

**Publics, Counterpublics, Black Publics:
The Growth of a Negritude Public in the Twentieth Century**

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Overview of the Book

“One would say that negritude is now dead.”¹
Obiajunwa Wali, 1963

“The most obvious aspect of the literature of negritude is its revolutionary character.”²
Abiola Irele, 1964

“Today I want to hammer down the nail on the lid of the dead orphan called Négritude.”³
Andrew Aba, 1976

There are few guarantees for an idea’s endurance as certain as regular demands for its demise. Since Black intellectuals first conceptualized distinctive varieties of internationalism in Paris during the 1920s, and among them some coined the term negritude in 1935 to name one of them, opponents have queued up to perform the funerary rites. Alternately a philosophy, aesthetic, politics, and much else across its near-century of circulation, negritude has inspired equally devoted resurrectionists. Notoriously difficult to pin down, countless thinkers have formulated and continue to propose their own understandings of the concept. One possible unifying thread for twentieth-century negritudinists would be an emphasis on the particularity of an African and African-descendant “civilization” and its potential to remake humanism. It might seem surprising that such a proposition could fuel continuous debate. Acrimony, though, has always been the mother of intellectual invention.⁴

This book project initially emerged by stringing together the greatly exaggerated reports of negritude’s death and noticing some patterns. One is that while the debate about negritude remains uninterrupted, its meaning has not been. Successive contestations transformed the idea during the pinnacle years of its expansion: from a liberal humanist emphasis during the 1940s-late 1950s, to a project of global Black consciousness by the 1960s, to an African ideology of soft power by the 1970s. Another constellation reveals an international formation of Black intellectuals who effected this transformation across the francophone, anglophone, lusophone, and hispanophone world – especially those situated in the former two. These individuals – publishers like Alioune and Christiane Yandé Diop, academics like John Davis and Adelaide Cromwell, artists and public intellectuals like Abiola Irele and Ben Enwonwu, among many others – forged the strongest nodes of this francophone-anglophone network between Senegal, Nigeria, France, and the United States. All were affiliated in varying degrees with the iconic vehicle of negritude’s dissemination: the journal/publishing house *Présence africaine*, founded in 1947.

¹ Obiajunwa Wali, “The Dead End of African Literature?” *Transition* no. 10 (Sept. 1963): 13.

² Abiola Irele, “A Defence of Negritude,” *Transition* no. 13 (1964): 9.

³ Andrew Aba, “FESTAC 77 and Senghor’s Negritude,” *Sunday Standard*, July 11, 1976, 5–6.

⁴ Randall Collins, “On the Acrimoniousness of Intellectual Disputes,” *Common Knowledge* 8, no. 1 (2002): 47

The remaining patterns, however, only fully emerge once we look beyond the archive of printed disputes toward that of institutions and states. Negritude's unprecedented midcentury expansion was made possible not only by its interlocutors, but a flow of material capital that enabled it to become one of the most globally recognizable forms of Black thought. Across the long moment of decolonization and the cold war, many states invested in "culture" as a means of wielding soft power in a new geopolitical order – not least in Africa and its diaspora. After the Second World War, subventions from all of the above four states were key to fortifying negritude into a movement of stable growth and immense reach. Some, like France and the United States, proffered funds out of imperial motives while others, like postcolonial Senegal and Nigeria, did so out of pan-Africanist ambitions. Negritude's non-state enthusiasts and challengers were not mere pawns in this struggle, and the story of negritude's expansion is also tied to their resistance to statist projects. Yet the range of responses to statist entanglement laid down a consequential legacy in the Black public sphere.

Put this tessellation together, and you get the central premise of my book: that negritude's evolution compels us to reckon with new histories of Black thought and of public spheres. Firstly, tracking negritude's intellectual transformation and institutional expansion has much to teach us about the contestations over African-anchored conceptions of Blackness. Before the Second World War, negritude was the avant-garde watchword of a small coterie of metropolitan African and Caribbean elites. Afterwards, it became "the pivotal *African* statement on which everyone had a position," whose dissemination was directed by Africans foremost, in institutions radiating from the continent outward.⁵ Negritudinists often proclaimed that decolonization had shifted the intellectual center of gravity within the "Negro-African" public sphere away from the diaspora and toward the continent. Even as African negritude enthusiasts failed to grapple with their own status as metropolitan-traversing elites, their tensions and collaborations with diasporic collaborators provide a unique perspective on the asymmetries of the Black international.

Secondly, I argue this history can also push us to reconceptualize the way we understand public spheres – that slippery term used to describe the arenas of literal or discursive assembly where communities gather to debate shared concerns. Contending with negritude's legacies allows us to challenge theories of public spheres that conceive of them as necessarily autonomous from the state. The intellectual and structural dimensions of this history provide a window into a period when it seemed that Africa would become the literal, and not merely figurative, heart of the Black public sphere. Journals like *Présence africaine* were later followed by ones such as Nigeria's *Black Orpheus*; *Présence's* first gathering on "Negro-African culture" in 1956 inaugurated a continual series of them across West Africa, while the Society of African Culture founded that same year in Dakar and Paris immediately inspired chapters in Lagos and New York. Every one of these and numerous other ventures received substantial financing from state authorities. According to the canonical theories of Jürgen Habermas and Pierre Bourdieu, intellectual cultures develop into spheres or fields as conditions emerge which facilitate their autonomy from the state. Negritude's trajectory during the transition from a colonial to a postcolonial Black public sphere, therefore, however, compels us to move beyond an expectation that there exists a sanitized public sphere beyond bureaucratization or commodification. It illuminates the central role which states have always played in the crystallization of public spheres and pushes us instead to reckon with why intellectuals become attached to "autonomy" even in the face of its structural impossibility.

⁵ Italics my own. Peter S. Thompson, "Negritude and a New Africa: An Update" *Research in African Literatures* 33, no. 4 (2002): 149- 50.

Chapter One: Publics, Counterpublics, Black Publics

In 1996, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o concluded “the creative state of art is always at war, actually or potentially, with the crafty art of the state.”⁶ This wasn’t always believed to be so. In fact, for most of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, it was a minority opinion amongst intellectuals in Africa and its diaspora. This chapter tells the story of how that changed: how the state and the public were opposed to one another and how full autonomy was framed as the desirable relation between them. The history of negritude’s institutional expansion offers an especially useful entryway into this story, since it was part of the historical process which initiated that transformation in the first place.

