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Chapter 17

Cultural Pan-Africanism in twentieth-century France

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17 Cultural Pan-Africanism in twentieth-century France

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In 1935, Henry Eboué, African-born son of a French Caribbean civil servant, wrote an essay on African music and Western philosophy. The young writer described how the people of Ubangi-Chari (now part of the Central African Republic) used the tam-tam to communicate. For them, he wrote, ‘music is language and language is music’ (Eboué, 1935). Eboué used this analysis of an African cultural practice to tackle long-standing Western ways of thinking about music and language. Many Western philosophers had argued that language is more rational and meaningful than music. Moreover, by the early nineteenth century, many Europeans believed that European classical music showed they had reached a superior stage of evolution to Africans and their music. Eboué challenged these cultural assumptions and suggested that Africa had a lot to teach Europeans about the relationship between music and meaning. He ended his piece by critiquing European ‘“savants” – philosophers and thinkers’ – who, he argued, hadn’t been able to strip away their own preconceptions in order to understand African music. The whole case thus revealed the difficulty of ‘evaluating a civilization when it is not one’s own’ (Eboué, 1935, 5).

Eboué himself was of Antillean descent and born in Africa. He doesn’t claim the tam tams and the culture of Ubangi-Chari as his own in the article. In other words, he doesn’t suggest that there is a single Black identity and culture but offers thoughtful and nuanced observations of Black cultures, differentiating himself from the Ubangi-Chari while defending Afro-diasporic cultures from European stereotyping. In this, as in other respects, his piece exemplifies cultural Pan-Africanism. He critiques European philosophy and science and argues that it has misrepresented Black culture as primitive, instinctive and non-rational, driven by emotion rather than reason. He uses a cultural practice to discuss these issues and describes it as a source of pride and distinction. He published this essay in a fledgling student newspaper, *L’étudiant noir* (The Black Student), produced by and for the Black Francophone community in Paris in the 1920s. The editors aimed to bring together people from Africa and the African diaspora who were living in Paris in a shared intellectual and cultural endeavour. They urged Black Francophone readers to transcend their differences. They sought to bring Afro-diasporic communities together and inspire them through critical intellectual engagement, political action and cultural production.

The editorial aims of the newspaper, and of Eboué’s essay, were characteristic of cultural Pan-Africanism, a process that used cultural expression and production to represent and to co-create a shared sense of Black identity across many different individuals and groups of African descent. It promoted a vision of Black unity and identity that drew on African culture and history and then deployed it for political and global community-building aims. Cultural Pan-Africanism paralleled political Pan-Africanism in building and developing

practices and processes that had liberatory potential and it promoted culture as the field in which to do this.

Here it might be helpful to establish a clear understanding of culture, as it can mean many different things in different contexts. Cultural historians use three broad categorizations of culture to explain its role in shaping both past and present. The first is that culture consists of a community's shared ideas and mentalities. These are value and belief systems we hold in common that create social, emotional, and cultural bonds. The second relates to practices and rituals. Food, religious celebrations, the ways in which we commemorate life and death, celebrate unions, announce personal and communal success, share our joys and tragedies. The third consists of cultural production which is used to refer to art, performance, music, literature, film and TV (although we can include foodways, and museum collections, cultural heritage sites, and exhibitions here too). Sports, fashion and architecture also fall in this category as well as having a role in rituals and daily practices. Sometimes cultural production has emphasized 'high culture' which is the culture of the elite and thus assumes a taste-making or canonic form by inscribing certain works as illustrating universal appeal, quality, and beauty or merit. The 'high art/low art' distinction is historically constructed but many Pan-Africanist individuals and networks subscribed to it.

Other chapters in this Handbook deal with political Pan-Africanism and with the role of Francophone Africans in Black political networks in Paris and in France during the twentieth century. This chapter focuses on how culture became part of the Pan-African movement and how Francophone Africans based in France were engaged in it. The term Pan-Africanism refers, first, to the global political movement which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, achieved momentum in the early twentieth century, continued into the 1950s and helped spur decolonization. This political movement had official associations, affiliates, leaders and chapters in many nations who sought to unify all individuals and communities of African descent in a common political struggle against the racial oppression of Black people(s). In some factions this also took the form of promoting a return to Africa while in others it emphasized Black political and legislative power and equality within the nation-state.

The term also, however, refers to the way the Pan-African movement fostered Black solidarity and pride. That work had a cultural and social, community-building function that was just as much part of Pan-Africanism as the political struggle for representation and equality. There were several core premises of this cultural work. One was to emphasize the shared origins of Black peoples around the globe. A second was to assert the importance of early Black societies (civilizations) in Egypt and Ethiopia to human civilization. A third was to promote African culture(s) as a source of expressive power and to show that Black culture had beauty and aesthetic value, although Western cultural developments had overlooked or excluded it from 'High Art' traditions. And a fourth was to show that Black people could excel in terms of both European intellectual and cultural endeavours and Black cultural practices.

So cultural Pan-Africanism, as these definitions suggest, consisted of the use of culture to promote ideals, aims, representations and community-building that furthered the Pan-African movement. At its most expansive, this meant the use of culture to promote the advancement and well-being of all people of African descent. This chapter cannot capture the myriad ways and forms in which Francophone Africans and their networks in twentieth-century France pursued cultural Pan-Africanism, but it will explore key themes and examples largely drawn from music and literature.

Interwar era

Cultural Pan-Africanism was in evidence well before World War I. In 1914, Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Jamaica which advocated Pan-Africanist ideals. He and Amy Garvey (his wife) put out a newspaper (the *Negro World*) promoting these ideals. Both the paper and the ideals that shaped it circulated globally. It alarmed French and British colonial authorities so much that they banned copies, which were subsequently smuggled by Black seamen. The same thing happened to several French Pan-Africanist newspapers founded in Paris in the 1920s. Even earlier than Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, also a Pan-Africanist (albeit deeply opposed to Garvey), co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909, which was producing its own newspaper-journal by 1910. *The Crisis* exemplified the importance of Black cultural production in Pan-Africanism, including literary and musical contributions from its earliest days, alongside critiques of racial science that portrayed Black people as primitive. The journal had a global outlook although its primary focus was on Black Americans.

