

# Négritude and Postcolonialism: The Dakar Satire, or the Ideological Revenge of The West

## Introduction

If the cream of Africa's intelligentsia had not pursued the resistance with wailing sirens of postmodernist-cum-postcolonialist 'deconstruction' of the *Third World, of unbalanced development* and of the *theory of dependence*, one would have been greatly tempted to hold the somewhat masochistic view that 'Africa has only got what she deserves!' However, to cloud the issue and exculpate himself of any moral responsibility for what is happening, Mr Sarkozy's main protagonist in this affair, Achille Mbembe, has suggested the fake possibility of heaping responsibility on colonial ethnology and Hegel, in spite of his constant commitment, like the French president himself, to delegitimise the nationalist and Third World struggle. Accordingly, Mbembe has attempted to obfuscate: (1) what constitutes the topicality of the Dakar speech, namely, the ideological revenge of the West regarding the issue of a new world order, and (2) the convergence of the pronouncement with Senghor's most radical views and also with some trends of postcolonial ideology, the link being endorsement of the empire (Eurafrique, globalisation) and dislike for anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist commitment.

## The Topicality of a Speech

In spite of appearance, Mr Sarkozy's pronouncement refers neither to the past nor to the racist prejudices against Africa. Firmly predicated on the topical issues of our world and yet forward-looking, the speech endorses certain disturbing phenomena of our era: the momentous revival of aggressive tendencies of 'liberal imperialism' in the world; attempts to recolonise certain major Third World states (Iraq, Iran, Syria, etc.), the diktat of economic partnership agreements, in the spirit of Eurafrique, etc. Put together, these phenomena are a testimony to the impasse on the essential issue of the *new world order* clamoured for by the Third World. Ideologically, the West responds periodically to this crucial question by

**Nkolo Foé**  
École Normale Supérieure  
University of Yaounde  
Cameroon

denying the existence of the Third World and discrediting the theory of unbalanced development and dependence, which justify such requests. Outside this context, the themes of the Dakar speech would be difficult to grasp. Let us recall them: *refusal to repent*, an obsessional reminder of *the Third World's responsibility for its own misfortunes* – a unique phenomenon in the history of the world – assertion of the *benefits of colonisation, emancipation from ghetto life, hybridisation, internationalism, Eurafrique*, etc. The consistency of this theme with delegitimation of the Third World, of nationalism and of unbalanced development appear clearly in *Le sanglot de l'homme blanc: Tiers-monde, culpabilité, haine de soi* by Bruckner 1983,<sup>1</sup> who thus revives a much bigger project for which Aron has a more radical title.<sup>2</sup>

## Exorcising the Decadence of the West

How does one divorce the feeling of guilt and self-hatred, put an end to the attendant idea of decadence and invite Europe to, at last, gain awareness of its superiority? Such is Aron's objective. For him, the danger threatening Europe stems from what constitutes at once its strength and its fragility: (1) the weakness of its power and (2) the inclination to self-criticism, guilt and repentance. Europe can only surmount the moral crisis it is experiencing if it takes its ideological revenge against its rivals: communism and its offshoot, the Third World.

Césaire was able to prove the guilt of a 'morally and spiritually indefensible' Europe, with the indictment 'provided at international level by dozens and dozens of millions of Men who, in the depths of slavery, set themselves up as judges'<sup>3</sup> (1955/2004: 8). For the first time, slaves had an advantage over their masters: they

knew henceforth that the latter were liars; that between colonisation and civilisation there was an infinite gap (1955/2004: 10). Loss of the empire was the culprit's terrible punishment, a moral defeat as devastating as the fall of fascism, a pure offshoot of monopolistic capitalism.<sup>4</sup>