Negritude was known by, at most, two dozen Black Parisians when it was first coined in the later 1930s. By the next decade and a half, the variously defined concept of Black humanism was at the core of a network of institutions that included journals, publishing houses, and cultural societies. This would not have been possible without state sponsorship and subvention, which was provided first by France and the United States and later Senegal and Nigeria. Negritude’s trajectory during the transition from a colonial to a postcolonial period, therefore, might be assumed to provide a case study into conditions of autonomy and heteronomy in public spheres. However, a common equivocation between colonial/heteronomous and postcolonial/autonomous perpetuates false assumptions about the conditions of African and diasporic public spheres. As we shall see, there was no single moment where something like full autonomy from the state was ever achieved. Indeed, “the autonomy/heteronomy binary effectively mystifies the role of the state-influenced institution that provides the material resources for the production of...knowledge.”⁷

⁶ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 10.

⁷ Stephen Shapiro, “Intellectual Labor Power, Cultural Capital, and the Value of Prestige,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108, no. 2 (2009): 254.

The second mistaken construction of heteronomy/autonomy has evolved from the now voluminous literature of the “cultural” cold war.⁸ These histories have been instrumental in demonstrating the full range of neo-imperial ambitions among cold warriors, especially American. The Central Intelligence Agency’s activities tactics of surveillance or clandestine subvention of both African and African American intellectuals provides a sobering portrait of American cold war imperialism.⁹ Thus for most cold war specialists, the twentieth century represents not the dawn of a newly possible autonomy, but the American state’s duplicitous subversion of the Black public sphere’s independence. Juliana Spahr, for example, argues that the CIA “belittled...more resistant and autonomous literatures such as Negritude” because it was not caught up in its moneyed headwinds.¹⁰ Not only does evidence of clandestine CIA subvention of negritudinists overturn this assumption, but it also challenges the cold war exceptionalist logic which underpins it. Rather than viewing the cold war as a heteronomous exception to an otherwise autonomous rule, we should consider whether the state of exception was not in fact the state of affairs. Negritude’s ascension to newfound visibility and

⁸ For a sampling of this now vast literature, see: Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989); Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, transl. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999); Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA, and Post-war American Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2002); Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (London: Harvard University Press, 2008). Andrew Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁹ On the impact upon African American publics see: Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Lawrence P. Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934- 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Mary Helen Washington, *The Other Blacklist: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Vaughan Rasberry, *Race and the Totalitarian Century: Geopolitics in the Black Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016). For the much smaller African literature: Peter Kalliney, “Modernism, African Literature, and the Cold War,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2015): 333-358; Asha Rogers, “Black Orpheus and the African Magazines of the Congress for Cultural Freedom,” in *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War*, ed. Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte Lerg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 243-259; Nathan Suhr-Sytsma, *Poetry, Print, and the Making of Postcolonial Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2020).

¹⁰ Juliana Spahr, *Du Bois’s Telegram: Literary Resistance and State Containment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 105.

distribution by the later twentieth century asks us not to definitively settle the question of autonomy, but to inquire why intellectuals were once conceptually attached to it.

In the whistle-stop tour of print publics that follows, I begin by tracing their historical origins in nineteenth-century West Africa. I start here not merely because this region formed the continental basis for negritudinalists' later twentieth-century operations. Rather, beginning in the nineteenth century allows us to situate negritude's innovations in longer patterns of continuity and rupture in African and Black public spheres. The second section focuses on the early twentieth-century when negritude first emerged, and here I concentrate on West African developments specifically to provide a context that often goes missing in typical studies of the movement which concentrate on metropolitan Paris alone. In this section, I show how transformations in liberal thought enabled a shift in the conceptualization of the proper relationship of publics to the state, in which a kernel of autonomy was believed to be desirable. In the final section, I complete the history of negritude's transformation into the twentieth century during the high cold war and after it, evaluating how autonomy from the state came to be enshrined as a public ideal. Throughout, I retain a continuous comparison between anglophone and francophone West Africa in order to overturn tendencies to analyze them separately. While the risk of an aggregate, comparative analyses will always overlook important particulars, retaining this comparative dimension offers important insights. Moreover, doing so follows the example of negritude's subjects, in line with the francophone-anglophone project negritude later became.

Publics in Nineteenth Century Africa

The recent revival of public sphere theory amongst Africanists has given rise to new ways of interpreting African intellectual life. In the classic Habermasian definition, publics can be understood as arenas distinct from both the market and the state, where people gather figuratively (e.g. by reading

or writing film reviews) or literally (e.g. in film clubs) to engage in debate over shared concerns.¹¹ The reason we have publics at all, according to Habermas, is due to the social transformation initiated by capitalism, which detached intellectual life from prior dependence on the state and created a bourgeois class of intellectuals. This group managed to fashion a new form of “publicity,” (the publicness of representation) whose ideals (if not their practice) were defined as: 1) accessibility; that is, the public sphere was upheld by an ideal of universal access to all wherein social differences could be bracketed 2) openness; that is, membership was conferred not on status or class position, but on equal footing as a reasoning participant.

Habermas’s account is rife with the tension between explaining the contingent historical development of publics on the one hand and delineating a normative set of its practices and features on the other. Like others, I find his normative claims about democracy, modernity, and publicity both mistaken and uninteresting. Inevitably, as a historian, I am more concerned with thinking through the contingent historical processes that gave rise to publics and coming to terms with why such idealized conceptions of public spheres came to be articulated. These conditions have been described as: the materiality of circulation (such as communication infrastructures, the physical tools of production and distribution, or the physical spaces of reception), modes of addressivity that convened participants (personal/impersonal, multilingual, etc.) scenes of performativity (from self-positioning to performed readings and beyond), rhythms of temporality (punctual, irregular, etc.), and finally, coercion from imperial states (whether via censorship, surveillance, or other means).¹²

Of these, it is typically coercive control that captures attention when it comes to analyzing publics in Africa. While it is commonly assumed that censorship dominated West African intellectual production, this is far from the case. The British Colonial Office prided its approach to press freedom

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, transl. Thomas Burger, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 27.

