Research article

Négritude as a resource of cultural diplomacy: Léopold Sédar Senghor and the German-African cultural dialogue

Pawel Zajas

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In this article, I examine Négritude not as a static literary doctrine but as a historically evolving, intellectually hybrid, and politically instrumentalised field of discourse. I focus on the central question of how Léopold Sédar Senghor's formulation of Négritude—frequently criticised for its essentialist and racialised premises—operated simultaneously as a philosophical project and as a resource for German-African cultural dialogue and Cold War cultural diplomacy. I approach Négritude from a comparative and intercultural perspective, reconstructing its Parisian origins, its entanglement with German Romanticism and Leo Frobenius's cultural morphology, and its subsequent reconfiguration in Senghor's shift from essentialist cultural typologies towards *métissage* and a *civilisation de l'universel*. I argue that these intellectual entanglements were not merely sources of philosophical inspiration but also created a symbolic repertoire that could later be mobilised in cultural and diplomatic relations. Against this intellectual-historical background, I trace the reception and political appropriation of Senghor and Négritude in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. I demonstrate that West Germany mobilised Senghor's intellectual affinity with German culture, his international literary prestige, and his political standing in postcolonial Africa to bolster its claims to humanist internationalism and to cultivate German-African cultural relations. East Germany, by contrast, sought to integrate Senghor into its anti-imperialist cultural diplomacy while remaining deeply suspicious of the ideological premises of Négritude and Senghor's political orientation. My key finding is that Négritude functioned as a flexible symbolic currency in the geopolitical competition between the two German states. At the same time, its divergent appropriations reveal the selective readings, omissions, and ideological adaptations through which African intellectual concepts acquired new meanings as they circulated within European cultural and political contexts. **Keywords:** Négritude, Léopold Sédar Senghor, German cultural diplomacy, Cold War, intercultural philosophy, decolonisation.

Introduction

Négritude is regarded as one of the most significant literary and cultural-philosophical movements in postcolonial Africa. The term emerged in the 1930s within the contact zone of Paris—ironically created through colonialism—among Black students of diverse geographical origins: Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal, Aimé Césaire from Martinique, and Léon-Gontran Damas from Guyana. The intellectual engagement of this group aimed to reclaim African cultural roots and promote a distinct sense of self-consciousness. The movement sought to valorise a global 'Black' culture grounded in African heritage and to articulate a universal and transnational 'Black' mode of thought (Schüller 3). Jean-Paul Sartre famously characterised this assertive affirmation of 'Black' values, along with its deliberate distancing from 'white' culture, as a form of "racist anti-racism" (Sartre, "Orphée noir" xiv).[1]

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Césaire coined the term '*Négritude*' in an essay published in 1935 in the journal *L'Étudiant noir*. The concept was inspired by African American movements such as the Harlem Renaissance, in which negatively connoted external designations (for instance, '*New Negro*') were transformed into positive self-definitions (Simo 191). Négritude was both political and aesthetic. Césaire wrote: "Once, again, I systematically defend our old Negro civilizations: they were courteous civilizations. […] It is a new society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all the fraternity of olden days" (Césaire, *Discourse* on Colonialism 51–2). The Négritude movement, however, was subject to criticism early on. Critics argued that the concept relied on racialised categories, universalised subjective experiences, and occupied a problematically binary position in contrast to postcolonial theory, which emphasises hybridity and cultural negotiation (Simo 193). Césaire himself later reflected upon these concerns. In a speech delivered in 1987 at the *First Hemispheric Conference of Black People in the Diaspora* in Miami, he expressed a retrospective ambivalence towards the term '*Négritude*.' He stated that he had reservations about the term, even though it "corresponds to an obvious reality, or at any rate to a need that must be acknowledged as profound". Négritude, Césaire argued at the time, should not be understood as "belonging to the realm of the purely biological", but rather as referring "to a certain sum of lived experiences" and as constituting "one of the historical forms of the human condition granted to humankind" (Césaire, *Le Discours sur la Négritude, Miami 1987 12*).[2] Césaire placed particular emphasis on its political dimension: Négritude is neither "a philosophy", nor "a metaphysics", nor "a pretentious worldview", but rather "a way of living history from within history—the history of a particular community whose experience has proven to be […] exceptional: shaped by the deportation of its people, by their transfer from one continent to another, by memories of distant beliefs, and by the remnants of murdered cultures" (Césaire, Le Discours 32).

Beyond its function in constituting a collective memory, Négritude is, in Césaire's formulation, also an active and assertive spiritual stance, understood as a revolt against the "European reductionism" embedded in global cultural systems (Césaire, *Le Discours* 33).

