

EIGHT African Socialism and the Fate of the World

When all economic misery and pain has vanished, laboring humanity has not yet reached its goal: it has only created the *possibility* of beginning to move toward its real goals with renewed vigor. Now culture is the form of the idea of man's humanness. And culture is thus created by men, not by external conditions. Every transformation of society is therefore only the framework, only the possibility of free human self-management and spontaneous creativity. —GEORG LUKÁCS

Léopold Senghor regarded federalism and socialism as inseparable elements of a decolonization that would operate on an imperial scale by transforming overseas *and* metropolitan territories. He shared Césaire's interest in identifying unrealized potentiality within devalued or deformed African *and* European traditions that could be reclaimed and refunctionalized. This orientation informed his attempt to find in Marx's writings, socialist politics, and African culture resources for an anticolonialism that could transcend the mechanical materialism and political instrumentalism that he identified within existing socialism. Scholarly discussions of Senghor's federalism are often separated from those of his socialism. Because his postwar interventions have typically been interpreted from the perspective of his later presidency, his commitment to African socialism is often regarded as a superficial or opportunistic state ideology rather than a considered engagement with Marx's writings.¹

Marxism as Critique of Socialism

As we saw, Senghor pursued self-determination without state sovereignty on two fronts: the National Assembly and the Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais. If the assembly was the primary stage on which Senghor articulated his program

for nonnational decolonization, the BDS was the institutional organ through which he sought to realize it.

On September 27 1948, Senghor resigned from what he saw as a corrupt and hypocritical Socialist Party (SFIO). This public and performative act followed a power struggle with the established Lamine Guèye faction of Senegalese socialists, whose support was based primarily on coastal urban elites and citizens of the Four Communes.² In his letter of resignation to Secretary General Guy Mollet, Senghor asked, "Since when has opportunism become a socialist virtue?"³ In language similar to that which Césaire later addressed to the PCF, Senghor criticized the SFIO's poor voting record on colonial issues: "The truth is that the party . . . sacrifices principles to electoral results, Marxist ethics and socialist action to tactics . . . [it] uses overseas territories not as an end but as means." Senghor related that his decision caused "a great rending of my heart and mind."⁴ For his aim was not to abandon socialism but "precisely to realize it."⁵

In October 1948 he cofounded the BDS party with Ibrahima Seydou Ndaw and Mamadou Dia.⁶ His older colleague N'Daw was a colonial army veteran, peanut farmer, and political activist in Kaolack and Sine-Saloum who had close ties to rural cultivators and Muslim marabouts. Dia was a pious schoolteacher whose political career Senghor had helped launch. He became Senghor's principal ally and adjutant until 1962. Dia had been raised in a Senegalese village near Thiès and attended Koranic school as a young child. After receiving a degree at the competitive École William Ponty he worked as a teacher and school director before being elected, with Senghor's support, to the Assemblée du Conseil Général on the Socialist ticket in 1946. He quickly aligned with Senghor in the rift with the Guèye faction of the Senegalese SFIO. He shared Senghor's desire to create a party whose socialist program was more directly grounded in African peoples' distinctive cultures and conditions with special attention to the needs of rural populations.⁷

Regarding BDS activities, Senghor was primarily concerned with metropolitan interventions and the party's larger political vision, while Dia assumed responsibility for local Senegalese politics and the party's economic program.⁸ But Dia too participated in French national politics. In 1948 he was elected to represent Senegal in the French Senate, where he served until being elected a deputy in the National Assembly in 1956. In 1953 he became the secretary general of the Coordinating Committee of the IOM group of federalist legislators.⁹ During his time as a parliamentarian in Paris, Dia studied geography, law, and political economy. He belonged to a cohort of Third World students,

which included Samir Amin, strongly influenced by François Perroux's ideas about global economic development.¹⁰

Dia was especially interested in reorganizing Senegalese social relations on the basis of producers' cooperatives.¹¹ Like Senghor, he hoped to link a socialist program for local self-management and humane economic development to the transformation of imperial France into a federal democracy. He promoted economic liberation through African unity as well as a vision of mutual and complementary development on a global scale that would promote worldwide solidarity and a community of united nations. Like Senghor, he believed that to combat neocolonialism African peoples needed to overcome territorial nationalism and regroup themselves into larger federal formations.¹²

Morgenthau describes how Senghor and Dia shifted power away from established Senegalese socialists by building the BDS into a broad coalition of rural farmers and fishermen, lower-level civil servants, and marginalized city dwellers. The party consolidated its electoral base through alliances with Muslim marabouts, local chiefs, regional and ethnic associations, trade unions, veterans, schoolteachers, professional associations, Catholic missions, and European commercial interests.¹³ The BDS presented itself as an alternative to the established coastal elites while distancing itself from the more militant forms of syndicalism and anticolonialism then developing across urban West Africa.¹⁴

Senghor identified the BDS as an organ of "the masses of peasants and laborers" and denounced the Socialist Party in Senegal as an instrument of the urban bourgeoisie and rural feudal authorities.¹⁵ Whereas they could only offer "favors, decorations, promotions, at best nominal citizenship," the BDS promised "structural reforms that alone could make real the rights inscribed in the Constitution."¹⁶ Senghor supported measures for broader suffrage, a labor code, municipal autonomy and local assemblies, workers' accident compensation, and the reform of agricultural cooperatives and credit systems.¹⁷

The BDS "condemned violence and revolt as means" to socialist transformation.¹⁸ It paired "the peaceful solution" of constitutional change, namely "the institution of a French Federal Republic," with a "realist conception" of the economic challenges facing colonial Senegal.¹⁹ Rather than abolish relations of capitalist production altogether, it sought to eliminate *le colonat*, an exploitative variant of sharecropping, and regulate colonial capitalism.²⁰ Senghor explained, "a powerful modern economy, can only be constructed upon a prior accumulation of capital. The task is to impose social responsibilities upon capital and to limit its profit margins to a reasonable level."²¹ Senghor placed his hopes for responsible accumulation on agricultural cooperatives,

which, following Dia, he believed would “resolve the triple question of credit, production, and commercialization.”²²

After forming the BDS, Senghor began to write directly about Marx and African socialism.²³ Many of the positions he developed over the coming years were already present in a 1948 essay “Marxism and Humanism.”²⁴ There Senghor challenged attempts by left Catholics and orthodox Soviets to reduce Marxism to economism, positivism, or atheism.²⁵ He argued that although Marx criticized Hegel’s speculative idealism, he never intended to replace it with a vulgar materialism. Rather, Marx’s point was that consciousness cannot be grasped apart from the specific conditions and concrete lives in which it is embodied. Senghor acknowledged that Marx posited an objective reality that exists independently of human consciousness but insisted that Marx’s analysis was not confined to observable facts. Structurally, Marx “sought to seize the surreal that subtends [apparent] phenomena.” He argued that Marx’s dialectical method emphasized the “reciprocal action” that linked material conditions to spiritual acts in a relation of “spiral and equivocal causality.”²⁶

For Senghor, Marx’s dialectical method also served an ethical project centered on the critique of alienation. In his reading, Marx demonstrates that capitalist production based on private property did not only create “de-realized” and “depersonalized workers.” It produced a dehumanizing condition of “dis-equilibrium,” whereby workers became alienated from their labor, individuals from the collectivity, and humans from their own essential being.²⁷ To this, Marx counterposed a conception of human freedom based on a distinction between *individual liberty*, the bourgeois right to private property, and *personal liberty*, “the possibility of the development of individual faculties” through community. This social form of “personal” freedom would transcend alienating oppositions between objectivism and subjectivism as well as materialism and idealism. The full human capacity of all individuals could then be realized by reconciling labor and capital, man and himself, and human and natural worlds.²⁸

Senghor argued that for Marx, the aim of socialist revolution was not only to end labor exploitation and class antagonism and to create a more equitable distribution of goods. Marx’s attempt to reground productive capacity in social reappropriation also sought to establish a “new order” that would ensure “the blossoming of the person’s intellectual and spiritual life.”²⁹ Elsewhere Senghor argued that revolutions did not necessarily require seizing the state violently. He reminded BDS militants that for Marx, social revolution meant above all “the transformation of the world by and for man” and “the establishment of the order of the human condition.”³⁰ Senghor mobilized Marx to

emphasize the spiritual dimension of human freedom that he believed could neither be reduced to the individual liberty celebrated by liberalism nor the material well-being fetishized by traditional socialists.

Senghor attempted to reconcile what he regarded as Marx's ethical humanism with the Christian "personalism" developed by the Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain. He quotes Maritain: "humanism . . . tends essentially to render man more truly human . . . in leading him to participate in all that could enrich him in nature and in history [so that] man develops the virtualities contained in himself, his creative forces and the life of reason, and works to make the forces of the physical world the instruments of his liberty."³¹ This, Senghor asserted, was precisely Marx's project one hundred years earlier.

Senghor also contended that Marx's expansive vision of personal freedom was inseparable from his dialectical philosophy, writing,

Marx . . . proposes neither a doctrine nor a system, but . . . a method of action in the service of total man, which excludes all totalitarianism, all fixity because man always remains to be realized. Marxism is not a catechism . . . it implies a continual process of overcoming [*dépassement*]. . . . It is dialectical . . . in truth, there is no definitive state: everything is movement, struggle, change.³²

Senghor speculated that humans would even one day surpass communism. In short, he attempted to detach Marx's philosophical humanism from actually existing socialism, whether embodied in European parties or the Soviet state and to reclaim Marxism as a standpoint both from which to criticize actual socialist parties and to craft an independent socialism for postimperial Africa.