On the musical front Black American choirs, who toured widely between the 1870s and 1890s, throughout America and from Europe to South Africa made ‘Negro Spirituals’ popular (Erlmann, 1999). These songs, known as the ‘sorrow songs’ (and sometimes as ‘slave songs’) were central to Du Bois’ canonic book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, which tackled racial prejudice and conditions for Black men and women (Du Bois, 1903). His reverence for these songs illustrates how they were a source of pride and a vehicle of cultural Pan-Africanism. The very words ‘spiritual’ and ‘souls’ suggest how much work they did in offsetting ideas of Black inferiority. The emphasis on spirituality counteracted the buffoonish portrayal of Black men and women in blackface minstrelsy which was popular not just in America but around the globe – in Europe and in white settler colonies such as New Zealand and Australia. In contrast to this religious and spiritual (and respectable) genre, the rise of Black popular dances and music in the Blues, Jazz and Charleston genres set a new cultural trend at the turn of the century. This more secular music became both a curse and a source of pride for Pan-Africanists. These musical developments were galvanized by World War I which also saw a flourishing of the Pan-African movement.

In 1919, a landmark Pan-African conference had taken place alongside the Versailles peace process. In the discussions at Versailles, President Wilson’s visionary aims of self-determination had been summarily denied to people of colour, despite the political pressure applied by participants in the Pan-African congress, among others (Manela, 2014). The deprivations of war and the disillusionment of fighting for a colonizing power which did not reward military service with full citizenship affected Francophone colonial subjects deeply. This was the context within which Black American jazz performers had arrived in France during the war and won almost instant notoriety and popularity. Their performances amplified the passion for African and Afro-diasporic art and music known as the *tumulte noir*, a cultural development which raised the visibility of racial difference throughout Europe sky high. But the representations of African and Afro-diasporic art and culture that proliferated as a result were often reductive and stereotyped. These conditions contributed to the importance of France and especially Paris, as a centre of cultural Pan-Africanism. Francophone Pan-Africans from across the Empire gathered there and both embraced and rejected the influence of the *tumulte noir*. They produced novels, newspapers and journals, poetry, music, art and fashion that expressed and explored Pan-African ideals and aims.

The surge in Pan-African cultural production was heralded by a prize-winning and controversial novel, *Batouala* by French Caribbean (Antillean) author René Maran. The preface was a scathing denunciation of French colonial practices. The novel portrayed rituals, customs, foodways and music-making (including the use of the tam tam) among the Banda people and it was awarded the Prix Goncourt in 1921. Maran's selection as winner was decried by some reviewers and journalists as a sign of cultural decay that paralleled the assault of the 'epileptic cacophony' of jazz on French cultural standards (Hayes-Edwards, 2003, 81–83). In response a new literary prize for 'colonial literature' was founded in 1924 and given to a novel that asserted the benevolence of French colonialism. Maran's novel was a product of Africa and of a man of African descent. The novel's condemnation of supposedly 'civilized' French colonial administrators and of the colonial regimes of forced labour and brutal rule satisfied two Pan-Africanist aims – that of illustrating the vibrancy of African culture and of undermining the supposed superiority of the French.

It also achieved a third aim of cultural Pan-Africanism which was to demonstrate excellence and win recognition for individuals and cultural works produced by Africans and those of African descent. Maran, an Antillean of African descent, won one of the highest literary prizes in France and thus demonstrated excellence, on the most French of terms, that of a French national literary prize. It also illustrated another trend in Pan-African cultural production which was the portrayal of Africa by Afro-diasporic men and women from other regions. Maran was one of a significant numbers of French Caribbeans (Antilleans) trained in the French educational system who ended up administering African colonies (Hélénon, 2011). His personal history exemplifies the differences among Black French who participated in cultural Pan-Africanism, some of whom romanticized or mythologized Africa to serve ideological purposes. Nevertheless, Maran's novel was a watershed moment for Francophone African literature.

Maran was also instrumental in the network of Black Francophone individuals that built a vibrant print culture in interwar Paris. They produced an array of newspapers, journals and organized intellectual networks and gatherings that served Pan-African goals. *Les Continents*, founded in 1924, was one of the earliest and the short-lived *L'étudiant noir*, mentioned earlier, was one of the last. In between came newspapers from every political standpoint. Many others were a print outlet for Black political organizations (see Table 17.1). They show how cultural activities and preoccupations were as much a part of the Pan-Africanist struggle as politics. This paralleled developments in America, most notably the Harlem Renaissance, which saw a proliferation of African American art, literature, musical and cultural production. From the outset, editorial teams producing these newspapers used them to promote the Pan-Africanist cultural and intellectual goals identified earlier; demonstrating Black excellence on Western terms, counteracting damaging stereotypes (particularly those that associated dark skin with hypersexuality), promoting Black culture(s), establishing Black people as having an ancient and honourable civilized lineage and tackling the 'solidarity-in-difference' problem at the heart of Pan-Africanism.