While Césaire speaks of a distinctive particularity of people of African descent and conceives of Négritude as a mode of positioning and a form of dialectical self-definition—a return to an origin through which historical agency might be reclaimed—Senghor (1906–2001), the first president of an independent Senegal, internationally celebrated poet, and influential philosopher, was concerned with demonstrating the existence of a specifically African philosophy from the outset. The epistemology, aesthetics, and political doctrine that Senghor develops are thus founded on an essentialising conception. He formulated a distinctive African poetics grounded in vitalism and racial theory (Simo 192). Above all, however, Senghor drew on the writings of the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius, including his *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas* (Cultural History of Africa), published in 1933. Such an orientation was rather uncommon among anticolonial thinkers: while emerging anticolonialism in the French and British empires drew primarily on Wilsonian doctrines of national self-determination as well as Vladimir Lenin's reflections on the national and colonial question, it was German literature, philosophy, and ethnography that assumed a decisive role for Senghor in the intellectual formation of Négritude.

In this article, I trace this conceptual and historical terrain through a tripartite structure that moves from intellectual genealogy to transnational entanglements and, finally, to geopolitical contestations. Following the introductory outline of Négritude's emergence and its philosophical stakes, in the first section, I reconstruct the formative influence of German Romanticism and cultural morphology on Senghor's thought, situating these cross-cultural appropriations within wider debates on essentialism, race theory, and poetic epistemologies. In the second section, I examine Senghor's pivotal role in West German cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, reading his poetic and political self-fashioning alongside the Federal Republic's efforts to cultivate symbolic alliances within the postcolonial world. In the third section, I widen the comparative frame by analysing the parallel, though ideologically distinct, attempts by the GDR to mobilise cultural policy in its engagement with Senegal, thereby illuminating the competing claims to anti-colonial solidarity advanced by both German states. Taken together, in these sections I demonstrate how Négritude functioned not merely as a literary or philosophical movement but as a dynamic resource within the shifting architectures of 20th-century cultural diplomacy.

Négritude and the legacy of German Romantic thought

During his years of study in Paris (1928–1934), Senghor engaged intensively with European literary and philosophical currents (Riesz, *Léopold Sédar Senghor und der afrikanische Aufbruch im 20. Jahrhundert* 109–28). For the student living in Paris, the global economic crisis of the 1930s appeared to confirm the collapse of an entire civilisation. In this

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climate of a still inchoately articulated resistance to the very foundations of the French *mission civilisatrice* (the colonial civilizing mission), the elastic notion of the "Romantic"—which for Senghor was henceforth to signify the German *par excellence*—developed into a counterpoint to the Cartesian-inflected rationalism of France (Steins 228–9).

At first, Senghor recognised in the young Johann Wolfgang von Goethe a model for his own aspirations. Two aspects fascinated him about the German especially: a deeply felt understanding of nature, scarcely encountered in classical French literature, and the departure from a socially oriented poetics modelled on the French tradition. In short, Senghor regarded early Goethe as a precursor to his own turning away from colonial assimilationist policy (Steins 229). "This simultaneous discovery of Black African cultures and the German movement of *Sturm und Drang*", he later recalled, "was, at least for me, of fundamental importance for the formation of the concept of Négritude" (Senghor, "Die Versöhnung der Gegensätze" 17). The German Romantics served as a significant source of inspiration for Senghor in formulating an African self-understanding grounded in cultural autonomy. They decisively shaped his conception of a holistic, intuitively lived African humanity:

> You will understand how deeply moved we were—and, upon reflection, how proud—when we read Novalis and the German poets of Romanticism. They had returned to the Germanic sources of song and fairy tale; after the sun, they now sang the moon, after the day, the night. They celebrated the earth and drew forth from the abysses of the soul the archetypal images that rose out of the forest twilight of empathy. Nothing could have encouraged us more strongly to continue on our path of return and homecoming to *primal Africa*. (Senghor, "Versöhnung" 19, emphasis in the original)

For Senghor, German Romanticism did not merely represent a literary movement but embodied a distinct cultural type. Senghor came to this insight through the work of the German ethnologist and Africanist Leo Frobenius (1873–1938), whose French translation of *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas* he received as a gift from Césaire in 1936. The book constituted for both men a form of "illumination" and a decisive "key experience" (Riesz, *Léopold* 155). In this work, Frobenius developed a speculative cultural morphology in which he distinguished between "Ethiopian" and "Hamite" culture. The former he characterised as mystical and intimately connected to nature; the latter as rationalistic and individualistic. Because of their capacity for *Ergriffenheit* (deep emotional responsiveness), Frobenius assigned both the Germans and the "Negro-Africans", whom he regarded as analogous in this respect, to the "Ethiopian" cultural sphere. France, England, and the United States, by contrast—shaped, in his view, by a pronounced sense for factuality and a will to power—he classified as belonging to the "Hamite" sphere. In reality, however, Frobenius projected onto Africa the very resentments towards the "Western" democracies that predominated in the German Empire during the First World War and beyond (Kreutzer 375).

