



1936: Senghor's conference on the cultural problem in French West Africa (AOF). 1937: *Pigments* by Léon Damas; *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Notes on Returning Home) by Aimé Césaire. 1956 and 1959: Congresses of Black Writers and Artists. 1965: First African-Black Arts Festival (Dakar). February 1969: First General Francophonie Meeting (Niamey). July 1969: Pan-African Cultural Festival (Algiers). March 1970: Niamey II, Francophonie and the creation of the First Conference of the Agency of Cultural and Technical Cooperation (ACCT). July 1970: Colloquy on Negritude (Dakar). October 1971: Second Conference of ACCT in Quebec. Between 1936 and 1971 the destiny of a recuperated ideology is inscribed. In 1937 in Paris, Léon Damas and Aimé Césaire found the newspaper *L'Étudiant Noir* (The Black Student). These are negritude's first steps. In the face of the white enslaver and exploiter, its voice is raised to make the black listen, a distinct entity whose points of reference reduced the dominant ideology. Its intent: the rediscovery of black personality and consciousness. But as the Senegalese intellectual Pathé Diagné shows, negritude could not be anything more than a stillborn ideology because of its complete inadaptability.

Negritude's trial took place at the Festival of Algiers. Francophonie's is still to come. Negritude's ultimate avatar. The bourgeoisie knows well where its interests lie and when it can further bewitch the gaze that certain nearby colonized peoples still direct admiringly toward the former boss. It is not surprising that Francophonie should have taken its path initially from Senghor in 1962 ("the marvelous utensil that the French language represents"), from Bourguiba in 1965, and finally, from the African and Malagasy Common Organization (OCAM) in 1966, which proposed the creation of ACCT in 1968.

The first general Francophonie meeting included 30 countries. Symptomatically absent were Guinea, Mauritania and North Viet Nam which were not members of ACCT as it was finally constituted, and of course Algeria, Cambodia, Laos and other countries for various reasons. Francophonie is a new attempt by the dominant bourgeoisie with the support of the colonized nationalists, to impose its idiomatic and even cultural universe.

"We reject allowing the world to be divided into rich and poor," ACCT's Assistant Secretary-General from Togo declared. We have not gotten rid of the intellectual point of view that disguises the refusal of some to consider the simple fact that the division between rich and poor is not born of an abstraction, of a rationalization on the one hand and a magic thought on the other, but out of the existence of imperialism and capitalism. The true partisans of negritude are the fighters of PAIGC, FRELIMO, MPLA, the guerrillas of Zimbabwe.

Within the community of the exploited in struggle, Ernesto Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh are blacker than Senghor.

ally hide their servitude to other values that are not attributes of blacks and of black civilization, neither of which, in his opinion, seem to need propaganda slogans in order to be fully accepted.

The meeting in Dakar in 1965 had two objectives.

On the one hand, to obtain a vision of the creation of blacks in the world and in time. This went from a confrontation concerning ballet, cinematic and literary prizes, and expositions of contemporary modern art to the rediscovery of ancient art in the epochs of the pharaohs, the civilizations of Nok, Irkour, Ife or Benin.

On the other hand, within the framework of the colloquy on the arts, a confrontation had started between the black intellectuals and the specialists from all countries who have worked in the field of our creations, to illuminate the significance, the function and the future of black arts in the world.

But then why reproach this colloquy on black arts for having stimulated a Pan-African Festival?

First of all, for having left out — because of the precise advantages this represented — a considerable multitude of creators and writers; the official character of the invitations permitted this. The most original creators of Brazil, the United States, Cuba — to cite these alone — those committed to the violent resistance of the political situations they had lived through or are living through, were deliberately left out. This meant that numerous delegations were not at all representative. Through diplomatic channels especially; they had rounded up notables who were certainly famous and safe, but currently far outside the creative stream of the life and struggle of blacks and of their people. Not a single representative of black North American, Cuban, Angolan or South African youth. A total absence of fighting Africa. Makeba, LeRoy Jones, Nicolás Guillén, Dépestre

could not bear witness.

Countries of importance, if one considers their contribution to political and cultural evolution, they decided it was inopportune to have present. Guinea and Cuba in particular.

A third reproach was made concerning the Festival of Dakar. It personified in an excessive manner a tendency which, even though it referred to the black and African presence in the world, appeared above all to seek to debate minor themes. The colloquy about art had to do with art. Some believed a meeting of that nature should go beyond and focus the responsibility of the intellectuals and those in power with respect to national culture and to building free and democratic nations in Africa.

The patronage of the European cultural empire, in whose eyes the festival of negritude seemed to seek evidence of its legitimacy, was equally shocking. It was a founder of negritude who lightly affirmed — to the astonishment of the men of African culture — that there were only two cultures in Africa: Francophonic and Anglophonic and he went into eulogies over their respective merits. Two days later, the same writer returned to the theme to confess that black art was a major art because Malraux, in the name of the France of General de Gaulle, "had solemnly recognized it."

But it was not only this willingness of France's black children to salute their festival and be happy at having passed an exam.

The Dakar Festival was reproached for being the festival of a negritude and not simply a Pan-African festival. This was one more difficulty that had to set the tone for Algiers.

The Festival of Algiers, if we sound out the diplomatic profundities, the quarrels about precedence, the behind-the-scenes struggles and

the internal contradictions in Africa, appeared in the minds of a good number of its promoters as a counterfestival to Dakar but, let us repeat, for ideological and political reasons.

Nevertheless, in Algiers as in Dakar, it dealt with the future of the African masses, their culture, their art, their vision of the world and their destiny. The meeting in Algiers born of the divergencies we have just explained, could only take place on the basis of more or less tacit compromises. Organized under the aegis of the African states, it was held under the technical direction of the OAU secretariat, its preparation was entrusted to an organizing committee which under the presidency of Guinea — absent from the Festival of Arts in Dakar — included Algeria, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal.

