofeminist group, Mwasi. Through this conversation, it becomes apparent that Lallab exists alongside Afrofeminism because of shared roots in North American Black feminist thought, but that it cannot necessarily be defined as an Afrofeminist collective because it is not only comprised of 'Black' French women for 'Black French women. This chapter then concludes with a brief conversation of Lallab's role in the larger French social justice movements and how putting Lallab in conversation with other activists such as Isabelle Boni-Claverie and Assa Traoré highlight a modern Pan African liberatory movement occurring in France today.

Section 1- Formation of Lallab

The intersectional and antiracist feminist organization, Lallab, was founded in May 2016 by Sarah Zouak, a French Muslim woman of African descent, and Justine Devillaine, with the goal of raising the voice of French Muslim women to speak on their own lived experiences throughout France and to take back the power from the French media and French politicians regarding Islam in France. The timing of the creation of Lallab situates itself at the end of François Hollande's presidency, the rise of Emmanuel Macron and Marine le Pen as the main contenders for France's 2017 presidential election, and the string of deadly attacks in France

between 2015 and 2016. Within this period, then, French media and French politicians focused on the question of Islam in France and how compatible the religion is with French Republicanism and French secularism, a debate that has been raging throughout the country for decades.[2] In framing the 'question' of Islam around national French identity, French media and French politicians contend that the practice of Islam in France is not compatible with French Republican values because of irreconcilable 'cultural' differences. As a result of this, as historian Jim Wolfreys notes in his text *Republic of Islamophobia: The Rise of Respectable Racism in France,* "[t]hese currents have helped create a climate where, as we shall see, Islamophobia has flourished as a form of prejudice that emphasises culture rather than race, but transmits a message about race all the same... the mainstream right's decision to make republican secularism, or *laïcité,* the centerpiece of its legislative programme after Jacques Chiracs' 2002 presidential election victory further eased the convergence of international and domestic trajectories of Islamophobia. The spiral has proven difficult to halt, let alone reverse."[3] As Wolfreys mentions, the practice of Islam in France and the growing population of French Muslims since the end of French colonial rule in the mid-20th century has resulted in this population being directly targeted and used as a scapegoat in political debates. Existing within this climate, French Muslim women have been particularly targeted because of the headscarf and the belief by French politicians that they need to immerse themselves in French culture to be 'saved' from Islam.[4] Within these constructs of France's targeted attack against French Muslims and its particular emphasis on French Muslim women, French politicians and French media continuously spoke on the behalf of this population rather than giving them a voice. This, then, is the surrounding context behind the formation of Lallab, "a combination of the Arabic words for 'woman' and 'laboratory,'" in 2016.[5]

In a 2018 article discussing French secularism in relation to French feminism during the #MeToo movement, Karina Piser interviews Sarah Zouak and discusses the formation of Lallab and why Zouak felt the need to create a feminist organization uplifting the voices of French Muslim women. Within the interview, Zouak describes her childhood growing up as a Muslim child of Moroccan immigrants in the Parisian suburbs and how a particular experience in university changed her perspective on her identity and her career plans. Piser writes, "[a]dvocacy work clicked with her, and she enrolled in a master's program in international affairs, planning to study global feminist movements, especially in the Muslim world. 'When I submitted my proposal, my thesis director said it wasn't possible to be Muslim and a feminist at the same time,' Zouak said, smiling slightly. That argument—not only that Islam and feminism are incompatible, but that practicing Muslims can't be feminists as a sort of rule—seems to be dogma for at least the older generation of the French feminist establishment."[6] In recalling this particular instance of subtle discrimination felt by her thesis director, Zouak emphasizes the ways in which her lived experience as a French Muslim woman of African descent directly affect her relationships with other French peoples, particularly in French institutions. In a non-subtle way, Zouak was forced to contend with this idea that being a feminist was antithetical with her religious affiliation and that it was not possible to identify with both simultaneously.

This interaction, then, led to Zouak creating a documentary highlighting the intersectional lived experience of Muslim women around the world.[7] Upon her return to France in 2016, as Piser writes, "[Zouak] saw an 'urgent need' to create an association that would address the diverse experiences of Muslim women—a lacuna in an otherwise crowded feminist landscape dominated by organizations that approach them with a 'paternalistic' tone."[8] The creation of Lallab, then, directly resulted from Zouak's own lived experience as a French Muslim woman of

African descent but also through her travels interacting and documenting other Muslim women; through these experiences, Zouak wanted to create a feminist organization based on the concept of inclusivity that allowed other French Muslim women to have their voices heard, challenging both French media but also other mainstream feminists organizations. In speaking about Zouak's decision to create Lallab, Piser writes, "[g]enerally speaking, the French mainstream is skeptical of the argument that women of color experience overlapping forms of discrimination—the principle of intersectionality developed by UCLA professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leading scholar critical race theory. The same holds true for Islamophobia, which many here assert is a concept invented by Islamist groups to galvanize support for their cause among and sow resentment against the West."[9] By employing the concept of intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, Zouak created Lallab with the main principle of being a safe and inclusive space for French Muslim women to discuss their lived experiences to raise awareness to others.[10] It is important to note, then, that while Lallab is centered around the lived experience of French Muslim women in order to give them a voice, the organization itself is feminist and areligious.[11] In thinking about the external influences that led to the creation of Lallab in 2016, what are the organizations ideologies and how does it use these ideologies to further its objectives and actions?

