# NEGOTIATIONS ONTHEDOTTEDLINE

how does one negotiate with differing and sometimes conflicting legacies/identities?

# **PROJECT REPORT**

Transart Institute Berlin, New York

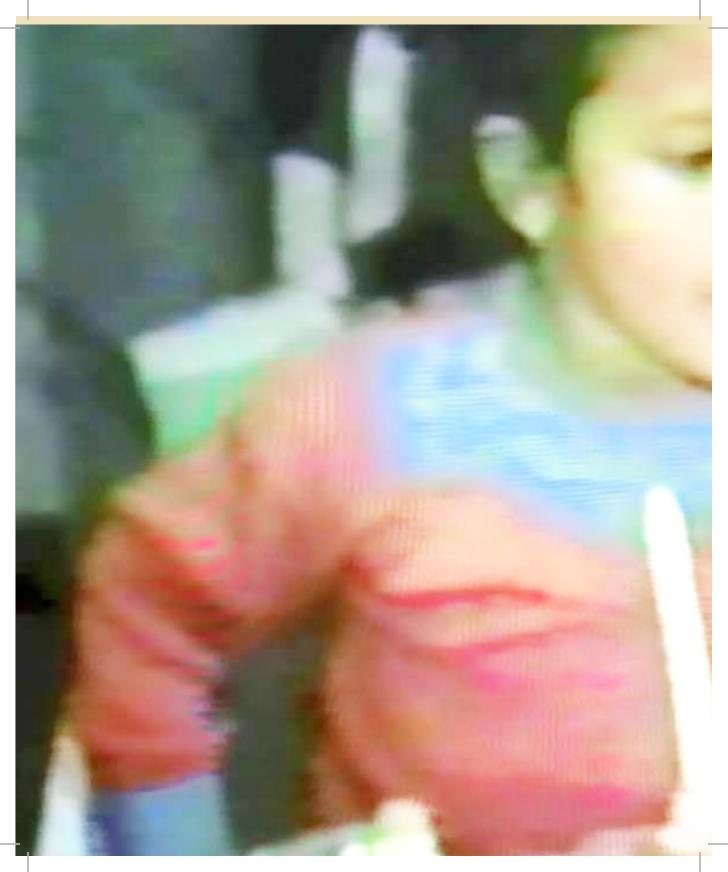
June 2013

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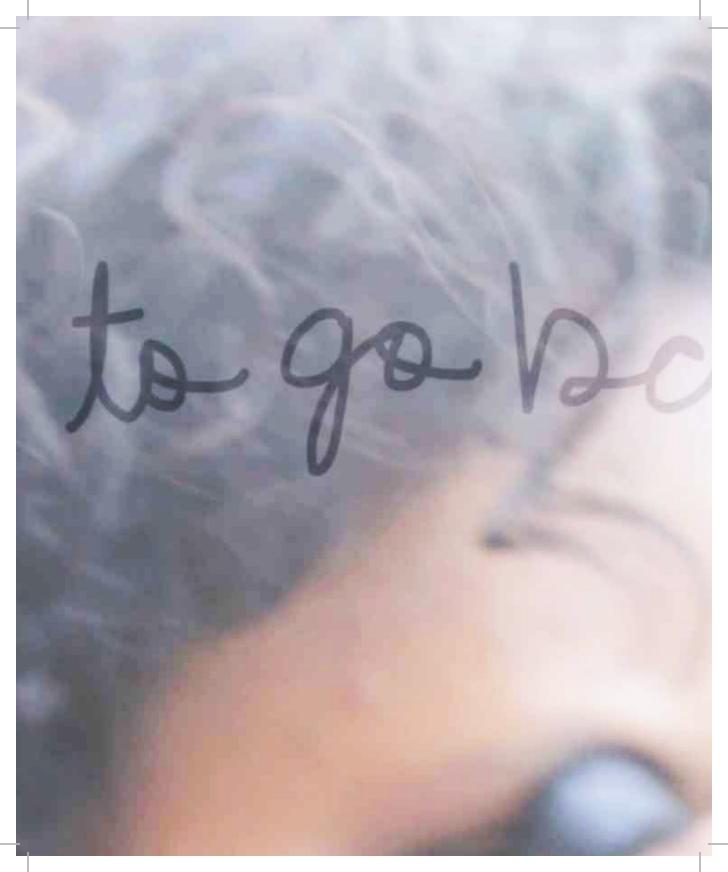
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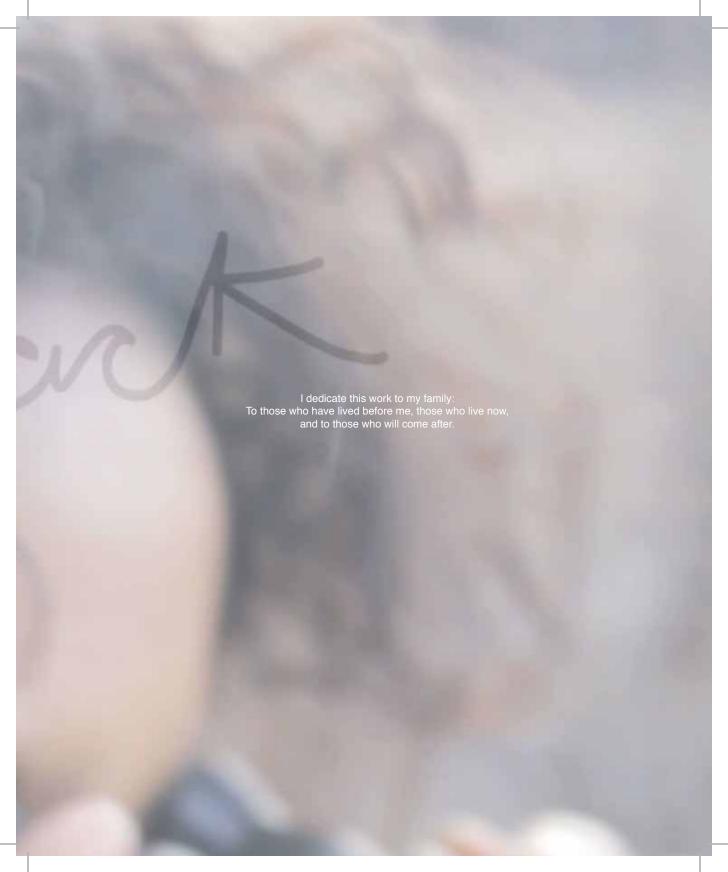
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Anna Binta Diallo









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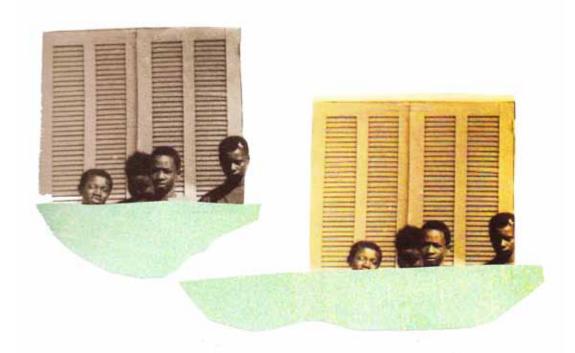
I would like to thank my advisors, Nicolas Dumit Estavez, Victoria Hindley, Jean Marie Casbarian and Myron Beasley for their assistance throughout this project. Thank you to cella, Klaus, and all my friends and colleages at Transart Institute.

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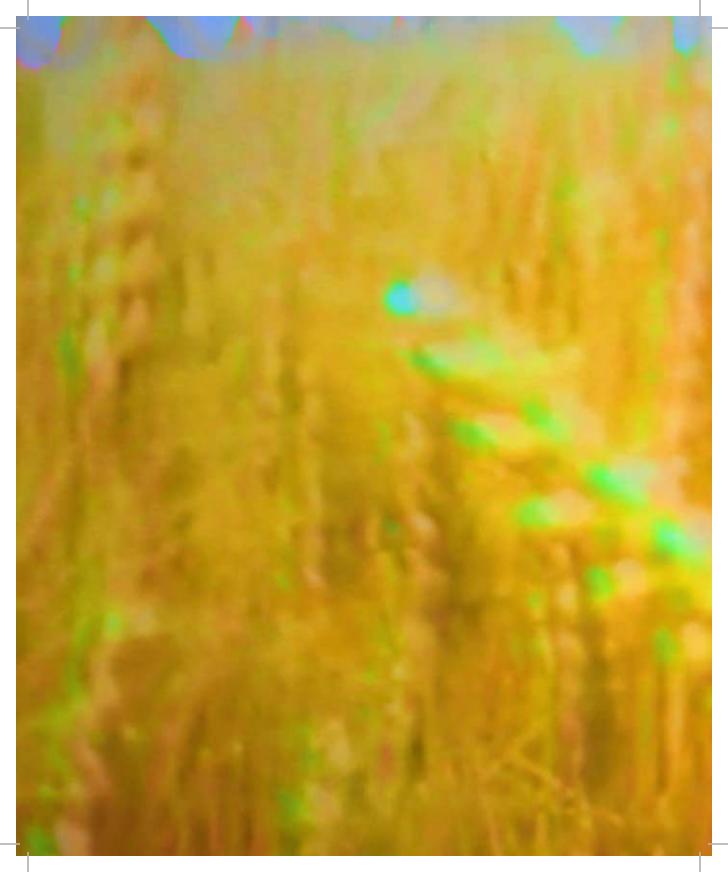
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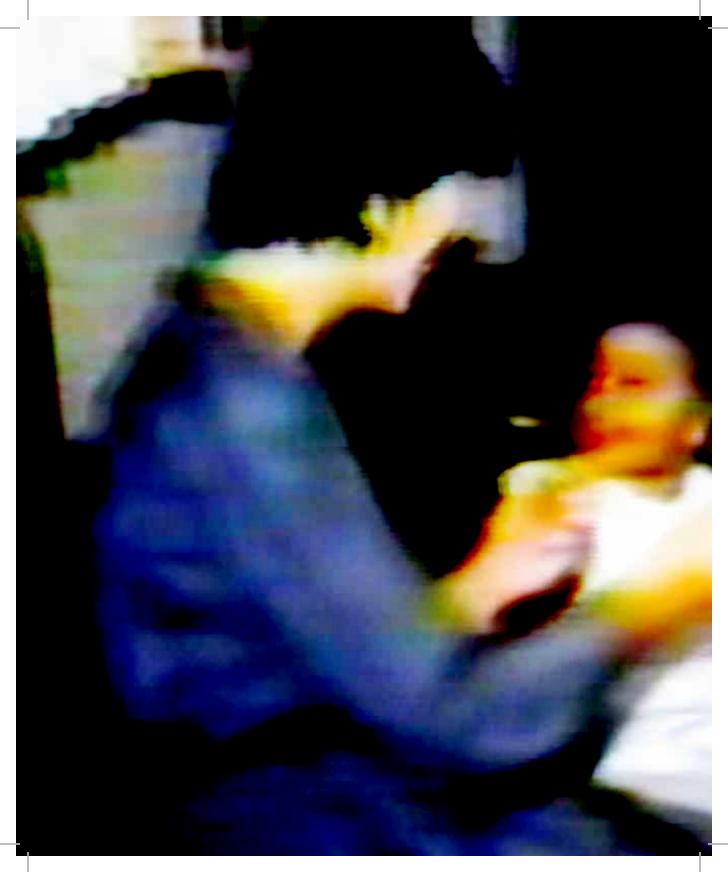
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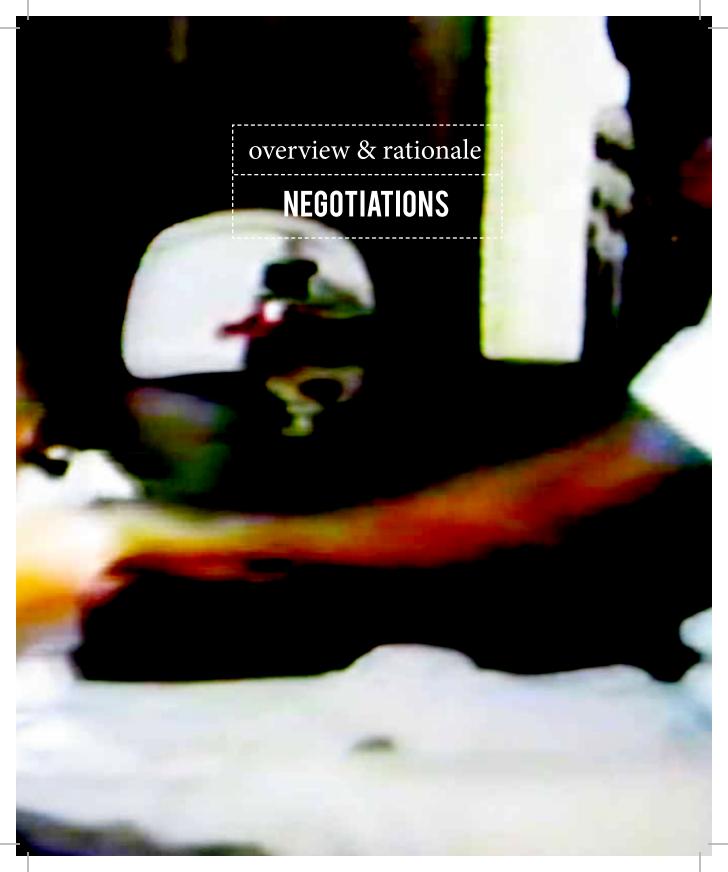




section a

# PROJECT REPORT





## overview

## **Title of Project**

"Negotiations: On the Dotted Line"

- Series of Videos and Digital Paintings with Sound Vignettes

## **Aims and Objectives**

From the beginning, my intention has centered on becoming very specific in my narrative in order to deliver a concise artistic response to my research question, which reads: *How does one negotiate with differing and sometimes conflicting legacies/identities?* As this is a vast subject, I have conducted research on the themes of: personal mythologies, geographic locations of my birthplace Senegal, anthropology of humanity, ancestry, foreignness, exoticism, objects or ideas that become forgotten, post-colonialism, economics, genealogy, family roots and ties, etc.

I have familiarized myself with many different theoretical approaches and consulted diverse sources revolving around the issue of what it means to be "multicultural", "mixed", "biracial", etc. I have embarked on an exploration that attempts to reveal the many ways in which one grapples with personal and historical baggage, with the potential gifts and certain burdens of his or her past. This investigation, with all of its intertwined nuances, has so far circled around the motifs of post colonialism, genealogy, nostalgia, the woven identity and the political, economic and social realities of the African Diaspora, in particular, but also touches upon contact between native peoples, migrants and Immigrants.

In my studio work, I have been producing a body of work that could be referred to as *moving digital paintings*. The final result constitutes a collection of videos. As the written research component of the project report is to be integrated with the studio practice, I have also been researching artists working with video, or with my subject matter. As I am processing all of this information, both in my practice and in research, I have drafted out a framework I believe responds to the criteria of the final project report. In the first draft of my execution of this plan, what I intend to lay out represents my final written component. The project report is divided into 3 sections: Part 1: Memoirs (Mirrors); Part 2: Theoretical Investigations; Part 3: Studio Reflections. The project begins with a brief presentation of my rationale, which is followed by an introduction. The project ends with a conclusion followed by an annotated bibliography. Throughout the paper, I will include photographs, maps, and anecdotes related to my ongoing research.

## rationale

Here I will introduce my topic, research question, and explain why I undertook this research. I will provide the reader with a background on why I am interested in this topic, both in my research and studio work. I will also discuss how the project relates to the work I have previously done, and how it has led me to this current investigation. I will explain how my somewhat vast topic has been narrowed and whittled down to a more precise theme.

Introduction: topic, research question and explanations (why I undertook this research):

How does one negotiate with differing and sometimes conflicting legacies? This question has led me on a personal, academic and artistic journey and still remains to be answered in its entirety, simply because there is no definite, single answer, and any partial truths discovered are constantly evolving. This enquiry, both rhetorical and hypothetical, is deeply steeped in personal experience, reality, imagination, individual and collective memory, and history. I had to identify and explore indefinite interpretations of this query, and throughout this process I have embarked on an investigation that attempts to reveal the many ways in which one grapples with personal and historical baggage, with the potentials and burdens of their ancestral past. In the beginning, this topic, with all of its intertwined nuances, circled around the motifs of post colonialism, genealogy, nostalgia, the woven identity and African Diaspora. However, I soon also became interested in Native history and métissage (migration and immigration). In addition to discussing critical theory and the results of my research and issues of general interest, I would also like to share how my focus has shifted, and how I became interested in this topic. Indeed I have come to understand that being mixed has many definitions, and it was important for me to understand how I became interested in this specific topic.

#### Background information: research and studio work.

My conceptual motivation is fuelled by the need to make connections in order to better understand what I feel is inherent to my personal experience and share these discoveries with an audience. The theme of *identity* as well as the concept and reality of *being mixed* have long been entangled with the dialogue that revolves around my work as an artist even though, at times, it was not clearly defined nor articulated. It became imperative for me to tackle and reflect upon certain issues, issues that I felt I had skirted or neglected.

In my previous explorations, I had primarily focused on "nostalgic" yearnings for an unknown past. I started by posing this question: Can we be nostalgic for something we never knew? This question started out as a very personal one, but rapidly evolved into a universal question that soon became apparent both in my studio work and in my research and writing. Following my research and art practice, I proposed

to locate (or define) the origins of nostalgia within the self, and attempted to reaffirm it by locating this nostalgia within a broader context in order to establish a correspondence between the feelings of sorrow, pain, longing, time and memory. I began to explore how curiosity can become a catalyst that can propel one to become nostalgic. I attempted to offer my own diasporic perspective about my former homeland as I excavated and dug through the many layers of yearning in order to reinvest the present with things past.

Although the research question and theme evolved from a different question based on nostalgia, my studio practice objectives remained the same. The use of visual narrative or story telling is my preferred way of conveying ideas that are both intuitive and learned. I set out to create a series of audio-visual works. My intention was to produce a body of work that could be referred to as a series of *moving digital paintings*, a term I use to describe a visual work that has been altered digitally and contains movement. A major component of my practice consists of gathering material information, such as documents, photographs, maps, personal, appropriated and archival materials, and utilizing these sources to create a final work. My studio project consisted of investigating the notions of geographical, historical and cultural nostalgia, and how it relates to origins, history, dreams and memory. Although some of the materials used in the videos were similar, the contents of the videos evolved into an exercise that dealt strictly with what it means to be mixed, as we shall examine in the following pages.

In this recent work, I wanted to create an audio-visual experience that would convey to my audience how I have dealt with my own legacy as a person with mixed lineage of French Canadian, Métis and Senegalese ancestry. Using drawings, stop motion, recent, old and found footage, I set out to create a series of videographic compositions that embodies and dissects the topics of my research, whilst I attempted to respond to the question I put forth. The result is a collection of videos, which culminated into a 3-channel video installation.

How this project relates to the work I have previously done, and how it has led me to this current investigation.

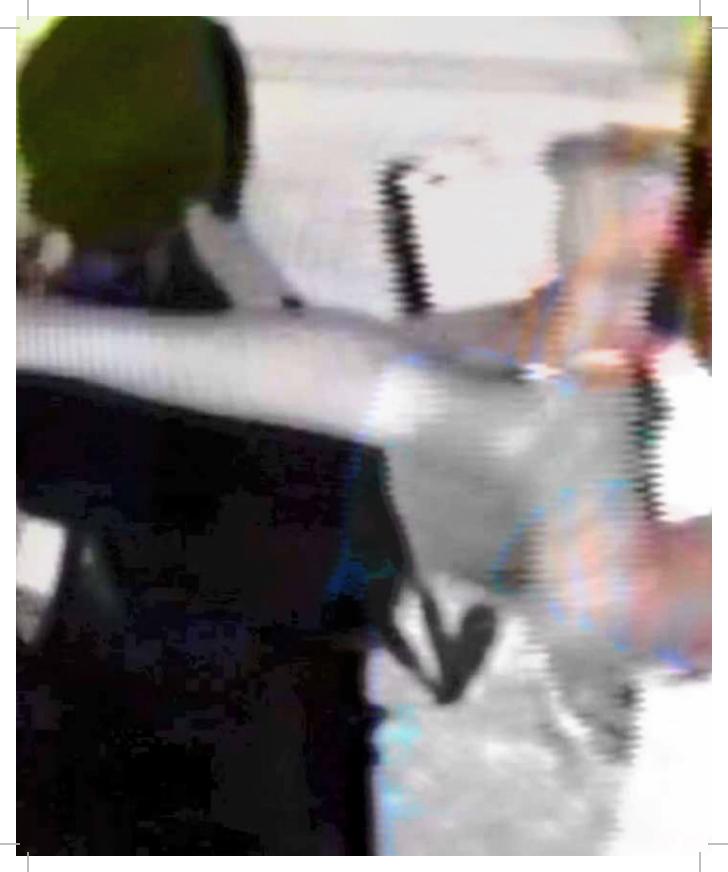
Writing, researching and creating work under the larger umbrella of the topic of negotiating legacies, based on and evolving from the initial question (*How does one negotiate with differing and sometimes conflicting legacies/identities?*), allowed me to tell a very personal story. But it also allowed me to investigate certain issues that I had been trying to relate to, or grapple with, during my whole life. I realized that I had chosen a vast and richly complicated subject, but that by examining it from different angles, it would become a bit less overwhelming. I tried not to let myself be bombarded with information, but allowed myself to continue my research and to blend my personal experiences with the more universal aspects of my themes of nostalgia, heritage, and memory.