The denazification of Nietzscheism, the barbarism of the Indochinese, Algerian and Vietnamese wars, the inculcation in minds of the fascist myth of a powerful (Gaullist) state, nuclear disarmament of the South and destruction of its economic and industrial potential through structural adjustment programmes, military occupation and recolonisation of hostile major Third World states, etc. – these and many more examples confirm that the ideological, political and military revenge of the West is irreversible. It is henceforth clear that the bourgeoisie is no longer ready to make concessions to the poor, since such concessions are tantamount to loss of power by the beneficiaries of the current world order.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, to the extent that the functional concepts of Third World and unbalanced development made it possible to pin-point the structures of domination and oppression of our time and offered a theoretical and political alternative to colonialism and imperialism, they had to be discredited. Indeed, the bourgeoisie was convinced that decisive victory over communism and, by extension, over the Third World, would pave the way for a period of stability, predicted by poststructuralism and the end-of-history thesis. Such doctrines betokened the absolute reign of the universal and homogeneous, Christian and capitalist, liberal and democratic state. French thought in the last decades of the twentieth century perfectly reflects such evolution, as illustrated by Aron and Foucault, the two greatest French thinkers of that era.

## Discrediting the Third World

This is a direct result of the theoretical rejection of communism. Indeed, Aron accuses Leninism of having created the

Third World as a problem by raising the argument of *unbalanced development* as part of criticism of monopolistic and imperialistic capitalism, seen by Lenin as a parasitic regime. Aron's entire task consists in demolishing this argument, which is the basis of all the others. Imperialism presupposed that the West survived on shameless exploitation of other peoples, which meant affirming the illegal origin of its opulence. May we recall that Lenin saw in the colonial market the only place within the capitalist system where it was possible to 'eliminate a rival with monopoly, secure authority, strengthen "necessary relations"', etc.<sup>6</sup> According to Aron, capitalism does not survive on the 'surplus extorted from dependent peoples'. He cites as proof the 'high living standards in metropolitan States that became "victims" of "decolonisation"'.<sup>7</sup> Aron puts into perspective the importance of 'colonial wealth' by arguing that the first Spanish and Portuguese conquerors acquired precious metals as possessions in the distant past, a period of glory and power, but did not acquire any lasting wealth or the capacity to produce wealth (1977: 273). He bases his argument on two interesting examples: Germany's purported industrialisation before its acquisition of colonies, and France's ownership of a dispersed and unprofitable empire, which did not 'contribute substantially to the industrialisation or the wealth of the metropolitan State' (1977: 274).

One may legitimately wonder about the intellectual probity of the author of such lines. How can one hide the massive historical fact that without colonial trade, the major economic changes of the mercantilist era, in particular, would have been difficult, if not impossible? Without such trade, it would have been impossible to restock a whole range of food, mineral and textile raw materials, etc., which were so vital for the expansion of European industry. Indeed, cotton, wood dye and cabinet wood, silk, spices, indigo, coffee, tobacco, precious metals, etc., proved decisive for an industrial revolution whose historical scope transcended the simple boundaries of pioneering nations. Similarly, it is difficult to hide the fact that the slave trade contributed enormously to increase the concentration of capital available to the rich merchants who were to become the first real bankers of the West. The financial and economic importance of such trade can be felt in

Europe's main commercial centres: Lisbon, Seville, Antwerp, Bruges, Nantes, etc. Now, from these cities, the proceeds from triangular trade by land and maritime routes were to benefit even the economies of Germany, Scandinavia, Poland, the Baltic countries, Russia, etc. To prove that there is no direct link between colonial domination and the prosperity of the West, Aron, cites the case of prosperous European states that did not own colonies. Such an argument about prosperous countries within the confines of Europe would have been tenable had Ziegler not aptly raised the question of 'Swiss imperialism'; he accuses Switzerland of playing 'the indispensable role of receiver for the world imperialist system'.<sup>8</sup>

None of these arguments succeeded in pushing back the line of defence of a culprit happy to quibble about the meagreness of colonial benefits, and thus better exalt the infinite superiority of the West's industrial genius. Aron is convinced that with or without colonial exploitation, the West would still have developed. Conversely, he wonders whether without colonisation, Morocco, for instance, would have developed faster.

