

## **Culture, Development and the African Renaissance:**

### **Ousmane Sembene and Léopold Senghor at the World Festival of Negro Arts (Dakar 1966)**

#### *Introduction*

The *Premier Festival Mondial des arts nègres* [First World Festival of Negro Arts] took place in Dakar from 1-24 April 1966: it was organized in the middle of a period extending from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s during which a wide range of organizations and events—cultural, sporting and political—informed by pan-Africanist ideals were created. For instance, the 1966 festival was followed by major pan-African cultural festivals in Algiers (Algeria) in 1969 and in Lagos (Nigeria) in 1977. The international forum provided by the Dakar Festival showcased a wide array of arts and was attended by such celebrated luminaries as Duke Ellington, Josephine Baker, Aimé Césaire, André Malraux and Wole Soyinka. Described by its principal architect, Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor, as “the elaboration of a new humanism which this time will include all of humanity on the whole of our planet earth” (cited in Flather 1966, 57), the festival sought to emphasize the significance of culture and the arts in defining a global role for Africa in the aftermath of empire. In particular, the Festival was designed as a showcase for Senghor’s concept of Negritude as the fundamental expression of “black” identity, one that highlighted rhythm, spontaneity and emotion, and also a certain understanding of art as “high culture”.

Ironically, however, it was the self-educated, Marxist novelist Ousmane Sembene who won one of the Festival’s literary prizes for his novella, *Le Mandat* (*The Money Order*), an ironic critique of the failures of independence in Senegal (of

which Senghor was President, let us not forget). Sembene, then just beginning to develop a parallel career as a filmmaker, also won the cinema prize for his haunting film, *La Noire de (Black Girl)*, about the powerful hold that France continued to play on the imagination of Francophone Africans. Sembene was a compatriot and arch-enemy of Senghor, both politically and culturally: he was a virulent opponent of Negritude, which he viewed as an obfuscating, essentialist discourse that had no answers for a contemporary Africa emerging from the trauma of colonial rule. In his scathing film *Xala* (1974), Sembene denounced what he saw as the hypocrisy of Senghor's "African socialism", while his novel, *Le Dernier de l'empire (The Last of the Empire)* (1981) included vitriolic caricatures of both Senghor and Negritude. In turn, Senghor clearly saw Sembene as an uncouth and unrefined rabblouser: "Nous souhaitons seulement que ses films soient moins superficiels, moins politiques, donc plus nègres, plus culturels — au sens de la profondeur. [...] J'aimerais qu'il y eût un cinéma fidèle aux valeurs de la Négritude" (Senghor 1980, 231) [We only wish that his films were less superficial, less political, and therefore more black, more cultivated —with more depth. [...] If only there were a cinema that was faithful to the values of Negritude]. For his part, Sembene was highly aware that he was locked into an ambiguous relationship with his more powerful fellow artist. As he stated in a 1969 interview:

Je me rends parfaitement compte que je sers pour le moment d'alibi à Senghor qui peut laisser entendre à l'étranger: "Voyez comme je suis libéral: je laisse Sembene faire des films de contestation." C'est une contradiction que j'essaie d'utiliser au mieux. (cited in Murphy 2000, 225)

[I understand completely that I serve as an alibi for Senghor because he can say to the outside world: “See how liberal I am: I let Sembene make oppositional films.” I’m in a contradictory position but I try to make the best of it.]

Within this complex political and cultural relationship, Sembene and Senghor were rivals who shared more ideas than they would ever allow in public. This is not to deny the fact that they were diametrically opposed in terms of their understanding of the modes of expression appropriate to this process, and also in terms of the form that development should take. However, despite their cultural and political differences, they shared a profound belief in the significance of culture as central to the development of post-independence Africa. Their views on culture represent not only their individual opinions but, more importantly, a wider set of cultural debates that marked the era of decolonization. This chapter thus uses the debates surrounding the meaning of culture and development at Dakar 1966, as well as Sembene’s role within the festival, to explore the competing idealistic notions that were at play more widely in the aftermath of African, and, particularly, Senegalese independence. What exactly do Sembene and Senghor understand by the role of culture in the development of postcolonial Africa?