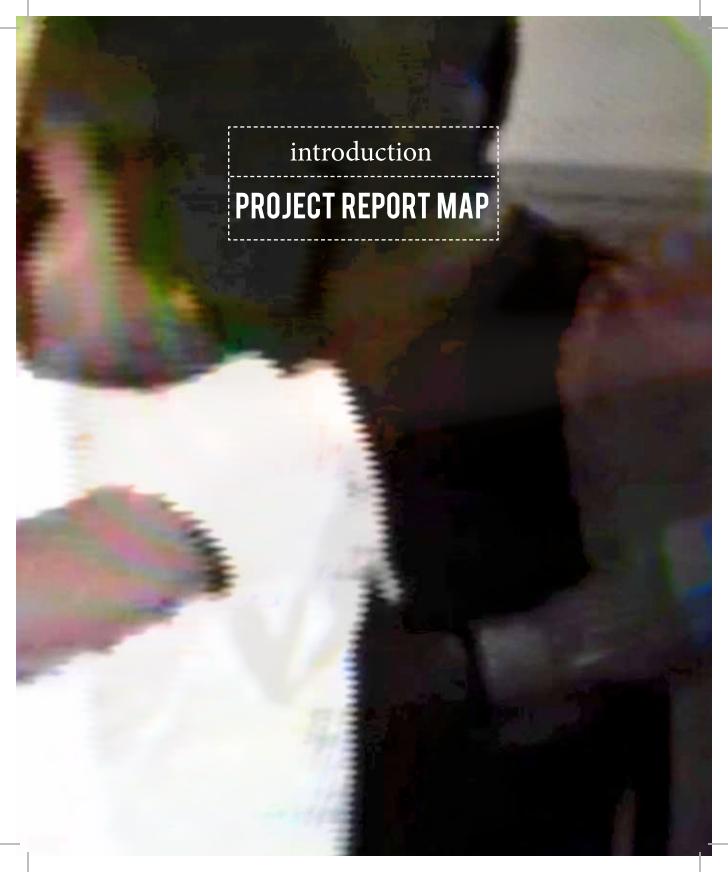
This initial research allowed me to pinpoint certain subjects I hadn't ever directly attempted to analyze, such as being mixed. Picking up where I left off in the first part of the project where I focused on the meaning of nostalgia, I continued to address the ramifications and experiences of living as a multicultural person in a post-colonial epoch. The idea that one has to negotiate with one's multiple cultural identities daily and in different circumstances, whether it be unconsciously or consciously, is an interesting idea that deserved an in-depth investigation. I believed I was well placed to revisit some of the themes of my previous research and hopefully deepen my understanding and articulation of this layered, important topic.

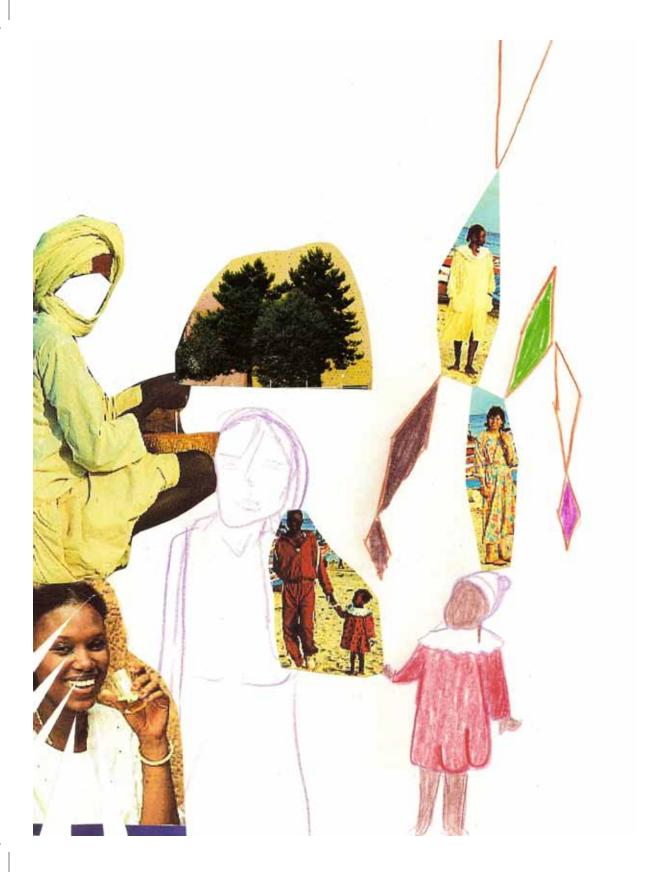
#### How my somewhat vast topic has been narrowed down.

This research experience is an ongoing process and after questioning my feelings of nostalgia for my birthplace, I decided I needed to familiarize myself more with what historians, artists, and my contemporaries have said about the ideas of being mixed in artistic, historical and contemporary contexts. I wanted to inform myself, which in turn would inform my work. Since I have activated this curiosity, the challenge is how to find a way to conduct research and create artwork simultaneously without the pressures of becoming overwhelmed by such a vast topic. I still feel like I have just scratched the surface and there is still so much to learn and to explore. There is such a strong connection between the writing and the visual components of my work that I think as I read and research more about these specific topics, it becomes naturally reflected in my work.

Just to be clear, it is not that I have been questioning my own heritage, or what to make of it, but I have often struggled making sense of certain personal experiences, behaviors, and opinions. This topic has been lingering and lain dormant in my system for a long time. It only made sense that I continued on this path. I am satisfied that this project allowed me to bring some of these queries to light. I was able to bring this academic, artistic and personal research into existence, into the physical world, by leaving a trace and by trying to entice an audience to share in a singular yet collective experience.







# project report map

#### Part 1

### **Memoirs (Mirrors)**

In this project report, I will begin by offering a personal memoir, follow by discussing my theoretical investigations, and conclude by looking at the final work, and the processes that led me there. Part 1 will resemble a memoir, or an autobiographical reflection written from my own perspective and experiences grappling with my research question. I believe this section is crucial in order to contextualize my studio work. Here I will combine autobiographical narrative with historical and cultural critique. Writing on the topic of negotiating identities, I think it's important to relate my own experience in comparison to that of others.

#### Part 2

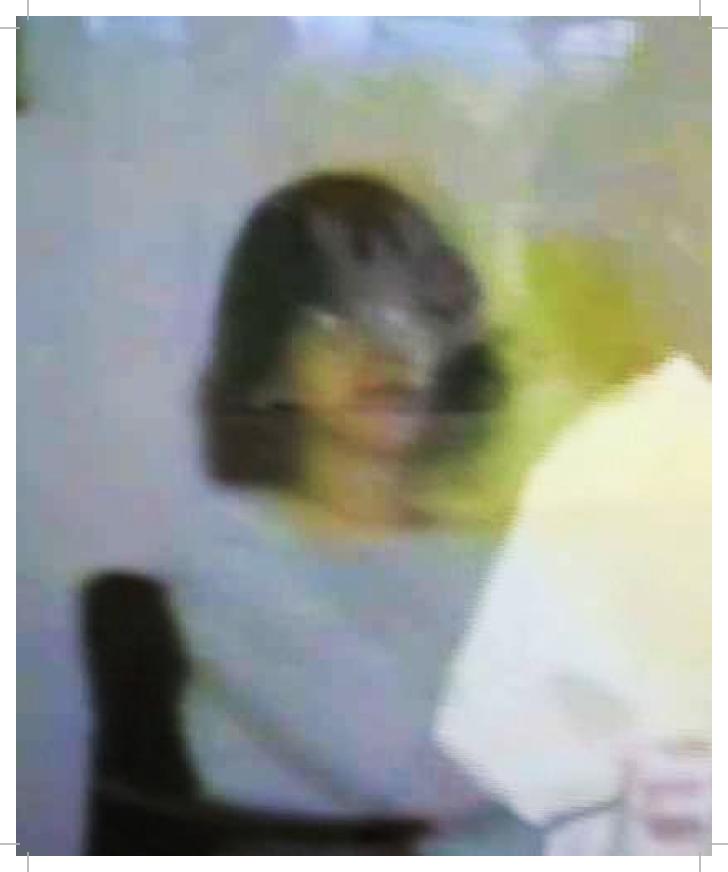
## Theoretical Investigations

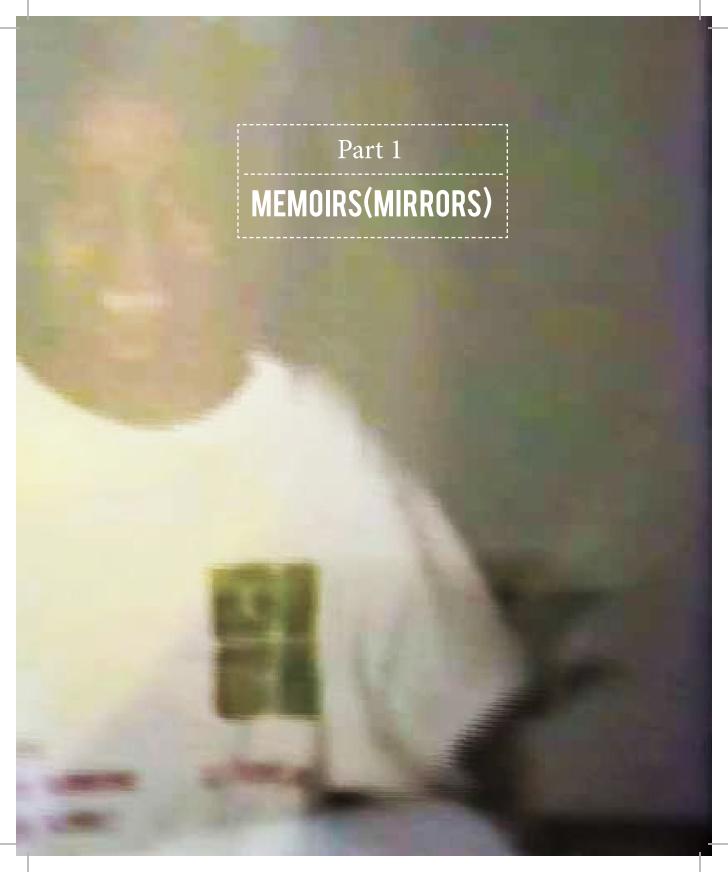
I will bring into context the research I have done and how it has informed my practice, my thoughts as an artist. I will discuss the theoretical investigations I have undertaken, engaging with, or sometimes challenging with the ideas put forth by various authors. Here I will have a chance to propel the autobiographical aspects of the subject into a larger investigation that is no longer personal, and perhaps more universal. I will explain how my explorations have influenced my research and what discoveries I have made along the way. I am particularly interested in how society has become increasingly multiethnic, and how society as a whole deals with conflicting and opposing legacies. This section will be my chance to articulate how the theoretical, philosophical, political, historical, aesthetic and contemporary voices and diverse opinions encountered in my research have been critical to my investigation and have helped me unearth certain aspects that relate to the themes of "identity" and "legacy" in a post-colonial epoch.

#### Part 3

#### Studio Reflections

This section is reserved for the critical reflection and evaluation of my studio practice within a theoretical critique. With the use of video, collage, animation, and sound, I am investigating the overlapping themes of negotiating with "identité métissée" or mixed identities and mixed legacies. Using drawings, stop motion, recent, old and found footage, I have created a series of visual compositions that embody and dissect the topics of my research. Here I will discuss the expected outcomes of my final work, and how my visual research came to fruition. This will be a good opportunity to discuss some of the productions of other artists who also work with video or with similar topics. Since I am working with video, I will certainly include stills of the final work, as well as stills from earlier works to show the evolution of the body of my work. I intend to include a timeline to show how the research and writing have impacted my work. I intend to include a DVD with the final project report.





"You are the result of two rich hereditary lines that converge to produce a 'singularity in time', a reflection or summation of all that preceded you since the beginning of humankind."

-Étienne Gaboury, my maternal grandfather

# memoirs (mirrors)

I began this project by reading a few memoirs such as Edwidge Danticat's <u>Brother I'm Dying</u>, a harrowing look at Danticat's own life, and that of members of her extended family from Haiti, some of whom eventually immigrated to the United States. The story focuses particularly on her love for her uncle Joseph, who has the misfortune of never being able to escape the grips of political, geographical or physical mistreatment. I also read bell hooks' <u>Art on My Mind: Visual Politics</u>. This memoir shifts the dialogue to a critique of the art world, where the politics of identity have become increasingly entangled with production, exhibition, and aesthetics. I appreciated hook's perspectives, especially her argument that art should be used as an agent of change and that it can be an empowering force for minorities. I responded to both of these authors, as I found myself relating to Danticat's need to share her very personal story and hook's empowering attitude, sense of agency and responsibility.

While reflecting on certain aspects of my heritage and genealogy and writing and creating work about these themes, it occurred to me that I had many things in common with these writers. The library shelves are filled with these books, written by people of all colors, nationalities or of mixed heritage, and who investigate their immediate past, their complex lineage of multiple cultures, as well as their sociopolitical and cultural environments. Sometimes, I admit I felt that my work might be perceived as being a bit narcissistic, or self-centered, as I am constantly looking at my own life, where I was born, where I live, my past, my memories, etc. I realized that all of this research and thinking is not merely navel-gazing, especially if I look at the **present**. By examining my own experiences, my heritage and my essence, I attempt to capture, honor, encapsulate, synthesize, express, pay tribute to, celebrate, what came **before** me. I'm comfortable with that. Is this interesting to others? I realized that I had to find a way to make it so... Perhaps it could be by revealing unknown aspects about me throughout this process, or simply by sharing my discoveries with others.



# capturing the past

### Who do you think you are?

This manifestation began when I became increasingly interested in gathering documents, artifacts, stories and imagery that pertain to my history. Over the past few years, I have collected and gathered so much "material", mostly photographs, postcards, and books, that I ended up with piles and piles of this stuff on shelves, in albums, on my walls, and on my desktops. I also had digital scans. The reason I felt I needed to have all of this material was to try and piece together a puzzle that has a thousand pieces. Being mixed, I have always looked at both sides of my heritage with a great deal of curiosity and wonder. Maybe it's because I have felt like I am neither black nor white, neither Senegalese nor Canadian, or sometimes I feel I am both, and at other times, one rather than the other. During my research, I began to feel like an anthropologist to my own life.

I admit to watching one too many episodes of <u>Who Do You Think You Are?</u>, a reality television show sponsored by ancestry.com, the popular web platform that lets you research for documents linked to your background. All of the episodes are devoted to popular and rich celebrities, a choice that was obviously dictated by the need to get more ratings. These celebrities embark on a journey to trace their family tree and discover their known or unknown ancestors. They are flown across the world as they uncover more information about their genealogy. The show has a British, American, and a Canadian version, and I was so intrigued by these celebrities tracing their genealogy, I thought to myself, I might have some pretty interesting discoveries to make myself! I became particularly obsessed with wanting to recreate my own episode, but realized I probably had to forget about the free plane rides and camera crew. I did however realize I had many of these tools at my fingertips. I didn't really need a big Hollywood budget to accomplish what this reality show did, albeit I would not refuse an offer if the opportunity ever arose!

Since I already had a vast collection of artifacts, stories, notes and photographs from my father's Senegalese side, I decided to start looking into my mother's French Canadian history. Last year, I asked my Grandparents if they had any genealogical family tree books or documents I hadn't had the chance to see. I don't presently live in my hometown, so my Grandfather graciously scanned each page and painstakingly emailed me each .jpg. The only problem was that most of these files were corrupted when I received them. This past winter, I spent four hours scanning my maternal family's genealogical book that spans four centuries. This past December when I went home from the holidays, I asked to borrow the book, although I could sense his apprehension of lending me such a precious artifact, as I learned only a few copies of this book exist. I was handed a giant brown envelope that contained a book,

photographs, notes, newspaper clippings and maps. Basically, I had hit the jackpot. But what was in here that I didn't already know? I brought it home and scanned about 200 pages from the books and other notes onto a USB key. When I returned to Montreal, the USB key with all the images had once again become corrupted, and thus all the files were unreadable. I suddenly felt defeated, as though trying to recapture the past is perhaps more difficult than I thought, if not impossible... Thankfully, I was able to recover a few of these pages.

#### SECTION I

- o Ancestry of the Gaboury Family
- o Family Files

-6-

#### SECTION I

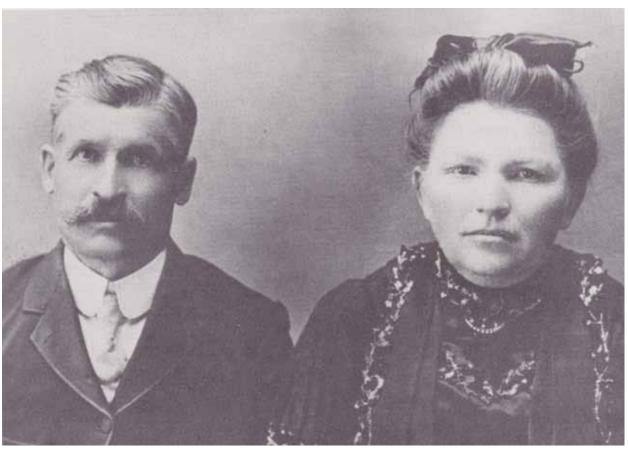
#### 2 - Gaboury: name and origin

2.1 Origin of our Ancestor: (according to Cyprien Tanguay):

Charente-maitime\_ au sud di Vendee saus le Golfe de Sainfonge "Antoine Gaboury, son of Jacques Gaboury and Jeanne Beaudoin, of La Rochelle in Aunis, France, married in 1678 (Filion contract, January 8) Jeanne Mignot, daughter of Jean Mignot and Louise Cloutier".

2.2 Meaning of the Name: (See N.-E. Dionne):

"Gaboury: "From Gabris, commune of Alpes-Maritimes (in South-eastern France), arrondissement of Grasse. Gaberie, joke, prank".



Joseph and Aurélie (Chabot) Gaboury, 1879

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AND: Antoine Gaboury	iboury				
,	Jacques Gaboury			+	1678 - 01 - 08
Son of:	Jeanne Beaudoin		mariage	- place:	(Fillon contract)
Jeanne Mignot	gnot				
ř,	Jean Mignot				
HITER OF: :	Louise Cloutier				
		CHILDREN			
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guerite				Anne Lagout	Québec
	L'Ange - Gardien	ungnar			1719 - 04 - 04
n Baptiste	1683 - 12 - 26	1709 - 05 - 01	MMadeleine Kasseu		Hôtel - Dieu de
	L'Ange - Gardien	St - Augustin		Jeanne Chapeau	Quebec
d	1686 - 01 - 06	1713 - 01 - 25	Pierre Racet	Jean Racet	
	L'Ange - Gardien	St - Augustin		Jeanne Chapeau	
		1720 - 11 - 18	André Clement	Gilbert Clement	-
		St - Augustin		MMadeleine Buisson	
	1688 - 05 - 09	1713 - 11 - 22	Françoise Cotin	Tugal Cotin	1756 - 12 - 12
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22221200	Pointe-aux-Trembles	St - Augustin		Etiennette Beaudon	



Gaboury Family, 1940's





29

Valentine Lafrénière Jeanne (Nadeau) Breton



Lillian, Florence, Juliette, Jeanne Gaboury



Gérard Gaboury

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	( mon				
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JE	Jacques Gaboury			30+0. 1678	- 01 - 08
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		CHILDREN			
		20.000	Spouse	96	Date and place
NAMES	Date and place of birth	Date and place or marriage	Name of spouse	Parents of spouse	of death
	1680 - 10 - 05	1698 - 11 - 04	Pierre Vallières	Pierre Vallières	1749 - 11 - 16
Sactions	e - Ga	St - Augustin		Anne Lagout	Québec
	1683 - 12 - 26	1709 - 05 - 01	MMadeleine Rasset	Jean Rasset	0 - 40
an baptiste	- Gar	St - Augustin		Jeanne Chapeau	Hôtel - Dieu de
ie	1686 - 01 - 06	1713 - 01 - 25	Pierre Racet	Jean Racet	
	L'Ange - Gardien	St - Augustin		Jeanne Chapeau	
		1720 - 11 - 18	André Clément	Gilbert Clement	
	-	St - Augustin	,	MMadeleine Buisson	-
4000	1688 - 05 - 09	1713 - 11 - 22	Françoise Cotin	Tugal Cotin	1756 - 12 - 12
	St - Augustin	St - Augustin		Tiennette Beaudon	St - Augustin
rie Charlotte	1691 - 08 - 24	1709 - 08 - 18	Joseph Cotin	Tugal Cotin	
	Pointe-aux-Trembles	St - Augustin		Etiennette Beaudon	
				The State of the S	

Portier et Lecteur le 14 dec., 1952. Exorciste et Acolyte le 21 juin. 1953. Adresse: Scolasticat du Sacre-Coeur, Lebret, Sask.