Aron willingly admits the commission of crimes in the scramble for the control of cheap raw materials. This is immaterial! In spite of such 'crimes', however, Westerners do not owe their current living standards to cheap raw materials (1977: 255). According to him, 'the productivity of labour, which is expressed as GNP per capita, does not resemble the gold or diamond that the invaders exported as a sign and benefit of victory' (1977: 255-6). To better invalidate the theory of unbalanced development, he points out that: 'It is indisputable that there was violence and plunder. However, such violence and plunder are not exclusively responsible for or the major causes of poverty in Africa or South-east Asia' (1977: 275). Here, Aron clearly formulates an idea revisited much later by Bruckner, namely that the violence against other peoples blamed on the West simply coincided with the latter's breach of the poverty pact that bound them to the rest of mankind. This means that the West is 'aggressor' only to the extent that its opulence suddenly unveiled to the peoples 'the contrast between the so-called modern sectors and the others, diseased cities, shantytowns and favellas in the periphery of luxury

neighbourhoods, the comparison offered by television between the misery of some and the ostentatious consumption of others' (1977: 276). Thus, development brings into focus underdevelopment exactly in the same way as health unveils sickness or daylight unveils the night. Aron argues that 'under-development necessarily accompanied development because some States first engaged in economic and industrial development, while other States or peoples lagged behind' (1977: 277). Aron even invites the Third World to pay homage to colonisation presented as an excellent vector of cultural growth. Indeed, each time Westerners 'directly ruled foreign peoples, they brought along certain elements of their own civilisation such as railroads, machines and administration' (1977: 278). Mr Sarkozy extends the list by citing bridges, roads, hospitals, dispensaries, schools and knowledge. Both of them are unaware of or scorn Césaire's arguments:

They tell me of progress, 'achievements', cured diseases, a living standard raised high above the people themselves ... they assail my head with facts, statistics, kilometres of roads, canals and railway lines. And I tell them of thousands of men sacrificed in Congo-Océan. I talk of those who, as I write, are digging with their bare hands at the port of Abidjan...<sup>9</sup>

In the same vein, they are refusing to acknowledge that the achievements brandished were financed with money from the colonies. Former colonial masters even obliged some independent states to pay to them debts incurred on behalf of colonies, not leaving out rents for plots of land seized or colonial buildings constructed.

Let us return to Aron, who invites us to revisit all the principles underpinning the development economy. Cartels are accused, for instance, of imposing 'unfair prices', but no one says what is an 'unfair price' or a 'non-exploitative price' in a trade relationship. Consequently, all calls for a new world economic order are invalidated. In addition, for him, such an order is 'meaningless' (1977: 296). 'The South will have to content itself, for a long time yet, with dependence, which necessarily involves some asymmetry in favour of the powerful and the rich' (ibid.). This must be so, for according to Aron,

'neither the monetary regulations nor the trade rules' (ibid.) of the current world order are negotiable.

In essence, Aron does not understand the absurdity of the belief that the claims of the South are justified in themselves. Indeed, he argues that the Third World is only taking advantage of the tolerance of the West 'supposedly rooted in the principle of equality of individuals and nations – as well as in the unity of the human race' (1977: 279). He accuses the poor of blackmail, since the latter say that the legitimacy of their claims is premised on 'the crimes committed by Westerners in the past' (1977: 280). Accordingly, he concludes that '*the peoples of the West shall not give in, out of a guilty conscience, to the requests of Algerians, Indians, Angolans or Peruvians just to expiate the crimes of their fathers or grand-fathers*' (ibid. italics added).

Mr Sarkozy can pride himself of having such a venerable ancestor! For Aron, only pragmatism and not any form of ideal of justice whatever would attract the benevolence of the North. The only 'argument that may impress leaders of rich States derives from the philosophy, which progressively convinced the privileged classes of capitalist democracies: it is consistent with and not contrary to the interest of the rich to raise the living standards of all peoples and thus promote economic development and prevent social upheavals' (1977: 280). Such benevolence may be manifested through 'reduction of the debts of some poor countries', an increase in the volume of assistance and 'opening of frontiers to manufactured products from the Third World' (1977: 295–6). As we recall, this is the spirit that informed the signing of the Lomé ACP agreements.