#### What Was Said in Algiers?

To lend clarity to the information, I will first explain very briefly the theme of the colloquy in Algiers. In itself it represents an entire program and defines from the beginning certain forms of departure and very clear options.

I will also explain briefly the different opinions that the key delegations expressed there, before going back to the nature and the extent of the reservations expressed on negritude.

The colloquy of Algiers referred to African culture, its realities, its role in the liberation struggles, in the consolidation of an African unity and in economic development. Its intention was to break with colonization and, within the framework of the emancipation struggle, to provide a political-cultural definition, a policy for renaissance attentive to the responsibilities of African intellectuals toward their peoples and to the cultural, political and economic hegemony still exercised today by Europe over our continent.

Three types of answers or three major currents, among them negritude.

The influence of Fanon, evident in the announcement of the theme, was to become still more notable in the responses that arose within the current animated during the festival by Algeria and Guinea in particular, though with shadings.

The delegations from Arab Africa would join in the overall themes and perspectives developed in the Algerian Chief of State's speech, partly for reasons of convenience but also because of the similarity of situations, as I will explain later.

For Algeria, Libya and the Sudan in particular, the essential problem is one of defining a policy of national culture. Decolonization there implies the liquidation of western cultural imperialism in particular. These delegations recalled that African culture is abandoned by its elite, separated from its origin. These elitists now speak and think within a borrowed and poorly assimilated culture, which inhibits and alienates them to make them accomplices in the alienation of their people.

African culture is not dead, the analysis continues; it is now at the point of entrance into the center of the liberation struggle, and from the beginning it was here that the reference to Fanon's thesis on the cultural meaning of acts of war and of global resistance to cultural, economic and political imperialisms came up. These delegations said it was a question of accelerating a cultural rebirth that would recuperate and illuminate our history, give our values of civilization more vitality within the framework of sovereign nations, open to the contributions of advanced foreign cultures. The elite rulers, they add, have the duty of avoiding at all cost diluting themselves with cultural or political-cultural structures that serve interests outside Africa. They



must stop falling into a veneration of foreign cultural models and progressively impose on Africa and the exterior world our own view of things. Explicit reference was made to the need for using the African linguistic and historic heritage as the most effective support and instrument for the diffusion of modern knowledge, for the creation of a progressive literature and art rooted in the people. Nothing that smacks of a profligate policy.

The Guinean delegation took approximately the same point of view. It insisted from the beginning, however, that the cultures coexisting in Africa are specific and particular. But it also insisted on the class significance that the different cultures connote within the same context. Gathering strength as it went along, it posed the importance of the contribution of the artistic, literary, linguistic, historic and scientific heritage of Africa to the world. It concluded with a denunciation of the alienation of the African historic vision of elites totally subjugated by the universe and the hegemonic power of the West.

But, and this is important to our argument, the Guinean delegation broke the taboo of negritude and opened — to the great joy of some delegations — a profound breach in this movement.

The philosopher Adotevi asked the Senegalese defenders of negritude what they have made of the black of Cape Verde and Fouta in the economic and cultural apparatus controlled for and by French interests, within which the Senegalese as well as the indigenous peoples of the Ivory Coast and Dahomey are dominated, alienated and exploited in 1970.

Senegalese History and the  
Misadventures of Negritude,  
Assimilationist Slogan

Senegal's official historic position  
on negritude, we are told here,

grows out of this policy of education and culture founded on Francophonism and Francophilia, which perhaps it was thought might be proposed to Africa in Algiers.

Negritude, in the Senghorian view, received its first blow from Césaire. Even though he was invited, the author of *Les armes miraculeuses* (Miraculous Arms) and *Le roi Christophe* (King Christopher) did not come to Algiers. He was scarcely criticized for this. But a week before the festival, he confessed to the weekly *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* the meaning that the movement and the concept he invented still represented for him. At the same time he noted his differences with the Senghorian view on this matter.

Césaire says in substance: "Senghor and I invented and gave content to the concept and movement of negritude. But my friend Senghor and I are no longer in agreement about the idea and its practice. It seems that he has made something metaphysical out of the concept."

But it seems to me this makes imperative a focus that clarifies the content and range of the Senghorian view of negritude. This would provide a certain clarification to the content of the criticisms formulated in Algiers and here, too, concerning an ideology suggested to us for constructing a modern Senegal.

In general there has been much insistence on the impact of existentialism on Senghor's thinking. René Menil in particular observed, in this respect, that neither Senghor nor Césaire began as theoreticians. They are artists and creators first. The elements that initially establish the ideology of negritude and, above all, the particular concept that results from Senghor's extension of it are primarily Sartre's doing. He is the master of French existentialism who, as Menil stressed after Gabriel d'Arboussier, goes on giving form



and figure to the nebulous and vague ideas of those who only later will be converted into leading theoreticians of the movement. The position taken by Sartre is stated in the preface of *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie noire et malgache* (Anthology of new black and Madagascar poetry) by Senghor. Sartre provides negritude with its coherence and apparent systematization, says Menil. He made a world view out of the exegeses of the texts of the blacks. He tries to circumscribe and discover the mentality, the being, the black focus on the world, including its values, on the basis of the elements that the sensibility of the black artists of this epoch reveal to him. Thus the illusions of the consciousness and emotion of the black writer are raised to the level of general truth.

The position that this view will occupy in the criticisms directed at negritude was evident long before, during and much after the Festival of Algiers.