- 3.2-Jules, Ne le 25 sept., 1927. Marie le 16 juillet, 1951 a Rhea Vertefeuille, nee le 26 juin, 1933. Ils eurent 2 enfants. Adresse, 12543 - 127th. St., Edmonton, Alberta.
  - 1.3 Diane, Nee le 7 mai, 1952. 2.3-Gilbert, Ne a Edmonton, Alta. le 23 oct., 1953.
- 4.2-Robert, Ne le 15 mai, 1929. 5.2-Maurice, Ne le 28 sept., 1930.

6.2-Rita, Noe le 5 mars, 1932.

7.2-Raoul, Ne le 17 mars, 1933. Decede le 31 mai, 1934.

8.2-Lucille, Nee le 6 juillet, 1934. 9.2-Francoise, Nee le 25 juin, 1936. 10.2-Paul, Ne le 4 juillet, 1939.

.1-Diana, Nee le 13 aout, 1900. Mariee a Georges Roy le 7 oct., 1929. Ne le 22 mai, 1887. Decede le 26 juin, 1952.

- -1-Emmanuel, Ne le 7 mai, 1902. a St. Vallier de Bellechasse. Marie a Yvonne Giroux de Montmartre, Sask. le 5 juin, 1928. Nee le 16 sept., 1909. Ils eurent 10 enfants. Adresse: Montmartre, Sask.
  - 1.2-Emile, Ne le 26 fev., 1930. 2.2-Jeannine, Nee le 7 mars, 1933. 3.2-Rose-Ange, Nee le 25 oct., 1938.

4.2-Leon, Ne le 2 avril, 1940. 5.2-Aime, Ne le 17 mai, 1942.

- 6.2-Helene, Nee le 25 dec., 1943.
- 7.2-Lucille, Nee le 25 oct., 1945. 8.2-Gerard, Ne le 9 avril, 1947. 9.2-Laura, Nee le 10 sept., 1948.
- 10.2-Robert. Ne le 28 nov., 1949.
- .1-Ernest, Ne le 24 oct., 1903. Marie a Pauline Halle le 20 avril, 1940. Nee le 17 janv., 1913. Ils eurent 4 enfants.
  - 1.2-Michel, Ne le 24 mai, 1942. 2.2-Denis, Ne le 9 aout, 1945. 3.2-Helene, Nee le 12 mai, 1949. 4.2-Dine, Nee le 28 juin, 1951.
- .l-Yvonne, Nee le 26 dec., 1905. Mariee a Girard Theberge le 15 juillet 1936. Ne le 27 fev., 1906. Ils eurent 8 enfants. Adresse: St. Raphael, Conte Bellechasse, P.Q.
  - 1.2-Weraldine, Nee le 16 juin, 1937.
  - 2.2-Claire, Nee le 6 nov., 1938.
  - 3.2-Jlaudette, Nee le 15 juin. 1941. 4.2-dejeanne, Nee le 28 fev., 1943. 5.2-Agathe, Nee le 23 juin, 1945. 6.2-Louise, Nee le 18 juillet, 1947. 7.2-Leonel Ne le 13 gout. 1950.





Albéric Breton

Napoléon and Valentine Gaboury



Gaboury Family



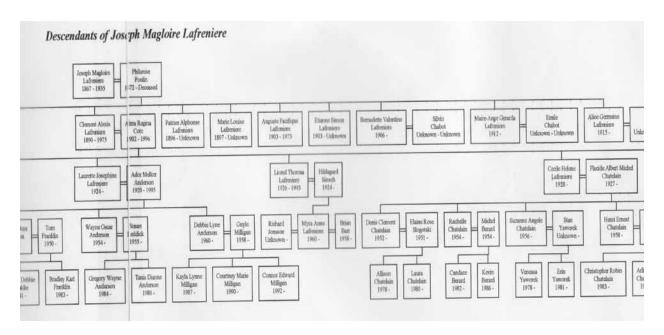
Breton children, 1940's

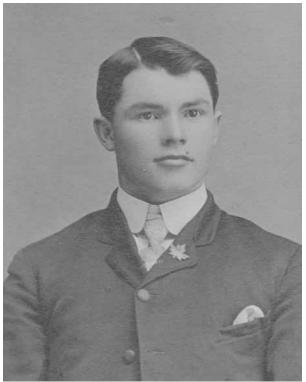


Claire Breton, 1940's



Breton Family, 1940's







Napoléon Gaboury

Étienne Gaboury, Claire Breton and Lise Gaboury, my mother, 1957



Dr. Gabriel Nadeau and spouse, 1924

- 1. Charles Robertson Colonel demeurant dans la ville de Quebec. Marie a Marquerite Wilson. Il eut 7 enfants: Wilhelmine, Charles, Georges, Johnny, Alexandre, Christine, et Henri (ne d'un second mariage).
- 1.1-Wilhelmine Robertson. Mariee a Michel Letellier, Elle mourut jeune a St Vallier en 1874.
- 2.1-Charles Robertson Decede en Nov. 1885. Marie a Philomene Nolin en 1862. Decedee a St Louis de Pintendre le 15 fev. 1926. Ils eurent 9 enfants:

1.2-Charles, decede en bas age.

2.2-Wilhelmine, decedes en mai 1881 a l'age de 16 ans.

3.2-Medore, decede en bas age. 4.2-Albert, decede en bas age.

5.2-Edmond, decede en bas age. 6.2-Albert, (2ieme), decede a 7 ans, le lier sept. 1890.

- 7.2-Albertine, nee le 10 mars 1875. Mariee a Octave Fournier le 7 sept. 1906. Ils eurent 8 enfants.
  - 1.3-Marie-Therese, Nee le 20 oct. 1908. Mariee a Jean Pouliot le 25 mai, 1936. Ils eurent 4 enfants.

1.4-Jean-Marie, ne le 27 mai, 1937. 2.4-Marthe, Fee le 31 mai, 1941.

3.4-Louise, nee le 29 oct. 1942.

4.4-Guy, ne le 29 aout, 1946.

2.3-Charles-Herri, ne le 23 sept, 1909. Marie a Antoinette Francoeur le 20 mai, 1942. Ils eurent 3 enfants.

1.4-Gilles, ne le 20 fev. 1943.

2.4-Louisette, nee le 16 oct., 1944. 3.4-Denig, ne le 24 mai, 1946.

- 4.3-Deux fils jumeaux, nes le 23 oct., 1910. Decedes a 1 jour. 5.3-Albert, ne le 10 mars, 1912. Decede le 10 oct., 1918. 6.3-Cecili, nee le 22 oct., 1913. Mariee a Armand Fouquet le 27 mai, 1944. Ils eurent 2 enfants.
  - 1.4-Solange, nee le 24 mai, 1945. 2.4- Monique, nee le 21 mai, 1950.
- 7.3-Fernande, nee le 3 avril, 1915. 3.3-Lucienne, nee le 17 dec., 1916. Decedee le 7 oct., 1918.
- 8.2-Hilagion, ne le 17 oct., 1877. Decede le 4 mars, 1949. Marie a Lee Roy. Decede le 15 fev., 1922 a l'age de 34 ans. Ils eurent 5 enfants: Charles-Henri, Alexandre, Albert, Monique, Madeleine.
- 9.2-Alphonsine, nee le 12 oct., 1879. En religion SS.Jesus-Marie, Sr.St. Barthelemi. Decedee le 31 dec., 1912.
- 7.1-Georges Robertson, Marie a Camille Nolin. Ils eurent 2 enfants

What they reveal is that my Grandmother's family settled in Saskatchewan, in a quaint French town called Montmartre. My Grandfather's side of the family has roots in Manitoba, but initially came from France, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. After settling in La Nouvelle France, or Québec, some of them headed west. In fact, in 1806, Marie-Anne Gaboury is known to be the first woman of European descent to travel to and settle in what is today Western Canada. She is remembered as the "Grandmother of the Red River" and many Métis people of the Canadian Prairies can trace back their ancestry directly to her. In fact, she is also Louis Riel's Grandmother. Louis Riel: Founder of the Province of Manitoba, politician, rebel, political and spiritual leader of the Métis peoples in the prairies. Although he was recognized to be the one responsible for shaping the Red River province, and is considered by many as the Father of Manitoba, he was also considered a traitor by the Canadian government and was hung in 1875. It is interesting to note that he was pardoned in 2003. He is considered one of the greatest figures in Canadian history, and is to some, including myself, a hero.

It is peculiar to realize your ancestors were responsible for such important events in history. Although I knew there was a family connection with Louis Riel, and thus there must be some Métis ancestry in my genealogy, I was never totally sure if there were any First Nations people on my Mother's side. If there were, nobody seemed to talk about it....

A curious moment happened as I looked through the photos my grandfather shared with me. Sentimentality, curiosity and nostalgic feelings come over us, as the people in these images are your family, yet you don't know them. They seem like forlorn ghosts, framed in these withered photographs, some poses scribbled on with a pen on a page. They were people. You feel connected to them, but separated by time. One particular image was compelling: a family photo of my Great Grandparents and their children, and my Great-Great-Grandmother, sitting amongst the family. My Grandfather tells me she was First Nations Cree, but there was no name available to me, as it wasn't marked on the photo. As I sifted through all of these records, I realized the importance of this type of document and concluded that this project I am pursing is perhaps the main reason for this stubborn and persistent research; to leave something for the future generations.



Joesph Malgoire Lafrénière and Phélanise Poulin's family, 1911

## métis, métis? métis!

The fact that I now know I share ancestry with an important figure in Canadian history, a leader of the Métis nation, and that my fourth Great Grandmother was Cree, leaves me perplexed. Perhaps it shouldn't, but it does. I wondered how come nobody in my family talked about this side of our heritage... the Native side. As I proceeded to look into things myself, I realized that this information is not hidden but just needed to be uncovered. Why is it so important to uncover this? Perhaps it is because of my own genetic make-up. Mixing cultures has been going on in my family for generations, and this is just another example, and perhaps I felt it was necessary to honor all of my ancestors.

I knew certainly about my roots in the West African Peuhl tribe and French Canadian, European, but uncovering the Métis roots essentially brought another layer to my experience of being *mixed*. Could I now identify as being Métis as well? Should I? I did some research and to belong to the Métis nation, you have to be able to prove certain aspects. Being Métis in Manitoba is not an anomaly. They say most French Canadians living there probably have some Native blood in their family. Those who don't know for sure have perhaps forgotten or chosen to forget. This is probably the result of years of neglect or denial. There has been so much discrimination against First Nations people in Canada that for centuries First Nations People were systematically robbed of their land, their culture, and even saw their families being ripped apart. They are often still marginalized to this day. They were forced into unspeakable traumas as they were sent to the horrific residential school programs. There, they were told to "forget" their ancestry, their beliefs and customs. It's hardly surprising then that some Canadians would have aboriginal ancestors or relatives in their families, who didn't identify themselves as being Halfbreed or Métis, would choose to ignore and hide their ancestry. I am not saying that my own family was partaking in this denial, especially if there was only one First Nations person many generations ago, but I feel there is a need to contextualize for future generations given the evolution of our contemporary social landscape. Part of me wants to be able to prove this so I can give a voice to my Fourth Great Grandmother, the Cree woman in the photograph.

When so many of your identity lines are already crossed, faded or blurred, it's not surprising that things can become so "mixed up." This quest brings so many questions to surface. I wanted to verify if my lineage could actually be traced to the Cree nation, or the Métis nation, as these photographs, stories and records show. By traced I mean: could I belong to the Métis nation? What would this prove? It is strange to think that we still live in a society where race and identity is governed by "drop of blood" rules, which are still applicable. According to what I found so far, I am 1/16<sup>th</sup> Cree. Is this enough to embrace this part of myself or belong to this nation? The Métis only accept you into their nation if you have a membership. I then discovered something fascinating on the Métis Resource Centre of Manitoba, the *Claiming Your Own Genealogy Project*: (Metis Culture & Heritage Resource Centre)

In short, this is a web project aimed at people who are wishing to establish their Métis ancestry. I decided to apply, to see whether or not my lineage can be traced, and proven. I needed the proof. The amount of details required to fill out the application forms is quite surprising, but I happily filled out all the forms with the help of my family members, paid the 30\$, and am now waiting for a response. If it can be proven, what will happen, will anything change? Will I begin to check the Métis box on Census applications, along with the "white" and "black" boxes? When will they make a box that says "All of the above" or better yet, "none of the above"? If society hadn't decided to compartmentalize cultures in such a way, perhaps so many of us wouldn't presently be in a very ambiguous position with regards to our own identity. Perhaps if there weren't such a discrimination against First Nations and black people in the last centuries, aspects of these culture would have been passed down to me, much like the French and Senegalese sides have been at the forefront of my identity. I am already considered one type of Métis, why not claim the other Métis within me? Métis. Métis? Métis!









West African and First Nations garments at a Powwow (personal photographs)

## powwow

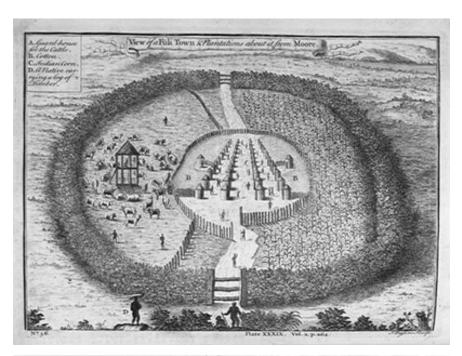
#### **Powwow**

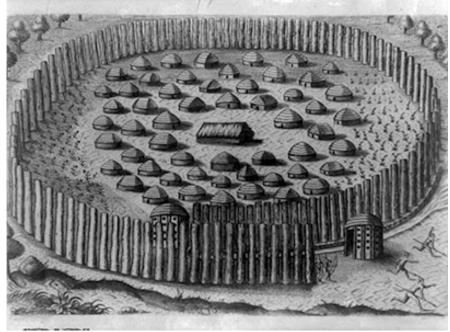
Definition: A modern powwow is a specific type of event where both Native American and non-Native American people meet to dance, sing, socialize, and honor American Indian culture. (Wikipedia)

Let me tell you a strange story my mother told me recently. My mother, my father and a few of his African friends decided to go to a Powwow celebration to experience firsthand some facets of Aboriginal culture. My mother said the Natives completely ignored her, but that my father was welcomed with opened arms by his new Native "brothers." I saw a photograph of this day, and it's true, there is my dad, in his colorful African boubou with his new friends from the First Nations, dressed in similarly bright colors, with arms around each other.

I suppose my mom is taking the photograph, seeing as though she was not being treated particularly warmly, as she explained to me. This anecdote really made me realize how certain things can go full circle, how issues of race can constantly be *flipped* around. How the "oppressor" can feel prejudice, how the "oppressed" can come together and forge bonds. Talk about "complications"! This made me wonder if this underlying issue was the reason for the African / Native bond at this Powwow? Was there something specific that was superficially or honestly linking them together? I began to research the similarities between certain African and First Nation tribes, or what armchair anthropologists would have called "the Primitives". The similarities were astounding.

I discovered this online exhibition called: IndiVisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas. It focused around the similarities between First Nations groups and African societies. Aside from the obvious fact these cultures were severely damaged and to some extent invariably transformed by colonization and by the advent of slavery by Europeans centuries ago in the Americas and Africa, I learnt that the peoples of these different continents shared many more similarities than that which meets the eye. These societies flourished for thousands of years before they were colonized, and many considered themselves stewards of their ancestral homelands. African and Native groups held similar ideas about animal spirits, the guiding presence of ancestors, oral traditions, a living world and extended family relationships. (Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian)





In these European views of two villages, the similarities between the two distinct peoples are compelling.

A Fortified Village, a Timucua settlement in Florida, by the French artist Jacques Le Moyne, 1564, a Fulani village in Guinea, by a European artist, 1500s (Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, 2009)

Africans and First Nations have together fought against oppression, whether they did so separately or together. I believe that they are united in their struggles and they retain a deep and permanent bond that was created out of solidarity. There are many accounts of Africans and Natives coming together during colonial times to defend themselves, just like there are accounts of whites and Natives coming together, and Whites and Blacks, during the Human Rights movement of the 1960's. What did these groups all have in common? They were defying the imposed "racial order." Crossing racial boundaries resulted in terrible consequences. Where does all of this bring me? Present day.

# post-racial discrimination society

In a recent article published in Toronto Life Magazine, "A new mixed-raced generation is transforming the city: Will Toronto be the world's first post-racial metropolis?" written by Hune-Brown, I encountered the word "mixies", a hip 2013 way of claiming you are multicultural, I assume. The author discusses why he thinks today's Canadian landscape is increasingly "mixed". He says: "For today's mixies, growing up multiracial has meant inner debates about which parent to identify with, how to explain one's background, and coping with the urge to blend in." (Hune-Brown) He goes on to say that his city of Toronto is rapidly changing in demographics, and that many mixed children are now much more common in this millennia. "Living in an era of mixed race doesn't mean the obliteration of race—it means the creation of whole new complex categories." (Hune-Brown)

I have to agree. There are so many mixed people everywhere now, more than ever. In a way, growing up I felt unique, original. Today I realize it's not so rare anymore. We are living in a globalized society and although cultures have been continually mixing for millennia, it seems that it is happening now at an increasingly rapid pace. The stigma of interracial marriage has begun to dissolve and dissipate in modern western societies, as it is no longer considered a crime or punishable to copulate with someone from a different culture. The President of the United States of America, Barrack Obama was voted the first "Black President" in 2008 and reelected in 2012. This in itself reveals how society is evolving. Also, President Obama truly embodies what it means to be "mixed": African, European, Irish; American, and his election changed the course of history forever. The satirical cartoon South Park aired an episode where a mysterious new race called the Goobacks (Parker) return to earth from the "distant future". They descend a giant spacecraft and we notice that they all have the same dark beige complexion and are all speaking a new language that seems to be a mix of many. This is a humorous way of questioning whether human beings will eventually evolve into one race. Although this is comedy, can we say that we are already living in post racial discrimination times?



The Goobacks- Southpark



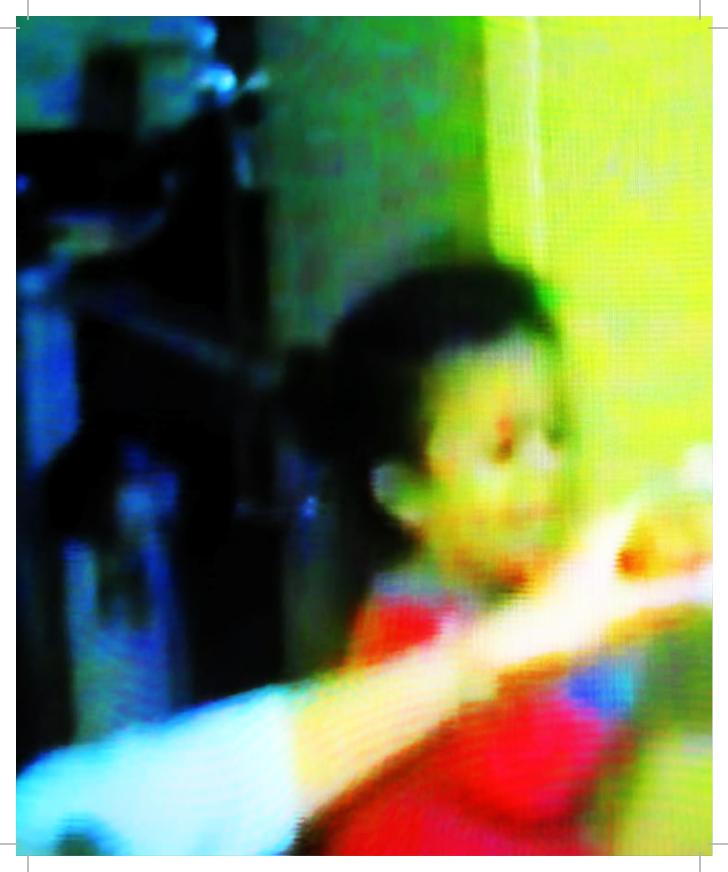
Jimi Hendrix "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace."