Mr Sarkozy's satire thus deliberately fits into a *radical bourgeois vision*, with the message to Africa being that the West has definitively gained more confidence; that they are ready to adopt a hard line in relations with the poor; that they are no longer ready to make concessions to the Third World; that they are determined to combat any attempt to renegotiate or call into question the existing world order, etc. The message thus finally renders intelligible all the manipulations involved in indicting the poor, using blackmail and intimidation to make them accept that they are responsible for their own misfortunes, etc. In short, it is aimed at nipping in the

bud any idea of revolt against the established world order.

There is no gainsaying that the Dakar speech seduced a large segment of the postcolonial African elite, given its advent within an ideological and cultural context profoundly marked by postcolonial deconstruction. This lends coherence to a concept, which still lacked clarity in Aron's writings. What is it?

### **Global Internal Temporality and Specific Historicity of Societies**

Aron has a latent poststructural thesis that is a product of the fragmentation of universal history into separate and autonomous segments. Aron claims that up till the nineteenth century, 'each country, at least for part of the century, was master of its destiny'. Accordingly, 'it responded or resisted Western aggression in its *own way*' (1977: 272). This means that imperialism and unbalanced development alone cannot explain the difficulties of the Third World, and that one needs to turn to the *specific historicity of societies* to find explanations; such historicity alone can explain the advances and lags in history.

We now understand better the pronouncements of Mr Sarkozy on 'tradition', the tragedy of societies that are not firmly rooted in history. Hegel alone is not responsible for those views, which indicate, on the contrary, the advent of a new poststructural era.

Only this era provides the decisive philosophical argument that associates each historical or social production with a *specific global internal temporality*. Such argument makes it possible to put into perspective the impact of imperialist domination in the history of the Third World. Colonialism is indicted for being at the root of Africa's stagnation, dependence and underdevelopment; the West's response is that right from the primitive history of mankind, each country's development trajectory is governed by *specific* development laws and historicity. They need not imply the radical relativism that the existence of specific 'cultural species'<sup>10</sup> presupposes. It suffices that these views mask the polarisation of the world and shield the fact that the phenomena linked to *specific global internal temporality* refer to a *unique albeit polarised world system*.

Contesting the existence of universal rationality criteria and in the wake of the 'ethnoscience', postcolonialists themselves are progressively acquainting us with the idea that each 'ethnoscience' is only intelligible in relation to norms and criteria internal to each culture. We shall now relate these views to the Dakar speech.

The latter contains an apparent contradiction: the withering of identity 'purity' that is accompanied by a solemn appeal to 'reason' and to 'universal consciousness', on the one hand, and a tribute to the African identity based on 'mysticism, religiosity, sensibility and the African mentality', on the other.

This last point sheds light on the first. Reference to the Dionysiac by which Senghor (cited in the speech) defined the fluctuating ethnotype is definite proof that ethnic characterology does not fundamentally contradict the secret intentions of technical globalisation (or even those of (post)modernity/coloniality as demonstrated by Hindutva in India). It is to be recalled that fluctuating ethnotype groups together essentially 'traditional and agrarian peoples operating on the fringes of capitalism: Africans, Latin Americans, Mediterraneans, slaves, etc. A common characteristic of these peoples is that they are coloured peoples subjugated by the West.'