African Socialism

"Marxism and Humanism" was guided by the question Senghor would address directly in a series of "Reports on Method" prepared for the annual BDS party congresses: why Marx's critique of capitalism was relevant to the task of understanding African alienation. Senghor noted that social stratification in Africa was less a function of class exploitation than colonial and racial subjugation.³³ In colonial Africa, he argued, workers were actually elites and peasants the real proletariat.³⁴ But despite these differences, he believed, Marx's critique of European capitalism related directly to African societies insofar as they remained subject to the parasitic commercial capitalism of the *pacte colonial*.³⁵ Because imperialism had created deep bonds between metropolitan

and overseas territories, Africa was an integral part of the “Europe” that Marx analyzed.³⁶

Senghor later developed a critique of the *pacte colonial* as a system of asymmetrical exchange that violated the principles of economic solidarity enumerated in the preamble of the constitution of the Fourth Republic. He argued that French state planning, which underwrote a reign of cartels and trusts, perverted socialism and destroyed any prospect of African industrial development or self-sufficiency.³⁷ He insisted this system be abolished through syndicates and cooperatives. But he maintained that overcoming alienated labor in Africa would not only entail “returning to the colonized his land [and] product” but also his “soul.”³⁸

Senghor believed that Marx’s dialectical method and ethical project could be applied to particular African societies, which might pursue distinct roads toward socialism. Citing Marx’s 1881 exchange with Vera Zassoulitch on rural communes in Russia, Senghor insisted that as an agrarian society, Africa already practiced the kind of social production and solidarity that Marx envisioned.³⁹ He explained to party cadres that by defending the distinctive “Senegalese and African man” the BDS was following Marx’s methodological and ethical focus on “the whole human” [*l’homme integral*].⁴⁰

But in order to reclaim Marx for Africa, Senghor had to confront religiosity, which he called “the very sap of Negro-African civilization.”⁴¹ He insisted that Marx’s purported atheism was only a conditional rejection of Christianity, which had been deformed by capitalism into an ideological rationalization for systemic social misery.⁴² He argued that whereas European atheism was founded upon the “myopic logic” of “classical rationalism,” Marx’s work actually rejected this “rational logic.” It attended to the surreal phenomena subtending the apparent reality that was the domain of empirical science. Marxism, Senghor liked to explain, was a “*dialogue* between reason and the real.”⁴³ He claimed that Marx recognized among different peoples the existence of a plurality of “reasons” that did not always assume the particular rationality of the *cogito*.⁴⁴ He often quoted Marx’s claim in his 1843 letter to Arnold Ruge that “reason has always existed, but not always in a rational form.”⁴⁵

Senghor believed that Marx’s support for the emancipation of the total person was consistent with religion’s fundamental aims and values. Senghor thus denounced “atheistic” socialist parties as “churches” guilty of quasi-religious dogmatism that contravened the original spirit of Marx’s writings. He maintained that African spiritualism directly embodied Marx’s “integral humanism.”⁴⁶ And he contended that Christianity and Islam in Africa also promoted revolutionary socialist aims by challenging “all sorts of despotisms” in order

to “[restore] human dignity.”⁴⁷ To denounce religion from the standpoint of socialism, Senghor suggested, was therefore to “slip from a practice to a doctrine, from a method of action to a metaphysics or even a philosophy of history.”⁴⁸ Referring to orthodox socialism, he wrote, “At this moment when atheist parties have become churches and live their faith, we must be careful not to forget religion as the source of will. For us, it is not a question of making the party into a religion, but of supporting it with our religion.”⁴⁹

Senghor stated that socialism was not a doctrine but a method and that African religion promoted socialist methods by combining will and act with vital energy and popular emotion. He wrote, “our religions insist precisely on the fact that the will is forged through the act. We acquire faith by praying and practicing charity.” Similarly, he explained “one becomes a [socialist] militant worthy of the name through syndicalist action, cooperative action, in study groups, conferences, organization, and propaganda.” For Senghor, African religion and socialism intersected in this focus on concrete practice over abstract doctrine, which was “the only way that we can abolish [*supprime*] ‘the existing state of things,’ the only way that we can create a *revolution, which is nothing other than a permanent transformation of the world, by and for man.*”⁵⁰ Senghor instructed party members that “we can quite legitimately be socialists while remaining believers.”⁵¹

This faithful socialism would require the BDS to organize cooperatives and syndicates. Senghor observed that “syndicalism, that is to say, worker direct action” required “courage and communitarian faith among its militants.”⁵² Through such political work, he declared, the party would “begin to model the socialist face of the *cit * of the future.”⁵³ Here he seems to suggest that African socialists should not only shape their own future polity but enact a *cit * to come through an anticipatory politics that could guide socialist transformation globally.

Senghor’s ideal African socialism would integrate politics, ethics, and religion. He explained to party members in 1953,

It is not a question of collapsing or confusing politics and religion, of assigning one to the role of the other. *Politics*, as you know, is not exactly a religion, not even a philosophy—nor either a science. It is an art, the art of administering *la Cit *. It does not aim to discover and give the absolute truth. It is the art of using a method which, by ceaselessly corrected approximations, allows the greatest number [of people] to lead a more complete and happy life because it conforms more closely to the *human condition*. Politics is an active humanism. But because this is so . . .

it must be integral to and found itself upon an ethics. And religion still remains the most solid foundation of ethics.⁵⁴

In order to be authentically socialist and authentically African, the BDS had to undertake a political project rooted in vernacular religious ethics. But Senghor was not only arguing that African socialism be founded on local forms of religiosity. He was suggesting that such a religiously inflected socialism might more fully embody the unrealized spiritual and humanist potentiality in socialism's original promise.

Senghor's African socialism posited a relation whereby politics revealed the truth about religion and religion the truth about politics.⁵⁵ Each disclosed the end toward which the other should strive. Within Senghor's schema, doctrinaire socialism and atheism were dogmatic materialist religions focused more on "church" power than human dignity. His vision implied that politics became more political when routed through religion and religion more religious when routed through politics. For Senghor, authentic politics, like religion, addressed itself to transcendent potentiality. And authentic religion, like politics, addressed itself to worldly possibility. Senghor thus developed a critique of religious absolutism from the standpoint of Marxian dialectics and a critique of vulgar Marxism from the standpoint of religious ethics. These were also immanent critiques: of religious absolutism from the standpoint of humanist and worldly currents within religious tradition and of mechanical materialism from the standpoint of Marx's attempt to overcome the dehumanizing opposition between subjectivity and objectivity. Senghor thereby challenged fixity and foundationalism whether expressed in religious or political idioms. He envisioned *religion without dogma* and *socialism without orthodoxy*. His objective was religious humanism and secular transcendence.⁵⁶ And neither, for Senghor, could be separated categorically from realist calculation and strategic politics. His revolutionary hope was tethered to a gradualist program of concrete acts, social reforms, and constitutional adjustments.

Identifying "Cartesianist Jacobinism" as a "French deviation," Senghor argued that the BDS party would "return socialism to its first vocation . . . that of coexistence and interdependence."⁵⁷ Because original socialism had a "federalist tendency," he explained, his aim was to create "a balance which is local autonomy within union."⁵⁸ Strategically, this meant that "syndicalism because socialist is anti-autarchic" and must, in the spirit of "Eurafrican cooperation," "federate itself" within an "international organization."⁵⁹ In his view, autarchic solutions to the global problem of capitalist alienation could not succeed. The BDS should both focus on African specificity and support socialist

internationalism through close alliances with other working classes, democratic movements, and subordinated peoples.

But Senghor was also claiming that economic self-management and humane development of the total person could best be pursued within the framework of a postcolonial federation.⁶⁰ As in Proudhonian mutualism, Senghor considered socialism and federalism to be two sides of the same coin.⁶¹ “Economic relations between the metropole and the overseas territories,” he explained in 1954, “would cease to be dictated unilaterally. We would no longer be satellites of the metropole, our economy would thus be complementary and not a supplement.”⁶² He instructed party organizers that federalism, socialism, and religion were “interdependent . . . acts of the trilogy [which] form a single drama, that of the *human condition*.”⁶³ As he recounted, “using the method of socialism . . . we discovered federation as the only solution to our problem and to *that of France*.”⁶⁴ In other words, socialism required federalism and federalism would renew socialism; together they would resolve Africa’s local problems, its problems with France, and France’s own problems.⁶⁵ In the Cold War era, Senghor suggested, France and Africa would each need socialism, federalism, and each other.

Decolonizing France, Redeeming the World

Senghor called neither for France to decolonize Africa nor for Africa to liberate itself, but for Africans to *decolonize France*. African socialism would play a vanguard role in a process whereby the imperial republic would be elevated into a plural democracy. In turn, this transcontinental formation could serve as the elemental unit for an alternative global order. Senghor’s socialism-federalism-religion trilogy would promote African singularity, Franco-African *métissage*, and “the civilization of the universal.” This federation would allow members to pursue the dreams of human solidarity and reciprocity proclaimed by various currents of postwar internationalism. Once again, he believed that if colonial emancipation were to institute a new era of human solidarity, it could best do so by inventing a sociopolitical form that did not yet exist for a world that had not yet arrived.

Operating on imperial, international, and global scales, Senghorian decolonization sought to inaugurate a new epoch of world history through a process of interdependent overcoming. Colonial capitalism would be superseded by cooperative socialism. Illiberal empires would become postnational federations. International conflict would be displaced by civilizational rapprochement. Cold War antagonism would be transcended. Marxism and spiritualism

would be reunited, ethics and politics reintegrated, multiplicity and democracy reconciled. This was a redemptive vision of African-led decolonization as planetary salvation. In the spirit of Marx, Senghor developed a critique of national sovereignty from the standpoint of human emancipation, rather than a critique of colonial domination from the standpoint of national sovereignty.⁶⁶

Senghor's position proceeded from the postulate that because true alienation was moral as well as economic, emancipation could not focus exclusively on material well-being. African socialism would have "to return man to himself."⁶⁷ The aim was not merely to raise Africans' standard of living but to restore to them their "reason to live." He argued that African socialism must start with but also surpass "economic realities."