Drawing on the dichotomy of cultural types established by Frobenius, Senghor derived an elevation of that "immediate intuition", "born of feeling and leading to a vision of the realities concealed behind the mechanically accumulated facts" (Senghor, "Die Revolution von 1889, Frobenius und die universelle Zivilisation" 779). In his writings published after 1945, Senghor deliberately positioned the specific mode of cognition and psychological structure of the "Negro-African" in contrast to "classical" European rationality. He advanced a race-based thesis according to which the African possesses a highly emotional, intuitive way of apprehending the world—no less valuable than the European mode, yet fundamentally different in constitution. Central to Senghor's distinction was the relation between subject and object: whereas the "white European" cultivates an "objective intelligence" that analyses and holds the object at a distance, the "Negro-African" lives in a kind of symbiotic relationship with the world. "Enclosed in his black skin", he does "not at first distinguish himself from the object: the tree, the pebble, the human being or the animal, the natural phenomenon or the social fact". Knowledge does not arise through abstraction, but through participation: "He discovers the Other in his subjectivity, with the help of his antennae, which are like the feelers of an insect" (Senghor, "Négritude. Zur Psychologie des Negro-Afrikaners" 540–1).

This form of cognition is closely linked to an almost somatic perceptual capacity. Thus, for example, Senegalese soldiers "react to the slightest changes in weather" and even to "alterations in tone", which makes them appear "as sensitive as women". The African is described as "a being with open senses", "receptive to every stirring"—particularly to "forms and colours, to tones and rhythms". Emotion is not regarded as a "lowering of consciousness" but as an "access to higher knowledge"—it is "world-consciousness" (Senghor, "Négritude" 539, 550). The reception of Frobenius's work thus contributed to a rehabilitation of Négritude, which Senghor (together with Césaire and Damas) understood as "the totality of the cultural values of Negro-Africans". This

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"emotive orientation toward the world" appears not only as an epistemological principle, but also as the source of cultural forms of expression—from religion and social structures to language and art (Senghor, "Der Geist der negro-afrikanischen Kultur" 215–33).

In a striking confession from 1961, Senghor wrote: "The advocates of Négritude who have tasted Germanic passion will always carry its resonance within them" (Senghor, *Liberté 3 Négritude et civilisation de l'universel* 15). Yet the Belgian literary scholar Martin Steins has also pointed to the ambivalent relationship between Négritude and racial theory as well as to ideological currents of National Socialism. It is noteworthy that Senghor's growing interest in German Romanticism coincided chronologically with Hitler's rise to power. This historical coincidence reinforced Senghor's conviction that a "national-ethnic rebirth" (*völkische Neugeburt*) was underway in Germany—a spiritual awakening that he interpreted as running parallel to the cultural renewal he envisioned for Africa.

Senghor's ideal of a preservative society grounded in an essentialised notion of Black African identity exhibits remarkable similarities to fascist social models. His rejection of both capitalism and collectivism positioned him in ideological proximity to right-revolutionary movements that were widespread in Europe at the time (Steins 235–6). It was only his wartime imprisonment that brought Senghor into an existential confrontation with the racist reality of National Socialist doctrine—an experience that led to a profound ideological reorientation. Yet he succeeded in retaining central elements of his thought while placing them within a new, humanist framework—a process that found its symbolic appreciation in Sartre's celebrated preface "Orphée noir" (Black Orpheus) to the Négritude anthology in 1948 (Sartre, "Orphée noir" ix–xliv). Senghor himself never fully disclosed the precise influence of the years 1935 to 1940—particularly the German traces of this period (Steins 239).