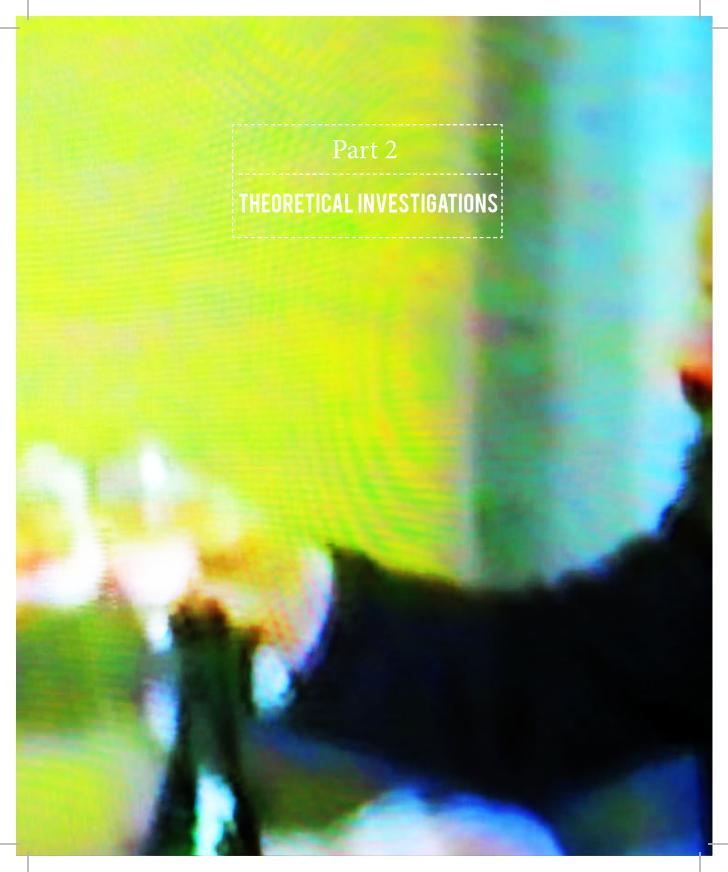
—Jimi Hendrix

The rock-and-roll innovator Jimi Hendrix often spoke proudly of his Cherokee grandmother. He was one of many African Americans who cite family traditions in claiming Native ancestry. (Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian)

Yes, as Bob Dylan wrote: times... they are a changin'... and the "racial landscape" will continue to change, but I don't believe we are yet living in post racial discrimination societies. I suppose this work I am undertaking is a true attempt to try and understand and reveal all of the layers of the past, present, and future. It may not be possible, but after a person is continuously trying to break down these in/visible barriers, codes, customs, identity politics of being multicultural, it can tremendously affect your life, behavior, thoughts and art. As a person who has deep roots in cultures that belonged at one time or another to either the oppressors or the oppressed, I wonder if I am unique or does everyone have deep roots in many different cultures and that will slowly evolve to become something entirely new. I see that younger generations are often perceived in some way as becoming the beacons and voices of the future. Perhaps it is futile to go around in circles with these thoughts, because in the end, nationality, color, race, it all shouldn't really matter when one is faced with a life or death situation. We are all carbon based beings.

What matters is how richly you live your life, the wrongs you right, the love that you give to others, the relationships you foster, and the choices you make, and ultimately, the legacy that you leave behind. An artist can choose to use paint, clay, pencils, or their body. I can one day choose to be African, French, speak English, etc. The splitting of the personality is what has encouraged researchers to reflect upon and discuss the hybrid, "mixed", biracial, mulatto, mestizo, mule, Métis identity or *conditions*. This is an aspect of society that has been largely researched, and redefined, over and over again, and it is still a hotly debated topic. As I began this project, I wanted to try and offer my personal visions of my own experiences. I read a lot about all these subjects and will attempt to unearth and define certain theoretical aspects in the next chapter. Some of what I learnt is shocking, some is painful, but some is also filled with joy and hope. I did this because I am personally interested in this subject, but mostly, because I feel a true responsibility to better understand the past and the present, so that I in turn can pass on my legacy to the future.





# theoretical investigations

My studio practice is currently informed by the examination of the impact of genealogical, historical, national and cultural heritage on identity. I began by delving into my own personal history, as I have a paternal connection to Senegal and a maternal link to French Manitoba (Canada), as well as some Métis lineage. I quickly discovered the importance of collective history and its relevance in today's world. I am particularly interested in the question of how visible minorities perceive themselves, how others perceive them, and most importantly how identity politics<sup>1</sup>, affect people with multiple backgrounds. The Other is so prevalent in every facet of society; something or someone can easily be "othered." The Other can be part of you and you can other "it". Traces of the Other can remain or change with time within you. (Lévinas 358) Evidently, I have been interested with members of the African Diaspora with whom I share a personal connection, who arrived in Canada with a certain baggage, depending on their country of origin and their status (political refugees, new immigrants, for example). In this project, I specifically chose to explore the relationships between the Self and the Other and certain questions related to hybridity. But what exactly is hybridity? These questions cannot be answered without addressing the multiple "hybrid theories", which are abundant, evolving and oftentimes conflicting. Hybridity has long been a challenging and fascinating topic for cultural theorists, artists, intellectuals, and psychologists alike. Here I will explore some of these theories, and offer my own interpretations, and also explain how this has affected my practice.

### hy·brid (noun)

- 1. Genetics: The offspring of genetically dissimilar parents or stock, especially the offspring produced by breeding plants or animals of different varieties, species, or races.
- 2. a) Something of mixed origin or composition, such as a word whose elements are derived from different languages.
- b) Something having two kinds of components that produce the same or similar results, such as a vehicle powered by both an electric motor and an internal combustion engine as sources of power for the drive train. (Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary)

Hybridity has become a fashionable topic, whether we are discussing genetics or technology. The truth is, everyone has a mixed genetic origin, and therefore we are all hybrids. We are all derivatives of something else that is mixed. It is believed that all living species share a common ancestor. Recently, a new religion in Sweden has been invented in response to the increasingly tight laws on piracy and file sharing on the Internet. It is called The Missionary Church of Kopimism and members of this church use CTRL C and CTRL V (copy / paste) as their sacred symbols. What has

<sup>1</sup> The laden phrase "identity politics" has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

this got to do with my topic? I found it comical when I first heard about a religion undeniably invented for members to be exempt from the laws of digital copyright infringement, but after looking into it further, I felt it made a lot of sense. They believe that copying or remixing information communicated by another person is sacred, and that the act of copying is sacred. (The First Church of Kopimism for the USA) Are we all not copies of each other, genetically remixed and remixed? Why then, must we resort to creating nomenclatures with words like "mixed", "metis" or "hybrid" when, in a way, we are all hybrids? I suppose, when speaking of identity politics, alas, things cannot be so simple. I have argued that I have felt like a hybrid many times in my life, even though, at times, I was not always sure what that meant... The aim of my project has been to precisely consider the many different discourses on or about postmodern hybridization to better understand the evolution and the contemporary ideology of miscegenation.

In Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson discusses the origins and processes of nationalism and describes how certain communities have members who can never interact face-to-face. (Anderson, 1983) Homi Bhabha questions identity, national affiliation, cultural hybridity and the notion of being "In between" in The Location of Culture. In Variations métisses: Dix métaphores pour penser le métissage, the author Philippe Chanson summarizes the theories of ten Francophone intellectuals who studied the phenomenon of *mixing* or hybridisation, each one challenging the reader to rethink anthropological values and socio-political interpretation of the meaning of *m*étissage. Chanson gives ten metaphors to illustrate how the meaning of métissage has evolved over time. For example, for Victor Segalen the metaphor used is diverse 'exoticism'; whereas for Claude Lévi-Strauss, the metaphor is to perceive *métissage* as tinkering with a kaleidoscope.<sup>2</sup> I have been navigating through this material in hopes of uncovering new perspectives and to broaden the scope of my understanding. As I created my videos, I attempted to explore and understand my research question and I repeatedly asked myself: How does one negotiate with differing and sometimes conflicting legacies/identities? In this present day, to borrow from Scarpetta's book, L'Impureté, we can reflect, such as the author does, on how we should react to the idea of cultural "impurity" which surrounds us everywhere. Scarpetta's question is perhaps even more relevant when we now live in a society that has become increasingly "multi-ethnic", and even cross ethnic. A good example of this is 'tex-mex' food or fusion cuisine or traditional garb used in modern fashion.

The other 8 metaphors are as follows: Roger Bastide - the metaphor of métissage as a syncretic mosaic; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari - the metaphor of the rhizome; Georges Balandier - metaphor of movement in disorder; Paul Ricoeur - metaphor of the narrative identity; René Despestre - metaphor of the 'add-on'; Serge Gruzunksi - metaphor of mixing; Jean-Loup Amselle - metaphor of branching out; François Laplantine and Alexis Nouss - metaphor of oscillating or alternating tensions. (My translation)

Obviously, the advantages and disadvantages of mixing cultures are too numerous to enumerate in this exercise. It is important, however, to at least touch upon some of these issues in order to understand and reveal the complexity of these issues.

In <u>Negotiating Caribbean Identities</u>, Stuart Hall addresses the subjects of Caribbean culture and identity, and the complications associated with assigning a single cultural identity to the Caribbean people. Hall suggests that throughout history, humans have all sought to belong to a particular "culture", as it "provides the ground for our identities, something to which we can return, something solid, something fixed, something stabilized, around which we can organize our identities and our sense of belongingness." (Hall 4) He claims that Caribbean peoples often felt a need to search for a pure *Essence*, or a pure identity, which can be very problematic. There are many complications associated with assigning a single cultural identity to the Caribbean people, or to any people for that matter, because, as I have argued, we are all "mixed" hybrids of our ancestors.

Evidently, political mobilization, economic and cultural developments have played a role on the identity politics of the Caribbean people, mostly due to factors such as slavery, colonialism, and subsequently, the fight for independence. The diasporic nature of culture and identity linked to the inhabitants of the Caribbean islands means that if someone is searching for his or her origins, he or she would undoubtedly trace back their genealogy to discover that the past is interlaced with trauma but also survival. For First Nations peoples, sometimes their genealogy is impossible to retrace because the indigenous peoples of the areas were largely eradicated, following the 'discovery' of America. For Afro-Americans, retracing history also is problematic because many families were directly affected by slavery. and so like their Native-American or indigenous compatriots, they often hit what genealogists call the "brick wall". Unable to retrieve satisfactory evidence, the search is interrupted and oftentimes incomplete due to lack of record keeping. The use of genetics and DNA matching has proven to be a very accurate and conducive way of tracing one's roots, but is used mostly by scientists and anthropologists, and is not the standard for the general population. Although I am not Caribbean, nor African-American, growing up in a place that is categorized as a "melting pot", the similarities that all diasporic and mixed cultures share, epitomizes how burdens of legacy and identity politics arise.

Recently, Édouard Glissant's theory on creolization illustrates the interesting trajectory, which occurs through *métissage*. He states that when several cultures come into contact, or at least when elements of different cultures mix in one specific place in the world, the result is the blossoming of something completely different and new, the sum of the whole being much richer than each individual part. For Glissant, the individual elements blend to create a stimulating renewal and synthesis

of cultures. For creolization to occur, he argues that the mixing of cultures is not the determining factor, but the unpredictable results that occur in the mixing of separate or unique cultural identities. I can relate to this perspective when I think about my own personal trajectory, melding some French Canadian traditions to certain West African ones. This theory, when applied to non-Creole societies, demonstrates that it is evident that new and variable cultural *mixed* identities have been formed worldwide and they continue to evolve in contemporary times, to varying degrees. In <u>Traité du Tout-Monde</u>, Glissant suggests that creolization should ideally not be perceived as a dilution or bastardization of a 'race', but rather as a renewal of a culture that can produce unpredictable, but enriching change.

However, if Glissant emphasizes the positive contribution of the phenomenon of creolization leading to the interpenetration of cultures (27), Roger Toumson evokes the dangers of this type of glorification of the end-result of mixing, or in his words, miscegenation. According to this author, praising creolization or hybridity legitimizes cultural relativism, and erases the many different visions and versions of history. Toumson sheds light on this topic by raising readers' awareness to the fact that many people have suffered tremendously simply for being considered *mixed*. We can now see that human experience differs greatly from person to person, culture to culture. I was lucky enough to be brought up in a place that did not ostracize me for my differences, yet I am still compelled to explore *métissage* in my work, which has often arisen from semi-fragmented ideas of the self, and with various experiences linked to cultural identity.

Deleuze and Guattari develop the concept of "Rhizomic Identities", which derives its meaning from the term rhizome. The on-line Webster dictionary gives the following definition: "a root-like underground stem commonly horizontal in position that usually produces roots below and sends up shoots progressively from the upper surface." These authors use botany for their theory and research to illustrate how identity grows; for these authors and philosophically speaking, identities develop following a variety of non-hierarchal passageways in data representation and interpretation. (Deleuze and Guattari) They offer the metaphor of the 'rhizome' to illustrate what can be perceived as the underlying system of roots, branching off unexpectedly, but still tying individuals, families and groups together. Applying this notion to my topic, we can think of a *rhizomatic* identity, which inspired me to create videos with a non-linear approach. I felt this was the best way to reveal and understand the motifs which relate to *mixing*, such as colonization, immigration, grafting, the principles of enculturation, acculturation, de-culturation, and so on. By cutting and pasting imagery pertaining to my relationships with my birth country and my home country, I was able to classify information that is oftentimes difficult to sort out. In my final video works, I touch mostly upon memories, fantasies or nostalgic elements of my past. One could say I have nothing to reproach my heritage, my reality of being mixed, simply by looking at my work. At first glance, I seem to depict only happy memories and celebratory imagery based on old family footage. But at more intimate and closer look, it is evident that I have interspersed some of the unsavory experiences and perceptions, as I depict common stereotypes about what it means to be Canadian. Some of these remain somewhat obscure, and sometimes even sinister yet it is these opposing nuances that define the reality of navigating one's identity.

With a topic as dense as the terrain of the burdens of legacy, it is simply impossible not to address the positives without the negatives. As Paul Gilroy describes in <u>Postcolonial Melancholy:</u>

The horrors of the twentieth century brought "races" to political life far more vividly and naturalistically than imperial conquest and colonial administration had done. Our postcolonial environment reverberates with the catastrophes that resulted from the militarized agency and unprecedented victimization of racial and ethnic groups. (Gilroy 29)

Gilroy asserts that "few new ways of thinking of "race" and its relationship to economics, politics, and power have emerged since the era of national liberation struggles to guide the continuing pursuit of a world free of racial hierarchies." (Gilroy 30) I agree that the discourses pertaining to race and identity have been abundant over the years, and I believe he is correct about the fact that we need to eventually move away from relying on categorizing race, as it simply reinforces the prejudices and negative stereotypes of the past. Concurrently, if we don't change our attitudes towards the ideas and social constructs of race in some ways, we will continue to delineate separations between cultures and groups of people. I am also certain that to eventually move away from race classifications, the dialogue must continue. As May Joseph points out, in <u>Performing Hybridity</u>:

The discourse over hybridity has numerous international points of emergence, which has historically revolved around anthropological and biological discourses of conquest and colonization, while the modern move to deploy hybridity has been to address it as disruptive democratic discourse of cultural citizenship, which is a distinctly anti-imperial and antiauthoritarian development. (i)

The terrain and dialogue gets further complicated, as we encounter and quantify the experiences of different groups of people, who are indigenous to a place, have immigrated, or are considered mixed or diasporic. In <u>Narratives of Citizenship:</u> <u>Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples Unsettle the Nation-State</u>, Aloys Fleischmann states that:

The "agonized relationship to home" of diasporic subjects is reconfigured in the case of Indigenous populations, especially those who literally have "not left" their ancestral homelands and whose sovereign claim predates the nation state that has imposed itself around them. Their "Elsewhere" may even be "right here", and accepting citizenship in the settler nations amounts to accepting the passport of an occupying power. (Fleischmann xxxvii)

This greatly exemplifies the convoluted results of colonialism and helps to illustrate how "cultural citizenship refers to subordinated groups' own notions of citizenship and belonging". (Ramirez qtd. in Fleischmann xx) Some people have a difficult time embracing their identities, even if they were born and lived all their life in a particular place. Furthermore, addressing the narratives of citizenship, sociologists Jeffrey Reitz and Ruba Banefree analyze the Landmark Ethnic Diversity Survey released by Statistics Canada following the 2001 census, (Reitz and Banefree qtd. in Fleischmann ii) which revealed that:

the descendants of recent white and visible minority immigrants in Canada appeared to exhibit opposite trends with respect to their feelings of belonging toward Canada. Visible minority immigrants in Canada are apparently more likely to articulate strong feelings of belonging toward Canada than their white immigrant counterparts... the children of visible minority immigrants become strikingly less likely to articulate such belonging compared with the children of white immigrants. (Chariandy qtd. in Fleischmann ii)

What does this mean? For me, as a child born as a visible minority, born outside of Canada, to White and African parents, one of which is a recent immigrant, I have to say that I do have strong feelings of belonging to both Canada and my birthplace. If I asked my brother and sister, whom were both born in Canada, I have a feeling they also demonstrate strong feelings of belonging to Canada.

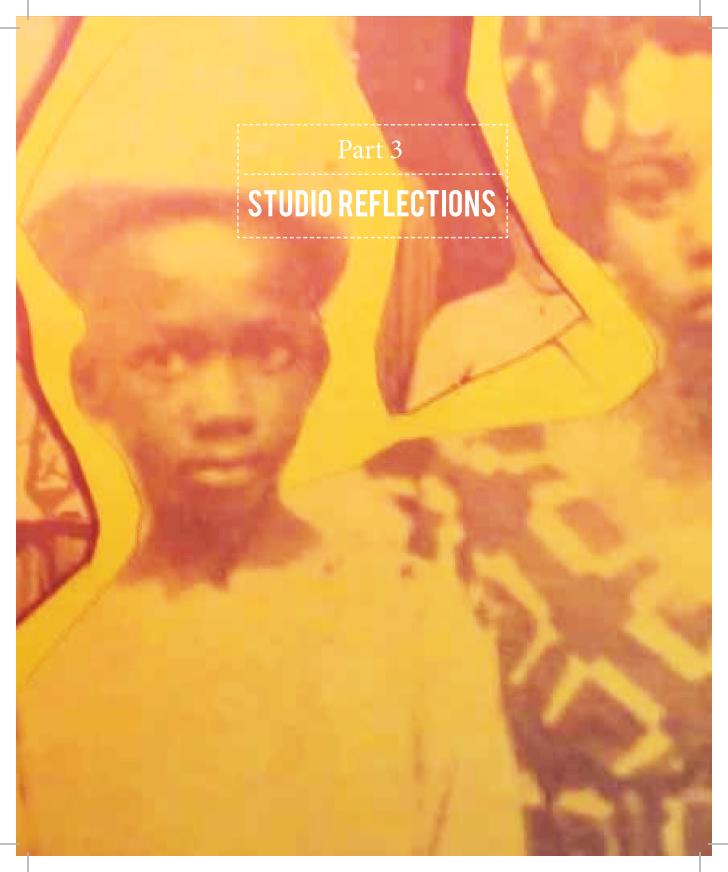
## in conclusion

In the ongoing context of cultural *métissage*, sometimes still fraught with ideological or socio-cultural and political confrontation, one can still ask: how does the hybrid subject relate to multiple layers of identity? As Homi Bhabha states: the subject can stand between two cultural realities, in a new "third space"... Or, perhaps Dominiques Chancé's idea is closer to the truth: the mixed person perceives reality as fluctuating. Chancé proposes the expression "alternative or alternating identities", much like Laplantine and Nouss (qtd in Chanson) who suggest métissage be perceived as "oscillating or alternating tensions" in identity. Finally, all these theories seem to mesh together and take us back to the notion of "hybridity" in the sense that they also contain the appearance of impurity, heterogeneity, or more exactly the coexistence of two or several overlapping realities. We have to agree with Chancé who concludes that contemporary notions related to hybridity seem to reveal the idea of inclusion in the sense that a new vision of multifaceted Self fits into the accepted view of identity. That is to say the mixed or bi-racial Other is not different but the same on varying levels. To reformulate: the Other can be the Self and vice-versa.