Because *the real* is not wholly contained by these realities. Economic alienation is only one aspect, an instrument of our veritable alienation, which is in the moral domain. . . . It is good to raise the standard of living for the masses, but the very life of man, his dignity, is not in his *standing* [English in original]. . . . It is in the vigor of his spirit and in his taste, his sense of beauty, it is in his conscience and his creative activity. In our struggle against the resurrection of the *pacte colonial*, let's guard ourselves against conflating means and ends. "To live" let's protect ourselves from "losing the reason to live."⁶⁸

European socialist parties, he explained, had failed precisely because they inverted means and ends, focusing on material improvement rather than moral liberation, economic rather than cultural development, and superficial rational rather than the deeper spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of human being.

Senghor described culture as "the most powerful means of revolutionary action," as it "illuminates consciousness" and "[transforms] the world . . . for the blossoming of the person."⁶⁹ Because he believed that "an action, to be fruitful, must be nourished by thought" and that "action is first of all will" or "energy of the soul," cultural practices and products could be revolutionary media.⁷⁰ He blamed the failure of the Second International on its desiccated rationalism, suggesting that even early Soviet communists recognized that socialism could succeed only if rooted in popular culture, the *élan vital* of a people, and "the immense energy of faith."⁷¹ He denounced party-dictated socialist realism as violating the spirit of Marx's thinking by restricting free artistic expression, instrumentalizing creativity, and presenting an impoverished conception of social reality.⁷²

Senghor was less interested in rejecting socialism than in *realizing* it, by returning to its Marxian sources, via Africa, in order to overcome its existing

incarnations. He instructed BDS cadres that “the failure of socialists is not a failure of socialism.”⁷³ He directed them to return to “the works of Marx . . . not to recite them, like the Bible, or the Koran, like a *dogma*, but to recuperate from them their spirit, their living and vivifying substance.” Marx, he explained, recognized that “man, to be fully human, must escape his alienation by capital and be a *creator* of beauty.”⁷⁴

According to Senghor, culture had “a double objective: to satisfy immediate physical needs . . . but above all to satisfy the spiritual exigencies of life in society . . . [which] essentially is nourished by . . . art.” Such art leads “man to commune with men, [and] all men with all the forces of nature,” making “him more free by allowing him to *realize* himself.”⁷⁵ African art, Senghor argued, expresses what he regarded as Marxian aims insofar as it was

about . . . leading the people to participate in the collective life of the *cit  * . . . [it is] precisely not [meant] to satisfy animal needs, but these needs being satisfied, to give life [*faire vivre*]. . . . It is about creating a communion of men . . . with the vital forces of other men, and through this, with the cosmic forces of the universe. . . . In short, it is a matter of transforming our spiritual life by integrating it within social life to make it more intense because more human.⁷⁶

Senghor figured black art as a medium of human and cosmic reconciliation through which Africans could revitalize Marxism and redeem socialism. In turn, an ethical and vitalist socialism rooted in African culture, aesthetics, and religiosity would save Europe, which had been alienated by an instrumental rationality that reduced the human person to material utility, confused standard of living with reason for living, and perversely inverted human means and ends. Senghor thus reminded his Senegalese supporters that “Black Africa’s art and literature remain our most precious heritage. They are necessary in the world at a moment when Western and Eastern European technical reason risks transforming men into robots, worse, of annihilating humanity.”⁷⁷

Senghor maintained that European “discursive reason” was only “a method, an instrument” that provided “practical recipes for utilizing nature” to improve material existence. But, he argued, such scientific and technological rationality could not be used to “perfect ourselves.” Referring to European reason, he asked,

Aren’t its inventions, of which thermonuclear engines are only the most spectacular, in the process of destroying the very existence of man like the miracles of the sorcerer’s apprentice? . . . far from combating our true

evils, which are the egoisms of class, nation, race, or continent, European reason has made itself the docile servant of them. If it has helped Europe transform the world and, as Karl Marx wanted, its material life, it has not transformed its true life, that is to say, its moral style.⁷⁸

The *moral* transformation of *true life*, Senghor argued, required the kind of “analogic reason” or “sympathetic intuition” that he believed subtended both Marx’s thinking and African ways of being, knowing, and making.⁷⁹ He thus criticized existing socialist parties from the dual perspective of Marx’s actual writings and “labor in precolonial Africa,” which was “a rite and source of joy by the grace of rhythm and song.”⁸⁰ These were not nativist gestures meant to reify incommensurable differences between Europe and Africa but a reminder to each that their postcolonial prospects, both spiritual and material, depended on the other. He believed that Europe and Africa could help one another to develop in ways that would facilitate worldwide human self-realization within the civilization of the universal.

Senghor’s African socialism contained numerous tensions. Consider his celebration of Marx’s dialectical method and critique of alienation, which identify immanent contradictions leading to crises within capitalist societies, versus his assertions about reciprocity, interdependence, and social solidarity *without* overcoming capitalist social relations. His invocations of popular spirit, collective emotions, and syndicalist action versus his reformist faith in constitutionally driven societal transformation through legal reforms. His emphasis on democratic and cooperative self-management versus his alliances with conservative power brokers across Senegal and in Paris. His pragmatic belief in socialist federalism as the best solution for African decolonization at that moment versus his tendency to imply that federalism was an intrinsic human good. His federalist convictions about mutualism as the basis for socialism versus his statist interest in planning and development. Senghor’s proposals also implied future problems that he never addressed concerning ownership of natural resources, capitalist polarization, and structural economic dependence.

But such tensions do not warrant treating Senghor’s project for a socialist-federalist form of decolonization as a charter for the territorial nationalist logic it forcefully challenged. Such an interpretation is possible only if his socialism is separated from his federalism or reduced to the political ideology of a national state rather than recognized as a utopian project born of sustained reflection on the prospects for self-determination under late-imperial conditions. Senghor’s vision was partly based on an immediate concern with how best to promote moral and material development in the postwar world. He

did not treat socialism and federalism as doctrinal or dogmatic ends in themselves; whether they would be the best paths to decolonize Africa, to reconstitute France, and to create a new global order would depend on the situation.

As historical conditions changed, so did Senghor's conception of African socialism. From roughly 1948 to 1956 he attempted to recuperate Marx's writings in order to challenge economic determinism and mechanical materialism, to produce an immanent critique of actually existing socialist parties, and found an independent African socialism. But he then began to use African socialism to criticize Marxism itself, which, in an about-face, he accused of economism, determinism, and atheism. This shift was conditioned by the declining prospects for a federalist decolonization for West Africa

The Territorial Trap

With the passage of the Loi-Cadre in 1956, significant administrative powers devolved to local organs of African government.⁸¹ By vesting authority in separate territorial assemblies, the new system bypassed the "federal" administrative infrastructure that already existed in French West Africa, thereby undermining prospects for political unity across the region.⁸² The Loi-Cadre set the stage for a conflict between African "territorialists," who supported separate national governments, and "federalists" who wanted a multinational African government. Félix Houphouët-Boigny, in Côte d'Ivoire, was the most vocal public advocate of territorialism; Senghor and Dia were leaders of the regional federalist movement.⁸³

Despite their opposition to territorialism, Senghor and Dia responded to the Loi-Cadre by creating a larger political organization through which to govern Senegal under this new system. In 1956 the BDS neutralized many of its critics (communists who had defected from the Senegalese RDA, socialists who had defected from the SFIO, and regionalists in the Movement for Cassamance Autonomy) by joining with them in a new Bloc Populaire Sénégalais. The BPS then won overwhelming victories in the local March 1957 elections. Socialist supporters of Lamine Guèye and Ousmane Socé Diop, had largely coalesced around a new Parti Sénégalais d'Action Socialiste. But in April 1958 the BPS co-opted this urban elite by merging with the PSAS to create the Union Progressiste Sénégalais. The UPS, co-led by Senghor and Guèye, then absorbed other independent socialist parties and the Senegalese section of the RDA. N'Daw, Dia, Guèye, and Diop all assumed official posts in the semiautonomous Senegalese government; Senghor happily remained a party leader.⁸⁴

Through these flanking maneuvers, Senghor and Dia created a broad-based coalition. They also regarded the UPS as an instrument for organizing a wider West African federalist movement that could counteract the territorialist RDA. In July 1958, the UPS led efforts to organize a unity conference in Cotonou under the auspices of the Parti du Regroupement Africain (PRA). Although Senghor served as president of the PRA, its more radical delegates dominated the meeting. Against his and Dia's opposition, they passed a resolution that called for immediate independence from France.⁸⁵

These intersecting conflicts—between territorialists and federalists and between advocates of autonomy within a union and those who supported independence—were played out during the debates around de Gaulle's 1958 constitutional referendum. At stake was whether overseas territories would choose to become members of the Fifth Republic's new *Communauté Française*. The PRA militants who supported the Cotonou resolution called for a "no" vote while party leaders campaigned for a "yes" vote. Senghor, Dia, and Guèye believed that the proposed community offered the best hope for federalist reforms. When de Gaulle toured West Africa to campaign for his constitution he was denounced by Sékou Touré in Guinea and was confronted in Senegal by crowds of protestors demanding independence. Senghor and Dia were both in Europe at the time. For better or worse, their position triumphed; every French West African territory except Guinea voted yes in the referendum.⁸⁶