The poetry of Césaire is known. He writes: "Blacks abandon themselves trapped by the essence of things." The poems of Senghor, who will say later: "The black is emotion and Hellenic reason," and above all the essay by Sartre who translates existentially that the black focus on the world operates out of the "captivation" with the world, and explains that it is a "magic captivation." Certainly the black man in the villages would ask himself, if he understood this theory, how he could be concerned about this essence given him. Certainly he would ask how he can be compared to the hippie marihuana smokers and the surrealist poets in search of exotic emotions.

Nevertheless, I do not believe, as the best critics of negritude suggest, that the evolution of Senghor's thought was essentially thrown off course by his encounter with Sartre in the period of the *Anthologie de*

*la nouvelle poésie*. Sartre's preface marks a decisive phase without systematization, but Senghor's options in the plane of cultural renaissance began sketching their outlines as early as 1936. The conference he gave at the Dakar Chamber of Commerce on the cultural problem in French West Africa (AOF) is an indication of this. It traces the great lines of thought we know today. The text is witness to numerous influences and also to a personal effort to formulate the political-cultural future of black Africa. The echo of the literature of colonial writers such as Faiderbe, Delafosse or Delavignette is strongly inscribed in it. It is up to date on what has been done in the British countries on the level of the cultural autonomy of British Commonwealth territories. Nor does he overlook the moment of reevaluation, renewal, that agitates the blacks of the Diaspora — North Americans, Jamaicans, and Haitians in particular.

But — and this is essential — Senghor places himself from this period on in a false position with respect to the values of black civilization to which he addresses himself. He himself goes on to wipe out the implication of his discovery, for two reasons that are mutually explicable and on which his own texts shed a vibrant clarity. From the start, Senghor is addicted to the colonial order and this is the first point. In the second place, when he looks over his own values of civilization and those of the French conquerors, he is led to postulate almost unreservedly the historic and intrinsic superiority of French culture. Thus his vision of the black world will be simply the projection onto African values of the gaze of a black whose objective is to assimilate — that is the term he uses — and who goes on identifying progressively and unquestioningly with the French conqueror's view of the world from which he emerges. From this point of view, from 1936

on, Senghor is a black theoretician of the French economic, political and cultural empire.

On the political level, he writes in 1937: "Politically we work to make the West African a French citizen." Then he adds: "France need not justify its colonial conquests nor the annexation of Bretagne or the Basque country [...] the colonial problem is basically a provincial problem, a human problem. Colonialization is a humanism; the proof, the work of a Faiderbe, the spirit of a Van Vollenhoven."

With respect to the economic future of the colonized peoples, he writes: "France need only harmonize its interests with those of the indigenous people. I am not the first to have observed this. Lyautey had spoken about it before and closer to us, Delavignette, that imperial humanist, in his most suggestive book *Sudan, Paris, Bourgogne*."

The cultural assimilation he foresaw is explained and legitimated in pages where he insists on "the need to affirm the existence of a black African civilization and its character of originality, the existence of black African humanities and the promotion of an indigenous language, a necessary companion to French, etc." And he concludes in the name of a conciliatory accord and of dialogue on the necessity for

... assimilation, a Latin-French and Cartesian doctrine. If we hope to survive, the necessity for adaptation, for an assimilation cannot escape us. This means an assimilation that permits association. [...] It is only with this condition that there will be a common ideal, a common reason for living, only with this condition a French empire.

Neither before nor now is there anything here of the will to oppose, to define oneself from within, to affirm oneself without reference to the French nation. Africa, in the spirit of Senghor, cannot conceive of a future without France or Euro-

pe as its source.

These Senghorian perspectives merely acquired their form and consistency in the epoch in which Sartre systematized negritude.

Even the idea of the existential or semi-rational, semi-emotional and little or only slightly abstract black whom we associate with a truly Sartrean essay on the black view of the world, was already expressed by Senghor at that stage. "Don't force your minds. [...] We will never defeat them in mathematics. [...] I have the impression that the natives of French West Africa, *exceptis excipiendis*, are more talented in letters."

From now on in the thinking of the father of negritude, there will be no break in theme, in view, in solution. Nevertheless, we will note two strong periods whose demarcation can be situated after the epoch in which Senghor commits himself to political life and when the personage is confronted with an unedited context.

The first epoch coincides with what we might call literary negritude or "pan-negritude." We have just analyzed briefly the components. The second, ideological negritude. Terminology simplified to the extreme, even to the point of abuse if you will, but useful.

The epoch of literary or pan-negritude also touches on the Sartrean episode. Senghor, theoretician of assimilation, responds to the necessities of an elite that dreams of changing its status as men of color, citizens of a second zone, French subjects, ghetto blacks, victims of a planetary racism. The black elite of Haiti, of French West Africa, Jamaica or the United States, want to live at all levels in the world or in their respective nations without being maltreated because of their race, whatever the system or political-economic regime under which they live. This is the anti-racist negritude, that of the Dias-

pura, of the harmonious assimilation, etc.

Senghor's thesis in 1936 suggested making black African cultures elements of sustenance for French civilization. They would raise the black to a French view of the world and of French interests. They would culminate by acclimating Africa to a sphere of French influence.

On the historical level of cultural renaissance they turned their backs on the most classic lines. And in practice, the concept they give of African renaissance follows a policy of progressive negation of African cultures in their most intimate sense: their originality and their liberty.

Why?

Because renaissance postulates a policy that sums up the people's cultural instruments, particularly their language. That is the support for ideas, the means by which new knowledge is spread to renew and strengthen from within the authority, the originality and the contribution of a people to themselves and to the world.

Renaissance implies the retelling of national history based on an internal vision that, by referring to itself, illuminates the past and the future of a people and serves the culture of that people.

It does not view its history through the eyes of its conquerors, however comprehensive.