### *Research Context*

Before sketching out some tentative responses to these questions, it is necessary to engage briefly with recent scholarship on the spate of cultural festivals that marked the 1960s and 1970s in Africa. Despite the overwhelming success of the Dakar festival and the subsequent pan-African festivals in Algiers and Lagos, these international exhibitions of a global African culture have received surprisingly little

sustained critical attention.<sup>1</sup> The one major, book-length study to have appeared in this field is Andrew Apter's *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (2005). This volume examines the politics of FESTAC '77, which was explicitly billed as the successor to Dakar 1966. (A third world festival of negro arts, which was widely referred to as FESMAN 2010, was held in Dakar in December 2010.) From the 1980s onwards, a wide body of work by historians such as Annie E. Coombes (1994), Herman Lebovics (1994) and Patricia Morton (2000) had begun to explore the exhibitionary practices that had marked Europe's attempts to represent the colonial world to the populations of the metropolitan centre. Following on from their work, Apter perceives his volume as "a new kind of ethnography [...], one that extended a developing literature on world's fairs and expositions to postcolonial Africa; engaged new debates on translocal and transnational forms of community; confronted the state; and addressed the mysterious relationship between nationalism, modernity, money and value" (Apter 2005, 3). Basically, Apter seeks to explore how the postcolonial Nigerian state, flush with oil revenues, attempted to project a pan-African culture that was truly global but that positioned Nigeria as the centre of this culture: "Nigeria's black and African world was clearly an imagined community, national in idiom yet Pan-African in proportion, with a racialized sense of shared history, blood and culture" (2005, 6).

Although he began the project by reading FESTAC as the antithesis of colonial exhibitions—"transforming the gaze of othering into one of collective self-

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<sup>1</sup> This gap in the existing scholarship is being addressed by a major research project currently being conducted by scholars at the EHESS and the CNRS in Paris, which seeks to archive four major pan-African festivals: Dakar 1966, Algiers 1969, Kinshasa 1974, Lagos 1977.

apprehension” (2005, 5)—Apter soon found a more complex set of relationships between the exhibitionary practices of the colonial and postcolonial periods. He invokes Terence Ranger’s well-known discussion from *The Invention of Tradition* (1992) of the role played by Victorian colonial culture in “inventing” an African traditional culture, as well as Jean and John Comaroff’s ideas (see Comaroff 1991) on the role of ceremonies created by the colonial powers in southern Africa in reinforcing colonizer-colonized and tribal divisions: “[FESTAC’s] [a]rtistic directors and cultural officers invented traditions with precolonial pedigrees. [...] [I]n a fundamental sense, the customary culture which FESTAC resurrected was always already mediated by the colonial encounter, and in some degree was produced by it” (Apter 2005, 6).

Although the context in Dakar in 1966 was in certain respects rather different—Senegal was a small country, with no oil boom to boost its economy or self-esteem—it witnessed similar attempts to project a “new” African culture that was predicated upon rather problematic colonial-era notions of racial and ethnic identity. Unlike Nigeria, it had a single, creative mind behind its construction, that of Léopold Sédar Senghor,<sup>2</sup> who appears to have envisioned the festival as the embodiment of his own poetic and philosophical reflections on the creation of a “Universal Civilization” in which “black” culture would once again (after centuries of slavery and colonisation) have a central role to play. How then did Senghor’s festival seek to represent a pan-African culture?

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<sup>2</sup> Alioune Diop, founder of the Paris-based publishing house *Présence Africaine*, was the official chair of the festival organizing committee but Senghor was the figure that did most to promote the specific cultural vision at the heart of the festival.

*Dakar 1966 as cultural renaissance: looking back or looking forward?*

A US visitor to the Dakar Festival, Newell Flather, wrote of his impressions a month later in *Africa Report* (May 1966):

Visitors to the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar had an exhilarating immersion in the sights and sounds of Africa and the Negro World, of the old and avant-garde in dance and drama, poetry and painting. Dr Léopold Sédar Senghor, President of Senegal and principal architect of the festival, told the audience on opening night that its purpose was the “defense and illustration of negritude”—“the elaboration of a new humanism which this time will include all of humanity on the whole of our planet earth.” (57)

It is no coincidence that this quote from Senghor manages to refer both to Negritude and to the work of Joachim DuBellay, author of a “defense and illustration of the French language”, promoting vernacular French against the then dominant cultural and scientific language of Latin in sixteenth-century France. For Negritude was never conceived of by Senghor as an end in itself, a simple retreat into a self-contained and self-isolated “blackness”, which is why one also needs to consider the term in relation to the concepts of *francité* and *civilisation de l’universel*. In Senghor’s view, *francité* is expressed most clearly in the cultural domain, and he defines it as “l’ensemble des valeurs de la langue et de la culture, partant de la civilisation française” (1988, 158) [the collected values of the language and culture that emanate from French civilization]. The future of Francophone Africa lies in a Franco-African cultural hybridity of which he and his fellow *évolués* will serve as a sort of avant-garde, bridging the divide between negritude and *francité*, and somehow combining to forge

a “Universal Civilization”. The reference to DuBellay also signals the parallels that Senghor is drawing between what he views as the current African renaissance and the European renaissance several centuries earlier: it is through an increased awareness of the cultural importance of the past that a great, modern culture will emerge.