The ideological implications of Senghor's early thought have therefore remained the subject of sustained scholarly debate. The critical assessment advanced by Steins, according to whom Senghor espoused a biologistic and even racialised conception of a specifically "Black essence" in his earlier years, had already been articulated in the 1960s by intellectuals such as Wole Soyinka, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Stanislas Adotevi, Mamadi Keita, and Sékou Touré (for an overview of these positions, see Thiam 12–34). Among the most vehement critics was the Cameroonian philosopher Marcien Towa, who regarded Senghor's Négritude as an ideological dead end that reproduced colonial stereotypes by replacing reason with emotion and conflating culture with nature (see Christophe 53). From the 1980s onward, however, parts of this critique were increasingly called into question. Michael J. C. Echeruo, for instance, argues that Senghor did not appropriate Frobenius uncritically, but rather selectively reinterpreted and transformed his ideas. Whereas European philosophy—from Hegel to structuralist thought—tends to hierarchise difference through the distinction between a sovereign self and a subordinate "Other", according to Echeruo, Senghor conceives of difference as "a necessary seriality of identities": "Because there is one, there is another, hence others. The *universal* is *all*" (Echeruo 2, emphasis in the original). From this perspective, Négritude emerges not as a counter-model to Europe but as a precondition for a "civilisation of the universal" in which cultures coexist instead of excluding one another (Echeruo 12). As Steins rightly observes, however, this interpretation of Négritude as a model of exchange rather than demarcation primarily characterises Senghor's later thought. Even in contemporary debates, the problematic dimensions of Senghor's philosophy—particularly its essentialist tendencies—continue to be critically discussed. At the same time, despite decades of criticism, Négritude is increasingly interpreted as an intellectually autonomous and philosophically substantial theory that critiques Western modernity from an African perspective—especially its concept of rationality and its colonial dehumanisation—while developing an Africa-centred ontology and epistemology (Thiam 111–21; Oguejiofor 8–12; Lamola 65–6).

More recent studies have further complicated this picture by insisting that Senghor's thought should be read diachronically rather than reduced either to its early essentialist vocabulary or to its later humanist self-description. Dominique Combe, for instance, argues that the notion of the *civilisation de l'universel* (civilization of the universal) must be traced over a long period, from the late 1930s to the 1960s, precisely in order to avoid fixing and essentialising Senghor's intellectual trajectory. From this perspective, the universal is not simply the negation of Négritude, but the outcome of a conceptual negotiation between the particularity of Black cultural experience and the search for a non-Eurocentric humanism. This reading also helps to explain why recent criticism has increasingly returned to the early writings of the late 1930s, not only to expose their racialised assumptions, but also to recover their anti-assimilationist and anti-colonial force (Combe 1–3).

At the same time, the recent archival turn in Senghor studies reinforces the need for such a differentiated reading. Edoardo Cagnan and Claire Riffard argue that contemporary approaches to Senghor seek neither to

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glorify the poet-president nor to reduce him to a series of political and ideological failures, but rather to reopen his work through manuscripts, correspondence, libraries, and other documentary traces (Cagnan and Riffard 2–3). Recent studies likewise emphasise the extent to which Négritude emerged through multilingual and transnational exchanges rather than through a self-enclosed Black essentialism. Guy Dugas's analysis of Senghor's correspondence with Albert Memmi and Armand Guibert demonstrates that Senghor's reflections on Négritude evolved in dialogue with concepts such as *Judéité* (Jewishness) and *Lusitanité* (Lusitanity), thereby situating Black identity within a broader comparative framework of cultural and historical identities (Dugas 1–4). In particular, Senghor's engagement with Lusophone cultures and the idea of *métissage (*cultural and racial mixing), *which is* associated with Brazil and the Portuguese-speaking world, complicates reductive readings of Négritude as a strictly racial doctrine (Dugas 1–4, 7–9). Recent work on translation archives further reinforces this relational perspective. Susanne Gehrmann and Giuseppe Sofo show that Senghor's German reception depended on complex collaborations among translators, editors, and Senghor himself. Archival materials reveal that Senghor actively participated in explaining culturally specific concepts to his translators and contributed directly to the glossaries accompanying German editions of his work (Gehrmann 1–2; Sofo 2–4).