Although it is not a simple task, it is important to investigate the ambiguous states of being that exist between many cultures when relating to subjectivity. I am still processing and will probably be doing so for some time to come as I integrate what I learn and discover within my artistic practice. Hybridity theories, the exploration of legacy burdens and family heritage have been important components of this exploration, and one could not be spoken without the other. It is here that I leave behind the theory and begin discussing the art that was produced under this research topic as I reflect on my time in the studio.

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## studio reflections

My studio project, just like my research, went through many transformative "phases". To begin, I set out an established set of guidelines to arrive to the finished product, which was initially going to be a series of videos with sound, or vignettes. Striving to combine visual and sound content, I worked within a methodology that encouraged exploration. The first phase consisted of gathering and assembling visual content that revolved around my theme, and that I would eventually utilize in my videos. Although there is an underlying narrative, the cacophony of images in my videos appears in a non-linear manner. I used a certain degree of self-awareness using personal life experiences to conduct more general inquiries. My intention all along was to produce a body of work that could be referred to as *moving digital paintings*. I did finally create these moving digital paintings, however the trajectory went through a few phases before it eventually led me to the moving images. I worked with collage, painting and digital photography.

Using key research words, such as personal mythologies, geographic locations of my birthplace Senegal, anthropology of humanity, ancestry, foreignness, exoticism, objects and ideas that become forgotten, post-colonialism, economics, family, roots, etc., I went through my vast collections of home videos, pictures, postcards, letters, and genealogical materials and also went online and appropriated some images as well as some footage.

#### Phase 1 / Visual Content

#### **Assembling Material**

Each week, I pulled material from various sources:

- Printed matter from the web, using key research words
- Paper cut outs of personal photographs and self created drawings/illustrations
- Public domain video footage from the internet using my key research words as well as, personal footage
- Created collages, and played with stop motion animation
- Creating paper puppets and marionettes

#### Phase 2 / Sound Content

In order to fully experiment with the sounds or soundtracks that accompanied these videos, each week I experimented with different sound formats:

- Voice
- Create a mix of sounds using software and found sound clips
- Use and create noise from my environment (physical or instruments)

#### WEEKLY LOG FOR VISUAL AND SOUND CONTENT OF VIDEOS

WEEK VIDEO	VISUAL CONTENT			SOUND CONTENT			RESULTS
WEEK 1 VIDEO 1	Video footage	Paper cut outs	Printed from web	Voice	Mix of sounds	Noise from environment	
WEEK 1 VIDEO 2	Video footage	Paper cut outs	Printed from web	Voice	Mix of sounds	Noise from environment	
WEEK 1 VIDEO 3	Video footage	Paper cut outs	Printed from web	Voice	Mix of sounds	Noise from environment	

Exemple of weekly log

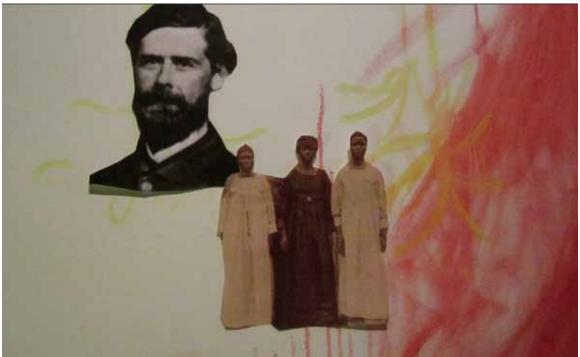
### COLLECTING

To begin the process, I started collecting virtual and physical images, through the use of the internet as well as magazines, postcards, photographs etc. I began a collection of paper cutouts that were printed, drawn, or painted. I created a repository of images that I was be able to use to make dioramas for stop motion videos.







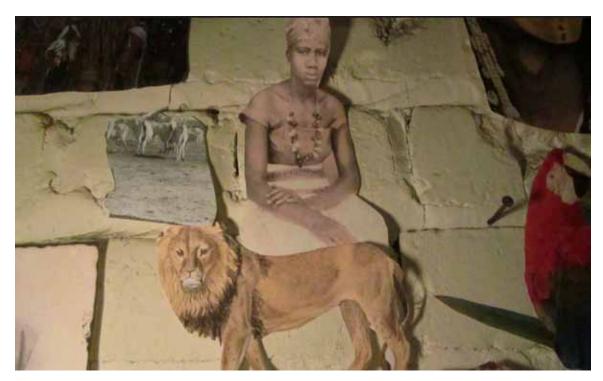






















#### Phase 3 / Assembling Sound and Visual Content to Create Videos:

I began to compose a series of mini videos, which resembled collage work, because they contained a layered or "cut and paste "aesthetic. I found some footage from the online Database *Perlinger Archives*, which is a free database of thousands of clips, and video footage without copyright constraints. I also appropriated some YouTube videos, because we are living in an age of technological exchange. I found myself searching the same way I did in the previous phases, but this time it felt exciting and exhilarating, because it was all new to me. After hours of searching through videos, I recorded the ones I thought could then be incorporated into my work.

Then, I brought all of my materials together. I experimented with various forms of video editing. I decided the best way to assemble all of this content was to create a variety of little chapters. In each chapter, I would engage with my research question and try to create some type of response. What I ended up with was a series of eight short videos, each with their unique narrative, imagery and separate soundtracks. However, I created it with the intent to combine it as one whole entire piece. The result is a six minute video called: *Negotiations*.

#### **NEGOTIATIONS**

Negotiations is a compilation of a series of eleven short digital paintings with sound vignettes created using the materials I collected. Each vignette contains their own images and individual soundtracks and were weaved together to create a final piece.

Chapter 1 - Take Off

Chapter 2 - Time Warp

Chapter 3 - New Moon

Chapter 4 - VI'à l'Bon Vent

Chapter 5 - Ancients

Chapter 6 - Spin Cycle

Chapter 7 - Time Warp II

Chapter 8 - Bright Birds Old Ghosts

Chapter 9 - My Daughter's Hair

Chapter 10 - Ancients

Chapter 11 - Self Portrait

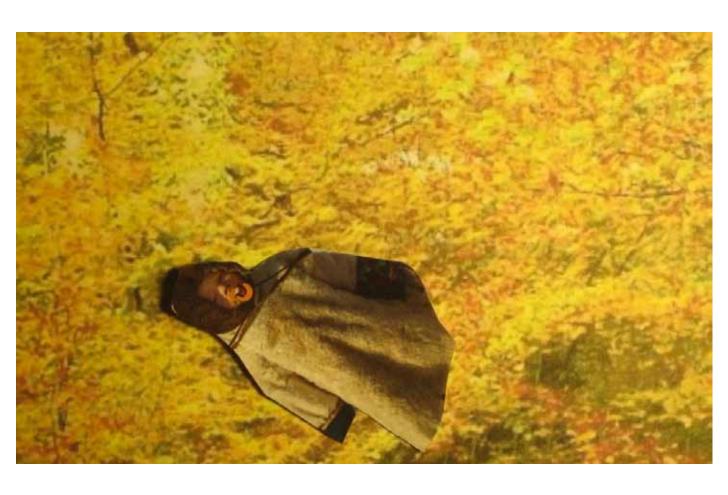






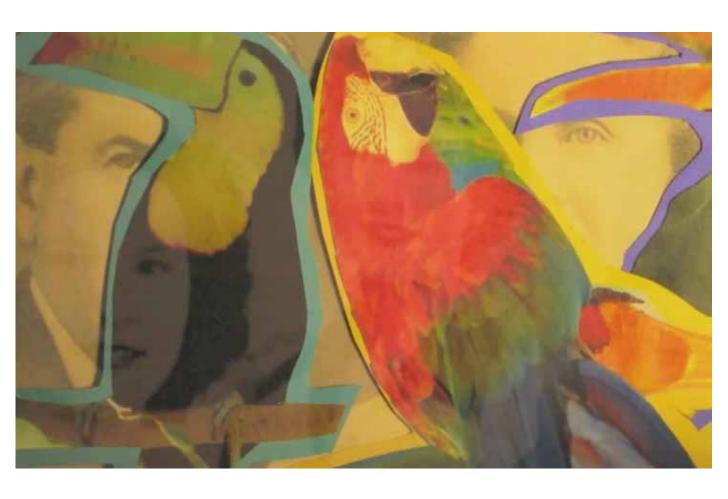




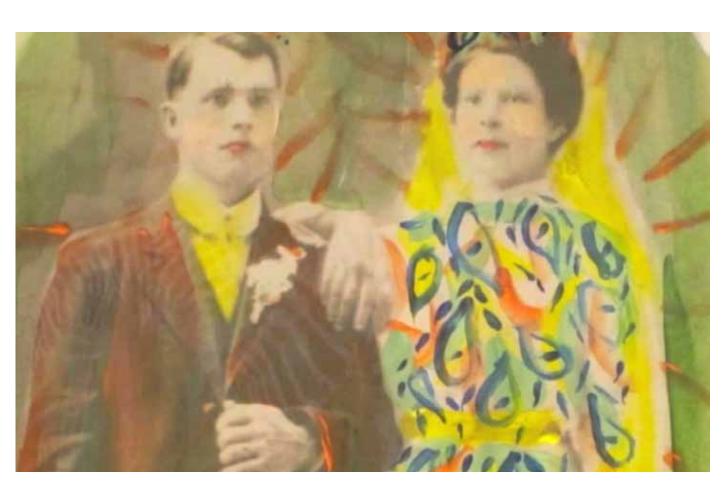


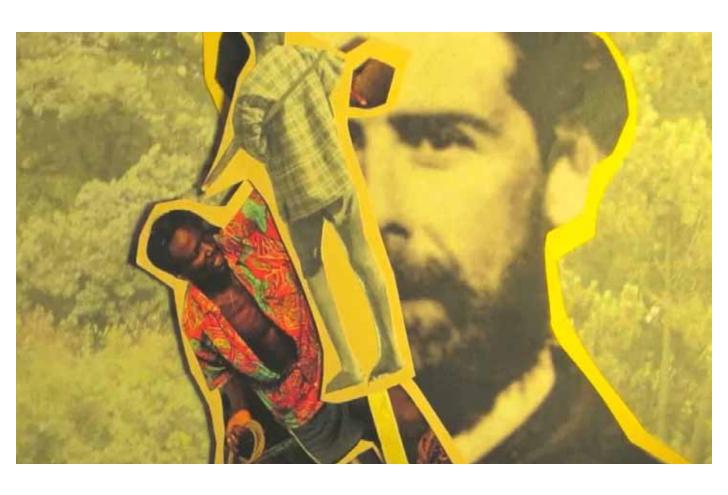














## other artists

Although I was very satisfied with the result of *Negotiations*, I felt I needed to push the work further. I realized I learned a lot from editing this, and that I should take some risks to really engage more directly with my theme. One main problem is that I felt it lacked direction or a clear intent. As I explored and researched other artists' work, whether it was for guidance, inspiration, or simply curiosity, I came across many artworks that were of interest. I tended to navigate towards artists that either worked with similar video techniques, or within the realm of themes I have been conducting my research. I encountered many inspiring and moving works.

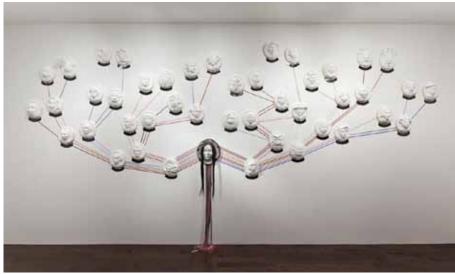
With Chris Marker's quiet meditation, <u>Sans soleil</u>, the viewer is ushered through many fleeting film clips, and after viewing it, I felt that, aesthetically, this film mirrored what I was already attempting to do. "<u>Sans soleil</u> migrates quickly between places, time spans and a continual collectomania of images by Marker and other cameramen," says Carol Mayer in the article "Chris Marker's <u>Sans soleil</u>". About his film, Marker says: "I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining. We do not remember, we rewrite memory much as history is rewritten." (qtd in Mayer) This aspect of remembering or rewriting history is something that struck a chord with me. In my work, I am using all of these images to tell a story, yet only some of it is based on actual memories. Other memories came flooding back as I encountered the footage, and some memories were, so to speak, "invented", to lend themselves to the telling of my stories.

Guy Maddin's, My Winnipeg provided me with the courage to incorporate fantastical ideas and elements into my clips. I always felt connected to this film because he is depicting his relationship with a place that is also my hometown. The scene that struck me the most is the one that depicts many horses drowning on the frozen Red River as the ice is cracking, and truly convincing the viewer this is a historical fact, which it is not. Blending truth with fantasy and memory, the viewer begins to question what really did happen? The accompanying narration pulls the viewer into this strange and foreign world. After watching the film, I realized perhaps my work needed this type of narration as well, or if not, at least use more unusual video clips to push the fantasy element.

Canadian artist Shary Boyle recently made a piece at the BMO Project Room in Toronto. The installation featured is entitled <u>Canadian Artist</u> (2012), and I found it to be somewhat grotesque, yet very whimsical and powerful. Boyle constructed a gigantic and astoundingly sculptural family tree, made out of porcelain faces of her supposed "ancestors". I was unable to see the piece in person, but from what I saw and read online, I wished had I been able to see the final exhibit up close. I found similarities between our intersts.

Forty-five three-dimensional plaster portraits hang on a wall, bound together by multicolored ribbons. Together, they form a family tree for the typically macabre figure in the middle: the eponymous Canadian Artist, a stunned porcelain face painted with weepy swirls and crowned by a curtain of long, dark hair. It's only upon closer examination that the piece truly comes alive: from the plaster busts emerges a whimsical yet disturbing tapestry that sets out the genealogy of this imaginary artist and an imagined history of Canada itself. (Landeau)





Shary Boyle, <u>Canadian Artist</u>, Installation, 2012.

Lorna Simpson is a leading artistic figure of her generation and was very prolific in the 1980's and 1990's. Her work primarily focused on the issues of African-American women and has tackled issues of gender, identity, culture, history and memory. Her body of work is political, apparently unassuming but most times quite ambiguous and thought provoking. I am drawn to the simplicity of her work, as well as the interdisciplinary approach. In Jackie (2008) we are shown a strange black and white video of a boy named Jackie trying to pick up a pencil, which is part of a larger installation, which also includes drawings. My approach to art is often to utilize many mediums, which can become a little bit overwhelming at times. I think I am drawn to Simpson's work because she cleverly demonstrates to her viewers how restraint and specificity can lead to something quite haunting. Easy to Remember (2001) is another beautiful work that shows fifteen mouths humming an African-American Gospel song. It is sentimental, sad, but also filled with hope and communicates so much about a particular collective human experience.







Lorna Simpson, Jackie, video instillation and detail, 2008.

Lorna Simpson, <u>Easy to Remember</u>, video installation, 16mm black-and-white film transferred to DVD, 2001.

# final videos

### **Negotiations II**

After viewing all of this work, (and so much more!!!) I really wanted to confront my research questions and ask myself: How do I negotiate with my own conflicting legacies? I decided to make two separate videos where I would interpret what my position is in each culture. Using clips of personal footage, and my collection of appropriated videos, I started to write out some thoughts and separate the footage in two categories: 1- my relationship with Senegal, and 2- my relationship with Canada. I decided these two videos were basically negotiating with each other, trying to find similarities and contrasts of my own experiences, stereotypes, fantasies, and imagined situations. I still wanted to continue working with drawing, painting, collage, and integrate them within the videos, and although I wanted to use all of these aspects, only some of these clips were included in the final work. I also began to specify certain thoughts and ideas in order to know what to include and portray in each video. Below is an example of the lists of questions and thoughts I engaged with for the process of gathering and editing the footage.

#### Video 1 / TV 1

## Senegal

What is my relationship with Senegal?

The images are anecdotes of what Senegal is like in my imagination or what I remember about Senegal.

Is it a real and imagined place?

Am I an outsider here?

What is my connection to this place? How am I connected to this place?

What are some of thoughts and memories about Senegal?

How can I show my perspective?

How do I integrate my genealogy?

#### Video 2 / TV 2

#### French / Métis / Canada

What is my relationship with Canada?

What are my life experiences as a visible minority in Canada?

Am I an outsider here as well?

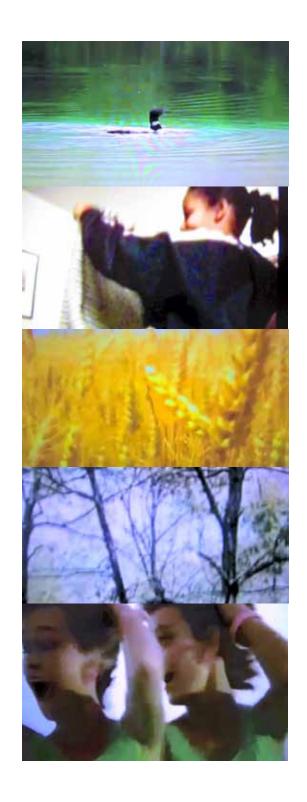
How is life as mixed person in Canada?

Do I hold different allegiances to different groups in Canada?

How can I show my perspective?

How do I integrate my genealogy?





This method of separating the videos allowed me to fully engage with my research question. The simple act of siphoning specific visual information into each video permitted me to isolate specific memories, thoughts, experiences and stereotypes about my relationships with both countries. I decided to input the clips I gathered in random order and at varying degrees of speed. I played with the pace and timing, and concluded that I wanted the images to be a bit difficult to grasp I wanted Video 1 and Video 2 to be silent as I felt the imagery by itself spoke volumes. However I realized that the work lacked an element of narration, and I wanted to offer the viewer an opportunity to escape the fast paced rhythm of the alternating images. I decided to include hand written anecdotes into the videos, and although some are legible, others are less. A certain amount of patience is required from the audience in order to decipher the images and text in my videos, but I hoped that this would mirror and convey the experience of negotiating with identities to the viewer.

I reflected on William Kentridge's piece, <u>The Refusal Of Time</u>, an incredibly, sculptural, complex audio-visual installation with performance elements. I was lucky to experience this piece at Documenta13, in Kassel, Germany in the summer of 2012, and enjoyed how as a spectator, I felt completely engulfed and memorized by the kinetic energy and complexity of the work. Moving imagery was projected on the four walls of the room, there was a very loud accompanying musical soundtrack, and there was also a sculptural piece in the center of the space. In this piece, Kentridge explores:

Time in its various manifestations--narrative, fragmented, slowed down and speeded up; distortions of space-time; simultaneity--is explored through various media, including dance, film, music and spoken word. (Galison)

This inspired me to find a way to propel my video work "beyond the screen", meaning I wasn't interested in only projecting the work, but was beginning to envision this work more as an installation. As I was thinking more about how I planned for this to be exhibited, I started to envision these two televisions facing each other. I thought about 1980's type televisions because much of the personal footage is from the 1980's, and many of the clips retain this same type of pixelated, dated, retro aesthetics. I suddenly envisioned a third video, and realized that to complete this installation, I would need to create a third video. The third video would stand somehow as a symbolic "referee" to both of these responses and would truly illustrate Laplantine's and Nouss' metaphor of oscillating tensions found in mixed identities and Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space". I wanted this video to be different from the alternating fast clips and pace of the other videos.

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me were luck



Text still shots from Negotiations II (Canada TV), 2013

#### VIDEO 3

### The Library

As I was approaching the finishing line of this project, I was trying to produce a third cathartic video that echoes or perhaps gives the voice to the chaos of the other two clips. I toyed with many ideas, I envisioned a performative walk through the library, recalling Maya Deren's Meshes of the Afternoon, where the viewer is taken on a winding surrealist adventure. The film's narrative is circular and repeats a number of psychologically symbolic images. I think this groundbreaking film from cinema's early days is a great way to "let go" of certain fears and I used this as inspiration.