Every renaissance rests on an art and literature that interests the people, extracting from them its tools, its themes, renewing itself in them and remaining open and receptive to all their inspirations.

Finally, a policy of decolonization and of rebirth leans toward the construction of an autonomous national economy that provides a place for the culture of the community whose interests it protects against foreign hegemony. However, Senghor's replies to these demands do not seem convincing. At least we can question

whether the cultural policy elaborated and imposed on the Senegalese by his unique will merits being accepted and put forward, as exemplary. We can get an idea of it by referring to the ideology of negritude as it appears.

#### Before and After the Algiers Meeting

Negritude, the co-called ideology of development, coincided with Senghor's appearance as a man of politics. To the extent that his literary and philosophical work is amplified, that its illumination of the African political scene becomes more precise, that the Senegalese state institution broadens its field of action, the contours of its structure become more clarified. This period also marks the birth of a vision more properly that of the Head of the Senegalese State, a vision that enables the translation of his ideas into deeds.

This contemporary Senghor who interests us above all as the theoretician of cultural renaissance paradoxically takes theoretical and practical positions during the epoch of autonomies and independences that are still more assimilationist than in 1936.

This evolution is also very well explained in the sense that it is that of an elite joining its fate, its prestige and its illumination to the political, economic and cultural interests of France and Western Europe; it is the ideology of a bureaucratic petit bourgeois, segregated by the colonial and neocolonial apparatus. It does not dream of assuming its destiny by creating its own universe. It is content to be elevated by France, to assent to her authority, absorbing the illumination of France on the cultural level, the economic surplus that foreign capitalism deposits in the budgets of the young states.

The manner in which the association of West African states with the Common Market was managed,



their pulverization into inconsistent entities, the organization of a political-cultural sphere of influence within the framework defined by organizations such as the OCAM, the Francophonie agencies, etc., could have no other significance.

This context explains that the ideology of negritude is coming to be a theory and a policy of assimilation and of world dispossession both of the values of African civilization and of black Africans, alike. One sees why, analyzing:

- 1) Negritude as an assimilationist theory that explicitly renounces what is essential in the African cultural and linguistic heritage.
- 2) Negritude as an alienated and imperialist view of the history and destiny of the peoples of Africa.

#### Theory of Intellectual Assimilation: Language and Cultural Heritage

I said that the essence of the negritude movement followed a very classical path of national renaissance. And it is along this path that the ideology of negritude can be scientifically and fairly analyzed in comparison to the history of national renaissances.

To choose a familiar example, what did the French Renaissance signify? The definition of a French national economic and political period which became autonomous in relation to the European entities of its period, thanks to the diplomatic and military efforts of the kings of France. But the French nation defined itself, above all, through a cultural revolution carried out against the Greek-Latin culture of the elite, for the promotion of a historic-cultural heritage through French, a popular language termed vulgar and nonscientific, but spoken by the people. Finally, on the level of the recuperation of its symbols of culture this cultural revolution signified a firm determination to impose itself and to impose a view of the history of the French nation

and of the French. It signified a construction that has profound roots in a common and more or less idealized past. The French Renaissance is the birth of Gaul, of Gallic culture and of a view of the world, from a historic perspective, that serves the Gallic tradition. It is the revenge of Vercingetorix against Caesar and Rome.

And at bottom, all national questions, all hegemonic and liberation struggles — as Fanon recalls following Marx and Mao Tse Tung — are debates around elements that a given culture seeks to impose to defend specific interests.

All cultural renaissances have understood the danger of abandoning the language and national tongue and the cultural world they transport.

All the peoples of Europe or the Third World have founded their cultural renaissance on the definition of a language and a national cultural heritage of their own that is based on an autonomous political and economic interval that favors the birth of a strong and competitive world economy.

The Arab language, the Japanese effort, the Soviet and Chinese Revolutions, Ghandi's movement, always consist of processes of opposition to foreign political and cultural hegemonies and of the will to define national or multinational societies on the basis of a precise cultural, linguistic and historical heritage.

The paradox of the theory of negritude is precisely that of having hoped to base a renaissance of the black African world on a cultural heritage totally foreign to Africa and, moreover, utilized up to the present to assimilate and alienate the dominated peoples. To the great questions so forcefully raised by a cultural renaissance, Senghor gives the answers of a European intellectual assimilationist, both European oriented and extremely conserv-

ative. Thus on the level of language and cultural instruments, he elaborates in absolute truths his experience as a man of French culture, that of a university man who knows and admires Indo-European and Greek-Latin languages, literature and civilizations. More precisely, he accepts the definitive superiority of the civilizations of the colonizer.

Perhaps Senghor proposes himself as a model of this. As G. Balandier justifiably stated, he has triumphed and the negritude achieved is that which has two things as its objective. On the one hand, to assimilate European cultural hegemony in order to be accepted according to the norms and canons of dominant thought. On the other hand, because of an inability to be totally digested by the assimilationist world due to the fact of a color difference and a cultural heritage that survives among Africans, for example, and blocks their entrance into the world of western and bourgeois civilization, to consider themselves very vaguely partisans of certain indelible characteristics such as race or a past to which one only pays lip service.

In an article in *Dakar Matin*, he invites us to a conversation at the sources, "in Greek, Latin or French, in their language, their culture and their vision of the world, to define a policy of black African renaissance." He says in the text, "In grade school, first, but above all in high school, the teaching of the official language, French, will be required. Moreover, the teaching of other languages should help in teaching French. Naturally, first among these will be the black African languages." These companions to the French, as the author of *Ethiopiques* wrote in 1937!

As for the classic languages, he observes that they are certainly not required study anywhere — not in Italy, where they were born, nor in

France, wherefrom they reach us. But here "we will study them, since our situation is not that of Italy or France. These languages are notable for the coherence and logic of their structure. There is also a cultural problem and Latin and Greek cannot help but aid our deeper understanding of French." Comment: negritude is the French language, is it not?