Such reinterpretations are possible precisely because Senghor's own conception of Négritude underwent a considerable transformation after the Second World War. Following his wartime imprisonment and the ideological reorientation it entailed, Senghor increasingly distanced himself from the earlier ideal of an essential, "pure black being" and embraced the idea of *métissage* as the true destiny of Africa instead (Senghor, "Versöhnung" 21). Yet Senghor's notion of *métissage* should not be understood in the later Glissantian sense of open-ended relationality or radical creolisation. As Serge Bourjea has argued, it remained embedded in Senghor's vision of a socio-cultural synthesis between civilisations that nevertheless continued to presuppose relatively stable collective and even racial identities (Bourjea 16). In this context, the German Romantic tradition came to function for Senghor as a model of cultural synthesis, a notion that after 1945 became increasingly central to his reformulation of Négritude and to his later idea of a *civilisation de l'universel* (Senghor, *Liberté* 195–214). This substantive shift was likewise reflected in Senghor's transformed reception of Goethe. Whereas Goethe had initially appeared to him as the rebellious poet of *Sturm und Drang*, Senghor now discovered the mature classicist "who translates romantic exuberance into the order of form and thus dispels the chaos that lurks in the irrational" (Steins 240). In this second phase of engagement, Goethe became a symbol of a reconciled synthesis of emotion and reason, of the familiar and the foreign (Sossou 63–4). German Romanticism as a whole was consequently reinterpreted—not as an escape from reason, but as the expression of a mediating and integrative cultural disposition that does not negate difference, but productively incorporates it (Senghor, "Versöhnung" 21).

Senghor and the West German cultural diplomacy

The figure of Senghor—his considerable capital both within the political sphere of the non-aligned African states and within the world literary system—was swiftly instrumentalised by both the United States and the Soviet Union amid the polarised tensions of the Cold War. From the early 1960s onwards, Senghor sought to secure a partner for a reorientation of cultural foreign policy beyond colonial patterns in the United States. Through this mediation, John F. Kennedy advocated for the organisation and financial support of the First Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres (1966) in Dakar. The festival thus developed into a transatlantic project that deployed aesthetic practices not only as instruments of diplomatic soft power but—at least to some extent—also as a means of ideological postcolonial renewal (Ripert 295). During the same period, Senghor's cultural-policy relations with the Soviet Union were markedly less conciliatory. Time and again, he endeavoured to limit direct Soviet influence on Senegalese cultural practitioners and shaped cultural exchange in an extremely selective manner, in line with his rejection of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy (Blum and Katsakioris 846–7).

In this tension-laden cultural-political context of the Cold War, the Federal Republic of Germany, too, recognised the potential of the Senegalese president, an avowed admirer of Goethe, in the early 1960s. Senghor's presence in the German-language literary field had initially been mediated through the translator Janheinz Jahn, who first became acquainted with the future Senegalese president in 1951 during Senghor's reading at the Franco-German Society in Frankfurt am Main. Three years later, Jahn published the anthology *Schwarzer Orpheus. Moderne Dichtung afrikanischer Völker beider Hemisphären* (1954), which drew in part on Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (1948) but expanded its scope considerably. In addition to francophone Négritude poetry, Jahn's anthology included anglophone and Hispanophone poetry from Africa and from the

African diaspora in the Americas, thereby presenting Black modern poetry within a broader transnational and multilingual framework. Following the publication of *Schwarzer Orpheus*, Jahn continued to devote himself with great passion to promoting African and Afro-diasporic literatures in Germany. Even before the Bonn Foreign Office initiated contact with Senghor, his poetry had already begun to circulate in West Germany through Jahn's translations (Senghor, *Tam-tam schwarz. Gesänge vom Senegal*).

As a poet, Senghor thus occupied—albeit not yet a prominent, but already a discernible—position within the contemporary German literary field and was regarded, in this capacity, as an ideal symbolic bridge between West Germany and the newly established African states. In the immediate context of Senegalese independence in 1960, the West German embassy in Dakar documented the Federal Government's interest in establishing an early rapprochement. A dispatch from December 1960 requested sending a delegation to the independence celebrations and granting scholarships for study in the Federal Republic. Central to German-Senegalese relations was Senghor's state visit in November 1961, whose diplomatic and cultural dimensions were orchestrated with great care by the Foreign Office.

On this occasion, the Bonn Foreign Office vigorously pursued the conferral of an honorary doctorate upon Senghor, not merely as a personal distinction, but with an explicitly political rationale: "Such an honour accorded to an African by a German university would certainly be noted throughout Africa and thereby acquire political significance" (Federal Foreign Office 1961). The archived correspondence of the German embassy in Dakar points to a deliberate interplay between cultural recognition and strategic considerations. Cited in support were Senghor's avowed affinity with the German intellectual tradition and his international renown as a poet. At the same time, the embassy advanced political arguments. Senghor's intellectual stance, situated between his own theory of Négritude and the "*voie africaine du socialisme*", made him, in their view, an ideal partner for the Federal Republic. According to the embassy's report to Bonn, Senghor was "struggling for a renewal of socialist-Marxist doctrine in order to adapt it to the new circumstances in Asia and Africa". He was "too independent-minded to submit to party discipline". Senghor understood Marxism primarily as "a humanistic doctrine". While he accepted "the Marxist analysis of the economic situation of the nineteenth century," he "strongly rejected the anti-religious stance of Marxism". The Senegalese poet-president was "not an anti-communist", but equally "no supporter of the dictatorship of the proletariat" (Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Dakar 1961a).