Internal differences and what they implied for Pan-Africanism and Black solidarity formed one of the key themes and challenges of cultural Pan-African production in France. Black Americans experienced Paris as a land of comparative freedom, given political conditions in America. For their part, many Antilleans residing in France came from a relatively well-established Antillean middle-class who considered themselves to be bourgeois, 'évolué' (cultured, assimilated and quite literally 'evolved') and superior to Francophone Africans. Francophone Africans were not blind to this snobbery. Many resented it and it moved them towards radical anti-colonial activism that sought independence and that

Table 17.1 Main Publications and Their Affiliations

<i>Name</i>	<i>Date Formed</i>	<i>Leaders and Prominent Affiliates</i>	<i>Newspaper or Associated Publication</i>	<i>Ideological Affiliation</i>
Ligue Universelle de Défense de la Race Noire	1924	(Prince) Touvalou Houénou, René Maran	<i>Les Continents</i>	Intellectual, anti-colonial, left-wing
Comité de défense des intérêts de la Race Noire	1926	Lamine Senghor, Mme. Kossoul, Emile Fauré, Georges Fougues, Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté, Léo Sajous	1926 <i>La Voix des Nègres</i> 1927 <i>La Race Nègre</i> Some members also involved in production of <i>La Dépêche Africaine</i>	Left-wing, anti-racist and moderately anti-colonial but not initially communist
Ligue de défense de la race nègre	1927	Lamine Senghor, Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté	<i>La Race Nègre</i>	More radical than CDRN, strong affiliation with communists
Ligue Contre l'Imperialisme et l'Oppression Coloniale	1927	Lamine Senghor, Auguste Bloncourt	<i>Le Paria</i>	Left-wing, anti-colonial, affiliation with Comintern, international
Union des Travailleurs Nègres	1932	Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté	<i>Cri des Nègres</i>	Radical, Trade Union affiliations although not officially a union, Communist influences although maintains fiscal and political autonomy
Salons chez les Sœurs Nardal	1930	The Nardal sisters, Louis Achille, Leopold Senghor (briefly), Aimé Césaire	<i>Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World</i> Many participants also wrote and produced <i>La Dépêche Africaine</i>	Bourgeois, eclectic, although hosts were conservative, mostly advocated working within colonial systems

used more confrontational cultural production. The Pan-African movement thus faced a problem. How could this global movement provide a unified understanding of blackness and Black identity and yet also recognize the regional, economic and cultural differences among Black peoples of the world?¹

La Dépêche Africaine, one of the most influential Black newspapers in Paris, gave an answer in its opening edition, published in February 1928. It came in the form of an article written by Jane Nardal, an Antillean, middle-class, educated woman. She was one of seven formidable sisters who wrote, made music, hosted salons and who were instrumental in producing cultural work and in providing space and support for others to do the same. Jane Nardal came up with the concept of 'Afro-latin' identity to suggest some of the ways in which those of African descent had been shaped by contact with Europe. Furthermore, she identified bonds between Francophone men and women that differentiated them from Black Americans even as she recognized that all Black people shared something that could be the basis of Black solidarity. Jane Nardal wrote that 'blacks everywhere, from different

cultures, backgrounds, nations and religions, nevertheless feel vaguely that they share the same race' (Nardal, 1928).²

Jane Nardal then carefully examined the distinctions within that broad category of 'blacks everywhere' and argued that 'Afro-Latin' captured how men and women like her enjoyed the 'intellectual riches' and 'benefits' of white civilization without 'denying their race'. This was a moderate, calibrated, assessment of the relationship between race and Frenchness, yet it critiqued the French emphasis on assimilation. It demanded space and respect for an Afro-French cultural identity. Nardal insisted that expressions of difference could coexist with a broader racial affinity or loyalty. She laid out a bold vision for a Pan-African future:

Henceforth there would be some interest, some originality, some pride in being Negro, in turning back toward Africa, the cradle of Negroes, in remembering a common origin. . . . From these new ideas, new words, come the creative significance of the terms: Afro-American, Afro-Latin.

Jane's work, along with that of her sisters articulated the intellectual and conceptual frameworks of a 'black consciousness', as her sister Paulette Nardal labelled it, and laid the foundations for the literary movement later known as *négritude* which is discussed in more depth below.

La Dépêche Africaine exemplified Pan-African cultural activism in other ways. It devoted a lot of attention to Black culture. Issues included articles about art and sculpture, for example, an interview with Harlem renaissance sculptor Augusta Savage. Many issues promoted performances of classical music by Black artists, advertised records released by Black performers and reviewed and published interviews about novels by Black authors. The newspaper even sponsored an essay competition to promote Black literature. It published refutations of anthropological work that deemed Black men and women inferior to white and critiques of novelists who wrote racially stereotyped characters.

Here music enters the picture again. The prominence of jazz had led to a proliferation of caricatures and exoticizing portrayals of Black men and women. Jane Nardal's now canonic critique of Josephine Baker, entitled 'Pantins Exotiques' ('Exotic puppets') attacked those stereotypes. It exemplifies Pan-Africanist aims to promote Black humanism and to undo negative stereotypes. Nardal stated that Josephine Baker burst through the bounds of the French colonial imaginary, and into the twentieth century:

But Josephine came. . . . Behold, a woman of color who leaps onto the scene, with lacquered hair and a sparkling smile; she is still dressed in feathers, and banana leaves but she brings to the Parisians the latest Broadway productions. The transition between the past and the present, welding the virgin forest to modernism, the black Americans are achieving this, and making it tangible.

(Nardal, 1928)

This excerpt shows how jazz had a double-edged power for Nardal, and for Pan-Africanism. It made Black culture more visible and disrupted long-standing associations between primitivism and blackness because the music was recognized as modern. At the same time, jazz music and musicians attracted negative attention in mainstream white French and Pan-African anti-colonial print cultures. Jane Nardal recognized this paradox. She wrote

that even when French novelists portrayed Black millionaires, and modern jazz players, they always showed them returning to a 'primitive' state in accordance with their inner nature. An occasional variation on this was to suggest that foolish and simple 'Uncle Tom' figures were better off than these modern Black men and women. Nardal turned to the Harlem Renaissance for an answer, suggesting that Francophone authors, like their American counterparts, take the matter into their own hands and write (more of) their own novels and literary works (Nardal, in Sharpley-Whiting, 2003: 108–112).³ She also critiqued how European artists and musicians drew on African art and American jazz for iconic avant-garde and surrealist works of high art without acknowledging the sources fully, and without promoting the work of Black artists, musicians and intellectuals. Nardal challenged Black men and women to establish a more intellectual and artistic image of Black men and women in France.