Through its formation in May 2016, Lallab has a website and various social media platforms that outlines its values, principles, and impact on French society. In addition to its website and social media presence, Lallab also has a regularly updated magazine, *Lallab Magazine,* as well as links to Zouak's documentary project, "Woman SenseTour in Muslim Countries." By displaying its principles and direct impact on French society on the main webpage of its website, Lallab allows online users to quickly make sense of what the

organization believes in and what actions it takes to bring about its vision. In defining its organization, Lallab writes that it is "a feminist and antiracist association of which the goal is to make voices heard and to defend the rights of Muslim women who are at the heart of sexist, racist, and Islamophobic oppression. We bring about a paradigm shift in the French political system of anti-discrimination. We fashion a world in which women freely choose their own paths to emancipation."[12] In adhering to its brief description and goal, Lallab further states that its main values include: "justice, liberty, solidarity, benevolence, and boldness."[13] In discussing its principles, Lallab defines itself as an organization built on the ideas of intersectional feminism, giving a voice to the concerned, self-organization, and plurality.[14] By defining itself as an antiracist and feminist association rooted in the ideology of intersectionality, giving a voice to the unheard, community organizing, and respecting the different perspectives and worldviews of its members, Lallab models itself on North American Black feminist theory and organizing strategies. Rather than being situated around one specific person or political entity, Lallab honors the power that comes with a collective and how working as collective rooted in intersectionality allows for more flexibility and a chance for the movement's evolution rather than stagnation and dissolution. Through defining itself and describing the principles in which it is based on, Lallab then moves to discuss its objectives and actions:

> Objective 1: Create a caring and inspiring space where solidarity broken by society can be renewed so that Muslim women can receive support, empowerment, and training. Objective 2: Create a space of political expression and resistance with the creation of tools to make Muslim women's voices heard. Objective 3: Create a space of power, fight, and political action in making Muslim women's voices heard in spaces of power—notably media and politics. The activities of Lallab articulate themselves around 4 axes: Community, formation, deconstruction, and mobilization.[15]

In highlighting the main objective of the organization and the ways in which it seeks out to achieve them, Lallab's brief biography on its website orients the viewer quickly on what the

organization is about and what it plans to do. At the core of the organization, the most important objective of Lallab is to empower Muslim women by giving them the opportunity to use their voice to speak on their lived experience in the media and on the political level. Lallab achieves this goal through its active social media presence, its frequently updated online magazine, and its community work throughout France.[16]

As an organization, then, Lallab successfully maintains an online presence in addition to its community outreach throughout France to bring awareness to the lived experience of Muslim women in France and the myriad forms of oppression they face in the French Republic. In so doing, Lallab sets itself apart from other feminist organizations and collectives in France because of its insistence on adhering to intersectionality but also because of its focus of inclusivity and allowance of all French peoples to participate in events the organization sets up.[17] Lallab's inclusivity is important to the larger social justice movements occurring simultaneously throughout France because of the organization's desire to affect as many people as possible in the hopes of changing their perspective of Islam and practicing Muslim women throughout France today. By allowing all people to participate in these conversations and events, Lallab continues to spread its message to 'ordinary' French citizens with the desire of having these conversations move to the political level.

By situating Lallab in conversation with Isabelle Boni-Claverie and Assa Traoré, one sees an age of activism in which each take their personal lived experience as French women of African descent and turn these personal sentiments and feelings on non-belonging and exclusion from 'mainstream' France into political ideology and action. Lallab diverges from both Boni-Claverie and Traoré in that its organization focuses specifically on religious affiliation and how Islam has become a targeted threat in France for its alleged incompatibility with French

Republican tenets. Furthermore, while Boni-Claverie and Traoré both discuss feminism and what it means to be a French woman of African descent in this current wave of activism occurring throughout France, Lallab is explicit in its connection to North American Black feminism and its connection to Crenshaw's ideology of intersectionality. By situating the efforts of Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab together, one sees the different ways that activism is manifesting in France today and how these different approaches are all fighting for the same desired outcome. Furthermore, by putting Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab in conversation with one another, one sees that each exist in a stage of activism that is still largely centered around bringing awareness to social justice issues in France and how working with 'ordinary' French citizens and continued persistence will hopefully result in political transformation.

Section 2- Situating Lallab in the Larger Islamophobic Rhetoric in France

The creation of Lallab in May 2016 and its continued growth in popularity online and physically is the direct result of a growing sentiment of France's Muslim population to feel more accepted in France, regarded as *real* French citizens, and to feel included in mainstream French society. These sentiments overlap even more for French Muslim women and the ways in which racism, sexism, and Islamophobia from 'traditional' France impacts their lived experience and actively works to silence them. In the increase of Islamophobia felt throughout France since the mid-20th century, French Muslim women have been directly targeted by French political figures as entities that need to be saved from their religion and need to be 'enlightened' by French Republicanism in order to better assimilate into French culture and society. This attack on Muslim women in France has been most direct in French politicians trying to control what Muslim women wear outside of the home and in public spaces.[18] By particularly targeting Muslim women's dress, mainly the hijab, niqab, and the burka, French politicians sought to

'liberate' these women from alleged oppression to forcibly assimilate them to French culture. This phenomenon is important to further consider because of the ways in which Muslim women in France are viewed, once again, as subjects rather than French citizens. Furthermore, through the attempt to 'liberate' these women by banning the wearing of religious dress in 'secularized' places, such as public schools, French politicians and the French media further portray Muslim women as outsiders who are part of this 'other France,' even if these women have French citizenship and identify with their French nationality.