At the opening ceremony of the 1966 Dakar festival, Senghor reiterated his fundamental belief in both a deep sense of identity and the need for dialogue and exchange: “[P]our dialoguer avec les autres, pour participer à l’œuvre commune des hommes de conscience et de volonté qui se lèvent de partout dans le monde, [...] il nous faut, nous Nègres, être enfin, nous-mêmes dans notre dignité: notre identité recouvrée” (Senghor 1977, 62) [In order to dialogue with others, to participate in the common goal of men of conscience and goodwill from across the world, [...] we, Negroes, must remain ourselves in order to retain our dignity: to recover our identity]. Appropriately, then, the centrepiece of the Festival was the apparent juxtaposition of so-called traditional African arts and European high modernist art, which were simultaneously designed to illustrate both difference and complementarity. As Senghor had so famously and controversially stated in his best-known maxim, Africa was emotion and rhythm, while Europe was rationality and science, but each needed the other. Senghor had deployed all of his political and cultural capital to bring to Dakar—housed in the specially constructed and dramatically situated Musée Dynamique, perched on the Corniche—a touring exhibition of some of the finest examples of “traditional” African art: that is, African masks and sculptures borrowed from the great collections of European museums such as the Musée de l’homme in Paris and the British Museum in London. These were (apparently) exhibited alongside reproductions of works by Picasso, Léger, Modigliani (amongst others), in what must have been a fascinating contrapuntal play between traditional sources and the modern

masterpieces inspired by them:<sup>3</sup> once again, we can see that Africa's classical art is positioned as central to twentieth-century modernity.

For Senghor, this exhibition was “la base solide du Festival” [the fundamental basis of the Festival] due to the correlation that it revealed between what he termed “les classiques de la Négritude, d’une part, et d’autre part, l’art contemporain, je veux dire Picasso et ses émules” (cited in Rous 1967, 78) [the classics of Negritude, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the contemporary art of Picasso and his followers]. It is highly significant that it is traditional/classical African art that is elevated by Senghor to the status of high art. Meanwhile, at the Palais de Justice, an exhibition of art works by young African painters left him “disappointed”, but understanding, for these were, he stated, the first, stumbling steps of a new art attempting to engage with Western modernity in a new visual language. A similar approach was taken to dance and music, which remain at the heart of so much popular creativity in Africa. At the national stadium in Dakar, there were during the festival daily displays by “national dance troupes”. The phenomenon of national dance troupes was a common feature of the period, as national governments sought to create an officially sanctioned version of authentic local dance. Almost inevitably, these troupes created a hybrid interpretation of a range of ethnic dance traditions that often differed greatly from folk and popular music and dance, which were both a marginal presence throughout the Festival.

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<sup>3</sup> I say “apparently” as various sources refer to this contrapuntal play but I have found no evidence in the archives or the official festival documentation to suggest that the originals of these paintings were exhibited. It might also be noted in passing that it seems almost impossible today to imagine a touring programme of Western-owned African art of this kind beginning in an African capital...

Why this insistence by Senghor on what he understood as Africa’s “Classical” tradition, often held in opposition to its actually existing folk and popular traditions? I would argue that, despite his oft-repeated support for a new, hybrid culture, Senghor remained throughout his life a Classicist — we should not forget that his training was in Greek and Latin civilization — and he seemed temperamentally inclined to view modern arts with relative suspicion.<sup>4</sup> (Similar claims could be made about many European-educated African intellectuals and politicians of that era.) As was mentioned above, Senghor believed that a newly liberated Africa would contribute to an emerging globalized, *Civilisation de l’Universel*, in which each part of the world would have an equal role to play (thereby replacing a discredited Western universalism based solely on the values of what he perceived as a cold, rational, industrial modernity). Senghor borrowed his conception of a *Civilisation de l’Universel* from the French Jesuit palaeontologist, theologian and mystic, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: this vision posits a common source of humanity as emerging from the first forms of human life in Africa. Senghor was clearly inspired by archaeological discoveries in the second half of the twentieth century that had begun to trace patterns of human evolution in which Africa was seen as the “original” source of global cultural diversity. However, despite recurring references in his essays to the “brassage” [mixing] of various peoples, it is remarkable that his work never manages (or seriously attempts) to develop a compelling historical narrative of change. Cultural and racial “mixing” may have taken place throughout the history of mankind but Senghor perceives a deep-seated and immutable foundation to culture. For instance, in his late essay, *Ce que je crois*, laying out the fundamental beliefs that had marked his