¹² Special issue: “Colonial Public Spheres and the Worlds of Print,” *Itinerario* 44, no 2 (2020): 227-470.

as the distinguishing feature of its own liberal imperialism.¹³ Even among the more notoriously interventionist French, cases of censorship were rare until the late 1940s.¹⁴ Of course both imperial powers created differential legislation governing the printing and circulation of material in the metropole versus the colony and both also surveilled nineteenth century West African publics. However, the initial lack of overt intervention was intended to sustain an image of enlightened imperialism – whether the British liberal variant of absence from interference, or the French liberal-republican style of state patrimony. Instead, both pursued covert means of punishing “sedition” and ensuring a loyalist public in print, which could include, even if rarely, include offers of payment in exchange for sympathetic articles.¹⁵ As a result, West African anonymity and self-censorship were the most common practices to navigate the strictures of colonial publics, the latter of which can still be felt in *Présence africaine*’s earliest issues in the 1940s.

Without a doubt, states in the colonial period and after it shaped the structures of African publics. Yet, as we are rightfully reminded by Emma Hunter and Leslie James, though the “sharply unequal power relations” imposed by imperial powers are significant, “they also were – and remain – features of many noncolonial settings.”¹⁶ An emphasis on coercion or other unfree conditions as the defining feature of colonial publics implies that “free” publics existed elsewhere or at other times and posits Africa as a heteronomous exception. Already we can appreciate that “independence” from the state is not a necessary condition for the emergence of publics. West Africans understood full well the restrictions placed upon them by colonial powers, yet they wrote for newspapers or founded

¹³ Stephanie Newell, “Paradoxes of Press Freedom in Colonial West Africa,” *Media History* 22, no. 1 (2016): 101-122.

¹⁴ Hans Lüsebrink, “L’espace public colonial et la censure-recherche de traces en Afrique occidentale française,” *Présence Francophone* no. 51 (1997): 97-115.

¹⁵ Stephanie Newell, *The Power to Name: A History of Anonymity in West Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2013). On payment as a tactic specifically see: Hans Lüsebrink, *La Conquête de l’espace public colonial: Prises de parole et forms de participation d’écrivains et d’intellectuels africains dans la presse à l’époque coloniale (1900-1960)* (Frankfurt am Main: IKO-Verlag, 2003), 35.

¹⁶ Emma Hunter and Leslie James, “Introduction: Colonial Public Spheres and the Worlds of Print,” *Itinerario* 44, no 2 (2020): 236.

intellectual societies anyway. The fact that they did so was not indicative of some inexorable democratic logic embedded in public spheres. Rather, it was suggestive of patterns of social and economic transformation that caused something like publics appear to possess qualities of accessibility and openness.

For Habermas, publics came into existence within eighteenth century Europe because capital unhitched cultural life from the patronage system of nobility, monarchy, and the Church. Intellectual discourse, performances, etc. became purchasable as commodities, which is what enabled the appearance of their “accessibility” – even if, as we know, numerous conditions restricted such “openness.” Moreover, this new obtainability of cultural products also enabled a belief in the democratic possibility of publics: if intellectual life was available simply by the purchase of a ticket, say, then one could pen a review of a play without membership in a specific class or social group. As Karin Barber has shown in the nineteenth-century West African case, a similar pattern of cultural genres like Yoruba praise singers, for instance, became independent of courtly patrons when they could attract a fee-paying public for their performances.¹⁷ Commercialization did not just release old genres from a restricted social or political circle, however, but also fed an immense creativity to fashion new publics that could find success in an expanding market.¹⁸

Publics signified a new, distinctive kind of audience that was brought together by such marketplaces of ideas, “whose members are not known to the speaker/composer of the text, and not necessarily present, but still addressed simultaneously, and imagined as a collectivity.”¹⁹ This “stranger sociability” is key to understanding how publics operate.²⁰ It was particularly appealing in nineteenth century West African contexts, where social life was often embedded in vertical patron-client

¹⁷ Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons, and Publics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁸ For instance: Karin Barber, *Print Culture and the First Yoruba Nobel* (Boston: Brill, 2012); Isabel Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

¹⁹ Barber, *Anthropology of Texts*, 139.

²⁰ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Zone Books: New York, 2005)

relationships, whether indigenous or imperial. When used effectively, this sociability could weld together multilingual, multiethnic, and intergenerational communities into “West African” collectives and “Negro” ones.²¹ Or it could be employed to draw in a “base” of populist support, which could then demonstrate to colonial authorities that a political party or social group enjoyed the widespread support of “the public.”²²

If we take the example of choice for historians of print culture and nationalism alike, West African newspaper contributors and editors repeatedly proclaimed their pages as harbingers of a “new, participatory style of politics” that welded together religious communities, ethnic groups, and social classes in previously unprecedented ways.²³ By proposing to speak on behalf of “public opinion,” these writers often desired public spheres which had greater state-backed decision-making authority, not less. As Stephanie Newell has pointed out, their utopian beliefs in citizenship, democracy, and modernity can read like Habermas at his most prescriptive.

Rather than dismissing this utopian liberalism as misguided or self-interested, however, Newell proposes that we can follow it to trace the development of new social imaginaries and formations. Even for skeptics who reject the term public sphere because the coercive conditions of colonial intellectual life “diverged from the Habermasian outlines in nearly every way,” appreciating publics as meaningful to subjects preserves it as a category of practice, at the very least.²⁴ Yet I still want to insist that public is a useful category of analysis. The précis outlined above conveys the analytical purchase of public spheres as formations made possible by transitions to a commercialized intellectual economy, sharing features of addressivity and stranger sociability, but with variable contextual expressions. I

²¹ For an example in British West Africa see Philip Zachernuk, *An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (London: University Press of Virginia, 2000); for a French West African example: Wesley Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal: The Struggle for Power in the Four Communes, 1900-1920* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971).

²² Karin Barber, “A Conversation: Revisiting Publics and Counterpublics,” *Itinerario* 44, no 2 (2020): 259.

²³ Newell, *Power to Name*, 38.

²⁴ Tobias Warner, *The Tongue-Tied Imagination: Decolonizing Literary Modernity in Senegal* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 274.

argue that as an analytical tool we can use it to grapple with a persistent (though of course not universal) liberalism that characterized the emergence of publics. In other words, we can analyze the structural transformation of *liberal* public spheres.