The conferral of an honorary doctorate upon Senghor was promoted through diplomatic channels over several years at various German universities. It was ultimately the Faculty of Philosophy at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main that awarded him the degree in 1968. By that point, Senghor's ties to the Federal Republic of Germany and to what was then referred to as the "German intellectual tradition" were already well established. Shortly after the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Senegalese president—by then a corresponding member of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts—supported the Federal Republic's position at the conference of African states in Antananarivo in September 1961. This position entailed an uncompromising stance on the protection of West Berlin and the consistent non-recognition of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Moreover, Senghor expressed interest not only in cultural exchange but also in economic and military cooperation (Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Dakar 1961b; Federal Foreign Office 1969).

The Federal Republic was active in Senegal and other West African states, particularly in the fields of development cooperation, technical assistance, agricultural support, and educational projects. German companies were primarily engaged in the raw materials sector and also exported industrial goods and vehicles (see Rempe; Fettich-Biernath). In 1966, Daimler-Benz AG illustrated an issue of its international company magazine *Mercedes-Benz in aller Welt* with a photograph of Senghor's young son, Philippe, playing with a toy Mercedes car. In 1968, the Senegalese postal service issued a commemorative stamp in honour of Konrad Adenauer. In an official letter of thanks, Federal President Heinrich Lübke praised this gesture as an expression of a "*liaison étroite*" and "*an entente particulièrement amicale*"—that is, a close bond between the two states and a particularly cordial relationship between the German and Senegalese peoples (Lübke).

The presentation of the Goethe University's honorary doctoral certificate to Senghor was scheduled for 22 September 1968 to coincide with Senghor's stay in Frankfurt on the occasion of his receiving the German Book Trade Peace Prize. Since its inaugural award in 1950, the Peace Prize had developed into the Federal Republic's most prestigious cultural distinction and served as the "cultural-political superstructure" of the Frankfurt Book Fair (Weidhaas 166). The enduring proximity of the prize to the state was evident both in the regular presence of high-ranking governmental representatives at the award ceremony in the Paulskirche and in the

frequent consonance between the selection of laureates and the Federal Government's foreign policy orientation (Weidhaas 166; Scheideler 63).

Senghor was to become the first non-white laureate and the first sitting head of state to receive the Peace Prize. His candidacy was formally proposed by the then director of the Book Fair, Sigfred Taubert, albeit in close coordination with the Federal Foreign Office (Taubert 116–7, 196). As a prominent intellectual architect of decolonisation and a politician who "stood loyally behind the Federal Republic without the slightest hesitation", Senghor corresponded closely to the political profile of the award (Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Dakar 1967).

Following the announcement of Senghor as the laureate, the Socialist German Students' Union (SDS) declared its intention to stage protests. It was less about Senghor himself, who was relatively unknown to the broader public, and more about the prominence of the public platform that provided the impetus for political mobilisation. The protest targeted the realities of governance in Senegal. The SDS accused the president of presiding over a neo-colonial regime and of governing in a manner that, by European standards, could not be regarded as democratic. A leaflet stated: "We shall block the path to the Paulskirche for the philosophising persona of French imperialism who, with Goethe in his head and a machine gun in his hand, oppresses the exploited masses of his people" (Büttner 104). On the day of the award ceremony, the situation escalated into considerable unrest: around 1,500 demonstrators blocked the access routes, necessitating a large police deployment to ensure Senghor's entry into the Paulskirche (Seyer 191–209; Weidhaas 230–42; Schneider 100–5).

In 1977, Senghor received an honorary doctorate from the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. During the formal ceremony held at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Senghor delivered a widely discussed address devoted to German-African "convergences". Central to this address was his concept of a "fruitful spider's web" linking Germanic and "Negro-African" culture. Senghor described the "rigour of thought, the sense of discipline and organisation" as the "Apollonian side" of German culture, which he contrasted with a "Dionysian side"—intuition, empathy, and the ineffable. It was in this intuitive dimension that he discerned a cultural affinity with "Negro-African" culture, characterised, he argued, by a "mystical intuition" that "breaks through the bark of the real". The collaboration of the two cultures could, Senghor suggested, pave the way towards a "panhuman civilisation" (Senghor, Address on the occasion of the conferral of the honorary doctorate by the University of Frankfurt, 3 Mar. 1977)—an interpretation that enhanced both his own intellectual biography and the Federal Republic's cultural self-understanding.