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<sup>4</sup> See Murphy 2009 for a more sustained engagement with Senghor’s cultural philosophy.

career, he takes the reader on a one-hundred-page detour through the pre-history of Africa, stressing the continuities in African cultural expression as a “necessary” prelude to introducing the concept of negritude: moreover, there is an extremely dangerous biological determinism at work in his vision of the unity of black African culture, which suggests that he never fully freed himself from the legacy of 1930s racialized thought. Senghor’s education in the Classics and his linguistic work on the development of African languages gave him an important “long view” on the process of cultural evolution but this results in a largely static view of cultures as fundamentally unchanging: his visions of both Africa and Europe are remarkably monolithic for someone who believed so forcefully in the notion of *métissage*. This enables him to develop an authoritative and empowering image of blackness that rejects the cold rationality of the modernist project; but its images of this blackness are all turned towards the past with little sense of the very real engagements with Western-dominated modernity taking place throughout Africa.

To return then to the 1966 Festival, I would argue that Senghor is seeking to “perform”, through his writing and through the festival, an African renaissance, to define an African classical age that can act as an inspiration for the future. For example, in speeches made prior to the Festival, he made remarkable comparisons between contemporary Senegal and ancient Greece:

Nous ne pouvons prétendre à être une grande nation au sens de la puissance matérielle. Nous n’avons l’étendue, la population, ni de la République du Nigéria [...] ni de l’Ethiopie, pas même du Maroc ou de l’Algérie. Nous ne pouvons prétendre à la puissance de Rome: à la quantité. Le peuple que je vous propose en exemple, c’est donc le peuple grec, le peuple hellène, comme il

s'appellait lui-même. Il habitait un pays pauvre, fait de plaines étroites et de collines caillouteuses. Mais, comme le peuple sénégalais, il avait la mer en face de lui et des céréales sur ses plaines et de l'huile sur ses collines et du marbre dans son sol. Le peuple grec, en son temps, a préféré la qualité à la quantité. Il a tout sacrifié à l'amour de la liberté et de la vérité, au goût de la vie et de la beauté. Il a cultivé, avec amour, les lettres et les arts [...] les mathématiques et la philosophie. [...] C'est pourquoi, si longtemps que vivront des hommes sur notre planète, ils parleront de la civilisation grecque comme d'un monde de lumière et de beauté: le monde de l'homme. (Speech to Senghor's UPS party congress in January 1966; cited in Rous 1967, 76-77)

We cannot claim to be a great nation in terms of material wealth/strength. We possess neither the land mass nor the population of Nigeria, [...] or Ethiopia, nor even that of Morocco or Algeria. We cannot claim to rival the grandeur of Rome [not in terms of the sheer quantity of art it produced]. The country that I thus lay before you as an example for Senegal to follow is [ancient] Greece. The Greeks lived in a poor country of narrow plains and rocky hills. But, like the Senegalese people, they had the sea beside them, cereals on the plains, oil in the hills and marble in the soil. At the high point of their civilisation, the Greek people preferred quality to quantity. They sacrificed everything for the love of liberty and truth, for the love of life and beauty. They lovingly cultivated literature and the arts [...], mathematics and philosophy. That's why, as long as Men are alive on this planet, they will speak of Greek civilisation as a world of light and beauty: the world of men.

This is, in many ways, a typical piece of Senghor prose and no doubt far-removed from the day-to-day concerns of many of his people, though it is consistent with the profound (and inspirational) idealism of the era of decolonization that he was able to imagine such a vision for a newly independent, small country on the westernmost tip of Africa. Most importantly, this quotation from Senghor raises fundamental questions about the role of culture in the development of postcolonial Africa. Is Senghor in effect here placing greater emphasis on culture than on the modern industrial and technological development of his homeland? And, if so, does this logic not lead to a situation in which culture is posited as a form of compensation for the absence of material development? Is the argument here that culture is more important than development or is it rather the case that culture in itself is here being held up as proof of development?