### **An Administered World: Empire and Ethnological Paradigm**

The ethnological paradigm at the heart of the 'empire's' ideological machinery relating to governmentality<sup>11</sup> toned up these crucial issues. As an offshoot of the poststructural era, it provides definitive answers to two burning questions: the question of *time, progress and history*, on the one hand, and the question of the *intelligibility of reality*, on the other. The *norm*, the *rule* and the *system*<sup>12</sup> (which mean that each group, society or culture generates their own consistency and validity) make it possible for ethnology to delegitimise historical thought, invalidate the theory of dependence and of the negative unity of the world, and, as world decentration and acentric theory, to legitimise the 'empire' as a 'decentralised and deterritorialised machinery of government, which progressively mainstreams the entire world within its open and perpetually expanding frontiers'.<sup>13</sup>

From a poststructural point of view, the ethnological paradigm implies, *a priori*, cultural diversity and equality. This does not stand in the way of ethnology as a *science of constraints*, as a theory of 'equilibrium between the various forces at play in the world: economic and political systems, classes, industrialised countries and countries with limited industrialisation'.<sup>14</sup> Ethnology endorses the status quo, which explains why it rejects *function, conflict and signification*.

In the *freedom philosophies*, function presupposes the existence of an active subject of history. Spurred by reason and will, such a subject endures the *conflict* and contradictions that are rife in the world. By facing them squarely, the subject demonstrates the full extent of his/her talent and power. Such a struggle cannot be effective, unless the world around the subject is intelligible and meaningful, contrary to the opaque universe of structure and ethnology that typifies the *unconscious* and the *thoughtless*. Free thinking is based on objective knowledge of the laws of history, the economy and society. Its goal is to liberate the oppressed of the System (Eurafrrique, globalisation, empire, etc.) in order to integrate them into the community of nations as mature peoples. Constraint theories and (post)structural ethnology seek to maintain them in the System, by assigning them a place akin to the one Senghor reserved for Blacks in the grand 'panhuman convergence' concert where Europe assumed the role of orchestra conductor and Africa was relegated to the rhythm section. Such is the very prototype of a *polarised and administered* world.

### Master and Subordinate

Postcolonial deconstruction contributed to delegitimising the Third World by presenting 'cultural studies', 'postcolonial studies' and cross-culturalism (a postmodern version of universal civilisation) as alternatives to economic and social analysis. It, thus, enabled imperialism to gain definitively in confidence and to reverse the trend by engendering among the victims a feeling of guilt and by driving them to self-hatred and culpability.

A coherent postcolonial approach substitutes economic and social formations for the concepts of *cultural* and *significant human expression*

*formations*. Here, the illuminating human and social realities are drowned in a sea of magma where 'doing', 'seeing', 'hearing', 'feeling', 'desiring' and 'touching' play a major role.<sup>15</sup> Diverting the average classes from the fight against class oppression, imperialism, market violence, etc., postcoloniality instead proposes to this hedonist class a form of *light thought* as well as substitutes of 'political' and 'social' struggles that are inoffensive to liberalism: *self-struggles, recognition of the difference in sexual orientation* (homosexuality), *gender, hybridisation, cross-culturalism, tolerance and pluralism*, etc.

Neither *light thought* nor these forms of postmodern 'commitment' provide a response to such challenges as poverty, economic and social inequalities, political oppression and imperialist domination. Their obvious goal is even to have us forget that 'imperialism continues to be the only real problem' of our era.<sup>16</sup>

Postcolonialism rejects the theory of dependence under the false pretext that the external colonial constraints no longer exist. It also claims that though powerful, imperialism is not an all-embracing machine capable of crushing all colonial societies, given that Western cultural hegemony is neither absolute nor global and the subjects of captive nations are not passive.<sup>17</sup> The cultural inventiveness of the dominated in the face of capitalist formations justifies an approach based on the *specific historicity of indigenous societies*, their 'own specific legality', their 'own specific rationales' and their 'exclusive relationship with one another'.<sup>18</sup>

Masked by phenomena, Western domination is only integrated in the approach as an ornament, or better still, in a sterile form that impedes any intelligibility of the real relations between the centre and the periphery. The approach especially urges one to admit that the canker eating Africa is from within:

One cannot eternally indict colonialism, imperialism and dependence. The world shall take Negroes seriously when Negroes start being serious themselves. For the time being, they have sunk into anarchy. Paradoxically, their venality makes them euphoric, while drunkenness pushes them to engage in brawls and even massacres. In the face of such

forms of self-intoxication, what can the world do?