It is striking that, in his public statements about Germany, Senghor mentions his experiences as a prisoner of war—particularly the 20 months of internment in various *Frontstalags*—only in passing, almost as a "troublesome interruption". Unlike many contemporary accounts, Senghor does not frame this period in the essayistic mode of "heroic struggle" (Riesz, *Léopold* 217, 219). A different picture emerges from the poems in his collection *Hosties noires* (1948; *Black Hosts*). In the account of the German prisoner-of-war camp in the poem "Camp 1940", readers are confronted with profound experiences of violence, dehumanisation, and existential threat:

> It is a large village surrounded by the immobile spite of barbed wire
> A large village under the tyranny of four machine guns
> Always ready to fire.
> And the noble warriors beg for cigarette butts,
> Fight with dogs over bones, and argue among themselves
> Like imaginary cats and dogs. (Senghor, *The Collected Poetry* 56)

Just as Senghor "forgot" the suffering he and his compatriots had endured at the hands of the Germans in the aftermath of the war and referred almost exclusively to positive aspects of German culture in his public rhetoric in an attempt to seek intellectual alliances as part of his deliberate positioning within the cultural field of the Federal Republic (Riesz, "Senghor and the Germans"), so too did German readers prefer to recall only that positive image Germany found in Senghor's work and to contemplate themselves in its mirror. In François Bondy's laudatory address on the occasion of the Peace Prize, for instance, it is solely the "African idea of peace" that is emphasised; war and imprisonment remain unmentioned (Bondy 2–3). Jahn, Senghor's translator and German advocate of Négritude, likewise focused primarily on style and form in the afterword to Senghor's *Sämtliche Gedichte* (*Collected Poems*): on the "captivating, incantatory monotony", the "cosmic vital force", the "tirelessly advancing rhythm", "effervescent syllables", and "restrained ecstasy" (Jahn 213).

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Senghor in the German Democratic Republic

The Federal Republic of Germany's diplomatic stance towards Senghor was closely intertwined with its cultural-policy competition with the GDR and the Eastern Bloc as a whole. For the socialist countries, the postcolonial process of nation-building in Africa presented a historical opportunity to expand into a global system and to attain strategic superiority over the West. On various levels, the GDR operated in Africa and the Middle East as a junior partner of the Soviet Union and sought, through extensive assistance, to advance state-building and economic and infrastructural projects in the newly independent nations (Saehrend 7–8). Relations between the GDR and Senghor's Senegal were marked by cautious diplomatic rapprochement, which, however, did not culminate in formal diplomatic recognition. The surviving correspondence of the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1965 to 1976 reveals how the East German state repeatedly attempted, in its contact with Senghor, to secure diplomatic recognition within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement and international institutions such as the United Nations. It did so to counter the Federal Republic's claim to exclusive representation (*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*)—namely, its assertion that it alone was the legitimate successor state to the German Reich and entitled to speak for all German interests—and to present itself as an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist partner to emerging African states.[3] In his foreign policy, Senghor himself maintained a pragmatic balance and remained open to engagement with socialist countries, though without binding himself politically or ideologically to the GDR. The GDR thus remained in a kind of diplomatic liminal zone characterised by benevolent dialogue and mutual respect on a cultural level but was ultimately limited to political cooperation (see Saehrendt 70–2).

The culturally and politically motivated contact between the GDR and Senegal took place primarily in the fields of technical and economic assistance and educational policy. Early attempts to employ cultural exchange as an instrument of diplomacy proved to be of limited success. When the Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres—a cultural event of Olympic proportions featuring 2,500 artists, among them global stars such as Duke Ellington, and tens of thousands of visitors—was held in Dakar in April 1966 at Senghor's initiative, a delegation of the German-African Society from East Berlin, led by the writer Harald Hauser, also travelled to the event. Although the delegation was received personally by Senghor ("DDR-Delegation in Dakar" 6), it nevertheless found that the festival was largely "Western-dominated" and "anti-Marxist in orientation" and therefore afforded them little scope for influence (Report of the German-African Friendship Society on the Participation of a GDR Delegation in the Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres, 20 Jun. 1966). Senghor's writings, in which the new African identity was articulated in dialogue with a Western modernity, were likewise only partially compatible with the socialist ideology of Moscow's design. The concept of Négritude was regarded as ideologically backward-looking, and Senghor himself as a "friend of the French" (Gerlach 159).