### *Culture and Development*

The notion of an African cultural renaissance in 1960s Africa (or at least in Francophone Africa) is often closely associated with Senghorian Negritude, that is with a certain conception of independence as turned towards the past, the break with European imperial control signalling the re-emergence of a previously oppressed culture. As I have attempted to illustrate, Senghor's vision of post-independence African culture is more complex than such critical views allow. However, it is crucial to note that the theme of cultural renaissance was also at the heart of much left-wing thinking about Africa in this period: although certain strands of this thought heralded independence as a radical break with the past and the entrance of the continent into a new socialist modernity, it is striking that so many left-wing politicians and artists of

the period—from Frantz Fanon to Amilcar Cabral to Sembene—also engaged with notions of a cultural renaissance that necessitated a turn to the past that would eventually lead towards the path of development. In Sembene’s case, this is not simply a question of restating his commitment to his art in the face of the old canard that he was more interested in the political message than the artistic form of his work but rather of underlining his vision of culture as an integral part of lived experience.<sup>5</sup> Before examining Sembene’s ideas on the relationship between culture and development, I would like very briefly to look more generally at the ways in which Africa was imagined in the idealistic discourse of the era of decolonization. In particular, it is illuminating to compare and contrast Dakar 1966 with the Algiers Festival of 1969, for the two are often cast (somewhat misleadingly, in my view) as opposing visions of Africa and decolonization.

Senghor’s vision of a pan-African culture was racially defined and delimited, which meant that North Africa was largely, if not entirely, omitted. (Performers and artists from ‘non-black’ countries were allowed an observer status at the 1966 festival.) Senghor also chose to exclude representatives of the liberation movements that were at that time still fighting against racist colonial regimes in the settler colonies of Southern Africa, as well as in Lusophone Africa. At the *Premier Festival Culturel Panafricain*, held in Algiers in July 1969, both of these omissions were “rectified” as the organizers explicitly sought to include the entire continent, including representatives from various liberation movements in Africa, as well as the Black Panthers from the United States, and the PLO, thereby unambiguously linking pan-African culture with an ongoing process of political liberation. Although the Algiers

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<sup>5</sup> Sembene’s views on art and politics can be found in the highly entertaining collection of interviews published by Busch and Annas (2008).

Festival may have been more overt in its support for the radical politics of the day, this should not be taken in itself as proof that its vision of culture was fundamentally different to that expressed in Dakar three years earlier. (Decisions regarding the invitees to any such event are, of course, highly significant but, in this instance, the value of the ‘radical’ nature of certain invitees would appear to be more symbolic than substantive.) In the opening speech of the Festival, President Houari Boumedienne (a military general with no great cultural pretensions) asked: “Quel sens, quel rôle, quelle fonction pourrions-nous accorder à la culture, à l’enseignement et à nos arts, si ce n’est de rendre la vie meilleure à l’ensemble de nos peuples libérés [...] si ce n’est, d’une façon ou d’une autre, de participer à l’entreprise universelle de réhabilitation de l’homme par l’homme” (*Le Premier Festival 1970*, 9) [What meaning, what role, what function should we give to culture, education and the arts, if they do not serve to make life better for all of our newly liberated peoples [...], if they do not participate in the universal task of rehabilitating man through his own actions]. Although there is more of a socialist flavour to the wording, there is also a fundamental continuity with the thinking of a Senghor (who is in fact widely quoted in the official Algiers festival book) in terms of the role that culture should play in creating a new, universal civilisation. This is the territory explored by Fanon in the conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961): in the aftermath of empire, a new humanism is required and culture is given a fundamental role in that process: the trouble lies in attempting to define the practical ways in which culture might in reality bring about such a change.

For instance, at the National Congress of his UPS party in late 1966, Senghor’s speech dealt with various budgetary matters and justified the expenditure set aside for the Festival in the following terms: “Les sacrifices financiers que le Festival nous a coûtés, nous ne devons pas le regretter parce qu’il s’agit de la culture

et qu'encore une fois, la culture est au commencement et à la fin du développement” (cited in Rous 1967, 81) [The financial sacrifices that the Festival has cost us should not be a source of regret because this is a question of culture, and let me repeat it again, culture is the beginning and the conclusion of development]. In a country entering a vicious cycle of drought and famine that would devastate large sections of the rural population, was expenditure on the Festival merely a frivolous and irrelevant extravagance? This is not to suggest that the pan-African festivals of the 1960s and 1970s were grandiose but fundamentally empty political gestures. For even if their strength lies primarily in their idealism and their rhetoric, that alone makes for a powerful legacy, as the ongoing relevance and inspiration of Fanon’s work has proven. What interests me is the question of whether culture really is so central to development; and what exactly is the conception of culture that is being promoted?