The targeted attack on French Muslim women and religious dress is part of France's larger attack on Islam and its alleged incompatibility with French Republicanism. Despite being a secular State that "signifies a separation of church and state as a prerequisite for peace and national integration" under the 1905 parity law, France's conceptualization of Islam has gone beyond a religious affiliation and has instead become synonymous with North African, or Maghrebi, ethno-racial identity.[19] This overgeneralization made by French politicians and reiterated by public discourse is significant because it eclipses the fact that not each person of North African descent is Muslim, not every Muslim in France is a person of North African descent, and the homogenization and generalization of Muslim identity in France is detrimental as it does not allow individual voices to be heard. This overgeneralization of Muslim identity combined with this desire of forced 'integration' is further problematic because it highlights the hypocrisies of French universalism; French politicians insist that those they deem to be Muslim, i.e., all peoples of North African descent, must integrate to French culture to be liberated and treated as an individual rather than aligning oneself in a collective identity. And yet, through the practice of morphing religious affiliation with ethno-racial identity, the French Republic further treats peoples of North African descent, regardless of their religious affiliation, as outsiders and

not *true* French citizens. In discussing *communautarisme,* (communitarianism), and France's insistence that French Muslims exist as individual and universal citizens, scholar Myanthi L. Fernando writes, "…the insistence that Muslims become publicly invisible as Muslims is a ruse, for Islam has always marked colonial and postcolonial subjects of North African descent as distinctively Other, as not French."[20] As Fernando exemplifies, French Muslims, or French peoples of North African descent who are assumed to be Muslim, exist within the confines of being racialized and systemically discriminated against by French institutions while simultaneously told to 'assimilate' to French culture in order to be a 'proper' French citizen, even though they are regarded as Others or outsiders. This perception of French Muslims and the rise in French anxiety surrounding national identity are both linked, then, to the mid-20th century following the end of France's colonial hold over its colonies throughout North and West Africa and Southeast Asia.

The vilification of Islam in France and its supposed threat to French national identity, then, is directly related to the rise of immigration from France's former colonies during the process of decolonization in the mid-20th century. With the growing increase of predominantly North African workers migrating to France amid its economic boom between 1945 and 1975 during the *Trente Glorieuses* (Glorious Thirty) and its subsequent economic recession following the 1973 oil crisis, France saw an increase in national anxiety surrounding French identity and culture and what it 'meant to be French.'[21] Furthermore, the increase of family reunification amongst this North African population occurring in the mid-1970s further raised national anxieties as French politicians and the French public grappled with the fact that this process of immigration was not temporary, and that this growing community was here to stay.[22]

In describing this phenomenon, Francophone scholar Alec G. Hargreaves writes, "[d]uring that period, the central notion in political discourse about those minorities was the need for 'integration.' To the extent that 'integration' was not proceeding at the desired speed, this was commonly blamed on the alleged inability or unwillingness of Muslims to adjust to the cultural norms dominant in France."[23] And yet, this supposed 'unwillingness' of Muslims to adjust to French culture was not for a lack of wanting or purposely, but rather France's structural segregation and systemic discrimination that forced these populations to the fringes of French cities. In discussing France's forcible expulsion of North African populations from its cities, urban studies scholar Mustafa Dikeç writes, "[o]nce the economic crisis hit in the 1970s, however, problems started to emerge… Thus the estates in the *banlieues* increasingly became home to more economically disadvantaged groups, with an increasing proportion of immigrant residents, who were pushed out of city centres because of prices or housing-market discrimination."[24] This increase in Islamophobia and, more bluntly, racist sentiments felt throughout France from the mid-20th century into the 21st century resulted from social and institutional factors that linked peoples of North African descent to Islam and thus made this population a scapegoat to try to justify France's social, political, and economic stagnation. In this way, French politicians across the political spectrum personified and politicized Muslim 'identity' as being the true enemy to French Republicanism.

This campaign of attacking Islam was further reinforced, then, in the 21st century following the September 11th, 2001, terrorist attack in the United States and the subsequent 'War on Terror' by the West. Following 9/11 and the West's resurgence of military involvement in the Middle East, French politicians, with the help of the media, further scrutinized its Muslim population and portrayed them and their religion as being dangerous to Western society.[25] Fear

of Islamist extremism felt throughout France furthered national conversations surrounding the question of integration for French Muslims because of their alleged refusal to cast their 'loyalties' with France. The early 21st century conversation surrounding Islamist extremism also further reignited the debate surrounding French people of North African descent, generalized as being Muslim, and whether they were true citizens of the Republic or also needed to be further 'monitored' for national security. In the media, French reporters managed to sustain national anxieties surrounding Islamist extremism and French Muslims through a gendered lens. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 2005 banlieue riots, French Media portrayed French men of North African descent as inhabitants of the *banlieue* who are inherently violent, threatening, and dangerous to French society. On the other hand, French media portrayed French women of North African descent as helpless and frail victims who need to be saved from the oppressive practices of Islam and from these violent men.[26] Through this media representation of French Muslim women as frail and oppressed that is further reinforced by French politicians across the political spectrum, it is further conveyed that these women do not have any agency in their decision to veil and that the banning of the hijab in 2004, the niqab in 2010, the ban of religious dress that covers the face, and the ban of the burqini in 2016 were all enacted in an effort to liberate these women and to show them the 'positive' aspects that French universalism offers to French women.[27] In this political crusade, French politicians and French media not only vilified Islam as a public threat to national security and national identity in France, but also silenced French Muslim women by talking over them and speaking on behalf of their supposed best interests. Through actively silencing French Muslim women from the conversation surrounding their own identity and lived experience, France further restricted these women's choice of donning religious garb and in so doing further set them as targets in public spaces.

This, then, is the sociopolitical climate surrounding French Muslim women and their identity that Sarah Zouak found herself in upon her return to France and why she felt driven to create Lallab in May 2016.