Who is speaking, Mr Sarkozy? No! Yet this is the person who most virulently contested his satire.<sup>19</sup>

Slavishly, the subordinate revels in phraseology inherited from the colonial masters that portray the Negro as frivolous and venal in addition to being disorganised and immoral, ethylic and euphoric, aggressive and a butcher. To these traits, another subordinate adds laziness, passiveness and want of zeal.<sup>20</sup> After discrediting African nationalism, Mbembe claims that Africa's quest for self-determination culminated in tragedy, the gruesome 'transformation of human beings into beasts' and darkness synonymous with a 'period of tragedy', 'a period during which power and existence are conceived and exercised with animality'.<sup>21</sup> Does such a historical trajectory not suggest that Africa used to be 'the land of barbarians', pre-colonial (darkness), that 'gradually, Africa emerged from its savagery'<sup>22</sup> because illuminated by 'colonial lights' and that at present Africa is relapsing into the darkness (of independence)?<sup>23</sup>

The image of Africa that postcolonialism seeks to impose is neither that of a proud people freed from the chains of slavery nor that of a heroic continent struggling under unfavourable conditions to gain its freedom and independence, but that of a hideous pigsty, one 'hell of a mess'.<sup>24</sup> An Africa soiled by excrement should thus only be talked about as a 'nightmare' that 'disgusts us so profoundly that we can loathe it as we would a corpse'.<sup>25</sup>

Deep down in them, the postcolonial elite cultivate a complex akin to selflessness and masochism. Fanon had already noted this kind of complex among the blacks of the West Indies. He wrote: 'When, at school, he happens to read stories of savages in white books, he always thinks of Senegalese'.<sup>26</sup>

Why continue the struggle against imperialism when one is convinced that 'if Africa is treated as insignificant', 'it is solely the fault of her children',<sup>27</sup> or when one thinks that 'the overall cause, the unique cause, that cause which is responsible for all distortions, is African culture' itself? (ibid.).

The examples above are testimony thereof: Mr Sarkozy made his pronouncement within a favourable

ideological context. From the condition of victim, Africa, via the voice of her postmodern elite – that keep cursing themselves for being born of such a cruel mother – has decided to confess her sins. Decades of severe structural adjustment encouraged the dissemination of a penitential vision of the world. Popularised by neo-evangelical churches, the latter did not spare the working classes. Voltaire wrote:

We buy only Negroes as domestic slaves. We are blamed for engaging in such trade: a people trafficking in their own children are to be condemned much more than the buyer. Such a trade demonstrates our superiority; he who chooses a master is born to be an underling.<sup>28</sup>

Safe in cosmogonies, the phenomenon of pushing a defeated people to accept that they are responsible for their problems and misfortunes seems to be unique in modern history, since no one hitherto had the nerve to apply the same principle to France, defeated and humiliated: an undignified France inviting the Nazi occupier to establish a European and world leadership; a France that surrendered her own children to the hangman's cremators and to its war factories, etc.<sup>29</sup> Let us disregard the heroic resistance and attempt to apply to this France, on its knees, Voltaire's maxim: 'he who chooses a master is born to be an underling'!

### 'Tradition' or 'Hybridisation'?

Let us revisit the crucial question of the alternative between 'tradition' and 'hybridization'. Within a context of colonial domination, tradition may play either a reactionary role – such is the case when local traditionalist tyrants establish 'a good services and complicity network' with foreign tyrants<sup>30</sup> – or a progressive, revolutionary role. This characteristic emerges each time precapitalist culture is resisting market penetration. That is when it poses a real enigma to capitalism. The solidarity ethic is indicted for promoting 'family parasitism' and inhibiting the entrepreneurial spirit. Indeed, these precapitalist institutions constitute a safe haven for all those who seek to evade the constraints of capitalism: unemployment, low wages, chores, etc.