*Sembene, Senghor and Postcolonial African Modernity*

As was stated above, by 1966, Sembene was well established as a writer—*Le Mandat* which he entered in the festival’s literary competition was his sixth published work—and he was gradually developing a parallel reputation as a pioneering figure in sub-Saharan African cinema—*La Noire de*, which won the film prize in Dakar was his third film and his first feature. A committed Marxist who had found his way into the artistic sphere via the trade union movement in France, he had emerged in the early 1960s as a firm opponent of Negritude, which he viewed as outdated and unhelpful in the post-independence era. In his novella *Véhi-Ciosane (White Genesis)*, published alongside *The Money Order*, he uses a story of incest in a dying Senegalese village as a metaphor for the inability of post-independence Africa to face up to its ills, imprisoned as it is within a racialized opposition with its former imperial masters.

Indeed, in the preface to the novella, Sembene claims that unnamed figures have asked him not to shine this harsh light on Africa for fear of how this would play to external perceptions of the continent. However, he denounces such views as a fundamental barrier to progress in what is clearly designed in part as a sideswipe at Negritude: “Quand cesserons-nous de recevoir, d’approuver nos conduites, non en fonction de Notre Moi d’Homme, mais de la couleur des autres” (15; emphasis in original) [when will we stop acknowledging and approving our actions in terms of the other’s colour, rather than in terms of Our Own Humanity].

Sembene’s unconventional education and literary background meant that he had absolutely no investment in Senghorian notions of a Classical African tradition, which is not to say that he was uninterested in “traditional” African culture but his was a fundamentally historicized—and, I should add, highly contentious—interpretation of that tradition, which sought to explain it in light of the material circumstances of trade, war, slavery and colonialism, illustrated most clearly in his powerful essay, “Man is Culture”, which will be examined below. Although primarily concerned with the social and political issues facing contemporary Africa, Sembene refused to concede discussion of the pre-colonial past to supporters of Negritude, and he sought throughout his career to embed his ideas within a radical reading of “traditional” African societies. The clearest expression of this is his celebration of the “ceddo”, those he problematically perceived as the common people, resisting all forms of domination in his 1976 film, *Ceddo*.

Sembene’s most extended reflection on tradition, culture and history in Africa is to be found in “Man is Culture”, which is taken from a lecture he delivered at a US university in 1975.<sup>6</sup> From the very beginning, Sembene refuses to view art as a

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<sup>6</sup> For an extended discussion of this text, see Murphy 2000, 29-36.

separate sphere of human activity: “Where I come from art is not adornment. The word ‘art’ does not exist in any of the languages of West Africa. On the other hand, Man is the symbol of art. He himself is art” (1979, 1). Culture is deemed to be an integral part of daily, lived experience. This places it within the realm of history and not in terms of the timeless essence of an imagined cultural authenticity. Sembene celebrates the survival of certain elements of black African culture as a symbol of African resistance to European domination but he refuses the blind celebration of all things African: “If the demand for the ancient culture was a just cause, the servile imitation of it checks progress. The obligation to do today as the ancestors did is a sign of intellectual deficiency. What is worse, it reflects a lack of control over daily life” (1979, 9). The African past offers meaning and value but not a template to be copied for the future.

As one might expect in a festival masterminded by Senghor, literature played a central role in Dakar 1966. There were poetry readings and performances of plays by Césaire and Soyinka, and there were also literary competitions covering various categories (poetry, fiction, theatre). It was thus something of a shock when Sembene won one of the major prizes for literature, not least because the story told in *Le Mandat* was that of independence betrayed. In the brief span of its 100 pages, Sembene provides a comic, entertaining but fundamentally pessimistic account of deceit and hypocrisy in Dakar, as various parties fight to gain access to the money order of the title. Independence has ushered in the era of capitalist modernity: in place of progress and development, the reader is invited to see exploitation and corruption.

The success of Sembene’s work at the Festival created something of a problem for those critics, scholars and journalists who had built up the event as the apotheosis of Negritude. For example, in the June 1966 edition of the monthly cultural magazine

*Bingo*, Paulin Joachim sought to engage in a less than subtle process of recuperation in his somewhat ambiguously titled editorial, “La Négritude, connais pas” [Negritude, never heard of it]. He claims that Wole Soyinka, Tchicaya U’Tamsi and Sembene, all of whom had previously signalled their disapproval of Negritude but who had now won prizes at the Dakar Festival have been forced to see the error of their ways, as though winning prizes at what he explicitly views as a Festival of Negritude is clear evidence of their false consciousness.