The new constitution held that "the Republic and the peoples of the Overseas Territories who, by an act of free determination . . . institute a Community . . . founded on the equality and solidarity of the peoples that compose it."⁸⁷ Its member states would "possess autonomy . . . administer themselves and freely and democratically manage their own affairs." The larger community government would be responsible for foreign policy, defense, money, strategic raw materials, justice, higher education, and telecommunications.⁸⁸ The constitution stipulated that "there only exists one single citizenship [status] in the Community" for all of its inhabitants.⁸⁹ As we saw, Article 73 allowed for distinct legal regimes to evolve overseas through "adaptive measures necessitated by their particular situation."⁹⁰ Similarly, Article 74 recognized that "the Overseas Territories . . . have a particular organization that takes into account their proper interests within the ensemble of the interests of the Republic."⁹¹

But we also saw that de Gaulle's constitution did not transform France into a true federal union.⁹² Senghor and Dia were criticized by sectors of their own constituencies for supporting it.⁹³ Senghor explained that he and Guèye, who were members of the *Comité Consultatif Constitutionnel* that drafted the

document, told de Gaulle they would support the constitution if West African territories could join the community as a multinational federation and if they were free to decide later to convert autonomy into independence.⁹⁴ Senghor thus claimed responsibility for Article 76: "Overseas Territories . . . can become either Overseas Departments of the Republic or, whether or not grouped together, Member States of the Community," and Article 86: "the transformation of the status of a member state of the Community can be democratically demanded, . . . according to the same procedures, a member state of the Community can become independent."⁹⁵

Senghor argued that his support for the community was not a renunciation of the principle of African independence per se but an "unequivocal" affirmation of "the unity of French-speaking Negro-African territories."⁹⁶ He recounted that his yes vote "essentially had a political meaning . . . we voted for the Constitution, not necessarily for the government of the Republic, let alone for General de Gaulle."⁹⁷ He added that "since the Loi-Cadre, which balkanized the federations of AOF and AEF," there had developed across West Africa a new desire "among the elites . . . to reconstitute the two federations and to promote them into Federal States."⁹⁸ In short, he insisted that he essentially voted for *federalism*.

But Senghor now equivocated around the question of independence. He had long argued that autonomy within a federal union would be a better framework for African decolonization than national sovereignty. He also believed that a range of solutions to the problem of freedom could coexist in the community. Accordingly, he called on the French state to recognize Algeria's and Guinea's independence and to embrace them as partners within a postcolonial "commonwealth."⁹⁹ Yet, he also declared that joining the community "was only a means to realize *independence* for black Africa."¹⁰⁰ Was Senghor renouncing his support for a federal union with metropolitan France? Was he pandering to separatist constituents? I suggest this was a resigned concession to what he began to regard as the inexorable force of the nationalist vector of decolonization. He explained, "whether we celebrate or deplore it, the fact remains, the 20th century is one of overseas nationalisms. The dependent peoples of Asia and Africa are animated by the same will to national independence. A Frenchman can hardly reproach them for this. It was France that started it all." He recounted how during the revolutionary wars of the 1790s France "inoculated" Italy, Germany, Russia, and the Balkans with a "nationalist virus" and how this "European epidemic" then spread through Asia and Africa. Senghor remarked, "it is vain to struggle against History."¹⁰¹

In these debates Senghor often temporized, contradicted himself, and disregarded his own role in the historical processes he criticized. He was clearly politically maneuvering. But he was also adapting his program to new circumstances and narrowed options. His opposition to national autarchy and territorial “balkanization” never wavered. But as the possibility of transforming France into a democratic socialist federal republic diminished, he rescaled his hopes for federalism and socialism.

Under the Fifth Republic the “federal” administration of AOF effectively ceased to exist. The constitution created a territorialist system of separate overseas governments confederated with the metropole. The community did not establish executive organs at the regional level through which Africans could exercise their new autonomy. In April 1959, the French state formally dismantled the AOF system. This move prepared a future where African peoples, whether as autonomous territories or independent states, would be divided along national lines. Each government would negotiate a separate bilateral relationship with metropolitan France. The ongoing Algerian War and the punitive treatment of Guinea after its “no” vote also undermined the credibility of France’s claim to have created a democratic community of peoples. Across French West Africa demands for independence by radical parties, trade unions, and young educated urbanites gathered strength. Against this backdrop, Senghor pragmatically shifted his efforts to “the realization of a ‘multinational confederation’ with France” by creating a federal African state that could join the community.¹⁰²

In Senghor’s view both Houphouët-Boigny’s desire for African countries to join the French Community as autonomous nations and Sékou Touré’s desire for them to separate from France as independent states were equally misguided forms of “balkanization.”¹⁰³ Accordingly, he and Dia joined forces with the Sudanese political leader Modibo Keita to create a multinational socialist federation within Africa.¹⁰⁴ Although Keita was a member of the Sudanese section of the RDA, he was an antiterritorialist advocate of African unity. But he was a more orthodox socialist than Senghor and believed in a strong state. In January 1959, they convened a meeting in Bamako. Representatives from Senegal, Sudan, Haute-Volta, and Dahomey agreed to organize themselves into a new federal state that would be an autonomous member of the French Community. But Houphouët-Boigny pressured Dahomey and Haute-Volta to withdraw from the plan. Senghor and Keita still cofounded a new Mali Federation composed of Senegal and Sudan and governed by the Parti de la Fédération Africaine (PFA). This state formally established itself as

a member of the community on April 4, 1959, with Keita as president and Dia vice-president. The following September, the Mali Federation exercised its constitutional right to request independence, which was granted on June 20, 1960. Disagreements soon developed between the partners about whether each territory would remain semiautonomous or would merge into a unified state. These differences were compounded by Sudanese fears about Senegal's hegemony and Senegalese resistance to Sudan's interference in its internal affairs. By August the federal partnership dissolved, and Senegal and Sudan (henceforth called Mali) became independent nation-states.¹⁰⁵

Political Reorientation

Between 1956 and 1960 Senghor acted instrumentally to co-opt adversaries, neutralize critics, and build a party machine whose influence he hoped to project across French West Africa. His objectives also shifted from demanding an intercontinental federation to supporting an international confederation, then to creating a sovereign federal state, and finally accepting a national state. These shifts marked the unraveling of his postwar vision. But even when independence seemed to be the unavoidable dénouement of decolonization, he remained a forceful critic of nationalism and still tried to conjugate federalism, socialism, and universal civilization.

Senghor did not begin to reflect seriously on the category of "nation" or emphasize "confederation" until his dream of reconstituting France as a federal republic had been foreclosed. Even then he criticized the illusion of nominal independence and affirmed his commitment to multinational interdependence. Consider his 1959 Report to the PFA, which engaged the question of nation building by positing an ascending chain linking *patrie*, nation, federation, and confederation. According to this quasi-Kantian vision, each entity would be more fully realized in its specificity through participation in the larger entity that encompassed it even as the overall progression led toward greater freedom, universality, and humanity. In Mazzini-like reasoning, this universal freedom and humanism would be grounded in and inseparable from the ongoing existence of particular peoples, countries, nations, and states. Even during the time of the Mali Federation, when he abandoned plans to reconstitute France as a federal republic, Senghor continued to search for a political form that would correspond to his vision of concrete universalism and rooted cosmopolitanism.

Observing that "the most powerful states today are federal states," he surmised that "France's weakness is perhaps its excessive centralization."¹⁰⁶

Distancing Mali from the Jacobin paradigm, he pledged to “resist one of the temptations of the nation-state, which is the standardization of persons across countries [*patries*] . . . the impoverishment of persons, their reduction to robot individuals, their loss of sap and juice.”¹⁰⁷ In his view, “the superiority of the federal state over the unitary state” was based on its recognition that “wealth is born from the diversity of persons and *patries*, from their *complementarity*.”¹⁰⁸ Senghor reasoned that “only democracy . . . will allow the Negro-African to realize himself” and asserted that “our democracy will be *federal* . . . local diversities, by virtue of their complementarities, will enrich the Federation. Inversely, the Federation will preserve diversities.”¹⁰⁹

He invoked Proudhon’s belief that “the only way to reduce the tyranny of the state and conjure away its maladies” was through the federalist “decentralization and deconcentration of . . . economic and political institutions.”¹¹⁰ He also pointed to Yugoslavia as a model for a “federal structure” that could be extended from the state to “regional and communal collectivities” and encompass “social and economic domains.”¹¹¹ And given that “the interdependence of race, continents, [and] nations” was the “reality of the twentieth century,” Senghor argued, “real independence” required “a development plan” that “cannot even be thought, let alone realized within the narrow limits of a national territory.”¹¹² He quoted François Perroux’s claim that “today, for all nations, the real powers through which sovereignty is exercised are a function of effective alliances and coalitions.”¹¹³

But in a departure from his earlier thinking, he also promoted federalism as a statist vehicle for “rational and dynamic planning.”¹¹⁴ He called for “a strong democracy and planned economy” devoted to “open socialism” within “federal states.”¹¹⁵ Citing the recent volume, *The Third World*, edited by Georges Balandier, he informed students and labor leaders that they would have to cooperate with state policies to minimize public expenditures, accept French aid, and solicit private investments.¹¹⁶ For these reasons, he declared, “the Federation . . . is our primary framework. But a Federation integrated into a larger ensemble, the Community, and associated with an even larger ensemble, the European Common Market.”¹¹⁷

Senghor bolstered this position by again citing Perroux’s critique of “nationalisms obsessed with the allure of juridical sovereignty”:

common terms . . . such as sovereignty, independence, autonomy, collective will, the will of the state—can no longer be used interchangeably. . . . A territorial sovereign state . . . is neither the necessary, nor obviously, the sufficient condition for an ensemble of populations to manage

[*disposer*] itself, to discover or rediscover the values of its own civilization, or increase its capacity to produce and its standard of living.¹¹⁸

Senghor contended that members of the French Community, including the Mali Federation, were already “*independent* in the etymological sense of the word.” For “independence is essentially non-dependence in one’s decisions” and “we are still, at all moments, free to choose the path of our destiny.”¹¹⁹ He explained that “for a jurist, independence is a *form* not a reality . . . an independent state is one that is recognized as such internationally . . . one that possesses the external signs of sovereignty.”¹²⁰ He elaborated, “a merely nominal independence is a false independence. It can satisfy national pride, but it does not abolish the consciousness of alienation, the feeling of frustration, the inferiority complex, since it does not resolve the concrete problems facing the underdeveloped countries: to house, clothe, feed, cure, and educate the masses.”¹²¹ For him real independence was not a function of state sovereignty. But was he suggesting that autonomy within the community was a preferable arrangement or a preliminary step towards independence? It is difficult to know whether by wavering he was conceding to popular demands, recognizing an unstoppable historical movement, or hedging his bets until conditions disclosed whether the Mali Federation would best flourish as an autonomous member of the community or as an independent state.