It is such a protective framework that liberal institutions target when they accuse the precapitalist man of being 'self-

sufficient', 'lacking the passion to reach out and encounter other cultures',<sup>31</sup> 'disengaging with the rest of the world', 'giving in to the temptation of purity', 'remaining immobile', refusing 'human adventure', not 'having a sufficient foothold in history' (Sarkozy), preferring the ghetto to open space, and clinging on to a slothful conception of globalisation (Mbembe). What is the crux of the problem?

Capitalism's obsession is that no one must evade the System. It thus seeks to 'liberate' the individual from a protective framework offered by collective institutions, and in this way make them defencelessly vulnerable to market forces. Moreover, such 'liberation' requires the individual to forsake cardinal collective values – solidarity, nationalism, patriotism, revolutionary militancy, etc. – and to adopt liberal values: individualism, hedonism, the 'entrepreneurial' culture, personal initiative, self-actualisation, cross-culturalism and tolerance. Only such a background accounts for:

- the rejection of 'tradition' (Sarkozy), 'nativism', 'nationalism' and 'afro-radicalism' (Mbembe);
- the invocation of values specific to the (neo)liberal society: 'the appeal to reason and universal consciousness' (here, Sarkozy is closely akin to Hegel), 'emergence from the ghetto' (Mbembe);
- the invitation to 'have a foothold in history', that is, to adhere to Eurafrique (Senghor/Sarkozy) and globalisation (Mbembe);
- the appeal to hybridise (Senghor/Sarkozy/Mbembe).

It is pointless for us to dwell on these themes. Let us focus on some hybridisation considerations, a bequest by Senghor to postmodernity that epitomises all other themes.

Senghor used to dream of a hybrid Civilisation that was bound to sanction the assimilation–association to France and Europe. He wrote:

The most important concern for the colony is to assimilate the spirit of French civilisation. This refers to active assimilation that fertilises indigenous civilisations and lifts them out of their stagnation or makes them acknowledge their decadence.<sup>32</sup>

Hybridisation is thus constructed here under perfectly inequitable conditions, with

Senghor acknowledging explicitly the subordinate nature of a continent that can choose only between the Empire and stagnation, and worse still, decadence.

Such a humiliating position served the interests of the bourgeoisie, and one can guess that it is with relish that Mr Sarkozy cited the following pitiful lines by Senghor:

The French language has made us a gift of its abstract words – so rare in our mother tongues. Words in our mother tongues are haloed with vigour and blood: French words, for their part, radiate with a thousand fires, like diamonds. Rockets that light up our night.

Let us note the consistency of these lines with postcolonial rantings about the darkness in which the Dark Continent is plunged.

Within the particular context of colonisation, the fantasy of hybridisation actually camouflaged the dream of a vast French empire while supporting an ideal: Eurafrique. In the name of hybridisation and of the 'common objective to live' within 'the French Empire',<sup>33</sup> in short, in the name of Eurafrique, Senghor strongly renounced the principle of nationalities and nationalism, describing it as an 'obsolete weapon', 'an old hunting gun'.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, he construed independence as 'a myth likely to foster anarchical nationalism'. He also drew the following conclusion: 'to talk of independence is to reason with one's head down and feet in the air, which is not reasoning at all. It is raising a non-issue.'<sup>35</sup>

### Historical Initiative

Césaire tells us that in a colonial situation, the problem of the dominated is not so much cultural hybridisation as the recapture of the *historical initiative*. Theoretically, cultural hybridisation is an absurdity. Historically, it is an impossibility. A borrowing culture does not hybridise, it digests and appropriates. It is to be recalled that colonial domination does not seek to build coherence in the colonised society. By contrast, it seeks to dismantle its fundamental structures, scatter its components to render impossible any life synthesis thereof. The

goal of decolonisation and independence is therefore to promote historical initiative, the ultimate objective being to render the indigenous culture coherent and subsequently able to borrow from other cultures elements suited to its own needs. According to Marcien Towa,

the effort a colonised people have to make in order to wrest from the hands of the coloniser responsibility for their destiny, restructures their cultural outlook and lends even to the former coloniser cultural elements that are necessary and which the colonial regime denied them; such an effort is by no means analogous to hybridization, but could be better described by the term *struggle*.<sup>36</sup>

The *struggle* to establish a more just and a more equitable new world order must be pursued without giving in to the delusion of hybridisation, whose aims are known since Senghor, because it means endorsing the status quo by hallowing 'biology', the inequality in the master/slave relationship in a (post)structural-type world (empire, globalisation), that is polarised, administered and hostile to any historical initiative.