The tenuous nature of Joachim’s argument is all the more apparent in a profile of Sembene later in the same issue of the magazine. Attempting to gloss over Sembene’s hostility to Senghor and his ideas, Joachim announces that “Sembène Ousmane ne condamne pas la Négritude” [Sembène Ousmane does not condemn Negritude] but Sembene’s own words create a far more ambiguous picture:

“Je retiens”, dit-il [Sembene], “le service rendu par ce mouvement historique [la Négritude] à des milliers de consciences vidées d’elles-mêmes pour être remplies de la densité des autres. Mais le moment est venu de mettre un contenu nouveau dans le concept de la Négritude. Il faut dépasser la Négritude et ouvrir sur l’Universel.” (Joachim 1966b, 47)

[“I acknowledge”, says Sembene, “the achievements of this historic movement [la Négritude] on behalf of thousands of consciences that were hollowed out and filled with the ideas of other peoples. But the time has come to give Negritude a new meaning. It’s time to go beyond Negritude and open up to the Universal.]

It should be acknowledged that Sembene is far more charitable here than he is many of his other statements on Negritude; however, the quotation is consistent with Sembene's usual Fanonian reading of Negritude as a historically contingent concept whose time had passed with the achievement of independence. What is perhaps most remarkable is that Joachim appears to share Sembene's reading of Negritude, for in an article within the main body of the magazine, tellingly titled "Où va la culture négro-africaine?" [Where is Black African Culture Heading?], Joachim positions the Dakar Festival both as a celebration, and the culmination of, Negritude. Having outlined the nature of "classical" black civilization, Africa can now look to the future:

Ce Festival des Arts est un tournant. La nuit tombe [...] sur une étape [dans notre développement] qui fut certes douloureuse, mais exultante. Le jour se lève sur une nouvelle ère où il ne sera plus question d'encenser éperdument le Nègre, [...] ni de chanter l'Afrique comme la terre préservée ou comme le berceau de l'humanité. [...] Alors, il nous faut aujourd'hui exprimer un art de métissage culturel, sinon de métissage biologique. (Joachim 1966, 13)

This Festival of the Arts is a turning point. Night is now falling [...] on a stage [in our development] that was painful but exhilarating. The dawn of a new era is upon us, one in which it will no longer be a question of mindlessly praising the Black man [...] nor will we constantly be obliged to praise Africa as the promised land or the cradle of humanity. [...] Today, we must express the art of cultural *métissage* if not of biological *métissage*.

Essentially, for Joachim, the Festival was the real enactment of the metaphorical process that Senghor had often evoked in relation to Negritude, that of storing Africa's soul (for which we can read its Classical past) in a safe place in order to meet the challenges of a future globalized world.

Once again, we see here the difficulty of establishing any forward-looking or even contemporary-looking vision of Negritude, for it is fundamentally perceived, even by its supporters, as the celebration of Africa's Classical era. Joachim's desire to gloss over the success of Negritude's opponents in the arts competitions sponsored by the Festival is highly problematic precisely because it seeks to erase any sense of the present-day, postcolonial concerns of Soyinka, U'Tamsi or Sembene. Where Senghor saw the Festival as the embodiment of his conception of an emerging Pan-African culture and the expression of Negritude, the prizes awarded to the socially and politically committed fiction of Sembene illustrated the extent to which rival visions of African culture were coming to the fore: for Sembene, racial solidarity counted far less than socio-economic ties linking together the poor and the exploited. If culture is linked to development for Sembene, it is culture that emerges from below rather than culture imposed from on high.