Senghor called for “the transformation of “the Community into a Multinational Confederation,” which, he reminded supporters “had always been our common ideal.”¹²² He argued that participation in such an entity would ground rather than compromise Malian sovereignty and strengthen rather than weaken African unity.¹²³ “Horizontal solidarity within Africa,” he explained, “will be created bit by bit, by beginning at the beginning, with economic and cultural relations, while vertical solidarity between us and our metropolises will be transformed without breaking. Neither race wars not continental wars will allow us to establish [*consolider*] Peace.”¹²⁴ Note his use of the term *consolider*: to strengthen through joining and unifying; this is a verbal form of solidarity.

Finally, Senghor linked this call for a federal state within a multinational confederation to his enduring dream of universal civilization and planetary reconciliation.

Man remains our ultimate concern, our *measure*. . . . A people that refuses to show up at the *rendez-vous* of History, that does not believe itself to carry a unique message, this people is finished and should be consigned to a museum. The Negro-African will not be finished before even having

begun. Let him speak and, above all, act. Let him bring, like leaven, his message to the world. To help create the Civilization of the Universal.¹²⁵

Senghor thereby suggested that the “civilization of the universal” was the ultimate aim of his socialist federalism. Attempting to transcend the conventional opposition between universalism and particularism, he figured African civilization as making a signal contribution to the planetary tapestry of human civilization as well as acting as a messenger and *hostie* that would help to redeem the modern world by, in some sense, Africanizing—by which he also meant humanizing—Marxism, socialism, and humanity itself.

Of course, Senghor himself did not advocate a multinational confederation until after it became clear that his earlier program to decolonize France by transforming it into an intercontinental federation had been foreclosed. The distinction between federation and confederation for Senghor was significant. It was only at this late date that he called for France to “transform the Community into a *Commonwealth à la française*,” a “Franco-African Confederation” that former colonies would “agree to enter” as “independent states.”¹²⁶ Whether or not he acknowledged it at the 1959 PFA Congress, the shape of Senghor’s plan for a “great intercontinental ensemble” had changed.¹²⁷

African Socialism as a Critique of Marxism

As Senghor recalibrated his initial program for federalism, he also modified his thinking about African socialism. Earlier, he had reclaimed Marx as a standpoint from which to criticize actually existing socialism. Now he used African socialism to criticize Marx. In the 1959 Report to the PFA, he pledged “to rethink the founding texts [of socialism] in relation to Negro-African realities.”¹²⁸ He observed that Marx’s relevance for contemporary Africa was limited by his inability to foresee important twentieth-century developments. These included the capitalist state’s capacity to integrate the labor movement through social legislation and a communist revolution that made the state into “an all-powerful soulless monster, suppressing the natural freedoms of the human person, and drying up the sources of art, without which there is no longer a reason to live.”¹²⁹ Senghor added that Marx was able to envision neither the importance of colonialism for worldwide capitalist development nor the tendency of the Western working classes to identify with imperial states rather than act in solidarity with colonized masses.¹³⁰

Senghor continued to praise Marx’s insights about human emancipation. He traced a continuity between Marx’s earlier writings about alienation and

his theory of reification in *Capital*. In both cases, he believed, Marx demonstrated that when the worker was separated from the product of his labor he became alienated from his own humanity as a free “creator.”¹³¹ In his view, “Marxian analysis” demonstrated that “it is all Western civilization, machine civilization, factory civilization that is reified.”¹³² Marx’s aim, according to Senghor, was to restore a “natural balance” whereby “man will stop being dominated by his products and dominate them. He will institute the rational because planned, organization of production. . . . Thereby man will rediscover his place and his role in the universe. And the reign of *freedom* will then succeed that of *necessity*.”¹³³ Here Senghor shifts from using Marx to praise man as a creator of beauty to idealize him as a rational planner.

Senghor noted that Marx was able to recognize both “the grandeur and misery of man in and through labor” under capitalism. “From master of his tool, he becomes master of the world. But at the same time . . . he separates himself from the world and from himself.” Senghor suggested that this “vision of man” was “no less deep or true than that of the greatest philosophers. It recalls the vision of Pascal.”¹³⁴ He explained, “beyond economic ‘appearances,’ [Marx’s thought] plunges into the human realities that create them. For a *factual* vision of things, Marx substitutes a profound vision of human requirements. This is a new humanism, new because it is *embodied* [*incarné*].”¹³⁵ For Senghor, this conception of a concrete and embodied humanism, at once worldly and transcendent, continued to mark a crucial point of affinity between his and Marx’s thinking.

Senghor claimed that “Marx’s ambition, and his paradox, has always been to express . . . the dignity of man and his spiritual needs without recourse to metaphysics, morality, or religion, not even philosophy.”¹³⁶ Yet, he argued, Marx was only able to do so “in the name of a certain human *interiority* or transcendence that supersedes man.”¹³⁷ According to Senghor, the concept of *praxis* allowed Marx to then shift focus “back from God to man, from the transcendent to the immanent.”¹³⁸ Earlier, Senghor would have embraced this attempt to overcome the oppositions between immanence and transcendence, matter and spirit, and materialism and idealism. Now he used it to accuse Marx of having “an equivocal conception” of man and the universe.¹³⁹ Senghor asked, “what is religion if not the bond that unites man to the world?”¹⁴⁰

Senghor then extended to epistemology his suggestion that Marx was disavowing the transcendent bases of his own thinking. On the one hand, he praised Marx’s dialectical understanding that “subject and object are only two aspects of a single reality.”¹⁴¹ He noted that if Marx recognized the human mind as a type of matter, it was not matter as conceptualized by “the so-called exact sciences” but

the human and social matter of a given century—the nineteenth, of a given place—western Europe. It is complex, made of the reciprocal reactions on one another of infrastructure and superstructure, economic and cultural facts, things and men. It is a matter made up of contradictions, in a state of perpetual becoming. It is matter animated by *dialectical* movement.¹⁴²

However, Senghor also argued that in his analysis of capitalism “Marx reverts . . . to an old conception of mechanical materialism and seems to deny the active role of the subject in knowledge. He turns into a positivist . . . against his dialectical method . . . he opted for a strict *determinism*.”¹⁴³ But Senghor does not support this assertion.

Senghor had become concerned with recuperating dialectics from what he now characterized as Marx’s one-sided materialism, positivism, and determinism. He did so partly through a vitalist claim that neither Hegel nor Marx invented this idea of “perpetual *becoming*.”¹⁴⁴ He wrote,

As Heraclitus already noted more than 2,000 years ago, things, like beings, are perpetually in a state of becoming. Within themselves they contain . . . inner contradictions that . . . will bring about their destruction, more exactly, their transformation into new syntheses or symbioses, new realities.¹⁴⁵

Skipping forward, Senghor also noted that “the dialectic is employed by the most effective philosophical and scientific methods of today, including existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis.”¹⁴⁶ In a gesture that anticipated the direction his thinking would soon move, Senghor invoked the Jesuit priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who claimed to have found a “synthesis of the Christian ‘God’ above and the Marxist ‘God’ of the future [*en-avant*].”¹⁴⁷ This postulate, Senghor explained, allowed “believers” to “retain the positive contributions of socialism” through “the dialectical method” but also “legitimizes our faith.”¹⁴⁸

Senghor framed this discussion with a surprisingly categorical statement: because “no social realities, especially cultural realities, can be reduced simply to the ‘class struggle,’” he informed PFA supporters, “we are . . . engaged in the critique of ‘dialectical materialism.’”¹⁴⁹ Yet Senghor had never before read Marx as reducing social reality to the class struggle. He seemed to conflate Marx’s writings with the orthodox socialists and communists that he formerly criticized from the perspective of these writings. He still praised Marx’s “philosophy of humanism, economic theory, [and] dialectical method.”¹⁵⁰ He

affirmed the European traditions of “syndicalism, planning, federalism, and mutualism, which come to us from French idealist socialists—Saint-Simon, Proudhon, and Fourier.”¹⁵¹ But Senghor was now at pains to distinguish Marxist humanism and utopian socialism, which the PFA embraced, from actually existing state socialism. He criticized Leninism’s “univocal” materialism and determinism, and Stalinism for abandoning Marx’s revolutionary commitment to “human dignity and . . . freedom.”¹⁵² He condemned Soviet communism for pursuing American-style capitalist development.