The emergence of Lallab in May 2016 as a feminist collective with the mission of giving power to Muslim women's voices and to make them heard served as a tool to directly combat the discourse surrounding Muslim identity and its threat to French national identity and security. Through the creation of Lallab and its surge in popularity as a culmination of its online and physical presence throughout France, the feminist organization has managed to counter the narrative surrounding French Muslim women's identity through their own publications on their website, but also through their presence in online interviews and their interactions with French politicians. In this way, one sees that Lallab is not only trying to change the narrative surrounding French Muslim women in the media, but also in France's political institutions. The emergence and success of Lallab as a feminist collective surrounding Muslim woman is important because it showcases the power of social media and digital activism and how the Internet can be used as a successful tool to meet others and to plan physical events. Furthermore, Lallab's success is important to note because of the power its accumulated at the grassroots amongst 'ordinary' French Muslim women, but also French citizens in general. Through their collective efforts, members that make up Lallab are trying to shift the national narrative surrounding Muslim women by highlighting the overlapping oppressions they face and how an intersectional identity can lead to better understanding of their lived experience. In discussing the emergence of Lallab and its significance in changing conversation surrounding French national identity, scholars Ramatoulaye Mballo and Carine Bourget write, "Lallab tries to deconstruct the cliché according to which the Muslim woman is a submissive and captive object waiting for the

liberating Republican messiah… They reject the intervention of the French State, in other words the secular and Republican argument, in the construction of their story. Their tool of emancipation with be by them, and for them…"[28] In this way, as Mballo and Bourget present, members of Lallab are using their own lived experience as French Muslim women, some of whom are from African descent, to mobilize and challenge both French media and French politicians. Not only is this gesture inherently personally powerful, but also has the larger ramifications of effective grassroots organizing and changing the public perception of Islam in France.

While the rise of Lallab sparked a general positive response from other social justice organizations, other Muslim women, and overall positive response from French citizens both on the Internet and in person, Lallab has also faced a wave of Islamophobic attacks virtually, in the media, and by French politicians.[29] In describing the wave of Islamophobic sentiment Lallab faced following a political debate on the topic of the veil between then French Prime Minister Manuel Valls and Lallab's co-president Attika Trabelsi and its aftermath, Karina Piser writes:

> The online harassment that followed had real consequences. In August 2017, Lallab was supposed to participate in the civic service, a voluntary, state-funded program that enables young people to do internships in the public interest. Members of the Printemps Républicain, along with followers of the far-right National Front Party, sent aggressive messages to the civic service agency, accusing it of funding a religious group—that supports political Islam, to boot—and violating *laïcité.* Under pressure, the agency withdrew Lallab's accreditation… Lallab met with the head of the agency, who agreed to restore its application. But it was pushed down to the bottom of the pile, and the group has yet to receive any interns.[30]

The altercation between Valls and Trabelsi surrounding the veil and what it means for French Muslim women and the subsequent barrage of online harassment from other French citizens and French political members further illustrates France's fixed view of the veil as oppressive and its refusal to hear the perspective of those who willingly choose to veil. It also further illustrates the

state of France's dialogue surrounding Islam; rather than focusing on other issues pertaining to the lived experience of France's Muslim population, such as systemic discrimination and the racialization of a religion, conversations surrounding Islam remain rooted in religious clothing and the threat of violence to national security.

While continuously working both online and in person around French cities to discuss the lived experience of French Muslim women in the hopes of changing national perspective, Lallab remains limited to only being able to speak on certain matters and its continuous need to 'prove' that their organization is areligious and that members of Lallab are fighting for the betterment of French society and not its destruction.[31] While existing within these restrictions, Lallab tries to circumvent this through their regularly updated online magazine and their active presence on social media platforms. Through their collective work, and the positive and negative feedback they receive, the overriding success of the organization and its message is that it forces French peoples to grapple with the question of Islam in France and further spreads Lallab's name around the country and around the world. Even if Lallab exists in a state of still starting conversations and spreading awareness around the country, these efforts still achieve its goal of lifting the voices of French Muslim women both in social and print media as well as at the political level. Furthermore, Lallab circumvents these limitations and still manages to achieve its goals through public outreach and community work, which also results in greater diversity in membership and in lived experience. Despite the setbacks and the odds placed against them, Lallab remains resilient in the face of decades-old French Islamophobia, which itself is rooted in colonial racism, systemic discrimination, and self-imposed national insecurity.

Section 3-Situating Lallab in the Larger Afrofeminist Movement in France

The emergence of Lallab in May 2016 coincided with the larger resurgence of North American Black feminist and Afrofeminist ideology throughout in France, which has largely been attributed to the effectiveness of the Internet and the discussions taking place on web-based forums and social media sites.[32] With the rise of global interconnectivity thanks to the Internet and the rise of digital activism, it is not surprising that Lallab emerged at a time when North American Black feminist ideology texts were translated into French and French peoples of African descent began resonating with mid-20th century North American Black feminist scholars. Furthermore, the resurgence of North American Black feminist and Afrofeminist thought in France during the 2010s is also in part to the continued events occurring in France that highlighted its systemic discrimination and structural inequality for its non-white citizens. In thinking about the formation of Lallab in the larger context of the traditional white feminist movement in France as well as the growth of Afrofeminism throughout the country, where does Lallab 'fit' in this formation? Can Lallab be considered an Afrofeminist organization, does it fit into the larger white feminist movement, or does it exist outside of this binary?

In thinking about the formation of Lallab as an antiracist and feminist organization and the ideology it was founded on and reproduces, it is important to note its connection to traditional North American Black feminist thought. In thinking about what Lallab believes in and what actions it takes to achieve its vision, one sees the reproduction of North American Black feminist thought though its practice of intersectionality, recognizing how overlapping forms of oppression shapes one's lived experience, turning personal lived experiences into political messages and grassroots mobilization, and empowering women of African descent as a way of liberating all peoples in achieving a new humanism.[33] In this way, it is further important to remember the fact that North American Black feminism not only has its roots to the beginning of

the enslavement of peoples of African descent in North America, but that its growth during the mid-20th century was not as the antithesis of the mainstream white feminist movement occurring concomitantly.[34] Rather, North American Black feminist thought in the mid-20th century emerged out of the importance of the failures of equality felt during the Civil Rights Movement for women of African descent and as a way for women of African descent to recognize the ways that overlapping oppression affects their lived experience and their interactions with all people. Furthermore, through the importance of intersectional and plurality of women of African descent, North American Black feminist thought continues to resonate with the most disenfranchised and those most affected by systemic discrimination and inequality, both in North America and globally.