### *Conclusion*

In December 2010, Dakar hosted a third edition of the *Festival Mondial des arts nègres*. Was FESMAN 2010 able to summon any of the idealism of 1966 or was it just one more stopping-off point on the more adventurous end of the cultural tourism market? Can the expenditure on the Festival be justified when Senegal's economic position is, in certain respects, worse than it was forty years ago? Does the fact that Dakar 2010 was launched by former President Wade at a symposium in Paris (at the

Sorbonne of all places) indicate that Francophone Africa is still in thrall to the cultural superiority of its former colonial master? It is highly significant that the 2010 Festival took for its main theme the now slightly tarnished notion of an “African Renaissance” that first emerged from the early years of post-apartheid South Africa: once again, the future of the continent is identified as a rebirth, the renaissance of a glorious past, taking Africa from an uncertain present to a brighter future. That President Wade should choose to commission a monumental bronze-cast Stalinist statue, built by North Korea, as the centrepiece of his vision of an African Renaissance simply underlines the complex contemporary and nationalist politics that underpin any attempt to imagine an idealized version of the African continent’s past, present and future: antiquity and postcolonial modernity continue to be evoked in problematic, complex but often highly innovative ways.<sup>7</sup>

Equally, it was intriguing that discourse surrounding the 2010 Festival continued to underline the links between culture and development but in subtly different ways to the discourse of the 1960s. In an article significantly titled “Africa, Culture and Progress”, published shortly before FESMAN 2010 in the weekly magazine, *Jeune Afrique*, Cheikh Yérim Seck argues that:

Plus que tout autre, l’homme africain a besoin de création et de créativité. Après avoir été dominatrice pendant des siècles, sa culture a été rattrapée voire surpassée par les autres.

Le continent africain doit renouer avec l’inventivité, l’efficacité, le travail.

Max Weber l’a démontré depuis 1904 dans *L’Ethique protestante et l’esprit du*

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<sup>7</sup> For a very thorough analysis of the Monument de la Renaissance Africaine in relation to Wade’s overall pan-Africanist policy, see de Jong and Foucher 2010.

capitalisme: aucun peuple qui ne croit en son génie créateur ne peut se développer. Les Chinois, qui sont en passe de dominer le monde, ont assimilé l'enseignement de Confucius (vers 551-479 av. J.-C.): "Seules la créativité dans l'art et l'ardeur dans le travail élèvent l'homme". Les Africains gagneraient à s'inspirer de cette culture de progrès. (Seck 2010, 72)

More than anything else, Africa needs creation and creativity. After centuries of domination, other continents have caught up with and surpassed Africa.

The African continent must re-engage with invention, efficiency and hard work. Max Weber illustrated this in 1904 in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: a people that does not believe in its creative genius can never develop. The Chinese, who are on the way to world domination, have assimilated the teachings of Confucius (around 551-479 BC): "Only creativity through the art and arduousness of work can elevate Man". Africans could learn a lot if they allowed themselves to be inspired by this culture of progress.

In this vision, art and the spirit of entrepreneurialism go hand-in-hand. Far from the top-down vision of state-sponsored High art as promoted by Senghor or Sembene's sense of a communal culture that expresses the spirit of resistance of a people, we are here asked to admire a more generalized sense of culture as a spirit of creativity that informs all areas of life (which chimes with President Wade's promotion of free-market culture during his 12-year presidency from 2000-12). We can see thus see that notions intimately linking culture and development persist in the African context but it also appears clear that the 2010 Dakar Festival signals both rupture and continuity with the ideas that were promoted and challenged back in 1966.

In this article, I have attempted to trace the divergences but also the continuities between the differing conceptions of the relationship between culture and development promoted respectively by Senghor and Sembene. Rather than an absolute polarity, their positions reveal clear areas of overlap on key issues. In a recent article, Richard Watts (2009) cites Mongo Beti and Odile Tobner's *Dictionnaire de la Négritude* (1989) as an attempt to situate Negritude as an ongoing project constantly in need of reinvigoration: in light of this, we might wish to read the career of Sembene, the proud black nationalist, as an attempt to realign the project of Negritude, a notion that Sembene himself proposes in the 1966 *Bingo* interview cited above. This is not to suggest that we should fundamentally (and simplistically) recast Sembene and Senghor as allies in a shared project (many of their differences were on questions of genuine substance rather than mere form), for the significance of Sembene's dissenting voice, opposing any form of "official" discourse is crucial to our understanding of his work: his creative practice is marked by the blending of narrative styles, a profound understanding of human strengths and weaknesses, and a constant desire to make his audience leave the cinema with questions ringing in their head through his exploration of dissenting voices within African society. Essentially, Sembene believed that the work of art should launch a process of debate and reflection rather than seeking to provide all the answers; his work was fundamentally questioning and anti-elitist. The value of such dissent was revealed by its absence at FESMAN 2010: if the festival might be posited as a contemporary attempt to determine the meaning of blackness by the official apparatus of the postcolonial state, then it is a tragedy that no cultural figure of the stature of Sembene was present in Dakar in December 2010 to present an alternative vision of culture and development for the twenty-first century.

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