Senghor was equally critical of the American “regime of liberal capitalism and free enterprise,” for endorsing racial segregation and elevating “material success to the status of a lifestyle.”¹⁵³ Like many postwar reformists, Senghor declared, “We stand for a middle course, for a *democratic socialism*, which goes so far as to integrate spiritual values, a socialism which ties in with the old ethical current of the French socialists.”¹⁵⁴ He also invoked contemporary French Marxists, including Henri Lefebvre, Pierre Fougeyrollas, and Edgar Morin, who criticized the Communist Party for subordinating the person to the class and hiding “reality behind the screen of ideology.”¹⁵⁵ Senghor asserted that following the French Revolution and the revolution of Marxism, “a third revolution is under way, in reaction against capitalist and communist materialisms, that will integrate moral, if not religious values with the political and economic contributions of the two great revolutions. In this revolution, peoples of color, including Negro-Africans, must play their role; they must contribute to the construction of the new planetary civilization.”¹⁵⁶

This understanding of socialism as an ethical and spiritual project for human realization resonated directly with his understanding of African forms of life. Citing European ethnologists, he elaborated:

Negro-African philosophy, like socialist philosophy, is existentialist and humanist, but it integrates spiritual values . . . for the Negro-African, the ‘vital forces’ constitute the fabric of the world . . . animated by a dialectical movement. . . . Negro-African society is collectivist, or, more exactly, communitarian, because it is composed of a *communion* of souls more than an aggregate of individuals . . . we had already realized socialism before the European presence . . . we have a vocation to renew it by helping it to restore its spiritual dimensions.¹⁵⁷

Senghor is arguing that socialism was a useful framework for African development because it confirmed and complemented already existing, but suppressed, tendencies in Africa. But he was also suggesting that African civilization had the

capacity and responsibility to renew socialism by restoring to it the lost moral, cultural, and spiritual dimensions that were part of Marx's initial humanism.

In his 1959 presentation to the Second International Congress of Black Artists and Writers, Senghor argued that Marx showed that "the economy only determines society through certain mediations—races, families, groups of all sorts" and "superstructures react back on infrastructures in the same way that the latter do on the former." This process, Senghor explained, animates "the *dialectical* movement of History at the end of which erupts [*jaillit*] the freedom of Man." He cautioned that this was not a mechanical or predetermined process, explaining that the socialist "method is only a framework. It is up to us, in particular, to discover the mediations and to define their roles. It is, in fact, a question of *explaining Man by man*." This was possible, in Senghor's view, because African social institutions and cultural traits "carry within them *human values of universality* even as they are specifically black [values]."¹⁵⁸ Senghor, in other words, postulated a concrete, embodied, and incarnate African humanism that was at once situated and universal.

As he had done repeatedly since the 1930s, he outlined "Negro-African" civilization's specific forms of consciousness and knowledge, its particular ontology and conception of religion, its characteristic social organization and institutions, its conceptions of property and labor, its ethical orientation, and its approach to aesthetics. This was another attempt to reconcile African singularity, European modernity, and universal humanity. He again stressed how an alienated humanity could more fully realize itself by learning, or remembering, the lessons that African civilization could teach about modes of being, knowing, relating, and creating. He wrote,

in black Africa, art is not only *social*, but *vital*. It accompanies and accomplishes activities of *production* . . . not only material production, but also spiritual production. . . . Art is vital because *production*, in the material sense, is the first expression—in time—of Man: his *generic* activity. But, beyond this material production, art expresses . . . the interior life by which he essentially distinguishes himself from the animal. The materialist Karl Marx affirmed this truth. . . . Only Man can dream and express his dream in works that transcend him [*le dépasser*]. And in this domain, the *Nègre* is king. Thus the exemplary value of Negro-African civilization and the need to decrypt it in order to found a new humanism upon it.¹⁵⁹

This was familiar territory for Senghor. The difference was that now he related this distinctive vision of an "incarnate" African humanism to his specific

historical conjuncture to emphasize the indispensable cultural and spiritual dimensions of decolonization.

He remarked, “new autonomous or independent States are being born in black Africa . . . But . . . what will black peoples do with their recovered liberty? For it is evident that freedom without consciousness is worse than slavery.”¹⁶⁰ Senghor contended that as important as parliamentary democracy and socialism certainly were, such institutions could not create “real independence, not only of peoples but also of persons.”¹⁶¹ And he reminded black intellectuals who considered religion to be an outdated and regressive form of consciousness that “religion, whatever it may be, more generally *faith*, is as necessary for the soul as bread, rice, or millet are for the body. . . . The challenge is not to suppress religion, nor to replace it; it is to assign it to its true place and to refine it by making of it one of the elements of humanism today.”¹⁶²

Like Césaire, he assigned writers and artists “a primary role in the struggle for decolonization,” instructing them that

Man must be the center of our preoccupations. One does not construct a modern State for the pleasure of constructing. The action is not an end in itself. We must therefore protect ourselves from a will to power that defines the State, that crushes *Man* beneath the State. It is, in fact, about creating the black man within a humanity marching towards its *total realization* in time and space.¹⁶³

For Senghor, the task was not merely to found independent states but to create a new man who could remake the world and redeem, by realizing, humanity. Whether he maintained this critical relationship to state power is a different story.

From Marxian Dialectics to Vitalist Metaphysics

When state sovereignty for Senegal became inevitable, Senghor’s writings became at once more philosophically dense and less politically innovative. His efforts to complement Marx’s thinking devolved into a theoretically cruder attempt “to carry [Marx’s dialectical] logic to its ultimate consequences in order to complete and, let us dare say, correct” it.¹⁶⁴ Now positing a break between Marx’s earlier philosophical writings and the political economy of *Capital*, Senghor claimed that Marx’s dialectical materialism was trapped within a form of superficial discursive rationality. Breaking with his earlier analysis, he situated Marx within an abstract and deterministic philosophical tradition that accepted the subject-object distinction (which he traced back through

Kant, Spinoza, and Descartes to Aristotle). Senghor added that Marx's understanding of world history placed too much emphasis on the class struggle, his conception of internationalism depended on a fictive solidarity between metropolitan working classes and colonized masses, and his vision of human freedom neglected the cultural and spiritual dimensions of disalienation.¹⁶⁵

On these grounds Senghor argued that Marxism could *not* adequately address the concerns of African societies where, he instructed the youth wing of the PFA, people traditionally lived "in communion . . . with the solidary forces of the whole universe: the living and the dead, men and animals, plants and pebbles."¹⁶⁶ Nor, for Senghor, could Marxism meet the twentieth-century demand for a "panhumanism" rooted in the realities of global "interdependence."¹⁶⁷ Referring to Marxism as a "dehumanized humanism" based on an "inhuman metaphysics" and an "atheistic materialism," Senghor concluded that Africans would "betray Marx by using, as such, the Marxian dialectic, without changing a comma."¹⁶⁸

Citing philosopher Gaston Bachelard's epistemological claim that "a new situation always requires a new method," Senghor turned to non-Marxian currents of antirealist philosophy that, in his view, rejected the subject-object distinction and developed lived, practical, and participatory ways of knowing the world.¹⁶⁹ He regarded such approaches as more able than either classical rationalism or dialectical materialism to grasp the underlying essence of things as they really are, without trapping them in logical categories. Among the European thinkers that Senghor invoked to develop this vitalist approach to African socialism, including Kierkegaard, Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, and Maurice Blondel, he engaged most deeply with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Gaston Berger.¹⁷⁰

In his 1962 Seminar for Political Cadres of the Senegalese Progressive Union, Senghor wrote, "socialism is essentially a *politics*, that is to say, the art of governing men in a given society, by harmoniously organizing their relations. The object of socialism is thus not the economy, as too many Marxists today believe, but concrete living man, in his totality, body and soul."¹⁷¹ He cited Lefebvre to affirm that Marx himself had hoped to transcend "economic man."¹⁷² But he argued that Marx's aim was actually realized more successfully by Teilhard de Chardin who "plunges beyond the appearance [*apparition*] of man" and "studies the human phenomenon, progressing from apparently inanimate matter until the Omega Point (God), traversing the critical thresholds of the Biosphere (life) and Noosphere (thought)."¹⁷³

Senghor embraced Teilhard's evolutionary belief that supraindividual forces "have accelerated the process of socialization, through . . . the symbiosis of

different civilizations. This explains how, before our eyes, the Civilization of the Universal is actually being built.”¹⁷⁴ He explains that for Teilhard, technoscientific processes of “co-reflection” on an international scale are leading humanity towards a state of “more-being [*plus-être*].”¹⁷⁵ Out of this “movement of *panhuman convergence*,” Senghor contends, “the planetary civilization will be born, a symbiosis of all particular civilizations.”¹⁷⁶ This process, he explains, is propelled “not by a causal push from behind, but by a final attraction from ahead.”¹⁷⁷ Senghor interprets Teilhard to say that humanity coheres through a “personalized *center* that attracts towards itself all human centers in order to make them flourish, by organizing them, this is the famous *Omega Point*. It is *God*. It emerges dialectically as the result of *orthogenesis*, from the cosmic drift [*dérive*] of Man.”¹⁷⁸ In language that is at once Christian, Hegelian, and vitalist, Senghor concludes, “in the middle of this twentieth century, we are therefore pushed—or more precisely, drawn [*aspiré*]—toward the Center of centers, this ultraconsciousness of consciousnesses, which is God . . . the ultimate aim of our progress.”¹⁷⁹ But Senghor also figures this forward and upward propulsion as a worldly and human affair. “Since Marx, since the decline of capitalism and the emergence of socialism, we are only at the beginning of the era of ultrareflection, which must lead us from well-being to more-being before we consume ourselves in God. First, we must construct the earth, our earth.”¹⁸⁰