The reason Deren's work inspired me is very personal. Drawing upon the experience a young girl studying in a Catholic French grade school, I was sent to the library every day because my parents had decided I should not have to participate in morning prayers. And since I never went to the mosque even though my father is Muslim, I can say that I felt that I had no religion. I experienced firsthand what Bhabha calls the 'Third space' or the 'In Between' space my parents created for my siblings and myself: a particular syncretism of moral values, drawing from both Catholicism and Islam. I and a few other immigrants and non-Catholic children spent a few minutes every morning at the library while the rest of the students stayed in class. Growing up, I felt this was a very significant event in my life. This was a time where we are trying to decide whether or not we fit in, who we are as people, what we believe in. I felt this library memory would be a good metaphor for what it is like to negotiate your identity. Surrounded by books, knowledge, internally pondering my status as a person, it would make a nice setting for a filmed performance piece. I felt the library story was a good visual metaphor, as books contain memories on paper, they are a way to collect, retrieve and save information. Without books, photos, albums, this project would not have been possible.

### The Music Video

I also had another idea, which is perhaps more reminiscent of Swiss video artist Piplilotti Rist's work. Rist is interested in narratives, and presents these in a playful language that reminds us of pop culture and music. She has created immersive and interactive installations inside galleries, but also in unusual locations like apartments, aquariums and cathedrals, and she will usually saturate the entire space with her dreamy aesthetic of bright colors and striking imagery, with an original soundtrack as an occasional accompaniment. The work often alternates quickly in sound, speed or color, and can either be lengthy in duration or be rapid and short. Rist has stated in an interview at MoMA that "the environments created are meant to conform to the inhabitant" (2009). I decided I should explore this third piece in the form of an experimental music video that would add a contemporary layer to the television conversation. I concluded that Video 1 and Video 2, which I began to

call TV1 and TV2, mostly contained footage of me growing up. I decided that Video 3 would only contain footage of me in the present, and began to experiment with and develop a few soundtracks. If this third video was to be played simultaneously with the others, the sound needed to correspond accordingly, as it would create the environment for the entire installation.

At this point in the project, I realized I had so much unused footage, animations, text clips and all of the drawings, paintings, collage, sound clips, that were not integrated into the first two videos. I felt it would make sense to combine this footage with some new footage of me in the present day. By blending elements of the library story and deciding to create my own loose interpretation of a music video, I experimented continuously until I realized that the possibilities of combinations were endless, which echoed my research on *métissage* and hybridity. I composed many different musical scores, some were strictly ambient, others more musical, and some included narrations of me recounting the library story among others. I became confident again that a mix of all three would eventually reveal itself to be the best resolution. I also chose to include a common thread between all three videos, since they were going to differ in terms of imagery and content. I chose to include some of the same handwriting clips into this third piece as well for cohesion.

#### Final Video 3: Untitled TV

After struggling to complete Video 3, which I started calling my Nemesis, I eventually decided I simply had to redo it, from scratch. I wasn't happy with the way it looked together, and it was rather complicated to try and edit and rework what I had done. After putting some serious thought into it, I realized that what I was trying to say about "negotiating identities" was in the footage all along, I just needed to capture those moments, and then insert my present self in between these moments. I felt this was the best way to mesh Video 3 with Video 1 and Video 2. Once I accomplished this, it became amaprent that the work had finally taken the true form of a triptych. I chose to use repition and slow down the pace of the clips, to add a balance to the frenzy of the two first videos, yet keep them linked. This new dynamic unified the piece altogether. As for the audio of the video, I recorded the same repeated melody with a digital keyboard, and "negotiated" it into three different musical styles using recording software. It is a continuous loop that draws the viewer in, I hoped this would convey a hypnotic, pensive, melodic, happy, sad. nostalgic and hopeful feeling to my audience. The slow pace of the sound also matches the repetitive movements within Video 3.



Mock installations for Negotiations II: Senegal TV (left), Canada TV (right), Library/Music Video (top) Televisions, video projections, (2013)





Final Tryptichs for Negotiations II: Senegal TV (left), Canada TV (right), Untitled TV (top) Televisions, video projections, (2013)



# final notes

I wanted this final interdisciplinary piece to be a reminder that the use of nostalgic objects such as an old television, with the addition and careful and calculated use of technology can be used innovatively to tell a story. I wished to accomplish a playful exploration of my research question and the human condition by combining multiple mediums and effectively using technology, but mostly by developing and executing a particular idea. My aim has been to deliver a concise artistic response to my research question and I believe the final work, titled *Negotiations: On the* Dotted Line is a clear manifestation of this academic and personal research. I wished this to be a successful and powerful work that encourages, intrigues, inspires and urges artists and spectators to investigate their personal stories and continue to take risks in art making. In combining different mediums, such as collage, mixed media, sculpture, sound and technology, I tried to push my own artistic boundaries. I learned that this project was complex from the beginning, but by carefully sifting through information and content, I was able to make some sense of the chaos. My intention was to produce a series of videos and digital paintings with sound vignettes, and although my project had many incarnations, the final installation is an honest and intuitive portrayal of my experience truly negotiating differing and sometimes conflicting legacies/identities.

# final conclusion

The entire process of this project has been an enriching experience that led me through many different winding paths. From the inception of the research question, the discovery and assembling of the artistic content, writing the memoir, engaging with the abundant critical theory, and finally spending time in the studio creating the work were all vital parts of the process. I have come to realize that this project does not end here. It is true that this project originated from a very personal space, but as I forge ahead as an artist, I believe I will undoubtedly move into different territories. I have laid a foundation that has allowed me to easily cross into other political and social realms within my artistic practice. Art making is a powerful tool that leads to personal discovery whilst engaging people and even provoking meaningful social change. I think it is always important for artists to challenge themselves and their audience. By sharing my personal narrative, I am striving to contribute in my way to the ongoing dialogue about racialization, mixed identity, métissage or hybridity, historical legacies and burdens, as well and the individual and collective experience of people, whoever and wherever they may be.

Please view the attached DVD for the final videos.

For more information and details about the final installation, please visit:

www.annabintadiallo.com

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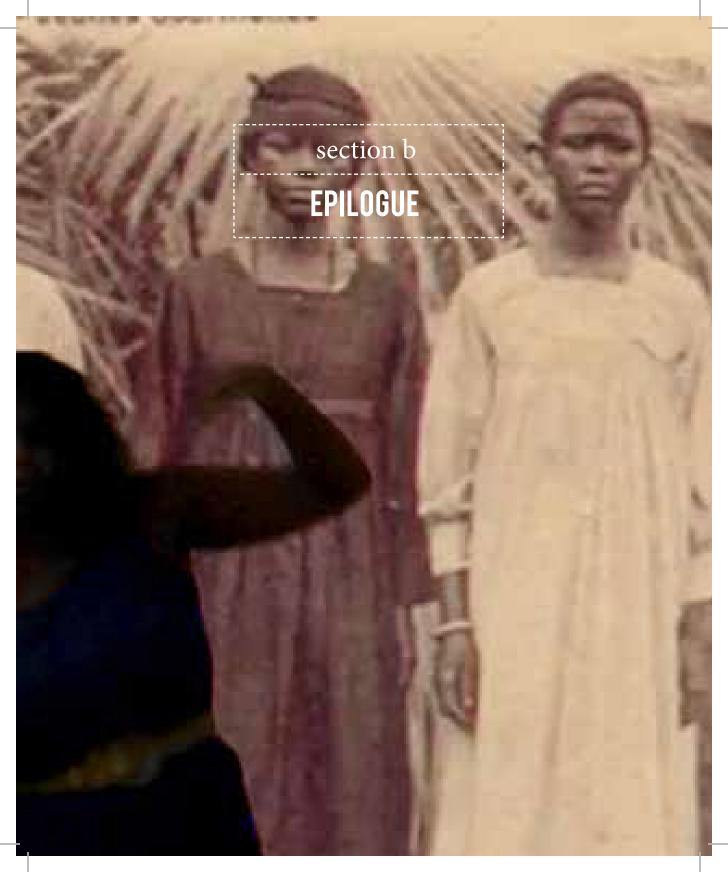
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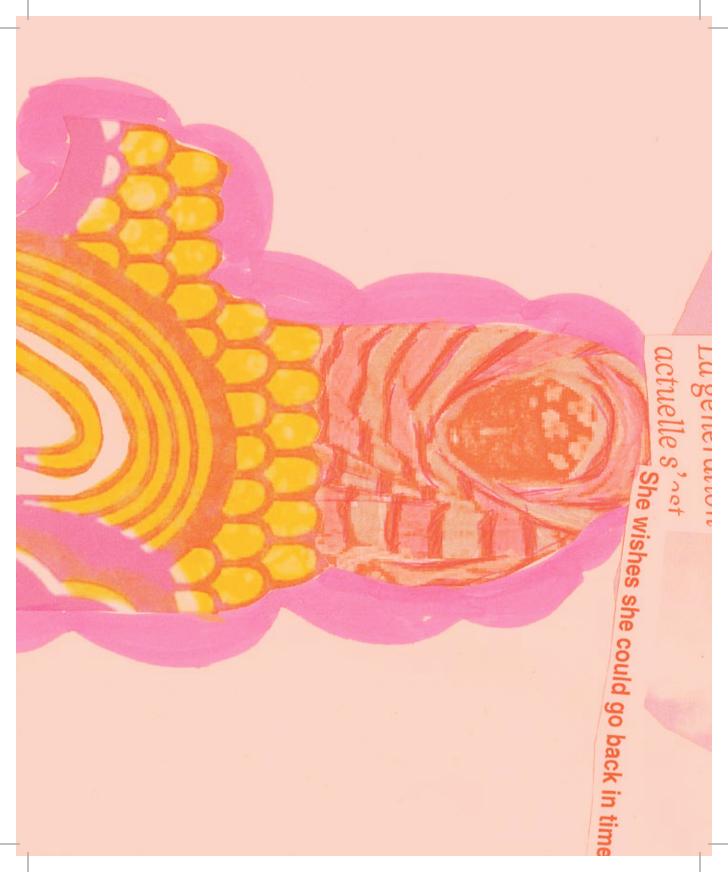
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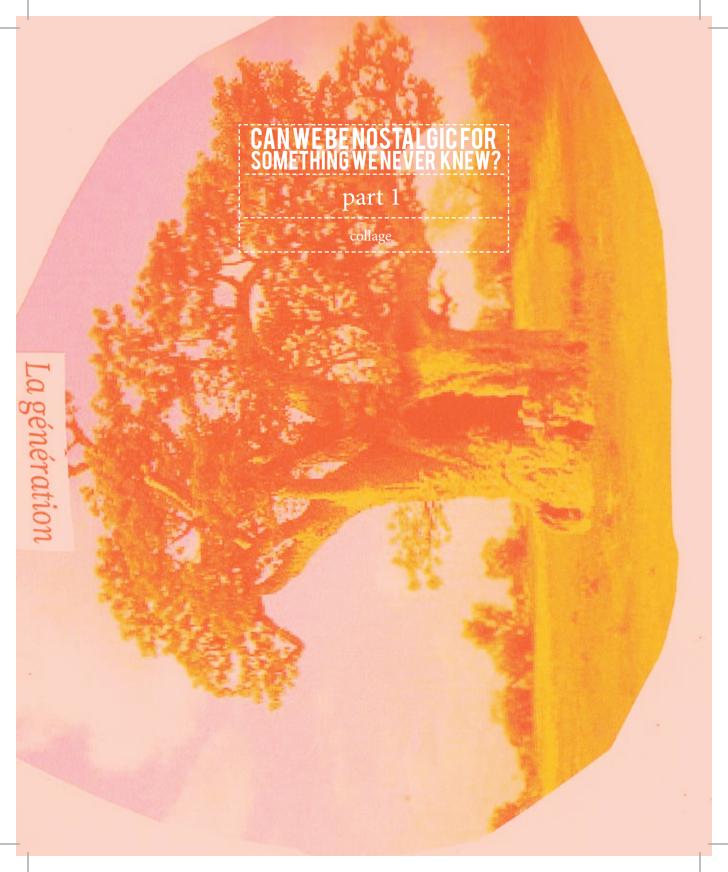
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## **NOSTALGIA**

*Nostalgia* is a series of collages which were created while exploring: Can we be nostalgic for something we never knew?

All 8.5 " x 11 ", glue, paper, mixed media, 2011, Anna Binta Diallo.

Titles In order

Ancestor soup

Un lieu donné

Roi d'Antan

Sous la glace

Braids

Goat's milk

Effacer

Strange Birth

Home la frontière

T. (C.

Traffic

Roi d'Antan II

Totem L.

Under lock and key

Nirvana

Totem P.

Paradis perdu

Couch Stars Bucket list

Des voix

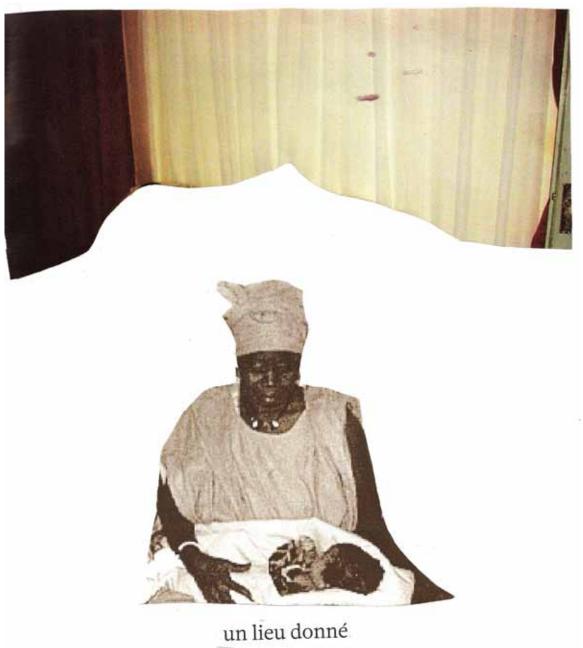
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Yassa!

Génération

La première poire



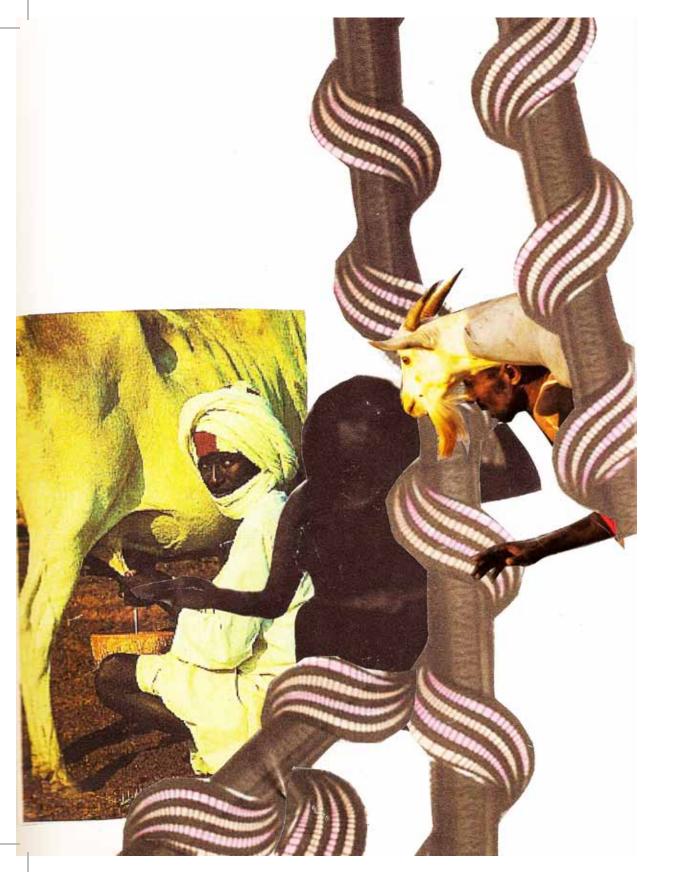














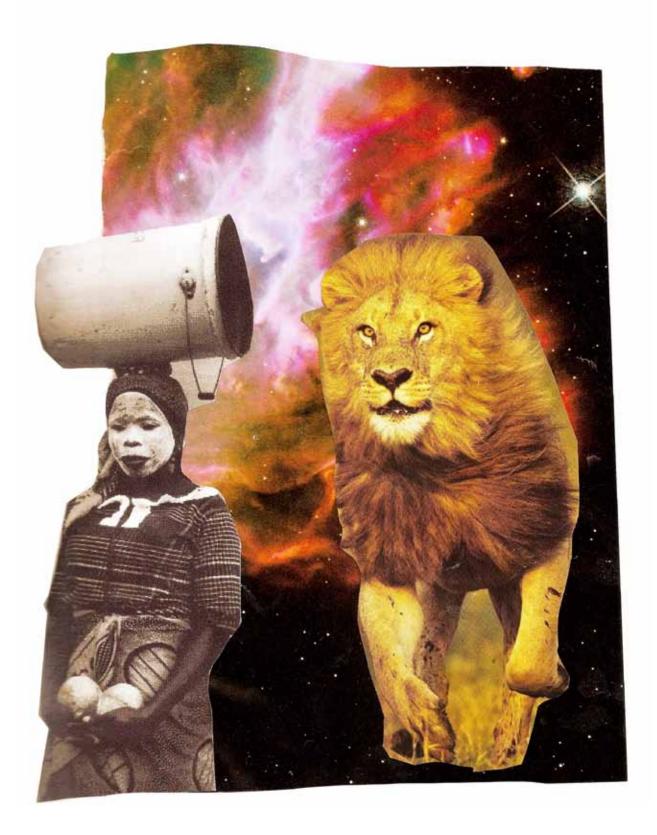
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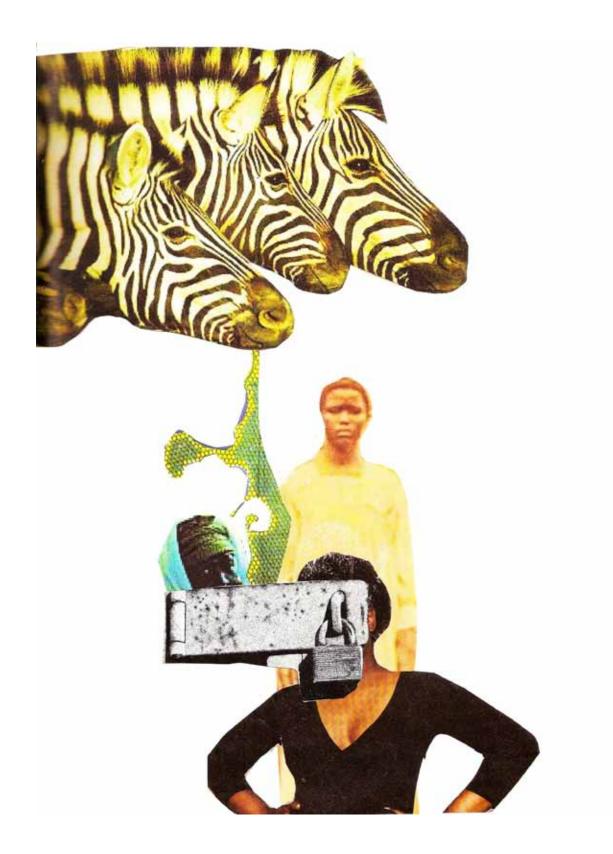
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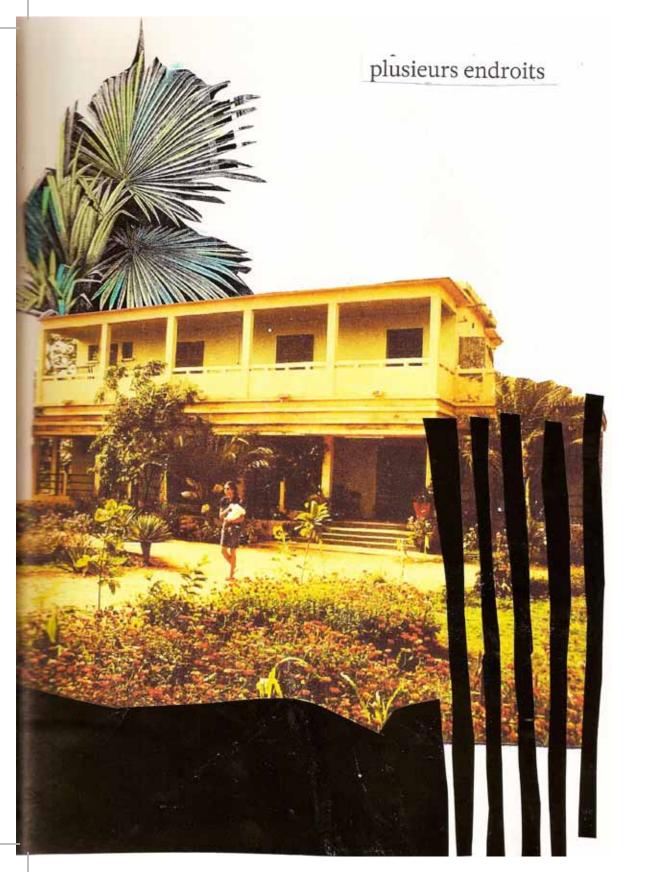