In thinking about the traces of North American Black feminist thought in its ideology and mobilizing tactics, Lallab's main goal of raising the voices of Muslim women throughout France has caused further ripples with France's mainstream feminist movements, particularly through Lallab's practice of intersectionality and its belief in freedom of choice for Muslim women to veil. France's mainstream feminist movement, while advocating for the equality between men and women, follows a traditional path and often adheres to the tenets of French Republican ideology, color-blindness, and the belief that veiling is a restrictive and oppressive practice imposed on Muslim women. In this way, while insisting on fighting for the rights of women and women's freedom throughout France, mainstream French feminism reproduces Islamophobic sentiments articulated by French media and French politicians while also silencing Muslim women and taking their own agency away from them. Furthermore, in adhering to French Republican thought, France's mainstream feminist movement sees the important of North American feminist thought and ideology as a detriment to French universalism and its goals. In

discussing the competing versions of feminism expressed by intersectional and antiracist feminist organizations like Lallab and traditional French feminism, Martinican political scientist Silyane Larcher writes, "[b]y the denial of racism of which they understand neither the causes nor the consequences, as well as their blindness, these feminists consign the descendants of postcolonial immigrants to an otherness defined according to a norm of feminine and gender experience, ultimately resulting in an implicit barrier between 'whites' and 'nonwhites.'"[35] As Larcher exemplifies, France's mainstream feminist movement is at odds with current waves of feminist organizations practicing intersectionality and comprised of non-white peoples on the basis of France's refusal to acknowledge race as a social construct and the real consequences of racial discrimination. In the case of Lallab, this is further complicated because of France's conversion of Islam as a religion to a racial indicator and its subsequence discrimination against those of North African descent, regardless of their religious affiliation. In this way, the existence of Lallab is at direct conflict of mainstream French feminism because of its direct conflict in ideology and practice. Lallab, then, cannot be considered a part of the larger mainstream Feminist movement because of these contradictions and because of the organization's practice of intersectionality and acknowledgement of the overlapping oppressions that Muslim women face in France today.

If Lallab is not a part of the larger mainstream French feminist movement and was founded on the traces of North American Black feminist thought, can the organization be considered a part of France's larger Afrofeminist movement? Moreover, what are the qualifications needed for an organization to be considered Afrofeminist? In defining Afrofeminism and its practice in France today, scholars Akwugo Emejulu and Francesca Sobande write, "…Afrofeminism insists on grounding analysis and action in the particular and

specific histories of colonialism, racial formation, and gender hierarchy of the various European nation-states in which Black women live."[36] They continue, "Black feminism and Afrofeminism have been so influential that they have helped to inspire the thinking and politics of non-Black women of colour in Europe… Solidarity between different racialised women can never be taken for granted—it must be fought for and in this creative tension exists the possibilities for new insights."[37] Through Emejulu and Sobande's definition of Afrofeminism and its goal of seeking solidarity between other racialized women, situating Lallab within this definition proves insightful because of the organization's actions against these aforementioned obstacles put in place by French institutions, but also because of the organization's ethno-racial makeup. While Afrofeminism is rooted in the traditional teachings of North American Black feminism, its surge throughout Europe, in France in this instance, today is the result of women of African descent molding these teachings to fit a more realistic version of their lived experience. In this process, while becoming a separate movement on its own removed from the effects of Americanization, Afrofeminism today still has its roots in these traditional practices. As an anti-racist and feminist organization, Lallab has adapted the teachings of traditional North American Black feminism to fit its own ideology and practice in combating Islamophobia, racism, classism, and sexism in France today. Furthermore, Lallab is comprised of peoples of African descent regardless of the North and Sub-Saharan divide that separates identity predominantly in scholarship and in societal thinking. It is important to reemphasize, once again, that Muslim identity in France is not indicative of one's ethno-racial background; not every French Muslim person is of North African descent and being of North African descent does not separate one from being of African descent. If one of the main tenets of North American Black feminist thought was the liberation of women of African descent for the ultimate liberation of all peoples, does Lallab not fit into this mold?

Situating Lallab in the context of France's current Afrofeminist movement becomes more insightful in juxtaposing the organization with the most prominent Afrofeminist organization in France today, the Mwasi Collectif. As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the Mwasi Collective is a Pan African and Afrofeminist collective founded in 2014 by Sharon Omankoy. On its website, Mwasi Collective describes itself as "A French based collective based collective fighting hard for Black liberation. We work in a non-mixed environment exclusively open to womxn of all gender experiences, femmes, and gender-marginalised people of African and Caribbean origin and descent."[38] In describing its political practice, the Mwasi Collectif writes, "[t]hough some deem Black feminism a personal identity, we are adamant that it is a global political movement which combines multiple practices, theories, and historical contexts… Our fight is for all Black womxn and we cannot ignore how class and gender racialisation further oppress the most marginalized amongst us."[39] In describing itself as an organization and how it uses Black feminism as a political tool for its activism, the Mwasi Collectif has garnished controversy for its use of non-mixed spaces meant only for Black women.[40] In this way, while describing itself as an organization meant for womxn of African descent, Mwasi Collectif connects this definition with the concept of 'Blackness,' which further reinforces the idea that African identity is limited to Sub-Saharan Africa.

While evoking traces of North American Black feminist thought around the concept of intersectionality and the ways that overlapping oppressions affects one's lived experience, Mwasi Collectif exists as an Afrofeminist organized created by and for Black womxn. In this way, however, Mwasi Collectif's conceptualization of a 'Pan-African' world includes peoples of African descent in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and the larger African diaspora, while further reinforcing the physical, ideological, and theoretical divide between 'North' Africa and

'Sub-Saharan.' In addition to this separation, Mwasi Collectif further reinforces the notion that all peoples of North African descent are Arab and/or Berber and that these populations, while considered to be the 'brothers and sisters' of 'Sub-Saharan' Africa, exist within a separate sphere and are not ultimately included in a Pan-African vision. Furthermore, this ideological division physically manifests in who can/cannot be a member of the Mwasi Collectif. This, as an example, further plays into the Collectif's practice of non-mixed spaces, which is what deems the Mwasi Collectif to be controversial in a universalist and Republican France.