Evidently we go to pieces when we hear of logical languages, of illogical languages or of alogical languages. This is pure metaphysics. As I have already stated, logic refers to a content that is no more German than Wolof.

Having denounced those who abandoned their cultural sovereignty in Algiers, he proposes in the same article to establish Senegalese cultural policy, naturally and in plain language, on the basis of French cultural instruments. We see how the fathers of negritude can be blinded by the educational system experienced within the framework of the colonial accident.

They reach the point of having no cultural references other than those of Latin-Christian civilizations. They push them to the end, they canonize them to the point of forgetting their very national and limited character. Greek-Latin logic, French clarity, etc. So many statements that reveal perspectives that seem very narrow to me. And theory on this point recalls the intransigence of the men of faith of the Islamic culture who have wreaked havoc by proclaiming Arabic and the culture of the Arabs as the essence, the foundation of all civilization and of all knowledge.

Basically according to the logic of this view, the black Anglophile elite, Russophile elite, Sinophile elite formed outside of Africa, should also build for us on their return systems of so-called negritude all of which are designed to convert us to the foreign languages and cultures they adopt and serve. Thus, according to the countries of

formation, we could have a complete panorama of negritude seasoned, according to taste, Slavic, German, Chinese, anything except authentic and black.

Thus we witness this paradox that makes negritude a part of the French Community and Francophilia, but in no way the lifeblood of Bantu, Sudanese or Berber languages and civilizations. I do not believe we can find a better formula than that of the cultural policy known as negritude for concretely turning one's back on the values the black world or the people of Africa have given to civilization.

They held meetings in Niamey, or elsewhere, to debate in the name of these options for the future, French cultural influence through all its agencies and organizations; but there was only a token effort to give form to the great languages and cultures of the unification of Africa. And all this in the name of negritude.

The problem of the linguistic and cultural heritage is essential. The language carries within it the culture of a people; this is its primary role. It is the basis for the signs and symbols that give that universe its content and illuminate the beauty of its darkness.

To build a culture on the base of a national language is simply to construct a civilization that is concerned with the people and not merely with an elite.

This is equally true of all renaissances, whether they be French, Hungarian, Chinese, German or Vietnamese; they have been linguistic revolutions, that is, cultural revolutions and revolutions of determination to define, around the language, the intellectual treasures and history of a political-economic interval that gives the nation its place.

How then in Senegal can one theorize on the national vocation of French or on the tradition of Rome and Athens when Wolof achieves our unity on a much more profound

basis? How can we silence the profound linguistic unity of the masses of the Organization of Riberian States of the Senegal (OERS) or of West Africa, that are based on the great cultures of Mandinga, Pulaar, Wolof, Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa that everyone speaks, and suggest that our unification is based on French culture?

When we fail to translate and transplant into our own languages, the great works and great discoveries of humanity, refusing to create with our own intellectual instruments, we condemn our view of the world to folklore and ourselves to becoming an exotic cultural appendage in which we lose our own point of reference, our own basis for censure.

The folklorization of a culture is simply black art behind a museum case. The pornographic and stereotyped ballets we show that evidence no research effort, they are the black art that diverts the naive tourist. We give the illusion of cultivating the values of civilization while, in effect, we clear our conscience with spectacles that bore, disgust and seduce an ignorant and undemanding petite bourgeoisie.

We are an exotic appendage when we condemn ourselves to interpret through a foreign language and culture, symbols in which we have not been raised, myths whose meaning escapes us because we do not dominate them.

The creations drawn from foreign cultures and languages are transposed, extended or naturalized through their own languages, their own conceptual or symbolic tongues.

Obviously in the 20th century, it is possible to test the achievement of a cultural policy on the basis of a foreign heritage, or to sponsor spectacles of another time, sum up operatic situations or personages in a caricature of society. But the extroverted African petite bourgeoisie that believes in black African cul-



ture with a foreign expression, is going down the wrong road.

Senghor's suggestion concerning a renaissance of black Africans converted to Francophonia is not only a profligacy, it carries within it the essential argument for the path of cultural imperialism.

Such perspective could not provide more than the weak echoes of an art and a thought for which the black African will not have been historically responsible and which he will perhaps never control. We can produce a *Macbeth* that is badly interpreted, badly assimilated because of an inability to penetrate totally the text of a language and the context of a culture whose symbols, universe, poetic and emotional charge escape us, yet at the same time believe in its genius.

In effect, copying, imitating, enslaves without convincing. The black Africans submerged in the Latin-Christian culture, Anglophonic, Francophonic, Arab-Islamic, have a dimension that is simply folkloric. Shakespeare, in his themes, in his obsessions, which are those of a man submerged in the context of a culture and an epoch, can be rethought through Yoruba, Wolof or Bantu and give birth to works of great value, but on condition that the references extract all their symbols from these cultures, their languages, their substance.

Universalism is above all an opening, continuous attention to the new, original, alive that is growing in another place. Study contemporary literature and art; you will see that their universality sometimes lies in the interpretation of symbols and languages, true. But it is more particularly in the identity of content, in the unity of human experiences that increasingly include all societies and all cultures in similar terms and situations. Specificity, which makes one speak of the stamp, the style of a national art or the work of an innovator, is

almost exclusively due to the language and the signs through which they make their universe seen.

The originality of the forms that give a cultural heritage its substance are not to be renounced. It is an irresponsibility to say or write that the language and cultural symbols of a people or of a creator are of little importance and that one can say in a foreign language and an imaginary foreign universe, whatever one wants.

Consequently one measures the risk run in making western Latin-Christian culture so foreign to our tradition, our point of reference.