Black Francophone intellectuals took up Jane Nardal's challenge. Chief among them were her sisters who hosted a Black humanist salon at their home in the Parisian suburb of Clamart. Some members of this group produced a bilingual journal the *Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World*. Its very title proclaimed its Pan-African ideals. Many years later, reflecting on the founding of the journal, which first appeared in 1931, Louis Thomas Achille, an Antillean student at the Sorbonne in the 1920s, later professor at Howard University, recalled how the journal confirmed that Pan-African work had to be cultural as well as political:

The publication of the first issue [of the *Revue du Monde Noir*], in Autumn of 1931, confirmed the emergence in Paris of currents and resources, human powers long held in check or kept secret, which formed a new reality. No longer political, like the pan-African movements that had preceded it, but cultural and sociological. No longer a people, a black *nation*, but a culture, a soul, a black humanism, diverse, and open to all men and women who desired to enrich themselves through it or simply discover it. (Achille, 1992; viii)

The journal's intention to publish poetry, literature, art and music reviews, and intellectual content revealed its middle-class, moderate, Western-trained editorial board. At the same time, the journal embraced and promoted the art, music and culture of Africa and the Antilles. These two activities were not antithetical for many Black French. The Nardal sisters played sonatas and attended classical music concerts and poetry readings. They fiercely promoted and defended the Antillean musical genre the 'biguine' alongside and in contrast to jazz. Poet, novelist and literary theorist Gilbert Gratiant wrote in the pages of *L'étudiant noir* that he loved the biguine but he also loved the works of Racine. One of the composers who helped make the biguine famous, Maïotte Almaby, also composed classical music and won prizes for her classical violin-playing.

As these examples show, besides promoting Black excellence in European culture, Pan-Africanists took pride in Black cultural forms such as the biguine, or in varieties of African drum and dance performance. In the interwar era, promoting the art, music and culture of African and Afro-diasporic groups became a central feature of Pan-African organizing. In addition to moderate intellectuals, Black radical communist activists, led by the Senegalese activist Kouyaté, hosted fundraising dances featuring Black music. They invited Madagascan jazz bands, Antillean biguine performers, American jazz musicians and many more, to ensure they catered to and represented members from around the French Empire. Their deployment of music illustrated its importance for Pan-Africanists.

In 1932, Giselle Dubouillé, writing for the *Revue du Monde Noir*, located the origins of both jazz and the biguine in Africa. The biguine, she claimed, was the ‘firstborn child’ of African music.

Most of the modern dance music – from the tango to the rag-time, passing through the biguine and the blues – proceeds from the sources of African songs. Notwithstanding this evident relationship, African music has been neglected till now by the record firms which have otherwise supplied us with a pretty complete range of jazz. Parlophone should be complimented for having registered lately some purely African songs.
(Dubouillé, 1932/1993)⁴

In this assessment, Dubouillé was clearly invested in tracing a variety of contemporary Black music back to its African source. She commented favourably on a ‘purely African’ record and suggests that professional musicians and dancers would find ‘mines of original ideas’ in it but it would be very different from records of jazz, or the biguine. She identified music as a source of a shared identity located in an African past.

Another commentary on music, produced by Paulette Nardal, Jane’s older sister, revealed how cultural Pan-Africanism extended well beyond print culture. Francophone Pan-Africans also expressed their various Black identities in clothing, dancing and personal style. In 1929, she reviewed a new ‘colonial dance hall’ (P. Nardal, 1929). This new space was created partly because other dance halls set up for and run by French colonial subjects had become crowded with the white avant-garde, in search of ‘authentic’ colonial exoticism. A white journalist reporting on his experiences at the Bal Nègre, for example, noted that on each step of the staircase ‘stood a spitting image of Josephine Baker, barely more clothed, but without the ostrich feathers’ (Pays, 1928). At the new dance space, in contrast, Paulette Nardal takes care to note that all of the women present were fully dressed. She describes women with every shade of skin colour ‘from caramel to deepest Egyptian black’ and wearing a variety of styles from contemporary European fashion to the brightly coloured skirts and head kerchiefs of Martinique. Nardal emphasizes the variety of Black women at the dance, as if to offset one-dimensional print representations of exotic colonial women and erotic Black femininity in Parisian theatres. Her efforts were echoed in a *Revue du Monde Noir* survey on ‘What black men and women in Europe should wear’ (P. Nardal, 1932). This was also the era in which the ‘sapeur’ or flamboyant French African ‘dandy’ (young men who imitated the style of colonial officials to parody and also imitate them), entered Paris for the first time, in the person of Camille Diata (Gondola, 1999). Several female contributors to the *Revue Du Monde Noir* discussion pointed out that wearing regional headdresses, such as the Antillean headkerchief, when done appropriately and with European dress on the body, conveyed a sense of regional pride while not compromising dignity. In both cases, Pan-Africanists in Paris worked to offset exoticizing representations of Black womanhood and offer more nuanced representations than those presented by jazz.

By 1931, the year in which the *Revue Du Monde Noir* was launched, Black cultural production in Paris was in full swing. It was further stimulated by the 1931–1932 Colonial Exposition which brought music, dance, clothing, print culture and intellectual discussion about Francophone African cultures into sharp relief. The exposition generated a lively debate among Antilleans, Madagascans and French West Africans. Some of them took pride in the displays of their cultures even though they were staged by the French colonial state. Others, however, decried the reductive and exploitative display of various Black cultures

all used to promote French colonial glory. Ousmane Socé, a young Senegalese author pursuing his education in Paris, captured one of the ways it inspired him, and others, to adopt a Black nationalist strand of cultural Pan-Africanism, in his semi-autobiographical novel *Mirages de Paris*. His work exemplifies the characteristics of the *négritude* movement which had its origins in the work of the Nardal sisters but became famous as a movement through the involvement of Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Leon Gontran-Damas. He collaborated with them all on the student newspaper, *l'Étudiant Noir*.