By this I mean neither that all publics are liberal, still less that West African or Black publics were especially so. Print publics of all kinds of ideological stripe in West Africa and beyond thrived in the nineteenth century and beyond it. But it is notable to observe the regularity with which liberal ideals were championed during this period; it would “not do to dissolve this remarkable regularity [into] pluralized discursive formations.”²⁵ African Victorians, much like their Indian counterparts, employed liberal thought in order to stake claims as aspirational imperial citizens.²⁶ So, too, did the *originaires*, the inhabitants of the only regions within French West Africa who were accorded (limited) citizenship status under France’s Third Republic.²⁷ Insisting upon their status as “Black Englishmen” or “Black Frenchmen,” these claims were made on the basis of an expansive notion of English or French *national* identity inclusive of race; which then accorded political rights. Imperial states, however, instituted a division between nationality and citizenship which doubled down on the racial exclusivity of race, creating lasting barriers to full political rights. This horizon of political inclusion into the imperial state would endure into the twentieth century even as its inflections shifted significantly, as negritudinalists remapped the nation/race/citizenship coordinates onto a political language anchored in culture.

²⁵ Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 41.

²⁶ Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming imperial citizens: Indians in the late Victorian empire* (London: Duke University Press, 2010). Adelaide Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist: The Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford 1848-1960* (London: Frank Cass, 1986).

²⁷ Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, “Nationalité et Citoyenneté en Afrique Occidentale Française: Originaires et Citoyens dans le Sénégal Colonial,” *Journal of African History* 42, no. 2 (2001): 285-305.

Toward a “Negro-African” Public: Negritude in the Early Twentieth Century

In contrast to prior decades of press freedom, British and French officials clamped down on publics beginning in the 1920s and continuing through to the 1980s. They justified their actions on the basis of alleged Communist infiltration, since most imperial officials believed Black peoples, especially “uneducated” West Africans, were especially vulnerable to outside agitation. Surveillance was pervasive in the colony as well as the metropole, where thick archival police records testify to the extent of metropolitan insecurity for Black students, and above all for migrant workers.²⁸ The cold war thus began in Africa and its diaspora long before its conventional periodization in 1946.²⁹ For Phyllis Taoua, this repressive atmosphere explains negritudist’s early quiescence during its coinage in 1930s Paris, though we can see how it may have been in keeping with a longer practice of self-censorship observed earlier.³⁰ Yet it might be more useful to think about the specific ways that increased state incursion reshaped liberal Black publics.

That incursion was not just to be found in the surveillance state, but in the state’s acceleration of education provision. At the turn of the century, colonial departments of education across West Africa were established to standardize – and control – the formation of a literate elite. Perceived as one of the central institutions for the social reproduction of publics, it is unsurprising that classrooms may have become a lynchpin of debate. Drawing from interwar social anthropology, a new crop of liberal colonial administrators across Britain and France argued that prior assimilation policies had tragically sundered colonial subjects from the traditions which gave their lives social cohesion. Thus,

²⁸ Philippe Dewitte, *Les mouvements nègres en France, 1915-1939* (Paris: Harmattan, 1985); Newell, “Paradoxes of Press Freedom.”

²⁹ David Killingray and Richard Rathbone, “Introduction,” in *Africa and the Second World War*, edited by David Killingray and Richard Rathbone (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 1–19.

³⁰ Phyllis Taoua, *Forms of Protest: Anti-Colonialism and Avant-Gardes in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002).

it was necessary to install an associationist educational policy to allow “natives” to gradually develop within their own rich “civilizations.”³¹

Liberal, progressive colonial administrators championed an “adapted education,” one that replaced classical instruction with greater emphasis upon “practical subjects of all kinds – manual work, agriculture, hygiene.”³² Administrators like Robert Delavignette, for example, a close friend of Léopold Senghor’s and Chief of the Overseas National Schools, argued that “traditional” African societies represented basic units of political organization, similar to premodern French rural communities. He insisted that the French colonial project should be based not on notions of national (*qua* racial) purity but admixture, and he pushed his proposed reforms as the first steps in realizing a humanism of future Franco-African civilizational *métissage*.³³ Some Black and African elites celebrated this newfound respect for indigenous cultures, while others argued the reforms were subtle efforts to disenfranchise them by widening even further the gap between *nationalité* and full citizenship.³⁴

Francophone West African authors wrote in to voice their own views on the matter regularly between 1920-50.³⁵ This outpouring was not limited to the subject of education, however, but included ethnography, essays, and beyond. It is notable, in fact, that the origins of specialist periodicals for “intellectuals,” in which such contributions appeared, were initially intended for instructors, like the *Bulletin de l’Enseignement de l’Afrique Occidentale Française*. If the first generation of Black counterpublics developed amongst student ranks in metropolitan and colonial France, as we saw in the last chapter, its second generation would be marked by the professorial tones of these newly graduated instructors.

³¹ Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Benoît de L’Estoile, “Au nom des « vrais Africains,” *Terrain* 28 (1997): <http://terrain.revues.org/3173>

³² André Davesne quoted in *Contesting French West Africa: Battles over Schools and the Colonial Order, 1900–1950* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 109.

³³ On both Delavignette and Senghor’s closely aligned thinking on the relationship between the *patrie*, nation, and state see Etienne Smith, “‘Senghor voulait qu’on soit tous des Senghor,’ Parcours nostalgique d’une génération des lettres,” *Vingtième Siècle* 2, no. 118 (2013): 90-91 and Véronique Dimier, “For a Republic ‘Diverse and Indivisible?’ France’s Experience from the Colonial Past,” *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 1 (2004): 63.

³⁴ Gamble, *Contesting French West Africa*, 125-158.

³⁵ Hans Lüsebrink, *La Conquête de l’espace public colonial*.

By 1947 it was this “literature of schoolteachers” in the francophone West African press, not the ephemeral interwar Black Parisian periodicals, to whom Senghor attributed the origins of a nascent “Negro-African” public.³⁶

Interestingly, he applauded the achievements of these instructors “*alongside* the elite who came out of the ‘schools of chief’s sons.’”³⁷ I highlight this seemingly perfunctory acknowledgement of customary elites to pause over the significant social transformation of publics and society during the interwar years. If in the mid-late nineteenth century what was tantamount in convening West African publics was to gather ‘strangers’ into these new formations, by the early twentieth century competition developed over such a rival way of legitimating authority. As we know, imperially-appointed chiefs had premised their own authority upon access to indigenous knowledge, styled as a fixed, unchanging repertoire of “tradition” that was exercised in a web of reciprocal obligations with known subordinates. Chiefs and their allies could therefore take as much umbrage to “modern” educations as colonial administrators did.³⁸ As the latter crafted educational policies to cope with supposedly “de-racinated” or “de-tribalized” intellectuals alienated from their society, these same found themselves in a precarious position. Demonstrating broad-based popular support from their ‘publics’ was no longer a sound way to prove one’s authority, in contradistinction to chiefs. In fact, it was the very public-convening capacity of educated elites in swaying “unenlightened” masses which rendered them suspect to imperial states.³⁹

By rendering chiefly and educated elites as collaborators in the emergence of “Negro-African” social and intellectual life, Senghor endeavored to reclaim authority for both. The fact that he was still

³⁶ Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Afrique Noire,” in *Les plus beaux écrits de l’Union Française et du Maghreb* (Paris: Éditions du Vieux Colombier, 1947), 233.