Before going on to the other element that constitutes a policy of renaissance, I will make my own position clear so that I am not judged for certain attitudes I do not hold concerning linguistic and cultural instruments. I have never proscribed either external influence nor the use of foreign languages. We will still need English or French for a long time to acquire advanced scientific, technological, literary, economic or administrative knowledge. The same is true for diplomacy, but the Senegalese people are not made up only of diplomats or highly technical engineers. In some years we will be able to organize our whole economic, political, administrative, scientific, school and university life on the basis of our own languages and cultures.

All the work of preparation for the utilization of Senegalese languages in school and in life, is essentially completed now. There exist precise primers that can make all Senegalese literate in the language of their village in a maximum of three years. The political-economic apparatus can be totally bilingual in three years (French plus a Senegalese language) and because of this fact, of interest to all the people. Thanks to investigations already carried out, there are works in all the disciplines taught in primary schools. They will make it possible now to provide modern

adapted primary education in Wolof or in Mandinga. With what national education hopes to introduce as a language base in regional languages, there will be enough books ready in one year to meet all the needs required to give the full program.

Senghor's negritude is still seriously wrong, taking into account all the renaissance movements, because of its historic perspective.

Senghor projects a view which on each point assumes a colonial perspective of history. In this sense, the texts are clear.

The critics of negritude often address themselves only to objectionable details or criticisms of form in the system. Rarely do they criticize the content. Almost never do they pay attention to what Senghor writes about the history, about the cultural models and historic symbols he proposes. However, the history of a nation and the perspective with which we approach it constitute part of the data of every theory of renaissance.

In the epoch in which he still had not yet assumed power under colonial domination, he developed a singular concept of humanism. He evoked the colonial humanism of a Delavignette. He comes to it progressively in the epoch of the independencies, making the role of the recreators of African values accidental and due to a social category born in Africa, but absolutely marginal. He attributes an exaggerated historic contribution to the group that crossed the frontier of Atlantic commerce represented by the assimilated, the mulattoes and the cultural mestizos in general.

There is something still more serious and I refer once more to the written sources and in this case to the speech President Senghor gave in Dakar in 1970 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Senegal's independence. We are invited, and it is an absolutely unedited invitation in the process of cultural renaissance, simply to con-

sider the episode of the conquest of Africa as the starting point for all that is essential. In a word, colonization, Senghor writes contrary to what Césaire says, is history and not a simple accident. We exist beginning with the moment in which European and French political and economic domination supplied our arms and awakened our intelligence.

No responsible people can determine, as an objective, to reproduce the history of a nation — however close — and much less sum up its own history, through the vision, the subjectivity, the biases of its conquerors.

Very well, this is also one of the roads travelled by the ideology of negritude.

Senghor wrote in his general report to the Congress of the Senegalese Progressive Union (UPS): "I should like for our people to appear like those of Athens." Well, it should be enough, in my opinion, for us to appear as Kayorians, Mandingas or Foutankes, to do and be what we dream of doing and being. "I propose to the V Congress, the Greek people as the ideal." Perhaps it would have been wiser to refer to our democratic and intellectual tradition, which is certainly rich, to summarize, illustrate, and defend it by offering the Fouta of the great builder that Abdel Kader was (if for example we dream with order and organization) or the democratic Kayor of Damel Maadior, who embodied both the most vibrant solicitude toward the man of the people and the strictest respect before the Kayorian law.

Recently, and long after the echos of the Festival of Algiers, Senghor confessed to Paris Dakar an opinion of the same nature, speaking of Senegalese-Guinean relations.

I believe that a nation that wishes to go against the current of its history cannot win. [...]

It is evident that Guinea cannot renounce its history, the history of French colonization. Sékou Touré is still conscious of it. And this is the reason, I believe, he has always wanted to renew political, cultural, economic relations with France. We are four Francophonic countries. Objectively, the maintenance of good relations with France helps our development, even more since we believe in the cultural value of the language and of French culture.

Sékou Touré, interviewed by *Jeune Afrique* in the same period in which Senghor gave his opinion on the history of Guinea, was certainly to give an indirect but fairly clear answer concerning the options of the people of Guinea and one which contrasts with the opinion of his Senegalese friend. I cite it. It gives the tone of the Festival of Algiers and permits a better judgment of the event. Sékou Touré's words, in effect, constitute a global reply to the projection of negritude.

It is a fact that they speak of Francophonia. But tomorrow the generations of Africa will recognize this aberration. Certain men have denied our history, our civilization, and have organized Francophonia at great cost, instead of proceeding to make our masses literate, our cultural wealth of value; they have opted for the other road. If what they did in Niamey is history, history will record the fact and perhaps condemn it.

He answered the question: What do you think of negritude?: "Negritude is not a historic concept as far as we are concerned."

Evidently Senghor is very far from Césaire's view of the same problem. The author of *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Notes on Returning Home) wrote of Guinea and of the history of the people of Guinea: "Colonization is the ac-

cident, [...] The role of the historian is to realize the double continuity broken by colonization, continuity with the world, continuity with ourselves."

What Césaire says very well fits current practice in the nations, the normal perception of history. The study of history operates in the same manner in all nations conscious of themselves.

And we return in effect to the basis of the debate in Algiers on the opposition between an African renaissance that comes from within and the whimsicality of extroversion and dilution in the universe of the conqueror; the opposition between the rediscovery of our world and a construction that culminates in the dispossession of our world.