Socé's novel follows its protagonist, Fara, from rural Senegal to Paris where Fara joins a group of 20 Senegalese men bound for the Exposition. He visits the Exposition, works there briefly as a vendor, but more importantly meets, and serves as an informal guide for, a group of young, white Frenchwomen. He falls in love with one of them just as he has earlier fallen in love with France through his education. As Fara experiences Paris he differentiates between 'real' representations of Black culture and their hyper-commercialized variants. He turns a critical lens on France and the French and exposes the colonizers as naïve and ignorant when they wander around the Exposition unthinkingly accepting the fictive wonders on offer as 'authentic'.

In the novel, one result of this process is that Fara reflects more favourably on the rural Senegalese culture in which he was raised. His irritation at the false representations of his culture results in a search for 'true' or resonant African traditions from his past. His turn to these, however, is ultimately unsuccessful in providing stability. His lover dies and Fara casts himself into the Seine, leaving their child to be raised by the child's white grandparents.

Fara's reawakening to his own roots reflects a broader theme of cultural Pan-Africanism which is the reassertion of pre-colonial cultural traditions (which were sometimes romanticized or mythologized). This cultural awakening became a tactical goal as well as a metaphor for rising consciousness among a Pan-African (imagined) community of colonized subjects and citizens. Socé, the author, after writing two novels both of which draw on autobiographical material, later assembled and published a collection of songs and folktales and presented them in the guise of a 'griot' or revered songster and storyteller within West African communities. His critique of European culture and reverence for and use of African traditional cultural elements in his work are typical of the *négritude* movement.

The *négritude* movement emerged in the form it would later be known and become canonic, in the years from 1935 to 1939. Many of the authors involved were among the students who produced *l'Étudiant noir*. The name of the movement reclaimed the word *nègre* which was used as a racist insult at the time. And, just as they reclaimed the word, the leaders of the movement proclaimed the power of Black culture with increasing volume(s) heading into World War II. In a canonic 1939 essay, 'What the Black Man Contributes', for example, Léopold Senghor argued for the existence of an 'African essence' in culture in which rhythm and spirituality prevailed and that was both opposed to but also complementary to Western high art. He suggested that a new Black-inspired culture might bring the two together productively (Diagne, 2018). Many of his ideas in that essay echo those of earlier writings of Jane and Paulette Nardal, whose salon he and the other 'fathers of *négritude*' attended.

Post-war: the *Présence Africaine*

The momentum of the *négritude* movement, begun before World War II, continued through and after it. Senghor's fellow *négritude* authors, Césaire and Gontran-Damas,

differed slightly from him on the potential of combining European and African culture. Senghor, some have argued, privileged the role of Black culture as philosophy and aesthetics, whereas Césaire emphasized its potential as a site for remembering history and producing Afro-centric art (Wilder, 2005, 2015; Sharpley-Whiting, 2003; Bà, 2016). Whatever the nuances in their positions, these intellectuals wrote essays and poems that tried to express Black identity/ies through incorporating spiritual, affective and unapologetically physical and emotional material in their work. Senghor's 'Prayer to Masks', for example, moved through stanzas which used the mask as a metaphor for his experience of feeling the presence of his ancestors through him as he took up and inhabited the mask for his generation. Senghor states that Africans 'teach rhythm to the dead world of guns and machines' and proclaims that Africans are like leaven (yeast) for white flour (Senghor, in Bà, 2016).

Senghor's colleague and fellow poet, Léon Gontran-Damas, 1937 poetry collection, *Pigments*, included poems that ridiculed assimilationist Black French. In 'Hoquets', (hiccups), for example, the speaker of the poem describes his mother insisting he speak the 'French the French speak' and play the violin, rather than the banjo. In the poem, the poet writes out his 'hiccups' in prose, which produces a jarring sensation for the reader. He thus likens forced assimilation to a rupture, a gap, a hiccup in the speaker's identity. Aimé Césaire's landmark work *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* worked with similar themes (Césaire, 1956). Césaire wrote it before the war but published it afterwards. It brings together the sound of African drums with the sights and scenes of Martinique and the poet depicts his country as both proud and ravaged by colonialism. All of these works served Pan-African goals by promoting Black traditions and cultural practices, asserting the solidarities linking people of African descent around the globe, and challenging European claims to cultural and racial superiority.

In 1947 and 1948, respectively, Damas and Senghor published anthologies of Black Francophone literature which consolidated the importance of their literary movement (Diagne, 2018). Damas differed from that of Senghor in two important ways. First, he included a more diverse range of contributors. And second, Senghor's anthology boasted a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, whose involvement marked the work of *négritude* with elite European literary recognition (Senghor and Sartre, 2011). Sartre's support for the work of the *négritude* movement continued into the 1950s and had an influence on its growth and success.

Much ink has been spilled over the lionizing of Senghor, Damas, and Césaire as founders of *négritude* and the erasure of work done by the Nardal sisters, among others, in creating the space and contributing to the intellectual currents which helped shape it (Sharpley-Whiting, 2003; Hayes-Edwards, 2003; Boittin, 2015; Gillett, 2021). This erasure was significant and real. After the war, *négritude* cemented the reputation of its male leaders, won recognition and inspired admiration, critique and new developments in Pan-African culture. These were reflected on the pages of its mouthpiece, the journal *Présence Africaine*. The journal, which was launched after the war, rapidly became recognized as a pre-eminent forum for Pan-Africanist cultural production and it continues to publish and maintain a website, cultural activities and social media presence to this day.

Présence Africaine was spearheaded by its editor and founder Alioune Diop, Franco-phone, Senegalese, and deputy to the National Assembly. Diop assembled Césaire, Senghor and Damas, and a host of white and Black intellectuals who supported the vision of a publication that would 'restore its place among the concert of nations to Africa'.⁵ The front cover of the first issue had an illustration of an African mask and that issue consisted of 198 pages of work by, or about, Africa, the African diaspora, and the role of their culture in

the world. The journal, in many ways, realized the aims of the *Revue du Monde Noir* and succeeded in remaining afloat, unlike its predecessors in the interwar era.