## Notes

- (Paris, Seuil).
- R. Aron 1977, *Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente* (Paris, R. Laffont): 267–8.
- A. Césaire 1955/2004 *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris, Présence Africaine).
- At the exclusive service of imperialist bourgeoisie, the reactionary and aggressive fascist state was supposed to provide 'sufficient protection against socialism' (see G. Lukács 1958 *La destruction de la raison. Les débuts de l'irrationalisme moderne, de Schelling à Nietzsche* (Paris, L'Arche Editeur): 297).
- See R. Tucker 1980 *De l'inégalité des nations* (Paris, Economica): chap. V.
- V. Lenin 1967 *L'Impérialisme, stade suprême du capitalisme* (Paris and Moscou, Editions du Progrès): 108.
- Aron 1977: 267–8.
- J. Ziegler 1976 *Une Suisse au-dessus de tout soupçon* (Paris, Seuil): 82.
- Césaire 1955/2004: 24–5.
- According to Malinowski 1970, 'cultural species' meant that 'cultural contact' induces the existence of a cumbersome, permanent and dichotomic system in the 'hinterlands' to which each partner involved in the 'contact' refers permanently (*Les dynamiques de l'évolution culturelle: recherches sur les relations raciales en Afrique du Sud* (Paris, Payot): 40–1).
- See M. Foucault 1964 *Histoire de la sexualité, III, Le souci de soi* (Paris, Gallimard) and 2001 *L'Herméneutique du sujet* (Paris, Seuil/Gallimard).
- See M. Foucault 1967 *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris, Gallimard).
- M. Hardt and A. Negri 2000 *Empire* (Paris, Exils Éditeurs): 17.
- H. Lefebvre 1971/1975 *L'idéologie structuraliste* (Paris, Anthropos): 69.
- A. Mbembe 2000, *De la postcolonie. Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine* (Paris, Karthala): 16.
- S. Amin 1970 *Accumulation à l'échelle mondiale* (Paris, Anthropos.): 435.
- Steven Robins, 2004 ' "Le (Tiers) est un ghetto"? A la recherche d'une "troisième voie" entre le cosmopolitisme post-moderne et le nationalisme culturel', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, nos 1&2: 24.
- Mbembe 2000: 14.
- A. Mbembe 2001, in *Patrimoine: Culture et Sciences sociales*, no. 18 (septembre-octobre): 13.
- Etounga Manguéle 1993 *L'Afrique a-t-elle besoin d'un programme d'ajustement culturel?* (Ivry, Editions du Sud): 20.
- Mbembe 2000: 269.
- Passages of the former Cameroon national anthem, conceived in the 1930s.
- The idea is borrowed from Godwin R. Murunga 2004 'Les écritures africaines de soi by Mbembe and the critique in *Public Culture*', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, nos 1&2: 32.
- Sony Labou Tansi 1983 *L'Anté-peuple* (Paris, Seuil): 65.
- Mbembe 2000: 274.
- F. Fanon 1952, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris, Seuil): 120.
- Etounga Manguéle 1993: 20.
- Voltaire 1963 *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (Paris, Garnier): 2/805.
- See 'Service du travail obligatoire'.
- See Césaire 1955/2004: 24.
- Etounga Manguéle, 1993: 21.
- L.S. Senghor 1964 *Liberté I. Négritude et humanisme* (Paris, Seuil); 45.
- Ibid.: 45.
- Senghor, cited by Marcien Towa 1971 *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Négritude ou Servitude?* (Yaoundé, CLE): 80.
- Ibid.
- Ibid.: 112–13.