Senghor praises Teilhard for recognizing that “beyond material well-being, spiritual more-being—the blossoming of the soul: of intelligence and the heart—is . . . the ultimate aim of human activity.”¹⁸¹ He also defines this goal as love. Senghor explains that “humans, having satisfied their animal needs, their *well-being*, through democracy and planning, can then, in union, which is Love, realize their *more-being*. It is this Love-Union that can be found at the ordinal center of art, morality, and religion.”¹⁸² Democracy, socialism, and communism, according to Senghor, all failed in the quest for “totalization and socialization without depersonalization . . . because they sacrifice the part to the whole, the person to the collectivity.” Since the latter was “thought only as a technical organization,” he asserted, social integration was pursued through “constraint and violence” rather than nonviolent “human love” and “love of the Super Person.”¹⁸³

Senghor relates this conception of love to efforts by both phenomenology and “Negro-African gnosiology” to transcend the opposition between matter and spirit.¹⁸⁴ According to Senghor, Teilhard resolved this opposition through a “dialectical revolution” which recognized that

there is not spirit [*esprit*] and matter, but Spirit-Matter . . . only one single energy, which presents itself in two aspects. One, *tangential energy*, is that of physicists and chemists. It links minute particles [*corpuscules*] to one another materially. The other, *radial energy*, psychically links centers of consciousness one to the other. This second type of energy should be considered the “primary stuff of things.”¹⁸⁵

Senghor concludes that this “new dialectic does not contradict that of Marx but only deepens and completes it by removing from it any trace of one-sided determinism [*unilateralité*].”¹⁸⁶

Teilhard figured this long-term movement toward panhuman convergence, planetary civilization, and cosmic reconciliation as a self-propelled organic process. Senghor agreed. But he also believed that African socialists must play an active role in accelerating and orienting it through a rational and humane approach to development and planning. His thinking about the medium-term future was informed by Gaston Berger, who he contends was influenced by Teilhard’s evolutionary theory and Blondel’s conception of action-oriented thought.¹⁸⁷

Senghor refers to Berger’s conception of “la prospective” as a “science of the future” that makes a crucial distinction between “operative time,” which is “the time of action,” and “existential time,” which is “the time of poets . . . whose fabric is anxiety.”¹⁸⁸ He quotes Berger’s claim that “prospective reflection “makes us seize the future as such, with its complexity, mobility, risks, and surprises.”¹⁸⁹ This “prospective” orientation seeks to “seize,” in the sense of anticipating, and orienting action toward, a future that it cannot predict. As much an ethical as a technical operation, it is concerned not only with what might happen but with what *should* happen. Senghor explains, “beyond economic facts, *la Prospective* attaches itself to human facts” by placing “man at the heart of our problems—often man as a means, but always as an end.”¹⁹⁰ Senghor declares, “we have been practicing La Prospective without realizing it. No doubt because, like Berger, we are Senegalese.”¹⁹¹

These were not merely abstract considerations for President Senghor. As a head of state he was charged with fostering Senegalese social welfare. Before, he had related his future-oriented conception of African socialism to a federalist utopia of decentralized self-management. Now he related “prospective” thinking to a statist utopia of humanist development. Whereas he once used Marxian dialectics to criticize instrumental reason, he now instrumentalized vialist phenomenology for “good planning,” which, “as the organization of a more human future, must be prospective. It must rest on an analysis of the

situation in Senegal, on the scientific inventory of our economic and social data.”¹⁹²

Equally surprising was Senghor’s claim that such planning will “awaken ‘dormant energies.’ To combat prejudices, routine, inferiority complexes, and the spirit of fatalism. In a word, we must awaken the national consciousness to the call of *Négritude*.”¹⁹³ Did his shift from Marxism to phenomenology, from dialectical ethics to vitalist metaphysics, from federalism to statism, from poetic anticipation to technological planning, from intuitive knowledge to scientific data, also signal a shift to nationalism or nativism? Although the relative emphasis he placed on either cultural specificity or human solidarity varied, I would suggest that his commitment to embodied humanism, situated universalism, and concrete cosmopolitanism persisted.

Senghor concluded this 1962 address by indicating that “prospective” planning also had a transcendent dimension rooted in ancient religiosity. As with socialism, he sought to recuperate the radically ethical, universal, and humanist core of early Christianity and Islam against their later “inevitable crystallizations.”¹⁹⁴ He asserts that “Jesus was a *revolutionary*. In his sermons, he challenged Roman morality—that of the colonizers—and the ancient Law of Israel. Born poor, he had a predilection to support the poor and oppressed of all races and religions.”¹⁹⁵ Similarly,

Mohammed proposes first to perfect the Arab community. . . . But beyond that, like Jesus, he aims at all men. He works for the establishment of a *new society*, for the birth of a *new man*. Mohammed thus reveals himself to be an *emancipator of women*, contrary to what the average European believes. Like Christianity, Islam introduces *universal* values into human society.¹⁹⁶

For Senghor Christianity and Islam were revolutionary projects for planetary social justice. He even suggests that Marxism “is a Christian reaction to the embourgeoisement of historical Christianities. Several of its ideas, including the concept of *alienation*, have their source in Christian theology.”¹⁹⁷

Senghor figured early Christianity as a cosmopolitan movement whose openness and vitality were eventually undermined by the development of European rationality:

the Apostles and their successors had very soon felt the need to use *Greek culture* which was then the most advanced. It was necessary, *sine qua non*, for the effective propagation of Christianity. Already, abandoning Hebrew and Aramaic, St. John wrote his gospel in Greek. It was only

after the invasion of Western Europe by Germans, the *barbarians*, that Christianity assumed the role of the guardian of the science and technology of Greco-Roman civilization. . . . The scholasticism of the Middle Ages . . . was truly a *method of open discussion*, of research.¹⁹⁸

Senghor contends that it was after the collapse of Scholasticism that a Greek conception of the cosmos was replaced by a Christian mathematical philosophy.¹⁹⁹

Senghor suggests that from within the Roman empire, early Christianity defined itself and changed the world precisely through linguistic borrowing and cultural *métissage*. By extending and reworking aspects of Greco-Roman civilization these Christians forged a singular form of life that was at the same time a cosmopolitan universalism. By adapting and, in some sense, realizing a Greek conception of the cosmos, it practiced a cosmopolitanism that was simultaneously Christian, Roman, Greek, and universally human, but *not* grounded in scientific or technological rationality. Nor was this ethic of cosmopolitanism rooted in Western European culture. It arrived there and was instituted in Christian universities through medieval Scholasticism before being ruined by mathematical reason and lost through modernity and to moderns.

This story is not simply an exercise in golden-age nostalgia. It is a critique of Christian modernity from the standpoint of ancient Christianity, and of European rationality from the standpoint of Mediterranean cosmology. It challenges ideological assumptions about the supposed equivalence of European territory, mature Christianity, and humanist thinking. It undermines civilizational narratives that posit modern Europe as the direct descendent of ancient Greece. This story is also an allegory for the relationship between imperial entanglement, African renaissance, and the planetary reconciliation that Senghor spent his life pursuing. More concretely, he also implies that this cosmopolitan legacy can now be reawakened by African socialism through African forms of knowing and being. In his view, African civilizations nourished precisely the human and spiritual values embodied in this ancient ethic, in part through transcultural borrowing and mixture. Senghor thus concludes,

For we Senegalese, the task is therefore clear. Not to neglect, in the construction of our Socialism and the execution of our Plan, the *spiritual means* contained within our religions. To return to their sources and return to these religions their *meaning*, their *interiority*, that which Feuerbach called . . . "the immediate liaison between the individual and the universal." For this is the meaning of *re-ligion*: a liaison, through the reciprocal integration of subject and object, of Man and the Universe. . . .

This is what, for many years, we have been doing by integrating socialism with *Négritude*.²⁰⁰

We see here that even after Senegalese independence, Senghor called on African socialism to identify, reawaken, and elevate lost possibilities that he believed remained crystallized within Marxism and socialism, early Christianity, and African civilizations. In his view, a culturally grounded and spiritually oriented “prospective” approach to planning would not only foster Senegalese national development. It would also help to realize a cosmopolitan humanism and a cosmological universalism that could contribute to reconciliation and redemption at the level of the species and the planet. Even after Senghor’s vision of self-determination without state sovereignty was blocked, his thinking about state politics, African socialism, and universal civilization remained animated by an untimely attempt to anticipate worlds to come. He still hoped to awaken immanent possibilities condensed within outmoded objects.

But we can also see that when Senghor became president he increasingly related dialectics to a vitalist evolutionary process rather than to an ethical political project. As the prospect of a federalist form of decolonization was foreclosed, the emphases of his thinking shifted from the human and historical to the organic and cosmological. His African socialism finally *did* become a legitimizing state ideology, which he deployed instrumentally to authorize planning, party rule, and national unity, and to marginalize critics and minimize dissent.²⁰¹ His presidential invocations of *Négritude* also often functioned to justify politically unpopular and even socially conservative state practices.

