

Guinean intellectuals were above all confronted with a generalized ostracism and the syncretic contempt of the colonizer, their reaction was one of self-regard and celebration. Following the unconditional affirmation of European culture came the unconditional affirmation of African culture. Generally speaking the bards of negritude would contrast old Europe versus young Africa, dull reason versus poetry, and stifling logic versus exuberant Nature; on the one side there stood rigidity, ceremony, protocol, and skepticism, and on the other, naïveté, petulance, freedom, and, indeed, luxuriance. But also irresponsibility.

The bards of negritude did not hesitate to reach beyond the borders of the continent. Black voices from America took up the refrain on a larger scale. The "black world" came into being, and Busia from Ghana, Birago Diop from Senegal, Hampaté Ba from Mali and Saint-Clair Drake from Chicago were quick to claim common ties and identical lines of thought.

This might be an appropriate time to look at the example of the Arab world. We know that most of the Arab territories came under colonial domination. Colonialism used the same tactics in these regions to inculcate the notion that the precolonial history of the indigenous population had been steeped in barbarity. The struggle for national liberation was linked to a cultural phenomenon commonly known as the awakening of Islam. The passion displayed by contemporary Arab authors in reminding their people of the great chapters of Arab history is in response to the lies of the occupier. The great names of Arabic literature have been recorded and the past of the Arab civilization has been brandished with the same zeal and ardor as that of the African civilizations. The Arab leaders have tried to revive that famous Dar el Islam, which exerted such a shining influence in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Today, at a political level, the Arab League is a concrete example of this determination to revive the legacy of the past and

carry it to a conclusion. Today Arab physicians and poets hail each other across borders in their endeavor to launch a new Arab culture, a new Arab civilization. They join forces in the name of Arabism, which is the guiding light for their thoughts. In the Arab world, however, even under colonial domination, nationalist feeling has been kept alive at an intensity unknown in Africa. As a result the Arab League shows no signs of that spontaneous solidarity between members of the group. On the contrary, paradoxically, each member endeavors to praise the achievements of his nation. Although the cultural element has been freed from that lack of differentiation that is characteristic of the African world, the Arabs do not always manage to forget their common identity when faced with an objective. Their actual cultural experience is not national but Arab. The issue at stake is not yet to secure a national culture, not yet to plunge into the groundswell of nations, but rather to pit an Arab or African culture against the universal condemnation of the colonizer. From both the Arab and African perspectives, the claims of the colonized intellectual are syncretic, continental in scope and, in the case of the Arabs, global.

This historical obligation to racialize their claims, to emphasize an African culture rather than a national culture leads the African intellectuals into a dead end. Let us take as an example the African Society for Culture. This Society was created by African intellectuals for a mutual exchange of ideas, experiences, and research. The aim of the Society was therefore to establish the existence of an African culture, to detail it nation by nation and reveal the inner dynamism of each of the national cultures. But at the same time this Society was responding to another demand: the need to take its place within the ranks of the European Society for Culture that threatened to turn into the Universal Society for Culture. At the root of this decision there was therefore the preoccupation with taking its place on an equal footing in the universal arena, armed with a culture sprung from

the very bowels of the African continent. Very quickly, however, this Society proved incapable of handling these assignments and members' behavior was reduced to window-dressing operations such as proving to the Europeans that an African culture did exist and pitting themselves against the narcissism and ostentation of the Europeans. We have demonstrated that such an attitude was normal and drew its legitimacy from the lie propagated by the European intellectuals. But the aims of this Society were to deteriorate seriously once the concept of negritude had been elaborated. The African Society for Culture was to become the Cultural Society for the Black World and was forced to include the black diaspora, i.e., the dozens of millions of blacks throughout the Americas.

The blacks who lived in the United States, Central, and Latin America in fact needed a cultural matrix to cling to. The problem they were faced with was not basically any different from that of the Africans. The whites in America had not behaved any differently to them than the white colonizers had to the Africans. We have seen how the whites were used to putting all "Negroes" in the same basket. During the First Congress of the African Society for Culture in Paris in 1956 the black Americans spontaneously considered their problems from the same standpoint as their fellow Africans. By integrating the former slaves into African civilization the African intellectuals accorded them an acceptable civil status. But gradually the black Americans realized that their existential problems differed from those faced by the Africans. The only common denominator between the blacks from Chicago and the Nigerians or Tanganyikans¹⁷ was that they all defined themselves in relation to the whites. But once the initial comparisons had been made and subjective feelings had settled down, the black Americans realized that the objective problems were fundamentally different. The principle and purpose of the

¹⁷ Translator's Note: Present-day Tanzanians

freedom rides whereby black and white Americans endeavor to combat racial discrimination have little in common with the heroic struggle of the Angolan people against the iniquity of Portuguese colonialism. Consequently, during the Second Congress of the African Society for Culture the black Americans decided to create the American Society for African Culture.

Negritude thus came up against its first limitation, namely, those phenomena that take into account the historicizing of men. "Negro" or "Negro-African" culture broke up because the men who set out to embody it realized that every culture is first and foremost national, and that the problems for which Richard Wright or Langston Hughes had to be on the alert were fundamentally different from those faced by Léopold Senghor or Jomo Kenyatta. Likewise certain Arab states, who had struck up the glorious hymn to an Arab renaissance, were forced to realize that their geographical position and their region's economic interdependence were more important than the revival of their past. Consequently the Arab states today are organically linked to Mediterranean societies and cultures. The reason being that these states are subject to modern pressures and new commercial channels, whereas the great trade routes of the days of Arab expansion have now disappeared. But above all there is the fact that the political regimes of certain Arab states are so heterogeneous and alien to each other that any encounter, even cultural, between these states proves meaningless.

It is clear therefore that the way the cultural problem is posed in certain colonized countries can lead to serious ambiguities. Colonialism's insistence that "niggers" have no culture, and Arabs are by nature barbaric, inevitably leads to a glorification of cultural phenomena that become continental instead of national, and singularly racialized. In Africa, the reasoning of the intellectual is Black-African or Arab-Islamic. It is not specifically national. Culture is increasingly cut off from reality. It finds safe haven in a refuge of smoldering emotions and has difficulty