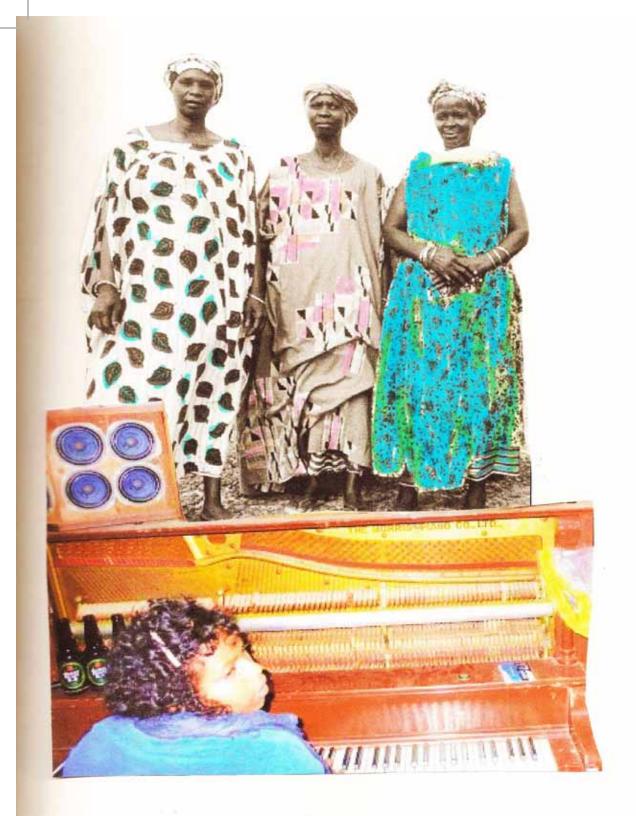






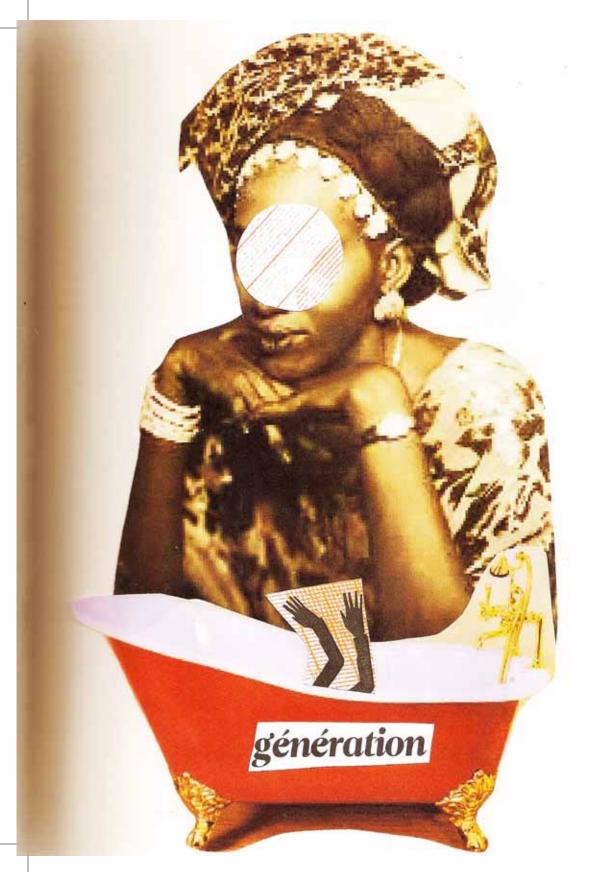


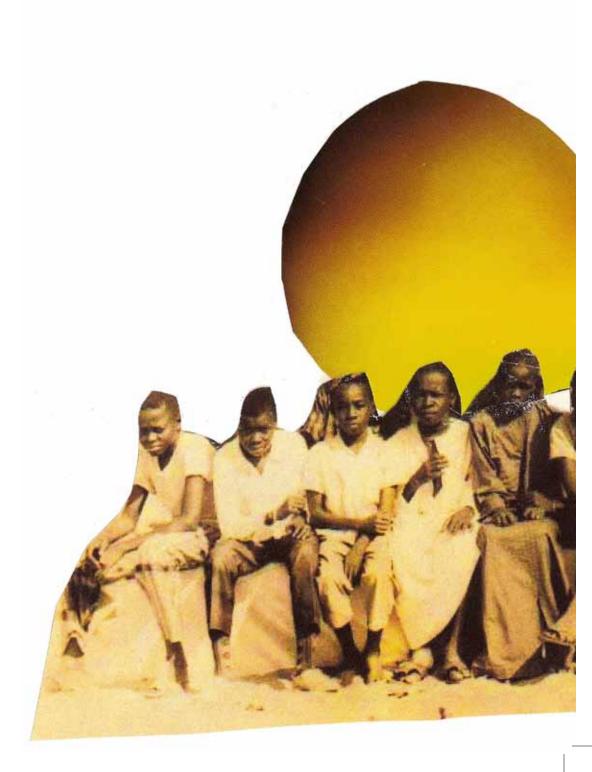






comperen monceaux on mende un melana de poblet un sac d'ognions à couper en de aussy une tasse et den un quart d'huile de jus de aitron demi lures fines tros a quatre cur à café de moutano ajuden Son week plus acide une tarre et donn's de canottos cupies en nondel ine et demi fayettolives petilos rendelle violes soms mayoux rate à ang feilles d dery a trois pinon ing towns de nix blanc nettrele jusci cition. us revenir les le boullon o mons double thuit poulet. Ale ande guzzual a moderale Ajouter le Donises Ajente poine a vote il evase. goin. Bien mel onis le poulet morceaux) it aussi clin noulet le let sin le un oa am ne pour u polhailes ulet de la cas









# part 2



### woven me

Sorrow, pain, longing, time and memory dance together, in a delicate, tense, and beautifully dangerous performance. A thought dissipates into another, and suddenly I realize that I can't go back. I am not able to pick flowers with my great-grandmother in the prairies of Saskatchewan, or play the violin with my distant relatives of the Red River settlements in French Manitoba. Nor will I hear my Senegalese grandmother's voice, or swim with crocodiles in rivers, as did my father as a child. In sadness and deep regret, I realize that acting out these desires is not possible, and that there is nothing that I can do but momentarily enjoy the thought of it, while being in an impenetrable state of stasis. Old photographs and stories fuel my hallucinatory voyages to a foreign time, and I can't help but feel...nostalgic. What is this fleeting obsession for revisiting the past? Why dream and wish for something that is inherently impossible? Perhaps this irrational and ephemeral fantasy is necessary; to understand the present, one must attempt to understand the past.

It may be voyeurism, or even a form of romanticized objectification. It can be a way to reconnect with lost loved ones or temporarily resurrect them. Whatever the cause or reason, nostalgia is a complex and rich notion and there are no shortages of things to crave. My nostalgic yearnings have often turned towards the mélange of my cultural heritage. Born in Dakar, to a Senegalese father and French-Canadian mother, I grew up in Canada with strong desires to relive, revisit and investigate my past. I have fantasized about a past that I have never actually lived. The term *Nostalgia* originates from the Greek: *Nostos*, returning home and *algos*, ache or pain. This taste for my *homeland* amplifies continuously. Can we be nostalgic for something we never knew?

I am interested in the woven identity, the conscious and unconscious desire to reconnect with certain aspects of the past, such as the African Diaspora now living in a post-colonial epoch, but also the intriguing notion that nostalgia can be shared, and finally the concept of being homesick. I propose to locate the origins of nostalgia within the self, and attempt to reaffirm it by locating them within a broader context in order to establish a correspondence between the feelings of sorrow, pain, longing, time and memory. More importantly, I would like to explore how curiosity can become a catalyst that can propel one to become nostalgic. Furthermore, I would like to offer my own "diasporic" perspective about my former homeland. I will attempt to excavate and dig through the many layers of yearning in order to reinvest the present with things past.

<sup>1</sup> Origin of "nostalgia", <u>The Merriam-Webster Dictionary</u> <a href="http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nostalgia">http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nostalgia</a>>.

# family matters

I was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November in 1983, in Dakar, Senegal, the western country on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, in the vast continent of Africa. I spent my first eleven months living with both my parents on an agricultural farm and zoo-technological research center, based in Dahra. My father worked there as a director of research in veterinarian medicine. My parents met in Paris in the late 70's, where my mother was obtaining her Masters in French Literature at the Sorbonne, and my father, a Post Doctoral Degree in veterinary medicine.

They were married in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and decided to return to live in Senegal. Having spent nearly half a decade getting accustomed to Senegalese life and getting comfortable in what was initially a completely new and foreign environment, shortly after my birth, my mother, decided it may be time for her new family to return to visit her hometown. My father enthusiastically agreed it was perhaps time to consider emigrating to a place that was foreign to him, even though Canada had always held a space in his imagination as he read many comic books about the Canadian West as a child. Winnipeg, Manitoba and the Canadian West were places that he had often read about, and it seemed fitting that he would eventually emigrate there. Leaving behind his career as a veterinarian, his family, and his birth land, my father settled comfortably into the Francophone community of Saint-Boniface, welcomed by my mother's family and friends. The lively and friendly Franco-Manitoban community became a rich and comfortable place for our family to establish itself in a predominantly Anglophone city. Surviving his first winter, with the pleasure of befriending many new people, my father soon considered Winnipeg to be his new home. Educated and worldly, my parents both started their life-long careers as professors at the Francophone University of Saint-Boniface, where they are both still teaching today.

My large gaping family spans two different continents, countries, and cultures. My father has seven living siblings, who in turn have had children, and even those children are now parents. In contrast, my mother has three brothers, but my maternal grandparents both have extensive families. My maternal side of the family is predominantly French-Canadian, while my Grandfather's relatives have both French and Aboriginal, mostly Cree and Métis ancestry. I am the eldest sister, to my brother and sister who were born in Winnipeg, as well as the eldest cousin on this side of the Atlantic. As a child, my parents often spoke about my cousins, aunts and uncles who still lived in Senegal. I paid special attention when I heard my father speak in his native mother tongue, Wolof, on the telephone, to a family member "back home". I am lucky to have been able to grow up with my mother's parents around, but sadly, my father's parents both passed away by the time I was six years old. I remember the day I found out my Grandfather had passed. I was young, probably too young to understand the gravity of the death of a grandparent, but I knew that the distance between us could no longer be remedied by simply taking a plane. The geographical distance that separated me from my Senegalese family,

occupied a lot of space in my mind. I often daydreamed of meeting these people, who were my family, and blood, but who remained so elusive and almost imaginary. As the years passed, two of my father's brothers also immigrated to Manitoba. I began to know more of my immediate family, and learn more about my heritage, but this didn't erase my curious desires of meeting the rest, and unfortunately, I knew there were two that I would never be able to meet.

My parents returned to Senegal on a few occasions, and they would return with souvenirs and photos and letters from our family abroad. This would of course only add to the mystery and desires of my birth land. When would it be our turn to visit Senegal? It was long over due. It took a while for my parents to finally take my siblings and I on that trip of a lifetime. The principal reason they decided to wait as long as they did to bring us, is that they wanted all of us to be old enough, of a certain maturity, to be able to take it all in. I was never really sure what that meant, but in 2003, we finally landed at the Dakar airport. Nervous, excited, and notably tense with anticipation, it took 20 years, but I was about to finally return.

# personal mythologies

My whole life, my parents jubilantly opened our eyes to the cultures and histories of my native country as well as my French-Canadian-Métis heritage. The stories, folktales, books, languages, expressions, and of course the local cuisines weaved themselves into a unique brand of Franco-Senegalese-Canadian-Métis identity. When strangers, friends, or fellow students would ask, what is your background? I would struggle to find a simple explanation, and would say something along the lines of I suppose I am a mélange of all these distinct cultures... Growing up with these multiple dualities has often been conflicting and confusing. I felt Canadian, but I was also Senegalese. I felt as though I did not identify with one particular part of my family more than the other. I was both black and white. I spoke French and spoke English. I truly felt like a mix. In a predominantly white school, I felt different from my peers. As a Francophone minority in an Anglophone city, again, I felt separate. I never felt marginalized for my differences, but I recognized that I was unique. Interested in the arts, I soon found a way to express myself, and immersing myself in artistic practices lead me to learn more about culture, identity and art. Art became my third language, and perhaps both intuitively and unconsciously, I began to discover that this charged hybrid, biographical and historical content, fast became the underlying thematic source of my work.

As a teenager, I became increasingly fixated on African historical events, whether it was the African slave trade, colonialism, or traditional facts. An overbearing moral responsibility to learn, analyze and dissect these occurrences became somewhat of a minor obsession. As I delved into it, the world quickly became more complicated to me. I felt an inexplicable unease, a malaise, unrest or nervousness. I felt that as a

'mixed' person growing up in middle class Canada, I had never experienced anything as painful as the suffering and strife my ancestors went through. The general feeling I had was anger. Anger that generations and millions of Africans were displaced by force, were robbed of their homelands and were murdered, oppressed, marginalized, and some of them still are today. I carried this weight with me. When someone at school would call me a mullatto, I would immediately declare my opposition to the term, and would inform them that the word's origin is from the Portuguese *mule*. The Portuguese used this term to identify people of mixed race two centuries ago. I also felt insulted and rejected such racist terminology like half-blood, half-caste, cross-breed, as they reflect the colonialist nomenclature that still prevails today. It enraged me how people were unaware or could not understand how these terms could be considered offensive. Whichever my battles were with opinions on race and ethnicity, I always felt it was my duty as a person of color to challenge others and myself to deeply consider the implications of what being African means, what being mixed-race means. Unable to find a simple answer to these dilemmas, I wondered how could I incorporate these ideas into my art? This became somewhat difficult, because in some ways, I didn't even understand what being mixed race, or African meant. All I knew, is that I had begun peeling back the layers, and could not stop. I left Africa but was very much still connected to her. An invisible, ancient, umbilical chord was still attached to my navel.

When I was forteen, my father gave me an interesting book. Conceivably aware that his children might need some understandings of what it was like to grow up with different ancestral backgrounds, such literature opened my eyes to notions that are undoubtedly complex. It is still difficult today to understand all the levels and implications that occur with the term "mixed". In *Nini, Mûlatresse du Sénégal*, a fictional novel about a girl who is both Senegalese and French who lives in Colonial times in Senegal, the author states:

"Nini is the eternal moral portrait of the mulatto, whether she is born in Senegal, the Caribbean or any of the Americas. It is a portrait of the physical and moral state that is morally hybrid. The unconscious nature of her reactions are spontaneous, as she continuously searches to elevate herself above what is already known about her, as she searches above a humanity that considers her inferior, but her own unique destiny awaits her nonetheless." (Sadji 7)

I immediately related to this colorful character of Nini, who without restraint but with much difficulty, searches for ways to belong to two societies that continually neglect her. Identifying perhaps less with the ostracized nature of her plight, but more with her layered and conflicting feelings of not knowing where she *belongs*, I realized that the issue of hybridity, or woven identity, has had profound effects on people who identify with more than two distinct cultures, yet feel like they

belong to neither. Living on the borders of Mexico and Texas, Gloria Anzaldua, a self proclaimed *Chicana*, presents a collection of texts entitled <u>Borderlands: La Frontera-The New Mestiza</u>, that poetically explores the implications of having multiple languages, cultures and identities. She explores her Aztec-Mexican-Indian and European ancestry and history, and defines how the past has affected and shaped the lives of so many. Here, she states: "Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la *mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war." (78) This inner war varies from one person and time period to the next, but it is ultimately a flame that can never be extinguished.

Prior to my first trip to Senegal, I often imagined what it would be like to live there in the past, present, and future, and simply imagining this would inspire me to sketch, paint and draw this familiar yet foreign place. I would collect photos and postcards from my native land and soon build a repertoire of personal imagery that would continuously inspire me to learn more about the place where I was born. I was like a sponge, readily soaking up any information that had to do with my origins, background, ethnicity and cultural make-up. A major transformation occurred in me after this trip. As a young adult, I began feeling much more conflicted, mixed up and unsure of my identity as a mélange... Who was I really? Which side of my culture did I identify with the most, and why did that even matter? I suddenly realized I had more questions than answers. I was happy to have finally met my cousins and extended family, yet I could not help but feel alienated in this process. Post-colonial theorist Robert J.C. Young makes a poignant comment whilst referring to Zimbabwe born author Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel Nervous Conditions. In this coming of age tale of multinational identity and adolescence, Young concludes that "When an original culture is superimposed with a colonial or dominant culture, through education, it produces a nervous condition, of ambivalence, uncertainty; a blurring of cultural boundaries, inside and outside, an otherness, within." (23) In no way am I proposing that my family in Senegal is less educated, less fortunate, or that I am of the dominant culture. What this illustrates is that there are multiple cultural, social and political repercussions of colonization, and definite feelings of nervousness came to the surface during this first visit of my birth land. The implication is that it is impossible to ignore certain aspects of life that distinguish us from each other due to traumatic events of the past.

In other words, I was experiencing a heavy dose of *culture shock*. I had trained my imagination for years to sketch out my own ideas of what Senegal was like, so the reality of actually being there, was like processing through many years of myths, fantasies, hopes, fears, assumptions and stereotypes. There were many pleasant surprises, as well as some disappointments. Some things were as expected, others were the complete opposite. These polarities instilled in me a mixture of strong

emotions; regret, love, sorrow, happiness, pain, fear, comfort, passion, and guilt. To add to the confusion, I felt immensely calm through the turbulent state of my emotions. What seemed like an internal analysis and dialogue with myself, unraveled into an unrestrainable quest for knowing more about the country I came from, in relation with the country where I grew up. This encompassed questions directly related to aspects such as race, distance, and diaspora. I was continuously reminded of a bittersweet truth, which I already knew; my parents chose Canada not only because my mother came from there, but most probably because they felt there would be more opportunity there. Colonized since the fifteenth century by the French, Senegal became an independent state in 1960. Senegal is still struggling to escape the destructive grasp of colonialism that brought on slavery, civil unrest, poverty, economical, and humanitarian catastrophes.

The reality of this struck harder as seemingly "normal" and mundane occurrences began to arise on this trip; children in villages, sometimes including my own cousins, would ask us for money. I noticed that my uncle and his family of five lived in a house the size of our family living room. It struck me when I realized the chicken we had gone to kill at the market was going to feed a large group of fourteen people. Or when we bathed in a bucket with cold water because the city shuts down the electricity power for days. I did not consider these examples of economic differences between us as indicative of any type of social inferiority, but rather as an alternate way of life functioning with a new set of values. It took me aback at first but I understood I was just having an honest reaction to living in such different conditions. My Senegalese family was happy to finally meet us, whereas I was trying to get over the guilt of having grown up with different priorities. However, I soon quickly got used to the cold evening baths, the crowded dinners in the small room, and the small little hands reaching out asking for money. I soon became in love with the laughter and abundance of joy shared within the community, and stopped thinking about being so materialistic and about the wealth that separated us. We were after all, family. However, there was this unshakable distance between us. There were many grey areas in which we wondered if they viewed us as the rich, white, lucky and more fortunate distant cousins, while simultaneously hoping that they didn't think that we viewed them as the less fortunate, unlucky, or poor African ones. My siblings and I were humbled by the experience, yet we also felt embarrassed, spoiled, by our riches. Whether or not any of this is actually true is beside the point. We came from what Western society views as a more privileged country, and in the examples I listed above; there was no way of escaping that fact. At times, this was hard to take in; we lived with constant reality checks. We were however able to put these observations behind us and take the time to get to know each other, embrace our differences, as well as share our distinct cultural opinions, upbringings, stories and experiences with one another. We were able to unearth certain mythologies about each other, and in those moments, we were able to revisit certain myths and break down cultural barriers and dismantle stereotypical thoughts about each other's cultures, identity and country. Underneath it all, we



were the same, we had the same wishes, to be happy, to succeed, to laugh, to eat, to share, to love.