³⁷ Italics my own. Ibid., 234.

³⁸ Saheed Aderinto, “Researching Colonial Childhoods: Images and Representations of Children in Nigerian Newspaper Press, 1925-1950,” *History in Africa* 39 (2012): 253.

³⁹ Newell, “Paradoxes of Press Freedom.”

addressing this crisis of “cultural development” in the late 1940s (as it came to be known), is suggestive of how long it persisted. Two public lectures at the Dakar Chamber of Commerce in 1937 given by Senghor and Ousmane Socé Diop, to overflow audiences of 2,000 people, encapsulated two responses to this problem which embody new definitions of culture and citizenship.⁴⁰ Socé (the surname he went by) and Senghor had been the recipients of rare scholarships to study in France, where they were part of interwar Black Parisian circles. Both took part in the foundation of the literary magazine in which the word *negritude* was first coined by Aimé Césaire, *L'étudiant noir*. They had excelled academically and were already-published writers by 1937, so their invitations from the Dakarois cultural association Foyer France-Senegal further verified their status as public intellectuals. By the time of their speeches, Socé had already returned to Senegal, where he would have a permanent intellectual and political career, while Senghor was on leave from his post as an instructor at a French lycée.

Delivered only three months apart, their speeches would be published and debated widely for years in the Dakar press. Criticizing the educational reforms that had shrunk African intellectual and professional opportunities, Socé argued against an “adapted education” for Africans. He insisted upon widespread education for both youth and adults, to close the gap in technical and economic knowledge with Europe.⁴¹ Elsewhere a fierce critic of “tribal” custom, Socé did however believe that “civilizations” like those of Senegal had redeeming qualities.⁴² Senghor took up the notion of a distinctive civilization more thoroughly in his speech, insisting upon what would become a *negritude* rallying cry – the restoration of “black values in their truth and excellence.”⁴³ Yet for Senghor, this

⁴⁰ For a close discussion of these two lectures see Gamble, *Contesting French West Africa*, 125-158.

⁴¹ Ousmane Socé, “Conférence prononcée à la Chambre de Commerce le 31 juillet sous les auspices du Foyer France Sénégal (suite et fin),” *Paris-Dakar* (6 Aug. 1937): 2.

⁴² Pascal Brousseau, “Vie et oeuvre d'Ousmane Socé Diop,” (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 2004).

⁴³ Léopold Senghor, “Le problème culturel en A.O.F.,” *Paris-Dakar* (8 September 1937): 2.

meant embracing a program of Africanized education and keeping youth away from the very classical education which had produced someone like himself.

In his injunction for youth to “assimilate, but don’t be assimilated,” Senghor in effect proposed that a balance of European and African instruction would avoid producing the “de-tribalized” African *évolué*. In their own ways, both Socé and Senghor offered pathways to reclaim authority on behalf of educated elites. West African youth would take up their proposals and offer new ones in constant editorials and letters-to-the-editor, still going by the time of the Vichy regime in 1942. Mamadou Dia, later Prime Minister to Senghor’s President in the Mali Federation, was a newly graduated schoolteacher in St. Louis, Senegal at the time of these discussions. He penned numerous articles of his own on similar themes and observed in his memoirs: “We did not use the words *negritude*, authenticity, but it was the same struggle. We styled ourselves, in a way, as the defenders of African authenticity *avant la lettre*.”⁴⁴ While we need not take Dia’s retrospective retconning of *negritude* into these debates at face value, it is worth considering the parallel emphasis on culture that was developing in Dakar at the same time as it was in Paris.

A year after the debates over cultural development were raging in the West African press in 1942, Alioune Diop launched a call in the *Bulletin de l’étudiant d’outre mer* inviting African students to “learn about their own civilization.”⁴⁵ The wording is indicative of Senghor’s influence, who was both cousin of his wife and *Présence africaine* co-founder, Christiane Yandé Diop, and a friend to them both. When Alioune’s employment in the civil service between 1946-48 enabled them both to travel frequently to Dakar, he and Christiane fortified the Dakar-Paris networks which during their educations had been sustained via exchanges of letters and news clippings. Much later, Yandé Diop expressed her views about the disjuncture between metropolitan and colonial publics and *Présence’s*

⁴⁴ Mamadou Dia, *Memoirs d’un militant du tiers monde* (Paris: Publisud, 1985), 36.

⁴⁵ Philippe Verdin, “Les principales intuitions d’Alioune Diop à propos du monde noir et de son avenir,” *Présence Africaine* 181/82 (2010): 98.

attempts to overcome them: “We are shocked that the novelists and poets (of French or English expression) don’t reach an African public, which anyway is not itself devoid of culture.”⁴⁶ When the two founded *Présence* simultaneously in Dakar and Paris in 1947 (though it never succeeded in establishing printing operations in Dakar, the magazine was distributed there), Alioune wrote that expressing the “particular spirit” of “Negro-African” peoples would enable the “changing of public opinion.”⁴⁷ In the famous and endlessly quoted opening editorial, the journal announced its culturally particularist “Negro-African” intervention into humanist universalism: “The black man, conspicuous by his absence in the building up of the modern city, will be able to signify his presence little by little by contributing to the recreating of a humanism reflecting the true measure of man.”⁴⁸

Lest we assume that culture was an exclusively francophone preoccupation, a look toward similar developments – also motivated by interwar social anthropology – in British African territories prove otherwise. Here, too, the educated elite contested their supposed “de-tribalization” and found ways to legitimate their authority through culturalist discourse. The Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu, for instance, reclaimed both “modernist” and “traditional” authority for himself by virtue of his youthful immersion into Igbo culture, as well as his Slade Art School training.⁴⁹ The resultant synthesis of Igbo and Western art cultures, insisted Enwonwu, gave his art practice its unique quality.⁵⁰ Or consider Jomo Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya*, an English-language classic of the culturalist style, where it was ancestral rituals and anthropological training which endowed Kenyatta with the unique qualities to lead publics like the Gikuyu Central Association.⁵¹ Even Paul Robeson proclaimed: “I believe that Negro culture merits an honorable place among the cultures of the world. I believe that as soon as

⁴⁶ Christiane Diop to Michel Leiris, 22 Oct. 1955, fr/cdf/las/FMLE.01.01.076, Archives Michel Leiris, Paris.