In effect, there is at present no nation free in its elections and conscious of its responsibilities that refuses in its schools or in its efforts, to define a culture and an identity of its own without reference primarily to its own cultural instruments and to its own past in order to give a sense of its history and its destiny. The entire drama of the Afro-Americans traumatized by the rupture with their history, proceeds from this. Thus in the black society of the United States, instead of being able to endow himself with an authentic black history, of which the black in the United States is ignorant, and oppose the Anglo-Saxon pretense of being the only ones with the history and chosen culture, the most enlightened segments of the Afro-American movement turn in desperation to experiments in Judaism or Islam without being either Jews or actually Black Muslims. They simply try to tie themselves to a past that will not uproot them from the Indo-European and Saxon hegemony that controls the North American capitalist apparatus. The desperation of the black North American and his impotence has its roots in the impossibility of finding anew, through his own cultural in-



struments and his own vision of the world and of history, a cultural base that legitimizes his claims to make or remake the world too. Thus he seeks to cloak himself in the authority of prestigious non-Saxon cultures which, however, are foreign to him. And all this because he is unable to elevate the art of Pharos, the stature of Ife and the empire of Mali.

It is not only the inverted history and the Latinized Africanism that concerns one in the theoretical effort and in the policy of the proponents of negritude.

The great paradox is all this display of our educational, political, diplomatic apparatus with the motto of negritude and the values of black civilization in the service of Francophonía and French cultural hegemony.

#### **Significance of the Ideology: Negritude is an Ideology of Dispossession**

The Senghorian vision of negritude has not been nourished only by the irrational European sources of 1936. Separated from the literary field, it has become an apologia for conversion. Through the teaching of negritude and the illustration of African values of civilization, Senghor develops a strategy of appendage to the cultural, economic and political empire of the West and particularly of France.

The imperial hegemony will happily come to an agreement with us provided we agree to model ourselves on it, assimilate it, be the consumers of its language, its cultural values, its products. Francophonía proposes nothing more than to convert us in order to extend its light, in detriment to the peoples and the nations that agree to strip themselves of their own being, their own culture.

This conversion to the worn-out model of a capitalist European society that is bourgeois and contradictory, is nevertheless presented

as an effort at renewal. Well, it is simply enslavement, the refusal to take on fully an international revolution that readjusts our societies to the modern world on the basis of their achievements and their own dynamism. The ideology of negritude is the dispossession of the black African universe.

It is not surprising that this structure which leads to the absence of a national policy of education and of national culture in Senegal, met with the most insistent reservations in Algiers.

#### **Negritude is the Ideology of a Caste**

Negritude's perspectives require a cultural resistance.

The appearance of a theory with perspectives similar to those that explicitly or implicitly surround the practice and the theory of negritude, is not a chance occurrence.

This ideology is that of an elite whose bases are not so narrow and whose roots are not so superficial as we might have believed.

It is the expression of the interests and the world view of a group that has ramifications in Africa and in an elite in the black Diaspora, and on which the model and force of the exterior exercises a very strong fascination.

The ideology of negritude, on all essential points, is the design of a social faction closely allied to specific interests.

In Senegalese society and among the black intellectual mercenaries, there exists a social category and elements for whom the ideology of negritude is a necessity, an instrument of control, the political-economic call of their countries of origin or adoption, a means of manipulating the black world in the name of the black. The extroverted elite allied to the colonial and neo-colonial apparatus, who aspire to nothing more than being assimilated or assimilating themselves into

the bourgeois and alienated culture of Europe, are perfectly happy; today of course they refer to the technical assistance which, in effect, rules in the ministries, an aid to conveniently discarding their interests for those of France, more or less like the Senegalese who is technician, political man, intellectual and businessman. The ideology of negritude, which has wreaked havoc in Senegal, does not define a policy of cultural renaissance. It is the theory of an extroverted elite that joins its interests to those of a foreign hegemony. It is of no interest to the people. It does not give them the possibility of defining the modern and efficient culture that concerns them. Because of a school and a political-administrative apparatus that raises linguistic barriers inherited from the colonial system, it does not facilitate the participation of the people in their own liberation, in their own progress. Consequently it answers very badly the preoccupation touched on in Algiers.

I will be brief concerning the failure of this ideology to define a national economic interval. It would be necessary to have another debate on this theme which preoccupied the conference in Algiers.

It is enough to note the inability of the Senegalese economic apparatus — conceived as an aid to the French system on every level (monetary, on the evaluation of the franc of the French Community of Africa, CFA; commercial, predominantly with the same French capital; industrial, market of products), the smashing of a true bourgeoisie and of a truly national productive apparatus — to put the finger on the weaknesses of the ideology of development that negritude seeks to be. The economy of a nation must, in the first place, benefit its citizens. But everything there is thought of in terms of the interests of the French economic agent and

a few figureheads that he baptizes Senegalese capitalists.

I should conclude by saying that the film makers in Algiers had reason to affirm that one of the first tasks in the entire effort of renovation and renaissance had to be the liquidation of the alienation of the elites and of the complex of the colonized accomplice that inhibits the ideologists of negritude. The complex of the colonized that inhibits the African elite, deforms their view of the world, enslaves and makes servile their whim of autonomy, must be liquidated.

The complex of the colonized is the attitude of the petite bourgeoisie, wasting away, segregated by the colonial apparatus and fearful of all change. They bear within them the stigmas of a mediocrity and a lack of ambition that is often expressed in surprising areas. When the Africans become aware of the difference in technical knowledge between their societies and those of their conquerors, they attribute this contrast to a congenital superiority: they react blindly. They express the complex of the colonized.

Certainly before colonization there was no SICAP or building administration, we had no cars, there were no titles of doctor, no assistants, no stainless steel needles, etc., but it is reacting in a servile manner to believe that the appearance of all this is tied to a necessary and beneficent domination.

