

# Black Identity

## - A Comparative Study in Senegal, France, and the Antilles-

Year : 2013  
Place of fieldwork : Senegal  
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### 1 Research background

In the 1930s, a literary movement called Negritude was begun by Léopold Sédar Senghor (from Senegal), Aimé Césaire (from Martinique), and others. This movement focused on appreciation of black culture and traditions, and demanded the restoration of rights following the assimilation policy, which effectively sought to « whiten » blacks in France. While, Senegal gained independence in 1960, Martinique and Guadeloupe remained French départements (or territories), although some Guadeloupeans and Martinicans argued for independence. France currently has many black immigrants from these areas.

Last year I conducted research in Guadeloupe where most citizens have no conscious African origin and nor believe it is of interest to them. Guadeloupeans are generally divided into two types : people who recognize themselves as a Guadeloupean or Caribbean, and those that identify as French. However, their self-awareness is as variable as the objects with which they reveal their identity.



Statue of slaves in Gorée island

### 2 Research purpose and aim

The objective of this fieldwork in Senegal is to conduct the same questionnaire as the one provided in the Guadeloupe interviews. The questionnaire was given to 40 men and 40 women between 19 and 73 years of age in the city of Dakar. Subjects were asked questions about their language(s), identity, France, and black people in other French-speaking areas. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with subjects involved in religion-related worker, statesmen, professors, musicians.

### 3 Results and achievements by fieldwork

#### 3.1 Questionnaire

When asked about their languages, some younger respondents expressed resistance to their ethnic language or the common language, Wolof, because they were taught in French by their parents when they were children and continue to speak French at home. This is similar to the results found in Guadeloupe. In Senegal, about 30% of respondents answered that they have a bad impression of France for reasons of racial discrimination, which is also similar to the results in Guadeloupe : however, those in Dakar cited more numerous and specific points when asked about the good side of France than those the Guadeloupean respondents.



#### 3.2 Interview

Most of the interviewees over 40 years of age brought up the subject of Senghor and Césaire : however, some younger respondents criticized Caribbean people for low self-respect as blacks. Some additionally expect that Internet accessibility will enable the integration of black identities through out the world.

Performers and informants

#### **4 Implication and impacts on future research**

Perhaps it's because I had personally been reconsidering my identity during my fieldwork (i.e., acquaintances say I am very Senegalese and others say I am very white), during my fieldwork but I think that I became more sympathetic to Senegalese who were born and raised abroad and who were in Senegal for their holidays during the time of my research.

I plan to compare the results in Senegal and Guadeloupe according to their generational and academic backgrounds and devote efforts to my preliminary doctoral thesis based on the information.