When I returned to my comfortable middle-class home, I felt a cynical depression come over me, or a newfound confusion. Who was I? What would I have become if I had stayed In Senegal? Why didn't I get the chance to listen to my grandfather recount stories under the big baobab tree that my cousins pointed out? Why are my aunts and uncles so poor? Why were there so many lepers in Senegal? Why did those African men call me white when I am clearly not? What kind of person would I be today if I had grown up there? I felt a mixture of deep sadness, pride, embarrassment, guilt, and an inexplicable regret for not having had the chance to have certain experiences. Now I could add selfishness and longing to the list of stirred emotions.

### generations

An Immigrant has many definitions, but is simply defined as a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence.<sup>2</sup> Whether it is by choice, by force, by circumstance or by pure coincidence, people who live in places where they were not born have tendencies to trace back their stories so they can shape their present lives. Tracing back your history can be a fulfilling way to understand your predecessors and to understand yourself, or maybe even, to continue telling the story. Do Immigrants have a duty to tell their story? In my case, I feel compelled to do so, and it goes beyond the personal. What is the responsibility of the immigrant or the descendent of the immigrant to know their story, to then tell their story? Haitian born author and artist Edwidge Dandicat alludes to many of these issues in her book, Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work. She begins by asking the question: "What happens when we cannot tell our own stories, when our memories have temporarily abandoned us and what is left is longing for something we are not even sure we ever had but are certain we will never experience again." (65) This certainly corresponds with the responsibility I have felt as an artist and as a person with a distinct historical background. She follows by stating that for "[for...] the immigrant, far from home, memory becomes an even deeper abyss." Particularly relevant is her claim that "all artists, writers among them, have several stories one might call them creation myths - that haunt and obsess them, and she firmly believes that immigrant artists are obliged to bear witness when their countries of origin are suffering from violence, oppression, poverty, and tragedy." (5)

In <u>The Collective Memory Reader</u>, a collection of essays discussing nostalgia in the collective mind, a passage states: "Immigrant stories are the best narratives of

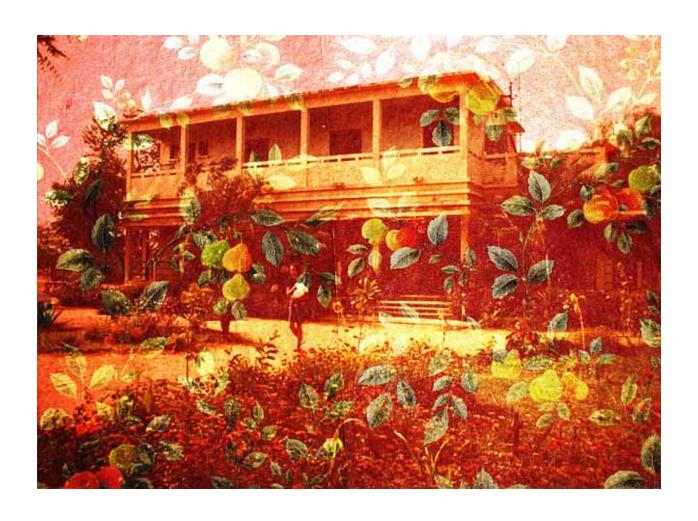
<sup>2</sup> Def. 1 of "immigrant", <u>The Merriam-Webster Dictionary</u> <a href="http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/immigrant">http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/immigrant</a>

nostalgia, not only because they suffer through nostalgia, but also because these stories are often framed as projections for the nostalgia of others who speak from a much safer place." (456) Am I nostalgic of my birthplace because I have been relocated to a more affluent, safe, and comfortable place? I grew up in a completely different society, and consider myself lucky that I had many opportunities available for me. I remember when my cousin asked me what I studied at university, and I replied fine arts. He had a very astonished look on his face. The conversation had come up because, as a matter of fact, he was also a very skilled artist. He had just finished showing me his drawings, and he could not hide his disappointment that I had the chance to study art. In that moment, I realized how my privileged and safe environment even contributed to my educational choices.

American sociologist Fred Davis argues that nostalgia in a community is a "reaction to disruptive and anxiety-producing events, and acts to restore a sense of continuity across such ruptures." (446) In some way, he claims that nostalgia is caused by having been displaced, and thus will enable an attachment to the homeland to continue. He offers another analogy: "Generational nostalgic sentiment [...] creates as it conserves. It creates because the past is near something simply there just waiting to be discovered. Rather, the remembered past like all products of human consciousness is something that must constantly be filtered, selected, arranged, constructed and reconstructed from collective experience. And the fulcrum for this great labor can only be the present with its shared anxieties, aspirations, hopes, fears, and fantasies." (450) It is by exploring my origins, history and my own ideas about the past that I am, in my own right, bearing witness to my country of origin. I think it is necessary, in homage for the generations that came before me and the generations that will come after, to attempt to investigate the profoundly multilayered chapters of our individual and collective histories. Could nostalgia have led me to this place of yearning?







## curiosity

Curiosity is a very powerful trigger that can initiate nostalgia, and of course, I believe the reverse is also true. For example, the use of photography and other visual information such as film or books encourages us to construct our ideas of the past. Objects such as heirlooms and personal effects can also function as time capsules. Susan Sontag's On Photography offers an enlightening explanation to how we relate to photographs, as she explains that what is apparent in imagery can become more real than life itself. She adds that our dependency on images permits us to create other versions of our own lives, our 'selves', and that they may even shape who we are. (Sontag) There is a photograph of my mother and me shortly after my birth; she is standing holding me in a garden, in front of a strange house. The colors are bright and the photo is faded. It is peculiar, yet not surprising, that this image, along with numerous others, have permanently become imprinted in my mind. An interesting duality occurs here: these photographs have amplified my feelings of nostalgia, and yet, my nostalgia has simultaneously stimulated my sense of curiosity. The reasons for the attraction to this picture are numerous. If I am in the picture, the photograph functions as evidence that yes, I was somewhere, in a foreign place, at a time that I can't remember. In this example, a photograph thus causes inquisitiveness. However, it is also a way for me to fantasize and escape to another time, to imagine where this was, what was happening at the time, and become engulfed in a pure nostalgic state.

The personal experiences that shape our lives can be intangible. After my trip to Senegal, I was immediately aware that I had nostalgia for a time before my birth, a time where my grandparents were still alive. I wished to see how they lived, how they spoke, how they behaved. My father held onto many photographs of the time right before my birth, but he didn't have many photos of his youth. The images that I had the opportunity to see were incredibly intriguing. They became the blueprint to my imagination. I would imagine how my grandmother would move, how her hands felt. I often wished I could build a time machine to zoom back to that time, and sit beside her.

Curiosity for the unknown can stimulate feelings of loss, wonder, and mystery. The mind will attempt to fabricate a blend of fictional narratives and imagined reality in attempt to satisfy unanswerable questions. When curiosity for one's cultural heritage or ancestry is triggered, it can be challenging to identify why these feelings occur in the first place. Since I grew up in a middle class western society, is it possible that I am viewing my past and my own family as something completely separate from myself? The notion of appropriating the *Other* for one's pleasure deserves exploration. Curiosity could be considered a form of consumption. It is clear that my birthplace has indeed taken the form of the *Other*. My investigation has led me to locate these nostalgic and curious feelings inhabiting my mind fuelled by a desire to consume an idea of the other: an *other* country, an *other* person, an *other* time, an *other* epoch. In Eating the Other, Black Looks: Race and Representation,

postmodern theorist and social critic bell hooks suggests that:

"When race and ethnicity become commodities as resources for pleasure, the culture of the specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate encounters with the Other." (367)

I don't believe I am affirming my power over things associated with my birthplace, but because I am of two distinct cultures, is it possible that internally, I am trying to consume what is *Other* within my own self? What fuels this desire? hooks also states that the "*Other is indelibly streaked with a legacy of colonial nostalgia and fetishistic yearnings*". (23) Could it be that am I am fetishizing a part of myself that is unknown? If I have a desire to know more about my past, then I will continuously fall prey to this desire to go back in time. In The Object of Desire and the Totality of the Real, there is a short excerpt by multifaceted French author and philosopher, George Bataille, where he briefly examines the nature of desire: "In a word, the object of desire is the universe, in the form of she who in the embrace is its mirror, where we ourselves are reflected. At the most intense moment of fusion, the pure blaze of light, like a sudden flash, illuminates the immense field of possibility, on which these lovers are subtilized, annihilated, submissive in their excitement to a rarefaction which they desired." (par 15)

# desire and yearning

The desire and yearning for the return of past circumstances and events is a complicated idea. Why not live in the present? In Yearning: Race, Gender and <u>Cultural Politics</u> hooks has said that "Yearning is the word that best describes a common psychological state shared by many of us, cutting across boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexual practice." (27) Let us look at a few examples of how the transcendence of nostalgia within multiple boundaries can occur. Woody Allen's most recent film, Midnight in Paris, playfully recounts the story of an author who wishes to return to the 1920s era, and eventually the spectator finds him in that time period midway thought the film. He falls in love with Picasso's mistress, only to be disappointed to discover that she wishes to be transported back to the time of la Belle Époque. This cycle perpetuates itself as far as the Renaissance, each artist wishing to return to the time of his or her predecessors. It is only at the end of the film, that the character discovers and accepts the fact that the desire to return to another time is a typical condition that occurs to many people, no matter what time period they live in, as they will always tend to idealize the past. This mindset will occur when there is unrest in the present times, and desire and yearning will be triggered with a delusion that everything was glorious in the past. However, I am not that naïve to believe that things were better in the past. Perhaps it is the same for the characters in the film, or that of any artist, but my preoccupation lies more within the realm of the unknown. What I don't know about certain people, about their lives, their hardships, joys, and experiences, this is what continues to fuel my imagination and waking life.

Another author who examines in depth the nostalgic condition, is Jewish American writer Jonathan Safran Foer. His novel, Everything is Illuminated, is about the quest of a young American Jew who decides to take a journey to the Ukraine in search of a woman who had saved his grandfather's life escaping from the Nazis during the Second World War. An avid collector of artifacts, belongings and heirlooms that are related to his family, the writer finds that these objects enable him to piece together a map and find himself in the exact area where his grandfather has come from. Decades later, nothing remains, as the village was completely destroyed by the Nazis. All that is left is a massive tomb, or common gravesite. It is through finding his way back home that the character becomes *illuminated*. It has been suggested that the title of the book was taken from a chapter of Franco-Czech novelist Milan Kundera's book The Unbearable Lightness of Being. In this book, Kundera famously claims: "In the sunset of dissolution, everything is illuminated by the aura of nostalgia, even the guillotine." (04) Yearning for the past can lead to understanding the past, no matter how painful this may seem, and the present can thus become less bleak.

### homesickness

Through this exploration of the self, I have said little about the actual condition that is nostalgia. Let me return the word's epistemology. *Nostos* means returning home and *Algia* or *Agos* means a painful condition. It was interesting to discover that a Swiss physician coined this term in the seventeenth century. (Davis 446) In <u>Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia</u>, Fred Davis explains how this term was used for a very specific, frequent and extreme condition of homesickness among Swiss soldiers who were fighting in other countries. (446) The transition of how the meaning of the word evolved and was used as an expression and moved away from a specific medical condition is also explained. In that period of time, no word existed to fully illustrate the emotion and turmoil behind these feelings, nor embody the occasional severity of this condition. The word 'nostalgia' was invented and was considered a psychological disease. Today, this term is no longer linked strictly to mercenaries or the military, but as a common way to express one's inner dialogue when thinking about the past.

After all this personal research and historical analysis can I, will I eventually return *home*? Can this feeling of homesickness ever be eradicated? I visited my birth land, and yet, the feelings of nostalgia continue to fester. I have perhaps romanticized my past, and fabricated with my imagination certain ideas about where is my *home* 

truly located. My own memories, perceptions and definitions of home continue to evolve and continue to become entangled. Davis best illustrates the complexity of this inner dialogue: "While both speakers must be present and engaged, as it were, for nostalgia's mise en scene to fall into place, in the ensuing dialogue, it is always the adoration of the past that triumphs over lamentations for the present." He continues to say that: "Indeed, this is the whole point of the dialogue; for to permit present woes to douse the warm glow from the past is to succumb to melancholy, or worse vet, depression. And, while it may be true that the nostalgic dialogue nearly always entails some risk of this sort on the self, there can be no question that points at issue are intended to arrive at the foregone conclusion of the superiority of times and things past..." (448). No matter how painful it may be to know you may never revisit the past, the simple concept of revisiting it nullifies the sorrow that accompanies the feelings of impossibility. Davis concludes by explaining that "Herein lies, too [...] the powerful generation-delineating properties to which nostalgia lends itself so easily: we summon to mind and communicate among ourselves those comforting images from our pasts [...] which seem to ironically bestow upon that past, an age-graded distinctiveness and separableness, that mere chronological division could never by themselves engender." (450). By briefly basking in the light of our imagined ideas of the past, we are enabling a form of escapism, and this I believe to be the pure magic of nostalgia.

#### intermission

There is an intermission; the lights have come on, but the dance will surely continue. As sorrow, pain, longing, time and memory are ushered off the stage. As thoughts continue to dissipate into other preoccupations, and while my imagination and thirst for knowledge are as rampant as ever, I have become aware that my wishes to go back in time are not abnormal. By examining my own woven identity, by offering a personal account of my own "mixed" identity and by presenting thoughts and anecdotes about my heritage, I have identified why conscious and unconscious desires to revisit certain facets of the past can occur. I have managed to ascertain some of the origins of nostalgia within the self by locating them within the multiple threads of my personal fabric and within a historical context.

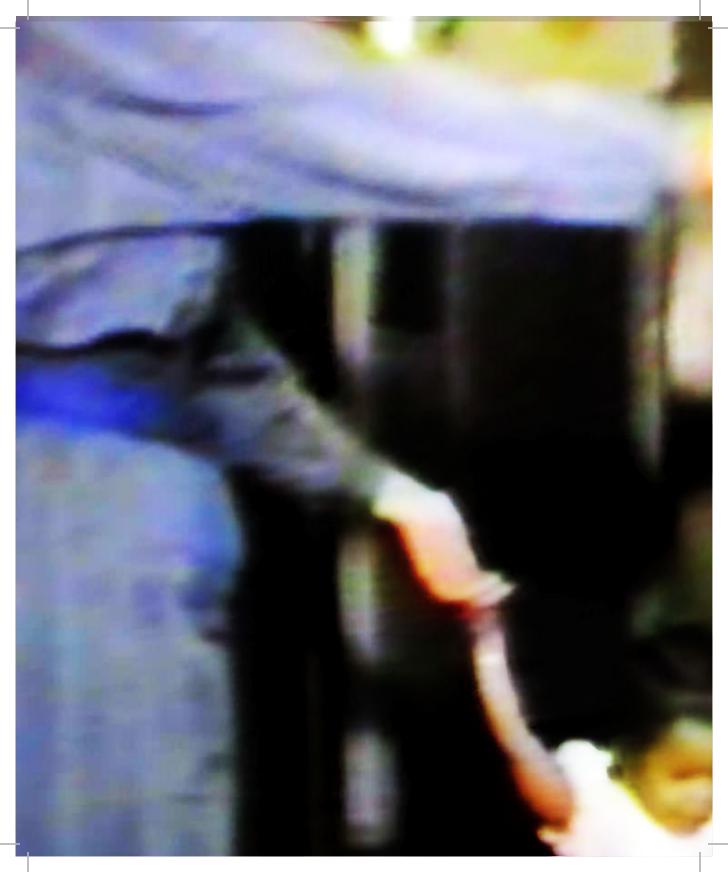


My fantasies about a past that I have never actually lived will continue to inspire me, but perhaps along the way, more pieces to the bewildering puzzle will continue to appear. Many questions must remain unanswered, because it is the unknown that fuels a condition as powerful as nostalgia. My own cultural hybridity has influenced my interests in these topics, but the condition remains more powerful than simply stating the past is an interest. This exploration was also a crisscross of ideas, topics, both personal and universal, that hopefully illustrated the complexity and true conflicting nature that is Nostalgia. As many of the theorists have suggested above, putting the pieces back together is necessary to achieve a state of illumination. Can we be nostalgic for something we never knew? The established correspondences between the feelings of curiosity, desire and yearning have proved that the answer is yes. The plight of the geographically and generationally displaced immigrant changes his or her perception of self, of past, of present and of future. The responsibility of the displaced artist to recount her quest through the past is left as a choice. But what other way is there to hold my African grandmother's hand?

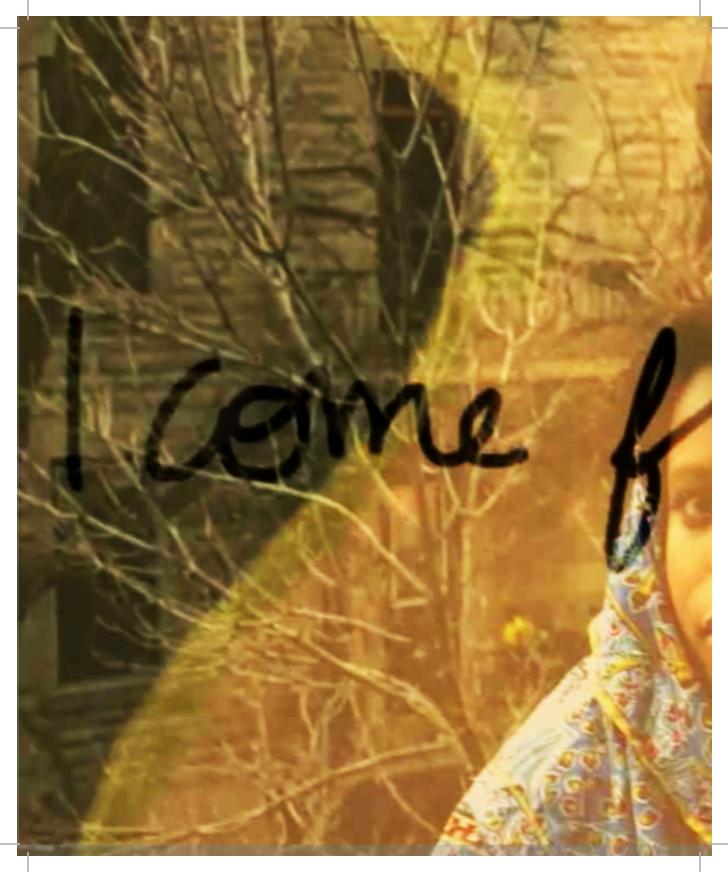
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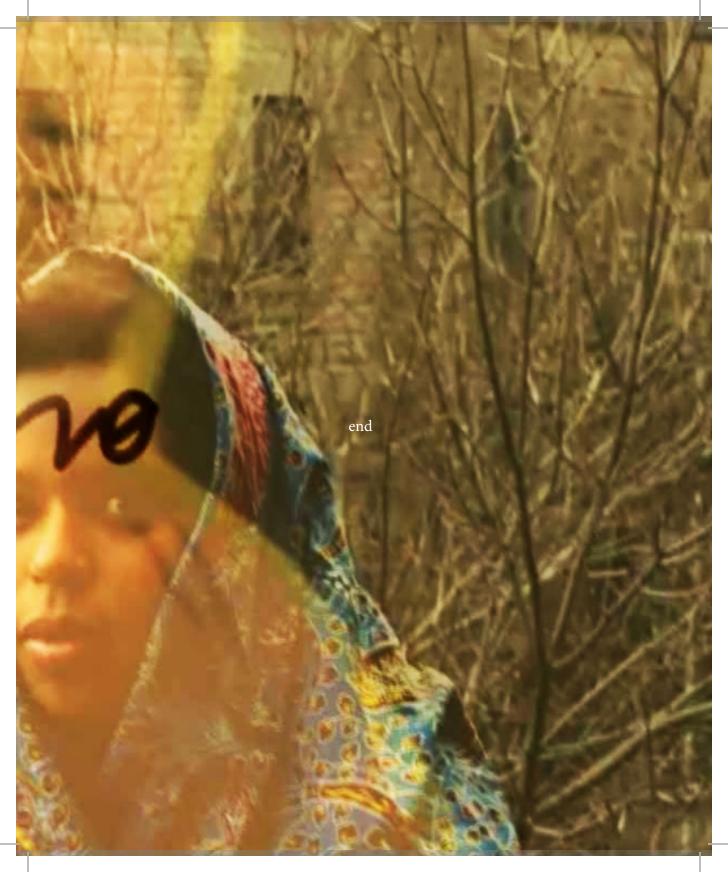
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