The list of contributors to the journal reads included stars of the intellectual pantheon of its day. C.L.R. James, Senghor, Damas, American Richard Wright, Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Leiris, Gwendolyn Brooks and of course Alioune Diop himself were involved in producing it. The journal later became a publishing house and issued numerous landmark first editions, from Césaire's 'Discourse on Colonialism' to Cheik Anta Diop's philosophical *Nations, Nègres et culture* in which he pursued a classic Pan-African theme of the Ethiopian and Egyptian origins of human civilization.

The journal also sponsored major cultural gatherings which became a focal point for cultural Pan-African activity and networking. One of the significant ones was the Congress of Black Writers and Artists, in 1956 (shortly after the Bandung conference). Jacques Howlett, one of the indefatigable editorial team for the journal described its impact. His description contains all the hallmarks of cultural Pan-Africanism laid out above, from valorizing African origins, to counteracting negative stereotypes, building global Black networks and promoting Black culture:

[E]ight years of work had paved the way for this brilliant manifestation of the vitality and originality of Negro culture. This indeed crowned the efforts of *Présence Africaine*, dedicated since its inception to cultural problems. Responding to the appeal issued by the magazine, some sixty delegates from Africa, America, and Europe proceeded to take inventory. Certainly this was the culmination of our efforts, but it was also and above all else a point of departure, a spring-board to the future. The papers and discussions found their ultimate meaning in the perspective of liberation for colonized people. Naturally, in its final resolution, the Congress recognized 'the imperious necessity of proceeding toward a rediscovery of historical truth and a re-evaluation of Negro cultures.' Naturally it invited Negro authors, artists, and intellectuals to revive, rehabilitate, and develop those cultures so as to favour their integration into the general stream of human culture. But it also stated 'that the flowering of culture depends on the abolition of those twentieth century scandals: colonialism, the exploitation of weaker peoples, racism'. The resolution ended with a proclamation of brotherhood toward all men, and the final act of the Congress was to create an international association: The Society of African Culture.

(Howlett, 1958)

The mixture of the cultural and the political here resonated with the work of cultural Pan-Africanism throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the 1956 Congress was full of reflections on music, literature and how cultural practices revealed tensions as well as solidarities within Pan-African circles (Dunstan, 2015). Towards the end of the Congress, Dr. Louis Thomas Achille, teacher, lecturer, composer, singer and conductor, presented a 'Negro Spiritual' he had composed. This Francophone Caribbean, trained in Paris and America, created a Spiritual with lyrics in French and English and presented it to this illustrious group of Pan-African intellectuals, in solidarity with the Montgomery bus boycott. It was received with rapturous applause. It seemed to suggest a way forward for these Pan-African cultural and intellectual efforts that recognized and embraced distinct strands of their identity/ies and politics (Moore, 2021).

In accordance with its aim to include a diversity of African and Afro-diasporic voices, the journal also published work by those who critiqued its founders, critiqued *négritude*

and proposed different visions of Pan-African culture. Two key critics who took part in the intellectual work of Pan-Africanism were Frantz Fanon and Glissant. Fanon's confrontational Black nationalism embraced more radical policies than those of the Pan-Africanists who came before him. Like many Francophone African intellectuals, he was the product of an elite French education system begun in Martinique and continued in France. The fifth chapter of his searing 1952 analysis of French racial structures and colonialism, in the book *Black Skins, White Masks*, describes how the work of Senghor, prefaced by Sartre, gave him hope, when he was traumatized by the racism, rejection and 'double consciousness' he experienced as a Black man in France. Fanon then describes his despair as he realized that Sartre's preface, while legitimating Black poetry, showed that Black poetry needed legitimation by a white benefactor. He argued, moreover, that Sartre honoured Black poetic vitality but also saw it as one stage in the journey towards a universal humanist poetry. Fanon argued that this de-emphasized Black creativity as its own end. His later work identified gaps and failures in Pan-Africanism and eventually Fanon, who worked in Algeria and joined in the struggle for Algerian Independence, proposed a radical Black nationalism unafraid to turn to violence.

Edouard Glissant had a different cultural critique of the *négritude* movement. He argued that it focused too much on Africa as a homeland, and on the African origins and 'essence' of Black culture. He, instead, argued that Black culture was inherently diasporic, and that modern Black culture was born in the movement of the slave ship and the encounters of the Americas that followed. It was inherently mixed, hybrid 'creolized' and could not be traced to a mythical African origin. Glissant's work developed into the 1960s, 1970s and it was picked up and elaborated upon by Patrick Chamoiseau, and Rafaël Confiant, and is evident in Maryse Condé's work.

One more critique of *négritude*, and a powerful one, is seen in the work of Mariama Bâ, who is not a Pan-Africanist although her Black feminist challenge to Pan-African literary production links her strongly to its work. She pointed out that many, if not all, Pan-African male authors, were far more concerned about the idealized figure of 'Mother Africa' than they were about actual African women and mothers. She wrote in the 1970s, but her critique identified genuine absences in cultural Pan-Africanism and its emphasis and legitimation of Francophone masculinity and prominent Black men as leaders and creative geniuses of the movement. Moreover, her major work, *Une Si Longue Lettre*, portrays Francophone Islam from a woman's perspective, introducing both Islam and women's voices more prominently into Francophone cultural production.

Présence Africaine did not shy away from religion. One of its editorial aims was to promote respect between adherents of the different religions practised by Africans and Afro-diasporic peoples throughout the world. In the 1950s, an interesting development unfolded on its pages. Young Black Catholics who incorporated some traditional animist Senegalese practices in their Catholic worship advocated for decolonization of the Catholic church. Their initiative towards Black Catholic independence was furiously opposed by some French Catholics (Archbishop Michel Lefebvre, most notoriously, as Elizabeth Foster discusses in *African Catholic*). But eventually these advocates of African Catholicism on its own terms won support from the Vatican. One of the outcomes was more Black priests, some mixed liturgical practice, and a recognition from the Vatican that African Catholicism should/could take its own path towards independence from the French catholic church (Foster, 2019).