In practice, the Mwasi Collectif aims to create physical and virtual 'non-mixed' spaces that give Black and mixed women and femmes the opportunity to organize in a safe space created by them and for them. From its manifesto, the Mwasi Collectif wants "an Afrofeminism as a political practice and not an identity. The liberal drift would want to make Afrofeminism an individual identity, whereas it is a political movement of struggle, that rallies an assembly of practices, of theories at a proper historical development to each context. Therefore, it is essential for us to reinforce Afrofeminist thought in the French context, starting from the experiences of Black women living in France to produce strategies and collective political analyses."[41] This policy of 'non-mixing' is what has caused nationwide controversy for the Mwasi Collectif because of its supposed anti-white racism and exclusivity, also known in French as *communautarisme.* The most notorious example of this occurred in the summer of 2017 when the Mwasi Collectif announced its festival, Nyansapo, which hosted workshops exclusively for women of African descent, followed by spaces that allowed men of African descent and for 'non-Black' people.[42] In the weeks leading up to the festival, Mwasi Collectif received fierce backlash both politically and through the media because of the festival's supposed practice of *communautarisme,* despite the festival's simple goal of wanting to create safe spaces for women

of African descent attending the workshops. In discussing the events that surrounded the festival, Cyn Awori Othieno and Annette Davis note, "[i]n 2017, in France, you can have gender/self-segregated feminist gatherings amongst women… Oddly enough, as soon as certain criteria is added, i.e. the racial one, the idea of safe spaces becomes unbearable and one must push back from the highest levels of office."[43]By linking 'Blackness' to African identity and by utilizing non-mixed spaces, the Mwasi Collective limits itself on who is allowed to participate in its events and who can participate within the collective itself. While the Mwasi Collective creates a space to 'Black' womxn to discuss their lived experiences and how systemic discrimination and racialization affects their lives, the collective itself perpetuates the divide between North and Sub-Saharan African identity, which ultimately further restricts its Pan African vision.

By putting the Mwasi Collective in conversation with Lallab, both organizations utilize similar ideologies and mobilizing practices digitally and physically, but Lallab's belief in intersectionality expands beyond to more inclusivity in its movement; Lallab is not restricted to allow only Muslim women to participate within the organization and during planned events. Furthermore, while giving a voice to Muslim women, Lallab's focus also centers around working with all peoples to change national narratives surrounding Islam in France and to make France contend with the realities of its systemic discrimination and oppression of its non-white citizens. In this way, while working towards the same goal using similar theoretical ideology in certain respects, Lallab and the Mwasi Collective diverge in their approach to achieving these goals. This is not to say that one organization is more effective than the other in its advocacy for improving the lives of France's marginalized populations, but the ways in which both organizations go about their activism speaks to their respective beliefs around intersectionality and inclusivity. While the Mwasi Collective advocates for complete systemic transformation in

France at the hands of 'Black' womxn, this approach is decidedly difficult because of its insistence on transforming a system from the outside with a limited base. Furthermore, while the Mwasi Collective is not the only Afrofeminist organization in France today, it is the most notable because of its radical political message and its continuous controversies with both the French media and French politicians.

In thinking about Lallab's 'place' as a feminist organization within France's mainstream feminist movement and France's growing Afrofeminist movement, can the organization be placed in either category? As previously discussed, Lallab cannot be placed within the context of France's mainstream feminist movement because of the stark ideological differences between the two movements surrounding the concept of race and racism, French Republicanism, and the politics of the veil. By placing Lallab within the context of the Afrofeminist movement, more similarities arise between the two movements because both are rooted in mid-20th century North American Black feminist thought surrounding the ideas of intersectionality, acknowledging the overlapping of oppressions and how they affect one's lived experience, turning personal experiences into a political message and grassroots organizing, and the idea of liberating the most oppressed in the hopes of liberating all peoples. And while Lallab and France's Afrofeminist share this ideological history, the two diverge mainly in the conceptualization of 'Blackness' and how 'Blackness' is equated to Afrofeminist ideology and practice. This mainly takes form through the conceptualization of 'Blackness' as an indicator of Sub-Saharan African descendance and leaves those of North African descent in an 'othered' category. In this way, conceptualizing Afrofeminism around this concept of 'Blackness' through a North and Sub-Saharan African divide further reinforces separation between the two populations, which further reinforces France's implementation of a racial hierarchy and racialized difference amongst its

marginalized populations. Therefore, while Lallab shares ideological similarities with France's growing Afrofeminist movement, it is not necessarily true that it can be considered a part of this movement because of these ideological differences. That is not to say, however, that Lallab and France's Afrofeminist movement are not fighting for the same end goal; while its approaches and conceptualizations might be different, they are still marginalized from France's mainstream feminist movement and are still racialized by French media and French politicians. For there to be a path forward, then, it would be necessary to construct a movement that recognizes the differences of lived experiences while also working towards the same goal of changing national narratives and emancipating those most affected by France's oppressive systems.

Conclusion

To briefly conclude, this chapter has argued that the anti-racist and feminist organization, Lallab, is important to further analyze because of unique intersectional approach to fighting for the rights of French Muslim women and how this fight challenges the narratives of Islam, race, gender, and feminism in French media and French political conversations. In similar ways reminiscent of both Isabelle Boni-Claverie and Assa Traoré, Sarah Zouak co-founded Lallab with Justine Devillaine after feeling a need to turn her personal sentiments regarding the representation of Islam and Muslim women in France into an organization that gives back the voice and power to Muslim women in the hopes of changing national narratives of Islam in France at the social, media, and political levels. As a biproduct of activism in the modern age, Lallab's success in part can be attributed to its regular maintenance of its website, its online magazine, and its different social media platforms. Lallab's digital activism serves to not only allow Muslim women to express themselves and write about their lived experiences, but also to educate others on the realities of Islam in France. Physically, Lallab's success as an organization

can be attributed to its public outreach throughout France and its continued participation in media outlets, university talks, town hall debates, and community work.