⁴⁷ Alioune Diop, “Niam n’goura or Présence Africaine’s Raison d’Être,” transl. Richard Wright and Thomas Diop, 1 (1947): 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Sylvester Ogbechie, *Ben Enwonwu: The Making of an African Modernist* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008),

⁵⁰ Ben Enwonwu, “Letters to the Editor: New Movement in Nigerian Art,” *West Africa* (July 21, 1956): 516.

⁵¹ Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938).

Negroes appreciate their own culture, and confine their interests in the European to learning science and mathematics, they will be on the road to becoming one of the most dominant races in the world.”⁵²

Of course, the particularities of these expressions varied significantly. What I mean to suggest by comparing them, however, is that the unique responses were directed at a similar problematic. Their points of similarity were not haphazard, but suggestive of a culturalist discourse in twentieth-century West African and Black diasporic thought that was linked to global patterns of culturalism. As Andrew Sartori has written of the global circulation of the culture concept: “Culture could supplement the more classically liberal, negative conception of emancipation from the illegitimate exercise of state authority, with the positive conception of subjective freedom as a *capacity to*.”⁵³ In addition to critiquing state authority which prior West African liberal publics had done, culturalism offered a repertoire of self-actualization rooted in the distinctive creative capacities and experiences of groups. As opposed to unitarist liberal models of the indivisibility of state and nation/race, culturalist liberalism proposed pluralist models of associational life nested within imperial states. Early twentieth-century pluralist democratic theory, for instance, which drew heavily from anthropology, made room for the social and political existence of groups prior to their recognition by the state; indeed they could actively challenge the state’s monopoly on social formations.⁵⁴

For West African or diaspora culturalists borrowing from anthropological discourse, culturalism meant an arena of *communal* actualization, accomplished by defining the features of a “Negro-African” community’s distinctive *civilisation*. Senghor, the Diops, and others applied this understanding in their campaigns for a “federalist, Girondin” republic in which “France” could be a decentralized multinational state, which acknowledged the social “rootedness” of citizenship via the

⁵² Paul Robeson in Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 378.

⁵³ Sartori, 29.

⁵⁴ Cécile Laborde, *Pluralist Thought and the State in Britain and France, 1900-1925* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

particularity of cultural identities.⁵⁵ For many, as for Socé, Senghor, Kenyatta, Robeson and others, the end goal of culturalism was a civilizational union of discrete cultural parts. Their culturalism was sometimes conveyed in the language of synthesis, sometimes as *métissage*, and quite often it was articulated as a humanist project of cross-cultural hybridity. Yet a negritude humanism of civilizational hybridity reads less like a vision of radical cosmopolitan possibility, as Frederick Cooper and Gary Wilder have claimed, and more like an example of the paradoxes of the particular and universal embedded within liberal-republican thought.⁵⁶

Unlike earlier African and Black publics, culturalists sought inclusion into the imperial state not on the basis of a singular and expansive national identity, but by cultivating a community identity *autonomously* within the state. It is this notion of autonomy embedded within culturalism which captures a transformative moment in the conception of publics: the desirability of a separation between associational life and the state. This does not mean that culturalism could not make claims upon the state, since as we have seen negritude was invoked to do just that. Neither does it mean that culture was truly autonomous from the state. Instead, this history provides an understanding into how it became possible to conceive of a new relationship to the state: whereby one might be in, but not of it. This relationality would characterize exactly the attitude of negritude intellectuals to their states in the later twentieth century, as their publics became entangled in its moneyed webs.

“Pan-Négrisme” in Later Twentieth Century Publics

⁵⁵ Dimier, “For a Republic ‘Diverse and Indivisible?’,” 48.

⁵⁶ Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*; Wilder, *Freedom Time*. For the paradoxes of liberal-republican politics see Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

The very first issue of *Présence africaine* in 1947 promised “obedience to no philosophical or political ideology.”⁵⁷ A test of this commitment occurred the very next year, when Alioune Diop’s friend Senghor asked him to use the journal to throw his support behind his newly founded political party. Diop’s reaction was severe – he insisted he had no intention to make the magazine a party organ: “I refuse to submit to all paternalism, even of a compatriot, and claim the freedom to act in politics according to my own convictions.”⁵⁸ Perhaps as a manifestation of this commitment, Diop quit his job as a representative in the French Senate that same year in order to concentrate full time on the journal. By 1949, however, he accepted two grants from the Grand Council of French West Africa: 3 million francs to fund the journal and 12 million for the newly established publishing house.⁵⁹

For Diop and for many others, there was no issue with accepting state funding, as long as the means of cultural production were in African or Black hands. *Présence africaine*’s state subventions and the extensive connections many of its contributors enjoyed with the French state (so many of them were or had been civil servants or politicians) would rouse lingering suspicions about their allegiances. An unnamed Martinican attendee of the journal’s 1956 congress put it bluntly: “Présence Africaine Negroes did not represent French Negroes, and could not because they were government employees.”⁶⁰ The famed Pan-Africanist George Padmore was even more damning, warning his friend Richard Wright, “These intellectuals are big imperialist stooges and must be watched. There are police agents in Diop’s camp...Beware!”⁶¹

⁵⁷ Alioune Diop, “Niam N’Goura,” 7.

⁵⁸ Alioune Diop to Comité de patronage, July 23, 1948, fr/cdf/las/FML.E.01.01.101, Archives Michel Leiris. The exchange cost the fledgling journal the advertising it had once enjoyed in Senghor’s party newspaper, *La Condition Humaine*.

⁵⁹ Ruth Bush, *Publishing Africa in French: Literary Institutions and Decolonization, 1945-1967* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 81.

⁶⁰ James Ivy, an African American delegate to the 1956 congress recounted this conversation between him and an unnamed Martinican attendee. James Ivy to John Davis, February 9, 1957, Box 21, Folder: Ivy, James, AMSAC Papers, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center.

⁶¹ George Padmore to Richard Wright, April 17, 1956, Box 103, Folder 1522, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Library.