Présence Africaine also extended its cultural reach into the realm of film. The editors commissioned one of the earliest films that portrayed European, colonial, exploitation of

African art, and critiqued it: the 1953 film *Statues Also Die*. The journal also published the literary work of Ousmane Sembène, who later became the first Black Francophone filmmaker to win widespread European critical and public recognition. His 1966 film *La Noire de . . .* won a French film award (the *Prix Jean Vigo*) and launched his reputation as one of the founding figures in African film. Sembène's output featured African struggles, he exemplified Black excellence, and he incorporated African symbolism in his work, such as his use of a mask, in *La Noire de*, which is an evocative visual motif that references not only African artistic and cultural traditions but also Senghor's poems.

What then, of music? There was no lack of Black music in Paris in the 1950s but much of the focus was, as it was in the 1920s, on jazz and on large jazz festivals marketed towards white French audiences. French pop music had absorbed American influences too, which themselves derived from Black American culture, but none of this reflected a Francophone cultural Pan-Africanism. The Antillean 'retour aux sources' movement of the 1960s which produced *Gwo Ka* music, a reinvention of the biguine music of the interwar era, illustrated the assertion of African roots, a commitment to regional pride and folk musical traditions and a Black musical nationalism that was Pan-African. Pan-African music festivals in Dakar (1966), Algiers (1969) and Kishasa (1974) had a huge impact, although some critics argued that they served American and European propaganda and politics as much as the cause of Pan-Africanism (Moore, 2021). Radio shows like the Voice of America/*Voix de l'Amérique* broadcast in France and Francophone Africa in the 1950s and 1960s also circulated Black music and promoted exchange, encounter and invention among African and African-American musical styles. In the 1970s and 1980s, Francophone music producer Ibrahim Sylla was being hired by French record labels (Pathé-Marconi and Celluloïd) to record artists like Youssou N'Dour and Orchestra Baobab. He eventually founded his own record label, Syllart, featuring Francophone Black performers in the 1980s.

Legacies: the rise of French rap or the return of the 'Tam Tam'

Cultural Pan-Africanism, like its political counterpart, may have lost visibility and a certain amount of credibility as well as momentum after the achievement of decolonization. This is debatable as Kwame Nkrumah, for example, actively invested in Pan-African cultural initiatives as president of Ghana, and some productive and interesting exchanges took place through the medium of jazz and the Pan-African Festivals mentioned earlier. The legacies and reinvention of Pan-Africanism can be heard and seen to this day in French rap, in the *sapeur* culture of the 1980s, and in the assertion of a complex and sometimes fragmented Black French identity in literature, as in art and film.

One of the most obvious examples of an ongoing Pan-African legacy is in French rap. And, as in the 1920s, the meeting of different Afro-diasporic and African cultures on the soil of France had a catalysing effect on the genre. France itself is second only to the United States as market and producer of hip-hop music in the world. The following short case study of French hip-hop group IAM from Marseilles illustrates the Pan-African legacies alive in the genre. Formed in 1989, their debut album, 1991, *de la Planete Mars* had sales figures of about 100,000, which at the time was hailed as a breakthrough for the 'still young genre of French hip hop'.⁶ They collaborated on the soundtrack linked to *la Haine*, a film dealing with *banlieues*, racism and generations of immigration and Black French presence and marginalization in France.

French rap is interwoven with a sense of identification that asserts aspects of ethnicity and draws upon histories of racialization. These histories continue the same themes that produced early Pan-Africanism – a shared sense of racial oppression and a daily lived experience of exclusion and consequent affinity with the anti-racist struggles of others. In IAM's case, the artists identify themselves as descendants of North African, sub-Saharan African and Antillean immigrants. IAM's lead singer, for example, describes his heritage as Italian, Muslim and French (Hélénon, 2006; Whidden, 2007). They represent themselves as heirs to a musical tradition that has links to both America and a long African past. By taking Egyptian stage names, Akhenaton, Kheops and Imhotep, three of IAM's members invoke the classic Pan-African homage to Egypt and Ethiopia as the founding civilizations for Black people and, indeed, for humanity.⁷ This recalls the way in which early Pan-Africanists, like Giselle Dubouillé, mentioned earlier, linked their music to Africa, claiming it was the 'first born child of Africa.' It echoes how Césaire and Senghor wove poetic renderings of tam tam rhythms into their work.

The band is recognized as political in France, and by scholars working on French hip hop. One critical aspect of the historical context in which they wrote and performed the album *de la Planete Mars* was the ongoing debate in French educational policy about how to deal with the past. 'Tam tam de l'Afrique' was popular at the same time as the debate raged about whether, and how, to teach France's complicity in the slave trade in French schools.⁸ That controversy was ended in the Taubira law of 2001 which recognized

both the Transatlantic and Indian Ocean Negro slave trade, on the one hand, and slavery itself, on the other, that were practiced from the 15th century, in the Americas, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and Europe against African, Amerindian, Malagasy and Indian populations, as constituting crimes against humanity.

The law, further, required that French schools teach the history of slavery and recognize its role in the French past. However, the Taubira law was undermined by one in 2004 demanding that French schools recognize France's 'positive influence' in Africa. To date, scholars, poets, novelists and French rappers are continuing to challenge and refute that view (Niang, 2019).

The popular rap hit 'Tam Tam de l'Afrique' has overtly political lyrics which decry the failures of the French republican promise in both the past and the present and declare the shameful historic truth of the Atlantic slave trade. The song accuses a racist white culture of brutality in the past – it describes French colonizers and slave traders as having 'a block of granite in place of a heart'. The song states these men have burned African roots (racines) and despoiled African culture from South Africa to the Nile, separating 'Black men' as a category from white 'humans' known as such by their superior skin colour.⁹ The opening verse details how French individuals become savages in the process of colonization, arriving in monstrous ships, without a civilized greeting, beating men and raping women.