These efforts in the digital and physical realms have resulted in Lallab growing as an organization and its message being spread to wider audiences throughout France and the world. The success of Lallab is important to study, then, because of the way that this organization blossomed because of grassroots organizing and its composition of 'ordinary' marginalized citizens yearning to have their voices heard. Lallab's success shows the power of the collective and the power of turning personal experiences into a political message that can challenge the nation's narrative surrounding Muslim identity in the country, which is upheld by the media and by politicians across the political spectrum. In situating Lallab in the context of the activism of both Isabelle Boni-Claverie and Assa Traoré, the success of their efforts shows the ways in which these French women of African descent have turned their personal lived experiences as oppressed beings by the French State into successful political ideology and organizations. It further speaks to success that each have had in making their voices heard by larger populations and making their political ideology and organization accessible to others through various mediums. The success of each can also be attributed to the age of Internet activism and using the Internet as a tool to reach others in ways that was not as easy and accessible as before.

Additionally, this chapter has argued that putting Lallab in conversation with France's mainstream French feminist movement and its growing Afrofeminist movement offers more nuance to the conversation of feminist practice in France today as Lallab cannot be neatly placed within France's mainstream feminist movement and its growing Afrofeminist movement because of ideological differences. This chapter has argued that Lallab cannot be placed within the mainstream French feminist movement because of the conflicting ideologies behind the

existence of race and racism, French Republicanism, and the politics of the veil. Moreover, this chapter has argued that Lallab cannot be neatly fitted into France's growing Afrofeminist movement mainly because of the conceptualization of 'Blackness' to the movement. Despite Lallab and the Afrofeminist movement both being rooted in mid-20th century North American Black feminist theory and practice, Lallab diverges from France's Afrofeminist movement because it is not inherently a 'Black' movement, even if it is fighting for the same end goal of emancipation from French institutional discrimination and racialization. This, then, leaves Lallab in a space of being rejected by French mainstream feminism and working alongside, but not necessarily with, Afrofeminist organizations.

The creation and subsequent growth of Lallab, then, is fundamentally important to this thesis' larger argument of Pan African liberatory efforts because of the organization's success in raising the voices of its most oppressed in the hopes of changing national narratives and finding the humanity of French Muslim peoples. Lallab is an example of a Pan African liberatory organization, then, because of its work at the grassroots to liberate those most oppressed by French institutional discrimination and racialization, but also because of its efforts to work with all French peoples to bring about a new humanism that recognizes the humanity of Islam, French Muslim identity, and all French peoples.

Conclusion: Where Do We Go from Here?

The culmination of this thesis is occurring amid the 2022 French Presidential election, which is likely to see current president Emmanuel Macron compete against Far-Right politician Marine Le Pen for the presidency. Regardless of the outcome, France will remain rife with social and civil unrest as the world enters its second year in the Coronavirus pandemic and as Black Lives Matter protesting from 2020 continue to simmer in the national consciousness. At this current conjuncture, France remains divided over the question of its national identity and what it truly means to be *culturally* French. Despite the country's diverse population of peoples from a wide variety of ethno-racial backgrounds, France remains insistent on upholding an outdated version of itself that is rooted in the '*grandeur*' of its late-19th and 20th century Colonial Era. As the country's status as a world power began waning following the end of World War II, the loss of its colonial possessions, and the increase of immigration largely from its former colonial territories, France has waged a war on its minority population and has in turn used them as a scapegoat to explain its alleged decline.

Through the maintenance of an outdated model of the French Republic and its tenets of liberty, equality, and brotherhood under color-blind universalism that is rooted in its colonial legacy, France has instead excluded its minority population by pushing it to the margins of society while simultaneously perceiving and policing this population as colonial subjects rather than citizens. In this way, France has maintained the belief that French identity and culture is rooted in whiteness and its nonwhite citizens can never *truly* be French. This sentiment manifests itself as implicit and explicit racial discrimination, systemic inequality, and physical segregation towards its nonwhite populations while concomitantly upholding the belief in the national psyche that France is a country in which citizenship brings equal opportunities and treatment. This, then,

remains the version of France; rather than embracing the 'Other France' that it has excluded to be a more multicultural and equitable society, France continues to uphold this division. It is through this phenomenon, then, that has resulted in the growth of social justice movements throughout the country in the 21st century and the forcible nature of these movements to make French media and French politicians contend with the questions surrounding national identity and belonging.

This phenomenon, then, exists as the basis for the research that culminated in this thesis. In analyzing the social justice movements of the 21st century and how their efforts are disrupting French Republican thought, this thesis has analyzed the activisms of Isabelle Boni-Claverie, Assa Traoré, and the anti-racist and feminist organization, Lallab. These three 'actors,' or case studies, exemplified the shared sentiments of non-belonging and the physical manifestations of systemic racism and structural inequality and how these phenomena affect the lived experience of those affected. While Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab exist within their own spheres, have their own ideologies, and have their own methods of activism, putting the three in conversation with each other presents the opportunity to see the different productions of activism and how, despite their differences, each has the same goal in mind: bringing meaningful and systemic change to France to improve the lives of its nonwhite citizens and creates a more inclusive and nurturing society. Through the analysis of these different activists and how they go about their activism, this thesis has contended that each have roots in North American Black feminist ideology because of the shared acknowledgement of the belief in intersectionality, turning personal lived experiences into a political message and agenda, and in participating in grassroots organizing with the goal of community outreach and increasing recognition. This form of activism, rooted in this North American Black feminist ideology, further disrupts the

conversation surrounding race and national identity in France because of its ability touch the lives of many while also giving a voice to those most oppressed. Furthermore, the analysis of these activists and their approach to activism has highlighted the power of the Internet as an effective tool in spreading political ideology and organizing a massive amount of people digitally and physically. Unlike prior social justice movements of the past in France, the Internet has allowed people to connect and organize in ways never known before. The use of the Internet by these different activists, then, offers a glimpse into future possibilities.