While there is no evidence to substantiate Padmore's claim of police agents, the equivalence between state proximity and ideological complicity was one of the very products of the high cold war. In fact, *Présence africaine* never quite enjoyed the cozy relationship with the French state of which it was accused – it was also heavily surveilled and staff sometimes faced outright intimidation.⁶² However, it was true that *Présence*, its network of Societies of African Culture, the journals it inspired, and the congresses and meetings it hosted were often supported by subventions from imperial states like France and the United States, as well as postcolonial ones like Nigeria and Senegal. Midcentury Black publics were notoriously fractured by the intensification of surveillance and infiltration during the high cold war.⁶³ Yet imperial (and later postcolonial) states also adopted a different relationship to some Black publics: rather than suppress them, they financed them. Through such material support, within a decade negritude became one of the most globally recognizable forms of “Negro-African” thought, and it persisted long after other cold war Black publics faded away. Assessing this expansion allows us to see how such a change in the fortunes of some liberal Black publics led to a discourse which doubled down on autonomy, reshaping prior inflections of culturalism.

We have already seen how the French government waged battle for ‘hearts and minds’. Yet the evidence on the American end is especially thick and stark: the US Central Intelligence Agency, under the guise of a clandestine front organization called the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), subsidized a global umbrella of artists and organizations as part of a cultural cold war.⁶⁴ From its foundation in 1950 until journalists exposed the CIA link in 1967, the CCF had funded an astonishing

⁶² The police records on *Présence africaine* as well as the Diops are suggestive of this, and Alioune's biographer notes that their home was once raided by police and printing materials confiscated. Verdin, *Alioune Diop*, 154. Christiane Yandé Diop has also said that intense surveillance dogged the organization of the 1956 congress. Diop interviewed in *Lumières Noirs*, directed by Bob Swaim, (2006; Paris, France). DVD made available courtesy of director.

⁶³ William J. Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁶⁴ Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*; Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*; Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture*.

number of Black cultural endeavors.⁶⁵ The CCF established an African programme in 1959 and hired none other than Ezekiel Mphahlele as its chief officer a year later.

Nigerian and American cultural organizations which had been founded in the wake of the 1956 Congress of Black Writers and Artists hosted by *Présence*, received substantial CCF funding. Nigeria's *Black Orpheus* (the title was taken from Jean Paul Sartre's famous essay on negritude) and its attached Mbari writer's clubs were kept afloat by the CCF, after the Ministry of Education of the Western Regional Government of Nigeria cut off their prior subsidies. The American chapter of *Présence's* umbrella organization, the Societies of African Culture, was itself an independent front organization.⁶⁶ Unlike the staff of Black Orpheus or the Mbari clubs, the leadership of the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC) was fully witting and knew of the attachment to the surveillance state. Publicly AMSAC proclaimed its affiliation to *Présence* and negritude, but privately pledged to orient Africans "in the direction of a neutral nationalism and to disassociate them from either side in the East-West conflict."⁶⁷

Clandestine efforts were also coupled with overt ones, such as cultural ambassador State Department tours intended to facilitate exchanges of musicians, artists, and writers that celebrated capitalist liberal democracy.⁶⁸ The State Department funded an American cultural tour for Alioune Diop as part of an effort to earn his goodwill (it failed).⁶⁹ The Soviets, for their part, sought to attract Diop to conferences hosted by the Union of Soviet Writers and the Soviet Committee of Solidarity

⁶⁵ Mary Helen Washington, *The Other Blacklist*; Raspberry, *Race and the Totalitarian Century: Geopolitics in the Black Literary Imagination*; Peter Kalliney, "Modernism, African Literature, and the Cold War,"; Rogers, "Black Orpheus," Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint*.

⁶⁶ Wilford, *Mighty Wurlitzer*.

⁶⁷ Summary Report: First Annual Conference, June 23-15, 1958, Box 9, Folder: African Cultural Center, AMSAC Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁶⁸ Penny von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁶⁹ Richard Wright to John Davis, Nov 25, 1957, Box 17, Folder: Wright, Richard, AMSAC Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

with Asia and Africa (they also failed).⁷⁰ At the 1966 Festival of Black Arts in Dakar, the two cold war powers faced off with their own sponsored delegations: the Americans arriving via private jet while the Soviets sent a cruise ship (each claimed they had won).

In the midst of this constricted ideological space, nonalignment famously represented one response to this binary. As a way of articulating an *autonomous* pathway beyond cold war oppositions, we are extensively familiar with the multiplicity of its applications as a rallying cry of Third World self-determination. Negritude's enthusiasts were no exceptions to heeding it; after all the 1956 Congress had styled itself as a "literary Bandung." Yet negritude's reinvention as a movement for racial consciousness, an Afrocentric Black identity, represented another answer to the same problem. In 1958 J.P. Clark, then a student at the University of Ibadan, celebrated negritude, "a most compendious word!...it stands for...that new burning consciousness of a common race and culture which black men in Africa, the West Indies and America are beginning to feel towards one another."⁷¹ Even Alioune Diop offered up his own anglo equivalents for negritude which represented a stark shift away from his prior humanist emphasis: "negro-ness" and "African personality."⁷² Two other anglophone champions (American and Nigerian, respectively) coined the English definitions with which it would become most associated: St. Claire Drake's cultural Pan-Africanism and Abiola Irele's Black cultural nationalism.⁷³

It's not hard to see why this may have happened. As the aspirations of imperial citizens were unequivocally blocked by imperial nation-states and in newly founded global forums like the United

⁷⁰ Constantin Katsakioris, "L'Union soviétique et les intellectuels africains. Internationalisme, panafricanisme et négritude pendant les années de la décolonisation, 1954–1964," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, no. 1 (2006): 15–32.

⁷¹ John Pepper Clarke, "Editorial," *The Horn* 1, no. 1 (1958): 11 in W.H. Stevenson, "'The Horn': What It Was and What It Did," *Research in African Literatures* 6, no. 1 (1975): 17.

⁷² Alioune Diop, "Remarks on African Personality and Negritude," in *Pan-Africanism Reconsidered*, ed. John Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 339.

⁷³ St. Clair Drake, Speech at AMSAC Annual Meeting, Box 25, Folder 12, AMSAC Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. Abiola Irele, "Négritude or Black Cultural Nationalism," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3 no. 3 (1965): 321–48.

Nations, nationalist independence became the only remaining answer. Negritude's makeover from empire's old clothes, however, also points us towards culturalism's adaptability to the more essentialist expressions with which we are more familiar. Before, negritude's culturalism was a way of articulating an autonomous space of associational life, of publics, that could still comfortably be nested within the imperial state. At midcentury, this culturalism had shifted into an embodiment of the utopian potential of African peoples and their new states, or in the case of the US, an unapologetically assertive presence within their state. By shoring up the Africanization and racialization of negritude's meaning, its advocates ensured its survival after the high point of decolonization and desegregation.