It was not until 1984 that the East Berlin publishing house Volk & Welt decided to acquire a licence for the publication of Senghor's collected poems, which had already been translated and edited in West Germany in 1966 by Jahn. The East German Senghor edition was prepared for the renowned bilingual *Weiße Reihe* (White Series) by the East German Africanist Rainer Arnold, who also translated several poems not included in the West German edition (Senghor, *Wir werden schwelgen, Freundin*). In a detailed internal memorandum, Arnold anticipated the potential objections of the censorship authorities:

> Senghor is not an ally of the Marxists, although he engaged intensively with Marxism and repeatedly affirmed his agreement with the socio-political ideal of Marxism. Senghor's achievement and limitation lie precisely at the point where the bourgeois leadership role of the national liberation movement is both realised and exhausted. Although, as President of Senegal, Senghor represented a pragmatic variant of bourgeois politics—above all in foreign relations—and although he occasionally spoke in favour of certain aspects of the socialist community of states, he was never able to take the step towards revolutionary democracy, remaining consciously and fervently rooted in a deeply entrenched affinity with capitalist France. (Arnold)

At the same time, Arnold emphasised "the unique and enduring greatness of his poetry" by highlighting two of its aspects. First, Senghor's poems constituted "the definitive distillation of the spirit and sentiments of an era in which the young African intelligentsia discovered both the cultures of the colonial metropoles [...] and an awareness of the grandeur of African cultural and historical traditions". Secondly, by drawing on the resources of oral literature, Senghor had endowed the French language with "a new dimension". For this reason, readers in the GDR, too, ought to become acquainted with the work of the poet "who, in a significant phase of African literature's rise to world literary prominence, created—within all his limitations—works that are inimitable

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and unsurpassable". From the perspective of foreign policy, Arnold concluded, this edition "may be of particular significance in the spirit of our state's principle of maintaining objective and peace-promoting relations with all peoples" (Arnold). Within this cultural-political framework, a representative selection of Senghor's poems could therefore appear in the GDR in the autumn of 1984.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, in this article I have demonstrated that Négritude must be understood not as a static doctrine or a self-contained literary movement, but as a historically shifting, intellectually hybrid, and politically instrumentalised field of discourse. Beginning with its Parisian formation in the 1930s, Négritude emerges as a project shaped by entangled genealogies—simultaneously drawing upon African diasporic self-assertion, European philosophical traditions, and the lived experience of colonial modernity. In elucidating the depth and ambivalence of Senghor's early encounter with German Romanticism and cultural morphology, I have foregrounded the methodological necessity of reading Négritude comparatively as a discursive formation constituted through selective appropriations, conceptual translations, and ideological reconfigurations. The influence of Frobenius and the German Romantics thus appears not merely as a set of external references, but as a matrix through which Senghor negotiated questions of race, affect, intuition, and universalism—questions that later crystallised in his decisive shift from essentialist cultural typologies to an ethos of *métissage* and intercultural synthesis.

By extending this intellectual history into the arena of Cold War cultural diplomacy, I have further shown that Négritude functioned as a flexible symbolic and political resource. Senghor's position as both poet and statesman enabled him to inhabit multiple cultural fields simultaneously: the global literary sphere, the diplomatic networks of the newly independent African states, and the ideological battlegrounds of the bipolar world order. In West Germany, his thought was mobilised as a medium of cultural rapprochement, a means of stabilising the Federal Republic's claim to moral and intellectual internationalism, and a vehicle for re-inscribing Germany within a narrative of post-war humanism. East Germany, by contrast, approached Senghor with a mixture of ideological suspicion and strategic pragmatism, revealing how the socialist bloc attempted—albeit only partially successfully—to integrate African literary authority into its own project of anti-imperialist legitimation. The divergent receptions of Senghor across the two German states further underline my broader methodological argument: that intellectual movements such as Négritude cannot be disentangled from the institutional, geopolitical, and affective structures through which they circulate.

Notes

1. The terminology employed in this article in reference to the anachronistic category of 'race' is determined solely and exclusively by the cited and analysed source material.
2. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of foreign-language quotations are my own.
3. The relevant collections of documents concerning the diplomatic, political, and ideological relations between the German Democratic Republic and the Republic of Senegal are held in the Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office (PA AA) under the reference numbers M1/191, M95/5404, M1–C/7376, and B116–M3/239.

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