Through the analysis of the activisms of Isabelle Boni-Claverie, Assa Traoré, and Lallab, this thesis has also contended that their collective efforts highlight a larger trend in Pan African thought and liberatory practice. While Pan African thought and practice has traditionally taken shape in Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and South America, the collective efforts of Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab highlight the possibilities of utilizing Pan African thinking in Europe to achieve liberation. While Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and the Lallab's co-founder Sarah Zouak are all French women of African descent, the implementation of Pan African thinking in their activism culminates in the collective desire to improve the lives of French peoples of African descent to reformulate this conceptualization to recognize their humanity. This thinking also culminates physically through the practice of inclusivity, working with community members at the grassroots, and the shared desire of having a grassroots-led movement enact systemic change in France, not just for the betterment of French peoples of African descent, but for all French peoples. While this is not an easy task, the momentum that these activists have cultivated since their respective emergences in the mid-2010s highlights a greater desire amongst French peoples to see real and meaningful change for their country.

In trying to conclude, where do we go from here? Through the analysis of contemporary movements, it is not possible to predict future outcomes or see the fruition of the efforts set in motion. It is difficult to measure success in real-time, but the sudden and continuous growth in recognition amongst Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab as well as the increase in membership in the *Comité Vérité pour Adama* and Lallab in a short amount of time speaks to the success of these women in spreading their political ideology and their efforts in community outreach. Despite the odds being against them, these women stand defiantly in the face of the French State and continue to put pressure on the national narrative surrounding race and national identity. In the avoidance of trying to look at movements of the past and their shortcomings, these women remain hopeful and optimistic that they, and the generations following them, will be the arbiters of change. While the future is never certain, it is certain that France currently exists in a state where the continuous efforts to push an outdated model of citizenship and ideology on its citizens is becoming increasingly more difficult. Boni-Claverie, Traoré, and Lallab have brought about change to France, and it is difficult to halt change once it has begun.

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[20] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1973) pp. 6-51; Horace Campbell, "The Pan-African Experience: From the Organization of African Unity to the African Union," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History,* ed. Martin Shanguhyia and Toyin Falola, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2018), pp. 1031-88; Micere Mugo, "Re-envisioning Pan Africanism: What is the Role of Gender, Youth and the Masses?" in *Pan Africanism and Integration in Africa,* ed. Ibbo Mandaza and Dan Nabudere, (Harare: SAPES Books, 2002) pp. 239-62.
[21] Campbell, *The Pan African Experience,* 3.
[22] Ibid, 3.
[23] Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,* 18.
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Chapter 1- *Trop noire pour être Française*: An Interrogation of a Color-Blind France

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[3] Unless stated otherwise, all translations from French to English are my own.
[4] Isabelle Boni-Claverie, *Trop noire pour être Française,* (Paris: Tallandier, 2017), 7, Kindle.
[5] Ibid, 8.
[6] Ibid,10.
[7] Ibid, 19.
[8] Ibid, 27.
[*] French idiom: "Couper l'herbe sous le pied de quelqu'un" directly translates to "to cut the grass under the feet of someone"
[9] Ibid, 27.
[10] Ibid, 28.
[11] Ibid, 32.
[12] Ibid, 32.
[13] Ibid, 29.
[*] Ficher la paix (familiar/well known verb) can be translated in this instance as 'get off my back'; 'give me space'; 'leave me alone'; 'let me be' in English.
[14] Ibid, 40.
[15] Ibid, 41.
[16] Ibid, 40-41.
[17] Ibid, 44.
[18] Ibid, 45.
[19] Ibid, 87.
[20] Ibid, 90.
[21] Ibid, 113.
[22] Ibid, 132.
[23] Ibid, 164-65.
[*] Français(e) de Souche roughly translates to being of French stock, or more directly, being a native-Born French person.
[24] Ibid, 167.
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[26] Ibid, 73.
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[28] Ibid, 91.
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[38] Ibid, 314
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[47] Boni-Claverie, *Trop noire pour être française*, 313-14. Kindle.
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[49] Ibid, 5.
[50] Etienne Jacob, « Comprendre l'afroféminisme en cinq questions » *Le Figaro,* May 31, 2017. https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2017/05/31/01016-20170531ARTFIG00205-comprendre-l-afrofeminisme-en-cinq-questions.php
[51] Cyn Awori Othieno and Annette Davis, "Those Who Fight For Us Without Us Are Against Us: Afrofeminist Activism in France" in *To Exist is to Resist: Black Feminism in Europe* ed. Akwugo Emejulu and Francesca Sobande, (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 47.
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[55] Ibid, 47.
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[61] Horace Campbell, "The Pan-African Experience: From the Organization of African Unity to the African Union," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History,* ed. Martin Shanguhyia and Toyin Falola, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2018), 1033.
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Chapter 2- Comité Vérité pour Adama: The Activism of Assa Traoré

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[5] Ibid, 10.
[6] Ibid, 11.
[7] Ibid, 14.
[8] Ibid, 21-22.
[9] Ibid, 45.
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[11] Ibid, 107-108.
[12] Ibid, 23.
[13] Ibid, 133.
[14] Ibid, 159.
[15] Ibid, 99.
[16] Ibid, 112.
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Chapter 3- Lallab and the Fight for Muslim French Feminism

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[25] Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia,* 27.
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[37] Ibid, 6.
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