Yet one will notice that some negritudinists had not given up on the idea of the state as such. At the highest pitch of cold war suspicion, some African and Black intellectuals still believed it was possible to take the money from the state and run. This included some of negritude's loudest critics, like the CCF's African director Mphahlele. Even after its CIA links were exposed in 1967, Mphahlele defended the integrity of all the African cultural organizations who had been funded by it. "Yes, the CIA stinks... We must naturally bite our lips in indignation when we learn the CIA has been financing our projects," but he added that no source of funding came untainted, whether it was from private interests or state governments. He concluded, "[I]t is dishonest to pretend that the value of what has been thus achieved is morally tainted."⁷⁴

A permanent suspicion of the state became widespread only by the later 1960s, with the disappointments in neo-imperial states and postcolonial ones. Because of cold war exceptionalism, this has been difficult to appreciate, but the enormous investments by postcolonial states in culture between the 1960s and 1970s have yet to be surpassed today. Senegal spent 158 million CFA francs, equivalent to about \$4.5 million today, on the First World Festival of Negro Arts (known as FESMAN) in 1966. Senghor, with Alioune Diop as head of the organizing committee, together

⁷⁴ Ezekiel Mphahlele, "Mphahlele on the CIA," *Transition* 34 (1967): 5.

planned for the first global Black cultural festival to take place on the continent as a “Defense and Illustration of Négritude.”⁷⁵ The care with which the festival’s planning records are preserved in the Senegalese National Archives reflect its centrality as a state-building exercise in addition to a Pan-African one – or, more accurately put, a state-building exercise *through* a Pan-African one.⁶

At the festival, Senghor strategically anointed Nigeria as the ancient Greece of “Negro-African” civilization and African Americans as the vanguard of its modernism. Nigeria took up its official designation as the “Star Country” (*Pays Vedette*) with gusto.¹² In the aftermath of Kwame Nkrumah’s overthrow in February 1966, the festival occurred at an opportune window of Pan-African realignment, wherein a display of Senegalese-Nigerian partnership could fill the vacuum for a model of West African regional alliance to replace the francophone-anglophone alliance between Ghana and Guinea. Thus, it was no surprise that at the final iteration of these continent-based cultural festivals in 1977, the Nigerian government would reach out to its old ally. Yet Nigeria had its own reasons for organizing a show of national unity and Pan-African leadership. With the civil war still fresh in living memory, a coup in 1975, and another attempted coup in 1976, Lieutenant-General Olusegun Obasanjo was intent on portraying the Nigerian state as a unified entity.

Nigerian oil revenues allowed the country to dwarf the amount Senegal had spent in 1966, tallying up nearly \$800 million in today’s currency for the Festival of Black Arts in Culture (known as Festac). At Lagos, too, Diop and other Senegalese organizers had been invited to join the organizing committee. Yet though the wording of the festival mission remained within negritude’s orbit, to “ensure the revival, resurgence and propagation of black and African cultural values and civilization” – its organizers would not be.⁷⁶ Diop and his fellow Senegalese committee members were booted out

⁷⁵ Léopold Senghor, “The Function and Meaning of the World Festival of Negro Arts,” Colloquium on Negro Art in the Life of the People, Box 583, Folder 13882, Langston Hughes Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

⁷⁶ Festival Programme, Center for Black and African Arts and Civilization, Lagos.

for their refusal to accept northern African delegates as “Negroes.”⁷⁷ Part of the motivation for the Senegalese snub was likely the fact that in 1969 in Algiers, negritude had been roundly denounced as a bourgeois, anti-revolutionary movement. However, Head of State Obasanjo remained unequivocal about his definition of continental Pan-Africanism: in his words, any member of the Organization of African Unity would be recognized at Festac.⁷⁸ Even members of the diaspora could only apply to take part as representatives of states, a rule against which African Americans chafed, amongst others.

In both Nigeria and Senegal, culturalism was again transformed, from a way to disaggregate the state’s sovereignty, to a way of refusing its divisibility. In the state’s hands, culturalism became an ideology of a multiethnic but indivisible, unitary state – seen as the only way to demonstrate Pan-African leadership. Negritude had travelled far from its beginnings as a current of Black internationalism, now morphed into a bureaucratic rationality of Black inter-state relations. Counterpublics of any kind were out of the question in this new atmosphere. When Fela Kuti gathered one anyway, hosting a counter-festival at his Shrine to denounce the 1977 event as propaganda, he was brutally assaulted and his 77-year-old mother, the legendary nationalist icon Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, was thrown out of a window and killed.

Wole Soyinka, who had been part of the organization of the Nigerian delegation to FESMAN in 1966, quit over disputes during the official preparations for Festac. As early as 1967 he had lamented: “[I]n the modern African state especially, the position of the writer has been such that he is in fact the very prop of the state machinery.” In his remarks at this conference in Stockholm, Soyinka targeted negritude in a critique that saw him at once his most sympathetic and unsparing. He faulted negritude less for its theme of “racial essence” than for the remnants it represented of an imperial elite formation, “the crystallization of the writer’s image in Africa in the character of the Establishment.”⁹²

⁷⁷ VII Meeting of the International Festival Committee at Lagos, 27 Nov to 2 Dec 1975, Document VII/120, Center for Black and African Arts and Civilization, Lagos.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

He explained: “I do not suggest that nothing of this literature was valid nor that there was not to be found in it of genuine literary value. Only that the present philosophy, the present direction of modern Africa, was created by politicians, not writers. Is this not a contradiction in a society whose great declaration of uniqueness to the outside world is that of a superabundant humanism?”⁷⁹ Just over a decade later, the iconoclastic Nigerian critics Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike accused Soyinka of collaborating in the “the imperialist campaign against negritude.”⁸⁰ As the only autonomous “remnant[t] of the native resistance to Anglo-Saxon pseudo-universalism,” critics of negritude like him were responsible for stifling truly independent publics on the continent and in the diaspora.

The acrimony shows no signs of ebbing.

⁷⁹ Wole Soyinka, “The Writer in an African State,” *Transition* no. 31(1967): 10-13.

⁸⁰ Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, Ihechukwu Madubuike, “Gibbs’s Gibberish,” *Research in African Literatures* 17, no. 1 (1986): 48.