In this number, then, IAM flips the rhetoric of the colonial-era 'civilizing mission'. Members of the band were familiar with the writings of Cheikh Anta Diop and Frantz Fanon. Their work shows these influences and, in the spirit of previous *négritude* and *créolite* authors, their music lists racial injustices, and proclaims that the group will remember the spirit of enslaved peoples, and the generations of crime and destruction committed against their descendants.

The song ends, beautifully, with a proclamation that

in the free tempo of his imagination, the singer will remember that his music was born in a field of cotton, but no, he is not racist through these opinions, this is not a critique but a narrative, he is simply telling these incredible stories, and will remember, in his heart, the tam-tam d'Afrique.

These lines claim the American heritage of cotton plantations and plantation slavery for the music itself, unambiguously linking French rap to America, slavery and share cropping as well as to Africa (albeit in a vision of Africa that is quite romanticized).

The emphasis on the drums makes an emotional, and affective, identifying claim to link back to an African heritage, through the 'tam-tam' itself. The tam tam is a powerful trope and reference to Africa and Blackness in French culture and literature. It has all sorts of ambiguities attached to it – from Josephine Baker's seductive but exoticizing (and savvy) performance as a Tunisian Princess, in the film *Princess Tam Tam*, to Aimé Césaire's invocation of African drum sounds in *Cahiers de Retour*, to the display of African drums at the Colonial Exposition in 1931, to Langston Hughes' proud invocation of 'the low beating of the Tom Tom, the slow beating of the Tom Tom' in his poems for children.

In this number, then, the artists of IAM connect the past intricately and intimately with the present. They connect France with Africa and also with the slave plantations of the Antilles and America. The song, as I mentioned earlier, was a big hit in France – at a time when the French were just beginning to grapple with the public memory of slavery and institutionalized racism through empire. The context and the genre illustrate how IAM's work continues many of the traditions of cultural Pan-Africanism.

Rap is a recorded but aural/oral art form. It connects with the use of orality and storytelling as a form of honoured history-making among many Francophone African cultures. This oral tradition and culture and its political and cultural and historical significance is recognized in the figure of the griot, or honoured storyteller. It is a role that links novelist Ousmane Socé, collecting Senegalese songs and stories, with the work of IAM, documenting the Black French past and giving voice to its legacies in the present.

Conclusion

These examples, drawn from across the twentieth century, illustrate some of the defining features of cultural Pan-Africanism. Cultural Pan-Africanism was grounded in Pan-Africanism's assertion of the shared origins of Black peoples around the globe and the quest for political and social equality for them within a global context of racialized inequality. Its advocates sought to build awareness and community among African and African-descended peoples through promoting African and Afro-diasporic culture. Cultural Pan-Africanism connected political struggles for citizenship, equality, anti-racism and inclusion with work in the sphere of cultural production and representation. This commitment can be seen in work from Henry Eboué's interwar essay on Black musical production through to the present-day website of *Présence Africaine* and the thousands of other works that showed that Black culture had beauty and aesthetic value, although Western cultural developments had overlooked or excluded it from 'High Art' traditions. And from musical fundraising events for Ethiopia in 1935 through to IAM's adoption of Ethiopian stage names, a consistent theme in cultural Pan-Africanism has been to assert the importance of early Black societies (civilizations) in Egypt and Ethiopia to human civilization.

From the salon of the Nardal sisters through to Aïssa Maïga's anti-racist, pro-Black solidarity activism within the French film industry, Francophone Black individuals have understood how culture is a powerful site for demonstrating the excellence and claims to equality of peoples of Africa and of African descent.¹⁰ Cultural production has thus carried and carries political meaning for Francophone Africans. Pan-African cultural products circulated and flowed around the Francophone African world, carrying its politics with them. Cultural Pan-Africanism has been a source of resistant energy and joyous identification and of discussion, and debate. It can elide genuine differences among and between the communities it seeks to unite and represent and reify racial categorizations that have done damage in the past. The Nardal sisters recognized that, as did their counterparts in Harlem, and the Pan-Africanists who followed them and built upon the work they, Maran, and many others had begun. Cultural Pan-Africanism, in all its richness and complexity, was a vital arm of the Pan-Africanist struggle, and the work of IAM, of MC Solaar, and more recent stars like Stromae, Francophone Belgian, remind us of that fact.

Notes

- 1 The individuals, associations and even the newspapers and journals involved in Pan-African cultural production and black intellectual history in the interwar era are too numerous to name in a short chapter, although Tyler Stovall (Stovall, 2012), Jennifer Boittin, Brent Hayes Edwards, Tricia Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Imaobong D. Umoren (Umoren, 2018) and Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel (Joseph-Gabriel, 2020), among others, have told their stories in books and monographs (see further reading.)
- 2 The quotations that follow are paraphrased, not exact translations.
- 3 This section paraphrases the article extensively. See the original, now digitized at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k12031354/f2.item>.
- 4 The translations were made by the editors of the journal and are often not literal.
- 5 This is from current website. www.presenceafricaine.com/
- 6 <http://musique.rfi.fr/artiste/rap/iam>
- 7 Of course, this opens up issues around the gender politics and 'hotep' masculinity in hip-hop which complicates the positive picture I am presenting of cultural Pan-Africanism as does the romanticization (appropriation) of African cultural traditions and references in some early French rap. IAM are clear about anthropological referents though – see their web bio: 'le groupe se construit autour de références égyptiennes et extrême-orientales, traces de lectures croisées des albums de bandes dessinées d'Alix et des ouvrages de Cheikh Anta Diop, l'historien anthropologue linguiste sénégalais'. <http://musique.rfi.fr/artiste/rap/iam> accessed 10/26/2017.
- 8 www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/117-memory-laws-in-france-and-their-implications-institutionalizing-social-harmony.
- 9 These translations/paraphrases are my own, working from the lyrics available at www.lyricsmania.com/
- 10 www.elle.com/culture/movies-tv/a33448090/aissa-maiga-interview/

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