Africa is a rich continent. She gave birth to Europe and the Orient from the Nile. Her history didn't start to make itself felt until the 16th century. Because of her human and economic potential, she is today one of the most richly endowed areas of the world. Our problems are political; it is simply a question of freeing a power concerned with the interests of the African communities, in order to build, on the basis of modern science, societies and cultures as rich as those of North America, China and Japan.

The black must stop blowing himself up in negritude when he thinks, on the other hand, that the order of the white colonizer, the conquistador and bourgeois western view is the only possibility for survival.

It is evidently necessary to provide the Senegalese and Africans anew with a confidence in their destiny, the conviction that they themselves are able to construct their own world without any help other than themselves and world science.

The effort at renaissance must be oriented in specific directions. We must define political, economic and cultural space in Africa that provides favorable relationships of strength, and the basis for the liberty and prosperity of the African peoples free of all outside hegemony. This implies the construction of multinational and multiracial societies on the basis of a vanguard social system.

A coherent political and economic space must be the cornerstone of African civilization, open to the world, but primarily concerned with the African heritage, cultural instruments and the diversity of African cultures. We want a Nigeria with its Ibo, Hausa, Yoruba or Kanuri cultures adapted to modernism and progressively unified into powerful nations on the basis of the Nigerian historic heritage, and not on the basis of that of the English or Britannia.

The Senegalese nation's vocation is to speak Wolof. Not to speak Arab or French. It will be that much easier to build, realizing that through the Wolof culture's vocation of uniting people that have an identical cultural base, there can emerge freely the Mandinga, Diola, Pulaar or Berber components that are a part of it. West Africa from inside can progressively construct great civilizations around certain cultural linguistic poles: Mandinga, Yoruba-Ibo, Arabic, Hausa, Swahili. Lingala. The Bantu group has

defined for itself language and a civilization that concern a population three or four times more important than that of France and the Francophonics. We must work for political and cultural space that goes beyond the ethnic and tribal. Pan-African reality is concretely stated also. But it would be a betrayal to found our unity on the basis of foreign languages or cultures, on the basis of racial or religious considerations starting from compromises made between exploitative elites and foreign interests.

Above all it is not necessary for the construction of a nation to rest simply on the sterile exaltation of the past, of folklore, of exoticism and of death values. The past can mobilize the masses when it is a question of popular and democratic institutions. The symbols, systems and literatures of the past do not interest us further than the extent to which they stimulate the imagination of the creator, a revolutionary art that strengthens the authority and prestige of mass cultures with a universal appeal. One need not turn one's back on African civilizations nor on the historic accident of race. Neither is the problem to weaken oneself in a passive contemplation of dead values or to abandon oneself to an aggressive racism; nevertheless it is necessary to defend the black, the yellow or the white wherever he is threatened because of the color of his skin. In Senegal as in Rhodesia, in Brazil as in Burma, the black minorities are legitimate as communities of culture, demanding within the framework of nations in formation that they be offered a power that protects them, institutions that serve as a bulwark of security for all minorities, white or yellow, whether or not they identify with the religious or philosophic conditions. It is a fact that the black suffers a double alienation. He is exploited by a capitalist system



from which the white masses, even those alienated, draw more benefits than the blacks concentrated in the ghettos. At the same time the black, maltreated because of his race and his culture, has the right to defend himself within the framework of a people's pan-negrism, a revolutionary pan-negrism. The essence of the problem continues to be political.

In its present formulation, negritude will not be able to resolve the problems that exist in Africa. It leads us no further than to a state of an exiled people unreconciled even with themselves. It is not negritude that will bring about the renaissance of our smashed cultures.

Our civilizations are our languages, our intimate myths, and those nonvisible forces that identify authenticity and that we can call the spirit of a people.

Some cultures make internal innovations, changing from within their content and their symbols; they make their own history. The history of cultural rebirth, as Jacques Berque very well states in *L'Orient Second*, is not a reedition of the new. It works as an act of rebellion that reconquers and remolds the past in a fundamental form comparable to that vital depression of which the biologists speak. And Jacques Berque adds that "the progressive European of today is the accomplice of this rebellion." A violent reaction against the assimilationism of negritude is necessary; that is to say that against the stammerings of the picturesque and exotic, a popular, democratic and modern culture must be opposed.

Negritude, finally, means just one thing: that it is always easier to sell oneself to one's conqueror than to invent one's own instruments of liberation. But our destiny is something we ourselves must continue strengthening by our own methods.

It would be betrayal of ourselves to create the opposite. The intellectual youth at the Festival of Algiers debated freely the political and cultural future of the continent, they did not stand up against black or African values of civilization. They opposed the loss of self that a simple conversion, a simple dilution in the sphere of influence, in the universe and cultural instruments of the foreigner, would represent; they stood up and will again stand up against any theory that hides behind the mantle of negritude or of the Arabness whose consequences would amount to our dispossession in the world, our impoverishment and the annihilation of the civilizations of the world. It will be successful if it refuses to be annexed to foreign hegemonies and if it accepts as its responsibility, with progressive perspectives, the cultural heritage of which the masses exploited by the local and foreign bourgeoisie, are still the depository.

A new ideology is necessary, attentive to the interests of the continent, for the world today is a universe of great political, economic and cultural capacities. For this reason the progressive elite must be conscious of an international solidarity that unites their fate to that of all peoples. But in order to be effective and to contribute concretely to the evolution of the world, they must first move toward constructing policies in Africa that serve their culture and their vision of the world. In this sense, the Pan-African idea put forward in Algiers constitutes a basis for work. Pan-Africanism has known vicissitudes. But Africa can continue fighting for a continental civilization. Perhaps even then we have to dream of a people's Pan-Africanism that cuts off the traditional Pan-Africanism of the elite. This goes beyond race and culture, but assumes them first of all as realities on which we must act in order to construct a humanism.