The tension between Senghor’s commitment to producers’ cooperatives, self-management, and decentralized power, on the one hand, and statism, national unity, and social peace through alliances with conservative forces, on the other, ultimately erupted in his fateful confrontation with Dia in 1962. As Dia, who was then prime minister of Senegal, sought to implement a more radical version of cooperative socialism in postcolonial Senegal, Senghor was worried about its potential to alienate powerful interests, including Muslim organizations and French commercial houses, whose political support and financial investment he courted.²⁰² Senghor’s decision to imprison his longtime lieutenant for supposedly planning a coup d’état surely marked the collapse of Senghor’s postwar vision of African socialism as a program for redemptive decolonization and human emancipation.²⁰³

Poetic Power

Janet Vaillant rightly suggests that Senghor prefigured his ambivalent relation to state power in his dramatic poem "Chaka," which was first published in *Présence Africaine* in 1951 and later included in *Ethiopiennes* (1956).²⁰⁴ Written in the form of a play, it stages the passion of Shaka Zulu, the real life warrior king and legendary hero of epic poetry, whom Senghor presents as a Christ figure.²⁰⁵ The play-poem is set in the moments before Chaka's death, after his half brothers have mounted a coup d'état and left him "nailed to the ground with three spears, ready for the howling void." Chaka calmly intones, "Yes, here I am between two brothers, two traitors, two thieves. . . . Here I am brought down to earth. How bright it is, the Childhood Kingdom! And this is the end of my passion."²⁰⁶

The first act, or "song," is meant to be accompanied by "sonorous funeral drums." It stages an antagonistic dialogue between Chaka and the white colonizers with whom he had collaborated. They debate Chaka's legacy as a leader who unified his people and built a powerful state through conquest and coercion. A White Voice tells Chaka that he is "a poet . . . a smooth speaker . . . a politician!"²⁰⁷ Chaka replies that he "killed the poet" and is "only a man of action, a man alone, and already dead."²⁰⁸ A Seer reminds Chaka that "power is not secured without sacrifice, absolute power requires the blood of the most beloved."²⁰⁹ In this play, the poet-politician is indeed torn between his love for his fiancé, Nolivé, whom he killed, and his love for his people, who were confronted with foreign enemies.

Senghor's Chaka defends his use of political violence even as he is haunted by his own violent acts. The White Voice taunts him with accusations: "They wanted a warrior and you were nothing but a butcher . . . power was indeed your goal."²¹⁰ Chaka protests that he had to make sacrifices for the greater good: "Like a careful landowner, I brought an axe to dead wood, I lit a fire in dry brush. They were ashes for sowing in winter."²¹¹ He refigures wars of conquest against fellow Africans as resistance to British colonialism. "Forests cut down, hillsides ruined. . . . And the people . . . dying of hunger. . . . Could I remain deaf to such scornful suffering?"²¹² He pleads that he regarded power as only "a means. . . . Oppression is the only thing I hate. . . . It is not hatred to love one's people. . . . I wanted all men to be brothers. . . . Each death was my death. Harvests to come and the stone for grinding such white flower from black tenderness had to be prepared."²¹³ But however much Chaka insists that his means justified his ends, he is also haunted by his past crimes. A spectral voice that is at once faraway and inside himself laments that even a "condemned

man is accorded a few hours of forgetting.”²¹⁴ This longing to forget betrays the ethic of the leader who takes responsibility for his actions as well as the vocation of the poet who remembers, narrates, and commemorates.

The second “song” is accompanied by “lively drums of love” and stages a call and response between Chaka and a Chorus just before his death. He has now left the domain of politics and returned to the kingdom of poetry where he hallucinates a reunion with the fiancé whose murder he had wanted to forget. The Leader of the Chorus announces, “It is the moment of rebirth [*re-naissance*]. . . . The poem is ripe in the garden of childhood, it is the hour of love . . . in the minute that precedes.”²¹⁵ To his ghostly Nolivé, Chaka sings, “Oh, my fiancé, I’ve waited so long for this time / So long have I grieved for this night of love without end, suffered so much, so much. . . . For such a long time I spoke in the solitude of endless palavers. . . . Against my vocation. Such was the ordeal [*épreuve*] and the purgatory of the Poet.”²¹⁶ Here the murderer presents himself as a victim, a poet forced, against his vocation, to waste his time in parliamentary deliberation. Or is this the lament of the man of action forced to inhabit the world of words, a poetic purgatory?

This passion play ends with the dying Chaka celebrated as a martyred messiah, a political leader and poetic creator who has sacrificed himself to liberate his people and redeem humanity. The Chorus refers to him as “the Anointed,” and its Leader sings

You are he who is Gifted with a Wide Back, you carry all the black-skinned peoples. . . . You are the athlete and your cloth [*pagne*] has fallen. . . . You are the slender dancer who creates the rhythm of the tam-tam . . . the creator of words of life / The poet of the Kingdom of Childhood . . . And we stand here at the gates of the Night, drinking the ancient stories . . . We will not sleep, Ah! we do not sleep while waiting for the Good News.²¹⁷

The Chorus shouts, “Death to the politician, and long live the Poet!”²¹⁸ In response Chaka seems to agree even as he recasts the poet as a self-abnegating creator of political possibilities: “I am the pirogue that splits the river, the hand that seeds in the heavens, the foot in the belly of the earth . . . the stick that plows by beating the drum . . . Let this great sonorous battle, this harmonious struggle . . . continue to last! But no, I will die waiting . . . From the drums let there rise the sun of the new world.”²¹⁹ The Leader of the Chorus confirms that Chaka’s sacrifice for his people has been universally redemptive: “White dawn, new aurora that opens the eyes of my people . . . dew, that awakens the sudden roots of my people . . . There the sun at its zenith over all the peoples

of the earth.”²²⁰ Does this mean that Nolivé’s political murder is thereby justified by the Good News that does indeed arrive?

Senghor transformed the pitiless Shaka Zulu of historical legend into an ambivalent poet-politician and *hostie noire*. This dramatic poem enacts many of the dilemmas that Senghor as a man of politics confronted concerning the proper balance between private and public, means and ends, action and thought, present and future, pragmatic strategy and ethical vision. It is also a parable about the relationship between politics and poetry, instrumental action and aesthetic imagination, timely intervention and the untimely magic of memory, dreams, and legacies.²²¹

In his own acts, Senghor had long demonstrated the affinity between politics and poetics. But in “Chaka” he seems to return to his earlier fear that a career in politics was antithetical to the poetic vocation. It expresses an ambivalent relationship to power and anticipates the haunting compromises that Senghor would make as a leader. But it would be a mistake to believe that such later developments disclose the covert truth that had always existed beneath the veneer of Senghor’s postwar vision of African socialism—as if he had always intended to use it instrumentally to aid his ascent to power and to rationalize his actions as president. In fact, Senghor’s growing statism after independence had less to do with the underlying motivation of his African socialism than with the troubling ways that he responded to the foreclosure of federalism as a viable political option.²²²

Scholars have yet to attend adequately to Senghor’s conviction that real decolonization must operate on an imperial scale by transforming overseas and metropolitan societies simultaneously, that Africans should explode and redeem France by reconstituting it as a democratic socialist federal republic, that socialism, federalism, and decolonization in Europe and Africa had to be integrated within a single transformative project whose aim was not only African liberation or European redemption but planetary reconciliation and human realization.

Critics typically counterpose a gradualist like Senghor to the “real” radicals of the African independence movement. Of course the political differences between Senghor and revolutionary nationalists, socialists, and pan-Africanists were significant. But are there grounds for automatically privileging the moderate versus revolutionary taxonomy as the crucial axis of comparison and understanding? Alternative inquiries might attend to the difference between those who supported politics of autarchy and the politics of interdependence or between territorialist and planetary optics. Such perspectives might allow us to recognize Senghor as one among various types of postwar internationalists,

all of whom elaborated distinct solutions to a common concern with looming neocolonialism. Our focus could then shift from criticizing the supposed contradiction between Senghor's revolutionary rhetoric and his reformist practices to examining the tension between dialectical-historical and vitalist-metaphysical tendencies within his postwar initiatives.

It might be useful to recall that while territorial nationalists like Sékou Touré and pan-Africanists like Kwame Nkrumah sought to improve Africa's position in the postwar interstate system, Senghor dreamed of transforming that system itself through new political forms that superseded state sovereignty. Whereas they hoped to replace colonial capitalism with African socialism in new nations or regional associations, Senghor believed that a socialist decolonization that did not also seek to revolutionize *metropolitan* societies could never succeed. We don't have to agree with his specific proposals to appreciate how this insight might invite us to rethink decolonization in far-reaching ways. Just as Senghor identified immanent potentialities within the multifaceted French Union, perhaps we can identify unrealized political potential within his plan to decolonize France through African socialism.²²³ His attempt to end colonial imperialism *and* transcend territorial nationalism should be considered a moral and utopian project whose "ambition," in Gandhi's legendary formulation, was "much higher than independence."²²⁴ Rather than dismiss him as a failed revolutionary nationalist, perhaps we should revisit him as a flawed post-national visionary.

Thinking *with* Senghor about African socialism—taking seriously his cosmopolitan ruminations about postnational democracy and his cosmological reflections on planetary reconciliation—allows us to conjure the history of a decolonization that might have been. To suggest that his unrealized future past warrants our attention is not to say that it would have resolved the problem of freedom. I am not proposing that we convert to Senghor's theologico-political program. But we should try to recognize the work that it sought to do. The point isn't that his version of African socialism would have redeemed humanity. But it is worth examining why Senghor claimed that it might. The obscured past of Senghor's unrealized future may also illuminate our present predicament, which is defined partly by the collapse of the Bandung project, the resurgence of resource imperialism, the supposed inability to imagine socialist alternatives to a seemingly unsurpassable neoliberal capitalism, and the democracy deficit of our postnational constellation.²²⁵ If we inhabit the future that Senghor both feared and anticipated, we may now be able to recognize more clearly his exhortation to supersede empire by creating political forms through which to "desacralize" national independence as the necessary form for self-determination.